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## TO BE IN PAIN, OR NOT TO BE: THAT IS THE QUESTION

*Gary Colwell*

In October of 1992, I was privileged to give the Homeward-Spun Philosophy Lectures at my alma mater, the University of New Brunswick. Part of my assignment over the three-day visit was to lead a discussion on the topic, “Mercy Killing: Right or Wrong?” I chose not to discuss mercy killing from an expressly biblical perspective, but sought instead a language which my largely non-Christian audience would understand and engage. I sought a way to bring an issue that is fraught with so much emotion for Christians and touches the core of the Gospel into the public square. I framed six questions which I hoped would take us to the heart of the mercy killing debate and reveal what I believe are grave dangers that await us if we continue to pursue the legalisation of voluntary active euthanasia. Since then I have continued to ruminate on the subject and to participate in a wider public debate. In what follows I present the six questions to readers of the *Lutheran Theological Review* with the hope that this will both stimulate and encourage other concerned Christians to move into the so-called naked public square.

### 1. WHAT KIND OF KILLING IS MERCY KILLING?

There are many kinds of killing: accidental killing, first degree murder, killing an enemy in war, killing in self-defence, capital punishment, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, etc. A moment’s reflection will tell you that these are not all alike. Nor would it be reasonable to assume that one must either condemn them all or else condone them all. It is even difficult to apply a sweeping moral judgement to all the sub-categories of certain kinds of killing; for example, euthanasia. We must try to be specific. (Please see the diagram at the end of the article.)

Euthanasia, or mercy killing, may be **voluntary** or **non-voluntary**, depending upon whether the patient decides that she wants to die or whether she is unable to make the decision, most often because she is unconscious.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Not only is it possible for a person to be conscious yet unable to make a decision about his/her future, but also possible for him/her to be able to make such a decision yet unable to communicate it (e.g., unable to respond to his/her physician’s or family’s questions). For simplicity’s sake, in the diagram I have used the typical case of unconsciousness as the paradigm state of a patient’s being unable either to decide her future or to communicate her decision.

Mercy killing may be **passive** or **active** depending upon whether the physician allows her to die naturally or whether the physician hastens her death by using a procedure which overrides the natural process. Regarding the distinction between passive and active mercy killing, Douglas Walton has observed that “to allow something to happen [to let her die] is to make it possible for it to happen when it does in fact happen. By a double negation, to make it happen [to kill her] is to not allow it [her death] not to happen.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, “to allow her to die” implies that the physician also allows her to live, however unlikely her continuing to live may be, because so-called “spontaneous remissions” do occasionally occur. However, in active mercy killing “to kill her” implies that the physician does not allow her to live, because the physician’s action closes off every avenue of healing, including ones that are unfamiliar to medical science.

Unless stated differently, I shall pose the remaining questions only about **Voluntary Active Euthanasia (VAE)**. The patient is “terminally” ill; she freely asks her physician to kill her; the physician accedes to her request by carrying out a procedure which makes it happen that she dies; and the procedure hastens her death by overriding the natural process of dying. For example, the physician injects her with curare, a deadly paralyzing drug.

## 2. IS IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HER ILLNESS TO GO INTO REMISSION?

Some ethicists think that the answer to this question is certainly “yes” for some terminal cases. James Rachels, for example, says:

it does **not** follow from the fact that doctors have **sometimes** been mistaken that they can **never** know for sure that any patient is hopeless. That would be like saying that since some people have sometimes confused a Rolls Royce with a Mercedes, no one can ever be certain which is which. In fact, doctors do sometimes know for sure that a patient cannot recover.<sup>3</sup>

It needs to be said straightaway that this is an odd way of speaking. Physicians with whom I have spoken, one being the director of a palliative care unit, generally do not talk this way about terminal cases. In my experience they do not say that a case is “hopeless”, because a meaningful life can still be lived even if the patient and her physician both believe that she has no hope of recovery, and they do not claim to know for certain that a

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<sup>2</sup>Douglas Walton, “Splitting the Difference: Killing and Letting Die”, *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 20.1 (1981): 76.

<sup>3</sup>Tom Regan, ed., *Matters of Life and Death*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Random House, 1986) 59.

physical recovery could not occur. However, for the sake of continuity I shall use the word “hopeless” to mean what I hope Rachael means by it, namely, “physically hopeless” or “having no possibility of physical recovery”.

Still, does the car analogy quite establish Rachael’s point? The problem of uncertainty in the case of the two cars is not one of establishing their identities, that is, not one of deciding what to call the cars once you know all the facts about them. Rather, it is the problem of confusing the cars whose identities have already been established. In Rachael’s case the problem is one of **misidentification**, not one of **identification**.<sup>4</sup>

However, the problem of uncertainty in many cases of apparently terminal illness is one of identification. Whether an illness can with certainty be identified as “hopeless” is often the first problem with which we should grapple in making an ethical judgement. The Rolls Royce will not transform into a Mercedes while we are examining it closely; but a so-called “hopeless” case might transform into a “hopeful” case, or at least a “less hopeless” case, as we continue to look at it closely, however rare such an occurrence has been in the past.

It is notoriously difficult to establish the truth of such negative universal statements as: “there is no possibility that any terminally ill patient of this type will ever get well.” One would have to know about all the terminal cases of this type ever to have occurred, and then be able to say that none of them went into remission. Moreover, one would have to know for certain that no first-time remissions of this type could occur in the future. This calls for an omniscience rarely found in physicians. Furthermore, remarkable cases of so-called “spontaneous remission” have been documented.<sup>5</sup>

But let us grant that physicians do know for certain that some types of cases are hopeless; for example, cases of anencephaly. We are still left with the question of whether the numerous other types of “terminal” cases, most of which are not so bleak, can safely be subsumed under the same category of “hopeless”. Since there are degrees of hopelessness among terminal cases, we should not want to use the certainty about the most hopeless of them to establish warrant for VAE in all hopeless cases.

We have been thinking only about the prognosis of the physical state of the patient. If we consider the prognosis of her psychological state as well, our uncertainty is compounded. To be certain not only that someone will die

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<sup>4</sup> Neither the act of mismatching a name and an object nor the act of misapplying a name to a vaguely perceived object is the same as the act of trying to determine the category in which to place an unusual object which is clearly perceived.

<sup>5</sup> For example, H. R. Casdorff, M.D., Ph.D., *The Miracles* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1976).

of a particular disease but also that she will continue to want to be put to death until she dies naturally, requires a sobering amount of knowledge. It should give pause, not just to those who would request VAE, but also to those who would assist someone else out of this life. A suicide assistant should want to be certain not only that the patient will die but also that she will continue to **want** to die if she is allowed to die naturally. Negative attitudes can also go into remission.

Why this anxiety about certainty? Do we not base most of our decisions in life upon probability? The short answer to these questions is that the end state of VAE is certain; indeed, VAE brings to an end in this life not only all probabilities, but all possibilities as well. There are plenty of cases which justify our worry, not the least of which is the case of Stephen Hawking. At the age of twenty-one Hawking was told that he had ALS and that he would not likely live more than two and one-half years. Today, at the age of fifty-three, he is still doing cutting-edge research in cosmology. What if he had taken the prognosis about his physical state as gospel, had assumed that his initial depression over his disease would never abate, and had asked for and received VAE or assistance in committing suicide?<sup>6</sup>

### **3. WHAT EFFECT WILL MERCY KILLING HAVE UPON THOSE WHO CARRY OUT THE PRACTICE?**

The strongest motive for killing terminal patients is said to be mercy—at least as it now stands. We should recognise, however, that our merciful attitudes are dependent upon the high value that we still give to human life. If we start killing those whom we previously thought were too valuable to kill, will we not run the risk of devaluing human life and hence of eroding our merciful sensibilities? If physicians become desensitised to killing people whom they would not now think of killing, what will this do to the motivations of our chief caregivers? If you were in a terminal state and wanted to die a natural death, would you feel confident that your attending physician had your interest in living at heart?

Moreover, pain and suffering have spurred medical research and promoted a noble dedication to the wounded and dying. Will the same sense of urgency to find cures and the same desire to provide palliative care be sustained if we take the easier way out? For after all, it is easier simply to remove the patient and the disease than to keep the patient and try to remove the disease.

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<sup>6</sup>Stephen Hawking, *Black Holes and Baby Universes and Other Essays* (London: Bantam Books, 1993) 22-23, 167; Stephen Hawking, with Gene Stone, *A Reader's Companion [to] A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam, 1992) 49ff.



Let those who are enthralled with the idea that physicians would be incorruptible if VAE were legalised consider the findings of the Rummelink Commission. This was a commission set up by the Dutch Ministers of Health and Justice in January 1990 to gather detailed information about the practice of euthanasia by physicians in The Netherlands. The data in the commission's report, released in September 1991, have been variously received and interpreted.<sup>7</sup> The report itself and a summary of the report both try to allay the anxieties of the Dutch and American societies regarding the large number of cases of voluntary and especially non-voluntary active euthanasia discovered in the Netherlands.<sup>8</sup> But some reviewers of the report have been sharply critical of the widespread practice of euthanasia.<sup>9</sup> Still others have attempted to strike a balance between the nearly-everything's-all-right interpretation and the nearly-everything's-all-wrong interpretation. They find merit in what the Dutch government and physicians have been doing in the area of health care, but point out some worrisome irregularities in the Dutch physicians' practices, as well as the danger of trying to use those practices *per se* as a model for other countries.<sup>10</sup> However, all the interpretations I have read acknowledge the fact that Dutch physicians in a large number of cases have broken the Royal Dutch Medical Association's code of ethics, published in 1984, as well as the governmental guidelines on the practice of euthanasia, also established in 1984. To take the clearest example, in 1990 there were about one thousand cases of active non-voluntary euthanasia.<sup>11</sup>

What much of the public under the tutelage of Plato does not see, and what those under the tutelage of the apostle Paul do see, is that knowing where to draw the moral line in cases of VAE is not the **main** problem. Rather, the main problem is gathering the moral resolve to keep from crossing the line. Witness our current situation. For a good long time we have had a clear legal line barring us from the practice of VAE; but now there is almost a stampede to cross it. What is especially troubling is that many physicians are at the front of the herd.

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<sup>7</sup> See the late Daniel Overduin's comments in "Matters of Life and Death: Bioethical Issues in a Christian Perspective", *LTR* 4.1/2:69-93.

<sup>8</sup>Henk A. M. J. ten Have and Jos V. M. Welie, "Euthanasia: Normal Medical Practice?" *Hastings Center Report* 22.2 (March-April 1992): 36; Paul J. van der Maas, Johannes J. M. van Delden, Loes Pijnenborg, and Caspar W. N. Looman, "Euthanasia and Other Medical Decisions Concerning the End of Life", *The Lancet* 338.8768 (14 September 1991): 669-74.

<sup>9</sup>Richard Fenigsen, "The Report of the Dutch Governmental Committee on Euthanasia", *Issues in Law and Medicine* 7.3 (Winter 1991): 339-44.

<sup>10</sup>Barney Sneiderman, "Euthanasia in the Netherlands: A Model for Canada?" *Humane Medicine* 8. 2 (April 1992): 104-15.

<sup>11</sup>Sneiderman, 105-6.

#### **4. WHAT EFFECT WILL MERCY KILLING HAVE UPON OBSERVERS WHO ENDORSE THE PRACTICE?**

We may not assume that the members of our society who approve the practice of VAE and observe it at a respectable distance will escape the effects of desensitisation. Their moral sensitivities can also become dulled if they endorse by legislation the habit of killing terminally ill patients. A way of life can easily become a way of thought, and vice versa. What assurance would we have that, in a few decades after the endorsement of VAE, the less-than-terminally ill patients would not become candidates for a “merciful” death? It might become perilously easy for us to urge ailing granny to take the nearest exit if we find that she has been generous in her will—not only because we have been thinking that way but also because we have been vicariously behaving that way all along.<sup>12</sup> Here is an insidious problem: once our sensitivities have changed, so will the mercy-killing debate, perhaps irrevocably. Three decades after VAE has been legalised, and probably less, those proponents who originally said that the excesses would never occur may no longer be operating with the same definition of excesses. What they once thought was horrible and excessive they may no longer consider to be so. They could simply say that their thirty year-old sensitivities were mistaken.

We cannot predict with certainty how humans in a society will behave, but the distinct possibility that mercy killers and their compliant observers will become desensitised should give us pause. Better to err on the side of caution when the stakes are so dreadfully high.

#### **5. DO WE VALUE PAIN TOO LITTLE AND PLEASURE TOO MUCH?**

After quoting a passage in which Bishop Sullivan essentially argues that, according to his church, suffering is meritorious, James Rachels says, “This argument may strike some people as simply grotesque.”<sup>13</sup> Anyone who suggests that there is something to be gained by enduring pain, that virtues of a religious or non-religious kind can be developed, is liable to meet with ridicule and disgust. Unfortunately, ridicule and disgust do not

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<sup>12</sup>Although the circumstances in Nazi Germany admittedly are not the same as those in North America today, it has been argued with chilling cogency that “four sets of beliefs which were held in common between exponents of earlier and later eugenics, are widely held today”. The “common factor” is that “some lives are deemed not to be worth living”. David Lamb, *Down the Slippery Slope: Arguing in Applied Ethics* (London: Croom Helm, 1988) 26, 30.

<sup>13</sup>Regan 58.

solve moral problems. The difficulty is this: for each individual living in horribly undignified circumstances who “wants out”, there is someone living in equally deplorable circumstances who finds life worthwhile. So pain by itself does not produce the same evaluations in all people who experience it. Perspective and attitude make a great deal of difference.

This may suggest that the principle of personal autonomy should be our guide. But this principle does not adequately account for the intricacies of the situation either. In the first instance, the person who wants to be killed will not be the only one involved, and we have just explored how worrisome that can be. Moreover, if VAE is legalised, terminally ill patients who do not want to be killed will be placed under enormous economic and psychological pressures to request death. It also is not clear that the person experiencing debilitating pain is the best judge either of his destiny or the destiny of society.

This, of course, is paternalism, but not uniquely so. Protecting people against themselves is considered morally right in many other circumstances. For instance, we do not assume that children are the best judge of their educational experiences. Nor do we assume that suicidal adults are the best judge of the worth of their lives. In such instances the responsibility for making judgements is withheld or taken from one group and given to another more mature, balanced, and less emotionally involved group. By extension, it may be argued that prohibiting VAE protects not just an individual but the whole society, because changing a dominant thread of society will change the fabric itself.

## **6. WILL KILLING HIM RELIEVE HIM OF HIS MISERY?**

Whatever one believes about post-mortem existence, this last question is profoundly difficult to answer. It cannot be glibly answered in the affirmative, as so many proponents of VAE seem to imply.

Broadly speaking, one of two presuppositions will underlie our thinking about the person who died. Either he will survive beyond the point of physical death in some conscious state, or his conscious life will be permanently extinguished and he will be no more. If we hold the second presupposition we cannot answer our question in the affirmative, as the following example will show.

When a boy’s broken arm is mended he usually lives to enjoy the cure. But if we try to mend a man’s miserable life by removing it, he is no longer around to enjoy the help. Here the choice is not between living in pain and

living in peace; rather, it is between living in pain and not living at all. To be in pain, or not to be: that is the question.

If we say that extinguishing a life which is terribly painful has more value than sustaining that life, we must ask a further question: For whom does it have the greater value? We can scarcely answer, "For the man who dies," for he exists no more. Can the extinguished life enjoy its painless state?

However, if we hold the first presupposition, our question becomes even more acute. Are we confident that the conscious state that he will enter will be an improvement upon the one from which he now yearns to find an escape? Waiting for death has at least the virtue of allowing a person more time to ponder his destiny and "make his peace", where that seems right.

Before we decide to kill ourselves, let us give it some thought. And before we decide to help other people kill themselves, let us give it even more thought. Here are at least six questions that we ought to address before we decide to help someone out of this life, or before we endorse a law which will sanction such behaviour.<sup>14</sup>

#### EUTHANASIA

	Passive	Active
<b>Voluntary:</b>	<i>Patient</i> —"Let me die." <i>Physician</i> —"I'll let you die."	<i>Patient</i> —"Kill me." <i>Physician</i> —"I'll kill you."
<b>Non-Voluntary:</b>	<i>Patient</i> —unconscious <i>Physician</i> —"I'll let you die."	<i>Patient</i> —unconscious <i>Physician</i> —"I'll kill you."
<b>Involuntary:</b>	<i>Patient</i> —"Let me live." <i>Physician</i> —"I'll let you die."	<i>Patient</i> —"Don't kill me." <i>Physician</i> —"I'll kill you."

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<sup>14</sup>Thanks are due to John O'Callaghan, Thomas Boogaart, and Sydney Page for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.

## **SCHLEIERMACHER'S DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM AS AN EXAMPLE OF HIS DIALECTIC OF EXPERIENCE AND HISTORY**

*C. Robert Hogg, Jr*

In his work on Protestant theology in the nineteenth century, Karl Barth noted that the theology of F. D. E. Schleiermacher moves between two poles: experience and history.<sup>1</sup> We may expand this insight by saying that history is the sphere of the church as the believing community. The church played a very important function in the theology of Schleiermacher. The church is the gathering of those who have experienced the influence of the Redeemer in their lives. Indeed, even the Scripture is normative only inasmuch as it is the first statement of the church's experience of the Redeemer. It does not possess authority intrinsically.<sup>2</sup> And when the term "church" is used here, it does not have reference to some denomination or other (all of which will pass away); but as stated above, the term "church" refers to all believers in Christ the Redeemer. History is one pole of Schleiermacher's thought because it is the sphere or arena in which the individual relates to others who have experienced the forgiving influence of Jesus the Redeemer.

The other pole of Schleiermacher's thought is experience. Experience is the sphere of God as the Being corresponding to man's feeling of absolute dependence. In Christianity it is, more specifically, the sphere of the individual's experience of Jesus as Redeemer. Schleiermacher's experiences in Pietism and his involvement in the early history of the Romantic movement in Germany both played key roles in the formation of his thought in this area.<sup>3</sup>

The common factor in both poles of Schleiermacher's thought is the individual; more specifically, the individual's experience of the feeling of absolute dependence (§1-61 of *The Christian Faith*); the individual's experience of the fragmentary nature of this experience in himself, or sin (§62-85); and the individual's experience of the restoration of this feeling

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973) 450.

<sup>2</sup> Note the remarkable statement in F. D. E. Schleiermacher (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) *The Christian Faith* §128.3: "Hence throughout the whole of the foregoing exposition of faith we have assumed no more than faith itself, present in a feeling of need ... and Scripture we have adduced only as expressing the same faith in detail ... ."

<sup>3</sup> Martin Redeker's *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973) is an excellent introduction and overview.

and its strengthening in himself through the influence of the Redeemer (§86-172).

This twofold character of Schleiermacher's theology may be seen and used profitably in examining his doctrine of Baptism. Schleiermacher divides his discussion of the topic of Baptism into three propositions, dealing with its nature (§136), its effect (§137), and the special topic of infant Baptism (§138). We will examine the doctrine of Baptism in each of the three propositions under the two poles of his thought delineated above; i.e., Baptism in the sphere of the individual's relationship to the Church, and Baptism in the sphere of the individual's relationship to God.

### THE ESSENCE OF BAPTISM

Concerning the essence of Baptism, Schleiermacher defines it first of all as "the act of will whereby the Church receives the individual into its fellowship".<sup>4</sup> Two things are operative in this sphere of the essence of Baptism.

First, Baptism is the **church's** act of will. Because it is the act of will of the church, Baptism and the regeneration that for Schleiermacher it symbolises will never be tied together absolutely. As he says:

it is undeniably in the nature of the case that the inclination of the Church to baptise will sometimes run ahead of the inward workings of the Spirit for regeneration and sometimes lag behind them, according as those whose office it is to baptise lean to one estimate or the other of the catechumen's inward state.<sup>5</sup>

Implied here is something that we will examine later, that for Schleiermacher the normal candidate for Baptism was not the infant, but the adult. Schleiermacher then notes the view of Zwingli, who started with the premise that Baptism and regeneration were not always one hundred percent simultaneous and drew from this the conclusion that any coinciding of the two is purely accidental. Schleiermacher rightly castigates Zwingli because Zwingli's view ignores the working of the Spirit in the activity of the church. But he claims that there is some good in Zwingli's view, as Zwingli was seeking to exalt regeneration over against Baptism. Schleiermacher then examines the opposite point of view, which says that since regeneration and entrance into the fellowship of believers are bound up and reciprocally conditioned, then "the most natural and most original statement of this is to say that one and the same series of Church actions terminates in both

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<sup>4</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 619.

<sup>5</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 623.

things—baptism and regeneration.”<sup>6</sup> This view would be true in an ideal sense, but according to Schleiermacher it is never realised in the real world.

If in comparing Baptism and regeneration we are forced to give priority to one or the other, we must yield priority to Baptism as that which conditions regeneration. This is because the consciousness of regeneration is subject to the ups and downs of the Christian's sanctification. Baptism, however, is not subject to such ups and downs, but stands as a “given”, and as an act of the church's will.

In addition to being an act of the church's will, Baptism is that act whereby the church receives the individual into its fellowship. Here Schleiermacher stresses the fellowship of the church as opposed to that of the world. Of the church he says: “the Church only confronts us as something growing out of the world and gradually, of itself, expelling the world ... .”<sup>7</sup> Thus the church is an entity distinct from, and set over against, the world. And what does fellowship with this body involve?

Here certainly we have a self-consciousness which has to be grasped in thought, namely, the antithesis which is established in our fellow-feeling and sympathy between the previous inclusion of all in the common state of sinfulness, and the new differentiation between those under grace and others.<sup>8</sup>

So, while like the entire world the church shares in the common state of sinfulness, which is defined as God-forgetfulness (Proposition 11.2 of *The Christian Faith*), the church also experiences the grace of God, which is to say it experiences Christ as the Redeemer (§§100-101 of *The Christian Faith*).

It is this fellowship, the fellowship of the church as the group of people under the influence of the Redeemer and acted upon by His influence, that a person joins when he is baptised. Added to his painful self-consciousness of his God-forgetfulness is the transforming influence of the grace of God in Jesus the Redeemer, and in Him the restoration of man's God-consciousness. Thus, considered under the sphere of the church, Baptism is the act of will whereby the church receives the individual into its fellowship.

But Schleiermacher takes pains to indicate that Baptism is not just the act of the church; it is also “the channel of the divine justifying activity”.<sup>9</sup> For that which distinguishes the church from the world is precisely this, that the church is also where God works. As he says in Proposition 124 of *The Christian Faith*:

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<sup>6</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 625.

<sup>7</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 529.

<sup>8</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 529.

<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 619.

