

Concordia Theological Quarterly

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What Would Bach Do Today?

Paul J. Grime

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was arguably the greatest composer of all time. Certainly that is true of the music that he composed for the church. That we Lutherans are able to claim him as one of our own should be a big deal. And so, we fete him from time to time, especially when significant anniversaries roll around, such as the one that marked the 250th anniversary of his death in the year 2000. In the interim, we promote the music of Bach, all the while recognizing that much of it remains out of reach of the skill level of musicians in most of our congregations.

Beyond the vast *oeuvre* that Bach left to us, what else, if anything, does the great master have to offer to the church today? What can we learn from his life, his interactions with others, and his insatiable desire to improve his craft? Far from being an out-of-touch model for the 21st century musician, this paper will demonstrate that we have much to learn from Bach, not so much through imitation but rather by way of inspiration.

I. The Landscape of Bach's World

To begin our inquiry, we must first consider the times in which Bach lived. Born in Germany in the final quarter of the 17th century, Bach entered a world that was finally beginning to recover from the devastation of the Thirty Years' War. Economic development coincided with the expansion of trade throughout Europe, with Saxony at the crosshairs of trade routes that would develop into an extraordinary exchange not only of commerce but also of information and ideas.¹ The implications for the development of musical styles will be considered later.

Among the many consequences of the Thirty Years' War was a religious realignment in Germany. Whereas the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 had brought about the protection of Lutheranism in those territories that were ruled by Lutherans, the Peace of Westphalia that signaled the end of the Thirty Years' War granted official recognition to Calvinism and also opened up the possibility of rulers converting to a differing confession without requiring their subjects to convert with them. The practical effect

¹ Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2001), 16.

of this arrangement was an increase in religious pluralism and tolerance.² Thus, in the course of Bach's career, he worked among the Pietists in Mülhausen, the Calvinists in Cöthen, and orthodox Lutherans in Leipzig.

Simultaneously developing in Leipzig and other places around Germany were the initial evidences of what would soon become a major movement in the world of thought—the Enlightenment. Leipzig, with its renowned university, was certainly no stranger to the never-ending exchange of new ideas and scientific discoveries that became the hallmarks of this movement. Spending more than half of his professional career in Leipzig, Bach certainly rubbed shoulders with many of those who were espousing these progressive trends in philosophical thought, even though he himself was never a member of the university faculty.³

The significance of Leipzig as an incubator of progressive thought cannot be over-emphasized. By the end of the 17th century, for example, Leipzig had become the publishing center for all of central Europe.⁴ Its regular book fairs, held as many as three times a year, drew visitors from across the continent. These fairs were important for the widespread dissemination of new ideas. For Bach personally, they were an opportunity for presenting newly composed works that demonstrated his own abilities and forward-looking perspective as a composer.

So what does this admittedly brief depiction of Bach's world tell us about what he might do today? Consider, once again, Leipzig, the place where all of Bach's talents coalesced to produce his greatest works. This was a cosmopolitan city, perhaps not unlike New York City or Chicago in our own day. Leipzig was at the forefront of the latest trends, an environment in which Bach thrived. He was not afraid of being challenged in his professional development in the 18th century, nor would he be, one presumes, in our time.

As for implications for 21st-century church musicians, Bach's example would suggest that they too should be widely read, conversant in the latest developments in philosophical and political thought. Though Bach never

² Carol K. Brown, "Tumultuous Philosophers, Pious Rebels, Revolutionary Teachers, Pedantic Clerics, Vengeful Bureaucrats, Threatened Tyrants, Worldly Mystics: The Religious World Bach Inherited," in *Bach's Changing World: Voices in the Community*, ed. Carol K. Brown (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 39.

³ Wolff, *The Learned Musician*, 310. See also Günther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig*, trans. Herbert J.A. Bouman, Luther Poellot, and Hilton C. Oswald; ed. Robin A. Leaver (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 31–35.

⁴ Brown, "The Religious World," 49.

had the benefit of a university education, his inquiring mind kept him from ever becoming content with his own personal growth and advancement. Such an attitude in our present-day church musicians would certainly be welcome and beneficial.

II. The Musical Landscape of Bach's World

Designing New Instruments

When it comes to the musical world in which Bach lived and moved, here he was even more at the forefront of the latest developments, assimilating and synthesizing musical styles like no one else. Before turning to his musical output, it is instructive to consider a less obvious matter—namely, the interest Bach took in the musical instruments with which he and his musicians made their music. Bach was a leader when it came to experimenting with the use of a variety of new instruments, especially for use in his cantatas. As the Bach biographer, Christoph Wolff, puts it, “Bach’s unbowed spirit of discovery continued to spur his exploration of new instrumental sonorities and combinations.”⁵ For example, as soon as he was able, Bach began making use of the new lower voiced oboe d’more and oboe da caccia. He also had his hand in the development of the contrabassoon and the viola pomposa. Likewise, from the spring of 1724, Bach made the switch from the ubiquitous recorder to the traverse flute. Considering that the sound of the recorder had for centuries been in the ears of composers and performers alike, the shift to a new instrument—the precursor of the modern flute—was a significant departure.

Bach had very close connections with a number of instrument makers, sometimes serving as a broker who facilitated the sale of instruments to individuals who respected Bach’s judgment. He was without peer as an organ consultant, assisting in the design and testing of many new instruments. He played a significant role in the design of the new lute-clavier instruments. And perhaps most significantly, Bach worked with the organ builder Gottfried Silbermann in the design of the first pianofortes—the precursor to the modern-day piano. After hearing of Bach’s critique of his earliest models, Silbermann did not sell any pianos for nearly a decade while he corrected the weaknesses that Bach had identified.⁶ Again, the radical contrast between the harpsichord or organ on the one hand and the newly designed pianoforte on the other demonstrates that Bach was not content simply to hold on to the instruments of the past. He wisely saw the potential in the new tonal colors produced by these instruments and was quite happy to be among the first to put them to use.

⁵ Wolff, *The Learned Musician*, 273.

⁶ Wolff, *The Learned Musician*, 412–413.

So what might the inquisitive instrument designer Johann Sebastian do in our present age? He would likely be as curious and adventuresome as he was two-and-a-half centuries ago. Imagine the percussion instruments from other lands that he might acquire for his personal collection. And what new insights would he bring into the world of organ building? Perhaps it might be some exotic flute or reed stop that he would design in collaboration with an organ builder. And, pushing the envelope just a bit, how would Bach react to the electronic synthesizer? Would he automatically rule out its use, or might he find ways to incorporate it in some judicious fashion? Given how Bach was at the forefront of employing new sounds in his day, it is certainly likely that he would demonstrate a similar willingness at least to investigate some of the sounds that modern technology offers in our own time.

Knowledge of Contemporary Musicians

Bach's unparalleled mastery of his craft went far beyond his interest in musical instruments. Throughout his career, he used his own funds to purchase musical scores of the best known German, French, and Italian composers. This included not only the old masters of previous generations but also a number of contemporaries of Bach. Just a few of the more familiar composers whose music Bach knew included:

Germans such as Dietrich Buxtehude (1637–1707), Georg Böhm (1661–1733), Johann Pachelbel (1653–1706), George Frederic Händel (1685–1759), and Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767).

Frenchman such as Francois Couperin (1668–1733), Pierre Du Mage (1674–1751), Nicolas de Grigny (1672–1703), and Louis Marchand (1669–1732).

Italians such as Giovanni Palestrina (1525/26–1594), Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–c. 1643), Giuseppe Torelli (1658–1709), Tomaso Albinoni (1673–1751), Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713), Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741), Alessandro Marcello (1669–1747), Benedetto Marcello (1686–1739), and Giovanni Pergolesi (1710–36).

Bach made it his business to acquire music representing the latest styles and consciously incorporated these newfound compositional techniques into his vast compositional vocabulary. Christoph Wolff has surmised that Bach's personal library equaled that of the most avid music collectors in Europe, especially with regard to the "quality, breadth, and depth" of keyboard and instrumental music in his possession.⁷

⁷ Wolff, *The Learned Musician*, 333.

What, exactly, did Bach do with these musical scores that represented such a diversity of styles? Obviously he studied them. He was continually in search of new compositional techniques. A careful study of his work reveals that in most cases he not only learned the new techniques of various composers but often advanced and perfected them as only Bach could. In some cases, he actually reworked the compositions. For example, he transcribed several instrumental concertos by the Italian master Antonio Vivaldi so that a single performer could play them on the organ. While remaining true to the composer's intent, Bach was able to adapt the original compositions in a way that made them idiomatic to the keyboard. With still other works Bach would make adaptations, such as adding an additional instrumental part, thus creating a denser texture. Far from being viewed as pilfering another composer's work, such a practice was more akin to paying that composer a compliment. In the process, however, Bach's own skills as a composer were being continually enhanced.

How might such a mindset work in today's setting? Obviously, Bach would be well-versed in the wide range of compositional techniques in use in our day. He would be familiar not only with the music of the old masters but also with that of his contemporaries. He would likely have read many of the latest books on music history and theory. He would be, by all accounts, a well-rounded musician.

This is one of the points, however, where a potential disconnect exists between Bach's world and our own. The diversity of musical styles in our day dwarfs any differences that existed in the 18th century. Yes, there were stylistic differences back then, especially between various nationalities. But when compared with our own age, the differences were minor. If Bach were on the scene today, he would have to contend with such divergent musical styles as Impressionism, twelve-tone serialism, minimalism, electronically-generated sounds, and truly advent garde approaches to composition,⁸ not to mention jazz, big band, rock, easy-listening, rap, and a host of other popular music styles.

Secular and Sacred Music

This leads us to consider a more specific point of divergence between the world in which Bach lived and our own—namely, the relationship between sacred and secular music. It is well-documented that Bach and his

⁸ If we had to choose a modern counterpart to Bach, it would be Igor Stravinsky. Here was a composer who was both in the forefront of new trends in composition and also able to synthesize a wide range of musical styles and techniques. Though not a practicing church musician, he also composed sacred music, including a setting of the Western Mass and his Symphony of Psalms.

contemporaries regularly composed music for both realms. Indeed, Bach's employment as a court musician in Cöthen for the six years prior to his final move to Leipzig gave him the unique opportunity to hone his skills through the composition of a significant amount of instrumental music intended for use outside the church.⁹ Even in Leipzig, Bach's official duties included composing for civic events at various times throughout the year. In addition, he sought out opportunities to compose and lead music outside of the church, as evidenced by his twelve-year directorship of the *Collegium Musicum* in Leipzig.

Stylistically, the differences between Bach's sacred and secular music are minimal. In fact, it was not uncommon for Bach to parody his secular music for sacred use. Unlike his church cantatas, which could be repeated when a particular Sunday in the church calendar rolled around each year, his secular cantatas were almost always written for specific occasions, making them unsuitable for repetition at a later time. In many cases, Bach took these compositions and reworked them by replacing the secular texts with sacred. Sometimes the music was also significantly changed, other times not. Either way, Bach had no difficulty moving from one realm to the other, often with only minor adaptations being necessary.

In our own age, the relationship between sacred and secular is a considerably more complicated. A little history is needed to understand why. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the development of western music was totally intertwined with the church. New developments in composition were driven by the church. In the 17th century, the rise of Italian opera and the ushering in of what became known as the Baroque era signaled that the church was no longer the chief sponsor of music. Very quickly the royal court became a major player. By the end of the 18th century, churches in Germany began scaling back their elaborate systems of cantors and choirs. For example, when Bach's son, Carl Philip Emmanuel, died in 1788, his position as cantor in Hamburg was essentially eliminated, the very position that Georg Telemann, the famed contemporary and onetime competitor of Johann Sebastian, had previously occupied for over 40 years.¹⁰ From this point on, the most notable composers either worked under the patronage of the court—like Haydn in

⁹ See Wolff, *The Learned Musician*, 187–235. For a fuller discussion of Bach's years in Cöthen, see the monograph by Friedrich Smend, *Bach in Cöthen*, trans. John Page; ed. and rev. Stephen Daw (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985).

¹⁰ Tanya Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate), 221.

the court of Esterhazy—or struck out on their own as freelance artists. Some of the more famous early examples of the latter would include Mozart and Beethoven.

Because the church has seldom played the same role she once did as a major patron of the arts, her influence in the development of musical composition has, understandably, waned. The church's composers have, for the most part, focused their energies on writing music for the church and have not ventured significantly into the secular realm. Certainly there are exceptions to this stereotype. The point, however, is that Bach would find a very different world were he to be among us today, with a divide between sacred and secular that has grown quite wide over the centuries.

What does this all mean for 21st-century church musicians? With Bach as their model, it might suggest that our musicians would be enriched by increasing their exposure to and interaction with the wide variety of musical styles that exist. This does not necessarily mean that we should suddenly hear Kyries written in the style of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* or an Offertory of silence after the likes of John Cage's *4'33"*.¹¹ What it does mean, however, is that composers would benefit from an ever-increasing palette of musical ideas to put to use as they go about their task of writing for a new generation.

III. The Musical Landscape of Our World

Moving beyond the various influences of Bach's own day, there are several new trends that have appeared in our time. Presenting both opportunities and challenges, they remind us that the church musician in every age must work within his or her God-given confines.

Global Music

One area worthy of exploration by the modern-day church musician is what is commonly referred to as global music. The concept of globalization is not limited only to the economic realm. In recent decades, we in the west have had opportunity to become familiar with musical traditions from every corner of the world. This has especially been the case within the church. Those nations to whom the western church took the Gospel over the past centuries have in recent times begun producing their own church music. A burgeoning song tradition has risen up in many lands, songs which are now reaching our shores.

¹¹ This was a controversial composition published in 1952 in which a three-movement work lasting four minutes and thirty-three seconds consists of total silence on the part of the performer(s). The "music" is actually made up of the sounds of the audience as individuals react to the non-performance.

Were Bach a practicing church musician today, it is quite plausible that he would make the effort to become familiar with these new traditions. He would undoubtedly fill his music library with collections of this new song from distant lands. Most likely, he would travel to those lands as well, familiarizing himself with the performance practices of different peoples. Back in his own study, he would likely follow his typical pattern of drawing on some of the new techniques that he discovered in an effort to enrich his own compositional palette. The result would like be a mix of the old with the new, such as taking a traditional chorale melody and combining it with a new melody or rhythmic pattern. If there is one lesson we can learn from Bach, it is that the church's musical heritage is so rich that it is capable of constant reworking and adaptation.

Rise of Pop Culture

There is, however, another element in our modern musical landscape that needs to be taken into consideration—namely, the pop culture. Ever since the advent of the transistor radio in the early 1960s, life has not been the same in the world of music. With that simple advancement, the enjoyment of music no longer was limited to a stationary piano or a radio or turntable plugged into the wall. Music was now available “to go,” whether one was walking in the park or sunning on the beach. As units were mass produced and prices fell, teenagers could each have their own radio and retreat to their bedrooms to listen to *their* music.¹²

The advent of the transistor radio coincided with the invasion of the Beatles and soon a plethora of other rock bands. The need or desire for individuals to learn how to make music on their own slowly but surely began to diminish. Or perhaps it just shifted. Where in the past millions of children learned to play the piano or another instrument, suddenly it was all the rage to play the guitar. Would-be rockers learned to strum a few chord progressions, found someone who could do the same on the piano, and hooked up with a drummer who could hold it all together while sitting behind a trap set. How many family garages were suddenly transformed into practice studios from which the next great band just might emerge?

The effects of pop music have been profound. It is all-pervasive and simply overwhelming. No matter where one turns, pop music is there in abundance. And to the surprise of many, it eventually found its way into our churches and asserted itself with a vengeance. The Contemporary

¹² It is worth remembering that those teenagers back in the early sixties were the leading edge of the baby boom generation.

Christian Music movement is itself a multi-billion dollar industry, replete with recording artists and charts of the latest Top 40. Many of our lay-people listen to this music daily and have become deeply attached to it.

How would Bach react to this situation? It is highly unlikely that he would simply imitate the style and produce his own pop music. Given how highly Bach developed his compositional craft, he would not find pop music particularly challenging or engaging. Perhaps he might go about his usual process of making “improvements” to an existing composition, adding a voice part in one place or a canon at another suitable place. The improved version, however, might not appeal all that much to those have an affinity for this style of music, so it is possible that Bach might not proceed along this path for very long.

That last point brings up something, however, that ought not be disregarded too quickly. The baby boomer generation that cut its cultural teeth in the 1960s is very much tied to the pop culture. Just consider the many rock bands from that era that still perform the same songs they introduced over 40 years ago. The younger generations, in contrast, are much more eclectic in their choice of music. To be sure, they certainly still gravitate toward pop and rock music. But they are also much more open to other styles of music. Perhaps they would be more receptive to a Bach-like “improvement” to some of the music they hold dear, even one day being able to acknowledge the ability of well-crafted music to serve as a more fitting vehicle for the Gospel.

Pervasiveness of Serious Music

This raises yet another point that demands our consideration. Proponents of pop music in our churches contend that classical music is only preferred by a very small sliver of the general population, something like two percent. They then go on to equate serious church music with classical music and ask why this should be the only music sanctioned for use in the church, especially when it is not the preferred heart language of the great majority of the people.

There are at least two fallacies with this kind of thinking. First, the term “classical” music conjures up a particular image that is not all that descriptive of the music of the church. Certainly there is an overlapping portion of church music that is also performed in the concert hall. But the vast majority of the church’s music composed over the centuries was written specifically for the church and should not be confused with the broader genre of classical music. If we need to find a word that conveys what these two types of music hold in common, then perhaps we might want to refer to it as “art” music, or even “serious” music.

In light of this distinction, the second fallacy that requires debunking concerns the argument that classical music only appeals to a small segment of the population. In truth, the appeal factor is closer to 100 percent; the problem is that most people are unaware of it. Case in point: consider the sixth of the Harry Potter movies in which the fatherly character Dumbledore dies. As the students at Hogwarts gather around his lifeless body, the soundtrack is brought to a fevered pitch, music filled with pathos as heart-wrenching suspensions tug at the listener's gut. This is not pop, soft rock, or easy-listening music; it is serious, well-crafted music. There is little chance that anyone watching the movie would leave the theater saying, "The movie was great; I just don't like that style of music." To be sure, the soundtrack is tied to a powerful storyline. The fact that the music serves the plot—the text, if you will—demonstrates what a serious composer is capable of when he or she hones the skills necessary to create well-crafted music.¹³

IV. The Textual Landscape—Then and Now

This example now brings us back full circle to Bach and to a consideration of another aspect of his art—namely, the attention that he gave to the texts with which he worked. The new musical style that reached its highest level of maturity in the music of Bach had its roots in Italian opera in the early 17th century. A hallmark of this new style was a compositional technique known as recitative. In essence, recitative provided composers a vehicle for singing large sections of text in an efficient fashion. Coupled with these recitatives were arias, solo songs—

¹³ A similar example of art music used in a film score is that of American composer Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*. Originally composed in 1936, it was used a half-century later in Oliver Stone's movie *Platoon*, a film that graphically portrayed the horrors of war in Vietnam. Toward the end of the movie as American soldiers are retreating with their wounded on several helicopters, the strains of Barber's *Adagio* quietly emerge. The music increases in volume to a fevered pitch as the main character, Chris, sees other soldiers on the ground below who have been left behind. The scene then shifts to close-ups of these soldiers as they are gunned down by the enemy. The sounds of war—machine guns firing and helicopters whirling—are completely drowned out by the gut-wrenching music, which fades away as the scene shifts back to the helicopters, now flying off in the distance, unable to attempt a rescue of the fallen comrades because of increasing enemy fire.

Barber's *Adagio* has been used in a number of other film scores. The composer himself recognized the adaptability of this piece when he produced a choral version of it in 1967, setting of all things the Latin text of the *Agnus Dei*. Perhaps no other piece of music in modern times has been so effectively used in such diverse settings—certainly a testament to Barber's musical craft.

sometimes duets—that featured shorter texts that received more elaborate musical treatment.

By the beginning of the 18th century, this new form of composition had been fully adapted by German composers for use in the church. By the time Bach began writing his cantatas, the cantata texts had reached a level of development that expanded on the Italian model by incorporating two other features into the pairings of recitatives and arias—namely, chorale texts with their melodies and occasional biblical quotations. In the compositional hands of Bach, these texts received expert treatment as never before and perhaps never since. An examination of his attention to textual details reveals a sensitivity and imagination that often brings the texts to life in ways one might not otherwise have imagined. Every cantata is filled with Bach’s interpretive surprises:

violinists and cellists plucking their strings to evoke the image of Jesus knocking at the door of the believer’s heart;

a flute melody as playful as a bird in a spring shower, coupled to a text that speaks of the joy of one redeemed by Christ;

sharp chromaticisms set to words that speak of Christ’s pain and suffering;

the musical accompaniment suddenly fading away in order to symbolize death.

Both Bach’s choice of texts and particularly his treatment of these texts reveal a skilled musician who was at the same time thoroughly equipped to interpret the texts theologically. One cannot walk away from the performance of a cantata of J.S. Bach and not recognize how significant the text was for him.

How might this insight manifest itself were Bach alive today? No doubt he would be just as intent on giving careful attention to the text. And he would likely demand no less of other church musicians. That would suggest, first of all, that it is incumbent that our church musicians receive theological training. They especially need to be well-versed in the distinctive tenets of our Lutheran confession, including such topics as the centrality of the cross and justification by grace, the distinction between Law and Gospel, and the role of the means of grace.

Just as church musicians need to pay attention to the texts used in worship, so do pastors need to learn how well-crafted music is capable of revealing a depth of meaning in a text that might otherwise go unnoticed. There can be little doubt that in our day Bach would insist that his pastors be well-schooled in the art of music, precisely so that they could collaborate in a fruitful way with their musicians.

This discussion about sensitivity to texts actually begs a previous question: what texts are most appropriate for use in worship? With the advent of the worship wars nearly three decades ago, the church found herself confronted with new genres of texts that were heavy on subjective expression and less concerned with an objective proclamation of essential Lutheran teachings, chief among them the doctrine of justification by grace for Christ's sake. In reality, this was nothing new. Long before the rise of the Contemporary Christian Music movement, many of our congregations supplemented their hymnals with small collections of songs with titles such as *Hymns You Like to Sing*. What was new was the fact that, all of a sudden, the church was inundated with a new song repertoire that seemed to well up from a bottomless pit.

In response, pastors and musicians hunkered down and did their homework. We recovered that lovely German word, *Gottesdienst*, in order to make it clear that any response of the worshiper was only secondary to God's initial action by which he comes to us through his means of grace. We stressed the strengths of the objective character of the texts of the Lutheran chorales, implying that other texts were less desirable in the Lutheran liturgy.

In the process, it may be that we committed the classic error of driving the car off one side of the road in order to avoid running off the other side. What I mean is this: in order to guard against the subjective and sometimes synergistic language of many of the contemporary praise choruses, we overcorrected by giving the appearance of rejecting any text that used a more subjective, heartfelt language. The problem with this approach is that much of our classic hymnody uses this very language. Consider, for example, just the first lines of several very familiar hymns:

"Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart" (Martin Schalling)

"Thee Will I Love, My Strength, My Tower" (Johann Scheffler)

"Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me" (Paul Gerhardt)

The language of these and other hymns is very personal, warm, and introspective. Plenty of other examples could be shown to demonstrate that Lutherans from the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy held on to a rich piety that was replete with expressive language, language that frequently spoke quite intimately of the believer's relationship with Christ.

It was in this context that Bach arrived on the scene in the first half of the 18th century. The first cantata texts patterned after the Italian models of arias and recitatives were published in 1700 by Erdmann Neumeister, an

orthodox Lutheran pastor in Hamburg whose liturgical texts were rich expressions of Lutheran piety at its best.¹⁴ Unique to his approach were cantata librettos that went beyond the mere presentation of biblical texts; here the arias and recitatives provided commentary and interpretation. Soon other authors followed suit, with the further development of anchoring the cantata texts with Lutheran chorales.¹⁵

The texts that make up these commentaries are noteworthy for their expressiveness. Consider this example from Cantata 80, which is based on the chorale “A Mighty Fortress.”

Come into my heart’s abode,
 Lord Jesus, my desire.
 Drive out the world and Satan,
 and let thy image shine renewed within me.
 Be gone, vile horror of sin!
 Come into my heart’s abode,
 Lord Jesus, my desire.¹⁶

From Cantata 140, which is based on the chorale “Wake, Awake,” Bach sets the following text for soprano and bass in a dialogue that ensues between the soul and Christ:

My beloved is mine!
 And I am yours!
 Love shall by naught be sundered!
 I will join thee—
 thou shalt join me—
 to wander through heaven’s roses,
 where pleasure in fullness, where joy will abound!¹⁷

Finally, from Bach’s Ascension Oratorio, which is based not on a chorale but on the biblical account of the ascension from Acts 1, consider the following recitative and aria:

Ah, Jesus, is your departure so near?
 Ah, has the time now come when we must let you leave us?
 Ah, see how the hot tears roll down our pale cheeks,
 how we long for you,

¹⁴ Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*, rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1973), 371.

¹⁵ Wolff, *The Learned Musician*, 255.

¹⁶ J.S. Bach: *Six Favorite Cantatas* (recording); accompanying booklet, ed. Fabian Watkinson (New York: London Records, 1988), 15.

¹⁷ J.S. Bach: *Six Favorite Cantatas*, 20.

how much we need comfort.
Ah, do not leave us yet!

Ah, stay then, dearest life,
ah, do not leave me so soon!
Your farewell and early parting bring me the greatest pain,
ah yes, do stay longer here,
or I will be surrounded by grief.¹⁸

The heartfelt language of these texts is almost palpable. In setting them to music, Bach made use of the latest musical expressions in order to draw careful attention to the texts. What is important to note is that while the texts give the appearance of a certain subjectivity, the objective proclamation of the gospel consistently shines forth. Like the chorales with which they are paired, these texts always have Jesus and his saving benefits at their heart.

As for what Bach would do today, perhaps he would tone down the subjective/personal language in his texts in order to highlight the objectivity of the gospel. Still, much of the confusion that we experience today also existed at the time of Bach. The controversies between the Orthodox and Pietist camps did not prevent Bach from making use of these warm and introspective texts. In some ways, Bach's cantatas demonstrated a way of bridging the divide between those who were keen on handing down the church's rich liturgical tradition and—in the Pietist camp—those who sought a more heartfelt language.

V. The Lutheran Cantor and the Chorale

Finally, any discussion of what Bach did in his own century and what he would likely do were he here among us today must take into consideration his use of the Lutheran chorale in his church music. Simply put, the chorale was at the heart and center of Bach's compositional efforts. The people's familiarity with the chorales gave them an immediate connection with the newly composed cantatas. In fact, the use of chorales in the cantatas likely helped to soften the opposition of some who questioned the appropriateness of using compositional techniques that were drawn from the secular world of Italian opera. Those debates, which erupted with full force at the very end of the 17th century, were still being heard in some quarters as late as the 1730s, well after Bach's incredible

¹⁸ J.S. Bach: *Magnificat* (recording), (Hayes Middlesex, England: EMI Recordings, 1990), 19, 21.

output of cantatas in the mid-1720s.¹⁹

That little tidbit of historical data actually provides us with a good clue as to what Bach would do in our own day. When you think about it, Bach was quite progressive for his time. Rather than stay with older compositional forms, he adopted and adapted and refined and improved the very latest musical styles. Despite opposition from the Pietist camp—and even from some in the orthodox camp—Bach pressed forward, always placing his considerable skills into the service of the Gospel.

In this regard, Bach was really no different from his predecessors in the Lutheran cantorate. As Carl Schalk has demonstrated in his monograph, *Music in Early Lutheranism*, the most significant Lutheran composers in the first 150 years of Lutheranism led the way in showing the church how to appropriate new musical styles in a responsible manner for use in the church.²⁰ Characteristics that Schalk sees in these composers as being essential to their success include the following:

all were musicians highly trained in their art and craft;

all were musicians involved, in varying degrees, in the secular musical life of their day;

all were musicians who wrestled in various ways with the challenges and implications of a “new” musical style for the church;

all were musicians who found the liturgy and the worship of God’s people to be the most natural and appropriate context for the great part of their music;

all of these musicians were influential as teachers.²¹

Of particular interest to our inquiry is that third point concerning how these composers wrestled with developing a new musical style appropriate for the church. The approach they did not take was to simply discard everything they had learned and practiced previously and then to write only in the new style. Rather than turning their backs on the tradition, each composer used the tradition—chiefly the Lutheran chorale and the ways in which composers had treated it in previous generations—as a foundation onto which the latest compositional techniques were added.

These descriptions obviously apply quite well to Bach. Furthermore, they give us more than a few cues as to how Bach would carry on were he

¹⁹ Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig*, 136–138.

²⁰ Carl Schalk, *Music in Early Lutheranism: Shaping the Tradition (1524–1672)*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2001), 181–184.

²¹ Schalk, *Music in Early Lutheranism*, 181–184.

among us today. Most likely, Bach would not be shy or timid with regard to the music he wrote for the church. No style would be off limits, though it is certain that Bach would bring his considerable skills to bear in molding and shaping whatever new styles he appropriated. Recognizing the importance of the church's heritage, he would build on that tradition, perhaps sometimes pushing it to the limits. The texts would be of paramount importance to Bach, since proclamation is always at the heart of the church's task. The chorale would likely be the launching pad for anything that Bach wrote, though by "chorale" he would not limit himself only to one slice of the eclectic pie of congregational song that has grown over the centuries. Just as Bach drew upon the most recent texts of poets in his day, so would he recognize the genius of Christian poets in our day, even among one who are not Lutheran! The same would undoubtedly be true of the new melodies that have enriched the church's song over the centuries.

VI. Conclusion

Whether God will ever again bless the church with the likes of another genius like Johann Sebastian Bach no one can say. Perhaps such inspiration will not be seen this side of heaven. But that gives us no excuse not to roll up our own sleeves and get to work. God has blessed his church with many gifted people who are just waiting to be pressed into service for the sake of the Gospel. It does us no good to wring our hands or look over our shoulders to see from where the next challenge to the church's tradition may come. Nor will it be productive to limit ourselves unnecessarily, avoiding certain styles or texts out of fear that some might see us as capitulating. The church needs to encourage budding composers to hone their skills. Concurrently, freedom needs to be given to our proven composers so that they, like Bach, can press on to the next level, to that new insight. Will they always be successful? No. Even Bach likely had a composer's scrap heap. But it will only be through trial and error that today's church musicians will be able to create that next fresh expression of the grace of God, using his incredible gift of music to awaken faith in our generation and the next. Bach would expect nothing less!

Standing on the Brink of the Jordan: Eschatological Intention in Deuteronomy

Geoffrey R. Boyle

When theologians speak of eschatology, they often have different things in mind than simply “last things.” Furthermore, when exegetes speak of eschatology, the discussion generally centers on the New Testament, focusing more upon the “apocalyptic” elements within it (i.e., Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; and book of Revelation). Rarely does the Old Testament enter the conversation, except perhaps in discussion of Daniel 7–12 and the prophetic *בְּיוֹם-הַהוּא* (“that day”).¹ Nevertheless, this study will examine the eschatological thrust of Deuteronomy, specifically that which pertains to the *telos* of God’s direction and purpose of human history.² An “already/not yet” eschatology is evident both within the structure of Deuteronomy, as well as in its content.

The canonical placement of Deuteronomy presents both an eschatological conclusion to the Mosaic *Torah* as well as an eschatological impetus for all that follows—namely, the prophets.³ Deuteronomy functions a bit like a hinge, both concluding and beginning—hence the numerous theories of both a Pentateuch/Hexateuch on the one hand, or a Tetrateuch and Deuteronomistic history on the other.⁴ Yet aside from canonical ordering on the grand scale, within the book itself there is a clear eschatological tension, both in geographical imagery—“beyond the Jordan,” anticipating the Promised Land—as well as homiletically, by means of eschatological

¹ Cf. Isa 2:11; Jer 30:8; Hos 2:16; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11; Zech 3:10. Though not comprehensive, these citations demonstrate the multiplicity of witnesses to this eschatological day. Of the 63 OT references, all fall within the latter prophets save three: Deut 31:17–18 (it occurs twice) and 1 Sam 8:18.

² See K.E. Brower, “Eschatology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T.D. Alexander and B.S. Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000): 459–464.

³ We are unaccustomed to think of what follows Deuteronomy as the “prophets,” though that is the traditional designation of the books of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings.

⁴ Even conservative scholars will not deny the Book of Deuteronomy a lively literary history with later shaping and editing. See Horace Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 91.

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rhetoric. Moses' preaching turns on the temporal axis of past, present, and future. This combination of both realized and inaugurated eschatology provides the key to unlocking the purpose of the book: to gather all Israel today (Ps 95:7) before the Lord as at Horeb in order to receive the promise, as if access to Sinai has not and will never end.⁵

Moses' rhetoric of past, present, and future governs a uniquely eschatological impulse within the book, permitting "Israel" of any and all generations to hear the sermon as if "God made the covenant with *us* . . . who are all of us here alive today" (Deut 5:2-3). The "eschatology that is in process of realization"⁶ draws each hearer into the "now" of receiving and requires each to *remember, hear, keep*, and consequently, to *enter and possess* what will be theirs in the "not yet." Brevard Childs notes the historical and theological problem well: "There is only one covenant and one law, but there are different generations, facing new challenges. How does the old relate to the new?"⁷ This is precisely what Deuteronomy intends to answer, and in the process invites its hearers, even those today, to find themselves standing before the Lord's promise—both already given and yet more still to come!

I. Structural Eschatology

The shape of Deuteronomy reveals an eschatological motivation and demonstrates a unity of form and content that is neither arbitrary nor accidental. Before examining Deuteronomy on its own, however, it is important to understand how the work functions within the canonical corpus as a whole. Notable here is Martin Noth's thesis of the Deuteronomistic history.⁸ This "history" begins with an introduction to the whole work (Deuteronomy 1-3), continues with an introduction to the law (Deuteronomy 5-11), and then the law itself (Deuteronomy 12-26). The history then, according to Noth's thesis, forms one composite work, which carries on with Joshua and continues through 2 Kings. There are ever-growing challenges to this thesis. What Noth's theory assumes is a Biblical genre termed "history."⁹ "History," however, does not appear to function

⁵ See Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 224.

⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, 1963), 230.

⁷ Childs, *Introduction*, 215.

⁸ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981).

⁹ History is central to the thesis of John Van Seters as well, who, dealing with the classical categories of JEDP, purports "J" (the Yahwist) to be the first *historian* (cf. J. Van

categorically within the Old Testament canon.¹⁰ What we have in terms of canonical formation and achievement is what would commonly be known as “the law and the prophets.”¹¹ While history certainly helped to convey the prophetic storyline, it was not *history qua history* that was being written. Deuteronomy, then, functions as the eschatological pivot that connects the Law and the Prophets.

It should also not be forgotten that we are dealing with a narrative.¹² The story begun in Genesis and carried through Deuteronomy is largely coherent: from primeval history (Genesis 1–11) and patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12–50) in Genesis, to the story of Moses and wandering Israel under the Lord’s providential care in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This story continues seamlessly into Joshua (thanks to Deuteronomy 31–34) and throughout the “former prophets.”¹³ It is not difficult to see how Noth construed his category of “history.”¹⁴ But the question at hand is how? How does one go from Law to Prophet, Moses to Joshua, wilderness to Promised Land? Deuteronomy offers itself as a solution. The book ties the *grammar* together, including even the latter prophets, most notably Jeremiah. Clements affirms, “In a striking way, therefore, Deuteronomy manages to serve as a link between ‘The Law and

Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* [Louisville: WJK, 1992]).

¹⁰ See E.A. Kauf, “From History to Interpretation,” in *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact, and Israel’s Past*, ed. D. Edelman, JSOTSS 127 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991): 26–64, where he argues that the genre of “history” is anachronistic.

¹¹ See Christopher R. Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), who argues that this literary conjunction is a grammar, “by which the language of Israel’s scriptures makes its voice most fundamentally heard, and hearing that rightly is unaffected by the existence of additional writings” (33). Cf. Stephen Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation*, Forschungen zur Altes Testament 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

¹² For a helpful narrative-critical approach, cf. R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part One—Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

¹³ Chapman argues, “Rather than driving a wedge between Law and Prophets, Deut 34:10–12 construes the significance of Moses in such a way as to connect his work theologically with the work of the prophets who follow him. . . . The work of the prophets stands behind the image of Moses in the Torah itself and the traditions in the prophetic corpus have been shaped along the lines of the mosaic portrait,” *The Law and the Prophets*, 127–128.

¹⁴ See Ronald E. Clements, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 96: “From the point of view of the Old Testament story there is no major break between the ending of the era of Moses, with which the Pentateuch comes to a close, and the beginning of the era of the ‘Former Prophets’, which commences with the book of Joshua.”

the Prophets' as well as between the exodus and the settlement in the land."¹⁵ This connection is canonically intended based on the prophetic character of this book.

Central to this connective work of Deuteronomy is the prophetic witness of the Joshua–Kings complex. More than mere history, it relates in a proto-typical way the “prophet like [Moses]” (Deut 18.15), whom the Lord raised up from among the people: beginning with Joshua himself, and including Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. Moses anticipates each of these prophets and each follows his lead by drawing his generation back to Sinai’s God.¹⁶ Indeed, the function of any prophet is to speak forth the Lord’s Sinai word under a new context. Prophets interpret Torah as the mouthpiece of the Lord—they simply speak forth what the Lord shows them in the divine council.¹⁷ Such prophetic interpretation of Torah is explicit in Deuteronomy: “Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to *explain* [בָּאֵר] *this law* [אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה תְּהַזָּא], *saying . . .*” (Deut 1:5). But this is all to be expected. One cannot have Torah without the Prophets—the two come together to deliver a lively encounter between the Lord and his people.¹⁸ This encounter places the law and the gracious work of God in recent history on one side, and the promise of (near) future inheritance and blessing on the other. It then preaches to those of each generation, seeking the faith necessary for entrance into the land. Deuteronomy then bridges this past and future gap with a word for those gathered today.¹⁹ The prophetic task in Deuteronomy is to elicit a con-

¹⁵ Clements, *Deuteronomy*, 97.

¹⁶ See Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship*, 71: “The book of Deuteronomy—by intimating an order of prophets to follow and insisting that future generations under that new order find themselves always with the fathers at Sinai—created a radical closing of one canonical section and a maximal relating of two evolving canonical sections.”

¹⁷ Pertaining to this council, see Amos 3:7. “God speaks to his divine court, from which various voices respond, in a manner similar to what is depicted in 1 Kings 22 (‘and one said one thing, and another said another’); (Christopher R. Seitz, “The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109:2 (1990): 229–47, 235.

¹⁸ Seitz (*The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets*, 26 n.15) refers here to an unpublished Society of Biblical Literature paper read at the 2007 international meeting in Vienna by Georg Steins, who contends: “There is no canonized Torah without Prophets, for a Torah without interpretation is inconceivable [*da eine ‘Tora’ ohne Auslegung nicht vorstellbar ist!*]” (13).

¹⁹ Patrick Miller, states: “Thus the Book of Deuteronomy is to be understood backwards; its significance is its summarizing and closing of the foundational period. Deuteronomy signals that the period is over. That very fact, however, means that the book is also to be understood from the future. Its impact is not fully comprehended apart from reading the books that follow and sensing sharply that the word of the Lord in Deuteronomy is

fession from the people, one that professes who they are now on the basis of what happened in the past, as well as who they will be on account of the promises of God.

But, so as not to lose sight of the details in an overarching literary achievement, we now take a closer reading. How Deuteronomy is structured internally helps to focus the eschatological pulse of the text.²⁰ Dennis McCarthy and Meredith Kline, among others, have argued quite convincingly that Deuteronomy is, in some manner, structured after the ancient suzerain-vassal treaties of the Near East.²¹ But why would the author employ this treaty form? This structure enacts an agreement between Yahweh and his people. If they hear and keep the whole law (*Torah*) then they will have life. The treaty format provides the direction for the translation of the people from where they are now to what they will be. If they keep to the treaty, they will receive the *telos*, which the Lord has set for them (the land). If not, then curses abound (Deut 27:9–26; 28:15–68)! According to this structural model, the book functions as a plea for faithfulness to Yahweh, the one God of Israel (Deut 6:4–5).

The superscriptions throughout the book, along with Deuteronomy 5, demonstrate the progression from past to present and into the future.²²

always set for future generations. The intentionality of the book prohibits its ever being viewed as over and done, an enterprise belonging only to the past. No other book of the Old Testament is so straightforward and self-conscious about its character as a guide for the future." *Deuteronomy: Interpretation* (Louisville: WJK Press, 1990), 10.

²⁰ There are three dominant theories behind the structuring of Deuteronomy. The first relies upon the Ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties—either Hittite, Assyrian, a combination of both, or “Egyptian see Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991); Gordon J. Wenham, *The Structure and Date of Deuteronomy: A Consideration of Aspects of the History of Deuteronomy Criticism and a Re-Examination of the Question of Structure and Date in Light of that History and the Near Eastern Treaties*, Ph.D. diss. (University of London, 1970); Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). The second examines the “superscriptions”; see Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading, Overtures to Biblical Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994]). The third suggests a concentric literary model (See Duane Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 2nd ed., World Bible Commentary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001], lviii).

²¹ Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, Analecta Biblica 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1994); Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1989).

²² See Deut 1:1; 4:44; 6:1; 29:1; 33:1. Olson suggests, “Chapter 5 is the *torah* of Deuteronomy *en nuce*,” *Deuteronomy*, 15. For his catechetical theory for the book, chapter 5 is crucial because there the Ten Commandments are actually given.

Israel's past story (Deuteronomy 1–4) leads to a confession of the Torah in a nutshell (Deuteronomy 5). This gives way to laws for the present (Deuteronomy 6–28) and a new covenant for the future (Deuteronomy 29–32). Finally blessings for future generations abound, from death to life (Deuteronomy 33–34).²³ Olson rightly concludes,

In both form and structure, the book of Deuteronomy intends to bring readers of every age to claim its *torah* as their own. Moses' words to the ancient Israelites beckon each new generation. . . . The contemporary reader is invited to join Deuteronomy in a transformative journey that leads from past to present and on to a future yet to be revealed.²⁴

The third structural hypothesis to merit attention is based on literary concentricity.²⁵ This structure adheres closely to an eschatological purpose: the *Torah* is central to Israel's past as well as her future, while the outer frames interact with the central core in an explicitly eschatological manner. However, whether such a broad parallelism is inherent in the text, or forced from without, is another question.

What these structural models suggest is that no matter how one approaches the text, the theological intention is clear: all of time (past, present, and future) is brought into a dialogue between God and man through the prophet Moses. Deuteronomy, however, does not provide how the dialogue concludes, hence a not yet fully realized eschatology.

So, does the actual content of Deuteronomy match all that has been gleaned from its form (*lex orandi; lex credendi*)?²⁶ The answer is a resounding "Yes!" A helpful case study is chapter 8.²⁷ Here, again, we are

²³ Olson, *Deuteronomy*, 16.

²⁴ Olson, *Deuteronomy*, 17.

²⁵ Christensen's model is as follows:

- A The Outer Frame: A Look Backward (Deut 1–3)
- B The Inner Frame: The Great Peroration (Deut 4–11)
- C The Central Core: Covenant Stipulations (Deut 12–26)
- B' The Inner Frame: The Covenant Ceremony (Deut 27–30)
- A' The Outer Frame: A Look Forward (Deut 31–34)

²⁶ See Peter Vogt, *Deuteronomic Theology and the Significance of Torah: A Reappraisal* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 22. "Structure should be identified on the basis of form *and* content, not simply in terms of one or the other."

²⁷ Perhaps even more apparent is the role of Moses. See Olson's *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses*, where his thesis of a catechetical purpose is rooted in the recurring theme of Moses' death. Indeed, the author presents Moses as the embodiment of the book's eschatology: "For you shall see the land before you, but you shall not go there, into the land that I am giving to the people of Israel" (Deut 32:52). In addition, it is Joshua, Moses' successor, who ushers the people into the land. Joshua stands as the type

dealing with a concentric model, two variations on the theme follow:

1. Lohfink/Weinfeld²⁸
 - A. 8.1: Paraenetic Frame/Exhortation
 - B. 8.2-6: Wandering in the Desert
 - C. 8.7-10: The Richness of the Land
 - D. 8.11: Do not Forget YHWH/Exhortation (central idea)
 - C¹. 8.12-13: The Richness of the Land
 - B¹. 8.14b-16: Wandering in the Desert
 - A¹. 8.19-20: Paraenetic Frame

2. Van Leeuwen/Olson²⁹
 - 8.1: Introductory Frame—Observe the Commandment that You May Live
 - 8.2-17: Remember/Do not forget
 - I. 8.2-10: Remember (רָמַז)
 - A. 8.2-5: *Wilderness* journey in *past*
(Result of remembering: obedience to God - 8.6)
 - B. 8.7-9: The *promised land* in the *future*—echoes of the Garden of Eden
(Result of remembering: praise of God - 8.10)
 - II. 8.11-17: Do not Forget (שָׁכַח)
 - B¹. 8.11-13: The *promised land* in the *future*
(Result of forgetting: exalt yourself - 8.14)
 - A¹. 8.15-16: The *wilderness* journey in the *past*
(Result of forgetting: claim self-sufficiency - 8.17)
 - 8.18-20: Closing Frame—Remember and Live; Forget and Perish

Olson's model makes the best sense of the chapter's content. The two-tiered pattern with a balanced chiasm allows for both hymns to fit into the structure and emphasizes the tension of faithfulness and disobedience, remembering and forgetting.³⁰ Notice also the balance of time and place: wilderness/past and promised land/future. The central thought is bi-focal: remember and do not forget. Remember the Lord's graciousness—both His

of eschatological realization, whereas Moses functions as the icon of future hope—for there will be a "prophet like Moses" (18:15).

²⁸ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 397; cf. N. Lohfink, *Das Hauptgebot: Eine Untersuchung literarischer Einleitungsfragen zu Dtn 5-11* (Rome: Pontifical Bibl. Inst., 1963): 189-199.

²⁹ Olson, *Deuteronomy*, 55. See Van Leeuwen, "What Comes Out of God's Mouth?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 55-57.

³⁰ Hymn to the Land (8:7-10) and Hymn to YHWH (8:14b-16). See Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 72.

guidance in the past (wilderness) and his promise for the future (land)—so that you do not forget in the future; and thus fall away from Yahweh, utterly perishing.³¹ This theme is enhanced by the eschatological vocabulary of past, present, and future: “these forty years” (8:2, 4), “today” (8:1, 11, 18, 19), and the future, “when you have eaten” (8:12). Consequently, the temporal aspect of Deuteronomy 8 roots the future life of Israel in her confession of Yahweh’s work in the past. The decisive acts of the present are the eschatological now and not yet that every generation must face.³²

II. Geographical Eschatology

The Jordan: Landmark, Theological Metaphor, or Covenant?

The Jordan River stands as the physical boundary between the Law and Prophets. Yahweh commanded Moses, “You shall not go over this Jordan” (Deut 31:2). But to Joshua He promised, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you” (31:23). As the book of Joshua narrates the crossing, realizing this promise (at least in part), Deuteronomy can only anticipate the crossing.³³ For Moses and those gathered around his preaching, the Jordan stands as a “metaphysical reality”—the judgment of sin—while the land reveals the blessing of life with Yahweh.³⁴ Both “land” and “Jordan” might be best understood as eschatological characters within the narrative of Israel’s journey.

The Jordan appears by name twenty-six times in Deuteronomy. Only once does it appear within the “laws” (Deut 12:10); the rest occur within the sermons at the beginning and end. The author uses the Jordan River in two ways: first, as a simple geographical reference point (Deut 1:1, 5; 3:8, 17). Second, it serves as the (theological?) boundary to the land (2:29; 3:20, 25, 27). The two are not mutually exclusive. The precise locatedness with

³¹ See Dean Wenthe, “Redeeming Time—Deuteronomy 8:11-18: Dedication of Crucifixes,” *CTQ* 65 (2001): 157-159, “[Deut 7:6b-8] is what Israel was called to remember: the gracious character of their God” (158).

