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CONTENTS

EDITORIALS

Editor's Note	342
Theological Observers	344

ARTICLES

The Wrath of God: A Biblical Overview	
Scott A. Ashmon.....	348
Original Sin in the New Testament	
Charles A. Gieschen.....	359
Sin in Cyril of Alexandria's <i>Commentary on John</i>	
David R. Maxwell.....	376
The Origins and Consequences of Original Sin in Luther's <i>Bondage of the Will</i>	
Cameron A. MacKenzie.....	384
Speaking to Contemporary American Culture on Sin and the Wrath of God	
John W. Oberdeck.....	398
God's Wrath Against Sin	
James V. Bachman, Peter L. Senkbeil, Kerri L. Thomsen.....	411
GRAMMARIAN'S CORNER	425
HOMILETICAL HELPS	428
BOOK REVIEWS	450
BOOKS RECEIVED	469
INDEX	471

Editor's Note

The six articles in this issue were originally papers presented at a convocation of professors of theology of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, which met in Dallas, Texas, on March 4-5, 2005. They address the issues of human sin, sinfulness, and the wrath of God as understood from Holy Scripture, historically in the church, and in contemporary society.

In the first article, “The Wrath of God: A Biblical Overview,” the Reverend Scott A. Ashmon discusses God’s wrath as one aspect of His Law. He probes such topics as the term “wrath” in both testaments, the nature of God’s wrath, the justification of objects of His wrath, the persistence and end of God’s wrath. He concludes that God’s wrath is God’s response to human disobedience to His will and plan of salvation. The purpose of God’s wrath includes the punishment of sinners and their separation from God and His blessings. Finally, God’s wrath led to Christ Jesus satisfying it through His suffering and death on the cross.

Dr. Charles A. Gieschen in the second article, “Original Sin in the New Testament,” examines the New Testament for evidence that “sin” should not be understood primarily as individual acts of disobedience to God, but it should be understood as an “enslaved condition” that reveals itself in the individual acts of human beings. He focuses primarily on Romans 5, especially verse 12, as the *sedes doctrine* for Scripture’s teaching on original sin. It is clear from Romans 5 and other Pauline epistles that sin as a universal human condition originated with Adam in the Garden of Eden when he ate of the forbidden fruit. A full appreciation of human sinfulness is necessary for a true understanding of our redemption in Jesus Christ.

Dr. David R. Maxwell, in “Sin in Cyril of Alexandria’s *Commentary on John*,” raises the question of whether the spiritual problem for human beings is the fact that they are sinners or that they are created beings. Related to this is the question, Does God’s plan of salvation through Jesus Christ overcome or remedy our creatureliness, or is it primarily to overcome sin and death and thereby restore us to the original condition of Adam in the Garden of Eden? For answers he turns to Cyril of Alexandria’s *Commentary on John*. Cyril’s writing is helpful in leading us into a deeper reflection on what Adam lost when he fell into sin. For a better appreciation of this we can seek to understand the nature of humanity prior to the Fall and human nature as revealed in the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

In the fourth article, “The Origins and Consequences of Original Sin in Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*,” Dr. Cameron A. MacKenzie looks at Martin Luther’s understanding of the origin and consequences of original sin as discussed in Luther’s treatise, *The Bondage of the Will*. Original sin has corrupted all human beings and made them entirely incapable of saving themselves. Through original sin all people have become slaves of Satan.

Believers in Christ are fortunate to have a sovereign God who is in charge of the universe. When God speaks graciously in the Gospel, He offers deliverance and salvation to all who believe. There remain imponderable questions about why God permitted Adam to sin, why He allowed sin to affect all human beings, and why He allows people to suffer the dire consequences of sin. While such questions remain divine mysteries, God does provide answers in the Gospel.

In the next article, "Speaking to Contemporary American Culture on Sin and the Wrath of God," Dr. John W. Oberdeck discusses the difficult task Christians have of communicating the message of sin and God's wrath to our contemporary culture. The church's message of sin and the wrath of God speaks about alienation and disobedience, death and damnation. He demonstrates religious themes, which parallel some aspects of the Christian message and how people confront it in literature, such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, in films like *Blade Runner*, in studies of human response to terminal illness by Kübler-Ross, and in a music album by Pink. In their difficult task Christians are enabled to confront people of our culture because we have died to sin in our Baptism and are empowered by the Holy Spirit in our vocation to lead people to see that death under the Law leads to rebirth to a new and better life through the Gospel.

In the final article, "God's Wrath Against Sin: Echoes in Contemporary Culture?," Drs. James V. Bachman, Peter L. Senkbeil, and Kerri L. Thomsen explore evidence of the wrath of God in their respective disciplines of philosophy and ethics, theater, and English literature. In contemporary culture there is an awareness not only of sin, but also a consciousness of original sin and the corrective pressures of God's wrath. While there is ample evidence of people wrestling with these important issues, the authors are not optimistic that people in our affluent, materially comfortable society will make any significant changes in their thinking or commitments. Instead of confronting these issues directly, they have "found highly sophisticated ways to ignore God and keep consciousness of our original sin and of God's genuine wrath at bay."

Quentin F. Wesselschmidt

Theological Observers

Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE) I-XXXVI, Completed

After nearly three decades of work, at last, the full *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (TRE), thirty-six volumes in total, ed. by Horst Balz and Gerhard Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977-2004) has finally been completed. It began under the leadership of editors Gerhard Müller and Gerhard Krause. Since the death of Krause, Müller has been solely responsible from volume 12 to the publication of the last volume in 2004. The TRE, a very worldly renowned project, is significant in both size and scope, with approximately eight hundred pages in each volume and covering an enormous range of subjects contributed by writers in different disciplines of theology from various lands, mainly Germany. All articles, large or small, include the writers' names and responsibilities. The very first fascicle (of five) of the first volume appeared in October 1976 and the entire first volume in July 1977. Two cumulative indices have already appeared, first to volumes 1-17, and later to volumes 1-27 (1998). The final cumulative, enlarged, and enhanced index of the entire TRE, presumably with special emphasis on Christian theology, is almost ready to appear for users and libraries. The publisher has also offered other reference aids to facilitate the use of TRE. Among them are an index volume of abbreviations on theology and related disciplines (*Abkürzungsverzeichnis*, 1994) and separate indices beyond the indexing offered in each volume. The entry points are divided by Biblical citations (name, place, and subject) and by the authors of articles. A high standard of excellence has been maintained. It can be an enormous task to provide evaluations and comments not only on an individual volume but also on some major individual entries with special importance in theology. A thoughtful attempt could be made on the content and the approach to the subject concerned.

Each entry concludes with a very comprehensive bibliography (or bibliographies), including the sources of the materials handled. These alone can be very meaningful to users. In the *Vorwort* of the final volume, Professor Bishop Emeritus Gerhard Müller, the representative editor, expresses his appreciation to the people who were chiefly involved for the production of the historical undertaking with the words: "Ihnen allen sei herzlich für ihre Mitarbeit gedankt" (July 30, 2004).

The "Theological Observer" serves as a forum for comment on, assessment of, and reactions to developments and events in the church at large, as well as in the world of theology generally. Since areas of expertise, interest, and perceptions often vary, the views presented in this section will not always reflect the opinion of the editorial committee.

This gigantic encyclopedia contains the quintessence of the twentieth century theology at its culmination and provides an excellent *Anknüpfungspunkt* with twenty-first-century life and the academic world.

In some respect, the TRE is a successor to *Die Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*—the RE (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896-1913, edited by Johann Jakob Herzog (1805-1882) and Albert Hauck): first *Auflage* (RE¹), 1854-1868; second *Auflage* (RE²), 1877-1888; and third *Auflage* (RE³), 1896-1913, volumes 1-24. (N.B.: RE³). However, the TRE is a fresh undertaking, employing a broader interpretation of theology and related subjects and is less concerned with the strictly Protestant point of view in light of the peculiar context of life and scholarly and academic world in the twentieth century. The *Vorwort* to the first volume of TRE by Carl Heinz Ratschow in 1975 is worth noting. It alludes to the objective and direction of TRE as it had been planned. Ratschow noted these points on behalf of the editorial group: (1) the increasing research on theology's self-awareness as a science in the previous six decades from the perspective at the time of his writing (cf. RE³ at that time); (2) the newly developing international climate of the scientific world; (3) confessional concern not only for itself but also on the search for the unique Christian Truth (Gospel); (4) as compared with the emphasis of Protestant theology and church in RE³, the inclusion of many more new topics in the TRE; (5) handling the nature and issues in the theology of the church from new perspectives; (6) a serious look at preaching and administration of the Sacraments and other churchly tasks as we contemplate faith and life today, that is, with an emphasis on integrating different theological disciplines with close consideration of exegetical, historical, systematic (*religionsphilosophisch*), and practical realms; (7) consideration of developing ecumenical interest and concern, as well as inter-religious climate.

Long scholarly articles, many pages in length, are signed by the contributors and include extensive bibliographies. Some random samples with their length: "Afrika" (108 pages), "Gott" (107 pages), "Jesus Christus" (185 pages), "Atheismus" (87 pages), "Auferstehung" (133 pages), "Luther" (80 pages), "Calvin" (22 pages), "Augsburger Bekenntnis" (22 pages), "Trinität" (30 pages), "Hermeneutik" (5 pages), "Mission" (60 pages), "Eschatologie" (109 pages), "Islam" (43 pages), "China" (35 pages), "Japan" (27 pages). "Korea" (11 pages).

Those who use theological encyclopedias and reference materials know the story and history of encyclopedias in German and English, realize their profound development, especially in the twentieth century, and appreciate the usefulness of those meticulously documented scholarly efforts for academic and practical work and engagement. The sequence of works that culminate in the TRE are historically and theologically related to each other, either directly or indirectly. In fact, an examination of their relations, both in content and approach can be no insignificant task. It would include, for example, the RE in German mentioned above, the *New Schaff-*

Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge in English version, the *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (an extension of the above New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia); *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, first *Auflage*, 1909-1913, in five volumes; second edition, 1927-1932, in five volumes; third edition, 1957-1962, in seven volumes; the fourth *Auflage*, 1998-2005, in eight, with one more volume (the index) forthcoming. For the users of these fantastic works, there may be a wholesome “competition” between TRE and RGG⁴. For one thing, at least it seems, the latter wins a point for its sturdier binding and maybe one more for a forthcoming English translation!

It is conceivable that in the coming years there will appear comments and reviews, evaluations and critiques on TRE as a whole and on individual volumes and pertinent articles included in the TRE. At any rate, the users may immensely enjoy the excursion.

Won Yong Ji

Luther’s Works—Chinese Edition

Though it’s somewhat artificial to assign special significance to one day of what, in reality, is a long and multi-layered process, 26 May 2005 was a watershed day for ministry in the Chinese-speaking world. In one sense, that day simply marked a meeting in Hong Kong of an editorial committee, a meeting which is part of the process of producing what is planned to be a fifteen-volume set of Luther’s works in Chinese translation.

What allows the word “watershed” to be ascribed to that day is that it also marked the presentation of the first two volumes of the project published in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). (Those two volumes, a selection of Luther’s early occasional writings, through the mid-1520s, will also be formally presented at Concordia Seminary as part of its Reformation observance this year.)

This process has not been without its difficulties. Most problematic among them has been the necessity to produce two versions, one for use inside the PRC and one for use outside. Though there is no difference in content, there are significant linguistic and cultural issues. One concerns the writing of Chinese characters. Most Chinese outside the PRC use the traditional characters inherited from forever. Several decades ago, the PRC undertook a major effort to simplify these characters. The differences are marked enough that people who are accustomed to one form of Chinese character cannot easily read the other. Another is that the PRC has produced a standardized transliteration of proper names (person, place), which is not necessarily consistent with transliterations in the Chinese Christian tradition, (e.g., the names for Wittenberg or Augsburg are rendered differently). Yet another is differing levels of governmental approvals. Con-

sequently, though these volumes have been available in traditional characters (published in Hong Kong) for a year already, it was only at this meeting that the PRC version was formally presented, with much rejoicing and no small relief.

This means that Martin Luther (and his witness to the Gospel) has been, as you are reading this, in bookstores (eight U.S. dollars per 500-page volume) and in libraries throughout China for half a year already and throughout the wider Chinese-speaking world for almost two years. Much of the initial run of four thousand copies has already been distributed.

With that encouragement, the process presses on to the next stage, the translation of the next three volumes, hopefully completed by the end of next year, which should allow publication in 2007.

Glitches, bumps, and potholes are an inevitable part of the process. We are grateful, however, that our committee, comprised of members from a striking variety of political and cultural backgrounds (PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, United States), has been able to work through what could be divisive problems with a deep sense of partnership and shared commitment. One mark of the importance granted this effort is that the PRC government has designated this project as one of its “fifteen major publication projects.”

Among the pleasant spin-offs of this project is a series of Luther events that have taken place, one already in the PRC, another last Reformation Day in Hong Kong, and one more planned for next year in Taiwan. Not only is this an encouragement for the Lutheran churches in Asia, but through this project the Lord continues the reformation of His church through His servant Martin Luther. Beyond the church, the Lord extends the word of the Gospel through Martin Luther into parts of society that the church does not easily reach, especially the academic world.

This joyous news is particularly gratifying to Concordia Seminary, because it, together with LCMS World Mission, is the major supporting partner behind the project. Dr. Won Yong Ji sparked the vision some years ago and continues to serve, together with President Dale Meyer (replacing former President John Johnson), Dr. Bruce Schuchard, Dr. Jeffrey Oswald, and Dr. Daniel Mattson (LCMS World Mission) as Coordinating Committee. Through this global partnership God’s forming and reforming ministry expands throughout the world.

Henry Rowold

The Wrath of God: A Biblical Overview

Scott A. Ashmon

While preaching on Galatians 3:23-24 on New Year's Day in 1532, Martin Luther said:

The difference between the Law and the Gospel is the height of knowledge in Christendom. Every person and all persons who assume or glory in the name of Christian should know and be able to state this difference. If this ability is lacking, one cannot tell a Christian from a heathen or a Jew; of such supreme importance is this differentiation.¹

To the end of knowing and being able to state the supreme difference between God's Law and Gospel, this paper will focus on one aspect of the Law: God's wrath. This paper will briefly discuss the terminology, reasons, nature, justifications, objects, standard(s), means, effects, aversion, satisfaction, ineluctability, times, duration, and functions of God's wrath. This paper will also note the differences from and relation to the Gospel, or God's mercy. By necessity and design, the paper's format will be more synthetic than traditio-historical, except where there are significant transitions to display between the Old and New Testament.²

“Wrath” Terminology

Both the Old and New Testament contain terminology that explicitly denotes and implicitly connotes the wrath of God. The most frequently used words for God's wrath in the Old Testament are the nouns **אַף** (“an-

¹Ewald Plass, ed., *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 732.

²In this matter, it is worth noting that Bruce Baloian does not see any traditio-historical development of God's anger in the Old Testament. See Bruce Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 174. Similarly, H. G. L. Peels does not see any traditio-historical development of the vengeance of God in the Old Testament. See H. G. L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 296.

The Reverend Scott A. Ashmon is Assistant Professor of Religion at Concordia College in Bronxville, NY. This article was originally presented at a convocation of professors of theology of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which met in Dallas, TX, March 4-5, 2005.

ger,” Ex. 4:14) and חמה (“wrath,” Nah. 1:2).³ Other explicit nouns are חרון (“rage,” 2 Kings 23:26), קצף (“ire,” Deut. 29:27 [-Eng 29:28]), עברה (“fury,” Is. 13:9), זעם (“indignation,” Ps. 78:49), בעס (“aggravation,” 1 Kings 15:30; פעש in Job 10:17), זעף (“vexation,” Micah 7:9), and ריח (“exasperation,” Job 4:9). Frequently the Hebrew verbs אנף (“to become angry,” 1 Kings 8:46), חרה (“to become enraged,” Joshua 7:1), קצף (“to become irate,” Deut. 1:34), עבר (“to become furious,” Ps. 78:21), זעם (“to become indignant,” Zech. 1:12), and רנו (“to become agitated,” Is. 28:21) have God as the subject while the verb “to provoke to anger” (בעס, 2 Kings 17:17) can be used with God as the object of provocation. Often an incendiary verb like “burned” (חרה, Joshua 7:26), “blazing” (בער, Is. 30:27), “fume” (עשן, Deut. 29:19 [-Eng 29:20]), and “kindled” (ניח, 2 Kings 22:13) is connected with God’s “anger” (אף) or “wrath” (חמה).⁴ Metaphorically, God’s wrath is depicted as a consuming “fire” (אש, Deut. 4:21, 24; Jer. 4:4) as well as the ultimately fatal “cup of wrath” (החמה בוס, Jer. 25:15; 51:39).⁵

Implicit indicators of God’s wrath also abound. There are metaphors from nature which connote God’s wrath, such as God being a destructive “flood” against enemies (פרץ מים, 2 Sam. 5:20). There are military metaphors such as God shooting his “arrow” at the wicked (חץ, Ps. 64:7). There are also numerous events whose descriptions imply God’s wrath. For instance, God “curses” the serpent for tempting Adam and Eve (ארר, Gen. 3:14), “sends out” Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden after they sin (שלח, Gen. 3:23-24), “grieves” over sinful mankind so much that He “wipes out” most of mankind with a flood (מחה נחם; Gen. 6:5-7), and “executes vengeance” on his enemies (נקם, Is. 1:24).⁶

In the New Testament, God’s wrath is explicitly indicated by two Greek nouns: θυμός (“anger, wrath,” Rev. 14:19) and ὀργή (“anger, wrath,” Matt. 3:7; Mark 3:5). While in classical Greek θυμός represents the “inner emotion of anger” and ὀργή refers to the “outward expression” of anger, both the Septuagint and New Testament use the two nouns interchangeably and even place them together (Rev. 19:15).⁷ The verb ὀργίζομαι (“to become angry”) is never explicitly predicated of God in the New Testament. However, in a few parables God is represented by a king who becomes angry (Matt. 18:34; 22:7). As in the Old Testament, God’s wrath continues to be metaphorically expressed by the “cup [of wrath]” that Jesus drinks in His

³Baloian counts 170 occurrences of אף for God’s wrath and 90 for חמה. See Baloian, 189.

⁴For more discussion of Hebrew terminology see Gary Herion, “Wrath of God (OT),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6:990-991; Baloian, 5-7 and 189-210; and Paul Raabe, “The Two ‘Faces’ of Yahweh,” *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Normal Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Dearborn: Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), 285.

⁵For an excellent analysis of the “cup of wrath” metaphor in the Old Testament see Paul Raabe, *Obadiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 206-54. Also see A. T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957), 27-36.

⁶For a full discussion of נקם in the Old Testament see Peels.

⁷Stephen Travis, “Wrath of God (NT),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6:996.

death (ποτήριον, Matt. 26:39). Those who worship the beast will also drink this cup (Rev. 14:10). In a related metaphor, God's wrath is depicted as "seven plagues" in "seven golden bowls" that seven angels pour out in the last days (τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσοῦς, Rev. 15:6-7).

Outside of these explicit terms, God's wrath is seen implicitly in many places. For instance, Jesus tells parables that refer to God's wrath on impenitent sinners (Luke 16:19ff.), utters "woes" against spiritual hypocrites (Matt. 23:13ff.), clears God's Temple of the "den of thieves" (Mark 11:15ff.), foretells the Last Day of eternal punishment on the unrighteous (Matt. 25:31ff.), and voices His suffering of God's complete wrath with the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). So also Paul warns of God's "curse" on those who preach a gospel other than Christ crucified (ἀνάθεμα, Gal. 1:8-9). Finally, Hebrews 12:29 implicitly refers to God's wrath by calling Him a consuming "fire" (πῦρ), a metaphor that draws directly on God's fiery wrath in Deuteronomy 4:24 and connects the incendiary character of God's wrath in the Old Testament to the New.⁸

It is important to realize, though, that many Biblical expressions portray God's wrath in an "anthropopathic" manner.⁹ As such, one should be careful not to equate God's wrath fully with human anger. Even though human anger is the vehicle through which God's holy wrath is verbally communicated, human anger can be irrational, excessive, and unjust (Gen. 4:6; Prov. 29:11, 22).¹⁰ Other expressions of God's wrath involve metaphors from nature. Again, God's wrath is not to be equated with nature.

Provoking God's Wrath

Most often God's wrath is provoked by sin.¹¹ Stated more fully, God's wrath is mostly seen as His punitive response to humans who, in belief or action, disobey God's ways of living with Himself and mankind (Law), or reject His will of salvation (Gospel).¹² For instance, God places death and expulsion from the Garden of Eden on Adam and Eve after they doubt the fatal punishment attached to eating the forbidden fruit, eat of it in an

⁸Perhaps this incendiary quality is what lies behind the "fire" of hell, e.g., Matt. 18:8-9.

⁹S. Erlandsson, "The Wrath of YHWH," *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 112 and Herion, "Wrath of God (OT)," 990.

¹⁰Xavier Léon-Dufour, "Wrath," *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 684 and Terrence Fretheim, "Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God in the Old Testament," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24 (2002): 6-7.

¹¹For more discussion on this point see Walter Nagel, "Sin as the Cause of God's Wrath," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 23 (1952): 721-737.

¹²Baloian finds that God's anger in the Old Testament is motivated by the wickedness of humans toward one another about 50% of the time, while about 75% of the time God's anger is aroused in response to pride, syncretism, or idolatry. The 25% overlap shows that there are cases where God responds to both idolatry and injustice. Clearly, then, disobedience against both tables of the Ten Commandments (commandments 1-3 and 4-10) provoke God's wrath. See Baloian, 73.

attempt to make themselves “gods,” and so reject worshiping God their Creator (Gen. 3). So too Israel’s idolatry later “provokes” God’s wrath (עָנַם, Judg. 2:12; 1 Kings 14:9; Ps. 106:29; cf. Rom. 1:18 and Col. 3:1-6). In the prophets, God’s wrath frequently falls on those who do evil to their fellow humans (Amos 1-2). God’s wrath also rages against those who reject His plan of salvation, such as when God hardens Pharaoh’s heart and decimates Egypt for opposing His deliverance of Israel (Ex. 7:1-3). Similarly, God’s wrath can be seen in Jesus’ rebuke of Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!,” after Peter tempts Jesus to avoid His atoning death (Matt. 16:23). Finally, God’s wrath even extends to angels who reject God’s ways and will (Gen. 3:14-16; Rev. 12:7ff.; 20:7-10; 2 Pet. 2:4).

However, there are times when God’s wrath is not a response to human sin, but an affliction of suffering and separation placed on God’s faithful people *as if* they had sinned (Ps. 22:1-10; 44:17-22; 88:14-18; Job 16:9-21; 19:1-11; 42:7).¹³ This kind of wrath seems to surface in response to other issues, such as testing human faith (Job 1:8-22; 2:3-10), building Christian character (2 Cor. 12:7-10), displaying God’s life-giving power (Job 41:10-17; John 9:1-3), and demonstrating God’s omniscience over those who are truly faithful (Job 1:8-22; 2:3-10).

The Nature of God’s Wrath

Seeing that God’s wrath always comes as a response, it is clear that God’s wrath is neither irrational nor is it a part of His eternal nature, unlike gods of other religions.¹⁴ The following three, interrelated points further support this thesis. First, wrath is God’s “alien work” in history (וְעֵצָה עֲבָדָהוּ, Is. 28:21) as distinct from His “proper work” (*opus proprium*), to use Luther’s phrase, which is His eternal love and mercy.¹⁵ Second, God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone, but desires all people to turn from sin and live (Lam. 3:33; Ezek. 18:23; 33:11; Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).¹⁶ In fact, God even grieves over the just punishment He must send on sinners (Jer. 4:19-26; 8:18-9:1; 42:10).¹⁷ Third, as is creedal in the Old Testament

¹³As Fløysvik says, “In most of the complaint psalms sin is not mentioned. In Psalm 44 the people profess not to have given Yahweh any reason for his wrath.... We should not take this to be a profession of total sinlessness. But according to the covenant Yahweh had made with his people, they could see no reason why God should reject them and deal with them in wrath.... One cannot say that God’s wrath is always predictable, that it is always a reaction to human sin.” See Ingvar Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997), 153.

¹⁴Fretheim, 17 and Peels, 289.

¹⁵Egil Grislis, “Luther’s Understanding of the Wrath of God,” *The Journal of Religion* 61 (1961): 286.

¹⁶In the matter of God’s desire or will, Raabe makes some helpful distinctions: God’s “ultimate will” is not to destroy out of wrath; God’s “consequent will,” e.g., wrath, is a response to human actions; and God’s “antecedent will,” e.g., love, comes prior to and apart from any human deeds. See Raabe, 296.

¹⁷Terence Fretheim, “‘I was only a little angry’: Divine Violence in the Prophets,” *Interpretation* 58 (2004): 374-375.

and confirmed in the New, God is slow to anger and abounding in love (Ex. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; 2 Pet. 3:9). Still, on the Last Day, God's wrath will descend on impenitent unbelievers (Ex. 34:7; Nah. 1:2-3; Mal. 4:1-5; Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Pet. 3:7-10).

All of this paints a revealing picture of who God is and is not. God is not apathetic about sin and punishment and thus logically incapable of love and functionally amoral, like a Stoic or Marcionite god.¹⁸ God, though hidden, is not absent from this world and thus impersonal and passive concerning the Law and justice, like a Deist god.¹⁹ Neither is God "tolerant" of sin and thus a relativist in terms of immorality and its consequences, like the Postmodern god. Nor is God filled with capricious wrath by personality and convulsive emotion, or "passion," like ancient Near Eastern gods.²⁰ Instead, God's wrath is always a just, personal, reasoned, emotional (re)action, or "pathos," to sin or some other situation (Deut. 32:4; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6).²¹

Justifications for God's Wrath

There are many justifications for God's wrath over sin. Some reasons justify His wrath over all people. God is the creator of everything and rightly claims everyone's worship and obedience (Eccl. 12:1-14; Rom. 1:18-23). God is just and righteous by nature and so demands and upholds justice and righteousness in accordance with His character (Ezra 9:15; Ps. 7:11; Micah 6:8).²² God is also the King and Judge, which means that all people—including His elected people—are subject to His rule and judgment (1 Sam. 2:10; Ps. 96:10, 13; Is. 33:22; Acts 10:42; Rom. 14:10-12; Rev. 20:11-15).

Other reasons tend more to justify God's wrath over His elected people. For example, God is the covenanter who requires His covenantal people to live according to His ways lest they be cursed (Ex. 20:1ff.; Lev. 26:25; Deut.

¹⁸For a short discussion on Stoicism, Marcion, and God's anger see Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, 132 n. 50. For a longer survey see Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper, 1962), 299-306.

¹⁹Included in this negation would be Fretheim's semi-Deistic view that God has established in creation a "moral order" that is "a complex, loose causal weave of act and consequence" where "consequences grow out of the deeds itself" and God's job simply entails "'seeing to' the movement from act to consequence." See Fretheim, 370, 373.

²⁰For a brief discussion of "passion" and "pathos" as well as examples of ancient Near Eastern gods, see Herion, 991-992. For the classic analysis of "passion" and "pathos" see Heschel, especially pages 224-225.

²¹Some scholars see a hint of capriciousness in God in passages like Ex. 4:24-26; 19:21-25; Judg. 13:21-23; and 2 Sam. 6:6-11. While God's wrath can be sudden and strong, it is perhaps too much to say that it is because of caprice or passion. For Ex. 4:24-26 can be explained on the grounds that Moses, whom God called to lead His covenantal people Israel out of Egypt, had apparently not even circumcised his own son, which is the sign of God's covenant (Gen. 17). All of the other passages can be explained as the holy God not tolerating the presence of or contact with sin (Lev. 11:44-45; 16:2ff.; Ps. 5:4-7).

²²Raabe, 290.

4:1ff.; 12:1ff.; 28:15ff.); God is jealous for His people and punishes those who worship other, false gods (Ex. 20:5; 34:14); God is holy and so requires holiness in His people (Lev. 11:44-45; Eph. 4:21-24; 1 Thess. 4:7-8); and, God is the redeemer, justifier, and sanctifier who enables, expects, and warns believers in Christ to live new, sanctified lives (Rom. 6:1-7, 15-18; 1 Cor. 6:11; 10:1-12; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Eph. 4:30-32; Heb. 3:7-19; 10:26-29). In short, God's wrath over all sin is justified because God is both the creator and redeemer of life.²³

The Objects of God's Wrath

Aside from the faithful who at times may experience God's wrath as affliction, most of the objects of God's wrath are sinners. God pours out His wrath on individual sinners such as kings (1 Sam. 15:23), priests (1 Sam. 3:11-14), false prophets (Jer. 28:15-17), military leaders (Judg. 4:6-7, 21-22), unrepentant believers (Acts 4:32-5:11), and non-believers (Ex. 14:5-28; John 3:36). God sends His wrath on groups of sinners like tribes (Judg. 20:27-28, 35), nations (Is. 13-28; Jer. 46-51; Amos 1-2), and angels (2 Pet. 2:4). God even unleashes His wrath on all the unrighteous (Gen. 6:5ff.; Matt. 25:31ff.; Rev. 20:11-15). Vicariously, God places His wrath on children and animals—as types of sacrifices—who are not responsible for a particular sin (Ex. 11:1, 4-5; Lev. 16; 2 Sam. 12:13ff.). Ultimately, God places His complete wrath once-for-all on Jesus, who is, in His priestly role, the true sacrifice for the sins of all humanity (Is. 52:12-53:12; Matt. 26:39; 27:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Thess. 5:9-10; Heb. 9:27-28).²⁴

The Standard(s) of God's Wrath

The fundamental standard for God's wrath is *lex talionis*.²⁵ That is, God's wrath fairly operates on "eye for an eye" judgments (Gen. 9:5-7; Ex. 21:22-25; Lev. 24:17-20; Deut. 19:21). Or, as Jeremiah says, God gives to each "according to the fruit of his deeds" (לְהַחֲ לְאִישׁ כְּפָרֵי מַעֲלָלָיו, Jer. 17:10; 21:14; 32:19; cf. Obadiah 1:15 and Rom. 2:5-6). However, a second and stiffer standard of wrath, although no less just, seems to apply to God's people who turn away in unfaithfulness and apostasy, for these people had faith, had God's ways revealed to them, and then rejected faith and faithfulness (Amos 3:2; Jer. 16:16-18; Luke 12:47-48; Rom. 2:9; Heb. 10:26-31; 2 Pet. 2:20-21).²⁶

²³Ibid., 289.

²⁴R. V. G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: Tyndale, 1951), 34.

²⁵Raabe, 289.

²⁶Tasker, 18-20.

The Means of God's Wrath

God always executes His wrath by some physical or spiritual means.²⁷ There are countless examples of these means in the Bible, which can be organized under some general categories: nature (Gen. 6:17; Ex. 9:13-35; Is. 29:6), creatures (Ex. 8; Num. 21:5-6), disease (Ex. 9:8-12; Num. 12:9-10), famine (2 Sam. 21:1), individual humans (Judg. 14:4; 16:28-30), nations (Is. 10:5), governments (Rom. 13:1-4), angels (Is. 37:36), Satan (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Cor. 5:5), and pastors, who proclaim God's wrath over sin and withhold forgiveness or fellowship from the impenitent (Matt. 3:7-10; 16:19; 18:15-18; John 20:23; Acts 2:29-41). But just because God uses a human agent to execute His wrath does not mean that the agent always executes it fully (1 Sam. 28:18), justly (Is. 47:5-6; Zech. 1:15), or with the knowledge of being God's agent (Is. 10:12-13). As such, God also turns to punish human agents for their own sins (Jer. 50:8-18).²⁸

The ultimate means of executing God's wrath is Christ Jesus. Just as the incarnate, crucified Christ fully revealed God's reconciling love in His first advent (Eph. 3:19; Col. 1:19-20), so the risen, ascended Christ will fully reveal God's wrath in His second advent (Matt. 25:21-46; John 5:22-29; Rev. 6:15-17; 20:11-15; 22:7-20).²⁹ Jesus is, paradoxically, the full revelation of God's wrath both as its object on the cross and its means (and subject as "Lord" [κύριε, Rev. 22:20]) on the Last Day.³⁰

The Effects of God's Wrath

The emotional, physical, and spiritual effects of God's wrath are many. For instance, there is sickness (Num. 12:9-10; 1 Sam. 5:2-6),³¹ destruction (Ex 9:18-19; Ezra 5:12; Luke 21:20-24), hardening of the heart against God

²⁷This is true even if God is present at the execution of His wrath, e.g., Genesis 3:14-19 where God curses the serpent by means of having it traverse on its belly, punishes the woman by means of pain in childbirth, and punishes the man by means of agricultural toil. So also, God punishes the unrighteous standing before Him on the Last Day by means of the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Certainly these can be called the effects or results of God's wrath, but they also function as the means by which God exercises His wrath.

²⁸As Fretheim well says, "The exercise of divine wrath against Babylonian excesses shows that God did not micromanage their activities; they retained the power to execute policies that flew in the face of the will of God. Hence, the will of God active in these events is not irresistible." See Fretheim, 25.

²⁹Like an Old Testament prophet (Ezek. 4:1-17), Jesus, in His earthly prophetic ministry, is certainly a means of communicating the emotions and warnings of God's wrath by His words or deeds (Matt. 16:23; 21:12-13; Luke 21:20-24), but He does not yet exercise the punishment of God's wrath (John 5:22-29; 12:47; 18:36). Even in casting out demons Jesus does not appear to be executing God's wrath as much as healing those who are possessed because the demons are not cast into perdition (Mark 5:1-13).

³⁰Travis, 998.

³¹Following the *Qerê* of אֲרִיָּה in 1 Samuel 5:6, it seems that God humorously shows the people of Ashdod what pain He can mete out on sinners by inflicting them "with hemorrhoids."

(Ex. 9:12; Is. 6:10; Matt. 13:13-16), the increase of sin (Is. 63:17; Rom. 1:24-26), abandonment by God (Ezek. 10:4; 11:22-23; Matt. 27:46), military defeat (Ex. 15:1ff.), terror (Ex. 23:27; Lev. 26:15-16; Ps. 6:1-3), exile (Gen. 3:22-24; 4:11-14; 2 Kings 18:9-12; 24:8-16), death (Gen. 2:17; 2 Sam. 6:7; Rom. 6:23), and eternal damnation (Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 20:11-15; 21:8).³² Whatever the particular effect of God's wrath, the basic, devastating result is that it separates the sinner (or faithful person who experiences God's wrath as affliction) from the love and life that only God the creator and redeemer can give.³³ This occurs in varying degrees from partial to total and temporary to eternal.

Averting God's Wrath

God may, however, avert or divert His own wrath based on His "proper work" of love, for God does not want to punish, and is extremely patient and longsuffering in the hope that sinners will eventually repent and live. Thus, the basis for averting God's wrath rests solely in God's eternal qualities of love, mercy, and patience. God's great patience with sinners can easily be seen in how He gave the Amorites hundreds of years to turn from sin before driving them out of Canaan (Gen. 15:13-16; Joshua 11:16ff.), waited generation after generation for Israel and Judah to repent before exiling them, and waited several centuries until the first Passover since the time of the judges was held in the Promised Land under King Josiah (2 Kings 23:21-23), the last recorded Passover being just after Israel crossed into the Promised Land with Joshua (Joshua 5:10-11).

In brief, there are five ways that God may avert or divert His wrath. First, God may postpone His wrath (Gen. 15:3-6; Acts 17:30-31; 2 Pet. 3:8-9). Second, God may cease or retract His wrath after a period of time (Is. 54:7-8; Micah 7:18-19; Zech. 1:12-17). Third, God may displace His wrath by pouring it out vicariously on an "innocent" third-party, such as an animal sacrifice or a child (Ex. 11:1, 4-5; Lev. 16; 2 Sam. 12:13ff.). Fourth, a human may, in faith, call upon God's love and faithfulness in prayer on behalf of himself or others (Ps. 22:1ff.; Ex. 32:9-14; Num. 21:7-9). Fifth, sinners may honestly repent of their sins trusting in God's mercy, whereupon God may relent from punishment (Jer. 26:2-3; Joel 2:13-14).

³²Baloian lists the physical and mental effects of God's anger in the Old Testament as: "military defeat (136 times), death (89 times), plague or sickness (26 times), famine (29 times), destruction of the agricultural capacity and actual cities of the land (25 times), captivity (33 times), scattering of the population without captivity (9 times), earthquakes (3 times), desecration of the cult (7 times), loss of leaders or positions of power (11 times), and finally, not being able to enter the promised land (Moses, 4 times)....sorrow (11 times), terror (12 times), perception of God's abandonment (16 times), and....shame (28 times)." Baloian, 99.

³³Raabe, 285.

Satisfying God's Wrath

But none of these avenues fully satisfies God's wrath. All are either temporary or imperfect types of satisfaction (Heb 10:1-4). God's just wrath over human sin can only truly and fully be satisfied by the death of the guilty sinner or a sinless human on behalf of another sinner (Heb 9:14). God in His mercy—not wanting any to die and be damned under His wrath—graciously satisfied His anger by placing all His wrath on His own sinless Son, Christ Jesus, who died once for the sins of all mankind (John 1:29; Rom. 3:21-25; 5:6-9; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 9:11-12).³⁴

Paradoxically, then, God's mercy on sinners cannot come without God's wrath. It is only by God placing all of His just, punitive anger over human sin on Christ that God's wrath was truly and fully satisfied. Only then could God truly and fully do His "proper work" of giving mercy, forgiveness, and salvation to sinners (Heb. 9:15-28). By faith in Christ's vicarious, atoning death and resurrection, the repentant sinner graciously receives God's everlasting pardon and eternal life (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8-9).

The Ineluctability of God's Wrath

For those who do not trust in Christ's propitiation of God's judgment, God's wrath remains on their sins and is unavoidable. As John 3:36 says, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." In the Old Testament, a similar doom adheres to those who reject God's gracious covenant (2 Kings 22:16-17; Amos 9:1-4, 9-10).

The Times of God's Wrath

The times of God's wrath may broadly be categorized as "now" and "not yet." Now, as "realized eschatology," God has already poured out His full wrath on Christ for the sins of the world (John 1:29; Rom. 5:9).³⁵ Now God also places some of His wrath on unrepentant sinners. This "penultimate" or "historical" wrath on sinners is a type of "eschatological" or "final" wrath meant to punish the unrepentant and, if the punishment does not amount to death, persuade them to turn to God, repent, and live (Gen. 6:7; Judg. 3:5-11; 2 Kings 8:35-36; Jer. 46:7-10; Amos 5:4, 18-20).³⁶ So too the proclamation of God's impending wrath has the intended effect of

³⁴B. T. Dahlberg, "Wrath of God," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 907.

³⁵Léon-Dufour, 687.

³⁶For the terms "penultimate" and "final" see Raabe, 287. For the terms "historical" and "eschatological" see Fretheim, "Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God in the Old Testament," 12.

turning sinners from imminent punishment to life (Jer. 36:3; Ezek. 33:14-15; Jonah 3:4-10; Matt. 3:1-2).