Membership in this common life therefore means at the same time being set within the sphere of operation of the sole Founder ... being drawn ... into the fellowship of believers, having a share in the Holy Spirit, and being drawn into living fellowship with Christ—must simply mean one and the same thing.<sup>10</sup>

As the channel of the divine justifying activity, Baptism is first of all founded on the command of Christ. The church baptises with confidence only because it does so because Christ commanded (*angeordnet*) Baptism, and is assured that its reception of a person is Christ's reception of that person "if performed in the manner He enjoined and according to His command".<sup>11</sup>

Schleiermacher next examines Baptism as the channel of the divine justifying activity by comparing Christian Baptism with that of John. Though he notes the historical connection between the Baptism of John and Christian Baptism, he denies that they are identical. For how could John's Baptism be identical with Christian Baptism when he himself testifies that he did not know the Redeemer before he baptised Him? Furthermore, John did not baptise in Jesus' name. Of course, this is not to say that those who had been baptised by John needed to be rebaptised. As long as they recognised that Jesus was the Christ, His call to them gave them everything that Baptism gives. In their case, Baptism would have been an unnecessary supplement to the call of Christ. The corollary to this understanding is that Baptism now takes the place of Jesus' personal call and gives to the individual both of Baptism's blessings, "the application of the divine decree of redemption to the individual, and the placing of the individual in fellowship with all who already believe ...".<sup>12</sup>

Because Baptism is founded on the command of Christ, and takes the place of His personal choice, it is thirdly a source of assurance for the Christian in times when doubts of salvation arise. Here Schleiermacher quotes approvingly from Luther's Large Catechism, section 44 on Baptism, where Luther makes this very point.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, however, Schleiermacher derives this comfort from a different place than Luther:

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<sup>10</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 575.

<sup>11</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 620. Note here also the emphasis on Baptism as a command of Christ, a common Reformed emphasis as opposed to the Lutheran emphasis on the promissory nature of Baptism, its character as Gospel.

<sup>12</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 622.

<sup>13</sup> *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921) 743: "Thus we must regard Baptism and make it profitable to ourselves, that when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless I am baptized ... ."



The personal self-consciousness, if uncertain and vacillating, may be strengthened and confirmed by the common consciousness of the Church expressed in baptism and hallowed by prayer in the name of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Here it is not Baptism as God's work accompanied by God's Word that gives assurance, as in Luther; it is Baptism as an expression of the "common consciousness of the Church", i.e., the consciousness of Jesus as Redeemer, that gives assurance to the individual.

### THE EFFECT OF BAPTISM

The same two-poled tension exhibited in the discussion of the essence of Baptism is also present in Schleiermacher's treatment of its effect. In the sphere of the church, the effect of Baptism is to give the individual baptised citizenship in the Christian church. But what do we mean by the words "Christian church", since there are so many denominations? What about the intention of the person baptising? And what is the benefit of being made a citizen of the Christian church?

Concerning the first question, Schleiermacher views the term "Christian church" in its broadest possible meaning when he says:

... it is a general principle for all ages during which the Church may continue to be divided into a number of relatively antagonistic communions, that baptism which anyone of them causes to be administered is valid not only for the administering Church itself but for all Churches whatsoever ...<sup>15</sup>

This is because when a church baptises, it is the church's intention to bring the person into the church. Schleiermacher even extends this principle to heretical parties, saying that since they consider themselves to be the true church, their intention is to receive the person into the Christian community. In dealing with those baptised thus, the church need not rebaptise, but only strongly counteract the heresy. It is questionable how far Schleiermacher would extend this principle; clearly he would recognise the Baptisms of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, United, and Baptist congregations. He does insist on the need for a presentation of the word of Father, Son, and Spirit in connection with Baptism, as we shall see; but he is also willing and insistent on the inclusion of the Rationalists in the church.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 625-26.

<sup>15</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 628.

<sup>16</sup> F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Luecke* (Ann Arbor: Scholar's Press, 1981) 68: "I do not fear we would disagree that it is neither Christian

Concerning the intention of the one baptising, Schleiermacher affirms the anti-Donatist decisions of the early church. The validity of a Baptism is not contingent on the intention of the one baptising. This is because the one baptising is doing so as a representative of the church, and the intention of the church is always right and true. The only condition laid down for a Baptism being valid is that it be done according to the institution of Christ. This does not necessarily imply a repetition of the *ipsissima verba* “very words” of Jesus, but nevertheless it is true that “along with the action there must go a presentation of the Word of God on which discipleship rests; and this in point of fact is the Word of Father, Son, and Spirit ... .”<sup>17</sup>

Though it is true that the validity of Baptism is not based on the intention of the one baptising, Schleiermacher says that the saving virtue of Baptism is contingent on the state of heart of the one performing it. The one baptising must judge the heart of the one being baptised as much as is possible to determine whether faith is present. Since it is impossible to judge the heart, the rule to follow will always be “the sympathy of the church”,<sup>18</sup> i.e., the person’s attitude to the fellowship in which he desires to partake. Where faith is not present in the heart of the one being baptised, the Baptism is a sin!<sup>19</sup> This brings to the fore the tensions inherent in Schleiermacher’s view of infant Baptism, since he holds that infants do not believe.<sup>20</sup> The beginning of Schleiermacher’s answer to this difficulty may be seen in his view of the benefit of Baptism in the sphere of the church.

The benefit of such action of the church lies in the fact that Baptism puts the individual in the place of the influence of the Holy Spirit, i.e., the Church:

... the influence of the appropriated perfection of Christ and the enjoyment of His appropriated blessedness become real only within the fellowship of believers; ... it is only within the fellowship that an individual can come to have the forgiveness of sins ... and divine sonship ... .<sup>21</sup>

This is Schleiermacher’s equivalent of saying, “Outside of the church there is no salvation.” This concept of the influence of the Spirit will become

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nor beneficial to expel the so-called Rationalists from our church community, even if it were done amiably and without rancor.”

<sup>17</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 628.

<sup>18</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 633.

<sup>19</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 633.

<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 635: “infant baptism ... is administered in the absence of repentance and faith in those baptized ... there need be no talk of proving that even in such children faith can be produced by baptism ... .”

<sup>21</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 631.

important when we examine his view of infant Baptism. The community as influence is vital for Schleiermacher. The community of faith can make up for the absence of faith in the candidate by leading him along in the faith until his own conversion and personal faith.

In the sphere of Baptism as God's activity, its effect is "salvation conditioned on the divine activity in regeneration".<sup>22</sup> Baptism does not work *ex opere operato*; for a Baptism to be complete it implies the presence of faith in the one baptised.<sup>23</sup> And faith, in Schleiermacher's understanding of it, implies self-consciousness and free choice on the part of the one having it.

Since each can only enter (the Christian Church) through a free resolve of his own, this (entrance) must be preceded by the certainty that the influence of Christ puts an end to the state of being in need of redemption, and produces that other state and this certainty is just faith in Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the effect of Baptism on the one being baptised is conditioned on their self-awareness as being conscious of their God-forgetfulness and of God's provision for forgiveness through the influence of the Redeemer.

Along with this affirmation of the necessity of faith for Baptism comes Schleiermacher's denial of Baptism as a means of working faith in the baptismal candidate. Here he cites and opposes John Gerhard, who held that Baptism kindles faith in the heart of the person baptised.<sup>25</sup> Schleiermacher's denial of Baptism as a means of working faith places him solidly in the tradition of the Reformed, who have always tended to view the sacraments primarily as signs which accompany the Spirit's immediate working, rather than means whereby the Spirit works. He charges with "magic" those who see Baptism as a means whereby the Spirit creates faith:

And as our paragraph only asserts the efficacy. of baptism in connection with divine grace in regeneration, and thus links up the act of the Church with what is going on in the individual soul, magical conceptions are very definitely barred out ...<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 626.

<sup>23</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 631: "As regards complete baptism, which implies the existing faith of the person baptised, what we say is that it effects salvation ..."

<sup>24</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 68.

<sup>25</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 630 n. 3: "See Gerhard, *Loc. Theol.* ix 152, where the statement is made that baptism kindles faith in the heart of the person baptised, but not the slightest proof is given between the two things."

<sup>26</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 632.

Thus we see that the effect of Baptism is citizenship in the Christian church and therefore also the beginnings of the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual.<sup>27</sup>

### INFANT BAPTISM

The question of infant baptism was not so pressing in the nature of the Prussian Union church for which Schleiermacher wrote, since both parts of the new union had previously practised it. Nevertheless, as one who viewed denominational differences as temporary, Schleiermacher had his eye on a large branch of Christians who did not practice infant Baptism. So he devoted one proposition to the discussion of that which divided Lutherans and Reformed from the Baptists.

Considering paedobaptism within the sphere of the church, he notes first that in order to be considered a complete Baptism, paedobaptism presupposes the need of confirmation. Confirmation cannot be ignored; that would make the previous Baptism of the child sinful, since the officiant would knowingly have baptised one who did not believe. But Schleiermacher holds that there is a place for paedobaptism provided that confirmation is kept in view as that which completed Baptism. Earlier, in his first proposition dealing with Baptism, he said that Baptism and conversion have a dual relation. Since this is so, the church must have a dual strategy. This relationship may be exhibited in this way:

<i>Person's condition</i>	<i>Church's goal</i>
baptised but unconverted	conversion
converted but unbaptised	Baptism

Infants who are baptised fall under the first category. Confirmation should not be seen as a separate sacrament but rather as the natural completion of paedobaptism.<sup>28</sup>

Those who have not held to the necessity of infant Baptism should not be anathematised by those who have; Schleiermacher seeks to remove the

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<sup>27</sup> The word “beginnings” is not used here in a temporal, but in a logical sense. Compare *The Christian Faith* 632: “... it may be said that even if faith is not yet present at the time of baptism, yet it will arise not merely **after** baptism, but—baptism being the first item in the whole series of influences which the Church brings to bear on the baptized—**through** baptism.”

<sup>28</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 633, 636ff.

*damnamus* of Augustana IX. He holds that fellowship with the Baptists would be possible provided they recognise that infant Baptism is not absolutely invalid "when supplemented by confirmation".<sup>29</sup>

As implied earlier, for Schleiermacher the normal candidate for Baptism was the adult; thus he had to explain whence came the custom of paedobaptism. He lists four reasons for infant Baptism's appearance in the life of the church:

1. The desire to include Christian children who had died before the age of instruction in the people of God.
2. To make the church more responsible for the children of parents unable to implement congregational obligations.
3. To separate Christian youth from Jewish and pagan youth.
4. The comfort that children thus brought would not miss the Spirit's nurturing care.<sup>30</sup>

He finds no biblical ground for infant Baptism, and says in a practical way that it should be the decision of each household whether to baptise their children or wait until they were older.

Moving on to consider paedobaptism from the sphere of the individual's relationship to God, Schleiermacher denies that infants have faith.

... infant baptism is the same as any other baptism which has erroneously been imparted prior to the full faith of the person baptised and yet is valid; only, its proper efficacy is suspended until the person baptised has really become a believer.<sup>31</sup>

This again points out what has been noted before, that Schleiermacher denies that infants can believe. And why can children not believe? The answer is tied up with Schleiermacher's view of both sin and grace as conscious states in man. Indeed, original sin itself cannot be viewed as resulting from the sin of Adam and Eve; Schleiermacher focuses in on the sociological side of original sin,<sup>32</sup> children lacking consciousness of God-forgetfulness and the consciousness of its being solved in the Redeemer:

... [J]ust as we cannot suppose that before baptism children are subject to misery due to a consciousness of sin which is growing into penitence, we cannot after baptism ascribe to them blessedness due to a dawning sense of divine sonship.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 638.

<sup>30</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, summary of pages 634-35.

<sup>31</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 636.

<sup>32</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 282ff., 292.

<sup>33</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 635.

But if children cannot believe, what then happens to them if they die? He says, "... it is only if we ascribe magical powers to baptism that we can believe that it confers a claim relating to the life after death quite irrespectively of its influence on this life."<sup>34</sup> For Schleiermacher there is no difference between the child who never was baptised and the child who was baptised but did not live to renew his baptismal covenant. Infant Baptism is a bond between the infant and the Kingdom, but it does not have magical power to make them believe.

### SUMMARY AND CRITIQUE

One cannot fail to be impressed by the inner consistency and systematic nature of Schleiermacher's presentation of Christianity. His entire presentation, also in the doctrine of Baptism, moves between the poles of experience and history, and is rooted in the notion that faith necessarily involves self-consciousness.

In addition, fairness demands that we acknowledge Schleiermacher's own motivation for re-working the traditional *corpus doctrinae* in this radically new way. First and foremost, he sought to be an apologist for Christianity—one who explained the faith to those around him in terms which they would understand. Hence the title of his first book, *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers*.

With these considerations in mind, let us reflect on Schleiermacher's presentation of Baptism. In particular, it is worth pondering his notion that faith necessarily involves self-consciousness. Schleiermacher says, "... this term [i.e., 'faith'] always signifies, in our present province, the certainty which accompanies a state of the higher self-consciousness."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, near the very beginning of *The Christian Faith* he says:

**§3. The piety which forms the basis of all ecclesiastical communions is, considered purely in itself, neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness.**<sup>36</sup>

The view that Schleiermacher espouses has a long history; already in the public ministry of Jesus the disciples rebuked mothers who brought their children to Jesus for His blessing. How shocked the disciples must have been when Jesus told them that the Kingdom of God belonged to children (τὰ παιδία), and that children are the paradigmatic recipients of that Kingdom! Nor was this utterance isolated; on another occasion He said that

<sup>34</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 637.

<sup>35</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 68.

<sup>36</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 5. Emphasis original.

if adults are to enter the Kingdom, they must become like children. One key difference between adults and children is the lack of self-consciousness on the part of children.<sup>37</sup>

Traditional Lutheran dogmatics have distinguished between two kinds of faith, the *fides directa* and the *fides reflexa*. Francis Pieper says:

The distinction between *fides directa* and *fides reflexa* must be carefully observed. The *fides directa* designates that act of faith (*fides actualis*) by which the Christian directly lays hold of the divine promises of grace set forth in the Gospel, desiring and seizing it. The *fides reflexa*, reflex faith, is found in those who by reflecting on the effects and fruits of faith are conscious of the existence of their faith. In all cases believers accept the promises of the Gospel with *fides directa*, whether they are awake or asleep, whether they are adults or infants (Luther, St. L. XI:495), even when in trials and afflictions (*in statu temptationis*) they fear that they no longer believe. It is a grave error to define faith as the conscious acceptance of the grace of God. It is not the *fides reflexa*, but solely the *fides directa*, faith grasping the Gospel of Christ, which is the medium ληπτικόν of the grace of God.<sup>38</sup>

Because Schleiermacher defines faith in terms of self-consciousness, it is evident that he does not make the distinction between *fides directa* and *fides reflexa*. It follows naturally from such a view, then, that the Baptism of children is suspect, since they are not capable of the self-consciousness which for Schleiermacher is essential to faith. But since the Means of Grace are “visible words”, the promises of the Gospel joined with material elements, only *fides directa* is the means of receiving them beneficially. Hence for Lutherans, in contrast to Schleiermacher, children are the normal recipients of Baptism.

Schleiermacher's view was, of course, more palatable to his audience—those who had been gripped by the Romantic exaltation of feeling and self-consciousness. Like all apologists, he was as it were a translator between the Christian tradition and the culture in which he lived. But it seems that he fell into the danger faced by every translator—that of so seeking to speak in the target language that the content of the source language is fundamentally altered. The ability to speak in other tongues, it seems, cannot be achieved by our best efforts, but must remain a gift of the Spirit we receive in Baptism.

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<sup>37</sup> In this connection note the words of Jesus in Luke 10:21.

<sup>38</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 2:443-44.

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## A PROGENY OF A THEOLOGICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL UNION: HOUSE CHURCHES<sup>1</sup>

*Glenn E. Schaeffer*

If you asked, “Where is the church?” in any important city of the ancient world where Christianity had penetrated in the first century, you would have been directed to a group of worshipping people gathered in a house church. There was no special building or other tangible wealth with which to associate “church,” only people!<sup>2</sup>

Walter Oetting’s words may surprise the Christian of the twentieth century who lives in a world dotted with towering temples, baronial basilicas, cyclopean cathedrals, comely churches, and charming chapels. The truth of the matter is this: for the first two and a half centuries after Pentecost (Acts 2), the Christian house served as a post for missionary activity in an urban centre. The Christian home served as the centre where God’s chosen people would be spiritually fortified through catechesis, sacramental worship and Christian hospitality. The Gospel of Christ spread across the Roman Empire through the planting of house churches.

Many scholars assert Christians worshipped in house churches in the two hundred years following our Lord’s ascension because of their poverty, paucity, persecution,<sup>3</sup> and eschatological expectations.<sup>4</sup> These assertions cannot be denied, but one might counter, using an analogy of fertility, that house churches were the natural progeny of a theological and missiological union. This paper will try briefly to explain the theological and missiological “seed” that birthed this baby called “the house church”.

The first theological “seed” we must consider is christological. The house church is the offspring of an antitypical fulfilment of the Old Testament temple worship and sacrificial worship in the person of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented at a Mission Convocation held at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, on 23 February 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Oetting, *The Church of the Catacombs* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964) 24.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. Davies, *The Secular Use of Church Buildings* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968) 1-9.

<sup>4</sup> See Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 146; Metosalem Castillo, *The Church in Thy House* (Metro Manila, Philippines: Alliance Publishers, Inc., 1982) 53-54; Vincent Branick, *The House Church in the Writings of Paul*, Zaccheus Studies: New Testament (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989) 14; Massey H. Shepherd, Jr, ed., *Worship in Scripture and Tradition. Essays by Members of the Theological Commission on Worship (North American Section) of the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963) 141-42.

Christ. A reading of Hebrews 6-9 reveals how temple worship was fulfilled and abolished in the incarnation of the Messiah. Jesus inaugurated the new order (Hebrews 9:8-15). The rending of the curtain on Good Friday signified the fulfilment of Old Testament temple worship. The temple was no longer thought of in terms of a building but as a Person—the Messiah (Matthew 12:6; John 2:19). The temple was thought of in terms of His Body—the Church (I Peter 2:4-5; II Cor. 6:16)—and as individual members of that Body (I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). When “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling [‘tabernacled’] among us” (John 1:14) the temple, the ceremonial law, and the Levitical priesthood became obsolete to the Christian disciple. Matthew 18:20 is a plain rejection of the Jewish understanding of worship for, on the one hand, the presence of the incarnate Lord replaced the cultic presence of God in the temple, and on the other hand, the requirement of at least ten persons for Jewish worship was abandoned.<sup>5</sup> After a time the Christian came to the realisation that he did not have a significant reason to worship at the temple or observe the ceremonial law. But the Christian had no holy place which had been particularly chosen by God as His place of visitation. The Christian simply knew Christ had promised He would be present wherever two or three gathered in His name around the Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Thus, an elaborate building, set aside for the worship of God, was of little importance to them. The ordinary house became the setting for the gathering of Christ’s “temples” as they gathered around His holy Table in the presence of the Word to receive the Word.

When we study Luke/Acts we see a movement away from the temple to the household. John H. Elliott<sup>6</sup> observes that, whereas the Gospel of Luke opens (Luke 1:5-23) and closes (Luke 24:50-53) with scenes in the temple, the opening chapter of Acts has the disciples in a house (Acts 1:12-14) and concludes with Paul’s house confinement in Rome (Acts 28:30-31). He also observes that within the first eight chapters of Acts the scene shifts with regularity between the household, where the believers gather for worship and hospitality, and the temple, which had become a centre of bankrupt politics and religious control. In his article, “Temple versus Household in Luke-Acts,” John Elliott writes:

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<sup>5</sup> See Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1973) 46.

<sup>6</sup> John Elliott, “Temple versus Household in Luke/Acts”, in Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 225-26. See also John Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981) 193-94.

The temple, at first the locale of hoped for salvation and symbol of Israel's holy union with God, eventually is unmasked as the political concentration of power opposed to God's people and the truly righteous. The household, on the other hand, once the gathering place of the powerless and the marginalized, eventually emerges as the institution where God's spirit is truly active and where familial relations, shared resources, and communal values concretize the vision of a salvation available to all the families of the earth.<sup>7</sup>

There is another theological reason for the birthing of the house church. New Testament Christians thought of God as their "Father" and of each other as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Elliott observes:

In this kingdom/household, God is experienced as a merciful, generous, and forgiving "father" (Luke 2:49; 6:36; 9:36; 10:21-22; 11:1, 13; 12:30, 32; 22:29, 42; 23:34, 46; 24:49; Acts 1:4, 7; 2:33). Jesus is recognized as "Son of God" (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:3, 9, 41; 8:28; 9:35; 10:22; 20:13; 22:70; Acts 8:37; 9:20; 13:53). In contrast to the "children of Jerusalem" (13:34), believers who hear and do Jesus' words form his new family (8:19-21) and become the true "children" of the heavenly Father (11:13; 24:49), "brothers and sisters", one with another (Luke 6:41-42; 8:19-21; 17:3-4; 22:32; Acts 1:15-16; 2:29, 37; 6:3; 9:17, 30; 10:23; 11:1, 12, 29; 12:17; 14:2; 15:1, 3, 7, 12, 22-23, 32-33, 36, 40; 16:2, 40; 17:6, 10, 14; 18:18, 27; 21:7, 17, 20, 22; 22:13; 28:14, 15).<sup>8</sup>

With this familial understanding of God's relationship with man through Jesus Christ it was only appropriate the family of God should meet with their Father, His Son, and the Paraclete in a Christian household.

With this brief explanation, one can see the paternal theological traits stamped on the embryonic development of the house church. But the theological "seed" was not the only thing that brought about the conception and development of the house church. There was also the missiological "seed" that contributed to its conception.

A survey of the Book of Acts<sup>9</sup> will demonstrate that one of Paul's missionary methods was to target the *pater familias* for conversion.<sup>10</sup> Paul's

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<sup>7</sup> Elliott, "Temple versus Household" 217.

<sup>8</sup> Elliott, "Temple versus Household" 228.

<sup>9</sup> See chapters 10 (Cornelius), 16 (Lydia and the jailer of Philippi), 17 (Jason), 18 (Aquila and Priscilla).

<sup>10</sup> See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983) 28-30; Derek Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1984) 84-85; E. A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the New Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960) 36; Del Birkey, "The House Church: A Missiological Model," *Missiology: An International Review* XIX, 1 (Jan. 1991): 93-94; Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, *The Social Structure of the Early Christian Communities* (New York: Verso, 1987) 134-35;

strategic plan to target the *pater familias* for conversion was a wise decision for a number of reasons:

1. The *pater familias* was the “emperor” of his household. His authority and decisions were absolute. Vincent Branick writes, “At the top of the pyramid was the paterfamilias, the family father or other ‘head of the house,’ whose power extended at times to that of the children’s life or death.”<sup>11</sup> When we discuss the *pater familias* we must remember the *oikos* or *oikia* was not defined

[b]y kinship but by the relationship of dependence and subordination. The head of a substantial household was thus responsible for—and expected a degree of obedience from—not only his immediate family but also his slaves, former slaves who were now clients, hired laborers, and sometimes business associates or tenants.<sup>12</sup>

2. A common household religion was the glue that bonded the family. Every Roman home had its own official house cult.<sup>13</sup> In the Jewish world, at the time of the New Testament, the family was the primary place for transmission of the household faith.<sup>14</sup>

3. The first-century Mediterraneans were not an individualistic-oriented people. They were more dyadic or group-oriented. Their basic unit of social analysis was not the individual person but the dyad, a person in relation with, and connected to, at least one other social unit. They were primarily of the group in which they found themselves inserted. Without this group they ceased to have an identity. Thus, the decision of one member would influence and affect the rest, especially if that decision was made by the *pater familias*.<sup>15</sup>

4. The household was the foundation upon which the Roman Empire rested.<sup>16</sup>

With these factors taken into consideration one can see why Paul and the other missionaries would try to convert the *pater familias*. The conversion of the *pater familias* would result in a “people movement”

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Branick 18-20; Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* 188-89; Elliott, “Temple versus Household” 226; Castillo 113-15.

