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# LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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## JOHN R. WILCH A TRIBUTE

This issue of *LTR* appears in honour of the Reverend Doctor John Robert Wilch, who after almost two decades of full-time service became the St. Catharines seminary's third Professor Emeritus in the summer of 1999. Successive generations of St. Catharines graduates have known and respected Dr Wilch as a meticulous scholar with a flair for languages ancient and modern, as a man with a passion for mission, and, above all, as a humble, self-effacing Christian of cheerful demeanour. To understand and appreciate this man of God, a glance at his antecedents and prior career is in order.

John's piety and love for mission are in themselves a tribute to what was given him, in the providence of God, by his parents, the Reverend and Mrs Andrew W. Wilch, Sr. The elder Pr Wilch was a clergyman of the American Lutheran Church of 1930, with his roots in the venerable Ohio Synod. At the time of John's birth his parents were on furlough in Columbus, OH, whereafter they soon returned to their missionary posting in India, which lasted until 1941. John's parents planted in their son a zeal for mission which would take professional shape in his years of service as Director of Studies for the *Evangelisch-Lutherischer Zentralverein für Mission unter Israel* from 1974-1979 and which is reflected in his ongoing labours as a Board member of the Haiti Lutheran Mission Society of which he was chairman for six years.

John's resolve to follow his father in the ministry resulted in his graduation from the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbus, OH, in 1959. Postgraduate study in Germany under Professor Karl-Heinrich Rengstorff bore a triple fruit, in the shape of his enviable fluency in spoken and written German, the award of his theological doctorate in 1965 (published as *Time and Event* by E. J. Brill of Leiden in 1969), and his marriage to the former Ruth Grossmann in the same year. A daughter of Missouri's sister church, the SELK, Ruth has been John's devoted helpmate, her graciousness much appreciated in the seminary community and beyond.

Ordination by his father in 1965 was followed by parish service in Abbotsford and Masqui, BC, and by an assistant professorship at Lenoir Rhyne College in Hickory, NC. Dr Wilch's robust loyalty to the Lutheran Confession caused him to transfer from the clergy roster of the American Lutheran Church of 1960 to that of the Missouri Synod, and, after a year as visiting professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, he came to Concordia, St. Catharines, in 1980, where, in addition to his teaching of

Old Testament, world religions, and missiology, he served for many years as academic dean and latterly as director of vicarage.

What goes around comes around, and John and Ruth were given to transmit their own zeal for mission to their two children, both born in Abbotsford, BC. Pr Gerhard Wilch (married to Tingyu, soon to graduate with a MTS degree from the St. Catharines seminary) is a missionary pastor in Toronto, and Miss Anastasia Wilch serves as a LCC-rostered missionary in Macao, China.

In recent years Dr Wilch has devoted much energy to a commentary on the Book of Ruth, soon to be issued by Concordia Publishing House, and he has just returned from a teaching trip to the Ukraine. John remains a familiar and well loved figure at the St. Catharines seminary, a cherished counsellor to the faculty and student body and a formidable opponent at table tennis. Their many friends wish John and Ruth many years of blessed retirement and hope that his influence will continue to be felt throughout Lutheran Church–Canada.

JRS

Monday in the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost 2000

John R. Wilch, Dr.Theol.

## PASTORAL CARE AS DYING

*Erwin A. Brese*

### PROLOGUE

The title of this article attempts to shift the focus away from the reality that the art of pastoral care, the care of souls, is on a dramatic decline in our times. The care of individuals and families in need has been given over to specialists among clergy, to secular therapists, and to the training of laity to visit the sick, elderly, shut-ins, and homebound.

The parish pastor's office has headed more into the arena of the pastoral administrator who may see working with grieving people as a very minor part of the work-load, if at all. By itself, this fits better into our culture which denies and defies death. It moves away from the beginnings and endings of life in which we are found vulnerable and without control. To frame this reality the title of this article might be "Pastoral Care **is** Dying". It exists to be vulnerable to the grace of God and the work of the Spirit of God upon mankind.

However, many have written and spoken in lamentation about the woeful demise of the art of pastoral care, the cure of souls, while others have sought to revive this long and hallowed tradition. The current departure has to do more with a deeper look at the nature of the pastoral care given by all clergy whether they are aware of it or not. It is in the nature of the Gospel for which they stand that dying becomes not a side activity or issue, but the central core of their existence and calling. Consider this reality proposed in these words which look on the years of pastoral ministry and aptly label them with the title "Pastoral Care as Dying".

### THE SITUATION

God said: If you eat any fruit of that tree, you will die before the day is over (Gen. 2:17 CEV)

The serpent said: No you won't! God understands what will happen on the day you eat fruit from that tree. You will see what you have done, and you will know the difference between right and wrong, just as God does (Gen. 3:5 CEV).

Death was already present in Creation even before it happened. It was in the Creative Word. However, mankind's struggle since eternity has been the struggle to deal with that reality. The first people tried to ignore, deny and

defy its reality, just as all humans have done ever since. However, death was an option even before the Fall. Separation was dictated in Paradise with the announcement by God that man must leave father and mother and cleave to a wife. That brought boundaries and separation into the picture. Its presence was experienced on the day of the bite into the forbidden fruit. Since then, death has been the record of mankind and continues to be his/her chief struggle. For from Adam until now death has reigned.

So now God has entered into this process to experience it for Himself and to love His creatures while facing it to move through it to eternity (Rom. 5:12ff.). Facing his own and another's death is the chief pursuit left to mankind by the Creator. It began as a solitary threat, a single deterrent from living without God in His created space, His garden. It was given while Adam and Eve enjoyed the graceful benefits of life in that Eden of God's creating, and stood in contrast to it. Yet then it became more than a theory, but a reality; that experience totally enveloped the human experience.

Eve succumbed to the serpent's inviting words and Adam's to his wife's. Death became a reality that could not exist in God's Garden of Eden but which would lead them out into the world of visible death in their daily lives. It would lead them through daily dying to prepare them for the final death with nothing to hold on to but God's promising word and trust in Him to right their wrong.

### **PASTORAL CARE IN THE MIDST OF DYING**

Pastoral care happens while living in that in-between time; it means aiding people to cope with the results of their own fallenness, the deaths behind them and the ones up ahead with nothing to hang on to but a word of promise that conquers even death. Like Adam and Eve, we can hear a word and let that deter our daily actions in favour of personal desire and interests. We can avoid looking at death by attempting to look only at the "beauties" of this world without any depth of understanding of what we are doing. This then minimizes our appreciation for the depth of the relationship which God has established with His creatures. Such a deeper relationship deals face-to-face with our death and His own so that the relationship might persevere into eternity.

Daily dying is the order of the day for the people of this world. That first separation from mother's body in birth is summarized with a cry of remorse by the infant. The threat of death without nourishment and motherly contact impinges upon the scene. Each sleep is a lapse into a mini death that may always turn into death to this world. With Baptism that daily dying is confirmed and attaches to the hope of rising again through the promise of a dying God who has come into the waters to accompany us into a new life.

Each stage of life is a wrestling of forces within and without and among those connected by blood and water. Deaths occur when the struggle emerges into a new stage of life that leaves the old behind. In almost every book he has written, Erik Erikson has suggested the following schema to chart the course of human development:

<b>Old age</b>	Integration vs. Despair	<b>Wisdom</b>
<b>Middle age</b>	Generativity vs. Stagnation	<b>Care</b>
<b>Young adult</b>	Intimacy vs. Isolation	<b>Love</b>
<b>Adolescence</b>	Identity vs. Id Confusion	<b>Fidelity</b>
<b>Pre-puberty</b>	Industry vs. Inferiority	<b>Skill</b>
<b>Pre-school</b>	Initiative vs. Guilt	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>Toddler</b>	Autonomy vs. Doubt, Shame	<b>Will</b>
<b>Infant</b>	Trust vs. Mistrust	<b>Hope</b>

Each stage of life presumes a struggle to reach some resolution between opposites before moving on. At each stage there is a dying and a new life in the next stage of maturity producing another virtue. At any time life can and does get stuck and requires retreat and regression in order to resolve the unresolved and move ahead from that point. Each day of life lets us crawl back to basic trust and fall asleep to arise and tackle the challenge for the day with the resources recovered and supplied by the little deaths that occur which enable us to move on with a new area of living. Each stage of life builds its own idols, straw gods, that tumble as the God of it all leads us to growth and faith in Him who overcomes and defeats deaths of every kind.

