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**Errata**

There is an error on page 285 in the article by Charles A. Gieschen, "The Relevance of the *Homologoumena* and *Antilegomena* Distinction for the New Testament Canon Today: Revelation as a Test Case," *CTQ* 79 (2015). The sentence in the first paragraph that reads, "It is ironic that the two primary proof-texts . . . are both from the *antilegomena*" should read: "It is ironic that one of the two primary proof-texts for the divine nature of the Scriptures, 2 Timothy 3:15 and 2 Peter 1:21, is from the *antilegomena*."

The Editors

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# The Sacraments and Vocation in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*

**Paul Gregory Alms**

There are many surprises in Martin Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*. Luther's handling of the text is an unexpected mix of exegesis, polemic, and practical application of the lessons of the Scriptures. The commentaries are wildly unsystematic, and Luther brings in a wide-ranging group of seemingly unrelated topics to the stories of the patriarchs. Luther took up the text of Genesis in the latter part of his life, and he seems to comment on every aspect of his theology. While there have been questions about the theological reliability of the text of the lectures as they have been transmitted,[1] in recent years they have been a rich source for scholars looking for the mature Luther's views on a number of topics. Mickey Mattox, for example, has completed an in-depth study on how Luther interprets the role of women in Genesis.[2] In an even more ambitious study, John Maxfield has probed the motives and effects of the Genesis lectures in forming an evangelical community.[3] In addition, other scholars have looked at the Genesis commentaries in view of Luther's use of the "divine game,"[4] prayer,[5] the

[1] See especially Peter Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers und ihre Herausgeber* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936).

[2] Mickey Mattox, *"Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs": Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesin, 1535–1545* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

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

[4] S. J. Munson, "The Divine Game: Faith and the Reconciliation of Opposites in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*," *CTQ* 76 (2012): 89–115.

[5] Mary Jane Haemig, "Prayer as Talking Back to God in Luther's Genesis Lectures," *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (2009): 270–295.

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use of the stories of the patriarchs to mold Christian life,[6] and how Luther's interaction with the text is a model of biblical interpretation.[7]

One topic that is missing in all this attention on the Genesis lectures is that of vocation. Luther's thought on vocation has generated a lively and extensive literature. Wingren's treatment, translated into English in 1957, has become known as the starting point for exploring vocation in Luther.[8] Generally taken as the standard work on the topic, Wingren's study has also resulted in much debate and clarification. Kenneth Hagen, for example, produced a significant dissent of Wingren's approach.[9] While vocation has become a popular item in Luther studies,[10] its place in the Genesis lectures has not received much attention.[11] However, the way Luther approaches the subject of vocation in the Genesis lectures is surprising. While he preserves the traditional threefold view of vocation that centers on family, state, and church, he also relates vocation to the life of a Christian within a sacramental framework. In these lectures, Luther sees God at work in vocation similar to the way he is at work in the sacraments. The similarities are revealing, for they show how deeply incarnational and Christological Luther's thinking was toward the end of his life. While Luther steadfastly kept the notion of works as merit out of the matter of the justification of the sinner, he did see God acting in similar ways in vocation and sacraments. In vocation, as in the sacraments, God operates on the basis of his promises and uses created means as a sort of fleshly covering for his work. Luther sees the need for certainty as important in both sacraments and vocation. In addition, both sacraments and vocation

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[6] Robert Kolb, "Models of the Christian Life in Luther's Genesis Sermons and Lectures," *Lutherjahrbuch* 76 (2009): 193–220.

[7] James Nestingen, "Luther in Front of the Text: The Genesis Commentary," *Word & World* 14, no. 2 (1994): 186–194.

[8] Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation,* trans. Carl Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

[9] Kenneth G. Hagen, "A Critique of Wingren on Luther on Vocation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 249–274.

[10] For example, see John A. Maxfield, ed., *The Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation: The Pieper Lectures* (Northville, SD: Luther Academy, 2008); Robert Kolb, "Called to Milk Cows and Govern Kingdoms: Martin Luther's Teaching on the Christian's Vocation," *Concordia Journal* 39 (2013): 133–141; and Vitow Westhelle, "The Word and the Masks: Revisiting Luther's Two Kingdoms Doctrine" in *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology,* ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

[11] One exception is Roberts Kolb's essay "Models of the Christian Life in Luther's Genesis Sermons and Lectures," but Kolb focuses on the Christian life in general and treats vocation in only one section of the article.

are incarnational for Luther and ultimately point to Christ in the forms they take.

## I. Sacraments

In order to understand Luther's treatment of vocation in the Genesis lectures, it is important first to grasp how he discusses the sacraments.[12] Luther sees the sacraments as visible, created places where God is present to give forgiveness to the Christian. That assurance comes from the word of God. He emphasizes the need for a word from God to provide certainty in the matter of righteousness: "Righteousness is not fulfillment of the Law; it consists in believing God when He makes a promise."[13] In the Genesis lectures, Luther repeatedly emphasizes the need for the Christian to be able find this God and to know where God can be located. It is the word and promise of God that provides this certainty. The word of God, his command or his promise, functions as a marker that God is to be found in certain places, namely preaching, absolution, and the sacraments. The various theophanies in Genesis are for Luther precursors to the sacraments. In both theophany and sacrament, God is present, speaks, and promises.[14]

Luther sees the fallen human being in constant need of these assurances of God's presence. For created, material people, these assurances must also have a material dimension. To meet this need, God paradoxically reveals himself by covering himself up. He uses created coverings or masks to come to the creature. These coverings are nothing other than the sacramental signs:

> Let it be the concern of each one of us to abide by the signs by which God has revealed Himself to us, namely His Son, born of the Virgin

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[12] See P. D. Pahl, "Baptism in Luther's Lectures on Genesis," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 1 (1967): 26–35; Naomichi Masaki, "Genesis as Catechesis Sacramental Instruction of Dr. Martin Luther according to His Lectures on Genesis, 1535 to 1545" (STM thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 1997). The author is not aware of any major study of Luther's general use of the sacraments in the Genesis lectures.

[13] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelican, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 3:84; hereafter AE.

[14] The story of Jacob's ladder, for instance, is the story of the certainty of God's presence marked by his word: "God's church is a place where God's Word resounds. . . . Wherever that Word is heard, where Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, and absolution are administered, there you must determine and conclude with certainty: 'This is surely God's house; here heaven has been opened.'. . . Where God speaks, where Jacob's ladder is, where angels ascend and descend, there the church is" (AE 5:244).

> Mary and lying in the manger among the cattle, the Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and absolution. In these images we see and meet a God whom we can bear, one who comforts us and lifts us up into hope and saves us.[15]

Luther insists that created persons need a created, visible place in which to find the presence of God. Human reason is unable to find God without visible markers that guide the person to where he is.[16] Without such visible signs, men go astray and devise their own works and ways of worshipping, a fault Luther continually finds in the papal church of his day.[17] Visible forms afford safety for sinful people and ensure them that they can indeed find God and his mercy:

> We shall be safe . . . if we follow that visible form or those signs which God Himself has set before us. In the New Testament we have as a visible form the Son of God on the lap of His mother Mary. He suffered and died for us, as the Creed teaches. Besides we have other visible forms: Baptism, the Eucharist, and the spoken Word itself.[18]

Luther sees this "enfleshed" way in which God works not only in the sacraments but also in the person of the minister. In the Old Testament the many theophanies of God by which he appeared in extraordinary ways to the patriarchs are nothing, says Luther, compared to what a pastor does today. The pastor, when he does the Gospel tasks given to him by God to perform, is greater than the Old Testament appearances of God:

> This happens to us too, however and indeed daily, as often as and wherever we wish. It is true that you hear a human being when you are baptized and when you partake of the Holy Supper. But the word which you hear is not that of a human being; it is the word of the Living God. It is he who baptizes you; it is he who absolves you for your sins. And it is he who commands you to hope in His mercy.[19]

Such visible signs indicate not only God's presence but also his gracious presence. They are for Christians the very face of the Lord for us: "When He addresses us in a winsome manner and shows His good will toward us by His words and deeds, then God shows His face. In this life this takes

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[15] AE 2:48.

[16] AE 3:107.

[17] AE 3:109.

[18] AE 3:108–109.

[19] AE 3:166. See among many other examples: "Nor is it the pastor who absolves you, but the mouth and hand of the minister is the mouth and hand of God" (AE 5:249). See also AE 8:145.

place only in the Word and sacraments."[20] The gospel and sacraments are sure and certain marks of God's presence and favor.[21] It is the weakness and need of men that moves God to work in this way, and he has always done so. Sacrament and sacramental ways of working are not New Testament innovations; for Luther, they are the way a gracious Creator works. The sacraments are indications not of exceptions that God makes outside his regular working, but they are examples precisely of his normal way of dealing with his people: "All the sacred accounts give proof that by His superabundant grace our merciful God always placed some outward and visible sign of His grace alongside the Word, so that men, reminded by the outward sign and work or Sacrament, would believe with greater assurance that God is kind and merciful."[22]

The promises of God function in the Genesis lectures to give certainty to the Christian as to where he may find the gracious presence of God in the face of the eternal temptation to devise his own worship and means to find God. Luther again and again excoriates the papist piety and superstition that finds assurance and God's presence in such man-made rituals as pilgrimages, indulgences, or monasteries.[23] But it is not only the papists who devise such errors. The Old Testament people of God did the same. It is a part of the sinful human nature, regularly shown by the patriarchal narrative from the Book of Genesis that Luther was expounding.[24] As Luther reads the stories of Genesis, he sees this "constant madness" by

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[20] AE 6:172–173.

[21] "For God governs us in such a way that wherever He speaks with us here on earth, the approach to the kingdom of heaven is open. This is truly extraordinary consolation. Wherever we hear the Word and are baptized, there we enter into eternal life" (AE 5:247).

[22] AE 1:248.

[23] "And the pope has concerned himself with this one purpose: to do away with the fixed place or tabernacle, that is, the ministry of the Word. He does not bother about the Word and sacraments, nor does he make use of them; but he takes them away and horribly torments the people. He fills the entire world with his indulgences, and wherever there are places and self-chosen nooks, he dispenses indulgences in order to give support to his errors and his mania for idols" (AE 4:179).

[24] "This tabernacle God gave to Moses as a sure sign of the place He had chosen, and He added the promise that He would dwell there, be present, and hear the invocations and prayers of those who call upon Him. But that very people, which most of all had a sure and definite place of worship, wandered and strayed most of all in uncertain and self-chosen places. Such is the deplorable perversity of our nature that we do not keep what God commands or regard it highly; but whatever the devil prescribes, this we receive and observe with utmost eagerness and deference. We erect altars, chapels, churches; we run to Rome and to St. James. But meanwhile we slight Baptism, the Eucharist, absolution, and our calling" (AE 4:179).

which "men chase after pleasant groves, fountains and streams" that they themselves had chosen rather than approaching the temple that God had designated with his word. [25]

The Christian is not only in a battle with the devil and the flesh over certainty, but he is also in a paradoxical, mysterious battle with God himself over that same certainty. God acts in strange and contradictory ways and often hides himself in opposites. He often acts as if he does not exist. The battle for a Christian then is also against God himself and his ways of disclosing himself: "For not only are we conquerors of the devil, sin, death, men, and this life but also of God."[26] God intentionally plays a cruel and vicious game[27] with his children in which he hides his face[28] and in which he pretends that he is absent and acts as if he had forgotten all his promises. God, in allowing all sorts of illness and wretchedness and evil to befall his people, even death itself, is simply playing "a most pleasant and beautiful game of His goodness."[29] The only way to overcome him and win at this "game" is through faith in the word, where he promises his presence and places it in tangible things. One must oppose God with his own word. This is the game at which we defeat God: "Indeed, He has given Himself to us. It if it were not for that, we would not be conquerors of God. For He is ours through the promise, and He has said: 'I will be your God; trust Me etc.,' and from this it comes to pass that we come forth as conquerors of God."[30]

In the midst of such actions by God it is the word and sacraments that give certainty. Man must hold onto the word and promises of God at all costs, for it is that very word of God that is the only hope for mortals. God acts in opposites for the sake of the gospel; he does so to keep faith in the word. God's aim is that we "learn to die according to the flesh and to depend on the Word."[31] This mortification—putting the old Adam to death—leads to faith in the Word alone: "Therefore the flesh and understanding of the flesh and reason must be mortified, and all human wisdom must be reduced to nothing. It must finally come to this! All things have been made and are restored through the Word; we are created from the Word, and we

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[25] AE 7:299.

[26] AE 6:259.

[27] For Luther's concept of God playing a "game" with his people, see S.J. Munson, "The Divine Game," 89–115.

[28] See AE 6:140–141, 356–357 and 7:231–234, 357.

[29] AE 7:226.

[30] AE 6:259.

[31] AE 6:344.

must return to the Word."[32] At the moment of death and the threat of hell, it is the sacraments that give the only sure knowledge of God and his grace:

> When I die, I descend into hell; I perish! What am I to do? No help remains except the Word: "I believe in God, etc." To this I firmly cling, however angry He may be, however much He may forsake, kill, and lead me down to hell. Why? Because I have been baptized and absolved; I have made use of Holy Communion. I believe this Word.[33]

Luther finds a need for such sacramental certainty not only in the outward circumstances of life or in the trials and difficulties that God places upon us and allows to happen but also in the matter of theology itself, in the study of God. Luther sees in theology a constant temptation to engage in speculation, to allow one's curiosity or reason to propel oneself outside the revelation God has given. Such speculation is, by its very nature, uncertain. Any investigation that seeks "something more sublime above or outside the revelation of God" is devilish. All that happens is that we "plunge ourselves into destruction." In approaching the hidden God "there is no faith, no Word, and no knowledge; for He is an invisible God, and you will not make him visible."[34] A Christian ought not investigate such hidden matters as predestination. Predestination leads to despair or security, leading men to give up and think that all things are decided by God and that nothing can be accomplished, no matter what we do or say.[35] But God's hidden will is hidden for good reason, and we are not to seek it out. Rather we are to stick to God in those places where he shows himself, that is, his word and promise: "God will not let Himself be taken captive and forced within the limits of your wisdom. His foreknowledge and predestination are no concern whatever of yours. Indeed, lest you tempt God, you should rather listen to Him when He promises. Cling to him in firm faith."[36] Speculation about such matters is to try to "understand the Godhead without a covering." God cannot be found when he is "uncovered." Rather, Luther counsels seeking God precisely where he is covered up "as today he wraps himself up in Baptism, in absolution etc."[37]

For Luther, the sacraments are ultimately Christological; Luther easily places Christ on the lap of the Virgin Mary, Baptism, the word, and the

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[32] AE 6:361.

[33] AE 6:361.

[34] AE 5:44.

[35] AE 6:105.

[36] AE 7:308.

[37] AE 1:11.

Eucharist in the same list.[38] The sacraments not only deliver God's presence but are incarnational in their form: "The incarnate Son of God is, therefore, the covering in which the Divine Majesty presents himself to us with all His gifts, and does so in such manner that there is no sinner too wretched to be able to approach him with firm assurance of obtaining pardon."[39] The flesh of Jesus and the reality of the sacraments function in the same way. They are God's way of coming to us in certainty so that we can grab hold of them and not be led astray. In the sacraments, there is the real presence of God, that is, the word covered with created things to give certainty to the believer. Luther is quick to recognize in this pattern a Christological reality. Christ is God himself covered and enfleshed, who has come to give salvific certainty. Luther lists Christ himself as a sign alongside of sacraments:

> Let it be the concern of each one of us to abide by the signs by which God has revealed Himself to us, namely, His Son, born of the Virgin Mary and lying in the manger among the cattle; the Word; Baptism; the Lord's Supper; and absolution. In these images we see and meet a God whom we can bear, one who comforts us, lifts us up into hope, and saves us.[40]

Christ himself is a "covering" in which the Divine Majesty comes to us in mercy.

This is the very same language that Luther uses of the word, the sacraments, and the office of the ministry. Just as the sacraments are low and humble, so too has Christ himself emptied and lowered himself for our benefit to give us his gifts.[41] The ministry of the church is a Christological "condescension" whereby God comes down to us now in the same way he did in Christ's incarnation.[42] In fact, in Luther's lectures, this is one and the same movement. The sacraments, the word, and absolution are Christ's coming down. They are, in a sacramental way, his incarnation now among us: "After Christ's coming I know nothing but Christ and Him crucified, who reveals Himself to us in visible forms: in the use of the Keys and in the Eucharist. I know that I find God there and that I receive the forgive-

[38] AE 3:108.

[39] AE 2:49.

[40] AE 2:48.

[41] AE 4:66.

[42] AE 4:61.

ness of sins there and nowhere else."[43] The sacraments are like Christ in his incarnation, and Christ in his incarnation is like the sacraments.

## II. Vocation

For Luther in his *Lectures on Genesis*, vocations are places where God is present in a manner similar to the sacraments. They are "sacramental" in that the word and promise of God is enfleshed in a particular person or action and in them God acts.[44] Vocations are worldy and physical matters in which God acts. The purposes are clearly different in sacrament and vocation. In the sacraments God is giving salvation and forgiveness; he is making a new person out of a dead, old one. In vocation, he is leading that new person to do his work in the world with certainty and confidence. The way in which he works is similar, but in both Luther sees God as the Creator who employs his word in connection with creation to his work. On one side, his work is justifying the sinner; on the other, it is serving the neighbor.

The presence of God through the word is intended to give certainty in the matter of vocation just as in the matter of the sacraments. Though it is a different kind of certainty in a different context, the pattern is the same, because God's character and identity and way of working are the same. God is always the God who speaks and promises and is known and apprehended through his word. Similarly, he is also always the Creator, so that he uses and is present in and through created things, whether that is to give forgiveness and Christ's body in the host or, as Luther might say, to give warm milk and a change of diapers to a baby. He is also a God of certainty in that he wishes his people to know and be certain of where he is and how to please him in the matter of justification as well as in the matter of good works and daily life.

In these lectures, the word is just as crucial to the matter of vocation as it is to the matter of sacraments. In vocations, God is the Creator through his word. He acts as the Creator by filling his creation with his presence and attaching his word to it. Furthermore, he commands the Christian what works to do. His word is crucial in this matter of works. Human

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[43] AE 3:109.

[44] Oswald Bayer writes that Luther "became aware of the essentially worldly—not only in the negative but also in the positive sense—mediation of the spiritual, the spiritual significance of all worldly things in the positive sense was revealed to him." Oswald Bayer, "Nature and Institution: Luther's Doctrine of the Three Orders," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1998): 134.

beings are a kind of element to which the word is added.[45] Luther writes: "Nor do we ourselves pay sufficient attention to the fact that in our whole life the Word is the measure, the standard, and the most precious thing that guides our life, so that you can say 'I am doing this in the Word of God. The Lord has commanded this. This pleases God.'"[46] Christians acting in God-pleasing ways can know that God acts through them because his word says so. He commands Christians to be parents, to preach the word, and to wield the sword. He promises that when such actions are undertaken, he is the one working. It is the word of God, his command and promise, that elevates mere human actions to divine ones:

> Since God himself is the Author of these offices, there are no grounds at all for thinking that the worship of God is hindered by these matters, but they are the most excellent and pleasing exercises of godliness toward God and men. For God wants the fetus to be borne in the womb and to be suckled and kept warm by the earnest care of mothers that it may be nourished and grow.[47]

A comparison to the sacraments is instructive. Elements with no word from God are mere creatures. So it is with vocation: what may seem to be simple human actions are the divine holy work of the Creator God. His word says this is so, and the Christian hears the word and lives that reality. Though someone be a humble mother, she is doing high divine work for God has commanded such things.

Vocation and sacrament also come together in the matter of certainty for the Christian. God's word is attached to human actions and roles so that the person doing them may be sure that they are pleasing to God: "True obedience is not to do what you yourself choose or what you impose upon yourself, but what the Lord has commanded you through His Word."[48] Vocational confusion and uncertainty were great evils in Luther's mind, spawning the monasteries, monastic works-righteousness, and the denigration of the works of family and world. The works of the monks and the papists were self-chosen, which by their nature lead to uncertainty. Just as the papists chose to worship God with self-chosen worship practices, so

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[45] Bayer investigates this matter of word and vocation carefully and aligns the traditional word/element framework of sacraments to the notion of vocation. Bayer, "Nature and Institution," 133–144.

[46] AE 5:70. See also 2:355: "We must appeal to our touchstone and look at the word of God. We must not simply give our tacit approval to such hideous sanctity but we must ask whether God has commanded such a thing."

[47] AE 6:347.

[48] AE 2:271.

also they tried to please him with self-chosen works. Who could know if such work was pleasing to God? The word gives vocational certainty:

> For this reason all the lives of the monks, no matter how showy they may be in the eyes of the flesh, are nevertheless altogether nothing. . . . The flesh, the heart, the eye of man are taken in by these remarkable feats. But see whether there is a connection with the Word of God. Ask Antony whether he has a word by which he has been commanded to go into the desert and to torture his flesh.[49]

What God really willed concerning daily life was clearly spelled out in the accounts of the patriarchs.[50] They did humble family chores, married, had children, worked, and all the other things pertaining to such life, and they were blessed by God for such work, which, unlike monasteries and monastic ventures, had the clear command and promise of God behind it:

> In the accounts of the fathers this is the only and most desirable jewel, namely, that God speaks with them and with us. . . . Nor do we ourselves pay sufficient attention to the fact that in our whole life the Word is the measure, the standard, and the most precious thing that guides our life, so that you can say: "I am doing this in the Word of God. The Lord has commanded this. This pleases God." Thus from the highest station in life down to the lowest, we can be sure that God has commanded, that God has spoken.[51]

Thus, Christians can have certainty that the work they do is pleasing to God, for God has promised it by his word and also promised to work through them to do his work in the world.

This vocational certainty is also buttressed by Luther's thought on how faith and justification operate in the life of a Christian. Faith in the word is not a matter of simply removing outward sins. Rather, faith in Christ's atoning work through the preached word brings about an entirely new person. It is not a matter of whether or not a particular work is valuable or exalted or humble; rather, it is a matter of who does the work. The nature of the person doing the work was more important than the nature of the work itself:

> But the learned theologian does not look at the bare works. He considers the person and the heart; and if the heart is full of faith, he concludes that everything he does in faith, even though in outward appearance it is most unimportant—such as the natural activities of

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[49] AE 5:4.

[50] See Kolb, "Models of the Christian Life," 203–206.

[51] AE 5:70.

> sleeping, being awake, eating, and drinking, which seem to have no godliness connected with them—is a holy work which pleases God.[52]

God has regard for Abel, "because He is pleased with the person. . . . God does not have regard for either the size of the quantity or even for the value of the work, but simply for the faith of the individual."[53] If the person doing the work had been justified by faith, then that work done in faith is intrinsically valuable and noble and precious to God because that person is holy. People are holy on account of Christ alone through the faith that brings that holiness to them. The works they do, then, are holy whether or not they are esteemed in the eyes of the world. God looks at the person, cleansed by Christ, not the work. This is one reason why Luther finds such value in the accounts of the patriarchs. Where others see inconsequential or even scandalous detail, Luther sees the life of faith:

> Thus in this passage the Holy Spirit gives a description of Lot's management of his household, which has no appearance of sanctity; and yet these very works in connection with the household are more desirable than all the works of all the monks and nuns, be they ever so laborious and impressive. Lot's wife milks the cows; the servants carry the hay and lead them to water. God praises these works, and Scripture calls them the works of the righteous. . . . For we observe that God did not consider it beneath His dignity to have these seemingly unimportant and paltry works recorded in His book. Whatever the godly do, even if it is a work that is not commanded, is pleasing to God and acceptable on account of faith. But if it is a work that God commands, there is that much less doubt that the obedience receives God's approval.[54]

God's word and promise assure the Christian of God's presence in the daily life of one's calling.[55] This presence in the vocations of the Christian functions in two ways in these lectures. First, God is present in and through Christians in their vocations in order to serve others and the world. The focus is on the world and the neighbor being served. The mother, the prince, and the pastor are all vessels that God inhabits to do his work in the world. God wishes the baby to be fed, the criminal

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[52] AE 2:349.

[53] AE 1:258.

[54] AE 2:349–350.

[55] "God is in preaching, in baptism, in government. That is where you can find him." Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 49:63; cited in Paul Althaus, *Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 54.

punished, and the sinner absolved, so he uses Christians to do it.[56] Christians in their vocations are the material elements to which God adds his word and promise and through which God keeps order in the world, raises families, and forgives in the church. He does not act directly, but mediately. When the magistrate or the parent or the preacher acts in his office, he does so as God under a mask—under the created element of a person.[57]

In vocation, God wants to use externals. He does not want to work directly; he wishes to use his people to do his work, just as in the sacraments. He could work directly on the human heart apart from the word, but he wills to work though his preachers. Also in the matter of curbing crime or running the state or raising children, God wishes to use the external, humble means of flesh-and-blood people. God wishes to use the individual Christian as his instrument: "It is God's command that you should do your duty, and He wants to work though you."[58] With regard to the office of the ministry, God could well "teach and enlighten hearts" without the pastor, but "he does not want to do so." He could forgive sins without Baptism, but "He wants us human beings to have a share in His workings."[59]

Luther not only sees God present in what the Christian does for others but also in what others do for the Christian. Here the focus is reversed and is on the Christian himself who is served by God through the vocations of others. If a Christian is looking for the presence of God in his life, he must look to the word of God and things such as Baptism or absolution. There, under the cover of material things, God has promised to be for the forgiveness of sins. But, in a parallel way, God is also present for the believer in the vocation of daily life where God sends others to serve the Christian.[60]

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[56] The household "is also defined by what God does through it: in this order the creator continues to give life to creature and creation, using wives and husbands as 'hands,' 'channels,' or 'masks' for this purpose." James Nestingen, "Luther on Marriage, Vocation, and the Cross," *Word & World* 23, no. 1 (2003): 35.

[57] "Man becomes God's mask on earth wherever man acts. . . . He is a tool in God's hand, bound before God, i.e. receiving and passive before God, but active outwardly, so that God reveals himself to others through man's actions." Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 137.

[58] AE 3:290.

[59] AE 3:288. See also 4:354; 5:140–141; 6:347; and 8:271.

[60] Carter Lindberg, as others have done, points out that for Luther the sacrament was the locus not only of divine grace but also Christian love that bound Christians to other Christians in service. Luther's ethics was "sacramentally rooted." Carter Lindberg, "The Ministry and Vocation of the Baptized," *Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (1992): 385–401.

The office of the ministry is the prime example of this for Luther: "The spoken Word is indeed the word of a human being, but it has been instituted by divine authority for salvation."[61] The vocation of the pastor is a means by which God comes to the Christian bearing salvation. But God also "speaks with us and deals with us through . . . parents and through the government, in order that we may not be carried about with any wind of doctrine."[62] The Christian can be sure that "God speaks with me, too, in the very station of life in which I live."[63] Indeed, Luther can say that we behold God's gracious face not only in the promises and sacraments[64] but "likewise in external blessings and gifts, in a gracious prince, a neighbor, a father, and a mother. When I see that the face of my parents is gracious, I see at the same time the winsome face of God smiling at me."[65] Luther can see the graciousness of God "in all His creatures," because they are his works.[66] God is the creator and uses his things to communicate himself, whether through the neighbor's vocational work or the sacraments.

The matter of hospitality in the Mosaic narratives gives Luther an opportunity to expand this thought of God present in the vocation and service of Christians in a surprising way. The Christian can be sure that God works through him when he exercises his vocation and that God is present to him when others serve him. Luther, however, also sees in the matter of hospitality and serving the poor or the persecuted a special way in which God comes to the Christian. In striking sacramental language, Luther extols this work: "He who receives a brother who is in exile because of the Word receives God Himself in the person of such a brother."[67] Luther is discussing the reception that Abraham accords the three visitors in Genesis 18, and he references Jesus' words from Matthew 25 that it is Christ himself that Christians serve when they feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. Luther takes the textual difficulty of Genesis 18 where the visitors who appear in the form of men are called angels on the one hand and "the Lord" on the other, and solves the riddle by relating it to vocation and hospitality. Moses, says Luther, "receives them and believes that in their

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[61] AE 3:273. See also 4:66; 5:23; 5:250; and 6:257, among many other examples.

[62] AE 5:71.

[63] AE 5:71.

[64] Maxfield points out that Luther identifies the household as the true monastic state. Holiness and righteousness are played out in the midst of the difficulties and trials of marriage and family and civic attachments. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity*, 99–106.

[65] AE 6:173.

[66] AE 6:173.

[67] AE 3:187.

persons he is receiving God . . . And he is not mistaken; he is receiving God himself."[68] Moses can be sure of this, because Christ is present in the disadvantaged, exiled brother according to Matthew 25. Hospitality involves the presence of God. One receives God himself when he practices hospitality. Luther brings this example into the present lives of believers: "So we, too, when we show some kindness to the least in the kingdom of God, receive Christ Himself in a hospitable manner when He comes to us in the persons of His poor."[69] In being hospitable to a human being, we are "receiving the Son of God Himself."[70] This is sacramental language that Luther uses to describe good works. Under the material elements of a human being whom one "receives," one also "receives" the Son of God himself. Christ places himself in the person of the poor so that his people may receive him when they welcome that poor Christian.

There is another way in which Luther treats the close relationship of sacrament and vocation. In both he sees the concrete, material way in which God works as giving certainty in the midst of trials and the temptation to find God through speculation. Luther knows well that when a magistrate or a spouse in marriage enters their vocation there will be "hatred and enmity" and "grumbling and cursing."[71] The easy way is to take the monastic road of escape to peace and quiet. But Luther advises staying in the vocations which God has commanded and which are pleasing to him even though they bring the cross.[72] For they have the word of God: "Take care first of all that you have meditated well on the Word of God, in which the government is richly established . . . . Likewise in marriage, whether one is a manservant or a maidservant, whether a teacher or pupil, they are sure of their station and the will of God. Just take hold of the Word, and bring forth fruits of the Word."[73]

The matters of speculation and predestination also impact vocation. Luther points out that some Christians, misunderstanding predestination and thinking that everything will happen of necessity, abandon their vocations and the work God has given to them. Some go even further and dispense with created means in the matter of daily life and the protection

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[68] AE 3:187.

[69] AE 3:184.

[70] AE 3:178.

[71] AE 5:5.

[72] Wingren repeatedly locates this mortification in the Christian's vocation. The purpose of vocation, according to Wingren's view of Luther, is precisely to kill the old self. See especially Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 63–77.

[73] AE 5:6. See also 4:94.

and providence of God. Some are drawn to contemplation and seeking out the hidden God. Just as Luther battled the enthusiasts on this score in the matter of sacraments, he does the same in the matter of vocation, insisting on the vocational means God has ordained: "These thoughts are wicked and impious, because God wants you to make use of the means you have at your disposal. He wants you to embrace the opportunity presented to you and to use it, since it is through you that He wants to accomplish the things He has ordained."[74]

God could create and sustain life directly, Luther says, but he wants father and mother to be involved. The use of created means ties the human being down to the earth and prevents the lazy or the curious from referring all things to the hidden will of God in predestination or in seeking knowledge of God in speculation. John Maxfield demonstrates that in these lectures Luther locates the acquisition of the knowledge of God not in papistic or enthusiastic contemplation and speculation but in the cross-bearing arena of vocation in which the patriarchs lived.[75] God wants his creatures to be ignorant of his hidden counsels and "remain in your calling and within the limits of the Word, and use the means and counsels which God has ordained."[76] This advice is fitting for Luther both in the matter of salvation and sacraments as well as in the matter of calling and daily work.

Ultimately the vocational pattern that Luther employs is incarnational and Christological. The Word is made flesh and comes to his people to give gifts. Luther uses the terminology of incarnation when discussing the work of magistrates: "For governing is a divine power, and for this reason God calls all magistrates 'gods' (cf. Ps. 82:6), not because of the creation but because of the administration which belongs to God alone. Consequently, he who is in authority is an incarnate god, so to speak."[77] In vocation there is a Christological descent: "[God] descends and lives with us. He speaks and works in us."[78] This is God's will and way of working: "He wants us human beings to have a share in His workings."[79]

As in other matters, the greatest example of such incarnational patterns is the office of the ministry. Luther identifies the descent or humbling

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[74] AE 5:173.

[75] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity*, 119–126.

[76] AE 6:105.

[77] AE 5:124.

[78] AE 5:250.

[79] AE 3:288.

of God, his self-emptying and taking human form, with the office of the ministry:

> He speaks with us through the ministry of men and in this manner conceals His majesty, which is dreadful and unbearable for us. . . . Therefore let us recognize His exceedingly great and incalculable gift: that he emptied Himself in this manner and took on human form. Let us not on this account despise the Word; but let us fall on our knees and honor and prize the holy ministry through which God deigns to speak to us.[80]

God dwells in the office of the ministry in a similar way as in Christ's incarnation: to shield his awful majesty ("He speaks with us through the ministry of men and in this manner conceals His majesty, which is dreadful and unbearable for us"[81]) and to give salvation ("The word which you hear is not that of a human being; it is the word of the living God. It is He who baptizes you; it is He who absolves you from sins; and it is he who commands you to hope in His mercy"[82]). The office of the ministry functions as the very place of the knowledge and salvation of God just as Christ himself is: "Through them we know God and obtain eternal life."[83]

## III. Conclusion

In the Genesis lectures, Luther consistently views vocation in a sacramental framework. He portrays God at work in vocation in similar ways as he works in the sacraments. These patterns demonstrate how fundamentally incarnational, Christological, and sacramental Luther's thinking was as he treated the biblical text. Promise and created means are the ways in which God marks and "covers" his presence in vocation and sacrament. The human need for certainty pushes Luther to see an incarnational pattern in God's work in the church and in the world.

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[80] AE 4:66.

[81] AE 4:66.

[82] AE 3:166.

[83] AE 3:167.

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# Luther and the Heavy Laden: Luther's Sermons on Matthew 11:25–30 as Liberation from Christ-Centered Legalism

**M. Hopson Boutot**

Few would accuse redemptive-historical preaching of being a legalistic enterprise. After all, the methodology began as a response to legalism prevalent in the church. Legalism, however, is often found in unlikely places. Despite its noble aspirations, redemptive-historical preaching has contributed to a new kind of legalism—a legalism that burdens, not the crowd who hear the sermons, but the clergy who preach them. The goal here is not to disparage regnant homiletical theories, but to suggest a more faithful alternative. This essay contends that the homiletics of Martin Luther, as demonstrated in three sermons on Matthew 11:25–30, can liberate the modern preacher from the unintended legalistic consequences of redemptive-historical preaching.

## I. Christ-Centered Legalism

Redemptive-historical preaching as a homiletical discipline began with laudable motives. Beginning with Edmund Clowney's seminal work, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, the universal desire of its proponents was to combat the moralistic sermons pervading many pulpits.[1] Daniel Doriani explains this exceptionally well:

> Redemptive-historical preaching exalts the God who saves with infinite mercy. It opposes moralizing application, denouncing narrative expositions that focus on human participants as exemplars of good or bad behavior. It cannot tolerate sermons (and hymns) that fail to name and honor Christ, that propound general moral or spiritual instruction that any theist could find agreeable.[2]

[1] Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

[2] Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 296. Cf., Bryan Chapell who states, "A message that merely advocates morality and compassion remains sub-Christian even

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Similar warnings against moralistic preaching exist throughout redemptive-historical literature.[3] Despite these praiseworthy beginnings, well-meaning attempts to liberate the pulpit from moralistic legalism have ironically bred a new form of it. This new Christ-centered legalism is not the atomistic moralism that was rightfully condemned, but a homiletical legalism resulting in heavy-laden preachers burdened by an ever-growing list of Christ-centered dos and don'ts.[4]

Careful study of the array of redemptive-historical literature yields an overwhelming list of guidelines for the aspiring Christ-centered preacher. Preachers must identify the fallen condition focus.[5] They must not ignore the eschatological kingdom focus of the text.[6] They must explicitly mention Jesus' name at least once[7] (preferably before the sermon's conclusion),[8] but

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if the preacher can prove that the Bible demands such behaviors. . . . By themselves, moral maxims and advocacy of ethical conduct fall short of the requirements of biblical preaching." Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 274.

[3] E.g., Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 78; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 118–119; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 36; Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 51; Derke Bergsma, "Evaluating Sermons," *Preaching* 9, no. 6 (2000): 25, 28–29; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 21; Michael S. Horton, "What Are We Looking for in the Bible? A Plea for Redemptive-Historical Preaching," *Modern Reformation* (June 1996): 5; David Edward Prince, "The Necessity of a Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 133–136.

[4] This essay does not argue that redemptive-historical preaching is intrinsically legalistic. However, the totality of literature on the subject has saddled the pulpit with a heavy yoke. These gospel-fueled preaching methods often burden the preacher with homiletical law: an ironic decree to preach the gospel or else!

[5] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 48–54.

[6] Prince, "Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching," 100.

[7] Prince maintains, "It is impossible for a Christian preacher to preach a Christ-centered sermon without specifically mentioning Jesus because all legitimate biblical interpretation and application is mediated through Christ." A sermon can speak of sin, redemption, and judgment, and say true things yet still be "sub-Christian" because "without mentioning Jesus, this is not a Christian sermon." Prince, "Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching," 101.

[8] Clowney laments the presence of so much "twisted and bungled preaching" in which "the name of Christ is not named except toward the end in an applicatory conclusion." Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 74.

they dare not think that merely mentioning Christ's name is enough.[9] They must utilize apostolic hermeneutics.[10] They must avoid preaching imperatives without reminding hearers that (1) they are powerless to obey them, (2) their obedience does not merit God's favor, (3) their obedience should be in response to Christ's obedience, and (4) Christ has already obeyed perfectly on their behalf.[11] They must filter all their application through the lens of the gospel.[12] They must avoid preaching the characters in Scripture as heroes.[13] They must position the text within its redemptive-historical context.[14] This onslaught of homiletical red tape has grown so thick that some redemptive-historical proponents are now claiming that other scholars within the movement are not Christ-centered enough.[15] The unintended result of this homiletical prescription is a heaven-laden clergy, threatened with the dreaded diagnosis of the sub-Christian sermon.

## II. Unlikely Yet Ideal

In many respects, Martin Luther is an unlikely candidate to emancipate the modern pulpit from this heavy yoke of homiletical legalism. After all, the reformer preached his last sermon over 450 years ago, and his contribution to homiletics is rarely considered the hallmark of his

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[9] In reviewing the Christ-centeredness of Sidney Greidanus's approach (any angle related to Jesus' person, works, or words), Glenn LaRue maintains that a Christ-centered sermon must do more than merely preach about Jesus: "A sermon may discuss Jesus while not really highlighting the nature of his salvation." Glenn Raymond LaRue, "Weighing Sermon Substance: Evaluating a Sermon's Degree of Expository Merit, Doctrinal Essence, and Christ-Centeredness" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 84–87.

[10] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*.

[11] Cf. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 274.

[12] "A biblical passage explicated and then applied to the hearers does not constitute a biblical sermon if the application is made without reference to the person and work of Christ." Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 118–119.

[13] Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 82–84; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 289–290; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 34–36.

[14] "Preachers who ignore the history of redemption in their preaching are ignoring the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus in all the Scriptures." Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 10. Cf. Albert Mohler who says, "[Preachers] must take the particular text and place it within the larger story of Scripture." R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 96.

[15] For instance, David Prince argues that many of the most well-known and respected redemptive-historical scholars are not sufficiently Christ-centered because they lack an eschatological focus. Prince, "Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching," 99.

ministry.[16] Nevertheless, Luther is perhaps the ideal candidate to correct the missteps of the redemptive-historical homiletic.

Luther is an ideal candidate due to his reputation as a proponent of Christ-centered preaching. It was Luther who encouraged pastors to "Preach nothing but Jesus Christ and of faith in him."[17] The homiletical landscape is full of quotes and anecdotes attesting to Luther's radical Christ-centeredness. After briefly surveying Luther's preaching, Sidney Greidanus concluded that although Luther's desire to preach Christ was laudable, much in his technique should not be emulated.[18] Greidanus explained that Luther's approach to preaching Christ often went beyond even what those within the redemptive-historical movement would commend.

Why, then, would a redemptive-historical uneasiness with Luther's excessive Christo-centrism make him an ideal candidate to correct the movement? If the burgeoning requirements for Christ-centered legitimacy are too stringent for a preacher as Christ-centered as Martin Luther, could it be that the redemptive-historical definition of Christ-centeredness is too narrow?

Luther is also an ideal candidate because he viewed himself as a Christ-centered preacher. In the last sermon he preached, Luther summed up his views on preaching with two parallel truths. First, he believed that

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[16] This is evidenced by the enormous knowledge gap in Luther's preaching. In 1967, A. Skevington Wood lamented the absence of a definitive work on the preaching of Martin Luther. A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther: Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press, 1969), 85. At that time, "No exhaustive monograph on this subject ha[d] yet been presented, not even in Germany." Richard Lischer shared a similar sentiment nearly two decades later: "Exhaustive studies of Martin Luther's preaching are few, and for good reason. The persistence of his scribes has resulted in a corpus of more than 2,000 sermons." Richard Lischer, "Luther and Contemporary Preaching: Narrative and Anthropology," Scottish Journal of Theology 36 (1983): 487. Fred Meuser echoes these concerns: "Literature on Luther the preacher is virtually non-existent in English," and "In no language is there a definitive book on Luther the preacher." Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 10. Meuser's own work is limited, despite its status as arguably the most comprehensive study of Luther's preaching in English. In his 2012 Gheens Lectures at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Carl Trueman expressed a continued need for study of Luther the preacher. Carl Trueman, "Theological and Biographical Foundations" (Gheens Lecture presented at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, September 11, 2012).

[17] Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils,* ed. Eugene F. A. Klug, trans. Eugene F. A. Klug et al., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 185.

[18] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 124–126.

preaching should be expository. He states, "Right preachers should diligently and faithfully teach only the word of God and seek only his honor and praise."[19] Second, he believed that preaching should be Christ-centered. He explains, "None other should be preached or taught except the Son of God alone."[20] Similar statements pervade his preaching and writings because Luther viewed true preaching to be Christ-centered preaching.[21]

### III. Luther and Matthew 11:25–30

This essay contends that the homiletics of Martin Luther, as demonstrated in his preaching on Matthew 11:25–30, can liberate the preacher from the unintended legalistic consequences of redemptive-historical preaching. But what potential do these sermons have to address the concerns of redemptive-historical preaching? With over 2,000 extant sermons to choose from, why were three sermons from Matthew 11:25–30 chosen?[22]

These sermons were selected for three reasons. First, they offer the potential to trace Luther's homiletical development. Although each sermon addresses the same text, they represent three different periods in Luther's life. He delivered the first sermon on February 24, 1517, eight months before posting the *Ninety-Five Theses*. The second sermon, delivered eight years later on February 5, 1525, addressed a profoundly changed world. The Reformation had opened the door for radicalism, from the hot-headed impatience of Andreas Carlstadt to the social upheaval wrought by Thomas Müntzer in the Peasants' War. The third sermon was delivered on February 15, 1546, three days before his death. Although he was "old and weak," Luther did not refuse the opportunity to preach the gospel just days before taking his final breath. Sermons from these three stages in Luther's life are ideally suited to reflect development in his preaching.

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[19] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 51:388; hereafter AE. See below for more detail on this sermon.

[20] AE 51:388.

[21] The issue here is how one defines genuine Christ-centered preaching. This essay will demonstrate that Luther's understanding of Christ-centered preaching is broader than that upheld by many proponents of redemptive-historical preaching.

[22] A brief note on sources is in order. This essay is concerned with Martin Luther's preaching, so selections must be limited to actual sermons preached by the reformer. Therefore, Luther's postils and lectures are excluded. Furthermore, this work is admittedly limited by its exclusive reliance on *Luther's Works*, the English translation of the Weimar Edition of Luther's extant material.

Second, these sermons were chosen because they offer the potential to trace consistent homiletical patterns to gauge Luther's preaching. Although it is not impossible for a preacher to deliver drastically different sermons from the same text, it is more likely that continuity will exist. Since these sermons are all from the same text, they are ideally suited to be illustrative of continuity in Luther's preaching.

Third, sermons on this text will demonstrate Luther's level of Christ-centeredness. This is not an obscure Old Testament passage in which movements to Christ may prove difficult for some, but a text where Christ teaches about the rest only he can offer:

> At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matt 11:25–30)

A brief summary of each sermon will illustrate the prominence Luther gives to Christ and his gospel.

*February 24, 1517*

In the first sermon,[23] Luther begins by asking two questions of the text. First, who are the wise and understanding? Luther believes the "wise" in this text are not necessarily those who incorrectly believe themselves to be wise, but those who lack a hunger for wisdom. He explains, "whether they be those who only think they are wise, like dolts and complete ignoramuses, or whether they possess wisdom, like subtle hypocrites, are wise only because they are not fools, not empty, not hungry for wisdom, and not babes [before God]."[24] The defining characteristic of these fools is pride.

Second, what has the Father hidden from those who appear to be wise? Luther answers, "What is hidden is Christ himself and God the Father."[25] Only they whom the world calls fools know Christ and the

[23] To read this sermon in its entirety, see AE 51:26–31.

[24] AE 51:27.

[25] AE 51:28.

Father, since this knowledge is not attained but revealed. It is foolish for the seemingly wise to exert themselves to achieve or attain this gospel, since it can only be revealed. Likewise, it is foolish to receive this gospel and then resort to laziness. Christians do not work in an ill-fated effort to decrease their heavy yokes. Such folly does not reduce one's labor but increases it. Christians work because their burdens have been lifted by Christ.

Luther concludes his sermon by addressing a then-current concern, the abuse of indulgences. The indulgence system does not give weary disciples rest, but adds a burdensome yoke. Ironically, this heavy burden of indulgences does not lead to holiness, but to greater licentiousness, because indulgences do not teach people to hate sin, but merely its penalty.

*February 5, 1525*

In the second sermon,[26] Luther begins by distinguishing between two types of wisdom. "True wisdom," he explains, "is nothing else than the knowledge of God, that is, when I know what I am to think of God and know his divine will."[27] The wisdom in verse 25 is "worldly wisdom, which puffs people up and will not admit the true, divine wisdom."[28]

The effects of this worldly wisdom are multitudinous. Worldly wisdom leads to a selfish motivation, leading people to call "good" only what is good for them personally. Worldly wisdom is not content to speak on secular matters, but encroaches into spiritual matters as well. It forsakes God for fleshly images. It makes it impossible to understand the things of God. Perhaps the worst effect of worldly wisdom is how it hinders people from understanding the gospel.