<sup>11</sup> Branick 37.

<sup>12</sup> Meeks 30.

<sup>13</sup> Judge 35; Kyrtatas 28-29; L. E. Binns-Elliott, *The Church in the Ancient World* (London: The Unicorn Press, 1938) 23.

<sup>14</sup> Branick 46ff.

<sup>15</sup> Elliott, “Temple versus Household” 72ff.

<sup>16</sup> Tidball, 1984: 79-80; Judge 30-32; Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980) 15.

within that household. The conversion of domestic units meant households of Christians became the basic social/cultic centres, economic support systems, and practical means for the extension of the Christian movement.<sup>17</sup> The Christian households, especially the more wealthy ones, would open their home to other Christians for worship, hospitality, and outreach.

The birthing of house churches was a natural development of the early church's theology and missionary methodology. The "seed" of theology and the "seed" of missiology united to produce the house church.

These house churches, usually consisting of about forty to fifty people,<sup>18</sup> were planted by Paul and others in important cities located along the trade route.<sup>19</sup> In some of the larger cities a number of house churches were planted. For example, if we look at Romans 16, we see there were at least five separate house churches—the ones which met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (v. 5), Aristobulus (v. 10), and Narcissus (v. 11), along with the two house churches which were greeted in verses 14 and 15.<sup>20</sup>

The house churches were sacramental communities. They were not primarily prayer meetings, although liturgical prayer borrowed from Judaism<sup>21</sup> and "free" prayer<sup>22</sup> were a very important aspect of their community life. House churches were not a church within a parish church (i.e., like a cell group of a larger congregation). The house church was the whole church in microcosm.

Christians usually gathered on the first day of the week<sup>23</sup> for catechesis,<sup>24</sup> that is, instruction in the teachings of the prophets, the stories and teachings of Jesus, and the writings of the apostles, if the autograph or copy of an autograph, were available. A simple liturgical order which varied from area to area in the first century would have been used in house church

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<sup>17</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* 188-89.

<sup>18</sup> John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985) 61, 65; Banks 41-42.

<sup>19</sup> Oetting 24; Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) 63; Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978) 117-18.

<sup>20</sup> Banks 39.

<sup>21</sup> Herman Wegman, *Christian Worship in the East and West*, trans. Gordon W. Lathrop (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1985) 21-23.

<sup>22</sup> Meeks 147-50.

<sup>23</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990) 55-57; Shepherd 142-43.

<sup>24</sup> Meeks 81-84; Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962) 81ff.

worship.<sup>25</sup> They would also meet for the agape meal. The high point of the worshipping community was the reception of the Lord's Supper.<sup>26</sup> Baptism was also practised at the house church. As time passed there was a progressive standardisation of the worship service as evidenced by the common catechism and common liturgy in the *Didache*.<sup>27</sup>

The house church was where "hospitality evangelisation", as Mortimer Arias<sup>28</sup> calls it, took place. Hospitality was a distinctive mark of Christians and Christian communities. They opened their doors to strangers (Romans 12:13) and to each other (I Peter 4:9). The house churches served as a "bed and breakfast" for the itinerant missionaries and for other travelling Christians as they supplied food, lodging, money, and other aids.<sup>29</sup> The house church provided an "equalling" environment where the rich and the poor; the slave and the free man could rub shoulders and accept each other as equals. The house church provided a family atmosphere where people were treated with honour and respect. It offered incorporation into a family, a place for permanent belonging, a supportive circle of brothers and sisters.<sup>30</sup> As time passed, and house churches were planted throughout the Roman Empire, an effective network of communication spread all over the Empire due to modest means of Christian hospitality.<sup>31</sup> "Hospitality evangelisation" cannot be underestimated when discussing the expansion of the early Christian church.<sup>32</sup>

The house church was a mission-sending centre.<sup>33</sup> Christians came to the house church to receive God's grace and mercy, to praise and thank God for their salvation, to hear the stories of Jesus, to study the Word of God, to receive the Body and Blood of their Lord for the forgiveness

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<sup>25</sup> Hahn 2; Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press, 1953) 27, 32.

<sup>26</sup> James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993) 24ff.; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 196-99.

<sup>27</sup> Oetting 27; Ralph Martin, *The Worship of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) 190; Glenn E. Hinson, *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981) 34-35.

<sup>28</sup> Mortimer Arias, "Centripetal Mission or Evangelization by Hospitality", *Missiology: An International Review* 10. 1 (Jan. 1982): 69-81.

<sup>29</sup> Theissen 8ff.; Malherbe 65-68.

<sup>30</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* 199, 285ff.

<sup>31</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953) 46, 75; Allen 134-35.

<sup>32</sup> Branick 18.

<sup>33</sup> Castillo 77-78.

of sins, to pray for each other and the lost, and to participate in “hospitality evangelisation”. As a result of their house church worship and catechesis they would be prepared “to give the reason for the hope” (I Peter 3:15) they had—to their immediate family, their friends, their slaves, their masters, and their business acquaintances.<sup>34</sup> The spread of Christianity was done so quietly and through such “normal channels”—the household and itinerant missionaries—that Walter Oetting writes:

By the year 250 Christianity had spread to the limits of the known world. We hear legends about it in England but know little more. We hear about it in areas to the east of Armenia, even in India and China, but know almost nothing about it. Two facts, however, become clear. First, the church spread rapidly over a geographical area increasing phenomenally in numbers at the same time. Second, this work was done by ordinary Christians. We know of no mission societies; we hear nothing of organized effort. Wherever Christians went doing their regular tasks, the pagan saw a different kind of individual and heard rumors about “the Savior.”<sup>35</sup>

The house church was the progeny of a theological and missiological union and through this “ordinary child” God worked to multiply His family, literally, from house to house (Acts 20:20).

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<sup>34</sup> See W. H. C. Frend, “The Missions of the Early Church 180-700 A. D.”, in Everett Ferguson, ed., *Missions and Regional Characteristics of the Early Church, Studies in Early Christianity XII* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993) 3-5, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Oetting 23-24.

## LET YOUR HOLY ANGEL BE WITH ME

*John R. Stephenson*

Such standard Luther studies as those by Karl Holl, Paul Althaus, and Gordon Rupp contain no index entries under “angelology”. While an ever-expanding galaxy of monographs manages by now to cover almost every imaginable aspect of the Reformer’s thought, scarcely a meagre journal article seems to have been devoted to Luther’s understanding of those heavenly beings concerning whom his morning and evening prayer have taught us to pray, “Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.”<sup>1</sup> On the basis of a single sermon preached by the Reformer at Coburg Castle on the Festival of St Michael and All Angels in 1530,<sup>2</sup> I hope to demonstrate by the end of this paper that Luther’s well-known petition for angelic protection represents no mere unconscious hangover from his mediaeval past, but rather encapsulates an integral part of his understanding of God’s rule in two realms and expresses a mature conviction bearing the mark of the article by which the Church stands and falls.

On 29 November 1525 the Strasbourg diplomat Gregory Casel wrote from Wittenberg to his city council a report of a tête-à-tête in which he had sought to persuade the Reformer to abandon his stubborn confession of the Real Presence and to join with Zwingli, Capito, and Butzer in their advanced views on the Holy Supper. Casel gloomily informed his addressees that Martin was not to be budged from his sacramental beliefs:

*Martinus* dixit saepe se expertum esse. Vidisse se visiones horribiles: **saepe se Angelos vidisse**: adeo ut coactus sit cessare a Missa. Elevationem ideo conservamus, propter sanctus Jesaiae: quod valde convenit Elevationi. Nam sonat, quomodo sedeat in throno et regnet. Et

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<sup>1</sup> The sole exception to this rule discovered by the present writer is Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics: A re-examination of Luther’s spiritual experience and his relationship to the mystics* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976). Hoffman tells how Emanuel Hirsch, the Nazi-sympathising Bishop of Berlin during the Third Reich, considered Luther’s angelology a foreign body in his thought fit only to be demythologised (68-74). For his part, Hoffman takes seriously the Reformer’s witness to the holy angels (183-86, 211-13).

<sup>2</sup> Noting that Emanuel Hirsch dismissed Luther’s angelology entirely without reference to the Weimar Edition (Hoffman 70), Bengt Hoffman examines Hirsch’s a priori judgements on the basis of a Luther sermon of 1535 (Hoffman 71).



elevare corpus et sanguinem Christi nihil aliud est quam Evangelium  
praedicare toti orbi etc.<sup>3</sup>

Which being interpreted means roughly the following:

Martin said he has been vouchsafed frequent experience of the bodily presence. He has beheld amazing visions. **He has often seen angels.** These events have been of such a nature as to force him to break off from celebrating Mass. “We therefore retain the elevation”, he said, “on account of Isaiah’s *Sanctus*, which is highly appropriate to this gesture. For the elevation gets across how He sits on the throne and reigns. And to elevate the Body and Blood of Christ is nothing other than to preach the Gospel to the whole world, etc.”

Assuming Casel to be an honest reporter, we discover in the *De servo arbitrio* of the same year 1525 the reason why Luther never ventured to share these astounding faith-strengthening experiences with his reading public. The “external clarity of Holy Scripture” is manifested when bearers of the dominically instituted office demonstrate dogma binding on the consciences of all Christians.<sup>4</sup> A parallel “internal clarity of Holy Scripture” is also vouchsafed by God, but to individual Christians, for their private illumination, supporting the *fides qua creditur* (i.e., the—subjective—faith by which we believe) but in no wise establishing the *fides quae creditur* (i.e., the—objective—faith which we believe).<sup>5</sup> If the Reformer saw angels and was granted sensory knowledge of the mystery of the altar, these experiences vouchsafed him much in the way of *claritas interna* but nothing under the heading of *claritas externa*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Theodor Kolde, *Analecta lutherana. Briefe und Actenstücke zur Geschichte Luthers* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Parthes, 1883) 72.

<sup>4</sup> “There is therefore another, an external judgment, whereby with the greatest certainty we judge the spirits and dogmas of all men, not only for ourselves, but also for others and for their salvation. This judgment belongs to the public ministry of the Word and to the outward office, and is chiefly the concern of leaders and preachers of the Word. We make use of it when we seek to strengthen those who are weak in faith and confute opponents. This is what we earlier called ‘the external clarity of Holy Scripture.’” Qtd from *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation, Library of Christian Classics XVII*, eds. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969) 159.

<sup>5</sup> See *Luther and Erasmus* 159: “What we say is this: the spirits are to be tested or proved by two sorts of judgment. One is internal, whereby through the Holy Spirit or a special gift of God, anyone who is enlightened concerning himself and his own salvation, judges and discerns with the greatest certainty the dogmas and opinions of all men. Of this it is said in I Cor. 1[:2-15]: ‘The spiritual man judges all things, but himself is judged by no one.’ This belongs to faith and is necessary for every individual Christian. We have called it above ‘the internal clarity of Holy Scripture.’ ... **But this judgment helps no one else,** and with it we are not here concerned, for no one, I think, doubts its reality”; emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> “... [H]e did not let his direct teaching revolve around such mystical experiences.” Hoffman 154.

*Saepe se angelos vidisse.* If the content of this sentence was in fact uttered by Luther in direct speech, it prepares us to register the fact that the Reformer never lived for a moment in the closed universe of the Enlightenment. The crisis of the First World War led Karl Barth to believe in many articles of faith that had been cast aside by his Ritschlian teachers; but while Barth was ready to defy the worldview of modernism by accepting the existence of good angels, his conviction of the ontological nothingness of evil prompted him to keep one foot in the Enlightenment camp by denying the reality of the devil and his hosts.<sup>7</sup> From hoary tradition we have learned that the Reformer threw an ink pot at the evil one during his enforced sojourn at the Wartburg, but the earliest account of this event, penned by John Mathesius in his Luther biography of 1591, relates that Luther was the object and the devil the subject of the missile throwing. At all events, the universe inhabited by the Reformer throbbed with the acts of angels and demons in the world of men.

The holy angels may often have formed the sugar-coating of cosy piety, their function being little more than the offering of a warm fuzzy in assurance of the deep-down goodness of the universe. Far removed from the world of fairy tales and make-believe is Luther's Michaelmas sermon of 1530, in which a robust angelology appears as the obverse of a coin whose better known tail side is the Reformer's equally realistic demonology.<sup>8</sup> Luther's angels are not effeminate youths who could never make a sports team, but rather steely warriors in the army of the Lord.

The Coburg Michaelmas sermon begins with two paragraphs of introduction to the topic of angelology. A swipe is aimed at mediaeval Rome, which stands accused of leading people to shift the locus of their *fiducia* (i.e., the trust of the heart) from Almighty God to the angels.<sup>9</sup> Michaelmas is appropriately celebrated:

For the understanding or knowledge of the dear angels should and must abide among Christians, and it is very useful and comforting to us to

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<sup>7</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960) 519-31. In these closing pages of a section entitled "The Ambassadors of God and their Opponents", Barth deftly practises the "demythologisation" for which he otherwise lambasted Rudolf Bultmann.

<sup>8</sup> "Luther possessed the most concrete satanology it is possible to imagine." Adolf Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, trans. John C. Mattes (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1936) 228.

<sup>9</sup> WA 32:111.27: "Also ist man von Gott auff die lieben Engeln gefallen und gewichen." All translations from the 1530 Michaelmas sermon given in the body of the essay are by the present writer.

know their office and essence and also what is to be held concerning them.<sup>10</sup>

Yet angelology is not contemplated abstractly for a moment. The angels enter the Reformer's field of vision only as they are locked in combat with the devils; so that from the third paragraph of our sermon until at least the beginning of the tenth Luther gives his hearers a short course in demonology. His opening definition includes an understanding of St Michael which the Reformer contradicts in other writings, where he equates the figure of Michael with our Lord Himself:

A Christian should have no doubt that the Devil is by nature a created angel, as St Michael is a created angel.<sup>11</sup>

Many Christians suffer from the illusion that the Devil is lounging at a safe hundred mile distance from themselves. Such souls "lose knowledge of the benefit which God does us by His angels":<sup>12</sup>

Thus when someone thrusts the Devil so far away, he does not esteem the dear angels. But a Christian ought to know that he sits among devils and that the Devil is closer to him than his coat or shirt, yea nearer than his own skin, that he is all about us and we are therefore at daggers drawn with him and must come to blows with him. ... This is then the first point, that we consider as certain that there is a Devil and he so near to us that he is much closer to us than the shirt on our back.<sup>13</sup>

Our post-modernist world can relate to Luther's proclamation "that we do not sit in a safe garden".<sup>14</sup> His drastic pulpit imagery rests on a proof text long familiar to him from the office of Compline, I Pet. 5:8. A whole paragraph is devoted to unpacking this verse spoken "not by a drunkard or a

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<sup>10</sup> WA 32:111.14-17: "Denn es sol und mus bey den Christen der verstand oder die erkenntnis der lieben Engeln bleiben und ist uns seer nutz und trostlich, das wir yhr ampt und wesen, auch was von yhn zu halten ist, wissen."

<sup>11</sup> WA 32:112.14-16: "Aber ein Christ sol kein Zweifel dar an haben, das der Teuffel sey von natur ein geschaffener Engel, wie S. Michel ein geschaffener Engel ist."

<sup>12</sup> WA 32:112.21-24: "Sondern wenn sie vom Teuffel hoeren reden, meinen sie, er sey uber hundert meil hin weg. Wenn man aber das nicht weis, das uns der Teuffel so nahend ist, so verleuret man die erkenntnis der wolthat, die uns Gott mit seinen Engeln thut."

<sup>13</sup> WA 32:112.26-113.2: "Darumb wenn einer den Teuffel so weit hin weg wirfft, der achtet der lieben Engeln nicht. Aber ein Christ der sol das wissen, Das er mitten unter den Teuffeln sitze und das yhm der Teuffel neher sey denn sein rock oder hembd, Ja neher denn sein eigene haud, das er rings umb uns her sey und wir also stets mit yhm zu har liegen und uns mit yhm schlagen müssen ... Das ist denn das Erste, das wir gewislich da fur hallten, das ein Teufel sey und so nahend sey bey uns, das er uns viel neher sey denn uns das hembd am leibe."

<sup>14</sup> WA 32:114.24-25.

joker, but in great and mighty earnest”.<sup>15</sup> The Reformer now launches into a description of the evil one’s ongoing mischief by way of bodily and spiritual possession of the children of Adam. Many are “full of greed, hatred, envy, and unchastity” and yet suppose the Devil to be more than a hundred thousand miles away from them.<sup>16</sup> The Devil wreaks untold damage on souls “with false doctrine, with despair, and with evil desires”, all aimed at tearing faith from the heart, producing the deadly sin of *acedia* (i.e., sloth), and turning Christian sanctification into a wearisome obstacle course.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the evil one is responsible for specific events in the external world:

When he has now thus got the soul in his grasp, he reaches for the body also, sending plague, hunger, distress, war, murder etc. The Devil serves up all this, that one now breaks a leg, the other drowns, the third commits a murder. Who stages all this? None other than the Devil.<sup>18</sup>

On reaching the tenth paragraph of his Michaelmas homily, Luther abruptly switches gear. The modernist worldview begotten by the Enlightenment has rendered theistic belief itself an unfounded conviction held privately by certain eccentrics. Twenty years ago at the height of the *Myth of God Incarnate* debate in England, Brian Hebblethwaite swam against the current by arguing for the Incarnation. Yet Hebblethwaite soon rescued himself from suspicion of fundamentalism by publicly flaunting his denial of the existence of the order of angelic being. The Reformer is thoroughly pre-modern in that he propounds no God of the gaps but preaches a God of the here and now immanently involved in the nuts and bolts of this world’s workings. Moreover, Luther presents God as governing in the kingdoms at His left and right hands through the holy angels against the machinations of the Devil and his hosts:

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<sup>15</sup> WA 32:113. 3-17.

<sup>16</sup> WA 32:113.31-33: “Darnach sind etlich geistlich oder heimlich besessen, die volgeitz, hass, neid, unkeusscheit sc. sticken und gehen dennoch so sicher einher, das sie gedencken, der Teuffel sey uber hundert Tausent meil weg von yhn.”

<sup>17</sup> WA 32:114.5-11: “... lasst uns nur vleissig lernen, was der Teuffel doch fur ein Geist sey und wie viel er schadens thue an leibe und an seel, An der seele mit falscher lere, mit verzweifelung, mit bosen luesten sc. Alles darumb das er den glauben hin weg reisse und zihe einen ya ynn ein wancken oder ynn einen faulen, schwachen gedancken: Ich fuele den Teuffel seer wol, kan es aber dennoch nicht so machen, wie ich gern wolt, Ich wolt gern hefftiger, hitziger und ernster ynn meinem thun sein, Aber ich kan fur dem Teuffel nicht.”

<sup>18</sup> WA 32:114.12-15: “Wenn er nu die seele also gefasst hat, so greiffet er nach dem leib auch, da schickt er pestilentz, hunger, kummer, krieg, mord, sc. Das richtet der Teuffel alles an, das nu einer ein bein bricht, der ander ersaufft, der drit thut ein mord, wer richt solches alles an? Niemand denn der Teuffel.”

Against this we must now also know that, although there are many devils with evil intent, they are opposed by many, many good angels who defend, protect, and guard. As we have heard, the evil angels do not sleep, but conspire day and night to institute idolatry and soul murder and to harm us in body, property, and honour. If God did not have another government (*Regiment*) to counter this, the Devil would not allow your house, wife, and child to stand for a single hour, and everything must go to ruin. For he is so poisonous that he even begrudges you enough room to set your foot on. So he is also vexed that you have healthy eyes, arms, and legs, and if he could bring it about, he would not leave you a single cow or goose alive. In short, if he could have his way, he would leave no stick standing and allow no man to live for a moment.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that this life proceeds as smoothly as it does prompts the remark that, “All this shows that God has set in order a power against the Devil, which constantly resists him and smashes his plans.”<sup>20</sup>

In an article published in 1982 I pointed out that the Reformer’s so-called “two kingdoms” doctrine in fact embraces four entities.<sup>21</sup> Small wonder that Luther scholars get hopelessly bogged down in the minutiae of the *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*, for Kenneth Hagen has recently proved that not four but six topics lurk under this well known heading! In addition to the kingdoms at God’s left and right hands we must consider the third kingdom of the Devil. And to the spiritual and secular governments we must add the government of the angels.<sup>22</sup> We should thus be wrong to suppose ourselves the only created agents at work in God’s repulsing the evil one on the battlefields of His left and right hand kingdoms. In the ninth paragraph of the Michaelmas sermon, Luther alludes to the Devil’s spiritual agenda at the recent Diet of Augsburg.<sup>23</sup> In the eleventh he recurs to I Pet. 5:8 and scares

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<sup>19</sup> WA 32:114. 33-115.9: “Da widerd müssen wir nu auch wissen, obgleich viel Teuffel sind und boses ym synn haben, so seyen da gegen viel, viel guter Engel die wehren, schutzen und hueten: Die bosen Engele, wie wir gehort haben, schlaffen nicht, sondern trachten tag und nacht darnach, wie sie Abegotterey auffrichten und seelen mord stifften, darnach auch, wie sie uns schaden thuen an leib, gut, ehre sc. wenn denn Gott nicht ein ander Regiment da gegen hette, So wurde dir der Teuffel dein hause, weib und kind nicht ein stund lassen stehen, es muste alles zu trumern gehen, denn so gifftig ist er wol, das er dir nicht so viel raum vergunnet, da du einen fuss mochtest setzen, So verdreust yhn auch, das du gesund augen, armen, beyn hast, und wenn ers thun durfte, er lies dir nicht ein kue, nicht ein gans stehen, Ja keinen menschen ein augenlick leben.”

<sup>20</sup> WA 32:115.15-17: “Das zeigt alles an, das ein gewalt sey von gott geordnet widerd den Teuffel, die yhm stets wehre und abbreche.”

<sup>21</sup> John R. Stephenson, “The Two Governments and Two Kingdoms in Luther’s Thinking”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34.4 (1981): 321-37.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Hagen, “Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms”, *God and Caesar Revisited* (Luther Academy Conference Papers No. 1) 26f.

<sup>23</sup> WA 32:114.29-32.

his listeners by insisting that the will of the evil one is far superior to our created powers, that the Devil “is cleverer than all the saints”, and that he is a more competent exegete than the scholastic theologians of Paris and Cologne.<sup>24</sup> The fact of his not bringing about the downfall of the whole world

is due to the protection and office of the dear angels, which restrains him. For the Lord God has ordered them to stand and fight against the Devil in much the same way as a prince commands his officials to rule a territory and its people against the depredations of street robbers.<sup>25</sup>

The Reformer is at one with the foregoing tradition in confessing on the strength of Mt. 18:10 that each Christian has been assigned his own guardian angel: “Thus each prince, townsman, house father, in short, each Christian has his angel who waits on him.”<sup>26</sup> Without going into detail, however, Luther indicates a certain distaste with scholastic treatment of angelology.<sup>27</sup> His own presentation of this topic is concrete, not abstract, his thinking operating not conceptually, but on the level of stark imagery. Agreeing that angels are created spirits<sup>28</sup> described as “messengers” on account of their office towards mankind,<sup>29</sup> the Reformer paints the subjects of this liturgical commemoration with the same folksy colours which he had used to explain I Pet. 5:8.