Internal death occurs in our souls, body and spirit as we relate, connect, and begin anew. We die to each stage of life: infancy, toddler, childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, maturity, and old age. We let go of earlier motivations of living from magical hope, to parental invocation, to independent assertions, to joint striving, to ageing solitude. Biological literates tell us we are dying cell by cell each day, but are rejuvenated by growth and new cells coming into existence to replace them. With normal growth that means a full life. When no new cells are produced our earthly life ends. If they grow out of hand, we also succumb to the cancer that strangles life. The balance is delicate and sublime.

The boundaries of life are formed and reformed. Toxins infect, and we produce immunities from it, but too many toxins overwhelm and kill. No matter how you slice life, psychologically, socially, biologically or spiritually, we are in a daily struggle with deaths, great and small, in our daily lives. To note and be aware of them, to speak to them and share them, and to point to the Author and Finisher of all is the task of pastoral care.

## **THE GOSPEL ESSENCE**

Tracing these themes through the Gospel in the flesh, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus who entered our fallen world both to pursue us even into death, His and ours, is instructive, enriching and strengthening for those who descend from the Adam and Eve of Paradise lost. However, we must be led to face death, in ourselves and others, and especially in our God as we walk the way of the cross with the Lord. Unless we deal with the realities of our own death(s), it is unlikely that we will be useful in aiding others who face the daily deaths in their own existences. Unless we daily drown the old Adam and come forth and arise in the newness of life (see SC IV, Holy Baptism!), we are only sounding words that cover over the realities of real death. On the other hand, seeing the mini-deaths in our daily lives of lost relationships, lost youth and innocence, lost fantasies and dreams, lost faculties and abilities, we are enabled to minister through the tears to bring a

dynamic hope and living Word to others in the same soup, this body of death from which we long for deliverance.

So we turn to a Gospel, a life of Christ who came into our world to experience it in our flesh, to walk with us and ahead of us to face death and its fears (8:34, 35). In Mark we see the statement and movement of that Gospel, and the sub themes and movements of those who follow and those who oppose that journey into and through death. The last one-third of the Gospel is devoted to the Passion days of our Lord, the climax of the story, with the first two-thirds leading us to it.

### **MARK ONE: LIFE/DEATH IS IN MOTION, COMING AND GOING**

He begins with those who have long since died but whose words live on. It notes that we are on the right path to look back and ahead. The appearance of John to point the way is rather abrupt, but his death is described later in much detail. However, here he is preaching a death to the past, a call to repentance, a drowning in the waters of Baptism to begin life from under the water that signifies death to the old. While people “die” in the water, another brings them up and out of it, giving a new life.

Jesus appears equally abruptly, to be baptized, to start His life under water and be brought to a life-calling that the Spirit and the Father acknowledged with Their firm presence. He was tried and tested by the Tempter and passed through that dying experience to connect His life with disciples, followers whose past life would have to die for them to follow Him, and they did. This Jesus confronts and overturns evil spirits, disease, leprosy in individuals, one by one giving death to an old way of life and pointing to healing and wholeness as God’s way of life into which they might be caught up.

### **MARK TWO: MANKIND’S CONDITION IS DEADLY PARALYSIS**

Jesus dealt with the “little deaths” of paralysis to point to the deeper predicament of mankind, paralysis of the spirit to forgive and be forgiven. Jesus pushes us to the grace of forgiveness as being greater than the grace to heal the body, that illness and health are symptoms of the deeper alienation of sin and of the forgiveness which He makes possible. He brings back the outcast tax collector, Levi, to functioning life in the community and calls him to follow into His death. In a monomaniacal way, Jesus would waste no time on lesser concerns, but focused on death and the urgency of dealing with it now, face-to-face with those who felt its creeping power in their own bodily illnesses and in their own procrastinations shored up by attention to

detail along the road instead of the goal up the road. The Pharisees worked hard at side-tracking Him with religion as the way to keep from dealing with dying, but Jesus insisted on pointing to a faith that did not avoid it, but met it head-on with trust and hope.

### **MARK THREE: HEALING AND CALLING INTO DYING**

When they pressed hard not to condone His intent to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus had to even die to His own anger with them that was superseded by His greater compassion for the crippled man who stood available for God's healing grace now. This pushed the Pharisees to their own anger, but instead of letting it die, they fed it with fuel and hatred that began a plot to eliminate anyone who brushes their arrogance to pursue the advancement of the grace of God to deal with the real issues of death and new life. While the elite opposed and dismissed Him, the common folks were heartened and given hope that Messiah had come to deliver them; He healed them gladly. Jesus opposed those who would name and seek control over Him. He selected the Twelve who would travel in the intimate circle of His way to the death by crucifixion. He pointed out the painful way that sees a more powerful family created by water than by blood. Death to one's own flesh and blood brings great pain and distress, but opens up a new way of life that is the only way to really have brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers forever.

### **MARK FOUR: PARABLES OF DYING**

The parables are about the Kingdom of God, stories that all involve some pain and dying, the people of avoidance and denial (4:15), the enthusiasts whose feelings burn out (4:16, 17), the distracted and unfocussed who lose their purpose in the end (4:18, 19) and those who produce a harvest in the painful end (4:20). Stories of Jesus call people to think about themselves and their condition, their lumination, their receptivity, their potential beyond their imagination and their overpowering fear in the face of the presence of the Lord of all power in heaven and on earth. They feel as good as dead in His presence. Yet no seed produces anything unless it dies first.

### **MARK FIVE: OUTSIDERS FACE DEATH TOO**

Jesus faces a man considered dead, outside the community, but rehabilitates him to return to the community of his own origin, a community which bids Him leave for they cannot deal with His power over such death and refuse to

look at it any longer. Jesus faces women and girls bringing them back from exclusion and death itself. The woman can now go back to live in her family and community, the girl back to her life that now extends into adulthood. He bears the scorn and ridicule of those who are paid to deal with death as a ritual expression alone. So women and girls are healed and quickened to go on with life as it has been given to them, to face yet unknown challenges to their femininity and humanity.

### **MARK SIX : DEATH AT HOME AND ABROAD**

In returning to His home town, Jesus finds scepticism that expresses the townsfolk's inability to see Him as separate, as another, which would allow for them to see their own separateness and potential for dying as persons and a community. So He retires from their presence and sends out His disciples to separate from Him but to carry on His mission two by two, drawing strength and wisdom from each other. While He awaits their return, Mark tells us of the bizarre death of John who introduced us to Jesus, but is now superseded by Him. He has dealt with death and exercised authority over it yet it seeks to subvert Him all the way.

Jesus gives new life to those who eat the bread of His disciples which He multiplies a hundredfold and more. They are sustained to go back to their homes. Death looms imminent to the disciples in the lonely boat in the middle of the night, but Jesus arises from the depths to still the storms that threaten them with death; the purpose, to heal still more people who were in various forms of dying.

### **MARK SEVEN: RESISTANCE TO AND ACCEPTANCE OF DYING**

Having accomplished all this, the opposition was sure to arise, those who deal with death by structuring it out of earthly life. The Pharisees scolded Him for not following tradition strictly enough to guarantee the survival of the religion and race. He points to their own hypocrisy and shows how sins, death and evil arise from within not without. Therefore, death is inevitable for all. In contrast the woman of Tyre is commended for her persistence in the face of painful opposition to trust in Him for life beyond the pain of rebuff. Jesus calls attention to the obvious, that human beings are deaf and dumb without the gift of speech and hearing from their Creator, who now is also their restorer and deliverer from all handicaps for full renewal.

**MARK EIGHT: FOOD FOR THE DYING**

The gift of food is again provided for the masses. Daily bread is underscored as a need of all mankind to sustain them in the on-going walk of faith which continuously draws resistance from the toxic system in place in the Jewish community as expressed by the Pharisees. They want instant signs on demand from Jesus to whom they cannot respond in faith. Jesus calls it a work like yeast, a small amount from the air that makes a loaf of bread puff up in time. The disciples miss the point and expose their own self-centred paranoia thinking Jesus is accusing them of not taking enough bread for the journey. They prove blind to see that He is the giver of all daily bread in sufficient quantity to nourish life just as God has done for His people from the beginning. He heals a blind man to teach them He heals their blindnesses unto death as well, even though it may be in stages of sight and insight.