³² See Telford Work, *Deuteronomy*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), who states: “Remembering all of Israel’s past is essential . . . lest God’s forgetful people lapse into either despair or complacency. We always recall that ‘he suffered, died, and was buried’ and that ‘on the third day he rose from the dead’” (111).

³³ The exegesis of Psalm 95 in the Epistle to the Hebrews suggests that Joshua did not *fully* realize what was promised, thus confirming an inaugurated eschatology for both Deuteronomy and Joshua (Heb 4:8-11).

³⁴ Henry O. Thompson, “Jordan River,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 3, H-J*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992): 953-958.

which Deuteronomy opens suggests there is more to the locative aspect than merely a historical/geographical account. Thus Deuteronomy intentionally begins geographically:

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab. It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them (Deut 1:1-3).

Within these three verses a specific time, place, and event are presented, one that the narrative will unfurl as the journey proceeds. Now, whenever the Jordan is referred to in connection with the entrance into the land, similar vocabulary ensues: "land," "possess," "cross over," and "today." There are approximately twelve additional implied references, where the text speaks of crossing over into the land, yet omits "the Jordan."³⁵ There is one more possible reference that is quite striking: "You are standing today all of you before Yahweh your God...that you may cross over/into the covenant of Yahweh your God, and over/into His oath which Yahweh your God is making with you today" (Deut 29:9-11 ESV: 29:10-12). We see the expected vocabulary, but, "today" and "crossover"—yet no explicit mention of the Jordan; neither is mention made of the land. This suggests that the crossing of the Jordan into the land connotes the establishing of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Rather than crossing over the "Jordan," the people are to cross over the "covenant." Instead of entering into the "land," they are to enter into Yahweh. The rhetoric intends the confusion of subjects, perhaps in order to reveal the theological import of the geographical imagery. Thus, the Jordan is the theological boundary separating Moses and his generation from entering the covenant of the land, it stands between Law and Prophets.

The Land: Eden, Post-Exilic Jerusalem, the Church, or Heaven?

With all this in mind, the greatest sin warned against in Deuteronomy is to have the land without Yahweh—a first commandment issue. Yahweh identifies himself with the land "beyond the Jordan." That is where his promise lies; that is where the past has been working its way forward until the present, and where this present gathering will "today cross over the Jordan" (9:1). Deuteronomy 8 again helpfully distills this theological move of identifying Yahweh with the land. Within a carefully structured chapter

³⁵ Deut 3:18, 21, 25, 28; 4:14; 6:1; 9:3; 11:8, 11; 27:3; 31:3; 34:4.

there appear two hymns—one, to the land, the other to Yahweh.

To the Land (8:7–10)

Yahweh your God is bringing you into a good land
 . . . of brooks of water, of fountains and springs
 . . . of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates
 . . . of olive trees and honey
 . . . in which you will eat bread without scarcity, lack nothing
 . . . whose stones are iron and from whose hills you can dig copper
 You shall eat and be full, and bless Yahweh for the good land he
 has given you.³⁶

To Yahweh (8:14b–16, 18a)

Then your heart be lifted up, and you forget Yahweh your God,
 who
 . . . brought you out of the land of Egypt
 . . . led you through the wilderness
 . . . brought you water out of the flinty rock
 . . . fed you in the wilderness with manna
 You shall remember Yahweh your God.

Concerning the land, von Rad notes the tenor of praise throughout: “Everything is described here by asserting sheer perfection, almost as though it were describing a paradise.”³⁷ Telford Work notices the eschatological nature of its description:

Yet the rain, grain, new wine, oil, grass, and being full in this passage do carry eschatological significance. Ordinary blessings of Israel in the land become stock images of extraordinary restoration in the fullness of time, and the absence of the former drives sufferers to hope in the latter. Every day, every week, every season, and every annual cycle foreshadow the age to come, not just before the first advent but also now as we prepare for the last.³⁸

The juxtaposition of land and Yahweh encourages eschatological imagery. Notions of “paradise” are striking. This land of the (near) future for Israel resembles the description of Eden, or paradise—the land in which Yahweh walked (Gen 3:8).³⁹

³⁶ See Deut 11:10–12.

³⁷ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 72.

³⁸ Work, *Deuteronomy*, 133.

³⁹ Another angle to approach this identification of Yahweh with the land is by way of the discussion of the Levites: “Therefore Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. The LORD is his inheritance” (Deut 10:9). The Levites, in some manner, *realize*

The relation of Moses to the land is also unique. Certainly the main actor in the narrative, Moses is not permitted entrance. Moses embodies the perspective of Deuteronomy by his clear anticipation of the land, but prohibition to enter. Moses is even given to *see* the land, the promise, the fulfillment—but not to cross over and into it; he is himself a now and not yet figure.

Like Moses, Deuteronomy's narrative audience—the people of Israel gathered at the foot of the Jordan—stands in the same eschatological position as anyone under the promise, but not yet within its fulfillment. Here, the church stands, too. For there is a promised land—"that Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them" (Deut 1:8)—and though we catch glimpses of it here and there, there is a fullness yet to come. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution present participation (*koinonia*) in the not-yet.

The Place [מקום]—Shechem? Shiloh? Jerusalem? Rome? St. Louis? Heaven?

What is to happen once Israel crosses over the Jordan/Covenant and into the land/Yahweh? Well, the event pertains to the place, "the place that Yahweh your God will choose to cause His name to dwell" (Deut 14:23). This place, appearing fifteen times within the text, is found predominately within the legal chapters of Deuteronomy 12–26. Each instance of the place discusses the sacrificial acts pertaining to this precise location (cf. Deut 12:6). It is also a place of "rejoicing" (12:18; 16:11, 15) and judging of hard cases (17:8–11). But Deut 31:11 is unique in that "the place" becomes also the place of hearing the law. This "place" serves as the third geographical character within Deuteronomy that elicits an eschatological awareness.

This "place," no doubt to the implied author, is a future reality. It exists only if the Jordan is crossed and the land is entered. It stands in antithesis to the many places of the Canaanites. The singular location affirms the First Commandment, both in the way of the Law and the Gospel: here, not there, boundary and freedom (thus, sacrifice and rejoicing, together). However, the where of this decisive location is another question, depending on where the audience is situated. The obvious retrospective choice is Jerusalem: Yahweh spoke of Solomon's temple, "My Name shall be there" (1 Ki 8:29). For Christendom it is the Church—the gathering of those baptized into the name around his word of Gospel

the eschatological direction of the land. They inhabit the land, but are given no definite borders within, in order to anticipate the final dwelling of Israel within Yahweh—no borders, no special allotments, just the Lord as inheritance.

proclaimed and his sacraments rightly administered (AC VII). For Israel who crossed with Joshua, perhaps the place was Shechem (Joshua 24) or Shiloh (Judg 21:19)? Or are we even asking the right question? McConville suggests otherwise:

Deuteronomy's decision to refrain from naming a place is in keeping with its fundamental understanding of divine presence, which it consistently advocates. In that understanding lays a paradox. Yahweh really makes himself present among his people on earth, in the context of a relationship which he enters with them at a time and in a place.⁴⁰

Therefore, the historical ambiguity is intentional; it invites readers or hearers of all times and all places to participate in the place.

What is necessary is that the place originates by Yahweh's choosing and that it is one place as opposed to many. At this concrete place the Lord "causes his name to dwell," and thus communes with His people by blessing and hearing them as they gather for sacrifice and praise. The character of this "place" suggests an eschatological here and now; yet without specified identification of the place, it remains in the future not-yet. This is amplified by the location of Yahweh in relation to this "place." Chapter 26 recounts the divine conversation with man by way of "the priest" (26:3) who is at "the place that Yahweh your God will choose" (26:2). The prayer that follows highlights the eschatological importance of the place, "Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey" (26:15). Here the "place" and the "land" and "heaven" all align in relation to Yahweh. This suggests that Yahweh himself is both "now and not yet" for Israel and dwelling with Israel.

III. Homiletic Eschatology

Robert Altar once asserted, "The Book of Deuteronomy is the most sustained deployment of rhetoric in the Bible."⁴¹ In view of eschatological expectations, we will tend most closely to the eschatological vocabulary of time.

⁴⁰ J.G. McConville, "Time, Place, and the Deuteronomistic Altar-Law," *Time and Place in Deuteronomy*, ed. J.G. McConville and J.G. Millar, JSOTSS 179 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 89–139.

⁴¹ Robert Altar, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 869.

Past: Yahweh promised (שבע), delivered/gave (ותן), brought up/out (אצו), multiplied (הבר), and bids Israel to remember (רכז).

Present: Yahweh commands (הוצ) Israel to do (עשה), hear (שמע), keep (שמר), tell (רבר), fear (ארי), and impress [upon their children] (שנו).

And future: Yahweh will cause them to enter (אוב), possess (להג), keep (שמר), and love (אחב).

These verbs present the hearer with the full spectrum of time, rhetorically intended to elicit a confession. The rhetorical aim is to persuade Israel to live within the life of God himself.

The Past

Whether or not Deuteronomy is modeled closely after the ancient vassal treaties, the opening chapters certainly present a historical prologue to the covenant at hand. As Millar notes, "The function of these chapters [Deuteronomy 1–3] is to bring Israel to the place of decision on the edge of the land."⁴² This calls for a remembrance of what Yahweh has done and, consequently, who Israel is. Remembering, however, is not simply an intellectual recollection.⁴³ It is rather participation—the recollection of the past informs and shapes the present. Therefore, by presenting the deeds of Yahweh, those memories of old teach, comfort, and guide those gathered at present. Remembering Yahweh's works is Israel's active participation in what those works delivered—namely, life in the land under his blessing. The alternative is to forget. Recall these two terms as the structural devices for chapter eight:

You shall remember Yahweh your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm His covenant that He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget Yahweh your God and go after other gods and serve them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. (Deut 8:18–19)

The crucial deeds pertain to the elective work of Yahweh: his promise to the Patriarchs and his deliverance out of Egypt. "Promise" or "swear" (שבע), though used consistently for the Lord's promise of old, it "virtually always referred to the future."⁴⁴ That is, the promise made in the past bears

⁴² Millar, *Time and Place*, 15–88.

⁴³ H. Eising, "zakhar," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Volume IV, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980): 64–82.

⁴⁴ C.A. Keller, "שבע to swear," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament: Volume 3*, 1292–1297 ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann, tr. M.E. Biddle (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997): 1293.

with it the expectation of fulfillment in the future. In addition, and proper to his function as prophet, Moses' emphasis upon the promise puts the onus on Yahweh to remember (Deut 9:27).⁴⁵ This intercessory role leads to Yahweh's gracious remembrance of the promise, and subsequent deliverance. Yahweh's remembering is performative—as he remembers the promise he enacts that which he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The promised deliverance is most clearly portrayed in the exodus account. Yahweh defines himself by this act: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt [מִצְרַיִם יְיָ מִצְרַיִם], out of the house of slavery" (5:6). Clearly, this is a work done in the past. However, the rhetoric of this refrain suggests that this was not the end of the story. The bringing out was the means to an end, an end not yet realized: "And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers" (6:23). Here, the promise and event of old are linked with the land of the future. Past and future meet in order to provoke a confession in the present hearing.

The Present

When the author addresses Israel in the present, it often appears in the form of command: do, hear, keep, etc. Most famous is the Shema': "Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:4). To hear is to obey. The fact that God speaks and they are given to listen (and not die) necessitates a gracious presence: "Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live?" (4:33). שמע, therefore, never appears alone—it always carries with it or implies עשה and שמר.⁴⁶ "When you *hear/obey* [תִּשְׁמַע] the

⁴⁵ Similarly, the *anamnesis* of the Eucharist: "do this *in remembrance* of me" (Lk 22:19). Such remembrance, certainly an act of recollection too, is chiefly the remembrance *by Yahweh* of His people. Two examples suffice: first, for the Passover, von Rad notes, "When Israel ate the Passover, clad as for a journey, staff in hand, sandals on her feet, and in the haste of departure (Ex 12:11), she was manifestly doing more than merely remembering the Exodus: she was entering into the saving event of the Exodus itself and participating in it in a quite 'actual' way" (*Message of the Prophets*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 82). The second example is Noah's rainbow: "And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature . . . When the bow is in the clouds, *I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant* between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth'" (Gen 9:12-16).

⁴⁶ Referring to the triad: שמע-to hear, שמר-to keep, and זכר-to remember, Wenthe affirms, "All three verbs map the relationship of God to His chosen people and are intimately intertwined. One cannot, from the perspective of Moses, do one of these and

voice of Yahweh your God, to keep [רמִשְׁקֶךָ] his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law" (30:10). Such obedience rendered to the word of Yahweh both prepares the people for entering the land, as well as results from their having been brought in. This obedience, both hearing/obeying and keeping/doing, is necessary for Israel's entrance as well as their remaining within the land. However, what we find (both in Deuteronomy as well as in the accounts of the former prophets) is that the people are not obedient. Nevertheless, Yahweh is—He is obedient to His sworn oath.

The Future

The future discourse centers on the land that Yahweh is giving to them: that Israel enter and possess it as their inheritance. Millar notes, "The key to the future is described in terms of obedience in the present informed by remembrance of the past."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Deuteronomy safeguards against what we might call "works-based entrance." Olson rightly states, "The present form of Deuteronomy [refutes] a mechanical view of retribution and reward."⁴⁸ Notable here are chapters 9–10, which are designed to convince Israel that any future livelihood depends upon a trust and upholding of Yahweh's covenant of grace.⁴⁹ Left to themselves what do you get?—the incident of the Golden Calf (9:13–29)! Why recount this incident? Two reasons: first, the ostentatious disobedience (notice the immediacy after receiving and vowing to keep the Ten Words and its blatant contradiction of the First Commandment, not to make graven images); and second, to highlight (by contrast and, therefore, serious reflection) the words spoken at the beginning of this chapter, "You are to cross over the Jordan today" (9:1). Their entering must not be to their credit: "Do not say in your heart, after Yahweh your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that Yahweh is driving them out before you" (9:4). It is Yahweh's land in the first place (Lev 25:23) and so it is his to give.

This future giving, entering, and inheriting/possessing is not realized in the present book. The promise is so emphasized that the land almost seems palpable—and to Moses, visible—but nonetheless, not yet theirs.

not the other two" (157). F. García-López ("*shamar*," TDOT XV: 279–305) notes that this combination of שמר and עשה denote "one of the primary motifs of Deuteronomy" (291).

⁴⁷ Millar, *Time and Place*, 16.

⁴⁸ Olson, *Deuteronomy*, 56.

⁴⁹ Robert O'Connell, "Deuteronomy IX 7–X 7, 10–11: Panelled Structure, Double Rehearsal, and the Rhetoric of Covenant Rebuke," *Vetus Testamentum* 42.4 (1992): 509.

Thus Millar observes,

It seems that what we have here is not only salvation history, but an exposition of the way of salvation in the present and the future, based on the national experience of the past. The events of the past and the places of the past coalesce with those of the present, so that Israel might walk in the ways of Yahweh.⁵⁰

The rhetoric of past, present, and future presents itself to Israel—they rightly remember and faithfully trust that what Yahweh has promised He will do? And as we readers and hearers of Deuteronomy are written into the narrative, we too are presented with our response to Yahweh.

IV. Conclusion

As part of the now and not yet eschatology, one is called to continual repentance—hearing and keeping. Whereas the account of the law in Exodus may be seen as representing a “once and done” approach to the covenant, Deuteronomy subjects itself to all people at all times, hoping to elicit renewal and conversion continually. Now, Deuteronomy should not be set against the Exodus account; but rather, when read canonically together, they encapsulate the whole assurance of the people: they are, in fact, still the people of God.⁵¹ This is the purpose of the eschatological structure. Not only the rhetorical self-reflection, evoking a confession to hear and keep, but also the clear promise that whoever is gathered around this word is the people that God has summoned for himself in the Promised Land.

The notion of a journey seems to best characterize the eschatology that Deuteronomy presents: there is a fixed reality, an institutional promise, but this reality is always the propelling motivation toward its fulfillment. We should note especially that the Israel Moses addresses is a far different Israel than the one standing at Horeb. Nevertheless, Moses preaches a “for-you” sermon. He permits his words boundless course among *all* Israel—all generations, all peoples, even us and those still to come! All of Israel, including the church today, is to consider herself at the banks of the Jordan. She is to hear what *Torah* declares, keep its statutes, judgments,

⁵⁰ Millar, *Time and Place*, 32.

⁵¹ To read Deuteronomy and Exodus as mutually exclusive models is similar to placing Baptism over against the Eucharist. If, to simplify somewhat, Baptism represents the “once and done” nature of salvation, the Eucharist then serves as the continual converting agent, reminding the people of the continual need for deliverance. Both Exodus and Deuteronomy (as well as Baptism and the Eucharist) relate the eschatological hope that what is had now will come to fruition.

and commandments, remember all that Yahweh has done (his promise and deliverance) and consequently enter and possess the land. "Deuteronomy, therefore," argues Childs, "serves as a commentary on how future generations are to approach the law and it functions as a guide in establishing its canonical role."⁵² Deuteronomy clearly encourages such a reading: "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before Yahweh our God, and with whoever is not here with us today" (Deut 29:14-15).

That covenant of old includes us as well. And it is precisely this journey, this standing on the brink of the Jordan that allows us to best hear the cry of John the Baptist. He is the one who connects the Old and New by standing in the Jordan! His bony-finger points across the Jordan to the One who "takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). To cross the Jordan with John, by way of a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4), is to truly enter, possess, and inherit the Promised Land! Jesus Christ is the inheritance promised long ago to our fathers. He is the one who faithfully hears, keeps, and does the *Torah* perfectly, fully, and best of all, he does it for you.

⁵² Childs, *Introduction*, 224.

Christ's Coming and the Church's Mission in 1 Thessalonians

Charles A. Gieschen

For many Christians in mainline denominations of the United States and a growing number of non-denominational evangelical congregations, the triumphal coming of Christ on the last day plays a relatively minor role in their understanding of the church and her mission. Lectionary readings often set forth this theme for a few Sundays at the beginning and end of the church year, but even then the end-time trumpets may not be blown too loudly in preaching. Why is eschatology not more widely understood as central to the preaching and teaching of the church, especially in light of the emphasis on eschatology in the teaching and preaching of Jesus and the apostles? A possible reason is the widespread understanding that the work of Christ stands functionally complete at his death and resurrection, or at the very latest, his ascension. Even though few of us would admit it, we may neither see nor teach the second coming as an integral part of the work of Christ. "And he will return to judge the living and the dead" becomes almost a creedal add-on that pales in significance to "was crucified, suffered, died, was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead." We may even fear that giving stress to eschatology might identify us with those Christians whose eschatological interests are driven by one of the abhorrent variations of pre-millennialism, or even with false prophets like Howard Camping whose two date-setting predictions of the return of Christ in 2011 were the object of ridicule by both the news media and late night talk shows.¹

The ongoing experience of Satan, sin, and death make it all the more important that we proclaim the second coming of Christ, when everything that he accomplished in his first coming is brought to its visible consummation. If this is not stressed, many are left wondering what difference the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus has made in this world

¹ Harold Camping is a Christian radio evangelist who made a very public prediction that the world would end on May 21, 2011. When his prediction did not come true, he then announced that it would happen on October 21, 2011. After this "prophecy" was also shown to be false by passing unfulfilled, he apologized for these two announcements.

where hate, tragedy, war, bloodshed, and death remain all around us. James Moorhead, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary with expertise in pre-millennial American Christian churches, made this astute observation:

Evil comes as the monstrous moral alien that cannot be incorporated into the prevailing culture; and because it cannot be assimilated, horror returns, it moves in an endless loop, it fails to satisfy intellectually, because liberal humanitarianism offers no way of articulating or transcending major acts of human transgression. In its eschatology, mainstream Protestantism has suppressed the blood, the chaos, and the terror of the Apocalypse [i.e., the book of Revelation]; and these have leapt out like the bogey from under the bed. If the mainstream churches cannot give a satisfactory account of the end, is it surprising that many people will choose to go elsewhere where those needs can be met and addressed?²

Certainly Lutherans should proclaim biblical eschatology in its fullness, with all its end-time deceptions and deceivers, resurrection, judgment, hell, and heaven. This study will demonstrate that eschatology, especially the *parousia* or triumphal coming of Christ, was central to Paul's apostolic missionary preaching and remains a vital foundation of the church's ongoing faith, mission, and daily living in hope. Nowhere in the Pauline corpus is evidence supporting this thesis more evident than in Paul's two letters to the church in Thessalonica.³ The term *parousia* [παρουσία] alone occurs six times in these brief letters (1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8). Not only do both letters contain extensive teaching sections about the end-times (e.g., 1 Thess 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess 1:5–2:12), but there are also several brief eschatological summary statements in 1 Thessalonians that serve as thematic discourse markers, pointing the hearers of these epistles to their future hope (e.g., 1:10; 2:12, 16, 19; 3:13; and 5:23). Selby notes the prevalence of eschatology throughout the first epistle:

Each major section and sub-section culminates in an eschatological pronouncement so that a strongly eschatological tone pervades the entire epistle. By using visionary language in this way Paul evokes a perspective from which the Thessalonians are invited to see themselves and their circumstances. They are living near the end of time and awaiting the imminent return of Christ, the resurrection of the

² James Moorhead, "Mainstream Protestants and the End of the World," *InSpire* (Winter 2000): 17.

³ See especially David Luckensmeyer, *The Eschatology of First Thessalonians*, NTOA 71 (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009). Unlike many critical scholars who dismiss 2 Thessalonians as pseudo-Pauline and inauthentic, I conclude that both letters are from the hand of Paul.

dead, the judgment before God, and the final reward and punishment which will be meted out at that judgment.⁴

This study will limit its focus to 1 Thessalonians, giving attention to Paul's teaching in both the longer eschatological pericopes and the short eschatological pronouncements. Even though only brief comments will be made on most of these texts, a substantial discussion of the theological implications of this evidence will conclude this study.

I. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

Paul's opening thanksgiving in 1 Thess 1:2-10 introduces several themes that are fleshed out in the rest of the epistle, including the triumphal coming of Christ featured at the conclusion of the thanksgiving:

⁹For they themselves are reporting concerning us what manner of entrance we had to you, namely that you turned to God from idols in order to serve the living and real God ¹⁰and also await his Son from the heavens [ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν], whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath that is to come [τὸν ῥυόμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης].

The language of "turning to God" for conversion is also found in Acts (9:35; 11:21; 15:19; 26:18, 20), especially Paul's preaching at Lystra: "Turn from these worthless things to the living God" (Acts 14:15). Paul's description of God as "the living and real/true God" in 1:9 is probably dependent upon Jer 10:10. His use of this language reflects a well-known polemic against pagan gods not being "living or true" (e.g., Isa 44:9-20; Wisdom of Solomon 13-15; and Philo, *Decal* 52-81, *Special Laws* 1:13-31).⁵ In light of Paul's testimony to Jesus' resurrection in 1:10, the adjective "living" in 1:9 may also indicate the identification of the risen Jesus within the mystery of the one living God (cf. Rev 1:18). The words "from idols" (ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων) in 1:9 indicates that the majority of these Christians were converted from polytheistic paganism and not from monotheistic Judaism (cf. 1 Thess 2:14, 16).⁶ Because the social and economic life in Thessalonica was bound up with the religious and political cultic life, the splash that Paul made through the baptism of pagans into Christianity did not go unnoticed. Even though the outward form of idolatry has often become more refined over the centuries in many cultures, the need to turn to God

⁴ Gary S. Selby, "'Blameless at His Coming': The Discursive Construction of Eschatological Reality in 1 Thessalonians," *Rhetorica* (1999): 398.

⁵ Beverly Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1998), 19.

⁶ J.B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (London: MacMillan, 1895), 16.

from these idols—whatever form they may take—remains in every generation and locale.

The preaching of the resurrection and return of Jesus in the early mission at Thessalonica is made clear in the closing words of this thanksgiving: “And also await his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:10). The gospel that Paul originally proclaimed and continued to echo in both of these letters had a decidedly eschatological focus: after being converted, these Christians began to “await his Son from the heavens.” Paul already signaled this focus at Thessalonica when he wrote of remembering their “endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 1:3), and then blows the end-times trumpet loudly throughout the final two chapters and much of 2 Thessalonians. The pair of present infinitive verbs, “to serve continually” (δουλεύειν) in 1:9b and “to await continually” (ἀναμένειν) in 1:10a indicate the daily tension of a Christian serving in the present circumstances while simultaneously awaiting the future deliverance. Waiting, in contrast to serving, is often viewed as a passive activity. This continuous waiting for the Son, however, is not a dull and sedentary existence as in idly waiting at an airport for the arrival of a long overdue relative whom you are not even excited about seeing; it is the dynamic activity of living in minute-to-minute expectation of the arrival of one’s most esteemed and beloved friend. These Christians appear to have expected the return of Christ imminently in their own lifetimes (1 Thess 4:15, 17; 5:4). I.H. Marshall makes this adept observation: “The point is that the present existence of the Thessalonian Christians was determined by their expectations about the future.”⁷

The designation “his Son,” which appears only here in these two epistles, adds to what Paul proclaimed earlier in this letter about Jesus with the designations “Lord” and “Christ” as well as complements what he wrote earlier about God as “Father” (1:1, 3). Within the salutation and thanksgiving that open this letter, Jesus is confessed to be Lord, Christ, and Son of God. Paul also states here that the Son will come again “from the heavens” (ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν). The reference to the resurrection that follows this phrase implies the ascension and enthronement of Jesus in heaven (Acts 1:9–11; 7:55–56), a reality Paul writes about in Ephesians: “he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named” (1:20–21). “Son,” “heavens,” and the context of end-time judgment in 1:10 indicates that Paul is alluding to the “one like a son

⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 58.

of man" scene in Daniel 7:9-14, an apocalyptic text that prominently influenced Jesus and early Christian eschatological expectations (e.g., Matt 25:31-46). Although Paul vacillates between using the singular and plural, the plurality of heavens here probably reflects the consistent use of the Hebrew plural form in various Old Testament texts (e.g., שָׁמַיִם in MT Ps 19:2).⁸ It also possibly reflects the cosmology visible in Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic texts that speak of multiple heavens (e.g., Paul writes concerning three heavens in 2 Cor 12:2). Paul's familiarity with first-century Jewish apocalyptic expectations is an important background for understanding his brief statements about Jesus in these letters.⁹

This continuous waiting for the Son's return from the heavens on the last day is grounded in the certainty of the end-time events that have already taken place in the death and resurrection of the Son: "whom he raised from the dead" (1 Thess 1:10). This relative clause is set forth by Paul elsewhere as public confirmation of Jesus' sonship (e.g., Rom 1:4), but here the resurrection of Jesus functions primarily as an assurance of his return. Several interpreters note the correspondence between this statement about resurrection and judgment and the one made at the close of Paul's speech before the Areopagus: "He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).¹⁰ The terse confession of Jesus' resurrection in 1:10 clearly implies not only his death, but also his incarnation, birth, earthly life, and true humanity unto eternity. The centrality of Jesus' death and resurrection in the gospel Paul proclaimed at Thessalonica is clear from confessional statements about Jesus later in this letter: "For because we believe that Jesus died and was raised again" (1 Thess 4:14) and "our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us" (1 Thess 5:9b-10a). This confession of Jesus' resurrection takes on added significance for the Thessalonians in light of their fears about those who died before Jesus' return (1 Thess 4:13-18), the widespread disparaging of "flesh" in Greco-Roman philosophy, and various conceptions of a fearful passage in afterlife present in Greco-Roman religion.

⁸ George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Macmillan, 1908), 15.

⁹ Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 89.

¹⁰ For example: Lightfoot, *Notes on St. Paul's Epistles*, 17; Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 14; and F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 19. All three note that this speech was probably delivered shortly before the writing of 1 Thessalonians.

Paul concludes his brief description of the enduring hope among these Christians by confessing both end-time salvation and judgment: “Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath that is to come” (1 Thess 1:10c). Rigaux observes that the use of the personal name “Jesus” (Ἰησοῦν) here without any other titles protects against exalting the Son to a docetic status without his humanity and disconnecting the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith.¹¹ Although Paul draws his specific description of Jesus as “the one who delivers us” (τὸν ῥύομενον ἡμᾶς) from Isa 59:19–20, the “deliverer” language here and elsewhere would have been reinforced by early Christian usage of the Lord’s Prayer: “Deliver us from the Evil One” (ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ; Matt 6:13b). There are past, present, and future aspects of salvation: Jesus *delivered* us in his death; he *delivers* us daily through the forgiveness of sins; and he *will deliver* us when he comes again. Paul speaks of the future aspect of salvation here.

First and Second Thessalonians give significant attention to the wrath (ὀργή) that is to come, which is understood as God’s end-time judgment against unbelief (1 Thess 1:10; 2:16; cf. 2 Thess 1:5–10; 2:8–12). Although Paul focuses here on the future wrath that *will come* upon all unbelievers, there is also a past and present aspect to the revelation of God’s wrath: it *came* upon Jesus for all sin in his death (Matt 26:39, 42; 27:46) and, to a certain extent, it *comes* now upon unbelief in the world (Rom 1:18–32; 1 Thess 2:16). Paul’s proclamation of “the wrath that is to come” is grounded in the preaching of the prophets about “the day of the LORD” being not only a day of grace but also a “day of wrath” (e.g., Zeph 1:15–18).¹²

There has been a growing tendency to downplay, dismiss, or ignore this biblical testimony about the wrath of God. C.H. Dodd downplayed it by arguing that Paul depersonalized God’s wrath by understanding it as an impersonal process whereby sin causes its own retribution.¹³ More recently, Rob Bell, in his widely read *Love Wins*, has questioned biblical testimony about afterlife punishment for unbelievers.¹⁴ The dismissing or ignoring of this testimony is seen on the popular level by the periodic opinion polls wherein a strong majority affirms some type of afterlife in heaven but only a weak minority affirms the existence of hell. Proclamation of the wrath of God continues to be a vital way to help people see

¹¹ Beda Rigaux, *St. Paul: Les épîtres aux Thessaloniens* (Paris: Gabalda, 1956), 395.

¹² Gary A. Herion, “Wrath of God (OT),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6:989–996.

¹³ C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), 21–23.

¹⁴ Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

their need for God's grace in Christ Jesus. It must, however, always be understood as his alien work in relationship to his love: "For whereas love and holiness are part of his essential nature, wrath is contingent upon human sin: if there were no sin there would be no wrath."¹⁵ Paul proclaims that Jesus "delivers us from the wrath to come" and later specifies how Jesus accomplished this: "who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we live through him" (1 Thess 5:10). In Christ, who suffered God's wrath for all sin, God is at peace with all sinners. "The wrath that is to come" will only be experienced by unbelievers who reject this peace. These concluding words of the thanksgiving prepare the reader for the extensive focus on eschatology throughout this letter, especially in 4:13–5:11.

II. 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16

1 Thessalonians 2:16 is another brief eschatological summary; the verses that precede it, however, are necessary for context:

¹³On account of this we also give thanks to God without ceasing, that when you received the word which you heard from us, you received it not as the word of men but—just as it truly is—the word of God, that is also at work in you who are believing. ¹⁴For you became imitators, brothers, of God's churches, the ones in Judea that are in Christ Jesus, because you suffered the same things by your own countrymen, just as they also did by the Jews, ¹⁵the ones who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, also persecuting us, not being pleasing to God, and opposing all men, ¹⁶because they are hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles in order to save them, *with the result that they heap up [to capacity] their sins continually* [εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἀμαρτίας πάντοτε]. *But wrath came upon them to the uttermost* [ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργή].

Here Paul alludes to the passion narrative of the arrest of Jesus by Jewish authorities and their role in his death by crucifixion. He also alludes to the Jews being responsible for a significant amount of the affliction he and the Christian congregation faced in Thessalonica, which is confirmed by Luke's account of Jews from the synagogue inciting legal action against Jason and other Christians at Thessalonica after some significant conversions from the synagogue and "God-fearing Gentiles, including some leading women" (Acts 17:4). Paul uses a judgment expression to signal the result of the rejection of the gospel and persecution by fellow Jews: "they heap up [to capacity] their sins continually" (my translation), which the ESV renders, "so as always to fill up the measure of their sins." Jesus used

¹⁵ Stephen H. Travis, "Wrath of God (NT)," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:997.

a similar expression in his critique of the Pharisees: “Do you, then fill up the measure of your fathers” (Matt 23:32). Then Paul mentions “the wrath came upon them to the uttermost.” “The wrath” here appears to be the same “wrath that is to come” mentioned in 1:10. What is striking here, however, is Paul’s use of the aorist tense rather than the future. Through the use of the aorist, Paul is stressing that these unbelieving Jews *already* stand under God’s judgment as those who will experience his end-time wrath. The evangelist John conveys a similar idea: “He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18).

III. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-19

The next text is another brief eschatological summary in the sentences that immediately follow those just discussed:

¹⁷As for us, brothers, after we were separated from you for a short time—in person, not in thought—we endeavored with much longing to see your faces. ¹⁸On account of this, we desired to come to you—I, Paul, did many times—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹For *what is our hope or joy or crown of which we boast before our Lord Jesus in his triumphal coming? It is certainly you, is it not?* [τίς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἐλπὶς ἢ χαρὰ ἢ στέφανος καυχήσεως ἢ οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐμπροσθεν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ;] ²⁰Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

Although many in Paul’s audience probably did not understand his allusion, he is alluding to how some Jews thought that they would “boast” (cf. *καυχήσεως* in 2:19) before the Lord about some of their own accomplishments in the afterlife.¹⁶ Even before Paul gets to his discussion of those who have fallen asleep in Christ, he is offering assurance here that the source of his boasting on the last day will not be his obedience to *Torah*, but the Holy Spirit’s work through the gospel that has not only brought the Thessalonian church from idolatry to serving the living God, but also will present them in risen glory alive before our Lord Jesus at his *parousia*. The technical Greco-Roman understanding of *parousia*, namely the public ceremonial arrival of a ruling dignitary, is important for how this term would have been understood by Paul’s original audience.¹⁷ I have translated it as “triumphal coming” in order to capture some of this sense of the word. One of the idolatries that these Christians had turned from is the veneration of the Roman emperor through the imperial cultic sites and

¹⁶ See evidence in Simon Gathercole, *Where is the Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁷ BDAG, 780–781; see especially Abraham Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (New York, Doubleday, 2000), 271–272.

ceremonies in Thessalonica. The implication here is that Paul and the Thessalonians will be present before their true and only Lord and King, who is none other than the crucified and risen Jesus, at his very public appearance on the last day.

IV. 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13

Another short eschatological summary is found at the end of chapter 3, which brings to a close Paul's extensive reflection on the time he spent in Thessalonica, his departure, and his effort to return in person. Paul brings this section to a close with a blessing:

¹¹Now may God our Father and our Lord Jesus himself straighten out our path to you and ¹²may the Lord increase and multiply your love for one another and all people, just as we have also for you, ¹³*in order that your hearts be established blameless in holiness before our God and Father in the triumphal coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones* [εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ].

Paul makes quite a context shift within this blessing: he begins by asking for the opportunity to visit Thessalonica and for the Lord to continue to increase their love, but then states that the purpose of this growth in love is that their hearts be blameless in holiness at the time of the coming of our Lord Jesus. The imminent return of Christ is clearly in view here; he does not say, "so that you remain blameless in holiness until the day you die." In light of their pagan background, it is not surprising that holiness or sanctification is often brought up in connection with Christ's *parousia*. That this sanctification is the result of divine work is made very explicit by Paul in the final blessing of this letter (1 Thess 5:23–24). As with the opening salutation of the letter, Paul expresses both distinction and unity by identifying the Father with the title "God" and then Jesus with the title "Lord." In the *parousia*, Jesus will be accompanied by "all his holy ones." In light of the intertextual echo here (Zech 14:6 LXX), this is most assuredly referencing created angels as is made explicit in the teaching of Jesus (e.g., Matt 25:31), not "the holy ones" who have died prior to the *parousia* and live with Christ.

V. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

This is the first of the two primary eschatological teaching sections of the letter, a text familiar to pastors because of its frequent use in the pastoral care of those who are grieving the death of a loved one. Some interpreters have even theorized that the situation behind this teaching is

the major impetus for Paul writing this letter. That situation appears to be that a few members of the church had died since the mission in Thessalonica had begun and some of those remaining were distraught because they thought that these believers would not share in the benefits of the *parousia* of Christ since they had died prior to his return. We have quite the opposite problem in much of Christendom today whereby some conceive of their loved ones as already enjoying the fullness of afterlife long before the last day and the resurrection of the body. What Paul writes here addresses both of these situations:

¹³We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning the ones who are sleeping, in order that you do not mourn even as others who do not have hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also God will lead [bring] with Jesus the ones who sleep through Jesus. ¹⁵For we say this to you as a word of the Lord: *we, the ones who live, the ones who remain, to the triumphal coming of the Lord shall surely not precede the ones who have fallen asleep* [Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας]. ¹⁶*Because the Lord himself—with a cry, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God—will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ will be raised first* [ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον.]. ¹⁷*Then we, the ones who are alive and remaining, will be snatched up at the same time with them into the clouds in order to meet the Lord in the air* [ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄερα.]. *Consequently, we will always be with the Lord* [καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα]. ¹⁸Therefore, continually encourage one another with these words.

Paul is not the originator of the language that Christians who have physically died are “asleep” (4:13, 14). He probably used language that was already part of the oral Gospel tradition with which he was familiar (e.g., Matt 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52; John 11:11–13). A similar use of Gospel tradition is visible in his later discussion of Jesus coming “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2, 4; cf. Matt 24:43; Luke 12:39). “Sleep” should neither be understood as a euphemism that Paul is using to soften or deny the reality of physical death nor as a technical term indicating so-called “soul sleep” (i.e., an unawareness of the person to after-death life in Christ during the intermediate state prior to physical resurrection on the last day). As with Jesus, Paul uses the language of sleep to communicate the mystery that those who physically die in Christ continue to live on even

though their heart and brain activity cease.¹⁸

Paul explicitly grounds the assurance of the physical resurrection of those who are "asleep" in Jesus' own death and resurrection: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also God will lead with Jesus the ones who sleep through Jesus" (1 Thess 4:14). Next to the confession, "Jesus is Lord," this phrase captures one of the earliest creeds of the church: "We believe that Jesus died and rose." Several interpreters have noted that this is a pre-Pauline formula because it uses the active voice form of ἀνίστημι rather than the passive voice form of ἐγείρω that is more typically used by Paul to speak of the resurrection (e.g., 1 Cor 15:4). That Paul understands Jesus' death as substitutionary atonement for sin is clear later in this letter with his use of the preposition ὑπέρ, "the one who died *on our behalf*" (1 Thess 5:10), a preposition he employs repeatedly in his later epistles in order to proclaim the significance of Jesus' death.¹⁹ Christ's future work of returning and raising the dead is grounded in his past work of everyone dying to sin in his death and all being raised to life in his resurrection (2 Cor 5:14; cf. Rom 6:1–11).²⁰

As Paul begins speaking of how the last day will unfold, he makes a very bold claim: "We say this to you as *a word of the Lord*." In a monograph devoted to the phrase ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, Michael Pahl presents all the possible ways of interpreting this phrase and then falls flat by saying it is a reference back to the death and resurrection of Jesus and not to what follows.²¹ His translation of this sentence is: "In accordance with this message about the Lord, we say this to you." It seems more probable that Paul is throwing the authoritative weight of Jesus behind what follows. In light of the fact that κύριος occurs four times in this section and the other three times the referent is Jesus, it is clear that the referent of κύριος here is Jesus. This means that it is either from the teaching of the earthly ministry of Jesus or from the exalted Jesus by special revelation. It is my conclusion that this reflects teaching from the earthly ministry of Jesus, even though we do not have a gospel account that gives us such a verbatim teaching.

¹⁸ See especially Piotr Malysz, "Paul's Use of the Imagery of Sleep and His Understanding of the Christian Life: A Study in the Thessalonian Correspondence," *CTQ* 67 (2003): 65–78.

¹⁹ This preposition communicates Paul's theology of substitutionary atonement (e.g. Rom 5:6, 8; 8:32; 1 Cor 11:24; 15:3; 2 Cor 5:14, 21; Gal 1:4; 2:20; 3:13; Eph 5:2, 25).

²⁰ See the brief discussion in Charles A. Gieschen, "Original Sin in the New Testament," *Concordia Journal* 31 (2005): 365–372.

²¹ Michael W. Pahl, *Discerning the 'Word of the Lord': The 'Word of the Lord' in 1 Thessalonians 4:15*, Library of New Testament Studies 389 (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009).

The evangelist John said that Jesus did many other signs “that have not been written in this book” (John 20:31); Jesus also said many other things, no doubt, which are not recorded in the four gospels but which circulated in early apostolic preaching.

Against all rapture doctrines that assert a secret coming of Christ that brings about a secret exit of the church, be they pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation variations of the rapture, Paul writes here of a very public triumphal coming: “Because the Lord himself—with a cry, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God—will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ will be raised first. Then we, the ones who are alive and remaining, will be snatched up at the same time with them into the clouds in order to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess 4:17). For all who are interested in the verb ἀρπαγησόμεθα “we will be snatched up” which the Vulgate renders *rapiemur* (thus “rapture”), Malherbe’s Anchor Bible commentary cites numerous uses of ἀρπάζω in epitaphs, Lucian, Plutarch, Seneca, Ovid, Ciero, Horace, and Pliny where deceased persons are said to have been “snatched up” by death.²² In what appears to be a wonderful twist on this common usage, Paul uses this same verb here to emphasize that we will be snatched up, not by death, but by the living Jesus unto eternal resurrected life with him!

Obviously there are those who have trouble reconciling the depiction of the last day events here with the judgment depicted in texts like Matthew 25:31–46, and thus conclude these are describing different events. The Scriptures, however, are more interesting than many of us are; they describe the same event with different language and imagery. Paul does not even mention judgment of the righteous and unrighteous simply because his purpose is to console and encourage Christians whose loved ones died in the faith. If he were emphasizing accountability, he would mention judgment, as he does in other contexts within these brief epistles.

One topic that is not discussed much in the commentaries on this text is the various frightening portraits of afterlife in ancient Greco-Roman literature.²³ Most of us are familiar with some of the portraits of afterlife in Hades that are found in *The Odyssey* (c. 8th century BC), such as Tantalus always being tantalized by water and fruit that is habitually swept out of his reach, or Sisyphus being doomed to rolling a huge stone uphill only to have it roll back down again (Book 11:563–600). These Homeric depictions

²² Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 275–276.

²³ See primary text examples in Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Longman, 1977), 238–269.

of afterlife, however, are tame compared with others that followed in later centuries. Two examples will suffice here to demonstrate that there was good reason why some of the pagan converts to Christianity in Thessalonica—who may not have been taught extensively about afterlife, resurrection, and heaven from the Scriptures or Paul's preaching—would have been fearful about what would happen to fellow Christians who died before Christ's *parousia*.

The first example is from the concluding section of Plato's *The Republic* (c. 380 BC) where he recounts Socrates' teaching about afterlife from the supposed experience of Er who had died and returned to life. There is extensive testimony here about the so-called "immortality of the soul" and the soul's 1000-year journey following death. Although there is a heavenly reward in the sky for the souls of those doing good, especially noteworthy is the testimony to divine punishment through underground travel of the soul for the one who did evil:

The first group recounted their experiences, weeping and wailing as they recalled all the various things they had suffered and seen in their journey under the earth, which lasted one thousand years; the other from the sky told in turn of the happiness they had felt and the sights of indescribable beauty. O Glaucon, it would take a long time to relate everything. But he [Er] did say that the essential significance was this: everyone had to suffer an appropriate penalty for each and every sin ten times over, in retribution for the number of times and number of persons he had wronged; that is, he must make one full payment once every hundred years (since that is considered the span of human life) so that he might pay in full for all his wrongs, tenfold in one thousand years. For example, if any were responsible for the deaths of many or betrayed and enslaved cities or armies or were guilty of any other crime, they would suffer torments ten times over for all of these sins individually. . . .²⁴

Another example comes from Vergil's *Aeneid*, written in the first century BC, which further explains the soul as part of the universal spirit, with the so-called immortal soul seeking escape from the physical body and then purging corruption through the 1,000-year cycle of punishment:

In the first place a spirit within sustains the sky, the earth, the waters, and the shining globe of the moon, and the Titan sun and stars; this spirit moves the whole mass of the universe, a mind, as it were, infusing its limbs and mingled with its huge body. From this arises all

²⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, Book 10, section 615. This translation is from Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 246.

of life, the race of men, animals and birds, and the monsters that the sea bears under its marble surface. The seeds of this mind and spirit have a fiery power and celestial origin, insofar as the limbs and joints of the body, which is of earth, harmful, and subject to death, do not make them full and slow them down. Thus the souls, shut up in the gloomy darkness of the prison of their bodies, experience fear, desire, joy, and sorrow, and do not see clearly the essence of their celestial nature. Moreover, when the last glimmer of life has gone, all the evils and all the diseases of the body do not yet completely depart from these poor souls and it is inevitable that many ills, for a long time encrusted, become deeply engrained in an amazing way. Therefore they are piled with punishments and they pay the penalties of their former wickedness. Some spirits are hung suspended to the winds; for others the infection of crime is washed by a vast whirlpool or burned out by fire. Each of us suffers his own shade. Then we are sent to Elysium and we few occupy these happy fields, until a long period of the circle of time has been completed and has removed the ingrown corruption and has left a pure ethereal spirit and the fire of the original essence. When they have completed the cycle of one thousand years, the god calls all these in a great throng to the river Lethe, where, of course, they are made to forget so that they might begin to wish to return to bodied and see again the vault of heaven.²⁵

After reading these two afterlife conceptions that were prominent in the Greco-Roman world in which Paul preached, one does not have to wonder long why some confused Christians at Thessalonica would have been very concerned about what lay ahead for their loved ones who died before the triumphal coming of Christ. Plato speaks of the journey of the disembodied soul under the earth in order to pay for every sin over a period of 100 years, ten times over (i.e., for a total of 1000 years) after which period the soul makes a choice regarding in what it will be reborn, whether human or animal. How depressing! Such teaching helps one understand why Paul's message in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 inspired hope and was to be used as encouragement. An important aspect of Paul's preaching in every context is the forgiveness of sins that has already been won in the death of Jesus and is proclaimed implicitly here in the creedal statement "if we believe that Jesus died and rose" (1 Thess 4:14). There is, therefore, refreshing clarity and certainty with which Christian life after physical death is described by Paul: sleep in Jesus, triumphal coming of

²⁵ Vergil, *Aeneid*, 700–751. This translation is from Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 246.

Jesus, resurrection of the dead, the faithful snatched up, and all Christians with the Lord always. This is pastoral teaching that truly comforts fears about death and encourages hope about the life that continues beyond the grave and climaxes in the resurrection of the body in glory.