If you want to paint the Devil aright before your eyes, imagine a wicked, poisonous person with an evil mind and will who is also a whopping trickster that likes to harm and plague people. If you can grasp how such a heart operates, then you can glimpse a little of the Devil. An angel, conversely, this is a fine friendly heart, as when you find a man with a thoroughly sweet heart and a completely gentle will, not tricky and yet reasonable, wise, and simple. Whoever could see such a heart has the right colour to paint an angel.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> WA 32:115.24-27.

<sup>25</sup> WA 32:115.30-34: “Das er aber das nicht thut und volbringt, das ist der lieben Engeln schutz und ampt, das wehret, Denn unser Herr Gott hat sie da zu geordnet, das sie widder den Teuffel sollen stehen und fechten, und gleich wie ein Furst seinen amptleuten befilht land und leute zu regim widder die strassenreuber ... ”

<sup>26</sup> WA 32:116.6-7: “So hat nu ein iglicher Furst, burger, hausvater, Ynn summa ein iglicher Christ seinen Engel, der auff yhn warte ... ”

<sup>27</sup> WA 32:118.15-21.

<sup>28</sup> WA 32:118.32.

<sup>29</sup> WA 32:118.34-119.1.

<sup>30</sup> WA 32:118.21-29: “Und wilt den Teufel recht abgemalet sehen, so fasse dir fur einen bosen gifftigen menschen, der ein bosen synn und willen hat und dazu tueckisch ist, gern die leute schedit und plagt: wenn du dir ein solches hertz kanst fassen, wie es geschickt ist, so sihestu ein stucke vom Teufel. Herwiderumb ein Engel, das ist ein feines freundliches hertz,

From St Luke's account of the appearance of the angels in the skies over Bethlehem, Luther characterises the angels as beings devoted, first, to the glory and praise of God, secondly, to peace on earth, and, thirdly, to the good of mankind.<sup>31</sup> Now the peace announced in the *Gloria* is not just of the internal, spiritual kind. The Reformer fleshes out the ongoing this-worldly impact of Lk. 2:14 by remarking that, "They don't like it when a house burns down or a cow dies."<sup>32</sup> The angels so cherished by Luther are vigorous agents of God's left-hand kingdom:

What do they accomplish? They rule, protect, and guard us, they are geared to service, that they carry out the commands given them by God: "See to it that this village is not infected, that the cows are not strangled, that no one drowns!"<sup>33</sup>

If you see a city, village, or house still standing, this is a sign that the dear angels are still on guard.<sup>34</sup>

As mighty agents of the right hand kingdom, moreover, the angels counteract demonic temptation, acting secretly to keep Christians in faith:

In the same way as the Devil secretly possesses people, the good angels also carry out their office secretly. And just as the Devil secretly shoots evil darts into the heart, so the good angels shoot good darts into the heart. And whenever the Devil tempts us, they are instantly on the scene to defend us and to say to the heart, "Not so!"<sup>35</sup>

The way Luther pictures the work of the good angels is entirely in keeping with his understanding of the Atonement in terms of the *Christus Victor* motif.

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Als wenn man einen menschen kund finden der durch und durch ein susses hertz hette und einen gar sanfften willen, nicht tueckisch und dennoch vernunfftig, weis und einfeltig dabey: wer ein solch hertz sehen kunde, der kunde ein farbe haben was ein Engel were."

<sup>31</sup> WA 32:118.1-14.

<sup>32</sup> WA 32:118.3-4: "Denn es ist yhn ya nicht lieb, wenn ein haus verbrennet oder ein kue stirbt, Denn yhr hertz ist nur friede."

<sup>33</sup> WA 32:119.1-5: "was richten sie denn aus? Sie Regirn, schutzen und behuten uns, da gehoren sie zu, zu dem dienst sind sie geordnet, das sie unsers Herrn Gotts befelh sollen ausrichten, den er yhn gibt: Da sehet zu, das das dorf nicht werde angesteckt, das das vihe nicht erwurget werde, das da niemand ersauffe."

<sup>34</sup> WA 32:120.20-22: "Wenn du nu sihest ein Stad, ein dorff, ein hause noch stehen, das ist ein Zeichen, das die lieben Engel noch hueten ... ."

<sup>35</sup> WA 32:116.24-28: "Nu gleicher weis wie der Teuffel die menschen so heimlich besitzt, so furen die guten Engel yhr ampt auch heimlich, Und gleich wie der Teuffel heimlich bose pfeil yns hertz hin ein scheusst, so schiessen die guten Engel gute pfeile yns hertz, und wo uns der Teufel anficht, sind sie als bald da und wehren und sagen yns hertz: Ey nicht also."

With might of ours can naught be done,  
 Soon were our loss effected;  
 But for us fights the valiant One,  
 Whom God himself elected.

The Incarnate Lord acts in defence of His own through His holy angels, who are therefore sheer realisation of Gospel. An infinite advantage is enjoyed by angels over demons:

They are much more rational and clever than the evil angels, the cause being that they have a mirror into which they look, that the Devil does not have, which is called *Facies patris*, our Lord God's countenance. Therefore a single angel is much cleverer than all the devils rolled into one. Thus they are much mightier than the Devil, for they stand with One Who is called by His name *Omnipotens*, Almighty.<sup>36</sup>

The 1530 Michaelmas sermon draws doxologically to its close, with the Reformer uttering from the pulpit confident extempore prayers for angelic protection.<sup>37</sup> Elisha's vision of the heavenly hosts leads Luther to conclude that "He has more angels than devils" and to take on his lips the prophet's triumphant cry, "There are more on our side than on theirs!"<sup>38</sup> Things were as shaky in the summer of 1530 as they are in the autumn of 1996. Trust in *Christus Victor* at the head of His heavenly hosts enables the Reformer to close with a paraphrase of

Our victory has been won;  
 The Kingdom ours remaineth:

He shall have the glory of being a mighty, wise, and pious God, which takes place when God helps us through His dear angels, so that we lick the Devil. God help us all to do this. Amen.<sup>39</sup>

This historical paper has ventured no critique of Luther's angelology, which, along with his better known demonology, perhaps invites the epithet "naïve". Was the Reformer writing in jest or in earnest when in the last weeks of his life he informed Katie that the Devil had put pitch in his beer?

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<sup>36</sup> WA 32:117.11-16: "Sie sind viel vernunfftiger und kluger denn die bosen Engel, Ursach, sie haben einen spiegel, darein sie sehen, den hat der Teufel nicht, der heist *Facies patris*, unsers Herr Gotts angesicht. Darumb ist ein Engel viel kluger denn die Teuffel all auff einem hauffen. So sind sie auch viel mechtiger denn die Teuffel, denn sie stehen bey dem der mit seinem namen *Omnipotens* heisst, Almechtig."

<sup>37</sup> WA 32:117.25-27, 119.25-27.

<sup>38</sup> WA 32:119.28-120.7.

<sup>39</sup> WA 32:121.21-24: "Er sol die ehr haben, das er ein mechtiger, weiser und frumer Gott sey, Das geschicht denn, wenn uns Gott durch seine liebe Engele huelfft, das wir den Teufel schlagen. Dazu helff uns Gott allen, Amen."



Maybe the Enlightenment had a grain of truth on its side when it resolved to explain even catastrophic happenings in terms of this-worldly secondary causes. But modernism certainly went too far when it had Kant's autonomous man write the script of his own history as the master of his own destiny. Luther's naïveté runs more with the grain of Scripture and experience than does the terrible hubris of the scientific materialist. A strong echo of the *De servo arbitrio* is to be heard in both the Reformer's angelology and demonology. His comments on the closing chapters of Daniel attest his view that under the hand of God superhuman powers of good and ill are at work shaping the fate of humankind. This opinion cannot be dismissed as unbiblical mediaevalism. And both Luther's demonology and his angelology speak powerfully to our post-modernist world that in the last decade of the second millennium has developed an ambivalent fascination with angels. Weak man may not in fact be an independent rider capable of choosing his own course, but rather a lowly beast ridden either by God or by the Devil. Beings touted as angels may turn out to be devils disguised as agents of light. Moreover, angels may not be accessible through the yellow pages, but may rather be servants of the crucified, risen, and ascended God-Man assigned to guard those who belong to Him. Indeed, our epoch of resurgent paganism may yet find much needed wisdom in the Reformer's charming, naïve, and deeply believing Michaelmas sermon of 1530.

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## MUSLIMS IN CANADA

*Gerhard A. Wilch*

Until a decade or two ago, few people in the West had any contact with Muslims and most had little knowledge of Islam, the religion of Muslims. That has changed. Islam is now the second-largest major religion in Canada and Islamic awareness is disseminated at universities and through the media. A visible expression of the inroads Islam has made is the construction of many new mosques, Muslim centres of worship, in many Canadian cities. Today most Christians living in urban areas have had at least some contact with Muslims, simply because of their large numbers.

The growth is primarily due to Muslims who come as immigrants in response to Canada's need for young, skilled workers, and secondarily a result of conversions to Islam and high birth rates among many Muslims. The 1981 Canadian census reported 98 000 Muslims.<sup>1</sup> Ten years later the figure stood at 253 000.<sup>2</sup> Today Muslims are estimated to number about half a million,<sup>3</sup> which means that they have surpassed the Jews as Canada's second-largest religion. It will be interesting to see the figures of the next census in 2001 when Muslims might be expected to have reached the 700 000 mark, which is the number of Canadians who claim to be Lutheran.<sup>4</sup>

Muslims have had a presence in Canada for more than a century. The first significant number of Muslims were of Lebanese and Syrian origin, arriving at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Initially they settled in the Edmonton area. In 1938 they built their first mosque there. In 1956 a mosque was built in Toronto, in 1963 mosques were erected in Vancouver and Calgary, and two more followed in London (1968) and Winnipeg (1976).<sup>5</sup> Since then the construction of Islamic centres of worship has mushroomed to over 100 in Canada.<sup>6</sup> A vast diversity of Muslims have come to live in Canada, representing many nations, languages, cultures, and religious traditions of the Muslim world.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, "Religions in Canada", in *1981 Census of Canada* (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, "Religions in Canada", in *1991 Census of Canada*, Catalogue Number 93-319 (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1993) Table 1, pp. 8 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with the director of the Muslim World League, 191 The West Mall, Toronto, Ontario. Hereafter cited as Personal Comm. Muslim.

<sup>4</sup> Personal comm. Muslim.

<sup>5</sup> Daood Hassan Hamdani, "Muslims and Christian Life in Canada", in *Islam in North America: A Sourcebook*, ed. M. A. Koszegi and J.G. Melton (New York: Garland Publishers, 1992) 254.

<sup>6</sup> Personal comm. Muslim.

There are many reasons why Muslims have come to North America. These include “push” factors causing them to leave their countries as well as “pull” factors attracting them to Canada. Among the push factors are poverty and economic necessity, political instability, and occasional religious or political strife. Among the first Muslims, pull factors included opportunities for trade and adventure. After 1950 many came primarily for educational reasons, with a large number staying or returning to Canada because of better economic opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

Like other immigrants, Muslim immigrants tend to settle in Canada’s urban centres. The Greater Toronto Area is estimated to be home to 200 000 Muslims.<sup>8</sup> It has been predicted that within a generation most of North America’s city centres will be predominantly Muslim. It is no wonder that a number of downtown church buildings, including Lutheran ones, have been sold and converted into mosques. Educationally, Muslims also tend to be among the top: one quarter of Muslims in Canada have earned university degrees. That is compared to an average of 16 per cent among Lutherans and 15 per cent among Roman Catholics.<sup>9</sup>

Muslim immigrants have been in the habit of organising themselves locally, beginning with the establishment of a mosque where they can gather for daily prayers and Friday worship. The mosque is often the place for Muslim community celebrations, especially religious festivities associated with the breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadan and the feast of sacrifice. Although new immigrants tend to organise themselves along ethnic lines, many current Islamic centres are virtual United Nations where Muslims from many different countries and cultural backgrounds unite for worship and activities. Many of these centres offer lectures on Islam, youth programmes, and classes for teaching children how to recite the Qur’an (the Muslim Scripture) in Arabic. Where the Muslim community is sizeable and sufficiently well organised, elementary and sometimes secondary schooling is provided.

## CHALLENGES FACING MUSLIMS

Muslims who arrived immediately after World War II were often secular in their orientation and assimilated relatively easily into a Christian culture that closely resembled their own traditional Islamic values.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> M. A. Koszegi, “Islam in North America: The First Wave”, in Koszegi, et al., 50.

<sup>8</sup> Personal comm. Muslim.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada, “Religions in Canada”, in *1991 Census of Canada*, Catalogue Number 93-319 (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1993) Table 5, pp. 150 ff.

<sup>10</sup> M. A. Koszegi, “Islam in North America: The First Wave”, in Koszegi, et al., 51.

However, as Canadian culture became more dominated by an anti-religious media and a morally permissive educational philosophy, Muslims found it increasingly difficult to assimilate. As they try to lay down a value system for their children, many are turning to their Islamic heritage and the values of their ancestors. Furthermore, most recent Muslim immigrants are professionals who do not feel as much pressure to assimilate as their working class predecessors did.<sup>11</sup>

It is commonly believed that the more religious Muslim immigrants tend to compartmentalise Islamic familial life from Western societal life and that the less religious will either abandon their Muslim characteristics for Western ones, or become more committed to Islamic principles than they had been previously.<sup>12</sup>

The major source of conflict for the conscientious Muslim arises from the fact that Canada is a non-Islamic country. Islam is based on a comprehensive system of law called the *Sharia*, which involves all aspects of life including the religious, family, social, and political. The question Muslims often face is how much of the *Sharia* must be observed in order to qualify as a Muslim. Must one pray five times daily? Must a woman be veiled? Must a Muslim abstain from alcohol and pork? Some have simply adopted the secular Canadian lifestyle and can only be considered nominal Muslims. Others choose to follow only some of the requirements, like occasional prayer, dietary restrictions, and fasting during the Muslim month of Ramadan. Working Muslims often find it a challenge to find opportunity to pray five times daily and gather for worship on Friday. So they may choose to observe only those practices which are convenient, or to perform them at another time. Thus it seems that under existing circumstances many Muslims do not consider it necessary to follow the letter of the Law. Perhaps the greatest challenge is that voiced by Muslim families who wish to raise their children with Islamically acceptable behaviour and values.<sup>13</sup>

When it comes to social laws involving marriage, divorce, banking, preparing wills, and burying, it can be even more difficult for those living here. To some extent orthodox Muslims who wish to follow the *Sharia* in areas of social and economic life are able to do so where the appropriate Islamic institutions exist. For example, there is a network for Islamic banking in Toronto and it is possible for Muslims to marry and divorce Islamically in Ontario. Canadian society generally has made room for

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<sup>11</sup> Ernest Hahn, *Muslims* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995) 25 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Nimat H. Barazangi, "Islamic Education in the U.S. and Canada: Conception and Practice of the Islamic Belief System", in *The Muslims of America*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 165.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication with the director of the Jami Mosque, 56 Boustead Ave, Toronto, Ontario. Hereafter cited as Personal comm. Jami.

anyone to practice their religion as they choose. Yet even when given the option of doing things Islamically the majority of Muslims still prefer limited involvement in these institutions.<sup>14</sup>

A fundamental inconsistency confronts the Muslim who has chosen to live in the West. It has to do with the fact that Islam is not simply a religion, but an ideology which at its core is incompatible with the Western worldview. Until this century it had been unheard of that Muslims would voluntarily choose to leave an Islamic state for a non-Islamic one. How do Muslims in the West justify their coming to and remaining in a non-Islamic environment? One reason often cited is economic necessity.<sup>15</sup> Another is the excuse that there really is no Muslim nation which truly follows the Islamic Law. Furthermore, the West does not prohibit Muslims from exercising the religious aspects as well as many other aspects of Islamic life. With their increasing numbers in Canada, some serious Muslims are justifying their presence here as being engaged in a struggle to establish an Islamic State.<sup>16</sup> The Muslims of Canada are making progress in establishing Islamic institutions, rooting Muslims in their faith, gaining the right to practise more of the *Sharia* laws, and in attracting converts.

In spite of these freedoms to exercise Islamic practices, the fact remains that most Muslims limit the extent to which they choose to follow them. While a few Muslim leaders are considering the establishment of closed Muslim communities in North America, it may be questionable how viable such a community can be if membership remains voluntary. As formidable as the Muslim community may appear to an outsider, there are still numerous external as well as internal challenges that limit the extent to which the West can be Islamised.

## ISLAMIC MISSION IN NORTH AMERICA

As a religion with universal claims, Islam is a missionary religion. Wherever a Muslim meets a non-Muslim or someone he believes to be an “unbeliever”, it is his duty to invite that person to accept Islam. Muslims refer to this kind of mission activity as *dawah*, an Arabic word with the root meaning of “to call” or “to invite”. Therefore, if one meets a conscientious Muslim it is not uncommon that the topic of religion will be raised early on.

Larry Poston classifies North American Muslim approaches to *dawah* into two basic categories. One approach is the defensive-pacifist approach and the other the offensive-activist. The first characterises the attitude of

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<sup>14</sup> Personal comm. Jami.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 56.

<sup>16</sup> *Arabia: The Islamic World Review* (June 1987): 48.

introversionist Muslims, in the sense that they are concerned primarily with retaining and maintaining their own Islamicity, and not with the extension of that Islamicity through *dawah* to the non-Muslim environment that surrounds them. The second applies to those who want to transform non-Muslim society, at both the individual and communal levels, to reflect Islamic values and beliefs.<sup>17</sup>

Early immigrants to North America tended to be defensive-pacifist in their orientation. They were primarily working class people and would have felt substantial pressure were they not to “fit in”. Most of them were also not overly rigid in their practice of Islam and would adapt their religious traditions to North American ways. Generally, they came to regard their host society as compatible with their beliefs and values. Later immigrants still included many with this outlook. However, many immigrants since World War II include professionals who are under less pressure to blend into Canadian society and who may have a more positive image of Islam, having been influenced by Islamic revival movements in various parts of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Historically, Islam has been spread primarily through an external/institutional approach in which territory was conquered and Islamic institutions set up. Once an Islamic environment existed, the masses could be converted as they desired to participate in the life of that society.<sup>19</sup> Such an approach would seem impossible to apply in the Canadian context, unless a large number of people first become converted. That is why Muslims who are serious about the Islamisation of the West see the conversion of the locals to Islam as a prerequisite to converting the nation’s institutions into Islamic ones.<sup>20</sup> However, to a certain extent, Muslims are already in the process of establishing alternative institutions in the West.

Muslims from many countries have influenced the spread of Islam in North America. Islamic revival movements like the *Jama’at-i Islami* in Pakistan and the *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt have had a great influence among Muslims in the West.<sup>21</sup> Some Islamic nations and individuals from the East provide generous funding for Muslim community revival and outreach among non-Muslims.<sup>22</sup> According to Khurram Murad, the Islamic Movement is

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<sup>17</sup> Larry Poston, “Da’wa in the West”, in Haddad 125 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Larry Poston, *Da’wa in the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 128.

<sup>19</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, “Toward a Comparative Study of Islamization”, in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. N. Levtzion (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979) 11.

<sup>20</sup> Poston, in Haddad 128 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Steven A. Johnson, “Political Activity of Muslims in America”, in Haddad 118f.

<sup>22</sup> Hahn 31.

an organized struggle to change the existing society into an Islamic Society based on the Qur'an and the Sunna [the life and teachings of Muhammad] and make Islam ... supreme and dominant, especially in the socio-political spheres.<sup>23</sup>

However, he recognises that this is the ultimate goal which can only be realised with the support of the general populace who alone have the power to change society into an Islamic Society. The immediate goal is to “communicate the basic message of Islam to every non-Muslim to gain their true understanding of Islam, leading to genuine sympathy for and then to acceptance of the values and concepts which Islam teaches.”<sup>24</sup>

The mosques have generally not been very effective in reaching out to the non-Muslim society. They tend to be oriented more towards reaching the Muslim and his needs. Dissatisfaction with this excessive inward orientation has led some Muslims to establish various “paramosque agencies” whose primary mission it is to do *dawah*.

One of the most activist *dawah* organisations in America has been the Muslim Student Association (MSA). As a Muslim student has put it:

The establishment of the Muslim Student Association in 1963 has been an extremely important step towards not only stopping the disintegration of Muslims in this country but also towards rejuvenating Islam in the hearts and minds of Muslims and conveying the message of Islam to nonmembers.<sup>25</sup>

With Muslim international students studying at most North American colleges and universities, the MSA has a tremendous network with hundreds of chapters covering the continent. In 1983 the organisation boasted more than 45 000 members.<sup>26</sup> While most of the MSA's activities might be geared towards Muslims, their prospectus makes it clear that *dawah* is their chief task.<sup>27</sup> The MSA also runs a separate centre, the North American Islamic Trust, which is responsible for the production and dissemination of Islamic literature in North America, its catalogues listing hundreds of titles, and for the training of “Islamic workers”—individuals who will be effective in communicating the message of Islam to non-Muslims. In 1981, for example, their Department of Correctional Facilities contacted 4000 inmates in 310

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<sup>23</sup> Khurram Murad in Abul A'la Mawdudi, *The Islamic Movement: Dynamics of Values, Power and Change*, trans. Khurram Murad (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1984) 36.

<sup>24</sup> Khurram Murad, *Islamic Movement in the West* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1984) 36.

<sup>25</sup> *The Muslim World* 63 (1973).

<sup>26</sup> “MSA and Family Builds in the U.S.,” *Arabia: The Islamic World Review* (May 1983): 63.

<sup>27</sup> “Know Your MSA”, brochure, n.d.

prisons, enrolling more than five hundred individuals in an Islamic Correspondence Course.<sup>28</sup>

Another paramosque agency dedicated to the spread of Islam in North America is the World Muslim League founded by the Saudi Arabian government in 1962. The League assists Muslim communities wherever they exist with youth camps, summer schools, and other such programmes; it has also provided teachers and religious leaders for Islamic centres, developed prison ministries, provided fellowships and grants for Muslim university professors, contributed to the production of television and radio programmes, and aided in the establishment of Muslim newspapers and journals.<sup>29</sup>

Muslim students turned professionals founded the “Islamic Society of North America” (ISNA) in 1983, which is an important Pan-Islamic organisation.<sup>30</sup> In Canada the “Islamic Circle of North America” was established in 1971, headquartered in Montreal. Other such organisations include the older “Federation of Islamic Associations of the U.S.A. and Canada”, which in Canada has become the “Council of Muslim Communities in Canada”. There are also a number of sectarian Islamic organisations present in Canada, like the Baha’i and Ahmadiyya communities which are also very active in recruiting converts.