The time has come for the key question regarding the identity of this Jesus. Have they grown in their observations and understanding of Him to see who He might truly be, and if so, who they might truly be in His presence? He asks many questions to help them and us think and respond after careful reflection. They have heard the crowds and their answers, but Peter speaks for them about the depth of His reality calling Him Messiah, the first time Jesus allows for that name to stand. However, Peter and the rest show they are not yet ready to see who they are in His presence, that they also must die, face persecution and go the way of the cross to truly be disciples, to be ministers to the dying around and beyond themselves.

**MARK NINE: SKETCHING OUT THE GRACE OF DYING**

Jesus takes His threesome of disciples to the high mountain to confirm that Messiah's claim in the presence of the prophets of old whose death no one witnessed, Moses and Elijah. He was hinting that no one would witness His resurrection either, but in an even more brilliant transcendence, life would go beyond death. Built upon the Law and the Prophets, the Gospel would break beyond into a new life. Jesus counters Peter's desire to stay on the mountain and insists that they must descend to the valley. The foursome come to the place of daily death and agony, to face a boy attacked by the demon of disease that leaves him dead before the Jesus who dares to speak to him, but then who is raised by Him alone. Again the Lord tries to teach His disciples about the impending death of Himself but they cannot face it, resisting it like Peter in chapter 8, by changing the subject and arguing with each other about power, a typical expression of avoidance in the face of vulnerability and powerlessness before death. Also the determination of competition signals their avoidance of the grace of new life.

The disciples want to champion a life of competition and taking sides, by morality and fairness, of the included and excluded. They proudly report rebuking a man who was healing people in Jesus' name but never went through instruction classes like they did. However, instead of approval, this brought the rebuke of Jesus, who commends all life-giving in His name. Grace is amazingly extended. They are humbled before this Lord of life and death. In fact, the undisciplined and child-like are the best examples of trust and faith, so Jesus sternly warns them not to mistreat these examples of faith lest they lose it themselves.

### **MARK TEN: NO FAITH WITHOUT VULNERABILITY**

Now children of faith arise from parents who trust and love each other. Jesus confronts the Pharisees who want to excuse themselves from facing the probable death of a spouse by killing a marriage beforehand. They want to take life into their own hands. He calls them and all to face a death of self for the good of the marriage and thus gain new life. This is a parable of the coming death and resurrection. Just as two people become one in marriage, so Christ and His body become one in the ultimate family of God. Children raised with such a blessing of God are indeed gifted into the Kingdom of God as examples for all people.

This young man of faith that Jesus loved came looking for that blessing from the right source, but when Jesus called him to choose between the death of his god of wealth to following Jesus further, he pulled back in sadness. No one chooses to follow Jesus on his own terms, for that means avoiding death. Only those who are called by Jesus are disciplined by Him to do so. For the third time, Jesus tells about His approaching death. Again, the disciples vie for first place in His sight and the Kingdom of visible power instead of servanthood and death. James and John, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, Saul and David—the deadly game of competition goes on and on, but Messiah, the Christ of God, moves to teaching and showing all about our blindness and how He heals it. Bartimaeus is the named follower who is healed and heads down the road to Jerusalem with Jesus; it was time.

### **MARK ELEVEN: COME TO MAKE DEATH PLAINLY VISIBLE**

Jesus parades into the capital, the holy city of ambivalence, a city named for peace but the scene of much bloodshed. He comes by way of a seedy suburb, but rides in like a King Solomon of old. The crowd responds in festive ways, eager to find a rescuer from Roman occupation and religious tyranny. They want a political new life. The parade was enough for one day; Jesus slipped

back into the suburbs. He curses the fig tree on the way back into the city the next morning and brings the temple His curse in the afternoon. He brings the death of things around Him, showing the utter radical changes that dying brings, especially His own. The fig tree's death is confirmed on Tuesday morning and the death of the temple religion later in the day as expressed by the Pharisees' questioning of His authority. He lined Himself up in front of John, the dead Baptizer.

### **MARK TWELVE: ONE LAST CALL**

Jesus' final parable is illustrative of His role as the one who deals with death head on. The renters assumed ownership of the vineyard and went on their own illogical way of defending it even with murder including that of the owner's son. They choose to take life rather than give up the things of this life that have become more dear to them than the relationships that matter in the Kingdom. Jesus surfaced their inherent anxiety and angry attitude to the boiling point by letting it focus on Himself instead of themselves. They rolled into the greatest assault on His mission the closer He came to His goal. First, the Pharisees lobbed their black and white salvo about paying taxes, expecting to trap Him. He dealt with living in two worlds quite handily, something they could not do. Secondly, the Sadducees took their usual shot at the absurdity of the resurrection, to which He replied about the real way to read Scriptures that has a living God in the midst of a dying world all through it. Therefore, life is in the I AM God. Finally, a scribe challenged Him about His reading of the Scripture and the central law in it. Jesus pointed to God and mankind which since creation have been inseparable. He called on all to put that together by letting go of their pet gods, challenging all of them to understand that David's Lord was also David's Son, who stood before them now.

The real test of faith and discipleship ultimately lies in attitude, for the Lord Jesus now warns against all who are arrogant and insist on being above others in honour, respect, and treatment. That is opposed to the servanthood Jesus taught and lived out. He called attention to a pure example of it in a widow just coming by to put two mites into the temple poor box, herself being the poorest of the poor. That attitude of humbleness and trust Jesus lifts up for all to see as to what living the Gospel really comes down to. When facing death, we are all beggars, as Luther proclaimed on his death bed. This allows for us to see death's enormous power over us. Yet the greater power of the Lord of life and death arises in even greater scope and magnitude.

**MARK THIRTEEN: APOCALYPSE NOW**

While this may be an apocalyptic aside, it certainly continues the theme of the pride that goes before the fall, whether it be the religionist's faith in the solidity of the magnificent temple, the works of human hands, or their own practice of the religion within its courts and walls. In reality, all will come tumbling down in the end, both in Jerusalem and in the lives of all people, then and now. The poetic images of the horrible thing and glorious things ahead make real the curse of the fig trees and the power of the coming resurrection which is suspended in time and uncontrolled by mankind, just as is our coming into this world and our leaving it.

**MARK FOURTEEN: DEATH IS TOTAL**

The plot thickens. The heightened awareness of oncoming pain and death are on the scene as foretold by Jesus Himself. It would happen in the midst of the gathered people but subversively in darkness and secrecy. Before leaving Bethany the last time, Jesus is anointed for burial by the woman of faith who makes Him smell sweet even amid the sweat and blood of the next hours. Dollars were not a measured value by Jesus but the faith of one who had been forgiven much and who responded with perhaps all she had, just like the widow and her mites—this is valued above all else.

The initiation of the death of Jesus comes from within the discipleship, so great is the resistance to Jesus' presence. He gathers them for the last traditional meal, commemorating the last one in Egypt before they would pass through the waters into the unknown desert. He relived with them the agony of God's people of old, eating the bitter herbs and unleavened bread, the wine and the lamb before He would assume all of those things into Himself to share with the body he leaves behind. Since God urges no cannibalism, this meal assumes the impending death of Jesus whose blood will be shed and whose body is broken in death. It is the Lord's last supper. They leave the table singing the Hallel in the face of His imminent dying.

From trying to argue Jesus out of dying, to daring to announce His fight to the finish, Peter shows us the many natural human attempts of dealing with impending death. Our whole essence is unable to face it calmly and directly. Peter counts on his own bravado to see him through, but he sleeps as danger surrounds them and then denies Him when fear overwhelms him. Peter turns to tears when the reality of his actions become plain to himself. He has died fighting off death's imminence. As He is arrested Jesus calmly responds to Judas the betrayer, to the high priest and Pilate, even then seeking to show compassion for those who faced a greater death and separation from God than He. He suffers ignominy, beating, shame, and

indignation, but casts a loving eye Peter's way in the courtyard to show He understands.

### **MARK FIFTEEN: THE POLITICAL WORLD MUST ALSO DIE**

Before the earthly authority of one who decides in cases of life and death, Jesus does not express the anger of which He is capable, nor does He offer any rebuttal of the priests' charges or defence of His own innocence. When it is time, He points Pilate to a higher power of life and death. The real author of life and death stands before Pilate who ends up on trial. Still, Pilate seeks to manipulate a freeing of Jesus unsuccessfully and goes the easiest route by ordering His execution, a common end for whatever gets in Rome's way of power. Jesus is crucified, nailed to a cross to hang until dead as a warning to other Jews. He is ridiculed and stripped of dignity. Yet in this slow and cruel form of capital punishment, Jesus keeps a connective cry to the Father alive for all to hear His anguish. Quite publicly the Gentile soldier now carries the Gospel word earlier spoken in private by Peter: "Truly this is the Son of God." Jesus exhaled the breath of life and took on death fully and completely. Ministering women took note of events, while the rich Joseph, not from ancient Egypt, but the one from Arimathea, opened a fresh grave for Jesus' body where It rested until the third day. The Gospel, which was first wrapped in baby clothes (Luke 2) is wrapped by others in death, waiting to be unwrapped by divine power.