On the Last Day, when Christ comes again, God will unleash all His “not yet” wrath again, but this time on unbelievers (Is. 13:6-13; Zeph. 1:1-3, 14-18; Matt. 25:31-46; John 12:48; Rom. 2:5-6; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:11-15). This final wrath is purely meant to punish sinners for their impenitence and rejection of Christ by separating them forever from what they have refused: God’s love, mercy, blessing, peace, goodness, and life.³⁷

The Persistence and End of God’s Wrath

As soon as a person has faith in Christ’s atoning death and resurrection, God’s wrath against that person is extinguished (Rom. 5:9)—unless the person becomes impenitent or apostate (Mark 3:28-29).³⁸ On the Last Day, the cessation of God’s wrath will be consummated for those with faith in Christ. But those who have rejected Jesus will receive God’s “eternal punishment” (κόλασιν αἰώνιον, Matt. 25:56) for their sins (Matt. 18:8; 25:41; Luke 16:3; Rev. 14:11; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8). Against the impenitent, unrighteous sinners, God’s just wrath will burn forever.³⁹

The Themes of God’s Wrath

Finally, God has at least eight purposes for His wrath.⁴⁰ First, God can use His wrath to increase sin, thereby solidifying unrepentant disbelievers in their path to God’s final wrath (Ex. 14:4; Is. 63:7; Matt. 13:13-15). Second, God’s wrath can eradicate the wicked to preserve the faithful (Gen. 6:6-8; Is. 36:15-22, 33-36). Third, in the Old Testament, it can purge evil from among God’s people whereupon God’s mercy creates a new, faithful remnant (2 Chron. 30:6-9; Is. 10:20-21; Jer. 50:19-20; Micah 7:18-20). Fourth, God’s wrath can function as a just response of punishment—whether historical or eschatological—on sins against God’s ways of living and will of salvation (Deut. 7:9; Nah. 1:2-3; Rom. 2:4-5; 6:23; Rev. 16:5-7). Fifth, God’s wrath of affliction on the faithful can test their faith or build up their

³⁷As Travis says, “...the wrath of God is expressed as a spiritual condition of alienation from God.... Condemnation at the final judgment will be a consummation of this alienation.” See Travis, 997.

³⁸Léon-Dufour, 687.

³⁹This is contrary to those who see God’s wrath against sinners as terminating on the Last Day. For instance, see Dahlberg, 908.

⁴⁰Herbert Haney sees God’s covenant wrath in the Former Prophets as having three effects: the punitive “anger of a righteous God expressed upon those who, spurning the mercy of God, thought too little of an actual covenant relationship with Him to respond in faith and obedience”; the remedial “effect of the wrath of God in turning men towards the ideal covenantal relationship with God”; and the ultimate and eternal condemnatory “doom that the covenant of God provides for those who persistently refuse to turn to Him with a response of faith to His remedial wrath.” See Hebert Haney, *The Wrath of God in the Former Prophets* (New York: Vantage, 1960), 31, 53, 63.

Christian character (Job 1:8-22; 2:3-10; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). Sixth, God can also use this kind of wrath for the purposes of displaying His life-giving power and demonstrating His omniscience over those who are truly faithful (Job 1:8-22; 2:3-10; 41:10-17; John 9:1-3). Seventh, for the purpose of providing atonement for sinful humans, God poured out all His punitive wrath once-for-all on the sinless Christ (John 1:29; Rom. 3:21-25; 5:6-9; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 9:11-12).

Finally, God can use His wrath to persuade sinners.⁴¹ In the Old Testament God used His promised and actualized wrath to persuade sinners—both the elect and unbelievers—to turn in faith from sin and curse toward God’s covenantal mercy and life (Num. 21:4-9; Ezek. 33:10-11; Jonah 3:4-10).⁴² Similarly, in the New Testament era God can use His wrath—by warning or execution—to persuade unbelievers and believers to repent of their sins, turn in faith to God’s eternal love and mercy in the crucified and risen Christ, receive complete forgiveness, and inherit (if a new believer) or remain in (if already a believer) eternal life (Matt. 3:7-10; 18:15-18; Acts 9:1-22; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 10:1-13; Heb. 4:1-11; 10:26-31).

Conclusion

In conclusion, God’s wrath is either His personal and just response to disobedience against His ways of living and will for salvation, or His affliction placed on the faithful in response to some other issue. While the most basic and frequent purpose and effect of God’s wrath is the punishment and separation of sinners from God and all His blessings, God can use His wrath for the purpose of His life-giving mercy. This is most clearly seen in Christ, who, being the ultimate object of God’s wrath for human sin on the cross, is at the same time God’s once-for-all atoning sacrifice for sinful humans. This, as Luther would say, is the height of Christian knowledge.

⁴¹While God’s wrath is never merely a tool of God’s mercy—since God’s punitive wrath is a fully justified response to sin all by itself—God, in love, can use His wrath with the hopeful intention of turning sinners from doubt, disobedience, and death to faith, faithfulness, and life. Or, as Raabe says, “Divine wrath is not ‘wrath in love.’ It is truly wrath, but it *serves* mercy and mercy lies hidden *behind* wrath” (italics are original). See Raabe, 296.

Original Sin in the New Testament

Charles A. Gieschen

Drawing on vivid imagery from Greek mythology, Martin Luther offers this disgustingly accurate portrait of sin: “Thus this is Hydra, a many-headed and most tenacious monster, with which we struggle in the Lernean Swamp of this life till the very day of our death.”¹ This portrayal is grounded in the New Testament presentation of sin as an overarching reality that enslaves and torments each person, even the whole cosmos.² This study, therefore, will demonstrate that the New Testament offers much evidence to support the understanding that “sin” should not be understood primarily as individual acts of transgression, but as an *enslaved condition* that, in turn, manifests itself in individual acts of transgression. Lutherans typically label sin as an enslaved condition with the term “original sin,” although other nomenclature is sometimes used.³

The wide scope of evidence discussed below will be in contrast to the tendency of focusing narrowly on Romans 5, especially verse 12, as the New Testament *sedes doctrinae* for original sin. For example, Martin Franzmann states: “To be sure, sin as *original* sin, as *Erbsuende*, is not often specifically treated in Scripture; in the New Testament [...] it is treated

¹ *Luther's Works 25: Lectures on Romans* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 300. Hydra was the nine-headed monster who inhabited the swamps of Lerna in the Peloponnese. Although eventually slain by Hercules, this monster was formidable because each head that was cut off would be replaced with two others unless cauterized.

² For a more in-depth study, see Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); see also Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. LTD., 1927), especially 95-163.

³ For example, see Article II of both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Even though the term “sinful nature” is frequently used among Lutherans, this study will use the term “condition” rather than “nature” when speaking of original sin in order to prevent any confusion that sin is of the substance of our created being; see Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (4 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1.548-549, and Th. F. A. Nickel, “Sin,” *The Abiding Word: Volume Two* (ed. Theodore Laetsch; St. Louis: Concordia, 1947), 154. Another term that is less frequently used is “concupiscence,” a term that refers to the sinful desires in man that lead to sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

Dr. Charles A. Gieschen is Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology and Chairman of the Department of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN. This article is a revised version of a paper that was originally presented at a convocation of professors of theology of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which met in Dallas, TX, March 4-5, 2005.

in full only by St. Paul, and by him only in Romans 5, strictly speaking.”⁴ Although Romans 5 is a text that explicitly identifies the basis of our enslavement to sin as the sin of Adam, we must exercise care to see also the wider testimony of the New Testament to this teaching even where the condition of sin is not specifically traced back to its source, namely, the disobedience of Adam and Eve.⁵ This study, in continuity with our Lutheran Confessions, will emphasize that teaching about original sin in the New Testament is done primarily in service to Christ and His work, as the Apology states: “For the magnitude of the grace of Christ cannot be understood unless our diseases be recognized” (Article II, 50). The reason that significant space is given to sin in New Testament writings, therefore, is in order that readers truly appreciate the attention given to Jesus Christ as the one who *became sin, bore sin, paid for sin, and conquered sin*.⁶

The evidence will be presented in five sections. First, evidence concerning the understanding of the origin of sin in first-century Jewish texts will be briefly noted in order that the New Testament testimony is understood in light of contemporary Jewish teaching. Second, the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels will be presented as foundational for the apostolic church and the New Testament witness. Third, the weighty evidence from Paul, especially his epistle to the Romans, will be presented. Fourth, evidence from a few other New Testament documents will be briefly noted. Finally, the important impact that the death of Jesus had in shaping early Christian understanding of original sin will be noted. The bulk of the study will cover the evidence in the Gospels and Paul; the other sections will be brief and cursory.

I. The Origin of Sin in First-Century Judaism

It is often assumed that the evangelists and apostles are reflecting a widely accepted first-century Jewish understanding of the fall of Adam and Eve narrated in Genesis 3, as well as its consequences for creation. This is not the case. There were various explanations among first-century Jews for how sin came into the world and its impact upon humanity, as is visible in the literature of this period. Some looked to Genesis 6:1-5 and blamed the fallen angels for sin (e.g., 1 Enoch 6-11), some laid the responsibility for sin solely at Eve’s feet (*Life of Adam and Eve* 18:1 and Sirach 25:24), some argued that the “evil inclination” in Adam (and Eve) led to sin (4 Ezra 3:20-30; 7:48; Sirach 15:14; 37:3; 1 QH 9:14-16, 20), while still others view

⁴ Martin H. Franzmann, “Augustana II: Of Original Sin,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 20 (1949): 891. The German term *Erbsünde* means “hereditary sin.”

⁵ For example, although the Book of Revelation does not explicitly trace sin back to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin is presented as a condition that has enslaved the cosmos and there are unmistakable allusions to the Genesis 3 narrative of the Fall in Eden through the identification of Satan twice as “that ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), as well as through two references to “the tree of life” (Rev. 2:7; 22:2).

⁶ This point is emphasized by Franzmann, “Augustana II,” 881-893.

sin as resulting from individual action (2 Baruch 54:19). Therefore, although Genesis 3 played a central role in most discussions of sin, there was no uniform manner of understanding the origin of sin in first-century Judaism.

The idea of an “evil inclination” is especially important for understanding later rabbinic teaching about the *yetzer ha-ra* because some early Jewish texts assert that Adam and Eve were created with an “evil inclination” which they, in turn, acted upon.⁷ Unlike the New Testament understanding, the first-century Jewish text 4 Ezra emphasizes that the first sin grew out of this “evil root” in the human heart:

[4 Ezra 3:20-22] Yet you did not take away from them their evil heart, so that your Law might bring forth fruit in them. For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the people’s heart along with the evil root, but what is good departed, and the evil remained.

Similar to the New Testament perspective, however, this text testifies to the dominion of evil in man’s heart after the Fall of Adam.⁸ Sin, therefore, is understood here to be an inherited condition. This condition leads the writer to offer the well-known lament: “O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendents” (4 Ezra 7:118).

Even more important, and in contrast to this text as well as those in the New Testament, there is significant evidence that many first-century Jews affirmed that humans living after the Fall of Adam continued to have a free will that allows one to choose between good and evil. Evidence of this “optimistic anthropology” is found in several Jewish texts that date near or during the first century of the Christian era.⁹ For example, 2 Baruch 54:15, 19 (c. A.D. 70-100) states:

For though Adam first sinned and brought untimely death upon all, yet of those who were born from him each one of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come and again each one of

⁷ The language of “evil inclination” comes from Genesis 6:5 and 8:21. For further discussion, see Serge Ruzer, “The Seat of Sin in Early Jewish and Christian Sources,” in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa; Studies in the History of Religions 83 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 370-372.

⁸ 4 Ezra 7:48 softens the universal scope of this condition by stating that this evil heart is passed on to “almost all who have been created” (emphasis mine).

⁹ Other examples include: *Psalms of Solomon* 9:4-5; Philo, *Quod dues sit immutabilis* 10.45-47; and Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.165. For this language of “optimistic” vs. “pessimistic” anthropology, see Timo Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach*, trans. T. McElwain; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 115; (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

them has chose for himself glories to come [...]. Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul, but each of us has become our own Adam.

Here sin is not presented as a condition of bondage resulting from Adam's sin; instead each person faces the decision to obey or sin that Adam faced. An optimistic anthropology is also visible in Jewish texts that claim that one or more of the significant figures of Israel did not sin; for example, the Prayer of Manasseh states that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not need to repent because they did not sin (v. 8).¹⁰ Hugo Odeberg describes this denial of original sin within much of first-century Judaism:

In as much as this soul is indestructible, Pharisaic Judaism is unable to comprehend the fall of man and even less the idea of original sin. The story of the Fall in Genesis is therefore regarded by the Pharisaic teachers merely as a typical example of the disobedience against God of which man under certain circumstances is guilty. They speak of evil impulses in man, which oppose the good impulse during his earthly sojourn. These evil impulses, however, are able only for a time to obscure the purity of the soul, the divine spark in man, but they can never extinguish it.¹¹

Contrary to this understanding, the New Testament presents a very “pessimistic anthropology”—even more, a pessimistic cosmology—of man in a world enslaved to sin. This brief sketch of first-century Jewish teaching enables us to appreciate the distinctive clarity of the New Testament teaching to which we now give attention.

II. Sin as a Condition in the Teaching of Jesus and the Evangelists

The Synoptic Gospels contain some short, pointed teachings of Jesus that use the contrast between man and God to present sin as a condition corrupting all mankind. For example, one of the blunt assessments of humanity by Jesus is found in His response to the rich young ruler calling him “Good Teacher”: “There is no one good but one, that is, God [οὐδέ τις ἀγαθός ἐστι μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός]” (Mark 10:18).¹² Without using the word “sin,” Jesus renders a clear verdict about sin’s thoroughgoing corruption of man. The dominion of evil over man is also an unmistakable aspect of Jesus’ teaching about the nature of the Father: “If you, therefore, who are evil [ἐὶ οὖν

¹⁰ See further evidence in A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 13-69.

¹¹ J. M. Moe, trans., *Pharisaism and Christianity* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 75.

¹² Franzmann calls attention to the significance of this text; see “Augustana II: Of Original Sin,” 892.

ὑμεῖς ποιητοὶ ὄντες] know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him” (Matt 7:11). Jesus, however, does not understand this condition of man to be the result of God’s good creation, as is made clear in his discussion of divorce (Matt. 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12). Jesus clearly affirms that the “hardness of heart” resulting in divorce did not exist “from the beginning” when God created Eve for Adam and united them as one flesh (Matt. 19:8). In this interaction Jesus implicitly affirms the historicity of Adam and Eve as well as their responsibility for the sin that has corrupted His “good” creation.¹³

Other teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels reflects the truth that *outward acts* of sin are the result of the *inward condition* of sin: “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander; these are what define a person” (Matt. 15:19-20a; see also Mark 7:21-23). With these words Jesus is teaching that the source of our sinful deeds does not lie *outside* of man (i.e., “the devil made me do it”), but *within* us. As elsewhere in the Scriptures, the referent of “heart” here is our being or self. This teaching reflects the important conclusion found in Genesis shortly after the narrative of the Fall: “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5b). On another occasion Jesus traces sinful actions to a sinful condition by using the analogy of the problem with the fruit of trees lying in the trees themselves: “Every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit” (Matt. 7:16; see also 12:33). The inward state of sinful corruption in spite of outward appearances is especially evident in the judgment of the Pharisees rendered by Jesus: “For you are like white-washed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matt. 23:27).

The Johannine literature provides even more abundant testimony supporting this pessimistic assessment of man’s condition. The evangelist John at times uses the singular form of ἁμαρτία (“sin”) to signify that sin is *a singular and cosmic condition* rather than merely *multiple individual actions* (see John 1:29; 15:22; 16:8). For example, John the Baptist announces Jesus with these words: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the *sin* of the world [ἴδε ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου]”; John 1:29). Both the use of the singular (τὴν ἁμαρτίαν) as well as the inclusive genitive modifier that indicates universal scope (τοῦ κόσμου) signify sin is a condition that enslaves creation, including all people. The universal need for a “birth” from God of which Jesus speaks to Nicodemus

¹³ Jesus and other first-century Jews regarded the historicity of Adam and Eve as self-evident; this, however, is not the situation among many twenty-first-century Christians who have been impacted by Historical Criticism. The dismissal of the account of Adam and Eve’s Fall has profound impact on one’s understanding of the origin of sin as well as the goal of salvation being the restoration of creation; see David P. Scaer, “The Problem of Inerrancy and Historicity in Connection with Genesis 1-3,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 41 (1977): 21-25.

implies a universal sinful condition that is nothing less than spiritual death: “Unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the Kingdom of God [ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν, οὐ δύναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ]”; John 3:3).¹⁴ Jesus restates this same truth later in this Gospel: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (6:44; cf. 6:65). Sin’s grip is clear: man is in bondage to sin; thus he is “dead” in sin. This “death sentence” is the very one announced to Adam and Eve: “The day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

The understanding of this sinful state as an “inherited condition” is implicitly expressed by Jesus in His reply to Nicodemus: “The one who is born of flesh is flesh, but the one who is born of the Spirit is Spirit” (John 3:6; cf. 6:63). Although Adam and Eve are not mentioned here, we would be remiss if we did not interpret this statement in its wider canonical context and understand “flesh” (σὰρξ) as signifying the sinful condition that has passed to all humanity since Adam and Eve. This understanding is affirmed later in this Gospel when Jesus mentions that Satan has been a murderer “from the beginning” (John 8:44), certainly pointing to Cain’s slaying of Abel as the event that concretely demonstrates the truth that sinful flesh (Adam and Eve) begets sinful flesh (Cain; see also 1 John 3:8-12). The fact that fellow Jews saw only *some* people—not *all*—as born in the slavery to sin is apparent in their denial of the need for freedom (John 8:33) and in the condemnation of the healed blind man by the synagogue rulers reflected in John 9:34: “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?”

Sin is presented as a condition of bondage with explicit simplicity by Jesus in John 8:34: “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin [πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας].” The universal application of the truth that every person is a slave to sin without being freed by the Son is apparent in the contrast between Jesus as the Son and everyone else as slaves to sin in the verses that follow (8:35-36; cf. 8:46). Furthermore, Jesus identifies those who are slaves to sin as ones who “are of your father the Devil” (8:44). The cosmic scope of this bondage to sin and Satan is emphasized again in Jesus’ description of Satan as the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31). This perspective is also expressed extensively in 1 John (esp. 3:4-18). The Gospels present sin, therefore, both as a condition of enslavement from which we cannot free ourselves and as a condition inherited from the Fall.

¹⁴ The Book of Revelation also presents sin as a condition of spiritual death where man needs a spiritual resurrection (the “first resurrection” of Rev. 20:6) and the cosmos needs to be made new (Rev. 21:1). The “first death” (spiritual death) is implicit with the mention of the “second death” (Rev. 20:6; 14); see Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 565-568.

III. Sin as an Condition in the Teaching of Paul

When examining sin as a condition in the Pauline corpus, it is appropriate that attention be centered on Romans. This is certainly because of the significance of Romans 5:12 and its use in the Lutheran Church, but also because sin is such a prominent subject in this epistle.¹⁵ Words related to ἁμαρτία (“sin”) are found 60 times in Romans, 42 times in chapters 5-8 alone.

Romans 1:18-3:20 may well be the longest sustained testimony to the universal sinfulness of man that is found in the Scriptures, even though the term “sin” does not appear until 3:9.¹⁶ The climax of Paul’s discussion of the unrighteousness of all humanity comes in 3:9-18, which consists of a series of OT quotations—primarily from the Psalms—woven into one seamless, vivid, and powerful testimony to universal unrighteousness:

- [9] What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already been charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin [πάντας ὑφ’ ἁμαρτίαν εἶναι] 10 as it is written,
“There is none righteous, not even one;
[11] There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;
[12] All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.” [Ps. 14:1-2; 53:1-2]
[13] “Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving” [Ps. 5:9],
“The poison of asps is under their lips” [Ps. 140:3];
[14] “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” [Ps. 10:7];
[15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood,
[16] Destruction and misery are in their paths,
[17] And the path of peace have they not known” [Is. 59:7-8].
[18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes” [Ps. 36:1].
[19] Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are in the Law, that every mouth be closed, and all the world become accountable to God;
[20] because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Paul as a Jew draws on the Old Testament as the ultimate authority that affirms the Biblical truth he rolls out as he introduces this testimony: “Jews and Greeks all are under sin [Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἑλληνας πάντας ὑφ’ ἁμαρτίαν εἶναι]” (i.e., all are enslaved to sin). Notice that “sin” is a singular reality here. Beverly Gaventa emphasizes that sin in these chapters of

¹⁵ See especially Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “The Cosmic Power of Sin in Paul’s Letter to the Romans: Toward a Widescreen Edition,” *Interpretation* 58 (2004): 229-240.

¹⁶ See Richard H. Bell, *No One Seeks for God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 1.18-3.20* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

Romans should be understood as “a power that sets itself over against God.”¹⁷ Her comment on this verse is instructive:

Paul’s review of human behavior points to the reality of a power named Sin that holds human beings in its grasp. So firm is the control that even the greatest advantages conveyed upon Israel by God cannot immunize Israel against Sin’s power (3:1-8).¹⁸

Furthermore, the numerous inclusive statements in 3:10-18 reveal the universal scope of man’s unrighteous condition: “no righteous one, not even one”; “none who understands, no one who seeks God”; and “all turned away; no one does good, not so much as one.” Paul reinforces his teaching about this universal condition of man again in 3:23: “For all sinned and are lacking the Glory of God” [πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ]. The use of πάντες (“all”) with the aorist verb ἥμαρτον (“sinned”) prompts the question: What is the referent of “all sinned”? The context states that all who sinned “are justified [declared righteous] by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:24). Both sin and justification are past actions. It is apparent from this immediate “justification” context, as well as Romans 5:12 which will be discussed below, that Paul understands this statement in 3:23 as a reference to Adam’s sin as the act of disobedience that brought sin to all mankind (“all sinned”) and destroyed the image of God for all (“and [all] are lacking the Glory of God”).¹⁹

Romans 5 sets forth how the powers “sin” and “death” came into this world and especially how they have been overcome by Christ.²⁰ As noted earlier, this portion of Romans is considered the key proof text for the teaching concerning the sinful condition that all mankind inherits as the result of Adam’s disobedience that is narrated in Genesis 3. Even though Eve was also involved with the first sin, Paul’s focus is on Adam here because it sharpens the “one man Adam” and the “one man Christ” typology (Rom. 5:14). Paul clearly and unambiguously anchors the origin of sin and death in Adam’s disobedience: “Even as sin entered the world through one man and through sin death [also entered], therefore death came to all men, because all men sinned” (5:12). Paul here depicts sin and death as “powers” that enter the cosmos in order to enslave and rule it. Gaventa properly emphasizes that this language should be understood in light of Paul’s apocalyptic eschatology: “the gospel as viewed in Romans has do

¹⁷ Gaventa, 239.

¹⁸ Gaventa, 234.

¹⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield notes that 3:23 and 5:12 should be understood to have the “same meaning”; see *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975) 1.279.

²⁰ Although widely known, it is worth noting that Paul understands “death” as a reality that encompasses physical death but is a much broader spiritual power that exercises its rule over creation with sin as a result of Adam’s transgression.

with God's revealing invasion in Jesus Christ of a cosmos in the grip of Sin, of Death, subject to peril and sword and all the rest of the Powers of this age."²¹

There has been considerable debate over the centuries about how the important phrase ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον ("because all [men] sinned") in Romans 5:12 should be interpreted. C. E. B. Cranfield lists six basic options for understanding this phrase:

1. To take ᾧ as masculine with ὁ θάνατος as its antecedent.
2. To take ᾧ as masculine with ἐνδὸς ἀνθρώπου as its antecedent, and ἐπί as equivalent to ἐν.
3. As in 2, but taking ἐπί in the sense 'because of.'
4. To take ἐφ' ᾧ as a conjunction meaning 'because,' understanding ἥμαρτον to refer not to men's sinning in their own persons but to their participation in Adam's transgression (thus combining the essential theological idea of 2 with the grammatical explanation of ἐφ' ᾧ as a conjunction).
5. As in 4, but understanding ἥμαρτον to refer to men's sinning in their own persons quite independently of Adam, though after his example.
6. As in 4, but understanding ἥμαρτον to refer to men's sinning in their own person but as a result of the corrupt nature inherited from Adam.²²

Option 1 is difficult because of the distance between the relative and its antecedent. Option 2, even though it was preferred by Augustine because of an emphasis on sin happening "in Adam", is also difficult because of the distance between the relative and its antecedent as well as the use of ἐπί instead of ἐν. Although Option 3 is a slight improvement over Option 2, the grammatical problem concerning the antecedent of the relative remains. Understanding ἐφ' ᾧ as a conjunctive meaning "because" is found in many of the Greek fathers and is the best way to understand this construction (as in Options 4-6). Option 4, which is the preferred understanding, has the advantage of having both a solid grammatical basis as well as the theological understanding of Option 2 that "all sinned collectively in the primal transgression of Adam."²³ Option 5 reflects the Pelagian understanding that goes against the whole understanding of the typology of Adam's act of disobedience with Christ's act of obedience laid out in Romans 5:12-21.²⁴ Option 6 states that ἥμαρτον refers to actual sinning, but argues against

²¹ Gaventa, 239.

²² *Romans*, 1.274-281. The analysis of these options is based upon Cranfield, although he favors Option 6. Luther follows Augustine; see *Luther's Work 25: Lectures on Romans* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 296-302.

²³ *Romans*, 1.277.

²⁴ Pelagius (early fifth century) taught that sinners still had free will; thus one could be saved by an act of the will moved by God's grace. His teaching was countered especially

the Pelagian view by asserting that man's actual sinning which brings death is the result of the corruption inherited from Adam's primal transgression.

Following Option 4 means that Romans 5:12 states death to be the result of Adam's disobedience by which sin entered and enslaved the cosmos, including all humanity. Because death came to all men through Adam's transgression (5:12, 15, 18; esp. 1 Cor. 15:22), and because death is "the wages of sin" (6:23), therefore Paul understood that all are joined to the reality of Adam's transgression.²⁵ To express it simply: When Adam transgressed, "all men sinned" (3:23; 5:12, 19); from the time of Adam's transgression, therefore, "all are under sin" (3:9). This understanding of 5:12 is supported by the several ways in which Paul restates the Adam side of the Adam-Christ typology in the remainder of Romans 5:

The masses died through one man's trespass (5:15).
Through one man's trespass, death reigned [over all] (5:17).
One man's trespass led to condemnation for all (5:18).
By one man's disobedience [trespass], the masses became sinners (5:19).²⁶

Romans 5:19 is especially important support for the universal or collective aspect of Adam's sin: through Adam's disobedience "the masses" were brought under the condition of sin *before* they were actually conceived and inherited it.

Some interpreters argue that Romans 5:18 teaches the "imputation" of the one sin of Adam to all: "So therefore as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, so also through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men [Ἔρα οὖν ὡς δι' ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτως καὶ δι' ἑνὸς δικαίωματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς]"²⁷ "Imputation" nomenclature is used because of the appositional structure of this sentence:

just as...condemnation [ὡς...εἰς κατάκριμα]
so also...justification of life [οὕτως...εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς]

by Augustine and condemned by the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Orange (529); see Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 347-360. The Lutheran Confessions affirm this condemnation (e.g., see AC II).

²⁵ The Greek Fathers tend to emphasize death rather than sin as the inherited condition; for example, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.22. See also Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 167-314.

²⁶ This translation of οἱ πολλοί, ("the many") as "the masses" in Romans 5:15 and 5:19 is to preclude the conclusion that "many" does not mean "all" (i.e., limited atonement in Reformed theology). An inclusive translation of πολὺς ("many") is correct in this context due to the parallel content between these two verses and 5:18 where πᾶς ("all") is used.

²⁷ Blocher, 63-81.

The argument goes that if “justification” involves *the imputation of Christ’s righteousness* to sinners, then the “condemnation to all men” involves *the imputation of Adam’s sin* to all born of Adam.²⁸ Francis Pieper even draws battle lines on this point: “Those who reject the imputation of Adam’s sin as an injustice are compelled, if they would be consistent, to declare the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to be an injustice and to reject it; thus they take their stand outside the pale of Christianity.”²⁹ Part of the basis for this imputation of sin formulation is to make it clear that all people share responsibility or guilt for Adam’s transgression.

Universal responsibility for the first sin is taught in Romans 5:18; what is *not* taught is that this responsibility is based upon God imputing Adam’s sin to all. Paul is speaking in Romans 5:18 of the *universal* justification declared at the resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 4:25), not the *individual* justification that involves the imputation of righteousness through faith. Furthermore, Paul speaks in 5:18 of sin’s enslavement of all creation which results in God’s universal condemnation of fallen man. The possibility of this condemnation was pronounced *before* the fall into sin: “in that day you eat of it you shall die” (Gen. 2:17). The moment Adam and Eve tore into the fruit, sin shackled the cosmos and God’s condemnation was effected upon all humanity. There, in Adam and Eve, all died. There all lost the image of God. Neither this sin nor God’s verdict against it need to be individually “imputed” to sinners who are already dead and enslaved. Paul expressed this truth with profound simplicity in 1 Corinthians: “For in Adam all die” (15:22).

Another way to probe Paul’s understanding that all collectively sinned in Adam’s disobedience is to recognize an analogy in his collective understanding of Jesus’ death as expressed in 2 Corinthians: “because one has died for all, therefore all have died [ὅτι εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἄρα οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον]” (5:14).³⁰ Here Paul states that all sinners, including those yet to inherit Adam’s condition through conception in time, have already collectively died to sin in Christ’s death for all. As Franzmann has stated: “for we were all included in the body of the Crucified; His love, God’s love, has made His death the death of all (2 Cor. 5:14).³¹ How could “all” have died to sin even before they existed, much less before they were baptized into that

²⁸ See, for example, G. Stoeckhardt, *Romans* (trans. Edward W. Schade; ed. Otto F. Stahlke; Fort Wayne: CTS Printshop, 1984), 238-239, and Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1.539.

²⁹ *Christian Dogmatics*, 1.539.

³⁰ Paul Raabe notes helpfully that Paul writes in Romans and Galatians of both Christ’s “exclusive death” (apart from us) and “inclusive death” (through our Baptism into his death); see “Who Died on the Cross? A Study in Romans and Galatians,” *Concordia Journal* 23 (1997): 201-212. He does not, however, address how Paul’s understanding of Christ’s “exclusive death” on our behalf *includes* the teaching expressed in 2 Corinthians 5 that Christ embodied sinful humanity in his death. All, therefore, died on the cross before some individually realize that death to sin in Baptism.

³¹ Martin Franzmann, *Romans: A Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 122.

death (Rom. 6:1-4)? The answer is provided a few sentences later in 2 Corinthians: God made “him to be sin who knew no sin” (5:21). Christ mysteriously embodied all humanity in Himself from His Baptism through His crucifixion and resurrection. When He died to sin, therefore, all sinners collectively died to sin; when He came alive, all sinners collectively came alive in Him. In Baptism this death to sin and resurrection to new life is individually realized in the life of the Baptized. By way of analogy, all descendants of Adam collectively sinned and died in Adam’s act of disobedience. In each person’s conception the result of mankind’s collective participation in Adam’s disobedience is individually realized as each person inherits the condition of sin and death.

Paul’s most extensive discussion of sin as slavery or bondage is found in Romans 6-7. The key theological point of 6:1-11 is that our sinful condition (“old man”) is executed in our baptismal union to Christ’s crucifixion so that sin no longer enslaves us: “For this [truth] we know: that our old man was crucified *in order that* the body of sin be destroyed, *with the result that* it no longer enslaves us to sin” (6:16).³² The result of being set free from slavery to sin and being made slaves to God is clear in 6:22 (note the emphasis on God’s action through the passive voice participles translated here with causal force): “But now, because you have been set free [ἐλευθερωθέντες] from sin and because you have become enslaved [δουλωθέντες] to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end [result] is life eternal.”

In Romans 7 Paul teaches about the ongoing struggle against the power of sin that the Baptized who died to sin and rose to new life in Christ encounter. He makes it clear, from personal experience, that sin is still present in a Christian and part of a serious ongoing war. It is not the Law that is responsible for this struggle, but sin that rebels against the Law (7:8-12). This chapter is considered one of the most difficult in Romans, largely because of questions surrounding the identity and situation of the first person (“I”) references in the chapter.³³ Although there are several possible referents for the “I” (ἐγώ) of this chapter, the best solution—especially in light of the present tense verbs here—is to understand the “I” as

³² The ἵνα plus the subjunctive verb (καταργηθῆ) is the purpose clause and the articular infinitive (τοῦ δουλεύειν) is used here as a result clause (rather than its more typical use as a purpose clause). This verse is the source of Martin Luther’s expression “the Old Adam”; see especially the explanation of Baptism in his *Small Catechism*. The Book of Revelation depicts the condition of sin in relational terms as union with Satan which is apparent in those who bear of the mark/name of the Beast and are thus the harlot, who is Babylon (Rev. 14:16-18). This portrait is in obvious contrast to those freed from the dominion of this enslaved condition by the Lamb’s victory given in Baptism where the saints are sealed with the Divine Name and become his bride, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 7:1-3); see Charles A. Gieschen, “Sacramental Theology in the Book of Revelation,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67 (2003): 149-174.

³³ See esp. Michael Paul Middendorf, *The “I” in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997).

Paul's reference to himself as a Christian. He speaks for every Christian's struggle against the sinful condition when he writes: "For what I do is not what I desire, but the evil that I do not desire, this I do" (7:19).

The struggle of the new "inner man" (Christ) against the fleshly "old man" (sinful condition) is expressed in 7:22-23: "For I delight in the Law of God according to the inner man [κατὰ τὸν ἕσω ἄνθρωπον],³⁴ but I see another law at work in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner to the law of sin that is at work in my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me out of this body of death?" Our death to sin and rising to life in Christ through Baptism where we become slaves to righteousness is real, yet so is the sin that continues to exist in us, even though it is no longer in dominion nor does our "old man" define who we really are in Christ. The content of both Romans 6 and 7 in understanding our relationship to our sinful condition must be kept in balance; neither chapter should be taught to the exclusion of the other.

The cosmic scope of both sin's slavery and Christ's deliverance is expressed very emphatically by Paul through his discussion of the created world in Romans 8:

[19] For the creation waits with eager expectation for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility; not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And now only the creation, we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption as son, the redemption of our bodies.

"Birth" language, as was used of man in other texts discussed above, is used here of the wider creation. Such language is appropriate because although all creation has been freed from its bondage to death by Christ's death and resurrection, this freedom will not be realized in fullness until His *parousia* on the Last Day.

Finally, the description of sin as a power that enslaves is by no means exclusively presented in Romans. In Paul's letter to the Galatians he states:

[4:8] Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; [9] but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you

³⁴ The "inner man" should be understood in light of the baptismal union with Christ presented in Romans 6. This "man" is Christ who is "in" the one who is "in Christ" (2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16; cf. Gal. 2:20).

turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more?

As expressed in Romans 7, being freed from this bondage to “elemental spirits” (πρωχὰ στοιχεῖα) does not free us from being challenged by sin. The ongoing battle that the Christian has with sin is addressed in Galatians 5 in terms of the struggle with our “flesh” (σάρξ), a term Paul uses as a synonym for the inherited sinful condition: “But I say, walk by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh” (5:16; cf. 5:17, 19-21; esp. Rom. 8:1-17). The other epistle that discusses original sin as bondage is Ephesians. There Paul describes our fallen state before coming alive in Christ as a condition of death and bondage to Satan (“the Prince of the Power of the Air”):

[2:1] And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the Prince of the Power of the Air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. [3] Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by condition children of wrath [ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς], like the rest of mankind.

Especially noteworthy here is Paul’s use of φύσις in verse 3. This noun signifies a “condition or circumstance determined by birth.”³⁵ Paul, therefore, understands this slavery to sin as an *inherited condition* that places us at enmity with God: “we were, by [inherited] condition, children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3).

This evidence from the Pauline epistles provides us with a clear understanding of sin’s origin with Adam, its nature as a power that enslaves creation, and its ongoing impact in the lives of those who have been freed by Christ from its slavery. The futility of viewing sin primarily as individual transgressions is expressed well by Gaventa:

[. . .] the battle against evil is not fought by reducing it to a laundry list of transgressions and trying really hard to avoid them. Nor is it fought by identifying evil in other people and restraining or eradicating them. Evil is God’s own enemy. The gospel that Paul proclaims is that God has not left us alone and powerless. In Jesus Christ, God has already broken Death and Sin and will finally crush Satan on our behalf.³⁶

³⁵ F. W. Danker, ed., *English Dictionary of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1069 (hereafter BDAG).

³⁶ Gaventa, 240.

IV. Sin as a Condition in Other New Testament Writings

Although the weightiest New Testament testimony to original sin is found in the Gospels and Pauline Epistles, there is some evidence of this teaching in other New Testament documents. We will briefly examine texts from James and 1-2 Peter.

The opening chapter of the Epistle of James gives evidence of original sin by testifying that our internal evil desires are the source that gives “birth” to our outward sins:

[13] Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. [14] But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. [15] Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

James is saying that man cannot blame actual sins on others, especially not God, because these sins are the result of the evil desires that are inherent in us since the Fall.³⁷ Furthermore, James 4:1-2 reflects an understanding of the “flesh” as the sinful condition from which Christ frees us through what he “suffered in the flesh” (see John 3:6 and Gal. 5:16 above): “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffering in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions but by the will of God.”

1 Peter contains extensive testimony to sin as a condition of spiritual death “inherited from your fathers” (1:18) from which Christians are “born again” (1:23) and live as “newborn babes” (2:2). 1 Peter 1:18 emphasizes sin as an inherited condition from which we must be redeemed since we cannot free ourselves: ἐλυτρώθητε ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαράδοτου (“you have been redeemed from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers”). The Greek term for “inherited from your forefathers” (πατροπαράδοτος) is a compound noun that signifies a binding tradition from one’s “father” (πατήρ) that is “handed over” (παραδίδωμι).³⁸ Although Peter is not tracing sin back to Adam, this origin of sin is implicit in his statement. Leonard Goppelt recognizes this and states: “The term [πατροπαράδοτος] describes ‘sociologically’ what the Adam-Christ typology in Romans 5:12-21 says theologically.”³⁹ That this condition is one of spiritual death is clear

³⁷ David Scaer sees a parallel here with Jesus’ teaching in the Synoptic Gospels as discussed above (e.g., Matt 5:28; 7:21-23; 15:19-20); see *James the Apostle of Faith: A Primary Christological Epistle for the Persecuted Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983), 57.

³⁸ BDAG, 789.

³⁹ *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn; trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 117.

from the assurance that Peter gives: “you have been born again” (1:23). 2 Peter 2:18-22 provides another depiction of sin as enslavement in its discussion of the ongoing challenge that the condition of sin presents to Christians who have been freed from its dominion. It does this by presenting the possibility of becoming enslaved to sin once again due to apostasy (see Heb. 6:4-6).

V. The Death of Jesus as Defining Sin for Early Christians

The nature of a cure says something about the disease for which it is offered. The death of Jesus, therefore, speaks volumes about our sinful condition. Otfried Hofius, in an article on the use of Isaiah 53 in the New Testament, makes this illuminating assessment that is of great relevance for this study: “For now Christ’s death and resurrection determine the meaning of *sin*, *being a sinner*, and *existential place-taking for sinners*.”⁴⁰ Paul’s pessimistic assessment of his own condition and that of all humanity largely grew out of the revelation that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified is YHWH.⁴¹ That YHWH has gone to such drastic measures as to take upon Himself our sin and be cursed through cruel crucifixion said untold volumes to early Christians about the seriousness of the sinful condition in which we find ourselves and from which we cannot free ourselves (e.g., Gal. 3:10-14). We should certainly not underestimate the impact that the death of Jesus had on the apostolic witness to sin as a condition that totally corrupts and enslaves the cosmos, including all humanity.