Luther urges his hearers entrapped by worldly wisdom to repent and trust in Christ alone for wisdom. The Christian understands that true wisdom is a revealed wisdom, which excludes boasting. It is in this revealed wisdom of God where the heavy laden find true rest. The rest Christ offers, however, is not a rest *from* trials and temptations, but a rest *through* them. The Christian will still be tempted by sin. He will still need prayer. He will still need to endure hardships. These trials and temptations are no longer endured as a heavy yoke of law. They are endured "cheerfully, willingly,

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[26] To read this sermon in its entirety, see AE 51:121–132. Emanuel Hirsch remarks that this sermon is "one of the richest and most thoughtful of all his sermons which sum up his faith in Christ." Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Otto Clemen and Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 392. As quoted in AE 51:121.

[27] AE 51:123.

[28] AE 51:123

and gladly" because Christ is a co-laborer with the Christian.[29] The Christian's yoke "is called gentle, sweet, and easy because he himself helps us carry it, and when it grows too heavy for us he shoulders the burden along with us."[30]

*February 15, 1546*

In the final sermon,[31] Luther begins by discussing the wise from whom the Father hides. He states, "The wise and understanding in the world so contrive things that God cannot be favorable and good to them."[32] These people are wise in their own eyes, thinking "what God has done is too poor and insignificant, even childish and foolish; I must add something to it."[33] Examples of this include the Anabaptists, the antisacramentarians, the pope, and the government, among others. The wisdom that Christ gives is diametrically opposed to this worldly wisdom. The truly wise ask God to rule. They listen to Christ, they listen to his word, and they listen to their pastors. They listen and obey their governments, but only insofar as government officials do not encroach upon matters of faith.

Luther concludes by urging his hearers to come to Christ for rest. He reminds them that this rest is an ultimate rest, a rest that may come through trials. But even through these trials, the Christian experiences incredible rest. Through God's Spirit "the burden, which for the world would be unbearable, becomes for you a light burden."[34] The reader senses that Luther was speaking from experience. His sickness had worsened and forced him to cut his sermon short. He ends by saying, "This and much more might be said concerning this Gospel, but I am too weak and we shall let it go at that."[35]

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[29] AE 51:132.

[30] AE 51:132.

[31] To read this sermon in its entirety, see AE 51:383–392. Conflicting accounts remain regarding the actual date of this sermon. The transcriber recorded the date as February 15, which was a Monday. However, some historians believe Luther actually delivered the sermon on Sunday, February 14. Cf. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 372.

[32] AE 51:384.

[33] AE 51:384.

[34] AE 51:392.

[35] AE 51:392.

## IV. Luther the Liberator

What conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of Luther's sermons on Matthew 11:25–30?[36] What lessons from Luther's pulpit can liberate the heavy-laden preacher? First, his preaching liberates the pulpit by failing to qualify for genuine Christ-centeredness by redemptive-historical standards.[37] If one of history's seminal Christ-centered preachers is not Christ-centered enough, the modern parameters for Christ-centeredness may be too narrow.[38] Second, Luther's preaching liberates the pulpit by presenting a simpler alternative to the redemptive-historical understanding of Christ-centeredness. For Luther, preaching Christ accurately is accomplished by maintaining a robust understanding of law and gospel.

### *Luther, the Sub-Christian Preacher*

It is common among redemptive-historical circles to label sermons that do not adhere to the acceptable criteria as "sub-Christian."[39] According to

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[36] Before any conclusions are highlighted, let the reader understand that three sermons does not a preaching career make. By the 1540s, Luther was preaching almost every day of the week, leaving behind a massive corpus of nearly 2,000 sermons. With such a voluminous corpus of extant material, sweeping claims regarding Luther's preaching should be avoided. Therefore, this essay will restrict its findings to these sermons alone, with the understanding that further study should be done to ascertain whether similar characteristics are true of Luther's preaching as a whole. Nevertheless, given that these sermons allow the reader to trace both homiletical development and continuity (as noted above), it is reasonable to conclude that the findings from these three sermons *may* be reflective of Luther's preaching as a whole.

[37] This is not to suggest that Luther's preaching contains no Christ-centered elements. There are certain characteristics of redemptive-historical preaching that Luther does include in these sermons, but he does not meet every measure. Furthermore, many consider the measures that Luther fails to meet as a Christ-centered preacher to be core pillars of the movement.

[38] Of course, this is not *necessarily* true. It is certainly possible that Luther's preaching falls outside the parameters of Christ-centered legitimacy, not due to any fault in the standards, but because his preaching is not genuinely Christ-centered. However, given his 450-year-old reputation as a Christ-centered preacher, the onus lies with those seeking to redefine Christ-centeredness.

[39] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 273–274; Prince, "Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching," 101; Jason Keith Allen, "The Christ-Centered Homiletics of Edmund Clowney and Sidney Greidanus in Contrast with the Human Author-Centered Hermeneutics of Walter Kaiser" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 1; Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 53; Donald N. Bastian, *The Pastor's First Love: And Other Essays on a High and Holy Calling* (Toronto: BPS Books, 2013), 125–126; Steve Mathewson, "Preaching the Gospel in Judges," *The Gospel Coalition*, February 27, 2011,

several of these criteria, Luther could be labeled as a "sub-Christian" preacher. Despite the prominence given to Christ and the gospel in all three sermons, a careful review of Luther's preaching on Matthew 11:25–30 reveals that he consistently fails two redemptive-historical tests for Christ-centeredness. First, Luther does not position his text within its redemptive-historical context. Second, he preaches the imperatives of Scripture without gospel qualifications.

*Contextual Myopia*

One of the fundamental pillars of redemptive-historical preaching is a Christ-centered biblical theology.[40] Clowney contends, "Preachers who ignore the history of redemption in their preaching are ignoring the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus in all the Scriptures."[41] A careful analysis of the three sermons on Matthew 11:25–30 reveals that Luther does not attempt to place the passage within the grand storyline of Scripture. Nowhere does he utilize the discipline of biblical theology to orient his hearers to the grand meta-narrative of the Bible.[42] Luther's approach is contextually myopic at best. He seems far more interested in accurately expositing the text at hand than unveiling the storyline of Scripture. This is not to say that Luther never utilized something like biblical theology in his preaching. Nevertheless, it is safe to conclude that, in practice, Luther did not consider a broad presentation of biblical theology as essential to every sermon.

*Unqualified Imperatives*

A major point of emphasis among redemptive-historical proponents is how to preach the imperatives of Scripture.[43] Generally, these homileti-

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http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2011/02/27/preaching-the-gospel-in-judges/.

[40] Allen, "Christ-Centered Homiletics," 5.

[41] Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 10. Cf. David Prince who says, "One fully exposes the meaning of the text only in light of the biblical storyline." Prince, "The Necessity of a Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching," 161.

[42] Although it may seem anachronistic to expect a sixteenth-century German Reformer to utilize a theological discipline that some understand to be relatively modern, the fact remains that redemptive-historical advocates often label sermons without biblical theology as "sub-Christian."

[43] For example, Goldsworthy writes, "To say what we should be or do and not link it with a clear exposition of what God has done about our failure to be or do perfectly as he wills is to reject the grace of God and to lead people to lust after self-help and self-improvement in a way that, to call a spade a spade, is godless." Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 119. Cf. Prince, "Christocentric Kingdom-Focused

cians recommend that imperatives be qualified with one of four indicative truths. First, preachers can qualify imperatives by reminding their hearers that they are powerless to obey them. Second, preachers can remind their hearers that their obedience does not merit God's favor. Third, their obedience should be in response to Christ's obedience. Fourth, Christ has already fulfilled this imperative perfectly on the believer's behalf. Some redemptive-historical scholars may suggest that all four (or more!) qualifications should follow each imperative, but most would be content with at least one qualification every time an imperative is preached.[44]

At no point in any of these three sermons does Luther qualify his imperatives with one of these gospel indicatives.[45] For example, in the first sermon he commands his hearers to carry their crosses. He states, "[Christ] does not say: Do this or that; but rather, come to me, get away from yourselves, and carry your cross after me."[46] Luther sees this call from Christ as the supreme imperative, but he does not qualify this imperative. He does not follow up this imperative with a reminder that hearers cannot possibly carry their crosses apart from grace. He does not remind his hearers that Christ bore a cross for them. It is not that Luther denies these gospel truths; he simply finds it unnecessary to issue these qualifications after every imperative.

The same lack of gospel qualifications is evident in the remaining two sermons. In his second sermon, Luther's imperatives shift toward the

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Expository Preaching," 168–169; John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002); Richard B. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006), 71–72.

[44] Jeffrey Mann articulates this exceptionally well: "Among certain believers, there has been such a fear of teaching works-righteousness that any meaningful statement of law is quickly followed with the promises of the gospel, as if to say that everything will be all right for those not living righteously anyway. The law is not given opportunity to do its work. Alternatively, those who do seek to balance law and gospel in their sermons often end up preaching *about* the law rather than preaching the law. Law, like gospel, must be *pro me*. The law must be preached so that I feel its accusing finger pointing at me, not as a lesson on human nature. Who will run to a physician who does not first perceive illness?" Jeffrey K. Mann, "Luther and the Holy Spirit: Why Pneumatology Still Matters," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34, no. 2 (2007): 116.

[45] This is not to say that Luther did not qualify imperatives with indicatives in his preaching. A wide-angle view of his preaching ministry would reflect a view of gospel-fueled obedience akin to that espoused by advocates of redemptive-historical preaching. However, Luther apparently did not deem it necessary to issue these qualifications in every sermon.

[46] AE 51:30.

discipline of prayer. The Christian life is full of temptations and trials; therefore, prayer is necessary. He explains, "It will be hard for you, it will be bitter; therefore prayer will be needed and others too will have to pray for you, that you may have strong courage and a brave heart to withstand the devil."[47] Again, Luther does not qualify this imperative. He does not remind his hearers that their prayer does not merit God's favor. He simply urges them to pray. Finally, in his third sermon, Luther commands his hearers to gladly listen to and obey their government authorities.[48] He does not remind them that their submission to the government must be gospel-centered obedience; he simply preaches unqualified imperatives.

Luther's failure to meet two of the core standards of redemptive-historical preaching does not necessarily mean that those standards are suspect. However, it does suggest that if the redemptive-historical model is correct, genuine Christ-centeredness is far more difficult to achieve than many have realized.[49] Perhaps Luther's failure to exhibit the criteria of this model will liberate the modern preacher from it because its Christ-centered metrics are too narrow.

*A More Excellent Way*

Luther's greatest potential to liberate the pulpit from the homiletical handcuffs of redemptive-historical preaching is his proclamation of law and gospel. Luther does more than fail the redemptive-historical litmus test. His law-gospel preaching offers a healthier, simpler alternative.

Perhaps no element of Luther's theology has received wider recognition than his distinction between law and gospel.[50] One of Luther's pupils

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[47] AE 51:128.

[48] AE 51:388–389.

[49] Redemptive-historical advocate Daniel Doriani recognizes these and other weaknesses to the redemptive-historical approach. He states, "Some advocates of RHP are wary of any specific application, fearing that calls to change behavior will usurp the Spirit's role in application and drift into anthropocentric moralism. Zeal to avoid moralistic readings of narrative leads some to refuse all moral uses of narratives. But narratives edify too. Indicatives precede imperatives, but there *are* imperatives." Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 296.

[50] For example, see Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, ed. Victor I. Gruhn, trans. Eric W. Gritsch and Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 120–179; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 267–276; Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 251–273; Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 110–124; Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God!: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (London: The Epworth Press,

claimed, "No other teacher had ever given clearer and more understandable instruction regarding the proper distinction of law and gospel . . . than had Martin Luther."[51] Luther himself states, "Whoever knows well how to distinguish the gospel from the law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian."[52]

The law and gospel dialectic, for Luther, was not a hermeneutical grid used to interpret Scripture. Luther believed one understands the law primarily in contrast to the gospel. The law and the gospel in their dialectical form are not chiefly about content but function. David Lose explains:

> In order to appreciate Luther's understanding of the law, we must note that he treats it always with regard to its functions. That is, Luther does not consider the law primarily in terms of particular codes of conduct but rather as the distinct means by which God achieves certain ends. You recognize the law, from this point of view, not simply from what it says (content) but from what it does (function).[53]

According to Luther, the law and gospel represent two different ways God speaks to people. Law is any word of God that kills or demands, and gospel is any word of God that makes alive or provides. God kills, crushes, and pulverizes the sinner with the law. He exposes his insufficiencies and reveals his incompleteness. With the gospel, God raises the hearer back to life. He provides what he demands and completes what is missing.

Many preachers mistakenly assume that certain passages are primarily law passages and others are primarily gospel passages. This error often appears in the belief that the Old Testament is concerned primarily with law and the New Testament with gospel. Bernhard Lohse writes, "Most texts assigned to the law have also a gospel side, just as most texts assigned to the gospel have also a law side."[54] Luther's preaching demonstrates this truth. When he preached the law of the Ten Commandments, Luther found gospel in the phrase "I am the Lord, thy God." When he preached the gospel of the cross, Luther found law in the severity of God's

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1947), 152–160; Hans-Martin Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther: A Critical Assessment*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 135–156.

[51] As quoted in Robert Kolb, "'The Noblest Skill in the Christian Church': Luther's Sermons on the Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 71 (2007): 301.

[52] AE 26:115.

[53] David J. Lose, "Martin Luther on Preaching the Law," *Word & World* 21 (2001): 254.

[54] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 269.

wrath against sin. Every text contains both law and gospel because every text testifies to the incompleteness of man and God's provision to make him complete.

The goal of the sermon for Luther, therefore, is not merely to speak accurate words *for* God but to speak in an accurate *manner*. If God speaks through the languages of law and gospel, the preacher must rightly employ those languages in the pulpit. Gerhard Forde opines, "The difference between 'old law' and 'new law (gospel)' is a difference in *speaking*."[55] He continues, "Law and gospel, as Luther understood them, are more a matter of modes of speech and ways of preaching than of difference in content between Old and New Testaments."[56] The point of Luther's sermons was to communicate law and gospel accurately to his people.

The import of this truth for the preaching enterprise cannot be overstated. Many redemptive-historical homileticians have unwittingly clamped one side of God's mouth shut while holding up a megaphone to the other. Luther preached the law in a robust manner, however, unlike this one-dimensional approach. If God speaks in the two languages of law and gospel, preachers must painstakingly strive for fluency in both languages.

Later in life, someone asked the Reformer whether law or gospel should receive greater prominence in the sermon. His answer reflects his robust understanding of law and gospel and his confidence in the Word of God. He replied:

> This shouldn't and can't be comprehended in a fixed rule. Christ himself preached [the law and the gospel] according to his circumstances. As a passage or text indicates, therefore, one should take up the law and the gospel, for one must have both. It isn't right to draw everything into the gospel alone; nor is it good always to preach the law alone. The Scriptures themselves, if properly adhered to, will give the answer.[57]

## V. Conclusion

This essay has contended that the homiletics of Martin Luther, as demonstrated in his preaching on Matthew 11:25–30, can liberate the preacher from the unintended legalistic consequences of redemptive-historical preaching. However, the claims of this essay are narrow since

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[55] Gerhard O. Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 240; emphasis original.

[56] Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," 240.

[57] AE 54:404.

they only relate to a small selection of Luther's sermons. Can the same be said of Luther's preaching in general? Several areas of additional study may further liberate the preacher from Christ-centered legalism.

First, further historical study is needed to test the faithfulness of other Christian preachers from the past by the Christ-centered metrics of the present. This brief analysis of Luther's sermons suggests that the definition of Christ-centered preaching has become too narrow. Evidence from other historical preachers, and more evidence from Luther's preaching, may further substantiate the need for a broader definition. Another area for further study is the development of a weighted definition of Christ-centered preaching to offer greater flexibility, as opposed to the current all-or-nothing approach.

Second, further study of Luther's preaching will reveal that he demonstrates a wide-angle view of pulpit ministry. Few evangelicals would deny the importance of the homiletical tools proposed by redemptive-historical advocates. At issue is not whether these are useful recommendations, but whether each of these elements is necessary in every sermon. Further study of Luther's preaching will reveal that he is content to build an overall foundation of law and gospel for his people.[58] An isolated glance at individual sermons may paint Luther as sometimes Antinomian and other times legalistic. But Luther is no homiletical schizophrenic. His strategy is to ground his people firmly in the two languages of law and gospel, and this foundation is not built in a single sermon.

Third, further study of Luther's handling of law and gospel may provide the preacher with a more flexible and robust alternative to redemptive-historical preaching.[59] One of the unintended consequences of redemptive-historical preaching is that by requiring preachers to move rapidly from law to gospel in a single sermon, neither law nor gospel is preached effectively. When every shot of law is immediately followed by a

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[58] Bernard Lohse opines, "Where the 'law' is in fact already encountered, in suffering, temptation, or other severe experiences, the preaching of the gospel is to be given priority. On the other hand, where the law is denied through self-confidence or hubris, a too hasty preaching of the gospel would only lead to one's feeling supported in self-righteousness. Luther's distinction is clearly related to the context of *proclamation*." Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 269; emphasis added.

[59] Cf. James F. McCue, "Luther and the Problem of Popular Preaching," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, no. 1 (1985): 33–43; M. Hopson Boutot, "The Arrangement of Law and Gospel in the Preaching of Martin Luther" (Research Paper, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

gospel chaser, the law is not given sufficient opportunity to work.[60] Conversely, the gospel is far less glorious when not understood against a backdrop of unfettered law. Further study of Luther's homiletic may allow the preacher to focus on law or gospel, given the concerns of the text and the needs of the congregation.

Further study will undoubtedly help preachers and theologians who desire to present God's word accurately, no matter the results. Perhaps many of the proposals suggested by advocates of redemptive-historical preaching will be supported by faithful preachers throughout history. Perhaps a closer look at Martin Luther's preaching will reveal that his homiletics conform more closely to redemptive-historical preaching than this essay has revealed. Be that as it may, further study on what it means to faithfully preach Christ will help the pulpit, not hinder it.

This essay is not ultimately concerned with dismantling or discrediting redemptive-historical preaching, but with liberating men of God to preach the word of God faithfully. The apostle Paul once remarked that whether men preached Christ out of rivalry or good will, he would rejoice in the proclamation of Jesus' name (Phil 1:15–18). The reality is that redemptive-historical preaching revels in the unashamed proclamation of Jesus Christ. Little else could be cause for greater rejoicing, regardless of minor methodological differences. Perhaps a deeper look at Martin Luther's preaching will lead to rejoicing on both sides of this debate. May the preachers who faithfully strive to proclaim Christ receive liberation from the threat of the sub-Christian sermon, even if their methodology differs from their redemptive-historical brothers. May these heavy-laden homileticians find rest, not *from* the burden of preaching Christ faithfully, but *through* it.

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[60] James McCue is very helpful here. He states, "The gospel—understood in Lutheran fashion as the proclamation of the unconditional forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake—is not addressed to every casual passer-by." Preachers should reserve the gospel for those overwhelmed by the seriousness of sin. "Where the gospel is proclaimed to a different sort of audience, the results, according to Luther, can be disastrous." "McCue, "Luther and the Problem of Popular Preaching," 37. Cf. Carl Trueman who states, "The gospel of the cross is not the Protestant equivalent of diplomatic immunity. It is the haven of those who know the daily terror of the law, and are acutely aware of the apparent chaos of the world around, and the battle within their own breasts." Trueman, "Theological and Biographical Foundations."

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# Luther's *Oratio, Meditatio, and Tentatio* as the Shape of Pastoral Care for Pastors

**John T. Pless**

The fact that pastors also need pastoral care is inherent in the nature of the office itself. In a 1968 essay under the title, "The Crisis of the Christian Ministry," Hermann Sasse puts it like this: "God always demands from his servants something which is, humanly speaking, impossible."[1] The language of crisis was common back in 1968. Racial unrest in the United States, student protests in Europe, and the Vietnam War captured public attention. The church, of course, was not exempt; there was sweated anxiety regarding the future of the church. Things were described as being in a "crisis." It was in this period that we heard of the crisis of biblical authority, the crisis of preaching, the liturgical crisis, the crisis of church unity, and the like. There was a restlessness for new forms, and everyone was convinced that the present crisis would be resolved only by innovation and creativity. Sasse weighed in with his own essay on the crisis of the Christian ministry. What he says is instructive.

Sasse notes that we must distinguish between the "crisis which belongs to the nature of our office" and "the crisis which is conditioned by the situation of the church in a certain age."[2] We tend to fixate on the second crisis and can form our own catalogue of issues that might be seen as crises today: projected clergy shortage, maltreatment of pastors, clerical burnout, moral failure of pastors, lack of public trust of the clergy, and the like. More often than not, these issues are addressed programmatically or administratively in the church. That is not bad, but if that is the only approach, it is inadequate and incomplete. These are certainly real problems, but they can only be adequately addressed from the perspective of the primal crisis that belongs to the nature of the office itself. This crisis is

[1] Hermann Sasse, "The Crisis of the Christian Ministry," in *The Lonely Way, Selected Essays and Letters, Volume 2 (1941–1976)*, ed. Matthew Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 356.

[2] Sasse, "The Crisis of the Christian Ministry," 356.

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occasioned by the word of God itself, namely, that God uses sinners to remit the sins of sinners. Here Luther's triad of *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* comes into play, providing an orientation for how we understand the pastoral care of pastors.

Luther describes the making of theologians who can distinguish the law from the gospel in his 1539 "Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings." He uses these three Latin terms (*oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*) to describe this process. His framework was a distinct break from the popular medieval scheme for theology as *lectio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. Westhelle observes:

> Luther's schema begins with *oratio*, which is more than prayer; it is all God-talk, talk of and to God when one knows that reason will not suffice. Second is *meditatio*—in which he includes *lectio*—which is not limited to meditation in the internal sense but also "external," hence engaging others in reflection. Luther does not follow the third medieval rule, *contemplatio*, but instead he brings up a very different and original concept, *tentatio*, which becomes the foremost—the "touchstone" he calls it—and the last characteristic of theological reflection.[3]

Thus Luther moves away from the speculative theology of scholasticism and the contemplative spirituality of mysticism. For Luther, the *telos* of the Christian life on this side of the Last Day is not a beatific beholding of the divine but suffering under the cross, which conforms the one who meditates on the Scriptures to the image of Christ crucified.

## I. *Oratio*

For Luther, "Holy Scriptures constitute a book which turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because not one teaches about eternal life except this one alone."[4] *Oratio* is anchored in the reading and hearing of these Scriptures, which create faith in Christ Jesus and kindle prayer. According to Luther, this is the prayer that David models in Psalm 119:

> "Teach me, Lord, instruct me, lead me, show me," and many more words like these. Although he well knew and daily heard and read the

[3] Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 35–36. See also John Kleinig, "*Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio:* What Makes a Theologian?," *CTQ* 66, no. 3 (July 2002): 255–267, and John T. Pless, *Martin Luther: Preacher of the Cross: A Study of Luther's Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 17–25.

[4] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelican, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 34:285; hereafter AE.

> text of Moses and other books besides, still he wants to lay hold of the real teacher of the Scriptures himself, so he may not seize upon them pell-mell with his reason and become his own teacher. For such practice gives rise to factious spirits who allow themselves to nurture the delusion that the Scriptures are subject to them and can be easily grasped with their reason, as if they were Markolf or Aesop's Fables, for which no Holy Spirit and no prayers are needed."[5]

Concerning Luther on Psalm 119, Oswald Bayer comments,

> Almost from the outset, Psalm 119 takes on fundamental significance for Luther's battle with the pope, who wants to prevent him from remaining with the word through which "I became a Christian": the word of absolution. From the beginning of the Reformation, this psalm is seen as a prayer for the victory of God's word against its enemies. In fact, it is seen as a double prayer that was turned into a hymn verse in 1543: Lord, keep us steadfast in your word and curb the pope's and the Turk's sword.[6]

The Scriptures are, to use the words of Oswald Bayer, the breathing space of the Holy Spirit.[7] Not only did the Spirit breathe his words through the prophets and apostles, but he continues to breathe in and through the Scriptures so that faith in Christ Jesus is created and sustained. In contrast to Schleiermacher, who described the Holy Scriptures as a "mausoleum of religion, a monument to a great spirit once there but no longer,"[8] Luther understood the Scriptures as the living and life-giving word of God, the dwelling place of the Spirit.

There was a shift in 1758 when Johann Salmo Semler (1725–1791) denounced Luther's use of *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* as unscientific and antiquated monastic theology that must be replaced by what he claimed as a historical reading of the Scriptures.[9] Semler forgot that "the exegesis of Holy Scripture cannot contradict their inspiration."[10] Now Scriptures are to

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[5] AE 34:286.

[6] Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way,* trans. Jeffery G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 40.

[7] Oswald Bayer, "Theology as *Askesis,*" in *Gudstankens aktualitet: Festskrift til Peter Widmann,* ed. Marie Wiberg Pedersen, Bo Kristian Holm, and Anders-Christian Jacobsen (Copenhagen: Forlaget Anis, 2010), 46.

[8] Cited by Bayer in "Theology as *Askesis,*" 38.

[9] See Bayer, "Theology as *Askesis,*" 38. For more on Semler's significance, see Roy A. Harrisville, *Pandora's Box Opened: An Examination and Defense of the Historical-Critical Method and Its Master Practitioners* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 105–113.

[10] Bayer, "Theology as *Askesis,*" 49.

be read and mastered without prayer and meditation. They are also rendered as ineffective weapons in the face of spiritual attack. Studied this way, they can no longer be proclaimed as words of Spirit and life. Sermons become commentaries on the text rather than proclamation of the text, occasions for the edification of religious consciousness or fortification in morality.

It is easy to see the contrast with Luther. In his Genesis lectures, for example, Luther writes, "I am content with this gift which I have, Holy Scripture, which abundantly teaches and supplies all things necessary both for this life and also for the life to come."[11] Luther believed the Scriptures to possess clarity, for they are illuminated by the Christ to whom they bear witness. The Scriptures are also sufficient to make us wise for the salvation that is in Christ alone. Far from being a dead letter in need of being vivified by the Spirit, the Scriptures that were inspired by the Spirit are now the instrument of his work to create and sustain faith.

## II. *Meditatio*

The word of God is heard with the ear, engaging the hearts and the minds of those who receive it in faith. With the lips, this implanted word is confessed, proclaimed, and prayed. *Oratio* leads to *meditatio*, which is meditation on the word of God. For Luther, this meditation is not an exercise of spirituality that turns the believer inward in silent reflection; *meditatio* is grounded in the *externum verbum* (the external word), to use the language of the Smalcald Articles (SA III VIII 7). For Luther, *meditatio* is oral and outward, so in his Genesis lectures he states,

> Let him who wants to contemplate in the right way reflect on his Baptism; let him read his Bible, hear sermons, honor father and mother, and come to the aid of a brother in distress. But let him not shut himself up in a nook . . . and there entertain himself with his devotions and thus suppose that he is sitting in God's bosom and has fellowship with God without Christ, without the Word, without the sacraments.[12]

Evangelical meditation draws one outside of himself into the promises of Christ (faith) and into the need of the neighbor (love): "Such meditation

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[11] AE 6:329. Also, for more examples of how Luther cherishes the Holy Scriptures as God's word, see Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relationship of Authority and Interpretative Method in Luther's Approach to Scripture* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004), 249–282; Robert Kolb, "Nowhere More Present and Active Than in the Holy Letters: Luther's Understanding of God's Presence in Scripture," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 49, no. 1 (May 2015): 4–16.

[12] AE 3:275.

does not just involve gazing at one's spiritual navel; it does not eavesdrop on the inner self."[13] Luther, therefore, is dead set against any and all forms of enthusiasm[14] that would rely on visions or miraculous appearances.

> Christ once appeared visible here on earth and showed his glory, and according to the divine purpose of God finished the work of redemption and deliverance of mankind. I do not desire he should come to me once more in the same manner, neither would I should he send an angel unto me. Nay, though an angel should appear before mine eyes from heaven, yet it would not add to my belief; for I have of my Saviour Christ Jesus bond and seal; I have his Word, Spirit, and sacrament; thereon I depend, and desire no new revelations. And the more steadfastly to confirm me in this resolution, to hold solely to God's Word, and not to give credit to any visions or revelations, I shall relate the following circumstance: On Good Friday last, I being in my chamber in fervent prayer, contemplating with myself, how Christ my Saviour on the cross suffered and died for our sins, there suddenly appeared on the wall a bright vision of our Saviour Christ, with the five wounds, steadfastly looking upon me, as if had been Christ himself corporeally. At first sight, I thought it had been some celestial revelation, but I reflected that it must needs be an illusion and juggling of the devil, for Christ appeared to us in his Word, and in a meaner and more humble form; therefore I spake to the vision thus: Avoid thee, confounded devil: I know no other Christ than he who was crucified, and who in his Word is pictured and presented unto me. Whereupon the image vanished, clearly showing of whom it came.[15]

Visions are deceptive and deceiving; Holy Scripture is not.

Meditation is immersion into the text of Holy Scripture. It is the ongoing hearing of God's word that is read and preached so that the one who hears Christ is enlivened to trust his promises and equipped to respond to the needs of the neighbor in his calling in the world. Luther likened meditation to a cow chewing its cud. In his 1525 commentary on Deuteronomy

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[13] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation,* trans. Thomas Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 35.

[14] See Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way,* 40. Here Bayer quotes a December 1520 Luther sermon on Genesis 28, "If they bore their way into heaven with their heads and look around they will find no one, because Christ lies in a crib and in a woman's lap. So let them fall back down again and break their necks." Bayer also writes, "Those who want to search for the Holy Spirit deep inside themselves, in a realm too deep for words to express, will find only ghosts, not God" (55).

[15] Cited in Hugh T. Kerr, *A Compend of Luther's Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), 57.

14:1, he writes: "To chew the cud, however, is to take up the Word with delight and meditate with supreme diligence, so that (according to the proverb) one does not permit it to go into one ear and out the other, but holds it firmly in the heart, swallows it, and absorbs it into the intestines."[16]

Luther provides a practical tool for such meditation in his celebrated devotional booklet, "A Simple Way to Pray," written in 1535 for the Wittenberg barber, Peter Beskendorf. Here he suggests that a person meditate on each of commandment of the Decalogue "in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book."[17] In Luther's way of meditation, one is encouraged to dwell on the text and to engage in various dimensions, including the didactic, doxological, diagnostic, and intercessory. Those who stand in front of the text are taught, brought to praise God, have their sins uncovered, and are given material for their praying.

While Luther prepared this tract for a layman, it certainly has application for the pastor whose life is given to the service of the text of Holy Scripture for the sake of proclamation and pastoral care. The Psalms, in Luther's estimation, were an especially fertile place for meditation for preachers. In his lectures on Psalm 1 (1519–1521), he states,

> Therefore it is the office of a man whose proper duty it is to converse on something, to discourse on the Law of the Lord. . . . For this meditation consists first in close attention to the words of the Law, and then drawing together the various parts of Scripture. And this is a pleasant hunt, a game rather like the play of stags in the forest, where "the Lord arouses the stags, and uncovers the forests" (Ps. 29:2). For out of this will proceed a sermon to the people which is well informed in the Law of the Lord.[18]

The preacher is not meditating on the word simply for his own spiritual wellbeing but for those placed under his curacy in the church. He meditates on the word so that he may have something to say from the Lord to the people he is given to serve.

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[16] AE 9:136.

[17] AE 43:209. Also note Brecht's observation: "Nowhere is the connection between order and freedom in Luther's practice of prayer so clearly seen as in his advice for Master Peter." Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532–1546,* trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 14.

[18] AE 14:296.

### III. *Tentatio*

For Luther, meditation does not take place in a spiritual vacuum in isolation from the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. God uses *tentatio* (spiritual affliction, trial, and temptation) to drive away from the self and toward his promises alone. Bayer captures Luther's thought:

> Anyone who meditates can expect to suffer. Luther once again also allows Psalm 119 to prescribe this experience. Therefore in light of this third rule, he expects students of theology also to see themselves in the role of the psalmist who "complains so often about all kinds of enemies . . . that he has to put up with because he meditates, that is, because he is occupied with God's word (as has been said) in all manner of ways."[19]

For Luther, meditation is anchored in the First Commandment. To use the words of Albrecht Peters, "God's First Commandment, however, confiscates this center of our entire human nature for itself. God, as our Creator, calls our heart out of clinging to what is created and demands it for itself in an exclusive and undivided way. Here the First Commandment and the Creed interlock."[20] It is only this confiscated heart, fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things that is free to pray in the fashion that God commands and promises to hear. Such prayer is not easy; it involves struggle, for "when we meditate on the first commandment we are involved in a battle between the one Lord and the many lords (cf. 1 Cor. 8:5f)."[21] To meditate on the First Commandment and to pray from it is to let God be God, but for the flesh, the world, and the devil, such meditation is a declaration of war.

*Tentatio* is no stranger to those who serve in the pastoral office. Luther understands this *tentatio* as a spiritual affliction that drives faithful servants to rely on the sure and certain promises of Christ alone. Commenting on Genesis 32:32, Luther says, "our Lord Jesus Christ, tested Jacob not to destroy him but to confirm and strengthen him and that in his fight he

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[19] Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 60.

[20] Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther's Catechisms: Ten Commandments,* trans. Holger Sonntag (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 118. Also see John Maxfield: "For Luther idolatry is the self-enslaving false worship of a heart turned in on itself, of religious piety shaped by self-will and thus works righteousness in any number of ways, of substituting human reason for the revelation of God in the divine Word." John Maxfield, "Luther and Idolatry," in *The Reformation as Christianization: Essays on Scott Hendrix's Christianization Thesis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 168.

[21] Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 62.

might more correctly learn the might of the promise."[22] God does his work under opposites: "When God works, He turns His face away at first and seems to be the devil, not God."[23]

Temptation, which is entailed in the *tentatio*, is necessary for the Christian life in general but especially for preachers of the word. Luther says in a "Table Talk" of 1532,

> I did not learn my theology all at once, but had to search constantly deeper and deeper for it. My temptations did that for me, for no one can understand Holy Scripture without practice and temptations. That is what the enthusiasts and sects lack. They don't have the right critic, the devil, who is the best teacher of theology. If we don't have that kind of devil, then we become nothing but speculative theologians, who do nothing but walk around in our own thoughts and speculate with our reason alone as to whether things should be like this, or like that.[24]

The experience of temptation prepares and equips the pastor to serve as an "instructor of consciences" in the sense that he must have the capacity to distinguish the law from the gospel, directing the afflicted away from the erratic and errant movement of the conscience from excuse-making to accusation. A conscience ceases to rationalize sin or be terrorized by the law only when it comes to rest in the forgiveness of sins:

> Therefore I admonish you, especially those of you who are to become instructors of consciences, as well as each of you individually, that you exercise yourselves continually by study, by reading, by meditation and by prayer, so that in temptation you will be able to instruct consciences, both your own and others, and take them from the law to grace, from active righteous to passive righteousness, in short from Moses to Christ. In affliction and in the conflict of conscience, it is the devil's habit to frighten us with the law and to set against us the consciousness of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell, and eternal death, so that he may drive us into despair, subject us to himself, and pluck us from Christ.[25]

Like the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, who speaks of the comfort that we give to others in their afflictions as flowing from the comfort that we ourselves have received from Christ, Luther speaks out of the *tentatio*

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[22] AE 6:144. Here see Mary Jane Haemig, "Prayer as Talking Back to God," *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (Autumn 2009): 270–295.

[23] AE 7:103.

[24] AE 54:50.

[25] AE 26:10.

that he himself had experienced. The judgment of Walther von Loewenich is on target: "The secret of Luther's proficiency in pastoral care was that he himself had known what it was like to experience attacks of despair [*Anfechtung*]."[26] Only as one who himself was comforted by the gospel could Luther be a comforter to the afflicted and despairing.

### IV. *Oratio*, *Meditatio*, and *Tentatio* in the Pastor's Life

Luther's triad of *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* shapes the ongoing life of the pastor as he is forever dependent on the power of God's promises. The crosses and afflictions of the pastoral life drive the pastor to meditate on the words of the Lord, and God's word opens his lips for confession, prayer, praise, and proclamation, with the confidence that the divine word accomplishes God's purposes and does not return to him empty.

Here we see that Luther's triad is also reversible. The *tentatio* drives us to the *meditatio*, which in turn enables the *oratio*, the calling on the name of the Lord. Spiritual attack disables and deconstructs all of our own resources; we are left without anything but Christ and his absolving word. In that word the conscience takes refuge, delighting in it day and night, to use the language of Psalm 1, and finding in it a gift more precious than gold and silver and sweeter to the taste than honey, to use the imagery of Psalm 119:72, 103. It is this word that opens the lips for prayer and proclamation.

At this point, it might also be observed that the catechetical core—the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer—follows the contours of the *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*. Robert Kolb has observed that the Decalogue sets the agenda for Christian praying, and the Lord's Prayer for Christian living.[27] Along these lines we might also say that *oratio* encompasses the prayer that grows from God's command and promise. *Meditatio* is a meditation on the works of the Triune God, and *tentatio* is that life lived under the cross, which is characterized by the Lord's Prayer, where we pray the seven petitions that describe our wretchedness and promise God's mercy. Luther's theology of prayer is a reflection of the theology of the cross. James Nestingen writes:

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[26] Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work,* trans. Lawrence Denef (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 359–360. See also Lennart Pinomaa, "The Problem of Affliction," in *Faith Victorious: An Introduction to Luther's Theology,* trans. Walter J. Kukkonen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 89–100; Mark D. Thompson, "Luther on Despair," in *The Consolations of Theology,* ed. Brian S. Rosner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 51–74.

[27] Robert A. Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching: A Guide for the Study of Luther's Catechism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2012), 103.

> The Ten Commandments set out the requirements of the creaturely life, incumbent by creation; the Creed declares the gifts of the Triune God; the Lord's Prayer gives voice to the circumstances of the believer living in a world of the nomos (law) in the hope of the resurrection. . . . Luther's explanations of the Lord's Prayer arise from such an analysis of the situation of faith. Barraged by the relentless demands of the law, under assault by the powers of this age yet gripped in the hope of the gospel, the believer learns "where to seek and obtain that aid." So, while exposing the Lord's Prayer at its first level, as instruction in how to pray, Luther is at the same time describing the contention in which faith lives, giving language for the rhythm of death and resurrection that is the hallmark of life in Christ. At this level, the Lord's Prayer is a cry wrung from the crucible, an exposition of the shape of life lived under the sign of the cross in the hope of the resurrection.[28]

Each petition of the Lord's Prayer is a diagnosis of our neediness and a promise of God's mercy.[29]

What are the implications for the pastoral care of pastors? First, Luther did not understand this triad as individualistic or private. Broadly speaking, they take place within the context of life of the church. Bayer has pointed out the parallel between Luther's ordering of the seven marks of the church enumerated in Luther's treatise "On the Councils and the Church" and the *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* of the Wittenberg Preface, both of which were written in the same year. The *oratio* and *meditatio* are embraced in the first six marks: the holy word of God, Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, the office of the keys, the calling of ministers, and prayer/public praise/thanksgiving to God. The seventh external sign is "the possession of the sacred cross."[30] This sign is the *tentatio*. For Luther it means that Christian people

> must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord's Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness in order to become like their head, Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly

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[28] James Nestingen, "The Lord's Prayer in Luther's Catechism," *Word & World* 22, no. 1 (2002): 39–40.

[29] In his *Explanation of the Lord's Prayer for Simple Laymen (1519)*, Luther described the Lord's Prayer as "seven reminders of our wretchedness and poverty by means of which man, led to a knowledge of self, can see what a miserable and perilous life he leads on earth" (AE 42:27).

[30] AE 41:164.

> adhere to Christ and God's word, enduring this for the sake of Christ.[31]

More narrowly, we see the triad in the context of the ministerium.

While our spiritual fathers spoke more frequently than we commonly do of the "ministerium," it is a word in our collective vocabulary that we would do well to recover, especially when we think of the pastoral care of pastors. Years ago Ulrich Asendorf spoke of the pastoral office as a brotherly *Amt*. We are not isolated spiritual entrepreneurs, but we are brothers bound together under the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. And under their regency, we are accountable to one another. We are to have one another's backs, to use the slang. This is not a hermeneutic of mutual pastoral suspicion, nor is it a matter of mouthing the mantra "we've got to trust one another."[32] It is a watching out for the brother, but not something that would make his fulfilling the responsibilities given to him unnecessarily difficult. It is also being there for him with the courage to call him to repentance and the compassion to console him with word of the cross. In this way, pastors are also comforting one another with the comfort that they have received from Christ, to paraphrase Paul's language in 2 Corinthians.[33]

The *tentatio* is sure to come for the pastor, but he need not face it alone. God gives us brothers and fathers in the office, not simply as companions to dispel loneliness, but as men who will be for us the ears and mouth of Christ Jesus. Such mutual conversation of the brethren is not an occasion for a mutual pity-party, but it exists for the exercise of God's law and his gospel, so that we are called to repentance and faith even as we bear the cross in our various callings. Churchly implications of this are to be found in the practice of visitation, for which we have circuit visitors. The change in nomenclature is a welcome one. Counselors are called in when people are in crisis. Visitors look in to see how things are going not only in times of difficulty or in a period of transition but in the ongoing life of the pastor. Whether it is the circuit visitor or another brother in office, pastors also need a father confessor.

Second, *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* frame the pastor's life of prayer, study, and suffering. The pastor lives with Holy Scriptures as a child in a

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[31] AE 41:164–165.

[32] In the New Testament, Christians are never directed to trust one another. We are instructed to love, forgive, edify, admonish, encourage, restore, and bear with one another but never to trust one another. Trust is reserved for God alone.

[33] See the excellent discussion of this comfort in Mark Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 22–30.

cradle, to borrow Luther's language.[34] It is here that we learn how to listen to God and to call upon him. It is being nestled in the Scriptures that we learn how to preach and to pray and to suffer. It is this study to which the Apostle beckons Timothy, when in 2 Timothy 2:15 he urges him to present himself as a workman who has no need to be ashamed, "rightly handling the word of truth." This is what Bayer calls "*askesis*" or the exercise of faith.[35] It is essential for the spiritual soundness of the pastor. Such study and prayer are not leisure-time activities, a retreat from the world of supposedly "real ministry," but instead they are essential for both the pastor and his hearers, and they cannot be divorced from the cross that is borne for the sake of the office.

Pastoral care of pastors will shepherd pastors to live within Luther's triad: *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* rather than seeking alternative ways, self-chosen and self-directed, of serving God's holy people.

[34] Cited by Bayer, "Theology as *Askesis,*" 46.

[35] Bayer, "Theology as *Askesis,*" 35.

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# All Theology Is Christology: An Axiom in Search of Acceptance

**David P. Scaer**

Some of the most useless time in seminary classrooms is spent defending the usability of abstract phrases for which no final, definitive explanation is possible. A perennial one concerns the crucifixion of Jesus: Is it law or gospel? Since law and gospel have to do with the character of proclamation and not events in that proclamation, the crucifixion, which is an event, albeit the redemptive one, is neither law nor gospel. In the sixteenth century, Lutherans argued whether good works were detrimental or beneficial to salvation.[1] Choose your poison. We approach the correctness of the phrase "all theology is Christology" with caution. Like the question about the crucifixion, this dictum, apart from a particular context, may have multiple meanings of which some are predictably wrong. On the other hand, the phrase may provide the key for a fuller understanding of God. In fact, it will be argued here that Christology is the overarching category under which theology, that is, our knowledge of God, is to be placed. Instead of opposing attributes against one another, we should first find God in Jesus of Nazareth, in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily (Col 2:9).

## I. Misunderstanding of "All Theology Is Christology"

On an elementary level, the phrase might mean that Christology is the only topic in theology and hence the only course in a seminary curriculum. A student preparing for the ministry would learn nothing except the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. In spite of the limitations of such a curriculum, it would certainly be preferable to those wherein Christology is sidelined in favor of such important courses as stewardship, church administration, feminism, or ecology. Surely no serious theologian in the classical Christian traditions holds that such a narrowly defined Christ-

[1] FC SD IV 1. The opposing phrases were: "Good works are necessary for salvation" and "It is impossible to be saved without good works."

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ology encompasses an entire theological program; however, if Christology should include soteriology, it might very well do the job.

Objections to this proposition may falsely identify it with a unitarianism of the Second Person. Such "Jesus religion" can be recognized in sects that baptize in the name of Jesus alone. Christomonism is not a new phenomenon. Without explicitly denying the Trinity, it surfaced in medieval Catholic mysticism, in which the soul merged with Jesus, and in Protestant Pietism, as is evidenced in Zinzendorf's "Jesus only" hymns. The maxim that "all theology is Christology" might suitably describe Karl Barth's system, whose doctrine of revelation rests on the believer's encounter (*Begegnung*) with Christ. Barth's Christological bent was a reaction against Enlightenment rationalists, Immanuel Kant, and F. D. E. Schleiermacher. These forerunners of classical liberalism promoted a theology where Jesus no longer played an exclusive role in revealing God. Rationalists derived knowledge of God from reason interpreting nature. Kant knew God from the moral imperative, and Schleiermacher's God emerged from consciousness. In spite of their diversities, these approaches did not recognize Jesus as the exclusive manifestation of the divine. Theology soon was replaced by *Religionsgeschichte*, which treated all religions as purely historical phenomena. These approaches were more anthropological than theological, since they studied human quests for God and, in some cases, the human situation without reference to God. Godless religion existed long before he was declared dead. Even in some church-related colleges and universities, religion is often another academic discipline among the arts and sciences and is no longer entitled to a separate department. The value of theology, now devolved into religious studies, was measured by its moral and cultural usefulness for society.