### **MARK SIXTEEN: DEATH, SO ...**

No mortal witnessed it happening, but the women who came early to the tomb thinking to do the ritual reverence for a loved one were confronted with an empty tomb and an angelic announcement of life which they were bidden to carry back to the disciples, especially Peter, but they fled in fear, unable for some time to say anything to anyone. If facing death was difficult, facing resurrection is even more of an amazing grace. Mark ends almost begging all readers of this Gospel to write their own ending, which some ancients have done. However, the call to deal with this paramount and penultimate story of death and resurrection remains for all who would believe in this Gospel and live in its wake.

**TODAY'S PRACTICALITIES**

So what shall we make of all these things? To be a Christian, a follower of the way, is certainly to be involved in death, both His and our own. To be a giver of Pastoral Care finds its basic foundation in the experiences of dying with a hope in new life as a gift. It is not so much where we have been that is basic but where we are and where we are headed. The disciplined life of a follower is constantly called to face death, his/her own and in the lives of those around, in the community of faith, the body of the Christ.

We have always lived in a death-avoiding and -denying environment, and always will in this world. We can avoid it by treating it as commonplace if we work as a mortician, MD, hospice worker, ER worker, or in the places where many people die today. We can also live avoiding those places in the failing determination to avoid the inevitable.

**SOME SIGNS OF AVOIDANCE IN OUR WORLD TODAY:**

- The drive to accumulate while postponing or refusing to make a will or buy cemetery lots.
- The drive to avoid going to cemeteries, or its opposite, going there far too often.
- The growing custom of eliminating the visitation of the dead, or a hasty cremation with ashes kept or scattered in some favourite place, to avoid seeing the face of death.
- The dwindling numbers of people who attend a funeral visitation or services, especially in the church building, because they fear they will be having to face death every time they worship there.
- The drivenness of many to talk about getting better or comparing aches and pains, but never talk about facing an approaching death.
- The manipulating of dying relatives to avoid talking or even thinking about dying.
- When the choice for many means to take marriage apart rather than grieve together at the death of a child, or the loss of earlier dreams and goals.
- The insistence upon an upbeat service of praise and joyful hymns all the time to avoid facing the cross and its daily meaning, or its converse, living a morbid lifestyle that rules out a resurrection power.

- Any attempt to avoid a baptismal drowning in favour of cute droplets of water to minimize the power of Baptism.
- The murdering of a marriage rather than sacrificing for the good of the new life together that marriage grows.
- Congregations that kill mission life and activity instead of looking at their own losses and attending to their own grieving so they might go on with the new life the Lord of the Church gives.
- The attitude that says, "I've had a hard time, but now I'm back on track, thanks to God!" instead of, "God led me through hard times to increase my faith and prepare me for more hard times. Thanks be to God!"

### **FACING UP TO DEATH**

Death pushes many a parishioner in the door of the pastor who cares and can grieve with them for however long it takes. Likewise, I have never worked with any person, couple or family in pain or distress that did not uncover an unresolved death and its attendant grieving process which was stuck somewhere. Conversely, I never saw a person, couple or family that did not move ahead with creative energies to live once they had grieved the loss of someone in their lives.

### **CASE STUDY TO ILLUSTRATE THE ABOVE:**

M was a pleasant-looking woman of 36 who hesitantly called to talk to the pastor. He welcomed her to his study and asked how he could help. She wasn't sure but began to unravel her story of many years. She has been a baptized member of the church since childhood, the youngest of many children. It took many visits and some confidence-building on her part before she could admit to having many suicidal thoughts, of having difficulty getting out of bed for days on end, of worry that her husband and two boys were going to commit her one of these days. She felt guilty not caring for their needs like she used to. Many things were discussed, but they were all narrated to see if the pastor could handle her depressed feelings and thoughts. Having persuaded herself that she could, she opened up a subject that had not been discussed since she was 12 years old.

At that time of her life, M's father had died after a lengthy illness. She was taught by her mother to keep a stiff upper lip while attending the funeral events at church, after which she was told with all the other children that their "father was gone, and we will never talk about him again." His chair had been removed from the family table. M shook as she talked, even

looking around to see if mother could somehow be listening to her telling me this. The tears flowed.

A few sessions later, M came in all smiles. “Well, I did it!” she announced. When I questioned what “it” was, she told of going out to the cemetery to find her father’s grave in the February cold. While this was forbidden by mother, she decided she was able to handle whatever mother said if she found out. She took along a rug to kneel on and had a long talk and cry with her dad, the years of regret for not coming to see him, the anger and pain she felt as he left her as a vulnerable child, the memories of some good times they had together, and the sorrow over the times she missed him most—at her wedding, at the birth of her children, and now, when she almost decided to join him.

The Resurrection had just been synonymous with a rather cold Easter observance, but this year it became an experience in her and around her. The family wondered what was going on with her and the pastor. They came to sessions with her to learn how to cope with the new mom and wife they were living with. However, it wasn’t easy. The old one was a pushover, and now she pushed back and stood up for herself. Since she was the hub of the family, the others moved ahead with maturity and adjustments in their new life together as well. She took them out to the cemetery to introduce them to the father-in-law and grandfather they never knew. She joined another church and let her ageing mother take care of herself. Her brother quickly assumed a caretaking role for mom, and she and her siblings all found themselves able to get along much better after M’s trip through death to new life.

The pastor walked through the “valley” with M and her family as he was suffering losses in his own family and self. As he retired from office, M called to wish him the very best of a new life saying that the three things she saw most in her pastor was the determination not just to preach the Gospel but to live it, and to suffer the pains of opposition in so doing, and continuing to have compassion for others as his overriding value. Pastoral care experienced the dying of the past, the grief of the present, and the hope of the future in the people served and in self.

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**SINNERS DIRECTED TO THE SAVIOUR:  
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY MOVEMENT  
IN GERMANY (1811-1848)**

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION<sup>1</sup>

*William F. Mundt*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**W**hat motives and methods enhance the Christian's response to the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19)? Jesus provided the apostles few details for the task. The history of missions researches and evaluates this concern. One area of special interest is the nineteenth century, the beginning of the modern mission era. The development of the Mission, Bible, and Tract Societies came as part of the Awakening's response to the Great Commission under Enlightenment influences. A simplified analysis of these developments suggests that the Mission Societies concentrated on the "all nations" aspect of the Commission. The Bible Societies stressed "making disciples" in light of such Scriptural teachings as, "So faith comes from what is heard" (Romans 10:17). The Tract Societies emphasized the "Go" and the "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded" from the second verse of the Commission (Matthew 28:20). Tract Societies encouraged each individual Christian to take an active role in the distribution of religious truths. Tracts were intended to explain the Bible to everyone, but especially to the common folk. The Tract Society Movement also called for a wise use of current ingenuity in mass media methods. The ease and low cost of printing small pamphlets had already been employed in the political realm. The cause here, of course, was more earnest. Christians were invited to "see the state and worth of souls" and become "instruments of their salvation".<sup>2</sup> One of these earnest undertakings, its origins, methods, theology, and effects is the focus of the study: *Sinners Directed to the Saviour: the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany (1811-1848)*.

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<sup>1</sup> The complete dissertation has been published as volume 14 in the series *MISSION* (Missiologisch Onderzoek in Nederland), published by Boekencentrum Publishing House (P. O. Box 29, 2700 AA Zoetermeer, The Netherlands).

<sup>2</sup> RTS 1, David Bogue, *An Address to Christians on the Distribution of Religious Tracts* (London: RTS, 1799) 2.