VI. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the New Testament offers abundant evidence to support the understanding that sin should not be understood primarily as individual acts of transgression, but as an *enslaved condition* of spiritual death from which no one can free himself and which manifests itself in individual acts of transgression. We have also seen that this condition has its origin in the primal transgression of Adam and Eve, a sin in which all humanity participated, that is inherited or passed on to all children of Adam. The ongoing challenges that this sinful condition inflicts upon the Baptized who have been freed from its dominion were also noted. The New Testament evidence emphasizes both the cosmic scope of this condition and the desperate need for divine deliverance from sin’s power-

⁴⁰ “The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters,” in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher; trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 188 (emphasis his).

⁴¹ See Charles A. Gieschen, “Paul and the Law: Was Luther Right?,” in *The Law in Holy Scripture: Essays from the Concordia Theological Seminary Symposium on Exegetical Theology*, ed. Charles A. Gieschen (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2004), 138-140.

ful grasp. As discussed in Part I above, this testimony about sin stands in stark contrast to much first-century Jewish teaching on this subject.

Gustav Aulén, in his famous exposition of the *Christus Victor* theme, stated: “No form of Christian teaching has any future before it except such as can keep steadily in view the reality of the evil in the world.”⁴² As we have viewed the abundant New Testament testimony to the original sin that enslaves God’s good creation, we have been given a new appreciation of the monstrous evil within and around us. This, in turn, leads us to a more profound appreciation of Jesus Christ who “became sin for us,” breaking sin’s shackles, that we truly “become the righteousness of God” through and in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

⁴² A. G. Herbert, trans., *Christus Victor* (London: SPCK, 1931), 176.

Sin in Cyril of Alexandria's *Commentary on John*

David R. Maxwell

The soteriology of the early Eastern fathers, as classically expressed by Athanasius, is that God became man that man might become God. This view of salvation as divinization or *theosis* raises questions about what we are being saved from. Is our problem that we are sinners, or is our problem that we are created beings? Although the fathers never meant the language of divinization literally, as if salvation entailed becoming *homoousios* with the Father, that language can at least be heard to suggest that what really needs to be overcome in us is our status as created beings.

While I do think the Eastern fathers have a keen sense of the limitations of created beings, I do not think they are saying that salvation overcomes our creatureliness. Instead, as I hope to show, they understand Christ's saving work as overcoming sin and death and thus restoring us to the condition of Adam before the fall. This restoration is divinization not because it makes us gods, but because it restores to us the divine life that Adam shared through the Holy Spirit and the image of God.

In order to provide a focus for the paper, I have chosen to examine one particular description of the economy of salvation: that of Cyril of Alexandria in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Although this approach leaves unanswered the question of to what extent Cyril's commentary is representative of the early Eastern fathers, I hope this disadvantage will be outweighed by the opportunity to be specific about theological convictions and exegetical moves which cohere in an actual text. Otherwise, I would be trading in abstractions and generalities.

The extensive *Commentary on John*, written between 425 and 428 A.D.,¹ gives Cyril ample opportunity to explicate his understanding of sin and salvation. The commentary is polemical in tone, directed primarily against the Arians and the Jews. Thus, Cyril's overarching concern is to defend the deity of Christ. Not surprisingly, therefore, the deity of Christ or of the Holy Spirit looms large in Cyril's descriptions of the economy of salvation.

¹ Lars Koen, *The Saving Passion: Incarnational and Soteriological Thought in Cyril of Alexandria's Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1991), 24.

Dr. David A. Maxwell is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO. This article was originally presented at a convocation of professors of theology of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which met in Dallas, TX, March 4-5, 2005.

One of his more extensive descriptions of salvation occurs when he comes to John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus' Baptism in chapter one. John the Baptist reports, "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him" (John 1:32). For Cyril, this passage presents a Christological problem, and the answer to this Christological problem holds the key to Cyril's understanding of sin and salvation.

The problem is that the account of Jesus' Baptism, especially the descent of the Spirit, is one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of the Arians. If Jesus receives the Spirit, then He must have lacked it. But how can He lack the Spirit if He is God? Therefore, Jesus must not be God.

Cyril's response to this logic turns on the soteriological significance of Jesus' Baptism. True enough, it makes no sense to say that God lacked the Holy Spirit or that God received the Holy Spirit. But the Arian argument, according to Cyril, loses sight of the purpose of the incarnation. Cyril urges upon them the words of 2 Corinthians 8:9, "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." He received the Spirit not because *He* lacked it, but because *we* lacked it. A Christological problem has a soteriological answer.

At this point, Cyril launches into an account of salvation history to make it clear just how Jesus' reception of the Holy Spirit at His Baptism saves humanity. Cyril begins with the creation of Adam in Genesis, noting not only that Adam was created in the image and likeness of God, but also that He was "sealed into the divine image" (εις εικόνα την θείαν κατεσφραγίζετο) by the Holy Spirit when "God breathed into his face the breath of life."² The image of God, moreover, is in play not only at creation, but it also enables Adam to keep the commandment God gave him. Cyril says that Adam kept this commandment "by means of the conspicuous divine image of his creator through the Holy Spirit who dwelt in him."³ This divine image Cyril elsewhere defines as the capacity for holiness and the desire for what God implants in man.⁴ It is also associated with incorruptibility and imperishability (τὰ ἀφθαρτον καὶ ἀνώλεθρον).⁵

When Adam sinned, however, the grace that God gave to Adam is recalled (ἀναπράττετο). God curses Adam with the words, "Dust you are, and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19).⁶ Adam's creation is undone. When grace, which here is interchangeable with the Holy Spirit, departs, that breath of life which God breathed into Adam no longer sustains him, and

² Cyril of Alexandria, *In D. Joannis Evangelium*, in *Sancti Patris Nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini*, vol. 3-5, ed. P. E. Pusey (Bruxelles: Culture of Civilisation, 1965), 2.1 (Pusey 1:182.27-29). Unlike other Greek fathers, Cyril drops the distinction between "image" and "likeness," maintaining that they are the same thing (Koen, 44).

³ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:183.2-4).

⁴ *De dogmatum solutione* (= *In Jo.*, Pusey 3:555.7-10). See also Koen, 44.

⁵ *In Jo.* 9.1 (Pusey 2:484.9-10). For a more expansive discussion of Cyril's definition of "image of God" see Eduard Weigl, *Die Heilslehre des hl. Cyrill von Alexandrien* (Mainz, 1905), 25-26.

⁶ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:183.5-7).

he reverts to what he was before: dust. Because of his sin, he loses the incorruptibility that the Spirit provided him, and he is therefore now subject to death.

The departure of the Spirit means that Adam can no longer maintain the image of God. This image, which Cyril pictures as an image on a coin, was devalued (παρεχαράττετο) by sin. “The engraving (οἱ χαρακτήρες) was no longer distinct but was somehow fainter and darkened because of the transgression.”⁷ The blessings of holiness and incorruptibility, associated with the image of God and the Spirit at creation, are lost because of Adam’s sin.

As the above passage indicates, however, the departure of the Spirit did not take place all at once. Cyril says the image of God became fainter, not that it was completely effaced. In fact, the loss of the Spirit in Cyril’s view happened over a period of time. As humanity increased, it grew increasingly more wicked. Eventually, according to Cyril, sin conquered everyone. “[Human] nature,” he says, “was stripped of the ancient grace, and the Spirit departed completely (παντελῶς).”⁸

At first glance, this progressive view of the fall may seem rather odd. The Scripture text which lies behind this view is found in Genesis 6. Though Cyril does not cite this text here, Genesis does state that “men began to increase in number” (Gen. 6:1). This increase is accompanied by the sin of the sons of God who married the daughters of men, which in turn, is met with the statement, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years” (Gen. 6:3). This passage seems to be the basis for Cyril’s view that the decisive loss of the Spirit occurred not at Adam’s fall but somewhat later. Genesis 6 goes on to state that “every inclination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5), giving further reason for Cyril to view the fall into sin as culminating not with Adam, but later, presumably just before the flood. The end result of all this is that humanity finds itself totally devoid of the Holy Spirit and thus without the image of God.

God responds to this catastrophe by transforming (μεταστοιχειοῦν) humanity back into the ancient image by the Holy Spirit.⁹ “For there was no other way (οὐχ ἑτέρως),” says Cyril, “that the divine engraving will become distinct just as it was before.”¹⁰ This transformation occurs in Jesus’ Baptism. Since “the Holy Spirit of wisdom will flee deceit” (Wis. 1:5), He could not dwell in Adam or his descendants. But God sent the second Adam who was able to receive the Spirit. When John the Baptist says, “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him” (John 1:32), Cyril understands that to be the restoration of the Spirit to humanity. Since Christ has no sin, the Spirit could remain on him, and thereby be-

⁷ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:183.10-12).

⁸ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:183.14-16).

⁹ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:183.21-23).

¹⁰ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:183.23-24).

come accustomed to remain on us as well.¹¹ John 20 has the same force for Cyril. When Jesus breathes on His disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” He is restoring the Spirit to humanity.

In this account of sin and salvation, is the problem that we are creatures or is the problem that we are sinners? The recall of the Spirit, the curse pronounced on Adam, and the loss of the image of God are all linked to Adam’s sin in Cyril’s account. Cyril is by no means neglecting sin. However, it is also the case that Cyril offers a rather negative diagnosis of creation *per se*, even apart from sin. In his discussion of John’s prologue, Cyril argues that the fact that Christ is the light means that He is divine. Correspondingly, the entire generate nature, he says, is darkness.¹² By darkness, Cyril means that created nature lacks understanding. He criticizes those who suppose that created beings attain understanding from rational seeds within them.¹³ Illumination, or understanding, come only from Christ.

That is not to say that only Christians have understanding. Cyril here is speaking of Christ’s activity in creation providing illumination for all humanity, “having mingled himself in all that exist that reasonable things may have reason and things capable of understanding may have understanding.”¹⁴ Cyril is here recognizing what we might call a passive capacity for reason that human beings have by nature. We are among those things that are “capable of understanding” (τὰ φρονήσεως δεκτικά).

Just because we have the capacity for understanding, however, does not mean that we actually have understanding or reason. A man is capable of reason, for example, and in addition to this, he may learn how to build a ship. Though he will always remain capable of reason, he may lose the skill of being a ship-builder.¹⁵ Likewise, man remains capable of reason and understanding, but actual reason and understanding must be supplied by Christ.

The theologians of the early church commonly held that susceptibility to change or loss is a characteristic of created beings as such. Creatures are created from nothing and are composed of parts. The fact that they are created from nothing means that they can fall back in that direction again. The fact that they are composed of parts means that they can fall apart again. As a creature, man is inherently unstable.

In Cyril’s view, Adam fell easily, so Christ lends us His stability (τὸ ἀμετάπτωτον). That is why immutability is such a key divine attribute for Cyril. The divine nature has stability which creatures *qua* creatures lack. So when the Spirit is rooted once again in human nature at Jesus’ Baptism, stable possession of the good is restored to humanity

¹¹ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:184.26-29).

¹² *In Jo.* 1.7 (Pusey 1:88.4).

¹³ *In Jo.* 1.7 (Pusey 1:87.11).

¹⁴ *In Jo.* 1.5 (Pusey 1:87.18-20).

¹⁵ *In Jo.* 1.8 (Pusey 1:106.8-11).

It would be wrong to suppose, however, that Cyril is some kind of creation-hating, crypto-Gnostic. In fact, he is very insistent on affirming the goodness of creation. This becomes clear in Cyril's discussion of John 1:9, which refers to, "the true light, which enlightens every man coming into the world." Grammatically, the verse can mean either that the light was coming into the world or that every man comes into the world, depending on how one divides the verse. Cyril interprets it to mean that Christ enlightens every man who comes into the world. In so doing, he is rejecting the Origenist speculation that embodiment is a punishment for a sin committed by a soul in a pre-incarnate state. For Cyril, this is impossible because John 1:9 explicitly states that when a man comes into the world he is enlightened. It is difficult to see, according to Cyril, how enlightenment and punishment could be the same thing. Furthermore, Cyril extols the hope of the resurrection as further evidence that the body is no punishment.

If Cyril does not want to denigrate creation, however, why does he say that all generate nature is darkness? Why does he speak in such a way as to lead one to wonder whether our problem is that we are creatures or that we are sinners? Cyril's point is to make clear that even in his pre-Fall state, Adam does not have his blessedness independently from God. The Spirit is the one who maintains the image of God in him. The Spirit is the one who is the cause of his incorruption and remaining in virtue.¹⁶ Christ is the one who illumines him. Cyril is not so much saying that being a creature is a problem that needs to be overcome, but rather he is saying that creatures do not act independently from God. They have nothing of their own. "What do you have that you have not received?" This applies not only after the fall, but before it as well.

This notion that creatures are never independent from God constitutes what I believe is the core orthodox conviction that unites East and West. We have seen this intimated in what Cyril has to say about the problems of being a creature, but he develops it to crystal clarity in his Christology. The point of the *theotokos*, which Cyril championed, was to make clear that the Logos is the subject of all Christ's actions, even His most humiliating ones like birth (and death). Cyril explicitly rejects the exegetical procedure of dividing up statements in the Gospels, attributing some to the human nature and others to the divine nature of Christ.¹⁷ The Logos is always the subject. Lutheran Christology, drawing on sixth-century terminological developments, expresses the same idea with the notion of the *anhypostasis* of the human nature of Christ. Christ's human nature has no person of its own. Rather, it subsists in the hypostasis of the Logos. All of this is to deny that, in the case of Christ, the human nature acts independently from God.

¹⁶ *In Jo.* 5.2 (Pusey 1:691.17-19).

¹⁷ See Cyril, *Third Letter to Nestorius*, anathema 4.

If we apply to anthropology Cyril's Christological concern to rule out any human sphere of activity that takes place apart from God, we might say that for Cyril, to be fully human means partaking in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Thus, for Cyril, divinization does not mean transcending our creaturely finitude, but it means a restoration to the original condition of Adam in which the Spirit imprinted the image of God on Adam. The following are all interchangeable terms for Cyril: new birth, partaking of the divine nature, restoration to the original image, and refashioning into divine sonship.¹⁸

Where does sin fit in all this? Once Adam falls, Cyril views the consequences of this fall as punishment for sin, not just byproducts of creatureliness. God recalls His Spirit. Adam is punished (ἐκολάζετο)¹⁹ by the curse to return to dust. The root problem with humanity for Cyril is clearly sin, for it is sin that necessitates God's saving economy to restore Adam's race to participate in the divine nature, that is, to be stamped in the image of God by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, one often hears the claim that the East is more optimistic about the human condition than the West because they are not affected by the Augustinian notion of original sin. True enough, Cyril does not develop a theory of the transmission of sin the way Augustine does, but Cyril is hardly optimistic about the human condition before conversion. Because of Adam, humanity lost the image of God and the Holy Spirit. Even Nestorius criticizes Pelagius's view that Adam's sin harmed only himself.

One may press Cyril, though. Does he really carry through with his negative estimation of human powers? He makes a number of statements that, to our ears, sound at least Semi-Pelagian. He says that Christ chose Philip because He knew he would be good.²⁰ He says that some hearts are more receptive to the word than others.²¹ Particularly striking is his discussion of John 6:65, in which Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless it is given to him by my Father." Cyril states in the first place that since "Every good and perfect gift comes down from above" (James 1:17), how much more is knowledge of Christ a gift from God, a gift that is even beyond all grace (πάσης ἐπέκεινα χάριτος)?²² Nevertheless, Cyril continues, this gift is not given to the unclean. The potential recipient must depart from his old way and get rid of his unlawful intentions.

If the recipient of the knowledge of Christ must first cleanse himself, one may ask, why does Christ say that He did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance? Cyril himself brings up this question as

¹⁸ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:219.1-6).

¹⁹ *In Jo.* 1.9 (Pusey 1:139.1).

²⁰ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:196.15-16).

²¹ *In Jo.* 2.1 (Pusey 1:212.5-10).

²² *In Jo.* 4.3 (Pusey 1:555.20-22).

an objection to his own position. He answers by saying that Christ was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, but some of Israel were nobler than others. Some were searchers of the truth, while others, namely, the Pharisees and the high priests, were hard-hearted and proved themselves unworthy of eternal life.²³ Ultimately, it would seem, there is something within human beings that distinguishes those who are saved from those who are not.

What do we make of such statements, and how do they square with Cyril's view that the human race lost the Holy Spirit and the image of God? It would be helpful at this point to recall an observation made by St. Augustine in the course of the Donatist controversy that before a controversy occurs, the fathers tend to speak imprecisely. In Augustine's case, he had to face the fact that the Donatists were able to find passages in Cyprian which supported their practice of rebaptism. It was not that Cyprian was wrong, St. Augustine countered, but Cyprian was not forced (by the Donatist heretics) to clarify his thinking on the matter in question.

In the same way, Cyril was not directly involved in the Pelagian controversy, so it would be unrealistic to expect him to have reflected with precision on the role of human faculties in the apprehension of the salvation won by Christ. When one examines the synergist-sounding statements in the *Commentary on John*, one realizes that they are not usually part of an extended discussion on the power of natural human faculties. Most of them are almost throw-away lines in the context of some other discussion.

One exception to this observation occurs in Cyril's discussion of John 7:30, which states that Jesus' hour had not yet come. For Cyril, the danger of this passage is that it may suggest that Jesus is under the control of fate, as if hours and seasons dictated what would happen in Jesus' life. Cyril identifies such a view as belonging to the Greeks, and he opposes it primarily on the basis of the fact that it makes exhortation to good works, effort, and reward meaningless. If our wills are controlled by fate, Cyril argues, then it would be appropriate for us to do as the pilots of ships are said to do when they lose hope in the midst of a storm: let go of all the ropes, undo the tiller, and set the ship at the mercy of the waves.²⁴

In general, Cyril's emphasis on the role of human powers in attaining the knowledge of Christ seems to arise not so much from his commitment to carve out a sphere of human activity which occurs independent of God—such a procedure would utterly contradict his most basic commitments in the realm of Christology—but rather he employs the notion of free will as a way of denying a pagan view of fate.

This is not to say Cyril is not serious about his claims for free will. Rather, I am suggesting that Cyril's teaching on free will may stand towards the periphery of his theology. Perhaps we might characterize it as

²³ *In Jo.* 4.3 (Pusey 1:556.19-29).

²⁴ *In Jo.* 5.1 (Pusey 1:665.11ff.).

an *ad hoc* solution to the question of fate. Certainly Cyril was not forced to reflect on the role of will in salvation the way Augustine was in the Pelagian controversy. Furthermore, if I am correct that his teaching on free will is a peripheral matter, it may be possible to find commonality between Augustine and Cyril, or between Luther and Cyril for that matter, by keying into more central concerns of Cyril.

The first of these central concerns, at the risk of some repetition, is the role of Christ's human nature in Christology. For Cyril, Christ's human nature never acts on its own. The Logos, acting through the human nature, is always the subject of Christ's actions, no matter how degrading or unbecoming to God those actions may be. Because of Cyril's clarity on the Logos being the acting subject in Christ, perhaps we might even refer to Cyril's Christology as "monergistic." This monergism would then find a point of contact in the monergism of Augustine which emphasizes the same concern to make God the subject of human actions. The difference is that in Augustine's case, this happens in the realm of soteriology.

The second of Cyril's central concerns is his conviction that because of Adam's fall, the human race lost the Holy Spirit and the image of God. Cyril may not have applied this conviction consistently throughout his theology, especially when it comes to the role of natural human powers in conversion, but the conviction is nevertheless there.

For Lutherans, the point at which Cyril leads us into deeper reflection is not so much his understanding of sin itself, but rather his description of what Adam lost when he fell into sin. Before we can understand the effects of sin, we need to have an understanding of anthropology prior to sin. There are two places we can look to find such an anthropology. We can look to Adam, created in the image of God and sealed in that image by the Holy Spirit, or we can look to the second Adam, whose human nature is passive and never stands as the subject of the sentence. In either case, Cyril would have us flee from any notion of a sphere of human activity that operates independently from God.

The Origins and Consequences of Original Sin in Luther's *Bondage of the Will*

Cameron A. MacKenzie

I wonder if we haven't made too much out of Luther's remark to Wolfgang Capito that except for *The Bondage of the Will* and the *Catechism*, he acknowledged none of his other books as really his.¹ This is often understood as Luther's identifying these two works as his best.² But there is something rather strange about that assessment, and I am doubtful that many of us would agree. Certainly one can make the case for the *Catechism* (either *Large* or *Small*), but I am less confident regarding *The Bondage of the Will*. For if our admiration for Luther derives from his recovery of the Gospel and his persistent proclamation and application of this chief article of the Christian religion, then *The Bondage of the Will* is something of a disappointment. One reason for this is undoubtedly the fact that it is a response to Erasmus's *Diatribes Concerning Free Will*,³ for that means that Luther directs his work largely to answering the arguments of the other.

¹"Regarding [the plan] to collect my writings in volumes, I am quite cool and not at all eager about it because, roused by a Saturnian hunger, I would rather see them all devoured. For I acknowledge none of them to be really a book of mine, except perhaps the one *On the Bondage of the Will* and the *Catechism*." Martin Luther to Wolfgang Capito, July 9, 1537. LW 50:172-173 (WABr 8:99.5-8). LW = Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986). WA = *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vols. 1- (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1883-).

²See, for example, J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, trans., "Introduction," *Martin Luther on The Bondage of the Will* (n.p.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1957), 40; Philip S. Watson, trans., "Introduction," *The Bondage of the Will*, LW 33:5; and Timothy F. Lull, "Luther's Writings," in Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 44.

³Johannes von Walter, ed., *De Libero Arbitrio Diatribe Sive Collatio per Desiderium Erasmus Roterodamum* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1910). For his part, Erasmus was responding to Luther's *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X novissimam damnatorum* (WA 7:94-151), especially Article 36, "Since the fall of Adam, or after actual sin, free will exists only in name, and when it does what it can it commits sin." This article, in turn, was taken from the thirteenth thesis of the Heidelberg Theses (WA 1:353-374; LW 31:39-70). See Harry J. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* (New York: Newman Press, 1969), 251-273, 277-279, and Heinrich Roos, "Die Quellen der Bulle 'Exsurge Domine'" in Johann Auer and Hermann Volk, eds., *Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Michael Schmaus zum sechzigsten Geburtstag* (München: Karl Zink Verlag, 1957), 909-926.

Dr. Cameron A. MacKenzie is Professor of Historical Theology and Chairman of the Department of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN. This article was originally presented at a convocation of professors of theology of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which met in Dallas, TX, March 4-5, 2005.

But even so, it is difficult for the contemporary Lutheran to designate as Luther's best a book that is much more about sin than it is about forgiveness. True, one can find Gospel in this work,⁴ and Luther concludes his argumentation on an evangelical note⁵; but its theme is hardly the grace of God—the sovereignty of God is more like it—and its emphasis is on man's plight as a sinner rather than on his prospects as a child of God.⁶

But for a conference devoted to the human condition under the Law, *The Bondage of the Will* is certainly an appropriate source for Luther's thinking on the subject, and in the time allotted, we will focus especially on "the origins and consequences of original sin" as Luther discusses them in *The Bondage of the Will*. Since the question of "origins" is the more challenging of the two in this work, let's begin with the latter—the conse-

For the historical background to the controversy between Luther and Erasmus, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 213-238, and Léon-E. Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 146-159. For a more detailed account, see Karl Zickendraht, *Der Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther über die Willensfreiheit* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909)

⁴For example, "In the New Testament, the gospel is preached and this is just the word that offers the Spirit and grace for the remission of sins which was procured for us by Christ crucified. It is all entirely free, given by the mercy of God the Father alone as he shows His favour towards us, who are unworthy, and who deserve condemnation." In this paper, English quotations are from the Packer and Johnston translation (abbreviated P&J). Parenthetical references are to volume 18 of the Weimar Edition of Luther's works. The quotation in this note is from P&J, 180 (WA 18:692.20-693.1). See also P&J, 71 (606.24-28), 111 (642.2-6), 162 (679.30-36), 166 (682.14-20), 167-168 (683.11-27), 176 (689.22-28), 187 (697.36-698.3), 244-245 (737.10-738.17), 276 (758.37-759.2), 287 (766.30-31), 290 (768.10-12), 292 (769.32-35). For an "evangelical" reading of *Bondage*, see Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 122-126.

⁵"And, finally, if we believe that Christ redeemed men by His blood, we are forced to confess that all of man was lost; otherwise, we make Christ either wholly superfluous or else the redeemer of the least valuable part of man only; which is blasphemy, and sacrilege." P&J, 318 (WA 18:786.17-20). But note that even here, the Gospel is used as a proof of man's sinfulness. See also P&J, 312 (782.21-24). This is very similar to what Luther says in the Smalcald Articles (3.1.11). In fact, Part 3, Article 1, "Sin," of these articles repeats many of Luther's conclusions from *The Bondage of the Will*.

⁶The literature on *The Bondage of the Will* is extensive. There are fine introductions in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 160-168; Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 259-285; Walter von Loewenich, "Gott und Mensch in humanistischer und reformatorischer Schau: Eine Einführung in Luthers Schrift *De servo arbitrio*" in *Humanitas-Christianitas* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1948), 65-101; and Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 417-458. For comprehensive analyses, see McSorley's *Luther: Right or Wrong?* and Klaus Schwarzwäller, *Theologia Crucis: Luthers Lehre von Prädestination nach De servo arbitrio, 1525* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1970). Schwarzwäller has also written a monograph that reviews the interpretation of *The Bondage of the Will* in the second half of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries, *Sibboleth: Die Interpretation von Luthers Schrift De servo arbitrio seit Theodosius Harnack: Ein systematisch-kritischer Überblick* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1969).

quences—before moving to the more difficult.

As the title itself suggests,⁷ Luther's principal concern in this work is to demonstrate man's inability to save himself—an inability rooted in his condition as a sinner. In only one place, however, does Luther really discuss original sin (*peccatum originale*), at least as far as the term is concerned, and then, only in passing, as an argument among many that he is *not* going to develop against free will. Nevertheless, in that passage, Luther describes original sin as the sin that becomes ours by birth and argues that on its account, free will has no "power at all except to sin and incur damnation."⁸

Obviously, this consequence of original sin is dire indeed, and Luther mentions it all over the place in *The Bondage of the Will*. That man is a sinner from first to last and therefore powerless to save himself is one of the great themes of the treatise.⁹ Of course, Luther's focus is on what sin means for the will, i.e., the power to choose. But he makes the following points as well: (1) all human beings are sinful; (2) every person is sinful in every part; (3) sin puts people under the power of Satan; and (4) even after Baptism, man remains a sinner.

Consider, first of all, the scope of human sinfulness. Who are sinners? Answer: everybody. Every human being. Referring specifically to original sin, Luther writes, "Of that one man [Adam], thus corrupt, *all* men were

⁷*De servo arbitrio* (literally, "Concerning the enslaved choice"). Since Augustine used the term on at least one occasion (*Contra Iulianum* 2.8.23), Lohse, 163, thinks that Luther chose it in order to identify himself with Augustine's doctrine of sin and grace. Luther himself refers to Augustine's terminology at WA 18:665.10-11 (P&J, 142). See McSorley, 90-93, for Augustine's understanding of "*servum arbitrium*."

⁸P&J, 297-298. "Igitur ipsum originale peccatum liberum arbitrium prorsus nihil sinit posse nisi peccare et damnari." WA 18:773.17-18. Cf. SA 3.1.1.

Lohse, 251-257, argues that "Luther's view of inherited sin did not differ from the tradition to any great degree" (251). See also Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 157-160. Regarding possible influences on Luther's doctrine of original sin, Adolar Zumkeller, *Erbsünde, Gnade, Rechtfertigung und Verdienst nach der Lehre der Erfurter Augustinertheologen des Spätmittelalters* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1984), 503, maintains that in the century before Martin Luther, Erfurt Augustinians did not teach the theology of Occam, but there were some advocates of Gregory of Rimini. Unfortunately, the position of Johannes Nathin, the theologian most likely to have influenced Luther directly, is not known. For an overview of medieval theologians' understanding of sin, see *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 10 vols. (München: Artemis-Verlag, 1977-1999), s.v. "Sünde, 'Sündenfall'" and Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller, eds., *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 1- (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977-), s.v. "Sünde VI. Mittelalter."

⁹"[The ungodly man's] corruption, his turning of himself from God, makes it impossible for him to be moved and made to act well...the ungodly man cannot alter his perversion. As a result he sins and errs incessantly and inevitably until he is set right by the Spirit of God." P&J, 205 (WA 18:710.5-8). See also P&J, 100 (632.29-32), 102 (634.15-21), 113 (643.13-20), 147 (670.8-11), 168-169 (684.19-22), 179 (691.33-34), 198 (705.20), 241 (735.20-22), 256 (745.30-31), 263 (750.31-38), 265 (252.12-15), 278 (760.22-23), 286 (765.25-27), 288 (767.14-16), 290 (768.23-26), 292 (769.20-23), 296 (772.6-11), 310 (781.15-22), 311 (781.14-16).

born ungodly [emphasis mine].”¹⁰ This means then that all people are liable to God’s condemnation. Writing with reference to Romans 1:18 (“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness”), Luther says: “Do you hear this general judgment against all men, that they are under the wrath of God?...He [Paul] assigns the reason for the wrath by saying that they do only that which merits wrath and punishment—that they are all ungodly and unrighteous.”¹¹ Luther explicitly rejects the notion that Paul’s judgment refers only to some and not all people;¹² and in another place, Luther includes even the “saints” under the condemnation of sin:

I can easily prove to you [Erasmus]...that whenever such holy men as you boast of approach God to pray or deal with Him, they approach him in utter forgetfulness of their own “free-will”; in self-despair they cry to Him for pure grace alone, as something far other than they deserve. Augustine was often thus, and so was Bernard when, at the point of death, he said, “I have wasted my time, because I have lived a waster’s life.” I see no mention here of a power that could apply itself to grace; all power is here condemned, because it was entirely turned away from grace.¹³

Besides the universality of sin, Luther also teaches the total corruption of the sinner as a consequence of original sin. There is no part of man that is not sinful. Luther writes, “Since by the single offence of the one man, Adam, we all lie under sin and condemnation, how can we set our hand to anything that is not sinful and damnable?”¹⁴ Referring to Romans 3:9 (“We have proved both Jews and Gentile to be all under sin.”), Luther also says, “By describing them all as ‘under sin,’ that is, slaves of sin, he leaves them no goodness”; and in response to Erasmus’s suggestion that the best parts of man, reason and will, still have power to make endeavors

¹⁰P&J, 202. “Ex quo homine sic corrupto nati sunt omnes impii.” WA 18:708.23-24. Cf. SA 3.1.1.

¹¹P&J, 273. “Audis hic generalem sententiam super omnes homines, quod sint sub ira Dei?...Caussam irae assignat, quod gerant non nisi ira et supplicio digna, nempe quod impii et iniusti sint omnes.” WA 18:757.14-17. See also P&J, 242 (736.15-16), 248 (740.12-16), 250 (742.5-9), 254 (744.25-27), 279 (761.9-11), 283 (763.19-25).

¹²P&J, 274-275, 277 (WA 18:757.37-758.1, 759.20-26).

¹³P&J, 114. “Ego vero contrarium vobis facile ostendam, Quod viri sancti, quales iactatis, quoties ad Deum oraturi vel acturi accedunt, quam penitus obliti incedant liberi arbitrii sui, desperantes de semetipsis, ac nihil nisi solam et puram gratiam longe alia meritis sibi invocantes, Qualis sepe Augustinus, Qualis Bernhardus cum moriturus diceret: Perdidit tempus meum, quia perditte vixi. Non video hic allegari vim aliquam, quae ad gratiam sese applicet, sed accusari omnem vim quod non nisi aversa fuerit.” WA 18:644.4-11.

¹⁴P&J, 297. “Cum unius Adae unico delicto omnes sub peccato et damnatione sumus, quomodo possumus aliquid tentare, quod non peccatum et damnabile sit?” WA 18:773.8-9. Cf. SA 3.1.3-8.

for good, Luther writes, “But wrath is revealed from heaven against them, and unless they are justified by the Spirit, it will damn them, whole and entire; which would not be, were they not under sin, whole and entire.”¹⁵

As further evidence of total corruption, Luther cites the failure of “the best and most excellent of men...with their best and most excellent faculties, that is, their reason and their will” to find favor with God in spite of undeniable “zeal for the works of the law.” “If *they* are condemned,” writes Luther, “for ungodliness...and are declared to be ‘flesh’ in God’s sight, what then is left in the entire human race which is not ‘flesh’ and ungodly?”¹⁶

In fact, Luther views it as a singular indication of sinful perversity that these “best devotees of the law” (“*optimi et studiosi legis*”) who seek righteousness before God by the law not only fail in their objective but are actually ignorant of what the law teaches, viz., the knowledge of sin. “And what can a man essay to do in order to take away sin, when he does not know what sin is?” Luther asks. “Surely this: mistake what is sin for what is not sin, and what is not sin for what is sin!” As a result, those whom the world values as its best representatives of righteousness and godliness, hate and hound the true righteousness of the Gospel.¹⁷

Clearly, then, because of their sinful condition, all human beings—apart from grace—take their marching orders from the devil. Christians know, Luther writes,

...that there are in the world two kingdoms at war with each other. In the one, Satan reigns.... He...holds captive at his will all that are not wrested from him by the Spirit of Christ; nor does he allow them to be plucked away by any other power but the Spirit of God.¹⁸

¹⁵P&J, 278-279. “Neminem excipit, qui dicit: omnes. Nihil relinquit boni, qui eos sub peccato esse id est servos peccati definit” (WA 18:760.22-23), and “Sed ira de coelo revelata super eos totos est damnatura, nisi spiritu iustificentur, quod non fieret, nisi toti essent sub peccato” (WA 18:760.38-39). See also P&J, 102 (634.16-20), 241 (735.20-27), 243 (736.24-25), 248 (740.19-26), 251 (742.15-21), 254 (744.25-29), 280-81 (761.32-37; 762.5-7), 308 (780.16-17).

¹⁶P&J, 283. “At cum ipsa legis opera damnet et impia faciat coram Deo, manifestum fit, quod omnes, qui studio legis et operum pollebant, damnat. Studebant autem legi et operibus non nisi optimi et praestantissimi, idque non nisi optimis et praestantissimis sui partibus, ratione scilicet et voluntate...si, inquam, ii damnantur impetatis...sed caro esse definiuntur coram Deo—, Quid iam reliquum est in toto hominum genere, quod non caro et impium est?” WA 18:763.39-764.6. For Luther, this indictment includes Jews like Nicodemus (P&J, 305-306; WA 18:778.17-779.10) and Gentiles like Cicero and Demosthenes (P&J 316; WA 18:785.11-12). See also P&J, 251-252 (742.26-743.15), 253 (743.35-744.2), 275 (758.14-16), 276 (758.36-759.12), 318 (786.14-17).

¹⁷P&J, 286-287. “At qui peccatum ignorat, quid ille conetur pro peccato auferendo? Hoc scilicet, quod peccatum pro non peccato et non peccatum pro peccato iudicabit.” WA 18:766.10-12. See also P&J, 153 (674.1-2), 186 (697.9-12), 187 (697.36-698.9), 232-233 (729.7-730.15), 275 (758.14-17), 276 (759.6-12), 277-78 (759.33-37; 760.8-14), 285 (765.14-17), 300 (775.1-4), 311 (782.1-4).

¹⁸P&J, 312. “[Cuncti Christiani] sciunt (inquam) duo esse regna in mundo mutuo pugnantissima, in altero Satanam regnare...qui cunctos tenet captivos ad voluntatem

But what does it mean to be ruled by Satan? For one thing, it means that we are blind to God's Word, "fast bound in a darkness that is no more human, but devilish."¹⁹ In spite of the inherent clarity of the Bible, the power of Satan is such that we do not understand its plainest teachings. As a result, we are blind to our own condition as sinners, "The work of Satan is to hold men so that they do not recognize their wretchedness, but presume that they can do everything that is stated [in the law]."²⁰ It also means that we are powerless to do anything but sin, because "Satan is by far the most powerful and crafty prince in this world.... Under his rule the human will is no longer free nor in its own power, but is the slave of sin and of Satan, and can only will what its prince has willed. And he will not let it will any good."²¹

It is in connection with this total power of Satan over people that only God can break that Luther employs his famous comparison of the human will to a beast of burden standing between two riders. "If God rides," says Luther, "it wills and goes where God wills.... If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it."²²

Though effective in conveying the utter helplessness of man's will, there is something misleading about the comparison, for man's situation is even worse than it suggests. Luther contends that even after God has rescued man from Satan's kingdom, there is a sense in which the devil continues to ride—or at least tries to—for man remains a sinner. Although Luther does not really develop this argument because Erasmus did not debate it in his work,²³ Luther designates it "the Achilles" of his argu-

suam, qui non sunt Christi spiritu ab eo rapti,...nec sinit eos sibi rapi ullis viribus nisi spiritu Dei." WA 18:782.29-34. See also P&J, 147 (670.6-11), 156 (675.36-37), 187 (697.27), 188 (698.13-14), 253 (743.32-35), 301 (775.16-18). Cf. SA 3.1.1.

¹⁹P&J, 132. "Daemoniacis nec iam humanis tenebris tenemur." WA 18:658.15-16.

²⁰P&J, 162. "Satanae opus est, ut homines teneat, ne suam miseriam agnoscant, sed praesumant sese posse omnia quae dicuntur." WA 18:679.31-33. Cf. SA 3.1.3.

²¹P&J, 263. "...Satanam esse principem longe potentissimum et callidissimum mundi,...quo regnante voluntas humana iam non libera nec sui iuris, sed serva peccati et Satanae non potest velle nisi quod princeps ille suus voluerit. Nihil vero boni ille sinet eam velle." WA 18:750.33-36. See also P&J, 103 (635.7-9), 107 (638.9-11), 156 (675.36-37), 162 (679.23-26), 201 (707.10-11), 262 (750.31-35), 312 (782.21-783.1), 317 (786.7-10). Cf. SA 3.1.5.

²²P&J, 104. "Sic humana voluntas in medio posita est ceu iumentum, si insederit Deus, vult et vadit, quo vult Deus,...Si insederit Satan, vult et vadit, quo vult Satan, nec est in eius arbitrio ad utrum sessorem currere aut eum quaerere, sed ipsi sessores certant ob ipsum obtinendum et possidendum." WA 18:635.17-22. See McSorley, 335-40, for historical background to this image.

²³It is a major theme, however, in Luther's reply to the Louvain theologian, Latomus, (WA 8:43-128; LW 32:137-260). Luther's teaching that sin remains after Baptism was also one of the points for which Luther had been condemned in the papal bull of 1520 and which derived from Thesis 2 of the Leipzig Debate, "To deny that...sin remains in the

ments against free will and explains it on the basis of Romans 7²⁴ and Galatians 5,

There is in the saints and the godly such a mighty warfare between the Spirit and the flesh that they cannot do what they would. From this I would argue as follows: If human nature is so bad that in those who are born again of the Spirit it not only fails to endeavour after good, but actually fights against and opposes good, how could it endeavour after good in those who are not yet born again of the Spirit, but serve under Satan in the old man?²⁵

Luther returns to the problem of sin in the life of the faithful in the conclusion to *Bondage* and lists it as one of his five chief arguments against free will. He identifies it explicitly as a consequence of original sin:

If we believe that original sin has ruined us to such an extent that even in the godly, who are led by the Spirit, it causes abundance of trouble by striving against good, it is clear that in a man who lacks the Spirit nothing is left that can turn itself to good, but only to evil.²⁶

Because of original sin, therefore, man's situation is truly desperate, a slave to sin and Satan, unless he is rescued by God's grace, and even then, so weak that he remains utterly reliant upon that same grace.