Karl Barth countered this homogenization of God-with-culture by holding that Christ was the first and only revelation of God. At first, his *solus Christus* theology appeared to be a promising revival of Reformation beliefs. Sadly, it promised more than what it delivered. By making Christ the sole revelation of God, Barth denied the natural knowledge of God, placed the Scriptures as the word of God in a subordinate position, and had no necessary, salvific role for the sacraments. With Christ as the first, full, and only revelation of God, the gospel, by the inclusion of demand, became law. As a result, Barth appropriately entered the political arena and participated in the Barmen Declaration. His political goals were in line with those of the social gospel, against which he had originally mounted his system. He led Protestantism back into the clutches of the classical liberalism from which he promised to deliver it. In reaction to the theology of immanence spawned by Schleiermacher, Barth revived the concept of a

sovereign God who was "the Wholly Other." Yet in making the moment of the encounter with Christ the revelatory connection with God, he left the initiative with the individual. The bright Christological promise of his approach faded. His failure to produce an eschatology in which unbelievers were accountable to God showed that he had not gone beyond the horizons of classical liberalism. His equalizing of divine sovereignty and grace resulted in an unspoken universalism.

Important for our immediate purposes is that a theology derived from attributes, like Barth's, is problematic. After the attributes are named, they must be defined and, to avoid contradiction or unacceptable conclusions, coordinated.[2] If some are favored, others must be subordinated. Freedom leaves God at the mercy of an indefinite future.[3] Give love the upper hand, and the argument might go like this: "I cannot believe in a God who sends anyone to hell." What are the alternatives? A God who sends everyone to heaven or a God who annihilates people to avoid the choice? A third option leads to atheism. Divine non-existence is preferable to letting a capricious, non-loving deity survive. Deriving theology from attributes parallels Darwin's theory of natural selection: some survive and others do not.[4]

In this regard two theorems are offered. First, theological systems locating truth within human experiences, even if they use biblical or Christological terms, eventually prove to be neither Christological nor theological. Rationalism, Schleiermacher, classical liberalism, and a-futurism, in which God depends on his creation, all assign him a subordinate role. He becomes creature-like and with little advantage over his creatures in determining the future. He is simply another player on the team. *Credo in unum deum patrem omnipotentem creatorem coeli et terrae* is rendered impotent over the future. The future dissolves past omnipotence, projected guarantees

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[2] Michael Horton understands that an isolated attribute of divine sovereignty can lead to doubt and despair, so he balances it with the gospel promises: "We must eliminate both the idol of a loving but weak god, and the idol of a strong but graceless god. For neither is great enough to capture the hearts and minds of our disenchanted age, especially in the face of evil, oppression, violence, and death." Michael S. Horton, "Is the *New* News *Good* News?," *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999): 18.

[3] This view has been discussed in *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999) and *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 6 (1999). See especially Paul Helm, "Openness Theology and God's 'Project' for the Future," *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 6 (1999): 46–50. This review of John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), points out that the other side of this argument of a God whose future is at risk is Arminianism, in which man has the final word.

[4] Horton, "Is the *New* News *Good* News?," 11–14.

are annulled, and the "and forever will be" is removed from the *Gloria Patri*. A second theorem, one that comes to definitions of God by sifting through the attributes, runs the risk of equivocation, since some terms can have both biblical and philosophical meanings. For example, love is seen as synonymous with tolerance and leads to universalism.[5] Divine impartiality, which makes no distinction among people, has led to the ordination of women, as well as revealing a god who wants to be understood as "Mother" at least in equal standing with him (or her) as "Father."

If it is argued that faultily defined attributes lead to faulty conclusions about God, then our response is that any definition of God, even if it is framed in raw biblical terms, by itself and apart from the person of Jesus, carries the potential for error. An idolatry of stone and wood is replaced by one of abstractions masquerading behind biblical evidences.[6] In a theology of abstractions, anything can and will go wrong. Love leads to universalism. Wrath leaves sinners at the sporadic, occasional mercy of an otherwise angry God who is free to change his mind. Infinite freedom gives God limitless possibilities including non-existence at the hands of his creatures. Internal self-perfection raises the questions of why God created in the first place and, more importantly, why he then bothered to rescue a creation that rejected him. Introducing divine sovereignty does not help; a completely self-contained God would hardly be moved from anything external. Worse still, God may be totally unconcerned. These theological failings—and that is what they are—result from isolating some attributes to the exclusion of others and then driving the chosen ones to their logical conclusions.

Some methods in defining God are deficient because they introduce the person of Jesus only after the theological dialogue is well under way or, in some cases, completed. Christology becomes secondary and is made to fit the contours of predetermined views of God. Its relationship to theology is only tangential, with the result that we are dealing with two different topics without a necessary relationship. At best, Christology serves to confirm a predetermined theological agenda and often to provide an escape from otherwise unacceptable views of God. Christ serves as a *deus*

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[5] For a treatment of this issue in contemporary theology, see Paul R. Hinlicky, "The Future of Tolerance," in *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 375–389. For example, "[Love] is not some all-condoning leniency, which is indifferent to sin, and righteousness, but a costly grace. It is neither lenient nor permissive, but merciful to sinners" (388).

[6] Horton uses similar language: "We must eliminate both the idol of a loving but weak god, and the idol of a strong but graceless god." Horton, "Is the *New* News *Good* News?," 18.

*ex machina* to whom we can assign attributes that do not fit our idea of God. Jesus is capable of involvement in the human situation in a way that God is not. He bridges the unbridgeable in an almost Arian way. By keeping Christology out of theological definition, our ideas of God are kept intact and redemption becomes an afterthought of a deity who had the options of non-redemption or redemption by another means.

Virtually all historical Christian traditions operate with the same set of divine attributes, but they are not agreed upon which are primary. For the sake of exaggeration, add feminism to the divine mix. The result is a book like *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective*, in which the keys to understanding the Third Person of the Trinity are the five senses, which are said to be more keenly developed in the gentler sex.[7] However, even by confining ourselves to traditional attributes, the theological task goes awry. The Reformed are preoccupied with sovereignty,[8] and Lutherans with the gospel as in the law-gospel motif.

## II. The Historical Reasons for the Importance of "All Theology Is Christology"

Some Lutherans were understandably attracted by Barth's Christologically laden system. They were also drawn to Rudolph Bultmann's definition of the gospel as the proclamation of forgiveness, so they proceeded to make justification the only necessary tenet of their program. Their gospel-shaped theology dispenses with the law in the Christian life.[9] Barth had fused law into gospel, but Lutherans with a gospel isolated from the law took the path to an antinomianism known as "gospel reductionism,"[10] a phrase popularized by the majority of the faculty at Concordia

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[7] Rebecca B. Prichard, *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

[8] So Horton, "This is an important warning for some who seem to regard God's sovereignty as the center of the Christian message." "Is the *New* News *Good* News?," 18.

[9] This antinomianism had church-dividing effects, since Lutherans are bound to the Formula of Concord, the Sixth Article of which deals with the third use of the law: "[Those] who have been converted to the Lord and from whom the veil of Moses has been taken away, learn from the law to live and walk in the law" (FC SD VI 1). See also R. D. Linger, "Antinomianism," *Modern Reformation* 9, no. 2 (2000): 31–33. Linger identifies three kinds of antinomianism of which the first is, "once persons are justified by faith in Christ, they no longer have any obligation toward the moral law because Christ has freed them from it" (31).

[10] This Christological or gospel theology relegated biblical injunctions, especially the Pauline ones, to parentheses, which were for particular churches in specific times and places, but not universally binding. The gospel not only rescued the believer from

Seminary, Saint Louis, in the 1970s and still in use.[11] Unencumbered by the law, "gospel reductionists" were free from such biblical injunctions as limiting the pastoral office to men. Faith was emancipated from the historicalness of the virgin birth and the resurrection. This new Christ-religion was a radicalized doctrine of justification.[12] A doctrinally-shaped ideology replaced historical reality as the basis of faith.[13]

Discussion about "all theology is Christology" took place in the late 1980s and 1990s at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.[14] Waldo J. Werning, a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor and former ally of J. A. O. and Robert D. Preus[15] during the "gospel

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his predicament under law but abolished the law itself, and it became the trump card that took every theological trick. As long as the gospel remained intact, all things were possible. Ethical and doctrinal barriers were temporary. This position's conclusions were steeped in Christological language but were no different than those of classical liberalism.

[11] Carl Braaten, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) clergyman, a one-time professor at its Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and someone who had supported the Saint Louis faculty majority, is described as being "dissatisfied with 'gospel reductionism.'" See Philip E. Thompson, "A New Question in Baptist History: Seeking A Catholic Spirit among Early Baptists," *Pro Ecclesia* 8, no. 1 (1999): 51. "Gospel reductionism" has allowed the ELCA to enter into full fellowship with churches whose doctrines are condemned by the Lutheran Confessions.

[12] John H. Tietjen, in his *Memoirs in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), describes an essay he delivered to the faculty in which he argued that doctrine was not dogma and that dogma was the standard to which the church agreed. Disagreements in theology did not affect the gospel (18). He also provided ample examples of how the gospel principle works. See his listings under "Gospel" in his index (363). For a specific reference in how this applied to the ordination of women see the transcript of Robert Bertram's interview (37).

[13] Some Luther research has tried to set this forth as the Reformer's view. For a response to this see Ulrich Asendorf, "*Viva Vox Evangelii*—A Necessary Course Correction," in *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215–227. Luther's *simul iustus et peccator* is not an independent existential principle but one that receives its meaning from the gospel, and the gospel in turn from the resurrection and God's trinitarian life.

[14] See David P. Scaer, "All Theology Is Christology," *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999): 28–32.

[15] Preus was well known in Evangelical circles, and so his defense of the phrase assured its notoriety. He was associated with the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy and later the Association of Confessing Evangelicals. For his book *The Inspiration of Scripture*, he had long been recognized as a defender of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, key doctrines for Neo-Evangelicals. In the course of his lifetime, he had worked with Carl F. H. Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, and Earl D. Radamacher, and more lately with Robert Godfrey, Michael Horton, and R. Scott Clark, who dedicated *Protestant Scholasticism* to his memory. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds.,

reductionism" controversy, took exception to a sentence in an article on sanctification and found cause to bring charges against its author and Robert D. Preus, who accepted it.[16] Superficially, "All theology is Christology" may have resembled "gospel reductionism."[17] However, in the new controversy, no one was charged with denying the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy, the historical character of its accounts, or the continued validity of the law for Christians. Igniting the controversy was this sentence, "Any attempt to make Christology preliminary to theology, or even only its most important part, but not its only part, is a denial of Luther's doctrine and effectively destroys the Gospel of the message of a completed atonement."[18] This sentence was summed up as "all theology is Christology." At issue was whether Christology is part of all doctrinal definitions, including the one of God, that is, whether theology is defined in relation to Jesus.[19] The conclusion was that Christology is not incidental but is integral to how God is understood. It profoundly informs theology.[20]

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*Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999). His reputation as a confessional scholar was tested in preventing the LCMS from sliding into the liberalism that had engulfed mainline Protestant churches by the 1950s.

[16] See David P. Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," *CTQ* 49, no. 2–3 (1985): 181–195 (discussed below). Robert D. Preus had been a major player in the events at the Saint Louis seminary in 1974 and was responsible for keeping the institution afloat. Apart from the politics connected with any dispute, the underlying reason for the faculty majority dismissal was theological. They held to an amalgam of Barth's Christologically defined theology combined with Bultmann's demythologizing exegesis. This allowed the outward form of justification, the major tenet of Lutheran theology, to remain intact. John Tietjen described the gospel in this way: "'Works don't justify; faith does. God has already justified you. You believe God's promise. Don't be afraid.'" Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 7. Theirs was an existential Christology accessible in the proclamation of forgiveness, but it did not require belief in historical incarnation and resurrection. This situation occasioned formal and informal alliances between the conservative Neo-Evangelical scholars, who were conversant in these matters, and often untutored confessional Lutherans. Three months after the "Gospel reductionist" matter was resolved by the faculty majority leaving their posts, Preus became president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

[17] When John H. Tietjen was removed by the seminary board in January 1974, the faculty majority left their posts in protest. When they did not return to their teaching responsibilities, they were removed in February. For a description of these events see Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile*, 161–230.

[18] Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," 194.

[19] Preus delivered a series of essays that provided specific references from Luther and the Lutheran Confessions to demonstrate the correctness and the necessity of the Christological approach to theology. Citing Luther in defense of a theological position may not finally be convincing to the Neo-Evangelical community or for that matter to

In grammatically deciphering an intransitive sentence, the predicative nominative describes the subject. For example, in the sentence, "The dog is brown," "brown" tells us something about "dog" and distinguishes it from dogs of other colors. So in the phrase, "all theology is Christology," Christology is descriptive. Who and what God is happens to be the subject, and the predicate nominative "Christology" describes God. Jesus' life and death are the givens; "all theology is Christology" means that in Jesus we know something about God, a claim that Jesus makes. Since no other word appears in the predicate, it is absolute. Reversing the sentence so that it reads "Christology is theology" carries a different meaning. In this case, it is assumed that we know something about God. Such knowledge would be derived from philosophy or Bible passages apart from Christ. The sentence "all Christology is Christology" is meaningless. After isolating divine attributes, the sentence requires applying them to Jesus. This procedure is problematic, because it assumes an adequate natural revelation of God or a special revelation of God apart from Christ. In designating the appropriate attributes and assigning them *theological* definitions, some attributes will be predictably favored over others. Marcion found an Old Testament God who hardly resembles the New Testament one, and so he anticipated rationalism, Schleiermacher, and many modern biblical scholars. Favoring certain attributes results in different understandings of God and sometimes different gods.[21] To get around a problem that he probably did not fully recognize, one Lutheran theologian conceded that the attributes were

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Lutherans, but charges against him had to be resolved within the framework of the Lutheran Confessions to which ministers are bound at ordination. Within this scheme Luther's writings play a special role. It was not simply about what was permissible within the context of biblical revelation, but of Lutheran theology. See Robert D. Preus, "Luther: Word, Doctrine, and Confession," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (December 1992): 33–43. This series of essays was delivered on October 28–29, 1992, at Bethany Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota, three months after he was restored to his post.

[20] Good things are said to come from bad situations. Whether or not this is true, the tragedy in Preus's life did allow the phrase "All theology is Christology" to be evaluated, and the phrase continues to enjoy a certain prominence. A Festshrift in honor of this writer is entitled *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000). Several authors weave the "all theology is Christology" theme into their essays. Perhaps the best analogy might be the Old Testament prophets, who instinctively knew that their words carried a greater meaning that only later men of God would more fully understand.

[21] Michael Horton refers to some later Puritans for whom "'God' had become someone other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Trinity was not as prominent as a single, unitary being of blinding glory and power." Horton, "Is the *New* News *Good* News?," 12.

communicated in different ways to the human nature.[22] This *sic et non* approach was eating your cake and still having your incarnation.

### III. "All Theology Is Christology"

"All theology is Christology" was challenged by reference to the Athanasian Creed, where the divine persons share an equality in which none is before or after another. Another objection was the Lord's Prayer's address to the Father.[23] In reply to these, one person of the Trinity and his work cannot be isolated from the others. We can only pray the Lord's Prayer because Christ has made us God's children. Apart from *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*, each divine person exists within the Trinity in relation to the others (*perichoresis*).[24] This view is undermined, at least in Lutheran circles, when theology is divided into the three articles of the Creed as First Article, Second Article, and Third Article Christianity, as if a theology of each divine person apart from the other persons was possible. In confessing God as Father, belief in Christ is anticipated and included, and so the Second Article does not begin with an additional "I believe," but an "and." If a trinitarian theology is endangered by a detachment of the persons from one another, then understanding God by his attributes apart from his trinitarian character leaves the impression that it is an afterthought. This approach is evident in discourses that first treat at length the doctrine of God and only then proceed to discuss the Trinity. In an earlier time such trinitarian-less theologies might have passed as a conservative unitarianism. "All theology is Christology" is not synonymous with "all theology is *filiology*." Christology has to do with Jesus, the Word made flesh who assumed our humanity, and not merely the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus of Nazareth is the human face of God. In his image we know the Father (Col 1:15), and in his humanity God is fully encased.

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[22] Francis Pieper writes, "Quenstedt sums the truths on this point in full agreement with Scripture as follows: 'It is correctly said that *all* divine attributes are communicated to the human nature, likewise, that *certain* are not, and that *none* are communicated. All are communicated with regard to indwelling and possession, but certain ones as regards predication and definite statement, as the operative which have state and action, among which we may name omnipotence, omniscience, etc. But this does not hold true of the quiescent attributes, as eternity, infinity, and the like. No attributes are communicated by way of transfusion from one substance into another." Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2:242.

[23] Waldo J. Werning, *Making the Missouri Synod Functional* (Fort Wayne, IN: Biblical Renewal Productions, 1992), 210–211.

[24] ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοί (John 14:11).

Christology, therefore, informs what we think about God. Jesus is not a gnostic revealer of dark mysteries, but the one who completely envelops God simply because God has completely enveloped him into the divine being. The order of John 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father," cannot be reversed, so that either through the Father or the Spirit we may know Jesus. Tampering with the order so that the Father is known before the Son results in a temporary unitarianism, at least until we get to Christology. Defining theology Christologically requires not only holding that Jesus shows us God being God, but also that the revelation of God is accomplished in the humiliation of Jesus by crucifixion. This is the *one*, *chief*, historic moment of trinitarian self-revelation on which other moments are dependent. The crucifixion goes beyond revealing secret knowledge by including the redemption by which Jesus draws sinners through the cross into the inner recesses of the Father (Matt 11:25–30).[25]

The Spirit must also be understood Christologically.[26] Knowing the Spirit without reference to Jesus allows him to function as a *Weltgeist* who makes God accessible without Jesus. This provides an opening for universalism. The Pentecost of Acts 2 concludes the giving of the Spirit, who received his form in Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:10; John 1:32), life (Matt 4:1), death (Matt 27:50; John 19:30), and resurrection (John 20:22). The Spirit who proceeds from the Son (*filioque*) is shaped by Jesus' death and resurrection so that the Spirit of God becomes the Spirit of Jesus (John 16:13–14). *Incarnatus est de spiritu sancti* begins to open the door to a trinitarian understanding of God and renders other theological attempts by themselves inadequate. Only through and after the death of Jesus is God known as Father, Son, and Spirit (Matt 28:19).

## IV. "God Crucified"

Richard Bauckham, author of the volume entiteld *God Crucified* and former professor at the University of St. Andrew's, moves theology beyond the incarnation to the humiliation of the cross.[27] In creedal terms,

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[25] Compare Martin Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation," especially thesis 21: "God can be found only in suffering on the cross, as has already been said." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelican, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 31:53; hereafter AE. This, of course, leads Luther to make personal suffering a qualification for being a theologian (AE 31:40).

[26] See David P. Scaer, "*Cum Patre et Filio Adoratur*: The Spirit Understood Christologically," *CTQ* 61, no. 1–2 (1997): 93–112.

[27] Bauckham writes, "The profoundest points of New Testament Christology occur when the inclusion of the exalted Christ in the divine identity entails the inclusion of the

theology is not merely defined by *incarnatus est*, but by *homo factus est*. Theology is no longer obligated to answer philosophical questions asked of the incarnation,[28] a practice that arose in the patristic period,[29] but it recognizes the agony of the Crucified as the true face of God, the perfect revelation of *who he is*. In the dying of Jesus, God and his glory are known. Crucifixion is not merely the door to the divine reality, but it is the event in which that reality is present and hidden. The impenetrable God is accessible in the crucified Jesus. The cross is both God's humiliation and exaltation, and in it Jesus honors God and God honors Jesus.[30] Here God glorifies the Son, and the Spirit's mission is defined.[31] Christology, defined in the cross, may contradict a philosophically-delineated God to the point of scandal and embarrassment even of believers, but here is Israel's Redeemer who has taken on flesh in Jesus as Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23). The human Jesus receives divine honors. Divine uniqueness is not compromised but expressed by incarnation and crucifixion.[32] Bauckham writes, "Jesus, the New Testament writers are saying, belongs inherently to *who God is*."[33] The crucified Christ belongs to the divine identity.[34] "This radical self-renunciation was [Christ's] way of expressing and enacting his equality with God, and *therefore* ([Philippians 2:] v. 9) it

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crucified Christ in the divine identity, and when the christological pattern of humiliation and exaltation is recognized as revelatory of God, indeed as the definitive revelation of who God is." Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 46. See also 56–61, in particular, "The identity of God—who God is—is revealed as much in self-abasement and service as it is in exaltation and rule. The God who is high can also be low, because God is God not in seeking his own advantage but in self-giving. Only the Servant can also be the Lord" (61). Much of his material on this subject is found in Richard Bauckham, "The Worship of Jesus in Philippians 2:9–11," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 128–39.

[28] Bauckham states, "The question is not: how can the infinite become a finite creature, how can the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God take on human limitations?" See *God Crucified*, 60.

[29] Bauckham suggests the real contrast is not between the divine and human natures, but between the image of God as the exalted emperor and the servant; see *God Crucified*, 61–62.

[30] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 66.

[31] "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).

[32] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 4, 28.

[33] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 47; emphasis original.

[34] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 48.

qualified him to exercise the unique divine sovereignty over all things."[35] Humiliation, no less than exaltation, belongs to the identity of God.[36] The hour of the cross is the glorification of both the Father and the Son (John 17:1).

By appending "S. D. G.," *soli Deo gloria*, to his musical compositions, Johann Sebastian Bach confessed that his music was his vocation. I suspect that today some Lutherans use the phrase synergistically to give God some credit for their accomplishments. For the Westminister Shorter Catechism (1647), glorifying God is not optional: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever."[37] The God who gives of himself in begetting the Son also gives of himself in creating and in redeeming. God's glory is inherent in the Father begetting the Son and their giving procession to the Spirit. The God who is composed of an eternal self-giving in trinitarian life extended that self-giving in creation, redemption, and sanctification. In sacrificing themselves for others, Christians are not only following in Christ but are adopting the divine posture of God's trinitarian self-giving. Peter's death glorifies God (John 21:19) and so resembles Christ's death, which reveals the glory in which the Father and the Son live (John 17:1). Within himself and as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, God is not impassible, that is, without emotion, but passibility and emotion exist in their highest form in God. His sending the Son (John 3:15) does not result from an arbitrary decision, but it is an extension of the Father's eternal love for the Son (John 3:35). The ontological Trinity in which the Father begets the Son is love in its purest and original form. So R. Scott Clark, "In this case, we know that the Trinity we worship is no static deity, but rather there are dynamic relations among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is out of that dynamic, loving fellowship that both creation and redemption have emerged."[38]

In begetting the Son, the Father gives of himself, and in this self-giving he knows himself and is known as Father. The Son, in turn, responds to the Father not out of morbid, resentful obligation but out of the love that he receives from the Father. Apart from the Son, the Father is not Father, and the Son without the Father is not the Son. The inter-trinitarian relationship is a divine necessity marked with the pathos and emotion that inherently

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[35] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 58.

[36] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 61. Also, "Jesus' self-humiliation actually is exaltation by God" (67).

[37] Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1.

[38] R. Scott Clark, "The Splendor of the Three-in-One God," *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999): 38.

belong to self-giving. In sacrificing his Son by crucifixion, God is not doing something inexplicably alien to his being (even though it might be alien to some personal views of God), but he accomplishes what intrinsically belongs to who he is. Theology and Christology are now positioned to shape faith and ethics. Commands to love God and the neighbor (Matt 22:27–39; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27) are not arbitrary regulations of a sovereign God but are necessary extensions of the Father's eternal love in begetting the Son, seen in offering him as a sacrifice (John 15:9–17). Faith is a giving of the self in that we renounce ourselves and put God at the core of our lives by loving him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. God's self-giving caused him to see his fallen creatures as his neighbors and in coming to our rescue made us his friends. In loving the neighbor in place of ourselves, we begin to approach and reflect in ourselves the mysteries of the Trinity and Christ's humiliation.

"All theology is Christology" is only one way of expressing the great commandments to love God and the neighbor. Behind these concepts is divine self-sacrifice, which binds together that enterprise we call theology. The self-sacrificial character of his trinitarian nature does not allow God an indeterminate future. Rather, he must rescue those who cannot rescue themselves, because he must love even those who without him can only love themselves. Any system is doomed by falling on the sword of its own inconsistency. Understanding God as self-giving may seem to be contradictory in that God cannot be understood by coordinating his attributes. In response, what is said about democracy as the most inefficient form of government devised by man might by analogy be applied to divine self-giving: it is superior to all other options. We could also argue that self-giving is not an abstract attribute but a tangible reality in God crucified. From the lowliness of his cross Christ calls those who are burdened to share in the trinitarian mysteries:

> At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, *for I am gentle and lowly in heart*, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 11:25–30)

"All theology is Christology" does not do an injustice to our doctrine of God but opens it up to the fuller reality of God's essence by looking at his intentions. Neither does the Christological approach replace justification as the key to the theological task; rather, it provides justification with the necessary content of Christ and God. When the controverted phrase surfaced, no one understood its full implications, even though Robert D. Preus staked his position on it. This essay only makes a modest attempt at a fuller development. My colleague, William C. Weinrich, writes about his "conviction that the Man, Jesus [is] the Revelation of the Father and the Bearer of the Holy Spirit, so that to speak theological [is] to speak Christologically."[39] The following citation from N. T. Wright summarizes our view:

> The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation. The real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. *It is a new understanding of God*. Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own (arrogant, self-glorifying image) image, God reveals the truth about what it meant to be God. Underneath this is the conclusion, all-important in present Christological debate: incarnation and even crucifixion are to be seen as *appropriate* vehicles for the dynamic self-revelation of God.[40]

[39] William C. Weinrich, "The Face of Christ as the Hope of the World: Missiology as Making Christ Present," in *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215–227. Weinrich also notes Bauckham's contribution to this discussion (219). Differences in Christology's role in theology are reflected in differing interpretation of Philippians 2. For a treatment of the stakes in the argument, see the essays in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*. The *New International Version*, in translating verse 2, "did not grasp at equality with God," favors the traditional Reformed view, which is less than fully comfortable in ascribing God-like qualities to Christ's human nature (*genus maiestaticum*), which is the Lutheran position. For a discussion of the exegetical options, see Gerald F. Hawthorne, "In the Form of God and Equal with God (Philippians 2:6)," *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 99–110.

[40] N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 84, cited in Gerald F. Hawthorne, "In the Form of God and Equal with God (Philippians 2:6)," 104–105; emphasis added.

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# Reflections on the Ministry of Elijah

**Walter A. Maier III**

The account of Elijah and his ministry in 1 and 2 Kings teaches us much about God. This narrative presents to us theology for our edification. We learn about the character of God in the manner in which he deals with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, with King Ahab, with the Phoenician woman, and with Elijah himself.

## I. The Northern Kingdom

The Northern Kingdom of Israel, starting with its first king Jeroboam I, had entered into a corrupt form of the worship of Yahweh. Jeroboam had set up a golden calf in Bethel, the southernmost point of his realm, and at Dan, at the northern end (1 Kgs 12:25–33). He presented these images as pedestals on which stood the invisible Yahweh, and thus as alternatives to the ark of the covenant in the temple in Jerusalem. Jeroboam also maintained a priesthood, but not the Aaronic priesthood ordained by God, and he kept a religious calendar, but not the one given by God through Moses. Jeroboam introduced these changes for political reasons, so that his subjects would stay loyal to him and not go down to Jerusalem to worship, where they would be won back to the house of David. All his innovations, however, were contrary to the Torah, and he set the Northern Kingdom on the wrong spiritual path. As a result, the large majority of the people had incorrect ideas about Yahweh, they were weakened spiritually, their lives became increasingly wicked, and some even abandoned monotheism and began to practice aspects of pagan idolatry.

Clearly, the situation in the Northern Kingdom was very bad, but it became even worse with the ascent of Ahab and his Phoenician wife Jezebel as king and queen. Jezebel had a plan, and she influenced her husband to go along with her. She wanted to establish her religion—Canaanite polytheism—in the Northern Kingdom (1 Kgs 16:31–33; 21:25–26). More than that, she apparently desired to make Baal the chief god of the realm and Canaanite polytheism the main religion, pushing the

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Yahwism of Jeroboam I (which at least had *some* connection to the true God) into a secondary position. As for the remnant of true, genuine Yahwism that yet continued in her kingdom, she tried to eliminate it altogether (1 Kgs 18:4, 13; 19:10, 14).

This was now a major crisis for Israel, specifically, for the Northern Kingdom. When earlier in its history Israel had been in an extremely bad circumstance, God in his grace, love, and mercy raised up a great leader for the benefit of his covenant people. That previous predicament had been the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt, and the man God gave them as his instrument to deal with this critical situation was Moses. To meet and oppose the deadly threat posed by the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, Yahweh, again in his grace, love, and mercy, provided the prophet Elijah.

On the one hand, Moses should be seen as in a class by himself. One can say, echoing the wording at the end of Deuteronomy, that there was no other prophet during the Old Testament era who met with the Lord so many times "face to face" and who did such awesome miracles in the sight of *all* Israel (Deut 34:10–12). Also, the Torah came from Moses, while, according to the plan of God, Elijah did not author any books, or if he did, none of his writings have been preserved. On the other hand, there are definite similarities between Moses and Elijah and their ministries, and comparisons can be, and have been, made.

1. Both men are outstanding examples of what a prophet of the Lord was: one who received messages directly from God himself and then communicated that word to others, and who was used by God to have an impact on the people. Both were zealous for the honor, and word, of God.

2. Through or in connection with Moses and Elijah, God performed miracles. For the most part, though, the wonders associated with Moses were on a grander scale, while those that involved Elijah were more private in nature. With both there was a miraculous dividing of water: with Moses, of the sea, and with Elijah, of the Jordan River. Both men were associated with a miraculous provision of food: Moses, with the manna, and Elijah with the flour and oil in the Phoenician widow's house.

3. Both men had to deal with a hostile political power or government: Moses with Pharaoh Amenhotep II, and Elijah with Ahab and Jezebel.

4. Both Moses and Elijah were in a contest with paganism. Both men were used by God to attack pagan gods (Exod 12:12; 1 Kgs 17:1).[1]

[1] The plagues have been seen as an attack on the gods of Egypt. The chief deity of Jezebel and Ahab, Baal, was believed to be the storm god, who sent the rain and dew so

5. Both at one point in their life were afraid and fled: Moses from Egypt, with Pharaoh Tutmoses III trying to kill him, and Elijah from the Northern Kingdom, with Jezebel desiring to execute him.

6. Both men opposed state-sponsored enemies: Moses, the magicians in Pharaoh's court, and Elijah, the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the pagan goddess Asherah, who were supported by Ahab and Jezebel (especially the latter: Elijah described them as those "who eat at Jezebel's table" [1 Kgs 18:19]).

7. Moses had an encounter with the supernatural at a bush, Elijah at a broom tree.

8. Both men led Israelites to experience an awesome revelation of God at a mountain location: Moses at Mount Sinai, and Elijah at Mount Carmel.

9. Moses and Elijah both acted as intercessors for Israel (Exod 32:11–13; Num 14:17–19; 21:7; 1 Kgs 18:36–37, 42–44).

10. Both met with God on Mount Horeb, also called Mount Sinai. God and his glory passed by (עָבַר) Moses in the hole in the rock on Mount Horeb (Exod 33:19–23), and God passed by (עָבַר) Elijah in the cave on the same mount (1 Kgs 19:11).[2]

11. Moses and God dialogued, as did Elijah and God.

12. Both men at one point in their ministries asked God to take their lives (Num 11:15; 1 Kgs 19:4).

13. God said to Moses, "Go, return (לֵךְ שֻׁב) to Egypt" (Exod 4:19).[3] God said to Elijah, "Go, return (לֵךְ שׁוּב) to Damascus" (1 Kgs 19:15).[4]

14. God provided Moses with an assistant, Aaron; later the assistant for Moses was Joshua, who would succeed Moses as leader of Israel. God

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necessary for life in the ancient Near East (see the discussion below). The contest in 1 Kings 18 proved that Yahweh was God, not Baal.

[2] Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 433. Frank Cross notes that Elijah came to "*the* cave" (1 Kgs 19:9), which he thinks is "the hole of the rock" (Exod 33:22) where Moses had been hidden. Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 193.

[3] All translations are the author's.

[4] Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 433.

provided Elijah with an assistant, Elisha, who would succeed him as prophet.[5]

15. Both Moses and Elijah departed this earth east of the Jordan River (Deut 34:1–6; 2 Kgs 2:6–14). One could suggest that Elijah intentionally travelled into the Transjordanian territory in order to have the place of his assumption into heaven match the general location of Moses's death.

16. After their earthly departures, the body of Moses could not be found, nor could Elijah be found, though fifty men went looking for him, searching for three days.

17. Of course, both men met with Jesus on the mountain during the transfiguration of Christ. Some have held that Moses was there as the first great prophet of Israel, and that Elijah was present as the representative of all the subsequent prophets in Israel's history. One remembers the twofold division of the Hebrew Bible: the Law and the Prophets. Also, the names of both were mentioned toward the end of the Old Testament era by Malachi, who wrote as his book came to a close, "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and fearful day of Yahweh comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" (Mal 3:23–24a; ET 4:4–6). Both Moses and Elijah pointed ahead to Christ.[6]

With these similarities, God was in essence saying, "With Elijah I raised up another great messenger for Israel, my instrument to help the people, as I did earlier, when I gave Moses to the nation. Elijah is to be viewed in the same way as Moses, as my authorized spokesman, to accomplish my will in mighty ways." Throughout the history of the New Testament church, God has continued to provide his people with leaders for the benefit of his people, especially in times of crisis or of dire need. God has called us to be professional workers in the church.[7] Though not inspired as were Moses, Elijah, and the apostles, we have God's inspired word, and God uses us to his glory and for the spiritual welfare of many people. With his help, we will remain faithful to our calling. That someday might involve our having to take a stand in opposition to the secular

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[5] Cross observes: "Elisha plays the minister of Elijah . . . as Joshua is minister . . . to Moses, succeeds him, and crosses Jordan on dry ground in the path of Joshua" (Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 192).

[6] Cf. also Exod 34:28 and Deut 9:9, 18 with 1 Kgs 19:8.

[7] This article was originally presented before an audience that consisted mainly of those who were or would be pastors and deaconesses. It is of course understood that God uses the efforts of faithful laity in ways that are of utmost importance for the present and future church.

government if that political authority should ever demand us to live, teach, or accept various matters in opposition to the word of God.

Even as God was using Elijah to point the people backward in their history toward Moses, he was at the same time causing them to look forward toward Christ, the Messiah. Because of certain Old Testament passages, especially Deuteronomy 18, the Israelites knew that one of the roles the coming Savior would fill was that of prophet. The prophetic office, then, was a type or foreshadowing of an aspect of the work of Jesus; individual Old Testament prophets with their life and ministry gave the Israelites a glimpse of what Christ would do and accomplish as prophet. This was especially true with the great prophets Moses and Elijah. Many of the similarities already presented between those two men would obviously also apply to Jesus as prophet. For example, all three prophets were spokesmen for the Lord and were zealous for the word and honor of God.

Focusing on Elijah, it can be stated in addition that both he and Christ demonstrated God's mastery over nature: Elijah, by saying to Ahab that it would not rain in the Northern Kingdom except at his word, and Jesus, by his speaking a word and stilling a storm at sea. Both experienced angelic ministry (1 Kgs 19:5–8; Matt 4:11; Luke 22:43).[8] Both prophets brought the dead back to life. Elijah and Jesus both ascended bodily into heaven.

While believers in the Old Testament era would have made some connection between Elijah and the Messiah, Elijah's foreshadowing of still another prophet would have been largely unknown to them, at least until Malachi wrote his book. We, from our New Testament vantage, know the actual name of that prophet: John the Baptist. We clearly perceive the relationship today, because certain evidence and passages in the New Testament make it absolutely certain that John was a second Elijah.

First, the angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah (Luke 1:13–17) that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son who would go on before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah" and who would "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children" (Luke 1:17; cf. also Mal 3:23–24; ET 4:5–6). Second, both Elijah and John had a profound effect on their countrymen: Elijah, especially with his God-given victory on Mount Carmel, and John, with his preaching and baptizing at the Jordan River. Third, Elijah and John had the same distinctive style of dress. They both wore a garment of hair, with a leather belt around their waist. Fourth, both men faced a hostile political authority throughout their ministries. In particular, as Raymond Dillard

[8] It could also be noted that both Elijah and Jesus were provided with food in a wild place by God (1 Kgs 17:2–6; 19:4–8; Matt 4:11).

and Tremper Longman have pointed out, the main enemy for both was a woman, a queen, who was seeking their lives. For Elijah, it was Jezebel, and for John, it was Herodias.[9] Fifth, coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus indicated to Peter, James, and John that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come, in fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (Matt 17:10–13).

The similarities that Elijah had with John, as well as with Moses and Jesus, display the omniscience and omnipotence of God, who so controlled the events and life of Elijah that the believers in Israel were given encouragement from their past history and hope for the future. We stand in awe of this almighty ruler of the universe, who is furthermore a God of wondrous grace, love, and mercy. His word stands forever; all the promises contained therein have been, or will be, fulfilled.

This theme of God's concern for the spiritual welfare of his wayward people of the Northern Kingdom is evidenced by his sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice and altar of Elijah on Mount Carmel. Yahweh gave Elijah a great victory over the prophets of Baal and Asherah and proved in dramatic fashion who indeed was God. But also through the "regular" ministry of Elijah, which the prophet conducted before and after the incident on Mount Carmel, the Lord gave to many Israelites (albeit, a small minority of the Northern Kingdom) needed, vital spiritual nourishment. Through the prophet's preaching and teaching, God worked for their spiritual health, and also by allowing them to have altars in their vicinity.

During Ahab's reign altars to Yahweh existed in various parts of the Northern Kingdom, which Elijah mentions with implied approval in 1 Kings 19, despite the emphasis in the Torah on centralization of worship around the ark of the covenant. Elijah himself built an altar to Yahweh on Mount Carmel. A partial parallel to the Yahweh altars of Elijah's time were the Yahweh altars of Samuel's day. In the Torah God had made provision for his people to build altars in addition to the one at the central sanctuary (Exod 20:24–26). The understanding is that these were to be erected at God's express command, and/or in extraordinary circumstances (e.g., a crisis, or a theophany), and that they were temporary worship sites (even when the altars continued to stand). The Yahweh altars of Elijah's day were of such a nature. An additional consideration is that Jezebel perhaps tried to prevent loyal Yahwists in her kingdom from traveling to the

[9] Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 187.

Jerusalem temple, thus causing the need for the faithful to erect altars at other locations.

*Excursus: Elijah and Paul*

Before proceeding, one additional observation is in order—namely, a comparison between Elijah and the apostle Paul, who wrote that after his conversion he "went away at once into Arabia" (Gal 1:17). "Arabia" in Paul's day was an imprecise term, covering a vast area to the south and southeast of Palestine without specific boundaries.[10] In fact, Paul wrote that Mount Sinai was in Arabia (Gal 4:25). We recall that Elijah left Mount Sinai and was told to go to Damascus (1 Kgs 19:15) and that Paul left Arabia for Damascus (Gal 1:17).

Why did Paul go to Arabia? One can propose that he did so in order to meet with Christ and be taught by the Savior in seclusion. But might there have been another reason? N. T. Wright suggests that there was.

Paul wrote that he "was far more zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal 1:14). That zeal meant not only his intense study and scrupulous observance of the Torah, but also his having zeal against those Jews he considered to be violating, and moving away from, the law—namely, Christians.[11] Wright explains that Paul's zeal "led him into physical violence against those whom he saw as the heirs and successors of . . . the Baal worshippers of 1 Kings 18 (see Acts 22:3–5). He 'was persecuting the church with great violence and was trying to destroy it' . . . (Gal 1:13)."[12]

Elijah encountered Jezebel, whom he had opposed, and ended up going to Arabia (where Sinai was located). Saul of Tarsus encountered Jesus, whom he had opposed, and went there too.[13] Wright thinks that Saul of Tarsus, "having taken the Elijah of 1 Kings 18," which relates Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Baal and his having them executed, "as his role model in his persecuting zeal, [and he] took the Elijah of 1 Kings 19," which reports Elijah departing for his life from Jezebel and ending up in Arabia, "as his role model when confronted, after his zealous triumph, with a totally new reality that made him question [similar to Elijah] his

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[10] Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 434–35; N. T. Wright, "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah (Galatians 1:17)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 4 (1996): 686.

[11] Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 435; Wright, "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah," 686.

[12] Wright, "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah," 686.

[13] Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 435.

whole life and mission to date."[14] In Arabia, Paul could have gained a greater appreciation of the fact that, to use Wright's words, "it was the death of Jesus at the hands of pagans, not the defeat of the pagans at the hand of the heaven-sent zealous hero, that defeated evil once and for all. . . . The cross offered the solution to the problem that 'zeal' had sought to address."[15]

## II. Ahab

When one considers how God dealt with King Ahab through the prophet Elijah, probably the first thought that comes to mind is that God took an entirely negative stance toward the king—that is, one of judgment and condemnation. This is because Ahab was an idolater. 1 Kings 16:31–33 reports that Ahab "went and served Baal and worshipped him. And he erected an altar to Baal [in] the temple of Baal which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made the Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke Yahweh, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel who were before him." Elijah told Ahab, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and the house of your father have, when you abandoned the commandments of Yahweh your God and went after the Baals" (1 Kgs 18:18). Later the author of Kings states, "Yet there was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife instigated. He acted very abominably, going after the idols, according to all which the Amorites did, whom Yahweh drove out before the Children of Israel" (1 Kgs 21:25–26).

1 Kings 16:31 hints that Ahab, however, was not devoid of any trace of Yahwism in his religious history. This verse, occurring at the beginning of Ahab's story, starts the mixed portrayal of this king presented in 1 Kings: "Now it came to pass (did it appear trifling, his going in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat?) that he took as wife Jezebel . . . and went and served Baal and worshipped him." The implication is that initially Ahab practiced a semblance of Yahwism (the distorted form of Jeroboam I). After his marriage to Jezebel, he began to venerate Baal.

Moreover, Ahab retained a modicum of recognition of, even respect for, Yahweh and his word after Jezebel became his wife. That this was indeed the case is illustrated by the biblical text in two basic ways: by indicating what Ahab did not do or have a part in, and by reporting what he did do. Jezebel killed the prophets of Yahweh (1 Kgs 18:4, 13), not Ahab; the prophets of Baal and Asherah ate at Jezebel's table (1 Kgs 18:19), not Ahab's; after the Mount Carmel event Jezebel threatened to slay Elijah

[14] Wright, "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah," 687–688.

[15] Wright, "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah," 691–692.

(1 Kgs 19:2), not Ahab; and Jezebel plotted and brought about Naboth's death (1 Kgs 21:1–16), not Ahab.[16]

On the other hand, Ahab followed a summons of Elijah and met with him (1 Kgs 18:8–16). Furthermore, the king permitted prophets of Yahweh to talk with him, and he listened to them. When Elijah told him to gather Israelites and the prophets of Baal and Asherah to Mount Carmel, Ahab did so (1 Kgs 18:18–20). He ate and drank and got in his chariot and rode to Jezreel at Elijah's bidding (1 Kgs 18:41–45). Ahab heeded another prophet of Yahweh concerning how he was to defeat Ben-Hadad King of Syria (1 Kgs 20:13–21). When a prophet of Yahweh condemned him for releasing the captured Ben-Hadad, Ahab "went to his house sullen and vexed" (1 Kgs 20:43). After Elijah spoke a fierce word of condemnation on the house of Ahab because of Naboth's murder by Jezebel, Ahab humbled himself before Yahweh (1 Kgs 21:27–29). The last chapter of 1 Kings indicates that the king had listened to Micaiah, a true prophet of God. When Micaiah appeared before Ahab and Jehoshaphat and spoke an obviously sarcastic message, Ahab responded, "How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me only the truth in the name of Yahweh?" (1 Kgs 22:16).

Two other facts reported by 1 Kings demonstrate traces of Yahwism in Ahab. First, when Naboth refused Ahab's fair offer for his vineyard, the king refrained from forcing Naboth into the sale and simply returned home "sullen and vexed" (1 Kgs 21:4). By this he showed an awareness of, and some respect for, the Torah regulations concerning the selling of a family's property (Lev 25:23–24). Second, Ahab gave his children Yahweh names, that is, names containing an abbreviated form of God's covenant name: Ahaziah, Jehoram, and Athaliah.

What does this evidence concerning Ahab indicate? While Jezebel was totally devoted to the worship of Baal and hated Yahwism, Ahab was actually a syncretist. Certainly, his main religion was Baalism, and Baal was his chief god. But Ahab had not altogether rejected or abandoned Yahwism; the strings were not completely severed in his heart. To him, Yahweh was a god who existed and could foretell and accomplish certain things, and thus Yahweh's prophets were to be heeded, to a limited extent.[17]

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[16] Of course, Ahab is indirectly involved by his not exercising control over, or restraining, his wicked wife.

[17] John Bright describes Ahab as "a nominal Yahwist" (246), and observes that his building the Baal temple in Samaria "was no more than Solomon had done for his

As Ahab's personal religious situation was complex, so also were Yahweh's dealings with him through Elijah. To be sure, the prophet delivered plenty of harsh, fierce law to the king because of his idolatry, but he did so in part also to drive the king to the small amount of gospel that he still knew but had rejected.[18] That consideration, coupled with the fact that Yahweh again and again showed Ahab who the true God really was, leads to the conclusion that the Lord in his grace, mercy, and love was trying to convert Ahab and to bring him to a sincere, full confession of faith in Yahweh, and in Yahweh alone. God presented the truth to Ahab when he had Elijah say to the king, "As Yahweh, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there will not be these next years dew nor rain except according to my word" (1 Kgs 17:1), and this is exactly what took place, just as God foretold. Baal worshipers believed that Baal was the storm god, whose spear was the lightning bolt, the fire that came from heaven, and the one who sent the rains (and dew) that was so necessary for life in the ancient Near East.[19] Thus the announcement of the prophet, whose name

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foreign wives (ch. 11:1–8) and something that the ancient mind would tend to accept as a matter of course; it is probable that only the 'narrow-minded' objected." John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 245. Bright also proposes that Ahab permitted a state policy fostering Baalism because he "felt that he could not rely solely on Yahwism as the basis of his rule" (245).

[18] From the time Yahweh pronounced Gen 3:15, the worship of Yahweh also included belief in the promised God-man who would be the Savior. Over the following centuries God gave further information about this deliverer through the messianic prophecies. It can be assumed that even the corrupted Yahwism introduced by Jeroboam I retained a vestige of this messianic hope. Further, Ahab knew what Elijah preached and taught.