VII. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

It is especially in 1 Thessalonians 5 that one can hear the echoes of Jesus' teachings, such as those in the synoptic Gospels. As stated above, Paul's teaching that "the Day of the Lord come like a thief in the night" is probably drawing on Gospel tradition. Here the arrival of the last day and Christ's coming is linked pointedly with sanctification:

¹Concerning the general times and times of fulfillment, brothers, you have no need to have something written to you. ²*For you yourselves know accurately that the Day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night* [αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκριβῶς οἶδατε ὅτι ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως ἔρχεται]. ³*When people are saying, "Peace and Security," then suddenly destruction will come upon them just as birthing pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will surely not escape* [ὅταν λέγωσιν, Εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια, τότε αἰφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐφίσταται ὄλεθρος ὡσπερ ἡ ὠδὴν τῆ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσῃ, καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγωσιν]. ⁴*You, however, are not in the darkness, brothers, with the result that this day surprises you like a thief* [ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐν σκότει, ἵνα ἡ ἡμέρα ὑμᾶς ὡς κλέπτῃς καταλάβῃ]. ⁵For all of you are children of light, children of the day. We are neither of the night nor of the darkness. ⁶Therefore, then, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷For the ones who sleep, sleep at night, and the ones who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸Because we, however, are of the day, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹*For God has not destined us for wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ* [ὅτι οὐκ ἔθετο ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ εἰς περποιθησὶν σωτηρίας διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] ¹⁰*who died on our behalf* [τοῦ ἀποθανόντος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν], in order that whether we are awake or asleep we live together with him. ¹¹Therefore, encourage and build up one another continually, just as you are doing.

I follow Karl Donfried and others who argue that the background for this text is the religious and political cultic life of the city.²⁶ The Roman imperial cult promised "Peace and Security" as part of the *pax Romana* propaganda campaign backed up Rome's military might, but *pax Romana* will not be able to deliver people from God's judgment on the Day of the

²⁶ See the bibliography and discussion in Charles A. Gieschen, "Christian Identity in a Pagan Thessalonica: The Imitation of Paul's Cruciform Life," *CTQ* 72 (2008): 3-5.

Lord. The religious cults had drunkenness and sexual revelry under the cover of darkness, but Christians who await the Day of the Lord live as “children of light,” sober with faith, love, and hope, separate from such pagan idolatry and self-indulgence. Notice again how the future deliverance from end-time wrath is grounded in Jesus’ past deliverance at his death for our behalf (1 Thess 5:9–10).

VII. 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

The first epistle ends with a blessing that contains a short eschatological summary that is very similar to the one at the end of chapter 3:

²³Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, *and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* [καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖη]. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful; he will also do it.

What is made very explicit here is that the sanctifying activity that Paul discusses in the final two chapters of this letter is a divine work: “God himself sanctifies . . . he will do it.” Rome promised peace, but the God of peace who has reconciled humanity with himself through the death of Jesus will deliver everlasting peace at the triumphal final coming of Christ on the last day. Significant here is Paul’s emphasis on the body (τὸ σῶμα) also being sanctified; the future state of the body was not of concern in much Greco-Roman philosophy that viewed the body as a prison for the immortal soul. Paul uses this closing blessing to stress the value of God’s creation through his assurance that the body also will be raised and live eternally.

VIII. Eschatology, the Church, and Mission

In light of this brief tour through the eschatological texts of 1 Thessalonians, what is the Holy Spirit teaching here about the church and her mission? First and foremost, the church is to live with her eyes fixed on both the past work of Christ, especially his atoning death and victorious resurrection that is mediated to the present through preaching and the sacraments, and the future work of Christ when he comes again to raise and judge the living and dead. Paul’s pattern is to begin with Christ’s past work and then proclaim this as the sure basis for Christ’s future work at his coming on the last day. Proclaiming the past and future work of Christ is not an “either . . . or” situation for the church; it is “both . . . and.” According to 1 Thess 1:10, the basis for our “waiting for the Son from heaven” “who delivers us from the wrath to come” is the resurrection of the Son by the Father. Because of the past work of Jesus’ resurrection, we are assured of the future work of his coming and delivering us from evil.

According to 1 Thess 4:13, the basis of our assurance that "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep" is "because we believe that Jesus died and rose again." According to 1 Thess 5:9, "God destined us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us." There are past, present, and future aspects to salvation in the Scriptures. With the phrase "to obtain salvation," Paul is writing about the future aspect of salvation. The past salvific work of Christ's death is the foundation for the certain hope in Christ's future salvific work of end-time resurrection, deliverance from wrath against unbelief, and restored glory. This means that the inter-relationship and balance between Christ's past and future work should be maintained in the life of the church, especially the teaching and preaching of pastors. The church is where we hear of Christ's past and future work, where we receive the benefits of that past work in the present, and where this past and present work of Christ is the assurance of his future work that will be consummated at his *parousia*.

Second, because the reality of sin in and around the church inherently causes affliction, the church needs to point regularly beyond its past or present affliction to its future glory. It may be difficult for many in the current North American context of Christianity to empathize with the affliction that these first-century Christians and many others in subsequent generations have endured. The church suffers in every generation but often more in some locations than others. When I lectured in Lithuania in 2009, I heard many accounts about Christianity under communism. When I taught in South Africa in 2010, I heard of the many and varied challenges facing Christianity in different western Africa nations. Look at the challenges that Christians in Haiti face following the earthquake of 2010. When the present circumstances of the church are severe affliction, it is all the more important that the apostolic ministry put before the church her future circumstances of resurrected glory and restored creation. Christ's coming on the last day means that the church and individual Christians need never lose hope, no matter how desperate our present circumstances, because our future is as certain and glorious as the risen and returning Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, although God's wrath against sin was visited upon Jesus at the cross and is properly part of our preaching of Christ's past work mediated to us in the present through the means of grace, God's wrath over unbelief is a future reality that Paul proclaims in conjunction with Christ's second coming. Hesitancy among pastors to proclaim the end-time wrath of God over unbelief that leads to eternal death does not help the church to see the dire consequences for the world that rejects Jesus. Proclamation of those

consequences, however, adds urgency to the church's mission of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. To put it very bluntly: God is seeking to rescue unbelievers not only from the hopelessness of their present idolatry, but also from an utterly hopeless future in hell.

Fourth, because eschatology involves, by its very nature, mysteries that will be fully revealed in the future, there is a greater possibility for the church to be deceived or confused about eschatological events. We see this in the first-century church and yet again in the 21st century church. This possibility should not lead us to avoid the subject, however, but rather move us to engage the subject fully, addressing especially any confusion about the subject for the well-being of the church, even as Paul does in these epistles.

Fifth, preaching and teaching focused on the second coming of Christ should not lead the church or individual members of Christ's body to try to escape the responsibilities of daily vocation but to embrace these responsibilities with more fervor because our time on earth is limited and the day of the Lord is coming soon. Martin Menken has made a significant contribution to our understanding of these epistles by emphasizing that an over-realized eschatology led some at Thessalonica to think that the curse of Genesis 3—working by the sweat of one's brow—no longer applied to those who were a new creation in Christ Jesus. There are two allusions to this situation in the first letter.²⁷ 1 Thess 4:11-12 states, "[But we encourage you. . .] to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on no one." Among the list of exhortations at the end of the letter in 1 Thess 5:14 is this phrase: "admonish the undisciplined." This emphasis on vocational activity is very explicit, extensive, and blunt in the second letter. Paul writes in 2 Thess 3:6-13,

[6] Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. [7] For *you yourselves know how it is necessary to imitate us* [οἴδατε πῶς δεῖ μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς], because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, [8] nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we not be a burden to any of you; [9] not because we do not have the right to this, but *in order to offer ourselves as an example for you, in order*

²⁷ M.J.J. Menken, "Paradise Regained or Still Lost? Eschatology and Disorderly Behavior in 2 Thessalonians," *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 271-289.

that you imitate us [ἵνα ἑαυτοῦς τύπον δῶμεν ὑμῖν εἰς τὸ μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς]. [10] For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. [11] For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. [12] Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. [13] But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

Paul's blunt statement, "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (1 Thess 5:10b) is an obvious corrective to the over-realized eschatology held to by some of the Thessalonian Christians.

This study has argued that eschatology, especially the *parousia* or triumphal final coming of Christ, was central to Paul's apostolic missionary preaching and remains a vital foundation of the church's ongoing faith, daily living in hope, and mission of proclaiming salvation from the wrath to come. As with Paul and the Thessalonian church, it is vital that the integration of Christ's past and future work be heard in our present preaching and teaching, in order that this message shape the daily faith, love, and hope of his church in mission with the result that she ever lives in eager expectation of his coming on the last day.

Luke and the Foundations of the Church

Peter J. Scaer

I. Luke, the "Pentecostal" Catholic

Matthew has traditionally been known as "the ecclesiastical gospel."¹ Luke Timothy Johnson calls Matthew simply, "the gospel of the church."² Indeed, among the canonical gospels, only Matthew specifically employs the vocabulary of "church." Christ identifies himself as the builder of the ἐκκλησία (Matt 16:18). Built on the rock, it can withstand any storm (Matt 6:24), so that not even the gates of Hades will overcome it (Matt 16:18). The church, for Matthew is more than a concept; it is the place or context in which authority is vested, forgiveness is given or withheld, and disputes are settled (Matt 16:19; 18:17). Matthew further establishes that the church has an apostolic foundation (Matthew 10:28) and that the primary disciple is Peter, who is specifically designated as "first" (πρῶτος) among the apostles (Matt 10:2).

Luke-Acts offers an admittedly more complicated picture, describing the church not only as Jesus envisioned it, but as it began to grow and spread throughout the Roman Empire. The church of Luke-Acts, like life itself, is often messy. Decisions are made as new situations arise. One might say that the church in Acts appears to be both pentecostal and catholic, at once spontaneous and well organized.

For Luke, Pentecost marks the birth of the church. As Luke Timothy Johnson puts it, "Luke obviously considers the Holy Spirit to be the life-principle of the Church."³ The Pentecost Spirit fills not only the apostles, but permeates the entire church. Peter speaks of church as the new age, prophesied by Joel: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. Indeed, I will pour out my spirit in those days upon my men servants and women servants, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18). True to Joel's prophecy, the Book

¹ R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Pater Noster Press, 1989), 242.

² Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 172.

³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 15.

of Acts is a rollercoaster ride, filled with miracles, visions, and angelic appearances. Four unmarried daughters of Philip are said to prophesy (Acts 21:9), and the sick and lame are healed by Peter's shadow and Paul's handkerchief (Acts 5:12-16; 19:11). The church's story, with shipwrecks and snake-handling, is truly epic. No wonder, then, that the Book of Acts has become the inspiration not only for Pentecostalism, but also for countless attempts at church renewal. Acts represents for many a golden age when charisma trumped order, and the Spirit moved as he willed. As Leon Morris wistfully writes, "In the course of time the church did, of course, settle down as an institution. It lost the first fine flush of enthusiastic proclamation of the gospel and the eager expectation of the Lord's return. It became interested in questions of order and sacramental practice, and in general all that makes for the institutional side of Christianity."⁴

Then again, those who think of the church as a type of free-form dance might look again and see in Luke-Acts a church whose movement is thoughtfully choreographed. For all of the twists and turns, the overall story is structured, purposeful, and catholic. While the word "church" does not appear at all in Luke's first volume, it can be found often in his second.⁵ Within Luke-Acts, we have a more fully-developed ecclesiology with Christ, Peter, and the apostles, as well as a movement towards deacons, presbyters, and bishops. For this reason, many have seen in Luke what they call an "early catholicism."⁶ Luke's work not only lays a foundation for the church, but begins to add the second and third story. Even more, Luke demonstrates that the church, like a multi-storied tower, has floors built underground, giving the building structural integrity. For all of its revolutionary quality, Luke's story emphasizes continuity. There is essentially one Israel, the one true church, from the Old Testament prophets to the New Testament ministers, with Christ at the center of it all.

⁴ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 42.

⁵ The term "church" (ἐκκλησία), which appears some 23 times in Acts, is used most often in the singular to refer to the church at large. It can also be used to speak about the church as it appears in several places: "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" (Act 9:31). The term can also refer to a church in one particular place: "the church at Antioch" (Acts 13:1). At least three times, the term appears in the plural to speak about individual congregations (Acts 15:41; 16:4, 5). At the Council of Jerusalem, the decision is made with the approval of apostles, elders, and "the whole church" (Acts 15:22).

⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 23-27.

II. The Church as the Doubly-Inspired Israel

Though the most Jewish of writings, Matthew's gospel is largely about breaking with the past. The first evangelist aims, as R.T. France puts it, at "the formation of a new body which at the same time is and yet is distinct from Israel."⁷ With his subversive Abrahamic genealogy, Matthew demonstrates that Jesus is not only the fulfillment of Israel, but in many ways, its end. Jesus reveals "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matt 6:9), and by doing so, negates the need for further genealogies. Even more radically, Matthew depicts a Jesus who appears at times not only to fulfill the Old Testament, but to make it obsolete. In Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, Jesus frequently introduces new topics with the formula, "You have heard it said (5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43), followed by the unsettling, "But now I say to you." For Torah lovers everywhere, the words still sound shocking. There is a sense in which Moses and Elijah must fade, as Christians are told to "Listen to Him" (Matt 17:5). Matthew's task is, in many ways, groundbreaking. God's people, no longer led by priests whose job descriptions were written by Moses, would be shepherded by apostolic ministers who take their directions from Christ himself. Matthew's gospel drives a wedge between "their synagogue" and "my church" (Matt 16:18), as he radically points forward to a time when the gospel will be preached to all nations. Surely, this was not an easy task, and the effect is often jarring.

Luke's story, on the other hand, has more to do with continuity. If Marcion liked Luke's gospel, that was only because he misunderstood or distorted it. Writing to God-fearers and Gentiles, Luke aims to demonstrate that the church brings Israel not to its end, but its completion. The Spirit of the Old Testament flows like a river into the New. This sense of continuity is encapsulated beautifully in Luke's infancy narrative. At the birth of Jesus, Matthew tells us, "Herod was disturbed, and all of Jerusalem with him" (Matt 2:3). The Christ-child's only worshipers are foreigners who follow an eastern star (Matt 2:1-2). Luke's infancy narrative, on the other hand, features the faithful remnant. Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna are Jerusalem temple-dwellers who recognize that Christ is truly the "Glory of Israel" (Luke 2:32).

John the Baptist plays the part of the Old Testament prophet, pointing to Christ by his life and his words. John's miraculous birth, accompanied by an angelic visitation, a song of praise, and a report of continued growth,

⁷ R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 242.

paves the way for the story of Jesus, whose birth repeats these same elements, but takes them to a new and higher level.⁸ Luke believes in parallelism, not only as a literary form, but as a theological truth. Elijah's greatness is only enhanced by Elisha's coming. So also, Israel's honor is magnified by the coming of Christ, who brings Israel to her fulfillment and glory.

The Book of Acts pictures Pentecost as the dramatic birth of a new and wonderful age. But just how new is this new age? Luke would have us know that the Spirit of Pentecost is the very same Spirit who inhabited the Old Testament and announced his presence with fire and flame (Exod 19:18; 24:17; 1 Kings 18:38; 19:11-13). If the Pentecost Spirit resulted in the prophesying of Philip's daughters, they were in fact following in the line of Anna, the temple-dwelling prophetess (Luke 2:36-39). At Mary's greeting, Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41). Zechariah, a son of Abijah and a temple priest, is said to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:67). Gabriel tells Zechariah that his son also will be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15). Simeon likewise is described as a man who was "moved by the Spirit" (Luke 2:27), having received revelation from the "Holy Spirit" (Luke 2:26), for "the Holy Spirit was upon him" (Luke 2:25). In the light of the Infancy Narrative, Pentecost appears radical hardly at all. The Spirit who is poured out at Pentecost had long ago made his home in Israel.

If you had only the gospel of Matthew, you would think of Israel as history. In Matthew, the risen Christ is eager to move on. When he appears to the women, he says, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (Matt 28:10). The Great Commission then is given at Galilee, and Jesus sets the apostles' sights on the nations, leaving Jerusalem as it were in the rear-view mirror (Matt 28:16-20). Luke, on the other hand, ends his gospel where he began. After the ascension, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). And, indeed, Jerusalem would become the center and foundation for the church, its first growth-ring.

III. The Twelve Apostles and the Twelve Tribes of Israel

Though our Lord had many followers, Luke tells us, "He summoned his disciples, and chose from among them twelve, whom he named apostles' (6:13). As Francois Bovon recognizes, they are "the representatives of the twelve tribes of the renewed Israel."⁹ They represent both the

⁸ For a discussion of Luke's use of step-parallelism, see Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 313-314.

⁹ Francois Bovon, *Luke 1*, trans. Christine Thomas (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 210.

restoration of Israel and the church in embryonic form. To these specific twelve he gave “power and authority” (9:1). As the Twelve would be the guarantors and witnesses of Jesus’ words and life, they spent their lives “with him” (Luke 8:1). At the Lord’s Supper, and only in Luke’s gospel, Jesus blesses the apostles in a manner reminiscent of Jacob’s benediction: “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29–30).

Because of Luke’s emphasis on the apostles as the kings and judges of Israel, Judas’ betrayal takes on added significance, and become a special crisis. Judas was not only an intimate associate and disciple of Jesus, but had been “numbered” among the apostles. As Luke describes Judas’ betrayal, he writes that “Satan entered into Judas, the one called Iscariot, who was of the *number of the twelve* (Luke 22:3). Only Luke includes this additional reference to number. Again, upon the act of betrayal, Luke describes Judas as *one of the twelve* (Luke 22:47). Matthew seems not to recognize any numerical crisis. His work comes to its grand climax when Jesus gives his great commission to the eleven (Matt 28:16). For Luke, a foundation of eleven would not stand.

Luke, therefore, takes great pain to restore the number twelve. As the early church gathered, it was idyllic in almost every way. The presence of Mary and Jesus’ brothers witnessed to the continuity between Jesus’ ministry and the founding of his church. Yet, something was missing. Luke writes, “It happened in those days that Peter stood rose in the midst of his brothers and spoke,” adding parenthetically, “There was a crowd of about 120 names.” This approximation of 120 is no accident. As Luke Timothy Johnson writes, “The number 120 has significance because of the twelve apostles, and, through them, the twelve tribes of the restored Israel.”¹⁰ The congregation of 120 begs for the apostleship of the 12. Peter presents the problem in this way, “He [Judas] was *numbered* among us, and had a share of our ministry” (Acts 1:17). With the addition of Matthias by the casting of lots, the form is properly set, and the church’s foundation can be then be poured.¹¹

¹⁰ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 34.

¹¹ That this number twelve remains significant we find, incidentally much later, in Paul’s defense before Agrippa. There Paul says, “It is now because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night” (Acts 26:6–7). The true Israel, consisting of twelve tribes, hopes for the Messiah.

IV. Peter, the Church's Spokesman and Leader

For Luke, the twelve apostles play a crucial role in the foundation of the church. Peter, however, is clearly the first among equals. He is, as Martin Hengel calls him, the "Apostolic Foundational Figure of the Church."¹² Matthew establishes this fact after Peter's great confession, where Christ says, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." (Matt 16:18) Strikingly, though, Luke omits this dominical blessing.¹³ Does this mean, perhaps, that Luke wishes to downplay the significance of Peter? That case would be hard to make, at least when one considers the time and attention which Luke lavishes on the primary apostle.¹⁴

Peter's position in the early church is foretold by Jesus, who on the night of his betrayal said, "But I have prayed for you Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Indeed, the story of Acts begins as answer to Jesus' prayer, as Peter emerges as the unquestioned leader and spokesmen for the early church. Remarkably, of the twelve apostles listed in Acts, only Peter has any speaking part whatsoever. When it was time to choose the twelfth apostle, Peter takes the lead (Acts 1:15). On the day of Pentecost, all of the apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit, but it is Peter who offers up the first sermon (Acts 2:14-39). It is Peter who heals the crippled beggar (3:1-10), Peter who speaks at Solomon's Colonnade (3:11-26), Peter who speaks before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22). Though Luke does not record the giving of the keys, Peter clearly exercises this office in a most dramatic way in his dealing with Annanias and Sapphira. (Acts 5:1-10). For all of his bravado in the gospel, the early-church Peter boldly takes the lead when threatened, speaking on the apostles' behalf, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

So, was the church built on Peter or his confession? Reading Luke, the question makes little sense. To say that Peter was the rock upon whom the church was built might be analogous to saying that George Washington was the Father of our nation. It is simply a statement of historical fact. He is Peter, and upon Peter—his words, actions, miracles, boldness, presence—Christ built his church.

¹² Martin Hengel, *Saint Peter: The Underestimated Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 28.

¹³ He alludes to Matthew 16 in his list of the apostles, where Luke refers to the first apostle as "Simon, whom he named Peter" (Luke 6:14).

¹⁴ In Luke 9:50, John has a speaking part, and is credited with trying to stop others from driving out demons. For this our Lord rebukes him.

V. Peter as the Touchstone for Apostolic Identity: Peter and John

As Luke stresses the continuity of the church through time, so also does he emphasize the essential unity of the church. Again and again in Acts, we are told that the church acted in concert, and that they were of "one accord" (1:14; 2:1; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12). One of the ways that Luke illustrates this unity is through Peter, who serves not only as a foundational figure, but also as a kind of touchstone for apostolic identity. Luke seems to indicate that to be in fellowship with Peter is to be in fellowship with the church. (This point is significant, especially in an age where people talk not about Christianity, but of Christianities.) This we see in the relationship between Peter and John.

Now, from what we can gather elsewhere, the relationship between Peter and John was bumpy. John, no shrinking violet, well earned his nickname as a son of thunder. A fireball, John calls for judgment upon the Samaritans who reject Jesus (Luke 9:54). Hardly the ecumenist, John actively aims to try to stop others who cast out demons in Christ's name (Mark 9:38–40). Ever ambitious, he tried to finagle a special seat of honor and power in Christ's kingdom (Matt 20:21; Mark 10:37), a maneuver which caused the other disciples to become indignant (Mark 10:41). Tellingly, Luke would have us know that at the most solemn time of our Lord's self-sacrificial meal, there arose a dispute as to who was the greatest of the disciples (Luke 22:24). Most likely, that dispute was between Peter and John.

This same rivalry may also be seen in the Gospel of John, where Peter's role as the first apostle is arguably taken by the Beloved Disciple, who rests in the bosom of the Lord at the Supper, alone among the disciples stands at the foot of the cross, is the first to reach the empty tomb, and the first to believe.¹⁵ This tension between Peter and John seems to have played out in the early church as well. As David Dungan notes, "There is a long-standing riddle in the field of Gospel studies: Why did it take so long for the Gospel of John to become accepted and used in Rome as well as Asia Minor, the place where most scholars agree that it was written?"¹⁶ Looking at the evidence of the Gospel of John, as well as the writings of Papias, David Dungan concludes, "We have discovered a deep and pervasive

¹⁵ This competition is seen also in the resurrection where John tells us that the other disciple, racing with Peter, reached the tomb "first." Again, the other disciple is said to have reached the tomb "first," and then is credited with faith: "He saw and believed." Again, the Beloved Disciple makes a strange appearance at the end of the gospel, where his relationship with Peter appears strained (John 21:20–24).

¹⁶ David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 23.

pattern of antagonism between John and Peter (more precisely, John toward Peter), their respective followers, and the Gospels later given in their names."¹⁷

Whatever one might think of Dungan's conclusion, Luke takes great pains to show that John stands in good relationship primarily and specifically to Peter. Peter and John appear together regularly and often. In the Book of Acts, Peter appears without John, but John never appears without Peter. Indeed, Peter's name always comes first, as he repeatedly takes the lead, while John stands supportively beside him. When Peter and John meet a crippled beggar by the temple gate, it is Peter who takes the lead, saying, "Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, I give to you" (Acts 3:6). Then, at Solomon's Colonnade, John is present, but it is Peter who offers up a little homily on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets (Acts 3:11-26). Again, when Peter and John were brought before the high priest for questioning, we are told specifically that Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, gave their defense (Acts 4: 8-17). This is a clearly the dynamic duo of Jerusalem, with Peter starring as the Caped Crusader and John as his trusty but silent sidekick.

This pattern of tying together Peter and John is found also in Luke's gospel. In Matthew and Mark, the leading disciples are always Peter, James, and John. Luke, however, changes the order in a number of key places. For instance, at the raising of Jairus' daughter, "Peter, James, and John" becomes, "Peter, John, and James" (Luke 8:51). Likewise, the apostolic triumvirate upon Luke's Mount of Transfiguration is again "Peter, John, and James" (Luke 9:28). For Luke, this reordering serves the two-fold purpose of recognizing John's prominence in the early church, while at the same time tying him closing to Peter.

Luke, in fact, sets the foundation of Peter and John's fellowship in his story of their call (Luke 5:1-11). John's gospel would have us know that Peter was brought to Jesus via his brother Andrew. Luke's spotlight, however, shines squarely on Peter who is specifically and singularly told by Christ to cast his net into the waters, and who is given the dominical promise: "Don't be afraid; from now on you [singular] will be catching people" (Luke 5:10). Though James and John are present, Jesus specifically issues his apostolic call and command to Peter.¹⁸ What is interesting is the way that James and John are then incorporated into the story. For Luke, their

¹⁷ Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem*, 25.

¹⁸ This is reminiscent of the Lord's command specifically to Peter to feed his lambs in John 21.

status is clearly established in relationship to Peter. That is to say, Luke tells us that James and John are “partners” (μετόχοις) with Peter (Luke 5:7). He then adds that they were “companions” (κοινωνοί) to Simon (Luke 5:10). Now, both of these words can be translated in a generic sense, indicating their business relationship. However, as is so often the case, Luke uses the story for a greater purpose, setting the stage for what is to come.

The words Luke chooses are terms of fellowship. Yes, James and John are partners (μετόχοι) in a business sense, but their partnership will now run deeper. The term μέτοχος is used, for instance in 1 Corinthians 10:17, where Paul writes, “For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers [μετόχοι] of that one bread.” Luke then calls James and John κοινωνοί, or companions with Peter. But it is worth noting that this term is closely related to terms used for Eucharistic fellowship. Paul speaks about the κοινωνία of the Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:16. Luke also speaks of the New Testament church as a fellowship. The early Christians were said to devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the κοινωνία or fellowship (Acts 2:42). This resulted in the believers having all things in common (κοινὰ) (Acts 2:44). Again, in Acts 4:32, we are told that the believers held all things in common (κοινά).

So it is, in this story, Peter is called to cast out his net, and to catch men alive. This is the apostolic commission. The important thing for Luke is that James and John, though in another boat, are in fact μέτοχοι, or partakers in the ministry of Peter, and that they are in fact κοινωνοί with Peter, or in fellowship with him.¹⁹ James and John may in fact be working from a separate boat, but nevertheless share the mission given to Peter.

The end of the gospel provides one more indication that our Lord intends John to serve alongside and in fellowship with Peter. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus sent his disciples to prepare the Passover (Matt 26:19). According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus sent two of his disciples to prepare the Passover (Mark 14:13). We know the names of the two disciples only from Luke, who writes, “Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” (Luke 22:8) With these instruction, the triumvirate is boiled down to two, with Peter in the lead, and John in fellowship. Any disputes between them would have to be settled, for they had been called by Christ to work together.

¹⁹ In fact, this same metaphor of fishing fellowship may be found in John’s gospel, where Peter decides to go fishing, and the other apostles join him, saying, “We will go with you” (John 21:3). What follows is a story in which fishing becomes a metaphor for their renewed ministry together.

VI. Peter as the Touchstone for Apostolic Identity: Peter and Paul

While Luke went to some length to show the unity of Peter and John, perhaps his greatest accomplishment is in demonstrating that Paul, though not a companion to the earthly Jesus, was in fact a true apostle. If Luke had not done this, there is a distinct possibility that we would have had two entirely different churches, one Jewish and one Gentile. One way Luke approaches the problem is through the telling of Paul's conversion/commissioning, which he does three times. Even more, Luke stresses the continuity of Paul's ministry with that of the original apostles, and especially Peter

In Luke's infancy narrative step parallelism is employed to establish the connection between John the Baptist and Jesus and between Israel and the church. Luke's theology is one of continuity. This same theology of continuity can be found in Acts. This time, Luke shows that Paul continues and extends the work of Peter. Consider the parallels: Peter heals a crippled man (3:1-10); as does Paul (14:8-11); even as Peter raised Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43); so also Paul raised Eutychus (20:7-12); Peter was threatened (Acts 8:9-13); as was Paul (Acts 19:13-19); Peter was imprisoned and miraculously freed (Acts 12:6-17); as was Paul (Acts 16:25-37); Peter encountered a sorcerer, as did Paul (8:8; 3:16). In fact, both apostles had a numinous quality, such that even Peter's shadow had healing power (Acts 5:12-16), as did handkerchiefs and aprons touched by Paul (Acts 19:11). Though you might not guess it from the Pauline epistles, Paul resembles no one more than Peter.²⁰

Perhaps even more importantly, Peter himself is shown by Luke to be the model for Paul's specifically Gentile ministry. Just as Paul has a vision in which he is made the Lord's chosen instrument to carry the gospel to the Gentiles (9:15), Peter has one of his own, in which the Lord presents Peter with a picnic blanket full of unclean animals and commands him, "Rise, Peter. Kill and eat" (Acts 10:13). The vision results in Peter coming to understand the universal scope of Christ's mission: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34). Just as Paul would have to defend his circumcision-free ministry, Peter then defended himself against the charge of eating with the uncircumcised (Acts 11:1-18). Peter then becomes Paul's primary advocate at the Council of Jerusalem and even declares himself an apostle to the Gentiles: "Brothers, you know that

²⁰ For more on Luke's use of parallels, see Peter J. Scaer, *The Lukan Passion and the Praiseworthy Death* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 8-9.

some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe" (Acts 15:7). Peter, though thought by some to be at odds with Paul, is his greatest advocate. So Peter not only is the touchstone for church fellowship within the twelve, but also becomes the touchstone for the Gentile fellowship, as Paul himself walks in the shoes of the fisherman.

VII. Expanding the Circle: The Place of the Seven and the Seventy

As we have seen, Luke's gospel places a special emphasis on the number twelve. However, Israel was only the church's starting place, and as the mission expanded, so also did the ministry. As such, a new number was needed.

The story of the establishment of the diaconate is telling. Evidently, Hellenized Jews were complaining that their widows were being neglected in the distribution of food. The twelve gathered and responded, saying, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables" (Acts 6:2). In response to the problem, they chose seven men whom they appointed by prayer and the apostolic laying on of hands.

The story of the diaconate is odd on at least a couple of levels. First, the numbers make little sense, at least from an organizational standpoint. The diaconate, as first established, makes for an upside-down pyramid with twelve bosses and seven underlings. Second, though the problem begins with Gentile widows, as the narrative continues, the work of the deacons is not primarily that of food distribution. Instead, Stephen and Philip appear immediately as ministers of the gospel and preachers of the word. Were the deacons then practical helpers or gospel ministers? Luke Timothy Johnson helpfully writes, "The discrepancy disappears when we remember Luke's consistent habit of using authority over material possessions as a symbol for spiritual authority."²¹ That is to say, the ones who distributed the physical bread also distributed the spiritual bread. In the summaries of Acts 2 and 4, the disciples gather together for the breaking of bread and prayers. From this eucharistic activity comes also the sharing of material goods and results in the believers having "all things in common." *κοινωνία* leads to having all things *κοινά*.

Luke's telling of the story of the diaconate is then, at its heart, the intentional establishment of an apostolic ministry to the Gentiles. Just as Luke formally named the twelve apostles, most of whom we never hear from again, so also he offers a formal listing of the seven deacons, giving

²¹ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 111.

us their names: Stephen, Philip, Proculus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas from Antioch (Acts 6:5). Of these seven, only two will play a prominent role in the story. The names are important nevertheless, for seven is a foundational number. Indeed, the apostles, in choosing deacons, seem to follow a pattern set by the Lord in their own commissioning. According to Luke 6, Jesus prayed, and named twelve whom he had chosen (ἐκλεξάμενος) from those he had called. So also, the apostles chose (ἐξελέξαντο) the seven and prayed over them (Acts 6: 1-7).

With the naming of the seven, the ministry begins to expand outward. The sermon of deacon Stephen reminds us that God does not need a temple made with hands, thus setting the stage for a church beyond Israel. His sermon also introduces us to Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. What then follows is the story of how the word goes forth from Jerusalem, Judea, and into Samaria through the preaching of deacon Philip. The Choosing of the Seven serves as a symbolic transition. As the number twelve represents Israel, the number seven represents completion and fullness. Seven harkens back to the seven days of the creation. It also brings us back to the 70 Nations listed in Genesis 10-11. These 70 nations divided at the Tower of Babel will be united by the Spirit of Pentecost.²² The deacons first chosen to minister to the earthly needs of the Hellenistic women, will now begin to minister to the spiritual needs of the nations.

This symbolism, linking food and spiritual authority, is captured already in Matthew and Mark, in their stories of the feedings of the 5000 and 4000. In the feeding of the 5000, the apostles are commanded to feed the crowds, after which twelve baskets of food remain. This datum is taken by most to be a symbol of the church as the new Israel.²³ In the feeding of the 4000, which takes place on the Gentile border, there are seven large baskets of leftover κλασμάτων, the churchly term for the bread leftover from the Lord's Supper (Matt 15:37; Mark 8:8). As Jerome Kodell says of the seven baskets, "Seven is a number symbolic of universalism."²⁴ The seven baskets appear to represent then the expansion and completion of Christ's offering of his bread not simply to the children of Israel, but to the

²² This ideal of seven as fullness can also be seen elsewhere, as in our Lord's commanding Peter to forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven. This can also be seen in the Book of Revelation with its seven churches.

²³ See Jeffrey Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2-20:34* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 752.

²⁴ Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988), 87.

entire world.²⁵ The fact that Luke does not include the feeding of the 4000 makes sense. He has the entire Book of Acts to demonstrate how it is that the Gentiles will come into fellowship and join in the breaking of bread and prayers.

VIII. The Seventy

While the Gospel of Luke does not include the feeding of the 4000 with its seven leftover baskets, he demonstrates the expansion of the ministry in another dramatic way, also having to do with the number seven. Luke writes, “After these things, the Lord appointed 70 [72] others and he sent them two by two before him into every city and place where he himself intended to go” (Luke 10:1).²⁶

What is striking about the verse is its official character. First, the subject of the sentence is not “Jesus,” but “Lord” (κύριος) (Luke 10:1). What follows is a solemn command from the Lord himself. Secondly, we are told that the Lord appointed the 70. This is not an informal group sent out to canvass the neighborhood. The 70 are specifically appointed and receive a special status. Thirdly, Luke tells us that the Lord ἀπέστειλεν them. This, of course, is the apostolic word, and the same term Luke employs in telling the story of the sending out of the twelve (9:2). Strikingly, then Luke includes the same command and prayer that appears before the sending out of the twelve in Matthew 9: “Pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers into his field.” Luke then repeats for emphasis the apostolic sending of the 70, this time quoting Jesus, “Behold I send (ἀποστέλλω) you as lambs in the midst of wolves” (Luke 10:3). What we have then is a near duplication of the sending out of the Twelve, only this time with 70.

What makes this even more interesting is that the sending out of the 70 comes directly after a story of three would-be followers. What becomes clear is that Jesus chose not only the twelve, but was in fact running a seminary and that throughout his ministry he continued to recruit. When Jesus tells disciples about the hardships of discipleship—the imperative to let the dead bury their dead, and the importance of putting one’s hands to

²⁵ See Donald Hagner, *Matthew* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 451–452. This giving of the children’s bread to the world is anticipated in the story of the Canaanite woman, found again in Matthew and Mark, but not Luke.

²⁶ How many disciples were sent out? The manuscript evidence is divided fairly evenly between 70 and 72. Yet, it seems more probable to this writer that 70 is the better solution, for immediately afterwards we are told that the Lord sent out the disciples two by two, and it is easy to see how the mistake could be made.

the plow—he is not talking about the Christian life in general, but about becoming ministers of the gospel, and those who proclaim the kingdom of God (Luke 9:60). Indeed, questions about saying good-bye to one's parents and putting one's hands to the plow are, if anything, reminiscent of the call of Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21). Again, this is part of Luke's theology of continuity. The Old Testament anticipates the New. John the Baptist anticipates Jesus. The Spirit of the infancy narrative anticipates Pentecost. The apostles anticipate the 70 and then later the seven. There may be some truth in the writing attributed to Hippolytus, who actually lists the names of the 70, calling them the "70 Apostles of Christ," and then designated where each of them served as a bishop (*On the Seventy Apostles*).

At the very least, we can say that Christ himself appointed others besides the apostles whom he sent to carry on the very same tasks as the apostles themselves. To the 70 and to the twelve, the Lord gave the command to preach. To the Matthean twelve, Jesus taught, "Whoever receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me" (Matt 10:40). Christ's instructions to the 70 are similar, with the addition of a negative phrase, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you, rejects me; but he who rejects me, rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16).²⁷

These 70, therefore, point forward to the naming of the Seven, even as they hearken back to the 70 nations of Genesis, and the 70 elders of Moses (Exodus 24:1-15).²⁸ And from this, we might add that the church, in naming elders (14:19-23; 15:2-4; 20:17-21) was doing nothing radical or new, but simply carrying on the practice already found in the Old Testament and hinted at by Jesus in the choosing of the 70.

²⁷ Note that in Luke, to "receive" a messenger is to hear what he has to say. This pattern of receiving and rejecting will be carried out then in Acts, where the rejection of Stephen, for instance, becomes a retelling of the rejection of Christ, and the acceptance of Philip's message becomes salvation for the Ethiopian Eunuch and then the Samaritans.

²⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson notes an allusion to Numbers 12:28-29 in Luke 9:49. See *Luke* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 167. In Numbers, elders are prophesying, and Joshua is rebuked by Moses for trying to prevent this. In Luke, John is rebuked by Jesus for trying to stop others from driving out demons. This allusion argues for Luke's use of the 70 disciples as following in the historic line of the 70 elders of Moses.

IX. A Word about Church Structure: Apostles, Deacons, Bishops, and Elders

Peter and the twelve apostles play a role that is irreplaceable and in some ways unrepeatable. They serve as the foundation of the church, especially in Jerusalem. Things do, however, change. Peter's leadership at Jerusalem is for a time, but that time passes. After a miraculous escape from prison, he seems to pass on the baton to James, the brother of Jesus.²⁹ So also, the significance of the apostles fades a bit as the deacons begin to preach in Samaria. With the calling of Paul, things change still further, as another apostle is added into the mix, without exactly being added to the number of the twelve.

As Luke's story progresses, church offices appear, at least in an embryonic state. In chapter six we learn about how the apostles laid their hands upon deacons, or at least those who will serve diaconally (Acts 6). Later, we will hear about the appointment of elders, accompanied by the laying on of hands (Acts 14:23). Paul will also refer to the leaders of the Ephesian church, specifically as ἐπισκόπους, namely "overseers" or "bishops" (Acts 20:28).

Yet, with all the changes, the growth is organic and anticipated by what has gone before. If the beginning of a church hierarchy appears strange, in another way, it is nothing new at all. The creation of a new order within the ministry might better be seen as an extension of the duties already being carried out by Christ and the apostles.

Take for instance Peter's exhortation at the choosing of Matthias. As Peter recalls Judas, he says of him that he "was numbered among us and had a share of our ministry [δικονίας]" (1:17). He then quotes Psalm 109, saying, "Let another take up the oversight (ἐπισκοπήν) (Acts 1:20). Finally, Matthias was added to the eleven apostles (ἀποστολῶν). The apostles, as we see, exercise ministry, oversight, and apostleship all at once. This is not to say that there was not further development in these divisions of duties as the church grew, but it is to say that the essential functions of the office tended to overlap. Before there were bishops, per se, the apostles were already acting in the matter of oversight. Before there were deacons, per se, the apostles were already engaging in a ministry that consisted of service. The church order, from the point of view of the Pentecost, and Luke's writing, therefore, are not an intrusion into the church or an artificial hierarchical layering, but were an organic outgrowth of the apostolic office

²⁹ This move was anticipated by Luke when he tells us that Jesus' family was present at the church's founding.

itself. Thus, once more Luke emphasizes continuity. The Lord who chose the twelve, chose also the 70, who themselves hearken back to the 70 elders who served under Moses. Peter, in establishing the deaconate, was doing nothing other than what the Lord himself had done in furthering the ministry and its scope.

X. Jesus, Founder and Essence of the Church

We save the last, and probably most significant part for last, that is to say, the church comes from Christ. In fact, as we consider Luke-Acts as a two-part work, that also changes the way we think about Jesus. He is not simply Lord and Savior, but also the founder of the church. He stands as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Church and the pattern for the New.

The message of the apostles is the message of Christ. The miracles done by Peter and Paul are done first by Christ. As Paul appointed overseers, Christ appears first as a shepherd. As the apostles appointed deacons, Christ is the one who serves first. As Christ appointed apostles, he himself was sent by the Father (10:16). To receive the twelve, and the 70, and the seven, is to receive Christ, and to reject them is to reject him.

The church, thus, begins with Christ, whose ministry fulfills Old Testament expectations. He is like the Old Testament prophets, yet greater. From him come both the apostles and the ministry. And, if the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Christ, then Christ is himself the true Israel. And, even as he says to Paul on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me," he shows himself to be speaking for the church as if it were his very own body.

The Reformation and the Invention of History

Korey D. Maas

The above title will undoubtedly strike the reader as, if not grossly erroneous, at least exaggerated far beyond warrant. One can hardly be unaware that the writing of history long predates that early-modern religious upheaval commonly referred to as the Reformation. Many will also be aware of particularly famous names associated with historical writing more than a thousand years prior to the Reformation, names such as Eusebius, Tacitus, Livy, or Herodotus. Some will know that Herodotus—who was writing two thousand years before the world had heard of Martin Luther—would already in the first century B.C. be dubbed the “father of history.”¹

In other words, what is known about the literature of the two millennia preceding the Reformation would appear to make it very difficult to speak of any “invention of history” in the 16th century. What is more, even what is known—or at least what is often believed—about the Reformation itself would seem to compound this difficulty. The British historian Alec Ryrie, for instance, illustrates the sort of thing most people “know” about the Reformation when he suggests that “Protestantism was in the truest sense a fundamentalist movement; it only accepted a single authority, Holy Scripture, and that authority was absolute. It had no logical need to appeal to custom or history.”² Making this point even more strongly, another British scholar, Thomas Betteridge, has argued not only that Protestants had no logical need of history, but that any appeal to history on their part would in fact be illogical. Noting the Protestant rejection of Catholic doctrines which could only be supported by appeal to what the Roman church called “unwritten verities,” that is, truths that could not be substantiated with the written words of Scripture, he writes, “in a world based entirely on Scripture what place is there for history? Indeed if history, and all other non-scriptural writing, lacks all authority or

¹ Cicero, *Laws*, 1.5.

² Alec Ryrie, “The Problem of Legitimacy and Precedent in English Protestantism, 1539–47,” in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, vol. 1, *The Medieval Inheritance*, ed. Bruce Gordon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), 78.

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truthfulness as an unwritten verity what is the point of writing?"³ That is to say, an unswerving commitment to the doctrine of *sola scriptura* will logically limit Protestants to biblical scholarship, and therefore prevent them from pursuing anything that might properly be called historical scholarship, especially in the realm of theology.

The noted German historian Gerald Strauss, however, reminds us that "[h]istorical reassessments have always coincided with turning points in history."⁴ The religious controversy of the 16th century, whatever else it was, was unquestionably a turning point in history. Even before a thorough analysis of the evidence, then, Strauss could confidently claim that "[i]t would be astonishing if the Lutheran Reformation had not brought about a searching review of German history."⁵ Strauss's assumptions about the role of historical scholarship in the German Reformation would be partially vindicated by his own research, while his broader claim has also been defended with respect to lands beyond Germany. Writing about the Reformation in England, for example, Richard Bauckham has noted that "[c]hurch history proved useful in English Protestantism from the start."⁶ Likewise, and even more to the point, the doyen of English Reformation studies, A.G. Dickens, would conclude that "the progress of Reformation thought is coupled with a steady enrichment of historical perception and method."⁷

Assuming just for the moment that these claims are indeed true, the first question must be: why? If Protestants were in fact moved to define appeals to extra-biblical records of the past as logically unnecessary, and perhaps even inadmissible, what then accounts for their consistent, and allegedly successful, use of history and its fruits?

I. The Context of Renaissance Humanism

In attempting to answer this question, it is perhaps worth recalling, first of all, the intellectual context in which the Reformation movement arose—particularly that of Renaissance humanism. As is well known, the humanists in the century before Luther, as well as those contemporaneous

³ Thomas Betteridge, *Tudor Histories of the English Reformations, 1530–83* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 97.

⁴ Gerald Strauss, "The Course of German History: The Lutheran Interpretation," in *Enacting the Reformation in Germany*, ed. G. Strauss (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 676.

⁵ Strauss, "The Course of German History," 676.

⁶ Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism, and the English Reformation* (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay, 1978), 68.

⁷ A.G. Dickens, "The Reformation in England," in *Reformation Studies*, ed. A.G. Dickens (London: Hambledon, 1982), 455.

with him, were driven by the familiar motto *ad fontes*, back to the sources. These sources were of course the writings of classical antiquity, including the Greek and Roman histories of men such as the previously mentioned Livy and Tacitus. Also included, and most admired on account of his elegant Latin, was the preeminent Roman orator Cicero, who advised his own contemporaries that “to be ignorant of what happened before you were born is to remain forever a child.” This was a conviction eagerly adopted by the humanists, who would make Cicero’s phrase “a ubiquitous commonplace in the sixteenth century.”⁸

It was not simply that classical texts and ideas were being rediscovered during the Renaissance, however; the very fact of their rediscovery at the same time also forced their readers to come to terms with them as “historical” documents, that is, documents of a particular time and place very different from that of the 15th and 16th centuries. Unlike medieval annals and chronicles which began with creation and continued into the present as if history were simply a long, unbroken chain of events (and as if, for example, the Roman Empire of the first century were the same thing as the Holy Roman Empire of the 13th century), the humanist attempt to understand the world of classical antiquity brought with it “a sense of perspective on the past,” a sense crucial in the eventual development of what might be called critical or analytical history.⁹

This sense of perspective fostered by the Renaissance humanists, and its contribution to critical historiography, is perhaps most famously and most frequently noted in the work of the 15th-century Italian Lorenzo Valla, who demonstrated on historical and grammatical grounds that the so-called *Donation of Constantine*—attributed to the fourth-century Emperor Constantine and ostensibly granting immense authority, both spiritual and temporal, to the papacy—was in fact a much later forgery. The reason for Valla’s frequent mention in this regard will be rather obvious: not only is his work illustrative of the critical and analytical historiography being developed by Renaissance humanists and subsequently taken up by modern historians; it also highlights why such a method might be immediately and especially attractive to the Protestant reformers of the century following Valla.

Thus it has been argued that, building on these humanist foundations, the “16th and early 17th centuries were characterised by an interest in

⁸ Strauss, “The Course of German History,” 665.

⁹ Myron Gilmore, *The World of Humanism, 1453–1517* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), 201.

history first and foremost and that the very omnipresence of history made it the obvious means whereby theologians of all religious parties could affirm their confessional identity."¹⁰ There is undoubtedly much truth to this; but it still must be asked whether and why history was the "obvious means" of affirming the confessional identity of Protestants, of those who swore allegiance to Scripture alone. This question especially deserves addressing because, to whatever extent history was becoming popular in the 16th century, there remained much about the new humanist historiography that the reformers in fact found unappealing.

Humanist histories, like humanist Latin, were consciously modeled on those of classical antiquity. And Luther, to name only one reformer, was not nearly as enamored of the ancients as were many of his humanist contemporaries: however credulous or unpolished the post-classical medieval authors might have been, at least they were not rank pagans, as were the authors of pre-Christian antiquity. Not unrelated to this was also the question of content and themes. Humanist history, like ancient history, was largely moral, even moralistic history—what the ancients described as "philosophy teaching by example," with philosophy encompassing more than simply a body of knowledge, and instead a comprehensive way of life. In this spirit, the fourteenth-century poet Francesco Petrarca—often deemed the "father of humanism" just as Herodotus was named the "father of history"—could explicitly assert: "It is better to will the good than to know the truth."¹¹ Humanist history, then, was not meant simply to inform, but especially to inspire—and particularly to inspire men to act justly because, as Aristotle had insisted, those who act justly become just.¹² But of course this is precisely the notion of justification that Luther and his fellow reformers so railed against.