In spite of dozens of organisations dedicated to Islamic proclamation in the West, according to Larry Poston, Islamic mission activity in North America is still in its infancy. He believes that Islamic organisations have much more potential growth ahead as they mature in their development of outreach strategies and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. In the years to come it can be expected to see *dawah* activity increase substantially as Muslims gain confidence in themselves as the bearers of a viable religious alternative for North American society.<sup>31</sup>

## EPILOGUE

How are Christians reacting to the increasing numbers of Muslims and their influence in Canada? Understandably, people tend to react negatively to something new and unfamiliar. But what is a proper Christian attitude in the face of the challenge of Islam in North America? Perhaps we need to ask

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<sup>28</sup> “Know Your MSA”, brochure.

<sup>29</sup> S. Mazhar Hussain, *Proceedings of the First Islamic Conference of North America* (New York: Muslim World League, 1977).

<sup>30</sup> Sulayman S. Nyang, “Convergence and Divergence in an Emergent Community: A Study of Challenges facing U.S. Muslims”, in Haddad 242.

<sup>31</sup> Poston, in Haddad 126, 134.



ourselves why God has brought them to Canada. Muslims come from many countries that have yet to be reached with the Gospel. Being in Canada certainly makes reaching them much easier. Their presence among us is also a strong reminder for Christians of the 1.2 billion Muslims around the world, most of who still have not heard the message of God's love.

Unfortunately, barriers of language, culture and a long history of mutual animosity lead many Christians to regard Muslim missions as a "mission impossible" and thereby to excuse themselves from any serious encounter with Muslims. The challenge of Islam here in Canada may be a wake-up call for us finally to take the global task of Muslim missions seriously. It is not going to be easy. Yet God promises that His Word will not return to Him void.

Muslims from all over the world are present in Canada where they can be reached with relative ease. And a number of them are being reached, often in spite of the fact that Christian efforts to reach them are virtually nil. Some of these converts have returned to their countries, bringing the Gospel to places they know and people they can relate to, whose customs they are familiar with.

There is a spiritual hunger throughout much of the Muslim world. Many Muslims are yearning for something their religion cannot offer them: the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins and to know their Heavenly Father. It is my conviction that God has brought the Muslims to Canada as part of His plan to spread the message of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and to make us aware of our true heavenly calling in this world as ambassadors of His love—even to the Muslim.

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## LUTHER ON JAMES: A CURIOUS OVERSIGHT

*Glen E. Zweck*

### 1. TWO COMMON MISTAKES

In many of the discussions on the question of Luther and the Letter of St James, there is a serious distortion that arises from two related mistakes.

The first mistake, the “curious oversight” referred to in the title, is that of beginning the discussion with comments from Luther’s introduction to James in the September Testament of 1522. This error results from the oversight of ignoring the prior comments on the subject in his introduction to Hebrews, and thus distorting his comments in the introduction to James by taking them out of their proper context. What Luther says in his introduction to James presupposes what he had earlier said in the introduction to Hebrews.

The second mistake is misunderstanding Luther’s comments on apostolicity in his introduction to the Letter of St James, as if this were a new and subjective criterion of canonicity invented by Luther himself, and intended by him to replace the former criteria.

### 2. GOSPEL-REDUCTIONISM: THE ISSUE DEFINED

A good illustration of these errors, and the resultant evil consequences, is provided by the editorial comments in volume 35 of the American Edition of *Luther’s Works*. These evil consequences are far-reaching indeed, and go to the heart of the dispute over Luther’s understanding of Scripture. In particular, they have to do with that form of “Gospel-reductionism” which, under the plea of following Luther’s Christocentric interpretation of Scripture, turns the material principle of Christian theology (defining the essence of the Gospel) into a formal principle (defining the source of Christian theology). “Gospel-reductionists” frequently accuse the confessional theologians in the LC–MS of turning the formal principle (the Scripture principle) into a material principle (the Gospel principle): charging them with teaching that we are saved by the inerrancy of Scripture. Actually, the boot is entirely on the other foot. It is the “Gospel-reductionists” who turn the material principle (the Christ principle) into a formal principle, by teaching that only that in Scripture is God’s Word which *treibt Christum* “inculcates Christ”. In doing this, they seek to enlist Luther on their side, as if he taught that only that in Scripture

is God's Word which *treibt Christum* "inculcates Christ", and that there are other words in Scripture which do not *treiben Christum* "inculcate Christ", and, therefore, are not fully inspired. To this end, they insist that Luther held to a "canon within the Canon". In other words, they contend that Luther, like themselves, maintained that there are some things in Scripture which are not fully inspired, and which, therefore, are canonical only in a secondary sense. Thus, they speak of proto-canonical and of deuterocanonical books in Scripture.

However, the fact is that Luther would have recoiled with horror from any suggestion that the interpreter may distinguish in Scripture between that, on the one hand, which is God's Word and that, on the other hand, which is not God's Word. One does not have to read very far in Luther before one realises that, for him, that which is in Scripture is, by that very fact, God's Word. Robert Preus cites the research of W. Bodamer, who found over one thousand citations in which Luther clearly asserted that the Bible is the Word of God.<sup>1</sup> Luther passes remarks like the following: "So then Scripture is God's own testimony concerning Himself",<sup>2</sup> or "God has spoken the whole Scripture."<sup>3</sup>

### 3. THE BASIS OF GOSPEL-REDUCTIONISM

Luther knows nothing of different levels of canonicity or different degrees of inspiration. Something is either God's Word or not God's Word, inspired or not inspired, canonical or not canonical. The "Gospel-reductionists" have based their argument upon a complete misunderstanding of Luther's comments on James.

This error of "Gospel-reductionism" is epitomised by the following comment in the editor's "Introduction" to the "Prefaces to the Books of the Bible", in Volume 35 of the American Edition of *Luther's Works*:

Luther's prefaces, however, brought something new by means of which he revealed his understanding of the Scriptures, namely a set of value judgments and a ranking of the books into categories. For him the Gospel of John and the Epistles of Paul as well as 1 Peter rank as "the true kernel and marrow of all the books." As books of secondary rank come Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. While Luther's assigning of a standard of values to the New Testament books may have been simply an

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Preus, "Luther and Biblical Infallibility", in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984) 121 n. 68. See W. Bodamer, "Luthers Stellung zur Lehre von der Verbalinspiration", *Theologische Quartalschrift* 34 (1936).

<sup>2</sup> Preus 117 n. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Preus 117 n. 44.

act of religious devotion, it proved to be also, as Holl readily points out, a pioneering step toward modern biblical scholarship. Luther's prefaces are thus more than simply popular introductions for lay readers. They reveal a theological position of christocentricity which inevitably affects his understanding of the New Testament canon.<sup>4</sup>

Note the explicit claim that Luther's comments on James enunciate his understanding of Scripture. Note also the implicit claim that Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation are books of secondary rank within Scripture and within the canon. Note further the implicit claim that Luther operated with a Christocentric principle as a canon within the canon, distinguishing, on the one hand, between that within Scripture which is God's Word and, on the other hand, that within Scripture which is not God's Word. These three claims advance the notion that not everything in Scripture is truly canonical, and that not everything in Scripture is truly God's Word. All three of these claims are demonstrably false. With the fall of these three claims, the additional implicit claim, that Luther is the father of modern historical criticism, also falls.

#### **4. LUTHER'S ATTITUDE: THE RIGHT PLACE TO START**

The appropriate starting-point for a consideration of the question of Luther's attitude to the canon, specifically with reference to the Letter of James, is not the statement in Luther's Preface to the Epistles of St James and St Jude, to which most commentators appeal, but to the prior statement in his "Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews". The September Testament includes a "Preface to the New Testament", which serves as an introduction to all four Gospels. This is followed by a "Preface to the Acts of the Apostles". This, in turn, is followed by a lengthy "Preface to St Paul's Epistle to the Romans", which Luther intended as a general introduction to the second part of the New Testament, matching the earlier introduction to the Gospels.<sup>5</sup> This is followed by much shorter Prefaces to First Corinthians, Second Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, First Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians, First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon, First Peter, Second Peter, and then a "Preface to the Three Epistles of St John".

At this point, at the end of the list of the books numbered in the Weimar Edition, a significant change takes place. The "Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews" is obviously intended as an introduction to all the books that follow:

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<sup>4</sup> AE 35:231f.

<sup>5</sup> AE 35:365 n. 15.

Up to this point we have had to do with the true and certain chief books of the New Testament. The four which follow have from ancient times had a different reputation.<sup>6</sup>

The four books that follow are: Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. The question that arises is what Luther meant by saying that the whole number of books prior to this are to be considered “the true and certain chief books” of the New Testament, and what is the consequent status of the four that follow. There are many who at this point begin to talk of “proto-canonical” books versus “deutero-canonical” books, as if we were dealing with two different grades of canonicity, and thus two different degrees of being God’s Word. That certainly was not Luther’s meaning. As the editor of AE 35 notes, in a catalogue of “The Books of the New Testament” that followed immediately upon his “Preface to the New Testament” Luther listed, and numbered, 23 books of the New Testament, in the same order in which they appear in today’s English Bibles. The four books in question, however, are listed separately at the end, and are not numbered. This catalogue is printed in the Weimar Edition,<sup>7</sup> but is not reproduced in the American Edition. This is precisely the same procedure that Luther later (from 1534 onwards) followed in listing the apocryphal books of the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup> It is self-evident that Luther intended thereby to grant them similar status.

## 5. WERE THE OT APOCRYPHA SCRIPTURE FOR LUTHER?

What was Luther’s estimation of the status of the Old Testament Apocrypha? It is clear that he did not consider them to be part of the canon of Scripture. They appear in his German Bible for the first time in 1534, when the Old Testament was published as a complete unit for the first time. Earlier editions of the Pentateuch had contained a list of the “24” canonical books of the Old Testament, numbered in sequence, in the same order which they still occupy in the English Bible. These 24 books, as the Jews counted them, include all thirty-nine books which we today have in the Old Testament (counting the twelve Minor Prophets as one book, and Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles as one book each, and adding Lamentations to Jeremiah). After this list follows an unnumbered list of the apocryphal books: Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Ezra, the Book of Wisdom, Wise Man, and Maccabees.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> AE 35:394.

<sup>7</sup> WA DB 6:12.

<sup>8</sup> WA DB 1:35.

<sup>9</sup> AE 35:337 n. 1.

In the 1534 edition of Luther's Bible (the first edition of the complete Bible), the following title precedes the list of apocrypha: "Apocrypha: these books are not held equal to the Scriptures but are useful and good to read."<sup>10</sup> Nothing could be clearer than this: the Apocrypha are not Scripture, and therefore not canonical. There is certainly no justification here for the distinction that some have drawn, between "proto-canonical" and "deutero-canonical" books. The books are either Scripture or not, either canonical or not.

Nor is it legitimate to blather on about an ambiguity between the Hebrew canon and the Greek canon. Luther's list of apocryphal books does not coincide with the listing in either the Septuagint or the Vulgate. He accepts the Hebrew canon, and knows nothing of a supposed Greek canon. One could, perhaps, make out a case for "proto-apocryphal" versus "deutero-apocryphal", if that would do any good. But, even that finds no support in Luther. For him the question is: either canonical or not canonical, either Scripture or not Scripture, or either apocrypha or not apocrypha. He does not deal here in greys or in a sliding scale, but in black and white: either it is God's Word or it is not God's Word—or rather, either it is God's Word or it is man's word. Luther knows nothing of degrees of inspiration, or of degrees of being God's Word.

In Luther's translation of the Old Testament Apocrypha, Judith appears first. The Preface to Judith begins as follows:

If one could prove from established and reliable histories that the events in Judith really happened, it could be a notable and fine book, and should properly be in the Bible. Yet it hardly squares with the historical accounts of the Holy Scriptures, especially Jeremiah and Ezra.<sup>11</sup>

Two conclusions may be drawn from this statement. In the first place, lest someone begin to entertain theories about Luther's supposed willingness to subordinate Scripture to external authorities, it is clear that when he writes of "established and reliable histories", he is thinking of books within the canon, not of histories outside the canon. The two examples he specifies are Jeremiah and Ezra. In the second place, Luther did not consider Judith to be canonical, that is "part of the Bible". He merely suggests that it would be worthy of being in the canon, if canonical books supported its reliability.

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<sup>10</sup> AE 35:337 n. 1.

<sup>11</sup> AE 35:337.

## 6. WAS JAMES SCRIPTURE FOR LUTHER?

Already in 1519, Luther revealed doubts about James' status as Scripture:

However, since the letter of the apostle James teaches "Faith without works is dead", in the first place, the style of that letter is far below apostolic majesty, and should not be compared with the Pauline [style] in any way, since St Paul speaks of living faith. For dead faith is not faith, but fancy. But see the theologians, they fasten their teeth upon this one notion, caring for nothing beyond that, although the whole of the rest of Scripture commends faith without works; for this is their custom, to raise their horns from one snippet of the text torn out of context, contrary to the whole of Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

Luther also expressed doubts about the canonicity of James in the "Babylonian Captivity", in 1520. When he came to consider the so-called sacrament of extreme unction, he demonstrated that, even if James is taken to be canonical, it does not teach this sacrament. But he does express doubts about its canonicity:

I will say nothing of the fact that many assert with much probability that this epistle is not by James the apostle, and that it is not worthy of an apostolic spirit; although, whoever was its author, it has come to be regarded as authoritative.<sup>13</sup>

When Luther gets to write the Preface to the Epistles of St James and St Jude, he begins:

Though this epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and consider it a good book, because it sets up no doctrines of men but vigorously promulgates the law of God. However, to state my own opinion about it, though without prejudice to anyone, I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle, and my reasons follow.<sup>14</sup>

Two things should be learned from this statement. In the first place, Luther is relying upon external evidence, in the shape of the testimony of "the ancients", in excluding James from the canon. In the second place, he is willing to let others disagree, and to include James in the canon.

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<sup>12</sup> "Resolutiones Lutherianae Sver Propositionibus Svis Lipsiae Disputatis", WA 2:425.10-16: "Quod autem Jacobi Apostoli epistola inducitur 'Fides sine operibus mortua est', primum stilus epistolae illius longe est infra Apostolicam maiestatem nec cum Paulino ullo modo comparandus, deinde de fide viva loquitur Paulus. Nam fides mortua non est fides, sed opinio. At vide theologos, hanc unam auctoritatem mordicus tenent, nihil prorsus curantes, quod tota aliena scriptura fidem sine operibus commendat: hic enim mos eorum est, una abrepta oratiuncula textus contra totam scripturam cornua erigere." My trans.

<sup>13</sup> AE 36:118.

<sup>14</sup> AE 35:395f.

To support Luther's claim that James was rejected by the ancients, the editor of AE 35 refers to the following statement of Eusebius:

Such is the story of James, whose is said to be the first of the Epistles called Catholic. It is to be observed that its authenticity is denied, since few of the ancients quote it, as is also the case with the Epistle called St. Jude's.<sup>15</sup>

Once again, it is clear that Luther excluded James from the canon on the basis of external evidence, not on the basis of a private "canon within the canon". What he says subsequently is said in justification of the decision of the ancient church, not of his own conclusion.

Nor does the fact that he calls James "a good book" necessarily imply that he includes it in the canon, because he said something very similar concerning the apocryphal books of the Old Testament: "these books are not held equal to the Scriptures but are useful and good to read".<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the Preface to the Epistles of St James and St Jude, in every printing of Luther's New Testament from 1522 to 1529, included the following disclaimer:

Therefore I will not have him in my Bible to be numbered among the true chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him. One man is no man in worldly things; how, then, should this single man alone avail against Paul and all the rest of Scripture?<sup>17</sup>

From 1530 onward, this comment was amended as follows:

Therefore I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him.<sup>18</sup>

The significance of the amendment may be debated. It seems to be the case that, from 1530 onwards, Luther was less insistent about excluding James from the canon. That seems to follow from his omission of "I will not have him in my Bible", coupled with the omission of the word "true". This sentence thus could be interpreted by those who wished to retain James within the canon as a denigration of James, not in relation to the canonical books as such, but in relation to the most valuable books within the canon. In other words, while the Preface does not necessarily indicate that Luther had changed his mind about the canonicity of James, his comment is more even-handed, for the sake of those who wished to retain James in the canon.

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<sup>15</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II:xxiii.25; AE 35:395f. n. 47.

<sup>16</sup> AE 35:337 n. 1.

<sup>17</sup> AE 35: 397 n. 55.

<sup>18</sup> AE 35:397 n. 55.



Note a similar watering down, also in 1530, of strictures against the Epistle to the Hebrews. Where he had previously written “This is contrary to all the gospels and to St. Paul”, he now writes “this **seems to be** contrary to all the gospels and to St. Paul”.<sup>19</sup>

However, what cannot be debated is that, at least prior to 1530, Luther did not for himself include the Epistle of St James in the canon of the New Testament. He did not consider it to be part of his Bible. For him, it was not Scripture. However, he regarded the extent of the canon to be an historical question, not a dogmatic question. He therefore conceded to others the right to differ from his judgement and to include James in their Bible.

## 7. DID LUTHER CHANGE HIS MIND ABOUT JAMES?

Nor is there any indication that Luther changed his estimation of James in later years. This is demonstrated a number of times in his Table Talk. For example, one anecdote, probably from 1540, runs:

Only the Papists accept James on account of the righteousness by works, but my opinion is that it is not the writing of an apostle, especially because it calls faith body and the works soul. This is apparently absurd and against Scripture. Some day I will use James to fire my stove. We can adorn and excuse it, but only with great difficulties.<sup>20</sup>

No one who has read deeply in Luther, and has come to understand his theology of the Word, would find it possible for him to speak in this way about a book that he considered to be part of the Bible. On the contrary, his attitude toward Scripture was quite the reverse, as the following examples demonstrate:

A single letter, yea, a single tittle, of Scripture counts for more than heaven and earth.<sup>21</sup>

It is impossible that there is a single letter in Paul which the entire church should not follow and observe.<sup>22</sup>

And so the entire Holy Scriptures are attributed to the Holy Ghost, together with the outward Word and Sacrament, which touch and move our outward ears and senses. ... David will not countenance the words to be ascribed to him. They are “pleasant, agreeable psalms of Israel,” he says, but I did not make them up; rather, “the Spirit of the Lord has

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<sup>19</sup> AE 35:395 n. 45; emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> WA TR 5, no. 5854. Qtd John Michael Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (repr. *The Springfielder*, August 1960): 26.

<sup>21</sup> Qtd Preus 132f.

<sup>22</sup> Qtd Preus 133.

spoken through me.” ... The Holy Scriptures are spoken through the Holy Ghost according to the statement of David.<sup>23</sup>

An anecdote from 1542 reads:

The Epistle of James we have thrown out from this school [Wittenberg], because it has no value. It has not one syllable about Christ. It does not even mention Christ once, except in the beginning. I hold it is written by some Jew who heard only a dim sound concerning Christ but no clear, distinct message; and because he had heard that the Christians put great emphasis on faith in Christ, he thought I will oppose them and emphasize works. And this he did. Of the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ, this heart of the preaching of all the apostles, he does not say a word. Then, there is no order nor method. Now he speaks of clothes, now of wrath, jumps from one thing to another. He uses this simile: As the body does not live without the soul, so faith is nothing without works. O Mary, Madonna! What a poor simile! He compares faith with body while it should rather be compared with soul. Already the ancients saw this, therefore they did not number this Epistle with the Catholic Epistles.<sup>24</sup>

Note, once again, Luther’s appeal to the external evidence to settle the question of canonicity: “Already the ancients saw this, therefore they did not number this Epistle with the Catholic Epistles.”

Another anecdote reads: “Here at Wittenberg we nearly thrust James out of the Bible.”<sup>25</sup> There may be reason to query whether the *schir* (= *schier*), translated here as “nearly”, should be understood as a synonym of *rein* “completely” or as a synonym of *beinahe* “nearly”. In any case, this statement should be understood in harmony with other statements of Luther. He has elsewhere consistently made it clear that, for himself, he does not consider James to be part of the Bible. Some wish to take this statement as something of a retraction, as if he is now willing to grant James a kind of “deutero-canonical” status. Such an interpretation would contradict what Luther has said on this subject, both before and after this time. Some wish to reinterpret this statement, as if Luther had said “I”, and not “we”. A more likely explanation is that we should note the “we” and the “here at Wittenberg”, and interpret this statement in keeping with the statement recorded from 1542: “The Epistle of James we have thrown out from this

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<sup>23</sup> Qtd Preus 119.

<sup>24</sup> WA TR 5, no. 5443. Qtd Reu 26.

<sup>25</sup> Qtd Reu 26. WA TR 5, nNo. 5974: “Jeckel wollen wir schir aus dem Bibel stoßen hie zu Wittenberg, denn er redt nichts von Christo ne una quidem syllaba nisi in principio et praeludio et videtur contradicere Paulo nec de euangelio nec de lege recte loquitur. Ich hallt, es sey ein Jud gewest, der hab gesehen, das die christen souil de fide sagen, und hab die epistel dawider gemacht: Ey, es soll nit als der glaub sein; es mußen auch werk etwas sein! Es ist der papisten epistel. Sie nemen sich keiner so hefftig an als der. Paulum laßen sie wol stehen.”

school.”<sup>26</sup> What seems to be indicated by comparison of these two statements is that a virtual consensus had been reached in Wittenberg: that the majority on the Wittenberg faculty agreed with Luther in excluding James from the canon, but that there was still a minority who supported its retention in the canon. Neither statement necessarily implies any weakening of Luther’s own conviction on the subject. Quite the contrary is revealed by the commentary that he adds.

In 1543 Luther refused to accept a citation from James, because this Epistle lacks the necessary authority.<sup>27</sup>

### 8. “THE TRUE AND NOBLEST BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT”

It is true that Luther does distinguish within Scripture between those books that he regarded as particularly valuable against the rest; just as Christ distinguished, on the one hand, between the Twelve whom He loved (John 15:9), and, on the other hand, “the disciple whom he loved” (John 13:23) from within the Twelve.

One of the favourite passages of the Gospel-reductionists occurs in the general Preface to the New Testament. These comments did not appear in any edition of the complete Bible (1534 onward), nor did they appear in separate editions of the New Testament that were published from 1534 to 1537. They appeared in the editions of the New Testament from 1522 to 1534. In this passage, Luther distinguishes between the books in the New Testament canon, expressing greater appreciation for some than for others. He heads the section: “Which are the true and noblest books of the New Testament?” He is thus announcing his intention of directing his readers’ attention to those books in Scripture which ought to have priority for them. He thus specifies:

John’s Gospel and St. Paul’s epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter’s first epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought properly to be the foremost books, and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most, and by daily reading to make them as much his own as his daily bread.<sup>28</sup>

He then gives his reason for ranking these as the most valuable of the books of the New Testament:

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<sup>26</sup> WA TR 5, no. 5443. Qtd Reu 26.

<sup>27</sup> See Reu 26f. and Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte I, Luther* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1923) 561 n. 6.

<sup>28</sup> AE 35:361f.

For in them you do not find many miracles of Christ described, but you do find depicted in masterly fashion how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives life, righteousness, and salvation. This is the real nature of the gospel, as you have heard.