[19] There has been considerable discussion concerning the identity of the Baal imported by Jezebel into the Northern Kingdom. Some hold that this is a different god from the one presumed elsewhere in the Old Testament (the ancient Semitic storm god, whose worship was widespread across the ancient Near East). Rather, they think, the Baal promoted by Jezebel and Ahab, and opposed by Elijah in 1 Kings 18, is to be equated with the Tyrian deity Melqart, "king of the city [Tyre]," unless *qrt* refers to the netherworld/underworld. Regarding Melqart possibly being a god of the underworld, see William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1953), 81 and 196n29; William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1957), 307; Daniel I. Bock, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 2nd ed., Evangelical Theological Society Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 52; Bright, *A History of Israel*, 245n51; George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 43 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 175–179. Heider also observes that most scholars believe there were solar aspects to Melqart's character (*The Cult of Molek*, 177). I side with those scholars who reject the opinion that Melqart was the Baal advanced by Jezebel and Ahab. One such scholar is John Day, who writes, "(i) The Baal of 1 Kings 18 [cf. also

"Elijah" meant "my God is Yahweh," and what actually transpired, were a direct assault on Baalism. The truth was unmistakable: Yahweh was the ruler, he controlled nature, and Baal was helpless before Yahweh. In fact, Baal did not even exist.[20] In addition, the truth was made evident to Ahab through Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel when Yahweh, not Baal, sent fire from heaven (1 Kgs 18:16–39); when Elijah told Ahab that rain again was going to fall, and then that is what happened (1 Kgs 18:41–45); when Elijah, in the power of Yahweh, ran before Ahab in his chariot to Jezreel (1 Kgs 18:46); and when a prophet of God informed Ahab that Yahweh would deliver his enemies the Syrians into his hands, and then Ahab was victorious each time in battle (1 Kgs 20:1–30).

Nevertheless, despite these repeated, distinct demonstrations of who the true God really was, Ahab did not change spiritually because of his own hardness of heart. The closest Ahab came to genuine, saving repentance was when, after Jezebel had Naboth murdered, Elijah proclaimed God's harsh, fearful judgment on Ahab, Jezebel, and Ahab's whole house (1 Kgs 21:1–24). The prophet's words were so fierce that, as the author of Kings reports, Ahab "tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about meekly" (1 Kgs 21:27). The king humbled himself before Yahweh to such an extent that Yahweh decided not to bring the disaster involving Ahab's family in Ahab's day but rather his son's (1 Kgs 21:28–29).

One can draw from the narrative in 1 Kings that this change in Ahab, though, was not a repentance unto life. First, there is no report of God saying, "I have forgiven Ahab." Second, in the very next chapter, 1 Kings 22, Ahab is back to his old ways, listening to false court prophets. Third, God, who had again and again tried to win Ahab over to his side, now, in view of the king's continuing unbelief, allows an evil spirit to enter Ahab's

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1 Kgs 17:1] is clearly a god who was believed to bring lightning and rain; classical sources, however, reveal that Melqart was thought of as being asleep during the winter months when these phenomena abounded. (ii) The treaty between Baal king of Tyre and Esarhaddon king of Assyria in the 7th century B. C. clearly distinguished [three] . . . deities, who manifest themselves in the storm, from the god Melqart (ANET, 534)." John Day, "Baal (Deity)," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 548. While the identity of Baal Shamem, another Tyrian deity, is disputed, he perhaps was identical with the Baal attested elsewhere in the Old Testament. See, e.g., Richard J. Clifford, "Phoenician Religion," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 279 (August 1990): 60; Day, "Baal (Deity)," 548.

[20] Without question, Elijah stood for monotheism (versus polytheism), of which Ahab was well aware.

court prophets to entice the king to his death in battle. Fourth, Ahab shows contempt for a real prophet of God named Micaiah. Ahab says about him, "I hate him because he does not prophesy about me good, but bad" (1 Kgs 22:8). Micaiah goes on to foretell that Ahab will be slain in the upcoming battle. Even now through this prediction of the prophet, one can see God trying to reach Ahab, to shake him up and bring him to his spiritual senses before it was too late. However, Ahab still does not get it. He hardens his heart against the truth and commands that Micaiah be put in prison and given nothing but bread and water until, as Ahab said, "I return safely" from the battle, to the capital city Samaria (1 Kgs 22:27). We know that Ahab did not come back in safety but was brought to Samaria as a dead man (1 Kgs 22:35–37).

It is possible that God will have each of us, as church workers or laity, present his word to a person or people who has, or have, rejected his word in the past, and who will continue to turn away from it. We must maintain our witness for the Lord, as the opportunity exists, not knowing whether the person or people will persist in unbelief or be brought to faith. God gives the harvest; the results are in his hands. We just keep on preaching and teaching and speaking the truth, asking God to help us be as winsome as possible, knowing that God is the one who makes a person a believer.

### III. The Phoenician Woman

Hiding from Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah had been given food by the Lord's use of ravens and had been drinking from the brook Chereth. When the stream dried up, God told him to go to Zarephath in Phoenicia, where Elijah took up lodging in the home of this Gentile woman. God miraculously provided the widow, her children, and the prophet with food by never letting her jug of oil and her jar of flour run out (1 Kgs 17:2–16).

Some time later, though, the woman's son became ill, grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing (1 Kgs 17:17). Why did God preserve the life of the boy, saving him from starvation, only to let him die? His mother thought that it was because of her past sin (1 Kgs 17:18). Probably she had come to believe in Yahweh, the God of Israel, due to Elijah's witnessing to her and her seeing the miraculous supply of food. But in her grief she lashed out at the prophet, the man of God, believing that his residing in her house had brought God's focus on her abode, and thus on her and her transgressions. She reasoned, as Paul Kretzmann has surmised,

that her own sinfulness stood out in a more dramatic manner by contrast with the "holiness" that she ascribed to the prophet.[21]

Most likely, though, it was not because of her sin that her son died. John 9 reports about the man who had been blind from birth, not because of his sin nor that of his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. So also the widow's son died for reasons other than the woman's previous violations of God's will. Based on the text and the rest of Scripture, a few of these reasons can be adduced in this paper.

God in his grace, love, and mercy was working so that this experience turned out to be for the widow's good. She already appreciated Yahweh as the one providing her with food—something that Baal, the chief god of Phoenicia, had not been able to do. When the prophet of Yahweh restored her son to life, her faith in the God of Israel was made firmer. *He* was the Lord over death, which could not be claimed for Baal, who periodically, according to pagan theology, had to submit to Mot, the Canaanite god of death and the underworld. Yahweh, she saw in clearer fashion, was the supreme God—in fact, the only God. She was brought to confess to Elijah, "Now this I know [that is, with increased certainty], that you are a man of God, and that the word of Yahweh in your mouth is truth" (1 Kgs 17:24).

As such, she was the forerunner of the many Gentiles who would be made believers in the true God during the New Testament era. That was another reason why God let the boy die and then revived him through Elijah. God was foreshadowing mass Gentile conversions. God's plan of salvation had always included both Jews and Gentiles. The Messiah came to be the Savior of the whole world.

## IV. Elijah

In the way he dealt with his prophet, God revealed his grace, love, and mercy; he acted for the benefit of Elijah. For example, another reason God let the widow's son die was that, through this experience with the Phoenician woman and the dead boy, Elijah emerged as a man even stronger in the faith. He was led to wrestle with the Lord in prayer, asking God in very bold language, "Yahweh my God, even on the widow with whom I have been sojourning have you brought calamity, to kill her son?" (1 Kgs 17:20). The bitterness of the moment forced Elijah to grasp with firmer tenacity the encouragements and promises of Scripture, that believ-

[21] Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, The Old Testament, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923), 1:591.

ers can pour out their hearts to the Lord, approach him with confidence, bring any petition to him, and rely fully on God's grace, love, and mercy.

Elijah's faith was drawn to such a point through Scripture that the prophet asked God to perform a miracle—one that had never before occurred—to make a dead person alive again. Elijah, with heightened reliance on the Lord, stretched himself on the child three times, no doubt because of his belief in the persons of the Trinity. He trusted that God would use him, Elijah, as his instrument to raise the boy from death.

In turn, God used this incident to show Elijah and other Old Testament believers that the chief, the greatest, and the most important prophet would also raise people from death. Jesus Christ brought back to life the son of the widow of Nain; the daughter of Jairus; and Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. Furthermore, what happened in the Phoenician woman's house pointed ahead not only to the Messiah raising himself from death, but also restoring life to corpses through the apostles and raising all people on the Last Day.

In 1 Kings 19 we see God ministering to his minister. That chapter recounts how, after the contest on Mount Carmel, Ahab reported to Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and that he had executed with the sword all the prophets who had eaten at Jezebel's table. Furious, Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, "Thus may the gods do to me, and more so, if at this time tomorrow I do not place your life like the life of one of them" (1 Kgs 19:2). Following this in the text comes a famous problem: does the text say that Elijah "saw" and set out to save his life, or that he "was afraid" and set out to save his life? The Hebrew verb (וַיַּרְא) can be rendered either way.

Many of those who favor the "saw" translation think that Elijah simply could not have given in to fear, and that this was a strategic retreat on the part of the prophet. Those who propose the "afraid" rendering believe that the verb in question, coupled with the next phrase in the text, which literally says, "he arose and went for his life," indicates that Elijah was desperate, which naturally leads one to conclude that he was afraid.

The position I take, while translating the verb as "was afraid," combines both an aspect of seeing and an aspect of fearing. Elijah saw that, despite his tremendous God-given victory over the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel—when it was vividly revealed that Yahweh, and he alone, was God—nothing really changed in the Northern Kingdom. Worship of Baal and other false deities continued. The Israelites were not tearing down the altars and shrines of Baal. Elijah concluded that few, if any, other believers were left in the Northern Kingdom, and that he was

the last true prophet in the realm. Jezebel still ruled and was more dangerous than ever. Ahab appeared not at all transformed by what happened on Mount Carmel—even though he witnessed Yahweh, not Baal, sending the fire from heaven—and he remained under the influence of his evil wife. To Elijah it seemed that his ministry had been for nothing.

Elijah had become discouraged and despondent. Yet it was wrong for him to fall into such a condition. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4), which was, and is, God's will for all believers of all times and places. Elijah was a sinner, as are we all. As Charles Spurgeon said, "The best of men at best are only men."[22]

Elijah gave in to discouragement and despondency because he had fallen into focusing on himself. What he said to God later on Mount Horeb reveals as much: "*I* have been very zealous for Yahweh, the God of hosts. . . . *I* am the only prophet left" (1 Kgs 19:10). It seems that Elijah had moved from thinking, "See how the Lord is using me," to "Look what I have done for God." Seeing disappointing results, Elijah thought, "*I* have failed. *I* did not get the results that *I* hoped for." Simon DeVries comments that "there can be little doubt but that the Elijah of our narrative is so weak and filled with despair because he has suddenly cut himself off," that is, distanced himself unknowingly, "from the fountain of his strength, the God of Israel, who is also the God of heaven and earth. All that he can remember that is positive is his own prophetic authority and authenticity."[23]

Discouraged and despondent, Elijah then became afraid. Why? No word from the Lord came to him telling him what to do. Previously, after Elijah had announced to Ahab that there would be neither dew nor rain, God told the prophet to hide in the Cherith Ravine. When the Cherith Brook dried up, God told him to go to the home of the Phoenician widow. Later, the word of the Lord came to Elijah telling him to go and present himself to Ahab; this was shortly before the meeting on Mount Carmel. But now, with an enraged Jezebel seeking to kill him, no message came from Yahweh guiding him as to his next move. Overtaken by fear, Elijah set out to save his life, traveling to the southern point of the Southern Kingdom of Israel.

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[22] Charles H. Spurgeon, "Elijah Fainting," in *The Treasury of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n.d.), 795.

[23] Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 12 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 236–237.

Discouraged, despondent, and afraid, Elijah did not think clearly or correctly. He went from the Northern Kingdom in order to save his life and then prayed to God to take his life (1 Kgs 19:4). But if, as he thought, he was the only prophet of Yahweh left in the Northern Kingdom, and probably the only believer, that was a strong reason for him to want to live. His life and ministry were then most needed in his land.[24]

That Elijah had no word from the Lord did not mean, of course, that God erred or committed a mistake. God sent his word when he wanted, and his timing was always perfect. God delayed giving a message to Elijah because he knew what was going on inside of the prophet and that his servant needed a counseling session.[25] God could foresee that, by withholding an immediate message from Elijah, the prophet, despondent and discouraged, would become afraid and leave the Northern Kingdom. That is exactly what God wanted—for his servant to take a break from his work and to take a break from the territory where he had labored, so that Elijah would be free from any pressure. In that different setting and in his present emotional and psychological condition, Elijah would "let it all out" before the Lord. God ultimately had Elijah go to Mount Horeb, apparently having communicated his will to the prophet through an angel, who gave Elijah miraculous food (1 Kgs 19:5–8). Elijah must have realized the significance of going to Horeb—there God had met and communicated with Moses, and the encounter at Horeb had marked a new phase in the ministry of Moses.

On the mountain God came to Elijah not in the fierce wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in a gentle whisper. The Lord taught the prophet that although he, the Almighty, could deal with people through awesome displays of his might and majesty—as he just had on Mount Carmel—his usual way of operating was through his word. As Peter Leithart put it, "1 Kgs. 19 emphasizes that Yahweh is more fundamentally associated with his word than with any other phenomena."[26] God gave

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[24] Spurgeon, "Elijah Fainting," 797.

[25] Brevard Childs believes that Elijah misunderstood the significance of the contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) and "expected God to continue the fireworks. . . . Chapter 18 dealt with the issue of national apostasy, whereas 19 focuses on one's individual faith. Chapter 18 portrays the outer battle of faith, 19 deals with the inner struggle. Chapter 18 has a wealth of extra-biblical parallels, whereas 19 shares no parallels, but reflects a uniquely biblical concern. . . . Together they [1 Kings 18 and 19] reflect the tension between the public and private struggle in which the dialectic between faith and unbelief is carried on." Brevard S. Childs, "On Reading the Elijah Narratives," *Interpretation* 34 (1980): 136.

[26] Peter J. Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 142.

Elijah evidence of this reality: "I have preserved in Israel seven thousand—all whose knees have not bowed to Baal and all whose mouth has not kissed him" (1 Kgs 19:18). This was the result of Elijah's preaching and teaching, the outcome that *God* wanted to, and did, achieve, through the prophet's ministry. The news about the seven thousand must have startled Elijah, leading him to understand that he did not know, or see, everything. Elijah might have wanted a higher number, but it corresponded exactly to God's plan.

In addition, God gave Elijah new assignments to carry out (1 Kgs 19:15–16). Through the word that God spoke to his prophet on Horeb, God reenergized his servant, renewed him spiritually, encouraged him, and empowered him for further service. Despite the fact that Elijah wanted to give up, God had more work for the prophet, which he enabled Elijah to accomplish.

God truly acted for the good of Elijah; he led him in the right path. Elijah had prayed to die, but God willed otherwise. The prophet came to realize that God had the better plan. We can be sure that, in the end, Elijah preferred staying alive so that he could meet with God on Horeb, pronounce God's judgment on Ahab and Jezebel, carry out other work for the Lord, and train his successor Elisha.[27] God answered Elijah's prayer not as the prophet had requested, but in the best possible way.

Elijah knew why Yahweh could be, and was, gracious to him—because of the coming Messiah. Moreover, God in his grace, love, and mercy crowned Elijah's ministry with a wonderful act of vindication. Jezebel had been determined to kill Elijah, and the prophet had prayed to die. The Lord in essence said, "I'm going to show everyone who is in control. Elijah will come to heaven according to *my* timetable, and in fact, he will *not* die." Elijah's assumption (2 Kgs 2:1–12) not only testified to his being a true prophet of God; this also was a slap at Baal, who supposedly lived in the heavens, and at the Canaanite god Mot, supposedly the god of death. Again, Elijah's departure from this earth foreshadowed the ascension of the greatest prophet, Jesus, into heaven.

## V. Conclusion

What we learn from the theology derived from the narrative of God's relationship with Elijah is clear enough, and this gives us guidance not only as individuals, but also for our work in the church. Stand *for* the Lord

[27] Spurgeon, "Elijah Fainting," 800.

and his word, stand *on* his word, and be *in* his word and sacrament. Be on guard against discouragement. Remember that our labor in the Lord is never in vain. Through his word and sacraments, God achieves results, which are according to his will. We are simply instruments used by the Lord. Always trust in God, who guides us, works for our good, and answers our prayers in ways that are beneficial to us.

One might counter, however, that Elijah's ministry in the end should be deemed a failure, because finally the Northern Kingdom, for the most part given over to idolatry, came to an end with numerous Israelites taken into exile. Our response to that claim: Wrong! God, through the work of Elijah, brought the elect of his day to faith and preserved them in that faith. Due in part to the blessing of God on Elijah's efforts, enough of the truth remained among the Israelites that God could go after them in their place of exile and through his word restore many of them to himself, as the Book of Hosea indicates. Also, Elijah's faithful ministry, by God's grace, stands as an encouragement to us today.

As we are living in a society that is degenerating at a rapid pace and slouching towards Gomorrah,[28] the same basic points can be made about our working in the church today. That is, God uses our efforts for the salvation of the elect, the preservation of the truth, and the encouragement of future generations of church workers. Thanks be to God! To God be the glory!

[28] To borrow the title of Robert Bork's book, *Slouching towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1996).

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# The Spirit-Christological Configuration of the Public Ministry

**Roberto E. Bustamante**

John F. Johnson, the former president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, began his paper for the 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by affirming that

> difficulty with the doctrine of the Ministry is endemic to Lutheranism and a demonstration of its genius. Just as in other areas of Lutheran theology—Law and Gospel, justification and sanctification, formal principle and material principle—our view of the Office of the Ministry rests on understandings and expressions of irreducible tension.[1]

Johnson concludes his paper considering three pairs of tensions, the first of which is the most classical tension between the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers. Despite the truth contained in Johnson's argument, David Scaer had advised several years earlier against defining the ministry by matrixing it with the priesthood of all believers.[2] Scaer affirms that both the New Testament and the Lutheran Confessions define the ministry "from above," from its Christological character. "This ministry is Christological not only because it proclaims Christ as its chief and ultimate function, but because those who possess this office stand in Christ's stead."[3] Just as he is the Lamb of God and the Shepherd of Israel, says Scaer, so that scattered flock of the twelve "were designated by Jesus as shepherds of the flock" and were thus "destined to martyrdom." A definition of the ministry from below (i.e., from an ecclesiological matrix),

[1] John F. Johnson, "The Office of the Pastoral Ministry: Scriptural and Confessional Considerations," in Church and Ministry: The Collected Papers of the 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, ed. Jerald C. Joerz and Paul T. McCain (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1998), 78.

[2] David P. Scaer, "The Integrity of the Christological Character of the Office of the Ministry," *Logia* 2, no. 1 (1993): 15.

[3] Scaer, "Integrity of the Christological Character," 16.

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says Scaer, is the approach of Pietism and Schleiermacher that made its way into Lutheranism through Johann Höfling's agency. Here "order is the last word, [and] then the Law has replaced the Gospel."[4] A definition of the ministry from above that does not go beyond the apostolic matrix of Peter (or, we could say, the *collegia* of the apostles)[5] is, for Scaer, "only half a loaf."[6] "We speak first of a Christological ministry and only secondarily of an apostolic one."

The intention of this paper is not to discuss who is right (Scaer or Johnson) or which is first (the ministry or the priesthood). Here, I want to test the productivity or usefulness of Spirit-Christology as a narrative or system for dealing, in this case, with what Scaer affirms—the Christological matrix or character of the office of the ministry—and with what he leaves unresolved: (1) What kind of relation is established between the ministry and its Christological matrix?; and (2) What is the specific means by which the ministry receives its Christological character?

My double interest of attempting an answer to these two questions and also testing Spirit-Christology as a theological tool have led me to take several of the first Lutheran rites of ordination as a point of departure, since they offer a good combination of the necessary elements for our task. According to Ralph Smith, the ordination rites that the first two generations of Reformers articulated reveal significant aspects of their understanding of the ministry (*lex orandi, lex credendi*).[7] At the same time, all of them—and this is true of most of the ancient forms—place their definition of the ministry within the framework of the *epiclesis*.[8]

Therefore, I plan to perform a Spirit-Christological reading of Luther's 1539 ordination rite following the two questions previously posed, to which I will add a more fundamental one: Does the ministry have a clear Christological matrix according to the rite? I have chosen this particular rite not only because of its clear representation of the evangelical doctrine

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[4] Scaer, "Integrity of the Christological Character," 17.

[5] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 143–169.

[6] Scaer, "Integrity of the Christological Character," 18.

[7] Ralph F. Smith, *Luther, Ministry, and Ordination Rites in the Early Reformation Church,* Renaissance and Baroque Studies and Texts, vol. 15 (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 1–6.

[8] Geoffrey Wainwright, "Some Theological Aspects of Ordination," in *Studia Liturgica* 13, no. 2–4 (1979): 135.

of the ministry but also because it came to have a rather normative position for later Lutheran ordinals.[9]

Before performing this Spirit-Christological reading of Luther's ordinal, it is necessary to articulate a Spirit-Christological schema that may deploy its implications with respect to the office of the ministry (the apostolic office) in order to identify the kind of continuity that we are to expect between the ministry and its Christological matrix through the mediation of the Spirit.

## I. Spirit-Christology and Apostolic Office

During the last century, there have been several theological trajectories that determined our contemporary reconsideration of the ancient Christological model of Spirit-Christology. There is a great variety of forms of Spirit-Christologies that depend on the presuppositions and the purpose that work behind the articulation of each construct. Post-Chalcedonian versions attempt to replace the traditional Logos-Christology with a Spirit-Christology, which puts into question Christ's divine nature.[10] But there are versions of Spirit-Christology that do not attempt to go against the conciliar tradition of Nicaea (AD 325), Constantinople (AD 381), and Chalcedon (AD 451). The purported agenda of these attempts is to do better justice to the biblical narrative, pay attention to the Eastern criticism of Christomonism, bring our trinitarian talk back to the economy of salvation, and foster the connection between Christ and his church or the believers.[11] Clearly, there is room for discussing whether each of these

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[9] Ralph W. Quere, "The Spirit and the Gift Are Ours: Imparting or Imploring the Spirit in Ordination Rites?," in *Lutheran Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1975): 328.

[10] It is clear that these versions assume Adolf von Harnack's theory that a Logos-Christology is inherently part of the distortion that characterized the Catholic Hellenized form of Christianity. Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (vol. 2), trans. Neil Buchanan (New York: Russell and Russell), 10–13. Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ," in *Christ, Faith and History: Cambridge Studies in Christology*, ed. S. W. Sykes, and J. P. Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 111–120; Roger S. J. Haight, "The Case for Spirit Christology," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 257–287.

[11] Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1975); P. Schoonenberg, "Spirit Christology and Logos Christology," Bijdragen 38 (1977): 350–375; Mark Thomsen, "A Christology of the Spirit and the Nicene Creed," Dialog 16 (1977): 135–138; Luis Ladaria, "Cristología del Logos y cristología del Espíritu," *Gregorianum* 61 (1980): 353–360; Kilian McDonnell, "The Determinative Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," *Theology Today* 39, no. 2

attempts really follows the conciliar tradition, but breaking with it is not the only program that controls the rise of Spirit-Christology. A Spirit-Christology can function as a fruitful and valid theological resource to the extent that it does not work *against* the conciliar tradition of a Logos-Christology but rather *within* its more fundamental framework of confessing *Deum verum de Deo vero, genitum, non factum, consubstantialem Patri*.

It is within this more fundamental framework that a Spirit-Christology should be articulated in order to provide its complementary contribution,[12] which I will now proceed to do. According to Yves Congar, we can affirm that Christ "is ontologically the Son of God because of the hypostatic union from the moment of his conception,"[13] and still "respect the successive moments or stages in the history of salvation . . . [in which] the *virtus* or effectiveness of the Spirit in Jesus was actuated in a new way," bringing about a real *novum* (i.e., what Congar calls the two *kairoi* of baptism and the resurrection). Ralph Del Colle also describes some of the features that constitute a Spirit-Christology, even when it works within the framework to which I have already referred.[14] Del Colle lists the following elements: (1) economy of salvation (or biblical narrative) as point of departure; (2) affirmation of the hypostatic integrity and difference between Christ and the Spirit; and (3) the trinitarian persons dealing with us in terms of real (and not logical) relation (i.e., divine self-communication). These are some of the principles that will work behind my own articulation of a Spirit-Christology as I examine the following points: (1) pneumatic constitution of Christ's office; (2) pneumatic constitution of the apostolic office; and (3) evaluation of the continuity between one office and the other.

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(1982): 142–161; Yves M. J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols., trans. David Smith (New York: The Seabury Press; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983); David Coffey, *Believer, Christian, Catholic: Three Essays in Fundamental Theology* (Manly, Australia: Catholic Institute of Sydney, 1986); John O'Donnell, "In Him and Over Him: The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus," *Gregorianum* 70, no. 1 (1989): 25–45; Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus: The Mystery of Christ's Baptism* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1986); Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life and Mission in the Spirit as a Ground for Understanding Christology, Trinity, and Proclamation," PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (2003).

[12] Congar, *I Believe*, 3:165–166; Sánchez, "Receiver, Bearer, and Giver," 187–213.

[13] Congar, *I Believe*, 3:171.

[14] Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit*, 93, 195–196.

*Pneumatic Constitution of Christ's Office*

> But when we speak of the dispensations made for man by our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who will gainsay their having been accomplished through the grace of the Spirit? . . . Is it Christ's advent? The Spirit is forerunner. Is there the incarnate presence? The Spirit is inseparable. Working of miracles, and gifts of healing are through the Holy Spirit. Demons were driven out by the Spirit of God. The devil was brought to naught by the presence of the Spirit. Remission of sins was by the gift of the Spirit, for "ye were washed, ye were sanctified . . . in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the holy Spirit of our God."[15]

In this compelling way, Basil the Great argues for the pneumatic constitution of Christ into his office, a constitution that was not done once and for all. The New Testament tells us about the different *kairoi* (i.e., opportune times of eschatological fulfillment) that did not bring ontological *nova*, but did bring economical ones to the Son's messianic mission. We will consider three different moments in which the Spirit of the Father constitutes the Son in a particular way into his messianic mission: his baptism at the Jordan, his resurrection, and finally his session at the right hand of God. That these three events are multivalent goes without saying. We will focus, however, on just one single value in each of them: Christ's being constituted into his office by way of receiving (or being acted upon by) the Spirit of the Father.

In terms of Origen's assertion that, "no river is good except the Jordan," for it is "the great mystery of the Jordan",[16] one can say that Jesus, being "anointed by the Spirit from the Father, was made Jesus [the] *Christ*."[17] The voice of the Father and the descent of the Spirit work together in constituting Jesus as the Suffering Servant.[18] This Spirit that anoints him in his baptism not only "impels him" (αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει, Mark 1:12) into the desert or leads him back to Galilee (ὑπέστρεψεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος, Luke 4:14), but constitutes the power with which Christ develops his public declaration of the eschatological coming of the

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[15] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit,* Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 8:25, 31 (hereafter NPNF²).

[16] Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* VI, 47, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), 9:486.

[17] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies,* Ante-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1:423 (hereafter ANF).

[18] Joachim Jeremias, *Teología del Nuevo Testamento: La Predicación de Jesús,* vol. 1, trans. Constantino Ruiz-Garrido (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1985), 94–96.

kingdom of God (Luke 4:18–20; 11:20). "Christ had need of the Spirit in order to defeat the devil, to perform miracles and to receive (divine) instruction as to the activities he should undertake."[19] But being constituted as the Servant of Isaiah means also dying in the stead of God's rebellious people. Thus, the same Spirit that marked him as the Lamb of God (John 1:29–34) is the one that empowers him for offering himself on the cross (Heb 9:14).[20]

In fact, the Jordan's impact not only reaches forward to the cross but is constitutive of the successive and ulterior bestowal of the Spirit even after the resurrection. He is the one upon whom the Spirit "remained." Therefore, he is "the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit" (John 1:32–33) and who "gives the Spirit without measure" (John 3:34). This is a special locus for the ancient fathers: "[I]t was requisite that such [prophetic] gifts should cease from you; and having received their rest in Him, should again . . . become gifts which, from the grace of His Spirit's power, He imparts to those who believe in Him."[21] The Spirit "descend[ed] upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, [so that] becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race [may renew] them from their old habits into the newness of Christ."[22] "The Spirit had come to him, and he gave the Spirit at the time of his resurrection."[23]

Our second *kairos* in which the Spirit constitutes Christ into his office in a new way is referenced by the apostle Paul in his hymn-like definition of the Gospel in Romans 1:3–4: "concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead [τοῦ ὁρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν], Jesus Christ our Lord." Even though every phrase in this text has

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[19] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Dogmatic Fragments*. *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–1866), 66.996B. English translation from Boris Bobrinskoy, "The Indwelling of the Spirit in Christ: 'Pneumatic Christology' in the Cappadocian Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1984): 61.

[20] See also Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., *Pneumatología: Un estudio del Espíritu Santo y la espiritualidad del pueblo de Dios* (St. Louis: Editorial Concordia, 2005), 108.

[21] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho,* ANF, 1:243.

[22] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 17, 1, ANF 1:444.

[23] Origen, *Homilies on the Gospel of Luke* XXVII, 5. English translation from Joseph T. Lienhard, S. J., *The Fathers of Our Church—Origen, Homilies on Luke* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 114.

been debated endlessly,[24] the trajectory that we are following here still stays within the possible readings of this text. First, that it was the Spirit of the Father who raised Christ from the dead (Rom 8:11; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18) and in doing so, second, a *novum* in Christ's economy took place: he was "*designated* (RSV) Son of God or, indeed, *installed* as Son of God [in power]."[25] Just as the same apostle understands the meaning of Christ's resurrection in Acts 13:33, here Paul "makes his own conscious and distinctive use of an early conventional exegesis of 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2."[26] "Jesus' resurrection/exaltation was taken to be his royal investiture" of Christ as the fulfillment of God's promise to David.[27] Third, this action of the Spirit upon Christ constitutes a real *novum* in his messianic office in that his resurrection is not only *his own*, neither just the manifestation of his previously existent righteousness, but the factual and eschatological establishment and inauguration of "the [general] resurrection from the dead" (ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν). "By this fact he appeared to dissolve death, in order to redeem us. Thus Paul calls him our Lord."[28] The Last Adam finally *becomes* a life-giving Spirit (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ [ἐγένετο] εἰς πνεῦμα ζῳοποιοῦν, 1 Cor 15:45), because even his assumed flesh now "receive[s] the splendor of the everlasting glory" and "the corruption of the flesh [is] swallowed up, transformed into the power of God and the purity of the Spirit"[29] and, therefore, this deified body now "becomes the vehicle or channel"[30] for communicating "the image of the heavenly" (τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου), the same "spiritual body" (σῶμα πνευματικόν) that enjoys incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσίᾳ, 1 Cor 15:42–49). This climactic benefit is connected by Paul (as being of one piece) with the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins (διὰ τούτου ὑμῖν ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν καταγγέλλεται, Acts 13:35–39).

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[24] Martin Hengel says that this is the most discussed text in the New Testament. Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 59.

[25] Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 47.

[26] Christopher G. Whitsett, "Son of God, Seed of David: Paul's Messianic Exegesis in Romans 2:3–4," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no.4 (2000): 661.

[27] Whitsett, "Son of God," 676.

[28] Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1–2 Corinthians,* Ancient Christian Texts, trans. Gerald L. Bray (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2009), 4.

[29] Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* III, 16, NPNF² 9:66.

[30] Luis Ladaria, "La unción de Jesús y el don del Espíritu," *Gregorianum* 71 (1990): 568.

Our third *kairos* of Christ's pneumatic constitution into his messianic office takes us to what, according to Mikeal Parsons,[31] lies right at the center of St. Peter's sermon on Pentecost: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit [τήν τε ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου λαβὼν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός], he has poured out this [ἐξέχεεν τοῦτο] that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2:33). According to the previous references in the Lukan narrative, the promise of the Father consists in that "you [will be] clothed with power from on high" (ἐνδύσησθε ἐξ ὕψους δύναμιν, Luke 24:49) and that "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἁγίῳ, Acts 1:5). Max Turner considers that this promise of the Spirit condenses several dimensions; it is the Spirit of Israel's New Exodus, the constitutive power of Israel's renewed covenant, Joel's gift of the Spirit of prophecy, and the Spirit that mediates Christ's own presence and activity.[32] What is significant for our purposes is that the primordial receptor of this promise of the Spirit is not the church (or "all flesh"), but Christ himself. That is to say, Pentecost not only constitutes a *novum* in ecclesiological terms but also in Christological ones. It is here, when he is exalted at the right hand of the Father and is "made . . . both Lord and Christ" (κύριον αὐτὸν καὶ χριστὸν ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός, Acts 2:36), that the eschatological potency of baptizing (others) with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33) and bestowing this gift upon "those who believed in him" (John 7:39) is finally given to him (λαβὼν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός). This must not be set in opposition to the Johannine connection of the fulfillment of this same promise with the Paschal events (John 7:39; 19:30; 20:22; 1 John 5:6), since John understands these same events as constituting the monolithic unity of his glorification and ascension to the Father (δοξάζειν/ἀναβαίνειν, John 12:23; 13:31; 16:7). In John, "Jesus' death, resurrection, glorification, and even the effusion of the Spirit are inextricably united from a theological point of view."[33]

*Pneumatic Constitution of the Apostolic Office*

The same Spirit with which the Father anointed the Son at the different *kairoi* that constituted him into his messianic office came to be at the end of the day the Spirit of the risen and exalted one who now is bestowed upon his church as the new Israel, and upon those who had already been appointed as apostles (Mark 3:14–15), but now are finally "clothed with

[31] Mikeal C. Parson, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 44–47.

[32] Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 302–303.

[33] Felix Porsch, *El Espíritu Santo, Defensor de los Creyentes: La Actividad del Espíritu según el Evangelio de San Juan* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 1983), 106.

power from on high" (Luke 24:49) in order to be inserted into the final *kairos* of the Christological prophecy (δεῖ πληρωθῆναι πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα περὶ ἐμοῦ, Luke 24:44) announced in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms: "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name [καὶ κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν] to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). "Pentecost was for the Church what his baptism was for Jesus, that is, the gift and the power of the Spirit, dedication to the ministry, mission and bearing witness."[34]

> But He came down to clothe the Apostles with power, and to baptize them; for the Lord says, "ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" [Acts 1:5]. This grace was not in part, but His power was in full perfection; for as he who plunges into the waters and is baptized is encompassed on all sides by the waters, so were they also baptized completely by the Holy Ghost. The water however flows round the outside only, but the Spirit baptizes also the soul within, and that completely.[35]

In the Johannine narrative of the Easter Day, we do not find the announcement but the very constitution of the apostles into their Paschal office by means of the bestowal of Spirit.

> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you [καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς]." And when he had said this, he breathed on them [ἐνεφύσησεν αὐτοῖς] and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit [λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον / *acccipite Spiritum Sanctum*]. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them [ἄν τινων ἀφῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἀφέωνται αὐτοῖς]; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" [ἄν τινων κρατῆτε κεκράτηνται] (John 20:21–23).

Cyril of Alexandria pays attention to the continuity between Christ's mission and the apostles' mission that is established by our text, maintaining that Christ makes this connection "that they might fully comprehend their mission: to call sinners to repentance and to minister to those who were caught up in evil" and that they "not in any way [would] follow their own will but the will of him who sent them."[36] Two other fourth-century fathers, both connected with Antioch, seem to go one step

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[34] Congar, *I Believe*, 1:19.

[35] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* XVII, 14. NPNF[2] 7:127.

[36] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* XII, 1; English translation from *John 11–21,* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture—New Testament, vol. 4b, ed Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 360.

further in exposing the significance that John 20 has for our research. By being bestowed with the Spirit, the apostles are not only put in a track *behind* Christ (after his pattern of mission), but are placed *within* Christ's own divine and authoritative mission.

> What truly wonderful gifts! Indeed, it does not only give the power over the elements and the faculty to make signs and wonders but also concedes that God may name them [judges], and therefore the servants receive from him the authority that is proper to him. The prerogative to absolve and retain sins only belongs to God, and the Jews sometimes raised this objection with the Savior, saying, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The Lord generously gave this authority to those who honored him.[37]

> What authority could be greater than that? "The Father has given all judgement to the Son" [John 5:22]. But I see that the Son has placed it all in their [i.e., the apostles'] hands. For they have been raised to this prerogative, as though they were already translated to heaven and had transcended human nature and were freed from our passions.[38]

*Evaluation of the Continuity between One Office and the Other*

The ascending connection among the different stages that conform Christ's and the apostles' pneumatic constitution into their respective offices is evident and allows us to affirm the Christological character of the apostolic office. But, what kind of continuity does the biblical and patristic data establish between Christ and the apostles and between their respective spirit-shaped offices? Considering the content and function of the apostolic office and its specific location within the economy of salvation as being integrated into the last of the three *kairoi* that we found in the biblical narrative, it becomes clear that the apostles do not receive their pneumatic constitution in order to be a kind of "new avatar" of Christ. They are not constituted as Suffering Servants, Sons of God in power, second (third?) Adams, Lords, or Messiahs in order to perform by their own the same things Christ has done. They are, rather, integrated into Christ's own present office, that one for which the Spirit has previously constituted him, of bestowing upon "all flesh" the benefits that spring out of his death (forgiveness of sin), resurrection (life and incorruptibility), and exaltation (the Holy Spirit). Thus, Christ performs his present messianic office

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[37] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on John* VII, 20, 22–25; English translation, Elowsky, *John 11–21,* 362.

[38] John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood,* III, 5, trans. Graham Neville (London: SPCK, 1964), 72.

through the apostles as they are integrated through the Spirit of the Exalted One.

## II. Spirit-Christological Reading of Luther's 1539 Rite of Ordination

As indicated before, we will now perform a Spirit-Christological reading of Luther's 1539 ordination rite under the following three questions:

1. Has the ministry a clear Christological matrix according to the rite?
2. If so, what kind of relation is established between the ministry and its Christological matrix?
3. What is the specific means by which the ministry receives its Christological character?

*Departing from the Roman Ordination Rite*

With some few exceptions, prior to October 20, 1535 all Lutheran ministers were ordained under the pope, according to the *Pontificale Romanum*. But, since "bishops . . . enemies of the gospel" were "unwilling to ordain" (Tr 66) and were "persecut[ing] and condemn[ing] those who take up a call to such an office" (SA III, 10, 2), it became necessary for Elector John Frederick to issue a decree that mandated the theological faculty at Wittenberg "to ordain and thus to give the power and authority of the office of priest and deacon,"[39] since "the church must not remain without servants on their account" (SA III, 10, 2). A great number of Lutheran ordinals were produced, several of them under the supervision or by the very hands of Johannes Bugenhagen and Martin Luther.[40] There exist four different versions of Luther's German Ordination Rite (1535/36 [H/J], 1537 [S], 1538 [C/F] and 1539 [R]), the last of which proved to be the standard for most of the Lutheran rites to be formulated.[41] We will focus our attention on this last form.

Luther's definition represents a clear break with the *Pontificale Durandi,* the established Roman form during the late medieval age.[42] None of its

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[39] Smith, *Luther and Ordination*, 66.

[40] Smith, *Luther and Ordination*, 87–200.

[41] Ralph W. Quere, "The Spirit and the Gift Are Ours: Imparting or Imploring the Spirit in Ordination Rites?," *Lutheran Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1975): 322–46; James F. Puglisi, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry: Epistemological Principles and Roman Catholic Rites—A Comparative Study*, 3 vol. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 1:23.

[42] These are relevant parts of the rite of ordination that we find in the *Pontificali Durandi*: "[13] Then the bishop turns toward the altar and kneels. Before the middle of

central and constitutive features remained with Luther. These were: (1) the conferral of the ministerial power by means of the *traditio instrumentorum*[43] and the imperative "receive the power to sacrifice to God and to celebrate mass as much for the living and the dead" (#17); (2) the conferral of the apostolic Spirit with the critical imperative *Accipe Spiritu Sanctum* ["receive the Holy Spirit"] (#25); and (3) the vow of obedience (#27). Anointing the hands and singing the *Veni Creator Spiritus* was an integral part of the conferral of the ministerial power.[44]

Breaking with the Roman rite the way Luther did was not in fact a heretical innovation, but the recovering of the most primitive understanding of the ordination, just as the one represented by Hippolytus's Apostolic Tradition,[45] that already began to be distorted during the fifth century. All

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the altar, he begins in a loud voice: 'Alleluia. Come Holy Spirit' . . . or, if it is later than the octave of Pentecost, the hymn, '*Come, Creator Spirit*.' [14] Then, when the first verse has been sung, he rises and washes his hands. While the preludes are being sung, all of the candidates for ordination kneel before him in turn. *He anoints them*, not with chrism, but with oil of catechumens. . . . [17] When this has been done, he passes to each in turn a chalice with wine and water, and a paten set on top of it with a host. They take them between the index and middle fingers of both hands. . . . He says to each one: '*Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate masses both for the living and for the dead*. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Response: 'Amen.'. . .[25] When this has been done, *the bishop places hands over the heads of each of them in turn*. As he does this, they shall bow their heads slightly. He says to each of them: '*Receive the Holy Spirit*. Whose sins you forgive, they shall be forgiven. Whose sins you retain, they shall be retained.' . . .27. And then each one approaches the bishop again, one at a time. They place their hands, still joined, between the hands of the bishop and he says to each of them: '*Do you promise obedience and reverence to me and to my successors?' And the candidate responds: 'I promise*'." Smith, *Luther and Ordination*, 245–252; emphasis added.

[43] The handing down of the paten and the chalice. See n. 42.

[44] Smith, *Luther and Ordination*, 221.

[45] These are relevant parts of the rite of ordination in the Apostolic Tradition.

"Let him be ordained bishop who has been chosen by all the people, and when he has been named and accepted by all, let the people assemble, together with the presbytery and those bishops who are present, on the Lord's day. When all give consent, they shall lay hands on him, and the presbytery shall stand by and be still. *And all shall keep silence, praying in their hearts for the descent of the Spirit*; after which one of the bishops present, being asked by all, shall lay his hands on him who is being ordained bishop, and pray, saying thus: God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . *now pour forth that power which is from you, of the princely Spirit* [πνεῦμα ἡγεμονικόν] *which you granted through your beloved Son Jesus Christ to your holy apostles* who established the Church in every place as your sanctuary, to the unceasing glory and praise of your name . . . bestow upon this your servant . . . to feed your holy flock and to exercise the high-priesthood before you blamelessly . . . to propitiate your countenance unceasingly, and to offer to you the gifts of your holy Church; and by *the spirit of high-priesthood* [πνεῦμα τὸ ἀρχιερατικό] to have the power to forgive sins according to your command. . . . Amen.

the *Pontificale Durandi*'s main features have their origin in the tenth century Sarum Rite from England.[46] Ralph Quere points out that Rome moved from the primitive implorative mode of the *epiclesis* to the imperative mode of the *Accipe*.[47] Behind this move there was a clear reification of the Spirit that came to collapse into what Peter Fink describes as the "some Spirit for you, more Spirit for you" motif that still characterizes the Roman understanding of the "spirit" given at the ordination as the created grace that belongs to the one who passes it over, to say: the bishop.[48] James Puglisi affirms that, with the medieval transformation of the rite, "[w]e have passed from a concept of the ordained ministry as a service of the Church, exercised in the heart of the community for its edification, to a concept of the ordained ministry as something personally possessed for oneself."[49]

*Luther's Ordination Rite*

Ralph Smith organizes Luther's rite into the following thirteen parts (that do not correspond with the original more general numeration of the Ordinal parts): [50]

1. Exhortation to prayer
2. Choir: "Veni sancte spiritus"
3. Versicle and collect
4. Scripture readings
5. Address
6. Promise
7. Laying on of hands with prayer
8. The ordination prayer

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And when he has been made bishop, all shall offer the kiss of peace, greeting him because he has been made worthy of this. Then the deacons shall present the oblation to him, and he shall lay his hand upon it, and give thanks, with the entire council of elders, saying: "*The Lord be with you." And all reply: "And with your spirit*." Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1990), 107–108.

[46] Quere, "The Spirit and the Gift," 326.

[47] Quere, "The Spirit and the Gift," 345.

[48] Peter Fink "The Sacrament of Orders: Some Liturgical Reflections," *Worship* 56 (1982): 488. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* XX; XXI, 2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §§ 1576, 1582, and 1585.

[49] Puglisi, *The Process of Admission*, 159–160.

[50] Smith, *Luther and Ordination*, 100–101. For the text of Luther's rite, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 53:124–126 (hereafter AE).

9. The charge
10. Blessing
11. Hymn: "Let Us Pray to the Holy Spirit"
12. Lord's Prayer
13. Communion

The rite was located, as it becomes obvious, within a regular Divine Service, between the sermon and communion. Frank Senn indicates that here, as in any other ordination rite, the liturgical context in which the ordinal is placed bespeaks of the ministerial context and function into which the ordinand is placed.[51] What is the *novum* in Luther's rite and what are its particular emphases? I will point out four main emphases that seem to work in pairs as the main traits in Luther's definition.

*The Spirit of Pentecost and Community in Epiclesis*

The entire rite is framed with these two fundamental motives: the community calling upon the Holy Spirit so that he may come, with this coming of the Spirit expressed in unmistakable pentecostal terms. Both hymns that frame the rite (#2, 11) and the Versicle and Collect (#3) belong to Pentecost festival. In spite of the Lutheran polemic against Rome's *Accipe Spiritu Sanctum*,[52] it becomes obvious that Luther represents the ordination rite as a particular instance in which the pentecostal event is actualized once again. "[I]t is not to be doubted that with such prayer and laying on of hands the Holy Spirit not only surely comes, but does not depart without bearing fruit, for it accomplishes that for which it is sent according to the promise of Christ. . . . That is why Christians should ordain their pastors."[53] The spirit that is given in the Roman ordination is a spiritual substance (created grace) and is both given and received as a personal property that cannot be breathed but by the bishop and that, when received, imprints in the ordinand the *character indelebilis*.[54] The Spirit is not "transmitted" at all in Luther's rite. He is called upon (epiclesis), and his coming, though certain (as we have seen), is not reduced to a single quasi-magical gesture. Quere maintains that there is a clear intention in the ordinal to "separate the gift of the Spirit from a pre-

[51] Frank C. Senn, "Ordination Rites as a Source of Ecclesiology," *Dialog* 27, no. 1 (1988): 43.