Less obviously, but also militating against any eager adoption of humanist historiography by the reformers was a simple lack of patriotic motivation for doing so. The Italian Renaissance and its love of the classics were partially spurred by the belief that the glory of ancient Rome was the Italian heritage; men like Cicero and Tacitus were their forebears. The Germans, however, had no ancient glory to recall—with the unique exception of the virtue ascribed to them (and contrasted with Roman

¹⁰ Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation, 1378–1615* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3.

¹¹ Francesco Petrarca, "On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. E. Cassirer, P.O. Kristeller, and J.H. Randall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 105.

¹² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.1

decadence) by Tacitus himself, whose first-century *Germania* had only recently been rediscovered, and which went quickly into a variety of popular editions throughout Germany.¹³

II. The Use of History by the Roman Church and the Reformers

Far more significant than any differences between southern European humanists and northern European reformers, however, is the simple fact that, over against a Protestant adherence to Scripture alone, the Roman church specifically and explicitly claimed history as its own sphere of authority. Illustrating this point is King Henry VIII of England, to whom the papacy granted the title “Defender of the Faith” for his persuasive writing against Luther and his doctrine. In his 1521 attack on Luther, Henry had dismissed *sola scriptura* and championed the authority of history, or tradition, by asserting that “many things were said and done by Christ which are not recorded by any of the Evangelists, but by the fresh memory of those who were present, delivered afterwards as it were from hand to hand from the very times of the Apostles down to us.”¹⁴ That is, the historical teachings and traditions of the church—even if “unwritten verities” not found in Scripture—must be granted equal authority with Scripture because they are assumed to have descended from Christ himself. This is precisely the position officially affirmed later in the century by the Council of Trent.¹⁵

In King Henry’s own work, though, he was even more explicit about the authoritative nature of the historical record. If any error had been introduced since the time of the apostles, he wrote, then surely someone should be able to “point out the time [this occurred] by histories.”¹⁶ Nor was Henry alone in presenting the reformers with this historical challenge. Still in the 16th century the Jesuit theologian Edmund Campion would raise the rhetorical question: “In what age, upon what occasion, by whose power, hath a new and strange Religion invaded, not only that city of Rome, but the whole world besides?”¹⁷ Into the next century, Catholic

¹³ See D.R. Kelley, “Tacitus Noster: The *Germania* in the Renaissance and Reformation,” in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, ed. T.J. Luce and A.J. Woodman (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), 152–167.

¹⁴ Henry VIII, *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, ed. Louis O’Donovan (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1908), 278–280; capitalization and punctuation modernized here and in further quotations from the same work.

¹⁵ *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, tr. H.J. Schroeder, O.P. (Rockford: Tan Books, 1978), 17.

¹⁶ Henry VIII, *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, 202.

¹⁷ Quoted in Graham Windsor, “The Controversy between Roman Catholics and Anglicans from Elizabeth to the Revolution” (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of

polemicists would continue to ask: "in what Pope's days was the true religion overthrown in Rome?"¹⁸ If this had indeed happened, as the reformers said it had, then certainly Protestants should be able to pinpoint when, exactly, in the church's history this had occurred. So strong was the conviction that history corroborated the claims of the Roman church that the late Richard Marius could claim that, for a staunch defender of the papacy such as Thomas More, "the meaning of history was so intertwined with the Catholic Church that if the Church were false, history made no sense at all."¹⁹

Conversely, if demonstrating the veracity of the Roman religion, history, it was assumed, also thereby demonstrated the *prima facie* falsity of Protestant claims. The result of this assumption was that the wide variety of Rome's rhetorical questions, challenges, and taunts became distilled into one very pointed historical question hurled at the reformers: "Where was your church before Luther?" It was this question that, eventually, the reformers would have to answer. In one respect, then, it might be said that the very nature of the controversies of the Reformation forced historical questions to the fore. Contrary to the previously noted suggestion that appeals to history were not logically necessary for Protestants, then, Rosemary O'Day has insisted that "[h]istoriography was, therefore, a science which the religious must master, not a luxury."²⁰

Even before such explicit challenges were presented to the reformers, however, the utility of history in the Reformation debates had become apparent quite by accident. Before Campion, More, or Henry VIII threw down the historical gauntlet, and while still testing the validity of his ninety-five theses against indulgences, Luther, in preparation for debate on the subject, began a historical investigation of church councils, papal decrees, and canon law. Though primarily looking for data immediately relevant to the indulgence controversy, he discovered far more than he had anticipated: throughout its long history, the church had in fact regularly reversed and even condemned some of its own positions, making any claims to a historic consensus and continuity of teaching dubious at best.²¹ It was this first foray into history that awakened Luther to the possible

Cambridge, 1967), 259 n. 3.

¹⁸ Windsor, "The Controversy between Roman Catholics and Anglicans," 258–259.

¹⁹ Richard Marius, "Thomas More and the Early Church Fathers," *Traditio* 24 (1968), 393–394.

²⁰ Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London: Methuen, 1986), 25.

²¹ See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, vol. 1, *His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521*, tr. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 307–309, 325.

benefits of a sustained, systematic study of history—so much so that already in 1520 Luther could make the novel proposal that universities endow chairs for the teaching of history.²²

It was Luther's growing fondness for history that would prompt those statements still regularly heralded by history professors everywhere: that history is the "mother of truth,"²³ that "histories are . . . a very precious thing," and that "historians, therefore, are the most useful people and the best teachers, so that one can never honor, praise, and thank them enough."²⁴ Luther did more, though, than simply praise historians and encourage the establishment of history as a discipline in the university; he himself would take up research and writing in the field. He would publish his own refutation of the spurious *Donation of Constantine*, for example, and would write numerous prefaces and forewords to the histories penned by his contemporaries. That which has been described as "the most sophisticated historical analysis to come from Luther's pen," though, was his 1539 treatise *On the Councils and the Church*.²⁵ In this work Luther turned his full attention to the history of the church, the writings of its theologians, and the pronouncements of its official councils. Here he greatly expanded on the thesis he had first put forward twenty years previously in preparation for the Leipzig Disputation: on issues not clearly revealed in Scripture, the church had never reached unanimity. Quite the contrary; the pre-Reformation church had with an astonishing regularity contradicted itself, reversed its decisions, instituted new doctrines and rituals, or abolished old teachings and rites. As only one of the most important examples, Luther there demonstrated that the office of the pope—as supreme head of the church and even supreme temporal authority—was an office altogether unknown not only in Scripture, but also in the early church. Such arguments have allowed at least one modern scholar to suggest that Luther "rested his case for separation from Rome mainly on a historical argument, namely the gradual evolution of the

²² Lewis Spitz, "History as a Weapon in Controversy," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 18 (1947), 81.

²³ Martin Luther, *Disputatio Iohannis Eccii et Martini Lutheri Lipsiae habita* (1519), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Schriften*, 62 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1986), 2: 289.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Preface to Galeatius Capella's History* (1538), in *Luther's Works: American Edition*, 56 vols., ed. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 34: 276.

²⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 53.

hierarchical system of the Church contrary to the design of Christ."²⁶

But Luther, of course, was only one of many reformers, even in Germany, the home of the Reformation. And it is at least arguable that, with regard to the development of history as a discipline, he was the least influential. So it has recently been argued that it was Philip Melanchthon, Luther's colleague at the university of Wittenberg and author of many of Lutheranism's confessional documents, "who was more committed to the academic study of history," and that "he regarded [it] as a key to understanding theology;" as a result, it was Melanchthon who "made history-writing an important polemical tool of the Reformation."²⁷ This claim echoes the similar conclusion of one of the standard surveys of the development of historiography. Not only did Melanchthon himself offer lectures in history, but, according to Ernst Breisach, it was Melanchthon who "soon grasped that the key battle between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism would be fought over the validity of church tradition, and he saw to it that history, as the mighty weapon in that struggle, was given a prominent place in the new Protestant universities."²⁸ It was thus Melanchthon who finally implemented Luther's earlier suggestion that history be introduced into the university curriculum, and throughout the 1540s and 1550s Lutheran universities throughout Europe began to institute professorial chairs in the discipline.

Moreover, as any academic discipline requires its assigned texts, Melanchthon was further able to exert his influence. Taking an unfinished work commonly known as *Carion's Chronicle*, he reshaped it into a hugely successful textbook published in multiple editions and languages, not only in Wittenberg and several other German cities, but also in Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands.²⁹ And *Carion's Chronicle* was only the first of many such publications. As history became established in the university curriculum, there arose in the mid-16th century a wholly new genre of literature devoted to the "*artes historicae*," works explaining how best to read as well as write history.³⁰ Influential in this regard was also a

²⁶ Cyriac K. Pullapilly, *Caesar Baronius: Counter Reformation Historian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1975), 50.

²⁷ Bruce Gordon, "The Changing Face of Protestant History and Identity in the Sixteenth Century," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe, vol. 1, The Medieval Inheritance*, ed. Bruce Gordon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), 13.

²⁸ Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), 166.

²⁹ Strauss, "The Course of German History," 686.

³⁰ Neal W. Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method* (New York: Columbia University, 1960), 79.

Lutheran professor, David Chytraeus, one of Melancthon's former students. Perhaps best known as a theologian, and in particular for his role in the drafting of the *Formula of Concord*, Chytraeus was also a notable historian. In addition to lecturing on history at the university of Rostock and compiling several histories himself, he also produced a number of important treatises on historical method, giving an increasingly clear and coherent shape to the developing discipline.³¹

III. The Development of Historical Method among the Reformers

This gradual shift from an earlier, utilitarian and polemical use of history to a more sophisticated engagement with questions of historical method is central to the thesis that history, as a discipline, has its roots in the Reformation. Histories—records of the past—certainly existed prior to the 16th century; and these were eagerly put to polemical use by the first generation of reformers. But history as a subject for objective intellectual inquiry began to develop only as it was introduced into formal university curricula and given shape by a specific and generally accepted methodology. And these two phases are not unrelated. It was the utility of history that gave rise to sustained interest in the subject as a subject; and once piqued, it was this interest which made apparent the need for an objective, critical, and analytical method of writing history.

This relationship becomes further evident when taking into consideration those convictions common to the reformers—convictions arguably necessary to the development of modern historiography, and yet largely absent in pre-Reformation Christendom. It has already been mentioned that 16th-century Catholics often assumed that the church's history and tradition justified those beliefs not explicitly revealed in Scripture. It has likewise been noted that critical historical investigations such as Lorenzo Valla's might prove very damaging to these traditional justifications. It should not be surprising, then, that an institution dependent upon tenuous historical claims would effectively discourage any critical investigation of the historical record. Conversely, with the coming of the Reformation and its insistence that only Scripture is normative in determining doctrine, "the abolition of tradition as justification for belief left the historian freer to investigate the past on its own terms, and encouraged the establishment of history as an autonomous discipline."³²

³¹ See Strauss, "The Course of German History," 672; see also Robert Kolb, *For All The Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon: Mercer University 1987), 37.

³² Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran*

It is worth noting that this is a conclusion voiced even by the late Jaroslav Pelikan—a historian and theologian raised and educated in the Reformation tradition, but later leaving Lutheranism for Eastern Orthodoxy, a body defined by tradition perhaps even more so than Roman Catholicism. Pelikan would note quite correctly that “[t]he Protestant principle in Luther’s Reformation enabled it to be critical in dealing with the historical assumptions in the inherited Catholic substance, and thus to make room for the exercise of objective, critical historical methodology in the study of church history.”³³ In other words, the Protestant insistence upon Scripture alone being determinative in matters of doctrine allowed the reformers, and Reformation-leaning historians, to engage less tentatively and more objectively with that which was *not* Scripture. Further, it was precisely this objective engagement with the historical record that revealed even more clearly why *only* Scripture can be considered a trustworthy source of doctrine.

By way of example, Pelikan notes that the Roman theologians tasked with writing a confutation of the *Augsburg Confession* attempted to defend the disputed rites and doctrines of Rome with the assertion that they were part of an unbroken tradition going back through the history of the church to the apostles themselves. But a critical reading of the extant sources gradually revealed that these assertions had, in Pelikan’s own words, “no substantiation from historical evidence.”³⁴

However unconvincing the Catholic appeals to tradition were, the presentation of the *Augsburg Confession* in 1530 did not mean final victory for Lutheranism. Both sides in the debate would continue not only to engage in a battle of ideas and a war of words, but in the following years would enter a very real war in which the Protestant territories would not declare victory. In 1547, only seventeen years after the presentation of the *Augsburg Confession*, the Lutheran princes of Europe were very decisively defeated in the Schmalkaldic War by imperial troops with funding from Rome. With that Catholic victory came the reinstatement of—among other things—the Catholic Mass. With no small irony, it was in the very city of Augsburg that Bishop Michael Helding announced this fact. More ironically still, Helding was intent on reasserting the dubious historical justifications his co-religionists had offered in the same city seventeen years earlier. In his sermon announcing the reintroduction of the Roman liturgy, the bishop declared that the text of the Latin Mass had been

Reformation (Stanford: Stanford University, 1988), 102.

³³ Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 32

³⁴ Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 32.

written by the apostles themselves and had remained unchanged throughout the church's 1500 year history.³⁵

This particular episode is noteworthy because it illustrates once again the significant role history played in justifying traditional Roman doctrine and practice, as well as the sorts of historical claims that had to be overturned if Protestantism was to justify its own existence. But it is also noted because it contextualizes the individual who, perhaps more influentially than any other, contributed to the Reformation's development of history as a discipline. Though far less famous than Luther or Melanchthon, Matthias Flacius Illyricus, like Chytraeus, had been a student of Melanchthon's at Wittenberg. Flacius would eventually fall out with Melanchthon, however, on the very issue addressed by Bishop Holding.

When the Roman Mass was reinstated in Protestant lands, Melanchthon and his followers concluded that it was permissible for Lutheran churches to worship according to the Roman rite. Flacius and his followers reached the opposite conclusion. These "*gnesio* Lutherans," as they were sarcastically called, insisted they could not worship in accordance with the style and substance of medieval Catholicism. This stance was justified in part by the common understanding that *lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of praying is the law of believing. That is to say, to worship like Roman Catholics would engender believing like Roman Catholics—which of course is precisely why Rome insisted that the Mass be reinstated in Protestant territories. Moreover, the Roman Mass could not be made obligatory because it is not mandated by Scripture; Flacius argued that it is patently false to say that it was written by and then handed down unchanged from the apostles themselves. To prove his point, Flacius, like a good humanist, went *ad fontes*, back to the sources, and first made a name for himself by publishing various historic liturgies as they had existed in different times and different places, demonstrating conclusively that the Mass of the 16th century had been slowly and gradually pieced together over time, and therefore had no apostolic mandate.³⁶

The approach Flacius took to liturgical history was the very same subsequently taken in his monumental fourteen-volume work officially known as the *Ecclesiastical History*, but more popularly known as the *Magdeburg Centuries*. Something of the lasting influence of this work is

³⁵ Oliver K. Olson, "Matthias Flacius," in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 85.

³⁶ See Olson, "Matthias Flacius," 85.

evident even in that popular title. Before Flacius and his co-authors wrote, the word “century” had been commonly used with reference to any grouping of one hundred: perhaps a century of years, but just as often a “century” of miles, or a “century” of apples. Only with Flacius’ decision to divide his history into individual books of one-hundred-years’ length—and with the subsequent popularity of his history—did use of the word “century” come to be limited to the now standard usage designating a grouping of one hundred years.

The true import of the *Magdeburg Centuries*, however, is to be found in their content and method. This was a comprehensive survey of the church’s past that chronicled the history of every ritual, every office, every doctrine, every conflict between church and state—doing so with constant reference to the primary sources. It asked of each source, as Valla had, whether it was an original document or a forgery? The *Centuries* had, as one modern author notes, “all the trappings of critical history.”³⁷ Oliver Olson, the foremost modern authority on Flacius and his work, even more pointedly regards the publication of the *Centuries* as “the first time ecclesiastical history was subjected to scientific investigation.”³⁸ In light of frequent references to the nineteenth century as the era of “scientific history,” it might seem anachronistic for one to claim that Flacius was engaged in something of the sort already three centuries earlier. But at least one modern historiographer concedes that Flacius was in fact one of those individuals who served to connect the Reformation writing of history with the modern discipline; his exhaustive, critical methodology provided the 16th-century foundation upon which the nineteenth-century discipline would rest.³⁹

It is for this reason that, in the generations immediately following Flacius, “[s]cores of histories were written with techniques and materials borrowed from the *Magdeburg Centuries*.”⁴⁰ Of course these histories were, at least initially, written predominantly by Protestants. Many Catholics seem truly to have believed with Thomas More that “the meaning of history was so intertwined with the Catholic Church that if the Church were false, history made no sense at all.” Even the twentieth-century Pope

³⁷ Pullapilly, *Caesar Baronius*, 52.

³⁸ Olson, “Matthias Flacius,” 88.

³⁹ D.R. Kelley, “Historiography, Renaissance: German Historiography,” in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, 6 vols., ed. P.F. Grendler (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1999), 3:180.

⁴⁰ Ronald E. Diener, “Johann Wigand, 1523–1587,” in *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560–1600*, ed. Jill Raitt (New Haven: Yale University, 1981), 35.

John XXIII would look back and admit that the thorough, critical historical scholarship displayed by Flacius and his co-authors left 16th-century Catholics feeling “defeated, humiliated and despondent on the very territory of tradition and history on which defending their right of possession had seemed so simple and certain.”⁴¹

The preceding focus on historical writing as it developed out of the German Reformation should not be understood to imply that Germany was the only place such developments were taking place. English figures such as Thomas More and Henry VIII having been previously mentioned, it is also worth briefly noting the significant influence of John Foxe, the Elizabethan historian justly famous for his best-selling *Book of Martyrs*. As with Flacius’ *Magdeburg Centuries*, however, the title by which this work is most commonly known is not that given it by its author, and the more popular title obscures the fact that Foxe’s massive work (eight volumes in modern editions) was much broader in scope than a simple martyrology. His *Acts and Monuments* intended instead “to run over the whole state and course of the church in general.”⁴²

Like the German reformers, Foxe was convinced that the contemporary Roman church had departed from certain fundamental teachings of the apostolic church, as well as invented some teachings and practices foreign to that church. He argued that these new doctrines had only entered the church and been tolerated within it “for lack of true history.”⁴³ Like Flacius, he intended to uncover and record the “true history” of the church by thoroughly and critically examining the records of its past. Describing his own method for preparing his most famous work, he said:

the records must be sought, the registers must be turned over, letters also and ancient instruments ought to be perused, and authors with the same compared; finally the writers amongst themselves one to be conferred with another, and so with judgment to be weighed, with diligence to be labored, and with simplicity, pure from all addition and partiality, to be uttered.⁴⁴

Though rhetorically representative of prefatory claims to disinterested

⁴¹ Quoted in Oliver K. Olson, “Matthias Flacius Illyricus, 1520–1575,” in *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560–1600*, ed. Jill Raitt (New Haven: Yale University, 1981), 14.

⁴² John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London, 1583 ed.), 1; spelling and punctuation modernized here and in further quotations of the same work.

⁴³ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, unpaginated preface addressed “To the True and Faithful Congregation of Christ’s Universal Church.”

⁴⁴ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 578.

objectivity, this was more than a feigned scholarly pose. Comparing Foxe's work with the original sources upon which he had relied, British historian Patrick Collinson memorably concluded that Foxe "worked only a little more carelessly and a few shades more partially than would be tolerable in a modern doctoral thesis, but with essentially the same methods."⁴⁵

Foxe's work, like that of the German reformers, is not only illustrative of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture allowing for a method and use of history which had not previously been possible; its emphases also illuminate the manner in which the Protestant doctrine of the church allows for a new kind of history, the history of ideas. Foxe makes reference to this doctrine of the church at the beginning of his own recounting of its history; referring to "the proper condition of the true church," he noted, "none sees it."⁴⁶ That is, rather than the visible institution of popes, bishops, and lower clergy—or even those laity in attendance at worship—the true Christian church is that church which is hidden, its constituent parts being those who believe and that which is believed. Both Foxe and Flacius were often critical of earlier church historians for failing to recognize this. They believed that such historians had spilled too much ink describing what had been done in the church rather than what had been believed in the church. Commenting on Flacius and his co-authors, Norman Jones has highlighted the novelty of the historical approach deriving from this conviction. Shunning the simple chronicling of ecclesiastical events, which had dominated throughout the Middle Ages, they instead "wrote a history of the ideas that shaped the Christian church."⁴⁷ In doing so, says Jones, they became the unacknowledged "fathers of modern intellectual history."⁴⁸

IV. Conclusion

In light of the above, and by way of conclusion, three points suggest themselves as especially worthy of note. First, and contrary to popular belief, the Protestant reformers' doctrine of *sola scriptura* did not discourage historical investigation, but actually prompted it, gave it new direction, and in turn allowed its utilization in defense of the necessity of Scripture alone. As Bruce Gordon has concluded, "[f]or Protestants, the

⁴⁵ Patrick Collinson, "Truth and Legend: The Veracity of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs," in *Elizabethan Essays*, ed. Patrick Collinson (London: Hambledon, 1994), 156.

⁴⁶ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, unpaginated preface addressed "To the True and Faithful Congregation of Christ's Universal Church."

⁴⁷ Norman L. Jones, "Matthew Parker, John Bale, and the Magdeburg Centuries," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12 (1981), 44.

⁴⁸ Jones, "Matthew Parker, John Bale, and the Magdeburg Centuries," 35.

uncovering of history was a constituent part of establishing the Word of God as authoritative."⁴⁹

Second, the Protestant engagement with history proved highly effective in the primarily doctrinal debates of the Reformation. The reformers were able to refute dubious historical claims made by a long line of Catholic theologians and demonstrate the antiquity of some of their own positions. Especially in the form of vernacular works such as Foxe's, historians effectively presented the case for reformation also to the laity. Given the choice between sometimes abstract, technical doctrinal arguments and concrete historical arguments, Anthony Milton has suggested quite probably that "it was the more tangible and straightforward questions of historical fact . . . which seemed to offer the clearest guide to the trouble layman."⁵⁰

Finally, the reformers not only made use of history, but also did so effectively. This originally "polemical use of history affected the discipline of history itself."⁵¹ To be persuasive in debate with Roman Catholic theologians who staked many of their claims to truth on history and tradition, the reformers were forced to be both thorough and critical in their search for historical documents, their evaluation of the authenticity of those documents, and their interpretation and application of the same. In emphasizing this critical and analytical methodology, which would soon become the accepted and expected norm, and which would be "professionalized" as it came to be learned and taught in Protestant universities throughout Europe, the reformers effectively inaugurated what continues to be described as the "historical revolution"—the invention of history as a modern scholarly discipline.

⁴⁹ Gordon, "The Changing Face of Protestant History," 3.

⁵⁰ Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 270.

⁵¹ Rainer Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1968), 220.

The Divine Game: Faith and the Reconciliation of Opposites in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*

S.J. Munson

In his running commentary upon the trials and misfortunes of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, Martin Luther wrestles with some of the darkest passages in all of Scripture. To the reformer, however, these tribulations serve not as a counsel of despair and doubt but as a very great comfort to all the saints who suffer affliction and cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" As Luther quotes Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, "And I play in his world, and my fun is with the sons of men" (Prov 8:31, cf. Vulgate),¹ such human trials as the godly experience are in reality a *ludus divinus*, or divine game, through which they are purged and strengthened. It will be the purpose of this study to examine closely the reformer's comments upon the relevant texts within the *Lectures on Genesis* in order to uncover a general pattern in Luther's treatment of these passages and to relate these findings to the major themes of his theology.

The *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545) hold a significant place within the canon of the reformer's work. Comprising three volumes of the Weimar Edition (eight of the American), they remain the major literary achievement of the last decade of his life, and could even be said to contain the full flowering of his thought and a summary of his entire theology.² In these *Enarrationes*, or line-by-line commentaries on the biblical texts, the

¹ "Ludo praeterea in orbe terrae eius, et deliciae meae sunt cum filiis hominum." *Genesisvorlesung* in Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 44:466 (hereafter WA); Friedrich Gogarten, "The Unity of History," *Theology Today* 15 (July, 1958): 205.

² Johannes Schwanke, "Luther on Creation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 1. Asendorf refers to the Genesis lectures as Luther's "*Summa Theologiae*." Ulrich Asendorf, "Die ökumenische Bedeutung von Luthers Genesis-Vorlesung (1535–1545)" in *Caritas Dei: Beiträge zum Verständnis Luthers und der gegenwärtigen Ökumene: Festschrift für Tuomo Mannermaa zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds. Oswald Bayer, Robert W. Jenson, Simo Knuuttila (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1997), 19; cf. Heiko Obermann, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, tr. Eileem Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 166.

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aging and ailing Luther, knowing his life is nearing its end, appears to pour out all of himself—his life experiences, triumphs and failures, his theological battles (old and new), his sufferings and persecutions, his humor and vitriol, his pastor's heart, and above all, his passion for the Word of God—as he seeks to form the minds of his theological students, preparing them for the inevitable spiritual battles that lie ahead.³

It must be noted at the outset that the textual integrity of these lectures has come under a cloud of suspicion, beginning 80 years ago with the work of Erich Seeberg, and later Peter Meinhold.⁴ Most critical are their assertions that the *Lectures on Genesis* contain “traces of an alien theology” (*die Spuren einer fremden Theologie*) and corrections on theological issues relevant to growing struggles within later Lutheranism.⁵ It must be admitted that, unlike the reformer's earlier works, these published lectures did not receive his usual close scrutiny; ⁶ only one of the four original volumes had been published before his death. That at least some additions were made by a succession of editors, each under the influence of Melancthon, seems clear.

In recent decades, however, Meinhold's conclusions have been severely qualified, and some entirely dismissed, by such scholars as Klaus, Delius, and Asendorf.⁷ A major argument in defense of the text is that Meinhold has weakened his own arguments from the start by employing the writings of the younger, rather than the older Luther as a theological baseline. As mentioned, Luther himself did write both a preface and postscript to the first published volume (1544), thus giving his approval, at

³ John A. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity* (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2008), 2, 9.

⁴ Erich Seeberg, *Studien zu Luthers Genesisvorlesung: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem alten Luther* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932); Peter Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers und ihre Herausgeber* (Veit Dietrich, Michael Rotig, Hieronymus Besold), (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936). I also refer the reader to the excellent summary of relevant scholarship in Mickey Leland Mattox, “Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs”: *Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesis, 1535–1545* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 264–273.

⁵ Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung*, 370.

⁶ James A. Nestingen, “Luther in Front of the Text: the Genesis Commentary,” *Word & World* 14 (Spring, 1994): 187.

⁷ Bernhard Klaus, “Die Lutherüberlieferung Veit Dietrichs und ihre Problematik,” *Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte*, 53 (1984): 33–47; Hans-Ulrich Delius, *Die Quellen von Martin Luthers Genesisvorlesung*, (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1992); Ulrich Asendorf, *Lectura in Biblia: Luthers Genesisvorlesung (1535–1545)*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).

least to that redaction.⁸ Also, comparison with other later works from the hand of the reformer demonstrates that, despite some obvious and identifiable insertions, the vast majority of the Genesis lectures appears to give us Martin Luther himself, or at least the *vox Lutheri*.⁹ Nevertheless, the text remains compromised, at least in some places, and one ought to approach it with eyes open, especially in those areas that became topics of theological dispute following the reformer's death, such as the role of God's law in the life of the community.¹⁰ Yet, in other areas in which we have adequate corroboration from other writings, one can be relatively sure of being on firmer ground.

In his discussion of the suffering and tribulation of the patriarchs in Genesis, it is important to note that, for the reformer, God's sport is a function of *theologia crucis*, Luther's theology of the cross, the lens through which he views the whole of Scripture, faith, and the knowledge of God.¹¹

God places his own under the cross; and although he delays their deliverance, nevertheless in the end he gloriously snatches them out of their dangers and makes them victors, but only after they have first been vexed and have been wearied to despair by sundry conflicts.¹²

Thus, the pattern, like that of Christ's own cross and resurrection, is not one that moves from glory to glory, but from ignominy to glory, and from death to life. Human flesh, however, sets itself against such wisdom and cannot attain it. "The flesh is indeed weak," says Luther; "it groans, howls, and complains, but God says: 'You know nothing; you are a fool! Wisdom belongs to me, and from this cross of yours, I will bring forth the greatest good.'"¹³ This cross must be borne and overcome by faith and patience.

⁸ Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 7.

⁹ Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 7; Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532-1546*, tr. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 136. In his 1958 Introduction to the American Edition of the lectures, Jaroslav Pelikan acknowledges Meinhold's cautions but contends that the lectures are still "an indispensable source of our knowledge of Luther's thought," and that while the hands of the editors are sometimes at work, "the voice is nevertheless the voice of Luther." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition (hereafter *AE*), 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 1: xii.

¹⁰ Nestingen, "Luther in Front of the Text," 189.

¹¹ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, tr. R.C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 55; Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 148-52.

¹² *AE* 2:369; *WA* 42:526.

¹³ *AE* 6:352; *WA* 44:263.

For Luther temptation is inevitable. As the Christian lives in the shadow of the cross, life in this world becomes a continual *Anfechtung*, temptation (*tentatio*) in the form of an assault (*impugnatio*), which becomes a trial or test (*probatio*).¹⁴ During this ordeal, hell is unleashed, and faith undergoes a barrage of contradictions (*contraria*), designed to bring us to an end of ourselves by reducing us to a state of doubt and despair. Almost all the saints are tempted by despair, says the reformer, and the more godly they are, the more frequently they will be “attacked” with this weapon of Satan.¹⁵ Yet, for Luther, it is God who is the ultimate source of this assault, whereby he removes all impediments and props that stand in the way of our justification, as well as our sanctification.¹⁶

Concerning Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, Luther writes, “Because Abraham is the foremost and greatest among the holy patriarchs, he endures truly patriarchal trials, which his descendants would not have been able to bear.”¹⁷ Luther’s concept of divine sport is a figure drawn from the Holy Scriptures that illustrates how, in the words of the psalmist, “The Lord leads his saints in wondrous wise” (Ps 4:4).¹⁸ The Almighty does not play this way with the ungodly, who “spend their days in prosperity, and in peace go down to Sheol” (Job 21:13). Thus, “to feel God’s wrath is a sure sign of life.”¹⁹

According to the reformer, however, our first and most natural response to tribulation is to imagine that God has had a change of mind, or that we have finally committed some “extraordinary” sin that has alienated us from God and the covenant of promise. “By nature we are all in the habit of doing this,” Luther writes, and goes on to explain:

When some physical affliction besets us, our conscience is soon at hand, and the devil torments it by assembling all the circumstance. Therefore a troubled heart looks about and considers how it may have offended God most. This leads to murmuring against God and to the greatest trial, hatred of God.”²⁰

Those who are untutored in the promise of redemption are the first to be set awash.

¹⁴ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 33; McGrath, *Luther’s Theology*, 170.

¹⁵ AE 4:95; WA 43:203.

¹⁶ McGrath, *Luther’s Theology*, 170.

¹⁷ AE 4:91; WA 43:201.

¹⁸ Gogarten, “The Unity of History,” 205.

¹⁹ AE 7:233; WA 44:472.

²⁰ AE 4:93; WA 43:202.

As human beings, we are frequently tempted with despair, for what saint ever lived entirely free from this thought: "What if God does not want me to be saved?" Nevertheless, the Scriptures teach us that in such trials we must hold fast to the promises given to us in our baptism, which are "sure and clear."²¹ Yet, as soon as we grab hold of this rock, Satan redoubles his attack and continues to whisper that we are not worthy of such a promise. We know that God is merciful and does not lie; yet how many truly understand or believe this? "Rather," says Luther, "when I consider that I am a sinner and that it must be that I am being punished for my sins, I think differently."²² In that case, God is not our Father, but becomes the devil himself.

Temptation to despair, which usually accompanies all varieties of tribulation, only serves to increase the grief and agony of the flesh (that is, the mind) when the afflicted person complains that he has been cast off by God. Despair, or the abandoning of God's promises, is the last and most serious temptation to unbelief by which the greatest saints are disciplined.²³ Here, the reformer certainly speaks as one who wrestled often with the black dog of depression.²⁴ Luther's approach to these lectures is deeply rooted in his own personal experience, as well as his pastoral concern.²⁵ His own trials, which by the date of the Genesis lectures had been extensive indeed, he saw not as exceptional, but rather as characteristic of the *Anfechtung* of the Christian life. Such suffering is the common lot of all Christians—not as satisfaction for sin, as the medieval church taught, but as a means of God's own self-revelation through the cross.²⁶ This revelation comes about as the result of God's own initiative and terms, a revelation *sub contrariis*, in which God both hides and reveals himself in things that are foolish to human reason.²⁷ For Luther, the one who is able to withstand this temptation to despair comes to the perfect knowledge of God's will and exclaims with Jacob, "I have seen the Lord, and I did not know that God meant so well with me!" Before this stage is reached, however, life is quite literally a trying experience.²⁸

²¹ AE 4:93; WA 43:202.

²² AE 7:226; WA 44:467.

²³ AE 6:131; WA 44:97.

²⁴ Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, tr. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 93.

²⁵ H.G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 333; Nestingen, "Luther in Front of the Text," 194.

²⁶ Heino O. Kadai, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *CTQ* 63 (1999): 177.

²⁷ Kadai, "Luther's Theology," 179; McGrath, *Luther's Theology*, 153–161.

²⁸ AE 6:131; WA 44:97.

Sadly, according to Luther, our fleshly nature is the first to react in such contradictory circumstances. "There is a contradiction with which God contradicts himself. It is impossible for the flesh to understand this; for it inevitably concludes either that God is lying—and this is blasphemy—or that God hates me—and this leads to despair."²⁹ In the case of Abraham, human reason, in its limitations, concludes either that the promise itself is a lie or that the command to sacrifice Isaac does not come from God but from the devil. Here, reason's hands are tied; it can do nothing else.³⁰

As Robert Kolb notes ironically, "Of all the places to search for God, the last place most people would think to look is the gallows."³¹ The Almighty frequently hides under the form of the worst devil, Luther believes, and so we must learn that the goodness, mercy, and power of God cannot be grasped by mere speculation, but must be understood on the basis of faith's experience.³² God is merciful, wise, and good, desiring to give more than we ask or think. Such mercy as this is far too great for us to fathom by reflection.³³ Yet reason replies, "'These things are indeed excellently and beautifully spoken, but I am experiencing the contrary. [God] is not only sleeping but even snoring; to be sure there is plainly no God at all to care for us.'"³⁴

On this topic, Luther seizes the opportunity to ridicule the "Sacramentarians" (most likely Zwingli and Oecolampadius) for their failure to understand the "contradiction" of Christ's presence both in the bread and wine and at the right hand of the Father.³⁵ Merely to conclude that the flesh is of no avail, as Zwingli did, is, for Luther, to rush into the Scriptures "with unwashed feet and following the blind judgment of reason."³⁶ Both the Law and "carnal wisdom" do not understand these mysteries, which are offensive to the fleshly minded. Indeed, all the works of God, for Luther, are in conflict with the promise of redemption, which nevertheless remains completely true and unshaken. What offends the

²⁹ AE 4:93; WA 43:202.

³⁰ AE 4:95; WA 43:204.

³¹ Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 443.

³² AE 7:175; WA 44:429.

³³ AE 7:176; WA 44:429, 430.

³⁴ AE 6:360; WA 44:269.

³⁵ Kurt K. Hendel, "Finitum Capax Infiniti: Luther's Radical Incarnational Perspective," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35 (December, 2008): 420–423.

³⁶ AE 4:95; WA 42:204.

human mind is the fact that the promise is invisible, delayed, and so often hidden in its opposite (*in contrarium posita*).³⁷

So great is the temptation to cast away all hope that it cannot be told in words, only experienced. It is not strange, therefore, that reason cannot provide a “positive counsel or conclusion” based on the evidence. Like the other reformers, Luther completely rejected the competence of human reason to lead us to the knowledge of God.³⁸ Rather, this is an arena in which the human spirit itself is fighting, and the Holy Spirit is present to help our weakness. Without that succor, we would quite easily be reduced to despair.³⁹

Although deriving great pleasure from this game, God is not a cruel deity. Rather, this divine sport has a much deeper and lasting significance for both God and the saints. For Luther, God simulates anger and performs strange deeds in order to kill the mind of our flesh, which is opposed to God.⁴⁰ The Almighty disciplines us on account of that

sluggishness and coldness of original sin, because of which the hearts of the godly are benumbed and rendered rather sluggish toward faith, hope, prayer, and other spiritual exercises. For when that game of God [*ludus ille divinus*] is lacking, we snore and are cold. Therefore, with this goad, as it were, God pricks and drives the stupid and lazy ass, our flesh, which oppresses us with its huge bulk.⁴¹

God does not want us to be conformed after the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Only then can we recognize the goodness of God, his acceptable and perfect will (Ro 12:2). Without this renewal, we cannot attain this knowledge. How then are we renewed? By rejecting and abolishing the “old man,” Luther insists.⁴²

For the reformer, it was the “papists” who believed that in this trial God was exacting satisfactions, as though he required this on account of our sins. Here, Luther refers to the “third step” of the medieval penitential system (contrition and confession being the first two) whereby the sinner underwent some form of punishment to make reparation to God for the

³⁷ AE 4:326; WA 43:371.

³⁸ Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 77.

³⁹ AE 6:135; WA 44:100.

⁴⁰ AE 4:94; WA 43:203.

⁴¹ AE 8:15; WA 44:590.

⁴² AE 7:177; WA 44:430.

offense.⁴³ Yet, for Luther, there is no satisfaction for sins outside of Christ, except for that which occurs on the civil level and which has nothing to do with theology.

God afflicts us with disasters not to punish us, although it may appear to be identical to punishment, but to lead us to a deeper knowledge of our sin. God knows very well that we cannot make satisfaction of our own; the Almighty does not return evil according to our merits, although we deserve nothing less than death and hell. Here Luther deliberately employs such common terms as *satisfaction* and *merit*, applying them to the work of Christ and in direct opposition to their use in Roman doctrine.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the sin that clings to our nature remains hidden from our eyes.⁴⁵ Therefore, God employs “powerful and bitter remedies” to make it manifest and to cleanse it. “If he is to sweep out evil,” Luther remarks graphically, “he must take a broom and sharp sand, and he must scrub until blood flows.” Such punishments and disasters as plagues, wars, and famines fall into this category as well, and the Lord makes use of them in order that sin may be revealed in us and that we understand “who we are in God’s eyes.” Often we must fall very far indeed in order that we may come to a knowledge of ourselves and our corruption.⁴⁶

In Luther’s mind, it is those who refuse to submit themselves in faith and obedience to the disciplining hand of the Father who worry endlessly about satisfactions, and when they find at last that these can never be enough (as the young Luther had), they are forced to despair. God also cleanses hypocrites and godless people, the reformer admits, but they are “broken like glass” before the game is ended.⁴⁷

God desires that we consider the cause of our afflictions. Even if we are a paragon of good works, the flesh that we carry around with us remains impure, especially when we fail to comprehend the depth of our sinfulness. Certainly, all sins have been remitted and covered by the cross; yet they have not been completely removed from us. Those who are justified in Christ remain, in this life, *simul iustus et peccator*.⁴⁸ Thus for

⁴³ AE 7:227&n; WA 44:468; Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, Charles P. Arand (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 314.

⁴⁴ Watson, *Let Be God!*, God 120.

⁴⁵ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 141.

⁴⁶ AE 7:228; WA 44:468.

⁴⁷ AE 7:229; WA 44:469.

⁴⁸ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, tr. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 263; James F. McCue, “*Simul iustus et*

Luther, it is as though God were saying to us, “You have been enlightened and baptized; but you still stink, and your flesh is full of many great vices. Therefore, I might cleanse it, for that which is unclean and polluted shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” This is the merciful sport of God: that he afflicts us, not to destroy us, but so that we may arrive at an acknowledgement of our foulness and “cry to him invoking his mercy, which he shows so wonderfully.”⁴⁹

The “Sophists,” that is, the medieval theologians or “Schoolmen” in whose teaching Luther had been trained, claimed that if one is “perfectly contrite” (*contritus perfecte*), God then pours in his grace by “congruity” (*infundit gratiam de congruo*). In effect, the reformer says, they desire to merit grace through punishment alone; they do not know what sin is.⁵⁰

The “papists,” Luther scolds, taught that original sin was removed in baptism, and that all that then remained was “tinder” (*fomes peccati*). The medieval Summists had also declared the sacrament of penance to be, after baptism, *secunda post naufragium tabula* (“a second plank [of salvation] after shipwreck”).⁵¹ In a statement harkening back to his Ninety-five Theses, Luther cries out here that the whole life of the believer is one of repentance, not sacramental penance.⁵² Satisfaction cannot be achieved through our merits and virtues, but through Christ’s gift alone. The Christian life thus becomes a “purging out of the yeast” of sin; our own strength and satisfactions are useless. That Roman doctrine is a “sheer lie” for Luther. Rather we must see that we have been “received into grace through baptism for the remission of sins as well as for the purging of sin.” This remission is a free gift and takes place through the sacrifice of Christ alone. Nevertheless, remission is accompanied by “distress, perplexity, tribulation, and mortification” throughout the life of the saint. “All these have a bearing on the abolition of sin,” writes the reformer, “in such a way that it is not only remitted and forgiven by God’s grace but is also purged away by the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁵³

Original sin, Luther believes, was contracted in Paradise, and it clings to us until we are liberated through death. It is the “devil’s yeast,” and

peccator in Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther: Toward Putting the Debate in Context,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48 (March, 1980): 93.

⁴⁹ AE 7:229, 230; WA 44:469.

⁵⁰ AE 7:230, 232; WA 44:470, 471.

⁵¹ Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 65.

⁵² Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 353.

⁵³ AE 7:234–235; WA 44:473–74.

human nature is infected with it: “horrible darkness, ignorance, and aversion to God” are innate in us; our hearts and wills are full of “listlessness, smugness, and contempt for God.”⁵⁴ The scholastics thought of sin in terms of violations of God’s law in the human mind, speech, and actions, and in doing so, they failed to grasp the deep and radical nature of original sin (*peccatum radicale*). For Luther, however, our inner nature itself is corrupted through the fall, so that what we do is merely an outward expression of who we are. In other words, we are already sinful before we do anything.⁵⁵ As he states emphatically in a 1522 sermon,

Our deficiency does not lie in our works but in our nature. Our person, nature, and entire existence are corrupted through Adam’s fall. Therefore not a single work can be good in us, until our nature and personal being are changed and renewed. The tree is not good; therefore the fruits are evil . . . [T]here is deficiency in the whole natural being . . . its birth and everything connected with its origin are corrupted and sinful. That is to say hereditary sin or natural sin or personal sin is the truly chief sin. If this sin did not exist, there would also be no actual sin. This sin is not committed, as are all other sins; rather it *is*. It lives and commits all sins and is the real essential sin [*die weßenlich sund*], which does not sin for an hour or for a while; rather no matter where or how long a person lives, this sin is there too.⁵⁶

We dream that we are pure and clean and without any filth at all. Thus, the “rod of discipline” is necessary in order to “correct and abolish” this folly of the heart.⁵⁷ As Luther phrases it, “We cannot be sanctified unless the flesh and the body of sin is mortified.”⁵⁸

As a parent cares for a child, the Lord acts just like a mother who does not put her baby in its cradle without first washing and cleansing it. The baby’s wailing does not prevent her from washing it. “So we have been called; we have remission of sins; we are children and heirs of God, but laziness and the old filth of this body and soul still clings to us, and this plague God removes from us throughout our lives.” Therefore, “violent troubles” are required in order to “cast off this sluggishness and sloth.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ AE 7:234; WA 44:472.

⁵⁵ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 153.

⁵⁶ Luther, “The Gospel for New Year’s Day, Luke 2[21],” in AE 52:151–152; WA 10:i.1.508, 509.

⁵⁷ AE 7:233–234; WA 44:472.

⁵⁸ AE 6:152; WA 44:113.

⁵⁹ AE 7:234, 235; WA 44:473, 474.

For Luther, it is wisdom characteristic of a Christian to know that we are born in sin, that sin still “clings” to the flesh even up to the time of death, and that we cannot be perfectly freed from sin except through death. God is not a liar; rather, it is we who lie by our refusal to acknowledge our guilt. The Lord’s correction and discipline, therefore, are not lies, but a revelation of our identity as sinners.⁶⁰

In Ezek 24:6–7, the Lord refers to Jerusalem as a pot so thickly encrusted with rust that no amount of cleaning or scraping could suffice; it must be melted anew. “Its thick rust does not go out by fire”; it must be boiled and purified. Luther savors this image, for it vividly illustrates sin’s deeply entrenched nature, God’s hatred of sin, as well as the Almighty’s parental concern. It is a “fatherly game” which God plays when he sends us plague, famine, disease, sadness of spirit, misfortune, and other evils that fill this life, all in order to melt and purge us. Such a savior as this the Jews were not expecting, Luther says, although it was written in Mal 3:2, “Who can endure the day of his coming?” Rather, they, like our own flesh, desired a messiah who would set them up as kings and lords over the whole earth.⁶¹

Although the patriarch himself does not see it, in God’s eyes Jacob is weak in faith, with too light a grasp of the promise. Then the Almighty’s face appears to him, and it is a fierce, gloomy, and murderous visage. If the patriarch trembles and does not understand, it is because the flesh stands in the way, for “it cannot endure its own mortification and so hinders the spirit from experiencing the boundless love and beneficence of God until the spirit emerges victorious from this warfare and repels these hindrances.”⁶²

Our flesh kicks and demands to have its way. Yet God does not act in agreement with our wishes when he governs according to his goodness and wisdom. It is God’s nature not to give in to our blind petitions. At the time of his imprisonment in Egypt, Joseph desires to be set free and restored to his homeland. He prays for no more than this. Therefore, God allows him to “burn incense” for a while and to “send up odors.” Then, the Lord lets him languish still longer, saying, “I still want more of those columns of ascending incense.” Later, Joseph receives a much greater gift, one he had not understood or even hoped for.

⁶⁰ AE 7:237, 238; WA 44:475, 476.

⁶¹ AE 7:231; WA 44:470.

⁶² AE 6:150; WA 44:112.

In the case of Jacob, if God had revealed to him that the loss of Joseph would result in a great blessing, the patriarch would have let the boy go with joy, but Jacob's flesh or "old man" would not have been mortified and his new man renewed with greater things.⁶³ In a more tragic way, Luther says, the Israelites murmured in the wilderness. God was prepared, able, and willing to give them help, but they demanded it immediately.⁶⁴

In this discussion, the question must arise, "Is God a tempter?" For Luther, the Hebrew verb נָסָה ("to tempt"; used in the sense of testing in Gen 22:1, i.e. "God tested Abraham") must be taken seriously; it is not to be treated cursorily or lightly as, according to Luther, James does in his epistle (James 1:13). When God "tempts" Abraham, he leaves no hope, but confronts the patriarch with a blatant contradiction of the promise: Isaac, the child of promise, must die. The Lord, who was formerly Abraham's protector and benefactor, now shows himself in the guise of an enemy and tyrant.⁶⁵

According to Luther, it is the devil who looks for such contradictions, hunts them down, and employs them against us. Yet Christians must recognize with fear and respect that it is God's practice to do contradictory things, while God's nature and promises remain immutable. Thus, one may employ such statements as "God is pretending, lying, simulating, and deceiving us," or "He says one thing but has something else in mind," for, especially in regard to death, this is indeed a very "salutary lie" (*id nobis salutare mendacium est*).⁶⁶ The Almighty tests whether we are willing to give up present things and even life itself for God's sake as well as love God with our whole hearts. Luther explains that God is not deaf, nor is the Almighty's arm shortened; God is not only able but also ready to liberate and exalt the saints, except that for a time God hides himself in the shadows.⁶⁷

Joseph plays a similar game with his brothers in Genesis 42–44, a sport that reduces them to fear and trains them in humility. For the reformer, this particular story is also an allegory, for in a similar manner, God conducts himself in his game with the saints. Joseph does not play or act so harshly out of revenge or hatred; indeed, he weeps, and his heart is deeply moved during this game. Yet he pretends that he is a tyrant who wants to

⁶³ AE 6:354; WA 44:264.