His reason is thus a practical one: these are the books of the New Testament which most clearly describe the way of salvation for the beginner. In particular, they explain how the words and works of Christ relate to our own faith:

If I had to do without one or the other—either the works or the preaching of Christ—I would rather do without the works than without his preaching. For the works do not help me, but the words give life, as he himself says [John 6:63]. Now John writes very little about the works of Christ, but very much about his preaching, while the other evangelists write much about his works and little about his preaching. Therefore John's Gospel is the one fine, true, and chief gospel, and is far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them. So too, the epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.<sup>29</sup>

It would be a serious mistake to isolate from its context the statement, “the works do not help me, but the words give life”, and conclude that the factuality of the New Testament events is unimportant, and that all that is important is the spiritual truths that they convey. That would be a falsification of Luther's words. He himself has set the context: “If I had to do without one or the other”.

The principle to which Luther is here alluding is a very important one. Under the influence of dialectical theology in the twentieth century, we have seen theologians advancing the thesis that Scripture is not God's Word, but simply a record, medium, or witness of God's Word. The implication is that God merely acts, but that it is the task of the theologian to interpret for his own generation the meaning of those acts of God. A further implication is that this meaning may validly vary from one generation to another and from one person to another.

Against this whole line of thinking, Luther asserts the thesis that, in a pinch, it is more important for the Christian to have Christ's interpretation of His acts than to have the apostles' descriptions of those acts. The validity of Luther's argument here may easily be ascertained by several simple tests. In the first place, have a look at the exposition of Luther's Small Catechism in the LC-MS synodical catechism, and analyse where most of the proof-texts come from: the synoptic Gospels, or the Epistles of St Paul?

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<sup>29</sup> AE 35:362.

In the second place, consider the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? Is it not a fact that we know the meaning of Christ's crucifixion only because God Himself has explained this meaning to us in His Word? He is not only the God Who Acts, but is also the God Who Speaks. If He had not spoken to us, His acts would have benefited us nothing (compare Romans 10:14). That is the point that Luther is making about the works of Christ and His words. If we had only the works, their meaning would be subject to misinterpretation. Therefore, we need God's own interpretation of the meaning of those deeds. All Luther is saying is that, in a pinch, the words are more necessary for us than the deeds. On this basis, he values the doctrinal books of the New Testament more highly than the narrative books (although these titles—"doctrinal" and "narrative"—are only relative: no book of the New Testament is exclusively "doctrinal", and no book is exclusively "narrative").

In all of this discussion about the comparative values of the four Gospels and of the Epistles, there is, so far, no hint of a distinction between that which is God's Word and that which is not God's Word. All of those discussed are equally considered to be God's Word, even if some present the Gospel more succinctly than others:

In a word St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear another book or doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

It must be remembered that these words were originally written for people who had never had access to the New Testament as such in their own language, but who were acquainted only with the pericopes they heard read out in church. Suddenly, a new treasure is being placed into their hands: the whole New Testament, and in their own language. How should they make best use of it? That is what Luther is concerned to tell them.

It is also important to note that, in this Preface, Luther does not appeal to the *was Christum treibt* "what inculcates Christ" principle. That is not the point at issue between these noblest books and the rest of the New Testament, as it is between James and all the books of the New Testament. Therefore, Luther uses the verb *zeigen* "show", rather than *treiben* "inculcate". His point is that **all** the books of the New Testament *treiben* "inculcate" Christ, but some of them—in the way he has spelled out above—*zeigen* "show" Him more succinctly than others. But, when it comes to the Letter of James, the story is different.

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<sup>30</sup> AE 35:362.

## 9. “AN EPISTLE OF STRAW”

The following sentence of Luther’s, in itself, is admittedly capable of a variety of interpretations:

Therefore St. James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it. But more of this in the other prefaces.<sup>31</sup>

By itself, it would be possible to argue that this sentence is including James as a book of the New Testament, but of a lower value than the epistles of St Paul and St Peter. Even that would depend upon the interpretation of the phrase “epistle of straw”. This phrase is undoubtedly an allusion to I Corinthians 3:12. This allusion is clear, on account of the citation of I Corinthians 3:12 in the Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews. The question needs to be asked whether St Paul, in employing this image, and Luther, in citing it, intends it to be a reference to false doctrine, or to incompetent ministry, or even to a preoccupation to irrelevant pursuits. That question will have to be taken up elsewhere.

However, Luther does not let this sentence stand by itself. He places it in a specific context. That context is “the other prefaces”. Note the plural. He thereby places the Letter of James in another category from the books he has just discussed: it needs further treatment elsewhere.

Clearly, the Preface to the Epistles of St James and St Jude is one of these prefaces. Just as clearly, the Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews is another. Both of these Prefaces make it clear that Luther does not include St James in the canon. On balance, therefore, it must be held that, in the last paragraph of the Preface to the New Testament, Luther is contrasting the Epistle of St James, outside the canon, with the best books within the canon.

## 10. A CANON WITHIN THE CANON?

Therefore, Pelikan is guilty of a serious distortion of Luther’s teaching about Scripture:

Within the received canon Luther made sharp distinctions, to the point of constructing a private miniature canon.<sup>32</sup>

In this instance, Pelikan explains what he means, by referring to his comments in the introduction to Volume 21 of the American Edition:

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<sup>31</sup> AE 35:362.

<sup>32</sup> AE Companion Volume, *Luther the Expositor* 87f.

Thus Luther could construct a “miniature canon” of the New Testament, consisting of the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Paul (especially Romans), and the First Epistle of Peter.<sup>33</sup>

This really is quite overblown. Pelikan is guilty of ignoring the context in which these remarks of Luther were made. They were made in the introduction to the New Testament, in the first edition of his German translation of the New Testament (1522). The situation is that many of the readers for whom Luther had prepared this translation would now have access to the New Testament for the first time. Before this, they had to rely upon the reading of the pericopes in Latin. A few may have had access to inferior German translations made from the Vulgate. But, by and large, his readers would be confronted for the first time with the whole New Testament. Luther certainly is not attempting to assert that the Synoptic Gospels are any less Scripture than is the Gospel according to St John, or that the Catholic Epistles are any less the Word of God than the Letters of St Paul. His comments are in no way an attempt to establish a canon within the canon, but simply good advice on where they should begin their reading of the New Testament Scriptures. Furthermore, Pelikan’s remarks are plainly mischievous, in that he implies that, for Luther, the “canon within the canon” includes the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Paul, and First Peter, over against all the rest, including James, while Luther himself indicates that James is in a different category: more needs to be said about it elsewhere.

## 11. DID LUTHER REDEFINE CANONICITY?

It is a complete misunderstanding of Luther’s comments on apostolicity to imagine that he is here inventing a new principle, of a “canon within the canon”. He is simply adhering to the criteria established by the early church, which held apostolic content to be every bit as important as apostolic origin. He is being consistent with the practice of adhering to both the formal principle of the faith and the material principle. It is not legitimate to turn one of these principles against the other. Scripture is God’s authoritative Word both because it comes forth from God (formal principle) and because it proclaims Christ (material principle). Lutheran theology has never admitted the validity of making any doctrinal issue church-divisive unless it really is a doctrinal issue: that is, unless it impinges upon the Gospel, the material principle of the faith. This principle is expressed repeatedly in the Book of Concord. For example, consider the following paragraph from the Preface to the Book of Concord:

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<sup>33</sup> AE 21:xv.

It is a matter of common knowledge, patent and unconcealed, what very perilous events and troublesome disturbances took place in our beloved German fatherland shortly after the Christian death of that enlightened and pious person, Dr. Martin Luther, and how in this anguished situation and amid the disruption of well-ordered government the foe of mankind bestirred himself to scatter his seed of false doctrine and discord and to bring about destructive and scandalous division in churches and schools so that he might thereby adulterate the pure doctrine of God's Word, sever the bond of Christian charity and agreement, and in this way hold back and perceptibly impede the course of the holy Gospel.<sup>34</sup>

If the formal and material principles are misused, by placing them in opposition to one another, one of two errors results.

If the formal principle is placed against the material principle, for example, by appealing to the formal principle to the exclusion of the material principle, the result is legalism. The commands of the Law are placed upon the same level as the promises of the Gospel, and perfection of life is placed upon the same level as perfection of doctrine. In effect, the formal principle is turned into a material principle, and salvation is made dependent upon obedience to the demands of Scripture. This inevitably involves a distortion of the Gospel. What can happen all too easily is that questions of church fellowship are determined on the basis of the Law, by matters of life and behaviour, rather than by matters of faith and doctrine, on the basis of the Gospel. This error is characteristic of Evangelicalism, and of Pietism.

On the other hand, if the material principle is urged against the formal principle, it is thereby turned into a formal principle. This is exactly what has happened, as a result of the application of the so-called "christological principle", in liberal Lutheranism. This principle is used to distinguish within Scripture between that which is accepted as God's Word and that which is not regarded as God's Word. Thus it can happen that certain parts of Scripture are accepted as God's Word, on the grounds that they "inculcate Christ", while other parts of Scripture are relegated to an inferior position, on the grounds that they are peripheral to the "Christ principle". Hence, one may insist that only the doctrinal content of Scripture is God's Word, and therefore inerrant, while certain peripheral parts of Scripture may be considered not to be God's Word, and therefore not inerrant.

Against this heresy, Luther maintained that the whole of Scripture "urges Christ". For him, the "Christ principle" decided, not between that within Scripture which is God's Word and that within Scripture which is not God's Word, but between that which is God's Word, and therefore Scripture, and that which is not God's Word, and therefore not Scripture.

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<sup>34</sup> Tappert 3f.



This can be demonstrated by many of Luther's statements. Note the following:

The entire Scripture points only to Christ.<sup>35</sup>

Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what else will you find in them?<sup>36</sup>

The cross of Christ appears everywhere in Scripture.<sup>37</sup>

All Scripture teaches nothing else but the cross.<sup>38</sup>

One must not understand Scripture contrary to Christ, but in favor of him; therefore Scripture must be brought into relation to Christ or must not be regarded as Scripture.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, the futility of the "Gospel reductionist" approach is revealed by the inextricably interwoven nature of the formal and material principles. As soon as one appeals to the "Christ principle", the need arises of defining **which** Christ? The Christ of Islam? The Christ of the New Age? Of course, the only Christ with whom the Christian has to deal is the **Christ of Scripture**. One cannot have a "Christ principle" apart from the "Scripture principle" and remain a Christian. To be a Christian, one must adhere to both, equally.

## 12. APOSTOLICITY AND CHRISTOCENTRICITY.

In equating Christocentricity and apostolicity, Luther was simply being faithful to the content of the Scriptures themselves, and to the practice of the ancient church.

Justin Martyr insisted that apostolicity was the criterion adopted for the establishment of the canon. In his First Apology (AD 155), he writes:

And on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits.<sup>40</sup>

The equating here of the "memoirs of the apostles" with the "writings of the prophets" shows that it is Scripture that is being referred to. The definition of the canon of Scripture implies those books that are read in the regular worship services. Just as the criterion for the canonicity of the Old Testament was the prophetic authority of the writings, so also the criterion

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<sup>35</sup> Qtd Preus 112.

<sup>36</sup> Qtd Preus 112f.

<sup>37</sup> Qtd Preus 113.

<sup>38</sup> Qtd Preus 113.

<sup>39</sup> Qtd Preus 114.

<sup>40</sup> *Apology* I:67.3; *Library of Christian Classics* I:287.

for the canonicity of the New Testament is apostolicity. On this basis, for example, Mark was accepted in the canon, on the understanding that Mark was the “hermeneute” of the Apostle Peter,<sup>41</sup> and Luke likewise, on the grounds that he was the associate of the Apostle Paul.<sup>42</sup>

Actually, no one issued a set of guidelines for the early Christian congregations to use as criteria in selecting the canonical books of the New Testament. These books selected themselves by convincing thousands of individual Christians and congregations to accept them as canonical. Rather, this was the work of the Holy Spirit, who had inspired those books. He imposed these books upon the early Christian congregations, by creating in these congregations the acknowledgement of His presence. It is this acknowledgement that Justin labelled as apostolicity.

In fact, Metzger identifies three grounds for acceptance of books into the canon of the New Testament, insisting that these criteria were established during the Second Century AD, and remained unmodified thereafter.<sup>43</sup> These three are:

- (1) orthodoxy: conformity to the rule of faith, the basic Christian tradition recognised as normative by the church;
- (2) apostolicity;
- (3) consensus among the churches: continuous acceptance and usage by the church at large.<sup>44</sup>

In speaking of apostolicity, these Christians, such as Justin Martyr, were undoubtedly motivated by substantially the same scriptural argument as was Luther. He points to Christ’s word to His apostles in John 15:27: “You shall bear witness to me.”<sup>45</sup> That is what an apostle is by definition (Acts 1:16-21). An apostle is by definition an apostle of Jesus Christ. No one can be accepted as an apostle who does not proclaim Christ. Luther explains the meaning of Christ’s words in John 15:27:

All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate Christ. And that is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ. For all the Scriptures show us Christ [Romans 3:21], and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ [1 Corinthians 2:2]. Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever

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<sup>41</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 83.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 253.

<sup>43</sup> Metzger 254.

<sup>44</sup> Metzger 251-54.

<sup>45</sup> AE 35:396.

preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.<sup>46</sup>

Although the graphic way in which Luther expresses himself here gives ample opportunity for the stupid or the malicious to start up any number of hares, what he says is profoundly true.

Note, first of all, that Luther is not setting up a test here by means of which one may judge within Scripture between that which is Word of God and that which is not Word of God. On the contrary, his reference to “all the **genuine sacred** books” makes it clear that he is concerned here about the distinction between that which is Scripture (“all the Scriptures”) and that which is not Scripture (compare the “**true chief** books of”). As we have seen above, passage after passage in Luther indicates that if something is Scripture it is Word of God. Luther is here speaking of a criterion of canonicity itself, not of a criterion for a “canon within the canon”. He is spelling out a canonical principle, not only a hermeneutical rule. In this, he was imitating the early church.

In keeping with this principle, the Lutheran Church has always insisted that division in the church is permissible only where the Gospel itself is at stake.

The “not yet” in the above citation from Luther was changed in 1530 from the simple “not”. This does not necessarily imply any change of meaning. It was, presumably, an attempt to help those who are dull in understanding to get the point. The point is that true apostolicity includes not only that which originates from an apostle, but also that which does what an apostle by definition (Acts 1:16-21) does: bear witness to Christ.

If we wish to insist that apostolicity is limited in meaning to that which originates from an apostle, we create all sorts of problems for ourselves. We would have to maintain, for example, that every grocery list written out by St Paul, was canonical. We would also have to consider the first (I Corinthians 5:9) and third (II Corinthians 2:4) letters of St Paul to the Christians in Corinth to be lost Scriptures, even though no one in the ancient church ever considered them to be Scripture.<sup>47</sup> We would also create for ourselves problems concerning the unapostolic behaviour of St Peter in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14), or indeed of St Paul himself (John Mark [Acts 15:36-40]).

What about the hypothetical apostolicity of statements of the various unsavoury characters mentioned by Luther? We surely have an example of

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<sup>46</sup> AE 35:396.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows: A First Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961) 82, 96.

this sort of thing brought to our attention in John 11:49-51; 18:34 (Caiaphas).

But, what about Luther's definition of apostolicity? He appears to be saying that, in a pinch, the definition of apostolicity need not include origin from an apostle, provided it complies with the other criterion of bearing witness to Christ. The fact is that the definition of apostolicity does vary, or develop, in the New Testament. The definition of apostolicity in Acts 1 does not fit St Paul in all respects ("going in and out among us"), yet his genuine apostolicity is affirmed in Galatians 1:1, 11-12. Later, the definition of apostolicity was widened, to include Barnabas (I Corinthians 9:5-6), and Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7).

The point to be noted, however, is that Luther still adheres to the practice of the Early Church, in including content as well as origin in the concept of apostolicity and canonicity. Moreover, he permits others to disagree with him on his application of this criterion of apostolicity.

### **13. "PREFACE TO THE EPISTLES OF ST JAMES AND ST JUDE"**

This is an appropriate time for a closer consideration of what Luther actually said in his Preface to the Epistles of St James and St Jude. He begins by reaffirming the claim that the Letter of James is outside the canon, on the basis of external, historical evidence: "... this epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients".<sup>48</sup>

He then gives several reasons for not considering the letter to be apostolic, introducing them with the words, "In the first place", and "In the second place".<sup>49</sup> Because of this phrase, "In the first place", there are some who would wish to insist that the reason that follows should be regarded as having priority over the reason given earlier, in the Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews. In other words, they want to insist that Luther's overriding reason for rejecting James from the canon lay in a consideration of content of the Epistle, and not in a consideration of the external historical evidence.

There are at least three reasons for rejecting this interpretation as invalid. In the first place, as noted above, Luther begins this Preface by reaffirming the earlier verdict on the basis of the external historical evidence: that the early church had rejected the Epistle of James from the canon of Scripture. In the second place, the Preface to the Epistle of St James is not directed to the question of canonicity, as such, but to the subsidiary question of apostolicity: "I do not regard it as the writing of an

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<sup>48</sup> AE 35:395.

<sup>49</sup> AE 35:396.

apostle, and my reasons follow.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, a different question is being answered in this preface from the question that was being answered in the Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the third place, after giving his reasons based upon the content of the Epistle for considering the Epistle to be non-apostolic, Luther explicitly asserts the right of others to reach a different conclusion: “I would not thereby prevent anyone from including him or extolling him as he pleases.”<sup>51</sup>

Then examine the first reason he gives: “In the first place it is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works [2:24].”<sup>52</sup> The context makes it plain that Luther is speaking in terms of Paul “and all the rest of Scripture”, and not James “and all the rest of Scripture”. Note also the implication in the phrase, “although this epistle might be helped and an interpretation devised for this justification by works”.<sup>53</sup> The implication behind Luther’s whole line of argumentation is that, if the Epistle is part of Scripture, it cannot contradict any other part of Scripture; accordingly, if it contradicts any clear passage of Scripture, it cannot be Scripture. Luther’s whole line of argumentation here is incompatible with the assumption of different degrees of inspiration within Scripture.

Luther’s second argument against the apostolicity of James is that this epistle teaches only a general faith in God, and not, specifically, faith in the atoning merit of Christ; whereas an apostle is, by definition, an apostle of Jesus Christ:

Now it is the office of a true apostle to preach of the Passion and resurrection and office of Christ, and to lay the foundation for faith in him, as Christ himself says in John 15[:27], “You shall bear witness to me.” All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate [*treiben*] Christ. And that is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ. For all the Scriptures show us Christ, Romans 3[:21]; and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ, 1 Corinthians 2[:2]. Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.<sup>54</sup>

What is particularly noteworthy in all this is that, when Luther discusses the status of James on the basis of the external historical evidence, he simply presents the objective fact, without qualification: the early church

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<sup>50</sup> AE 35:396.

<sup>51</sup> AE 35:397.

<sup>52</sup> AE 35:396.

<sup>53</sup> AE 35:396.

<sup>54</sup> AE 35:396.

rejected James from the canon. However, when he discusses the status of James on the basis of its content, he is careful to add a qualifying disclaimer, such as the following: “Therefore I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases.”<sup>55</sup> This is precisely the reverse of the image of Luther that is presented to us by the Gospel-reductionist.

#### 14. “*SOLUS CHRISTUS*” AND “*WAS CHRISTUM TREIBT*”

It is surely time to consider what Luther meant by the phrase *treibt Christum* “inculcates Christ”. It clearly does not merely imply mentioning Christ. It certainly, as indicated above, includes proclaiming Christ as the only Saviour of mankind. It is quite evident, again and again, that by “Christ”, Luther includes the whole Gospel of Christ. It is quite evident that frequently the term “Christ” serves for Luther as a sort of cipher, denoting the doctrine of justification: that the sinner is justified before God not by his own works, but by God’s grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith. Any teacher or any book that undermines this Gospel in any way, takes Christ’s glory away from Him, and cannot be said to proclaim Christ, cannot be Scripture, and is not canonical.

We have here Luther’s famous *solus Christus* “Christ alone” principle, enunciated primarily in his “Lectures on Galatians”.<sup>56</sup> Luther spells out this principle in passages like the following:

Christ is the sum and truth of Scripture.<sup>57</sup>

The Scriptures from beginning to end do not reveal anyone besides the Messiah, the Son of God, who should come and through His sacrifice carry and take away the sins of the world.<sup>58</sup>

Outside the book of the Holy Spirit, namely the Holy Scriptures, one does not find Christ.<sup>59</sup>

The *solus Christus* “Christ alone” principle is spelled out more fully in the following passage, which reveals that the principle is clearly derived from Scripture itself. In this passage, Luther, in commenting upon Galatians 3:14, is criticising opponents who adduce Scripture passages concerning

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<sup>55</sup> AE 35:397.

<sup>56</sup> Robert D. Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession”, *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 32.4 (December 1992): 24.

<sup>57</sup> Qtd Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession” 31.

<sup>58</sup> Qtd Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession” 31.

<sup>59</sup> Qtd Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession” 32.

works in such a way as to oppose Christ's final work of atonement and redemption:

Therefore one should simply reply to them as follows: Here is Christ, and over there are the statements of Scripture about works. But Christ is Lord over Scripture and over all works. He is the Lord of heaven, earth, the sabbath, the temple, righteousness, life, sin, death, and absolutely everything. Paul, His apostle, proclaims that He became sin and a curse for me. Therefore I hear that I could not be liberated from my sin, death, and curse through any other means than through His death and His blood. Therefore I conclude with all certainty and assurance that not my works but Christ had to conquer my sin, death, and curse. Even on natural grounds, reason is obliged to agree and say that Christ is not my work, that His blood and His death are not a cowl or a tonsure or a fast or a vow, and that in granting me His victory He is not a Carthusian. Therefore if He Himself is the price of my redemption, if He Himself became sin and a curse in order to justify and bless me, I am not put off at all by passages of Scripture, even if you were to produce 600 in support of the righteousness of works and against the righteousness of faith, and if you were to scream the Scripture contradicts itself. I have the Author and the Lord of Scripture, and I want to stand on His side rather than believe you. Nevertheless it is impossible for Scripture to contradict itself except at the hands of senseless and stubborn hypocrites; at the hands of those who are godly and understanding it gives testimony to its Lord. Therefore see to it how you can reconcile Scripture, which, as you say, contradicts itself. I for my part shall stay with the Author of Scripture.<sup>60</sup>

The point is, that all Christian doctrine is a unity, like a large circle with Christ in the centre:

Therefore doctrine must be one eternal and round golden circle, in which there is no crack; if even the tiniest crack appears, the circle is no longer perfect. What does it profit the Jews to believe that there is one God and that He is the Creator of all, to believe all the other articles [*alios articulos*] and to accept the whole Scripture, when they deny Christ?<sup>61</sup>

Luther makes the same point in a slightly different way in the following passage:

It is rather a fact. The doctrine which belongs to God, not to us, is like a mathematical point [*mathematicus punctus*]. Therefore it cannot be divided; that is, it cannot stand either subtraction or addition.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, Luther argues:

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<sup>60</sup> AE 26:295. See also Preus, "Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession" 34f.

<sup>61</sup> Qtd Preus, "Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession" 38.

<sup>62</sup> AE 27:38. See also Preus, "Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession" 39.