## II. THE BIRTH OF THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND (18<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

The Religious Tract Society Movement was born in an era of abounding optimism and achievement. Europeans, especially the English, were penetrating jungles, crossing deserts, scaling mountains, seeking the North and South Poles, building railroads, and exploring the mysteries of the universe and of the atom in a spirit of adventure. This optimism was in part a result of Enlightenment thinking and its emphasis on individual goodness and potential. The same optimism characterized Christians desiring to carry the Gospel of Christ to people who had never known it. They dreamed of moulding vast nations and cultures according to the principles of their faith. Gäbler observed: “A Baptist missionary to India was not in the least considered to be naive, as he declared he wanted to win the 420 million Indians for Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

The history of tracts in Great Britain began long before the Religious Tract Society (1799); so did English influences on European efforts. The Bible was seen first and foremost as a devotional book, because it contained what Schöffler called the totality of possibilities for further developments.<sup>4</sup> Other works followed. John Wycliff (1328?-1384) produced volumes of useful writings, including commentaries and over one hundred volumes against the Antichrist and the Church of Rome. John Huss (1369?-1415) called the receipt of these writings through Jerome of Prague the happiest and most momentous event in his life and spoke of Wycliff as an angel sent from heaven. The most widely-known devotional works are the various Puritan publications, which were and still are continually reprinted and distributed. Of *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) by Richard Baxter (1615-1691) it was said that “there is no work so much calculated to stimulate a missionary to holy zeal and activity in his evangelistic labours”.<sup>5</sup> Earnestness compelled literary and other action. Joseph Alleine (1634-1668) reflected this in *A Sure Guide to Heaven* (1671) noting that he did not want to “flatter or entertain but to convert” and reminded his converted readers that “unconverted souls call for earnest compassion and prompt diligence to

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<sup>3</sup> Ulrich Gäbler, “*Erweckung im Europäischen und im Amerikanischen Protestantismus*”, Part 2 of “*Wurzeln und Werden der Gemeinschaftsbewegung*”, Gnadauer Verband Convention, Marburg-Wehrda, 15 April 1988. (epd Dokumentation, 1988) 14:7.

<sup>4</sup> Schöffler, *Protestantismus und Literatur* 153.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994) 26. The editor refers to Baxter as “the most outstanding pastor, evangelist and writer on practical and devotional themes that Puritanism produced.” (9) In addition to *The Reformed Pastor* (1656), he authored *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650), *A Call to the Unconverted* (1658), *A Christian Directory* (1673) and 131 other items.

pluck them as brands from the burning”.<sup>6</sup> The Puritans, often deprived of the care of souls, turned preaching and publishing into a kind of alternate cure. English earnestness introduced this literature to Germany.<sup>7</sup> German versions of English religious works appeared. Nürnberg became an important distribution centre. One obstacle to deepening Christian faith and life was the poor instruction of the people and the discontinuation of religious education in the higher schools. This great lack became the concern of numerous societies.

The beginning of the French Revolution prompted developments in societal work. The republican government distributed tracts declaring war on religion, kings, and nobility. Small balloons were to carry these promises of freedom across policed borders. Some landed in England where Hannah More (1745-1833), already renowned for her political ideals and social educational activities, battled them with her own tracts. Her example and success encouraged other Evangelicals. The Scots, John Campbell (1766-1840) and Charles Simeon (1759-1836), founded the Edinburgh Tract Society in 1796. The Religious Tract Society, founded in London in 1799, soon eclipsed all other efforts. In the first sermon preached for the Society in 1800, David Bogue (1750-1825) recounted how divine revelation was recorded in the Holy Scriptures and he characterized the books of the Bible as tracts for those early times. He remarked: “Man has a hand to write as well as a tongue to speak, and God has employed the pen of the ready writer, as well as the tongue of the learned, to convey a word in season to him that is weary.”<sup>8</sup> The comparison set the tone for the work to follow: printing and distributing religious tracts was a serious and sacred matter, one requiring great earnestness, bold faith, and much prayer.

The immediate goal of the Religious Tract Society was to convert sceptics and to strengthen believers in the homeland. Concerned Christians in England and in Germany feared the Enlightenment and the French Revolution would destroy Christianity. The proponents of the Society pointed to the need for moral reforms and missions. They felt alarmed at

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Alleine, *A Sure Guide to Heaven* (1671; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989) 15-16.

<sup>7</sup> Ward 12. In 1620, the *Praxis Pietatis* or *The Practice of Piety, Directing a Christian how to walk with God* (1612) by Lewis Bayley (†1631) appeared in Germany. That same year, *Das gülden Kleinod der Kinder Gottes* (The Golden Gem of God’s Children) ascribed to Emanuel Sonthomb (†1630?), was also published in Germany. Sonthomb was the anagram for E. Thompson, a member of the Merchant Adventurers of England living in Stade in the sixteenth century. Works by Baxter, Perkins, Joseph Hall (1574-1656) and John Barclay (1582-1621) were translated in great number. John Bunyan (1628-1688) wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress* in 1678. This was translated into German in 1685, but into Dutch already in 1682. Lawrence Marsden Price, *Die Aufnahme Englischer Literatur in Deutschland 1500-1960* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1961) 21, gives 1679 as the date of the first Dutch translation.

<sup>8</sup> Jones 1.

increased immorality. They attributed this to a decline in religious conviction, specifically to a lack of proper piety. The first tract, *An Address to Christians on the Distribution of Religious Tracts* (1799), voiced this concern. Supporters agreed that the distribution of religious truths in small, easy-to-read, and inexpensive publications was one of the best means to remedy moral deficiencies. Tracts offered pure truth in a plain, striking, and interesting manner, Bogue maintained. He insisted that each tract, regardless of its form or subject matter, present some account of the way of a sinner's salvation. The Committee collected and circulated stories of conversions and accounts of a tract's effectiveness to encourage and to recruit distributors and correspondents. In the first tract, Bogue wrote of the underlying concern for organized outreach. He focussed attention on the Society's chief aim of awakening and edifying: "While the temporal necessities of the poor and the afflicted are kindly inquired into and relieved, the Christian, enlightened from above to view the state of man as an immortal being, is most concerned for the salvation of his soul, and his eternal blessedness."<sup>9</sup>

The Religious Tract Society was established at St Paul's Coffee House in London on 9 May 1799. Those forty persons who breakfasted together that day were embarking on an evangelistic venture which very quickly developed international dimensions. Burder requested the meeting. While pleased with the popularity of More's series, he desired to publish more religious tracts. His plan in mind, he attended the Annual Meeting of the London Missionary Society on 8 May 1799 at Surrey Chapel. After the service he spoke of his plan and asked the ministers for their opinion. He proposed to meet the following morning at seven o'clock in the coffee house. On Friday, 10 May, Jones reports, Rowland Hill (1744-1833) presided when the following formal plan was adopted:

1. That the society now forming be called The Religious Tract Society;
2. That it consist of persons subscribing half-a-guinea or upwards annually;
3. That an annual meeting be held on the Thursday morning of the Missionary Week, at St Paul's Coffee-house, when a treasurer, secretary, and committee shall be chosen; and
4. That the tracts be paid for on delivery.<sup>10</sup>

The July 1799 *Evangelical Magazine* presented the Society to the public and called for commitment: "Let volumes be condensed into a few pages; let

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<sup>9</sup> RTS 1, *An Address* 5.

<sup>10</sup> Jones 15. These first rules were to be expounded in a distinct and well-digested tract. Interestingly enough Burder was not one of the first officers or committee members. Joseph Hughes (1769-1833) was appointed secretary. Stoughton 181, notes, "the catholicity of his temper, his superior education, his large intelligence and his skill in composition, fitted him for the post."

pious ingenuity toil, while twice ten thousand hands distribute the salutary produce from family to family, and from country to country.”<sup>11</sup> The distribution of religious tracts, Bogue argued, is a method “which is likely to do good” and “an easy way of doing good”.<sup>12</sup> The society’s founders viewed their publications as lasting, renewable, and graphic resources to awaken interest in the Bible, to clarify its contents, and to make biblical teachings real. In addition, the tracts gave guidelines for practical Christian living.