⁶⁴ AE 6:353; WA 44:264.

⁶⁵ AE 4:92, 94; WA 43:201, 202.

⁶⁶ AE 4:131; WA 43:229.

⁶⁷ AE 7:177; WA 44:431.

destroy his brothers.⁶⁸ He acts as a stranger and upbraids them, threatening them with punishment and even death. Yet his true heart remains gentle and beneficent. Nothing is further from his mind than punishment; rather, his goal is to exalt and honor them, once they have been duly chastened.⁶⁹

According to Luther, Jacob's wrestling with the "angel" in Genesis 32 is among the most obscure passages in the Old Testament, for it deals with the most "sublime temptation" in which Jacob has to fight, not with flesh and blood, but with God. The Lord acts in such a way toward Jacob that the patriarch does not recognize God but thinks it is an angel and an adversary who wishes to deprive him of the promise. Such serious games as these, says Luther, are becoming to God and befit his divine majesty.

We are "tempted" by God, not because the Lord desires this trial, but because in the midst of it, it is revealed whether we indeed love God above all others and whether we are able to bear God's darkness and taking away, just as we joyfully bear the kindness and promises.⁷⁰ In the same manner, Luther muses, a father may take an apple away from his son under some "pretense," not because he wants to deprive him of it, but merely to test whether his son loves him and believes that his father will give it back. If the son gives up the apple, the father is pleased with this obedience and expression of love. God's tempting is fatherly and, as James affirms, not for evil purposes or with the goal of producing hatred and fear, but for the exercise and stirring up of our faith and love. It is Satan who tempts for evil and attempts to draw us away into mistrust and blasphemy, but God honors and exalts those who wait for him and are able to bear the parental hand and rod.⁷¹ Those who endure such trial come to a deeper understanding of God's mercy and providence. "O my heavenly Father," they exclaim, "were you so close to me, and I did not know it?" For Luther, this is what Scripture means by "seeing the Lord face to face": to be brought back from hell into reconfession and reaffirmation.⁷²

Throughout his commentary on these Genesis texts, it is evident that the reformer, while defending God's providence, remains pastorally sympathetic to the pain occasioned by this divine game. To God, it is sport; but to us, it appears quite different. Such trials, he admits, cannot be overcome without much sorrow and grief, for "the saints are not blocks of wood and

⁶⁸ AE 7:225; WA 44:466.

⁶⁹ AE 7:232; WA 44:471.

⁷⁰ AE 4:93; WA 43:202.

⁷¹ AE 6:132; 7:174; WA 44:98, 428.

⁷² AE 6:151; WA 44:112.

devoid of feeling; on the contrary they are human beings, and the emotions and affections implanted in human nature are present in them to a higher degree than they are in others."⁷³ As a human being and a saint accustomed to great trials, Luther confesses that there is nothing more agonizing than this mortification of the flesh and sin. "For this reason," he writes, "it seems horrible and impossible, and we shun and hate it. Nevertheless one must accustom oneself to it and make a beginning, in accordance with the example of Abraham, who does not shun it but waits for it with the utmost readiness."⁷⁴

While this game gives God great pleasure, for us it is a "very sad death." "Reducing man to nothing," Luther cries, "giving him up to death, and afflicting him with disasters and troubles without number—this is not playing is it? It is a game of a cat with a mouse, and this is the death of the mouse."⁷⁵ Often our situation appears so hopeless and pathetic that the "spectators," that is, the angels, devils, and the world, suppose that we are surely doomed. Yet, for Luther, the Christian life is a divine *comedia*, in which the *catastrophe* (or denouement) unravels what has been true all along but hidden: that God has been playing with us in a most fatherly manner.⁷⁶

Luther also employs the analogy of the common household in which the correction of the children is by no means a pleasant task. For the author, parental love demands "blows and stripes" in order that children may be improved, for one cannot bear to allow one's child to become a wastrel. Such love cannot be expressed without pain and grief on both sides.⁷⁷ Similarly, when Joseph chastens his brothers, love and compassion well up within him so that he is unable to fight back his tears, although by all outward appearances he seems as hard as flint and a cruel tyrant.⁷⁸ The game is likewise a hard and bitter one for his family.

It seems strange to our fleshly reason that we should suffer such temptations while the ungodly mass of humanity goes unchecked. Yet, God's purposes are eternal ones, and as the author of Hebrews states, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb 12:11). Thus, for Luther, what a "sad and unhappy indulgence" is the

⁷³ AE 4:112; WA 43:216.

⁷⁴ AE 4:123; WA 43:224.

⁷⁵ AE 7:225; WA 44:466.

⁷⁶ AE 7:225; WA 44:466; Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 71.

⁷⁷ AE 7:232; WA 44:471.

⁷⁸ AE 7:231; WA 44:470.

prosperity of the wicked. They are far happier whom God delivers over to misery and death for the destruction of the flesh.⁷⁹ God, however, is the only one who sees this with any clarity and perfect confidence.

We may take comfort, however, in the fact that no time of tribulation and distress can be so great and so long as to break us or drive out the seed of faith that has been planted within us.⁸⁰ God is faithful and will not tempt us beyond what we are able to bear. Of course, Luther admits, such theodicy is easily undertaken as speculation; but practically, “[I]t is work and toil to be reduced in this way, to die, and to pass away into nothing so that nothing seems to be left either of life or of carnal feeling except the Word.”⁸¹

In the Abraham story, we have two contradictory propositions: Isaac will be the father of a great nation; yet Abraham will apparently die childless. Such antithetical statements cannot be reconciled by any human reason or philosophy. It is the Word alone that can reconcile such a contradiction: Isaac, though dead, will live, and Isaac, though alive and full of promise, must die. For Luther, all the saints live and yet are dead on account of sin, and though they are dead, yet they live. In this paradox lies the heart of Scripture for the reformer, that which the sophists and rabbis cannot comprehend—namely, the resurrection of the dead, life, victory over death, and the destruction of sin.⁸²

Based on the observable evidence, it is impossible to believe that God is able or even wants to destroy death and change it into life. Perhaps one may believe quite easily that death is sport for God, Luther admits. Yet to be convinced of this on a deeply personal level, that is, in regard to one’s own death, is quite another matter, one that no “physician, philosopher, or lawyer” can achieve. For who can associate and reconcile these statements: death is not death; it is really life? “This is the power of faith,” says Luther, “which mediates in this way between death and life and immortality, which as faith knows, has been bestowed through Christ.”⁸³

Despite the enormity of his trial, Abraham does not deny the promise; instead, he clings to it, believing that Isaac will yet bear descendents, though dead. Here, to drive home the point, the reformer pauses to remind his students that, only the day before, they had buried one of their own,

⁷⁹ AE 6:356; WA 44:266.

⁸⁰ AE 7:177; WA 44:430.

⁸¹ AE 6:361; WA 44:270.

⁸² AE 4:113; WA 43:217.

⁸³ AE 4:116; WA 43:218, 219.

Dr. Sebald Münsterer, professor of law at Wittenberg, who, though dead, nevertheless lives.⁸⁴ According to Luther, through obedience Abraham understands the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and through this doctrine alone he reconciles the apparent contradiction, which cannot be resolved in any other way.⁸⁵ He, therefore, is able to be instructed more deeply in the perfect will and wisdom of God. "By this deed, as though by some show," Luther comments,

God wanted to point out that in his sight death is nothing but a sport and empty bugaboo of the human race, yes an annoyance and a trial, as for example, a father sports with his son, takes an apple away from him, and meanwhile is thinking of leaving him the entire inheritance. But this is difficult to believe; and for this reason, the heathen are without hope.⁸⁶

Indeed, those who are without faith will despair, but Christians, who have the Word, should so meditate on it that however much they may be weighed down by the burden of sin and the hindrances of Satan they may be able to attain to "that glory of the knowledge of God's mind and so immortality," being able to affirm this immutable reality, namely, that death is sport (*mors est ludus*).⁸⁷ Luther's words here become all the more poignant when we consider the physical afflictions he endured during these lectures, and how he believed his own death was drawing near as well.⁸⁸

Although the "Sophists" may believe otherwise, faith is not an "idle quality" for Luther. On the contrary, it "reconciles opposites" (*conciliat contaria*), has the power to "kill death, condemn hell, be sin for sin, and a devil for the devil with the result that death is no longer death, even if reason insists that death is present." Can this be anything less than a divine *ludus*?⁸⁹

Luther confesses his own dullness in these matters, that his own understanding is imperfect. Reason for him is a donkey that remains at the foot of Mount Moriah and cannot ascend, and thus all who are not instructed in this doctrine of faith cannot help but remain "asses" and fail to grasp such a lofty concept, namely, that death is life. For if one still fears and trembles at the thought of death, one ought to confess ignorance and

⁸⁴ AE 4:91n.

⁸⁵ AE 4:96; WA 43:204.

⁸⁶ AE 4:116; WA 43:119.

⁸⁷ AE 4:116, 117; WA 43:219.

⁸⁸ Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work*, tr. Lawrence W. Denef (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 377-378.

⁸⁹ AE 4:117; WA 43:219.

not boast of being a theologian.⁹⁰ The fact of death is plain to all, both to the godly and to the heathen. Yet, it is the special wisdom of the church that enables Christians to confess: “Though I kill my son, yet he will live and beget a nation, even if heaven itself should collapse around me, and though I die, yet will I live.”⁹¹ In his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) the reformer states emphatically:

19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened.

20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.⁹²

Alister McGrath writes, “The ‘theologian of glory’ expects God to be revealed in strength, glory and majesty, and is simply unable to accept the scene of dereliction on the cross as the self-revelation of God.” Nevertheless,

God works in a paradoxical way *sub contrariis*: his strength lies hidden under apparent weakness; his wisdom under apparent folly . . . the future glory of the Christian under his present sufferings. It will therefore be clear that there is a radical discontinuity between the *empirically perceived situation* and the *situation as discerned by faith*.⁹³

For the reformer, all of these paradoxical affirmations regarding life in spite of death have their source in the First Commandment, which also contains the doctrine of faith and the resurrection of the dead. “To be God,” Luther maintains, “means to deliver from all evils that burden us, such as sin, hell, death, etc.” The heathen know God solely as the Creator, but in the First Commandment “you will find Christ.” The one who believes the First Commandment, “you shall have no other gods,” will have no trouble or doubt about the resurrection of the dead.⁹⁴ Luther states in his discussion of this commandment in the *Large Catechism*:

What more could you ask or desire than God’s gracious promise that he will be yours with every blessing and will protect and help you in every need? The trouble is that the world does not believe this at all,

⁹⁰ AE 4:118; WA 43:220.

⁹¹ AE 4:118; WA 43:220.

⁹² Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation (1518),” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 31.

⁹³ McGrath, *Luther’s Theology*, 167.

⁹⁴ AE 4:119,121; WA 43:221, 222.

and does not recognize it as God's Word. For the world sees that those who trust God and not mammon suffer grief and want and are opposed and attacked by the devil. They have neither money, prestige, nor honor, and can scarcely keep alive; meanwhile, those who serve mammon have power, prestige, honor, wealth, and every comfort in the eyes of the world. Accordingly, we must grasp these words, even in the face of this apparent contradiction, and learn that they neither lie nor deceive but will yet prove to be true.⁹⁵

As Maxfield so well describes, these lectures were, for Luther, an opportunity to instill in his students a new evangelical worldview.⁹⁶ Thus the trials of the patriarchs are often viewed from the perspective of battles the reformer himself was fighting. Watson, too, points out that the Genesis lectures are, from one perspective, "largely an account of the conflict between true and false religion, the true and the false Church."⁹⁷ Because of persistent faith of the patriarchs, Luther considers Abraham to be "a true priest and bishop, more so than any ascetic with long robe and shaved head." The ascetics are no more holy than the prophets of Baal, for the true priests are those "who believe the word of God, who offer the sacrifice of praise and of the cross, and do not walk about in long garments but walk about in the gifts and jewels of the Holy Spirit: faith, patience in death, and the expectation of another and better life."⁹⁸ The patriarch knows in his heart that God's promises are not subject to change or neglect. Thus, he obeys God's command to sacrifice the lad, evaluating this new command in the light of God's previous promise concerning Isaac's seed.⁹⁹ Faith precedes, and the waiting follows.¹⁰⁰

Yet if faith precedes patient suffering, for Luther the Word of promise must precede faith, for without the Word no obedience pleases God. A good work is that which is done in faith and in obedience by one who believes that God is the Creator, the Preserver, and the One who raises from the dead. The monks, priests of Baal, Turks, and Jews do not please God or walk in obedience, Luther says, for they have no authentically divine command to accompany their works. For instance, in 2 Kings 16, King Ahaz performs a "great work" by sacrificing his child, an act similar on some level to Abraham's. Yet Ahaz had no command to do such a

⁹⁵ Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, tr. R.H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 14.

⁹⁶ Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 2.

⁹⁷ Watson, *Let Be God!*, 183 n.94.

⁹⁸ AE 4:122; WA 43:223.

⁹⁹ AE 4:130; WA 43:229.

¹⁰⁰ AE 7:174; WA 44:428.

thing; on the contrary, God's command was the very opposite, and thus the king's sacrifice was an abomination. Obedience is based on faith, and faith does not exist apart from a divine promise.¹⁰¹

Luther exhorts his hearers not to demand a sign from God to confirm the promise, for the Lord has already given the church sufficient signs: baptism, Holy Communion, the Keys (the forgiveness of sin), and the ministry of the Word. For the reformer, these signs are equal to, or even surpass all the apparitions and visions given to the patriarchs. Compared with the signs given to the church, those offered to Abraham appear as mere "droplets and crumbs."¹⁰² God's promise to the church has been made more than sufficiently manifest in the work of Christ, of which the above serve as adequate signs and confirmations.

Thus, the church must say with Job, "Though God slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15 AV), for God's actions contradict his promises, which we know and which have been fed to us.

If [God] should cast me into the depths of hell and place me in the midst of devils, I would still believe that I would be saved because I have been baptized, I have been absolved, I have received the pledge of my salvation, the body and blood of the Lord in the Supper.¹⁰³

The church has nothing with which to fight against such an *Anfechtung* but the "pure Word and the sacraments." These are few in comparison with so many foes, for the enemies of the church are without number, including civil authorities, scholars, popes, the devil, human flesh, and those within the church's own household.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, let all human wisdom be reduced to nought, concludes the reformer, for we are created from the Word, and to the Word we must return.¹⁰⁵ It is the law that is linked with doubt:

It [the Law] promises nothing but demands much. For this reason, wherever you find doubt in Holy Scriptures, you should refer it to the Law and say, "Here the Law is speaking." You must not doubt the promises. To doubt after prayer and confession is to sin against the

¹⁰¹ AE 4:123-124; WA 43:224.

¹⁰² AE 4:126; WA 43:226.

¹⁰³ AE 6:131; WA 44:98.

¹⁰⁴ AE 6:147; WA 44:110.

¹⁰⁵ AE 6:361; WA 44:270.

promises. Thus the promise of the gospel always battles against the doubt of the Law.¹⁰⁶

Using the example of Jacob's bout with the angel, Luther maintains that God is "conquered" when faith does not leave off but presses on. Though exhausted beyond all human endurance, Jacob still grabs hold of his opponent and demands, "you must give me a retraction (that is, a blessing to counter the contradiction), or I will not let you go." So it is with the Canaanite woman in the Gospels, who cries out after Jesus to heal her demonized daughter. Curtly, she is told, "'You are a dog, and the bread of the children does not belong to you.'" Here, too, even Christ takes on the appearance of an enemy and sets his face against this petitioner. The woman does not buckle, however, but presses forward and opposes Christ's statement to his face. Only then does he soften and, removing the fierce mask (*larvam deponere*), offers words of love, approval, and encouragement: "O woman, great is your faith!"¹⁰⁷

W. D. J. Cargill Thompson writes, "In His dealings with man God is always 'Deus Absconditus'—'the hidden God'—who works behind the scenes, through 'masks' ('larvae') and whose actions are only known by his faithful."¹⁰⁸ In a 1517 sermon on Matthew 11:25, Luther states, "Man hides what he is in order to conceal it; God hides what he is in order to reveal it."¹⁰⁹ In the light of these scriptures and their examples of persistent faith, Luther advises his students:

Even if [God] hides himself in a room in the house and does not want access to be given to anyone, do not draw back but follow. If he does not want to listen, knock at the door of the room; raise a shout! For this is the highest sacrifice, not to cease praying and seeking until we conquer him. He has already surrendered himself to us so that we may be certain of victory: ". . . he who believes and is baptized will be saved." These promises will never disappoint us unless we refuse to follow and seek.¹¹⁰

To say that God has surrendered himself is a reference to his self-revelation in his Word, which is filled with promises. Yet, through our

¹⁰⁶Luther, "Licentiate Examination of Heinrich Schemedenstede (1542)" in *Luther's Works*, ed. L.W. Spitz (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 34: 318; WA 39:II.200.

¹⁰⁷ AE 6:139-140; WA 44:103,104.

¹⁰⁸ W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, ed. Philip Broadhead (Totowa, NJ: Harvester Press, 1984), 49.

¹⁰⁹ McGrath, *Luther's Theology*, 167. "Homo abscondit sua ut neget, Deus abscondit sua ut revelet," WA 1:138.

¹¹⁰ AE 6:140; WA 44:104.

own fault, through our sleeping and snoring, we fail to enter that arena of combat with God where these promises flourish. The angel, who for Luther is none other than the pre-incarnate Christ himself, “exercises” Jacob until true faith and firmness come to the fore. Reason attempts to conquer God, but its efforts are in vain. Rather, it is the constant and persistent seeker and petitioner who triumphs, and such a one, for Luther, offers the “sweetest sacrifice.”¹¹¹

These stories of strange events and hardships bear great value for the reformer, for he rejoices that through them the church in all ages may be comforted. In the Genesis texts, we see that the patriarchs were not senseless monoliths of perfection, as Luther saw monastic scholars as having imagined, but human flesh struggling against despair and doubt. Thus, when in tribulation, one should consider,

I am not alone in being tempted concerning the wrath of God, predestination, and unbelief . . . all the saints as many as have ever believed or now believe in God’s Son experience these struggles of temptation, by which either they themselves or the whole church are disciplined. For what is the whole assembly which is called the church? It is a tiny little flock of the most wretched, forlorn, and hopeless men in the sight of the world.¹¹²

If such trying experiences befell the holy patriarchs who were “full of the Holy Spirit,” Luther asks, why then are we so shocked or why does murmuring arise in our hearts when we suffer similar temptations? Rather, we should “rejoice and give thanks to God when we feel ourselves tossed about by the same misfortunes by which God exercised the saintliest of men from the beginning.”¹¹³ Thus, Christians should mutually exhort one another to patient endurance by such examples as these left behind by those who went before us in the faith and who resembled us in suffering and bearing the cross. In fact, these examples appear very near to the course of our daily lives and misfortunes, and they touch us more intimately than the example of Christ himself, whose suffering and death inclines to appear “too sublime and without comparison” although certainly identical in its dynamics of abandonment and resurrection.¹¹⁴

In the histories of patriarchal hardship and trial, the church must learn to grasp its own reflection. For God,

¹¹¹ AE 6:141; WA 44:105.

¹¹² AE 6:149; WA 44:111.

¹¹³ AE 6:351; WA 44:262.

¹¹⁴ AE 6:351; WA 44:262.

hides the church and also our salvation under a dark and horrible cover, to which we must become accustomed so that we do not despair whenever adversities are thrown in our path by Satan, the world, or even God himself. The church is called "seditious, error ridden, heretical, the offscourings of the very worst men who have ever lived."¹¹⁵

Here, the reformer alludes to the persecutions and slanders against evangelicals in his own day.¹¹⁶

It is important to remind ourselves that the Genesis commentary was first addressed in a lecture hall to theological students, many of whom would themselves become pastors.¹¹⁷ Luther, therefore, concerns himself here in a very practical way, as he does so often in his works, with comforting despairing consciences.¹¹⁸ As George Kraus notes, the assurance of salvation is for Luther the "bedrock for pastoral ministry" and "crucial to healthy soul care."¹¹⁹ For the reformer, these biblical stories contain much power when used correctly in pastoral care. As he states in his comments on Genesis 32:

These matters must be dealt with carefully for the sake of those who will be future pastors of the churches, for there will always be some who will suffer these temptations and will need to be cheered by the pastor's consolation: "You have been baptized, fed with the Lord's supper, and absolved with the laying on of hands, not mine but God's, who has said to you, 'I forgive your sins and promise you eternal life.'"¹²⁰

It is clear from this counsel that Luther exhorts Christians to stand upon those promises that they have already been given and not to allow the "staff of the promise" to be so easily knocked from their hands. What is the promise for the Christian but that of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and what is the evidence of this promise but baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Word of God? Therefore, when tempted with contradictions and despair, the godly have this recourse:

I know that I am baptized and that God, for the sake of his Son, has promised me grace. This promise will not lie, even if I should be cast into utter darkness. Therefore, what Satan suggests to me is not God's

¹¹⁵ AE 6:147; WA 44:110.

¹¹⁶ Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 1-3.

¹¹⁸ McCue, "*Simul iustus et peccator*," 92.

¹¹⁹ George Kraus, "Luther the *Seelsorger*," *CTQ* 48 (1984): 154.

¹²⁰ AE 6:132; WA 44:98.

will: but God is tempting me in this manner, that it may become manifest what is hidden in my heart. It is not that God does not know this but that I do not know it. He himself wants to make use of this occasion to crush the head of the serpent in me. For . . . the mind of the flesh is enmity against God.¹²¹

As Heino Kadai states, Luther's "pastoral counsel was almost always a practical application of *theologia crucis*."¹²²

One must cling to the fact that God's promises are immutable. For Luther, the Word of God cannot be without effect; it is powerful, active, and creative. What it says, it performs. Thus, when we obey God's command and believe the promises, the outcome, which is already determined, follows eventually but surely, even though "the very gates of hell fight against it."¹²³ "One must hold fast to this comfort," Luther exhorts, "that what God has once declared, this he does not change. If a person has been baptized, and thus has been given the promise of the kingdom, he has received God's unchangeable Word and should not allow himself to be drawn away from it."¹²⁴

Once a person is convinced in his heart of God's truthfulness, he proceeds with confidence and boldness, not being anxious about the "possible or impossible, the easy or difficult." As Paul declares in Romans 8:39, "nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." Gideon and Samson are such examples for Luther: in receiving the Word of God, they believed, not fearing the size of the enemy. It is this kind of faith that produces marvelous works, as Christ affirms: "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do" (John 14:12).¹²⁵

According to the reformer, such "greater works" were not witnessed in his day because Christians lacked a sufficient understanding of such faith matters, but were fast asleep, failing to believe God whether he was disciplining or promising. At the time of his lecture on Genesis 22, (October, 1539) for example, an epidemic had broken out and caused panic. Luther bemoans this weakness of faith: "It is as though we did not have the command to live and to call upon God. . . . The bishops and pastors remain silent like dumb dogs and do not believe that they are what

¹²¹ AE 4:95; WA 43:203.

¹²² Kadai, "Luther's Theology," 202.

¹²³ AE 4:103; WA 43:209.

¹²⁴ AE 4:96; WA 43:204.

¹²⁵ AE 4:104; WA 43:210.

they are." "Wait for the Lord" is the counsel of the psalmist (Ps 27:14), but in Luther's opinion, no one heeds this advice, for no one believes that "God has commanded confidence and condemned despair." One does not need to search for this confidence in the ends of the earth, for the everyday lives of each of us are filled with the commands of God. Yet we do not believe and therefore feel no joy, since we lack that "light and understanding with regard to that spiritual pride and confidence that is based on God's Word." Thus, the reformer counsels, the example of the patriarchs should be all the more exalted and painstakingly taught.¹²⁶

This doctrine, for Luther, must not only be dealt with on a theoretical level in the pastor's study and hammered home from the pulpit, but also practiced wholeheartedly in our daily lives. The person who wishes to be a Christian must meditate on these things carefully and commit them to memory. "The marvelous counsels of God in governing his saints must be learned," he advises,

and the hearts of the godly must become accustomed to them. When you have a promise of God, it will happen that the more you are loved by God, the more you will have it hidden, delayed, and turned into its opposite. For if God did not love you so exceedingly, he would not play with you in this manner. . . . These are the sure signs of a heart that is fatherly and burns with love for you. . . . He does this because he loves his son very much and wants to give richly, provided that his son perseveres and swallows and overcomes the delay. . . . But we grumble and are displeased at a delay, no matter how short it is. What is being promised we want to get either now or in another manner and in another way. . . . Therefore, the examples of the fathers teach us what the true forms of worship are, namely, genuine faith, perfect hope, and unwavering love. These virtues lead us to the realization that God is present and beneficent no matter how he seems to be against us.¹²⁷

The lesson to be learned and practiced is knowing how to be abased and how to abound, to be not only patient and hopeful in tribulation but also humble and thankful in prosperity. This is truly the "royal road" (*regia via*) for the Christian, and when we have locked these things away in our heart, we will not only bear adversity with patience but even long for God to try us in this manner so that the vestiges of the old man might be abolished in us.¹²⁸ It is important to note, however, that not all the saints

¹²⁶ AE 4:105, 106; WA 43:211.

¹²⁷ AE 4:326–327; WA 43:371.

¹²⁸ AE 2:370; 7:237; WA 42:527; 44:475.

will grasp these concepts so clearly, but they are not rejected by God for this reason.¹²⁹

It must also be clarified that, for Luther, a faithful grasp on the promise does not mean that the saint is free from temptation. On the contrary, such thoughts must occur. Jacob, for example, thinks that God may have changed his mind and rejected him. These were the patriarch's thoughts; yet they remained thoughts and not assurances, "axioms," or "conclusions." Our human nature and weak faith cannot prevent such doubts from assailing us, but faith is able to deflect these fiery darts and prevent them from starting a conflagration. Luther quotes a certain hermit who gives this advice in the *Vitae Patrum*: "You cannot prevent the birds from flying over your head. But let these only fly and do not let them build nests in the hair of your head." Foolish people like Saul and Judas make conclusions out of such thoughts, throwing away both the Word of faith and prayer with both hands. Such a response makes "judicial sentences" out of temptations.¹³⁰ The saint, however, must make an exerted effort of faith and take even greater comfort whenever God's promises are expressed in their opposite. On this subject, Luther offers the following pastoral proverbs:

When you think that our Lord God has rejected a person, you should think that our Lord God has him in his arms and is pressing him to his heart. When we suppose that someone has been deserted and rejected by God, then we should conclude that he is in the embrace and the lap of God.¹³¹

For this is what Paul means by that basic Christian paradox: "When I am weak, then I am strong."

In Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, we see in concrete and everyday terms how God exercises, exalts, and plays with the saints: that disasters, groans, tears, death, and tribulations of all sorts are but "a most pleasant and beautiful game of God's goodness" (*iucundissimum et pulcherimum ludum quendam divinae bonitatis*).¹³² Such a game as that of the father and the child's apple appears harmless on a domestic level, but in the arena of faith, when we struggle between contradictions on the one hand and the promises of God on the other, this is indeed a very arduous exercise. The patriarchs, like us, had to struggle not only against human opposition,

¹²⁹ AE 6:131; WA 44:97.

¹³⁰ AE 6:133, 134; WA 44:99

¹³¹ AE 6:149; WA 44:111.

¹³² AE 7:226; WA 44:467.

danger, and the threat of death, but more importantly, and excruciatingly, against temptation in the “highest degree”: that dual to the death, not against flesh and blood, but against God himself in hostile guise.

To the flesh, this game seems a most cruel, dark, and tyrannical will. Yet, although we appear to teeter on the brink of destruction, we must take courage and cling tightly to the promises, for when we groan, God is “smiling most kindly, taking pleasure in those who fear him and hope in his mercy.” In the end, it is revealed that this “quite childish playing” (*lusus prorsus puerili*) is “not wrath but discipline, not disinheritance but purification. It is excellent and very salutary exercise and perfect instruction.”¹³³ For it is necessary for our salvation that original sin, which, though covered over by the cross, nevertheless still clings to us, be removed throughout our lifetime, and that our flesh, senses, reason, and wisdom be put to death, so that we may trust without seeing, but with great “simplicity and with eyes shut, even though [God] pretends not to care for us.”¹³⁴

It is necessary that the flesh be mortified and the Spirit quickened within us, for according to the flesh we are being put to death, and according to the spirit we are being made alive. As Paul affirms, “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day” (2 Cor 4:16). This dynamic, for Luther is the “continuous teaching of the entire Holy Scripture and also God’s will.”¹³⁵ Thus, we may declare with the psalmist, “It is good for me that thou didst humble me that I might learn thy statutes” (Ps 119:71), and so, like a contrite child, kiss the rod of discipline.¹³⁶

In commenting upon these texts, Luther’s concern is not only theological and pastoral but also highly personal. He himself is certainly no stranger to such attacks and struggles of faith, and so is sympathetic toward the groans and doubts of the flesh.¹³⁷ For Luther, what one must impress upon those who are afflicted is the very sure evidence that they have not been abandoned, that God does not hate them, and that “what they interpret as desertion is acceptance and the surest proof of God’s grace.” For the Lord “chastises every child whom he receives” (Heb 12:6),

¹³³ AE 6:130, 131; WA 44:97.

¹³⁴ AE 6:359; WA 44:268.

¹³⁵ AE 6:355; WA 44:265.

¹³⁶ AE 6:152; WA 44:113.

¹³⁷ AE 6:148; WA 44:110.

so that the saints may not be swallowed up by that blindness to sin and aversion to all things godly, that characterize their original nature.¹³⁸

It is precisely at this point that the stories of patriarchal trials are of such great edification and comfort for Luther. As he remarks concerning Jacob's wrestling with God:

This is a useful and good allegory, instructing and confirming consciences, which should always be put to use and kept before one's eyes so that we may conclude that the believer conquers God by his faith and prayer, because God has promised that he will be his Defender and Savior and the Giver of all blessings. Therefore he is not willing to deny himself and cannot do so. But if he appears in another form or in another capacity and seems to be adverse to you, you should not be disturbed in heart, nor should you yield, but in faith you should offer resistance so that you may conquer and become Israel. How? Not with the strength or weapons of your flesh and nature but with confidence in the cause that intervenes between you and God, namely, that he has promised and sworn that he will be your God. With this confidence you will conquer, inasmuch as it arises not from Nature but from the promise. If, therefore, he meets you as a wrestler and wants to destroy you or to hide his name and promise, be strong and hold firmly to the Word, even though you feel great infirmity, and you will conquer. Then in that fight you will also feel that the sinew, or joint, of the thigh [i.e., the flesh] is moved from its place and is becoming weak.¹³⁹

In this counsel the saints may find consolation, concluding that all things take place for our salvation according to the Father's very definite plan, for such is God's government and perfect providence.

¹³⁸ AE 7:235; WA 44:474.

¹³⁹ AE 6:154; WA 44:115.

Fides Heroica?
**Luther's Prayer for Melanchthon's
Recovery from Illness in 1540**

Albert B. Collver III

In June 1540, a tertian fever¹ seized Philip Melanchthon and brought him to the point of death.² Dr. Martin Luther was summoned to Weimar to see Melanchthon before he died. Luther prayed at Melanchthon's bedside, and Melanchthon subsequently recovered. Timothy Wengert calls Luther's prayer for Melanchthon, "the most famous example of Luther praying."³ One of the most vivid, frequently cited, and readily accessible accounts of this event is found in Julius Köstlin's *Life of Luther*. He writes:

Filled with fear, [Luther] said: "O God, how the devil has shattered this instrument for me!" Then the faithful and manly friend approached his God in prayer for his much beloved friend, by throwing, as he, himself afterwards said, "the sack before the door, and by rubbing his ears with all the promises from His own word." He exhorted and commanded Melanchthon to be of good cheer, because God did not desire the death of the sinner, but needed further services from him; told him that he himself would rather depart now; had food prepared for him when he was gradually becoming convalescent, and upon his refusal to eat, threatened: "You will have to eat, or I will put you in the ban." Gradually the patient improved in body and spirit. Luther could write to another friend: "We found him dead; by an

¹ A three-day fever "*febrim tertianam*." WA TR 4, 655. No. 5096; 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), 54: 387 (hereafter AE).

² Melanchthon's bout with illness is well-documented. Luther's account of it can be found in Letter 290 to Mrs. Luther from Weimar, July 2, 1540. AE 50: 206-210 (WA Br 9, 168).

³ Timothy Wengert, "Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism," in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology*, ed. Timothy Wengert (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 171-197: 173. Wengert's essay was first published in Timothy Wengert, "Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 18 (2004): 249-274.

undeniable miracle of God he lives."⁴

Köstlin's account is not the primary source of the incident but is certainly among the most cited secondary accounts. Subsequent secondary accounts provide further details not previously included.⁵ Another account concludes, "There seems to be no doubt that but for Luther's arrival and prayer, Melanchthon would have died."⁶ Quite a few biographies about Luther or Melanchthon published in the mid-19th century retell the story of Melanchthon's illness and healing after Luther's prayer.⁷ This incident of Melanchthon's grave illness and recovery because of the prayer of Martin Luther presents challenges regarding the historical accuracy of the accounts and the theological interpretation of the event.

I. The Historicity of the Accounts

The account of Melanchthon's illness and Lazarus-like resurrection as presented by Köstlin⁸ appears to be drawn primarily from *Ratzeberger's Handwritten History about Luther and His Times*.⁹ At the time of Melanchthon's illness, Matthew Ratzeberger was the physician of Elector John Frederick of Saxony. After Martin Luther's death in 1546, Ratzeberger

⁴ Julius Köstlin, *Life of Luther*, trans. John G. Morris (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1883), 440. Also see Julius Köstlin, *Luthers Leben*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1883), 546-547.

⁵ Joseph Stumpe, *The Life of Philip Melanchthon* (Reading, PA: Pilger Publishing House, 1897), 160. "Luther rode night and day to reach the bedside of his friend." Timothy Wengert calls friendship between Luther and Melanchthon a "pious myth" and suggests that they were close colleagues. See Timothy Wengert, "The Priesthood of All Believers and Other Pious Myths," in *Liturgical Institute Conference Proceedings* (Valparaiso University, 2005), Paper 2, http://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/2 (accessed March 21, 2012): "I looked for the friendship between Luther and Melanchthon and discovered that they were colleagues not friends." This would stand in contrast to Köstlin's account. Ratzeberger, cited below, does not refer to Melanchthon as a friend in his account, but this may be as much for what transpired between him and Melanchthon after Luther's death as it is a reflection on what Luther felt about Melanchthon.

⁶ Stumpe, *The Life of Philip Melanchthon*, 160. Stumpe's version of Melanchthon's illness and recovery is nearly identical to Köstlin's account.

⁷ Charles Frederick Ledderhose, *The Life of Philip Melanchthon*, trans. G.F. Krotel (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1855), 173-174.

⁸ Köstlin is mentioned in particular because he is one of the main sources on Luther's life cited in the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century including somewhat disappointingly by Martin Brecht. *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532-1546*, trans. James L. Schaaf. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 209-210.

⁹ Matthäus Ratzeberger, *Die Handschriftliche Geschichte Ratzeberger's Ueber Luther und Seine Zeit*, ed. Christian Gotthold Neudecker (Jena: Friedrich Mauke, 1850), 102-105.

became the guardian of Luther's children.¹⁰ He also accused Melanchthon of departing from Luther's teachings.¹¹ Because he was an eyewitness of the event, one would assume that Ratzeberger's account has credibility, yet its credibility has been questioned. Theodor Kolde, the extraordinary church historian of the 19th century, finds Ratzeberger's account of Luther's life "disappointing" due to its "meager and anecdotic character" and considers it "valueless as history."¹² Ratzeberger's account received broad scholarly circulation in 1836 as an editor's note in the "Annals of Philip Melanchthon's Life 1540" in the *Corpus Reformatorum*.¹³ Via the *Corpus Reformatorum* Archdeacon Hare brought Ratzeberger's account of Luther's prayer for Melanchthon into English in his attempt to defend Luther from the attacks of the Tractarians and other Anglicans.¹⁴ In light of the anecdotal nature of Ratzeberger's "handwritten history" and the heavy indebtedness of most other sources from the 19th and 20th centuries to him, it would be unwise to grant his account uncritical acceptance.

Luther's personal account of Melanchthon's illness and recovery omits the majority of the detail provided by Ratzeberger's handwritten history. Luther's account focuses less on his personal faith or actions and more on the Lord's mercy.¹⁵ In Luther's letter to his wife he described the event, "Master Philip truly had been dead, and really, like Lazarus, has risen from death. God, the dear father, listens to our prayers."¹⁶ Table Talk records that the cause of Melanchthon's illness was the effect his grief over Philip of Hesse's bigamy¹⁷ had on his "soft disposition."¹⁸

¹⁰ Johann Jakob Herzog, Philip Schaff, and Samuel Macauley Jackson, eds., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1911), 9:404. Kolde, writing for Schaff, notes that Ratzeberger, "after the Reformer's death was one of the guardians of his children."

¹¹ "In 1550 he removed to Erfurt, where he watched with increasing dissatisfaction the growth of Philippism." Herzog, *The New Schaff-Herzog*, 404.

¹² Herzog, *The New Schaff-Herzog*, 404.

¹³ Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, ed., *Philippi Melanthonis Opera*, vol. III (Halle, Saxony: C.A. Schwetschke Et Filium, 1836), CR 3, XVII. Bretschneider lists his source for the account as Ratzeberger's *Die Handschriftliche Geschichte. Corpus Reformatorum III* appeared in 1836. The publication of Ratzeberger's *Die Handschriftliche Geschichte* was in 1850 (hereafter CR).

¹⁴ Julius Charles Hare, *Vindication Of Luther Against His Recent English Assailants*, 2nd ed. (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1855), 265-266.

¹⁵ Wengert, "Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism," 174.

¹⁶ AE 50: 208.

¹⁷ "Melanchthon was almost beside himself with mortification, and a serious illness into which he fell on his way to Hagenau, in the summer of 1540, was attributed by him

Melanchthon was greatly troubled over Philip of Hesse's bigamy. Melanchthon not only formulated the pastoral recommendation that a secret marriage could be permitted for the sake of Philip's salvation,¹⁹ but, also along with Bucer, was a witness to the public (not private) marriage between Philip and Margaret von der Sale on 4 March 1540.²⁰ Melanchthon feared the negative effects on the Reformation that both his and Luther's involvement in the matter might entail. Luther apparently believed he had acted with the best of intentions in providing a pastoral rather than a legal answer and was not terribly troubled by the matter²¹ or what people thought about it, especially since he felt deceived by Philip of Hesse. Luther noted in his letter to John Frederick that he gave his counsel under the seal of confession and that he was not ashamed of his counsel even if the entire world should come to know it.²² While Melanchthon fretted over it, Luther committed the matter into the Lord's hands confident the Lord would work good from it.²³

When Melanchthon became ill, Luther was lecturing on Genesis in Wittenberg, and stated,

But if help is delayed, one should not for this reason stop praying. Nevertheless, a time or something similar can be suggested, with a condition: "Lord God, if at this time or at this place it could be done as I would want it, I pray Thee not to fail me now," just as we are now praying for Philip, who is away from us and lies seriously ill at Weimar, that God would restore to him his strength and health and

and his friends over his part in the unsavory affair." Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work* (New York: The Century Company, 1912), 365.

¹⁸ WA TR 4, 655. No. 5096; AE 54: 387. *Ego novi ingenii teneritatem.*

¹⁹ WA Br 8:636 - 644. See "To John Frederick of Saxony, 10 June 1540," in Martin Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. and trans. Theodore Tappert (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishers, 1960), 288-291.

²⁰ Brecht, *The Preservation of the Church*, 207.

²¹ Table Talk records Luther saying, "I have developed a thick skin. I'm a peasant and a tough Saxon when it comes to such filthy things." WA TR 4, 655. No. 5096; AE 54: 387.

²² See Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, where he states, "All of this took place and was negotiated under the seal of confession" (290) and "I am not ashamed of the counsel I gave even if it should become known throughout the world" (291).

²³ WA TR 4, 655. No. 5096; AE 54: 390. "I don't want to do the devil and all the papists the favor of worrying about it," he said. "God will make it turn out well. To his keeping I commit the whole business."

preserve him longer for the church and the university.²⁴

On July 7, 1540, Justus Jonas provided John Bugenhagen with his account of Melanchthon's illness and recovery. Jonas notes that Melanchthon was on the path of death but the prayers of the church were answered and he was restored to life.²⁵ Melanchthon, in a letter to Bugenhagen on July 8, 1540, wrote that God had restored him from death to life.²⁶

What is known without doubt is that Melanchthon fell ill and was near death. Luther came to him and prayed. Melanchthon recovered. As for the exact words Luther prayed, the only source is the handwritten history of Ratzeberger. His account of Luther's life is generally considered to be unreliable. The familiarity and popularization of Luther's example of prayer over Melanchthon seems to correspond with 19th century publications related to Luther and the Reformation. Although Ratzeberger's handwritten notes were compiled during his life in the middle of the 16th century, general familiarity with them did not occur until their publication in the middle of the 19th century. Ratzeberger's account may or may not reflect Luther's actual words. Even if Ratzeberger's account portrays Luther's words accurately for the most part, the lens through which they are interpreted must be examined. Considering that most of the comment on Luther's prayer for Melanchthon has not occurred prior to the 19th and 20th centuries, a reasonable conclusion is that what Luther prayed was unknown, was considered unremarkable, or perhaps did not occur in the way it was presented by Ratzeberger. If Ratzeberger's account is taken at face value, his account can be interpreted in harmony with Luther's theology or in a way that is alien to his theology. In any case, a *hapax legomenon* by Luther should not be allowed to create novel interpretations that stand in conflict with his overall theology.

II. Interpretation of Luther's Prayer for Melanchthon

Timothy Wengert states that Luther's "chutpah toward God" in the prayer recorded by Ratzeberger should not be seen as a "sign of hubris" but rather "of faith."²⁷ Yet some have taken the prayer recorded by Ratzeberger as a sign of Luther's hubris. William Hamilton, responding to Julius Hare's *Vindication of Luther*, understands "the most famous example

²⁴ AE 4: 266; WA 43, 326: 21–26. The *Weimar Ausgabe* references Melanchthon's letter to Luther dated June 16, 1540 in Julius Köstlin and Gustav Kawerau, *Martin Luther: sein Leben und seine Schriften*, Vol. 2 (Elberfeld: R. L. Friderichs), 1875.

²⁵ CR III, 1060. *hic e media morte . . . oratione Ecclesiae et piorum revocatus est ad vitam.*

²⁶ CR III, 1061. *me divinitus ex ipsa morte in vitam revocatum esse.*

²⁷ Wengert, "Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism," 174.

of Luther praying"²⁸ as part of a claim that Luther raised Melanchthon from the dead.²⁹ These "appalling" expressions were also seen as confirmation that Luther believed nothing could be denied him in prayer.³⁰ The Anglicans were not alone in struggling to interpret Luther's "most famous prayer." This prayer lent itself to doctrinal discussions about the nature of prayer.

Francis Pieper states in *Christian Dogmatics* that Luther's prayer over Melanchthon falls into the realm of "*fides heroica* and is not subject to the general rule."³¹ According to Pieper, Luther's prayer does not fit the general rule because he asked "unconditionally for temporal blessings," which in this case was the "prolongation of Melanchthon's life." Pieper then quotes a portion of Luther's famous prayer, "There our Lord God had to give in to me; for I threw down the sack before His door and rubbed into His ears all His promises that He would hear prayer which I could enumerate from Scripture, saying that He would have to hear me if I were to trust His promises." Pieper gives Köstlin's *Luther's Life* as his source for the story. Since "unconditional prayer" does not fall into the general category of praying that the Lord's will be done, Pieper proposes the argument that, "It is the business of the Holy Spirit to direct the prayer of the individual Christian in special, exceptional circumstances."³²

Pieper seems to entertain the possibility of a heroic prayer because the Holy Spirit guides the person to pray in such a way. Ironically, Pieper's example of "heroic prayer" comes from Quenstedt, who mentions heroic examples of prayer that should not be rashly imitated. Quenstedt's example is of Elisha cursing the children of Bethel in the name of the Lord for calling him a baldhead (2 Kings 2:23–24). From Pieper, the story passes into J.T. Mueller's *Christian Dogmatics*.³³ Mueller states, "The heroic prayer

²⁸ Wengert, "Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism," 173.

²⁹ William Hamilton, *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform: Chiefly from the Edinburgh* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1866), 513. "Melanchthon had fallen ill at Weimar from contrition and fear for the part he had been led to take in the Landgrave's polygamy; his life was even in danger. Luther came; and Melanchthon is one of the three persons whom the Reformer afterwards boasts of having raised miraculously from the dead."

³⁰ Hamilton, *Discussions*, 514. "For Luther believed that nothing could be refused to his earnest supplication and accordingly he declares, that it required only that he should sincerely ask for the destruction of the world, to precipitate the advent of the last day."

³¹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3, (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 83.

³² Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3: 83.

³³ John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), 433.

should not be attempted unless the believer is fully assured that he has heroic faith (cp. Luther's supplication for the restoration of Melanchthon's health)."³⁴ Mueller shifts the focus away from the prayer itself to the faith of the person praying. What Christian would claim to have a "heroic faith?" Surely not Luther, after whom supposedly the prayer is patterned. Unfortunately, the dramatic and vivid description of Luther's prayer for Melanchthon continues to be held up as an example of bold prayer.³⁵ While those who cling to Luther's prayer for Melanchthon as a bold prayer are on shaky ground, they are not entirely to blame due to the paucity of scholarly research on prayer among 16th century Lutherans.³⁶

A better and more personal example, but a sadder story, of Luther's prayer life can be found in the accounts of the death of his daughter, Magdalene, on September 20, 1542. As his daughter's illness progressed, Luther said, "I love her very much. But if it is thy will to take her, dear God, I shall be glad to know that she is with thee."³⁷ For his own dear daughter he prays that the Lord's will be done, not an unconditional prayer of "heroic faith." Luther asked his daughter if she is glad to go to her Father in heaven. Magdalene replied, "Yes, dear Father, as God wills."³⁸ Now, the rationalist might argue that when Luther commended his daughter to the Lord's will, her illness had progressed so far that it was obvious she was going to die. However, the same rationalist should note that Melanchthon was on the threshold of death, at least according to various accounts. Had he not been, Hamilton would not have been able to accuse Luther of miraculously raising Melanchthon from the dead.³⁹ Magdalene died in Luther's arms.⁴⁰ Luther is reported to have said, "I'd

³⁴ Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, 433.

³⁵ Reed Lessing, *Jonah* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 338. "Luther put this theology of prayer into practice in his own life. At one point when Philip Melanchthon was gravely ill, Luther prayed that God would restore Melanchthon to health and prolong his life." Lessing then quotes the story from Pieper and concludes with this comment, "God answered Luther's prayer by sparing Melanchthon's life." This discussion is based upon his earlier work in Reed Lessing, "Pastor, does God really respond to my prayers?" *Concordia Journal* 32 (2006): 256-273, 271-272.

³⁶ Mary Jane Haemig, "Jehoshaphat and His Prayer Among Sixteenth-Century Lutherans," *Church History* 73, no. 3 (2004): 522-535, 525. "The scholarship on prayer among sixteenth-century Lutherans is relatively sparse."

³⁷ Table Talk, No. 5494; AE 54: 430.