But if that's the case, how did humanity come to be in this situation? Where did original sin come from?

The simple answer is from Adam, "By the single offence of the one man, Adam, we all lie under sin and condemnation." But that single of-

child after baptism...is equivalent to crushing Paul and Christ under foot." LW 31:317 (WA 2:160.34-35). See also Roos, 919, and Brecht, 7-9.

²⁴There is a long history of debate over who it is that Paul is talking about in Romans 7:14-25, but Luther, as early as his lectures on Romans (1515-1516), understood these verses as referring to Paul and all Christians (LW 25:61[WA 56:68.9-15] and LW 25:327-236 [WA 56:339.5-347.28]). See Michael Paul Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997), 273-274, and Otto Kuss, *Der Römerbrief*, vol. 2: *Röm 6,11 bis 8,19* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1963), 473-475.

²⁵P&J, 313. "Paulus docet, in sanctis et piis esse pugnam spiritus et carnis tam validam, ut non facere possint, quae vellent. Ex hoc sic arguebam: Si natura hominis adeo mala est, ut in iis, qui spiritu renati sint, non modo non conetur ad bonum, sed etiam pugnet et adversetur bono, quomodo in illis, qui nondum renati in verteri homine sub Satana serviunt, ad bonum conaretur?" WA 18:783.4-9. See also P&J, 255 (745.6-10) and 262 (750.4-5). Therefore, Luther concludes in the Smalcald Articles (3.3.40), the life of the Christian is one of daily repentance.

²⁶P&J, 317. "Si peccatum originale credimus sic nos perdidisse, ut etiam iis, qui spiritu aguntur, negotium molestissimum faciat adversus bonum luctando, clarum est, nihil in homine spiritus inani reliquum esse, quod ad bonum sese verti possit, sed tantum ad malum." WA 18:786.10-14.

fence now belongs to every human being, for, Luther inquires, “who could be condemned for another’s offence, especially in the sight of God?” This does not mean, however, that each of us has committed this sin. No, we are born with it, “His offence becomes ours; not by imitation, nor by any act on our part (for then it would not be the single offence of Adam, since we should have committed it, not he), but it becomes ours by birth.”²⁷

Clearly, Luther is not much interested in *how* original sin is passed from one generation to the next, but he does insist that it is so passed and thus wreaks spiritual havoc in humanity.²⁸

If, however, we all suffer from the consequences of Adam’s sin, it is not surprising that Luther discusses the origins of original sin in Adam himself. This, in turn, raises significant questions about the relationship of sin to the sovereignty of God.

As is well known, a principal argument for the “bondage of the will” apart from human sinfulness is the sovereignty of God. Luther makes this point early in his treatise in connection with God’s foreknowledge. “It is fundamentally necessary and wholesome,” writes Luther, “for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that he foresees, purposes, and does all things according His own immutable, eternal and infallible will. This bombshell knocks ‘free-will’ flat, and utterly shatters it.”²⁹

It *is* a great argument, but the challenge of Luther’s work is putting the argument from the sovereignty of God together with Luther’s other one, viz., the sinfulness of man. If God is in charge, how is it that man is a sinner? Is God responsible for sin?

Luther’s answer is, in part, No. Man and Satan are responsible for sin. True enough, they exist, live, and do evil—all while being subject to God. “Since God moves and works all in all, He moves and works of necessity

²⁷P&J, 297-98. “Cum unius Adae unico delicto omnes sub peccato et damnatione sumus, quomodo possumus aliquid tentare, quod non peccatum et damnabile sit?...Quis enim alieno delicto damnaretur, praesertim coram Deo? Nostrum autem non fit imitando aut operando, cum hoc non esse posset delictum illud unicum Adae, ut quod non ipse, sed nos fecerimus, fit vero nostrum nascendo.” WA 18:773.8-16. See also P&J, 202 (708.23-24), 314 (784.5-6).

²⁸Elsewhere, in connection with the virgin birth of our Lord, Luther explains the transmittal of original sin in a little more detail by maintaining that the corruption of sin extends to the activity of human procreation: “...the flesh is consumed and corrupted by evil lust, so that its natural act of procreation cannot occur without sin. Whatever conceives and bears through an act of the flesh produces also a carnal and sinful fruit.” *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, LW 45:202 (WA 11:317.1-10).

²⁹P&J, 80. “Est itaque et hoc imprimis necessarium et salutare Christiano, nosse, quod Deus nihil praescit contingentem, sed quod omnia incommutabili et aeterna infallibilique voluntate et praevident et proponit et facit. Hoc fulmine sternitur et conteritur penitus liberum arbitrium.” WA 18:615.12-15. See also P&J, 213 (716.5), 216-17 (718.31-32), 218 (719.26-30), 222 (722.9-13), 259 (747.31-35), 310 (781.10-14). One interesting note is that Luther claims that this truth is a part of the natural knowledge of God. P&J, 82-83 (617.23-618.18), 203 (709.10-11), 216-217 (718.15-19), 218 (719.20-35), 315 (784.21-26), 317 (786.3-7).

even in Satan and the ungodly. But He works according to what they are, and what He finds them to be.”³⁰ In other words, the fact that they do anything at all is due solely to the almighty power of God; but the fact that what they do is evil is due solely to the corruption of their natures, not God.

Luther applies the same reasoning to the transmission of original sin from one generation to the next. Every time a child is born God is creating human life that is sinful, not because He is wicked but because He creates it from human life that is already sinful. Luther writes:

Though God does not make sin, yet He does not cease to form and multiply our nature, from which the Spirit has been withdrawn and which sin has impaired. He is like a carpenter who makes statues out of warped wood. As is the nature, so are men made; for God creates and forms them out of that nature.³¹

In spite of God’s active participation in a world of wickedness, Luther insists that God Himself remains good. This is true even when He moves the wicked while they are doing evil, because God uses the evil done by them to accomplish His own good ends:

We being evil by nature, and God being good, when He impels us to act by His own acting upon us according to the nature of His omnipotence, good though He is in Himself, He cannot but do evil by our evil instrumentality; although, according to His wisdom, He makes good use of this evil for His own glory and for our salvation.³²

God’s good purposes may be invisible to us (“Many things seem, and are, very good to God, which seem, and are, very bad to us”), but Luther offers “Christ and the gospel” as a premier example of how God operates. The world cannot see—it “abominates” them both—but in truth nothing is bet-

³⁰P&J, 204. “Quando ergo Deus omnia movet et agit, necessario movet etiam et agit in Satana et impio. Agit autem in illis taliter, quales illi sunt et quales invenit.” WA 18:709.21-23. See also P&J, 258 (747.16-20), 259 (747.31-35), 265 (752.12-15), 267-68 (753.28-33).

³¹P&J, 203. “Licet enim Deus peccatum non faciat, tamen naturam peccato, subtracto spiritu, vitiatam non cessat formare et multiplicare, tanquam si faber ex lingo corrupto status faciat. Ita qualis natura, tales fiunt homines, Deo create et formante illos ex natura tali.” WA 18:708.31-34. Talking about Pharaoh, Luther says that “God created Pharaoh ungodly, that is, of an ungodly and corrupt seed.” P&J, 202 (WA 18:708.25-26).

³²P&J, 206. “Sed ita cogit, qui utcunque talia volet intelligere: In nobis, id est, per nos Deum operari mala, non culpa Dei, sed vitio nostro, qui cum simus natura mali, Deus vero bonus, nos actione sua pro natura omnipotentiae suae rapiens, aliter facere non possit, quam quod ipse bonus malo instrumento malum faciat, licet hoc malo pro sua sapientia utatur bene ad gloriam suam et salutem nostrum.” WA 18:711.2-7.

ter. So recognizing God's goodness is not a matter of sight but of faith. Luther puts it this way, "How things that are bad for us are good in the sight of God is known only to God and to those who see with God's eyes, that is, who have the Spirit."³³

From Luther's perspective, therefore, God is responsible for what happens and employs it for His own good purposes, but Satan and man are responsible for the sinful character of what they do.

But still there remains the question of origins. Since nothing happens apart from God's power, isn't God responsible for Satan's and man's becoming sinful in the first place? Luther frames the question this way, "Why did God let Adam fall, and why did He create us all tainted with the same sin, when He might have kept Adam safe, and might have created us of other material, or of seed that had first been cleansed?"³⁴

In a Table Talk, Luther once speculated that if somebody asked God at the last judgment why he permitted Adam to fall, He might answer, "In order that my goodness toward the human race might be understood when I gave my Son for man's salvation."³⁵ In this way, God's good purpose can be seen even in the Fall.

But in *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther responds differently. First of all, he says that we should not ask such questions. "It is not for us to inquire into these mysteries, but to adore them."³⁶ God is God, and we are not. He is the one who determines what is good; we certainly do not. "What God wills is not right because He ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He wills it so." This means that human beings are in no position to question or challenge God's decisions. In fact, there is no basis for anyone to challenge God, "Causes and grounds are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will

³³P&J, 203. "Multa videntur Deo et sunt bona valde, quae nobis videntur et sunt pessima. Sic afflictiones, mala, errores, infernus, imo omnia optima opera Dei sunt coram mundo pessima et damnabilia. Quid Christo et Euangelio melius? At quid mundo execratus? Igitur quomodo sint bona coram Deo, quae nobis mala sunt, solus Deus novit et ii qui oculis Dei vident, id est qui spiritum habent." WA 18:708.37-709.3. See also P&J, 232-233 (729.13-21), 234-235 (731.9-13), 314 (784.1-9), 317 (785.26-38).

³⁴P&J, 209. "Cur permisit Adam ruere, et cur nos omnes eodem peccato infectos condit, cum potuisset illum servare et nos aliunde vel primum purgato semine creare." WA 18:712.29-31.

³⁵WATR 4, 5071; LW 54:385-386; cited in Althaus, 160. Luther's main point, however, is the same as in *Bondage*, viz., that we should not we should not ask God "why" He does something.

³⁶P&J, 208. "Nec nostrum hoc est quaerere, sed adorare mysteria haec." WA 8:712.26. Though introduced as the answer to another question, "Why then does He not alter those evil wills which He moves?" Luther says that "the same reply" ("idem dicitur illis") should be given to those who ask why God permitted Adam to sin. See also P&J, 99 (631.39-632.2), 100 (632.22-26), 176 (690.1-2), 200 (706.29), 314 (784.6-9). Similarly, in the Genesis lectures (LW 1:144; WA 42:108.33-40, 109.8-13) Luther rejects questions about why God permitted Satan to tempt Eve.

of the Creator—unless you set another Creator over him!”³⁷ Since God has not told us why He permitted sin to enter the world, we must remain silent.

Interestingly, however, Luther himself does not quite let it rest there. Although he does not seek to answer why God permitted sin to enter into the world, he does say just a word or two about how it happened. Regarding the devil, for example, Luther writes, “God, finding Satan’s will evil, not creating it so (it became so by Satan’s sinning and God’s withdrawing) carries it along by His own operation and moves it where He wills.” This suggests a dual responsibility. Satan did the sinning but God “withdrew” (*desero*). Though he could have, God did not act to prevent Satan’s fall.³⁸

But with respect to Adam, Luther goes even further and comes very close to saying that God was responsible for his fall. Luther initiates a discussion of Adam’s original sin in order to show the impotence of sinful man. It is an argument from the greater to the lesser: If even sinless Adam could not exercise his will to resist Satan, how can sinners expect to do so now? Luther attributes a kind of “free will” to Adam, but one that does him no good apart from the presence of God’s Spirit. In Luther’s thinking, man as “man” is pretty weak stuff in the face of Satanic power. Luther writes, “What then could we, who are fallen, do to secure the first-fruits of the Spirit that have been taken from us. Especially when Satan, who cast Adam down by temptation alone, at a time when he was not yet Adam’s ruler, now reigns in us with complete power over us!”³⁹

So Satan overwhelmed Adam’s defenses. But why was Adam so vulnerable to the devil’s enticement? Luther answers, “Because God did not give him what he needed to resist”:

And if he [Adam], who had the Spirit, could not with his new will will a good newly proposed (that is, obedience), because the Spirit

³⁷P&J, 209. “Non enim quia sic [Deus] debet vel debuit velle, ideo rectum est, quod vult. Sed contra: Quia ipse sic vult, ideo debet rectum esse, quod fit. Creaturae voluntati caussa et ratio praescribitur sed non Creatoris voluntati, nisi alium illi praefeceris creatorem.” WA 18:712.35-38. See also P&J, 232-233 (729.13-730.2), 234 (731.9-13), 314-315 (784.6-13), 317 (785.26-38). For Luther, God is the only truly free being. See P&J, 137 (602.5), 198 (705.24-36), 233 (730.12-14). According to Lohse, 214-218, statements like this may reflect “Occamist influence” on Luther’s thought, but Luther differed from Occam in that Luther “did not set the freedom of God in the context of a distinction between the *potentia Dei absoluta* and the *potentia Dei ordinata*, but always under the aspect of the question of salvation.” For Occam’s theology, see *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, s.v. “Ockham/Ockhamism” and Joseph R. Strayer, ed., *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 13 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1982-1989), s.v. “Ockham, William of.”

³⁸P&J, 206. “Sic Satanae voluntatem malam inveniens, non autem creans, sed deserente Deo et peccante Satana malam factam arripit operando et movet quorsum vult.” WA 18:711.7-9. See also P&J, 204 (709.12-14).

³⁹P&J, 156. “Quomodo nos lapsi possemus in primitias spiritus ablatas? Praesertim iam regnante in nobis plena potestate Satana, qui illum [Adam] sola tentatione nondum regnans in eo prostravit.” WA 18:675.35-37.

did not add that to him, what can we, without the Spirit, do about the good that we have lost? By the example of that first man, it was shown us, with a view to breaking down our pride, what our “free-will” can do if it is left to itself, and is not continually moved and increased more and more by the Spirit of God.⁴⁰

Adam could not (“*non potuit*”), Luther says, will to obey the commandment because the Spirit did not give (“*non addebat*”) that power to him.

Although Luther’s main point is a pastoral one, sinful human beings must rely exclusively upon the grace of God,⁴¹ Luther’s language locates the ultimate responsibility for the Fall in the omnipotent God who did not supply what was necessary to prevent it.

Such statements are simply corollaries to a larger point that Luther makes elsewhere regarding the hidden and revealed wills of God. Rather than surrender one iota of God’s sovereignty, even in the face of sin and evil, Luther posits two, virtually contradictory wills in God—one as we have it in the Gospel, the other as we see it but do not understand it in a sin-cursed world. Luther describes the situation this way:

So it is right to say: “If God does not desire our death, it must be laid to the charge of our own will if we perish”; this, I repeat, is right if you spoke as God preached. For He desires that all men should be saved, in that He comes to all by the word of salvation, and the fault is in the will which does not receive Him.... But why the Majesty does not remove or change this fault of will in every man (for it is not in the power of man to do it), or why He lays this fault to the charge of the will, when man cannot avoid it, it is not lawful to ask; and though you should ask much, you would never find out.⁴²

⁴⁰P&J, 156. “Quod si is homo, cum adesset spiritus, nova voluntate non potuit velle bonum de novo propositum, id est obedientiam, quia spiritus illam non addebat, quid nos sine spiritu possemus in bono amisso? Ostensum est ergo in isto homine terribili exemplo pro nostra superbia conterenda, quid possit liberum arbitrium nostrum sibi relictum ac non continuo magis ac magis actum et auctum spiritu Dei.” WA 18:675.28-34. See also P&J, 202 (WA 18:708.22-23), “The immediate sequel, in the third chapter [of Genesis], tells how man became evil, and was abandoned by God and left to himself.”

⁴¹Indeed, Luther says of the entire dispute with Erasmus, “I did not undertake this debate with a view to self-advertisement, but in order that I might exalt the grace of God.” P&J, 111 (WA 18:641.13-14). See also P&J, 270 (755.3-16), 281 (762.28-30), 302 (775.41-776.3), 312 (782.35-38), 314 (783.28-33).

⁴²P&J, 171. “Igitur recte dicitur: Si Deus non vult mortem, nostrae voluntati imputandum est quod perimus. Recte inquam, si de Deo praedicato dixeris. Nam ille vult omnes homines salvos fieri, dum verbo salutis ad omnes venit, vitiumque est voluntatis, quae non admittit eum....Verum quare maiestas illa vitium hoc voluntatis nostrae non tollit aut mutat in omnibus, cum non sit in potestate hominis, aut cur illud ei imputet, cum non possit homo eo carere, quaerere non licet ac si multum quaeras, nunquam tamen invenies.” WA 18:686.4-11.

Clearly, Luther does not shy away from the most terrifying consequences of his understanding of God's power. Of course, he insists that we rely on God's revealed will, "We must keep in view His Word and leave alone His inscrutable will; for it is by His Word, and not by His inscrutable will, that we must be guided. In any case, who can direct himself according to a will that is inscrutable and incomprehensible?"⁴³ But reliance on the Word does not prevent Luther from acknowledging God's sovereignty over a world thrown into misery by original sin and its consequences.⁴⁴

But why does Luther care so much about God's sovereignty? Are these statements simply the consequences of unrestrained theological speculation? Admittedly, Luther believes that God's sovereignty is an invincible argument against free will, but is there anything more to it than that? Just a great argument to defeat Erasmus?

Not surprisingly, Luther contends that much more is at stake. God's sovereignty, he argues, is basic to the Gospel itself,

For if you hesitate to believe, or are too proud to acknowledge, that God foreknows and wills all things, not contingently, but necessarily and immutably, how can you believe, trust and rely on His promises? When He makes promises, you ought to be out of doubt that He knows, and can and will perform what He promises.... And how can you be thus sure and certain, unless you know that certainly, infallibly, immutably, and necessarily, He knows, wills and will perform what He promises?⁴⁵

⁴³P&J, 170-171. "Nunc autem nobis spectandum est verbum relinquendaque illa voluntas imperscrutabilis. Verbo enim nos dirigi, non voluntate illa inscrutabili oportet. Atque adeo quis sese dirigere queat ad voluntatem prorsus imperscrutabilem et incognoscibilem?" WA 18:685.29-686.1. See also P&J, 175-176 (689.18-25).

There is a very interesting passage in the Genesis lectures in which Luther returns to this same theme of the hidden and revealed God and particularly predestination. Concerned that after his death people will corrupt his teachings, Luther reaffirms that "everything is absolute and unavoidable" but emphasizes even more than in *Bondage*, not only the utter foolishness of trying to probe the hidden purposes of God but especially the *absolute reliability* of God's promises in Christ. See LW 5:42-50 (WA 43:457.32-463.17). This passage is cited in the Formula of Concord (SD 2.44) as Luther's definitive commentary on some of his ideas in *The Bondage of the Will* like "absolute necessity."⁴⁴ "Now, the highest degree of faith is to believe that He is merciful, though He saves so few and damns so many; to believe that He is just though of His own will He makes us perforce proper subjects for damnation." P&J, 101 (WA 18:633.15-17). See also P&J, 158 (677.1-4), 176 (689.25-690.2), 199 (705.32-36), 201-202 (707.32-708.9), 217 (719.4-19), 227 (726.4-13), 228-229 (726.33-38), 314 (784.1-9), 317 (785.26-38).

⁴⁵P&J, 83-84. "Si enim dubitas aut contemnis nosse, quod Deus omnia non contingenter sed necessario et immutabiliter praesciat et velit quomodo poteris eius promissionibus credere, certo fidere et niti? Cum enim promittit, certum portet te esse, quod sciat, possit et velit praestare, quod promittit.... At quo modo certus et securus eris? Nisi scieris illum, certo et infallibiliter et immutabiliter ac necessario scire et velle et facturum esse, quod promittit." WA 18:619.1-8. See also P&J, 78-79 (614.16-26), 211 (714.18-23), 213 (716.5-9, 13-15), 271 (755.36-37).

Therefore, in Luther's thinking, it is basic to the Christian hope that God is in charge of the universe: when He speaks, He delivers. It's as simple as that.⁴⁶

But why the world is the way it is, why God permitted Adam to sin, why God transmitted that sin through all generations, and why He continues to let Adam's offspring suffer its horrible consequences, we do not know, nor should we seek to know. Without making very clear the grounds of his optimism, Luther believes that by the light of glory, we will all understand the justice of God in these matters even if at present we do not; nevertheless here and now, our proper response is simply to believe in the righteous justice of God.⁴⁷

Humility in the face of divine mysteries is always the right course, and for Christians, the Gospel—God's revealed will—is always the answer to the horrors of the human condition. Nevertheless, in this work, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther forces us to face these horrors and to realize that at their center is a hidden God who in a strange way wills them, including our sin and death. Original sin is certainly ours, for prior to faith we willingly embrace all that it entails and even after faith, we are always wrestling with its aftereffects in our lives. However, nothing that we are or do changes the fact that God is always in charge. This may make us uncomfortable when we are discussing sin, but it is absolutely necessary for believing the Gospel.

In some places, Luther grants to man a kind of freedom in things below him, i.e., that which God entrusted to his care at the time of creation. But even in these matters, man's decisions are subject to God's will: "We may still in good faith teach people to use it to credit man with 'free-will' in respect not of what is above him, but of what is below him. That is to say, man should realize that in regard to his money and possessions he has a right to use them, to do or to leave undone, according to his own 'free-will'—though that very 'free-will' is overruled by the free-will of God alone, according to His own pleasure." P&J, 107 (WA 18:638.4-9). See also P&J, 150 (671.33-39), 256 (745.39-746.8), 257-258 (746.30-35), 265 (752.6-15), 309-310 (781.6-13).

⁴⁶Luther also makes the point that the Gospel itself depends on God's not acting "fairly" from a human perspective since by our standards, it is not *fair* that God forgives the sins of the undeserving. P&J, 234 (WA 18:731.7-9).

⁴⁷"To think that we cannot for a little while *believe* that He is just, when He has actually promised us that when He reveals His glory we shall all clearly *see* that He both was and is just!" P&J, 315 (WA 18:784.30-34). See also P&J, 234-235 (731.9-13), 316 (785.20-26), 317 (785.35-38).

Speaking to Contemporary American Culture on Sin and the Wrath of God

John W. Oberdeck

Gandalf is not welcome at Edoras in the court of Théoden, King of Rohan, for he is received as one bringing bad news. “Why indeed should we welcome you, Master Stormcrow? *Láthspell* I name you, Ill-news; and ill-news is an ill guest they say,”¹ intones Wormtongue, the unfaithful servant of Théoden, who has enchanted his master with a spell of lethargy. Doom is upon Middle Earth, however, and Gandalf the wizard has no patience for banter with an underling no matter how much power he usurps. Théoden must be awakened from his stupor if there is any hope against the evil Saruman. Bad news Gandalf brings, but bad news must be heard if saving action is to be taken. “Now Théoden son of Thengel, will you hearken to me?”² cries the wizard, and the fate of Middle Earth hangs in the balance.

Those familiar with Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* will recognize nothing odd about the fate of Middle Earth in this passage, in as much as Middle Earth’s fortunes hang by a thread throughout all three volumes. What is striking, however, is Gandalf’s comfort with the task of bearing bad news. He shows no disease for the darkness of his message. His only concern is that the king awake to his true circumstance and act.

We bear bad news. To a culture often sitting in self-absorbed stupor, enchanted by its own entertainments, listening to multiple wormtongues, we bring ill-news, indeed. Speaking of sin and the wrath of God is to speak of alienation and disobedience, death and damnation. The culture can’t bear to hear the news we are called to preach. Nevertheless we speak the words, recognizing that our concern transcends the darkness of the message. Will the culture hear? How will the culture respond?

The Message Is *Death*

“For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a NIV). This is unavoidable. If contemporary American culture hears what must be said about sin and

¹J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, vol. 2, *The Two Towers* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 502.

²*Ibid.*, 503.

Dr. John Oberdeck is Assistant Director of Lay Ministry and Associate Professor of Theology at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, WI. This article is a revised version of a paper that was originally presented at a convocation of professors of theology of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which met in Dallas, TX, March 4-5, 2005.

God's wrath over sin, then the message contemporary American culture will hear is death. We speak the Law, and the Law is a curse to everyone who has not kept everything written in it (Gal. 3:10). The Law always commands, always accuses, and always condemns. Of course, it does more than this, but for the culture hearing God's Word clearly for the first time, the gravity of the situation is overwhelming. This is all they can hear. The message we bring is the diagnosis of death; we must tell the patient he or she is terminal. We are physicians telling patients to set their houses in order because there is no hope. We are judges telling the accused their sentence is execution. In a metaphor used by Robert Kolb, we tell corpses they are dead.

The first task of Christian conversation involves leading unbelievers to see that they are as spiritually dead as are the objects of their trust. Then we must lead them to die as devotees of their self-constructed gods.³

Our right to converse in such an authoritative manner comes from two sources, our own baptismal death and our own Christian vocation. We are enabled by the Holy Spirit to lead others to see their own spiritual deadness because we ourselves have died. In fact, we die daily to sin and evil lust as we make the sign of the cross recalling our Baptism. We speak from Christian experience when we invite others to death and new life. Marva Dawn captures how much our worship life resurrects us in a chapter she entitles "Worship Ought to Kill Us: The Word."

God's word, rightly read and heard, will shake us up. It will kill us, for God cannot bear our sin and wants to put to death our self-centeredness. The apostle Paul exclaims that he has been 'crucified with Christ' and therefore that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ who lives in him (Gal. 2:19-20 NIV). Once worship kills us, we are born anew to worship God rightly.⁴

The God who empowers such speaking, speech with intent to kill, does not do so from malice. The anger over sin is indicative of the seriousness with which God takes his relationship to fallen humankind.⁵ Apathy of God toward sin would take us off the hook, but it would also mean that God did not care, and our second hopelessness would be worse than the first. God does care, however, and His love is never half-hearted, as C. S. Lewis, speaking from the perspective of God, explains:

³Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, rev. ed., (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 72.

⁴Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 206.

⁵Terence E. Fretheim, "Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God in the Old Testament," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24 (December 2002): 7.

I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit.⁶

There is always the temptation to water-down the message of the Law, to soften the blow, to make the diagnosis more “user friendly.” In spite of the advice provided by C. F. W. Walther that “when preaching the Law, you must ever bear in mind that the Law makes no concessions,”⁷ we can, with the best of intentions, inadvertently make concessions. This happens with the oft-used statement “God hates the sin, but God loves the sinner.” Both statements are undoubtedly true, but placing the two together results in a falsehood, at least to the ears of an uninformed culture. The diagram indicates the missing components that we, by default, automatically include. The culture makes no such addition. Without the addition, both the Law and the Gospel are short-changed, and the cross becomes unnecessary.

<p>A GOD HATES THE SIN A¹ <i>and condemns the sinner to hell</i> B¹ <i>God sent his Son to die so the sinner can be forgiven, and B (BUT)</i> LOVES THE SINNER</p>
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Even when we do inadvertently soften the blow of the Law, it does not make our message any more attractive or any less repulsive to the culture. It still remains ill-news. If our communication to the culture minimizes the anger of God over sin by mixing Law and Gospel, we should not be surprised if the culture's negative response is more directed at Christians than toward the God we represent. The culture will naturally wonder just what is wrong with Christians. Why are Christians so concerned? Fretheim explains the culture's confusion: “If our God is not angry, why should we be?”⁸ But God is angry over sin. Any minimizing of the Law misrepresents the God who gave it and denies the culture knowledge of its true condition.

The Law comes on the scene as the enemy of the sinner; it is God's *opus alienum*. It is bad tasting medicine for the sinner yet necessary for his recovery, but this does not improve its disagreeable taste.⁹

⁶C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000), 197.

⁷C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1928), 80.

⁸Fretheim, 3.

⁹David Scaer, “Law in a Law-Less World” in *The Law in Holy Scripture: Essays from the Concordia Theological Seminary Symposium on Exegetical Theology*, Charles A. Gieschen, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2004), 195.

To build on David Scaer's metaphor, we will not take the medicine unless we are convinced we are ill. We won't rise to new life unless we are certain we are dead.

The Response Is *Grief*

If those within the culture hear what is said about sin and God's wrath, and understand its implications, they will recognize how really ill the illness is that we bring. This necessitates asking the question, how do people react when they learn their diagnosis is terminal? Elisabeth Kübler-Ross codified the response patterns in her classic work *On Death and Dying*.¹⁰ The process involves five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. One would expect that a culture, made up as it is of individuals sharing multiple life practices, would reflect the grief in a similar way. Does contemporary American culture exhibit denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance in tangible ways that relate to its relationship, or lack of relationship, to God? If our message as ill-guests is death, do we see evidence of grief?

Denial takes multiple forms. Personal denial is maintained by minimizing or ignoring the corrupted human nature revealed by actual sin. Personal responsibility is denied, and the external environment bears the burden of guilt for whatever is uncomfortable, unfortunate, or tragic in life. This perspective fuels the litigious propensities of American culture since blame must be put somewhere. The task of the courts becomes the assigning of blame rather than finding justice. Culture's abdication of personal responsibility is evidence of culture's denial.

A second major form of denial is rationalization. The creature uses its intellectual gifts to deny the existence of the creator. Postmodern deconstructionist philosophy accomplishes this task through massive denial, as evidenced by deconstructionist theology. According to Roger Scruton, deconstructionist theology asserts that

1. There is no legitimacy or authority in the world, only human constructs, whose foundation is power.
2. There is no truth, but only 'truth' in inverted commas, a concept that is ripe for deconstruction.
3. There is no 'transcendental creator,' nothing that produces what we perceive (the text) apart from those who read it.
4. In particular, there is no meaning. To attempt to mean something is to embark on an infinite trajectory which can never arrest itself in sense.
5. Thus is inverted the central idea of our religious tradition: the idea of a sacred utterance, the Word of God, enshrined in a text.

¹⁰Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969).

The text remains sacred but is no longer the word (the *logos*). It is the absence of the word, the taking back of God's primeval utterance.¹¹

Scruton suggests that one cannot maintain viable existence in such a deconstructed world because it lacks an "ethical vision."¹² Scruton rejects any meta-narrative that solves the problem with a creator, however, and remains a secularist for whom the gods have died.

A community that has survived its gods has three options. It can find some secular path to the ethical life. Or it can fake the higher emotions, while living without them. Or it can give up pretending, and so collapse, as Burke put it, into the "dust and powder of individuality." These are the stark choices that confront us, and the rest of this book defends the first of them—the way of high culture, which teaches us to live *as if* our lives mattered eternally.¹³

Of course, according to Scruton our lives do not really matter eternally, but we will all be better off if we pretend they did. Such pretense is unable to support an ethical vision, however, because it cannot sustain a viable distinction between right and wrong, acceptable and abhorrent behavior. Moralism is unmoored as the culture attempts to establish its own criterion for right action. Perhaps this explains why campaigns are launched against smoking in public, while fornication and adultery, behaviors with incredible long-range effects on family and culture, are ignored, if not encouraged, by the media. Rationalist denial results in a culture unable to make moral distinctions. Witness the complaint of David Whitford, who found in his college classrooms that, as a result of postmodernism's emphasis on the relative and situational nature of truth, his students could not find reason to condemn atrocities by the Nazis in World War II. Whitford said it really was not their fault. "My students, and those like them around the country, are simply demonstrating that they really did learn something in high school."¹⁴

Another denial strategy deals with the definitions of "spiritual" and "religious." "Even those who are not 'religious' claim to be 'spiritual.'"¹⁵ New definitions allow the sophisticated person to be spiritual without having to engage in any of the unsavory aspects of religion. In religious stud-

¹¹Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2000), 145-146.

¹²*Ibid.*, 14.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴David Whitford, "Teaching God's Wrath," in *One Incarnate Truth: Christianity's Answer to Spiritual Chaos*, ed. Uwe Siemon-Netto, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 85.

¹⁵Gene Edward Veith, "Advent: Christ vs. Truths," in *One Incarnate Truth: Christianity's Answer to Spiritual Chaos*, ed. Uwe Siemon-Netto, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 17.

ies “spirituality” has been understood as a subset of “religion.” In contemporary culture, however, there’s been a change.

As the terms religiousness and spirituality have evolved over time they have acquired much more specific connotations. Currently, *religiousness* is increasingly characterized as “narrow and institutional,” and *spirituality* is increasingly characterized as “personal and subjective.”¹⁶

Will Penner, editor of *Youthworker Journal*, summarizes the way teens view their faith life and their relationship with the church using the phrase “I’m spiritual, just not religious.”¹⁷ Denial in this case takes the form of increased “spirituality” but decreased attachment or commitment to the set doctrines, beliefs, and practices of institutionalized “religion.” People gain greater freedom to fashion a god of their own liking, a god less likely to make demands or hold us accountable.

Evolution’s opportunity for denial by making God unnecessary has yet to be mentioned. Science, however, is moving at light-speed toward the necessity of intelligent design to explain the complexity of DNA and similar structures in the human body.¹⁸ Evolution is becoming a measure of the strength of the denial process, as more and more statistically improbable events must be believed in order to avoid confrontation with a creator.

Kolb reminds us that when the law works on sinners, sinners react from positions of security or brokenness. Brokenness happens “when the old gods no longer work.”¹⁹ When the old gods of science or philosophy finally expire and one must confront the true God, the time of denial is over. “When the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment. The logical question becomes: ‘Why Me?’”²⁰

Does contemporary American culture provide evidence of this second aspect of grief? Yes, it does. The unfairness and injustice of being born into a miserably fallen and broken world, with a nature already corrupted by sin, is not lost on those who now choose to face God directly. Anger provides a sense of righteous indignation, so that the individual approaches God from a position of superiority. C. S. Lewis describes the challenge of confronting this anger.

¹⁶Brian J. Zinnbauer and Kenneth I. Pargament, “Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 4 (1997): 563.

¹⁷Will Penner, “I’m Spiritual, Just Not Religious,” *Youthworker Journal*, 21 (November/December 2004): 1.

¹⁸Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator: A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence that Points Toward God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 73-76.

¹⁹Kolb, 105.

²⁰Kübler-Ross, 63.

We address people who have been trained to believe that whatever goes wrong in the world is someone else's fault—the Capitalists', the Government's, the Nazis', the Generals', etc. They approach God Himself as His *judges*. They want to know, not whether they can be acquitted for sin, but whether He can be acquitted for creating such a world.²¹

Anger at the human predicament is not only expressed through judging God; it is also expressed by rejecting God as He has revealed Himself to be and substituting a God that is more understanding and less demanding of creatures who appear to have few choices. This route is taken by Candace Chellew, who asks,

Do we really want a God that demands we toe the line, no questions asked? Do we really want to follow a God that would so restrain the creative free will of God's creation...a creation made in God's own image? I dare say no.²²

Judging God and changing gods are not the only options available for angry creatures confronting the creator. The film *Blade Runner*, released in 1982, broaches the subject of deicide. In a futuristic tale, bio-technology produces robots made of flesh and blood that in many respects are superior to human beings. The robots are prohibited from being on Earth and must remain on out-world colonies. They have built-in biological clocks that cause them to die after a life span of only four years. Roy, the brightest and most handsome of the robots, manages not only to get to earth but to find his way to the bedchamber of Mr. Tyrell, the genius who created him. In the conversation that follows, Roy demands what the creator cannot give.

Tyrell: I'm surprised you didn't come here sooner.
Roy: It's not an easy thing to meet your maker.
Tyrell: What can he do for you?
Roy: Can the maker repair what he makes?
Tyrell: Would you...like to be modified? Stay here?
Roy: I had in mind something...a little more radical.
Tyrell: What...What seems to be the problem?
Roy: Death.
Tyrell: Death? Well I'm afraid that's a little out of my jurisdiction.

²¹C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 95.

²²Candace Chellew, "Forget Love! What about God's Wrath?" in *Whosoever: An On-Line Magazine for Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgendered Christians* 3 (May/June 1999): 3. (Magazine on-line [Camden, SC, accessed 14 January 2005]; available from <http://www.whosoever.org/v3i6/wrath.html>; Internet.)

Roy: I want more life, ...Father.²³

When Roy learns that Tyrell cannot cure death, he gently takes Tyrell's head in his hands, presses out Tyrell's eyes with his thumbs, and breaks his neck. Killing the creator is an alternative to judging or changing the creator. Biblical undertones in the film, from "meeting one's maker" to Roy calling Tyrell "Father" to Tyrell calling Roy the "prodigal son," reinforce, either intentionally or unintentionally, the link to the cross where the Creator really does die. The robot's reaction to his limited life and inevitable death mirrors humanity's rage over denied access to the tree of life.

"Rebellion against God is the natural reaction to the discovery that the world was not made for our personal convenience."²⁴ All that destroys God's creation, whether oppressive political regimes, rampant destruction of the environment, nihilism in education, or art that has offense as its goal, provides evidence of human anger at the creator for the ill-news of sin and death. By destroying His creation and each other, humankind kills the creator who fails to give it the life it wanted.

The third stage in Kübler-Ross' analysis of human response to terminal illness is bargaining. For the terminally ill, bargaining involves a strategic move from making angry pleas to offering God something He may want. The success of human bargaining before the wrath of almighty God may seem so remote as to preclude making the attempt. Some, however, assume that struggling with God is the norm, rather than the exception, and that true faith is expressed by opposition rather than submission to God. Chellew uses Moses and Jacob as her models.

Like Moses we should not be afraid to argue with God, and even tell God to repent of evil! Like Jacob we should wrestle with the angels God sends to us until we are blessed by them. We should feel free to question the divine decrees of the Bible, the church, or anyone who dares to try to work out our salvation for us in the name of "helping" us avoid an eternity of hellfire.... Just like learning a subject in school, we must struggle with God, argue with God, and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.²⁵

More is going on here theologically than rebellion or miss-quotation of Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV) through the omission of "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." This is a theology that would allow human beings to approach God thinking that we actually

²³*Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott, 117 min. The Ladd Co., 1982. DVD Warner Home Video, 1999.

²⁴Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 244.

²⁵Chellew, 4.

have something God desires, something to bargain with. “Come now, let us reason together...” the culture invites God. “Let’s make a deal. I’ll give you my fine deeds and good intentions; you withdraw your divine judgment and wrath.” In the bargaining stage are all theologies that rely on good works for salvation, on good works plus faith for salvation, or on human choice plus faith for salvation.

An example from literature illustrates the futility of bargaining. Graham Greene, an author known for his ability to weave Christian themes into his works with surprising subtlety, tells the story of Chavel, the wealthy French aristocrat imprisoned along with his more common countrymen during the German occupation. During the night, several German soldiers are killed by the French resistance, and the prisoners are told that three of them will be shot later that day in reprisal. To make their circumstances even more difficult, the prisoners will have to choose the three to be shot. A lottery system is devised. The first two men are chosen, and they calmly accept their fate. Chavel draws the third slip, and immediately is beside himself, appealing to the others that he’s a man of property, shouting out, “I’ll give a hundred thousand francs to anyone who’ll take this.”

“Calm yourself, Monsieur Chavel,” Lenôtre said, “Just think a moment—no one is going to give his life for money he’ll never enjoy.”

“I’ll give you everything I’ve got,” Chavel said, his voice breaking with despair, “money, land, everything.”

Voisin said impatiently, “None of us want to die, Monsieur Chavel,” and Lenôtre repeated with what seemed to the hysterical Chavel shocking self-righteousness, “Calm yourself, Monsieur Chavel.”

“...Over,” the calmer Chavel whispered, “over. You weren’t good enough. You’ve got to think up something else....”