The first tracts and sermons enunciated principles. The committee desired to present the common Christianity underlying divisions in Christendom: the theological principles of St Paul revived by Luther and Calvin. The emphasis was on justification by faith, a free gift, a work of grace according to the divine will. Nothing should recommend one denomination over the other. Periodically published statements of faith were to prevent any confusion on this point. Neither the sentiments nor the statements hampered the production of strong anti-Catholic and strict moralistic tracts. Bogue wrote the first tract to publicize the Society’s aims and principles. Each tract was to contain pure truth and some account of what was necessary for one’s salvation. The language was to be so plain that it could not possibly be misunderstood. Constant revisions sought to simplify the publications. These conditions often made it difficult to find suitable writers. Still the *Jubilee Memorial* of 1849 by Jones looked back over 4 363 books and tracts in its catalogue and counted archbishops, bishops, and other ministers of the Episcopal Church; Lutheran, Moravian, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Wesleyan pastors; laymen and women among its writers.<sup>13</sup>

By 1849 there were 641 First Series tracts. These were basic tracts designed to exhort, to admonish, to encourage, and to comfort people in all walks of life. They were considered suitable for distribution anywhere. The *Reports*, contained in Jones, noted that many tracts were written “expressly against Popish, Infidel, and Socinian errors, while others explain and enforce the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Some are calculated to interest minds inclined to deep research, while others are written in the plainest language and the most simple forms of expression.”<sup>14</sup> A Narrative Series was developed for use in a loan or library system and attempted to deal with factual accounts in an interesting and edifying manner. Second Series tracts were better known as Hawker’s Tracts and were often sold by peddlers or street vendors. They were to replace other popular literature and used exciting stories and striking titles. Embarrassment arose when they required

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<sup>11</sup> Jones 17.

<sup>12</sup> RTS 1, *An Address* 3.

<sup>13</sup> Jones 151. The author, William Jones (1817-1885), was the son of the William Jones who served as secretary of the RTS. More information on the father could not be located.

<sup>14</sup> Jones 119.

more time and money than the First Series. Major revisions changed thousands of words between 1818 and 1820. The Committee retained such tracts for fear of what people might read otherwise and because they were able to document conversions through them.

Societies did not survive solely from tract distribution. Catalogues listed other literature deemed suitable for building up faith or aiding conversions. The Religious Tract Society considered children's books in 1803 but first printed them in 1814. By 1831 there were 292 youth publications, and by 1849, a circulation of four million. Broadsheets were large tracts, printed on one side only, and intended to be placed on the walls of cottages, factories, shops, and other buildings. Samuel Kilpin, known only through a Religious Tract Society account, was an avid supporter who distributed 10 000 publications a year. He hired sailors, shoemakers, and anyone willing to work as assistants. Jones reports each signed a promissory note stating, "I hereby faithfully promise to stick up, or see stuck up, 500 Broad Sheet Tracts, and I will use my best endeavours to remove all the old songs, filthy pictures, or any papers that have a seditious tendency."<sup>15</sup> Handbills were smaller versions of broadsheets for distribution at races, fairs, and other public gatherings. Elsner reported that hangings in England provided an audience not otherwise reached: "Usually, they gladly take the tracts and read them to pass the time until the execution begins."<sup>16</sup> Although first suggested in 1810, handbills were not printed until 1822 after reports of conversions due to a single leaf from a tract or the Bible. They were short addresses, admonitions, or counsel. These inexpensive publications were deemed to be within the reach of even the humblest person. Christians were encouraged to put them on walls, distribute them in their walks and the like. Some merchants wrapped their wares in them. Others placed bundles with a "Take One" sign outside their homes. Completing the list of publications during the first fifty years are sermons, larger books for older children, bound volumes, especially of the Reformers, and various periodicals.

The Religious Tract Society is the parent body of the British and Foreign Bible Society. When Thomas Charles (1755-1814) was confronted with the spiritual needs of the common people of Wales he first raised the issue, and the interest, at the 1802 annual meeting of the Religious Tract Society. Joseph Hughes (1769-1833) responded: "Surely a society might be formed to provide Bibles for Wales; and if for Wales, why not for the world?"<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Jones 173.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Elsner, *Neueste Nachrichten aus dem Reiche Gottes* (Feb. 1842): 95. He adds: "When Courvoiser, who murdered Lord William Russel, was hanged, 42,575 tracts were distributed; and when Blakesley, who murdered his wife and brother-in-law, was executed, 40,850 distributed."

<sup>17</sup> Henry Otis Dwight, "Bible Societies", *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1911, 2:88.

seed was planted. Carl Steinkopf (1773-1859) provided information about the need for Bibles on the Continent. The Religious Tract Society members did much of the preliminary work. On 7 March 1804, Hughes called for a public meeting at the London Tavern. Three hundred attended. Dissenters and members of the Church of England agreed on the importance of a society to increase the circulation of the Bible. Divergent interpretations were forgotten for the sake of this goal. By-laws were hastily drawn up and adopted. The first executive committee consisted of 36 laymen, fifteen from the Dissenters, fifteen from the Church of England, and six from foreigners residing in London. In 1806 the first wagon load of Bibles entered Wales.<sup>18</sup> When the Society's foreign operations began, Steinkopf and Robert Pinkerton (1784-1857) made extensive tours in Germany to establish Bible societies there. The first German Bible Society modelled after the English was founded in Nürnberg in 1805 with the assistance of the businessman Johann Kiessling (1742-1824). This later moved to Basel.<sup>19</sup> With London's help, similar societies formed throughout Europe.

### **III. THE BACKGROUND OF THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY MOVEMENT IN GERMANY (18<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)**

The Enlightenment and the Evangelical Awakening form the backdrop for the development of the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Enlightenment's emphasis on the free use of reason fostered a critical approach to the Bible and denigrated the idea of divine intervention. An awareness of the underlying principles of truth and justice produced inalienable rights for those being governed rather than for those governing. The notion that happiness could be pursued and procured was later reflected in religious tracts also. The Enlightenment's concepts of nature and harmony prompted changes in education. The idea that the Bible can have an impact on individual readers apart from ecclesiastical authorities was a product of this age. Despite its belief in innate goodness, rationality, and optimism, Enlightenment thinking did not eliminate inequalities and injustices nor prevent such evils as the French Revolution. Awakened believers in Germany reacted in different ways to Enlightenment influences. Some

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<sup>18</sup>The Society printed 20 000 Welsh Bibles and 5 000 Welsh New Testaments.

<sup>19</sup>For an updated account of the formation of Bible societies in Germany see Wilhelm Gundert, *Geschichte der deutschen Bibelgesellschaften im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1987). Support gradually declined as the Germans wanted to and were able to support their own societies. English support ended abruptly after the Apocrypha controversy in 1824.

viewed the Revolution and the resulting Napoleonic wars as a divine punishment and a warning against ignoring natural orders. Remnants from Pietism also furthered the Awakening's influence. Awakened believers could appreciate and use the Enlightenment's emphasis on individuality and on a morality based on discipline and self-control to support their insistence that doctrines be demonstrated by personal piety. For the most part, the Awakening was about individuals who had to awaken, or be awakened from the deadly sleep of sin and directed to the Saviour. The resulting new life of obedience in Christ would work as a leaven in society to create a better world. For all this to be possible, the Bible had to remain authoritative. Awakened believers rejected the Enlightenment teaching that the Bible was an ordinary book offering ethical advice. The three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in view of the proposed Protestant Union also stimulated renewal, especially among the Lutherans, as theologians like Claus Harms (1778-1855) reviewed the Reformation's legacy. There were always some Christians hoping, praying, and working for spiritual renewal. They often gathered in small circles to discuss devotional works and to pray for a return to an idealized Christianity, as they perceived it had been in the early church. Continental believers were also caught up in the excitement and earnestness generated by developments in England. The Enlightenment had discouraged missions but the English experience and example showed Awakened believers that mission was both necessary and possible. Societies appeared to be the most effective way to implement Christ's Great Commission. Basel quickly became a centre for spiritual renewal efforts. Both Samuel Urlsperger (1685-1772) and his son Johann (1728-1806) sought to bring enthusiasm and earnestness into the German situation. The former founded *Die Gesellschaft von guten Freunden* (The Society of Good Friends, Basel, 1756). The latter established *Die Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des thätigen Christenthums* (The Society for Promoting Active Christianity, Augsburg, 1773). Their common goal was realized in 1783 when *Die Deutsche Christenthums Gesellschaft* (The German Christian Fellowship) was founded in Basel. Reports received from interested individuals and from small circles or branch societies all shared a zeal for missions. The *Sammlungen für Liebhaber christlicher Wahrheit und Gottseligkeit* (Collections for Lovers of Christian Truth and Godliness), first published in 1783, provided information and inspiration. As the German Christian Fellowship grew, it planted seeds which gradually took root and grew into such Bible, Missionary, and Tract Societies as *Die Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung erbaulicher Schriften* (The Society for the Distribution of Devotional Writings, Basel, 1802). Individual Germans, who had heard of the work of the English Religious Tract Society, often through Basel reports or correspondence, made direct appeals to London to assist them in tract distribution efforts. Steinkopf was the key contact. For over thirty years,

until the Tract Society Movement took hold in Germany, the German Christian Fellowship was the central society for propagating the gospel on the Continent. It demonstrated that an international, inter-Church society was welcome and workable and thus prepared the way for the development of the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany and for the societies that soon followed.