³⁸ Table Talk, No. 5494; AE 54: 430.

³⁹ Hamilton, *Discussions*, 513.

⁴⁰ Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532-1546*, 3: 237. Table Talk, No. 5496. AE 54: 431. "When his daughter was in the agony of death, he [Martin Luther] fell on his knees before the bed and, weeping bitterly, prayed that God might will to save her. Thus she gave up the ghost in the arms of her father. Her mother was in the

like to keep my dear daughter because I love her very much, if only our Lord God would let me. However, his will be done! Truly nothing better can happen to her, nothing better."⁴¹ Luther thought that the Christian should boldly dare and defy death.⁴² In the case of his daughter, Luther defied death and "rubbed the promises" of God in "His ears with His Word" when he said at the coffin, "Close it! She will rise again on the last day" and, at the burial, "There is a resurrection of the body."⁴³ For Luther a heroic prayer in the face of death is the clinging to the promises of God that as Jesus was raised from the dead, so too, shall we.

III. Luther on Prayer

Luther's understanding of prayer can only be treated briefly here. Luther was very concerned with correct teaching about prayer. This prompted him to produce many works on prayer. In the Little Prayer Book (*Betbuchlein*) of 1522 Luther calls for a thorough Reformation of the personal prayer book, which he considers among the many books that are harmful and misleading because they give rise to false beliefs about prayer.⁴⁴ For Luther the Reformation was about how the church prays and teaching the church to pray.⁴⁵ One of the last things that Luther would desire is for an account of his prayer life to introduce false or misleading beliefs to other Christians.

Luther's teaching and writing on prayer centered in and was a reflection of the catechism: the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed.⁴⁶ To say that Luther rooted prayer in the catechism does not

same room, but farther from the bed on account of her grief. It was after the ninth hour on the Wednesday after the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity in the year 1542."

⁴¹ Table Talk, No. 5497. AE 54: 432.

⁴² Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's World of Thought* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 130. "In view of this we human beings should boldly dare and defy death. In all of Luther's writings on death no other words recur so often as the words 'to venture joyously' (*fröhlich wagen*)."

⁴³ Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532-1546*, 3: 238.

⁴⁴ AE 43: 11-12. "Among the many harmful books and doctrines which are misleading and deceiving Christians and give rise to countless false beliefs, I regard the personal prayer books as by no means the least objectionable. . . . These books need a basic and thorough reformation if not total extermination."

⁴⁵ William R. Russell, "Luther, Prayer, and the Reformation," *Word & World* 22, no. 1 (2002): 54. "For Martin Luther, the reformation was about how the church prays. And in this connection, the primary goal of catechesis was to teach believers to pray. Luther sought to instruct parishioners regarding the one to whom they were to pray, to know what to pray, and to know how to pray."

⁴⁶ Haemig, "Jehoshaphat and His Prayer Among Sixteenth-Century Lutherans," 523. "Luther centered his discussion of prayer on the Lord's Prayer. This is evident in

mean Luther is unwilling to pray using examples from the Bible. In "On War Against the Turk" (1529), he wrote:

In exhorting to prayer we must also introduce words and examples from the Scriptures which show how strong and mighty a man's prayer has sometimes been; for example, Elijah's prayer, which St. James praises [Jas. 5:17]; the prayers of Elisha and other prophets; of kings David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jesias, Hezekiah, etc.; the story of how God promised Abraham that he would spare the land of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of five righteous men. For the prayer of a righteous man can do much if it be persistent, St. James says in his Epistle [Jas. 5:16].⁴⁷

Luther thought that prayer based on the examples found in the Scriptures provided an opportunity to proclaim the Word of God. Such prayer nearly always is steeped in affliction, trial, and suffering. The examples from the Scriptures are full of the Lord's people facing affliction. Their prayers served for Luther as examples and models of how we should pray when facing similar afflictions. Prayer is a plea for aid in the face of helplessness.⁴⁸ Faith clings to the promises of the Lord in the face of contrary evidence. For example, faith clings to the promise that the Lord will hear our prayer as a father hears the request of his child, that he will provide us with our daily bread, that he will deliver us from evil, etc.

his explanations of the Lord's Prayer not only in the Small Catechism (1529) and the Large Catechism (1529), but also in earlier works such as his 1519 sermons published as 'An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer for Simple Laymen.' In 1522 his *Betbuchlein* or 'Personal Prayer Book' appeared. Republished many times in the sixteenth century, it was not a collection of prayers but rather a reflection on the ten commandments, creed, and Lord's Prayer because "everything a Christian needs to know is quite fully and adequately comprehended in these three items.' In other works—pamphlets, sermons, and biblical commentaries—Luther taught and modeled what evangelical prayer was."

⁴⁷ AE 46: 173–174.

⁴⁸ David P. Scaer, "Luther on Prayer," *CTQ* 47:4 (1983): 305–315. "One of the effects of the *Anfechtungen* in the life of the Christian is the personal awareness of his total helplessness in the face of the affliction. Through this sense of helplessness, the Christian is taught to pray correctly. *Anfechtungen* add both depth and dimension to prayer. Prayer indicates that the Christian has not given up hope and his willingness to seek help from God. The praying Christian means that Satan has not yet conquered. If the afflicted refrains from relying on his own power as Satan tempted him to do, he is brought by the affliction face to face with God. In his helplessness the afflicted can go no place but to God for aid and assistance. Prayer is the plea for aid" (305).

IV. Conclusion

The evidence for what Luther prayed over Melanchthon derives from a single source that is not regarded as a reliable account of Luther's life. Both the evidence for the prayer and the time in which it became popularized should prompt us to regard accounts of it critically and not use it as the basis of doctrinal points that are unsubstantiated in other writings of Luther. Ratzeberger's account of Luther's prayer presented as a "heroic prayer" fits into the *zeitgeist* of the 19th century which saw Luther as a "heroic" figure.⁴⁹ The idea of a heroic prayer also corresponds to the natural tendency toward enthusiasm that lives within each of us and satisfies our inclination towards saint worship.⁵⁰ As knowledge of teaching and doctrine decreases, hero worship increases.⁵¹ The idea of "heroic prayer" in the 19th century also appears to be influenced by Søren Kierkegaard's leap of faith and account of Abraham's faith in God.⁵² That Pieper could be influenced by the 19th century's Luther as hero movement and Kierkegaard is plausible. Even if the account of Ratzeberger is accepted without critical reflection, its interpretation should not contradict Luther's life's work of teaching to "reform how the church prays."⁵³ Once instance of a prayer of Luther outside his ordinary character should not become a norm for theological discourse.

Ratzeberger's account can be interpreted in a way that is both consistent and inconsistent with Luther's teaching on prayer. For instance, Luther's statement of rubbing into God's ears the promises found in his Word is very consistent with Luther's teaching on prayer. What the Ratzeberger account omits, but seems to be supplied by others, is *what*

⁴⁹ Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand*, tr. Theodore Tappert, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979), 31-35. Sasse discusses this in his chapter, "The Heroic Interpretation of the Reformation."

⁵⁰ Sasse, *Here We Stand*, 31. "It is in this way that the traditional, popular picture of the Reformation, as the life and work of the Reformer, came into being. All the demand for hero-worship, all the unexpressed longing for saint worship, finds its satisfaction in this interpretation of the Reformation."

⁵¹ Sasse, *Here We Stand*, 35. "The more Luther's teachings fade from the consciousness of the church, so much the more foolishly the cult of his person is promoted."

⁵² Robert D. Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," *CTQ* 45:3 (1981): 163-184. "Soren Kierkegaard made faith a condition for justification, not by teaching such an aberration—he was too good a theologian for that—but by an emphasis, by stressing always the *fides heroica*, the *fides activa* in the Christian life, in answer to the question 'How can I become a Christian?' rather than stressing the *fides passiva* which does nothing, but is pure receptivity" (176-177).

⁵³ Russell, "Luther, Prayer, and the Reformation," 50.

promises Luther rubbed into God's ears. Nowhere in Scripture did the Lord promise to heal from every illness or to deliver from death. Luther would not have been rubbing into the Lord's ears healing for Melanchthon, as that had not be promised in the Scriptures. No doubt, Luther prayed for Melanchthon's healing but not unconditionally. It is far more likely that Luther prayed for the Lord's will to be done as he did while holding his dying daughter, Magdalene, in his arms. Remaining consistent with Luther's teaching on prayer, the promises rubbed into God's ears during Melanchthon's illness would be the promises of the forgiveness of sins and of the resurrection of the dead. When one considers that Melanchthon felt guilty for his participation in the matter of Philip of Hesse's bigamy, it makes all the sense in the world that Luther would be comforting Melanchthon with the promises of the Gospel and rubbing those into the Lord's ears. Rather than being drawn to the fantastic and vivid account of Luther's prayer over Melanchthon, we ought to direct our attention toward the catechism as a way to pray.

The Quest for Lutheran Identity in the Russian Empire

Darius Petkūnas

The identity of the Lutheran Church in the Russian Empire presents a complex picture, consisting of many ethnic groups of immigrants as well as the inhabitants of conquered territories. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the question of confessional identity was not pressing. The Lutheran Churches of the empire accepted the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530, and later most accepted the other Lutheran symbolical writings. In the era of Pietism, however, Lutheran identity began to blur. The confessional writings were never denied, but they were no longer the active touchstone by which many groups identified themselves. The situation of confessional identity was soon further complicated by the spread of Rationalism, which regarded the Lutheran Confessions as merely indicating what was believed in ages past.

The present study examines the identifying characteristics of Lutheranism in the Russian Empire from the early days of the Reformation until the eve of the October Revolution of 1917. It provides a picture of the development of Lutheran consciousness in the churches that would eventually be united into one Lutheran Church in the Russian Empire until its dissolution in 1917. It examines the factors that led to the acceptance of all of the symbolical writings of the Book of Concord in these Lutheran churches, as well as the influences which jeopardized their identity in the time of Pietism and Rationalism. It also examines the events in the 19th century that led to a renewal of a Lutheran consciousness and of a new appreciation of the symbolical books and Lutheran traditions. The study is based on primary source materials including church orders and liturgical agendas that shaped and most clearly reflected the self-identity of these churches, as well as secondary source material that is primarily historical in nature.

This study will be of interest not only to students of church history but also to those who are concerned to see how patterns and trends of thought influenced the Lutheran Church in the modern era. One may see in present

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social and philosophical trends something of a repetition of the experiences of the Lutheran churches in the empire in the 18th and 19th centuries. The question of Lutheran identity becomes acute in an era of growing ecumenism, secularism, and accommodation. This study provides insight as to how the church reacted two centuries ago and the consequences of the directions taken at that time. In this way, this study may prove helpful to churchmen today, for those who have learned the lessons of the past are best equipped to meet present challenges.

I. The Church on the Eve of the October Revolution

In 1914, on the eve of World War I, the Lutheran church in the Russian Empire was the third largest Lutheran church body in the world. According to statistics provided by the General Consistory in St. Petersburg, there were 3,674,000 Lutherans in the Russian Empire.¹ Its size was exceeded only by the Lutheran churches in Sweden and the German empire.² Of the non-Eastern Orthodox churches in Russia, it was second only to the Roman Catholic church, which included within it large numbers of Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.³

The Lutheran church in Russia was of course not Russian at all. Russians were not permitted to convert, and any Lutheran pastor who accepted a convert from the Russian church or married a Lutheran to an Orthodox, or baptized the child where one parent was Orthodox would be severely reprimanded and, if caught doing it again, defrocked. This law was officially annulled in 1905, but that did not bring any influx of Russians into the Lutheran Church. In addition, no matter what was said

¹ Neither Poland nor Finland would be included in the statistics, since the Lutheran churches enjoyed some autonomy and were not under the jurisdiction of the General Consistory in St. Petersburg. Theophil Meyer, *Luthers Erbe in Russland: Ein Gedenkbuch in Anlass der Feier des 400-jährigen Reformationsfestes der evangelisch-lutherischen Gemeinden in Russland* (Moskau: Gedrukt in d. Rigaschen Typo-Lithographie, K. Mischke, 1918), 98.

² According to 1900 statistics there were 5,972,792 Lutherans in Sweden, and in 1905 there were 37,646,852 Evangelicals in Germany, the majority of whom were Lutherans. Those who took the census in the German empire did not differentiate between Lutherans and Reformed. *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, vol. 9 (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1910), 463.

³ A 1902 census of the Russian Empire indicates that there were 4,564,391 Roman Catholics in the dioceses of Mogilev (Могилёв), Vilnius (Вильнюс), Samogitia or Telsiai (Жмудь or Тельшяй), Lutzk-Zhitomir (Луцк-Житомир), and Tiraspol (Тирасполь). The Roman Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Poland was not included in these numbers. *Die Kirchen und das religiöse Leben der Rußlanddeutschen*. Katholischer Teil, ed. J. Schnurr. (Stuttgart: Selbstverlag, 1978), 24.

by officials in St. Petersburg, local officials and police might choose to maintain the old rules in their jurisdictions. Family circumstances were often such that it was not wise to encourage conversions.

Lutherans in Russia were people whose family backgrounds and origins lay elsewhere. Consequently, the Lutheran Church was very cosmopolitan. The largest single group was Latvian, numbering 1,293,000. Most of these were in Livonia and Courland, but there were also large numbers of Latvians in the regions of St. Petersburg and Moscow. The second largest group was Estonian. There were 1,100,000 of them, and the majority of them lived in Livonia and Estonia. There were also large numbers of Estonians in the St. Petersburg and Moscow consistorial districts. The third largest group consisted of the Germans, numbering 1,098,000. German Lutherans were widely scattered, but most of them lived in the St. Petersburg and Moscow consistorial districts. In the St. Petersburg district, there were 415,000 German Lutherans and in the Moscow district there were even more, 490,000. An additional 100,000 lived in Livonia and 75,000 in Courland. These three groups represented more than two thirds of all the Lutherans in the Russian Empire. In addition, there were 148,000 Finns, nearly all of them in Ingria, which was in the St. Petersburg consistorial district, 14,000 Swedes, most of them in Estonia or St. Petersburg, 12,000 Lithuanians in Lithuania, who along with 4,000 Poles were in the Courland consistorial district. Furthermore, there were 2,000 Livs (Lat. *Livones*), 1,000 Armenians, and approximately 1,000 Lutherans who did not fit into any of these ethnic groups.

To simplify matters, it can be said that Russian Lutherans and their churches fell in two main groups: those in the Baltic lands and those in Russia proper. The Lutheran Church in the Baltic lands consisted of three consistorial districts: Livonia with 1,280,000 members, Courland with 669,000, and Estonia 476,000. In Russia proper, there were 703,000 in the St. Petersburg consistorial district and 546,000 in the Moscow district. Both of these Russian districts comprised vast territories. Lutherans in Ingria and South Russia were administered from St. Petersburg and Lutherans as far away as Irkutsk and points even farther east were under the Moscow consistory. The Russian Lutheran Church consisted of 539 congregations with 832 church buildings and 996 prayer houses.⁴ Serving the church were some 553 pastors.⁵

⁴ *Luthers Erbe in Russland*, 98.

⁵ *Personalstatus der Evangelisch-Lutherischen und der Evangelisch-Reformierten Kirche in Russland* (Petrograd: Buchdruckerei J. Watsar, 1914), 3–108.

It could be said that Lutherans in the Russian Empire were either native Baltic peoples living in their traditional homelands or immigrants from the west who had come to Russia proper by invitation of tsars and tsarinas in the 18th and 19th centuries. Livonia and Estonia came under Russian control after the Battle of Poltava in 1709, when the Swedes lost their power in the region. The Third Partition of Poland and Lithuania in 1795 brought the annexation of Courland and Lithuania into the empire. Lutheran immigrants from German lands into Russia proper settled along the banks of the Volga River near Saratov, as well as in the region of St. Petersburg, in the governmental district of Volhynia in present day north-western Ukraine, and in the Southern Russian governmental districts of Cherson, Tauria, Jekaterinoslav, and Bessarabia, most of which are now in southern Ukraine.⁶ The greatest period of immigration came as a response to the 1763 invitation of Catherine the Great for Europeans to settle in Russia where land was plenty and freedom of worship guaranteed.

II. Confessional Character of the Lutheran Church in the Baltic Lands and Russia Proper in the 16th-17th Centuries

From the start, Lutherans in the Baltic lands understood themselves to be the church of the Augsburg Confession. Lutheranism spread far and wide mainly within the states of the old Livonian Confederation, which consisted of the lands of the Livonian Order, the Archbishopric of Riga, and the Bishoprics of Dorpat, Oesel-Wiek, and Courland, as well as the independent Hanseatic cities of Riga, Tartu (Ger. *Dorpat*), and Tallinn (Ger. *Reval*). These lands were largely under the control of German noblemen who were open to Lutheran doctrine and practice. Lutheranism first took root in the major cities of Riga and Dorpat in Livonia and Tallinn in Estonia and from there it spread to the surrounding areas. The public definition of the Lutheranism of these regions came to be necessitated by the collapse of the Livonian Confederation. The westward movement of the Muscovite armies in 1558 could not be effectively combated by the greatly weakened states of the Confederation. They ceased to exist with the dissolution of the Livonian Order by the Treaty of Vilnius in 1561. Already in 1559, the Bishop of Oesel-Wiek sold his lands to King Frederick II of Denmark, who found the church there to be unreformed. The king introduced the Danish church order and regulated life according to the Augsburg Confession.⁷ According to the terms of the 1645 Peace of

⁶ *Die evangelisch-lutherischen Gemeinden in Rußland*, vol. 1, Der St. Petersburgische und Moskowische konsistorialbezirk (St. Petersburg: Buchdruckerei J. Watsar, 1909), XV.

⁷ Alvin Isberg, *Ösels kyrkoförvaltning 1645-1710: Kompetenstvister och meningssmottningar rörande funktionssättet* (Uppsala: [Uppsala universitet], 1974), 14.

Brömsebro, Oesel (Est. *Saaremaa*) was ceded to Sweden. In 1561, Sweden took control of Tallinn and the west coast of Estonia. Now Estonia and the Estonian Church would be governed by Swedish rules which called for the formal acceptance of the Augsburg Confession and Luther's catechisms. The rest of the territory of the Confederation was divided into two regions: Courland, which bordered both Lithuania and the Baltic, and the new territory of Livonia, which spread northward from Courland through what is now central Latvia to include also large portions of present day southern and central Estonia.

In 1561, Gotthard von Kettler, the last master of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword, concluded an agreement with the Roman Catholic King Sigismund Augustus of Poland-Lithuania which made Courland a fief of Poland-Lithuania and officially declared that the Lutheran church would maintain the doctrinal position of the Augsburg Confession.⁸ The first Courlandian church order was adopted in 1570. It stated that the Church of Courland would hold the doctrinal position required by the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and their exposition in the three Ecumenical Symbols (the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds), as well as Luther's catechisms and the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530. This would remain the foundation of all Christian doctrine and practice. The church order, which was printed in 1572, required that all pastors know this doctrine thoroughly and teach it to their people in a simple way.⁹

The picture of the new province of Livonia was somewhat more complicated. The agreement with Sigismund II Augustus, known as the *Privilegium Sigismundi* of 1561, subjugated the land to Poland-Lithuania but at the same time it permitted the churches to continue to confess the *Augsburg Confession*. Twenty years later at the end of the Livonian Wars, the *Privilegium Sigismundi* would be annulled and replaced by the *Constitutiones Livoniae* of 1582 which brought the counter-Reformation to Livonia. A Roman Catholic diocese was established with the seat of the bishop in Wenden (Latv. *Cēsis*). This weakened the Lutheran Church substantially. Eastern Livonia, where the Lutheran Reformation had never

⁸ *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Emil Sehling vol. 5, Livland. Estland. Kurland. Mecklenburg (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1913), 45.

⁹ *De doctrina et ceremoniis sinceri cultus diuini Ecclesiarum Ducatus Curlandiae, Semigalliaeque etc. in Liouonia.*—*Kirchen Ordnung Wie es mit der Lehr Göttliches worts, Ausstheilung der heiligen Hochwürdigten Sacrament, Christlichen Ceremonien, Ordentlicher ubung, des waren Gottesdiensts, In den Kirchen des Herzogthumbs Churlandt und Semigallien in Liefelandt, sol stetes vermittelt Göttlicher hülf gehalten werden.*—*Anno salutis 1570* (Rostock: Gedruckt . . . bey Johan. Stöckelman und Andream Gutterwitz, 1572), D.

permeated the local population, was now firmly in the hands of the Roman Church. The counter-Reformation also made inroads into areas which formerly had been Lutheran. Indeed, the Lutheran Church maintained its strongest presence in and around Riga and Dorpat. It was the coming of Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus in 1621 and the assertion of Swedish power that reestablished Lutheranism in Livonia.¹⁰

The three churches in the Baltic lands were confessional in that they accepted the *Augsburg Confession* and Luther's catechisms. The controversies that had necessitated the *Formula of Concord* had not touched them, and they saw no need to add it to their confessional subscription. Sweden now ruled in Livonia and Estonia, and these churches became part of the Church of Sweden. Controversy hit the Swedish church in the 1630s when Bishop Johannes Matthiae Gothus of Strängnäs began to advocate publicly significant changes in the theology, polity, and worship. Gothus was much impressed by German theologian Georg Calixtus, who advocated a reunion of the churches on the basis of the supposition that the church was united and controversy-free for its first 500 years. Gothus invited John Dury of the Church of England to come to Sweden to advocate the adoption of policies that would unite the Swedish and English churches in a common confession and polity. The proposal was brought first to the theological faculty at Uppsala; they rejected it as not truly Lutheran. It was taken next to the clergy. They thought no better of it, nor did the Swedish *Riksdag* when its turn came to consider the proposal in 1638. Bishop Johannes Rudbeckius of Västerås took the occasion to move that the Church of Sweden to adopt the entire Book of Concord, including the Formula of Concord, as its doctrinal basis. Gothus continued his efforts to revise the church's polity, order, and worship, but he was unsuccessful. In the 1663 *Bill of Religion*, the Church of Sweden accepted the Formula and other symbols of the *Book of Concord* as its confessional basis. This was ratified by the *Riksdag* in 1664. In 1686, the Church of Sweden approved a new church law in which the Book of Concord was expressly named. Now both the Livonian and Estonian Churches confessed the entire Book of Concord.¹¹

¹⁰ Ernst Hj. J. Lundström, *Bidrag till Livlands kyrkohistoria under den svenska tidens första skede. Från Rigas intagande 1621 till freden i Olivio 1660* (Uppsala; Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1914), 10-13, 22; Hermann Dalton, *Verfassungsgeschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in Russland. Beiträge zur Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Russland*, vol. 1 (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1887), 75-80.

¹¹ Martin E. Carlson, "Johannes Matthiae and the Development of the Church of Sweden during the First Half of the Seventeenth Century," *Church History* 13 (1944): 296-305.

The first evidence of the acceptance of the entire Book of Concord in the Courlandian Church is found in the 1727 Latvian language Courland agenda. In the form for the installation of a pastor into his parish, the candidate was required to subscribe to the Ecumenical Creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the catechisms of Luther, and the Formula of Concord. No specific mention of The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope is found, but it may well have been understood as a part of the Smalcald Articles. The German agendas of 1741 and 1765 list the same requirements.¹²

Two other Baltic churches need to be considered. One was a small church surrounded by Courland and centered in the area of Piltene. After the collapse of the Livonian Confederation, this region was under Danish control. The Danes sold it to Poland-Lithuania in 1585, and it was incorporated into the Commonwealth in 1611. It was agreed that the church should continue to adhere to the Augsburg Confession in doctrine and practice. No mention was made of the acceptance of the entire Book of Concord until the 1741 Piltene rite of ordination, in which a pledge like that found in the Courlandian agendas was now included. The same provision concerning the acceptance of the whole Book of Concord was repeated in the 1756 Piltene agenda.¹³

The story of the Lutheran Church in Lithuania is unique. It was always a minority church. Past experience with the Teutonic knights made the Lithuanians suspicious of all things German. In addition, the stringent laws of King Sigismund the Old (1467–1548) made it impossible to confess openly Lutheran doctrine. The penalty for doing so was the loss of all property and privileges and likely banishment. His successor, Sigismund II Augustus, was more tolerant. Calvinism spread with the rebellion against the Roman Church of the Lithuanian nobility under Duke Nicolas Radziwill the Black. Enough noblemen followed him that it appeared for a time that Lithuania would become the eastern bastion of Calvinism. Calvinists soon split into two churches, one remaining classically Calvinist and the other espousing anti-trinitarian doctrine. The latter group was formally known as the Polish-Lithuanian Brethren. It came later to be called Socinian after Faustus Socinus, who gathered under his control

¹² *Lettische Neu verbesserte-und vollständige Kirchen-Agende Oder Hand-Buch* (Mitau 1727), 208; *Vollständiges Kirchen-Buch* (Mitau: Georg Radetzki, 1741), 154; *Vollständiges Kirchen-Buch* (Mitau: Christian Liedke, 1765), 306.

¹³ *Agenda Ministrorum Ecclesiae Evangelicae in Districtu Piltinensi* (no information is available) 1741, 31; *Agenda ministrorum ecclesiae evangelicae in districtu Piltinensi* (Königsberg: Johann Heinrich Hartung, 1756), 53–54.

formerly contending anti-trinitarian groups. The Lutherans were a minority from the beginning. In the 16th century, there were two strong German parishes, one in Vilnius and the second in Kaunas. Apart from these, there were only a few scattered congregations, mostly in Samogitia in northern Lithuania. None of these Protestant groups ever received any official status, and with the arrival of the Jesuits and the counter-Reformation Roman Catholic control was made permanent and complete. The Sandomierz Consensus of 1570, a political agreement between the Lutherans, Reformed, and Bohemian Brethren who had settled in Major Poland, attempted to establish a united front of Polish and Lithuanian Protestants in a bid for official recognition. The Reformed interpreted this document as an ecumenical manifesto proclaiming Reformed and Lutheran unity. Lutherans took a very different view of it, and in 1578 they repudiated it.¹⁴ The appearance of the Formula of Concord and the publication of the Book of Concord strengthened Lutheran confessional consciousness in Lithuania. As the power of the counter-Reformation grew, an attempt was made in 1585 to reconcile both groups in a colloquium in Vilnius, but Lutherans were no longer interested in allowing their doctrinal position to be diluted or subverted. This colloquium provides the first solid evidence that the entire Book of Concord was now the church's official confession.¹⁵ The confessional writings were specifically noted in the 1648 Vilnius church order.¹⁶

Lutherans in Russia proper in the 16th and early 17th centuries were few in number and consisted mainly of prisoners-of-war taken to Russia during the Livonian Wars (1558–1583), diplomats, and merchants. These were granted permission to build a Lutheran church in Moscow late in 1575 or early in 1576 in order to proclaim the gospel according to the terms set down in the Augsburg Confession. The Augsburg Confession is mentioned again in connection with the coming marriage of Johann, the brother of King Christian IV of Denmark, to Grand Duchess Ksenia (Xenia), the daughter of Tsar Boris Godunov. The king had given his

¹⁴ Darius Petkūnas, "The Consensus of Sandomierz: An Early Attempt to Create a Unified Protestant Church in 16th Century Poland and Lithuania," *CTQ* 73 (2009): 318, 335.

¹⁵ Darius Petkūnas, *Das Vilniuser Kolloquium von 1585 als Bemühung des Fürsten Christophorus Radziwilus des Donners, die kirchliche Eintracht zwischen der Lutherischen und der Evangelisch-reformierten Kirche des Grossfürstentums Litauen zu bewahren: Colloquium habitum Vilnae die 14 Iunii, anno 1585 super articulo de Caena Domini* (Vilnae: Institutum Litterarum Lithuanicarum Ethnologiaeque, 2006), 146.

¹⁶ D.T.O.M.A. *Des Wilnaischen Kirch-Collegii Kirchen-Ordnung* Den 22 July Vilna Anno M.DC.XLVIII. Lietuvos Valstybės Istorijos Archyvas (Lithuanian State Historical Archives, LVIA), LVIA F.1008, ap. 1, b. 402, p. 158v.

brother permission to wed her contingent upon a promise that the duke and his entourage would be permitted to worship and practice the Lutheran faith in accordance with the Augsburg Confession. Johan died in 1602 before the marriage could be consummated, but the Lutherans were permitted by the tsar to build their new church and belfry despite the strong objections of Russian Orthodox hierarchs.¹⁷ Additional impetus for building the church came with the request of Prince Gustav of Sweden, who visited Moscow in 1599 and asked that the Lutherans be permitted to build a new church of adequate size. Evidence of the confessional position of the Moscow Lutherans can be found in the 1678 church order written by Laurentius Blumentrost, M.D., who had come to Moscow from Thuringia where he had served as court physician to Duke Ernst I. Ernst had encouraged Blumentrost to go to Russia to assist in the propagation of Lutheranism. Blumentrost had a personal reputation as a strong confessionalist and stated in his church order that no one was permitted to preach who had not previously been examined and ordained on the basis of the pure Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Mention was made also of other symbolical books, though they were not specified.¹⁸

As the result of Catherine's 1763 *Manifesto*, congregations sprang up on both sides of the Volga River like mushrooms in the forest after the rain. These congregations were totally independent of external control by consistories or higher ecclesiastical bodies, and they ordered their worship and life as it had been back home—wherever that had been. The only control over them laid in the hands of the College of Justice for Livonian and Estonian Affairs in St. Petersburg (Rus. *Юстиц-Коллегия Эстляндских и Лифляндских дел*). The College was accustomed to consider these parishes as operating under the provisions of the 1686 Swedish Church Order according to which the whole Book of Concord was the doctrinal standard.¹⁹ They were supposed to maintain this standard, but the parishes were a law unto themselves.

III. The Influence of Pietism on the Confessional Position of the Church

A new movement was growing in the closing decades of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries, one that would alter the way Lutheran churches viewed their confessions. This movement was in fact several

¹⁷ Dalton, *Verfassungsgeschichte*, 9–10.

¹⁸ Дмитрий Владимирович Цветаев, *Памятники к истории протестантизма в России*. Часть I. (Москва: Въ Университетской типографіи, 1888), 190.

¹⁹ Яков Дитц, *История поволжских немцев-колонистов*. 3-е изд (Москва: Готика, 2000), 292.

movements that differed in particulars but in general came to be called Pietism. It was in Germany, in Frankfurt am Main, that Philipp Jakob Spener published his *Pia desideria* in 1675. He called for a spiritual renewal of the church and a religion of the heart. Spener did not openly attack the Lutheran Confessions or any Lutheran doctrinal positions. He thought it was sufficient to state that formalistic doctrinal statements and worship were matters of the head. He encouraged cell groups in which Christians would devote themselves to the cultivation of religious attitudes and personal piety. Far more radical than Spener was August Hermann Francke, who taught the necessity of a religious experience of rebirth in time and space to which one could point as a guarantee of his conversion. The pious Christian's whole manner of life from the cut of his hair to the cut of his coat must bear witness to the fact that he is not like other men. He must be a pious and righteous man who walks in the narrow way, free of tobacco, free of alcoholic drinks, free of theater-going, and free of dances, all of which lead the weak to degradation and destruction.

In the earliest period, the reaction of most German churches to the Pietists was negative. Both Spener and Francke were forced to move from place to place, seeking refuge and accommodating patrons. It did not help that when they found a patron willing to support them they often found it necessary to point out to him the full extent of his profligacy. Both ended up in Brandenburgian Berlin, where Reformed rulers regarded them more congenially than had the Lutherans. Elector Friedrich III, like the Pietists, was not enamored with the orthodox Lutherans, who to his mind put entirely too much stress on doctrine, as though what a man believed were more important than his outward actions. Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm I used administrative channels to foster the spread of Pietism. He reorganized the University of Halle, calling to its faculty of theology Francke and other Pietists. To establish firmly the importance of Halle and Franckian Pietism, the king issued a decree in 1729 requiring that men who studied theology in any other university in Prussia must also spend several terms in Halle, just to make sure they understood things rightly and had been set straight.²⁰

Among the first to show strong Pietist influences in the Baltic lands was Johann Fischer, the general superintendent of the Church of Livonia. It was no easy matter for him to bring Pietist pastors into his Livonian

²⁰ Wilhelm Stolze, *Friedrich Wilhelm I. und der Pietismus: Jahrbuch für Brandenburgische Kirchengeschichte*. 5. Jahrgang (Berlin: Kommissions-Verlag von Martin Warneck, 1908), 195; Richard Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-century Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 218.

Church. In 1693, new regulations were passed in Sweden that banned the promulgation of Pietist ideas; one year later King Charles XI issued a decree banning all conventicles and the importation of heterodox books and similar literature. His purpose was to try to prevent the growth and expansion of the Pietist movement in all lands under Swedish control. Superintendent Fischer found a way to circumvent these restrictions. He brought to Livonia a Halle student of Francke named Michael Behrends. Behrends arrived in 1695 to serve as a private tutor for Fischer's sons. Two years later Fischer saw to it that he was entrusted with a congregation. This enabled Behrends to spread his views from the pulpit and among his clerical brethren. Soon other noblemen adopted the practice of inviting private tutors from Halle. Their methods of teaching were modern, their study materials were of very high quality, and this, together with their high moral character, made them increasingly popular. They served as tutors, but within a short time they left these positions to serve as organists, cantors, school masters, and pastors.²¹

Professors at Dorpat University soon became concerned about the increasing influence of Halle and its Pietist positions. They appealed to the king, and Chancellor Dahlbergh was asked to take action. In March 1698, an edict outlining the proper response of the university was issued. The university was given authority to control all private tutors, to examine them concerning their background, mental state, doctrinal attitude and faith, academic qualifications, and aptness to teach. Only with university approval could these young men be certified to act as tutors. This new regulation was later supplemented by other regulations meant to exert strong control over all foreign influences. In 1706, King Charles XII ordered that all students who studied abroad must upon returning be tested as to their reliability in matters of faith. They were to give a detailed account of where they had studied and what activities they had undertaken. Later that year regulations concerning book censorship were introduced. These proscribed the publication, importation, sale, or distribution of any publication deemed heterodox or theologically dangerous.²²

Swedish control of Livonia and Estonia came abruptly to an end with the defeat of the Swedish forces in 1709. Primary among the terms negotiated to the tsar of the Baltic territories and leading cities were the ongoing status of the Lutheran Church and the clear identification of what

²¹ Arthur Vööbus, *Studies in the History of the Estonian People: with Reference to Aspects of Social Conditions, in Particular, the Religious and Spiritual Life and the Educational Pursuit*, vol. 3 (Stockholm: ETSE, 1974), 68–69.

²² Vööbus, *Studies*, 75.

was understood to constitute Lutheran identity. Religious privileges negotiated for Livonia included the statement that the Evangelical faith was to be retained and practiced according to the terms of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Symbolical Books. The Estonian privileges contained the same stipulation that the prevailing confession was to be that of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Symbolical Books. The same requirements were stipulated also for the city of Tallinn. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Symbolical Books were to be followed unhindered in all city churches and only Lutheran pastors were to be permitted to lead services in the Church. The religious privileges granted to Riga and Pernau stated only that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession was to be followed; namely, all pastors and school personnel were to follow its doctrine, ceremonies, and teachings.²³

Peter the Great was content to allow the Lutherans freedom of religion as long as they maintained their confessional grounding; he cared little about their internal decisions and disputes. It was up to the church to fight Pietism, and, in Livonia and Estonia, that fight was soon given up. Church leadership positions fell into the hands of Pietists and their supporters. Censorship ended, and soon Pietist literature multiplied. In 1736, Jacob Benjamin Fischer, an outspoken Pietist, was made superintendent general of the Church in Livonia. Exceedingly more Pietistic books, hymnals, and prayer books came off the presses.²⁴

In Courland, which was still under Polish-Lithuanian control, with the help of the duke and the territorial assembly, the church stood firm against the Pietists. In Lithuania, internal disputes broke out in the Vilnius congregation in the 1720s between Pietists and traditional Lutherans. The orthodox position prevailed.²⁵ A similar situation in Piltene had the same result.

²³ *Die Capitulationen der livländischen Ritter- und Landschaft und der Stadt Riga vom 4. Juli 1710 nebst deren Confirmationen*. Nach den Originaldocumenten mit Vorausstellung des Privilegium Sigismundi Augusti und einigen Beilagen herausgegeben von C. Schirren (Dorpat: Druck und Verlag von E. J. Karow, 1865), (The capitulation of the Livonian nobility) 37, (The capitulation of the city of Riga) 65; *Die Capitulationen der estländischen Ritterschaft und der Stadt Reval vom Jahre 1710 nebst deren Confirmationen*. Nach den Originalen mit anderen dazu gehörigen Documenten und der Capitulation von Pernau herausgegeben von Eduard Winkelmann (Reval: Verlag von Franz Kluge, 1865), (The capitulation of the city of Tallinn) 35, (The capitulation of the Estonian nobility) 59, (The capitulation of the town of Pernau) 96.

²⁴ Vööbus, *Studies*, 93.

²⁵ *Johann Jever Verzeichniss allerhand pietistische Intriguen und Unordnungen in Litthauen, vielen Stadten Teutschlandes, Hungarn und America* (Sebastian Edzardi, 1729), 1-20.

Pietism appears to have spread slowly in a few widely separated Lutheran congregations in Russia proper. There were only about ten congregations in 1717; the draft church order of Superintendent Barthold Vegetius gives no indication that Pietism was becoming an issue.²⁶ However, Francke wanted to bring Pietism into Russia proper. It is known that an emissary from Halle, Justus Samuel Scharschmiedt, arrived in Moscow from Halle to establish a center for Pietist activity and served as a direct pipeline from Halle. As a result, not only religious materials but also individuals from the Halle institutions traveled frequently to Moscow to expand the work of spreading the Pietist movement.²⁷

The Pietists themselves pleaded that they were innocent of any doctrinal irregularities. They stated that they were traditional Lutherans who had breathed in fully the spirit of the Reformation that revives the church and gives her new life. Nowhere is there any record of the Pietists' rejection of any of the writings of the Book of Concord. The single probable exception was Elector Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg, a member of the Reformed Church, who in 1656 decreed that candidates for ordination were no longer to be obligated to subscribe to the Formula of Concord. He stated that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the ancient symbols, and the Augsburg Confession were sufficient. Prussian king, Friedrich I, continued this policy and, in 1710, directed that in the general visitation pastors must be specifically asked if they realized that the Formula of Concord was not among the symbolical books accepted in Electoral Brandenburg.²⁸

There arose in Livonia and Estonia a Pietist movement that clearly eschewed Lutheran teaching and the Book of Concord. These Pietists came from Herrnhut, the estate of Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, who provided a refuge to persecuted Bohemian Brethren from Moravia and Bohemia. Zinzendorf lived in Lutheran Electoral Saxony, and the Brethren outwardly expressed their appreciation for Lutheran doctrine and even went so far as to state that they themselves were adherents of the Augsburg Confession. Both statements are not supported by the facts. The Brethren were not Lutheran and did not adhere to the Augsburg Con-

²⁶ *Hermann Dalton* *Miscellaneen zur Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Russland. - Beiträge zur Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Russland*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther & Reichard, 1905), 21, 33.

²⁷ Vööbus, *Studies*, 67.

²⁸ *Corpus Constitutionum Marchicarum . . . von Otto Mylius. Erster Teil Von Geistlichen-Consistorial- und Kirchen-Sachen . . . In Zwey Abtheilungen* (Berlin und Halle: Buchladen des Waisenhauses, [ca. 1737]), 366, 439.

fession. They had their own doctrines, their own clergy, and their own liturgy. They were a separate church. The Brethren did have a strong missionary spirit. They regarded the Lord's great mission mandate as a very workable program, and the fact that they were entering the fields of other churches gave them little pause. Christian David, a Herrnhut carpenter, and two coworkers traveled to Livonia in 1729 to evaluate it as a mission field. They visited with Pietist Superintendent General Jakob Benjamin Fischer, who did nothing to encourage them, since it seemed evident that they were intent on engaging in ministerial activity. They did find hospitality at the estate of *Generalin* Magdalene Elisabeth von Hallert in Wolmarshof, and they made her estate their base of operations. Zinzendorf himself visited Riga and Wolmar in 1736 and one year later, in 1737, a theological school was established to prepare missionaries.²⁹

Fischer and other Lutheran leaders were under the impression that the Brethren were simply interested in stirring up a spiritual renewal in the area. In the usual Pietist manner, they gladly called them "brothers," not realizing that the Brethren were intent on establishing their own separate church. In Estonia it was consistory members Albert Anton Vierorth and Christoph Friedrich Mickwitz who opened the doors to the Pietists. Herrnhut presbyter Friedrich Wilhelm Adolf Biefer began his work in Reval (Estonian: *Tallinn*) in 1738.³⁰ Here, too, the church leaders were initially under the impression that the Herrnhut Brethren were there to help them, and they paid no attention to the fact that Biefer's background was Calvinist, not Lutheran. He was the first Reformed preacher in this Lutheran territorial church. The Herrnhut made Brinkerhoff (Estonian: *Kriimani*) near Tartu in Northern Livonia the center of their activities among the Estonian-speaking Lutheran population. Many of the newly established Herrnhut communities intended to subordinate themselves to the Herrnhut leaders in Brinkerhoff rather than to Lutheran ecclesiastical authorities. The Brethren also established themselves on the island of Oesel where Lutheran Church Superintendent Eberhard Gutsleff became their enthusiastic supporter and involved himself in the religious revival they sponsored there.³¹

In none of these cases did church officials seem to realize that the growth of the Herrnhut movement would be at the expense of the church.

²⁹ Theodosius Harnack, *Die lutherische Kirche Livlands und die herrnhutische Brüdergemeinde. Ein Beitrag zur Kirchengeschichte neuerer und neuester Zeit* (Erlangen: Verlag von Theodor Bläsing, 1860), 27, 38.

³⁰ Harnack, *Die lutherische Kirche*, 47.

³¹ Vööbus, *Studies*, 105, 107, 143.

The Brethren drew people away from the Lutheran Church into their fellowship which had its own church order, liturgy, and a strongly regulated way of life. In many cases, they operated their own prayer houses. They divided the members of their congregations into three separate classes: those who had full fellowship, those who were closely associated, and those who were neophytes.

The work of the Herrnhut Brethren in Livonia and Estonia has been idealized by many. Some have even gone so far as to state that there was no real living Christianity among the native Latvians and Estonians until they came. The general impression is that the German Lutheran pastors did not know the native languages and ignored the native peoples. A very different picture is portrayed in the writings of Theodosius Harnack, whose Lutheran credentials can hardly be questioned. He stated that the assertion was absolutely incorrect that the pastors paid attention only to the Germans and ignored the spiritual needs of the non-Germans.³² The results of the activity of the Herrnhut Brethren was detrimental because they did not simply form small cells within the larger church (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*) but created a church within the church (*ecclesia in ecclesia*).³³ Lutheran doctrine and the Book of Concord were being left behind, and it seemed for a time that a sizable number of church members in Livonia, Estonia, and Oesel would be lost. By 1742, 13,000–14,000 had joined Brethren congregations, 3,000 of them in southern Livonia, 2,000 in northern Livonia, and the rest in Estonia and Oesel.³⁴

It was the German nobility who first realized what was happening and brought the matter to the attention of the imperial government in St. Petersburg. As a result, Tsarina Elisabeth issued an order on April 16, 1743, closing the Brethren prayer houses, confiscating their literature, and ordering their prominent members banished. In 1744, a further order forbade Zinzendorf and his associates from entering the Russian Empire.³⁵ Henceforth, the Brethren met in secret and stayed underground until Catherine the Great lifted the ban in 1764 as a part of her program to attract immigrants. By 1839, there were 48,000 Brethren in Estonia; if one includes all of those who attended Brethren services, that number would swell to 70,000, or about one in ten of all Estonians 14 years of age and older. The highest percentage of Brethren was on the Island of Oesel,

³² Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums: Soziallehren und Sozialwirkungen des Luthertums*, 2 vols. (München: Beck, 1952), 2: 213.

³³ Harnack, *Die lutherische Kirche*, 48.

³⁴ Vööbus, *Studies*, 109–110.

³⁵ Vööbus, *Studies*, 140–143.

where in 1854 as many as 16 percent of the people were Brethren. During this period there was a total of about 100,000 Brethren in Livonia and Estonia.³⁶ The movement ran out of steam in the 20th century, and attempts to revive it have met with little success.

Lutheran churches in the Russian Empire outside Livonia, Estonia, and Oesel made attempts to combat the corrosive influences of Pietism. Levels of success differed. Courland maintained its confessional commitment and remained firm. In Russia, the immigrant congregations in the Volga valleys pursued their own course with only the College of Justice in St. Petersburg to superintend them. Pietism may have taken root in some of them; elsewhere the lack of catechesis took its toll.

IV. Rationalist Rejection of the Church's Confessional Stance

In the second half of the 18th century, Rationalism as an alternative to Pietism spread, making it possible to preach virtue and morality without doctrinal foundation or metaphysical sanction.

Moving from the Reformed countries of Holland to France, its first appearance in Lutheran territory was in Prussia. The Reformed King, Friedrich Wilhelm I, presided over the spread of Pietism throughout his domain. He never called himself a Pietist—he wanted to be known only as a faithful member of the Reformed Church. His son and successor, Friedrich II, would not be known as a pious member of the Reformed Church. He rebelled against his father's faith and became indifferent to religion, making Prussia a place of refuge for atheists and free thinkers. The doors were now open to Rationalism. It soon found favor among the educated with the result that even the theological faculties came to be dominated by Rationalist thought. The formerly staunchly pietistic University of Halle soon became a center for Rationalist theology. The same spirit quickly spread through all Prussian universities. Theological norms were overthrown and theology was now free of the church and confessional commitment. Of all the Lutheran territories, it was in Prussia that the first steps were taken to establish the historical-critical examination of the Scriptures. Among the educated, Pietism now gave way to the cultivation of the modern virtuous man of the world. In place of Pietist thought, theology would now promulgate philosophy, the clearest example of which was Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* of 1793. Examined from this perspective, religious worship and those

³⁶ Jouko Talonen, *Herrnhut and the Baltic Countries from 1730 to the Present: Cultural Perspectives*, *Estonian Church History in the Past Millennium*, ed. Riho Altnurme (Kiel: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 2001), 100.

ceremonies formerly termed “sacramental” were now seen to have value only to the extent that they undergirded virtue and morality.³⁷ The new movement spread from Prussia to other German lands like the rush of a mighty wind. Even the territorial churches and secular rulers who had enjoyed some success in their resistance to Pietism no longer had the strength to resist this new intellectual movement. To fight the new philosophy was to fight against reason and modernity, and few were willing to be labeled anti-modern or irrational.

The Lutheran Church in the Russian Empire was no exception. Rationalism first arrived in the port cities of St. Petersburg, Riga, Tallinn like cargo, for they—along with Dorpat—were the centers of learning and culture. From there Rationalism spread through the upper classes and the Lutheran clergy who were always looking to be in the vanguard of forward-looking ideas. Rationalism inevitably affected preaching, catechesis, hymnody, and the shape and content of worship services and prayers. The clergy reasoned that all of these could be altered without leaving behind the substance of the gospel. They insisted that they were only adjusting the manner and style of the transmission of the gospel.