A voice said, “Tell me more. Maybe I’ll buy.” It was Janvier.²⁶

Against the certainty of death, no amount of wealth will suffice. The bargain Chavel offers to His fellow prisoners is ludicrous, but no more ludicrous than any of the bargains suggested by a well-heeled culture or human-centered theology. Even when it seems hopeless, Chavel tries to think of something else with which he can bargain. The twist in the story Greene provides is Janvier, the young man who, like Christ for us, takes up the offer. He dies so his family will receive his newly purchased inheritance.

The fourth and fifth stages described by Kübler-Ross are simple to explain, but difficult to illustrate, at least through examples from the culture. In these stages the defenses are down, the rage is gone, and the wheeling and dealing has ceased. To use Kolb’s terminology, the “stance of security” has been abandoned, and the “stance of brokenness” is all that

²⁶Graham Greene, *The Tenth Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 55-56.

remains.²⁷ Scruton asked, “What’s a community to do once it realizes the gods are dead.” The question is now reversed. What’s a community to do when it realizes the gods are alive, but it is dead! In stages four and five, the ill-news has been heard and understood. Now what’s a culture to do?

Stage four is depression. In depression, when all the masks have been taken off and the dying self acknowledges death, there comes a time when the last façade falls and the subject can say, “I a poor, miserable sinner confess unto thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended thee....” In this holy depression of confession, the sinner can say “by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault,” and mean it.

Occasionally, there are contemporary American cultural artifacts that border on the honesty and openness of the common confession. For example, the lyrics from a 2001 album by Pink, contains the song “I’m my own worst enemy,” an excerpt of which follows:

Everyday I fight a war against the mirror
I can’t take the person starin’ back at me
I’m a hazard to myself

Don’t let me get me
I’m my own worst enemy
It’s bad when you annoy yourself
So irritating

Don’t want to be my friend no more
I wanna be somebody else
I wanna be somebody else, yeah²⁸

Is this recognition of human failure before God or a typical example of teenage *angst* over lack of looks, brains, or money? We suspect very strongly that it is the latter. Even so, the lyrics demonstrate an awareness of want in the midst of plenty, emptiness surrounded by abundance, loneliness in a crowd, and severe dissatisfaction with self. Could these sentiments be evidence of a culture beginning to understand its limits?

Stage five is acceptance.

Acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage. It is almost void of feelings. It is as if the pain had gone, the struggle is over, and there comes a time for “the final rest before the long journey” as one patient phrased it. This is also a time during which the

²⁷Kolb, 105.

²⁸Pink. “Don’t Let Me Get Me,” *Missundaztood*. CD (07822-14718-2 RE-2), Arista Records, 2001.

family needs usually more help, understanding, and support than the patient himself.²⁹

The person is at peace with the losses about to take place and is preparing to say goodbye. Acceptance that brings peace is an acceptance that receives the peace that passes human understanding. If depression is reflective of the state of mind of the penitent, then acceptance is reflective of the penitent who has heard the words of the confessor, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Private confession and absolution brings together two elements that culture attempts to separate, spirituality and religion. Confession and absolution is a spiritual experience (spirituality) that is clearly defined by doctrinal understandings (religion). The confession is the admission of who we truly are as human beings, and the absolution is the pronouncement of who God truly is; the one who saves us from our own worst enemy, ourselves.

Private confession and absolution, it should be noted, is a practice well oriented to the postmodern psyche. To use Leonard Sweet's mnemonic, private confession and absolution is E.P.I.C.³⁰ Private confession and absolution is *Experiential*. It is often conducted in an atmosphere that engages all the senses and a full range of emotions. Private confession and absolution is *Participatory*. It does not allow for melting into the crowd. Private confession involves the strong *Image* of the penitent humbly imploring the mercy of God. Finally, private confession fosters being *Connected*, attached in strong bonds of sharing and commitment with other Christians, with the confessor and ultimately with God. The attraction of young, postmoderns to traditional liturgical worship practice of the church is a well-documented phenomenon, and builds on the E.P.I.C. qualities of the generation.³¹

The Goal Is *Rebirth*

Christians experience rebirth daily. It begins with recalling the name into which we were drowned in our Baptism. It continues as the sign of the cross is made over us by our own hand. It finds completion as our daily tasks are lived in vocation, calling us to joyful service as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Holy Spirit sanctifies us daily and guides us into all good works, our own denial decreases. The fact is there is less and less to deny. Our anger becomes less frequent as our wills are formed more and more in the shape of our Father's will. Our bargaining is among the first items dispensed with; inasmuch as we realized long ago we had noth-

²⁹Kübler-Ross, 124.

³⁰Leonard Sweet, *Post-modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

³¹Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Cultivating Authentic Community, Creating Holistic Connections* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 97.

ing to offer. We are sustained through the depression of our own weaknesses by the Holy Supper, and we live in the acceptance that God has numbered our days. Under the Spirit's guidance, we can apply our hearts to wisdom. Christians experience rebirth daily.

By comparing Kübler-Ross' stages of grief to the response of the culture to the message of God's wrath, we do not intend to imply that conversion is a process, and these are the five steps by which it is accomplished when it is taken in order. Nor do we intend to suggest that Christians are exempt from experiencing Kübler-Ross' stages of grief when they hear bad news. Christians will experience denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance when confronted with loss because Christians will grieve; however, they will not grieve like those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). The point is that the culture, if it hears us, will respond with grief because the message is death. But our goal in sharing the message of death is rebirth through the Gospel.

The wrath of God must be taken seriously, if not by the culture, then at least by Christians who understand what is at stake. This explains why preaching about the wrath of God will ever remain appropriate, though not necessarily popular, in Lutheran pulpits. God's wrath and God's love, God's message of Law and Gospel, must never be mingled; but must never be separated, either. This is for our benefit, as Marva Dawn explains:

We cannot really begin to know the uncommon grace of the Lord's love unless we first know how much we deserve God's righteous wrath; how we deserve the death we each must die.³²

What should we take with us from this study of speaking about sin and the wrath of God to contemporary American culture? Three points emerge:

1. God's wrath over sin frightens us. We are not told to fear those who can kill the body, but to fear the "One who can destroy both body and soul in hell" (Matt. 10:28 NIV). We are very aware of the judgment from which Jesus has saved us.
2. We are not surprised that the message of God's wrath is met with denial, anger, or bargaining, because it is ill-news of the worst kind, not unlike learning one has a terminal disease. We are assisted in our proclamation of Law and Gospel by recognizing stages of grief, exercising patience when faced with denial, being non-defensive when confronted by anger, and pointing to the cross of Jesus when bargaining is attempted.
3. We have at our disposal a rich heritage of liturgical worship practice that is, at its roots, experiential, participatory, image filled, and connected. We will communicate well with postmodern cul-

³²Marva J. Dawn, *Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 114-115.

ture to the extent that we can adapt our heritage in fresh and creative ways.

Gandalf wasn't welcome when he arrived in Edoras. But when he had brought King Théoden out of his stupor, his next act was to tear down the curtains and let the light, long shut out by lies and deceptions, into the great hall of the King. Then he opened the doors and windows and let the fresh air, driven by a sharp wind, cleanse the room. Doesn't this describe what we are called to do for a deceived world; to let in the light, and open the way for the Spirit to move when and where He wills?

God's Wrath Against Sin: Echoes in Contemporary Culture?

James V. Bachman, Peter L. Senkbeil, Kerri L. Thomsen

Introduction

Laguna Beach, California, is home to a variety of art galleries and exhibitions. During this past year Laguna Beach hosted an exhibition entitled "100 Artists See God." An eye-catching entry in the exhibition boldly proclaimed, "Beware of God" in white print on a bright red background. In the exhibit's catalogue, the artist, Scott Grieger of Venice, California, added this intriguing comment: "I often think there might be a wrathful God, but we'll bridge that cross when we come to it."¹

An opportunity to search for the wrath of God in contemporary culture emerged in an invitation to present at the Dallas' theologians conference in 2005. Three of us—Kerri Thomsen, Professor of English; Peter Senkbeil, Professor of Theatre; and James Bachman, Professor of philosophy and ethics—colleagues at Concordia University Irvine, collaborated in a search for echoes in contemporary culture of God's wrath against sin. We did not find many distinct expressions that have the courage to say "Beware of God." In this essay we document what we found and offer commentary on the findings.

Melanchthon's defense of Article II of the *Augsburg Confession* provided the reference point for our understanding of God's wrath. In his defense of Article II Melanchthon writes, "We wanted to show that original sin also included these maladies: ignorance of God, contempt for God, the absence of the fear of and trust in God, and the inability to love God. These are the chief defects of human nature—in conflict especially with the first table of the Decalogue."² The fact that original sin involves "ignorance of

¹John Baldessari and Meg Cranston, *100 Artists See God* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2004).

²Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 14.

Dr. James Bachman is Professor of Philosophy and Ethics at Concordia University in Irvine, CA, where he also serves as Dean of the School of Theology. Dr. Peter Senkbeil is Professor of Theatre and Director of Theatre Activities at Concordia University in Irvine, CA. Dr. Kerri L. Thomsen is Associate Professor of English and Chair of the Division of Humanities at Concordia University in Irvine, CA. This article is a revised version of a paper that was originally presented at a convocation of professors of theology of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which met in Dallas, TX, March 4-5, 2005.

God” and “lack of the fear of God” raises the question whether consciousness of sin and apprehension of God’s wrath are likely to be seen in a culture that is increasingly uninformed by the Biblical Scriptures.

On the other hand, Melancthon also describes original sin in this way: “doubt about God’s wrath, his grace, and his Word; anger at his judgments; indignation because he does not deliver us from trouble right away; fretting because bad people are more fortunate than good people.”³ And he writes that “world history itself shows the great power of the devil’s rule. Blasphemy and wicked doctrines fill the world, and by these bonds the devil has enthralled those who are wise and righteous in the eyes of the world. In others, even grosser vices appear.”⁴ These signs of original sin can, of course, be seen in a wide range of different kinds of contemporary cultural expression. Our question, however, concerns whether and where contemporary culture connects today’s anger and fretting and gross vice with sin and the wrath of God.

The problem we are exploring is to be seen also in Romans 1. There St. Paul, on the one hand, writes that “though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened” (1:21).⁵ One gets a sense of people now oblivious to their situation before God. On the other hand we read: “They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them” (1:32).

We did not in this essay concern ourselves with cataloging sinful expressions in contemporary culture. Rather, we sought to find whether contemporary culture from time to time betrays not only sin but a consciousness of original sin and/or the correlative pressure of God’s wrath. We could not survey the entire range of contemporary cultural expression. We chose to focus on dimensions of culture with which we three have had ongoing engagement: contemporary stage musicals, television, film, popular literature, science, and ethics.

Contemporary culture seems mainly to echo two world views concerning God and sin:

1. Many expressions in popular culture work from some sort of picture of a morally ordered universe. In this approach good and evil can be seen and understood. Evil should be punished; good should be rewarded. Sometimes tragedies occur.

We argue that the moral ordering seen in these treatments does not get much beyond what the Lutheran Confessions call “civil righteousness.” God may be thought more or less to be involved in

³Ibid., 42.

⁴Ibid., 49.

⁵The New Revised Standard Version, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989).

the moral order, but human beings seem perfectly capable of discovering and applying the correct order. These expressions are rooted in what the reformers called the *opinio legis*, “the law’s opinion,” and they fit with what Melancthon scores as “trivializing original sin,” a trivializing that has always “fostered trust in human powers and suppressed the knowledge of the grace of Christ.”⁶ In other words these expressions in popular culture do not take into account the depth of God’s critique of human sin, and the magnitude of the salvation won by Christ.

2. Conversely, other voices in popular culture avoid the whole topic of sin and God’s wrath by adopting the view that the universe is a product of aimless chance. Nothing beyond human inventiveness provides moral order. “Good and evil” are human constructs that can be created and played out in a variety of different ways. In this approach traditional and popular accounts of civil righteousness are thought to be arbitrary and can probably just as well be jettisoned in favor of exploring ways of life that creatively carry us “beyond good and evil.”

Popular Literature and Film: Fantasy and Horror

Of the popular genres of our time, fantasy—and its subgenre of horror—is the one realm where writers and viewers are comfortable dealing with “good,” “evil,” and the supernatural. Where the “suspension of disbelief” is most vigorously exercised, a non-religious audience can believe in the Dark Lord or the resurrection of “Gandalf the White.” Good and evil are easy to spot and easy to reward or punish.

The prolific and popular author Stephen King often uses the struggle between good and evil in his horror novels. In *Salem’s Lot*, however, his 1975 novel about a town overrun by vampires, he addresses the universality of sin in a more sober way. Before fighting the head vampires, Father Callahan asks Ben, a non-Catholic, to make confession. Inside the confessional, the priest says, “Now tell me your sins.’ ‘All of them?’ Ben asked, appalled.”⁷

Ben takes his confession seriously, but the Catholic church, as embodied by Father Callahan, gives an easy solution: “ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys.”

King further condemns the Catholic church in a scene between Callahan and Barlow, the vampire. Barlow holds Mark, a young boy, as hostage. Callahan holds up a cross, and as long as Mark is in the room, that cross has power against evil. Callahan “thrust[s] the cross forward,” and Barlow throws “his hands in front of his face. The cross flare[s] with preternatu-

⁶*Apology* II.44.

⁷Stephen King, *Salem’s Lot* (New York: Signet, 1975), 325.

ral, dazzling brilliance, and it [is] at that moment that Callahan might have banished him.”⁸

But when the boy flees, Callahan falters and the cross loses its power to frighten evil. Callahan’s sin is losing his faith in God. Thus, although King uses the cross as a weapon against vampires, he locates the source of its power in the human’s faith in God rather than in God Himself. Just as in *The Lord of the Rings*, the ability to do good, or to punish evil, resides in the heroes themselves.

The Vampire and Sin

God seems to be absent also from the popular TV series, *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off, *Angel*. Buffy is “called” to slay vampires, but not wrong-doing humans. Humans are “innocents.” So much for sin.

And God’s wrath? There is no indication that Buffy herself is a Christian, but that does not prevent her from wearing a cross pendant to protect herself. When those crosses touch a vampire’s skin, they burn, most notably, two vampires with souls, Angel and Spike. In the show’s mythology, a vampire is a demon-possessed corpse; the soul of the human has “moved on.” In Angel and Spike’s case, however, the souls have been returned to the bodies, and with the souls, a conscience.

Spike finds that his newly returned soul “burns.” In a confrontation with Buffy in a darkened church, he says to her, “It’s what you wanted, right?” then repeats the question as he looks up to the ceiling of the church. He continues, “And now, everybody’s in here, talking.... They all just tell me, go, go to hell.” He then walks towards a large cross, saying, “And she shall look on him with forgiveness, and everybody will forgive and love. He will be loved. So, everything’s okay, right? Can we rest now?” The final image is of the vampire, leaning over the cross and beginning to smoke. He feels the wrath and now asks for forgiveness, but it is Buffy’s forgiveness, not God’s, that he truly desires.⁹

In Angel’s case, he decides to atone for his past by doing good. He must fight the demon’s desire for blood. As one critic puts it, Angel is “a good man trying urgently to be better, rescuing the weak...as desperately as though he were rescuing them from himself, from terrible Angelus, who never dies.”¹⁰ Angel recognizes his own sinful nature and fears it, but neither God’s mercy nor His wrath enters the picture.

Except on one memorable occasion in an episode entitled “Amends.” A supernatural phenomenon—the First Evil—appears to Angel, trying to

⁸Ibid., 353.

⁹“Beneath You,” in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Mutant Enemy Productions & 20th Century Fox, 1997-2003).

¹⁰Peter S. Beagle, “The Good Vampire: Angel and Spike,” in *Five Seasons of Angel*. Edited by Glenn Jeffeth (Dallas: Benbella Books, 2004), 123.

convince him to kill Buffy. The temptation is strong, but he decides to kill himself via the rising sun. He tells Buffy, "Look, I'm weak.... It's not the demon in me that needs killing.... It's the man.... Am I a thing worth saving? Am I a righteous man?" He awaits his death, but the sun is blocked by a miracle: snow falls in southern California, and on Christmas Day, no less. Divine intervention surely, but the message is ambiguous: does God's mercy prove that Angel *is* a righteous man or that he is capable of doing good?

Evil fails, but its spokesman tries another tack. A dead lawyer tries to convince Angel to stop fighting his evil law firm, Wolfram & Hart. He tells the hero,

See, for us, there is no fight, which is why winning doesn't enter into it....Our firm has always been here, in one form or another. The Inquisition, Khmer Rouge. We were there when the very first caveman clubbed his neighbor. See, we're in the hearts and minds of every single living being. And that, friend, is what's making things so difficult for you. See, the world doesn't work in spite of evil, Angel. It works with us. It works because of us.... You see, if there wasn't evil in every single one of them out there, why, they wouldn't be people. They'd all be angels.¹¹

Like Faust, the lawyer speaks truth as far as it goes, but neglects the Gospel. The audience, Christian or not, feels that something is missing for it cannot accept the despair of its champion.

The "Stupid Curse"

Angel voices at least one theologically sound observation about his condition: the realization that no amount of good works can make up for his past sins. He seeks a redemption that he cannot possibly earn.

This topic is taken up by Marguerite Krause, who argues that Angel's current condition is "a stupid curse." The vampiric Angel was cursed by gypsies who "retriev[ed] the...blameless soul of Angel from wherever it was and return[ed] it to a body stuffed with memories of all the evil acts perpetrated" by the vampire. Thus, "Angel remembers everything [the demon] did—and, as illogical and unjust as it may be, takes the blame onto himself."¹² In other words, Angel tries to atone for sins he did not actually commit. This "stupid curse" sounds a bit like original sin, and Krause's reaction sounds like the typical "rational" response to a suggestion that guilt transcends our methods for assigning it.

¹¹"Reprise," in *Angel* (Mutant Enemy Productions & 20th Century Fox, 1999-2004).

¹²Marguerite Krause, "It's a Stupid Curse," in *Five Seasons of Angel*, ed. Glenn Yeffeth (Dallas: Benbella Books, 2004), 110.

One of the more usual strategies in contemporary culture for evading original sin and the wrath of God is to disconnect us all from each other in a radical individualism, then apply the philosophical ethicists' maxim, "Ought implies can." So now, the individual is only liable for sins he or she could reasonably have avoided. God is permitted to forgive us for these sorts of missteps, but has no right to hold us accountable in inextricable entanglement with the rest of humanity. Once again, the depth of Biblical critique of our losing God and therefore also losing each other is evaded. Original sin is a stupid curse, and smart people don't need to worry about it or the wrath that it threatens.

Strangely enough, vampires seem to have become a safe place for the popular imagination to deal with divine wrath. In *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis, the vampire with "a human soul," delivers this monologue: "[M]y mind swam with guilt at the thought of killing. I thought of all the things I had done and couldn't undo. And I longed for one second's peace."¹³ He, like Milton's Lucifer, carries hell within himself and recognizes that his evil nature dooms him. And, like Lucifer, the vampire is a safe place for humans to locate proof of God's wrath.

Films and Books for Children

Expressions of God's anger against supernatural beings exist also in Disney films, the most popular purveyor of children's fantasy tales on the big screen. Over the years, however, a subtle shift has taken place: where the hand of God was once discernible, it has been rendered obsolete by evil's propensity to destroy itself.

In Disney's first animated feature, 1937's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the wicked witch is about to "crush" the dwarfs with a boulder, when, zap!, a bolt of lightning strikes the witch and sends her plummeting to her death. Evil is defeated by an act of God.

Twenty-two years later, in *Sleeping Beauty*, Prince Phillip defeats Maleficent and "all the powers of hell" with a "sword of truth" and a "shield of virtue" provided by supernatural good faeries. The shield is emblazoned with a large silver cross, and after the defeat of Maleficent, the sword stands upright in her grave, making yet another cross.¹⁴ As in *Buffy* and other vampire tales, the cross represents God's punishment of evil.

Both *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, on a symbolic level, provide images of a God who will destroy evil when there is no other hope. In the 1990s, divine intervention is no longer necessary, perhaps because the villains are human and not magically endowed: the villainous Gaston of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) dies in the act of stabbing his rescuer; in *Tarzan* (1998), the unscrupulous Clayton hangs himself while chasing the

¹³*Interview with the Vampire*, Neil Jordan, dir. (Warner Bros., 1994).

¹⁴*Sleeping Beauty* (Disney, 1959).

hero, despite Tarzan's warning. Most recently, in the Disney/Pixar film, *The Incredibles* (2004), the villain's cape gets caught in his plane's engine as he attempts to kidnap a baby. All three representatives of evil are hoisted on their own petards.

As far as the message of these films goes, it's not a bad lesson for our children: the good guys don't kill the bad guys and violence is not promoted. On a deeper level, we might say that the wages of sin are indeed death. But God's role has been erased.

And evil itself is disappearing in some recent print retellings of popular faerie tales. When the Queen tells *My Side of the Story* concerning her relationship to Snow White, the reader learns that she's suffering from a bad reputation. In fact, Snow White is an "ungrateful stepdaughter." Moreover, the Queen was not killed in her terrible fall and now works in a "health-food store."¹⁵

Similarly, the Big Bad Wolf of Jon Scieszka's *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* does admit to blowing down two houses, but he attributes the action to "a terrible sneezing cold." The two pigs are accidentally killed, and the Wolf relates, "It seemed like a shame to leave a perfectly good ham dinner lying there in the straw. So I ate it up. Think of it as a big cheeseburger just lying there." Some "news reporters" are responsible for the more familiar version of the story; the Wolf has been "framed."¹⁶

While both of these retellings are done tongue-in-cheek, their tone may be obvious to adults only. Satire is always a tricky genre, and it is very possible that some children may begin to doubt the existence of objective evil. Good and evil become human constructs.

Musical Theatre

The constructed nature of good and evil has become even more evident in several recent Broadway musicals. While musical theatre no longer enjoys the dominant cultural position it held as late as the mid-1960s, when songs from Broadway shows such as *Camelot*, *My Fair Lady* and *Hello, Dolly!* topped the popular music charts, stage musicals continue to appeal to a large segment of the American public. They also reflect changing attitudes and ideas concerning the nature of sin, evil and God's wrath.

Many of the musicals produced on Broadway from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s depict an ordered moral universe consistent with civil righteousness as described by Melancthon. Famous examples include *Okla-homa!* and *Carousel* by Rodgers and Hammerstein, as well as *Camelot* by Lerner and Loewe. Such depictions stand in sharp contrast to the ambiguous moral landscape of *Into the Woods*, the 1987 musical by Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine. This clever play weaves together characters

¹⁵Daphne Skinner, *My Side of the Story: The Queen* (Disney Press, 2003).

¹⁶Jon Scieszka, *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* (New York: Viking, 1989).

from several faerie tales, including Cinderella, Rapunzel, Jack and the Beanstalk, and Little Red Ridinghood, all of whom end up encountering each other in the same mythical forest, with a typical faerie-tale narrator presiding over the action. The first act brings all these stories to their traditional conclusions; it also adds a newly-invented faerie tale called “The Baker and His Wife” that connects all the other stories and introduces some moral ambiguities.

In Act Two, these conventional endings are completely undermined, as we see the characters’ stories continue beyond the “happily ever after” endings they sang about in Act One. Cinderella’s and Rapunzel’s princes, now bored with their wives, are looking for new romantic conquests—“a beauty asleep” and a young woman in a glass casket with “a dwarf standing guard.”¹⁷ The widow of the giant that Jack killed descends another beanstalk and begins exacting her revenge by trampling everything and everyone she can, including Little Red’s mother, Cinderella’s castle, Rapunzel and the baker’s wife. Even the narrator dies, offered up to the giantess by the other characters after they grow disillusioned with his detached commentary on the deteriorating situation:

Narrator: It is interesting to examine the moral issue at question here. The finality of stories such as these dictates—(Narrator turns upstage and notices everyone looking at him menacingly. They move towards him. Music stops. To the group) Sorry, I tell the story, I’m not part of it.

Little Red Ridinghood: That’s right. (Pulls out knife)

Witch: Not one of us.

Baker: Always on the outside. (Baker grabs the Narrator and the group begins to pull him slowly towards the giant.) ...

Narrator: You need an objective observer to pass the story along.

Witch: Some of us don’t like the way you’ve been telling it.¹⁸

Afterwards, Little Red panics: “Now that he’s gone, we’ll never know what will happen next.”¹⁹ The orderly faerie-tale universe has now been completely deconstructed; the surviving characters, trying to make sense of a world in which the traditional rules make no sense and characters die in sudden and arbitrary ways, all blame each other for starting the series of disasters. They are stopped by the witch, who sarcastically points out the futility of assigning blame. Eventually the baker, Little Red, Jack, and Cinderella band together to kill the giantess and restore a semblance of order to their world; by the play’s end, they have become a sort of non-traditional family, relying on each other to construct new interpretations

¹⁷Ibid., 96-97.

¹⁸Ibid., 102.

¹⁹Ibid., 103.

of good and evil:

Baker, Cinderella: People make mistakes, Holding to their own,
Thinking they're alone.

Cinderella: Honor their mistakes—

Baker: Fight for their mistakes—

Cinderella: Everybody makes—

Baker, Cinderella: -one another's Terrible mistakes. Witches can
be right, Giants can be good. You decide what's right, You decide
what's good.²⁰

By the end of *Into the Woods*, conventional notions of good and evil have been completely redefined by the characters; suffering is the result of an arbitrary universe, not God's punishment for sin, because God is absent. For all its clever charm, the play depicts an existential moral universe reminiscent of some of Samuel Beckett's absurdist plays; thirty-four years after *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's bleak vision of an absurd universe in which fallible human beings can rely only on other fallible human beings has percolated down to the pop-culture level.

If the world of *Into the Woods* is morally ambiguous and uncertain, the world of the 2003 Broadway musical *Wicked* is one in which conventional images of good and evil are almost completely reversed. *Wicked* is an adaptation of Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel of the same name, which is itself a postmodern gloss on *The Wizard of Oz*—both the L. Frank Baum novel and the 1939 MGM film. Maguire's novel—and the musical by Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman—retell the entire Oz story with the Wicked Witch of the West (here named Elphaba) as the protagonist. In the process, we discover that virtually everything we thought we knew about the story turns out to be wrong.

In *Wicked*, Elphaba is depicted as a charismatic outsider who struggles to overcome others' prejudice against the color of her skin—green.²¹ Early in the play, we learn that Elphaba's mother accepted a green drink offered by the lover she was seeing while her husband was away on business; this act of infidelity caused their oldest child to be born “unnaturally green.” Elphaba's younger sister, Nessarose, was born with withered legs, caused by the milk flowers her father made her mother chew in an effort to avoid another green baby. Tragically, this magical remedy also caused Elphaba's mother to die in childbirth; not only are the parents punished for their sins, but the punishment is also visited upon the children of the next generation. God appears to be absent from the situation, however; the parents' own selfish actions and misjudgments bring about their own nega-

²⁰Ibid., 131.

²¹*Wicked the Musical: Synopsis & Summary*. http://mercy_bell.tripod.com/wickedynopsis.html. Accessed February 13, 2005.

tive consequences.

When Elphaba enrolls in Shiz, Oz's university, she meets Galinda, the popular insider who quickly climbs the social ladder there. Through a fluke, Galinda and Elphaba become roommates, and although they loathe each other at first, eventually they become good friends. Both are anxious to meet the Wizard, whom both feel is the key to their success. Elphaba shows a natural aptitude for magic; she also befriends Dr. Dillamond, a goat who tells her that all over Oz, animals are losing the ability to speak – perhaps because they're being forbidden to do so. When Dillamond becomes the target of anti-animal prejudice, Elphaba tries to champion his cause.

Eventually, Elphaba and Galinda meet the Wizard, who nearly succeeds in recruiting her to assist him until she discovers that he is not only a fraud as a magician, but also the man behind the suppression of the animals. When Elphaba attempts to expose him, the Wizard convinces the populace that she is the wicked one. Disillusioned and embittered, she rejects the Wizard and Galinda, and in the showstopping finale to Act One, she embraces her black hat, her flying broom and the title "Wicked." In this version of the Oz story, the Wizard is no genial fraud, but a conniving tyrant hiding behind a mask of folksiness. In refusing to help the Wizard, Elphaba retains the moral high ground, even though her reputation is destroyed; conversely, Galinda changes her name slightly and agrees to go along with the Wizard's wishes in order to get ahead, and she is rewarded with the title "Glinda the Good." Black is white and white is black, authority figures cannot be trusted, and freedom of speech is on the wane in Schwartz and Holzman's Oz. Sin is the product of human venality, and any moral order in the universe is purely a human construct.

Act Two continues to subvert—and invert—our expectations about Oz, including the characterizations of Dorothy and her friends. The Wizard tries to engineer Elphaba's downfall, with Glinda caught between them. Elphaba tries to right the wrongs she sees all around her and to help her sister Nessa, but each effort to help ends up hurting those she loves most and making her own position worse. [In a key song in Act Two, "No Good Deed," she sings:

Was I really seeking good or just seeking attention? Is that all good deeds are when looked at with an ice-cold eye? If that's all good deeds are, maybe that's the reason why No good deed goes unpunished Sure, I meant well—well, look at what well-meant did.... I promise no good deed will I attempt to do again!²²

²²*Wicked*. Original Broadway Cast Recording. Music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. Book by Winnie Holzman. Produced for records by Stephen Schwartz (Decca Broadway, 2003).

In the play's climactic scene, Elphaba decides to sacrifice herself, partly to protect Glinda. The two women sing a touching duet, "For Good," in which they explore what their relationship has meant to each of them, and what its moral implications are:

Glinda: Like a comet pulled from orbit, as it passes the sun
Like a stream that meets a boulder halfway through the wood,
Who can say if I've been changed for the better? But, because I knew you, I
have been changed for good....

Elphaba: And just to clear the air I ask forgiveness for the things I've
done you blame me for.

Glinda: But then I guess we know there's blame to share

Both: And none of it seems to matter any more!²³

After Elphaba lets herself be melted, Glinda mournfully clutches her friend's black hat and discovers a clue that leads to the realization that the Wizard was, in fact, Elphaba's father. In destroying her, he has destroyed the child he has always longed for but was never able to have. Glinda banishes the Wizard and assumes power in Oz. In a final plot twist, we learn that Elphaba has actually faked her own death—but she cannot tell Glinda about her "resurrection," or she will never be safe. The play ends with the two friends resigned to their separate lives. Moreover, the "wicked" witch has not only survived, but she has become morally superior to all the other characters in the play. Her punishment was only temporary, and she took it upon herself in order to resolve the main conflicts in Oz. Not only has the moral authority of those who would try to punish Elphaba been completely discredited, Elphaba herself has become a sort of Christ figure. The play's moral order is clear, but it is based on postmodern ideas about the relationship of power to discourse far more than it is on anything recognizable as sin or forgiveness. If the Wizard is a God figure, then God is a charlatan; if not, then God is absent, and morality is the convenient term used by humans to dignify their power struggles.

Ethics: Denial and Ignorance

Friedrich Nietzsche styled himself an "immoralist." He likely misunderstood the significance of Jesus Christ, but he saw with clarity that Christian theology trades in themes of responsibility, guilt, and punishment. In his crusade to press "beyond good and evil," he sought to purge the modern psyche of Christian concepts. In *Twilight of the Idols* he writes that today

when we immoralists seek with all our strength to get the
concepts of guilt and punishment back out of the world, and to

²³Ibid.

purge psychology, history, nature, social institutions, and sanctions of these concepts, there is in our eyes no opposition more radical than that of the theologians, who, with the concept of the “moral order of the world,” go on infecting the innocence of becoming by means of “punishment” and “guilt.” Christianity is a metaphysics of the hangman.... We deny God, and in denying God we deny responsibility; only *thus* do we redeem the world. (The Four Great Errors, #7 and #8)²⁴

Further on in *Twilight of the Idols* he excoriates the English and French for wanting morality without Christianity. Encountering George Eliot he writes that the English “are rid of the Christian God and now believe all the more firmly that they must cling to Christian morality” (Skirmishes #5). Encountering Renan, he protests, “To what avail is all free-spiritedness, modernity, mockery, and wry-neck suppleness, if in one’s guts one is still a Christian, a Catholic—in fact, a priest!” (Skirmishes #2).

Contemporary culture prides itself in an obsession with ethics, but contemporary ethics is to be done without any substantive reference to sin, wrath, or God’s forgiveness in Christ. The enlightenment hope for a rational ethics free of Christian superstition burns brightly in the world of modern ethics and in the modern, materialist scientific world view used to bolster the exclusion of Christian themes from moral reflection. If Nietzsche is in any way correct about the inseparability of traditional European morality and Christian faith, then we should be able to see signs of the collapse of traditional ethics that comes from eliminating sin, wrath, and Christ from ethical discourse.

Case Study: Ethics at the End of Life

In 1998 James Bachman presented a paper on “Religious Voices in Secular Settings” at the annual Wittgenstein conference in Austria.²⁵ In it he argued that the exclusion of religious voices from ethical debate was impoverishing contemporary ethical discourse. In order to illustrate this thesis he offered an analysis of contemporary debates concerning the ethics of assisted suicide.

The analysis began with a perceptive observation concerning the drive to legalize assisted suicide. Daniel Callahan, for one example, argues that people want not simply the freedom to choose. Rather, they want traditionally respected institutions of authority, in this case, law and medicine, to certify that suicide is on the list of acceptable choices for a human being.

²⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Richard Polt, in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999).

²⁵Bachman, J, “Religious Voices in Secular Settings,” *Invited Papers of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society*, Vienna, 1998.

“As people have turned away from religion and elevated medicine as the supreme arbiter of our lives, we ask for medicine’s sanction...we need somebody in authority to say it is O.K....”²⁶ People will not see legalization as simply preserving choices. Rather they will interpret legalization to mean also moral authorization.

The next step in the analysis was to note that this situation ought to and has impelled many religious voices to speak up on the issue. Both Judaism and Christianity raise challenging questions concerning suicide at the end of life. The basic question concerns whether and how the meaning of human life, lived in the presence of God, transcends the obvious material cycle of life and death seen in nature.

Bachman used Psalm 90 to argue that Jewish and Christian religious voices raise major questions whether suicide is the appropriate response to the human situation before God. These questions demand a hearing in the public debates about assisted suicide. In the matter of end of life and physician-assisted suicide, the problem is to shape a public policy that keeps a wide range of perspectives on death alive for people as they contemplate their own and their loved one’s deaths. The materialist interpretation of human life is only one choice among many. Bachman’s challenge to contemporary ethics was that we should stop privileging the materialist interpretation in secular debates.

The philosophers at the conference tried to appear evenhanded in making room for religious voices, but Psalm 90 was too much for them. The consensus was that we would be unkind to trouble the dying with talk about sin and God’s wrath. The response of the philosophers is not surprising. On the most central questions about life, contemporary culture has driven out the traditional biblical perspectives.

The Upshot: Procedural Ethics for Civil Righteousness and Sloppy Relativism for Personal Morality

We have not found many instances of a conscious wrestling with themes of original sin and the wrath of God in popular culture. What is worse, we are not optimistic that affluent America will soon change its ways. In our view Melanchthon best captures our times in the theme that original sin can consist in “ignorance of God” and “the absence of the fear of and trust in God.”²⁷ In our time we do not see in popular expressions “anger at [God’s] judgments; indignation because he does not deliver us from trouble right away; fretting because bad people are more fortunate

²⁶Paul Wilkes, “The Next Pro-Lifers,” *The New York Times Magazine* (July 21, 1996), 25.

²⁷Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 14.

than good people.”²⁸ We have mostly found evidence for St. Paul’s words about people becoming “futile in their thinking...their senseless minds...darkened” (Romans 1:21).

People will stay in this darkness so long as contemporary affluence keeps them reasonably comfortable materially. Many today think that civil righteousness can go forward reasonably well on a procedural basis rather than a substantive basis. In this view, law and government have the task of enacting and enforcing procedures that enable all people to pursue their own projects without interfering or betraying each other too much. Law and government cannot tell us how to live, but they can tell us how to stay out of each other’s way. Law and government cannot tell us which promises to make, say in economic or in sexual matters, but government can enforce the procedure of promise making so that people do not too much inconvenience each other through promise breaking and deceptive contracts. No God is needed to develop this sort of contentless, procedural public ethics. In fact God would be a serious hindrance to a system focused on procedures for maximizing preference satisfaction.

Within this pluralistic, contentless framework of public ethics people can, of course, make serious and substantive life commitments. But a contentless, procedural public ethics teaches many to adopt a minimalist and relativistic private morality. No good arguments are ever offered to support this least common denominator approach to life, but once the God hypothesis is safely defused and we are comfortable in our meaninglessness, then “eat, drink, and be merry” becomes the order of the day.

The evidence from popular culture and popular ethical discussion leads to the conclusion that contemporary culture has found highly sophisticated ways to ignore God and keep consciousness of our original sin and of God’s genuine wrath at bay. Few expressions of popular culture today seem to have Scott Grieger’s willingness to warn, “Beware of God.”

²⁸ Ibid., 42.

Grammarian's Corner

Word Order

It is helpful in so many ways to be able to read the books of the Scriptures in the original languages, both the Old and New Testaments alike. This is the first in a continuing series (it is hoped) of articles focusing upon the Greek of the NT, to help pastors, students, and able laypeople see the value of continuing their study of the canonical books of the NT in their original languages and to increase their facility in Koine Greek. This article will focus upon the issue of word order.

Native speakers of English tend not to think often of the matter of word order, oddly enough because it is so important to us. If given word orders are not followed, our sentences do not make sense. Thus, under almost all circumstances (poetry is the main exception), we follow a Subject-Verb-Object (=S-V-O) word order in sentences/clauses (e.g., “*John saw the brown house beside the bridge*”); we keep words together whose thoughts go together (e.g., “*John saw the brown house beside the bridge*”), and we put adjectival modifiers in front of the words they modify (e.g., “*John saw the brown house beside the bridge*”), to detail perhaps the three most important factors. We tend to be bound to such orders because our language is not highly inflected, i.e., it does not use different endings to indicate function in a sentence but the order of the various words.¹

Greek is similar to English in many ways, with one major exception: sentence/clause word order is much more flexible (possible, of course, because it is an inflected language).² S-V-O word order is very common in Greek, but it is by no means as dominant as it is in contemporary English. To take one example, Plato, in his description of the conversation between Socrates and his friends concerning final plans relative to the former's death in the *Phaedo* (115 C,D),³ uses nine finite verbs with objects; seven employ the order V-O, two use O-V. Chrys Caragounis, in his massive and informative new book on the Greek of the NT,⁴ notes that some traditional grammarians consider S-V-O word order to be normal and that others consider S-O-V order to fulfill that role, but he himself is of the opinion

¹ Thus, words in the following order: “Peter saw Paul” indicate that “Peter” is the doer of the action and “Paul” is the object/receiver. Reverse the order (“Paul saw Peter”) and you reverse the thought. The chief exception is personal pronouns. When we use these, inflection is possible. Thus, “he” is used for subjects and “him” for objects, allowing sentences such as “Him he saw” (“Paul Peter saw” is not clear).

² In Greek, unlike English, Πέτρος εἶδε Παῦλον and Παῦλον εἶδε Πέτρος say substantially the same thing (“Peter saw Paul”). One must, in effect, reverse the endings to reverse the thought: Παῦλος εἶδε Πέτρον / Πέτρον εἶδε Παῦλος. But see below for the semantics of the “reverse” word order.