[52] Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 vols., trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 2:92.

[53] Martin Luther, *House Postile on John 1* (1544), WA 52, 569, 16–22; author's translation.

[54] *Catechism* §1597.

cise moment in the rite."[55] To be sure, there are two instances in which the epiclesis is uttered by the ordinator (#3, 8), but the two main epicleses that frame the rite are the congregational and pentecostal hymns in which the ordinator is nothing else than one among the others (#2, 11). What is remarkable, at the same time, is that it is not only the ordinand upon whom the Spirit is called. According to Ralph Smith, the fact that the choir sings *Veni Sancte Spiritus* when those involved in the office of the ministry kneel before the altar makes them "the focus of the petition."[56]

Notwithstanding, the familiarity of the "we" that sing this Pentecost hymn may have turned unavoidable for people in the pew to appropriate once again the text of their hymn. The same kind of apparently intentional ambiguity takes place with the very Ordination Prayer (#8). On the other hand, Frieder Schulz suggests that the "we" in the invocation of the Spirit also includes the entire assembly.[57] This ambiguity seems to be no longer there with the final hymn, in which it is the congregation that now comes to the front as the receptor of the spiritual benefits. Rather than blurring the distinction between priesthood and ministry, I think that this ambiguity intends to express that Pentecost is taking place here at two different levels: on the one hand, the Spirit comes upon the ordinands to empower them for their ministry; on the other hand, the Spirit also comes upon the church to do his work in the heart of the believers by means of the ordinands' ministry.[58] That is to say: in providing new ministers, the Spirit renews and reaffirms the pentecostal event of coming upon the church. The prayer for the Spirit (Luke 11:13) and the prayer for more laborers (Matt 9:37–38) blend into a single concept in Luther's understanding of Pentecost:[59]

> For where He [i.e., the Holy Spirit] does not cause it [i.e., the Word of God] to be preached and made alive in the heart, so that it is understood, it is lost, as was the case under the Papacy, where faith was entirely put under the bench, and no one recognized Christ as his Lord or the Holy Ghost as his Sanctifier, that is, no one believed that Christ is our Lord in the sense that He has acquired this treasure for us,

[55] Quere, "The Spirit and the Gift," 329.

[56] Smith, *Luther and Ordination*, 112–113.

[57] Frieder Schulz, "Evangelische Ordination. Zur Reform der liturgischen Ordnungen," in *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 17 (1972): 43.

[58] Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator: Luther's Concept of the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1953), 3–172, 288–305.

[59] Cf. Martin Luther's several early Postils for Pentecost (1517 through 1523) in *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther* vol 2.1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 272–394.

> without our works and merit, and made us acceptable to the Father. What, then, was lacking? This, that the Holy Ghost was not there to reveal it and cause it to be preached; but men and evil spirits were there, who taught us to obtain grace and be saved by our works.[60]

*The Voice of the Shepherd and the Coming of His Kingdom*

For Frieder Schulz, the principal characteristic of this and the other sixteenth-century ordinals is the centrality of the Word of the Lord.[61] The Word is that for which the ordinands are ordained (consider the very name of the rite: #1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9). The divine Word of command, teaching and promise (#8) is that that brings about the ministry itself, the ordination rite and its epicletic thrust (#1, 8). Scriptural words that are read delineate in a prophetic way the proper task and responsibility for the ministry (#4, 5, 9). The Word is that with which the minister has to feed God's flock (#5) and what causes that "thy name may be hallowed, thy kingdom grow, and thy will be done" (#8).[62] Therefore, all the Pentecost flow of the Spirit descending in response to the church's prayer[63] is put here in a classical Lutheran way within the framework of the word of the Lord.[64] James Puglisi suggests that the imposition of hands and the prayer of ordination (#7, 8) constitute "the nucleus" of Luther's rite,[65] but he considers that Luther's decision of having the ordinator pray the Lord's Prayer when laying on his hands is "surprising [and] . . . does not contribute anything specifically pertinent to the ministry or to the rite that is being carried out."[66] Whoever knows Luther's explanation of the Lord's Prayer, however, will understand why this is so in the rite: "God's kingdom . . . comes here, in time, through the Word and faith."[67] For Ralph Smith, "the Lord's Prayer functioned here [i.e., in the ordinal] like the words of institution in the eucharist. It connected the present action with a foundational dominical event."[68] If the first pair of characteristic emphases that we mentioned before set the pneumatological framework of the office, this new pair

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[60] LC II 43–44; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 436.

[61] Schulz, "Evangelische Ordination," 3.

[62] AE 53:126.

[63] Johann Gerhard, *On the Ecclesiastical Ministry – Part I* (Theological Commonplaces), trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 240.

[64] Ap XIII 13; SA III VIII 3–13.

[65] Puglisi, *The Process of Admission*, 10–12.

[66] Puglisi, *The Process of Admission*, 11.

[67] LC III 53, Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 447.

[68] Smith, *Luther and Ordination*, 125.

exposes its Christological character.[69] This will be explored by answering three guiding questions.

*Has the Ministry a Clear Christological Matrix according to the Rite?*

The positive answer is self-evident. James Puglisi affirms that "nowhere do we read in the [first generation Lutheran] formularies that the pastor or the ordained minister is a delegate of the community: he is its servant, like Christ who came not to be served but to serve, by giving his life for the flock of God."[70]

*What Kind of Relation is Established between the Ministry and its Christological Matrix?*

I find three different relations. *(a) Christ configures the ministry (Christ → Ministry)*, and this in four ways: First, he is at the same time the one who commands his church to pray for laborers and the one who provides the ministers that are given (#1, 8). Second, the Spirit and the spiritual gifts that are asked for the ministers (particularly in the *Veni Sancte Spiritu*, #2) were demonstrated to be the same as those that empowered Christ himself for his ministry. Commenting on the Apostolic Tradition's πνεῦμα ἀρχιερατικόν, Puglisi suggests that "the bishop receives [here] the power of the Spirit which was received by Christ (scene of his baptism/royal-messianic sense) and by the apostles (scene of Pentecost/prophetic-evangelical sense)."[71] Third, Christ becomes the fundamental paradigm for the ministers. Just as he is the chief Shepherd, so they have to take heed and feed the flock (#4, 9); just as he shed his blood on the cross, so they are blessed "with the sign of the cross" (#10); just as he is blameless, apt to teach, patient, and able to conquer the devil, so they are exhorted to attend Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 3. Finally, the fruitfulness of the ministry depends on the Lord's provision of his blessing (#10). *(b) The ministry points to Christ (Ministry → Christ)*: ministers are to remain constant in Peter's confession of Christ (#1), and the congregation exits the rite looking forward to be taught "to know Jesus Christ alone, Clinging to our Savior whose blood hath bought us" (#11). Finally, there is a *(c) Mutual coinherence between Christ and the ministry (Christ ↔ Ministry)*. Just as Christ

[69] See Ian D. Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 54.

[70] Puglisi, *The Process of Admission*, 181. In a similar vein, see Arthur C. Piepkorn, "The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40 (1969): 553, note 2.

[71] Puglisi, *The Process of Admission*, 59.

makes his kingdom grow and come through "all those who are called to serve [his] Word" (#7, 8), so he also, as the Chief Shepherd, does not feed his flock but through his servants (#4, 5, 9).

> [The Gospel] is not left in any doubtful unlocatedness; rather, it is located where the Lord has put it, in the *Amt,* the office, which is where we are not left in doubt that the Lord is the one who does it. Hence "the holy ministry." The Lord baptizes, he absolves, he ordains, he gives into our mouth his body and his blood. As with the preceding articles, you have to tear AC V away from the Lord to get it wrong.[72]

*What Are the Specific Means by which the Ministry Receives its Christological Character?*

Regin Prenter points out that in Luther's thought, "*conformitas Christi* is not the result of an *imitatio Christi*, but of an act of God in man through the Holy Spirit."[73] The Spirit of the risen and exalted one, "the princely Spirit [πνεῦμα ἀρχιερατικόν] which you granted through your beloved Son Jesus Christ to your holy apostles,"[74] descends once again, "to send laborers into his harvest and preserve them faithful and constant in sound doctrine against the gates of hell" (#1),[75] to "fill full with thine own gracious good the faithful ones' heart, mind, desire" (#2), "that in thy service nought shake us" (#2),[76] "that we may have right understanding . . . and at all time rejoice in his comfort and power" (#3),[77] and "we may stand faithful and firm against the devil, the world, and the flesh, to the end that thy name may be hallowed, thy kingdom grow, and thy will be done" (#8).[78] Cyril of Alexandria asks: "And why [is this so]? Because they could have done nothing pleasing to God and could not have triumphed over the snares of sin if they had not been 'clothed with power from on high'."[79] That it is the same Spirit that rested upon Christ and that works through the minister is what both minister and congregation declare together from the very first action that the ordained minister performs: "The Lord be with you." And

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[72] Norman E. Nagel, "*Externum Verbum*: Testing Augustana V on the Doctrine of the Holy Ministry," *Logia* 6, no. 3 (1997): 28.

[73] Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 11.

[74] Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition* 3.

[75] AE 53:124.

[76] AE 53:266.

[77] AE 53:135.

[78] AE 53:126.

[79] Cyril, *Commentary on John*, XII, 1; English translation, Elowsky, *John 11–21,* 364.

all reply: "And with your Spirit."[80] The Spirit not only *empowers* the ministers just as he did the ministers' predecessors in the office; the Spirit *incorporates* the ordinands into his and Christ's own ministry. Christ keeps feeding his flock (#9) and bringing his kingdom on earth through "all those who are called to serve thy Word" (#8).[81] The Spirit "[t]each[es] us to know our God aright and call him Father with delight" (#2),[82] and "[t]each[es] us to know Jesus Christ alone" (#11)[83] "[t]hat we may seek no masters more, but Jesus with true faith solely" (#2)[84] by no other means but through the ministry of the Word. It is not only that the ordinand receives something from the Spirit of Christ; rather, he is received by means of the Spirit of Christ "into [Christ's own] ministry."[85] "The *ordo,* the office, the *Predigtamt,* does not have every Christian in it, but, as always, only those were in it who were put there—as was plain for all to see—*rite vocatus.* To be put into the *ordo* is to be ordained, and that is clearly so *rite vocatus.*"[86] Therefore, "whoever listens to you listens to me."[87]

## III. Final Comments

I will conclude by briefly expressing my evaluation of the fruitfulness of Spirit-Christology as a theological model for dealing with our specific topic regarding the Christological matrix or character of the office of the ministry, the kind of relationship that exists between the ministry and its Christological matrix, and the specific means by which the ministry receives its Christological character. Spirit-Christology proved to be a useful heuristic device in our reading of Luther's 1539 Ordination Rite as we

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[80] W. C. van Unnik, "*Dominus Vobiscum*: The Background of a Liturgical Formula," in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 270–305; Norman E. Nagel, "Holy Communion," in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 290–292; Timothy C. J. Quill, "And with Your Spirit: Why the Ancient Response Should Be Restored in the Pastoral Greeting," in *Logia* 7, no. 2 (1998): 27–35. See also n. 45.

[81] AE 53:126.

[82] AE 53:266.

[83] AE 53:264.

[84] AE 53:266.

[85] Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance,* Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, vol. 10 (Fort Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 151.

[86] Nagel, "*Externum Verbum*," 28.

[87] Luke 10:16; AC XXVIII 22.

sought to answer our three guiding questions. David Scaer's contention is confirmed as well as the specific link between the ministry and its Christological matrix by means of the work of the Spirit.

At the same time, the model seems to support Luther's parting of the ways with the Roman understanding of the Spirit bestowed in ordination. The Spirit is not the "created grace" that belongs to the bishop but the Giver of grace himself who comes at the Lord's promise/command and the church's obedient prayer. This Spirit is not given once and for all (indelible character), but it is asked as an ongoing free self-communication that comes upon the ordained, not to enable the minister to reproduce Christ's past office (i.e., to offer a sacrifice to God), but to be assumed or incorporated into Christ's own present office of "publish[ing] the good tidings" of the Gospel (#8).[88]

[88] AE 53:126.

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# The Dichotomy of Judaism and Hellenism Revisited: Roots and Reception of the Gospel

**Daniel Johansson**

I encountered the problem of Judaism and Hellenism for the first time about twenty years ago when I studied for the lower degree in church music in Sweden. The program included an introduction to the Christian faith and the New Testament. Given the fact that this school was run by the Church of Sweden, this introduction took a surprisingly traditional, conservative approach on every important issue. Our ordinary teacher was the school pastor. Sometimes, however, an older layman who held a Bachelor of Theology substituted. Whether he liked to shock us or simply wished to demonstrate his knowledge, in one of these classes we were told that the death and resurrection of Jesus were not as unique as we might have believed. He claimed that the idea of the death and resurrection of a god after three days was attested in the cultures surrounding Judea. I do not remember his argument but I remember my classmates being surprised and confused. I was not equipped at the time to counter his arguments, nor did I ask the proper questions. With my limited theological background, however, I simply felt that something must be wrong with his reasoning.[1]

I encountered the problem again in a different setting when several years later I wrote a paper on the Lord's Supper as student at the Lutheran School of Theology in Gothenburg. I was analyzing the arguments for and against a literal interpretation of the *verba institutionis*. To my surprise, I realized that those exegetes who traced the Lord's Supper back to Jesus himself almost all rejected the real presence of the body and blood of Christ. Those, however, who denied that Jesus had instituted the Supper and rather traced its roots to a non-Jewish, Hellenistic background concluded that the early gentile Christians did indeed believe in the real presence. I would lie if I say that I approached the problem of the inter-

[1] For an introduction to the phenomenon to which my teacher probably was referring, see e.g., Tryggve Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001).

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pretation of the *verba* from a completely neutral standpoint, so admittedly I felt somewhat attracted by the conclusions of those scholars who found non-Jewish elements in the early Christian faith.

The latter example illustrates a very influential idea in the study of earliest Christianity and New Testament exegesis, namely, the assumption of sharp dividing lines between Palestinian Judaism and Hellenism. In this article, I will first present this idea and the school of thought associated with it, the so-called *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (History of Religion School). Then, I will turn to Martin Hengel's critique of this idea, one that has convinced many and laid the foundation for the new *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. However, I will also attempt to offer a correction of Hengel, or, perhaps better expressed, a correction of the reception of Hengel's work. I will argue further that many of the insights of the old school are valuable as long as they are used properly. Neither Greco-Roman Gentile converts nor their philosophies or traditions hardly directly influenced Christian doctrines and beliefs as such—these go back to the earliest Jewish background. Nevertheless, these converts were the recipients of the Gospel and therefore brought their various backgrounds with them in their interpretation of it. Without completely rejecting the insights of the first History of Religion School, we ought to distinguish between the root and the reception when discussing it. This in turn has important implications for other theological disciplines, which I will discuss in my conclusion.

## I. The History of Religion School and the Sharp Line between Judaism and Hellenism

All modern exegetes, irrespective of theological conviction, take it for granted that the New Testament should be interpreted in the light of our knowledge of the first century AD (or even second century), or at least our knowledge of the Jewish world. Even conservative Lutheran exegetes have, consciously or unconsciously, recognized that the rule that Scripture is its own interpreter does not mean that other sources should not be consulted in the process of interpretation.[2] This has not always been the case, however. In fact, it took a while before practitioners of historical criticism turned to extra-biblical sources; it was only toward the last quarter of the nineteenth century that an extensive use of non-biblical material came

[2] Thus, to cast light on a New Testament passage, the exegete typically begins by looking at parallels in the Old Testament, contemporary Judaism, and Greco-Roman sources. Only in a second phase may one refer to other New Testament writings, but then only to confirm that the idea present in the passage under consideration is found in other early Christian authors as well.

about, beginning with the use of non-canonical Jewish literature. Since this affirmed the continuity between the Old and New Testament and could serve well to cast light upon the work and words of Jesus, this was an uncontroversial endeavor. Once this happened, however, it did not take long before scholars began to look at the Greco-Roman world, or indeed the Far East, searching for the roots of Christian ideas. The first main practitioner of this method and the real father of the History of Religion School, Otto Pfleiderer (1839–1908), studied the New Testament and early Christianity in the light of both Judaism and other religions. He could, for example, claim that the title Son of God was interpreted in three different ways among early Christians: 1) as the adopted Son of God, like the king in Israel, 2) as a pre-existent divine being, like Philo's *logos*, and 3) as the virgin-born child similar to Buddha and the Greek heroes.[3]

Why would the early Christians use pagan material? According to Pfleiderer, it was necessary to use contemporary expressions in order to make the Christian faith understandable and attractive among Gentiles; besides, "the historical Jesus had intrinsic limitations."[4] He was a child of his time and subject to its own limitations. It was therefore necessary that Jesus' person was given proper clothing so that it expressed his universal and eternal significance. For Pfleiderer, Christianity was a syncretistic religion that borrowed the best from its competitors, adopted it without losing its own distinctiveness, and overcame all other religions. With regard to the discipline of exegesis, Pfleiderer wrote that "the sphere of comparative religion . . . offers to the theology of the twentieth century a rich field of labour, whose culture will result in the clearing up of many problems to which Biblical exegesis and criticism have so far found no satisfactory solution."[5] It is doubtful that many problems were cleared up; it probably created more problems than it solved, but Pfleiderer was right about the future of New Testament research. The comparative approach has dominated for at least a century and the lasting effects of some of its false conclusions are still making their impact.

The History of Religion School consisted of scholars who were in one way or another associated with the University of Göttingen in the early twentieth century.[6] Among its more prominent members were Hermann

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[3] William Baird, *History of New Testament Research: Vol. 2: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 215.

[4] Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 215.

[5] Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 215.

[6] For a brief introduction to the school, see Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 238–252.

Gunkel, Wilhelm Heitmüller, and Wilhelm Bousset. Two characteristics in particular of this school were, first, the concern with finding parallels to the Christian faith in other religions, usually arguing that the influence came from outside of Christianity rather than the other way around, and second, the focus on cult and worship (i.e., the Christian liturgy). Thus, Wilhelm Heitmüller (1869–1926) studied the sacraments in Paul. In his discussion of 1 Corinthians 10, for example, he concluded that "Christians do not eat the body and blood of a sacrificed animal in order to come into communion with Christ, but, since Christ himself is the sacrifice, they eat the body and blood of Christ, and . . . come into the closest imaginable, completely secret communion with him."[7] This understanding, however, could not have originated in Judaism but in the syncretistic oriental religion of the Hellenistic world, according to Heitmüller.

Wilhelm Bousset's (1865–1920) main contribution to the History of Religion School is his majestic *Kyrios Christos*, in which he traces the development of the doctrine of Christ, or, more precisely, the development of the Christ cult.[8] Bousset is primarily interested in the rite and cult of early Christians. Following the reasoning of Heitmüller, developed a few years earlier, Bousset draws a sharp distinction between early Jewish Christianity and the somewhat later Gentile Christianity. Bousset argues that the earliest Jewish Christians believed that Jesus was the Son of Man, exalted to the right hand of God. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus *became* the Messiah. Here he follows William Wrede.[9] However, worship of Jesus did not follow from this conviction. This was not possible in the Jewish context since Jewish monotheism and monolatry would not allow it. In Gentile Christianity, however, the earlier titles Son of Man and Christ were superseded by the title *Kyrios,* which was used in an absolute and religious sense. It was around this Lord, Bousset argued, that the fellowship of Christians gathered to worship. They confessed his name, invoked his name at baptisms, and celebrated the Lord's Supper around his table.

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[7] Wilhelm Heitmüller, *Taufe und Abendmahl bei Paulus: Darstellung und religionsgeschichliche Beleuchtung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1903), 32. English translation in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 242.

[8] Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913; rev. ed. 1921); English translation: *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), from the 1964 German edition.

[9] In a very influential study, published in 1901, Wrede concluded that Jesus himself did not claim to be the Messiah, but that this idea was ascribed to Jesus by the early Church. See William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret,* trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971).

Indeed, the Lord himself was present as the head of the community and as a recipient of its worship. All this, however, could not have Jewish roots, but was a Hellenistic influence on early Christians made possible by the influx of Gentiles in the Christian communities. Bousset pointed out that the title *Kyrios* was used in the East to acclaim the king as divine and to venerate the gods in Egypt and Syria. Bousset claimed that it was this faith of the Gentile churches that Paul encountered after his conversion. Accordingly, we find the primary evidence for this branch of early Christianity in Paul's letters. The deification of Jesus then developed gradually. Further steps were taken by the Johannine communities, where Jesus is called God, and then in Ignatius' epistles, where Christ is called God on a more regular basis. Tracing this development all the way down to Ireneus, Bousset finds a gradual Hellenization and Paganization of the Christians' faith. Much of this theory—both its presuppositions and conclusions—has been contested. What is important to note is that the sharp dividing line between Judaism and Hellenism, between Palestinian and Gentile Christianity, is the foundation upon which Bousset grounds his thesis.

The same distinction is also at play when, for example, Rudolph Bultmann characterizes the Christology of the Gospel of Mark. In his view, the second evangelist united "the Hellenistic *kerygma* about Christ, whose essential content consists of the Christ-myth [e.g., Phil 2:6–11; Rom 3:24] . . . with the tradition of the story of Jesus."[10] The ability to distinguish between different social groups and their beliefs is taken to an even more sophisticated level by Ferdinand Hahn in his 1963 study of Christological titles from 1963.[11] Hahn distinguishes between Palestinian Jewish Christianity, Hellenistic Jewish Christianity, and Gentile Christianity. The new category, Hellenistic Judaism, was thought to function as a bridge between Judaism in Palestine, untouched by Hellenism, and the pagan culture. With these distinctions, Hahn finds evidence of no less than three different Son of God concepts in early Christianity: an early Jewish Christian concept of Son of God as a royal Messiah, a Hellenistic Jewish Christian concept of Son of God as a divine man, and a more elevated (Hellenistic), ontological sonship. All of these could be found in the same document. Mark, according to Hahn, included all three of them in his Gospel and let them stand side by side. Not all scholars, however, have been convinced that it is possible to make these kinds of distinctions.

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[10] Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of Synoptic Tradition*, trans. J. Marsh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 347.

[11] Ferdinand Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel: Ihre Geschichte im fruhen Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 287–319.

## II. Martin Hengel and the Influence of Hellenism in Palestine

We are largely indebted to one scholar, Martin Hengel (1926-2009), a giant among New Testament scholars of the twentieth century, for the questioning and undermining of the axiom laid down by the History of Religion School. He was largely driven by one goal, namely, to understand and present the early Christology of the church. Sound historical work and faithfulness to the sources were his guiding principles. Hengel wrote his dissertation on the Zealots. Even before Reza Aslan was born, Hengel had undermined Aslan's thesis that Jesus was a zealot, and Hengel probably said all that needed to be said about the Zealot movement.[12] In order to qualify for a position as professor in Germany, the candidate must write a second dissertation, a *Habilitationsschrift*. For this project, Hengel decided to challenge the consensus of a sharp distinction between Judaism and Hellenism in Palestine. The result is his study *Judentum und Hellenismus*.[13] This and subsequent studies made clear that Palestine was far from an isolated Hebrew entity in the pluralistic world of Hellenism. Strong influences of Hellenism are notable from the conquest of Alexander to the destruction of the temple. I refer to Hengel's work in what follows. He has pointed to four areas where there is a clear Hellenistic influence in Palestine.[14]

### *Greek Language in Palestine*

At the time of Jesus, Palestine was to a great extent a bilingual area. The Maccabean revolt against the impact of Hellenism did not change anything in this regard. Alexander Janneus (103–76 BC) issued bilingual coins, whereas Herod about forty years later went over to purely Greek inscriptions on Jewish coins. The number of Greek inscriptions on ossuaries in Jerusalem and its surroundings amounts to approximately forty percent. At least ten to twenty percent of the inhabitants in Jerusalem in this period are estimated to have had Greek as their mother tongue. The return of prominent Diaspora Jews to Jerusalem led to the founding of

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[12] Reza Aslan, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Random House, 2014); Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989). The German original was published in 1961.

[13] Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols., trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1974). See also Martin Hengel, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians: Aspects of the Hellenization of Judaism in the Pre-Christian Period*, trans. J Bowden (London: SCM, 1980); Martin Hengel, *The "Hellenization" of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (London: SCM, 1989).

[14] Primarily *The "Hellenization" of Judea in the First Century after Christ*.

several Greek-speaking synagogues (Acts 6:9). Given the evidence from inscriptions, we can assume that many in the leading aristocracy spoke Greek. This evidence is not limited to Jerusalem but is found throughout the region. We can also note that two of the disciples of Jesus, Andrew and Philip, bore Greek names. On the basis of the level of bilinguality, Hengel concludes that it is likely that already during the lifetime of Jesus his message reached Diaspora Jews, who almost exclusively spoke Greek.[15] It was this group that made up the core of the Hellenist movement in Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 6. Jesus' teaching was presumably translated into Greek well before he was crucified. In fact, Jesus himself may have taught in Greek, at least in part.

*Greek Education and Literature*

Greek education flourished in the Hellenistic cities surrounding Jewish Palestine and apparently in Jewish Palestine as well. The author of the *Letter of Aristeas* assumes that the seventy-two translators of the Septuagint who came from Palestine had a "solid Greek education." The first Jewish writer in Greek who is known to us, although we do not know the name, from about the time of Ben Sira, explicitly identified Enoch with Atlas.[16] At the beginning of the second century BC, a secondary school was built in Jerusalem and presumably also an elementary school, which was a precondition for a secondary school. This did not change with the Maccabaean revolt. The grandson of Ben Sira, who immigrated to Egypt in 132 BC and who translated his grandfather's work into Greek, must have acquired his basic Greek education in Jerusalem. Likewise Josephus, the Jewish historian, must have received the foundation of his amazingly broad Greek education in the holy city. The rabbis were influenced by Hellenism (as is evidenced by the large number of Greek loanwords in the rabbinic literature), and the Pharisees before them were more open to the Hellenistic environment than the Essenes. Matthew's note about the Pharisees travelling abroad to make disciples suggests that they were well-travelled (Matt 23:15).

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[15] Note the incident in John 12:20-21 where "some Greeks" expressed the desire to see Jesus.

[16] Martin Hengel, *The "Hellenization" of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1989). Hengel refers to Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.17 and 18.2.

*Political and Social Aspects of Hellenization*

Although the Maccabeans/Hasmoneans had revolted against the policies forced upon them by a Hellenistic ruler, the Hasmonean high priests and kings could not dispense with Greek technology, economics, law, warfare, and language. It is evident that the leaders of the nation needed to be well-educated in the Greek sense. Later, Herod made "Jerusalem a pearl among the cities of the Roman empire" and built palaces in places such as Jericho, Masada, and Herodium. He founded Caesarea Maritima and even contributed to buildings elsewhere in the Roman empire. Herod's Jerusalem was a Hellenistic city with theatre and hippodrome. The level of these buildings, both with regard to technique and artistry, was on par with other capitals of that day, and only surpassed in Rome two generations later by Nero. King Herod himself had a broad Greek education that he received from the high priest Hyrcanus II, who was interested in Greek studies. In order to secure his sons' education, Herod brought one of the most significant scholars of his time to Jerusalem. The presence and influence of Greek wisdom traditions may, according to Hengel, explain why there are affinities between the synoptic tradition and Greek gnomic wisdom and philosophical anecdotes. These should not be regarded as the result of a later Hellenistic influence on Christianity; rather, they go back to Jesus himself.

*Hellenistic Traditions in Jewish Palestine*

Given that Greek education was present in Palestine beginning in the centuries before Christ, it is conceivable that traces of its literature also are present there. Here we should perhaps remember that contacts between Greek myths and those of the ancient Near East can be demonstrated already in Homer. Hengel points out that the mythological geography of 1 Enoch has numerous points of contact with Greek ideas; for example, the kingdom of the dead in the distant West is reminiscent of the Elysian fields (1 Enoch 22:1–14). Similarly, the rebellion and fall of the watchmen in 1 Enoch 6–11 show similarities with the Greek Prometheus myth. The War scroll of the Essene movement seems to be based on Hellenistic handbooks of war techniques. Astrology and magic played just as great a role in Judaism as it did in the pagan environment. In Ben Sira, there are unique points of contact with Stoicism, such as the doctrine of the two ways. In Judaism, as depicted by Josephus, there was a discussion of free will among the religious groups that seems to reflect the different Greek schools of thought. Ben Sira's defence of the free will may very well reflect his reaction against certain Greek influences in this regard. The rabbinic rules of interpretation probably go back to the methods of Alexandrian philologists and jurists. Furthermore, the Jewish Passover Seder reflects

Greek customs at table, where the leading class would recline on comfortable couches to discuss and sing in their symposia. This festal custom has been transferred to the religious celebration of the whole Jewish people.

One final example, not mentioned by Hengel, is from the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. In the Hebrew version of Job 9:8, God is described as one who tramples the high places of the sea. This evokes the idea of God subduing the sea as an enemy. The LXX translation, however, says that God is walking on the water as on dry land, which could reflect a number of stories in which the Greek gods or demi-gods, such as Hercules, walk on water.

*Hengel's Conclusion*

Given this widespread influence of Hellenism on Palestinian Judaism from the third century BC down to the rabbis, it is inconceivable that anyone would make a distinction between Palestinian Judaism untouched by Greek ideas and Hellenistic Judaism. Palestinian Judaism is Hellenistic Judaism. For this reason we should not use such a distinction in describing early Christianity either, according to Hengel. We cannot make these distinctions on the basis of geography. It is likely that there are larger differences between a well-educated scribe and a poor peasant in Palestine than between the scribe and his colleague in Alexandria. Thus, what seem to be pagan Hellenistic influences on early Christianity had become part and parcel of Judaism before they were taken up by early Christians. As far as the roots of early Christian ideas go, they can all be accounted for on Jewish soil.

Hengel's studies have convinced a large number of scholars. Thus, the so-called New History of Religion School has looked for parallels in early Judaism when it has sought to explain the expression of the earliest Christian doctrine.[17] One consequence is that the idea of a primitive Christianity, pure and untouched by Greek ideas, is gone. Furthermore, much of what was regarded as Hellenistic elements in the Gospels and what was ascribed to as developments in the Christian communities may, in fact, go back to Jesus himself.

[17] J. E. Fossum, "The New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: The Quest for Jewish Christology," *Society of Biblical Languages Seminar Paper* 30 (1991): 638–646.

### III. But What about the Reception of the Gospel?

In my view, the pendulum has swung back a little too far. As a consequence of Hengel's work, the study of parallels in *religionsgeschichtliche* has been restricted to Jewish sources, at least by those who fully embrace Hengel's view. This was probably not what Hengel intended. In fact, he notes parallels between Jesus' preaching and Stoicism, which leads him to suggest a direct contact between Jesus and philosophers of that school.

In my own work on the early Christology in the Gospel of Mark, I have approached the subject with the intention of reading and interpreting the evidence against a solely Jewish background.[18] However, whereas earlier scholarship was looking for the roots of various ideas, following the general trend of scholarship, I have focused on the text itself, aiming to determine what the author intended to communicate and how the earliest hearers and readers of Mark may have interpreted it. I considered the other side of the coin, the reception of the message. Given the common view that the cultural background of most of Mark's earliest readers was Greco-Roman, I was forced to cast my net a little wider and include the Greco-Roman evidence.

One may think that bringing two different cultures to bear on the Gospels would yield diverging results, but this is not necessarily the case. Surprisingly often, the Greco-Roman interpretation simply confirms and reinforces the Old Testament/Jewish interpretation. Thus, when the Jewish cultural background, for example, implies that a certain act by Jesus is a uniquely divine act, it turns out that this act would communicate the same idea in a Greco-Roman setting. The crucial difference is not the activities ascribed to a divine being, but the number of deities. To offer only one example, already touched upon briefly, when Jesus walks on water he is clearly acting in the capacity of the God of Israel. The only one who is depicted as walking on water in the Old Testament is God. The Job passage mentioned earlier associates this with God's creative activities (Job 9:8). A passage from 2 Macc 5:21 (2 Macc 9:8, 12, 28) makes clear that at least some Jews understood that a claim on the part of a human to be able to walk on water was a claim to divinity and, consequently, blasphemous. A look at the Greco-Roman evidence, however, yields similar results. The gods of the sea either drive their carts on the surface of the water or walk on water. Some rulers who claimed divinity also claimed the ability to travel supernaturally on water. Given the Papias tradition—that Mark wrote down what Peter proclaimed in Rome—it is striking that Emperor

[18] See Daniel Johansson, "Jesus and God in the Gospel of Mark: Unity and Distinction" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2011).

Caligula, twenty years or so before Peter preached there, tried to "demonstrate" his divinity by making a bridge between Baiae and Puteoli, south of Rome.[19] He brought together a large number of merchant ships, anchored them in a double line and then let mounds of earth be heaped upon them. Over this "bridge," he then rode back and forth, claiming that even Neptune was afraid of him. It is noteworthy that this endeavor of the Emperor caused a minor famine in Rome, since he had acquired the merchant ships that brought wheat to Rome from Alexandria. According to Roman historians, some people starved to death in Rome and some also died at Puteoli, for the emperor himself threw into the water several of his friends who could not swim. The Romans had hardly forgotten this when Peter told them about a certain Jewish Messiah who came walking on the water to save him and his fellow disciples during a particularly severe storm.

## IV. Conclusion

I conclude this article by offering five points for further reflection. First, when interpreting the New Testament texts, it is highly important to read them in light of both the Jewish and the wider Greco-Roman culture. This will help us to understand how the earliest recipients read and received the message of Jesus and his apostles, but of course also what the authors intended to communicate. It was into this thoroughly Hellenized world, made up of Jews, Greeks, Romans, and other people, that the Gospel was first proclaimed. Reading Greco-Roman literature did indeed help the Lutheran fathers to clarify the meaning of key Greek terminology.[20]

Second, surprisingly often, the Jewish and Hellenistic cultural backgrounds overlap. It may be the case that this is due to a mutual influence of Judaism and Hellenism, but it may equally well be evidence of the general revelation of God. In the first History of Religion School, it was common to deem Christianity a syncretistic religion that nicely adapted to the circumstances and therefore was so successfully spread. I think we should turn the tables around. The universal message of Christianity is, rather, evidence for the common background of all human beings and for humans being created by the one creator God in his image.

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[19] See e.g., Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 59.17.1–11.

[20] Cf. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1,* trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: CPH, 1971), 470–471 on δικαιόω, and Phillip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1543,* trans. J.A.O. Preus (St Louis: CPH, 1992), 87 on πιστεύω.

Third, given the aforementioned observation, missiologists and pastoral theologians must be sensitive to these matters. There is perhaps more of a shared cultural understanding than we usually think. Many missionaries over the years have had experiences that confirm this.

Fourth, church historians should in a similar way be sensitive to History of Religion parallels. For example, there are noteworthy parallels between the roles of local saints and patrons in the Middle Ages, the roles of local deities in Antiquity, and the roles of angels in early Judaism. It has often been claimed that celebration of Christmas in Scandinavia, Sweden in particular, was a happy inculturation of *Midvinterblot*, the midwinter's sacrifice. While that may be the case, it may equally well be God's preparation of the peoples of the north for the celebration of his Son's birth.[21]

Fifth, returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, should we actually engage in bringing the cultures of Antiquity to bear on our interpretation of the text, given the Lutheran axioms in biblical interpretation that the Holy Scripture is its own interpreter, *claritas Scripturae*, etc.? This is, in fact, one of the questions modern Lutheran theologians have not fully solved. We keep repeating *Scriptura Sacra sui ipsius interpres*, yet this is often the last principle to which modern exegetes turn. The sixteenth century reformers as well as the theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy made use of extra-biblical sources in their interpretation of the Scriptures.[22] But how did they use them? The question remains: Is the modern exegetical procedure compatible with traditional Lutheran hermeneutics? Who is up for the challenge to address this question in a comprehensive way?

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[21] Some recent scholars have, however, suggested that the apostles of the north took Christianity there before the Vikings begun to celebrate *Midvinterblot*, if they indeed did at all. Evidence of a pre-Christian sacrificial feast is lacking. This may instead have been an attempt by the local leaders to gather the people around the old religion. See http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/aretsdagar/vintersolstandet. (This article on Swedish traditions, found on the webpage of the Nordic Museum, is only available in Swedish). A similar discussion is in vogue regarding the Christmas celebration in Rome. Recent scholarship argues that Christians had begun to celebrate Christmas at Dec 25 *before* Julian the apostate moved the *Sol invictus* feast to this date. Cf. S. Jijmans, "Sol Invictus, the Winter Solstice, and the Origins of Christmas" Mouseion 47 (2003): 277-298; K. B. Westerfield Tucker, "Christmas" in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought,* ed. A. Hastings, A. Mason, H. Pyper (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 124.

[22] Cf. J. A. Steiger, "Die Rezeption der rabbinischen Tradition im Luthertum (Johann Gerhard, Salomo Glassius u.a.) und im Theologiestudium des 17. Jahrhunderts: Mit einer Edition des universitären Studienplanes von Glassius und einer Bibliographie der von ihm konzipierten Studentenbibliothek," *Das Berliner Modell der Mittleren Deutschen Literatur,* ed. Christiane Caemmerer, Walter Delabar, Jörg Jungmayr, and Knut Kiesant (Amsterdam: Rodopi Bv Editions, 2000): 191–252.

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# The Contribution of Johann Salomo Semler to the Historical Criticism of the New Testament[1]

**Boris Paschke**

The German Lutheran theologian Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791) was quite popular in his lifetime, as becomes obvious in Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. In this 1774 novel, a pastor's wife is ordered to cut down the two beautiful hazels growing in her garden, not only because they block off the sun, but also because the boys of the neighborhood throw stones at their delicious nuts. This disturbs and annoys the intellectual lady when she ponders over the biblical canon by comparing Kennikot, Semler, and Michaelis with each other.[2] In light of Goethe's reference to Semler, Michael Rumpf aptly comments that Semler was a "well-known critic of the Bible" (*bekannter Bibelkritiker*).[3]

In New Testament scholarship, Semler is still popular today—about two hundred and fifty years after the appearance of Goethe's *Werther*. According to the majority of modern scholars, Semler played a significant role in the development of historical criticism of the New Testament. Many even consider Semler the father or founder of New Testament historical criticism. Werner Georg Kümmel, for instance, states, "Semler is the founder of the historical study of the New Testament."[4]

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[1] I dedicate this article to my doctoral promoter and dear colleague Prof. Dr. Martin I. Webber (Evangelische Theologische Faculteit Leuven/Belgium) who, during my doctoral studies, first prompted my interest in researching the history of historical criticism of the New Testament.

[2] Cf. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774; reprint, Osnabrück: Editio Simile, 1971), 148–151.

[3] Michael Rumpf, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther, Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Inhalt, Hintergrund, Interpretation* (München: Mentor, 2005), 39.

[4] Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. McLean Gilmor and Howard C. Kee (London: SCM Press, 1973), 68; similarly David S. Dockery, "New Testament Interpretation: A Historical Survey," in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery

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The goal of this article is to investigate what exactly Semler contributed to New Testament historical criticism, a discipline that David S. Dockery defines as follows: "Historical criticism is used as a comprehensive term designating several techniques to discover the historical situation, the sources behind the writings, the literary style and relationships, the date, authorship, approach to composition, destination, and recipients."[5]

Besides the components mentioned in Dockery's definition, however, historical criticism usually also involves the presupposition that supernatural intervention into human affairs is unlikely or even impossible. According to Klaus Scholder, this presupposition has been a substantial and decisive feature of historical criticism of the Bible since the discipline's beginnings in the seventeenth century.[6] According to Dockery's definition, the goal of historical criticism is "to discover the historical situation." Accordingly, in their definitions, both Howard I. Marshall and Edgar Krentz use the words "what actually happened,"[7] which are reminiscent of Leopold von Ranke's famous German phrase "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*."[8]

A study of Semler's contribution to historical criticism of the New Testament is worthwhile because—even though it can be debated if he is to be called its father or founder—he was certainly one of the first and leading figures in New Testament historical criticism.[9] Thus, studying his critical thought is a good introduction to the whole discipline.

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(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 50; Gottfried Hornig, *Die Anfänge der historisch-kritischen Theologie: Johann Salomo Semlers Schriftverständnis und seine Stellung zu Luther*, Forschungen zur Systematischen Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), 11; Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1984), 110.

[5] Dockery, "Interpretation," 50–51.

[6] Klaus Scholder, *Ursprünge und Probleme der Bibelkritik im 17. Jahrhundert: Ein Beitrag zur Entstehung der historisch-kritischen Theologie*, Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus 23 (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1966), 8–10; cf. Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Bedeutung der historisch-kritischen Methode für die protestantische Theologie und Kirche," in *Wort und Glaube*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), 34.

[7] I. Howard Marshall, "Historical Criticism," *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 126; Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, ed. Gene M. Tucker, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 37.

[8] Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1885), vii.

[9] Cf. Bengt Hägglund, *History of Theology*, trans. Gene J. Lund (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1968). Hägglund writes, "He [Semler] was also one of the first Bible critics" (348).

The focus of the present article is on Semler's historical criticism of the canon and content of the New Testament. Further, by comparing Semler to other historical critics—both of his day (Hermann Samuel Reimarus) and of later generations (Ferdinand Christian Baur, David Friedrich Strauss, and Rudolf Bultmann)—this study also offers a general overview of historical criticism of the New Testament.

Anders Gerdmar aptly states, "Semler's own literary production is vast."[10] Kümmel speaks of 171, Wolfgang Sommer even of 250 publications.[11] In studying Semler's contribution to New Testament historical criticism, the present article focuses on what can be considered the most relevant works of Semler's large œuvre.[12]

## I. Semler's Historical Criticism of the Canon of the New Testament

The present study of Semler's contribution to historical criticism of the New Testament is based on the first volume (1771; 2nd ed. 1776) of his four-volume *Treatise of the Free Investigation of the Canon*.[13]

### *The Canon as Historical Phenomenon*

When Semler speaks of "canon," he means the list of Jewish and Christian books that were considered divinely inspired and therefore publicly read in Christian gatherings.[14] According to Semler, the extent of the canon was not always fixed and clearly defined. He points out that the

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[10] Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*, Studies in Jewish History and Culture 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 39; cf. Gottfried Hornig, *Johann Salomo Semler: Studien zu Leben und Werk des Hallenser Aufklärungstheologen*, ed. Hans-Joachim Kertscher and Fabienne Molin, Hallesche Beiträge zur Europäischen Aufklärung 2 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1996), ix: "Umfangreiches und kaum überschaubares Schriftenkorpus."

[11] Cf. Kümmel, *The New Testament*, 62; Wolfgang Sommer, "Ein frommer Aufklärer: Erinnerung an Johann Salomo Semler," *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt* 91, no. 9 (1991): 365.

[12] In the main text of the present study, all statements of Semler are presented in English translation or paraphrase. Because all of Semler's works are unfortunately not yet available in English text editions, all translations or paraphrases are my own. At times, the original German wording is provided within brackets or in footnotes.

[13] Johann Salomo Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon*, ed. Heinz Scheible, Texte zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte 5 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1967). Scheible's edition follows the first edition of Semler's work (1771) and inserts additions of the second edition (1776) in pointed brackets (i.e., ⟨ . . . ⟩).

[14] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 3, p. 19.

general view of the "constant uniformity and consistency of the canon" is "without reason and historical accuracy" and, thus, a misconception.[15] Semler states that in the various parties and provinces of the early church, unity regarding the extent of the canon did not exist.[16] According to Semler, this unity was not accomplished until the fourth, or even fifth, century when bishops discussed and decided the extent of the canon.[17]

Semler refers to two documents of the Western church to prove that his reconstruction of the canon's historical development is correct. First, he quotes from Canon 24 of the Third Council of Carthage (AD 397)[18] that both decided the canonical status of the twenty-seven New Testament books and expressed the wish for respective negotiations with the bishops of Rome and surrounding areas.[19] Second, Semler cites from a letter that Innocentius (Bishop of Rome) had written to Exsuperius (Bishop of Toulouse) in AD 405 in order to answer the latter's questions concerning the extent of the canon.[20]

By tracing the developments of the canon, Semler emphasizes its historical and human aspects. In light of his findings, he rejects the widespread teaching among Protestants that the complete Bible is God's inspired—and maybe even dictated—word.[21]

In sum, Semler rejects the belief in the plenary inspiration of the Bible because (1) for a long time in church history agreement on the canon's extent did not exist, (2) unity with regard to the canon was reached only through human negotiations, (3) human decisions on the canon are contradictory and thus not trustworthy,[22] (4) statements of church councils concerning the canon will always remain "merely a historical information

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[15] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 4, p. 21.

[16] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 3, p. 21.

[17] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 4, p. 24.

[18] By mistake, Semler refers to Canon 24 with "canon 47."

[19] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 3, p. 20; cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 314–315.

[20] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 3, pp. 20–21: "The short appendix indicates which books should be included in the canon of the Holy Scriptures. These are the [scriptures] that you desired to be designated by requested voice."

[21] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 15, p. 60.

[22] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 6, p. 31.

and event"[23] and are thus not conclusive, and (5) even in Semler's lifetime different convictions regarding the canon were prevalent.

By demonstrating that the New Testament canon is a historical phenomenon, Semler made a significant contribution to the early development of New Testament historical criticism: he emphasized the historical and human nature of the New Testament and thus initiated and enabled its further historical-critical investigation.