One word of God is all the words of God; one article is all the articles and all are one, and when one article is lost, then by the loss of that one all are lost eventually. For all the articles belong together in one common chain.<sup>63</sup>

In these statements, Luther is asserting that to speak of Christ is to speak of the whole Gospel: all the doctrines of Scripture. To attack any doctrine is to attack Christ. From these statements, it is clear that, for Luther, *was Christum treibt* “what inculcates Christ”, the *solus Christus* “Christ alone” principle, is not only the central point of Christian doctrine but the whole of Christian doctrine. Accordingly, Robert Preus approves,<sup>64</sup> as in keeping with Luther’s theology, David Scaer’s assertion that Christology is not simply the most important part of theology, but its only part:

Any attempt to make Christology preliminary to theology or even only its most important part, but not its only part, is a denial of Luther’s doctrine and effectively destroys the Gospel as a message of completed atonement.<sup>65</sup>

## 15. SCRIPTURE AND THE WORD OF GOD

The “Gospel-Reductionist” interpretation of Luther insists upon identifying all his references to “the Word of God” as references to the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. This is accompanied by the denial, in the relevant passages at least, that “Word of God” in Luther denotes Scripture. Their whole case depends upon being free to make a distinction between that in Scripture which is the Word of God, on the one hand, and that in Scripture which is not the Word of God, on the other hand. They also insist that Luther draws this distinction.

Now it is true that Luther sometimes makes a graphic identification of the written Word with the Incarnate Word. By “Word of God”, Luther frequently means the Gospel, or the whole of Christian doctrine.<sup>66</sup>

However, there are also many occasions on which Luther identifies Scripture with the Word of God. For example, above we cited the fact that W. Bodamer found over one thousand citations from Luther clearly asserting that the Bible is the Word of God.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> AE 27:38. See also Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession” 39.

<sup>64</sup> Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession” 41.

<sup>65</sup> David P. Scaer, “Sanctification in Lutheran Theology”, *Concordia Theological Monthly* 49.2&3 (April-July 1985): 181-97.

<sup>66</sup> Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession” 18.

<sup>67</sup> See n. 1 above.



In view of all this, there can be no doubt that, for Luther, if something is Scripture, it is God's Word. The term "Word of God" is wider than "Scripture", in that it encompasses the Incarnate Word as well as the written Word. There is no warrant, however, for the notion that, with Luther, something that is Scripture may not be the Word of God. By the same token, it is plain that, for Luther, "the Word of God" is frequently a synonym for "Scripture". This is clearly the case in the celebrated passage in the Smalcald Articles: "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel."<sup>68</sup> The context here presents a contrast between the Bible, on the one hand, and the writings of Augustine, on the other: "It will not do to make articles of faith out of the holy Fathers' words or works."<sup>69</sup> It is the Bible that is here denoted "The Word of God", not just the Incarnate Word. In other words, the teaching of the Smalcald Articles at this point is not only that Christ establishes articles of faith, but that Scripture establishes articles of faith. There is no warrant at all in this passage of the Smalcald Articles for the concept of an authoritative word of Christ that is somehow less than the entire content of Scripture, or that there is something in the content of Scripture that is not the authoritative word of Christ.

## 16. CONCLUSION

In itself, it may appear to be a minor matter, what Luther intended by his comments upon the Letter of James in his Prefaces to the New Testament. However, history demonstrates that one of today's major heresies—the heresy of Gospel-reductionism—is either based upon a misinterpretation of these comments, or, at least, makes use of these comments as an excuse. Against this heresy, it must be protested that it is a falsification of Luther's theology to assert that the derogatory remarks he passed concerning the Letter of James were made concerning a book that he considered to belong to the canonical Scriptures. It is a misrepresentation of his theology to attribute to him a belief in different levels of canonicity within Scripture. It is also a misrepresentation of his theology to charge him with having imposed his own subjective criterion of canonicity upon Scripture. Above all, it is a misrepresentation of his theology to present him

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<sup>68</sup> SA II.ii:15; Tappert 295.

<sup>69</sup> SA II.ii:15; Tappert 295.

as one who distinguished within Scripture between that which is God's Word and that which is not God's Word.

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**REVIEW ARTICLE:**

***Hermann Sasse: A Man for Our Times?***

**Edited by John R. Stephenson and Thomas M. Winger  
(St. Louis, MO: Concordia Academic Press, 1998) 271 pp.<sup>1</sup>**

*Roger D. Pittelko*

The new volume on the life and theology of Hermann Sasse, edited by John R. Stephenson and Thomas M. Winger, is a compilation of the papers presented at the Sasse Symposium held from 30 October to 1 November 1995 under the auspices of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. Drs Stephenson and Winger have done the church a great service by editing and publishing these important papers on the work of Hermann Sasse. Scholars from the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe participated in the symposium. Papers were prepared and delivered by Ronald R. Feuerhahn, Lowell C. Green, John R. Wilch, John W. Kleinig, Thomas M. Winger, Tom G. A. Hardt, Kurt E. Marquart, Gottfried Martens, John R. Stephenson, Norman E. Nagel, and Edwin Lehman.

The symposium attempted to answer the question posed by the title of this volume. Is Sasse “a man for our times” or just an interesting theological figure noted for his provocative “letters to Lutheran pastors”? Do his life and theological work have any significance and relevance for life in the church today? It is clear that this volume of symposium papers answers the question in the affirmative. Sasse’s theological insights and concerns specifically address many situations that are still current and relevant.

Dr Ronald Feuerhahn’s paper (11-36) sets the tone for the remainder of the book by concentrating on the theology of Hermann Sasse. Feuerhahn views Sasse as a churchman. He both taught about the church and taught the church. He was a pastor and scholar who spoke to the church from both viewpoints. As a scholar he did not devise a new theological system. He understood that he was a follower in a long train of followers enunciating and teaching the orthodox Christian faith. He wanted simply and profoundly to make the confession of the fathers and to encourage those who followed him to make the same confession. His gift was not to draw us to himself or to his theology, but rather to draw us to the theology of the church and the church’s confession. Sasse believed and taught that theology really counts and that history is beneficial and necessary in understanding our theology.

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<sup>1</sup> Available for US \$24.99 from Concordia Publishing House.

Speaking to the church in a time of crisis, World War II and the demise of confessional Lutheranism in Germany, Sasse restored a vocabulary that had been lost to the church. It was a vocabulary of Holy Absolution, Holy Office, Body and Blood, hiddenness of the church, and the language of Creed and Confession. As a “lonely Lutheran” who had to leave his homeland after World War II, Sasse rejoiced in the words of another “lonely Lutheran”, Wilhelm Löhe: “Behold the church! It is the opposite of loneliness . . . . No longer lonely, but filled, satisfied, yes blessed is he who is one of these millions who completely and fully have Christ and with him have heaven and earth.”

If “lonely” was a word that could describe Hermann Sasse, Lowell C. Green in the second essay (37-64) attempts to explicate this facet of the Sasse character. Dr Green’s contribution discusses Sasse’s relations with his Erlangen colleagues. Green traces the developments in Germany from 1933 to 1949, certainly a time of political uncertainty. However, even before that time the church had faced the uncertainty of a new organisation. In 1923 the Federation of Evangelical Churches was transformed into the German Evangelical Church. Prominent Lutherans such as Paul Althaus and Werner Elert had supported this transformation since 85% of German Evangelical Christians were Lutherans. It was their hope that the new German Evangelical Church would be based on the Lutheran Confessions. Sasse understood that this was not to be and so opposed the new structure, to the consternation and criticism of his colleagues. In the same manner Sasse opposed the new Nazi regime seeing that the new German Evangelical Church was a Trojan horse that would be used by the Nazi government to take over the church. Again he stood almost alone on the Erlangen theological faculty in his opposition. Was Sasse difficult to get along with? Was that the reason that he was in conflict with his faculty colleagues? Perhaps. But Green gives us a deeper insight into Sasse, the “lonely Lutheran”. The political affairs of the church, the political meddling by the Nazi regime, and the reality of World War II and its aftermath deeply affected Sasse. As a man of integrity and strong Lutheran confessional piety, Sasse could not remain quiet. He simply did not “go along to get along”. As a result, even though he was one of the faculty members whose reputation drew students to the university, he spent most of his career at Erlangen as an “assistant (*extraordinarius*) professor” rather than as a full (*ordinarius*) professor. Theodore Baudler characterised Sasse at Erlangen as a “very lonely man”. Sasse saw through the false claims of National Socialism at a very early period, isolating himself thereby from other faculty members. After World War II, as a leader in the de-Nazification of Erlangen University, he drew the further wrath of his colleagues. Finally he was completely disillusioned with the state of the Lutheran Church in Germany which led to his emigration to Australia. Lowell Green’s chapter is perhaps

the finest summary available of what happened in the Lutheran Church and to the Lutheran Church during the period of National Socialism. If you have been mystified by the role of the Lutheran Church during the Nazi period, this is the chapter to read. If you want to understand what has happened since World War II in “Lutheran Germany”, this is the chapter that is indispensable in coming to an understanding. The chapter can stand alone as an excellent historical primer on the Nazi era and the Lutheran Church.

“Hermann Sasse and Third Reich Threats to the Church” by Dr John R. Wilch (65-105) picks up the theme announced and developed in the chapter by Green. Professor Wilch’s article is an examination of Sasse’s theological challenges as an ecumenical critic of world events. Sasse saw six threats posed by National Socialism to the Lutheran Church. The Nazi regime: (1) wanted to replace Christianity with the ancient German religion of paganism; (2) assigned to the *Volk* a religious value; (3) propounded a *Führer* ideology; (4) wished to banish the Old Testament; (5) ignored the Confessions of the Lutheran Church and forced a complete merger with the Reformed; and (6) exploited the Church as National Socialism capitalised on the Enlightenment. Sasse was one of the few who had the insight to realise that the Nazi persecution of the church really indicated a battle in the spiritual realm. As Sasse said, “Why has our Reformation church in Germany become so weak? Is it not that we all in our own life no longer take seriously the deepest need of our soul?” If the word “confession” comes to the lips as the name Sasse is mentioned, Professor Wilch demonstrates in his chapter why that is the case. Sasse played a major part in the development of the Bethel Confession contra National Socialism. While an initial participant in the development of the Barmen Declaration of 1934, Sasse ultimately withdrew when he saw that the Declaration assumed a teaching office over Lutheran and Reformed congregations. This he could not abide since he rightly understood that only Lutherans could decide for Lutherans what was false or true teaching as would also be said by the Reformed. While Sasse’s contributions to Bethel and Barmen faded, it was Hans Asmussen who reminded the Barmen Synod about Sasse. “We know him as one of the very few university professors who has supported us by word and deed in the Church Struggle and at the risk of our lives.” Sasse also played a significant role in the Schwabach Conventicle, a colloquium of pastors committed to confessional and theological study. Sasse led the Schwabach Conventicle to work out and present detailed plans for the reorganisation of the Reformation churches after World War II. However, the errors made in 1933 under Nazi duress were repeated in 1945 and 1947 without Nazi pressure, much to the dismay of Sasse. Professor Wilch’s assessment of Hermann Sasse is that he teaches us the lesson that it is better to give up everything else in faithfulness to our Lord without retreating an inch. Sasse was right in his stand regarding the Nazi threat and is greatly to

be admired for his exemplary courage in speaking out against National Socialism, even at peril of his own life.

Dr John W. Kleinig takes a different direction as he discusses Sasse on worship (106-22). As Professor Kleinig points out, Sasse was not a liturgical scholar. He never taught liturgy. He served on no liturgical commissions. He prepared no liturgies for use in the church. Yet Sasse's theology flowed from a deep understanding and appreciation of the liturgical life of the church. Kleinig terms Sasse a "liturgical theologian". On what basis is that designation made? During his lifetime, Sasse wrote three books and eight major essays on liturgical theology. Perhaps his understanding and appreciation of the liturgical and sacramental life of the church culminated in his masterpiece, *This is My Body*, published in 1959. This was followed twenty years later by *Corpus Christi*, his final liturgical work. Sasse understood that the real presence of our Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar was the heart of the liturgy. While Sasse acknowledged that the church has had and used many different services, he held that the Sacrament of the Altar was the chief Divine Service. Without the Sacrament, every other act of worship was partial and incomplete. All other services gained their significance from the connection with the Lord's Supper. If the Lord's Supper was the central Divine Service, then it was the real presence of our Lord in the Sacrament that is the heart of the entire service. Sasse understood and believed that the Sacrament of the Altar presented the risen Lord Jesus in His humanity and divinity entirely to the congregation. Sasse believed that there was an essential connection between the preaching of God's Word and the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar in the liturgy. Both illuminated and empowered each other. If either was divorced from the other, both were distorted. Both the preaching and the celebration were to be rightly connected that the Gospel might be communicated to the faithful. Dr Kleinig suggests that Sasse, like Luther, was a liturgical conservative whom many believed to be out of touch with the times. While he repeatedly argued for freedom from all kinds of liturgical legalism, he had no time for liturgical experimentation. He maintained that the oldest liturgies were the best ones and that the greatest freedom for the individual Christian lay in the use of the old forms. The old liturgies were objective and expressed what all Christians had in common. Therefore, they were capacious and inclusive. Perhaps Sasse's view of the liturgy can best be summarised in his own words: "the liturgy is an anticipation of the eternal worship which goes on in heaven."

Catholic and apostolic were two words that were common to the theological vocabulary of Hermann Sasse. Dr Thomas M. Winger takes up the task of looking at Sasse's theology from the vantage-point of these two key words (123-54). Sasse sought to understand and teach the doctrine of the church as a catholic expression. Modern Protestantism, rooted in

individualism, conceives of the church's confession as "I believe". The church's confession to the modern believer is simply the amalgamation of the individuals making a joint statement. Sasse understood the confession to be a corporate confession of the entire church catholic. It is the whole Christian church on earth making its confession of the Lord. Dr Winger looks again at Sasse's work during the period of National Socialism and his impact on the "German Christians", the Bethel Confession, and the Barmen Declaration. But Sasse did not limit himself to concerns in Germany. As Winger points out, Sasse took a keen interest in Lutheranism in North America and in particular the Missouri Synod. Sasse was deeply appreciative of the Missouri Synod as one of the few Lutheran bodies to hold to the entire Book of Concord. He also appreciated that the Missouri Synod had broken out of the provincialism of German Lutheranism and had through its missionary zeal drawn all sorts and manner of people into the church. However, Sasse's comment on the state of the Confessions in the Missouri Synod stands as a warning even today. "The Lutheran Confessions no longer play the role in the life and in the theological thinking of the Missouri Synod, in fact, of all American Lutheranism by far which they played during the 19<sup>th</sup> century."

Did natural theology or natural law play any part in Sasse's theology? That question is addressed by one of his closest associates, Dr Tom G. A. Hardt of Sweden (155-66). Sasse understood that in the orders of creation, through which God sustains His creation, something remains in the mind of fallen man. There is a "hunch of God's existence, which lives in all religions, and a final knowledge about eternal norms." It was this conviction that made Sasse protest against Karl Barth's denial of natural theology. Sasse turned, surprisingly to "feeling" as a defence of natural theology. Indeed Franz Pieper, Luther, and the Lutheran Confessions all referred to it in their defence of natural theology. However, Hardt asks the question, "Why are 'feelings' more exempt from the curse of sin than 'reason'?" Sasse's answer is that trust in reason leading us to the source of our existence, that is as a knowledge of the law, seemed impossible because of its historical connection with paganism. Yet Sasse saw the absolute necessity of upholding the defence of natural theology in some way and left open the emergency exit of "feeling" or "heart". Hardt's judgement is that this in no way diminishes the theological stature of one of the greatest theologians of our century.

Professor Kurt E. Marquart, who knew Hermann Sasse in Australia, also gives personal insights (167-93). Dr Sasse was an old man coming to the end of his career as a young Pastor Marquart was beginning his. Marquart in his chapter reflects on Hermann Sasse and the mystery of the Sacred Scriptures. Sasse played a key role in the Lutheran union that was consummated during his time in Australia. One of the key issues in union

talks was the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures. Agreement on inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures was a key element, so that once agreement was reached the final breakthrough to Lutheran union was inevitable. Professor Marquart discusses in detail the “Adelaide theology” and the “Queensland theology” that summarised much of the disagreement on the issue of Scripture. As a part of the Queensland Pastors’ Conference at that time, Marquart speaks with authority. While Sasse sought a middle way between those adhering to the inerrancy of Scripture and those who did not, Sasse wrote that, “inerrancy must be regarded as a valid conclusion from inspiration”. Reading the detail of the theological negotiations that brought union of the two Lutheran synods in Australia, you are led to the conclusion that it would not have happened without the presence and theological leadership of Hermann Sasse. The chapter by Professor Marquart is a “must read” for those who want to understand what made union possible in Australia and who want to understand the practical churchmanship of Hermann Sasse.

As a theologian who took the catholicity of the church seriously, Sasse could not ignore the relationship of the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic Churches. Dr Gottfried Martens picks up that subject in a chapter entitled “Where Rhine and Tiber Met” (194-223). As a teacher of church history and the history of Christian dogma, Sasse was well aware of the common history of the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran Churches. It was a special concern of Hermann Sasse that the history of the Lutheran Church does not begin in 1517 or 1530. Already in 1936 Sasse stated, “A Church that is not concerned with patristics becomes a sect.” However, as Dr Martens observes, it was during his Australian period that Sasse’s struggle with and for the Roman Catholic Church took place. As a close observer of Rome, Sasse had foreseen ten years before the event that the Roman Mass would be celebrated in the vernacular. While he had almost despaired of the Roman Catholic Church in 1950 when Pius XII declared the dogma of the Assumption, he rejoiced with the election of John XXIII and his calling of the Second Vatican Council. Although not in attendance as an official observer, he followed closely the events of the Council. As a result of a lively correspondence between Sasse and Cardinal Bea, Sasse was invited to Rome and was the guest of the Cardinal. It is suggested by Dr Martens that the importance of this contact between Sasse and Bea during the time of the Council should not be underestimated from both sides. Sasse had also come to know the Church of Rome through family contacts. Previous to his marriage, Charlotte, who has to become his wife, announced that she was converting to the Roman Church. While Sasse talked her out of it, she continued to remain very fond of Rome in her personal piety. Sasse’s son Hans was also inclined to the Roman Catholic Church and converted to that obedience after his marriage. It was under the categories of liturgy and the



real presence that Sasse saw the challenge of Rome for the Lutheran Church. Sasse believed that in spite of all heresies, in the liturgy the true Gospel was preserved. Looking at the Roman Church, Sasse saw that it was in the liturgy that true dogma was preserved, and thus addressing his own Church he wrote, "There is no more damning an indictment of a theologian than to say that he knows nothing about the liturgy." In addition to the preservation of the Gospel in the liturgy of the Roman Church, it is in the Sacrament of the Altar that he saw even more clearly that the Gospel was preserved in Rome. Sasse is not reluctant to take sides with Rome as far as the issue of the Real Presence is concerned. He criticised the dogma of transubstantiation because of its inherent rationalism, but not because it expressed the doctrine of the Real Presence. While having a high regard for liturgy and the Sacrament of the Altar in the Roman Church, Sasse did not hesitate to believe that the old Lutheran doctrine that the pope was the Antichrist was correct. This was not because of the life of the pope or his personality, but rather because of the pope's function and his doctrine. He understood the papacy as man's presumption of wanting to take God's place and identified this as the great error of the papacy. The papacy and the cult of the Virgin Mary therefore belong closely together and came to coincide in the pronouncement of the dogma of the Assumption in 1950. Sasse believed that the doctrine of the Antichrist is a very serious topic for ecumenical dialogue, although he did not believe that either Lutherans or Roman Catholics were ready for that. Sasse believed that the Lutheran Church had much to learn from Rome concerning the doctrine of Scripture. He saw clearly the incredible mirroring of the radical change that had taken place on the doctrine of Scripture. What Protestants and many Lutherans had carelessly given up on one side, had been rediscovered by Rome on the other side. While Sasse continued to have high regard for the Roman Church and took seriously his dialogue with that Church, he came to the conclusion that the dogmatic decay that he had seen in the Lutheran Church was also alive and active in the Roman Catholic Church. He saw that churches live by myths. Rome lived by the myth of the primacy of Peter and his successors. Anglicans lived by the myth of "apostolic succession". Lutherans lived by the myths of being the church of the Reformation and the three *solas*. But Sasse labelled them for what they were, myths. Dr Martens suggests that Sasse's comments on the Roman Church are a warning for the Lutheran Church today.

Dr John R. Stephenson, general editor of the volume, also provides one of the significant chapters as he discusses Sasse on "Holy Supper, Holy Church" (224-39). Karl Barth and the Ecumenical Movement dominated the theological world of the twentieth century. Sasse, who had first touched Confessional Lutheranism through reading Wilhem Löhe while at a Reformed Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, in the mid-nineteen twenties,

never became a part of the Barth/ecumenical world as a result of his Lutheran convictions about the Sacrament of the Altar. He remained the odd man out. He understood that apart from the Sacrament, the Church would be simply swallowed up by the world. In the Sacrament of the Altar the Church is uniquely manifested as what she is divinely intended to be. During the war years and in post-World War II Germany, Sasse continued to call the Lutheran Church to a eucharistic practice that once had been and might once again be. He stated, "The proclamation of this 'eternal Gospel' is always to be accompanied by the celebration of the Sacrament that our Lord instituted by which His death is proclaimed until he comes." It was Sasse's insight, paraphrasing Luther, that there was no Gospel without the Real Presence. It is the Blessed Sacrament that prevents Jesus being locked up in the past and His atonement from turning into abstract theory. Sasse was convinced that the restoration of the Blessed Sacrament to its proper place in the Divine Service dare not be an interest only of liturgical reform. It is a matter of life and death for the Lutheran Church, in his view. As Dr Stephenson comments on Sasse's teaching on the Sacrament, "Can we do without the rite once instituted in the upper room, which bridges the gap between the yesterday of the earthly Jesus and the tomorrow of our Lord's glorious return?" The answer seems obvious.

Consubstantiation is the non-Lutheran word taken up by Dr Norman Nagel in the final major chapter (240-59). Professor Nagel indicates that the word never existed until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and although ascribed to Lutherans as their teaching on the Sacrament of Altar, it is disavowed. What Lutherans confess is that the Sacrament is the "true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink." The term "consubstantiation" is traced to the Reformed theologian Hospinian in 1598. From that point Professor Nagel proceeds to trace the use of the word to the Harper Collins *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* of 1995. However, Dr Nagel's purpose is to do more than simply trace the use of the term. It is rather to expound the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar from Sasse's understanding and writings. Nagel proceeds through the Scriptural evidence, the Confessional writings, and the writings of the fathers to the orthodox Lutheran teachers. Nagel calls us to adoration. "Before His body and blood, before Him whose body and blood they are, we kneel, we worship, we worship 'with one adoration'."

The concluding chapter is an appreciation of Hermann Sasse, the man and the theologian, by Dr Edwin Lehman, President of Lutheran Church-Canada at the time of the symposium (260-68). He suggests that part of Sasse's legacy is that we are called to think theologically, to have a sense of history and the whole church, be ready to confess, and have a pastoral heart. Dr Lehman concludes by quoting Sasse, "When does the church exert its

greatest influence in the world? When it is church, wholly church and nothing else!”

Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary has done the Church a great service in sponsoring the Sasse symposium on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. Drs Stephenson and Winger along with the other authors have opened to us the riches of Hermann Sasse’s thought. For this we ought to be grateful.