³ *Platonis Opera*, E. A. Duke, et al., eds., vol. 1, Oxford: University Press, 1995.

⁴ *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004.

that no single order can be considered “normal”!⁵ I am not sure that I would go as far as Caragounis in terms of flexibility, because it does actually seem as if a general S-V-O word order can be detected in Greek prose (e.g., in Plato, above).⁶ Furthermore, while there are many exceptions to this order for various reasons,⁷ it is noticeable that frequently authors employ “exceptional” word order to convey emphasis. In the section of Plato referenced above, Socrates, incredulous that Crito is concerned about what to do with his body after his death (because he is unaware that the corpse is not the “real Socrates”), declares: καὶ ἐρωτᾷ δὴ πῶς με θάπτῃ. This can be rendered: “And he asks, indeed, how he shall actually bury⁸ me!” He then goes one to observe: ἐγὼ Πάλαι πολὺν λόγον πεποίημαι = “I have already some time ago produced a lengthy discourse” about the fact that when I drink the potion I will no longer remain with you.... In the NT, we see a similar construction in Paul’s famous 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, verses 1 and 2. Note the phrases ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω in verse one and toward the end of verse two = “...but (if) I don’t actually have love....” (See also the order with the infinitive in the ὥστε clause of v. 2: ὄρη μεθιστάναι = “...so as actually to move mountains....”) A striking example of such exceptional word order occurs in Acts 19, in Paul’s interaction with the disciples of John the Baptist. In verse 4, Luke/Paul takes the daring step, not only of moving εἰς τὸν ἐρχόμενον μετ’ αὐτόν, the object⁹ of the πιστεῦσασιν, to a position in front of it, but also and especially of removing it from its clause altogether and placing it before the subordinating conjunction ἵνα! This has the effect of bolding, highlighting, and italicizing the phrase all at the same time: “John baptized ...saying that they believe in the one coming after him—i.e., not in himself—that is, in Jesus.” One must keep one’s eyes out for “unusual” word order, as we have been describing it, because, generally speaking, the translations do not in any way reflect the emphasis that it conveys. (See also 1 Thessalonians 3:12, and in the Gospel of Mark 3:27b, 6:8 [ἵνα clause], 8:19-20a, 13:6b. [The phenomenon also oc-

⁵ Caragounis, 405-406.

⁶ It is important to make this genre point, because Greek poetry has, and must have, extreme flexibility, since it is metric in structure. Thus, in poetry, words are ordered, not principally for syntactical reason, but because of the requirements of scansion (the ordering of long and short syllables). When poetry—which comprises much of Greek literary stock—is brought into consideration, Caragounis is undoubtedly correct in his assessment of word order.

⁷ Of no small consideration for Greek writers were acoustic and stylistic features, i.e., how words sounded together and the prose meter of the words. See the revealing discussion in Caragounis, 406-433.

⁸ Note the use of the subjunctive mood, reflecting the deliberative subjunctive of the direct statement, employing the “present,” i.e., focus on connection stem to give emphasis.

⁹ While a prepositional phrase is used with πιστεύω in this construction, it behaves as if it were a simple object. The preposition εἰς is to be construed as virtually part of the verbal action (=“believe in”) rather than locative, showing in which direction one places one’s faith.

curs in phrases, e.g., θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον in Ephesians 2:8 and τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα in Galatians 3:29]).

One exception to what we have presented is noteworthy. Semitic word order in prose tends not to parallel that of Greek. In Hebrew and Aramaic, V-S-O word order is more common than S-V-O. Thus, verbs will tend to begin sentences/clauses which have come under Semitic influence, even though they are written in Greek. See, e.g., Mark 1:28: καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἡ ἀκοὴ αὐτοῦ εὐθὺς πανταχοῦ.... (also Mark 1:23, 1:25, 3:20, 12:18, 13:12). In these cases, one cannot conclude that emphasis is being placed upon either the verb or the subject. Rather, the word order is evidence that a Semitic speaker (e.g., Mark 13:12) or a Semitic Vorlage (Mark 1:23-28) is at work within or behind the text.

James W. Voelz

Homiletical Helps on LW Series A

—Gospels

All Saints' Day Matthew 5:1-12 November 6, 2005

The occasion: On All Saints' Day we sinners rejoice that God has "sainted" us, with His declaration that He has credited us with the very righteousness of His Son who died and rose for us. Above all, on this day we celebrate our relationship with all those experiencing what the Collect for the Day calls the "unspeakable joys" of a full relationship with the triune God in heaven: all the saints from the Old Testament patriarchs, to the apostles, to the church fathers, to the close relative or friend who died in Christ recently. We long to share their happiness, and we pray that, by the power of the Gospel, we may emulate the faith in Christ and the "godly living" they displayed during their life on earth.

Other lessons for the day: The Old Testament reading (Is. 26:1-4, 8-9, 12-13, 19-21) describes our yearning for God thus: "Your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for you in the night" (vv. 8-9). It accents the resurrection of our bodies with which our full entrance into "the joy of the Lord" begins. "The earth, will give birth to the dead"; "their bodies shall rise" (v. 19). And the reading reminds us that the saintly behavior we aim for in our day-to-day living is actually the work of God: "You have done for us all our works" (v. 12).

The New Testament reading (Rev. 21:9-11, 22-27 [22:1-5]) describes our relationship with God as that of a "Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (v. 9) and pictures the heavenly home our Bridegroom will give us as made of jewelry (v. 11 of the text and vv. 18-21 of the context) and as a city of ceaseless light ("there will be no night there," v. 25) provided, not by the sun, but by the Son: "its lamp is the Lamb" (v. 23).

The text: Completing this vivid picture of the ecstasy of our relationship with God and "all the company of heaven" is our text with its memorable beatitudes.

Although of exegetical interest, it does not seem homiletically productive to settle here—let alone enter into—the familiar controversy whether the Beatitudes are Law or Gospel. The thrust of the sermon—especially for an All Saints' Day observance—should be Gospel. One approach that will help the preacher to realize the Gospel potential of this text is to view the Beatitudes more as statements of fact than as challenges. "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—this is the condition that exists already for those who have a living connection with Christ by faith. The Beatitudes are addressed to people already disciples of Jesus (v. 1). Even if viewed as Law, the Beatitudes must be considered not as prerequisites or conditions for Christian discipleship, but rather as descriptions of God's expectations of those who are already saved.

Given that perspective, look at the Gospel blessings this text enumerates. Three times it mentions the gift of heaven (vv. 3, 10, 12), and in verse 8 it singles out the greatest joy of heaven, the fact that we shall see God. Heaven's other blessings are described as experiencing comfort (v. 4), as being satisfied with righteousness (v. 6), as enjoying mercy (v. 7), and as experiencing sonship under God (v. 9).

Although heaven and all that goes with it are our greatest Gospel blessings ("for your reward is great in heaven" [v. 12]), God's gifts are not limited to the

hereafter: “the meek...shall inherit the earth” (v. 5). And the blessings of heaven mentioned in the preceding paragraph (comfort, righteousness, mercy, and sonship) are blessings we enjoy to a degree in this life already. Think, for example, how we sinners have already been satisfied with righteousness—the righteousness of Christ, with which God has credited us. Although we look forward to being filled with actual, behavioral righteousness in heaven, as far as God is concerned we already are filled with that righteousness on account of Christ’s saving acts.

A Gospel handle: The description of Jesus’ action in verse 1, “He went up on the mountain,” provides an opportunity for bonus Gospel in a sermon on this text. The observation merely describes the locale from which Jesus delivered the sermon that follows.

Yet how prophetic! In a short time Jesus would once more *go up on the mountain* where He would suffer death and hell in our place and for our eternal salvation. The Scriptures call that mountain Calvary or Golgotha—if not exactly a mountain, at least a hill or a knoll. The Christian church, at any rate, has always referred to the site of Jesus’ crucifixion as Mt. Calvary, Mt. Golgotha.

Maybe connecting the two mountains, the one in our text and the other in the Passion Narrative, will help us better realize the Gospel potential of the Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount must be seen from the perspective of the crucifixion on the mount. If seen as Gospel, all the blessings of our text are facilitated by Jesus’ death and damnation on the cross. If seen as Law, all the challenges of our text are empowered by the event on the cross.

Suggestions for sermon theme and structure: The blessings God promises to His people in our text are operative in surprising contexts, contexts that seem to be devoid of, even impervious to, blessing altogether. Broadly, the text describes three such contexts: (1) the context of unpopular characteristics or dispositions (vv. 3-6); (2) the context of humble, self-effacing activities (vv. 7 and 9); (3) the context of persecution (vv. 10-12).

To a contemporary culture that emphasizes the blessings to be realized in, feeling good about yourself, possessing self-esteem and a good self-image, and in being in control, it must be jarring to hear God’s blessings operative among people who are “poor in spirit,” “meek,” mourning, and hungering and thirsting for a righteousness they so often fail to achieve in their everyday lives.

To a contemporary culture that accents the blessings to be attained in self-promotion, assertiveness, and in looking out for Number One, it must seem incredible to hear God’s blessings operative among people engaged in such humble and self-effacing activities as exercising mercy and making peace.

Most shocking of all to contemporary culture must be the message that God’s blessings are operative in the arena of persecution. What fellowship hath blessing with persecution?... Incidentally, in this last context, the text provides the preacher opportunity to connect the experiences of the audience he addresses with the experiences of those saints who have preceded them into heaven: “for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (v. 12).

A cautionary footnote: The surprising contexts described above are spheres for God’s blessings, not conditions or prerequisites for His blessings. God’s blessings in whatever sphere are always bestowed because of His grace through Christ—never *because* we are poor in spirit or meek or exercising mercy or enduring persecution.

Francis C. Rossow

Second-Last Sunday in the Church Year
Matthew 24:1-14
November 13, 2005

Comments on the text: Two Gospel selections are offered for this Sunday, each viewing Judgment Day from a different chronological and spatial perspective. The first selection, Matthew 25:31-46, views the Judgment at the very time of its occurrence and in the very place of its occurrence—at the threshold of heaven—as Jesus distinguishes between the saved and the damned. The second selection, our text, views the Judgment as an event in the future for which we yearn and prepare during our life here on earth.

Our text contains two major surprises. The first is that, contrary to popular opinion, the so-called signs of the end of the world are not signs of the nearness of the end but rather signs of the certainty of the end. After enumerating a number of those signs, Jesus clearly says that “the end is not yet” (v. 6) and that those signs are only “the beginning of sorrows” (v. 8). In short, wars, rumors of war, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, false prophets, persecutions, defections, and betrayals are not signs telling us when the end will come but rather signs telling *that* the end will come.

The second is an even greater surprise. The *only* sign informing us of the nearness of the end of the world is the widespread preaching of the Gospel: “Then shall the end come” (v. 14). Not only is that Gospel in itself Gospel (the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ), but the fact that something so positive as this Good News should be the one sign proclaiming the nearness of the end of the world constitutes additional Gospel. How kind and fair of God! Given this cheering truth, the dread catastrophes Jesus enumerates do not contradict or dilute the Good News of our salvation, but rather serve as a background or foil to accent the Good News. The first twelve verses of bad news in this text constitute a setting to bring into sharper focus the last two verses of Good News. Quantitatively, this pericope is a Law text; qualitatively, it is a Gospel text!

The word “privately” in verse 3 ought not escape our notice. However innocent or morbid the curiosity of the disciples may have been as they posed their question to Jesus, “Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” the discussion took place “privately.” May we infer from this that the perennial—and contemporary—hype about the time of Christ’s second coming is not intended as a matter for widespread, public speculation fueled by authors, publishers, and preachers desirous of fame and money. Talk about the time of Judgment is evidently not meant to be the principal thrust of the Christian witness to the Scriptures.

More appropriate to our interest in Judgment Day is our Savior’s inclusion among the signs of the certainty of that occurrence is this sign: the cooling of love for Jesus in many who profess His name. “The love of many shall wax cold” (v. 12). Ouch! This means that our own heart—not just happenings in the heavens, not just wars, famines, earthquakes, and plagues on our planet—but the increasing evil and decreasing faith in our own heart may well be testimony to the truth about Christ’s return in judgment. With the inclusion of this sign, Jesus lowers our gaze from the heavens to our self, where it should be also; He diverts our preoccupation with the external signs of Judgment Day to a possible internal one, declining love of Jesus in our own heart. It is “meet, right, and salutary” that whenever we think and talk about evil, including the evils preceding Judgment Day, we turn our atten-

tion inward, not only outward. There are signs in the heavens—and there are signs in the self. There are wars among nations—and there are wars between good and evil within our own person. (See Rom. 7.)

In any event, this inner-directed gaze will better prepare us for the blessed assurance of our text: a good thing, heaven, ushered in by another good thing, the good news of heaven (vv. 13-14). We Christians, empowered by the Gospel to endure unto the end, can look up and lift up our heads, for our “redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28).

A Gospel handle: The temple mentioned in verse 1 and Jesus’ prediction of that temple in verse 2 that “there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” constitute the Gospel handle. We can emulate the positive spin our text gives the dread signs of the end of the world by letting the dire news of the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem call to mind the temple making the prediction, Jesus. Jesus said of Himself, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). We can continue in the spirit of our text by letting the utter collapse of all the stones of the temple at Jerusalem remind us of that stone, Christ Himself, “which the builders rejected” becoming “the head of the corner” (Luke 20:17).

Amidst all the change and decay of our perishing world, here are two solid Gospel truths that will help us endure unto the end and be saved: Christ is the cornerstone of our faith, and Christ is the temple that rose again from the ashes of death.

Suggestions for sermon theme and structure: One theme that emerges from consideration of our text is the number of surprises it contains about Judgment Day, surprises that easily fit into a familiar Law and Gospel arrangement.

Those falling into the Law category are (1) the corrective that the familiar signs of Judgment Day are signs only of the certainty of the event, not of its imminence; (2) the inclusion among all the external signs of Judgment Day of an internal sign, namely, cooling ardor for Jesus in the hearts of many of those who profess His name; (3) the suggestion that concern about the time of Judgment Day is a matter for low key, private consideration—not the thrust of our public Christian witness.

Those falling into the Gospel category are (1) the evidence of God’s kindness and fairness in making the world-wide proclamation of His Gospel the one sign predictive of the nearness of Judgment Day; (2) the bonus Gospel in the idea that the One who describes the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in our text is Himself the temple that was destroyed but raised again three days later for our salvation (John 2:19); (3) the assurance that the end of the world is but the prelude to the beginning of an everlasting new heaven and earth to which God’s people can look forward with joy and eagerness (Luke 21:28).

Francis C. Rossow

Last Sunday in the Church Year
Matthew 25:31-46
November 20, 2005

Submitted below is a full manuscript of a sermon. The reader has permission to utilize any useful aspects of this manuscript in crafting his own sermon based on this text.

To the Least of These

This text from Matthew 25 is an appropriate one for today for several reasons. First, today has been designated by the LCMS as World Relief/Human Care Sunday, and Jesus in this parable commends care for those who are hungry, naked, and sick. Second, this text describes the final day of judgment. And today is designated as the last Sunday in the church year, a day which traditionally focuses upon the final judgment.

We have presented before us this awesome scene in which the masses of humanity from all generations are brought before the majestic throne of God, where their hearts and lives are laid bare for judgment. We are told that a clear separation is made between those who are righteous and those who are unrighteous. Jesus the Judge commends the caring acts of the righteous (vv. 34-36). Then they will ask him, in effect, “When did we ever do such things?” And Jesus will reply, “Whatever you have done unto the least of these my brothers, you have done unto me” (vv. 37-40).

Now before we go any further in trying to understand what this passage says, we must be clear about what it does not say. It is important to understand it in the context of the rest of Scripture. We just don’t isolate Matthew 25 from the rest of the Bible, but we interpret it in light of what the rest of the Bible clearly teaches. And the rest of the Bible makes it abundantly clear that our salvation and eternal life is a free gift that is not earned by our good deeds or acts of mercy. We don’t get to heaven by feeding the hungry or clothing the naked or welcoming the stranger or caring for the sick. (Quote Ephesians 2:8-9.)

Notice that in Matthew 25 the separation of the sheep and the goats takes place before any deeds are mentioned. The separation is based upon who they are, not on what they had done. The people on Christ’s right hand are placed there because they are sheep, because they are righteous. The people on the left hand are placed there because they are goats, because they are unrighteous. And Scripture makes it very clear that the people who are righteous are so because God has made them righteous by the blood of the Lamb.

God sees us as righteous and heirs of heaven from the moment when our sinful hearts are cleansed from sin through the merits of Christ. His verdict of “righteous” does not wait for the works that follow. The righteous are those who do not try to earn heaven by their good deeds. That is why they are surprised and ask “When did we feed, or clothe, or welcome, or visit you?” It’s the unrighteous who are keeping tallies of their good deeds, not the righteous. The righteous receive heaven as an inheritance, as Jesus calls it in verse 34. And like any other inheritance, it is not something earned, but something received simply as a gift on account of the death of another, in this case the death of Christ Himself. If it was something earned, then it would no longer be an inheritance.

And yet people who have been made righteous by faith in Christ will manifest who they are by what they do. Sheep do deeds of mercy. Goats neglect deeds of

mercy. As Jesus says in Matthew 7:17, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. Or as we Lutherans put it: “We are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone.” Faith alone, not good works, saves us. But true faith will always produce good works. James 2:17 states, “Faith without works is dead.” As someone once said, faith is like calories. You can’t see calories, but you can sure see their results! So also you cannot see faith, but you can see its results in deeds of compassion and service. In this scene of the Last Judgment Jesus describes what are the results of faith (quote vv. 35-36).

In the remainder of this sermon we wish to answer three crucial questions—who, what, and why—regarding Christ’s calling to us. Who are the “least of these my brethren”? What are we to do for them? And *why* are we to do it for them?

First of all, who are the “least of these”? They are the needy and hurting of the world, those who are suffering and considered insignificant by society. Oftentimes they are the ones the world would just as soon dispense of: the unwanted fetus, the battered child, the poverty-stricken family, the persecuted Christian.

On this Sunday emphasizing World Relief, we want to focus upon one specific group of the “least of these,” the hungry throughout the world. And what an overwhelming number this entails! The World Health Organization estimates that of the entire world population, one-third is well-fed, one-third is minimally fed, and one-third is seriously underfed. That is an awesome statistic! I would venture to guess that all of us attending this service today are well-fed. But that means that for each of us who are well-fed, there is another person in this world who is underfed, maybe even near starvation! Jesus here includes this third of the world’s population—over two billion people—who are seriously underfed.

But our next question calls for action. It is the question of what. *What* are we as Christians to do for them?

In a cartoon, Garfield the cat, seated in a comfortable chair, sees his friend Odie the dog at the window peering in eagerly. Garfield says to himself, “Poor Odie. Locked outside in the cold. I just can’t bear to see him like this. I gotta do something!” At that point Garfield gets up from his chair and closes the curtain.

We can laugh at Garfield, but not too loudly, because he’s so much like us. As we live in comfort and abundance here in America, throwing away the table scraps from our meals which have filled our bellies, once in awhile the reality of the needy and starving world outside our borders breaks in to our awareness. We view on our TV screens those skeletal creatures in the Third World which look like the living dead but are really human beings just like us. They seem so distant and unreal. So like Garfield in the cartoon strip, we pull the curtains or turn off the TV so that we don’t have to think about it. But although that may make us feel comfortable again, it doesn’t change the reality that they are hungry and starving and dying.

I have read that there was once a convent in California which was surrounded by a chain-linked fence. On the fence were signs which read: “Absolutely No Trespassing! Anyone Caught Trespassing on These Premises Will Be Prosecuted to the Severest Extent of the Law! [Signed] The Sisters of Mercy.”

How ironic, we think. Who needs mercy like that? But perhaps we Christians who are called by Christ to be merciful—to be brothers and sisters of mercy to the world—are not much better. When we fence ourselves inside our comfortable and affluent world and neglect the needy and starving, can we really call ourselves brothers and sisters of mercy? Or, as the apostle John asks in 1 John 3:17: “Whoever has this world’s goods and sees his brother in need but shows no compassion

to him, how can the love of God be in him?"

What are we to do? Jesus says: "Whatever you do to the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me.... I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me." One of the finest organizations in the world for accomplishing this commission of our Lord is LCMS World Relief. It goes to those areas of the world in crisis condition to provide care and relief to myriads of people. But more than that, LCMS World Relief seeks to help those people discover long-term solutions to their destitute situation and to enable them to become self-sufficient.

The final question to be answered this morning is *why*. We've already seen that such acts of mercy do not earn us salvation. So why should we seek to show mercy? Of course the most significant answer is because God has shown mercy to us. When we were in the poverty of our sin, Jesus Christ entered into our condition for us. As Paul writes: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Because of Christ's sacrificial death, we have our debt of sin cancelled—including the sin of ignoring the plight of the destitute and hungry. And we are made rich—rich with the righteousness of Christ credited to us. That righteousness makes us sheep, not goats! That righteousness makes us acceptable to God today and on the final day of judgment. But that righteousness is now also expressed to others as we share Christ's love with them in deeds of compassion.

Since Jesus has done so much for us, we will want to do much for him. How? Jesus guides us. He says, "Whatever you do unto the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me." Why do we show mercy to the hungry and hurting of this world? Because whatever we do for them, we are really doing for Christ. Or as the anonymous poem reads:

I pray each morning that I be not blind
To the Christ, who moves that day among my kind.
I dare not turn a hungry man away,
Lest I be leaving Christ unfed today.
I dare not slight some tattered, unclouted one,
Lest I shall fail to warm and clothe God's Son.
I cannot pass one languishing in bed,
Lest it be Jesus lying there instead.
And every burden bearer that I see
Must have my help, for, oh, it might be He!

The amazing thing is that when we show mercy to others, not only do they become Christ to us, but we become Christ to them. Not only do we serve Christ by ministering to others, but they see Christ in us, and Christ works through us to them. For we are His hands to help a needy world.

A story is told that during World War II a beautiful cathedral in Europe was so severely bombed that about the only thing left standing in its midst was a statue of Jesus. But this statue did sustain some damage, because the hands of Jesus had been broken off in the destruction. An American soldier who passed through this rubble noticed the statue, and inscribed some words at its base. These words simply read: He Has No Hands But Us.

Indeed, today He has no hands but us. So may we go forth as His caring and helping hands in a hurting world of suffering and hunger. Amen.

David J. Peter

First Sunday in Advent
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
November 27, 2005

Preliminary considerations: Paul is speaking from his heart regarding his love and concerns for Corinthian Christians. He lets them know that he is very grateful for what God in Christ has done and continues to do for them as they struggle with division and immorality in their church and the city. He makes it clear that all of the blessings that they have received come from what God has done in Christ and not, what they have done. This latter point is very important in understanding what this letter is all about. His introduction to this letter is a lesson for all pastors regarding pastoral care and conduct. He takes them where they are at. He begins with his God-given calling as an apostle of Christ. In addition, Paul makes the focus of his attention quite clear: “To the church of God in Corinth to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours” (NIV). Herein, the apostle Paul is reaffirming their life in Christ.

In the local parish, things are no different. Sin is sin. There is division (called “clicks and factions”) in churches, sexual immorality, gossiping, abuse of Christian freedom, worship and Holy Communion issues, spiritual gifts (their use and abuse), and lastly, the assurance of life eternal in Christ who gives all Christians victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. All pastors know that there is nothing new under-the-sun.

Hence this brings to the forefront St. Paul’s initial greetings. He sets the stage for addressing these issues and more by affirming their baptismal identity of Christ. In Christ, regardless what occurs in your life and what lies before, you can call on the name of the Lord. You are His child. St. Paul gives thanks to the Lord for all that He does for them and for all Christians. The LORD God is faithful.

Suggested outline:

A Christian’s Riches: God’s Grace

Introduction: Some Christians are financially wealthy. They have everything that the heart desires in terms of earthly items. Of course, most Christians are moderately blessed with financial wealth, living paycheck to paycheck. And, there are Christians who have little to no financial holdings; as a result they live at or below the poverty level. Regardless of your financial status, all Christians have one thing in common, “For in him [Christ] you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you” (NIV).

- I. God’s grace and its riches:
 - A. Seen in your Christian witness.
 1. Speaking and sharing the Good News.
 2. Knowledge of Christ shared in a Christian’s witness.

- B. Lived in your Christian witness.
- II. God's grace and its blessings:
 - A. Spiritual strength and endurance.
 - B. Blameless or "as not to be accused" (no indictment can be lodged before the Lord God because you are in Christ—His doing) when the Lord comes to judge the living and the dead.
 - C. Christian fellowship with Jesus Christ (mediated by the Word and Sacraments).

Conclusion: While status in this world is judged by financial and social status, St. Paul emphasizes that for Christians, all Christians, regardless of financial ability of status, are enriched by the grace of God. This gift of grace provides all things every Christian needs. In Christ, Christians lack nothing and have everything that affirms their fellowship with the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This assurance that comes to us in God's grace reassures all Christians that Jesus Christ, our Lord, is faithful.

Robert W. Weise

Second Sunday in Advent

2 Peter 3:9-14

December 4, 2005

Lectionary: The Old Testament reading (Is. 40:1-11) prophesies that a voice in the wilderness would prepare the way of the Lord who would gather His flock. The Gospel (Mark 1:1-8) reports that John the baptizer preached a baptism of repentance and points to a mightier one who would come after him to baptize with the Holy Spirit. This epistle tells of God's final coming to gather His flock, those who have holiness and godliness. It clearly says, "Be zealous" in being spotless and at peace with God.

Notes on the text: Verses 8-9: How can we judge time when our sense of it is so different from God's kind of time? For God a day is like a thousand years or a thousand years like a day. There's no watch that calculates that way. The "beloved" of the Lord should always be aware that they are unable to anticipate God's sense of timing. His kind of timing is so unlike our present-day living. We want our desires or needs fulfilled immediately and according to our preferences of the moment. The timing is always His, not ours.

What seems slow to us is better seen as God's patience, giving more time for repentance. Repentance (μετάνοιαν) is a change of mind (feelings, will, or thought, perhaps including remorse for what was done wrong). Turning around requires a clear break with the past (2 Cor. 12:21) and involves a new creation by the power of the Spirit. God's goal is that each of us turn from sin and selfishness to a reliance on His gracious mercy in Christ. Our whole hope and expectations for the future should be placed in God's hands. God is merciful and does not want anyone to perish eternally. Our desires should be only His desires, not our selfish ones.

Verse 10: While every day is the Lord's, the day of the Lord (ἡμέρα κυρίου) looks to the future when God will show His might, His readiness to save and His power as judge (Ezek. 34:12; Zech. 13:1-2; 1 Cor. 3:13). In this passage it is a "final" day when the universe will be broken up, heaven disappearing, and earth disintegrating. The old Latin hymn *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning, TLH 607)

rather fully explores the Biblical imagery and the believer's attitude of contrition. God descends, the earth quakes, and the judge separates the sheep from the goats. When this will occur, no one can guess—it will come when you least expect it.

Verse 11: Before the judge gets here we should spend the time becoming devout (ὑπάρχειν [ὑμᾶς] ἐν ἁγίαις ἀναστροφαῖς), that is, to convert, to return to, to act or walk in holy ways (2 Cor. 1:12; Eph. 2:3; 4:22; 1 Tim. 3:15). God seeks a holiness that encompasses the whole walk of life: “as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). We should think about making ours a life dedicated to (εὐσεβείαις) piety and godliness, outward actions that grow from a steadfast faith (1 Tim. 6:3) and what God would have us be.

Verse 13: After the day of the Lord our new place (heaven and earth) will be one in which righteousness dwells (ἐν οἷς δικαιοσύνη κατοικεῖ). Those who dwell there will be without sin. It will be a place of holiness (Rom. 6:16-19) by the grace of God (2 Pet. 1:1).

Verse 14: As we wait, we should be zealous (σπουδάσατε) about being spotless and blameless and at peace with God. While peace, purity, and righteousness are the gifts of God that come through the work of the Holy Spirit in those who hear and believe the Gospel, Peter encourages effort and eagerness in these things (1 Pet. 1:10). It is similar to the behavior that Paul urges when he writes, “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:11). Those who dwell with the Lord are at peace (ἐν εἰρήνῃ) with Him. This peace is more than removing all hostile feelings. Rather it is *shalom*, a state in which God gives peace and blesses His servants (Luke 2:29). Peter had pointed to this blessing (1 Pet. 3:11) when he quoted Psalm 34:13, “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” Such peace comes through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1). Waiting then is not an anxious waiting but a hopeful waiting for we know what the future will bring according to the promise of God.

Suggested outline:

Don't Look at Your Watch

Introduction: Looking at your watch never speeds anything up or slows it down. Better to put your energy into the task at hand.

- I. Time is running out as the day of judgment approaches.
 - A. It will come like a thief.
 - B. Whatever time you have is a time for repentance.
- II. Time should be spent being zealous about holiness.
 - A. God seeks the Christian walk and helps you toward it.
 - B. The walk with God has peace that lasts forever.

Conclusion: Get your attention off the clock and on God's making you holy—before time is up.

James L. Brauer

Third Sunday in Advent
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
December 11, 2005

The text: Verse 16: "Rejoice always." This first verse of the text draws us to the theme of joy for the Third Sunday of Advent and the Gradual, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion...." It can't be said more simply, and it can't be said more powerfully.

Verses 17-18: "Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Rejoice always, however, does not stand by itself. Pray constantly in verse 17 and in all things give thanks are all counted together as the will of God. Certainly these are God's will just as God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2). Those bought at a price, whose King has come and is coming again, have every reason to rejoice, pray constantly, and give thanks in their lives.

And look how well verse 24 brings these verses into perspective. The One who has called us is faithful and He will do it. Why does one rejoice? Is it for any merit they have earned? No. Here Philippians 4:4 helps us, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice." The only rejoicing that is done is done because of the Lord and what He has done and will continue to do; He is faithful and He will do it.

Christ Jesus has come as the prophets of old proclaimed. He is faithful to the point of death on the cross, and now He sanctifies us completely and preserves us blameless by His Spirit until the day He returns (v. 23). It is here we find the rejoicing always, for His faithfulness is always. It would be good here to reference 2 Timothy 2:13: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." So we rejoice, pray, and give thanks.

Verses 19-22: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." These verses are also marks of our identity as those who have been redeemed by the faithful One and also well understood in light of verse 24. These verses are an exhortation to those who walk as sons of light to walk according to that Light by not hindering the work of the Spirit, or despising the prophecies that come from God Himself.

Exegetical statement: In this text the Word of the Lord directs us to the life of the believer as he awaits the coming of the Lord. There are distinct marks in the lives of those who are sons of light: they are to rejoice, pray constantly, give thanks, do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophecies, test all things, hold fast what is good, and abstain from every form of evil. All these are done only because the One who calls the believer is faithful, and He will do it.

The context: The first part of chapter 5 is speaking of the coming of the Lord. Until His coming, which will be as a thief in the night, we are to act as we are: sons of the light, not of the darkness. Therefore as sons of light our lives reflect that light in what we say and do. Every action in the light is a response to the One who is faithful, and that One who will bring all things to completion (Phil. 1:6).

Liturgical context: The Third Sunday in Advent is the Sunday of joy. The gradual used is taken from Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118:26:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion
Shout, daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your King comes to you,
Righteous and having salvation.

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.
From the house of the Lord we bless you. (LW p.13).

Thus, in this text I have focused on verses 17 and 24 to draw upon the theme of rejoicing. As the reader reads this text he understands to rejoice not in a generic way, but in the Lord. The reason for rejoicing is the Lord who is faithful and who will do all He has promised and bring all to completion on the Last Day.

Possible outline:

Joy to the World, Always!

- I. Rejoice always, but this can only be because of the Lord.
- II. Rejoice always, because He, unlike us, is always faithful.
- III. Rejoice always, because you are the one called by God.
- IV. Rejoice always, because He will do it and bring all things to completion.

Kyle D.Castens

Fourth Sunday in Advent Romans 16:25-27 December 18, 2005

Lectionary: In 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 the Lord tells David he will not make a house for the Lord, rather the Lord will establish David's house (throne) forever since the Messiah would be born from David's line. In Luke 1:26-38 the virgin Mary, betrothed to Joseph (of the house of David) is told by Gabriel that the Lord will give her son "the throne of his father David." The words of Psalm 89, or the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:47-55), rejoice in the mighty acts of God as He fulfills His promise of a Savior. The epistle (Rom. 16:25-27) likewise gives glory to God, especially for the revelation of the mystery that comes through Jesus Christ. The Word of the Lord concerning His glorious plan for salvation comes to David, to Mary, and to us. For this we give glory to God.

Notes on the text: Verse 25: Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑμᾶς στηρίξαι. It is God who has the power. He is able to establish, fix firmly, support faith (1 Thess. 3:2, 13; 1 Pet. 5:10).

κατὰ. Note the series of phrases that begin with this preposition in order to focus on the means God employs. Paul brought *good news* (τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν) to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16), namely, the *preaching* (τὸ κήρυγμα) of Jesus Christ. Paul's "my" attached to the word Gospel obviously refers to what he personally brought, namely, the good news (Rom. 1:1; 2:16; 2 Cor. 2:4). The preaching of Jesus Christ, not oratory (1 Cor. 2:1), is the power (1 Cor. 1:21; 2:1; 15:14).

Paul carried God's *revelation of the mystery* (ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου) to Rome and through his letter to us. The mystery is not that of an ancient cult where the initiated worshipers participated in rites about which they were to keep silent nor is it that of a Gnostic sect with its special knowledge of God and of the origin and destiny of humans. Rather in Paul's writings the mystery is the wisdom of the cross on which the Lord of glory was crucified (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:1, 7). The plan for salvation through Christ's death had existed before the world began. The message breaks into the world and is part of the saving event (Eph. 3:2, 9), even as the Christmas angels announce it and sing "glory to God."

Verse 26: γραφῶν προφητικῶν. Especially among the rabbis, "writings" is a

term for the Scriptures (Rom. 1:2; 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:15). The prophetic writings are part of God’s plan for revealing His purposes to the nations though they were originally delivered to the people of Israel.

εις ὑπακοήν πίστεως. All the means mentioned in verses 25 and 26 have this purpose—to establish the obedience of faith. Hearing, faith, and obedience are linked (Gen. 22:18; Jer. 13:10; Mark 1:27; Acts 5:32; Eph. 3:20, 22). The “obedience” is assent that comes through the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. It is the essence of a new creature, one who is willing to put the God who brings salvation through Jesus Christ above all things and to obey only Him.

ἡ δόξα. The new creature’s response is to acknowledge God’s salvation and extol Him. “Glory” focuses on divine visible manifestation; it goes beyond words like honor, splendor, power, or radiance. The birth of Jesus brings that mystery into the flesh, and He dwells among us to save us. Believers, who know the greatness of the Lord, are transformed by the Spirit “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:7-18). This marvelous work is God’s glory.

Suggested outline:

Glory to God

Introduction: Everyone loves a mystery. It is probably the most popular kind of novel or TV show. It reveals who did it and how it was done. God’s plan for salvation (a mystery) was revealed by prophets and is the centerpiece of history.

- I. God’s glory comes by the preaching of Jesus Christ.
 - A. Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, is the mystery.
 1. A mystery requires revelation, or it remains a secret.
 2. The mystery is that the Lord of glory dies on the cross for sinners.
 - B. The mystery, once kept secret, is now made known.
 1. By the command of God (His plan all along).
 2. Through the prophetic Scriptures.
 3. Through the preaching of the Gospel.
- II. The mystery is revealed in order to establish faith in Jesus Christ
 - A. Faith is the obedience God seeks.
 1. To trust God in all things is faith.
 2. A true servant hears—and obeys.
 - B. Faith gives glory to God for what He has done.
 1. Mary heard the mystery, believed, and obeyed.
 2. Paul believed the mystery and preached it.
 3. We have heard, believe the mystery, and give glory to God for it.

Conclusion: Mystery? Who did it? How was it done? Now we know. God planned all along to rescue us by sending His only-begotten Son to the cross. Thank you, Lord, for revealing it to us. Glory to God!

James L. Brauer

The Nativity of Our Lord
Titus 2:11-14
December 25, 2005

Here we have a text that brings us briefly through justification and then addresses the response of the believer to the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Of course, we proceed on the basis of certain assumptions derived from the rest of the Pauline corpus: that we are sinners in need of a gracious God and that God in His mercy has provided Jesus Christ to pay the price for our transgressions and make us new. He did this by becoming flesh, giving His life both in terms of living with us sinful human beings (although without sin Himself) and dying for us on the cross. Here in this Christmas text we have a great gift of God: that the Word has given us the gift of new, regenerate lives. And what a Christmas gift He is—wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

The rest of our text focuses on the regeneration He produces in our lives. The product of this “grace of God that brings salvation” is a new attitude and life. Regeneration by the Gospel gives us the “power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16) to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions and lusts. There are changes to our sinful behaviors and attitudes. This is because Christ our Lord has given us newness and taught us to live in new ways. This leads us to the consequences of the work of Christ in our lives. We are taught to live “self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.” Sure there is still the sinful nature, but as regenerate Christians we can say with Paul, “it is no longer I who do it, but sin dwelling in me that does it.” This is not to say that we abandon responsibility for our sinfulness; to the contrary, by owning up to the sinful nature and its effects on our lives, we confess its destructive role in this life (a temporal and temporary estate). And we also confess the role of the new life of regeneration in Christ Jesus—our permanent and eternal estate both here and in the life to come.

Not only is this so, but we also live for the age to come. This world and its considerations are not of much import to the Christian because there is a life that is coming that is real in an eternal sense, not like the life in this world that has an end in death (or transformation at the return of Christ). We look for the hope of eternal life and by grace through faith in Christ Jesus indeed begin to live as citizens of that other eternal reality, the reality of a heaven with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the reality of a new life and hope in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. This is why the world and its cares are not of that much importance to the believer. For in all things, whether things of life or death, we are loved and cared for by a Lord and Savior, the Christmas gift that comes in this life to be with us in our weakness and will come again at the judgment to raise us poor sinners to glory and majesty with Him in heaven.

The great gift of Christmas is not only the one who gave His life for us but also the new life He presents us and empowers us to live—a life lived for Him that results in service to God.

Timothy Dost

Circumcision of Our Lord
Romans 1:1-7/Philippians 2:9-13
January 1, 2006

Romans and Philippians present us with two texts useful for the theme of the “Circumcision of Our Lord.” In the Romans text we have a brief but deep explanation of the nature and work of the Christ and what that means for us. Philippians presents us with the results of the life of the Christ who had been subject to the Law in every respect, to fulfill all righteousness and bring us salvation through the work of the cross. The result is His absolute lordship over the creation. The consequence of this lordship for us is that we become servants of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and no matter how humble our station or task in life, God sanctifies it for work in His kingdom. Furthermore, God sanctifies our repentance and the new lives we lead, allowing us “to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” It is not that we somehow earn our salvation, or that our salvation is not complete, but rather that the state of being saved is a kind of a task—an ongoing work in progress, that works Christ’s way, truth, and life through repentant Christians. The true believer is new, regenerated in Christ Jesus, and new people do the new work of repentance and an eternity-based life.

Paul begins this Romans text with an assertion of his apostleship. He is an apostle of the Gospel. This “good news” has a specific content. It comes through prophets and is written in Holy Scriptures. It is about the Son of God, a term that would have been familiar to Romans—as their gods tended to have children. But there would have been unfamiliar content here as well, as this was the Son of the true and living God, not some idol such as Jupiter with his son Heracles (in Greece, Zeus and Hercules were considered roughly equivalent). Rather than doing great deeds such as cleaning the Augean Stables by moving a river, Jesus Christ is established as the true Lord of all by His resurrection from the dead. No deed of a Greco-Roman demigod had ever come close to matching that.