*Free Investigation of the Canon*

Semler was a Lutheran who intentionally challenged the dogma of fellow German Protestant churches.[24] In agreement with his rejection of the church's dogma concerning the canon and plenary inspiration of the Bible, Semler severely criticized his church's theologians by referring to "the orthodox scholars of these days ⟨who want to reign alone⟩."[25] With regard to the question whether a certain biblical book/passage is inspired or not, Semler trusted neither the judgment of the church nor that of his parents and first teachers, but only his own reasoned judgment.[26]

Throughout his work, Semler uses several designations for those independently thinking individuals[27] who, by "making use of reflection and common sense,"[28] are in a position to carry out the "free" investigation of the canon promoted in Semler's treatise.[29]

Semler intends to find out for himself which portions of the Bible are to be considered inspired word of God. He justifies this critical, private[30] project by pointing out repeatedly that in the sixteenth century, the

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[23] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 2, p. 16.

[24] Cf. Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 1, p. 13.

[25] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 11, p. 47.

[26] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 1, p. 13.

[27] E.g., "truth-loving, reasonable person" (*Abhandlung*, § 1, p. 13), "thinking readers" (*Abhandlung*, § 7, p. 32), "researching persons" (*Abhandlung* § 8, p. 35), and "thinking Christians" (*Abhandlung*, § 23, p. 90).

[28] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 1, p. 14.

[29] Cf. Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 1, p. 14: "an individual, because of his/her strengths of mind [*Seelenkräfte*], is in a position to think independently." Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 14, p. 56: "This own opinion cannot be determined and prescribed by others."

[30] Cf. Martin Laube, "Die Unterscheidung von öffentlicher und privater Religion bei Johann Salomo Semler: Zur neuzeittheoretischen Relevanz einer christentumstheoretischen Reflexionsfigur," *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte* 11, no. 1 (2004): 1–23.

Protestant church questioned and investigated the canon of the Roman Catholic Church in a quite similar fashion.[31] Christian Gottfried Schütz, Semler's student who published his teacher's *Last Credo* posthumously in 1792, states that Semler was "undoubtedly the first Lutheran theologian of our century who dared to refrain from the long dependence on a fixed dogmatic system and who paved the way for the free investigation of the theory."[32]

Semler's independence from and rejection of the church's dogma became a major foundation of the historical criticism of the New Testament. An attitude similar to Semler's is found in the critical works of Strauss (1808–1874)[33] and Bultmann (1884–1976), who had "the desire to be free from the shackles, real or supposed, of church doctrine."[34]

## II. Semler's Historical Criticism of the Content of the New Testament

### *Quest for Timeless Moral Truth*

Even though Semler rejected the dogma of the plenary divine inspiration of the Bible, he held that the Bible *contains* the inspired word of God, which, in turn, is to be equated with those portions of scripture presenting timeless moral truth. The adjective "moral" (*moralisch*), which is frequently used in the *Treatise of the Free Investigation of the Canon*, relates to the realms of the spiritual and ethical and thus designates truth that helps all humanity (i.e., humans of all generations and locations) to make personal progress in these realms.

Semler clearly states that word of God (i.e., timeless moral truth) is not to be found in the whole Bible: "Holy scripture and word of God need to be clearly distinguished from each other. . . . Books like Ruth, Esther, ⟨Ezra⟩, and the Song of Solomon belong to Holy Scripture. These so-called holy books, however, do not all belong to the word of God that makes all people of all times wise unto salvation."[35] Because Semler is searching for

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[31] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 1, p. 13; § 2, p. 17.

[32] Christian Gottfried Schütz, ed., *Johann Salomo Semlers letztes Glaubensbekenntnis über natürliche und christliche Religion* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1792), iv; my translation.

[33] Cf. David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*, vol. 1 (1835; Tübingen: Osiandersche Buchhandlung, 1984), vi.

[34] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizon: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 207; cf. Thomas Söding, *Wege der Schriftauslegung: Methodenbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 59.

[35] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 15, p. 60.

*timeless* moral truth, he disregards the *time-bound* information that is found in the historical books and passages of the Bible: "All writings of the so-called canon certainly contain passages and parts of speech and composition that pass away together with their times because they refer to circumstances that have passed away with the immediate listeners or readers."[36] As an example of such time-bound passages, Semler refers to Galatians 1–2. According to Semler, Paul narrates both his conversion experience and his visits to Arabia, Syria, and Jerusalem, not to transmit moral truths for all people and all times; rather, Paul provides these accounts only to save his own reputation.[37] With regard to the value of historical information contained in New Testament texts, Semler formulates the following general rule:

> Many portions concern the first Christians' individual persons and circumstances that can never have a general reference [*welche nie ein allgemeines Verhältnis bekommen können*]. The local circumstances remain local and are obsolete for us whose surroundings are totally different in terms of both places and circumstances, so different that they do not match these texts.[38]

For Semler, the inspired word of God is not to be found in historical accounts[39] but rather in the poetic and doctrinal portions of the Bible, such as the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes[40] as well as the dogmatic sections of Galatians and Romans, respectively.[41] Semler even looks for timeless divine truth in the works of writers like Cicero.[42] Henning Graf Reventlow aptly summarizes Semler's position: "Semler is exclusively

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[36] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 9, p. 40.

[37] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 22, p. 86.

[38] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 23, pp. 90–91.

[39] Cf. Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 21, pp. 83–84. Since historical facts can be eyewitnessed, the four evangelists did not need inspiration for their accounts of tax collecting, casting of nets, crucifying, etc. Far from being inspired, Mark, for example, simply copied the historical information contained in the Gospel of Matthew (thus, Semler supported a *Benutzungshypothese* with Matthaean priority). The evangelists did need inspiration, however, in order to write down moral truth.

[40] Cf. Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 10, p. 42; § 12, p. 51.

[41] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 22, p. 86; § 23, p. 90.

[42] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 11, pp. 47–48; however, in spite of his openness for pagan writers in general and Cicero in particular, Semler did not actually turn to and investigate non-Biblical writers to detect timeless moral truth. Unlike, for example, William Wrede (1859–1906), Semler thus stayed within the boundaries of the Protestant canon. With regard to Wrede, cf. Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2000), 21.

interested in moral truths that, according to him, are contained in the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. He devalorizes historical events. As such, they are profane and do not have any religious significance."[43]

With his distinction between time-bound and timeless information, Semler was a child of his time. Similar ideas are already found in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677)[44] and are expressed by Semler's contemporary Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), who in 1777 formulated the famous dictum "Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."[45] Edgar Krentz states, "The historical thought of the Enlightenment was more philosophical than historical."[46]

Semler both studied (1743–1750) and taught (1753–1791) at the University of Halle. Through the ministry of August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), the city of Halle became a stronghold of Pietism. It is thus reasonable to ask to what extent Pietism motivated Semler to search for the timeless moral truth contained in the Bible. It is possible that the subjective character of Pietism[47] influenced Semler's free and independent investigation of the canon. However, it is unlikely that Pietism also led Semler to divide the biblical texts into time-bound information and timeless truth, since Pietists considered the *whole* Bible to be the inspired word of God.[48]

Semler's quest for timeless truth seems to have been a very subjective enterprise. Depending on their respective levels of moral insight, different readers can quite possibly come to different judgments concerning wheth-

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[43] Henning Graf Reventlow, *Epochen der Bibelauslegung*, vol. 4, *Von der Aufklärung bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001), 188; my translation.

[44] Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 145 (caput VII): "Again, to avoid confusing teachings of eternal significance with those which are of only temporary significance or directed only to the benefit of a few, it is also important to know on what occasion, at what period, and for what nation or age all these teachings were written down."

[45] Gotthold Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick, A Library of Modern Religious Thought (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 53.

[46] Krentz, *Method*, 22.

[47] Cf. Martin Greschat, *Christentumsgeschichte II: Von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Georg Strecker, Grundkurs Theologie, no. 4 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997), 92.

[48] Cf. Kazuya Yamashita, *Kant und der Pietismus: Ein Vergleich der Philosophie Kants mit der Theologie Speners*, Akademische Abhandlungen zur Philosophie (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2000), 242.

er a given biblical text is to be considered word of God or not. Semler even admits that for readers of the Bible who find themselves on a very low level of moral learning the *entire* Bible could be the source of new insight.[49]

*Theory of Accommodation*

One of Semler's exegetical aids to detect the timeless truth contained in the New Testament was his so-called theory of accommodation (*Akkommodationstheorie*),[50] namely, that Jesus and the apostles accommodated or adapted their teaching to the primitive mythological ideas prevalent in their times. According to Semler, most of these primitive mythological ideas were Jewish. It is the merit of Gerdmar to have pointed out this anti-Jewish component and, thus, dangerous potential of Semler's theological work: "The first Protestant writer to call for a dejudaising of Christian theology for theological reasons was Johann Salomo Semler."[51]

Semler equates mythos with a "low and uncultivated mentality"[52] and states that such a mentality existed among the Jews and other peoples before their cultures developed.[53] In his *Last Credo*, Semler mentions the Jewish conceptions of angels, demons, and the bosom of Abraham[54] as well as the idea of an earthly millennial reign of the Messiah[55] as examples for the primitive and immature mythological views of the Jews. In the times of Jesus and the apostles, such primitive Jewish conceptions were still prevalent among Jews and Christians. In order to convey their message, Semler suggests that Jesus and the apostles accommodated their teaching to these (wrong) contemporary ideas. They sought to lead their Jewish audiences gradually to the "better religion" (*bessere Religion*)—Christianity—so that they eventually would abandon their former conceptions.[56]

Semler stresses that mature, reasonable, and educated Christians are beyond all mythological thinking. They do not need mythology in order to

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[49] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 7, p. 33.

[50] Cf. Hornig, *Anfänge*, 211–236.

[51] Gerdmar, *Roots*, 39.

[52] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 10, p. 41.

[53] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 10, p. 42.

[54] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 8, p. 46.

[55] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 5, p. 36.

[56] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 6, p. 38.

understand the timeless truth of Christianity. Semler therefore considers these primitive conceptions unnecessary and dispensable.[57]

As soon as accommodation is detected through historical-critical study, the respective mythological ideas can be abandoned. Semler scholar Hornig labels such a procedure "demythologization" (*Entmythologisierung*).[58] A good example of how Semler's theory of accommodation (including demythologization) functions is found in his *Treatise of the Free Investigation of the Canon.* According to Semler, the idea of Christ's Second Coming was held by Jewish Christians who

> ⟨still were in a very low position and who were not yet capable of lofty, pure, and general ideas⟩. . . . Paul therefore complies with such people. It is for their sake that he writes some of such parts or pieces in his letters so that these opinions would be gradually weakened and eventually would ⟨even⟩ be abandoned by lovers who had been led, step-by-step, to a more mature judgment. These parts of Paul's letters have ⟨thus certainly⟩ no general relation to the true Christian teaching that is immediately relevant for our own current spiritual perfection.[59]

In the same vein, Semler considers the trumpet that the apostle Paul mentions in both 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 a Jewish conception that is not a general truth necessary for all Christians.[60] Semler regards the fact that Jesus did not return as an obvious proof that his accommodation theory is correct. He states that "the former idea that ⟨this event and the future of Christ⟩ would take place before long has been, as is now obvious, a human and incorrect idea."[61]

In view of these statements, Semler had a very critical, arrogant—and, unfortunately, also anti-Jewish—position regarding many Jewish New Testament conceptions, because he considered them to be part and parcel of a primitive mythological worldview. In his excellent analysis of Semler's enlightenment thought,[62] Gerdmar states, "Semler is often preoccupied with the Jews, writing them off as uncultivated and incapable of understanding true religion."[63] According to Gerdmar, this confident attitude of superiority expressed by Semler with regard to the Jewish religion is

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[57] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 8 p. 46.

[58] Hornig, *Anfänge*, 225.

[59] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 22, p. 87.

[60] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 22, p. 87.

[61] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 22, pp. 87–88.

[62] Cf. Gerdmar, *Roots*, 39–49.

[63] Gerdmar, *Roots*, 46.

"common in Enlightenment theology."[64] However, it is, unfortunately, already found much earlier in Christian theological discourse.[65]

When comparing Semler's accommodation theory to the so-called "mythical method of interpretation,"[66] espoused later by Bultmann, the following difference becomes obvious: Semler states that Jesus and the apostles "consciously"[67] and deliberately and accommodated their teachings to primitive conceptions of their times. For the spokesmen of the mythical method, however, the biblical authors *themselves* hold an erroneous position and thus shared in the general low mentality of their times.[68] Further, a significant difference between Semler and Bultmann becomes obvious. Whereas Semler simply *eliminated*[69] mythological ideas in order to find timeless truth, Bultmann *interpreted* them.[70] Bultmann did so because *in* those mythological conceptions he expected to find truth and

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[64] Gerdmar, *Roots*, 43; cf. Heinrich Rothe, "Die Stellung der evangelischen Theologie zum Judentum am Ausgang der Aufklärung" (PhD diss., Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen, 1953). Christoph Bultmann, "What Do We Mean When We Talk about '(Late) Enlightenment Biblical Criticism'?," in *The Bible and the Enlightenment*, ed. William Johnstone, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 377 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 119–134.

[65] Cf. Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus und seine Zeit*, Biblische Enzyklopädie 10 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), 179: Stegemann speaks of "the centuries-long disdain of Judaism and the vilification of Jewish beliefs and practices through the Christian world, especially in theological discourses" (my translation). Angelika Strotmann, *Der historische Jesus: Eine Einführung*, Grundwissen Theologie, 2nd ed. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015), 67: With regard to Judaism, Strotmann refers to "a religion that, from the Christian perspective, was regarded as a religion inferior to Christianity from early on (since the second century)" (my translation).

[66] This mythical method was developed by the historian Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812). His student Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827) then introduced it to Biblical studies. Via J.P. Gabler it eventually came to D.F. Strauss.

[67] Hägglund, *History*, 348.

[68] Cf. Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft*, ed. Hans Frhr. von Campenhausen, Constantin von Dietze, et al., Schriften der Studiengemeinschaft der evangelischen Akademien 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1952), 3; cf. William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 1, *From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 149–150.

[69] See, e.g., Semler's conviction that the mythological conceptions can or must be "wiped out" (Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 6: *auslöschen*) and "abandoned" (*Abhandlung* § 22: *verlassen*) because they are "not needed" (*Abhandlung* § 22: *nicht . . . nötig*).

[70] Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie: Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung*, ed. Eberhard Jüngel and Rudolf Smend, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie: Theologische Abhandlungen, no. 96 (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1985), 24–26.

meaning that might still be relevant and helpful for the existential issues and problems of the modern reader of the New Testament.[71]

*Miracles as Components of the "Primitive" Jewish Religion*

According to Semler, not just the ideas of angels, demons, paradise, and the like, but also the appreciation of miracles belonged to the primitive mentality prevalent in the Jewish religion of the first century. Surprisingly, this is not mentioned in the works of the leading Semler scholar Gottfried Hornig, neither in his books nor in his respective article in the standard reference work, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*.[72] In Hornig's overview of Jewish conceptions that Semler considered mythological, miracles are not listed.[73] And in his study of Semler's theory of accommodation, Hornig writes: "In spite of his tendency toward demythologization, Semler does not advocate a purely empirical concept of reality in the sense of considering only sensory perceptions to be real. As a historical-critical exegete, Semler expects God's intervention in earthly events."[74]

Hornig here gives the impression that Semler had no problems whatsoever with the belief in miracles. This, however, was not the case. In his *Last Credo*, Semler devoted a whole paragraph (§ 29) to the issue of New Testament miracles. In this paragraph, miracles are clearly placed into the realm of primitive Jewish thinking. Semler points out that the Jews were the ones "who always required to see signs and wonders in order to believe."[75] Semler then uses several expressions to make clear that the Jewish expectation of and demand for miracles is to be considered primitive thinking. According to him, the Jewish appreciation of miracles is a "mentality" (*Denkungsart*) that is "small" and "very immoral."[76] Semler

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[71] Rudolf Bultmann, "Die christliche Hoffnung und das Problem der Entmythologisierung (1954)," in *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. 3, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965), 85; cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung," in *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. 4 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965), 128.

[72] Cf. Gottfried Hornig, "Semler, Johann Salomo (1725–1791)," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 31 (2000), 142–148.

[73] Hornig, *Anfänge*, 226: Hornig here mentions the following ingredients of Jewish mythology: angels carrying the soul to Abraham's bosom; many sitting in the kingdom of heaven together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; heaven, paradise, and eternal bliss; hell, hades, and eternal punishment; and devil and demons that are able to possess humans.

[74] Hornig, *Anfänge*, 232; my translation.

[75] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, pp. 239–240.

[76] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, pp. 240–241.

even goes so far as to speak of "the old mind and mistake of the most common Judaism."[77] In agreement with all of the above, Semler states that miracles are "for the immoral children, for those who are mentally incompetent."[78]

Semler does not refrain from applying his theory of accommodation to the narratives of Jesus's miracles. Because the Jews expected their Messiah to perform miracles, the evangelists accommodated their reports to that expectation in order to show that Jesus was equal to[79] and even greater than[80] Moses who, according to Jewish tradition, performed miracles.

Semler holds that miracles are not necessary ingredients of the mature Christian believer's faith: "The Christian worship of God can also take place without these ideas."[81] Semler allows enlightened Christians for whom miracles are obscure (*dunkel*) to ignore the respective Biblical narratives altogether.[82] Semler uses two different lines of argumentation to prove that the mature Christian does not need the New Testament accounts of miracles. First, he makes the exegetical point that (1) Jesus blessed those who believe in him even though they do not see (cf. John 20:29);[83] (2) mature Christians do not need the belief in miracles, since they have the Spirit, the truth, and strong food (cf. Heb 5:12);[84] and (3) miracles do not occur in the epistles of the apostles[85] (cf., however, 1 Cor 12:10, 28; Gal 3:5).

The second line of argumentation is philosophical/logical and is based on the assumption that the (Jewish-) Christian worldview of the first century differed from that of later Christianity with regard to both demons and miracles. Within the framework of the Jewish worldview, miracles fulfilled the function of being divine antidotes to evil demons that supposedly existed and were thought to take possession of humans. Semler

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[77] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 244.

[78] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 244.

[79] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 245.

[80] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 21, p. 82.

[81] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 247.

[82] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 239.

[83] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 240.

[84] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 244.

[85] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 246.

suggests that once the mythological belief in demons ceased, miracles were no longer needed.[86]

*Belief in Miracles and Supernatural Intervention*

Even though Hornig might be too positive with regard to Semler's appreciation of miracles, he certainly is correct in pointing out that Semler did not hold to a purely empirical worldview but rather reckoned with the possibility of miracles and supernatural intervention into human affairs. This becomes obvious in the so-called "Fragment Controversy" (*Fragmentenstreit*). Three years after the first volume of Semler's *Treatise of the Free Investigation of the Canon* (1771) appeared, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing began to publish anonymous fragments of the so-called "Unknown of Wolfenbüttel" (*Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten*). The most controversial of these was a 1778 fragment entitled *On the Intentions of Jesus and His Disciples* (*Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*). Even though the public eagerly speculated about the fragments' author, his name was not revealed until 1814: Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768). The fragments had been portions of the *Apology for or Defense of the Rational Worshippers of God*,[87] which Reimarus had written secretly and then kept hidden in his desk.

Like Semler, Reimarus is considered to be an influential figure in the development of historical criticism of the New Testament. According to Earle E. Cairns, "the beginning of higher criticism of the New Testament is usually associated with the name of Hermann Reimarus (1694–1768)."[88] More specifically, Reimarus is considered the first scholar to have engaged in the historical-critical study of the life of Jesus.[89]

When comparing Semler to Reimarus, the Dutch scholars W. J. J. Glashouwer and W. J. Ouweneel come to the conclusion that the former was "as radical" as the latter.[90] This assessment, however, is not correct. In fact, because Semler considered miracles possible supernatural interventions,

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[86] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 29, p. 245.

[87] Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, 2 vols., Im Auftrag der Joachim-Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Hamburg herausgegeben von Gerhard Alexander (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1972).

[88] Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 448; cf. Hans Jochen Genthe, *Kleine Geschichte der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 52.

[89] Cf. Angelika Strotmann, *Der historische Jesus: eine Einführung*, 2nd rev. ed., Grundwissen Theologie (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015), 22.

[90] W. J. J. Glashouwer and W. J. Ouweneel, *Het ontstaan van de Bijbel* (Hilversum: Evangelische Omroep, 1998), 151.

he was *less* radical than Reimarus. Sommer states with regard to Semler, "The founder of historical-critical theology in Germany was a man characterized by a profound piety."[91]

Reimarus did not believe in miracles and supernatural interventions because he was strongly inclined towards the philosophy of deism.[92] In accordance with deistic ideas, Reimarus denied that the resurrection of Jesus actually happened. According to the fragment *On the Intentions of Jesus and His Disciples*, the belief in Jesus' resurrection is not based on fact, but on fraud. Reimarus states that the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the grave at night (cf. Matt 27:64)[93] and then preached his resurrection and ascension.[94]

For Semler, however, the unknown author, Reimarus, was going too far in his criticism of the New Testament. In 1779, Semler thus wrote his *Answer to the Fragments of an Unnamed Author, Especially "On the Intentions of Jesus and His Disciples,"*[95] in which he defended the historical reliability of the New Testament accounts on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[96] According to the preface to his work, Semler intended to offer a "study that is indeed useful for both the defense of Christianity and the real refutation of the accusations of the unknown author." Thus, Semler did not consider himself to be as radical as the anonymous author whom he labels "Deist" throughout his response.[97]

Semler refutes the criticism of the unknown author on two different levels. First, in the preface, he points out the "historical mistakes" of the unknown author. Semler demonstrates that it is both "totally impossible" and "very improbable" that the disciples stole Jesus's dead body from the grave.[98] Further, Semler—somewhat superficially—denies that there exist

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[91] Sommer, "Aufklärer," 368; my translation.

[92] Thomas K. Kuhn, "Reimarus, Hermann Samuel," in *Theologen: 185 Porträts von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2004), 203; Genthe, *Geschichte*, 50.

[93] Reimarus follows Byzantine witnesses of Matt 27:64 that add *nuktos* to indicate the supposed nocturnal time of the theft (see, e.g., codices C and L).

[94] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ed., *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger: Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* (Braunschweig, 1778), 242–245 (§ 56).

[95] Johann Salomo Semler, *Beantwortung der Fragmente eines Ungenannten insbesondere vom Zweck Jesu und seiner Jünger* (Halle: Verlag des Erziehungsinstituts, 1779).

[96] Cf. Hornig, *Anfänge*, 12.

[97] Cf., e.g., Semler, *Beantwortung*, 279, 358, and 368.

[98] Semler, *Beantwortung*, 413.

serious contradictions between the different accounts of Jesus' resurrection.[99] Second, he criticizes the anonymous writer's conviction that miracles cannot happen. For Semler, this presupposition is the heart of the unknown writer's historical criticism.[100]

Semler repeatedly makes clear that he does not share the unknown author's Deistic presuppositions. According to Semler, miracles and divine interventions are possible. He considers the resurrection of Jesus "a supernatural event"[101] and elaborates,

> Since the times of Plato, and even before him, the resurrection of the dead has been admitted as something possible. Historical proof has even been put forward: such-and-such has come back from death to life. If Deists want to doubt this possibility, we Christians should not hinder them from so doing. But their doubt and their claim do not necessarily enter into our soul . . . . This is the distinction between Deists and another class of people who, in spite of all their insight, do not dare to give God orders and laws from down on earth. That which Deists are not willing to accept as possible is thus still possible: Jesus was able to come back to life.[102]

In light of these statements by Semler, Horton Harris aptly writes that Semler "worked within a broadly theistic view of the Bible."[103] However, in light of the statements presented above, Semler had an ambivalent position concerning miracles. With regard to Semler's theology in general, Bengt Hägglund speaks of "the lack of clarity which characterized Semler's position."[104] This general assessment can certainly be applied to Semler's view on miracles in particular.

*Reconstruction of Early Christianity*

Even though Semler did not apply historical criticism to the New Testament to find out "what actually happened," it would be wrong to think that Semler did not have any interest in the historical situation of the New Testament. In fact, Semler did attempt to reconstruct the history of

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[99] Semler, *Beantwortung*, 371.

[100] Semler, *Beantwortung*, 358.

[101] Semler, *Beantwortung*, 274.

[102] Semler, *Beantwortung*, 417.

[103] Horton Harris, *The Tübingen School: A Historical and Theological Investigation of the School of F.C. Baur*, 2nd ed (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 249.

[104] Hägglund, *History*, 349.

early Christianity.[105] According to Semler, early Christianity was made up of two different parties, the Petrine/Jewish/Hebrew party and the Pauline/Hellenistic party.[106] According to Semler, these two parties had enmity for each other: "Another party, who were called Jewish-minded Christians, were public enemies of all of Paul's writings."[107] Paul, in turn, wrote his letter to the Galatians to react against "crafty undertakings of some adversaries from the Jewish party."[108]

Semler mentions two main differences in the teaching of these two parties: First, Paul and his party reacted against the legalism of the Jewish party.[109] Second, the Jewish party held views that were more primitive than those of the other party.[110] Semler contributed immensely to New Testament historical criticism in dividing early Christianity into two parties and in assigning the New Testament writings to one of these parties: "In so doing he [Semler] not only recognizes a difference of categories within the New Testament, but for the first time as a conscious act, sets the New Testament books into the historical context of primitive Christianity and makes the individual biblical authors the object of investigation."[111]

Scholars agree that Semler's reconstruction of early Christianity anticipated the research of Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860). Albert Schweitzer, for instance, calls Semler "the precursor of Baur in the reconstruction of primitive Christianity."[112] Glashouwer and Ouweneel even go so far as to see a direct dependence of Baur's Tübingen School on Semler's work.[113] While it is certain that Baur knew and acknowledged Semler as a

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[105] However, in contrast to Reimarus, who pioneered in the quest for the historical Jesus, Semler never attempted a historical reconstruction of Jesus' life.

[106] Schütz, *Glaubensbekenntnis*, § 6, pp. 38–39.

[107] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 4, p. 22.

[108] Semler, *Abhandlung*, § 22, p. 86.

[109] Cf. Semler, *Abhandlung* § 20, p. 76.

[110] Johann Salomo Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon*, Vierter Theil (Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1775), Vorrede.

[111] Kümmel, *Testament*, 67.

[112] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, ed. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 2000), 25; cf. Baird, *History*, vol. 1, 126: "Anticipating the work of F.C. Baur, he [Semler] believed the early church to have been made up of two parties."

[113] Glashouwer and Ouweneel, *Ontstaan*, 151.

church historian,[114] it is uncertain whether he took Semler's reconstruction of early Christianity as a starting point for that of his own, which was built on 1 Corinthians 1:12. In his programmatic article "The Christ Party in the Corinthian Church" (1831),[115] Baur refers to several succeeding scholars like Storr and Grotius. Semler, however, is not mentioned.

While it is true that Semler engaged in historical study when reconstructing early Christianity, for him this reconstruction was not an end in itself. The underlying motivation was to understand the texts against the background of their historical situations. Semler's ultimate motivation in this regard, however, was to detect—and remove—the time-bound content of the New Testament.[116]

## III. Conclusion

The present article has examined the contribution of the Lutheran theologian Johann Salomo Semler to historical criticism of the New Testament. Semler was a historical critic of both the canon and the content of the New Testament. His contribution certainly was greater in the first of these two areas. Here, Semler, as "the pioneer of the historical view of the canon,"[117] argued that the canon of the New Testament is a historical phenomenon and therefore open for free, independent, and critical investigation. William Baird states: "Above all, Semler's major contribution to higher criticism is found in his thesis about the canon. If one accepts his challenge of a free investigation of the canon, this means that the authenticity of every book in the NT is open to question."[118]

When it comes to Semler's historical criticism of the *content* (i.e., of the individual books and paragraphs) of the New Testament, however, the significance of his contribution must not be overestimated. It is obvious that Semler was not interested in the historical situation of the New Testament. Instead of attempting to discover "what actually happened," he

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[114] Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die Epochen der kirchlichen Geschichtsschreibung* (Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1852), 143: "Was Semler noch ganz besonders auszeichnet, ist der unermüdliche Fleiß in der Erforschung der Quellen, worin er wohl von wenigen Kirchenhistorikern übertroffen worden ist."

[115] Ferdinand Christian Baur, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde," in *Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. Klaus Scholder, vol. 1, *Historisch-kritische Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1963), 1–76.

[116] Cf. Hornig, *Studien*, 279.

[117] Schweitzer, *Quest*, 25.

[118] Baird, *History*, vol. 1, 126.

even disregarded the historical information contained in the New Testament. Semler rather directed his attention to the *timeless* moral truth that he thought to find above all in the dogmatic sections of the New Testament. In light of this it would be wrong to over-emphasize Semler's historical interest (as does Kümmel[119]) and to call him the father or founder of historical criticism.[120]

Even though Semler was neither a historical critic *par excellence* nor the father or founder of historical criticism,[121] he did make use of historical-critical techniques. An interesting comment on the limited extent of Semler's historical criticism comes from the pen of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827): "Semler sensed the necessity of the historical interpretation without being able to carry it out to the full extent."[122] The historical critics of the nineteenth century who built on the canonical criticism of Semler, and who were "influenced by secular historical research"[123] carried out the historical-critical interpretation of the New Testament in a more stringent manner.

In accordance with the modern worldview of the eighteenth century, Semler—in an anti-Jewish manner—considered the Biblical conceptions of angels, demons, paradise, and the like to be elements of primitive mythological thinking. Jesus and the apostles accommodated to these Jewish beliefs in order to bring their new and better moral teachings across. The modern reasonable Christian, according to Semler, does not need to take into consideration these mythological elements of their teaching.

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[119] Kümmel, *Testament*, 62: "The historical interest which Semler had taken over from Baumgarten led him to interrogate from a rigorously historical point of view all religious tradition, including the New Testament."

[120] Cf. Reventlow, *Epochen*, vol. 4, 189.

[121] It is impossible to name an individual person as *the* founder of New Testament historical criticism. According to both Klaus Scholder and Eckhard Schnabel, it is more correct to consider the modern *Zeitgeist* responsible for the rise of historical criticism; cf. Scholder, *Ursprünge*, 7–10; Eckhard Schnabel, *Inspiration und Offenbarung: Die Lehre vom Ursprung und Wesen der Bibel*, 2nd ed. (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1997), 47.

[122] Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Litterärgeschichte*, Zweyte Hälfte, *Litterärgeschichte der drey letzten Jahrhunderte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1814), 1071; my tranlation.

[123] Krentz, *Method*, 24; cf. 22–23: Krentz especially has the following works in mind: Barthold Georg Niebuhr's *Römische Geschichte* (1811–1812); Leopold von Ranke's *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker*, vol. 1 (1824); and Johann Gustav Droysen's *Alexander the Great* (1833).

Even though in his attitude towards miracles he was more sceptical than Hornig thinks he was, Semler was not as critical as most other historical critics of both his time (Reimarus) and later times (Strauss and Bultmann). The main reason for that was that he considered miracles possible supernatural intervention into human affairs. Semler was thus not totally inclined to the anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions that, according to Scholder, were characteristic and fundamental for historical criticism of Semler's time.

With his reconstruction of early Christianity, Semler initiated later developments of New Testament historical criticism. He demonstrated that the early Christian church was basically made up of two conflicting parties, namely, a Hebrew and a Hellenistic one. Ideas of that kind are later found in the works of both Ferdinand Christian Baur and his near namesake, Walter Bauer.

With regard to the limited scholarly attention that Semler's works have so far received, Ulrich L. Lehner recently stated, "Semler (1725–1791) was one of the most productive German theologians of the Enlightenment period, and yet he remains one of the last read due to his often-dark conceptual language and his infamous verbosity."[124] To date, scholarship on Johann Salomo Semler is, by and large, limited to German publications.

The present article might help to change this unfortunate situation. Hopefully, international theological scholarship will follow the example of the pastor's wife in Goethe's *Werther* in devoting adequate attention to the critical investigation of Semler's seminal writings.

[124] Ulrich L. Lehner, review of Marianne Schröter, *Aufklärung durch Historisierung: Johann Salomo Semlers Hermeneutik des Christentums* (Berlin, 2012), in *Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2012): 977.

*CTQ* 80 (2016): 133–164

# Theological Observer

## The Origin of Authentic Rationalism

Not fitting typical articles presented in the *CTQ* is one in this issue on the hermeneutical method of Johannes Salomo Semler, the leading Lutheran rationalist theologian in the eighteenth century. Students of Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* are familiar with Pieper's opposition to rationalism, which he called the mother of synergism. Among the sins of rationalism are its denial of biblical inspiration and the deity of Christ. Rationalism for Pieper stands for everything opposed to Christianity. That being said, many of us have only a passing acquaintance with how it originated and how it works. Contrast our experience with that of the founding fathers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, who lived and breathed rationalism in the Lutheran churches in which they were raised and in their theological education. They heard lectures at the theological faculties of German universities in the waning days of Rationalism and from their experience they were determined to establish a confessional church in the United States. When he was a young man, Wilhelm Sihler, the first president of Concordia Theological Seminary, saw himself as a rationalist, and he even admired Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, whose lectures he heard at the University of Berlin—all this before his whole-hearted acceptance of Christianity. If we dare speak of negative causes, the Missouri Synod as an explicitly confessional Lutheran church came into existence as a result of historical criticism.

Historical criticism is rooted in the philosophies of Baruch Spinoza, a Jew who denied Old Testament miracles, and of Gottfried Lessing, who held that past events remained inaccessible. These ideas found their way into Lutheran theology through Johann Salomo Semler, who is considered the father of historical criticism as a method in studying the Bible. Before the age of rationalism, Lutheran theologians took up the question of the historical character of biblically reported events. In 1658, before Spinoza came on the scene, Nicolaus Jung of Brandenburg, a student of the great Lutheran dogmatician Johann Andras Quenstedt, set forth the biblical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Bernhard Oldermann in 1683 presented the metaphysical possibility and the historical probability for Jesus' resurrection. Spinoza's arguments were specifically addressed by Paul Christoph Schilling in his 1709 dissertation at the University of Leipzig. Ideas spawned in the late seventeenth century prepared the intellectual

environment in which rationalism permeated eighteenth-century Lutheran theology and almost pushed it into extinction. Semler offered naturalist explanations for miracles, but he almost inexplicably held to Jesus' resurrection. His ideas evolved into the historical agnosticism of David Friedrich Strauss in the nineteenth century. While Semler held that Jesus and the apostles accommodated their teachings to fit the superstitions of the first century, Rudolph Bultmann credited early Christians with transforming the simple teaching and deeds of Jesus into dogma and miracles. Bultmann's hermeneutical principle was at the heart of the walkout of majority of the faculty Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis in February 1974. Dr. Boris Paschke presents a fascinating historical essay on Semler whose ideas ignited current historical critical methods.

David P. Scaer

## *Lutheran Service Book* at Ten Years

Almost nine years ago shortly after arriving here on campus, I was invited to offer my thoughts on the initial reception of the Synod's new hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book*, which at that time had been available for just over a year. Given that I had spent the previous decade shepherding that project to completion, it wasn't too surprising that my comments were generally positive (*CTQ* 71 [July/October 2007]: 368–71). And rightly so, I might add, since the overall response at that time was quite favorable. To my credit, I did concede that it was too early to offer a valid evaluation and that the historians would caution us to wait a decade or two. Well, by the end of this summer a decade will have elapsed since Concordia Publishing House started shipping the first copies of *LSB*. That we still hear it occasionally referred to as the "new" hymnal suggests either that old habits die hard or that deep down inside we are hoping there won't be another *new* hymnal for a long time.

So how has *LSB* fared after a decade of use? Though I'm still a biased observer, I think it's fair to say that it has fared quite well. My totally unscientific reading is that *LSB* hit the spot for the vast majority of congregations in the LCMS. CPH estimates that nearly 85% of congregations are using it. Of course, it's not a perfect book; indeed, we never had any illusions that it would be. And were we to begin the process today of developing a new hymnal, I'm confident that the final product would look a bit different.

Speaking of looking a bit different, much of *LSB* is available in a French translation (*Liturgies et Cantiques Luthériens*) that was published in

2009 by Lutheran Church–Canada. Additionally, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya published a new hymnal (*Ibada Takatifu*) in 2013 that was heavily inspired by *LSB*.

The vast supporting resources that were published early in the process have also been a great blessing. Editions new to us, like the guitar chord volumes for all of the hymns and services as well as the electronic version, *Lutheran Service Builder*, have been great boons. Perhaps an even more influential byproduct is the *Pastoral Care Companion*, which has not only been wildly successful in its original form but is available as a mobile app and has also been translated into Spanish. Seminary graduates of the past ten years whose entire ministries have been shaped by this resource would probably find it difficult to fathom how pastors cared for souls without it, much the same way the younger generation wonders how their parents ever communicated before the age of email (already passé) and instant messaging.

If there has been a disappointment, it's the delay in appearance of two essential supporting volumes: the companion (or handbook) on the hymns and the desk edition, which will provide commentary on all of the services in *LSB*. I can express disappointment without giving serious offense since, at least in regard to the latter resource, I am as much to blame as anyone. I could offer the excuse that the goal for both of these volumes is simply to produce the best resources on the market, but that is of little help if they aren't available for anyone to use. The good news here is that progress is being made on both fronts and that within a few years they should be available. And I think it's safe to say that they will be most useful.

And not a moment too soon. I say this because after ten years of use many of us are becoming quite familiar with significant portions of the hymnal. And that's a good thing. We've reached a point, however, where each of us has begun to "tune out" those things in the hymnal with which we are not as familiar. Though I was the director of the project and looked over every page umpteen times before the book went to press, I experience this phenomenon myself now and then! My suspicion is that this is a natural phenomenon that occurs with any hymnal. Just start paging, for example, through a section of the hymns, paying close attention to those things that don't look familiar. You'll be in for some surprises.

For a specific example, consider *LSB* 925–931 (and also 983–986 in the *Builder* and the hymn accompaniment edition). The texts for most of these Old Testament canticles appeared in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (pp. 120–122), though that hymnal provided no directions for how they might be used.

(*TLH* didn't even provide the biblical references for the texts, just the Latin titles.) The settings of these canticles in *LSB* provide antiphons for the congregation to sing along with chant tones for the text. There are various uses for these canticles, especially in Matins and Vespers. Until additional information becomes available in the forthcoming desk edition, you can read a little about these canticles in the 108-page resource the Commission on Worship distributed to the 20,000+ people who attended the hymnal workshops in the fall of 2006. If you don't have a copy, or can't locate yours, CPH still makes it available on its website (http://www.cph.org/images/topics/pdf/lsb/LSB_Guide-full.pdf). That resource is filled with information and ideas for making a fuller use of *LSB*.

One additional example of how to dig more deeply into the hymnal is by making use of some of the resources in the Liturgical Music section (*LSB* 942–963). Here you will find different settings of nearly every part of the Divine Service. During Lent next year, consider singing the medieval expansion of the Kyrie (*LSB* 942) in place of the regular Kyrie. (This was the form of the Kyrie that our LCMS forefathers regularly sang from Walther's German hymnal.) Or perhaps simply have the choir sing an alternate setting of the Agnus Dei on behalf of the congregation once in a while. (The four-part setting at *LSB* 962, for example, lends itself well to being sung in harmony.) While you wouldn't want to substitute parts of the service every Sunday, when used on an occasional basis or perhaps for a season, these alternate settings allow these familiar texts to be heard in a new light.

While more examples could be given, I'll invite you instead to come and see for yourself. This fall (November 6–8, 2016), the conference of the Good Shepherd Institute held annually on the CTSFW campus will explore this very topic as we consider the development of hymnals in the LCMS. As it turns out, it's not only the tenth anniversary of *LSB* but also the seventy-fifth anniversary of *TLH* (and almost the thirty-fifth of *Lutheran Worship*). Our conference will take advantage of all these anniversaries to ponder where we've been and where we might be going in the future. If you've never attended before, it's a feast not only for the mind but especially for the ears with all of the singing and music making in services and hymn festival. You won't be disappointed.

Paul J. Grime

## Is It Time for Wedding Silliness to End?

The institution of marriage has been much in the news of late. Christians of a more conservative bent have gone from indifference to confusion to outright fear over what the future holds concerning the "union of this man and this woman," as the service of Holy Matrimony in *Lutheran Service Book* puts it in the very first sentence of the wedding address. Our purpose in writing at this time is not to rehash recent changes regarding how our society views marriage; rather, we wish to raise a few questions concerning how the church conducts the service of Holy Matrimony. Simply put, is it time for biblically-minded Christians to ask some hard questions about the rubrics?

Many of us have heard the old adage that a pastor would prefer to do ten (insert your own number here) funerals to even one wedding. Why is that? Perhaps it's the fear of having to work with the professional wedding coordinator. Or dealing with the preconceived notions of the bride who hopes to pull off the wedding of her dreams. How many pastors and church musicians have struggled to explain why the choice of this or that popular song really has no place in the service? And what about the other bizarre requests that pop up as weddings are being planned? Were we submitting this opinion piece as a blog post, undoubtedly our colleagues out in the trenches would quickly add their countless examples.

Far too often the church has regrettably permitted the conduct of the marriage rite to be hijacked by the whims of the secular culture. We make that statement, of course, with the full awareness that there are many pastors and musicians in our churches, along with devout lay men and women, who have worked carefully and faithfully to instill a sense of the holy at this most sacred time. Our humble proposal is that the time has come for us to redouble such efforts, especially by helping those who are preparing to enter this holy estate to recognize the import of the vows they are preparing to take. To put it another way, we'd like to suggest that the era of wedding silliness is over.

In his *Marriage Booklet*, which was included in the Small Catechism and thus in the Book of Concord, Martin Luther explained why pastors were obligated to bless the marriages of those who requested it: "For all who desire prayer and blessing from the pastor or bishop indicate – thereby whether or not they say so expressly—to what danger and need they are exposing themselves and how much they need God's blessing and the community's prayers for the estate into which they are entering. For we experience every day how much unhappiness the devil causes in the

married estate through adultery, unfaithfulness, discord, and all kinds of misery" (*The Book of Concord;* Kolb-Wengert, 368–69). Unquestionably, the devil's assaults on this holy institution have only multiplied in the centuries since Luther wrote these insightful words.

Given the current climate, with the world rejecting nearly every tenet we hold to be true concerning marriage, the time has come not only for the church to confess what she believes but also to practice what she preaches. This is not to say that the marriage rite must be conducted everywhere the same; there is always room for scaling the conduct of the service to the needs of the local community, with each individual wedding ceremony recognizing the unique characteristics of the man and woman who are being married. What we must not forget, however, is that our conduct does matter, and that if we are not careful, our practice can easily come to be at odds with our doctrine.

Thus, we offer the following, modest proposal. Above all else, we urge pastors to use the rite—the words—as provided in the hymnal and agenda. *Lutheran Service Book* is the first official hymnal of the LCMS to include the marriage rite in the pew book. This is significant in that it sets before our people a theological statement as to what God says about marriage. The framers of *LSB* worked carefully on this rite, especially in the prefatory statement on marriage and in the consent. Much of this was covered just a few years ago in a previous Theological Observer, where encouragement to stick with the rite was urged with this observation: "Our very understanding of what it means to be male and female seems to be disintegrating before our eyes. In the midst of this moral confusion, the church must stand firm and speak with a clear voice" (CTQ 77 [July/October 2013]: 336). At the very least, can we agree that the days are gone of the bride and groom writing their own vows or pastors crafting their own services? The stakes are just too high.

Second, perhaps the time has come where we simply insist, in charity, that church weddings be seen as churchly events. In the *Lutheran Service Book Agenda,* one of the general rubrics reads: "As in all worship in the house of God, the rite of Holy Matrimony invokes the presence and blessing of God. Therefore, it should avoid triteness and empty sentimentality" (*LSB Agenda*, 64). Of course, there will be some difference of opinion as to what constitutes "triteness" and "empty sentimentality." But as the old evil foe prowls around looking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8), insisting that the church shouldn't have the right to refuse to marry Fred and Steve, if that's what they desire—in that light, the era of triteness and empty sentimentality really does need to come to an end. The stakes really are that high.

Third, what this will look like in practice will require some courage on the part of our pastors. For example, what message is conveyed when the congregation remains seated as the processional cross passes by—if a processional cross is even used in a wedding procession—only to stand a minute later as the bride makes her entrance? A minor point, some might say. Really? As Christians by the thousands are forced from their homes in Iraq, Syria, and other countries, and as videos surface on the Internet of Christians dying for the faith, like the twenty-one Coptic Christians who were beheaded on the Libyan seashore in 2015, can we maintain that it doesn't "mean" anything for us to sit comfortably in our padded pews as the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ passes by? Perhaps as our culture begins to turn the screws more tightly on the church, showing less and less tolerance for our "quaint" beliefs, we will finally come to see that the pseudo-deification of the bride in the classic "American wedding" is not serving us all that well. There, we said it.

Yes, this will require courage. And it will have to start with our pastors. First, they must hold unquestionably to the biblical witness concerning the holy estate of marriage, and commend every husband and wife for their faithful confession as they unashamedly enter this holy estate. Second, with that conviction firmly in hand, they must aptly teach the flock they have been called to shepherd. They begin, naturally, by teaching what God has to say about marriage. But eventually that teaching must proceed to an examination of the practices that accompany the rite of marriage. In the case of the wedding procession referenced earlier, this may inevitably result in stepping on a few toes. "But that's the way we did it at our wedding, pastor," one member might protest during a Bible class. "Are you saying we were wrong?"

This brings us to an additional ingredient needed when dealing with such a sensitive topic. In addition to conviction, you bring a pastoral heart. Hopefully in raising this particular example, you don't use our snarky comment about the pseudo-deification of the bride, but explain it a little more charitably, as in: "Have you ever considered what message we send in choosing to remain seated as the cross passes by but then stand as the bride makes her entrance?" In response to the question about whether the practice used all these years was wrong, you might respond with the honest statement that you yourself hadn't really thought carefully about this before. And if it was the case that the congregation showed similar honor to your own bride at your wedding, then you might simply add, "That's what we did at our wedding too. And it never occurred to me back then what message we were sending." Honesty will go a long way.

There are any number of practices that will require a second look. Why is it, for example, that the wedding party stands throughout the service? Does that give the impression that we simply want to hurry up and get out? While that practice isn't wrong, what message would be conveyed if the bride and groom and their attendants instead sat down to hear God's Word? (Pastors shouldn't assume that this suddenly gives them license to preach a twenty-minute sermon!) Or what of the practice of treating those in attendance at a wedding as nothing more than mere spectators? If that isn't our standard practice at a Sunday service, then why should it be at a wedding? Invite the congregation to join in praying a psalm or singing a hymn. (The tunes for the three wedding hymns in *LSB* were carefully chosen because of their familiarity by most Christians.) Just because many of the attendees at weddings aren't regular churchgoers doesn't mean that we need to dumb down either our message or our practice.