#### **IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY MOVEMENT IN GERMANY (1811-1848)**

The birth of the Religious Tract Society Movement in England and its background in Germany and Switzerland, especially in the organization and activities of the *Deutsche Christenthums Gesellschaft* (German Christian Fellowship), prepared the way for new societal developments in nineteenth century Germany. Its existence and its accomplishments encouraged like-minded Christians throughout Germany. One correspondent was a pious widow in Westphalia, Anna K. W. von Oeynhausen (1764-1811). She shared her vision of distributing religious tracts to the poor with two brothers near Eisleben, Johann G. Uhle (1781-1835) and Johann A. Uhle (1788-1813). They in turn founded the first major German devotional literature society, *Der christliche Verein im nördlichen Deutschland* (The Christian Union for Northern Germany, Eisleben, 1811).

Two men instrumental in establishing other German tract societies were Carl Steinkopf (1773-1859) and Robert Pinkerton (1784-1857). Both encouraged Germans to organize societies based on the English models. Steinkopf's contributions to the Religious Tract Society have already been noted. In 1812 he toured Germany as an ambassador for the Bible and Tract Societies. Every step of the way, from Hanover to Nürnberg, from Mainz to Bamberg, Erlangen and Erfurt, Steinkopf reported a desire for Bibles and a need for British aid. He described his "inexpressible pleasure in thus dispensing the bread of life" and blessed God, he said, "that, in his infinite mercy, it had pleased him to call me to the performance of this service of Christian charity; being fully persuaded, that the blessings of the poor, who were ready to perish, would come on all their British benefactors."<sup>20</sup> In 1813, Steinkopf reported that ministers in Stuttgart had printed and distributed many tracts. The garrison chaplain there, referred to as M. Moser, found that once he gave away a few tracts "his house was filled with soldiers, and the number of applicants increasing he could no longer give them away in his own house, but was obliged for two whole days to make use of a shop next

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<sup>20</sup> Karl Friedrich Adolf Steinkopf, *Reisebriefe: Europa 1812* (1813; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1987) 38.

door to him for that purpose.”<sup>21</sup> Following his 1816 tour, Steinkopf reported on new and established societies. Pinkerton likewise represented both the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Religious Tract Society. In 1814 he visited the Wuppertal area and helped organize the *Bergische Bibelgesellschaft* (Berg Bible Society). The next day the same supporters established the *Tractat-Gesellschaft im Wupperthale* (Wuppertal Tract Society). Pinkerton’s travels took him to Berlin. Once again he helped establish a Bible society and the *Hauptverein für christliche Erbauungsschriften in den Preussischen Staaten* (Central Society for Christian Literature in the Prussian States, 1814). Publication did not begin, however, until 1816.

The fourth major and lasting tract society was established by English and French Christians in Hamburg, guided by Jean Merle d’Aubigné (1794-1872) and aided by a few Germans. The *Niedersächsische Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung christlicher Erbauungsschriften* (Lower Saxony Society for the Distribution of Christian Devotional Materials) began work in 1820. It functioned as a daughter society of the Religious Tract Society. This brought them favoured treatment. Other smaller societies followed but the four mentioned here are well representative of the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany.

Although many of Germany’s awakened believers rejoiced to see the development of the Religious Tract Society Movement, not all of them were convinced that printed, pointed messages were the most desirable or effective means of outreach. While some complained, others set about developing different approaches. Adelbert von der Recke-Volmerstein (1791-1878) established a *Rettungsanstalt* (Life Saving Institute, 1819) to house the homeless and handicapped. Christian Barth (1799-1862), distraught by what he termed English excesses in the German tract societies’ publications, founded the *Calwer Traktatverein* (Calw Tract Society, 1829). Johann Burk (1800-1880) supported tract distribution but also wished to publish songbooks; Christian biographies and novels; wall charts; and ethics, doctrinal, economics, and nutrition books. He chose to establish his own society and began a Christian magazine, *Der Christenbote* (The Christian Messenger, 1831). Johann Wichern (1808-1881) had the most profound impact on the Religious Tract Society Movement. While he proposed a greater distribution of Bibles and devotional materials, his emphasis on Inner Mission, and the founding of the first *Rauhes Haus* (Rough House, 1833) directed attention to dealing with the underlying causes of social concerns. Other responses came from other quarters.

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<sup>21</sup> Jones [1816 Report] 342. Wichern noted a Wilhelm Friedrich Moser of St Gallen but provided no dates. No additional information about Moser was located.

The representatives of the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany, both societal and individual, were as diverse as the personalities and regions caught up in the Awakening. The message, tone, and quality of publications varied greatly. These diverse elements did, however, share similarities. They were loosely united by practical and theological perspectives. The goal of each society was to direct sinners to the Saviour by calling for repentance and supporting Christian life in general.<sup>22</sup> This literary mission, Mybes noted, grew out of Jesus' own commission and intended to proclaim the gospel outside the bounds of local congregations: "The missionary word wants to awaken faith and to lead people to Christ in different areas of life by contemporary-oriented, popular small writings (pamphlets, tracts, brochures)."<sup>23</sup> The underlying evangelistic ideals were to convert non-Christians and to enable believers to be more devout, more Christ-like. The earnestness of the task and the simple piety of the authors, Bauer notes, earned religious tracts the reputation of being the Word on the offensive.<sup>24</sup>

The German Religious Tract Society Movement shared the same earnest enthusiasm that the English Religious Tract Society had shown. The various Societies were united in their high regard for the Bible as the Word of God. They were certain that they had the Word of truth which only needed to be proclaimed to direct sinners to the Saviour and to promote piety. They were all convinced that the publication and distribution of religious tracts was the best way for doing the greatest good. All the Societies strove to publish worthwhile tracts and to avoid excess or sentimentality in the contents and carelessness or affectation in the style. The concern was to produce tracts which contained the "bread of life and not stones".<sup>25</sup> They tried to present only those doctrines of the Bible which could be personalized and applied to one's heart and life and wished to avoid controversial articles of faith. To build bridges to other movements or to remove intellectual hindrances to faith did not seem crucial to the tract societies.

There were other observable similarities also. Each Society arose out of concern for perceived individual and societal needs. This concern began with a few dedicated individuals who convinced others of the need and enabled them to share the vision. Developments in England provided encouragement. With the possible exception of the Eisleben Society this awareness came by

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<sup>22</sup> "Auszug aus den Statuten des christlichen Vereins im nördlichen Deutschland", *Jahresbericht des christlichen Vereins im nördlichen Deutschland* (Berlin, 1841) VII.

<sup>23</sup> F. Mybes, "Schriftenverbreitung", *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, V, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1539.

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard Bauer, Sr, "Schriftum, volksmissionarisches", *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*, III, 1959 ed., 853.

<sup>25</sup> Hermann Berg, "Tractatgesellschaften," *Real-Encyclopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, XIV, 1862 ed., 278.

contacts with the British and Foreign Bible Society and through Steinkopf's visits or correspondence. Each Society also based its organization on previous efforts and activities in the area. The Uhle brothers responded to Oeynhausens's early attempts. Wuppertal supporters responded to early endeavours by the Mission Society. Berlin contained a number of pious circles in addition to Schirmding's, Elsner's, and Janicke's previous attempts. The Hamburg Society built on previous efforts by the Van der Smissen family and d'Aubigné. Each Society encouraged the formation of branch or daughter societies to expand its work. Another similarity, although not a positive one, was the jealous, protective attitude that Societies took towards one another. This made cooperative efforts almost impossible. The Religious Tract Society could not comprehend this regionalism and at times irritated German supporters by suggesting Societies share tracts or even plates to reduce overall costs and of course to limit the number and frequency of grants. From the English viewpoint of practicality, Hamburg tracts or plates should be suitable for use in Berlin or Basel or anywhere else. The German Societies, however, were insistent on producing and printing their own tracts.<sup>26</sup> Cooperative arrangements came only after 1848. The same can be said of the individual efforts. Although Recke-Volmerstein, Barth, Burk, and Wichern were each aware of the other's work, they chose to establish their own organizations.