Jesus Christ then calls people of God to bring good news to others. It is this good news that death is not the end, but that the Christ, by being born and living in accordance with the righteousness of the Law, fulfilled the Law in Himself, making a new covenant with God. This fulfillment necessarily included His circumcision as an infant Hebrew. Here was one more act of the Law that had to be fulfilled to, as Jesus would later say at His Baptism by John, “fulfill all righteousness.” To paraphrase Hebrews, the circumcision was part of His becoming a man (albeit as a Hebrew) in every way as we are, but without sin.

In Philippians we see the results of the humiliation and cross of Jesus. Now that He has humbled Himself in all respects, even submitting to death on a cross, God raises Him up and exalts Him to the highest place. He has fulfilled all the requirements of the Law, not only for Himself as man, but for all mankind as God and man. He has been weighed in the balance against the sins of the whole world and been found to be holy and righteous. His *Chavod*—his heaviness, glory, or holiness, to use the Old Testament Hebrew term—is greater than all of our sins combined, and so having made payment for us, He is now exalted to the highest place. Here we find all knees bowing and tongues confessing that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But how do we tie the Gospel to the theme of circumcision? One way is to indicate as Paul did in Romans 4 that Abraham received the blessedness of the promise before circumcision, and therefore the circumcision became a sign in the

flesh for what had already been granted in the heart. In this way we understand that it is not the action of the cutting of the flesh that is most important, but rather the covenant promise for Abraham's descendents. And it is readily apparent that the promised land does not just represent a temporal promise, but also the true land of the promise, heaven with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, where we too will be able to bow and be raised up by Him to the place He has for us. What a glorious day that will be.

A second way is to use the analog to circumcision in the New Testament, Baptism. Paul ties this together well when he describes Baptism as "circumcision of the heart" in Colossians 2 (see especially vv. 9-12). Circumcision was an act required by the Law, but circumcision of the heart through Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a matter of grace, faith, new life, and the Gospel. For those circumcised in heart, the old has passed away, and the new has come.

Timothy Dost

Baptism of Our Lord **Acts 10:34-38** **January 8, 2006**

Preliminary considerations: Having read and preached on this text as I served God's people in the parish, I am always reminded of the text from Habakkuk 2:4— "...the righteous shall live by his faith...(ESV). Peter is summoned by God to Cornelius's house. When he arrives, he asks Cornelius why he was summoned to his house. He explains to Peter that the Lord God heard his prayer and sent an angel to give him direction regarding how he can learn more about revelation of God in Christ Jesus. According to these directions, Cornelius sent for Peter. Cornelius assembled people to hear all things that Peter is directed by God to share and witness to them. Cornelius knew that he wasn't going to receive St. Peter's opinion about the Word of God, but the very true Word of God. Cornelius and the gathered congregation of gentiles are eager to listen and inwardly digest the Word of God as it is proclaimed by the apostle Peter. This text is an excellent lesson for all pastors and Christian congregations who thirst for the Word of God and its Truth. They have heard about Jesus Christ, but want to hear more and more of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Suggested outline:

Telling It Like It Is

Introduction: We live in a world that has converted the absolutes of the Scriptures to the relativism of the world. All truth is relative, especially the Truth of the Bible. People say: "Times are different; so how can the Bible mean any thing for this day and age?" Telling it like it is about sin and the grace of God is being turned into moral preaching and discourse. Preachers and Christians don't want to upset the "apple cart" regarding people's happiness and personal desires. Yet, God in Christ tells it like it is about sin and His free gift of grace. St. Peter is called to Cornelius's house and to those gathered at his house. They are thirsting for more knowledge about Jesus Christ. In the beginning of Peter's sermon, he tells it like it is about the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

- I. Telling it like it is: God shows no partiality (God is no respecter of persons).
 - A. The world, sin, and the devil shows favoritism and partiality.
 - B. The Word of God doesn't show partiality or favoritism.
- II. Telling it like it is: Knowing the message of God.
 - A. The world, sin, and the devil do not bring peace but division
 - B. The Word of God in Christ Jesus, the Good News, gives peace (not as the world gives peace).
- III. Telling it like it is: Jesus is anointed by God.
 - A. The world, sin, and the devil are not "anointed by God," but the devil's lies.
 - B. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God to heal all those under the power of the devil (healing begins with forgiveness; Jesus the obedient Suffering Servant).

Conclusion: Baptized Christians love to have the pastor tell them about the Word of God as it is. No padding, no fluff 'n stuff, no twists and turns, and softening of the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians are enabled by the Spirit of God to hear, to tell and to witness the story of Jesus of Nazareth like it is in the Bible. Jesus always told like it is; lived it; died and rose for the forgiveness of sins for all who believe and thirst for the living waters that are God's gift of grace in Christ. Jesus Christ is *shalom*.

Robert W. Weise

Second Sunday after the Epiphany
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
January 15, 2006

Context: As much as Leviticus 18 deals with order, purity, and wholeness for the individual as well as the community of believers, so Paul's first letter to the Corinthians deals with those same themes. Consulting with the Concordia Commentary: *Leviticus* by John W. Kleinig (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003) and with "Why Won't Paul Just Say No? Purity and Sex in 1 Corinthians 6," by Mark Gravrock, *Word and World*, 16 (Fall 1996): 444-455, will prove helpful for further study.

1 Corinthians 5 and 6 address primarily sexual immorality while chapter 7 deals with marriage matters. Under marriage matters Paul discusses singleness as a gift on equal footing with marriage, divorce especially when one spouse is an unbeliever, and ultimately everything under this topic subordinate to the central matter of faith in Jesus Christ and His coming kingdom. Chapters 5 and 6 contains seven uses of the formula "Do you not know...?" (5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19), all of which presume a sense of knowledge, some of Leviticus 18.

The immediate context reveals the Law in 6:9-11—"Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were." The Gospel comes through clearly in the remainder of verse 11: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." These verses are the premise behind Paul's proclamation in 6:12-20.

Textual notes: Verse 12: The quotations probably come from members of the Corinthian congregation, quotations that reveal a misunderstanding or misapplication of the Christian liberty Paul had taught. In their thinking, liberty had become license to do as they pleased. Such a view jeopardizes the order, purity, and wholeness God intended for the community of faith. All things may be lawful, permitted, permissible, allowed, or even possible, but not everything is beneficial to me or to my brother or sister in Christ. Will this action or behavior make me a slave once again (2 Pet. 2:19; Gal. 5:1)? Such slavery comes about because the life-giving authority of Christ is ignored.

Verse 13: These quotations put food and sex on the same level and thus negate any spiritual consequence to either. Paul counters that food and the stomach will be destroyed or done away with by God. The spiritual nature and the physical nature cannot be separated—both are involved with the body: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” How different this is from Greek thinking that saw the body as inferior to the spirit. The premise behind Paul’s assertion is God’s creation of the body. Confer with Romans 12:1: “Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” Sexual immorality (from *porneia*, unchastity, fornication, prostitution, sexual activity outside of marriage) was well-known and cultivated in Corinth; but that was not to be the life for the Christian, whether in Corinth or in the USA.

Verse 14: The body will be raised just as the body of the Lord was raised. Could this be true if the body were insignificant or irrelevant? The resurrection of the body and life of the world to come become the basis and incentive for life presently in this world. Confer with Romans 8:11.

Verses 15-17: How are our bodies made members of Christ Himself? Paul’s statement here is further explained in 1 Corinthians 12:13: “For we were all baptized, by one Spirit into one body” (Baptism) and 1 Corinthians 10:17: “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (Holy Communion). Ephesians 5:25-26, 31-32: “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word... ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

Verse 18: Fleeing sexual immorality is an ongoing fleeing from sin, because this sin involves and affects the whole person, wounding a person at every level of being.

Verse 19: Temple, dwelling place, sanctuary (*naos*) equal a dwelling place of the Spirit, both individually and corporately: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). The Holy Spirit enables us to live, resisting and fleeing from sexual immorality (see Rom. 8:9). Since it is God who alone created, redeemed, and sanctified the body, we are not our own.

Verse 20: We were purchased with Christ’s holy blood, His innocent suffering and death (Luther’s Small Catechism, Explanation to the Second Article). Purchased (*agopa*) was used when purchasing slaves in a marketplace; thus, an appropriate verb usage for God’s redemption of the sinner. The only conclusion can be that we glorify God with our bodies.

Suggested outline:

You Are Not Your Own

Introduction: The situation at First Church Corinth was the misunderstanding and misapplication of Christian liberty. In trying to separate body and soul, spiritual lives and physical lives, the Corinthians were making liberty into license. They thought they could do as they pleased because they thought they were their own.

- I. You are not your own. We are enslaved to sin. The Corinthian sexual sins echo in our society and close to home. Liberty has become license as we do things “our” way.
- II. You are not your own. You were bought with a price. God created us for freedom. He purchased us from our sin-slavery with the blood and death of His Son.
- III. You are not your own. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices for the good of your neighbor—all to the glory of God.

Henry V. Gerike

Third Sunday after the Epiphany 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 January 22, 2006

Context: The Epistle’s emphasis on the shortness of time produces a sense of urgency for the life of the Christian. The immediate context of chapter 7 reveals the Corinthian believers’ concern as to what this meant for daily living. (See the context given for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany.)

Verses 25-28 speak to virgins and highlight the concern of “the present crisis.” Paul’s concern is pastoral when he states that “those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.” The troubles in this life, or the present crisis, could be impending persecution or the difficulty of living in Corinth’s immoral and hostile environment.

Textual notes: Verse 29: Brothers (*adelphoi*), fellow believers in Christ, sinners though they are. Paul thus reminds the Corinthians that they are redeemed in Christ and thus precious in His sight.

“The time is short” is the favorable period of time (*kairos*) that has been shortened (*sustello*, perfect passive participle, to limit, to shorten). We live in the “great in-between,” the time before the Second Coming of our Lord. Our times are in the Lord’s hands (Ps. 31:15). Matthew 24:22 (“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened”) reveals God’s mercy for His chosen people.

Because of what Paul has just stated, therefore, from that time forward (*loipon*) the Corinthians should live in this manner.

Overstatement and hyperbole are the tools Paul uses to make his case. True, marriage is God’s gift and institution; yet it is only “till death parts us.” What is lasting is the life we have in Christ, the Bridegroom who is soon to arrive. Colossians 3:1 (“Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God”) gives the proper perspective for living in this world. Love your spouse, but keep this present age in perspective, including marriage which is of this world

(Matt. 22:30).

Verse 30: Even death and life's ups and downs are to be seen in perspective. Yes, there will be sorrows and death. Because of the comfort we have in Christ (Matt. 5:4; Is. 35:10), we have joy (*chairontes*). That helps us in supporting one another (Rom. 12:15).

Even property and material resources are seen not as our property, but as objects given us by God for our stewardship. (cf. Ps. 24:1; 1 Tim. 6:7).

Verse 31: We are in the world, not of the world, and thus our use of the world is to be moderated and kept in perspective, God's perspective, because this world and its form are passing away. We do store up for ourselves "treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matt. 6:20).

Suggested outline:

Permanent, Eternal Perspective in Christ

Introduction: Living in the last days is hardly news to us. It usually hits us only with the news of the latest disaster or the latest celebrity to die. Otherwise our perspective turns to that which is close at hand, namely, our daily lives, bills, health, children, marriage, relationships.

- I. Perspective in life. Hearing Paul's words in the text we either shrink from our daily responsibilities in marriage or work, or we tighten the grip so tightly that we become attached to them. Marriage, vocation, health, and death are important events in life—but while important, they are not permanent.

What usually is important to us in life is what is closest to us. Yet life and world are always smaller than we think. Our nearsightedness, from which we all suffer, makes near things look important and makes us forgetful of the things and people who are really important in our lives. Marriage lasts until death parts us, times of grieving and rejoicing until tears evaporate, purchases and ownership until 60,000 miles or three years are up.

Permanence in this world is an oxymoron. "The present form of this world is passing away." Why invest an entire life in something that is decaying and will be destroyed?

- II. God did and does. Galatians 4:4: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son." Christ divested Himself of His royal glory and clothed Himself with our human nature. In His dying and rising, He put Himself under the old order of things (the things that will pass away) and took the curse of our sin upon Himself.

The past tense of His death and resurrection become a present reality in Baptism (see Rom. 6:3-4). The old passes away and we are made God's new creation. Our nearsightedness is cured and we can see what is eternally permanent—God's mercy and love in Christ.

2 Peter 3:11: "Since all these things [of this world] are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?" Our perspective changes. As God's redeemed children, we have a loose hold on the things of this world, because Christ through His Word and Sacraments has a firm grip on us.

Henry V. Gerike

1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 29, 2006

Text: Verses 1-3: In these verses a contrast between love and knowledge is established. Knowledge puffs up and fills one with vanity; whereas, love edifies.

As we see in verse 2, a person who thinks he knows anything reveals he does not know as it is necessary to know. For instance, in all he knows he leaves out the fact that knowledge is pointing him to the love God has shown to him through Christ, and he in turn is to show love to others. He does not take into consideration the one who does not know as he does, the one who is weak. The one who is weak stumbles at the knowledge of the one who is strong.

Thus what one thinks he knows is not the key, but rather the One who knows Him. Verse 3: "But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him" (NKJV). This one, in loving God, will also love the one who is weak. He will exercise the liberty of which he knows in accordance with love which is at the very heart of this liberty. For the one who knows as it is necessary, knows that the liberty has come by the love of God. Jesus says in John 8, "Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (vv. 31-32). And again, "Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you whoever commits sins is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed" (vv. 34-36). Certainly the one who loves is known by God, for He loves out of response to the grace offered to him by God through Jesus. One who loves is one of God's own. Verse 3 is well understood also in light of 1 John 4:6-21.

Verse 4-6: So what is it that we know? According to these verses, we know that there is no God but one and that an idol is nothing. We know there is only one Father, one Son, and one Spirit (though not specifically mentioned here). So, even the things associated with nothing are nothing. According to verse 8, we know that food does not commend us to God; for if we eat it we are not better, or if we do not eat it we are not worse. If an idol is nothing, then the food sacrificed to that idol is certainly nothing.

Verse 7: *But*, this knowledge is not everyone's knowledge. Those who are accustomed or conscious of idols see the food offered to them as intimately involved in idol worship. As Kretzmann says, "they could not rid themselves of the notion that there was something real about the idol" (*Popular Commentary of the New Testament*, 125). Thus if there is something real about the idol, there is something significant about the food offered to such idol. Thus, when they see this meat eaten, their conscience is defiled because they see it as something real, intimately associated with idol worship, and opposite of their Christian walk.

Verses 9-13: These verses draw a distinction between knowledge and love, and the food offered to idols. Verse 9 is where the "rubber meets the road." Simply, do not let your Christian freedom become a stumbling block for the one who is weak. You, who have knowledge of the extent of the liberty, may cause one who is weak to stumble. The weak do not have this same knowledge of their liberty.

Verses 10-11 draw out the problem. A brother who is weak may follow the example of one who has knowledge and eat that food of which he has a drastically different understanding. The reason the weaker eats is because the stronger, who has knowledge, eats.

The result? According to verse 11, the weaker perishes by being led astray by the one who has knowledge. We see here the most serious consequence of what Kretzman calls, “The reckless use of Christian liberty” (126).

In verse 12, the Word of the Lord reminds the Corinthians and us that we, in sinning against the weaker, sin against Christ. Remember the words of Christ, “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did to the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me’” (Matt. 25:40).

The text concludes with verse 13. Here we have an illustration of knowing as it is necessary and not separating love from that knowledge. Paul, although being aware of his liberty, would rather not eat meat again if it were to cause a weak one to stumble. Knowing as it is necessary to know means knowing the liberty we enjoy is a gift of love given by God through the sacrifice of His Son. Thus, we sacrifice something, even though it falls under our Christian liberty, showing our love in Christ to the weak and to spare him from stumbling.

Note: For additional insight into this text, refer to Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 13.

Exegetical statement: In this text, Paul, inspired by God, draws a distinction between knowledge and love to discuss the issue of food sacrificed to idols. Those who have knowledge, specifically there’s no God but one, see the food sacrificed to idols as simple food. This food can neither help nor harm them. However, not everyone has this knowledge. For those weak in conscience this food is idol food. When one who is weak sees one who has knowledge eating this food, he is compelled also to eat. This eating will defile his conscience and may lead him to perish. Thus, we are to love and give up that which would cause our brother to stumble even though it may fall under our Christian liberty.

Possible outline:

“Know It Alls, Know Less Than All”

- I. Those who think they know anything do not know as they need to know.
- II. Those who are weak do not fully know as they need to know.
- III. What matters most is not what we know, but that the Lord knows us and loves us.
- IV. By His love that we share, the one who is weak is built up, not made to stumble.

Kyle D. Castens

“On the reading of many books...”

BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM: *An Autobiography*. By Won Yong Ji, Th.D. Michigan: Lutheran Heritage Foundation (English version), 2004. 438 pages. Cloth or paper. \$18 from the Concordia Seminary Book Store. (Title also available in Korean.)

Don't call him Bill, and don't call him Joe. He tried on both. They didn't fit. Pyun-Woon is fine. Even among colleagues and friends, few call him by his familiar name—Won Yong. Sincere respect for his accomplishments, reputation, and person preclude such informality. Dr. Ji it is.

In this highly personal autobiography, the reader, anticipating a “rags to riches” story or maybe a “small town boy makes it in the big city” in this highly personal autobiography will be both gratified and disappointed. One can, if one wishes, read it in either English or Korean. The author wrote it in both languages—a feat in itself. What readers quickly discover in Dr. Ji's account of the first eight decades of his life is that, by the Ji standard, they have lived, really, very little. How many people, let alone seminary professors—Lutheran or otherwise—living at the turn of the twenty-first century have grown to adolescence in a tenant farmer's family with a benevolent matriarch (eating only home-grown food and first seeing a 4-wheeled vehicle at age 8), lived in a rural “well-village” under a foreign occupying power, been baptized by a Presbyterian after a spiritual encounter with a book on the life of Martin Luther, spotted for anti-aircraft gunners aiming to bring down American bombers, escaped by night across a highly secured border, developed proficiency (spoken and written) in three modern languages as well as scholarly working knowledge of three ancient languages, earned advanced degrees by studying and writing in a non-native language, served in a high position in an international Lutheran organization, lived for extended periods on at least three continents, and been instrumental in furthering theological education in several countries? There is more, but for that we have the book.

This is no summing up of a life well lived, however, or a resting on laurels, well earned though they be. The man who by the grace of God is what he is still works every day—teaching, writing, thinking, conversing—bubbling with new ideas and boundless energy. His years of four score and more have scarcely slowed the pace. The “ki” to Ji is found well past the middle of the volume, where he shares his continuing mission: “How do we communicate and propagate the exclusive message of salvation of Jesus Christ in the inclusive multi-cultural milieu of life whether that be in America or elsewhere” (348)? “In the person of Christ and His redeeming work, mankind finds the last chance of its very survival. I stress the supreme importance of the loyal commitment to Jesus Christ as our personal Savior coupled with open attitude toward others. Other ultimate questions will be answered and revealed face to face finally in the presence of the Lord” (349).

Underlying Dr. Ji's personal success (though he would not use the term) is a question, both haunting and motivating: “Sometimes I ask myself: Why am I allowed to live so long while some of my friends and peers died early [during WW II and the Korean War]? Their lives were as precious as mine. Such a question has been a constant challenge to me” (369). Dr. Ji has answered that challenging question by his very life. Having been given the gift of life, as well as the grace to live it

fully, he has been driven (an apt term, as the reader will see) to use the gift to the glory of the Giver. Regarding his first year of teaching at Concordia Seminary, he notes, "If my American colleagues were putting in 45 hours per week, maybe more, I had to put in 80 hours, I was so determined.... During the [first] year, I was assigned to teach seven courses; I had to prepare anew (at least for five) because I had not taught them before" (323). During that time he also spent about three hundred hours preparing a study guide to Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*.

There is much to glean from this first-person account, not the least of which is a deep appreciation for the "cloud of witnesses"—members of the body of Christ, interdependent, complementary, each assisting the other in the only work that has eternal value. Some may be put off by what, on occasion, has the appearance of boasting, e.g., quoting of congratulatory letters, listing of well-known colleagues and acquaintances. For that matter, the lists and personal vignettes often serve to credit those who have been instruments of God's grace in the author's life. One must, after all, keep firmly in focus the title of the book: *By the Grace of God I Am What I Am*. Dr. Ji has no need for false modesty because he knows that all that he is and has accomplished is a gift. Ultimately, it is God who wears the laurel. That said, there is a saint in the book. Her name is Ae-Kyung, Mrs. Ji (better known to her American friends as Kay). Dr. Ji's peripatetic existence has meant much upheaval for Kay and surely more time than usual as a "single spouse," raising four young children in various foreign settings.

In a book of this size and variety, some parts will be preferred over others. For a bit of serious fun, turn to the transcript of the author's speech on problems—linguistic, sociological, psychological—of studying in a foreign country (147-160) or to the account of his experience with an American junior confirmation class (143-146). This reader found most engaging the narrative of the author's early years in Korea—truly an adventure in an exotic setting—and his reflections in the final quarter of the book on his continuing work and concerns, as well as his years at Concordia Seminary. Communicating Christ in an increasingly multi-cultural context remains Dr. Ji's ongoing and consuming passion. His life and writings have a great deal to offer to this mission. Consider, for example, his apt advice on the value of learning other languages: "I have often said that foreign language study is like a high premium insurance policy. If one pays it faithfully for, let us say, five or more years, depending on one's intelligence and diligence, a satisfactory dividend will come throughout life. Worth a try" (325)! Indeed.

The author's reflections include both joys and disappointments. Who would ever guess that a man who was "pre-evangelized" to the Christian faith at an early age by an account of the life of Martin Luther and later translated twelve volumes of Luther's works into Korean has never had the opportunity to teach a course on Luther?

Those who persist to the conclusion, the "after-afterword" (391-412) by Il-Young Park, president of Luther University in Korea and former student of the author, will be rewarded with an unforgettable personal portrait of Dr. Ji.

Dr. Ji's written English, like his spoken English, is unique, a combination of scholarly, erudite vocabulary spiced by frequent instances of slightly off-center syntax. But then, who of us could write even a sentence in Korean? There is also the occasional neologism (Marxistic), omission of definite article, usually before proper nouns (do they really add to meaning?), and a few editorial lapses (lightening for lightning). The unfortunate, if unavoidable, presence of multiple acronyms, especially in the esoteric world of ecumenical organizations, is somewhat ameliorated

by a key to abbreviations at the outset of the book. An index to such a valuable and interesting historical record would have been a boon. None of these minor flaws should be seen as detracting from the reviewer's enthusiastic recommendation of this incomparable account of the grace of God.

David O. Berger

HANDBOOK ON THE PROPHETS. By Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. 512 pages. Cloth. \$34.99.

If you are looking for an accessible handbook on the prophets that is theologically conservative yet cognizant of broader scholarly issues, then this book is worth investigating. This book is geared toward college students, students taking their first course on the prophets at seminary, pastors, and interested laypeople. The book's purpose is to give "an overview of the prophets' message through a running commentary that analyzes the structure, themes, and the messages of the prophets. Indeed, one must see the forest as well as the individual trees, for the individual parts will not make sense without a feel for the whole" (9).

The author introduces each prophetic book with an overview of its historical context, authorship, date, large textual units (e.g., Is., 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66), and the main theological theme(s) and message(s) of these textual units. Next, the author explains the basic content of each small textual unit within the prophetic book (e.g., Is. 6:1-13). Occasionally the author outlines the literary structure of each small textual unit as well. For instance, the author outlines each of the three oracles of woe against foreign cities/nations in Amos 1:3-10 with this three-part formula: introductory formula, sin list, and announcement of judgment (379).

More contested interpretive issues are mostly found in the footnotes. There the author discusses these issues in greater detail utilizing Hebrew and other ancient languages as necessary in transliteration. In this way, the discussions are accessible both to those who know the Biblical languages as well as those who do not. For example, in one footnote on page 31 the author devotes almost half a page to discussing the Hebrew term *'almah* in Isaiah 7:14 and whether it means "young woman" or "virgin." Unfortunately, though, the author does not mention that the Septuagint translates *'almah* with *parthenos* ("virgin").

At the end of each section on Isaiah, Jeremiah and Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets there is a fairly extensive bibliography of recent English language commentaries and scholarly studies. This provides a good starting point for those interested in further research. Finally, at the end of the book there is a ten-page subject index of names, places, and topics.

The strengths of this handbook are its breadth in one volume, division between introductory material and deeper scholarly issues, attention to conservative and higher critical interpretations, and a wealth of references for pursuing further study. The book also highlights Christological connections (e.g., Is. 7:14-17 and Zech. 9:9). However, the book is not consistent in this matter. For example, when discussing Micah 5:2 the author only speaks about John the Baptist and fails to mention or discuss how Matthew 2:1-6 interprets Jesus' birth in Bethlehem as the fulfillment of Micah 5:2.

The book also lacks some extra features that might otherwise make it an invaluable handbook. For instance, the book lacks an introduction to the phenomena of prophecy in the Ancient Near East (ANE) and in Israel's former and clas-

sical prophetic periods. Such a perspective might help college and seminary students, pastors, or interested laypeople better understand the character of the Major and Minor Prophets and the nature of their prophecies. Also, the book does not have a section that sufficiently informs the reader about literary form and artistry. The author does, at times, within the “running commentary,” briefly explain literary forms (e.g., woe oracles) and artistry (e.g., chiasm). Still, a whole section that introduces the reader to the basic components and concepts behind Hebrew poetry, prophetic forms of speech, rhetorical criticism, etc. would enable the reader to interpret prophetic texts on a deeper level. Finally, the book does not include a section that synthesizes the main theological themes and messages of the prophets, a summary that would allow readers to see the “forest” of prophecy through the “trees” of prophets a bit more clearly.

In summary, this handbook is to be commended for tackling such a vast topic, approaching it in a scholarly yet conservative way, differentiating between basic and more complicated levels of commentary, and making all of this accessible to various readers. While it is not a flawless, “one-stop shop” handbook, it can be recommended as a useful addition to the library of its target audience.

Scott A Ashmon
Bronxville, NY

A BIBLICAL HISTORY OF ISRAEL. By Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. 426 pages. Paper. \$24.95.

In the past twenty years there has been a new interest developing in the literary forms of the Old Testament, kindled primarily by Robert Alter’s now classic book *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Texts are now being studied by posing some of the questions that might traditionally have been asked of prose fiction, and it hasn’t taken long to recognize the Old Testament’s considerable literary artistry and associated ideological bent. Many now view these literary elements as primary evidence of historical unreliability. Now the general consensus is that where the degree of artistic narration is high, less plausible is the chance of the text being an accurate reflection of historical reality. Following Alter and others, many Old Testament scholars today see the Biblical text as nothing more than an invention that has contributed to the silencing of the real history of Palestine—“biblical Israel” is a literary fiction. And so principled suspicion of tradition is considered the *sine qua non* of Biblical scholarship. Put another way, if Scripture cannot be externally verified (by, for example, archaeology or extra-Biblical texts), it is false. Most histories of Israel operate according to the following criteria: causal analysis is more important than description and narration, the general is more important than the unique, the individual and the directly observable present are more important than the unobservable past and if narratives cannot be externally verified, they are not a valid witness to the facts.

It is in this climate that Provan, Long, and Longman pose this question: “Given that Hebrew narrative is artistically constructed and ideologically shaped, is it somehow less worthy of consideration as source material for modern historiographers than other sort of data from the past?” (6). Put another way, what is more important in the task of creating an Old Testament history—Biblical texts, archaeology, or ancient Near Eastern texts?

A Biblical History of Israel charts a new course in the debate as it provides a rationale to privilege the Biblical testimony above the rest of the data. The argument of the book is best stated: "History cannot base itself on predictability. Lacking universal axioms and theorems, it can be based on testimony only" (73). What is decisively different in this treatment of Israel's history is that where the more skeptical position has been to require external corroboration of the Old Testament before its witness is considered, it is argued here that the witness of the Old Testament should be accepted unless it is able to be falsified.

A full one fourth of the book is devoted to this discussion about how historiography has developed, the current crisis of historiography in the history of ancient Israel, how "minimalist" Biblical scholars are out of touch and still in the nineteenth century, how historians as a whole have overlooked important principles, and, finally, a discussion of what is meant by a Biblical history and the authors' particular approach to writing this history. Vital to the authors' process is a careful reading of the texts themselves, as one of the criticisms consistently made with those with whom they disagree is that the evidence of the text itself has not been properly considered. From this position, Provan, Long, and Longman present Israel's history from the patriarchal period onwards, usually through dialogue between the Biblical text and relevant external evidence.

Against the dominant trend of late, but consistent with their own stated methodology, the history begins with a treatment of the patriarchal narratives in which the general historicity of the patriarchs is upheld. The authors are conscious that there is not a great deal of hard external evidence to support this view but argue that the patriarchs can be shown to fit into what is known of the period in which the Biblical account places them. They are aware of the problems caused by overly confident identifications with texts from Nuzi and Mari in the past and seek a more nuanced reading of the texts than those that were offered by, for example, E. A. Speiser, but still contend that the fit is in the nature of what would be expected. The narrative patterning that is evident is not regarded as evidence of unhistorical traditions but reflects the fact that those telling these stories still had to make them interesting if they were indeed to be passed on.

From this point on the rest of the history that is offered follows more or less logically, and the case that is presented is generally consistent with the Biblical witness. But this is not simply an exercise in paraphrasing the Bible itself, because the authors are keen to emphasize that the Biblical accounts are often far more complex than is sometimes thought to be the case. Such an approach becomes clear in their treatment of the vexed question of the origins of Israel in Palestine. They are aware of the diverse theories that have been proposed here but firmly reject those approaches that deny that Israel originated entirely within Palestine.

The authors' falsification principle is put to the test in terms of the conflicts that are often alleged to exist between the accounts of Joshua and Judges. The position argued, and it is an argument with considerable merit, is that these accounts are complementary and that the alleged disagreements come from a failure to properly attend to the textual evidence. But archaeology has also been a problem for the belief that Israel entered the land through conquest, and here we encounter another methodological approach adopted consistently through the book—a positive interaction with archaeology that does not undercut the Biblical text.

The belief that there should be a large number of destruction layers at the time of the conquest is rejected on the grounds that Joshua indicates only a small number of sites actually destroyed. Nevertheless, Jericho and Ai are inherently problematic on current interpretation. In the case of Jericho, though, support is offered for B. Wood's alternative assessment of the evidence which could be supportive of the Biblical account, while an alternative site is offered for Ai. Both of these interpretations are possible, but neither commands assent at the moment, yet the approach is consistent with the authors' view on archaeology as something that also needs to be interpreted in order to understand its narrative as well. They conclude in these words: "We believe that such archaeological evidence as is known to us in no way invalidates the biblical testimony and that at least some promising 'convergences' exist" (192). It is not possible to examine the treatment offered of all of the subsequent periods of history within the Old Testament, but the types of argument encountered here are those that are featured throughout the book.

With the focus on the main narrative of the Old Testament, an important witness like the book of Isaiah receives only two comments in the main text and a handful more in the endnotes. Even Chronicles is marginalized to some extent (though more so in the treatment of the material parallel to Samuel than to Kings), yet this is inconsistent with the stated methodology and also with the generally high view of the Chronicler's reliability that is expressed.

Taken as a whole, however, this is the clearest case presented for some time for a traditional reading of the history of Israel where the testimony of the Old Testament itself is taken seriously. If this investigation is not fundamentalistic, then it is certainly a prime example of what James Barr has called maximal conservatism—giving as conservative an interpretation as possible to the known facts. The great contribution of the book lies in its methodological and epistemological awareness. Those who wish to debate with it, and no doubt there will be many who shall, will need to provide as consistent a foundation as that which is offered here. After reading *A Biblical History of Israel* most readers of this journal will realize that skepticism and minimalism can no longer hold a privileged position in the discussion.

Reed Lessing

ANCIENT-FUTURE EVANGELISM: *Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community*. By Robert E. Webber. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. 219 pages. Paper. \$14.99.

Evangelism is (1) a process, that (2) takes place over a period of time, and (3) brings new believers to spiritual maturity. With these "three very crucial insights" (13) Robert Webber begins his exploration of an approach to giving witness to Christ for the conversion of false believers to the Christian faith. These insights reflect his conviction that incorporating people into Christ's body, the church, is not a quick and easy fix but rather a life-transforming action of God. Webber believes that in the history of the church twenty-first-century believers have rich resources for bringing people to trust in Christ and to live lives that reflect what God has done for them in claiming them as His own through Christ's death and resurrection.

Webber presumes that Christians live in community and that the Christian life cannot begin and cannot continue without the active involvement of the congre-

gation of God's people. He also presumes that rituals are important as one aspect of concretizing and confirming the message that brings people into the practice of the faith, although regrettably he did not absorb a Lutheran understanding of the power of the Gospel in the means of grace during his doctoral study at Concordia Seminary. Webber is sensitive to the psychological stages and struggles through which seekers and new believers pass as the Holy Spirit leads them to approach and enter into life in Christ. He also recognizes that catechesis in the twenty-first century must be holistic. Quick reviews of Biblical teaching regarding God's salvation in Christ must be joined to careful instruction regarding the calling of God to live in obedience through service to the neighbor.

The book takes seriously the way in which Satan deceives people in contemporary North American culture. Webber's analyzes the "three major obstacles" to Christian community (to communities of all kinds) and thus also to Americans' coming to faith in Christ—individualism, isolationism, and consumerism. This analysis is helpful in creating both perceptive ears for listening for brokenness in others' lives and embracing arms to receive people fleeing from these deceptions of the devil into the community of Christ. Worship, Webber emphasizes, is a vital part of the community's life, as is the practice of discipleship exercised in the callings God gives His people in all aspects of the believer's daily life. The book's summary of H. Richard Niebuhr's ways in which the church meets culture simply ignores Niebuhr's mislabeled description of Luther's "Christ and Culture in Paradox." The reformer's understanding of life in two dimensions that are experienced simultaneously and reflect two kinds of being a real (righteous) human being can add a great deal to fostering discipleship in a secularist age.

Webber's basic premise that the contemporary church and the congregations of the immediate future could profit greatly from a return to ancient roots is a call to Lutherans to plumb the depths of our own tradition as well as that of the ancient church. It can give us help in formulating approaches to Christian witness and congregational cultivation of the life of discipleship today. The two greatest spurts in the growth of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod took place before we began to seek evangelism methods outside our own tradition. To be sure, in the 1880s German emigration aided the growth of our congregations, and other factors contributed to the doubling of our membership in the Behnken years (1935-1962). But the understanding of delivering God's Word by distinguishing Law and Gospel, in the form of the means of grace which are God's instruments of re-creation and the power for salvation, must refreshen and stimulate thinking about Christian witness in new ways today. Such imaginative use of our own tradition can enable us to use Webber's insights in an even more effective fashion.

Webber indicates that no "program" can fix the evangelistic outreach of a congregation. God became a human being to bring us to trust in Him, and He uses human beings, in all their complexity, to proclaim His message of forgiveness of sin, new life, and salvation to others. Because He knows that it is not good for a human being to be alone, He calls us to witness in tag-team fashion, as part of a congregation. For those who are thinking of Christian witness, outreach, and cultivation of the life of new believers within the context of the distinction of Law and Gospel, presuming the power of the Word in its oral, written, and sacramental forms, this book offers excellent supplementary visions for how our congregations and their individual members can serve as the Holy Spirit's tools in creating faith, fashioning new creatures in our time and place.

Robert Kolb

THE MEANING OF JESUS: *Two Visions*. By Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000. 288 pages. Paper. \$15.00.

The “quest for the historical Jesus” has gone through three phases since the eighteenth century. The “Old Quest” tried to determine what Jesus actually did as a historical figure. The “New Quest,” which began in the early twentieth century, attempted to discover what Jesus actually said. The “Third Quest,” launched in the 1980s, seeks to illumine the historical Jesus by situating him socio-politically and religiously in His first-century A.D. Jewish and Greco-Roman world.

Two of the leading lights in this “Third Quest” are Marcus Borg, the Hundere Distinguished Professor of Religion at Oregon State University, and N. T. Wright, the Bishop of Durham. Borg, a Lutheran, takes a liberal approach to this quest, albeit a unique and eclectic one. Wright, an Anglican, adheres to a more traditional view of Jesus.

Aside from presenting two divergent positions on Jesus, the explicit purposes of their book are “to shift logjammed debates [over the historical Jesus] into more fruitful possibilities” and “model a way of conducting public Christian disagreements over serious and central issues that will inspire others to try the same sort of thing” (ix-x). This book is divided into eight topics with each author taking his turn to write a chapter on the topic. While rarely arguing directly against each other, this side-by-side posture creates its own obvious comparisons and tensions.

The first topic covers the presuppositions and methodologies that each author uses when approaching the quest. Borg, who writes first, puts forth the notion that all the Gospels are a combination of “history remembered” and “history metaphorized” (5). In other words, because the Gospels are “the product of developing tradition” about Jesus they contain elements of Jesus’ life that are historically factual along with elements that are not literally true but nonetheless portray a powerful truth about what early Christian communities felt or thought about Jesus after His death and resurrection (8). This dichotomy bridges into another crucial distinctive where Borg divides Jesus’ life into “pre-Easter” and “post-Easter” stages (7). For Borg, the pre-Easter Jesus is only human. It is in the post-Easter stage that early Christians see Jesus as the divine Lord and Christian Messiah. Among other methods that Borg employs, two stand out as being most critical for his vision of Jesus: the cross-cultural study of religion and the singular reliance on Mark as the earliest and most historically accurate Gospel.

Wright sees Jesus in “two ways: history and faith” (19). Both work together to sustain Wright’s vision of Jesus. As for history, Wright looks for any and all evidence that illumines the historical Jesus—including the Synoptic Gospels. Wright’s primary methodology is the “scientific method of hypothesis and verification” whereby one collects all available data, sees how everything fits together, proposes a hypothesis that accounts for all the pieces, and then tests the hypothesis in three ways (22). Does the hypothesis make sense of all the data, is it a sufficiently simple answer, and does it shed light on other areas of research? Wright likens his approach to constructing a jigsaw puzzle. As for faith, Wright emphasizes the knowledge one has about Jesus through a personal relationship with Him. Thus, faith is not so much a matter of trust but knowledge through experience. Through this method, Wright believes that his faith-knowledge about Jesus is “supported and filled out” by historical evidence (26).

Having laid the foundation of methodology, the authors address the question of what Jesus did and taught. Wright summarizes his vision of Jesus here as:

A first-century Jewish prophet announcing and inaugurating the kingdom of God, summoning others to join him, warning of the consequences if they did not, doing all of this in symbolic actions, and indicating in symbolic actions, and in cryptic and coded sayings, that he believed he was Israel's messiah, the one through whom the true God would accomplish his decisive purpose (50).

For Wright, then, Jesus was firmly grounded in the first-century Jewish beliefs of monotheism, Israel's election by God, Israel's lingering exile under Rome's pagan rule, and the eschatological hope of God's reign, forgiveness, and liberation. Based on this, Jesus came to defeat evil, of which Rome was merely "the symbol and pawn" (48), and deliver Israel from temporal exile. Jesus warned the Jewish people in various ways that if they did not repent of their sins of militant nationalism and oppression of their own poor people and, instead, join Him in forgiving and loving all people, they would soon experience God's judgment (i.e., Rome's destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70). Thus, in Wright's view, the kingdom of God that Jesus ushered in was not initially or primarily about individual salvation from sin and death (soteriology).