Finally, we offer a brief comment about wedding venues. For decades the church has witnessed a gradual shift away from weddings inside the church building to other venues, with "destination weddings" more recently becoming all the rage. As we consider how our wedding practices might best support our teaching on marriage, perhaps the time has come to urge those who are marrying to bring the ceremony back into the sanctuary so that all who are present might give their full attention to God's holy desire for husbands and wives.

We have every confidence that in this marriage debate we have the word of truth on our side. We believe the time has come when that truth needs to be seen and experienced more intentionally in our practice. The era of wedding silliness needs to end. Because the stakes really are that high.

Paul J. Grime
Kantor Kevin J. Hildebrand

## What Angels Witness "through the Church"

Ephesians 3:10 is a pericope that only appears in the lectionary on the Feast day of Epiphany, and is usually overshadowed by the Gospel reading, the story of the Magi visiting the holy family. Yet in this text St. Paul gives us a rare description of what human salvation means to the angels as they see it manifested in the church. He describes the gospel as "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the

angelic authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:9–11).

Because the gospel is about the salvation of God's foremost visible creatures, people tend to overlook the effect of the gospel on God's foremost invisible creatures. Yet, God's word does reveal something of the angelic reaction to the unfolding of his plan to show love and forgiveness to fallen humanity. What St. Paul contributes is the monumental insight that it was always God's intention that our salvation benefit the angels.

### I. Angelic Witness to Our Creation

Although Moses does not refer to it in the Torah, the book of Job reveals that the creation of God's visible creation was witnessed by his invisible creation. God asks Job the haunting question, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7). This question, in one of the earliest biblical witnesses, introduces the thought that human salvation is of immense interest to God's angels, both the holy and the unholy.

That theme of angelic interest in human salvation may be located throughout the Scriptures, as when St. Peter makes it known in his first epistle that angels are fascinated by the unfolding of our lives and the working out of God's plan to save us through the sacrifice of his Son, when he tells us that "angels long to look into these things" (1 Pet 1:12).

Consider what the angels had been witnesses to so far—perhaps even the creation of the material universe, depending on when one accounts for their creation. Would they have seen the Creator create anything else after creating them? If not, they would not have seen one of God's most wondrous abilities: his power to create something out of nothing. In Revelation 4:11, we see that part of the ceaseless worship of God is focused on his act of creating all things. Yet God did not create our universe only so that the heavenly hosts would worship him for doing so. The purpose of God's creation of our universe was to showcase not just his creative power but his love and mercy toward sinners. In order to demonstrate that he could forgive sin, God had to create other creatures, "a bit lower than the angels," who, after they also sinned, could be graciously redeemed and mercifully forgiven. Key features of God's character—his love and mercy, even to sinners, may not have been apparent to the angels, had God not created and redeemed human beings. All that they would have seen, among other things, would have been his condemnation, and punishment of sinners.

*To Demonstrate God's Proper Character to the Angels*

The holy angels would have witnessed the banishment and eternal condemnation of those angels among them who sinned. Every one of them could say, as Jesus later said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). But in seeing God's implacable justice in action, handing down damnation against rebel angels, the loyal angels would have only seen God's *opus alienum* ("alien work") of destroying that which is imperfect—hardly a complete picture of their Creator! When and how would they ever have seen God's *opus proprium* ("primary work"), flowing from his heart of love and compassion? How would they have seen him giving grace to the unworthy? When would they have witnessed his forgiving love? Where would they have seen a demonstration of the mercy of God that adorns the pages of Scripture?[1]

## II. Angelic Witness to our Redemption

God wanted the angels to see these aspects of his character, so he chose to create and redeem us. God knew the loyal angels would rejoice to see this and spend eternity worshipping him for it. Thus he created a creature ideally suited for this particular demonstration: man, with both a soul that could be saved, and a physical body that could die.

God's personal touch in the creation of the human form, foreknowing that he, in the person of his Son, would assume such a form, is well known from the first chapter of Genesis. Less well known is the fact that human beings, created "in the image of God," have a feature that all humans beings have, and that God himself did not have prior to the incarnation: the possibility of two kinds of death, spiritual and physical. In this respect human beings were created differently from both animals and angels. Animals, with no immortal souls, were created with only one death that awaited them, as a consequence of the Fall—namely physical death. Angels, too, although created to be immortal, could still face "death" if they sinned, and that one death would be, although not physical, nevertheless final and eternal. Everlasting death is their one and only

[1] "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18–19). "Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him? O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you?" (Ps 89:5–8).

death. Jesus taught that hell is an "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41).

*A Double Death, an Ideal Feature to Showcase Redemption*

To showcase the redemption of sinners, human beings can experience multiple deaths: they are born spiritually dead, they can experience a physical death even after spiritual rebirth, and they can experience an eternal spiritual death without rebirth in Christ (called "the second death" in Rev 20:14). Unique among all his creatures, these latter two deaths that humans can die each have a certain respective finality, yet they are not identical, and it is mercifully possible to experience the one, but not the other.

> Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:13–15)

The option of these two deaths gives human beings a built-in advantage, not only advantageous to us, but also to God, who planned to use our physical death as the centerpiece of a grand demonstration of his love from the very creation of our world: the atoning sacrificial death of his Son to redeem human beings to God by his blood. "For God demonstrated his love for us in this way—that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

For those who recoil at the thought that God created us with the capability of physical death, even before the Fall, consider an historic bottle of brandy. It could be kept "eternally" in a museum, or it could "die" by having its cork removed and its contents poured out. Yet, how foolish it would be for that bottle to resent its "death." It was obviously designed to have its cork removed and its contents poured out. Even after its first "death," the brandy bottle would not have to undergo a second death (that is, be relegated to a landfill). It could live forever in someone's prized bottle collection. God seems to have designed us well to serve the purpose of his glory. Seeing physical death this way almost rehabilitates it, or at least recognizes that human physical death serves a higher purpose by showcasing the surpassing love of God.

*Unlike Fallen Angels, Fallen Humans Are Not beyond Redemption*

Had humans been like the angels, with only a single kind of death (the eternal kind), then for Christ to demonstrate his love for us by sparing us

the punishment that we deserved and substituting himself instead under the judgment of God, God's Son would have to endure eternal death and be permanently separated from his Father—separating the persons of the Holy Trinity forever—hardly a practical option! But, as we humans are capable of being punished for sin with two kinds of death, Jesus could experience one of them (physical death), and his demonstration would still serve its purpose.

Through such a death, God—incarnate in the flesh—could redeem such creatures as us, in a way that he could not do for the angels that sinned. This is why the Scriptures tell us that "it is not angels he helps but Abrahams's descendants. For this reason he (Christ) had to be make like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:16–17).

So the author to the Hebrews tells us, "Since the children have flesh and blood (another way of saying human mortality), he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb 2:14–18). Notice that it says, "He had to be made like his brothers." Realistically, God could not make atonement for the angels that sinned, but he could make—and it was fitting to make—atonement to redeem his human creation.

## III. The Eternal Purpose behind Human Redemption

Knowing that his unique, beloved Son would have to endure a horrible death by crucifixion to give eternal life to sinners, even before the fall into sin, why would God proceed with the creation, let alone face the situation of a Father offering his Son a cup in a garden of tears, unless there was an immensely higher purpose, beyond merely creating another world. The angels may hold the answer to this question. Witnessing human creation and redemption, the angels were able to see, as they could not see in any other way, how the same just God who punished their rebel counterparts is also a merciful God who saves sinful creatures, even at incalculable personal cost.

### *Why Create Something That Will Cause Your Beloved Son to Suffer?*

Because Christ's death successfully demonstrated that God was loving and merciful enough to redeem sinners at tremendous cost, both humans and angels benefited enormously, and God is glorified eternally as a direct result. Humans benefit, because we can be forgiven our sins and spared

from eternal death (an inestimable benefit!). Angels benefit, because only in our redemption could the they observe God, their creator, showing mercy and forgiveness toward sinners without compromising his perfect justice—something they could never have seen had humans never been created, fallen into sin, and been redeemed through the atoning sacrifice of God's Son.

And, ultimately, God himself benefits, so to speak, because, as the result of what the crucified and risen Christ has done, both humans and angels join together to give him endless praise for the perfect combination of righteousness and grace that the redemption of humanity displays.

*It Was the Perfect Plan*

How remarkable it is (by virtue of his incarnation and humiliation) to be able to say of the Son of God, "He understands the taste of death." He who created our material universe by the word of his mouth (Ps 33:6) and became part of this creation was made "lower than the angels" that he might redeem humans (Ps 8:5; Heb 2:7). He knows suffering. He knows pain. He knows anguish, disappointment, grief, sorrow and rejection. "He was stricken by God, smitten and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:4—5).

It was the perfect plan. The author to the Hebrews writes, "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Heb 2:10).

The author to the Hebrews also invites us to contemplate the wonder of the fact that it was for people like us that our Savior came. The Son of the living God made sinners to be his brothers by paying for them the ultimate price: "we see Jesus . . . he suffered death, so that, by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:9).

This is the heart of the gospel—in which the holy angels never cease to delight—that almighty God did not just understand the plight of sinners. He offered them the ultimate help by sending his unique and beloved Son. God's Son, although he "existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being

found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7–8).

The Lamb, "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 3:8, NIV) is the object of angelic adoration, whose saving gospel they witness unfolding through the church, and in each member of the church, "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:10).

This was the "eternal purpose" behind the creation of human beings. God created us to be redeemed, and he carried out his loving plan to demonstrate his redeeming grace, mercy, and love, by means of the atoning sacrifice of his Son, our Redeemer and Lord Jesus Christ. Seeing this eternal purpose unfold, those loyal angels of God who had not sinned sang for joy, and they still find God's demonstration of love toward us endlessly delightful.

### IV. Angelic Joy at the Accomplishment of Human Salvation

Angelic worship of God, "innumerable angels in festal assembly," must not be accounted for as mere compliance with God's will, as soldiers might shout "Hurrah!" on command, or as joyful music that comes into our ears through the push of a button. Scripture gives us plenty of glimpses of angels worshipping God in heaven. But how often do we note that the worship that angels render to God is related to, among other things, their knowledge of the history of human salvation?

It is ultimately the only salvation they have ever seen, for no salvation was offered to any angel who sinned. Yet, although it is about the rescue from eternal damnation of another species (humanity), human salvation is a tremendous source of delight to the angels. Even the founding of the material universe itself made the angels shout for joy (Job 38:7).

Following this reasoning, it is easy to understand why "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). How the angels regard human salvation may be deduced from various narratives and visions in the New Testament:

1. Angels rejoice as witnesses to the creation of the material universe (Job 38:4–70).
2. Angels announce the birth in Bethlehem of the incarnate Savior, as a multitude of the heavenly host dazzle a group of shepherds. (Luke 2:13).

3. Angels minister to Jesus at crucial points in his suffering for human redemption (Matt 4:11; Luke 22:43).
4. Angels announce the resurrection, after Christ's work of atonement is finished, replacing weeping with joy that Jesus is risen (Luke 24:5).
5. Angels announce, at his ascension into heaven, that Jesus will one day return (Acts 1:11).
6. Angels remain "eager to look into these things" as the gospel grows the apostolic church (1 Pet 1:12).

The angels' joy at the beginning of our world, their singing in the skies over Bethlehem at the birth of God's Son, their interest in the redeeming work of Christ and the application of his merits to provide forgiveness to repentant sinners, and their ceaseless adoration in heaven of the Lamb that was slain, possibly suggests that the whole material universe was made as a demonstration to them of God's love as much as a demonstration to us.[2] Ultimately, angelic joy over human salvation is the best explanation for their rending to the praises they do, "saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'" (Rev 5:8–12).

*Angels Learn Much about God's Wisdom through the Church*

The eternal, cosmic context of what the angels witness through the church is taught in Ephesians 3:7–11, when St. Paul writes, "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord." By referring to an "eternal purpose," now revealed in human salvation by the "God who created all things," St. Paul gives us a strong hint as to why God created human beings in the first place. "Through the church," the angels would see a demonstration of God's love in action that they could see in no other way.

St. Paul gives us the concept of the gospel as demonstration in his epistle to the Romans, when he writes,

> For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be

[2] A "Grand Demonstration," as Jay Adams called it. Jay Adams, *The Grand Demonstration: A Biblical Study of the So-called Problem of Evil* (Santa Barbara: EastGate, 1991).

> received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:23–26)

Yet it is in Ephesians 3:10 that St. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us the New Testament's most explicit statement about what a demonstration to the angels the gospel is. He writes,

> Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:7–11)

The gospel of human salvation, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24), is the wisdom of God that the holy angels witness in action "through the church." This is why St. Peter affirmed that, "concerning this salvation . . . it was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look" (1 Pet 1:12).

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## "This is the Night"

*[This sermon was preached at the Easter Vigil at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, on March 26, 2016. The Editors.]*

"This is the night!" At least five times in this Easter Vigil liturgy we have heard reference to "this night." This is the night when God brings our fathers out of Egypt and leads them through the Red Sea; this is the night when Christ rises triumphant from the dead; how holy and blessed is this night when we are delivered from bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil.

"This is the night." This exclamation resonates with the liturgy for the Jewish Passover. "Why is this night different from all other nights?" asks a child of the household. "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover," answers

the elder. The ancient liturgy of the Passover calls for present tense verbs. "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover" (Exod 12:27). It is the night when God spares the children of Israel. It is the night when Pharaoh must bow his knee at the name of the Lord. It is the night when Israel is transformed from slaves into sons.

"This is the night!" Yet, what does such a statement actually mean? Surely, the present tense is absurd to our modern enlightened minds. The death and resurrection of our Lord is now two thousand years in the past. The exodus of Israel is a four thousand year old event. Both events lie in ancient history; they belong to a primeval and unenlightened people; they are primitive events beyond our ability to verify by modern scientific standards. How can such ancient relics be described in the present tense? Is it not disingenuous to say that this is the night of Jesus' resurrection? Perhaps our liturgical language should be translated into more reasonable terms. Perhaps it would be better to say: "This is symbolic of the night," or "this represents those ancient events." Or maybe we can simply say: "this is the night when we remember the past, when we reminisce about ancient times, when we renew our nostalgia for the old days."

However, we must recognize that all such explanations are lies that proceed from the mouth of the devil. In the beginning, the devil seduced us by translating God's present command into the past tense: "Did God really say . . . ?" With these words, Satan turned Adam and Eve into modern historians struggling to recall and interpret ancient words, and this skepticism about the past brought forth despair for the future. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Indeed, this is the power of death: it fragments time, it limits our faith to the past, and it binds our hope to the distant future. It leaves us in the present with a mere nostalgia for yesterday and a despair concerning tomorrow. And so we come here tonight, like the women that once approached the tomb of Jesus; we come with mere memories of a man who once lived; we come straining to recall past miracles, past words, and past glories. We come to remember, but it is a remembrance conditioned by the power of death, and a remembrance governed by death always carries regrets—regrets that the past cannot be repeated, repristinated, or resuscitated, regrets that what once was will never be again, regrets that the future will dim our memories and cloud our recollections.

However, the remembrance of the dead is not the remembrance of Jesus to which we have been called. Against the devil's lies, against the power of death and the fragmentation of time, the church proclaims Christ, "the same yesterday, today, and forever; the beginning and the ending; the

alpha and the omega; his are time and eternity." "This is the night!" Tonight, the true light shines in the darkness; tonight, our Noah emerges from the bowels of the ark; tonight, our Isaac returns from the sacrifice to the embrace of his mother; tonight, the stone of our David penetrates the head of the great adversary; tonight, the voice of our Daniel rises again from the Lion's Den; tonight, our Jonah returns alive from the belly of Sheol. Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

"This is the night." Tonight, on this altar, all the verbs of salvation are in the present tense. For here Christ is not limited to the past, but lives in the present. It is the very flesh that was martyred in Abel, saved in Noah, called in Abraham, suffered in Job, spared in Isaac, triumphant in David, swallowed in Jonah, and incorruptible in the three youths of the fiery furnace that has been taken up by the Son of God from the Virgin Mary, put to death on the cross, raised on the third day, and now lives as our eternal atonement before the face of the father. This is the flesh and blood that is on our altar; here there is no more fragmentation, no more wall dividing us from the past, no more veil concealing the future, no more regrets about what once was, no more despair about what will be. For all is present here. "Today," Jesus says, "this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). "Behold, now is the acceptable time," proclaims the apostle, "now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). Or, as our Lord declares to those grieving women at the tomb of their brother, who clung to a hope limited to the distant future: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

"This is the night!" If this is indeed true, dear friends, what can keep us from rejoicing as we come to this altar? Shall we not rejoice like the family of Noah finally emerging from the bowels of the ark? Shall we not be renewed like the old patriarch Jacob embracing Joseph, a son who was dead but now lives? Shall we not take heart like the soldiers of Israel to see Goliath fall? Shall we not, like them, leave our wall and rush with renewed courage into the battle? Shall our hope not be rekindled like Mary Magdalene as she recognizes the voice of Jesus calling her name? Finally, shall we not come to this altar with burning hearts like the Emmaus disciples as our eyes are now opened and we recognize the Lord in the breaking of the bread?

Why is this night different from all other nights? Because tonight, Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

James G. Bushur

## The Human Case against Same-Sex Marriage

[*Timothy Goeglein presented this essay on March 31, 2016, as part of a series at Valparaiso University entitled "Dialogue and Discernment: Seek First to Understand—A Conversation About Same-Sex Marriage." Goeglein was one of two panel members who supported traditional marriage while two other panelists supported same-sex marriage. The panel discussion was billed as "a respectful conversation, around a seemingly irreconcilable issue, designed to demonstrate non-contentious conversations in an ever growing contentious world." The Editors*]

Same-sex marriage is not primarily about homosexuality, individual rights or equality. It is not even about marriage or family at its deepest point. It is about the fundamental essence of humanity. At its core, same-sex marriage questions our historic and collective understanding that humanity is *one* nature embodied in *two* mysteriously diverse but wholly equal forms: male and female.

Male and female are not merely cultural constructs. Consider what *National Geographic* has taught each of us about the remarkable and starkly different cultures of the world. For all their splendid diversity, they share a few immutable commonalities. All cultures have rituals for collecting, preparing, and eating food. Just as basic, all cultures have a system of marriage, some form of socially encouraged, permanent pair-bonding. And until the last few nanoseconds of human experience, it has *always* been between the two streams of humanity: male and female. There were no exceptions until the Netherlands embraced genderless marriage in 2001. So why this unbending universality? Is it because Focus on the Family, religious conservatives, and the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church everywhere and at every time forced this "view" of family upon all these helpless cultures? Marriage requires male and female because nature demands it. And as such, marriage transcends culture, politics, economics, religion, and law. It is *the* primary human institution; both anthropologists and theologians hold this as true.

Consider the word "matrimony": the stem matri/mater can be seen in many other words, such as maternal, matrilineal, or maternity. Marriage exists in all human cultures for the interest of the woman, the mother, making sure that the man who fathers her children is attached to her in a way that protects and provides for her. Do we still need this today? Human nature and culture demands it. Consider a term coined by the sociologist Dianna Pearce in 1978, "the feminization of poverty"; because

of the decline of marriage, too many women were being left to raise their children by themselves.

Marriage is humanly fundamental because it is the way we solve the primary paradox of humanity, that men are not women and women are not men, but both are human. It is the way we bring these two parts of humanity together in the most intimate and cooperative way. No other social union bridges this mysterious distance as marriage does. Because every society consists of these similar but different beings, every society finds it must have marriage. Marriage—and particularly monogamy—socializes men, protects women from unattached males, regulates sexuality, and ensures that the people who create the babies are the ones who provide for and raise the babies. Aristotle referenced this essential nuclear nature of the family in his *Politics*.

But the same-sex marriage experiment says that we can ignore all this, and the mighty river of human experience can be diverted in a genderless direction in the present age without harmful consequences. It is a short-sighted and arrogant proposition driven by adult wishes, eclipsing child and societal needs, and ignoring the pan-cultural wisdom of the ages. This experiment's biggest stumbling block is that male and female are not mere social constructs, regardless of how much we are told they are. Every human life is a beautiful declaration to the contrary, an advertisement of the boundless wonder of that mysterious union of masculinity and femininity. The advertisement expresses itself in two ways: existence and embodiment.

First, each of us is an endorsement of the wonder of male and female in our existence. Every human person is inconceivable without a significant contribution from both streams of humanity. Every breathing, wriggling human baby that makes a debut upon the earth is a flesh-packaged message from creation that man and woman as a functioning unit is a fantastic idea. Nature sends no such endorsement of genderless unions. Every one of us gained access to our existence by passing through the door of heterosexuality, by either mechanical or intimate binary union of sperm and egg. There are no other options. Biology is a rigid and close-minded gatekeeper.

Second, there are two complementary models of embodied persons: male and female. Sylviane Agacinski is a leader in the French feminist *parité* movement—and shares a son with Jacques Derrida—who points out in her book *The Parity of the Sexes* what was obvious to our grandparents: "One is born a girl or boy, one becomes woman or man. . . . This division, which includes all human beings without exception, is thus a dichotomy.

In other words, every individual who is not a man is a woman. There is no third possibility."[3] (Only 0.018% of the human population can be termed truly intersexed.[4]) The miracle of every male's existence as a male person is not only an important value statement about the significance of male, but also about female. For the male proclaims the virtue, wonder, and necessity of female simply by contrasting her in his "otherness." Female does this for male also. We would not be able to define old without a value called youth. This is why same-sex unions are fundamentally genderless. The yin gains its full essence in contrast with the yang and is of little meaning in a yang-less community.

The legalization of same-sex marriage and the resulting same-sex family, however, brings all these basic human realities into question. For if two men or two women are the functional equivalent of a male and female family, the only thing that the first couple needs from the former to start a family is their respective gametes. In order to make the next human generation, the male same-sex couple must go next door and borrow an egg from heterosexuality. This reduction of gender to reproductive material is dramatically evidenced in a lesbian mothers' website that sells little t-shirts and bibs for their babies that inform the world "My daddy's name is donor."

This is a radical deconstruction of humanity, reducing the profound mystery of male and female to mere differentiated reproductive material. This genderless rationale is why marriage licenses address the couple as "Party A" and Party B" rather than the "bride" and "groom" or "male" and "female." It is also why birth certificates are increasingly asking for the name of "Progenitor A" and "Progenitor B." It is why activists are arguing for the possibility for a child to be assigned to more than two legal parents.

But our human nature as either male or female is much deeper than one's genitalia, sperm, or egg. If same-sex marriage is socially valid, then male and female are no longer essential for the family, and therefore, humanity. They are simply preferential. And children are denied their natural mother or father for no other reason than adults desire such families. This is precisely what Rosie O'Donnell told ABC's Diane Sawyer when she explained her little boy often asked, "Why don't I have a dad?"

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[3] Sylviane Agacinski, *Parity of the Sexes* (New York: Columbia Unviersity Press, 2001), 3.

[4] Leonard Sax, "How Common is Intersex? A Response to Anne Fausto-Sterling," *The Journal of Sex Research* 39 (2002): 174–178.

Her answer? "If you were to have a dad, you wouldn't have me. Because I'm the kind of mother who wants another mother."[5]

We hear that love makes a family, but can an abundance of love from two men turn one of them into a mother? Can any amount of love make a father out of a woman? A loving and compassionate society *always* comes to the aid of motherless and fatherless children; it *never* intentionally creates them.

Family configuration has always been intricately bound up with the structure and health of the larger community, and we cannot change it without significantly changing society. When we no longer have mores concerning the structure of marriage and family but settle for a buffet model—just pick what suits you, because one choice is as valid as another—society loses a shared norm without which it cannot function cohesively. This is why the male/female norm of marriage is humanly universal.

This is essentially what we believe at our core at Focus on the Family:

1. The marital union of male and female is exceptional and essential for human thriving.
2. Marriage should be loving, sacrificial, and life-long.
3. All children should have the benefit of being loved and cared for by their own mother and father.
4. Sexuality ought to be confined to the protective harbor of the intimacy of a husband and wife.

This is the sexual ethic that Jesus taught us. We have no right as Christians to say that he is too narrow here.

Timothy Goeglein
Vice President of External Relations
Focus on the Family

[5] Ann Oldenburg, "Rosie talks adoption in coming-out interview," *USA Today*, March 14, 2002, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/2002/2002-03-14-rosie.htm.

# Offending a Postmodern World: The Prophet Speaks the Truth

## Introduction

It is unlikely that many of you recognize the name Susan Otey. She represents the demise of the prophetic office in many ways. Not only does she occupy an office not given to women, but, more significantly, she demonstrates this generation's intent to abandon the concept of truth and to substitute in its place feelings as criteria for making judgments.

On November 20, 2014, Susan Otey became the first Montana member of the clergy to officiate at a homosexual marriage. Although the action was contrary to the teaching of her denomination (United Methodist) and to the vows she took when she entered that profession, she had a ready answer: "I really *felt* that God was calling me to be part of that. . . . I would say that sometimes, to stand with the love of Jesus Christ for all people, you have to break a vow you've taken."[6]

Ms. Otey was able to leap at least three hurdles that previous generations have found daunting. The truth of God's word was a low hurdle, having suffered many attacks through the years as bound to the time in which it was written. The vows she made to God and to his people were no constraint, because she *felt* differently in the present than she did when she made them.

What might have stopped the modern mind in its tracks seemed the lowest hurdle of all. She is able to function without a concept of truth: "I spent a lot of time in prayer about it, trying to discern whether this was right for *me*. . . . I have this strong belief that God does not want any of His beloved children to *feel* shame."[7] Anthony Esolen, in an article on the missionary task in the twenty-first century, complains of this generation, "They judge by flights of feeling."[8] The indictment stands against Susan Otey. It was not an objective truth; it was not even the truth of the

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[6] Susan Olp, "Methodist Pastor Marries Same-sex Couple Despite Church Doctrine," *Billings Gazette*, December 4, 2014, Section A, http://Billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/montana/metodist-pastor-marries-same-sex-couple-desptie-church-doctrine/article_f5d33b25-7537-5edb-9a86-235a90c35f8b.html#ixzz3LRXDm5BK; emphasis added.

[7] Olp, "Methodist Pastor Marries Same-sex Couple Despite Church Doctrine"; emphasis added.

[8] Anthony Esolen, "Mission Nary Impossible," *Touchstone* 28, no. 1 (January/February 2015): 25.

attending circumstances that drove her decision. It was the absolutely insular drive of her feelings that lifted her over all obstacles to the contrary.

I am keen to note, from a modern perspective, the thickness of the irony attending the event of that wedding. Here stands a "pastor," presumably chosen for the sake of the integrity of the office, asking two people to be faithful to their vows, while simultaneously breaking her own vow. Yet, judged by postmodern standards, the irony dissipates, for in the present world both actions are motivated by personal emotions, making them entirely consistent.

I intend in this present offering to demonstrate that we are rapidly moving in the direction of a world devoid of the concept of truth, which will create consternation for the prophetic office, an office dedicated to the proclamation of truth. I further hope to alleviate that consternation by pointing pastors especially to the power of truth to overwhelm even that barrier.

## I. Speaking the Truth Offends the Postmodern World

*Tolerance as Virtue*

The Christian faith is highly invested in the concept of truth. Jesus came into the world "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He characterizes his mission in terms of truth, "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). Furthermore, Jesus promises his followers that they will know the truth and that the truth will set them free (John 8:32). He begins to reveal the content of this truth when he calls himself "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus promises that his followers will have help, because "[w]hen the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Finally, Jesus directs his followers to the place where they will find the truth, when he prays on the night before his death, "your word is truth" (John 17:17).

The Christian commitment to a concept of truth has had a profound impact on the surrounding culture. During the Christian era, science, literature, and art all functioned with some concept of truth. Over the centuries the impact of that concept has eroded. In recent years, what many call postmodern thought has chipped away at the idea of truth: "Both Christians and modernists believe in truth. Postmodernists do not."[9]

[9] Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994), 20.

Some authors note a contrast between Postmodern and Enlightenment thought:

> The Enlightenment project . . . took it as axiomatic that there was only one possible answer to any question. From this it followed that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if we could only picture and represent it rightly. But this presumed that there existed a single correct mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this was what scientific and mathematical endeavours were all about), would provide the means to Enlightenment ends.[10]

Postmodern thought dismantles the Enlightenment devotion to a singular view representing the world, favoring instead a multi-faceted view of reality. However, the concept of truth is hard to kill, so the attack has continued through the modern era: "modernism has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production," while "fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or 'totalizing' discourses . . . are the hallmark of postmodern thought."[11]

As with most periods of thought, the first phase of the postmodern era is distinguished by a plea for toleration. The United States has endured a phase during which toleration has been touted as the premier virtue toward which its citizens should aspire. The fragmentation of its people into various "tribes" based on actual or "perceived" characteristics sends the mind reeling. In the arena of gender, for example, the clear God-given gift of two (male and female) has been expanded to anywhere from five (LGBTQ) to a score or more. Each tribe, clamoring for its own version of reality, has demanded toleration for its facet of the truth, leaving those believing in an absolute truth to be branded as intolerant and bigoted.

During this phase, the prophet of God (i.e., pastors) might expect a voice in the market place as long as he is careful not to make any exclusive claims on truth. It has become common to hear even true prophets of God preface their comments with the qualification, "I believe . . . ," as if reference to our personal belief made room for everyone else's personal belief on equal footing. By saying this, prophets may have found a place at the table in the past, but it will not last.

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[10] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1989), 27.

[11] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 9.

*Truth as Vice*

We are clearly in the second phase of the postmodern revolution. This is a period of time when the desire to maintain a concept of truth is seen as a weakness. The words of Allan Bloom in his 1987 work, *The Closing of the American Mind*, were prescient: "Openness used to be the virtue that permitted us to seek the good by using reason. It now means accepting everything and denying reason's power."[12] His argument then was that in the halls of academia, the plea for toleration had been surpassed by the demand for a new order, one that denied the existence of truth. What once populated academia is now on the streets. In this truthless world the actions of Susan Otey make perfect sense. Her willingness to stare her vows in the face and walk away unblinking is a bold proclamation that we are squarely in the era of untruth. The antithesis of truth, in terms of human actions, is not falsehood. In fact, quite the opposite holds. As long as we can speak of falsehood, there must be an opposing truth to define it. The enemy of the prophet today is not falsehood but untruth. We have been "untruthed." Asleep too long in our ivory chancels we have awakened to find a strange new world, where the majority of citizens no longer function with truth as a category of their minds.

As a result, those who cling to a concept of objective truth are viewed as creatures from another planet. This dependence on "truth" is viewed as a weakness, a moral failure, characterized by a need to subject others to a dominant personal truth. In this world, any language about truth is seen as a vice—a ploy for power over others. Speaking of the graduates of our systems of higher education, Gene Veith writes, "Many of them are coming out convinced that there is no objective meaning and that truth is nothing more than an act of power."[13]

That said, humans cannot function without some criteria for making decisions. This is where being "untruthed" creates some friction with daily life. However, by its fragmentation to the individual level, postmodern thought has provided a convenient solution: "The intellect is replaced by the will. *Reason is replaced by emotion*. Morality is replaced by relativism. Reality itself becomes a social construct."[14] The action is subtle, but we have gradually become a nation governed by our feelings. This criterion has the added benefit of being unassailable to a reasoned argument. At least one generation has been convinced that "feelings are neither right,

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[12] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 38.

[13] Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 51.

[14] Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 29; emphasis added.

nor wrong, they just are." "But that's how I feel" is the indignant answer you may receive upon the attempt to convince someone that their feelings are based on faulty information or have no basis in fact.

*Two Kinds of Offense*

In this world, the prophet who presumes to speak an objective, even divine, truth will be sure to offend all his hearers. However, for the purpose of proposing a solution, let me delineate what I think to be two distinct kinds of offense. On the one hand, sinners are offended when we are told the truth, because we do not want to obey it. We do not feel that what we are doing is wrong. How can someone else judge us? No one else has the right to impose his version of reality on us. This kind of offense often garners headlines and generally wins the ballot of public opinion. In the recent debate over a non-discrimination ordinance in Billings, for example, those who held for the old morality were called "haters" who wanted to scuttle the freedom of people to love whomever they felt like loving.

There is another, more subtle and much more fragile offense. It may be helpful for prophets to acknowledge this type of offense. I am suggesting that sinners may be offended when they are told there is no truth. This offense is a result of the fact that God's law is written on their hearts. The truth of the law in a man's heart will create a subtle internal conflict when that heart hears that there is no truth. The good news is that this conflict plays out in the minds of those whose consciences have not been seared. They may even go so far as to realize that a world without truth will become extremely chaotic. The bad news is that consciences can be seared to the point that they agree that there is no truth. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared" (1 Tim 4:1–2). If it is true that a vestige of the testimony of the law remains, those tasked with speaking the truth might be able to take advantage of it.

## A Brief Excursus on the Intent of the Art to Offend

There is an element of American societal structure that has attempted to bend to its advantage the human propensity to take offense. From earliest times human beings used symbols to represent the reality they dealt with every day. There are exceptions, but for the most part, from the time of cave dwellings through the period of the Renaissance, artists sought to reflect the truth of their observations of reality through their art.

By the late nineteenth century, artistic movements such as Impressionism and Cubism gave up strict representations and began to aim at evoking feelings in the observer of the art. This trend has continued to this day. Now, under the influence of postmodern thought, many artists, eschewing the idea of truth, simply try to offend the audience as a means of breaking down claims of truth, as well as oppressive systems supposedly designed to deceive through the illusion of meaning.

Wendell Berry, decrying the destruction of community, offers an interesting example of a 1989 play that had come to Louisville, Kentucky. The author had confessed that he wrote the play for the purpose of offense. My interest here is not in the quality or the purpose of Kopit's play, but in Berry's article about the play merely as an example of the conventionality of the artistic intention to offend—and the complacency of the public willingness not to be offended but passively to accept offense. Here we see the famous playwright coming from the center of culture to a provincial city, declaring his intention to "offend almost everyone," and here we also see the local drama critic deferentially explaining the moral purpose of this intention.[15]

The moral purpose, according the author of the play, was to react to the apathy that is "corrupting American life."[16] I find the intent to offend an interesting tactic. More to our point is Berry's assessment of the American public's willingness to accept offense as a tactic. If this is true, the prophet may find solace in the precedent that the giving of offense is not without its effect.

*An Application: Closed Communion*

Wendell Berry's concern that the postmodern mind will result in the disintegration of community ought to drive every pastor to consider the health of his congregation. A more specific application can be made to the pastoral practice of closed communion. When the concept of truth has been eliminated, there is no longer a basis for a public confession. That is, the postmodern mind can conceive of no totalizing discourse to which it ought to submit. It will only allow for the various perspectives of independent observations, or worse, transient feelings. The idea of making a public confession based on the unchanging confession of a group of believers does not make any sense. There is no such category in this postmodern mind.

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[15] Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 154.

[16] Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, 154.

When a visitor to your congregation comes calling, he will often appeal to his feelings of unity with all believers as the basis for entrance to your table. If he were to plead that his personal confession was that of your congregation, and you were to press him with regard to his contrary public confession as a member of another "denomination," you would doubtlessly confuse him. He would most likely deny any commitment to a public confession, because no one call tell him what to believe. The fallout of the inability to conceive of an objective truth is everywhere.

## II. Speaking the Truth Is the Prophet's Calling

*Speaking the Truth Is the Proclamation of the Gospel*

I speak unabashedly of prophets, that is, pastors—men in the office of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel is an eternal truth. I am not intent on positing a judgment as to whether the time of your exile is more difficult than that of any other prophet. I am intent on pointing out a key characteristic of the time in order that you may take advantage of it. The line between a world with truth and a world without truth is a bottomless chasm. The longer we refuse to accept this reality the more precipitous our fall.

God has called pastors to speak the truth of the gospel. Speaking to the church at Ephesus, Paul reminds the saints that the gospel of Jesus is the absolute truth: "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph 1:13). When closing his second letter to the congregation in Corinth, he emphasizes his commitment to the truth: "For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" (2 Cor 13:8).

Although in a different context, Paul's proclamation of the truth also met resistance. So his manner of proclamation is still instructive for you: "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor 4:1–2). When faced with people who do not seem to understand, who are working without a concept of truth, it is tempting to lose heart. It is tempting to tamper with the truth when its proclamation may mean persecution.

It is a matter of fact that many within the Church have given up the open statement of truth in favor of more manipulative methods. Some even go so far as to say that insisting on the Scripture as the truth of God's word is an archaic form of biblicism. Tampering with God's word in an attempt to wedge it into today's understanding of the individual's responsibility to construct reality is fair game for some. The prophet suffers persecution from within and from without.

So what are we to make of Paul's confidence? What is stunning about this statement, especially from the postmodern perspective, is that his confidence is not founded in the method. He is not selling the three easy steps to truth telling. He is not giving us a process by which we will find success. Paul's confidence is in the truth itself. Simply speak the truth, he says. There is no need first to convince the audience that such a thing as truth exists. Prophets simply speak the truth and let the truth do the work that it claims it can do.

This then is the proper response to the postmodern deconstruction of truth. While the Evangelical world pumps out more books taking the rational approach (e.g., *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*), the Lutheran tactic is to depend on the power of the word. Those who do not believe that truth exists are less susceptible to the rational approach. However, the creation of a new category of the mind is a divine prerogative. Only God's word can do that.

*Speaking the Truth Preserves the Physical World*

The true prophet does not accept the "untruthed" version of the postmodern world. He recognizes it as one more deception springing from the father of lies. When Satan tires of attacking the truth itself, he is capable of attacking the concept. If he can convince our hearers, or even us, that truth is simply an unnecessary category of the mind, he may have gained some ground.

But it is a dangerous surface for humanity. A world without a concept of truth devolves into chaos, and the tide of chaos is only stemmed by the strong man. This era was prefaced for us during the time of the judges. It was a time when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6). What God used to preserve the nation of Israel at that time was not the rule of law, but the power of the dictators, then known as judges.

This prospect looms on the horizon for our nation. It may be difficult to imagine, but one's proclamation of the truth could result in the preservation of the physical life of one's neighbor. There is evidence that our heavenly Father uses the prophetic pronouncement of the truth for such a

purpose: "You are the salt of the earth" says Jesus (Matt 5:13). (The dominant function of salt at the time being the preservation of food.) "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you," says Solomon (Prov 3:1–2). "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you," says Moses (Exod 20:12).

Truth is a gift of God to his creation. An understanding of the concept of truth pays dividends, not only for the sake of spiritual life, but also in this life, as it assists the hearer to conform his life to the reality of God's creation. Consequently, one reason the prophet speaks the truth is for the sake of his neighbor's physical welfare. Truth facilitates order and peace; falsehood facilitates chaos and destruction.

*Speaking the Truth Frees its Hearers*

"What is truth?" (John 18:38). As when these words were spoken during the trial of Jesus, so today these words could have various meanings. Was Jesus' judge angry? Was he resigned, sarcastic, or interested? We cannot know Pilate's attitude, but we can be assured that with regard to the existence of an absolute truth we will experience these reactions and more from our listeners. The prophet must be prepared for anger, resignation, sarcasm, interest, and a hundred other emotional responses.

The question "What is truth?" is significant, because it reminds us of likely responses that today's prophets will hear. But more important than the question is the statement that prompted it. Here Jesus summarized his ministry in terms of truth. Jesus said to Pilate, "For this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). In these words we have both gift and promise. Jesus has come into this world to bear the gift of truth. Since Jesus defines his purpose in this way, his prophets would do well to think of their service in the same way. You are called to bear witness to the truth. The promise of this text is overwhelming. Those who are of the truth will listen to the voice of Jesus. Of this you can be certain. However, since the prophet cannot know beforehand who are of the truth, he will speak the truth broadly and boldly. In speaking the truth of the gospel, the prophet can be confident that he is bearing the voice of Jesus into the world.

The voice of Jesus holds the key to freedom. Bound by sin, lost in error, untruthed to the point of death, there are countless souls that need to be set free. The postmodern world says that the claim to having truth is a

deception designed to keep people in bondage to those who have created the illusion of truth. On the contrary, the cruelest bondage is to the capricious taskmaster masquerading as emotion. Jesus says that truth sets people free: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32).

The office to which pastors have been called is not one of sterile rhetoric. It is no duty of family-oriented entertainment. The words that they speak make the difference between truth and falsehood, between freedom and bondage, between life and death. When they speak the truth of the Gospel of Jesus it sets people free from bondage. This is a high calling, so pastors dare not let the prospect of offense stand in the way. Prophets to a postmodern world trust the truth to overwhelm the offense.

## Conclusion

Imagine how many Susan Oteys have listened to a faithful pastor's proclamation of the truth. Carefree with regard to the truth, groping their way down the cold, dark hallway of life until they would have stumbled into the grave, they had been clueless that there was another whole world filled with grace and truth.

What if that proclamation offended them by pulling back the curtain on the obscenity of an absolute? What if they were disturbed by the thought that they might have been wrong? What if they responded with anger and sought to harm such a prophet? But what if God created in their minds a category to which they had never before been introduced? What if something miraculous came about through that "offense" proclamation to the truth? "What ifs" are the domain of the Divine, not ours. Whether or not they heard the truth in the voice of Jesus, the pastor will have fulfilled his calling. To bear witness to the truth—this is how God uses his prophets!

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# Book Reviews

**He Alone Is Worthy!: The Vitality of the Lord's Supper in Theodor Kliefoth and in the Swedish Lutheran Liturgy of the Nineteenth Century. By Naomichi Masaki. Göteborg: Församlingsförlaget, 2013. 478 pages. Hardcover. $59.85.**

In this volume, a revision of his doctoral dissertation, Masaki introduces readers to the liturgical theology of Theodor Kliefoth (1810–1895), the nineteenth-century confessional Lutheran from Mecklenburg, and to the liturgical revisions of the nineteenth-century Swedish liturgy, focusing on the peculiar wording of the *Preface* in the liturgy of Lord's Supper, published in the 1894 Swedish Agenda. In the agenda, the final sentence of the dialogue, rather than the traditional rendering "It is right and proper," receives a christological interpretation: "He alone is worthy of thanks and praise!" Masaki traces the origin of this phrase through the Swedish theologians U.L. Ullman and E.G. Bring, through various proposals of liturgical revision, back to the theology of Kliefoth. Although not the originator of this phrase, Masaki argues that Kliefoth's liturgical thought, in his emphasis on the centrality of the *Amt Christi* and the downward movement of the means of grace from Christ to his Church—through δόσις and λῆψις—provided the theological grounding for the development of this translation.

One of Masaki's goals in this volume is to provide an example of an alternative methodology for Lutheran liturgical theology. Masaki maintains that the presuppositions and conclusions of contemporary liturgical studies are inimical to Confessional Lutheran theology at various points (Appendix 1). This page from the liturgical history of the Swedish Lutheran Church details a Lutheran model for future liturgical scholarship and revisions.

This work, at first blush, may seem esoteric, but it is far from being a specialist's monograph. Masaki provides much to consider for subsequent Lutheran liturgical studies.

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***Sin Boldly! Justifying Faith for Fragile and Broken Souls*. By Ted Peters. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. 480 pages. Softcover. $44.00.**

*Sin Boldly! Justifying Faith for Fragile and Broken Souls* is written in a conversational—dare we say a colloquial California style—by an author whose career as a systematic theologian and ethicist has been situated in Berkeley for several decades. An emeritus professor at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union, Ted Peters has engaged a variety of issues from ethics of stem cell research to UFOs. He has been deeply involved in conversations between theologians and scientists. Shaped early by his exposure to the theology of Paul Tillich, the imprint of Tillich's "method of correlation" is apparent in this work. Like Peters' career, this book is both eclectic and ecumenical. Peters is often provocative, occasionally insightful, sometimes humorous, and always passionate in his articulation of theology. This makes *Sin Boldly* an easy and enjoyable read, even where one disagrees with Peters' arguments and/or conclusions.

Luther made a distinction between the "smug sinner" and the "terrified sinner"; Peters wishes to distinguish between the "fragile soul" and the "broken soul." The fragile soul "attempts to form itself—to justify itself—according to the structure of eternal justice, and, thereby, inherit eternal life" (87). On the other hand, the "broken soul" is crushed and depleted. The fragile soul in Peters' account seeks to establish itself according to its "moral universe" resulting in legalism and rigidity, efforts that he says attempt to hold its world together by "spiritual duct tape." Peters sees "justification by faith" (with the particular twist which he gives it) as the remedy for both fragile and broken souls resulting in "robust souls" that are vivified, hopeful, energetic, and creative as they are indwelt by the living Christ and turned outward both in self-giving love and in the pursuit of genuine justice in the world. Peters asserts that "Justification-by-faith is not an esoteric text that only licensed theologians check out of the rare book room. Rather, it is a radiant idea that brightens our daily life, interior thoughts, and deepest murmurings" (2). His version of the doctrine of justification is shaped by an eclectic array of influences, including the new Finnish School of Luther Research (Manneramaa et al) emphasis on the presence of Christ in faith, N. T. Wright's assertion of the cosmic dimension of the new creation, and Pannenberg's eschatology. With a few reservations, he celebrates the *Joint Document on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) as an ecumenical achievement. He is less than happy with the *Formula of Concord.*

Like Oswald Bayer, Peters understands that "self-justification is our human default position" (233). Unlike Bayer, Peters does not see justifi-

cation as the forensic verdict of God that declares the ungodly righteous for Christ's sake but a transformation brought about by the presence of Christ, who resides in the soul.

A strong point of the book is Peters' apologetic engagement with the "new atheists" and those who identify themselves as "Spiritual But Not Religious." Peters argues that atheism pits unbelief against belief, yet in actuality the new atheism proposes one belief against another belief. Atheism, no less than organized religion, can become violent and fanatical. Here Peters seeks to show that justifying faith in Jesus Christ is, in fact, justified.

Building on Bonhoeffer's observation that the first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate the goal of achieving the knowledge of good and evil, Peters notes how such knowledge is used against God to put ourselves into the right. He concludes, "We are sinners who hire ethicists to help us lie to ourselves" (213).