Rationalism knew no borders. Church leaders were always chosen from among those who were highly educated, and now the highly educated were all rationalists. Among them was Livonian General Superintendent Christian David Lenz. He was a man of the new age, yet at the same time was concerned about holding the church together. With this in mind he preached tolerance and understanding, since it was clear that there were many clergy in smaller towns and rural areas who either did not understand the new thinking or who understood it all too well and outspokenly opposed it. In many places, Pietism was not quietly dying as the new thinkers had expected it would. In 1793, Lenz made public his concerns. He announced to the church that the author of the Christian religion and his disciples knew nothing of liturgy and ceremonies. These had developed only in reaction to pagan idolatry; as a result, many ceremonies and practices that were idolatrous and superstitious had been introduced into the church. Luther, Melancthon, and Bugenhagen had striven mightily to eliminate idolatry and superstition in all its forms, according to Lenz, but unfortunately they had kept some of these ceremonies for the sake of the weak. The time had now come, Lenz said, to eliminate these last vestiges of paganism, and the Enlightenment was the instrument by which this cleansing would be accomplished. He thought it

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundary of Pure Reason* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1838), 1-14, 203-217, 265-275.

unfortunate that many pastors and students who should have supported these efforts were instead refusing to accept the corrections. Lenz viewed the Lutheran symbolical books as historical documents that were valuable in their own day, but that day had now passed. These books should retain their honored place among treasured historical documents, but conscience could no longer be bound to them. Those who would require blind adherence to them would like to institute a Protestant inquisition.³⁸ The church, he said, must tread the narrow path, rejecting both those who would reduce Christianity to moral maxims and those who still intolerantly asserted the old orthodoxy.³⁹

Rationalism in Livonia found its center in Riga and Dorpat. Leading exponents in Riga were Pastors Liborius Bergmann, August Albanus, and Carl Gottlob Sonntag, the latter of whom was made Livonian General Superintendent in 1803. These three were responsible for the appearance of a new Riga Handbook in 1801 that recast the prayers and creeds in modern rationalist terms. Dissatisfied with the church's ancient creed and its ancient faith as well, they offered something more in tune with the spirit of the age:

We believe that God is, that he is Eternal, the Only, the Unending, the All-knowing and Almighty, the Holy and Just, the All-wise and All-good, the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the whole world, and especially also of all men, that he is our most high Law-giver, and Judge, and Father, and that for our individual salvation he would be worshiped by us in none other way than through a genuine, steadfast, and childlike obedience to his commands.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son and the one whom God has sent for all humankind, that he has reliably made known to us the will of God, that through his life, teaching, sufferings, and death he has freed us from the power and lordship of doubt, error, superstition, sin, and misery, and has given us a joyful childlike confidence in God and the certain expectation of eternal life; so that we may have our portion in the blessedness which he has promised us, which we can have in no other way that only by the faithful imitation of his example and through a steadfast, conscientious following of his instructions.

³⁸ The probable reference is to the 1788 Edict of Wollner which attempted to bolster the Prussian Church's defense against Rationalism.

³⁹ Christian David Lenz, *Antwortsschreiben an einen der Theologie Beflissenen, seine Gesinnungen bey dem itzigen neuen für Aufklärung gehaltenen in der Theologie und Religions-Lehre eingerissenen Meinungen betreffend mit einer apologetischen Vorrede und dem Briefe, der zu diesem Antwortschreiben Gelegenheit gegeben* (Riga: George Friedrich Keil, 1793), 1–13.

We believe that if we truly desire to be wise, virtuous, and blissful, God gives us the assistance of his Spirit so that he may give, preserve, and increase to us all necessary powers, impulses, and means of assistance, and by this means lead us to the destiny he has created for us in time and eternity.⁴⁰

Here the historic Christian faith was abandoned and replaced by an entirely different religion. The Rationalist need not reject religion. Indeed he may long for it, but the Christ who is portrayed in this creedal statement is no longer the Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sins of the world, who suffers, dies, and rises for man's forgiveness, justification, and salvation. He is rather a teacher and warrior who does battle against superstition, sin, and misery and sets an example of joyful childlike confidence and promises eternal happiness in the sweet by-and-by.

Dorpat was important because it was the seat of the only Lutheran university in the empire. Here, too, Rationalism became the dominating influence in the faculty of theology. As older men retired from the faculty, they were replaced by younger men who embraced the spirit of the age.

The leading Rationalist in the duchy of Courland was Pastor Dr. Karl Dietrich Wehrt. Courland was not constrained to follow Swedish church law or use the Swedish handbook. In 1785, Pastor Christoph Friedrich Neander proposed a draft for a new church law and Wehrt used the occasion to produce a prayer and liturgical handbook that conformed to modern thought.⁴¹ His radical baptismal service contained no exorcism, no marking of the candidate with the sign of the cross (signation), no gospel of the blessing of the children, no renunciation of the devil, his works, and his ways. There was no confession of the apostolic faith. Instead, the minister asked whether the baptismal party committed itself to faith in God, the Father Creator and upholder of all things, Jesus, the Redeemer of the world, and the Holy Spirit, and whether they now wished that this faith be passed on to the child as a sacred bond or covenant. The traditional post-baptismal blessing gave way to a new one: "Blessed be your name, Almighty, here and in eternity."⁴² Here the pastor recited a poem asking God to grant this child to rest forever in his blessing, walk in a manner pleasing to God, enjoy good fortune, live a prosperous and happy life, and in the Lord's good time depart this mortal coil. There is

⁴⁰ *Liturgisches Handbuch für die Stadt-Kirchen zu Riga* (Riga: Julius Conrad Daniel Müller, 1801), 226–228.

⁴¹ *Entwurf zur Kirchenordnung 1785* (Mitau: J. F. Steffenhagen, 1785).

⁴² *Handlungen und Gebete bey dem öffentlichen Gottesdienst in den Herzogthümern Kurland und Semgallen* (Mitau: J. F. Steffenhagen, 1786), 127.

hardly any need to state that the Sacrament of the Altar is similarly reformed. It is simply a ceremony in which man gives himself to the Lord just as long ago Jesus resolutely faced the idolatrous leaders and Jewish mob and offered himself up as a model of resolute integrity.⁴³ He who participates in such a meal will leave the altar fortified and strengthened with a new and profound resolution to live the upright life, the order stated.

It was no longer clear what it meant to be a Lutheran. In earlier ages Lutheranism was defined in the terms of the Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and other symbolical books. This was no longer possible. Now the creeds were rewritten and the Symbolical Books were left to gather dust on the shelf. Lutheran identity was more and more being replaced by a general Protestant identity ready to move ahead in the "Spirit of Luther," rejecting the past and ready to move forward as led by the Enlightenment spirit. To be a Protestant was to stand with Luther against Rome and its superstition, vain pomp, and ceremonies.

The effect on the church's worship life was chaotic. Everywhere pastors began arbitrarily to alter the church's forms of worship and insert prayers that conformed to the new criteria. In 1805, the College of Justice secured from the tsar a directive that the church's worship be reunified. The leading theologian in the commission was none other than Livonian General Superintendent Sonntag. He left behind a detailed record of the deliberations of the commission. There was no common agreement among the commissioners as to what worship is, what it entails, or what it ought to include. This led to tensions and dissensions. If the meaning and purpose of worship were not altogether clear, then the meaning and purpose of ceremonies was even less clear. Some would have liked to eliminate ceremonies altogether. The sign of the cross was particularly held up to criticism. Sonntag wanted to keep it. He said he loved the cross because the death of Christ must still be considered meaningful. He noted that death is never far away from any man and that the death of Jesus could be used as a point of meaningful connection when a father or mother or friend passes away. The cross, he insisted, was nothing of which to be ashamed. The Apostle's Creed he viewed more critically. He stated that this creed was falsely named since it did not come from the apostles. It was also his opinion it was not the best summary of the Christian faith. Despite his opinion, the committee decided to keep the creed.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Handlungen und Gebete*, 128–131.

⁴⁴ Carl Gottlob Sonntag, *Geschichte und Gesichtspunct der Allgemeinen liturgischen*

When the directives were published in 1805, they did identify the Lutheran Church as the Protestant Church and they included a statement of its purpose: "The Protestant Church has no other purpose than to help its members to reach the highest level of morality and satisfaction consistent with the present day religious and moral circumstances and needs of the community. To that end it recognizes no other effective means than the right use of the Bible and human reason."⁴⁵ Accordingly, the church is one of many earthly associations established to accomplish some high moral or ethical purpose. It differs from other organizations chiefly in that it invokes divine sanction to justify its purpose and its operation. Since the church is guided by the Scriptures and reason this must be taken to mean that the Scriptures must be interpreted according to human reason, since nowhere are the Scriptures declared to be the decisive voice in matters of faith and morals. The definition includes not one word about the divine creation of the church or the work of the Holy Trinity in preserving and extending it. Nothing is said about the teaching of the gospel or the administration of the sacraments as constitutive of the church. They are to be seen as church activities, traditional customs that the church chooses to observe. Their value is chiefly moral. Tsar Alexander approved the liturgical directives and now Lutheran clergy were obliged to follow them. Some enthusiastically embraced them because the directives articulated their beliefs and allowed them great latitude in constructing worship experiences. The law that bound them to the old agendas was now null and void. Others found the directives unusable and paid as little attention to them as possible. They were obliged to use the Prayer of the Church with its petitions for the tsar and his household, but apart from that they chose to continue to use the old agendas.

V. Governmental Reaction and the Restoration of Lutheran Confessionalism

As important as Riga and Dorpat were, of even greater importance was St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire, the intellectual and cultural center of Russia, and the home of the College of Justice, the secular governmental unit charged with the supervision of the Lutheran Church. Lutheran pastors in St. Petersburg were wholly committed to the rationalist spirit and sought to implement it wherever possible. In

Verordnung für die Lutheraner im Russischen Reiche (Riga: Wilhelm Ferdinand Häcker, 1805), 30–32, 41–48.

⁴⁵ Von Sr. Kaiserlichen Majestät allerhöchst bestätigte *Allgemeine Liturgische Verordnung für die evangelisch-lutherischen Gemeinden im Russischen Reiche* (St. Petersburg: Schnoorschen Buchdruckerey, 1805), 3.

preparation for the 1817 celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, they decided to emphasize that this must be more than a Lutheran celebration. It must have significance for the whole Protestant community, for it represented not just the striking of hammer blows on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, but the breaking of the yoke of Roman bondage and the first light of the new dawn of Rationalism. It was well known that Friedrich Wilhelm III in Prussia had set in motion his plan to join Lutherans and Reformed into one "Evangelical Church." St. Petersburg Lutheran pastors could see no reason why a similar plan should not be undertaken in Russia. They would make use of the festal celebration of the Reformation to accomplish it. They invited Reformed pastors to take an active part in the celebration and to participate with them in a common Communion service in St. Peter's Church.⁴⁶ A month later the Lutheran and Reformed congregations in Archangelsk took the step by uniting into a single congregation. The Lutheran and Reformed pastors signed the act of union.⁴⁷

The College of Justice saw both these events as solid indications that they should move ahead in their own plans to unite Lutherans and Reformed under a single common banner. Count Aleksandr Nikolaevich Golitsyn, Minister of Cults and Public Enlightenment, took the matter to the tsar, and on January 7, 1818, he announced that the tsar supported this program and henceforth the Lutherans and Reformed would be united under the single name, "The Evangelical Church." He expected that Lutherans throughout the empire would be delighted. This turned out to be an error in judgment. Strong negative reactions came from the Livonian High Consistory and the Courlandian consistory. Golitsyn found it necessary to back down and allow that if any insisted on calling themselves Lutheran, the government had no intention of forbidding it, for the tsar did not intend to interfere in matters of conscience or with anyone's beliefs, worship, and practices.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Полное собрание законов Российской империи сь 1649 года. Собрание первое.* Т. 35 (1818) (Санкт-Петербург: Печатано въ Типографіи II Отделения Собственной Его Императорскаго Величества канцеляріи, 1830), 54 (hereafter ПСЗ Соб.1, Т. 35, 1830); Erik Amburger, *Geschichte des Protestantismus in Russland* (Stuttgart: Evangel. Verl.-Werk, 1961), 68.

⁴⁷ Hermann Dalton, *Urkundenbuch der evangelisch-reformirten Kirche in Russland: Beiträge zur Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Russland*, vol. 2 (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1889), 155-159.

⁴⁸ ПСЗ Соб.1, Т. 35, 1830, 54, 54-55; Amburger, *Geschichte*, 68. Reinhold Wilhelm Baron Staël von Holstein, *Zur Geschichte der Kirchengesetzes vom Jahre 1832*, ed. Arnold

In that same year, something occurred that would turn the tide against Rationalism in the Lutheran Church. Pastor Johann Heinrich Busse of St. Catherine's Church in St. Petersburg issued a new edition of the 1783 rationalist hymnal. It was no mere reprint; it was a new edition that went further down the rationalist road than the earlier editors had dared to go. When he presented his new edition to the College of Justice for its approval, it did not bother the members of the College that some of the hymns openly contradicted biblical teaching. Everyone knew that the St. Petersburg parishes had been using the old rationalist hymnal for several decades without incident. Reaction from congregations and their pastors from the region were entirely negative, and the College of Justice found that it was in the unfortunate situation of having allowed the publication of a hymnal which contradicted the position that the tsar was now taking against Rationalism. Earlier the tsar had been an enthusiastic supporter of Rationalism, but the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had shown him that it led to the introduction of democratic ideas and encouraged revolution. Now he had become decidedly anti-Rationalism, and the College needed to move quickly to fall into line. They stated that they had been misled by Pastor Busse and they insisted that the hymnal be withdrawn and its use prohibited. Pastor Busse was unceremoniously removed from the pastorate of St. Catherine's he had held for 19 years.⁴⁹

Now the government decided that it had to take a firm hold of the Lutheran Church in the empire. On July 20, 1819, Tsar Alexander issued an order that repeated the condemnation of the new hymnal. He stated that it implanted impious notions that even pagan writers could not accept. His language was clear and firm. He stated that in accordance with the royal Swedish Church Order of 1686 the Lutheran Church was allowed to exist in the Russian Empire based upon its doctrinal position as stated in the Sacred Scriptures, the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and the Book of Concord. Its existence and privileges depended upon its adherence to these foundations. No other position would be tolerated.

In addition, the order also included some positive references to the notion of an Evangelical Church containing within it both Lutheran and Reformed branches. The tsar used the occasion also to remind the Reformed that they were expected to abide by their own confessional writings. He announced his decision to create the office of "evangelical bishop" on the model of the episcopal office as practiced in Finland, Sweden, Denmark,

von Tidebühl *Dreihundvierzigster Jahrgang LII. Band* (Riga: Verlag der Baltischen Monatschrift, 1901), 133-134.

⁴⁹ Dalton, *Verfassungsgeschichte*, 260-261; Holstein, *Zur Geschichte*, 136-137.

and Prussia. This bishop would be responsible for the oversight of all Evangelical Churches, Lutheran and Reformed. In order to further strengthen his control, he announced his decision to create a General Evangelical Consistory in St. Petersburg that would be responsible for determining whether the church regulations were followed and to supervise the teaching of the church's principles as well as the supervision of the life and behavior of its clergy. Its first president was Count Karl von Lieven, curator of the Dorpat educational district and a strong Pietist and anti-Rationalist.⁵⁰

Soon after his appointment, the Consistorial Session of the College of Justice met under Lieven's presidency to begin the work of establishing the Evangelical General Consistory. In his opening remarks, Lieven made it clear that he was entirely opposed to Rationalism and decried what it had done to the Russian Lutheran Church. He stated that the rationalist theologians and preachers had completely forgotten that they were supposed to be servants of Christ, stewards of the mysteries of God, ambassadors for Christ to call all men to the reconciliation that he had accomplished. Instead, they were drunk with the spirit of the Enlightenment and deceived themselves and their hearers with vain philosophies and traditions of men that denied Christ. They regarded the word of God as filled with myths and fables that must be regarded as exaggerated Hebraisms. They turned the truth of God into a lie. They distrusted the word of God and arrogantly trusted in their own wisdom. They quibbled about the Word of God and perverted the gospel, stealing faith from the hearts of men and replacing it with a cold, calculating Rationalism and a heartless morality built on shifting sand. He said that it was a wonder that there was left in the Russian empire any Lutheran parish in which ten or twenty members could be found who had any knowledge of the church's faith. Now the time had come to return the church to its clear confession as proclaimed before the world in Augsburg in 1530. He reminded his hearers that every Lutheran pastor had taken an oath to teach according to this confession. Apart from it the church would always be tossed to and fro and carried about with any wind of doctrine. He concluded by stating his deep thanks to the tsar for showing such a fine Christian spirit and a desire to act with fraternal care for his Lutherans.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Полное собрание законов Российской империи. Собрание первое. Т. 36 (1819) (Санкт-Петербург: Печатано в Типографии II Отделения Собственной Его Императорского Величества канцелярии, 1830), 314–316.

⁵¹ Eduard Heinrich Busch, *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Statistik des Kirchen und Schulwesens der Ev.-Augsburg: Gemeinden im Königreich Polen* (St. Petersburg: Gustav Haessel, 1867), 23–31.

Lieven's speech was not empty words; it was a manifesto that he intended to act upon, and he did not delay in doing so. He gave his first attention to the theological faculty at Dorpat, where with the aid of Rector Gustav Ewers he picked off the Neologists one-by-one and replaced them with professors whose piety and adherence to the Scriptures and Confessions was beyond question. By 1823, there were three factions in the faculty: strict confessionals, Pietists, and those still under the influence of Schleiermacher and Hegel. No single school of thought predominated, but all faculty members were committed to the traditional Lutheran faith and confession.⁵²

The establishment of the Evangelical General Consistory was not completely accomplished for more than a decade. After a period of initial enthusiasm, the whole matter came to be bogged down with disagreements between Lieven and Baltic noblemen and consistories anxious to maintain their privileged positions. The whole process ground to a halt by 1825; the campaign against Rationalism, however, continued unabated. Earlier, General Superintendent Sonntag had thought himself to be unassailable when he published the second volume of his *Sittliche Ansichten* in 1820,⁵³ which was not in accord with Lutheran Orthodoxy. Lieven responded immediately. If it had not been for Sonntag's high position in the church and the support he received from the Livonian nobility, he would have been removed from office. When the bells tolled his death in 1827, they tolled also the death of Rationalism among the Lutherans.

A new order came from Tsar Nicolai I on May 22, 1828. He announced the establishment of a committee to unite the Russian Lutheran Church under a common law, liturgy, and administration. The government was concerned about missionary activity being conducted in the Caucasus and southern Russia by Ignaz Lindl and Johannes Evangelista Gossner. St. Petersburg pastors and Bishop Zacharias Cygnäus brought the matter to the tsar in 1827, stating that it was impossible to bring order among the Lutherans because there was no common administration under which all of them could be regulated. Thus, it was the tsar who decided that the Lutherans must be organized into a single community and he established a commission to accomplish it. Nothing further was said about uniting

⁵² Heinrich Seesemann, *Die Theologische Fakultät der Universität Dorpat 1802–1918: Baltische Kirchengeschichte. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Missionierung und der Reformation, der evangelisch-lutherischen Landeskirchen und des Volksirchentums in den baltischen Landen*, ed. Reinhard Wittram (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 207–209.

⁵³ *Sittliche Ansichten der Welt und des Lebens für das weibliche Geschlecht: in Vorlesungen, geh. von Karl Gottlob Sonntag*, 2 vols. (Riga: Hartmann, 1818, 1820).

Lutherans and Reformed into a single Russian “Evangelical Church.” The Russian Lutheran Church would not suffer the same fate Lutherans had experienced in Prussia.⁵⁴

The new church law was signed by the tsar on December 28, 1832. There was to be no doubt that this would be a Lutheran church law. The law stated that the Lutheran Church in Russia was bound to the sacred Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds, and all of the confessions which comprised the Lutheran Book of Concord of 1580.⁵⁵ As had been the case with the 1819 order, this law was binding, and it was to be observed by all. Only the single united congregation in Archangelsk was exempted. It was supervised directly by the minister of the interior, as were the few scattered congregations in southern Russia. Now there were only two Lutheran Churches in the Russian Empire not under the direct supervision of the imperial General Consistory. One was the church in the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, administered by the cathedral chapter at Borgo, Finland. The other was the Lutheran Church in the autonomous Kingdom of Poland, administered by the Warsaw consistory.

The 19th century brought with it a renewed appreciation of the Lutheran Confessions and the era of Lutheran orthodoxy, as was the case also in some parts of Germany. There were no more questions raised concerning Lutheran identity in Russia. It was known to everyone that the Lutheran Church was the Church of the Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord. While there was no question in anyone’s mind that its statements were authoritative, there were many different and sometimes quite contradictory understandings of what the confessional statements meant. Tensions continued between Pietists and those who wanted a richer liturgy. Some concerns were mainly aesthetic, some were historical, and some were theological in nature.

The church law of 1832 called for pastoral synods that were inaugurated in 1834. These synods had no legislative power but provided occasions for important theological presentations and discussion. Presentations and discussions were lively, but it was well understood that proper boundaries must be maintained. There was no room for radicalism. By the end of the 19th century, certain individuals would put forward some

⁵⁴ *Полное собрание законов Российской империи съ 1649 года. Собрание второе*. Т. 7, 1832 (Санкт-Петербург: Печатано въ Типографіи II Отделенія Собственной Его Императорскаго Величества канцеляріи, 1833), 956–957 (hereafter, *ПСЗ Соб.2*, Т. 7, 1832); Holstein, *Zur Geschichte*, 167; Dalton, *Verfassungsgeschichte*, 308; Amburger, *Geschichte*, 72, 75.

⁵⁵ *ПСЗ Соб.2*, Т. 7, 1832, 957.

rather radical notions. Pastor Julius Muethel of St. Petersburg insisted that a proper consecration of the Sacrament of the Altar required a special prayer of invocation of the Holy Spirit over the elements. It was this prayer, and not the *Verba*, he claimed, which consecrated the sacrament.⁵⁶ Pastor Alfons Meyer of Sarata in Bessarabia took a very different position. He stated that no consecration was necessary at all, since the elements had been consecrated for all time in the Upper Room.⁵⁷ The pastors discussed these and other matters on the basis of the Scriptures and the Confessions, and the radicals did not prevail.

Only in the opening years of the 20th century did some indication of the liberal theological spirit begin to spread from Germany into Russia. The theological faculty in Dorpat began to take a special interest in the psychology of religion, but this was understood not to contradict the theological position of the church. It directed its particular attention to religious experience.⁵⁸ The synodical protocols do not indicate that the clergy or the church-at-large were much concerned about this new discipline. Still some liberal tendencies were making their way into Livonia. Some pastors were well aware of new theological trends and were in tune with them. Among them were those who sought to replace the Apostles' Creed in the Confirmation rite with something more up to date and in line with modern views.⁵⁹ The outbreak of WWI brought to an end whatever interest in theological liberalism might have been incubating up until that time.

The Russian Empire was beginning to crumble, and the days of Revolution lay directly ahead. By the end of the second decade of the 20th century, the Lutheran Church in the former Russian Empire was effectively divided. A large portion of it remained within the borders of the Soviet Union and found itself in a hostile environment intent on its destruction. The majority of parishes, however, now lay in the three independent Baltic States, each with its own separate ecclesiastical administration. These Baltic Churches would enjoy freedom of faith, and each would have to face its own internal challenges caused by theological liberalism and ethnic tensions between Germans and local populations.

⁵⁶ Julius Muethel, *Ein wunder Punkt in der lutherischen Liturgie: Beitrag zur Liturgie* (Leipzig: Rudolf Hartmann, 1895), 2.

⁵⁷ Alfons Meyer, *Noch einige Desideria zur neuen Agende. Mittheilungen und Nachrichten für die evangelische Kirche in Russland*, begründet von Dr. C. C. Ulmann, ed. Th. Taube, vol. 52 (Riga: L. Hoerschelmann, 1896), 354.

⁵⁸ David M. Wulf, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991), 15–16, 555–559.

⁵⁹ *Protokoll der 73. Livländischen Provinzial-Synode, gehalten zu Pernau vom 22. bis zum 27. August 1907* (Riga: W. F. Häcker, 1907), 17–19.

The Theology of Stanley Hauerwas

Joel D. Lehenbauer

In 2001, *Time* magazine took on the task of selecting “America’s Best” contributors in the areas of science and medicine, arts and entertainment, and society and culture, including—in the last category—“America’s Best Theologian.” The recipient of this honor was Stanley Hauerwas, a United Methodist professor who earned his Ph.D. at Yale, taught for two years at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, then joined the faculty of the University of Notre Dame, where he taught until 1984. Since then, Hauerwas has taught theology and ethics at Duke Divinity School.¹

Interestingly, *Time* chose a Lutheran scholar, Jean Bethke Elshtain, to write the profile of Hauerwas that appeared in its September 17, 2001 issue. She wrote as follows:

Hauerwas is contemporary theology’s foremost intellectual provocateur. . . . [He] has been a thorn in the side of what he takes to be Christian complacency for more than 30 years. For him, the message of Jesus was a radical one to which Christians, for the most part, have never been fully faithful. Christians, he believes, are called to be a pilgrim people who will always find themselves in one political community or another but who are never defined completely by it. Thus, as the body of Christ on earth, Christians must be a “sign of contradiction,” to borrow a term from Pope John Paul II, a moral theologian much admired by the very Anabaptist Methodist Hauerwas.²

Without necessarily seeking to deny the accolade conferred on Hauerwas in this way, some wondered aloud “how the editors of *Time* would know” who “America’s Best Theologian” might be.³ Yet even those (like Richard John Neuhaus) who dared to question the theological competence of *Time*’s editors were also quick to acknowledge Hauerwas’s status and influence in contemporary theology, thus (in effect) confirming

¹ This article is adapted from a presentation titled “God in Public Discourse: Reflections on the Theology of Stanley Hauerwas” given by the author at the 2010 Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

² *Time* (September 17, 2001): 76.

³ Richard John Neuhaus, “In a Time of War,” *First Things* 120 (February 2002): 14 (hereafter *FT*).

Time's assessment. Wrote Neuhaus at the time: "[Hauerwas] is the author of dozens of books, and articles beyond numbering; interviews with him and discussions about him appear in numerous academic and popular publications, making him probably the most prominent theologian in the country."⁴

Those who have read even a sampling of Hauerwas's essays, books, or interviews have almost certainly encountered his passionately-held views on Christian pacifism and its place in the theology and life of the church.⁵ Elshtain's brief article in *Time* calls attention to this pacifist concern that surfaces in one way or another in nearly all of Hauerwas's writings.

Hauerwas is a volatile, complex person with an explosive personality and high-energy style. For many, he is an unlikely pacifist. He insists that Christians should exemplify a radical message of peace. Hauerwas learned this lesson from the Anabaptist theologian John Howard Yoder. Hauerwas has respect for a position known as the just-war perspective, a mode of reflection on war's occasional tragic necessity, either for self-defense or to protect those who might otherwise be slaughtered. But he insists that most Christians who claim that position are not really serious about it, or they would oppose many more wars than they do. His radical pacifism leads him to condemn any and all forms of patriotism, nationalism and state worship. (And he disdains most distinctions between these positions.)⁶

Ironically, the issue of *Time* dubbing this radical pacifist "America's Best Theologian" went to press almost simultaneously with one of the most peace-shattering days in recent American history: September 11, 2001. The events of that day thrust our nation and others—as well as many Christians, theologians and church bodies—into yet another complex and passionate debate about the nature and necessity of war and the best means for securing and maintaining national and global justice, freedom, and peace.

In December of 2001, the editors of *First Things*—the editorial board of which Stanley Hauerwas had long been a member—published an editorial called "In a Time of War," offering their view that the terrorist attack on September 11 constituted a bona fide "act of war" that placed America into

⁴ Neuhaus, "In a Time of War," 14.

⁵ This was the subject of my Ph.D. dissertation "The Christological and Ecclesial Pacifism of Stanley Hauerwas: A Lutheran Analysis and Appraisal" [see p. 1, para. 1] (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2004).

⁶ *Time*, 76.

the regrettable but necessary role of defender of fundamental national and even international human rights, justice, security, and freedom. The editorial goes on to offer a defense of the “war against terrorism” proposed by the Bush administration on the basis of historic “just war” principles. It voices respect, even admiration, for authentic pacifist views, with one significant caveat:

One matter that has been morally muddled in recent decades should now be clarified: those who in principle oppose the use of military force have no legitimate part in the discussion about how military force should be used. They only make themselves and their cause appear frivolous by claiming that military force is immoral and futile, and, at the same time, wanting to have a political say in how such force is to be employed. The morally serious choice is between pacifism and just war. Here, too, sides must be taken.⁷

Hauerwas was not a consensual participant in the writing of this editorial: his passionate dissent was published in the February 2002 issue of *First Things*. While this is not the place to discuss the details of that response, it illustrates well Hauerwas’s own view of the significance of his pacifist convictions for his theology and ethics as a whole:

The editorial makes clear that the Editors regard the Christian nonviolence I represent as at best “a reminder” to those who are about “being responsible.” I may be tolerated because of my theological commitments, but my pacifism can only be regarded as an aberration that is best ignored. The arguments “John Howard” Yoder and I have made in an attempt to show how Christian orthodoxy and non-violence are constitutive of one another are quite simply not taken seriously by the Editors. Or at least they are not taken seriously if “In a Time of War” indicates the best thinking of the Editors of *First Things*. I did not expect nor do I expect the Editors to take a pacifist stance, but I confess that their lack of sadness that should accompany the use of violence fills me with sadness.⁸

Hauerwas wonders aloud how “my life may be changed” by the publication of this editorialized “dismissal” of his conscience-bound pacifist convictions:

Should I, for example, continue to be identified as a member of the Editorial Board of *First Things*? If “In a Time of War” constitutes the perspective of this magazine, should the Editors continue to list me as

⁷ The Editors of *First Things*, “In a Time of War,” *FT* 118 (Dec 2001): 14.

⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, “In a Time of War: An Exchange,” *FT* 120 (Feb 2002): 13.

a member of the board? Surely the position taken in “In a Time of War” comes close to implying that the pacifist refusal to respond violently to injustice makes us complicit with evil and injustice and, therefore, immoral.⁹

A response from the editors followed in the same issue, and additional articles, responses and “exchanges” ensued in subsequent months. In May 2002, Hauerwas did resign from the editorial board of *First Things* because of his profound disagreement with the position taken by the editorial board and their construal of the role of pacifism and pacifists in war and peace debates. In an article published in the June 21, 2002 *National Catholic Reporter*, Neuhaus—editor in chief of *First Things*—expressed his sympathetic regret at Hauerwas’s decision.

His leaving the editorial board was entirely amicable, and I urged him not to, but understood why he did. Our essential disagreement is that for my friend Stan, pacifism is...the doctrine by which the church stands or falls, and I think that’s not only not true, I think it’s dangerously schismatic, and about that we have been arguing in a friendly manner I suppose going on 30 years.¹⁰

Still, says Neuhaus, Hauerwas is “provocative, energetic and a very, very useful person to have on the theological scene”—a well-intended comment, no doubt, but one that might be interpreted as implying the very sort of patronizing “dismissal” of his pacifism that Hauerwas finds so outrageous and offensive.¹¹

Hauerwas’s “project” for reforming Christian ethics—with its emphasis on the virtues, character, narrative, the particularity and exclusivity of Christian ethics, and (above all) the central and indispensable role of the church, the Christian community, as a “sign of Christ-like contradiction” in and to the world—has received considerable scholarly attention in recent decades in America and beyond. Far less attention, however, has been given to Hauerwas’s pacifist convictions and the central role that these convictions play in his “public theology” as a whole. That was the focus of my (as yet unpublished) dissertation work at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and that will also be my focus on here.

⁹ Hauerwas, “In a Time of War: An Exchange,” 13.

¹⁰ Patrick O’Neill, “Theologian’s Feisty Faith Challenges Status Quo,” *National Catholic Reporter* (June 21, 2002), 3 (hereafter *NCR*). See also *FT* 125 (Aug.–Sept., 2002): 106–107.

¹¹ O’Neill, “Theologian’s Feisty Faith,” 3.

The relative neglect of what is arguably the over-riding theme in Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics seems to confirm his perception, noted in his classic work *The Peaceable Kingdom*, that "many have viewed my pacifism with a good deal of suspicion, seeing it as just one of my peculiarities."¹² Whether or not Hauerwas would agree with Neuhaus's assertion that for him pacifism is "the doctrine by which the church stands or falls," there is ample evidence to demonstrate that Hauerwas does not regard pacifism, properly understood, as a tangential or secondary moral issue, a mere "quirk" in an otherwise sound and lucid theological system. Statements like the following confirm the utter seriousness of his claim that "Christian orthodoxy and nonviolence are constitutive of one another" (cited above):

Indeed, nonviolence is not just one implication among others that can be drawn from our Christian beliefs; it is at the very heart of our understanding of God. . . . such a stance is not just an option for a few, but incumbent on all Christians who seek to live faithfully in the kingdom made possible by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Nonviolence is not one among other behavioral implications that can be drawn from the Gospel but is integral to the shape of Christian convictions.¹³

For Hauerwas, the phrase "a Christian pacifist" is either redundant or misleading since it seems to suggest that "pacifism" is simply one moral choice among many for Christians. "I believe the narrative into which Christians are inscribed means we cannot be anything other than non-violent . . . nonviolence is simply one of the essential practices that is intrinsic to the story of being a Christian."¹⁴

Pacifism is "the form of life incumbent on those who would worship Jesus as the Son of God."¹⁵ Hauerwas goes on to state that "for a Christian to be nonviolent is not just another political position, but rather at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian."¹⁶ True, biblical pacifism is "not just another 'moral' issue, but constitutes the heart of our worship of a crucified messiah."¹⁷

¹² *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, 1981), xvii (hereafter *PK*).

¹³ *PK*, xvii; xvi.

¹⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, "Whose 'Just' War, Which Peace?" in *Dispatches from the Front* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994), 137.

¹⁵ Hauerwas, *Dispatches*, 134.

¹⁶ "Faith Fires Back: A Conversation with Stanley Hauerwas," *Duke Magazine* (Jan.-Feb., 2002), 12.

¹⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, "Remembering John Howard Yoder," *FT* 82 (April 1998), 15-16.

My first and primary goal, therefore, is to summarize as concisely yet helpfully as possible “The Christological and Ecclesial Pacifism of Stanley Hauerwas.” Second, I will offer a few thoughts about what we as Lutherans might learn from Hauerwas’s insights on this topic, despite inevitable disagreements about some rather fundamental theological issues along the way.

The still-classic text on *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* was written by Roland Bainton in 1960. Bainton also wrote (in 1950) the classic popular Luther biography, *Here I Stand*. The first time I read *Here I Stand* years ago, I assumed (perhaps like many others) that Bainton was a Lutheran. Actually, he was ordained (but never served) as a Congregationalist pastor and was married to a Quaker. Bainton’s father, like his wife, was a committed pacifist, and it is clear from his writings that Bainton also considered himself a pacifist.

In the introduction to *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, Bainton provides a nutshell summary of these “attitudes” throughout Christian history:

The early Church was pacifist to the time of Constantine. Then, partly as a result of the close association of Church and state under this emperor and partly by reason of the threat of barbarian invasions, Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries took over from the classical world the doctrine of the just war, whose object should be to vindicate justice and restore peace. The just war had to be fought under the authority of the state and must observe a code of good faith and humanity. The Christian elements added by Augustine were that the motive must be love and that monks and priests were to be exempted. The crusade arose in the high Middle Ages, a holy war fought under the auspices of the Church or of some inspired religious leader, not on behalf of justice conceived in terms of life and property, but on behalf of an ideal, the Christian faith. Since the enemy was without the pale, the code tended to break down.¹⁸

Even though Bainton explicitly identifies himself as a pacifist at the end of this book, Hauerwas is far from pleased with Bainton’s approach, for a number of reasons.¹⁹ First, Hauerwas is disturbed by the very use of

¹⁸ Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 14.

¹⁹ The following summary of Hauerwas’s (and Yoder’s) critique of Bainton is based primarily on chapter 6 (“Can a Pacifist Think about War?”) of Hauerwas’s book *Dispatches from the Front*, the arguments laid out in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, and John Howard Yoder’s books *Christian Attitudes To War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to*

these categories, as if pacifism, just war, and the crusade are three clearly definable and equally acceptable (or at least understandable) “Christian attitudes” toward war and peace that have manifested themselves throughout history. Each of these terms is capable of a wide variety of definitions, says Hauerwas, many of which can hardly be characterized as “Christian” in nature. In fact, Hauerwas often vigorously denies that he himself is a pacifist if this term is understood in any number of the ways that it is typically understood (e.g., as just another pragmatic political strategy for ridding the world of war).

To illustrate the complexity of this issue, in his book *Nevertheless* John Howard Yoder has catalogued and described no less than 24 distinct types of religious pacifism. The last chapter is devoted to his own brand of pacifism which he calls the “Pacifism of the Messianic Community,” and which he claims is radically distinct from the others. Yoder has also written a huge tome (highly regarded by Hauerwas) called *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton*, which tries to supplement and correct what he regards as Bainton’s rather sloppy and simplistic treatment of this complex issue.²⁰

In “Can a Pacifist Think About War?” Hauerwas writes:

Equally problematic from this perspective are typologies—crusade, pacifism and just war—developed by Roland Bainton in *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*. The heuristic value of such typologies hides from us the complexity of Christian nonviolence (as well as the multivalence of violence). This concealment is not only because Bainton held to the kind of Constantinian liberal pacifism that I think is so doubtful, but more significantly such typologies result in a peculiarly ahistorical reading of Christian nonviolence. For the typology makes it appear that the three types are simply “there.” Each, it seems, necessarily exemplifies how Christians can, have, or should think about war and/or violence. Yet that very assumption relies on the notion that we have a clear idea of what war and/or nonviolence may be, apart from the practices of a community of nonviolence.²¹

This leads to a second reason that Hauerwas rejects Bainton’s approach: it falls woefully short of exploring adequately the reasons why the early church turned away from pacifism at the time of Constantine.

Bainton (Elkhart, Indiana: Distributed by Co-op Bookstore, 1983), *Nevertheless: The Varieties of Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1971), and *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972).

²⁰ See footnote 19 for reference information on these two books.

²¹ Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 118–119.

Bainton mentions the barbarian invasions and the “close association of church and state,” as if the pacifism of the early church was rooted primarily in cultural, sociological, or political considerations. According to Hauerwas and Yoder, however, the stalwart pacifism of the early church was rooted primarily—even exclusively—in theological convictions. These early Christians were determined to be faithful to the clear words of Jesus in the Gospels about turning the other cheek, not resisting those who do evil, and loving one’s enemies just as Jesus loved his enemies. They understood, say Yoder and Hauerwas, that one simply cannot be faithful to the words and example of Jesus—especially his climactic act of non-violence and non-resistance on the cross—and at the same time willingly and knowingly engage in obvious acts of violence.

And so what happened at the time of Constantine, they contend, was not simply an inevitable and theologically acceptable shift in the Christian attitude toward participation in various forms of state-sponsored violence. Rather, what happened was nothing less than apostasy, a great and terrible fall of the church into a way of thinking that mixed and mingled in a kind of syncretistic heresy two radically different kinds of loyalty: loyalty to the state and its desires and demands and loyalty to Christ and his desires and demands. This is what Yoder and Hauerwas refer to as “Constantinianism,” the tragic tendency of the church ever since the time of Constantine to think that its primary job is to try to “control history” and “police or improve society” through control of or cooperation with the state. This understanding of the relationship between church and state, they insist, always involves some degree (and usually a profound degree) of compromise. Also, it almost always involves Christian participation in or support for various forms of violence in clear contradiction to the words and example of Christ. “Put the sword away,” said Jesus to Peter. “That’s not how my kingdom works; that’s not how my people are to conduct themselves in this world over which I am Lord” (see Matthew 26:52–56).

The greatest temptation Jesus himself ever faced, argue Yoder and Hauerwas, was to use force for what he knew better than anyone else was a “good and godly” cause. The agony in Gethsemane was rooted in a demonic temptation to call on his followers to take up the sword or to call on the legions of angels at his disposal to defend the just cause of his kingdom or to cooperate with the “powers that be” of his own day as a way of consolidating his own power, all for the very praiseworthy purpose of establishing God’s kingdom. Christ’s victory consisted in his ability as both God and man to resist that temptation, which meant, of course, refusing to resist the evildoers who nailed him to the cross. It is this same cross

that Jesus calls all of his followers to bear in his name and for the sake of his Gospel, which (as Peter clearly says—see 1 Peter 2:18–24; 3:8–18; 4:1–19; 5:1–11) may well involve suffering violence at the hands of evildoers. But this same Gospel never calls us to engage in violent behavior, even—and especially—at the behest of some self-seeking, power-hungry government which has no vested interest in the cause of Christ’s kingdom.

What Christians need to understand, say Yoder and Hauerwas, is that it is not those who bear arms but rather those who bear crosses for the sake of Christ who are truly working with “the grain of the universe.”²² We Christians are the ones (despite all appearances) who are promised final victory and vindication by God’s power, not by our own power or by our cooperation in un-Christ-like violence on the basis of the interests of some self-seeking state. When we compromise our convictions in order to cooperate with the state, we are showing that we do not really trust God to do what he has promised to do—and what he has already done by raising up Jesus in glory after he faithfully refused to use violence against his enemies and instead willingly surrendered himself up to death, even death on a cross.

This brief summary may help to explain why most critics of Hauerwas and Yoder tend to characterize their pacifism as potentially—or even essentially—sectarian in nature (i.e., as necessarily involving some sort of withdrawal ethic on the part of the church). If “the powers that be” are all basically corrupt and self-seeking, if Christians are not called to support the state or cooperate with the state in any of the various ways that it uses violence to maintain or expand or consolidate its power, then what other choice is left but for the church to retreat into its own little “ghetto” and try as best it can to remain separate from and unstained by the world? In his book *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, Bainton himself acknowledges this as a historical reality.

Pacifism has commonly despaired of the world and dissociated itself either from society altogether, or from political life, and especially from war. The advocates of the just war theory have taken the position that evil can be restrained by the coercive power of the state. The Church should support the state in this endeavor and individual Christians as citizens should fight under the auspices of the state. The crusade belongs to a theocratic view that the Church, even though it be a minority, should impose its will upon a recalcitrant world. Pacifism is thus

²² See the final chapter (“The War of the Lamb”) of Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus* and Hauerwas’s *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001).

often associated with withdrawal, the just war with qualified participation, and the crusade with dominance of the Church over the world.²³

That brings us to a third and crucial reason that Hauerwas rejects the (highly influential) approach of Bainton. Both Yoder and Hauerwas completely reject the notion that the pacifism they espouse involves any kind of “withdrawal ethic.” In fact, just the opposite is true, they say. Christians are not called by God to withdraw from society, they are called to be God’s witnesses in and to a sinful world. But they are to do this not by becoming a part of the world, or being co-opted by worldly causes and governments, or by imitating the politics of the world rooted in a craving for control and the exercise of violence. Rather, they are to bear witness to the world concerning the peaceable kingdom of Jesus Christ by committing themselves wholeheartedly and unreservedly to what Yoder famously called the “politics of Jesus” (“politics” as in polis, city, community). The “politics of Jesus,” according to Yoder and Hauerwas, is really just another name for the church: God’s set-apart people who live as “resident aliens”²⁴ in this world as they bear witness boldly and faithfully and joyfully to the non-violent life and death of Jesus Christ.

The church is to exist in the world as a radically different kind of community, with a radically different set of values and practices. By virtue of its character as a community²⁵ of holy, peaceable, loving, forgiving people, the church bears witness to the world by serving as a contrasting model to the world’s way of “doing politics” on the basis of power and pressure, preference and violence. There is simply no way, according to Hauerwas, that the church can bear witness authentically and meaningfully to the world and at the same time make use of aspects of the politics of the world that compromise that clear words and example of Christ—especially that climactic example of non-violence that lies at the heart of Christianity itself: Christ’s passive and non-resistant submission to death on the cross.

Ultimately, therefore, what makes Hauerwas’s pacifism “tick,” and what makes it unique, is its inseparable connection with the unique person and work of Jesus Christ (as he understands it) and with the peaceable kingdom of Christ as it is exemplified in the body of Christ, the church. And that brings us back full-circle to Hauerwas’s project for reforming

²³ Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 15.

²⁴ See Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

²⁵ See Hauerwas’s early work, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

Christian ethics. Almost 30 years ago, in Luther-like fashion, Hauerwas proposed ten theses for reforming Christian social ethics. These theses were meant as a challenge to the way mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics in the United States understood and practiced “social ethics” at that time, and they continue to stand as a challenge to most “liberal” and “conservative” Christian approaches to “social ethics” today. The theses are sometimes summarized by means of two pithy Hauerwasian assertions, namely: “The church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic,” and “The first political task of the church is to be the church.” The theses have been further developed by Hauerwas (and others) in various ways and forms over the years, but are presented below as they were set forth in his 1981 book *A Community of Character*.

1. *The social significance of the Gospel requires the recognition of the narrative structure of Christian convictions for the life of the church.*

Christian social ethics too often takes the form of principles and policies that are not clearly based on or warranted by the central convictions of the faith. Yet the basis of any Christian social ethic should be the affirmation that God has decisively called and formed a people to serve him through Israel and the work of Christ. The appropriation of the critical significance of the latter depends on the recognition of narrative as a basic category for social ethics.

2. *Every social ethic involves a narrative, whether it is concerned with the formulation of basic principles of social organization and/or with concrete policy alternatives.*

The loss of narrative as a central category for social ethics has resulted in a failure to see that the ways the issues of social ethics are identified—that is, the relation of personal and social ethics, the meaning and status of the individual in relation to the community, freedom versus equality, the interrelation of love and justice—are more a reflection of a political philosophy than they are crucial categories for the analysis of a community’s social ethics. The form and substance of a community is narrative-dependent, and therefore what counts as “social ethics” is a correlative of the content of that narrative.

3. *The ability to provide an adequate account of our existence is the primary test of the truthfulness of a social ethic.*

No society can be just or good that is built on falsehood. The first task of Christian social ethics, therefore, is not to make the “world” better or more just, but to help Christian people form their community consistent with their conviction that the story of Christ is a truthful account of our existence. For as H. R. Niebuhr argued, only when we

know “what is going on,” do we know “what we should do,” and Christians believe that we learn most decisively “what is going on” in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

4. Communities formed by a truthful narrative must provide the skills to transform fate into destiny so that the unexpected, especially as it comes in the form of strangers, can be welcomed as gift.

We live in a world of powers that are not our creation and we become determined by them when we lack the ability to recognize and name them. The Christian story teaches us to regard truthfulness more as a gift than a possession and thus requires that we be willing to face both the possibilities and threats a stranger represents. Such a commitment is the necessary condition for preventing our history from becoming our fate.

5. The primary social task of the church is to be itself—that is, a people who have been formed by a story that provides them with the skills for negotiating the danger of this existence, trusting in God’s promise of redemption.

The church is a people on a journey who insist on living consistent with the conviction that God is the lord of history. They thus refuse to resort to violence in order to secure their survival. The fact that the first task of the church is to be itself is not a rejection of the world (or a withdrawal ethic) but a reminder that Christians must serve the world on their own terms; otherwise the world would have no means to know itself as the world.

6. Christian social ethics can only be done from the perspective of those who do not seek to control national or world history but who are content to live “out of control.”

To do ethics from the perspective of those “out of control” means Christians must find the means to make clear to both the oppressed and the oppressor that the cross determines the meaning of history. Christians should thus provide imaginative alternatives for social policy as they are released from the “necessities” of those that would control the world in the name of security. For to be out of control means Christians can risk trusting in gifts so they have no reason to deny the contingent character of our existence.

7. Christian social ethics depends on the development of leadership in the church that can trust and depend on the diversity of gifts in the community.

The authority necessary for leadership in the church should derive from the willingness of Christians to risk speaking the truth to and hearing the truth from those in charge. In societies that fear the truth,

leadership depends on the ability to provide security rather than the ability to let the diversity of the community serve as the means to live truthfully. Only the latter form of community can afford to have their leaders' mistakes acknowledged without their ceasing to exercise authority.

8. For the church to be, rather than to have, a social ethic means we must recapture the social significance of common behavior, such as acts of kindness, friendship, and the formation of families.