In contrast, Borg sees Jesus as a Jewish mystic who had immediate first-hand experiences of God. Jesus did not think of Himself as the Messiah, did not talk about Himself this way, and did not want people to believe in Him this way. Rather, Jesus only became the Christ when early believers projected these "exalted metaphors" back onto Jesus' life (57). In addition to being a Jewish mystic, Jesus was a person who healed people in unexplained paranormal ways and was a wisdom teacher who provided an alternative to conventional wisdom. Jesus taught people to reject current religious institutions (the Temple and priests) that mediated God to the people for a price and, instead, to re-center their lives by seeking God immediately. Jesus was also a social prophet who challenged the "ancient domination system" that oppressed and exploited marginalized people while legitimating itself religiously and politically (71). All of this made Jesus a movement initiator who announced the coming kingdom of God.

The third topic focuses on Jesus' death. Borg believes that the passion stories of Jesus' death are a mixture of four ingredients: history remembered, prophecy historicized (i.e., early Christians created details in the Gospel's stories to make Jesus the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy even though these OT passages were not prophetic or Jesus did not in fact fulfill them), imaginative creations (e.g., the record of Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane when, according to Borg, no one could have heard it), and purposive interpretation (e.g., early Christians interpreted Jesus' death as divinely foreordained even though it was not). Because of this, Borg sees scant history in the passion stories. For instance, he does not think that Jesus saw His own death as bringing salvation from sin and death (81). Rather, this notion is a post-Easter creation. Jesus died at the hands of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and a small group of Jewish Temple leaders because He was a social prophet who opposed the ancient domination system. The Gospels later distorted history when they whitewashed Pilate's role and shifted blame to the defenseless Jewish masses in order to curry favor with the Roman government to keep early Christians from being condemned and executed as political rebels. In Borg's assessment, this shift "unwittingly...contributed to anti-Jewish attitudes in Christian lands" ever since (90).

Wright also has four starting points for Jesus' death. They are: Jesus' belief that He was fulfilling Biblical prophecies is congruent with what other first-century Jewish leaders thought about themselves, Jesus' belief that God's kingdom would come through His suffering and death is consistent with first-century Jewish expectations (e.g., the Maccabean martyrs), word-of-mouth information is a fast and effective way to spread information, and oral traditions tend to be "very conservative and self-regulating" (95). Thus, Wright thinks that the later Gospel stories about Jesus' death are historically plausible and accurate. Based on this, Wright believes that Jesus died at the hands of the chief priests, who saw Jesus' overturning of the Temple's tables as an anti-Temple act that would grow in following and fervor and undermine their power. Unable to execute Jesus by themselves the Jewish authorities cast Jesus as a rebel king, who challenged the Roman emperor, in order to make Pontius Pilate permit Jesus' crucifixion. They also portrayed Jesus as a "blaspheming prophet," who was leading Israel astray to gain the vocal support of the Jewish crowd (102). Later reflection on Jesus' death by early Christians spawned the "development" of atonement theology for the sins of all people (104).

Jesus' resurrection is the fourth topic of debate. To support the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead in a transformed physical body, Wright appeals to passages from the OT (Is. 26:19; Dan. 12:2-3; and Ezek. 37:1-14), intertestamental literature (2 Maccabees 7, 12, 14), and the New Testament (1 Cor. 15). For Wright, the inconsistencies in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection only point to their authenticity as non-scripted eyewitness reports. Wright outlines five key points that arise from Jesus' resurrection. They are: Jesus' resurrection validates Him as God's Messiah, marks His victory over sin, begins God's new creation, signals true hope for the future of individuals and the world, and calls believers to vocations of holiness.

Borg also believes that Jesus rose from the dead, but defines resurrection in a non-corporeal way. He sees Paul's distinction between a "physical body" and "spiritual body" in 1 Corinthians 15:44 as indicating that Jesus came back to life as an "apparition" (132). For Borg, then, the empty tomb (or, a tomb with Jesus' bones in it) is irrelevant. What matters is that Jesus' followers experienced Him "as a living reality after his death" (135). This experience yielded two key points: Jesus lives and Jesus is Lord. In Borg's estimation, though, "Jesus is Lord" is a NT metaphor meaning that Jesus is "like God" and "has become one with God and functions as Lord in the lives of his followers" (136, italics mine). Similarly, Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection for sin is not a literal, historical sacrifice. Rather, it is a parable that reveals the "path of personal and existential liberation from the lords of this world" (139), "the path of dying to an old way of being and being born into a new way of being" (139) where "God is immediately accessible to us and accepts us just as we are" (142).

For the next topic, "Was Jesus God?" Borg applies his metaphorical view to more NT descriptions of Jesus' divinity. Borg believes that taking a literal view of statements like "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) would make Jesus a psychology case. Not wanting this, Borg treats these self-proclamations of divinity as metaphors placed back into Jesus' mouth by early Christians. In this way, these post-Easter testimonies become very powerful "affirmations about the pre-Easter Jesus" (150). They point to the intense similarity that early believers felt existed between Jesus and God. Nevertheless, Borg does not stress the connection to the point of outright identity or singularity. Jesus is the "decisive revelation" for Chris-

tians, but He is not the only revelation of God or the only way of salvation (156).

Wright goes to some of the earliest NT documents (e.g., 1 Cor. 8:6 and Phil. 2:5-11) to demonstrate that the earliest Christians literally believed Jesus to be God. Moreover, Wright believes that Jesus must have thought He was God. The Jewish people expected God to return to Zion and reign as king, and Jesus not only told stories about this but “also acted as though he thought the stories were coming true in what he himself was accomplishing” (164).

The sixth topic addresses Jesus’ birth. Wright is willing to believe in the “virginal conception of Jesus,” as opposed to the “virgin birth,” because he believes in other miracles like the resurrection. He does not think that the stories of Jesus’ birth are fabrications based on prior expectations because there was no “pre-Christian Jewish tradition suggesting that a messiah would be born of a virgin. No one used Isaiah 7:14 this way before Matthew did” (176). There are some pagan stories about virgin conceptions, e.g., of Alexander, but Wright argues that it is highly unlikely that Jewish authors would adopt pagan stories to talk about their Jewish God. Although historical, Wright thinks that the stories of Jesus’ birth are theologically insignificant. As he says, “one can be justified by faith without it” (171).

Borg, on the other hand, does believe that the stories of Jesus’ birth are theologically significant, although they are not historical. Borg believes that the birth stories are fabrications because Mark, the earliest Gospel, does not contain the story; there are “striking differences” between Matthew and Luke’s accounts (e.g., their differing genealogies) which show them to be untidy creations (180); and the stories in Matthew and Luke look like overtures created to support the main themes of each Gospel (e.g., Jesus is the King of the Jews in Matthew 1 which segues to chapter 2 where wise men come and worship Jesus as the King of the Jews). Still, the stories contain metaphorical truths about Jesus. For instance, Jesus is the light of the world (based on the star in the sky), the Lord of the world (based on Jesus being called the King of the Jews), and was “of God” (based on the Holy Spirit conceiving Jesus in the virgin Mary).

The seventh topic covers Jesus’ Second Coming. Borg doubts that Jesus spoke of His own Second Coming and does not believe that there will be a “future visible return of Christ” (195). Instead, this idea originated by mistake with early believers who expected the general resurrection to come soon after Jesus’ resurrection. Additional factors adding to this end-time belief were the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70 and the belief that Jesus, the Lord, would return soon to judge the world. When Jesus did not return, the early church pushed Jesus’ Second Coming back to an indefinite time (e.g., 2 Pet. 3:4, 8).

In light of Jewish apocalyptic expectations, Wright thinks that early believers expected the general resurrection to follow Jesus’ resurrection. When this did not immediately happen early believers quickly developed the belief in two resurrections. The first came with Jesus, the first fruit of God’s new creation, and the second will come on the Last Day, which “might occur at any time” (204). On this day Jesus will judge injustice, wickedness, and death, and God will renew heaven and earth.

The last topic synthesizes and applies these different visions of Jesus to the Christian life. Wright sees his vision as yielding two poles that are the heartbeat of Christian living: worship and mission. Wright cautions that both must be present lest worship “becomes self-indulgence” and mission “degenerates into various kinds of do-goodery” (207). Flowing from these two poles are four Christian experiences. They are: spirituality (a personal relationship with Jesus that embraces the whole

person and shares this loving relationship with the world), theology (worshipping God truly and proclaiming the truth of the Gospels), politics (applying and living out the Christian faith in the world), and healing (bringing healing to people's lives like Jesus did).

Central to Borg's vision is his belief that being a Christian is not "primarily about believing...in the lens [i.e., God's Word], but about entering a deepening relationship to that which we see through the lens" (239). Based on this, Borg outlines four components of a Christian life. They are: a personal relationship with God that is immediate, the imitation of Jesus, a life transformed by the Spirit of compassion, community, and social justice; and a life in the Spirit that transcends relative cultural categories like good and bad.

This book is to be applauded for its irenic character, fairly honest nature, and wealth of historical analysis. Both scholars dialogue in a respectful manner with each other—even when they vehemently disagree. Both frankly discuss their presuppositions throughout the book, which allows the reader to evaluate their visions from evidential and personal perspectives. Both provide the reader with many historically grounded questions about and insights into Jesus.

Still, few books are perfect and one might find a number of aspects to critique in a book that encompasses two complete visions of Jesus. This reviewer will highlight three problem areas. First, if Wright's methodology is like constructing a jigsaw puzzle, then Borg's methodology must be compared to a crossword puzzle where all the evidence and clues are pre-selected and the final answers are predetermined. In other words, Borg's quest for the historical Jesus is rigged by his own presuppositions, e.g., pre- and post-Easter Jesus.

Second, Borg's vision is overly influenced by eastern religions. For instance, by portraying Jesus as a teacher of alternative wisdom who shows an immediate path to God, Jesus becomes a Jewish version of a Buddhist Bodhisattva. Also, by treating God's Word as merely a lens through which to glimpse God, Borg seems to be defining the Bible in ways similar to Zen Buddhist *koan* (a short saying or story) or *mondo* (a thought provoking question). These verbal media do not contain or reveal truth as much as spark the reader/hearer to perceive life differently and experience enlightenment. Once this has happened, there is no more need for the word.

Third, Wright may be critiqued for thinking that Jesus' conception is theologically insignificant. This reviewer wonders how one can do without the (hi)story of Jesus' virginal conception by means of the Holy Spirit, which makes Jesus true God and true man, sinless and yet suffering the consequences of human sin, and arrive, as Hebrews 9:11-15 does, at the doctrine that Jesus is the once-for-all perfect sacrifice for humanity's sins. One may be justified by faith without knowing this story, but there would be no justification without its historicity.

Despite these and other possible problems, this book is an intriguing and accessible window into the "Third Quest" for the historical Jesus. It engages the reader in a civil debate and challenges the reader to ground his/her faith about Jesus in history. Anyone who wishes to deepen his/her faith in this manner would benefit from reading and interacting with this book.

Scott A. Ashmon
Bronxville, NY

THE GOSPEL IN DISNEY: *Christian Values in the Early Animated Classics*. By Philip Longfellow Anderson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004. 221 pages. Paper \$13.99.

Having taught for many years in a homiletics elective the use of fairy tales, nursery rhymes, legends, and myths as vehicles for developing Biblical sermon texts, I was naturally attracted to this recent publication from Augsburg Fortress. The author, the late Philip Longfellow Anderson, a pastor in the United Church of Christ, presents twenty sermons developing a variety of Biblical texts through extensive use of twenty different Disney films, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Dumbo*, *Bambi*, *Cinderella*, *Lady and the Tramp*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Mickey Mouse*, and *Donald Duck*. Since most of these classics are more familiar to contemporary audiences than the fairy tales, nursery rhymes, legends, and myths I have drawn upon, they have a greater potential for homiletical usefulness than the resources I have suggested.

The Gospel in Disney both thrilled me and disappointed me. I found the book to be an excellent resource—but an inadequate model—for preaching.

To begin with, both author and publisher are to be commended for one more step in the removal of the false dichotomy so prevalent in contemporary thinking between the spiritual and the secular. *The Gospel in Disney* corroborates what Shakespeare suggested some centuries ago in *As You Like It*, that one can find “sermons in stones.” The twenty sermons by Pastor Anderson are superbly styled and symmetrically crafted. Reading them provides pleasure as well as edification. His homilies provide insightful parallels between the Disney classics and Scriptural truths. A surprising bonus in the collection is a wealth of additional sermon illustrations, unrelated to Disney, neither hinted at by the title of the book nor mentioned by its accompanying promotional materials. *The Gospel in Disney* could credibly be advertised as a sermon illustration book! If you’re looking for sermon ideas and attractive ways to say and illustrate those ideas, *The Gospel in Disney* is for you.

But use the book with caution. Despite their literacy, clarity, and insightfulness, the sermons are inadequate as sermons. Disney dwarfs the Scriptures. The secular materials overpower the Biblical texts they are meant to serve—always a danger whenever there is extensive use of secular sources to highlight Biblical truth. Even more serious, there is a dearth of Gospel in most of the sermons the book contains. Notable exceptions are the homilies about *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Jungle Book*. In these selections the author not only verbalizes Christ events and their saving significance but even harnesses the power of the Gospel he presents to the morals he is so fond of advocating. But, more often, the moral truths he advances are divorced from Gospel. The sermons about *Make Mine Music* and *Dumbo*, for example, are totally devoid of Gospel. The story of *Pinocchio*, which provides so much opportunity in its plot for the Gospel of vicariousness, resurrection, and transformation, is used by Pastor Anderson merely to inculcate the virtues of bravery, unselfishness, and truthfulness—and he makes the attempt apart from the power of the Gospel! In other sermons the Gospel is tacked on like a footnote or an appendix—a token recognition that insults the Gospel more than honors it.

Given the book’s Gospel deficiency, its title mystifies me. The subtitle, “*Christian Values in the Early Animated Classics*,” seems to be more accurate than the title, “*The Gospel in Disney*” (italics mine). In fact, the subtitle seems to contradict

the title, for the title promises Gospel and the subtitle promises morality. Usually, subtitles are in apposition to—not opposition to—the titles they follow. I doubt that such was the intention of the author or the publisher. It is my guess that in this instance the author and the publisher meant the “Christian values” of the subtitle as a synonym for “the Gospel” of the title. By “Gospel” they probably meant “Christian morality” or “the Christian religion in general.” If so, their definition is woefully inadequate for the task of preaching. When I see the word “Gospel” in a homiletical context, I expect talk about Christ’s saving person and work: for example, talk about the Messiah’s nature and mission; or His incarnation and birth; or active obedience; or vicarious suffering, death, and damnation; or resurrection; or ascension; or return on the Last Day—and/or the significance of one or more of these events for our eternal welfare and for our everyday behavior. *The Gospel in Disney*, despite all its merits, fails to meet this expectation.

Buy the book, enjoy it, profit from it, use it—and proceed with caution. Anderson’s sermons are good—but you can do better by not only writing as well as he did but, above all, by expanding the Gospel he minimized—and doing so empowered by the same Gospel of Jesus Christ you are committed to preaching.

Francis C. Rossow

CHURCH AND STATE: *Lutheran Perspectives*. Edited by John R. Stumme and Robert W. Tuttle. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. 200 pages. Paper. \$20.00.

How are Lutheran Christians to live in a representative democracy? How do/should church and state interact? Should there be an absolute separation of church and state? Is the Christian’s role in church and state different or the same? How are Christian citizens to live in an increasingly secular state? These questions and more are dealt with in this book.

This book was written at the request of the ELCA’s Division for Church in Society to help Lutheran Christians deal with some of today’s vexing church/state issues. The essays in Part I examine the Confessional and theological teaching on church and state. Those in Part II examine three First Amendment questions: religious liberty, Christian education, and land use.

Mary Jane Haemig’s essay, “The Confessional Basis of Lutheran Thinking on Church State Issues,” examines the Confessional teaching on church and state, their interaction, God’s rule in both, the orders of creation, and the distinction between civic righteousness and the righteousness in Christ that saves. Applications help to avoid an improper mixing of church and state.

Gary M. Simpson’s essay, “Toward a Lutheran ‘Delight in the Law of the Lord’: Church and State in the Context of Civil Society,” also lays out church and state distinctions in the Lutheran Confessions and Luther’s theology. Simpson examines Luther’s writings on political resistance, and how they influenced subsequent thought in western political theory. He also writes of civil society as an “order of creation.”

John R. Stumme’s essay, “A Lutheran Tradition on Church and State,” examines the change from the early twentieth-century view of absolute separation of church and state to a more interactive stance. Stumme interprets the ELCA’s emphasis on “institutional separation and functional interaction of church and state” as more in keeping with a classical two-kingdoms perspective.

Susan Kosche Vallem’s essay, “Promoting the General Welfare: Lutheran So-

cial Ministry,” examines this area of the “functional interaction” of church and state, and the constitutional questions arising from this interaction.

Myles C. Stenshoel’s essay, “Religious Liberty: A Constitutional Quest,” examines the constitutional questions raised by the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. Stenshoel sees four conflicting rationales for religious liberty (separation, accommodation, secular intent, impact analysis), indicating that the interpretation of the religious clauses of the constitution will continue to change.

Marie Failing’s essay, “We Must Spare No Diligence: The State and Childhood Education,” examines educational issues faced by Lutheran Christians today. On the one hand, Lutherans criticize secular education because its values are often discordant with their faith. On the other hand Lutherans support secular education because they recognize that education is critical to the future of a democratic society. She writes about government regulation of religious education and the place of values and religion in public education.

Robert W. Tuttle’s essay, “Love Thy Neighbor: Churches and Land Use Regulation,” speaks about recent changes in governmental regulations dealing with the religious use of property.

Though readers will not agree with all of the views expressed, this book states solid theological ground, and will stimulate thinking through issues dealing with God’s two kingdoms/realms (terms preferred to “church” and “state”). Lutheran Christians today wrestle with many church/state issues—one not addressed in this book is the homosexual marriage issue. This book provides guidance to help Christians think through such issues biblically, and live as godly citizens in both realms to the glory of Christ. With a proper distinction between the two kingdoms, the Gospel will continue to be proclaimed and souls will continue to be saved.

Armand J. Boehme
Almaty, Kazakstan

SPEAKING OF TRUST: *Conversing with Luther about the Sermon on the Mount.* By Martin E. Marty. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. 155 pages. Paper. \$13.99.

Martin E. Marty has been writing for decades, usually producing works of a high quality and worthy conversation. Expanding a previously published introduction to Luther’s Sermon on the Mount commentary, Marty adds his own voice to a conversation between “two Martins” to which each reader is invited to eavesdrop and then to engage. In concluding his introductory chapter he encourages, “I hope that you carry from this book, then, not a new sense of Luther scholarship or Gospel analysis, but a sense of the presence of the one who is the Inviter...” (23).

As a devotional text, Luther’s remarks on the Sermon on the Mount offer phenomenal material which draw us back to hear Jesus and to find direction for our journeys along the way to eternity. Luther always brings us into the presence of Christ and His most gracious presence, promises, and purpose. He is clear that this sermon is for Christians who struggle in their daily living. Christ’s Word continues to speak to our hearts and lives.

Scriptural material obviously abounds as we hear the two Martins explicate a variety of Matthean texts: 6:25-32 (A Lesson from the Birds and the Flowers); 6:33-34 (Seek First the Kingdom); 7:7-11 (Ask); 6:5-6 (When You Pray); 7:7-13

(Lord' Prayer); 5:3-5 (Blessed Are You); 5:6-7 (Hungering for Justice); 5:8-9 (Pure-Hearted Peacemakers); 5:10-12 (In the Company of the Persecuted). Martin Marty briefly explains his rearrangement of the material: "In our plot, the words about who is blessed will make most sense if we have become more clear about why we should not be anxious and why and how we should pray" (105).

Conversing with the two Martins is facilitated by questions for discussion or personal reflection at the end of each section. For example, at the end of the last chapter, he offers this directive: "The book began with speaking of trust. This theme has been the focus as we wandered through portions of the Sermon on the Mount commentary on worry and seeking the kingdom, prayer, and the Beatitudes. What have you discovered along the way that has strengthened your faith and solidified your sense of trust" (155)?

Hearing Luther's own words is very enriching as he leaps over five hundred years and brings a reality to Jesus' own conversation with His disciples of all ages. Martin Marty's own reflections are frequently helpful, often rephrasing Luther's own insights in a more contemporary context, sometimes drawing new perspectives on older themes. Yet, even in the more modern context, the ever-present Lord speaks a relevant message of love and care.

Keen observations and perceptive perspectives mark this book, yet there are a few idiosyncratic frustrations. An inconsistency of style is evident between early and later chapters in that the first chapter has several "conversations" between Martin Luther and Martin Marty, whereas most of the later chapters are only simply divided into Luther's comments and Marty's responses. This is not a major problem, but one which an editor could easily have corrected. More theological, one finds Martin Marty adverting to the Matthean text from a critical perspective, subtly justifying his rearrangement of "Matthean sources" (104), though this need not be a major obstacle.

Enriching the spiritual lives of Christians is a positive consequence of any devotional work. Martin Marty has provided this resource to proclaim the Good News once again through the words of two Martins and finally through the Word Himself. This booklet would be a beneficial resource in a group or personal retreat setting when time and temperament provide reflective moments for prayer and praise and personal exploration.

Timothy Maschke
Mequon, WI

SHADES OF SHEOL: *Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament*. By Philip S. Johnston. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002. 288 pages. Paper: \$20.00.

What and where on earth is Sheol? This question has perplexed Biblical translators, scholars, and "rank and file" Bible readers for millennia, as witnessed by the different and divergent ancient and modern translations for this Hebrew word, as well as the variety of opinions expressed when it comes to Sheol. At the root of the problem is that it appears in the Old Testament (hereafter OT) that believers and unbelievers alike are destined for Sheol, but in the New Testament the righteous and the unrighteous await opposite destinies in heaven and in hell. Christians—in general—have reduced this theological diversity by reading New Testament ideas back into the earlier OT texts. Further compounding the idea of Sheol and afterlife in the OT is that the Old and New Testament perspectives on the

destiny of people vary significantly. And for many scholars these outlooks are not just distinctive but contradictory. In a rewrite of his 1994 Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation Philip Johnston aptly “sheds light” on these “shadows” that swirl around the Hebrew word Sheol. The outline of the book is simple as it examines the following: death in general, the realm of the dead, relations between the living and the dead, and life after death.

To begin, the word Sheol—a proper noun—occurs in the OT sixty-six times and it always means the realm of the dead located deep in the earth, unlike other Hebrew terms which can mean both “pit” and “underworld.” Johnston’s breakdown of where the term occurs in the OT is as follows: psalmic literature twenty-one times; reflective literature (e.g., Job, Ecclesiastes) twenty times; prophetic literature seventeen times; and narrative literature eighteen times. This pattern of occurrence prompts the author to make three key observations. First, the phrase occurs mostly in psalmic, reflective and prophetic literature, where authors are personally involved in what they are writing. By contrast, Sheol appears only rarely in descriptive narrative, and then almost entirely in direct speech. In particular, Sheol never occurs in narrative accounts of death, whether of patriarchs, kings, prophets, priests or ordinary people, whether of Israelites or foreigners, the righteous or the wicked. Moreover, Sheol is entirely absent from Israel’s legal material, including the many laws which prescribe capital punishment. Johnston interprets this data as meaning that Sheol is a term of personal engagement rather than a concept mentioned dispassionately in a simple report of the past or a general legislation. Rather it indicates personal emotional involvement, in apprehension of one’s own destiny or anticipation of one’s enemies’ fate.

Sheol is clearly deep below the earth; to go there one “descends” (יָרַד) and to escape one “ascends” (עָלָה). Moreover, it is often qualified by adjectives of depth and is cosmologically opposite to heaven (cf. Ps. 139:8; Is. 7:11; Amos 9:2). The earth opens its mouth and rebels descend there (Num. 16:30, 33). It is associated with worms, maggots, and dust (Job 17:16; Is. 14:11).

Sheol is also separation: “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?” (Ps. 6:5; cf. Ps. 88:5, 10-12; 115:17; Is. 38:18). It is at the opposite theological extreme to Yahweh, and the dominant feature for its inhabitants is their separation from Him. They cannot remember, praise, or thank Yahweh (Ps. 6:6; Is. 38:18). It is characteristically “the land of forgetfulness” (Ps. 88:12), where people are cut off from Yahweh and forgotten (Ps. 88:5). Hence, Sheol is a fitting place for the wicked who forget God (Ps. 9:17; 31:17; 55:15), but one which the righteous dread (Ps. 16:10; 30:3; 49:15; 86:13).

Sheol is a place of captivity with gates (Is. 38:10) and bars (Jonah 2:6). It is a place of darkness (Ps. 88:6, 12), of inactivity and silence (Ps. 94:17; 115:17). Only two prophetic oracles portray any form of activity. In Isaiah. 14:9ff. the denizens of Sheol must be roused to greet a newcomer and they then describe themselves as weak. In the other, the long dead declaim that others “have come down, they lie still” (Ezek. 32:21). These texts confirm that inactivity is the norm.

Those destined for Sheol are the ungodly. They are often described in general terms, as wicked (Is. 5:14; Ps. 9:17), sinners (Job 24:19), the foolish rich (Ps. 49:14), scoffers (Is. 28:15, 18), and the immoral (Prov. 5:5; 7:27). A few are specifically named: Korah and his company (Num. 16:30, 33), Joab and Shimei (1 Kings 2:6, 9). The inhabitants of Sheol can also be national enemies of Israel: the king of Babylon (Is. 14:11, 15), the Egyptians (Ezek. 31:15-17), and many others (Ezek. 32:18-32).

Johnston notes that the problem with Sheol occurs when some individuals,

who are otherwise presumed to be righteous, envisage descent to Sheol, specifically Jacob, Hezekiah, Job, and a psalmist (Gen. 37:35, etc.; Is. 38:10; Job 17:13-16; Ps. 88:4). However—and this is the greatest insight of the book—they all speak in the context of extreme trial, whether loss, illness, affliction, or abandonment. Mention of Sheol is conspicuously absent in Jacob’s words *after* his family has been happily reunited in Egypt. Johnston concludes that the righteous only envisage Sheol when they face an unhappy or untimely death, which they interpret as divine punishment. By contrast, when they face a contented death at the end of a full and happy life, or where this is narrated, there is no mention of Sheol.

But seemingly at variance with this view are two texts that apparently present Sheol as the destiny of all. Psalm 89:48-49 notes that life is brief and created “for vanity,” and asks rhetorically whether anyone can avoid death and Sheol. This follows reference to Yahweh’s fiery wrath, in a lengthy and powerful lament of His spurning of kings, covenant, and city. Thus, Johnston concludes in these verses it is not everyone, but rather sinful humanity that is under judgment and is destined for Sheol. Ecclesiastes. 9:7-10 instructs readers to enjoy their life of meaninglessness (הבל) under the sun, since afterwards they will go to Sheol. That all without distinction will go to Sheol is part of Qoheleth’s reflection on the *absurdity of observable life*. But it is not the final word (cf. Eccl. 12:14). Johnston concludes that Sheol cannot be identified simply as the Hebrew term for the underworld which awaits all. It is exclusively reserved for those under divine judgment.

This insight alone makes Johnston’s work helpful in sorting out this complex word; but still additional chapters on suicide, necromancy, honoring the dead, and the resurrection of the dead round out a very thorough study of death and afterlife in the OT.

One concluding observation from Johnston’s book gets at the heart of the OT doctrine of death. He notes that it is widely accepted that the name “Yahweh” comes from the verb היה, “to be,” even if there remain differences about the precise form and meaning of the tetragrammaton. And even if the name has a different etymology, as some suggest, it is understood in the Hebrew text as related to “being,” notably in the account of its revelation to Moses: “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14). This means that essentially Yahweh *is* life and Yahweh *gives* life. This doctrine is repeatedly stressed in all forms of OT literature, e.g., “Now choose life... for Yahweh is your life” (Deut. 30:19). “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Ps. 36:9). “Yahweh kills and brings to life: he brings down to Sheol and raises up” (1 Sam. 2:6).

The very essence of who Yahweh is means that in the end Sheol is the place reserved *only* for the unbelieving wicked, whereas the faithful are forever alive, for Yahweh is, indeed, their life! This is climactically the teaching of our Lord: “Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12:26-27). So the King James Version was right all along in translating Sheol “hell”—even if its translators did not understand the term as being a proper noun they got the concept correct.

Reed Lessing

KATHARINA VON BORA: *A Reformation Life*. By Rudolf K. Markwald and Marilynn Morris Markwald. St. Louis: Concordia, 2002. 253 pages. \$20.99.

In the tale of Rumpelstiltskin a strange little man spins straw into gold. In some regards that is how this author has handled the life of Katharina von Bora, wife of Martin Luther. As there is little to go on, he uses others' perspectives and views of the broader situation to illumine the conditions faced by Kate. Threads that might appear unimportant are brought into sharp relief by this method, and we find here a life that not only describes the individual presented, but gives us both a family history of Luther's household and an eye to the conditions, factors and pressures faced by people of the day.

The strengths of this work are many. First, we are presented with the life of an important, female character of the day, and we see that she is capable and an apt partner to the Reformer. Here we have no doormat that is walked over; rather Kate represents an adept figure who watches over and protects the aging and ailing Luther.

Beginning with accounts of Kate's early family situation and her commitment at the age of six to a convent, the story continues with a shift from relatively good Benedictine surroundings to the impoverished life of a Cistercian sister. After some years in the convent, Luther's Reformation somehow penetrates the walls of silence at Marienthron and twelve of the sisters decide on a daring Easter-eve escape. Although they are not actually transported in the barrels, the ride on the herring cart to Törgau (where three sisters leave), and later Wittenberg, was dramatically depicted. Luther receives the sisters and uses his skills to marry them off. One that remains, after several abortive attempts at a match, is Katie. Her ability to both reject well-heeled suitors and attract Martin was news to this reader. Because she was hardly a shrinking violet, Melanchthon himself disapproved of the match.

Glimpses into the lives of Luther and Katie provide the next part of the account. Here we find a harmonious marriage, with only occasional problems. However it was not a modern match by any means, as it was not founded in any real way on being in love, but rather a love that grew as the relationship matured. Katie manages the house (the Augustinian Cloister), rents it out to students and travelers, has six children, four of whom survive, is hostess, cook, medic, bookkeeper and companion to one of the greatest minds of the sixteenth century.

Concluding chapters deal with the death of Luther and the various ungrateful responses of the beneficiaries of Luther to those who survived him. Katie makes heroic efforts to shelter her children from the ravages of war and the perils of unprotected privation. In the end it is her desire to save them from a runaway team of horses that causes the accident that resulted in her death. After three months of internal bleeding and injuries, Katie succumbs to death, maintaining that she was a burr in the coat of God.

Here we find a useful account, chock full of examples useful for sermons, counseling and Bible classes. I would encourage pastors and professors alike to read it both for its utility and as a review of the period. In many ways this Reformation life provides a Katie's eye view of the situation of the Reformation and grants the reader a different perspective into this often studied subject. The Markwalds have indeed spun Katie's straw into gold.

Timothy Dost

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Index of Volume 31

Since our page numbers are consecutive within a volume, the following key shows the page number for each reference.

- Volume 31, Number 1 - pages 1-108
- Volume 31, Number 2 - pages 109-212
- Volume 31, Number 3 - pages 213-338
- Volume 31, Number 4 - pages 341-476

Articles, Editorials, Homiletical Helps, and Short Studies

- The Apostolic Tradition in Colossae: Christology in Action (Johnson), 127-131.
The Biblical Theology of the Wrath of God (Ashmon), 348-358.
The Challenge of Homosexuality: What is at Stake? (Adams), 220-230.
Christian Responses to the Culture's Normalization of Homosexuality (Weise), 231-247.
God's Wrath Against Sin (Bachman, Senkbeil, Thomsen), 411-424.
Identifying Authorities and Pastoral Practice in the Early Church. Two Case Studies: Basil of Caesarea and Ephrem of Syria (Waddell), 48-59.
The Local Congregation Approaches the Issues: Lutheran Responses, "Sin, Sex, and Civil Silence" (Biermann), 248-259.
My Pilgrimage to Luther (Ji), 37-47.
Original Sin in the New Testament (Gieschen), 359-375.
The Origins and Consequences of Original Sin in Luther's Bondage of the Will (MacKenzie), 384-397.
Pastors Who Play God (Saleska), 12-36.
Sin of Cyril of Alexandria's *Commentary on John* (Maxwell), 376-383.
Speaking to Contemporary American Culture on Sin and the Wrath of God (Oberdeck), 398-410.
Textual Criticism of the Gospel Mark: Trying to Make Progress (Voelz), 2-11.
The Twelve Signs and the Seven in Acts 6 and the Needy (Nagel), 113-126.
What the Bird Said and Why It Was in the Gospel (Rossow), 132-139.
Where Is the Holy Family Today?: Marriage a Holy Covenant before God—The Biblical Role of Man and Woman (Brighton), 260-268.
Editor's Note (Wesselschmidt), 214-215, 342-343.
Grammarians' Corner (Voelz), 425-427.
Homiletical Helps:
 Advent (Weise, Brauer, Castens, Brauer), 435-436, 436-437, 438-439, 439-440.
 All Saint's Day (Rossow), 428-429.
 Christmas (Dost, Dost), 441, 442-443.
 Epiphany (Weise, Gerike, Gerike, Castens), 443-444, 444-446, 446-447, 448-449.
 Easter (Okamoto, Okamoto, Manteufel, Redeker, Graudin, Oschwald, Biermann), 73-76, 76-79, 80-81, 81-82, 83-84, 157-160, 160-161.
 Lent (Gibbs, Neilsen, Redeker, Neilson, Manteufel), 62-64, 64-66, 67-68, 69-71, 71-72.

- Palm Sunday (Graudin), 72-73.
 Pentecost (Kolb, Kolb, Becker, Warneck, Warneck, Carr, Carr, Kolb, Oschwald, Becker, Hartung, Hartung, Thomas, Thomas, Wollenberg, Wollenberg, Wesselschmidt, Rowold, Schumacher, Schumacher, Palka, Palka, Lewis, Lewis, Rossow, Peter), 162-163, 163-164, 164-166, 166-168, 168-171, 171-173, 173-174, 174-175, 176-178, 178-180, 180-181, 181-183, 273-274, 274-277, 277-278, 279-280, 280-282, 282-285, 285-286, 286-288, 288-289, 289-291, 291-293, 294-296, 430-431, 432-435.
 Reformation (Rowold), 296-298.
 Transfiguration (Gibbs), 60-61.
 Short Studies: (alphabetical by title, then author)
 Why One Thousand Years? (Kellerman), 140-149.
 Theological Observers (alphabetical by author, then title)
 Berger: Have a Nice Day, 216-218.
 Ji: Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE) I-XXXVI, Completed, 344-346.
 Lessing: "Living with the Laments," 218-219.
 Rowold: Luther's Works—Chinese Edition, 346-347.
 Schumacher: How Many Lutherans, 110-112.
 Theological Potpourri:
 Johnson: On Preaching Theology, 269-272.

Authors of Articles, Editorials, Homiletical Helps, and Short Studies

- Adams, David, 220-230.
 Ashmon, Scott A., 348-358.
 Bachman, James V., 411-424.
 Brauer, James L., 436-437, 439-440.
 Becker, Wallace, 164-166, 178-180.
 Berger, David O., 216-218.
 Biermann, Joel D., 160-161, 248-259.
 Brighton, Louis A., 260-268.
 Carr, William W., 171-173, 173-174.
 Castens, Kyle D., 438-439, 448-449.
 Dost, Timothy P., 441, 442-443.
 Gerike, Henry V., 444-446, 446-447.
 Gibbs, Jeffrey A., 60-61, 62-64.
 Gieschen, Charles A., 359-375.
 Graudin, Arthur F., 72-73, 83-84.
 Hartung, Bruce, 180-181, 181-183.
 Ji, Won Yong, 37-47, 344-346.
 Johnson, John F., 127-131, 269-272.
 Kellerman, James A., 140-149.
 Kolb, Robert, 162-163, 163-164, 174-175.
 Lessing, Reed, 218-219.
 Lewis, David I., 291-293, 294-296.
 MacKenzie, Cameron A., 384-397.
 Manteufel, Thomas, 71-72, 80-81.
 Maxwell, David R., 376-383.
 Nagel, Norman E., 113-126.

Nielsen, Glenn A., 64-66, 69-71.
 Oberdeck, John W., 398-410.
 Oschwald, Jeffrey A., 157-160, 176-178.
 Okamoto, Joel P., 73-76, 76-79.
 Palka, John M., 288-289, 289-291.
 Peter, David J., 432-435.
 Redecker, Michael, 67-68, 81-82.
 Rossow, Francis C., 132-139, 428-429, 430-431.
 Rowold, Henry, 282-285, 296-297, 346-347.
 Saleska, Timothy E., 12-36.
 Senkbeil, Peter L., 411-424.
 Schumacher, William, 110-112, 285-286, 286-288.
 Thomas, Glen, 273-274, 274-277.
 Thomsen, Kerri L., 411-424.
 Voelz, James, 2-11, 425-427.
 Waddell, 48-59.
 Warneck, Richard H., 166-168, 168-171.
 Weise, Robert W., 231-247, 435-436, 443-444.
 Wesselschmidt, Quentin F., 214-215, 280-282,
 Wollenburg, David, 277-278, 279-280.

Review Essays

The Lord's Supper. Volume XII in the Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics Series. By John R. Stephenson (Galler), 150-156.

Book Reviews

All That's Holy: *A Young Guy, An Old Car, and the Search for God in America*. By Tom Levinson (Hartung), 202-203.
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- What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?: *The Current Controversy over Divine Foreknowledge*. By Millard J. Erickson (Lessing), 319-321.
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Reviewer of Books

- Ashmon Scott A., 452-453, 457-461.
- Becker, Matthew, 323-327.
- Berger, David O., 450-452.
- Boehme, Armand J., 86-88, 196-198, 333-335, 463-464.
- Dost, Timothy, 331-332, 468.

Dorow, Maynard W., 85-86.
Elowsky, Joel, 194-196.
Gibbs, Jeffrey, 335-337.
Hartung, Bruce M., 202-203.
Heck, Joel D., 321-322.
Heckert, Jakob, 99-100, 311-313.
Holst, Robert, 205-208.
Ji, Won Yong, 97-99.
Kiehl, Erich H., 89-90, 187, 193-194, 322-323.
Kolb, Robert, 455-456.
Lessing, Reed, 91-93, 94-96, 102-103, 189-190, 191-193, 201-202, 313-315,
315-316, 319-312, 453-455, 465-467.
Lumpp, David A., 88-89.
Maschke, Timothy, 100-101, 198-200, 308-311, 316-318, 464-465.
Mitchell, Christopher W., 306-308.
Rehm, Merlin D., 93-94, 94, 103-104, 187-189, 191.
Roos, Deomar, 327-330.
Rossow, Francis C., 96-97, 104-106, 184-187, 462-463.
Rowold, Henry, 204-205, 318-319, 332-333.
Saleska, Timothy E., 200-201, 299-301, 337-338.
Schumacher, William W., 208-210.
Weise, Robert, 301-302, 302-304, 304-306.