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**REVIEW ARTICLE:**  
***Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary***  
**(Mankato, MN: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1996) 935 pp.<sup>1</sup>**

*David P. Saar*

In the Winter 1997 publication of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod’s Commission on Worship, it was reported that the LC–MS is beginning to consider work on another hymnal. At a time when many congregations regularly use a liturgy photocopied in the service folder, so that our members are unfamiliar with the hymnal, one might wonder at the wisdom of producing a new hymnal at all. Furthermore, in cost-conscious congregations, the expense of purchasing new hymnals could prove prohibitive. For these reasons alone, it is with great courage that a tiny synod in the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, smaller than our own Lutheran Church–Canada, should venture to publish the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary (ELH)*. As one might expect, the Norwegian heritage of the synod is strongly represented in the liturgy and selection of hymns. Nevertheless, what is even more noteworthy is the outstanding contribution this hymnal makes in the worship and devotional life of North American Lutheranism.

The variety of settings of the Divine Service betrays the diverse origins of the members of the ELS, including Norwegians and Germans. The first setting appeals to the Norwegians, being in the tradition of Bugenhagen’s church order. Its peculiarities include the absence of an invocation and a rubric for individual absolution at the altar. The second setting is the common service of *The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH)* familiar to the Germans of Missouri and Wisconsin heritage. The advantage of this setting is that it is in a lower key than *TLH*. While the language has been modernised, the musical setting the congregation sings is preserved intact from *TLH*. Congregations using *TLH* would find a shift to this setting of the Divine Service very easy and painless. “Divine Service: Rite Three” is a new composition. The *Deutsche Messe* or Chorale Service is included as “Divine Service: Rite Four”. All of the settings of the Divine Service include the collects, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Words of Institution pointed for the pastor to chant. Traditional usages have been retained in the Divine Service, such as the Communion Exhortation contained in each of the settings, and the ninefold

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<sup>1</sup> Available for US \$15.00 from Bethany Bookstore, 700 Luther Drive, Mankato, MN 56001. Tel.: (507) 386-5345 or (800) 944-1722.

Kyrie in the original language in the second setting. A rubric allows the Gospel to be read or sung. Options are fewer in the Divine Service than in *Lutheran Worship (LW)*; for example, there are no alternatives offered to the *Gloria in excelsis*, the “Create in me”, or the *Nunc dimittis*. In this, the rites are conservative and much more reminiscent of the old Common Service than the modernised versions in *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)* and *LW*.

*ELH* is not only a hymnal, a book to be used in the Divine Service; it is also a book of prayer. The incorporation of Prime and Compline in a simple straightforward form facilitates prayer throughout the day. These minor offices could also be used to begin or conclude a church meeting. Matins and Vespers are the familiar settings from *TLH*. An order for the confession of sins has been added to the beginning of these hours, presumably because many congregations use them in place of the Divine Service. As a further aid to prayer, the hymnal provides daily and weekly prayers, prayers for the sick and dying, and prayers for before and after worship. Among the latter is the beautiful Anglican composition, the Prayer of Humble Access, based on Matthew 15. A distinctive Norwegian feature in the prayers is the inclusion of the Veit Dietrich series of collects along with the historic Latin collect of the day.

Besides being a prayer book and a hymn book, the *ELH* is also a book of confession. This unique aspect is exemplified by the inclusion of our Church’s two leading confessions, the Small Catechism (ELS version) and the Augsburg Confession. The so-called Athanasian Creed is set to psalm tones. This permits the old custom of replacing one of the psalms in Matins on Trinity Sunday with this creed. The church year calendar confesses that the church is catholic. Confessors of the faith such as Ambrose, Augustine, and Chrysostom, previously unknown to Lutheran calendars, are incorporated in the calendar of *ELH*. The source and norm of our confessions is the Holy Scriptures. The *ELH* makes use of the New King James Version of the Bible. It provides a table of the Sunday pericopes for the three-year cycle as well as the historic lectionary, which the book’s editors seem to favour. As is customary in our hymnals, a selection of psalms is supplied for the Divine Service as well as the Daily Office. The older forms of the Nicene Creed and Apostles’ Creed are included, though not within the settings of the Divine Service.

It has been said that all theology is doxology. The hymns of *ELH* certainly prove that axiom to be true. In much the same way as the liturgical section of the hymnal is not characterised by the upbeat optimistic tone of *LBW* and *LW*, so the hymn portion reflects a serious, sturdy faith. This is illustrated first by the absence of the perennially popular “How Great Thou Art” (a Norwegian folk hymn!) and “Amazing Grace”, and by the use of a less than accessible tune for “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”. Secondly, the editors have resisted the urge to adopt inclusive language or substitute

modern forms for older English usage. A total of 602 hymns comprises the hymn section of *ELH*, approximately 15% of which have no music and only suggest a hymn tune. Following the order of its predecessor book, *The Lutheran Hymnary*, the hymns are organised according to the Sunday of the church year of the historic lectionary with the addition of a topical listing. To a person familiar with the hymnody of *TLH* and *LW*, the major weakness of the hymns in this volume is a peculiar quality of hymnody in the Norwegian tradition, namely, the use of isometric hymn tunes. Nearly 10% of the hymns make use of the isometric chorale rather than the original rhythmic form. If this form of the Lutheran chorale were ever adopted in our church, it would prove to be a serious step backwards. While the ELS has benefited from the influence of C. F. W. Walther and the Missouri Synod, who have consistently advocated the use of the rhythmic chorale, it has been slow to recover and regain the authentic form of the chorale. Setting this defect aside, though, time and again the strengths of the hymns in *ELH* exceed all expectations, proving the hymnal to be a worthy contender of the Lutheran faith.

One of the distinctive features of the hymnody in *ELH* is the inclusion of many new and different hymns. For example, there is a metric versification of the Athanasian Creed, which would provide an interesting alternative usage on Trinity Sunday. There are four hymn versions of the *Te Deum*, including Luther's (borrowed from the hymnal of our sister synod in Australia). The Queen Mum's favourite hymn, "Praise My Soul the King of Heaven", is included, though an easier accompaniment could have been provided. The hymn "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It" is an excellent reflection on living the baptismal life. This is a new hymn to the English-speaking world, from the author of "Jesus Sinners Doth Receive", and "I Know My Faith is Founded". A translation of this by Pr Harold Senkbeil of Wisconsin has recently been made available in our circles. For Martin Franzmann fans, besides the staples of "Thy Strong Word" and "In Adam We Have All Been One", is the rugged "Weary of All Trumpeting" with the well matched tune by Hugo Distler. For the musically challenged, Luther's Ten Commandments hymn is set to "Tallis' Canon", while for the more advanced, the lively rhythms of the original melody is also provided. A delightful hymn that would be well worth having children memorise, "Fear and Love Thy God and Lord", summarises the chief parts of the catechism in five stanzas. The Real Presence is boldly confessed in a newly translated hymn on the Lord's Supper, "O Jesus, at Your Altar Now", by the Danish churchman, Thomas Kingo, saying in part, "On this blest table e'er shall be / Your body / blood once shed for me."

Another refreshing aspect worth noting about this hymnal is that compilers resisted the urge to edit lengthy hymns to suit modern tastes. Hymn stanzas unfamiliar to users of *LW* and sometimes even *TLH* have

been restored. The hymnal has included a fourth stanza to “Silent Night” which most people probably had no idea even existed. The choice of stanzas for “Lift High the Cross” better reflect our theology of the cross than the ones chosen by *LW*. All ten stanzas of Paul Gerhardt’s Passiontide hymn, “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth”, are an excellent example of the rich piety much maligned and often considered non-existent in the period of Orthodoxy. Additional stanzas to the baptismal hymns, “Baptised into Thy Name Most Holy”, and “Dearest Jesus, We Are Here”, develop such neglected baptismal themes as clothing, light, and the renunciation of Satan. The sixteen stanzas of Philip Melancthon’s hymn appointed for Michaelmas is a good example of the catechetical aspects of our Evangelical-Lutheran hymnody. It mentions Daniel, Lot, the three men in the fiery furnace, and our guardian angels, and warns against the devil and his evil purposes. At the same time, the hymnal editors were not afraid to tackle weak hymns. For example, the hymn “Jesus! And Shall It Ever Be”, also included in *TLH* and *LW*, was extensively rewritten for the better. Previously, the hymn spent a number of stanzas rhetorically asking whether it would be possible to be ashamed of Jesus. In this form the focus was on the individual instead of on Christ, and thus falls short of what makes for a suitable Lutheran hymn. Comparing the last three stanzas of *LW* and *ELH* will make this point clear:

<i>Lutheran Worship</i>	<i>Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary</i>
Ashamed of Jesus, that dear friend On whom my hopes of heav’n depend? No; when I blush, be this my shame, That I no more revere his name.	Never! For Jesus is my Friend, On whom my hopes of heav’n depend. He sheds the beams of light divine O’er this benighted soul of mine.
Ashamed of Jesus? Yes, I may When I’ve no guilt to wash away, No tear to wipe, no good to crave, No fear to quell, no soul to save.	Jesus! May this my glory be: That He is not ashamed of me! The Lamb of God, my Savior slain, Has washed me clean from sin’s dark stain.
Till then—nor is my boasting vain— Till then I boast a Savior slain; And oh, may this my glory be, That Christ is not ashamed of me!	Jesus, the name which we adore, O make us love Thee more and more! Thy goodness, Jesus, now we sing, True Man and God, our loving King!

Another strength of *ELH* is the broad scope of hymnody it incorporates. No other North American Lutheran hymnal in the English language has ever included so many of the core hymns of the Reformation period. These *Kernlieder* are significant because they are a representative consensus of hymns produced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and considered normative for Lutheran

congregational singing for the next two centuries. *ELH* has 37 of these core hymns of the Lutheran faith. By comparison, the *Evangelical-Lutheran Hymn Book* (*ELHB*, the predecessor to *TLH*) has 32, *TLH* has 30, *LW* has 31, and *LBW* has only 25. When the temptation today is to bring congregational singing to the level of Vacation Bible School songs, it is a bold and brave move to embrace what many would put aside as culturally obsolete and too difficult to sing. At the same time, *ELH* has not neglected other fruitful periods of hymnody within the Church. It has included metric versions of the five medieval sequence hymns: *Victimi paschali*, *Stabat mater*, *Lauda Sion*, *Dies irae*, and *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, along with a Praetorius setting of a Latin hymn, Paul Gerhardt's endearing cradle hymn, "I Stand Beside Thy Manger Here", and a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century hymns, including one by a member of the ELS. Nor should it be assumed that the volume is full of German hymns. While it is true that Paul Gerhardt and Martin Luther are given a fair representation, over 10% of the hymns are of a Norwegian or Scandinavian background. The famous Danish bard and bishop, Thomas Kingo, has 15 hymns included, many unfamiliar to those of Germanic origins. Nor have the riches of English language hymnody been neglected, with 21 hymns by Isaac Watts and 13 by Charles Wesley. One would have to search high and low to find a hymnal as comprehensive.

A third area where *ELH* is strong is in its hymn translations. One such instance worthy of note is Luther's baptismal hymn, "To Jordan Came Our Lord". Where *LBW* and *LW* have used the Elizabeth Quitmeyer translation of this hymn, *ELH* has opted for its own translation. The result is that the catechetical nuances of this hymn are much clearer. In the second stanza for example, the Quitmeyer translation pales in comparison:

<i>Lutheran Worship</i>	<i>Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary</i>
Our Lord here with his Word endows Pure water, freely flowing. God's Holy Spirit here avows Our kinship while bestowing The baptism of his blessing.	That water at the font be used Is surely His good pleasure, Not water only, but the Word And Spirit without measure— He is the true Baptizer.

Likewise, the reference to the command and promise of Baptism is clearly enunciated in the *ELH* translation, whereas these catechetical citations are not spelled out as well in the translation of Quitmeyer. Such clear teaching and singing about Holy Baptism as in the *ELH* composite translation gives new life to this hymn and makes the effort to learn it worthwhile. *ELH* has probably the best English translation available of "Wake Awake". This is a superior translation because the implications of the Lord's Supper in the original text are made plain in English. No other English translation of this



hymn successfully manages to accomplish this. The final phrases of the second stanza,

Wir folgen all  
zum Freudensaal  
und halten mit das Abendmahl

becomes

We enter all,  
the marriage hall,  
To eat the Supper at Your call.

In the last stanza where the hymn writer concludes in an ecstatic Latin full of the praises of God in heaven,

Des sind wir froh,  
Io Io!  
Ewig in dulci jubilo

the translation in *ELH* more than any other captures the jubilant note of the original,

Blessed, will we,  
sweet jubilee,  
Sing "Gloria" eternally.

*ELH* offers one more example of fine hymn translation in the Lord's Supper hymn "Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Bestowed". The graphic phrases of this hymn stand in contrast to the popular Zwinglian conceptions of the Holy Supper all around us. Stanzas three and four proclaim:

Still You are here, as says Your Word,  
With us, Your congregation,  
With now Your flesh and bones, O Lord,  
Not bound to one location.  
Your Word stands as a tower sure,  
None can o'erthrow its trust secure,  
Be he most shrewd and subtle.  
"This is My body," thus You say,  
"Eat orally, so take Me;  
All drink My blood; by you I stay,  
And you shall not forsake Me."  
Thus You have spoken, so 'tis true;  
Naught is impossible with You,  
For You, Lord, are almighty.

Once again, the beautiful sacramental piety characteristic of the period of Orthodoxy is highlighted in stanzas six and eight. Stanza six confesses:

Your Baptism, Supper, and Your Word  
 My comfort here below afford;  
 Here lies my heart's true treasure.

And stanza eight proclaims:

Help that Your body and Your blood  
 May be my soul's consoling food  
 In my last moments! Amen.

One final area where the *ELH* shines is in its devotional aspects. The hymnal was clearly fashioned not only for congregational use in the Divine Service, but also for personal and family devotional use. For example, instead of leaving empty space on a page, the editors chose to fill that space with prayers and portions of the Holy Scriptures. Hymns that are favourites of young children as well as fondly remembered by adults, such as "Children of the Heavenly Father" and "God Loves Me Dearly", have been included. A hymn that might be considered more appropriate in Sunday School, "Jesus Loves Me", has with the composition of three new stanzas been given a churchly emphasis. For example, the final stanza says,

Jesus loves me! He is near.  
 He is with His Church so dear.  
 And the Spirit He has sent  
 By His Word and Sacrament.

The section on Holy Baptism is void of the sweet sentiments occasionally expressed in the baptismal hymns of *TLH* and *LW*. What is offered instead is solid, thoughtful, catechetical hymnody, "to give every Christian enough to learn and to practise all his life in regard to Baptism" (Luther). This baptismal emphasis is present throughout the hymns of the *ELH*. For instance, Kingo's Easter hymn, "Like the Golden Sun Ascending", says in part,

For Thy resurrection is  
 Surety for my heav'nly bliss,  
 And my baptism a reflection  
 Of Thy death and resurrection.

Another devotional strength of this hymnal is its powerful piety surrounding death and dying. Where *TLH* had 18 hymns in its section on death and burial, and *LW* has a mere 6, *ELH* has 19. In keeping with the theology of the cross, one of the characteristics of classic Lutheran hymnody was often a final stanza on death. Where this focus has been muted by *LW*, the *ELH* is not afraid to sing a godly approach to death, a helpful corrective in our society fixated in one way or another on dying.

The absence of the *LW* Divine Service Two and the repeated use of the isometric chorale prevent a whole-hearted endorsement of *ELH*.

Nevertheless, it should be on every pastor's shelf as a valuable resource to mine, and with judicious use could become a helpful asset for the church choir. For obvious jurisdictional reasons, we in Lutheran Church–Canada will not have the same voice in the production of the next Missouri Synod hymnal as we have had in the past. Could the example of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the *ELH* offer a model for us as we consider the future of hymnody in our congregations?

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## TWO EASTER HOMILIES ON PSALM TEXTS

*Roger J. Humann*

### I.

#### IT'S THE LORD'S DAY: REJOICE

*Psalm 118:24*

*This is the day which the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Easter is, without doubt, that day in His life which our Lord Christ made His own beyond all others. Not His birthday, for that meant His entrance upon a life of sorrows. Not His ascension day, for that was the closing scene of a triumph already achieved. Not His transfiguration day, for that was but a momentary flash of glory along the way to the cross. Not the day of His crucifixion; that was a great day for a ruined world, but for Him it marked the lowest stage of humiliation and woe. No, the day of days in the life of Christ was the day of His resurrection.

This is the day which the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

There are various theories about the original setting of this final psalm of the *Hallel* sung to celebrate the Passover, probably sung by our Lord Himself with His disciples in the upper room. But there can be no doubt that whatever its origin, in the economy of God it typifies perfectly the events of Holy Week and Easter.

This is the day which the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

**The Lord's Day is a day of victory.** Easter says our Lord is a winner and that gives us something to shout about.

Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous:  
"The Lord's hand has done mighty things." (v. 15)

Nobody likes to lose. Ask anyone who has competed on an athletic team, or fought in a war. But losers we are! Where it really counts, before God, we fall terribly short. No matter how hard we struggle we miss the mark of His absolute standards of holiness.

On Good Friday it surely seemed as if Jesus was a loser. The events which transpired shattered the hopes and expectations of his followers.

Death, not life, was obviously in charge and would have the last word. If Jesus were the Christ of God, then quite evidently, God was defeated.

But Easter shouts, “No way!” “The right hand of the Lord is lifted high.” Jesus lives! Death is not in charge. “The Lord’s right hand has done mighty things!” God is at work and nothing can keep Him from accomplishing His purposes of love and redemption.

That’s why we hear “shouts of joy and victory.” Jesus Christ was no solitary soldier striving and succeeding for Himself alone. True, the battle was single-handed, but the victory is shared. Sin, death, devil—defeated! For us. His victory is our victory; the Lord’s Day, our victory day.

This is the day which the Lord has made;  
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

**The Lord’s Day is a day of vindication.** Easter assures us that our trust in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ has not been misplaced.

The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone.  
The Lord has done this,  
and it is marvellous in our eyes. (vv. 22, 23)

For three years Jesus had been scrutinised and evaluated. His contemporaries observed His works, listened to His words, sat in judgement and rejected Him. He was not relevant or suited to their purposes.

But note, it was the self-sufficient, self-confident, self-satisfied scribes and Pharisees who would have none of Him, not the simple folk, the sinners, the despised, the little people, the downcast and drifters—they all accepted Him joyfully and gladly. They came to Him for help and healing. They came for forgiveness and life. Jesus was the primary building block in their lives, and His death called it all into question. But He rose again. Their faith was vindicated. The stone the builders had rejected become the capstone of the new building of God.

There are many “builders” in the world today who have no room for Jesus. “Outdated”, “irrelevant”, “unnecessary”, “irrational”—are all terms they might use. And they would make us feel naïve and ridiculous for centring our faith and devotion in a crucified Jew.

The resurrection assures us that our faith is not misplaced but is right where it ought to be. Our God may not have acted the way many think He ought to have. He may not allow Himself to be squeezed and fitted into our petty scheme of things. But the tomb is empty! That’s the point. It’s God’s doing. It’s what gives our faith validity; our faith is not in vain. Our hope for forgiveness, acceptance, life, is a living hope because Jesus lives!

Remember these things each Sunday, the first day of the week, the memorial of the resurrection. This is the day the Lord has made, a day of victory and a day of vindication—the Lord’s Day. Rejoice and be glad in it.

## II. LAUGHING WITH GOD

### *Psalm 2:2-6*

Humanly speaking, we might say that the day of our Lord's resurrection was the morning God got up laughing.

On Good Friday others were doing the laughing, poking fun at One nailed to a cross. "This **is** a good one", they jeered. "He called Himself the Son of God. Let's see whether God will save Him now." "You're the Saviour of the world; come on, save Yourself." Even Pilate had his little joke at the Jewish leaders' expense. "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews", is what he wrote above the cross.

But that was Friday, and with the dawning of the first day of the week God is laughing. This is the laughter that echoes in Psalm 2: "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them" (v. 4). The psalm pictures the rebellion of those who want to cast off the rule of the Lord and His anointed King; it contrasts this attempt with the grandeur of God in heaven who smiles at their machinations and proceeds with the enthronement of His Christ.

The psalm is "Messianic"; that means that it points ahead, beyond its own time to that of the Christ. Therefore with good reason St Paul refers to this psalm when he proclaims: "And we bring you the Good News that what God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus" (Acts 13:32, 33).

The events surrounding the crucifixion and death of Jesus graphically portray man's attempt to rid himself of the all-embracing rule and claim of God upon his life through His anointed King, Jesus Christ. And in the retrospect of the resurrection the folly of the endeavour is evident.

But let us not for a minute assume that the only plots "against the Lord and His chosen King" were confined to a few first-century people. God still has reason to laugh, for there is indeed a sort of holy hilarity about every attempt to emancipate ourselves from God. Satan still conspires and involves us in his conspiracy. We still try to push God out of the driver's seat, to whittle Him down to more manageable proportions. Is it not really somewhat ironic to profess "Jesus is Lord" on Sunday, and then go through the week as a living declaration of independence from much that such Lordship might involve?

Again and again our Lord in the Gospels calls upon us to see the sheer folly of our behaviour and the silliness that characterises our lives. We see such humour in the preaching of Jesus when He tells us to watch the man with a log in his eye as he goes running with a handkerchief to a friend with a speck of dust in his eye and says, "Don't worry, I'll get it out." Let's admit

it, how silly we are to be so ready to change others and not the least bit worried about bringing our own lives into line.

Now the point of our text is that what may be humorous to God is no laughing matter for us. When we try to live our lives without Him, God's laughter is a prelude to His judgement.

The One enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.  
Then He rebukes them in His anger  
and terrifies them in His wrath. (vv. 4, 5)

For God to laugh at you is a summons to examine your life, to repent the incongruities of profession and practice.

But there is another possibility: not to be laughed at **by** God but to laugh along **with** God! Easter gives us that opportunity. Christ is risen! Gone—in an instant, a flash, all the plotting, the devising, the attempt to be done with this Christ of God. He lives! God has set His King on Zion, His holy hill.

Christ lives and God smiles at man's futility, and by that smile invites us to share in His joy. Forgiveness is from a God who laughs, who for the prodigal brings out the best robe and the ring and puts the calf saved for the occasion on the huge spit. The elder son may stand outside and sulk, but God holds His party.

In the resurrection God laughs out loud so that the sound of His laughter might put holy hilarity into our lives. We are set free to laugh at ourselves. We can admit to our foolishness since it is folly forgiven. We can live confidently and serenely since we know who the King is and that His reign is a good reign and that nothing and no one can prevail against it.

That is the message of Easter. As Luther has written: "We should, therefore, learn to rouse our spirits and laugh with our God; laugh at raging Satan and the world, yes, even at sin and our own troubled conscience. I shall laugh with God. Even if I am a sinner, even if the punishment of sin is eternal death, this will not keep me from laughing."

He who laughs last, laughs the loudest; and God has the last laugh. So go to the empty tomb and learn to smile at sin, to chuckle at Satan's vain attempts, to laugh at death. In view of this joy, the question with which the psalm begins is a good one: "Why do the nations plan rebellion? Why do these people make useless plots?"

Indeed, why?

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