Trust is impossible in communities that always regard the other as a challenge and threat to their existence. One of the most profound commitments of a community, therefore, is providing a context that encourages us to trust and depend on one another. Particularly significant is a community's determination to be open to new life that is destined to challenge as well as carry on the story.

9. In our attempt to control our society Christians in America have too readily accepted liberalism as a social strategy appropriate to the Christian story.

Liberalism, in its many forms and versions, presupposes that society can be organized without any narrative that is commonly held to be true. As a result it tempts us to believe that freedom and rationality are independent of narrative—that is, we are free to the extent that we have no story. Liberalism is, therefore, particularly pernicious to the extent it prevents us from understanding how deeply we are captured by its account of existence.

10. The church does not exist to provide an ethos for democracy or any other form of social organization, but stands as a political alternative to every nation, witnessing to the kind of social life possible for those that have been formed by the story of Christ.

The church's first task is to help us gain a critical perspective on those narratives that have captivated our vision and lives. By doing so, the church may well help provide a paradigm of social relations otherwise thought impossible.²⁶

Obviously, there are many aspects of these theses and of Hauerwas's theology as a whole with which confessional Lutherans will inevitably disagree, some of them rather fundamental—even presuppositional—in nature. Since Hauerwas is not a Lutheran, that should not surprise us. In

²⁶ These are reprinted with a helpful introduction in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 111-115.

my dissertation, I developed a series of ten “Yoderian/Hauerwasian Christological and Ecclesial Presuppositions” and tried to show how those presuppositions differ from Lutheran presuppositions on such central issues as the person and work of Christ, the relationship between justification and sanctification, the nature of the church, the distinction between the two realms, and so on. A discussion of those presuppositions, however, is not the focus of this study.

At the same time, I am convinced that much of what Hauerwas has to say, especially when it comes to questions and challenges pertaining to the life and witness of the church in the world, can be very helpful to us as confessional Lutherans. Hopefully, we can muster the courage and humility to admit that we still have some serious work to do when it comes to fleshing out the practical, ethical, and societal implications of what has been described as a somewhat “impoverished” ecclesiology.²⁷ What follows, then, are a few brief thoughts and words of encouragement in that regard.

First, I think we Lutherans need to take seriously Hauerwas’s valid (if at times overstated) concerns about the dangers of “Constantinianism” and the temptation of competing loyalties, misplaced priorities, and false views of the church’s responsibility for society, even as we guard against dangers on the opposite extreme. Despite The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s generally quietist history as a church body when it comes to social and political ethics and involvement—or perhaps as an overreaction to that quietist history—I fear that even many Lutherans today sometimes succumb to approaches toward social and political ethics that are rooted primarily in Reformed or evangelical perspectives, whether “liberal” or “conservative” in nature. As we navigate through these various tricky and treacherous waters, I think Hauerwas’s warnings against wrong or unhelpful kinds of “political activism” on the part of the church are sometimes very well-placed, even if and when they need to be qualified by Lutheran non-negotiables.

Second, I think we need to take seriously what Hauerwas has to say about the nature of the church’s witness *as church* in and to society as a way of responding to the very real challenge of presenting to the world a radical and peaceable alternative to the world’s violence and chaos, discord and disunity. I think Hauerwas is exactly right when he says that “the first political task of the church is to be the church.” Here Hauerwas’s emphasis on character, community, the virtues, Christian *practices* (not just

²⁷ See, e.g., the various thought-provoking articles in *Concordia Journal* July 2008 and Winter 2009.

beliefs), and the normative (not only salvific) significance of the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ can also be very helpful.²⁸ I think this question is worth asking by congregations, church bodies, and ecclesial institutions: How effectively, as an ecclesial community, are we at demonstrating to the world, by the very character of our community, the peace that the world lacks and that is available only in and through Christ and the church?

In his book *Resident Aliens* Hauerwas identifies three types of churches:

The activist church is more concerned with the building of a better society than with the reformation of the church. Through the humanization of social structures, the activist church glorifies God. It calls on its members to see God at work behind the movements for social change so that Christians will join in movements for justice wherever they find them. It hopes to be on the right side of history, believing that it has the key for reading the direction of history or underwriting the progressive forces of history. The difficulty . . . is that the activist church appears to lack the theological insight to judge history for itself. Its politics becomes a sort of religiously glorified liberalism.

On the other hand we have the conversionist church. This church argues that no amount of tinkering with the structures of society will counter the effects of human sin. The promises of secular optimism are therefore false because they attempt to bypass the biblical call to admit personal guilt and to experience reconciliation to God and neighbor. The sphere of political action is shifted by the conversionist church from without to within, from society to the individual soul. Because this church works only for inward change, it has no alternative social ethic or social structure of its own to offer the world. Alas, the political claims of Jesus are sacrificed for politics that inevitably seems to degenerate into a religiously glorified conservatism.

The confessing church is not a synthesis of the other two approaches, a helpful middle ground. Rather, it is a radical alternative. Rejecting both the individualism of the conversionists and the secularism of the activists and their common equation of what works with what is faithful, the confessing church finds its main political task to lie, not in the personal transformation of individual hearts or the modification of society, but rather in the congregation's determination to worship

²⁸ See, e.g., my review of the book *Preaching the Sermon on the Mount: The World It Imagines*, ed. David Feller and David Bland (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007) in *CTQ* 72:3 (July 2008): 282–284. This book contains a sermon by Hauerwas called “The Way of the Church” and other thought-provoking essays and sermons that reflect many of Hauerwas’s themes and concerns.

Christ in all things. . . The confessing church, like the conversionist church, also calls people to conversion, but it depicts that conversion as a long process of being baptismally engrafted into a new people, an alternative polis, a countercultural social structure called the church. It seeks to influence the world by being the church, that is, by being something the world is not and can never be, lacking the gift of faith and vision, which is ours in Christ. The confessing church seeks the visible church, a place, clearly visible to the world, in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honor the poor, suffer for righteousness, and thereby testify to the amazing community—creating power of God. The confessing church has no interest in withdrawing from the world, but it is not surprised when its witness evokes hostility from the world. . . .

This church knows that its most credible form of witness (and the most “effective” thing it can do for the world) is the actual creation of a living, breathing, visible community of faith. . . . The overriding political task of the church is to be the community of the cross.²⁹

Again, Lutherans will not likely be able to accept everything Hauerwas has to say about what this “confessing church” will look like. But I think there is much here that we can affirm as Lutherans who also take seriously what our own Confessions have to say about the church as God’s holy, set-apart community in the world, about the necessary relationship between the doctrines of justification and sanctification, and about how the two kinds of righteousness go hand in hand, both in our lives as individual Christians and in our life together as a church.

Despite his emphasis on the church as the primary venue for Christian social ethics, there is also something very “vocational” about Hauerwas’s theology that I think most Lutherans will find attractive. In my view, the closest Hauerwas comes to explaining what he actually means by “nonviolence” is an essay called “Explaining Christian Nonviolence” in his 2004 book, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*. At the end of the essay Hauerwas writes:

Advocates of Christian nonviolence betray the very activity about which we care when we direct attention primarily to what we are against. Such a strategy cannot help but give the impression that most of our life is gripped by violence, from which we must try to rescue some small shards of peace. But I believe that our existence is one constituted by peace, God’s peace, and that violence is the exception. That is why it is so important for those of us committed to Christian

²⁹ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 44–47.

nonviolence to work to name for ourselves and our neighbors the peace, the friendships, without which we cannot live. I believe the best essay I have written on peace is called "Taking Time for Peace: The Moral Significance of the Trivial." It is a modest little essay in which I tried to counter the survivalism associated with the work of Jonathan Schell and Gordon Kaufman by calling attention to peaceable activities such as raising lemurs, sustaining universities, having children, and, of course, playing baseball. To be sure, in the face of alleged nuclear destruction these appear trivial or inconsequential activities; but I believe that without them and many other such activities we have no hold on what it means to be nonviolent. If we are as Christians to survive the violent societies that threaten to engulf us, we will do so just to the extent that we discover such worthwhile activities through which we learn not just to be at peace but that we love peace. That is why, contrary to the title of this essay, nonviolence cannot be explained. It can only be shown by the attractiveness of the friendships that constitute our lives.³⁰

I have not said much here about the role of theology in public discourse, Hauerwas does not have much to say about that topic either, at least not as it is typically defined or understood. There is little or no room in Hauerwas's radically Christ-centered, church-centered theology for "public" (i.e., not directly rooted in the church as church) "discourse" (discussion separated from the actual life and practices of the church) about "God" (understood in some generic sense apart from the only true revelation of God in Jesus Christ). He comes closest to addressing this issue directly in his contribution to the Gifford Lectures in 2001, which has been published by Brazos (Grand Rapids) under the title *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*. In the January 2002 issue of *First Things*, R.R. Reno has a very helpful review of this book, and perhaps the best way to bring this essay to a close is by sharing the closing paragraphs of that review:

Sacred politics has always been Hauerwas's preoccupation. His indifferent and inconclusive closing remarks on the role of Christianity in the contemporary university show how much more concerned Hauerwas is with *tikkum olam* (healing the world) than with contemplation. The real emphasis of his conclusion falls on two witnesses to the task of faithful "natural theology": John Howard Yoder and John Paul II. Of course, both no more advance propositions in the discipline of natural theology than does Hauerwas. Instead, both pro-

³⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 183.

vide clarity about how to take responsibility, not *for* the world (that is God's job), but *in* the world. Yoder teaches us that Christianity does not need the world in order to have a body. We are given a body in Jesus Christ. To dwell in him, Yoder insists that we must resist the detaching, distancing, and spiritualizing strategies of worldly accommodation. Thus, one of Hauerwas's great themes is struck. Christianity is at its best when standing in stark contrast to the world. Nothing better hardens and solidifies the faith than galvanizing conflicts with worldly powers. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. . . . The credibility of Christianity depends on the visibility of Christian holiness, not juggling the ever-changing prejudices of intellectual responsibility. In Hauerwas's view, John Paul II teaches the same lesson, but with a twist. For John Paul II, the blood of the martyrs is also the seed of a true humanism. The world, especially our world, needs a weighty and forceful witness of faith. Thus, as John Paul II reminds us, the Church does not need the world in order to have a body, but the world certainly needs the body of the Church in order to be humane.

[In Hauerwas's view] . . . No arguments of natural theology can give stability to modernity. Rather, we need ballast amidst the roiling conflicts of worldly powers. We all feel the need to stand somewhere. This is now evident in the resurgent patriotism that has followed in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. We cannot overcome evil by adopting critical detachment, the stance of anywhere and nowhere. And yet, Jesus did not promise the Holy Spirit to the nations. Only the Church, Hauerwas insists, can secure a fully and finally responsible place to stand. One can be a citizen, just as one can be a critical thinker, or a scientific inquirer. But we can only assume these roles responsibly if we do so in the service of the truth. And as Hauerwas never tires of reminding us, only in the Church can we reliably find the teachings and habits to guide us toward such service.³¹

³¹ R.R. Reno, "Taking Responsibility," *FT* (January 2002): 60–62.

Theological Observer

Faithful Lutheran Pastor Defrocked: Active Persecution by the Church of Sweden

On March 19, 2012, I received notice that my father, Pastor Jan-Erik Appell, was defrocked by the Church of Sweden on account of his relationship to the Mission Province, a group of confessional Lutheran pastors and congregations within the Church of Sweden.

For the past twenty years, the Church of Sweden bureaucracy has pursued a strategy of isolating and marginalizing the small confessional remnant within its ranks. Those in leadership hoped these bothersome “reactionaries” would simply succumb to pressure or die off without others to take up the witness of confessional Lutheranism, largely because new ordinations of confessional men have been blocked since 1993. This strategy was jeopardized by the establishment of the Mission Province in 2005, which reopened a path to ordination for confessional candidates. For seven years, the Church of Sweden, with the cooperation of the Swedish media, largely ignored those in the Mission Province and hoped they would fade away. Lately, partly in response to pressures from impatient radicals, the Church of Sweden has abandoned this hands-off approach in favor of more active persecution.

Some background for these actions that have led to the current situation may be of some help to those not familiar with the situation in Sweden. It is perhaps difficult for Americans who live among a multitude of church denominations to understand why confessional Lutherans in Sweden are so determined to fight for the reformation of the Church of Sweden. In short, until the 19th century the Church of Sweden was the one and the only church in this nation. This dates back to the time when the gospel reached Sweden in the ninth century through the efforts of St Ansgar, archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen and missionary to the northern countries. At first, the church was under papal jurisdiction, but she gradually separated from the Roman Catholic Church as the Swedish church adopted the ideas of the Lutheran Reformation. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church that had existed in Sweden since the ninth century became one that was evangelical and Lutheran. It kept its Lutheran identity after the Reformation despite attempts from both Rome and Calvinistic circles to change it. In the 17th century, King Gustavus Adolphus secured the place of Lutheran churches of the North through successful warfare during the Thirty Years War. For centuries our forefathers made great sacrifices to promote Christ’s kingdom throughout the whole country (the so-called folk-church), to catechize the country through the establishment of schools, to defend orthodoxy and Lutheran worship, to build churches, and to make sure there would be a Lutheran church standing for their great-

grandchildren in the 21st century—a mother ready to give birth to a generation of the baptized, to which I myself belong. In Sweden, we consider baptismal water to be thicker than blood. The Church of Sweden is our church—a gift, a responsibility, and nowadays also a tremendous grief.

Especially in the 20th and 21st centuries, the Church of Sweden was “occupied” by less orthodox bishops and theologians and abandoned Scriptural authority on some key matters, specifically on the question on women’s ordination and gender-neutral marriages. Today all sorts of shocking heresies and religious fantasies are allowed. What does not seem to be allowed is confessional pastors. It is impossible for those who oppose women’s ordination to be ordained, to become a senior pastor, or to become a bishop. In some dioceses, this is also the case for those who refuse officiate at the “marriage” of homosexuals. The remnant that held office prior to the introduction of these policies are increasingly marginalized. They are under threat to keep them silent and obedient to the new masters. Very few local congregations would call a confessional pastor, since church boards often are ruled by “politically correct” people.

As part of the effort to save and reform the Church of Sweden, the Mission Province was established to be “a non-geographical diocese in the tradition of the Church of Sweden,” with its own bishops and ordinations of pastors, congregations, and oversight. The purpose was and is to secure the essentials, the marks of the church. The established Church of Sweden refused to acknowledge this “independent diocese,” and the Mission Province was forced out of the structure and hierarchies of the Church of Sweden. Pastors involved in the establishing of the Mission Province were defrocked. Despite being “excluded,” the Mission Province has kept good relations with confessional pastors and congregations in the Church of Sweden, because they see a common mission: being the church for God’s people in Sweden and those not yet gathered into the church.

Now bishops of the Church of Sweden seem determined to end even these relations. They are acting as if the Mission Province is a group of people to be completely avoided. On February 20, the bishop of the Gothenburg Diocese, Per Eckerdal, issued a decree warning “all pastors in Gothenburg Diocese” against conducting services or administering other “ecclesiastical acts” (e.g. weddings, funerals, baptisms) in conjunction with Mission Province congregations or koinonias (i.e., worshiping fellowships that are typically composed of persons who are still members of a Church of Sweden congregation, but who seek more confessional worship and teaching). The bishop declared that such cooperation would constitute a breach of the ordination vows that would be considered so serious as to require that the pastor (or deacon) be defrocked (i.e., authorization to act as a pastor in Church of Sweden is revoked). The Mission Province is specifically singled out by name and is the only church

body targeted. On the other hand, the bishop specifically states that its pastors are authorized to conduct services or ecclesiastical acts in conjunction with member churches of the Lutheran World Federation, the Methodist Church in Sweden, member churches of the Porvoo Communion, and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). Many have reacted strongly against this “anti-ecumenical” position from the newly elected bishop and find it contradictory.

In the Diocese of Lund, Bishop Antje Jackelén, a former professor at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, investigated my father, Jan-Erik Appell, who is serving congregations in the Mission Province, and defrocked him on March 19. My father had served as a pastor in the Church of Sweden for 35 years before taking a call to this congregation in the Mission Province. He was defrocked on the charge of dual loyalty (i.e., loyalty to both Bishop Jackelén and the Mission Province bishop). The inquiry was delayed due to the fact that there are several other pastors in the Church of Sweden who have two ecclesiastical supervisors, one who is the state church bishop and the other from the Mission Province or other organizations/leaders/bishops. Some of the delay may also have taken place because my father is a loyal and long-serving pastor who is also the chairman of Kyrkliga Förbundet (The Church Federation), which sponsors the Lutheran School of Theology in Gothenburg, the Gothenburg Lutheran High School, the confessional weekly magazine *Church and People*, and other leading confessional Lutheran institutions in Sweden.

Fredrik Sidenvall, rector of the Lutheran High School in Gothenburg, is quoted in the weekly newspaper of the Church of Sweden saying that Bishop Eckerdal’s actions are signs of a dying organization. In the life cycle of an organization, Sidenvall said, “The last phase is focused on conflict and turf wars.” A small but faithful group of confessing Christians is treated as less important than the larger society. Although the Church of Sweden has conformed itself to current Swedish social attitudes, confessional Lutherans within her are increasingly feeling misled and betrayed.

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**A Whole New Can of Worms:
A Statement of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary
on Religious Liberty**

Standing before an assembly of princes at the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther famously said, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against my conscience. May God help me. Amen." When he spoke those words, the blessed Reformer knew that his life was on the line. His strong defense embodies not only the courageous spirit of Lutheranism but of Christianity throughout the ages. Indeed, the apostle Peter himself, upon threat of imprisonment and death proclaimed, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). This means that while we honor those in authority, our first allegiance must be to our Creator. Christians understand their duty is to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25).

Christians gratefully recognize that temporal authority is a gift from God. We heed well the words of St. Paul who writes, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1). Our Lord Himself did not come to establish an earthly kingdom but a heavenly one. While the government bears the sword, our only weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Christians did indeed come to "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17:18), but their purpose has never been to foment revolution. Rather, we come to preach a message of forgiveness, a crucified and risen Savior, who has won for us salvation and who has taught us that every human life is precious to God.

Thus, as Christians and in accordance with Scripture, we pray for those in authority. We thank God for the gift of governance, and in all things we strive to act in accordance with the law. We seek in every way to be good citizens of this land and to fulfill our civic duties. Still, we must also say to our leaders and to the world that we are also subject to another law and answer to a higher court. We confess that on the last day Christ will come to judge us all according to His holy law. This law manifests itself in our conscience by which all people act according to their perception of what is right and wrong (Romans 2:14-15). The conscience is the internal law, as it is written in our hearts. It is our perception of God's will. Now, it is true that our conscience may be uninformed or ill-informed. As Christians, we recognize that the conscience can err and, therefore, must be informed by God's Word so that it may conform to God's will. It is true that on certain ethical issues people of good will come to different conclusions. In the New Testament, we see instances of some who thought that eating meat sacrificed to the idols was a sin. Whether or not such eating was a sin was open to debate. What was not open to debate

was the fact that to go against one's conscience is always a sin. To go against conscience is to say within oneself, "I will disobey God. My will, not His, be done." For this reason, we must be especially respectful of conscience, for in doing so we show respect for the integrity and dignity of one another.

Now we come to the present day debate brought on by the "women's preventive care" mandate from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius issued this mandate with the endorsement of President Obama. According to this mandate, Roman Catholic institutions, including hospitals, schools, and charities, will have to pay for both contraceptives and abortifacients. Some have tried to turn this into a debate on women's rights and their access to reproductive services. And yet, we should be clear, this is not the issue.

This has been made clear by our Synod President, whose bold words echo those of Martin Luther. Appearing before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on February 16, 2012, Dr. Matthew Harrison, President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), testified, "The conscience is a holy thing," and then added, "We fought for a free conscience, and we won't give it up without a fight."

To some it may seem unusual to hear such words offered up by a Lutheran pastor in defense of a presumably Roman Catholic teaching. Now, we should say without hesitation that as Lutherans we stand firmly against abortion and recognize it as a grave evil and a national tragedy. On this position we are in full agreement with the Roman Catholic Church. We who proclaim Christ as the life of the world hold all life precious, from conception to natural death. Yet, there is still another issue which is at play, namely, that of conscience and of the religious liberty proclaimed in the Constitution of the United States.

As LCMS Lutherans, we operate preschools, elementary schools, and high schools. We take pride in our university system as well as our seminaries, and we perform countless works of mercy through our many charitable organizations. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's World Relief and Human Care brings needed supplies and resources to victims of famines and floods. At the grass roots level, Lutheran congregations operate food and clothing banks, provide shelters for the homeless, hope centers for the abused, and medical care to the indigent. Through these and so many other ways, we express our Christian faith and bring Christ's love to our neighbor.

According to this new ruling of the HHS, all employers will be forced to provide not only contraceptives but also drugs that induce abortion. Churchly institutions that do not serve primarily members of their own church would be subject to this new ruling, except with one "accommodation." This accommodation would allow churchly institutions to opt out of paying for this

service, with the proviso that their insurance carriers would then pay for these things themselves, providing them at no cost to those covered by the institution's policy. Christians must recognize that this accommodation is not enough. Rather than an expression of freedom, the mandate is coercive. Indeed, the very idea of an "accommodation" is troubling. Thomas Jefferson asserted that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. Unalienable means that these rights cannot be given, given up, or taken from us. According to our nation's own founding documents, the government has no right to pass laws that would abridge the exercise of our religious freedom. As Christians, we recognize that religious liberty is a gift from God. Our own church, the LCMS, was founded by men and women who left their homeland so that they could exercise their religion freely and in accordance with their conscience. And we are grateful for all the men and women who have fought to preserve this same religious freedom.

According to this unconstitutional mandate, Christians who own insurance companies will be forced to offer contraceptives and abortifacients. Christian institutions will be forced to buy insurance from companies that will also have to provide their workers contraceptives and abortifacients. While we do not share with the Roman Catholic Church the same teaching on contraceptives, we do honor their right, according to the First Amendment, to practice their beliefs according to their conscience. Furthermore, we do stand with them entirely on the matter of abortifacients, which we hold to be the taking of human life. We fear that human life itself is being treated like a commodity. We are concerned with a mindset that thinks of human beings as a commodity, rather than as a precious good and a source of blessing in and of itself. At stake is the very dignity of our humanity.

Furthermore, this mandate from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is by no means an isolated incident, but is part of a troubling trend in which governmental entities are demanding that religious institutions abandon their own biblical principles or else discontinue their works of charity. For instance, Christian adoption agencies are already being coerced into providing adoption services for same-sex couples. Due to conscience informed by biblical values, some agencies refuse, and as a result, adoption agencies are closed down, children are not adopted into loving families and the whole of society suffers. Terrible precedents have been set and, if allowed to stand, will forever alter the landscape of our society. Accordingly, we must ask some fundamental questions as to what type of society we wish for our children and grandchildren. Do we want to live in a world where social activities informed by religious conscience are systematically exterminated? Do we want to live in a world where the social fabric is torn apart, and an overreaching government harasses the very people who knit together our society through acts of charity and mercy? Do we want the public landscape

wiped clean of religious hospitals, schools and charitable organizations?

The situation is critical. If this mandate is allowed to stand, the world will become a poorer place, those in need will needlessly suffer, and our own message of Christ's love will be silenced. This mandate, and others like it, must be resisted.

What then can we, as Christians, do? For one, we must stand in solidarity with those under assault. As citizens of this nation, we must remind our leaders of the First Amendment, which states that Congress shall make no law that prohibits the free exercise of religion. We must teach our people that we have a right to life that comes not from the government, but from God. We must support those who put themselves on the line in defense of this liberty. And we must ourselves also be willing to stand up and pay the price of our convictions, whatever that price may be. While we do all this, we will continue to be good citizens. We will continue to engage in acts of mercy. We will continue to offer up prayers and supplications on behalf of our nation and its leaders, even as we pray that they would rescind this mandate. So, finally, we say with St. Paul, may we "always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man" (Acts 24:16). May God grant us wisdom and courage in the days ahead.

[This statement was adopted by the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on February 21, 2012. The Editors]

Book Reviews

***St. Paul's Ephesus. Texts and Archaeology.* By Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008. 289 + xxi pages. Paperback, \$29.95.**

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor of the École Biblique (Jerusalem) does for Ephesus what previously he did for Corinth in his *St. Paul's Corinth. Texts and Archaeology* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002). Because Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth (Acts 18:11) and possibly three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31; cf. two years and three months, 19:8, 10), attention paid to these particular cities seems warranted. The book is useful for scholars working on Paul, or for travelers who intend to visit the ancient site of Ephesus (cf. archaeological site plan, 189). A spectacular color photo of Ephesus's theater adorns the book's front cover, and Murphy-O'Connor provides Luke's account of the riot of the silversmiths (Acts 19:23-41; cf. 92-95). Indeed, the shout "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" rocked the great theater at Ephesus for two hours (Acts 19:34) while Paul tried to appear before the crowd. But the disciples would not let him. Imagine.

Part 1 (The Ancient Texts, 5-180) consists of the testimony of nineteen ancient historians and seven poets and novelists, spanning more than 600 years (from ca. 484 BC to AD 212). Author chapters follow a predictable pattern: first, a brief paragraph locating the ancient author historically; then, translated texts featuring various remarkable aspects of Ephesus; and finally, extremely erudite paragraphs by Murphy-O'Connor connecting the author's testimony to other ancient authors or to modern scholarship (cf. Bibliography, 262-268). Part 2 consists of two longer chapters focusing on St. Paul, first, The Center of Ephesus in 50 C.E. (183-200) featuring a walk-through of the city from Paul's point-of-view and, second, Paul's Ministry in Ephesus (201-245). In the second of the two chapters it comes out that Murphy-O'Connor believes Paul composed the so-called "prison epistles" (Philippians, Colossians, Philemon) from *Ephesus*, not Rome—even though, as all acknowledge, there are no explicit references to an Ephesian imprisonment (see J.G. Nordling, *Philemon* [St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2004] 7). Ephesians would be the fourth letter typically assigned to the "prison" category but, ironically, Murphy-O'Connor cites not a single passage from that letter (see the gaping hole in the New Testament Index, 288). He obviously buys into the theory that canonical Ephesians is deutero-Pauline, though once acknowledges that "the basis of Ephesians was a genuine Pauline letter" (232)—a weak admission. Curiously also Murphy-O'Connor supposes Luke's account of the riot contains too many "loose ends and contradictions" to be taken seriously (94), a charge leveled against no other testimony.

Despite these weaknesses, I thoroughly enjoyed *St. Paul's Ephesus*. No other book provides as thorough a picture of the sprawling Artemision

(Temple to Artemis) and the threat this enormous structure would have posed to Paul—or rather, I should say, the threat Paul and his determined Christians clearly posed to *it!* (200). In Paul’s day the Artemision seemed ageless, invincible, prestigious, and above all, beautiful (199–200)—one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (160, 162), in fact. But on account of Christianity’s gospel that great temple was stripped of all her glory and irretrievably lost to the ages until Englishman John Turtle Wood happened upon a portion of the Processional Way of Artemis on New Year’s Day, 1870 (21). This led in turn to the exhumation of a temple foundation “under eight meters of alluvial deposit” (21). *Sic semper gloria mundi*. Also, Murphy-O’Connor’s prose frequently packs a potent punch: “crack the carapace of their complacency” (242, of the Corinthians’ response to Paul’s “Severe Letter”) is one of the finest sentences I have ever read in a scholarly work.

John G. Nordling

***St. Peter: The Underestimated Apostle.* By Martin Hengel. Translated by Thomas H. Trapp. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. 161 pages. Paperback, \$18.00.**

The Lutheran Church’s fondness for the writings of St. Paul runs deep, and understandably so. Paul offers not only the clearest description of justification by faith, but he himself exemplified a spirit of courage and the willingness to stand up to authority, even authority within the church. Paul is for Lutheranism a theological genius, as well as a heroic character to which we aspire. Peter, on the other hand, is often treated as a bumbler, the example of a leader who too often looks before he leaps. He is little credited as a theologian, and perhaps thought of as only a megaphone for the early church.

Hengel, as the title of this book suggests, will have none of this. He sees in Peter an underappreciated leader and a theologian of genius, an organizer and a mission strategist. Hengel wonderfully pours through and digs under the texts of the New Testament to paint for us a vibrant picture of Peter and his seminal and pervasive influence. Peter is for Hengel *the* foundational apostle. He notes, for instance, that in Matthew Peter appears as “*the only authoritative disciple figure*” (25). Peter so dominates the gospel of Matthew that other figures tend to fade into the background, so much so that James and John are only named a few times, and always in relationship to Peter, who is portrayed as the most prominent. Mark is shown further to be Peter’s disciple, as well as his spokesman.

Hengel proceeds to show how Peter played the role of the “rock” or foundational apostle during “the entire thirty-five years of his activity, from his call to his martyrdom in Rome” (100). Drawing upon material from the Book of Acts, as well as the epistles, Hengel argues that Peter was in fact the

prominent leading theologian of the early church. The earliest teaching concerning Baptism, Jesus' Messiahship, and the meaning of the Lord's Supper can be traced back to Peter. As Hengel writes, "He would have played a decisive role, if not the decisive role, in the development of the earliest kerygma" (88). Hengel, working like a detective, lays bare the evidence that Peter first led the way in establishing gentile missions, while at the same time exhibiting special care for the church in Jerusalem. Now, much of Hengel's argument is admittedly by inference and induction, but the evidence is powerful. The early church's success was no accident, and Peter was the church's leader. Paul's missionary work does not begin in a vacuum. Peter's missionary influence is great, extending from Antioch to Corinth and beyond. The very fact of the church's early success attests to Peter's role as a theologian, preacher, and organizer.

Finally, we can only wholeheartedly agree with Hengel, who summarizes the situation this way: "Both Peter and Paul were premier—in fact, unique—early Christian teachers; we thank both of them for their decisive content of their apostolic witness, which Paul conveys by means of his letters and which Peter provides for us through the Synoptic Gospels, especially Mark and Luke" (102). And, as Hengel notes, Luke masterfully shows in his two-volume work how the two belong together, Peter showing the way, and Paul taking the baton by taking the Christian movement forward. Peter and Paul, as Hengel demonstrates, belong forever together, and in that order.

Peter J. Scaer

Luther's Works, Sermons V (Selected Sermons). American Edition, volume 58. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010. 520 Pages. Hardcover, \$40.00.

One of the many ways that young preachers become faithful Gospel centered preachers is by reading sound Lutheran sermons of more experienced pastors. In this line of thought, a great gift has been given to the church, especially for pastors, in the new American Edition of *Luther's Works* volume on Luther's Sermons. This collection of works is a compilation of Luther's sermons from 1539 to his death in 1546.

These sermons portray Luther at the end of his life as the great reformer remembering his work, but also looking forward to the future of the Gospel in Germany. These sermons hearken back to the catechetical teachings of the late 1520s as Luther strengthens a church being attacked on every side. One of the clearest examples of this is the set of three sermons on the Baptism of Christ (all based on the text in Matthew's Gospel), where Luther takes great strides to teach that Christ's Baptism is the Christian's Baptism (362). These sermons are a

wonderful example of how a pastor can be both catechetical and have the voice of proclamation for the forgiveness of sins in his sermons.

I would encourage any Lutheran layman to own this volume and read it weekly. It is absolutely necessary for any Lutheran pastor's library. The texts are a faithful translations filled with helpful and clear introductions. However, the greatest gift this volume has to offer is the clear proclamation of the Gospel that Luther so boldly asserted until the day he died.

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***Theological Commonplaces. Vol. XXVI/1. On the ecclesiastical ministry, part one.* By Johann Gerhard. Translated by Richard J. Dinda, edited with annotations by Benjamin T. Mayes. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011. 346 pages. Hardcover, \$54.99.**

C.F.W. Walther once remarked that, within the discipline of dogmatics, Johann Gerhard's *Loci Theologici* was "the most excellent and complete, both in contents and form, that has been produced within this department of the Christian religion, and will remain until the last day the model for all who make attempts in this sphere" (quoted in H. Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd ed. [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1899], 668). I totally agree with Walther, after browsing through the first four volumes released in the C.P.H. edition and carefully reading through this fifth volume "On the ecclesiastical ministry."

This volume is the most thorough treatment of the public ministry that I have encountered in many years of ministry and study. The chief issues treated by Gerhard include: the ministry as an "order" within the church, the three estates in the church, biblical and historical terminology of the ministry, the ancient and perpetual existence of the ministry, the divine promises concerning the preservation of the ministry, the necessity of the ministry, replies to those who reject its necessity, the divine cause of the ministry, what a "call" is, the necessity of the call, the distinction between mediate and immediate calls, how one should discern between immediate calls and the claims of fanatics, that mediate calls are no less divine than immediate calls, the rights of bishops and patrons in the call, things to avoid in the calling of ministers, the casuistry of the call, the call of Luther, the doctoral degree, whether ordination is necessary, whether ordination is a sacrament, the examination of candidates, the transfer and removal of ministers, the qualifications for ministerial candidates, the ordination of women, and the congregational flock.

Let's compare this topic in Gerhard to the same in the standard Missouri Synod dogmatics, Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* (German ed., 3:501-534; English ed., 3:439-472). Gerhard's primary opponents are, on the one hand, Roman Catholic theologians—chiefly Robert Cardinal Bellarmine (1542-1621), and on the other hand, Anabaptists, Socinians (called "Photinians" here), and Valentin Weigel (1533-88; a Lutheran with pantheist and theosophic ideas). Pieper's primary opponents are, on the one hand, Wilhelm Löhe (1808-72) and Theodor Kliefoth (1810-95), and on the other hand, Johann Höfling (1802-53). Pieper's chief polemical goal in his treatment of this topic was to defend C.F.W. Walther's position against Löhe and Höfling (see Pieper, English ed., 3:449 n. 9).

I do not believe that Pieper and Gerhard are in disagreement in the topic of the public ministry, but there are obvious differences of emphases, due to their polemical opponents and developments in theological method after Gerhard. Gerhard died the year that Descartes published his *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting Reason* (1637), with subsequent influence on all Christian dogmatics. Pieper's concern to defend lay preaching (English ed., 3:449) is not found in Gerhard, while Gerhard more thoroughly plumbs the biblical texts related to the public ministry. Pieper will always be invaluable for his defense of Lutheran theology against rationalism and its 19th century heirs, but with regard to the perennial topic of the public ministry, Gerhard is more useful.

Lutheran professors who teach systematic theology and pastoral theology should seriously consider using this volume of Gerhard as a required text for all M.Div. students. Lutheran pastors—whether liberal or conservative, North American, European, or post-colonial—will find that this book of Gerhard defends their office against all threats. Any Lutheran pastor who cares about his job should buy this book and read it with care. He will find many comforts and consolations, not the least of which is that his work is God's work.

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***The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way.* By Michael Horton. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2011. 1052 Pages. Hardcover, \$49.99.**

The Christian Faith with nearly 1,000 pages plus a glossary and four indices follows traditional Reformed outlines. No surprises. Elegantly presented. Horton's conversational writing style puts complex ideas within the readers' grasp. Contemporary theologians are engaged throughout. Prolegomena is entitled "Knowing God: The Presupposition of Theology," followed

by the doctrine of God under the title of the "God Who Lives." Creation, the third part, comes under the title of "God Who Creates" with subsections on "The Decree: Trinity and Predestination," providence, humanity and the fall. Christology properly begins with a survey of quests for the historical Jesus and comes under the title "God Who Rescues." Part Five, "God Who Reigns in Grace" covers a several topics beginning with "Christ's Presence in the Spirit." "Union with Christ" precedes forensic justification. Lutherans see it the other way around. Forty pages cover baptism and the Lord's Supper. Questions at the end of each part serve classroom purposes. In a mini-prolegomena Horton lays out religious possibilities for human beings. For pure secularists, facts are self-contained with nothing behind them and for others meaning to the raw data is provided by philosophies that birth ideologies. Christianity offers a competing metanarrative or a counterdrama, responding to God's acts in history. The authenticity of Christianity depends a non-self-contradictory canon. Well, maybe, but maybe not.

Christology is as good a place as any to enter the conversation. Divine and human natures are united in the one person of Jesus, a *tertium*, a third factor. Turn this around, Jesus is the "I" of the gospels, who engages in divine and human acts. For Lutherans the "I" in the mouth of Jesus is God. God almost becomes man, but not quite. Horton does not cover up Reformed Lutheran differences on Christology. In good Reformed fashion the infinite God cannot be contained by the finite. Most of the deity, the *extra Calvinisticum*, remains outside of Jesus. God's infinity, majesty, transcendentalism must be preserved and cannot be compromised by a complete incarnation. God is too big to be confined by the man Jesus, and Jesus is not big enough to confine God (476–479). Divine sovereignty, as philosophically defined by the Reformed, is the norm. If God cannot be fully involved in Jesus, neither can he be in sacraments or, for that matter, the Scriptures, in which he condescends to speak to us in what Calvin called "baby talk." God and man are separated from each other not only by sin, the Lutheran view, but as infinite creator and finite creature, a philosophical chasm bridged by Jesus as the mediator. The Holy Spirit, who has the transcendental attributes denied to the man Jesus, becomes the Jesus-substitute in dealing with humanity. Instead of getting Jesus, one gets the Spirit or at best Christ's divine nature as an *Ersatz*. Bait and switch. Not unexpected are frequent references to covenant with one replacing another, i.e., Adamic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, redemption, etc. Support for the Reformed view of covenant is found in Hittite and other ancient Near Eastern treaties in which terms for a vassal are set down by the suzerain, an absolute despot who mirrors God in his absolute sovereignty (151, 155). Horton does not deviate from classical Reformed thought, e.g., divine providence preserves the canon. Here is something to think about: "There can be no covenant without a canon or canon without a covenant" (155). But is this so? From Adam until the time of Moses or from Jesus to the first book of the New Testament, there was no canon, unless oral tradition was canon, a term that

ordinarily refers to a collection of writings. To support his covenant-canon paradigm for understanding the Scriptures, Horton cites the United States Constitution as a covenant canon. Add to this the Mayflower Compact. Cited are Luther, Chemnitz, and John Theodore Mueller, whose *Christian Dogmatics* was once a standard LCMS college textbook, though never regarded as a bone fide dogmatics. Francis Pieper's three-volume *Christian Dogmatics*, long-time standard for LCMS theology, merits a footnote in Horton's discussion of the Lutheran view on the Lord's Supper (805–807).

With Horton's appreciation for the late Robert D. Preus's defense of biblical authority and with his engagement with LCMS clergy on his radio show White Horse Inn and magazine *Modern Reformation*, it might appear that Lutherans and Reformed are two battalions of the same army marching under a common banner; for Horton this would be the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Horton's dogmatics shows that Lutherans and the Reformed live in different universes, not as allies but opponents. That being said, Horton's *Christian Faith* will serve well for Lutherans who want to be up-to-date on a contemporary expression that does not compromise traditional Reformed theology. At least Lutherans can become better equipped to avoid being swallowed up by it. Beginning after Luther's death with the Crypto-Calvinist heresy on the Wittenberg faculty, the defection of the rulers of Brandenburg and Prussia beginning in the 17th century, to the Leuenberg Agreement in Europe and more recent ELCA alliances with Reformed church bodies, there are no foolproof inoculations against Reformed infections into the body of Lutheran doctrine.

David P. Scaer

***The Repression of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania during the Stalinist Era.* By Darius Petkūnas. Klaipėda: Klaipėdos Universitetas, 2011. 255 pages. Hardcover.**

It is important to know modern *church* history. I do not mean the history of recent institutional and bureaucratic activity. That is the stuff of what Jesus once said, "The world may pass away, but my word will not pass away." Modern *church* history has to do with the deep, fundamental substance of truth, that without which the church herself would not exist. That the *church* exists and has existed in our modern world is an important lesson. In this case, the lesson concerns the confessional integrity and martyrdom of thousands in Lithuania, one of the Baltic states.

As the church has known from her inception, confession and martyrdom are of the *esse* of the church. They are so because the cross of Christ is so. In this book, Darius Petkūnas, the most important young theologian of the Lutheran church in Lithuania, has given a report of how the cross of Christ was experienced by Lutheran pastors and laypeople during the demonic times of

Stalinist repression. Lithuania is a predominately Roman Catholic country with strong historical and religious bonds with Poland. As one might expect, the anti-Christian wrath of communist overlords had to deconstruct the leadership and authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps that is the major story of Stalinist oppression against the church of Lithuania, but it is not the only story. Petkūnas tells the story of the small Lutheran church in Lithuania and her special plight during these years. It is a story worth telling. It is a story which we, as Lutherans, must see to be our story.

Petkūnas summarizes the book's narrative in the Preface:

All churches in Lithuania suffered repression during that time, but the Lutheran Church was singled out for special attention, because it had for so long been considered by many to be a "German Church." More than 70 percent of the Lutheran churches in Lithuania were closed or demolished. No other church lost so high a percentage of its houses of worship and other properties. In addition, the members of the Lutheran Church were often considered to be Germans in heart and mind and were treated as such, even if they were in fact native Lithuanians. When the directive was issued by the NKGB-NKVD in 1944 that any and all Germans in Lithuania were to be deported, Lithuanian local communist officials turned their attention to the Lutherans and deported many of them to Tajikistan, where a large number of them perished. The results of this deportation were particularly devastating in Suvalkija where the Lutherans were afraid to disclose their Lutheran identity for fear of reprisals. For that reason only a single organized parish in Sudargas was able to survive.

One can see from this summary that the hatreds of World War II were an element in the repression of the Lutheran Church. Yet, in the attempt to cleanse the Baltics of its German population and German loyalties, it is striking how xenophobic and thuggishly crude the communist leaders and operatives were. [During my own tenure as Rector of the Luther Academy in Riga, Latvia, I heard many stories of repression. A common aspect was the brutish stupidity of communist functionaries. Yet they had power of the state.]

The book divides into three chapters. In the first Petkūnas briefly summarizes a theme underlying the whole of the narrative, "repression as a factor in governmental attempts to control the church" (15-19). Perhaps intentionally, only one photo occurs in these pages, that of Bronius Leonas-Pušinas, Commissioner of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (1948-1957). He will become a major figure in the persistent attempt to deconstruct the religious authority of the churches in Lithuania. He is not unattractive, thick in the neck, round head, clean cut with tidy mustache, suit and tie. But the eyes, staring straight ahead, betray a fixed, inflexible intent. They have neither light in them, nor humor, nor mercy. This is the image of the common person, without moral anchor, whose utterly average face reflects the sheer banality that was communist belief.

Chapter Two, "The Repression of Members of the Church" (20–64), describes the special circumstances after WWII which made the Lutheran populace of Lithuania especially open to communist repression. "The repression of ethnic Lithuanian Lutherans in 1945 was often linked to the fact that they were members of the Lutheran Church. In the mind of communist officials, as well as the Lithuanian people in general, the Lutheran Church was a 'German Church' and therefore it could be assumed that its members were 'Germans'" (20). Most of the chapter, however, details the plans and execution of the deportation of 1945 which was especially devastating to the Lutheran population of Lithuania. Here is a description:

People began to arrive at the collection center in Kaunas on April 25. Bartašiūnas complained that the railway agency had not supplied a sufficient number of cars. Finally on April 29 forty-eight cattle cars, providing space for 742 deportees, were coupled together in Kaunas. The next day the deportees were loaded into the cars, but the train could not depart because the 70 deportees from Tauragė had not yet arrived. They came only in the early morning of May 3rd. Train No. 48066 left Kaunas on May 3, at 9:30 AM, according to the report of Lieutenant-Colonel Svechnikov to Colonel Chechev of the Vilnius NKVD (47). [NKVD refers to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. Juozas Bartašiūnas was People's Commissar for NKVD of the Lithuanian SSR.]

Petkūnas informs us that in all there were 948 people: 263 were children under age 16, 136 were over age 56, 220 middle age women, and 329 middle age men.

The main of the book (Chapter Three), however, tells the story of repressive measures against the clergy. There is a section on the persecution directed at the priests of the Roman Catholic Church. But clearly the primary interest of Petkūnas is to tell the stories of five Lutheran pastors who in one way or another fell victim to communist repression. Here are the names of five Lutheran confessors and martyrs: Gustavas Rauskinas, Jurgis Gavėnis, Jonas Mizaras, Erikas Leijeris, Jonas Kalvanas. What marks each of these pastors is their steadfast courage in doing what they could to protect their people and their parishes. "What they could" was not always the same, and it is clear that at times not all agreed that "what they could" was good and beneficial to the total cause. The subtitles speak volumes: Jonas Mizaras—Open Protester against Soviet Oppression; Erikas Leijeris—Bold Witness and Uncompromising Leader; Jonas Kalvanas—a Pastor under Constant Surveillance. When death stalks the street-corner, some maneuver more nimbly than others. For me the most compelling story was that of Erikas Leijeris. He made every effort to be pastor under both German and Russia tyrannies. Yet his pastoral activities attracted mistrust and eventually he was sent to the Gulag (1950): "On October 24, 1950 Leijeris arrived at the Gulag, which was situated in a forested area remote from any village, identified only as Suslov station, Krasnoyarsk railroad, Kemerov region" (173). There Pastor Leijeris was known for his good humor and

hospitality. One picture shows him with others at "Christmas Eve dinner in the barracks" (174). If you wish to know the heart of a true martyr, read this:

Leijeris was able to see the hand of God at work for good in his incarceration. On March 22, 1951 he wrote that this was now the second Easter he had celebrated in captivity. He stated that, although his conditions were harsh, he willingly and faithfully submitted himself to life in prison in obedience to God's will. 'In God's hands are the fate of nations and of the solitary soul and he brings all things to good effect.' On April 16 he wrote that for the past several days he had awakened early before the general wake-up call and gone outside to set his face towards his fatherland and to pray fervently but silently, opening his captive heart to God. On May 7 he wrote that the hardships he was enduring had sharpened his vision, like glasses when one with impaired vision was now able to see clearly what before had been indistinct. In this way hardships and tribulations strengthen faith and deepen love (177).

"At 12:00 noon on December 31, 1951, the doctors pronounced Leijeris dead." Petkūnas tells us that all the Lithuanians and Latvians with others accompanied the body to the gates of the camp. The body itself was carried into the forest and buried in "some unknown place, in an unmarked grave" (179).

The prose of Petkūnas is matter-of-fact throughout. After all, this study is published as an academic product, recommended by the Faculty of Humanities, University of Klaipėda, and read by two respected professors of the University of Helsinki (Jouko Talonen, Mikko Ketola). Yet, the material speaks for itself, and the reader knows that Dr. Petkūnas is not neutral. On the cover is a picture described as follows: "Pastor Erikas Leijeris defiantly holds a Divine Service in front of the closed Pakruojis church, 1948." *That is what the Kingdom of God looks like in the world of communist Lithuania.*

During the course of the narrative we meet a number of communist commissars: Bronius Leonas-Pušinis, Aleksandras Gudaitis-Guzevičius, Antanas Sniečkus, Alfonsas Gailevičius, Juozas Bartašiūnas. These are names of men who made evil possible. In the short Epilogue (234-240) Petkūnas speaks of the futility of these men: "The communists soon came to understand that, while the people seemed to be passive, they were becoming increasingly resentful of the government and were beginning to hate communism" (234). [In the Epilogue, Petkūnas mentions these communist officials only as is necessary. That is appropriate, for their historical meaninglessness lies in their banality and the collapse of their power. Yet, I must confess that I would like to know what happened to these persons. Did they live out their lives? Did they meet their fates in shame?] Upon Stalin's death many political prisoners were released. Among these were 242 priests and the Lutherans Gustavas Rauskinas and Jurgis Gavenis. This "army of clergy," as one commissioner called them, revitalized the church. From our vantage point we see the open

window in the last words of the author: "None of the returnees were any less committed to their faith and churches as a result of soviet repression. Now the communists understood that they would need to change their tactics and do everything in their power to form a wedge between the people and their priests. This would be a formidable task" (239-240).

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