Peters is attracted to the "third use of the law" as a more positive expression of the law's place in promoting justice and peace in the world. But in contrast with Article 6 of the *Formula of Concord,* he suggests that "it is more helpful to think of the law as a guide than a whip" (411). To be sure, the law does more than accuse, but it always accuses. The distinction between the law and the gospel is dulled, making it difficult for Peters to speak in terms of repentance and faith, death, and resurrection. Instead he prefers images of healing and growth as we see in his final chapter, "The Life of Beatitude," where he contends that Jesus is describing life in the kingdom of God that is now only dimly experienced but will be brought to fulfillment eschatologically.

John T. Pless

***On Creation and Predestination*. By Johann Gerhard. Theological Commonplaces Series 8–11. Edited by Benjamin T. G. Mayes and Joshua J. Hayes. Translated by Richard J. Dinda. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013. 390 pages. Hardcover. $59.99.**

The publication of Johann Gerhard's Theological Commonplaces VIII–XI in translation may rekindle some interest in the question of *intuitu fidei*, a phrase that refers to predestination "in view of faith." This phrase was promoted not only by the Ohio Synod and other opponents of the Missouri Synod in the late-nineteenth-century Predestinarian Controversy, but also by orthodox dogmaticians of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, in

order to oppose the Calvinist teaching of absolute predestination that occurred without any relation to the atonement, the means of grace, and faith. Gerhard also defended this phrase. Series editor Benjamin Mayes includes a helpful preface that introduces the reader to Gerhard's position, and explains the historical context and theological rationale for the use of the phrase.

In particular, Gerhard is chiefly opposed to the concept of an "absolute decree" being pushed by the Calvinists: the false teaching that God condemns some simply because of his eternal hatred of them, rather than to human sin, and that God saves others due to a grace based simply on his pleasure, rather than the merit of Christ (144–145). Instead of an absolute decree, God elects in view of Christ and reprobates in view of "ultimate impenitence and unbelief" (126).

Against this absolute decree Gerhard presents four broad arguments (146–196). Firstly, God's generally "beneficent will" (1 Tim 2:4, 2 Pet 3:9, Ezek 33:2, 11) indicates that he hates no one absolutely. Secondly, God created Adam with original blessedness, which included immortality, and this immortality was to be passed on to all children. Therefore God could have hated none eternally and absolutely. Thirdly, the universality of Christ's merit (2 Cor 5:14, etc.) indicates that this merit is for all people, not only some. Fourthly, the universal call of the Gospel invites all men to be saved.

Gerhard distinguishes between God's foreknowledge and predestination properly speaking. Foreknowledge in some cases can refer specifically to knowledge of faith in Christ, but generally refers to knowledge of all things (53). Predestination and election refer specifically to the separation and preference of some people for eternal life, "and the means which lead to that end" (131–132). Furthermore, reprobation is a general, not absolute decree, something allowed by God of the wicked because they already stand unapproved, but not something predestined by him (139–140). Reprobation is not due to God's absolute hatred, but to factors such as the reprobate's own sins, the failure to preach the gospel to them, the refusal to respond to the means of grace, and unbelief (218). God does nothing to cause sin, but as just punishment he condemns the sinner (226).

Election, furthermore (which is always to eternal life and never to reprobation, 132–133), is neither absolute nor due to any merit in the person elected, but in view of the satisfaction made by Christ (Eph 1:4; 197). God loves the elect in Christ. In this context, Gerhard discusses *intuitu fidei*. No one is in Christ apart from faith. For Gerhard, this means that "respect

for faith [*intuitus fide*] cannot be excluded from this love" which elects (197).

Gerhard insists upon the role of faith in election in order to counter the Calvinist teaching on election due simply to God's arbitrary will, apart from the consideration of anything. Central to Gerhard's argument is the premise that God saves people in time in the same way that he eternally elects them: "Just as the immutability of the divine essence does not permit us to say that God has decided one thing from eternity and then does something else in time, so also for the same reason we cannot say that God has decided one thing from eternity in one way and then acts in a different way in time" (199). God justifies on account of Christ through faith. Likewise, he elects on the basis of the merit of Christ, which is reckoned through faith. Solely the merit of Christ is regarded for the decree of election by grace, yet because this merit is received by faith, and election occurs according to foreknowledge (1 Pet 1:2) that relates to things in time, God elects in view of those who will persevere in faith by the means of grace (207). In fact, election must be this way if it is not to be arbitrary or the absolute decree of the Calvinists. For this reason, by Gerhard's thinking, faith must be in view in election.

Although Gerhard states more than once that faith is not a cause of election, he also denies that election is a cause of faith (212, 214–215). Strictly speaking, for Gerhard, God's grace in Christ, operating by the means of grace, causes faith. A person does nothing to bring about his own faith, so he does not elect himself. God from eternity foresees this faith, and in view of this faith—created and preserved by God through the means of grace, but not by election strictly speaking—then elects to eternal life. Thus Gerhard denies both synergism and an absolute decree of election that he understands to be Calvinist. By contrast, the Formula of Concord confesses that God's election brings about everything pertaining to salvation, including faith in the elect, by the means of grace (FC SD X 8, 13, 29, 30). The distinction between Gerhard and the Formula (which Gerhard does not rely on) is that, for Gerhard, election does not cause faith, but chooses in view of the faith created and sustained by God through the means of grace, while, for the Formula, election is a cause of the effective work of the means of grace in the elect.

Besides a refresher in the controversies over predestination, there is much more to be gained by this volume. These commonplaces are Gerhard's transition in discussion from the nature of God to the will of God, and they remind us of the important connection between God's nature and his works. God's will is *essential* to God, not an added

characteristic. Furthermore, the execution of his will—his works—is in perfect harmony with his will. God's works do not arise from desires which arise new in him after the passage of time, as though he decides over time to do new things. (Time does not rule over God.) Rather, God's eternal will has effects that may occur in time, but are nevertheless always desired in God's eternal will.

This is an important point for Gerhard, which means that there is no contradiction between the hidden and revealed will of God. If we distinguish the will of God terminologically, we still say nothing of the hidden will, precisely because nothing of it is revealed to us. It is outside the scope of theology and reserved for God alone (9, 90–91). Thus, that which God does in time is a manifestation of what he decrees eternally. This seems to be part of what drives him to embrace predestination *intuitu fidei*.

God's two great works are creation and redemption. This volume contains Gerhard's treatment of creation and of the beginning of redemption, that is, election. (The full treatment of redemption is broken down into the many parts of the subsequent commonplaces.) Gerhard's comments on creation are relatively brief. He teaches the creation *ex nihilo*, and the creation of things in a distinct order over six days (16–22). He has a more extended digression on the creation and nature of angels (23–41).

God does not cease to care for his creation. This continued care of creation is *providence* (47). Providence consists of God's knowledge (including foreknowledge), his will or purpose for creation, and his control (action) of creation. God's control is further broken down into preservation and governance (51). God knows all things simply by the one act of infinite knowledge, not through the deduction of premises. Nothing is future to him; he simply knows all things which are present to him (52). So his knowledge does not err nor does it change. Thus God does not impose necessity on contingent events through his general foreknowledge. This foreknowledge simply perceives all contingent events occurring as a consequence of previous events. So, for example, God foreknows sin, yet he is not the cause of sin (57–60).

With respect to God's purpose, he "controls the deeds of men in such a way that He commands, approves, and assists the good ones but does not command nor approve nor assist the evil ones, but permits them because of the good purpose which he knows how to elicit from them" (67). God's decrees, properly speaking, direct only good deeds. When God is spoken of in Scripture as decreeing evil, it is not that he decrees evil deeds in themselves, but the good ends that he works out from them (67). Pre-

destination may refer generally to any decree of what will happen, but specifically and properly it refers to the decree of working eternal life (67–68).

Finally, God controls all things, even evil things, not as causing them, but by permitting and limiting them in order to elicit good out of them. He preserves even in the midst of evil works and restores the elect from evil (79–87). True evil of fault, that is, sin, is to be distinguished from punishment, which God justly brings against the wicked (100).

The volume concludes with the commonplace "On the Image of God in Man before the Fall." Although the image of God broadly may refer to many qualities, such as intelligence, love, memory, and free choice, the image properly speaking is righteousness and holiness and must be renewed in fallen man (Eph 4:23–24; Col 3:10). Because this image was lost in the fall, the image of God cannot be considered of the substance of human nature (293–295). The souls of succeeding generations of human beings are not created from nothing by God, but they are generated and propagated through procreation, analogous to bodies, although not in a materialistic way. In this way original sin, which resides in the soul, is passed on, for God does not create anyone in sin. From this we know also that soul and body are composite (307–321).

Like the other volumes in this series, this one is published in a sturdy hardcover binding that will endure through many years of use. Dinda, Mayes, and Hayes continue to provide a great service to the church in publishing the commonplaces of one of Christianity's most important theologians. Even in this case, where an element of Gerhard's work presents us with an error, it provides a new opportunity for contemporary theologians to study his thinking and sharpen their biblical understanding of predestination. In this way, the volume will be of great interest to theologians, historians, pastors, and interested lay people.

Gifford A. Grobien

**Wittenberg vs Geneva: A Biblical Bout in Seven Rounds on the Doctrines that Divide. By Brian W. Thomas. Irvine: 1517 Legacy, 2016. 177 pages. Softcover. $15.95.**

1517 Legacy has its first champion imprint with Brian Thomas's *Wittenberg vs Geneva.* Simply put, this is the clearest, most concise, best written, and authentically biblical comparison of the distinctive doctrines that divide Lutheranism and Calvinism. This work needs to be widely

distributed and discussed among laypersons but also utilized by pastors and seminarians.

Thomas's unpretentious and accessible prose is pithy and precise. Leaving aside caricatures of Lutheranism and Calvinism (and dispelling not a few myths and misrepresentations along the way), Thomas levies the Reformational beliefs of Lutherans and the Reformed over against their *sola scriptura* allegiances, and he does so in a disarming, convivial manner. The result of this "contest" falls decidedly in the favor of Luther's teaching and that of the Concordists. Thomas does excellent exegetical work with theological analysis on the biblical doctrines of the atonement, predestination, the sacramental word, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and apostasy and assurance (representing the seven chapters or "rounds" of the book). Calvin's tradition simply does not measure up to the teaching of Scripture in these vital instances, and the proof is in Thomas's cogent and convincing presentation of the most salient biblical texts and governing theological narrative of Holy Scripture. *Wittenberg vs Geneva* is not a contest of "my pet denomination is better than yours." Instead, it is a fresh and edifying quest for biblical truth that, in the end, places the reader in the ringside seat of the bout's judges to examine the Scriptures to see who stands more faithfully and consistently in the apostles' teaching. Luther does not put Calvin against the ropes; Scripture does, and the results are decisive.

In this laudable way, Thomas establishes that Confessional Lutheranism represents the conservative Reformation, while Calvin's innovations align with a more radical Reformation and therefore, at least in respect to these select doctrines, a departure from a truly biblical, evangelical, and catholic preservation of our holy, apostolic faith. The author does so with commendable scholarship by examining Calvin's writings especially, along with a number of contemporary Reformed theologians (e.g., R. C. Sproul, Michael Horton, and Keith Mathison) and the Westminster Confession and Heidelberg Catechism.

Thomas shows that the differences between Wittenberg and Geneva *are* important, with far-reaching implications extending into the domain of Christology, sacramentology, worship, discipleship, missions, and worldviews. Luther was no proto-Calvinist and Lutherans are nothing at all like hesitant Calvinists or two-and-a-half-point Calvinists, as they are sometimes described in Reformed enclaves. Lutherans are "evangelical catholics," and understanding why *from Scripture* may make all the difference for evangelicals and those within Reformed traditions considering a deeper understanding and experience of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, or, alternatively, thinking about jumping the Calvinist or

non-denominational ship and paddling to Rome or Byzantium for sacraments and liturgy. Hold on, says Thomas, there is a more biblical alternative that preserves the doctrine of justification and does so in the cradle of creedal, confessional, and sacramental Christianity: Lutheranism. The journey to Wittenberg is driven by Holy Scripture.

The author had a long sojourn within Calvinist denominations, even attending a seminary committed to the Reformed faith, before converting to the "evangelical catholic" tradition that originated in Wittenberg. So he writes with congenial insight and fairness, not with an axe to grind. It was the teaching of Holy Scriptures that moved Thomas into the sacramental tradition of Wittenberg , which extols the gospel in all its biblical glory and Christ in the full dynamics of his continuing incarnation.

1517 Legacy should encourage Thomas to write a "rematch" that includes hermeneutical approaches to Scripture, paedo-baptism, the office of holy ministry, Holy Absolution, iconography, and even justification (there are important differences there too), just to name a few potential "rounds." Indeed, one hopes a similar volume is produced by 1517 Legacy squaring-up Wittenberg and Rome.

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***The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. By Gordon D. Fee. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT). Edited by Joel B. Green. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014. 1044 pages. Hardcover. $65.00.**

NICNT commentaries consistently address the text in service to the church. They are written for pastors, teachers, and theological students, and yet retain academic credibility for their careful handling of historical and grammatical matters. Fee's commentary on 1 Corinthians is no exception, as both his expertise in textual criticism, as well as his Pentecostal and Evangelical traditions, surface regularly.

This revised edition comes twenty-seven years after the first, intending to update the scholarly discussion in view of significant recent contributions, and to clean up the footnotes required in the previous edition due to the poor 1978 NIV translation. Also new is his desire to avoid chapters and verses, "foreign to the first-century author" (xvii), yet retain the ease of reference in the previous edition.

As Fee sees it, in terms of wealth, trade, and promiscuity, Corinth is "at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world" (3), and the church mirrors the city. The rift between rich and poor may be the cause of some of the church's tension, as well as their predominant Gentile background. Paul's goal is "radical surgery without killing the patient" (4).

Fee assumes Pauline authorship and a rough date of spring, AD 53–55, for this unified but combative response to various behavioral concerns—and one overtly theological problem, the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15). He challenges traditional assumptions, such as the notion of internal factions, or that the letter merely offers fatherly correctives. He identifies the primary conflict between the church and Paul as their misunderstanding of what it means to be "spiritual." The Corinthians are challenging Paul's authority and infusing the gospel with Hellenistic abstractions.

Theologically, Fee reads the letter chiefly eschatologically, under the rubric of "already and not yet" (17). Likewise, ethics is determined eschatologically, as "becoming what you are" (18). But above all else, Fee sees 1 Corinthians as Paul's ecclesiology, primarily emphasizing the imagery of temple and body, and the unity required in Christ.

As for the structure of the letter, Fee divides the letter in two: 1:10–6:20 and 7:1–16:12, with an introduction (1:1–9) and conclusion (16:13–24) drawing it together. This is his outline of the epistle (viii–xi):

I. Introduction (1:1–9)
II. Response to Reports (1:10–6:20)
    A. Church Divided (1:10–4:21)
    B. Immorality and Litigation (5:1–6:20)
III. Response to the Corinthian Letter (7:1–16:12)
    A. Marriage and Related Matters (7:1–40)
    B. Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1–11:1)
    C. Women and Men in Worship (11:2–16)
    D. Abuse of the Lord's Supper (11:17–34)
    E. On Spirit Gifting and Being People of the Spirit (12:1–14:40)
    F. The Resurrection of Believers (15:1–58)
    G. About the Collection (16:1–11)
    H. About the Coming of Apollos (16:12)
IV. Concluding Matters (16:13–24)

Troubling to Lutheran readers will be Fee's handling of the Institution of the Lord's Supper, which he understands as a "prophetic symbolic action" (610), cloaked in "Semitic imagery in its heightened form" (609).

Also difficult is his near certainty on the *in*-authenticity of 1 Cor 14:34–35, on the basis of text-critical placement and "the considerably un-Pauline way of saying things" (780). He argues, "almost nothing in these intruding sentences fits into the present argument, which to this point has only to do with manifestations *of the Spirit* in the community" (785). Perhaps, however, the public servant of the word is precisely the one who stands in the office *of the Spirit* and in his *speaking in the church* the Spirit manifests himself.

Interestingly, in Fee's discussion of 1 Cor 10:1–4 he is less fascinated with the typology and pre-existence of Christ than he is with Paul's point that Israel's idolatry of old was just as offensive as the Corinthian's presently (497).

Overall, Fee nicely ties together all the arguments and disagreements under the notion of a failure to believe the pure gospel. Factions, fornication, covetousness, pride, and a disregard for Paul's apostolic office all flow from missing the gospel of Christ crucified (50) and attempting to replace it with a theology of glory under the guise of being truly "spiritual." The commentary is a massive undertaking, and despite its faults theologically, it commends itself highly for a proper care of the text itself.

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***The Book of Psalms*. By Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, Beth LaNeel Tanner. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT). General Editor Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014. 1073 pages. Hardcover. $60.00.**

Though "Martin Luther" are the first two words of this commentary (1), Luther's thorough treatment of the Psalms only finds mention once (296–299; Ps 30). He gets a few other nods, typically for his catechisms or his hymn, *A Mighty Fortress* (157, 190, 369). Luther, however, is not the only Psalms expert left behind. You will not find the works of Athanasius, Jerome, Augustine, or any of the multitude of premodern voices dedicated to the church's prayerbook either. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his tremendous little booklet, *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible*, does not even get a passing reference!

Understandably, a commentary can only do so much, especially one that treats all 150 Psalms in one volume (for that the authors are to be commended!). Nevertheless, for a commentary that seeks to be both evangelical and of significance to the scholarly world, it is striking that the history of interpretation reaches back only as far as Hermann Gunkel and the rise of form criticism.

Regarding the canonical formation of the Psalter, the authors utilize the most recent research, notably that of William Yarchin. They understand the Psalter as having "direction," that is, a movement from beginning to end. Such an observation was heralded, albeit in primitive form, already in 1980 by Claus Westermann, who noted a general trend of movement from lament to praise. These authors have refined the movement and projected a historical narrative to explain the structure of the five books in the Psalter. Roughly, they understand the movement to be from David to Solomon, to the divided and then fallen Kingdoms, to the Babylonian exile, and finally to the return under the Persians (28–38). While the historical overlay offers great intrigue, the Psalms themselves don't fit so neatly into place. For instance, consider Ps 137. One would think this an exemplary Psalm lamenting the exile, notable to Book IV, and yet it falls in Book V. Furthermore, this reconstruction fails to explain why the percentage of Laments in Books I–II far outweigh those of III–V (27), if the Davidic reign is idealized in the "community of faith" under whom the Psalter finds its formation, and yet the Davidic reign spans Books I–II. With such sweeping summative statements, the system looks beautiful from afar, but once the texts are handled in their particularities, this total editorial plan appears to fade away. Additionally, this formation is presumed under a process of canonization in which the first three books achieved their form earlier, while the last two were not fixed until the first century AD. They call this process the "story of the shaping of survival . . . that charts a new structure for existence and identity for a postnational, Lord-centered community" (43).

No Psalms commentary can skirt a discussion of Hebrew poetry. Thankfully, this commentary goes beyond parallelism, which is the heart and soul of Hebrew poetry, and emphasizes also the "evocative language" (42) of the Psalms. The authors recognize "meaning" in the language itself, and not merely the intent behind the words or context. They say, "The power of the language is inseparable from the meaning. The meaning of the psalms exists 'in, with, and under' the poetic language" (43). Such a position strongly commends this commentary.

Theologically, the commentary addresses each Psalm individually, rather than offering a synthetic (44) approach to the whole. However, both

in general and in particular, Jesus is noticeably absent. Jacobson refers to him more often than the others; he does best with Psalm 24: "Who is this *King of Glory*? Jesus Christ. . . ." (253). More disheartening is Beth Tanner's commentary on Psalm 22 in which President Roosevelt's polio, AIDS patients, addicts, Job, lepers, and Jesus "reflect all of the times sufferers have been told or looked at in a way that implies they are responsible for their current condition" (234).

Most helpful in this commentary is the poetic analysis and its concise discussion of each Psalm. While it has a place within the scholarly realm, it falls short of being evangelical.

The division of labor only slightly favors Rolf Jacobson (Luther Seminary, St. Paul), who comments largely on Psalms 1–41 and 100–106 (~375 pages). Beth LaNeel Tanner (New Brunswick Theological Seminary) addresses Psalms 22, 25–26, 31–32, 35, 37–38, and 52–99 (~320 pages). And Nancy deClaissé-Walford (McAfee School of Theology, Atlanta) covers Psalms 42–51 and 107–150 (~265 pages).

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***Jeremiah: Prophet Like Moses*. By Jack R. Lundbom. Cascade Companions. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 192 pages. Softcover. $22.00.**

Combining "academic rigor with broad appeal and readability," as the Cascade Companions series aims to do, is no small task. In *Jeremiah: Prophet Like Moses*, Jack Lundbom delivers a short, readable, yet thorough work on the Book of Jeremiah. This will be a welcome resource for anyone—pastor or lay person—who wants more than what a study Bible offers but less than what a major commentary on Jeremiah would provide.

The book is arranged in twelve thematic chapters, each ten to twenty pages long. Major topics include Jeremiah's call and God's promise to him, the created order, the Sinai covenant, the prophet's relationship with priests, prophets, and kings, preaching of judgment, sorrow over the impenitence of God's people, personal lamentations (Jeremiah's "confessions"), prophet as covenant mediator, oracles against the nations, and the Lord's promises of comfort and hope. Readers encounter Jeremiah's own words through frequent and lengthy quotations of the biblical text in the author's own translations. He also introduces and

explains significant Hebrew vocabulary, such as *shub* ("return/repent," 5), *shalom* ("peace," 48); *mishpat* ("justice," 63–64), and *tsedeq/tsedaga* ("righteousness," 65–66).

Throughout, Lundbom locates Jeremiah (both the prophet and the book) within the broader history of the Ancient Near East and in the stream of other biblical writings and theology. For example, the Lord's "preeminent promise" to be with Jeremiah (1:8) is related to similar promises made to Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and in Isaiah's Servant Songs before being carried forward into the New Testament (16–18). Closing that section with Matthew 28:20, Lundbom writes, "God's pre-eminent promise continues to the end of the age" (18). New Testament passages on covenant mediators (117, 119) and a reference to Jesus' genealogy (67) show that the author writes as a Christian for Christian readers. There are places, however, where his critical assumptions appear. Genesis 2 is described as "the older Yahwistic creation story" in contrast to Genesis 1 (21). Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy is denied, though the Mosaic perspective is not. In Deuteronomy, it is as if Moses was "standing before Israel in the plains of Moab" (115). Also, "the tale" of Jonah is called "a fiction" (131). None of these are critical to his argument, so a discerning reader need not agree with them to benefit from this book.

Some of the contemporary applications and connections are a mixed bag, especially in the discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Statements like, "At first glance we might think Yahweh was censuring the people for environmental pollution" (23), shed more light on the twenty-first-century setting than they do on the text of Jeremiah. Yet Lundbom makes clear that the pollution of the land is about idolatry rather than modern environmental issues. While he meets readers where they likely are, he is also unafraid of "hot button" topics. For example, he offers these questions for discussion: "What does Jeremiah have to teach us today about the violation of marriage vows, deviant sexual behaviors, sexual adventurism, and the like? Are any or all of these new human rights, or are there moral issues that need to be rediscovered and addressed anew?" (36). Discussion that proceeds from the authority of Scripture and centers on the biblical text will be of great benefit.

The final chapter on Jeremiah as a prophet of hope makes for a fitting conclusion, though a short epilogue could have pulled the themes together and given the reader direction on what to explore next. Footnotes, a bibliography, an author index, and a twelve-page Scripture index helpfully round it out (though some of the page numbers in the Scripture index are off by a single page). *Jeremiah: Prophet Like Moses* is a helpful resource for teaching or preaching on the Book of Jeremiah, and, with some guidance,

could be recommended to interested lay members. For those wanting more, Lundbom is also author of the three-volume *Jeremiah* commentary for the Anchor Bible series (1999; 2004).

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***Paul and the Gift*. By John M. G. Barclay. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 2015. 672 pages. Hardcover. $70.00.**

After the representatives of the Roman Catholic church and the Lutheran World Federation signed the Joint Declaration in 1999, the leading conservative journal for pastors in the Church of Sweden declared that Lutherans and Catholics now had agreed that we are saved by *grace* alone. I did not believe my eyes when I saw the headline, as if that were the sole issue. About twenty years earlier, E. P. Sanders published *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, in which he challenged the prevailing negative picture of Second Temple Judaism as a legalistic religion. Instead, based on his survey of the surviving literature, he claimed that it was a religion of grace. The New Perspective on Paul (NPP) was born. Not everyone has agreed with Sanders, however. In fact, scholars on both sides in the debate have found grace where Sanders found none and works-righteousness where Sanders found grace. However, nobody has asked the self-evident questions: what did Paul and his contemporaries actually mean by grace, and what do we mean by grace?

Casting his net widely, John Barclay begins with a survey of the anthropology and history of the gift, which he treats as synonymous of grace, and finds that in most cultures gifts are given in the expectation of some kind of return. The modern, western idea of the "pure" gift, given without a return, seems to have emerged during the Reformation, being further developed by Kant, and taken to an extreme by Derrida. It also appears that there are a number of different aspects on the giving of gifts. Gifts can be perfected, that is, taken to its extreme, in a number of different ways. Barclay identifies six such perfections, which he then employs in his subsequent analysis: 1) *Superabundance* (the scale of the gift); 2) *Singularity* (whether the giver's mode of operation is solely and exclusively benevolence or goodness); 3) *Priority* (the timing of the gift, which is perfect in taking place prior to the initiative of the recipient); 4) *Incongruity* (to what extent the gift is given without regard to the worth of the

recipient); 5) *Efficacy* (to what extent the gift achieves what is was designed to do); 6) *Non-circularity* (to what extent the gift escapes reciprocity).

Armed with these categories, Barclay first surveys interpreters of Paul, older, such as Marcion, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, as well as modern ones, such as Barth, Bultmann, Sanders, and other representatives of the NPP. One may here note an unusually fair and extensive discussion of Luther, and that only one interpreter (D. A. Campbell) argues that Paul perfected all six aspects. After this, Barclay turns to five different representatives of Second Temple Judaism and concludes that although these all speak of grace, they tend toward different aspects. Some of these are closer to Paul, for example, the *Hodayot* hymns of Qumran and Pseudo-Philo, whereas others tend toward completely different aspects.

Barclay then moves on to Galatians and Romans. However, helpfully for the readers, he first offers a detailed presentation of four different readings of Galatians, namely those of Luther, James Dunn, Louis Martyn, and Brigitte Kahl. These then serves as points of orientation throughout his analysis. Apart from his main task, Barclay offers throughout his (often solid) interpretations of hotly debated issues like the meaning *pistis christou*, *erga nomou*, and *dikaiosyne*.

A Lutheran reader will probably not find all Barclay's conclusions persuasive; nevertheless, he surprisingly often ends up in agreement with Luther. Whether one will agree with Barclay or not, this is definitely a book that should be studied carefully. Some of his conclusions may be challenged, and his six perfections may perhaps be more fine-tuned, but he has certainly gifted pastors and scholars with new tools to study and speak of grace. This is a must-read for anyone interested in the concept of grace or the New Perspective on Paul.

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***The Book of Genesis*. Translated and Edited by Joy A. Schroeder. The Bible in the Medieval Tradition Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015. 317 pages. Softcover. $35.00.**

The significance of the Bible in medieval European society would be difficult to overstate. Specifically, the Latin text of the *Vulgate* played a central role in monasteries, cathedral schools, and churches throughout medieval Europe. Medievalists have produced many scholarly works on the study of the Bible in the Middle Ages based on printed editions and

medieval manuscripts. However, in this series, *The Bible in the Medieval Tradition*, scholars have translated selections from various medieval commentaries on different books of the Bible.

In this present volume, Joy A. Schroeder has translated and edited selections of medieval theologians' commentaries on the Book of Genesis. The medieval commentators span from the late ninth century to the fifteenth century. This allows the reader to observe various methods of biblical interpretation and how these methods changed in the Middle Ages. However, Schroeder's edition does not have comparisons of commentaries on the same biblical passages, but rather contains samples of commentaries on each part of the book of Genesis.

Schroeder places the medieval theologians' interpretations in chronological order from the ninth to the fifteenth century. For instance, Remigius of Auxerre demonstrates how late Carolingian biblical commentators drew upon patristic theologians from Late Antiquity. Then the reader may compare and contrast Remigius's methods with twelfth-century monastic (Rupert of Deutz) and early scholastic commentary (Peter Comestor). Additionally, Schroeder included a short excerpt from Hildegard of Bingen's questions and answers on Genesis as representative of female monastic exegesis. She also translated excerpts from Nicholas of Lyra's *Postills on Genesis* as an example of a well-known scholastic commentator from the fourteenth century. Schroeder concludes with a selection from a fifteenth-century mystic, Denis the Carthusian.

While this book (and the series) contains translated material to introduce non-specialists to the topic of medieval biblical commentaries, this work assumes a fair amount of familiarity with the Bible. Schroeder's introduction provides a good overview of medieval exegesis generally and an introduction to each medieval author. Her bibliography contains an excellent list of primary sources and scholarly works for those who want to do more advanced research. For this reason, I would recommend this book for advanced undergraduate students, graduate students, and seminarians.

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***Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine*. By G. Scott Gleaves. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015. 214 pages. Softcover. $27.00.**

G. Scott Gleaves has written a readable and concise argument that Jesus primarily used Greek in his public ministry. Gleaves's study is an important one for scholars as well as popular readers. If it can be illustrated that Jesus spoke Greek, then scholars should not be burdened with the difficult task of attempting to read behind the Greek text of the Gospels to imagine what the original Aramaic might have been. To do that, Gleaves simultaneously argues three separate, but interrelated, points: 1) Jesus primarily spoke Greek in his public ministry, 2) the Gospels were originally written in Greek, and 3) the Gospels have preserved Jesus' sayings. The strength of Gleaves's argument is that he shows the value of combining the discussion of issues of the historical Jesus (whether or not Jesus spoke Greek based on archaeological evidence) with exegetical study (whether or not the New Testament was originally written in Greek based on literary analysis)—a tactic too often lost in the division of genres in modern New Testament studies. This strength, however, is simultaneously the book's weakness, insofar as there is not enough space to discuss adequately either field satisfactorily.

Gleaves argues that Jesus must have spoken Greek due to four factors: 1) Greek was culturally dominant in first century Palestine; 2) Jesus' earliest followers clearly were using Greek; 3) the Aramaic expressions of Jesus in the New Testament are pointed out as an oddity suggesting that Jesus usually did not speak in Aramaic; and 4) the New Testament clearly uses the Septuagint as the source of scriptural citations, many of which would not function in the same way in Hebrew or Aramaic, thereby requiring an original discussion in Greek.

The strength of this book is its proof that the New Testament itself was originally written in Greek. He shows that not only was knowledge of Greek possible for Jesus' early followers, but also likely. Further, his argument for the use of the Septuagint requiring an originally Greek composition is convincing.

This can then lead to the question of whether the New Testament preserves Jesus' actual language. Even the most progressive historical-Jesus scholars usually look to Jesus' sayings in the New Testament as some of the "most historical" elements. What historical-Jesus scholars generally do not say, however, is that Jesus actually spoke in Greek. Gleaves presents a correlation between the New Testament and the historical Jesus in the language of Jesus' sayings, particularly in his third and fourth point above.

This correlation allows a real possibility that the sayings must have been expressed in Greek rather than Aramaic due to these linguistic points.

This melding of New Testament exegesis with the study of historical Jesus, however, left much unfinished in this book. First, Gleaves makes a concerted effort to prove that not only is it possible that Jesus knew Greek based upon archaeological data from the first century, but that it is quite probable. In contrast, critical scholarship has questioned how Hellenized Galilee was at this time (as opposed to Jerusalem), thereby challenging whether it would have been probable that Jesus could have known Greek.[497] While this is a disputed point, it needs to be addressed. Second, Gleaves could have strengthened his argument by engaging carefully with the Greek wordplay of Jesus in the Gospels. There is evidence that Jesus spoke Greek if one considers the linguistic necessity of Greek for some of the expressions of Jesus, such as the pun on ἄνωθεν in John 3:3, which would be very difficult to develop in Aramaic. Gleaves does bring up the use of Πέτρος in Matt 16:18 and the pun that follows, but he could have created a whole list of these examples rather than just this one. This omission would not have occurred had he done a fully exegetical study of the sayings of Jesus. By mixing the two genres, he did not fully explicate either.

In all, this book is worth reading. The great value of the work is his demonstration of the connectivity between exegesis and the historical Jesus. However, because he is neither doing a fully exegetical study of the sayings nor a fully archaeological study of the area, he does leave some questions unanswered. Therefore, this is an interesting introduction to the topic rather than a final study.

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***Abiding Words: The Use of Scripture in the Gospel of John.*** **Edited by Alicia D. Myers and Bruce G. Schuchard. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015. 302 pages. Softcover. $39.95.**

John's use of Scripture, like much of his Gospel, stands apart from that of his Synoptic peers by incorporating not only direct Scripture quotations

[497] See, for example, Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005).

but also allusions and echoes to an unparalleled extent. John's prescient claim (John 21:25) could very well apply to his adept use of Scripture. This collection of essays makes a modest contribution to that end, introducing readers to the latest scholarly research in this sub-field of Johannine studies.

Alicia D. Myers brings readers up to speed by reviewing past scholarship that focused primarily on the sources, methods, and functions of John's Scripture references. Contributors' essays featuring the diverse perspectives, approaches, and methodologies in currently scholarly discussion are subsequently divided into three broad categories. Part 1, "The Form of John's Citations," features essays by Bruce G. Schuchard, William Randolph Bynum, and Michael A. Daise. Particularly insightful, Bynum's identification and analysis of a Zecharian *inclusio* (John 12:15 and Zech 9:9; John 19:37 and Zech 12:10b) reveal a passion narrative shaped by "the hope, the joy, and the irony of Zech 9–12." Part 2, "Social and Rhetorical Perspectives," includes essays by Jaime Clarke-Soles, Alicia D. Myers, Benjamin J. Lappenga, and Ruth Sheridan. Most illuminating, Myers' method of consulting the rhetorical handbooks of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintillian, *et al.*, situates John's use of intertexts within the broader context of classical rhetorical usage and the expectations of John's original readers/hearers. Part 3, "Memory and Scripture in John," presents essays by Catrin H. Williams and Jeffrey E. Brickle. These two essays are, arguably, the most intriguing in the book. Williams utilizes social memory theories to investigate the interplay between past and present reflected in John's evocations of the collective memories of Moses, Abraham, and Isaac whereby the past shapes the interpretation *of* and *for* present realities and vice versa. Important mnemonic concepts include the use of frameworks, keying, and framing. Brickle, following Tom Thatcher's Memory Theater model, investigates John's skillful employment of the ancient art of memory, one of the five canons of classical rhetoric and an art that every pastor would do well to master. Brickle demonstrates how John masterfully utilizes classical mnemonic metaphors for his composition and his reader's/hearer's retention of his Gospel. Brickle's essay is particularly relevant in our multi-media driven context. John's use of Scripture references extends beyond proof-texting, and so should ours. This book puts a variety of perspectives, approaches, and methods at one's disposal.

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**Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective. By Andrew B. McGowan. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. 298 pages. Softcover. $29.99.**

What did ancient Christian worship look like, and how can it inform our practice today? These are the kinds of questions that matter, whether we are high church, low church, or somewhere in between. In various ways, whether we are Pentecostal or Catholic, Eastern Orthodox or Lutheran, we like to think that our way of worship reflects a certain continuity with that which came before us, as seen in the practices of Christ's earliest followers. For some, the early church was marked by charisma, a great movement of the spirit. Others see a straighter line from synagogue and temple to church. The strength of McGowan's work is that he demonstrates that while there were certain commonalities among the ancient Christians, their worship practices were, perhaps, as diverse as they are today.

As the book's title indicates, McGowan addresses worship from social, historical, and theological perspectives, and, I might add, in that order. For McGowan, worship is a sociological and historical phenomenon in which different peoples did different things, depending upon geography and culture. Hence, McGowan makes little attempt to define worship theologically, and he spends most of his time describing Christian worship in terms of its ritual aspects, concentrating on Meal, Word, Music, Initiation, Prayer, and Time. What strikes this reader is that these are not particularly theological categories, nor will this book offer much in terms of theological guidance. Repeatedly, McGowan offers caveats into reading too much of our present circumstances into the ancient evidence.

Helpfully, McGowan situates Christian practice within the prevailing cultural traditions of Second Temple Judaism, as well as Greco-Roman culture. So, for instance, in his discussion of "Bread, Wine, and More," McGowan claims, "A meal of bread and wine was unremarkable; no particular historical origins or associations are required to explain the use of these staples by Christian communities" (41). Bread and wine were staples, and would have been a complete meal for the ancients, argues McGowan. Now, such an insight, backed by ancient texts, may in fact be helpful. But then, one might ask whether such an interpretation is minimalistic. If we are to understand the bread and wine in the Supper, would we not first consult how bread and wine are treated in the very documents that tell the story of the meal that Christ offered on the night of his betrayal? While McGowan is strong in terms of understanding the meal from a sociological perspective, he draws considerably less upon the biblical

accounts of Jesus' own life and teachings as recorded in the Gospels. McGowan often writes as if he were an anthropologist, exploring a different culture, rather than as a Christian whose sacred writings inform his own opinion. Indeed, the Scriptures themselves do not appear, for McGowan, to have functioned as Scriptures. He posits that in early Christian communities, "communal reading material may not typically have been what Christians themselves regarded as Scripture" (81). He then claims that "the writings by the Christians themselves were read, not initially as Scripture or on the basis of inherited tradition, but as documents of present or recent charisma" (81). Such a view should be challenged, especially in light of the work of Richard Bauckham (*The Gospel for All Christians* and *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses)*, who has argued forcefully that the Gospels, written as the fulfillment and continuation of the Old Testament story, were written precisely as Scripture and were meant to be universally valid guarantors of the apostolic tradition. When it comes down to particulars, McGowan is able to stay above the fray. In some ways, this is an advantage, but it might be noted that his approach is itself a reflection of his own situatedness, reflecting what we might call the author's Anglican broadness.

That is not to say that the book is not helpful, especially as we re-imagine what Christian worship life would have been like for early Christians. Especially intriguing is his discussion of "The First Eucharists." He notes that the actions of *eucharistia* or "thanksgiving" are prominent in the Gospels and Acts and became "by far the most widespread term for the Christians' distinctive meal" (34). Perhaps, the Agape meal, or the love feast, was the second most popular name. Though Paul refers in 1 Corinthians to a "Lordly supper," it does not seem that the term "Lord's Supper" became popular until the fourth century. We might ask what to make of it, but it is a topic worth discussing. We might also wonder whether McGowan's assessment that the church consisted simply of discrete communities with varying traditions is really accurate. So often, differing visions and practices are thought to simply portray a tapestry of diversity. Perhaps, more attention to the Gospels as complementary resources, that is, writings that inform one another and that flow from the Old Testament narrative, would help make McGowan's story of ancient worship more cohesive and truer to the reality of their practice. A greater consideration of the person of Christ and the nature of apostolic ministry would ground the work, forcing us to ask why the practices took root in the first place.

Where this books shines is in its lucidity and inviting prose. The author clearly has command of the ancient texts and leads the reader

through many a primary document, from Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianus, to Tertullian and Chrysostom, and just about everywhere else. Here you will learn about early Christians' view of Sunday as the Lord's Day, as well as those who took a "both and" approach, honoring both Sabbath and Sunday (221). There is likewise fascinating discussion on everything from foot washing to eligibility for the catechumenate. For those pondering what the church will look like in the coming age of secularization, there is this tidbit: "It may not be surprising that astrologers, prostitutes, and gladiators could be refused admission to the catechumenate, but artists (who made pagan images) and public officials (who would be involved in enforcing measures against Christians) also fell at hurdles limiting acceptable professions; aspiring Christians working in these spheres would have to change their livelihood in order to seek baptism" (151). This book reminds us that we have a much better chance of understanding the present if we consider our past.

You will not be able to read this book without walking away enriched and immersed in ancient writings. Those who believe that worship is essentially God's service to us will no doubt be disconcerted by McGowan's conclusion that our "actions, offered as service to God, constitute Christian worship" (262). Yet the book does well to remind us that ancient Christian worship life was just as complex and complicated as is our worship today. Mining the ancient examples in hopes of a past purity may leave some frustrated. As such, this work is caution and a curb against jumping to conclusions as to which of our worship practices is authentic. On the other hand, this book, for all its strengths, cannot be more than a survey of sociological phenomena. It is not enough to speak about meals in a generic sense if we do not seem them as our touchstone to the eternal atonement and Christ's sacrificial death. And it is not enough to speak about initiation if we do not get more specific, seeing in Baptism our connection to Christ's healing and forgiving waters that flow ultimately from his side. As such, McGowan's work would serve as an inviting resource in a history of religions course, and as an excellent entry into the descriptive world of the early church. But if we want to find out what it all means, we will have to go elsewhere.

Peter J. Scaer

***Systematic Theology: Volume 1, The Doctrine Of God*. By Katherine Sonderegger. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. 538 Pages. Hardcover. $49.00.**

A good argument could be made that any philosophy is based on an unprovable theorem. This may also be so of systematic theology that adorns its pursuit with biblical references. The goal of both philosophy and a particular systematic theology is the creation of impregnable system that is unsusceptible to challenge. Reformed theologians are more adept at this than Lutherans, but this is not to say that any one particular systematic theology is without value. This gives good reason to take seriously and enjoy the dogmatics of Katherine Sonderegger, an Episcopal priest and professor at the Virginia Theological Seminary, who offers an eloquent and easily accessible dogmatics organized around God's attributes. After all, what is the perfect way to outline a dogmatics? Sondereggers organizes her chapters in her dogmatics around God's oneness, omnipresence, omnipotence, perfection, omniscience, and love.

What first comes to mind is that the divine attributes are presented in the Bible "in, with and under" each other, so that one is not to be preferred over another or isolated from one another. Where this is done, theology comes to loggerheads when the Calvinists advance God's sovereignty against the Arminian insistence on man's free will. This conflict is played out regularly in meetings of Evangelicals, never with a satisfactory conclusion. Sonderegger's introduction is a bit off-putting at first when she proposes Christology as a theology (xvii), until she explains that recent Christologies have focused on the humanity of Jesus that are then read back into how we understand God. She blatantly opts for a Chalcedonian Christology that is defined as "the personal relation of Deity and humanity in the Mystery of His own personal life." By holding that "the Divine Reality is compatible with the cosmos," she seems closer to Luther, though the Reformer does not have a major role in how she develops this or any part of her dogmatics (xix).

Rather than placing the locus on the Scriptures at the front of the dogmatics, she addresses this issue in the conclusion; this is arguably her most telling chapter of how she thinks theologically, "The Divine Perfections and the Exegesis of Holy Scripture" (505–528). Canon criticism has an attraction for her, since it handles the Scriptures as literature, but she holds that the Scriptures reach their goal by encountering the hearer. Only once is Barth mentioned in this chapter, but he may be a guiding spirit for her. In moving away from but not denying the value of critical research, she places dogmatics and not exegesis as the primary theological discipline. Sonderreger does not intend to write a Christology, but where she does

introduce the topic, she does so most eloquently (e.g., 293). Traditionally, dogmatics are not written in this mystical genre, which might be a possible description of her style. Applying a fine-tooth comb, one may uncover significant deficiencies, but in the meantime, she is a pleasure to read.

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***The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*. Edited by Gerald A. Klingbeil. "Creation in the Bible" Series. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015. 395 pages. Soft-cover. $24.99.**

Debates concerning the biblical witness of creation are perennially important for those who hold a high view of Scripture. This diverse collection of essays provides the non-specialist reader helpful defenses of traditional views of creation. The book seeks to be a dialogue between science and theology but is solely focused on arguing for traditional creation from the biblical witness itself without entering scientific debates. Like any collection of essays, there is an unevenness based upon authors, but, in general, this collection provides a helpful, fairly comprehensive introduction to multiple issues in creation theology. These essays are written to be accessible to non-specialists, requiring no knowledge of Hebrew. For those who work in Hebrew, however, the use of transliterated Hebrew is distracting. The scholars are all Seventh Day Adventists, which shows when they emphasize denominational debates; while occasionally distracting, it is not overly problematic.

The essays can be grouped into three kinds. The first are essays that examine the interaction of Genesis 1–2 with Ancient Near East backgrounds. The dominant theme within these three essays is the distinctive non-mythological character of Genesis. These are particularly helpful for those who do not have any familiarity with the Ancient Near East. For example, Gerhard and Michael Hasel argue that the interpretation that Genesis depicts a three-tiered universe with a firm firmament is not biblical but was imported from Greek philosophy. Elsewhere, Ángel Rodríguez shows that while evolutionary ideas were present in the cosmogonies of Egypt and Mesopotamia, these ideas are not present in the Genesis account.

Two essays are focused on textual analyses of Genesis 1–3. Richard Davidson provides an essay that presents the major issues concerning origins and argues for a traditional understanding. While some might

disagree with certain stances such as his advocating a two-stage creation between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:3, he introduces most of the important issues and a variety of perspectives. Jacques Doukhan demonstrates convincingly from a close reading of Genesis 1–3 that death is an unnatural intrusion into the created world. This argument is particularly germane to debates over theistic evolution.

The third group of essays examine the intertextual connections between Genesis 1–2 and the rest of the Old Testament. These five essays understand intertextuality and how the earlier Genesis text influences the later authors. Martin Klingbeil's discussion of the theoretical foundations of intertextuality is excellent. He also provides a helpful summary of how creation permeates the prophets, something that has been historically ignored by scholars. Paul Gregor's essay on the influence of Genesis 1–2 on the Pentateuch is unfortunately limited mostly to Sabbath regulations and does not examine broader influences of Genesis 1–2.

The debates over Genesis 1–2 will undoubtedly continue. This collection of essays provides a helpful introduction to the issues that will benefit pastors greatly as well as advanced undergraduate students. Its comprehensiveness allows the reader to understand the conversations fairly quickly and begins to enter the debates from a traditional Christian perspective. Since this is the first of two volumes, we look forward to the second in the series to see how it fleshes out the connections to the New Testament.

Ryan Tietz

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