Despite similarities, each Society gave individual expression to its work and activity. Although sharing common goals, the Societies' perception of how to meet these goals varied. The Eisleben Society desired to differ from English efforts. The Uhle brothers wished to avoid appealing to feelings by providing sound teaching. The Society wished to reintroduce a reverence for Scripture and provide a reacquaintance with its stories and teachings, especially to make the gospel of Jesus alive in the hearts of readers. Wuppertal had always been a centre of pietistic activity. The Society there initially chose to reprint English publications. These included a greater number of conversion accounts than other Societies. (Although critics complained the tracts were more suitable for the converted than for converting.) In the 1840s Society supporters began to respond to criticisms by focussing on developing original tracts. At the same time the Society seemed to consider it a duty to compose polemics against Rome. The Berlin Society organized to assist the Bible Society. This was the reverse of the

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<sup>26</sup> "Minutes", *RTS* (12 Oct. 1830): 237, for example, note that Berlin objected to the proposal to receive plates from Hamburg and to insert their own title page. The Berlin Society wrote the RTS requesting the committee to "change their grant to a vote of money for them to print the tracts already approved by this society, at Berlin, from moveable type." Sibthorb was instructed to write that although the committee was open to suggestions they saw no need to depart from their principles in this present case.

English Religious Tract Society. Its tracts offered what one called “noble Lutheranism” including tracts on Baptism and Holy Communion, in contrast to the Union-oriented theology of the majority of tract societies. The Hamburg group of supporters came from the English and French Reformed Churches. Hamburg was the traditional point of entry for English influence. The same was true for the Tract Society Movement.

There were other differences, too. The type and degree of English influence varied. The efforts in Eisleben began independent of English aid as the result of one pious woman’s vision. The Society published no translations from English works. The Tract Societies in Wuppertal and Berlin were started because Pinkerton offered funds as well as encouragement when he helped organize local Bible Societies. Berlin translated some English tracts, often as a condition for obtaining further aid from the Religious Tract Society. Wuppertal and Hamburg printed more translations than original German works. The Wuppertal Society also received direct aid from Basel. The London committee liked to monitor closely what it termed its cause on the Continent. A number of German works, for example, promoting anti-evangelical views raised concern and anxiety in England. In 1845, efforts were made to determine the real state of affairs. A key contact was Johannes Gossner (1773-1858), who became an evangelical pastor in Berlin. The Religious Tract Society continued to give encouragement and aid and many new tracts contained powerful evangelical appeals.

The penetration power of tracts as “silent preachers” was repeatedly emphasized in the annual May meetings, as was the blessing of distribution: “He that watereth shall be watered also himself.”<sup>27</sup> In time, the era of Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany was replaced by an era of institutions. Children’s homes were established by Johann Falk (1768-1826), Recke-Volmerstein, Christian Zeller (1779-1860), and others. Lay people led the way. Others followed: Wichern; Theodor Fliedner (1800-1864), the father of deaconess work; Wilhelm Löhe (1808-1872); Claus Harms; Friedrich von Bodelschwang (1831-1910); to name a few.<sup>28</sup>

## V. THE MESSAGE OF THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

As interesting and useful as a review of the birth, background, and development of the Tract Society Movement in Germany is, the Movement’s intent and impact are best seen in its message and mission. Questions about

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<sup>27</sup> “Fourteenth Report, 1813”, *Proceedings* 205.

<sup>28</sup> Conze 239.

the tracts' contents immediately spring to mind. What did they say? How did they say it? Tracts do reflect the theological thinking of the Awakened and their views on the issues of the day. They summarized and popularized revivalist answers to questions about Christian faith and life and attempted to refute deist, infidel, and non-Protestant viewpoints. These concerns were approached with earnest ideals. In general, tracts provided aids for understanding the Bible and guidelines for personal faith. Since tracts were randomly published as material became available or as committees perceived needs, few attempts at classification or systematic arrangement have been made.<sup>29</sup> Societies generally promoted tracts with numerical lists in catalogues or advertisements. The predominance of specific themes and topics, and the underlying earnestness, becomes apparent by reading, compilation, and comparison.

How tracts presented doctrines is considered under the heading "The Christian Faith". This deals with the German Religious Tract Society Movement's views on the Bible, on God, on sin, on Jesus, on repentance, on faith, on the Church, and on judgement. Religious tracts upheld fundamental doctrines. Such concerns were, for example, offered as "subjects for consideration" in a tract by that name. The reader was to reflect upon himself, specifically upon his conscience, the world, his life and impending death, the coming judgement and the threat of hell. Then he was to consider in contrast: God, His holy law, the Christian religion, the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ and the promise of heaven. Prayerful meditation upon biblical truths would convince him: "Jesus is the way, and the blessed way is open to you."<sup>30</sup> The Bible was to be the basis for religious tracts. It was viewed as the source of divine truth, the living God's direct communication with his creations.<sup>31</sup> Tracts directed readers to the Bible. "What is a religious tract",

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<sup>29</sup> Löwe divided the tracts of German evangelical societies into four classes. In the First Class he placed those with general Christian content. These included calls to repent and believe. In a Second Class he listed tracts providing instruction on specific points of Christian faith and life. These included tracts: 1) about the Bible; 2) about Jesus; 3) about Christian life and morality in general; 4) about death and Christian hope; 5) about prayer, sacraments, and the church; 6) about Sabbath observance, home devotions, and Christian family life; 7) with special instructions for individuals according to their social position, age, or circumstances; and 8) directed to concerns of the times. The Third Class, labelled stories and sayings, included: 1) items from church history or the mission fields; 2) conversion accounts and anecdotes; and tracts designed for 3) the poor, the sick, and the misfortunate; 4) troubled consciences; 5) the worldly-minded and doubters; 6) youth; 7) workmen and servants; 8) marriage and family; 9) sailors and soldiers; 10) prisoners; 11) children. A Fourth Class included collections of Bible verses, prayers, and songs. Höpfner made five categories. The first four are almost identical to Löwe's division, with some rearrangement of the order. Children's tracts are a separate class.

<sup>30</sup> RTS 3, *Subjects for Consideration* (London, n.d.) 8.

<sup>31</sup> Typical was Samuel Collenbusch's (1724-1803) attitude, recorded by Geiger: "How glad I am that we have the Bible! I want to explore it further every day. Certainly one does not find

Bogue asked, “but a select portion of Divine truth in a printed form, a book, larger or smaller in size as the case may be, but designed and adapted to make the reader wise unto salvation?”<sup>32</sup> Tracts stressed strongly the need for faith in action. The predominant concern was personal piety and how to find it and foster it. The emphasis was on faith expressed in simple active love rather than on theological formulations. One ideal was for a Christian to renounce all formal education and withdraw from the world.<sup>33</sup>

Christian dogma was not infrequently presented as a secondary consideration, but certain truths were essential to facilitate a Christian life. The section titled “The Christian Life” deals with the German Religious Tract Society Movement’s views on the work of the Holy Spirit, on prayer, on the lifestyle of the saved versus that of transgressors, and on the great goal of temporal and eternal happiness. Right doctrines led to proper piety. Proper piety helped one recognize his duties. The word “mission” was important.<sup>34</sup> A Christian was not only to work, as opposed to being idle, but to work with a sense of the purpose for which he had received special gifts from God. Tracts often reflected a yearning for a return to an earlier, idealized time. *Der uralte Glaube der Christen* (The Good Old Christian Faith, 1829) analysed theological trends and concluded that, although all

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pearls every day but one does find gold.” Publications stressed the organic unity and harmony of the biblical books. The RTS published *The Evidences of Christianity* (n.d.) by Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), among other works, to show that divine revelation was reasonable. Cf. Max Geiger, “Das Problem der Erweckungstheologie”, *Theologische Zeitschrift* 14 (1958): 444.

<sup>32</sup> RTS 1, *An Address* 3.

<sup>33</sup> Horst Weigelt, *Die Erweckungsbewegung und konfessionelles Luthertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (Calw: Calwer, 1968) 48. Karl von Raumer (1783-1865) made an ardent appeal to his brother Friedrich, noting that “the final judgement does not ask about formal education but about faith which is active in love.” He continued: “Erst recht warnte er ihn natürlich vor Dichtung und Philosophie, vor Theater und Tanz. ... Geschichtlich gesehen verbanden sich hier bei K. v. Raumer ein pietistisch verengtes Welt- und Kulturverständnis, der Rigorismus der idealistischen Ethik und des Moralismus der Aufklärungsfrömmigkeit.” Raumer attempted to put these principles into practice. He founded a Journeymen’s and Workers’ Society (*Handwerker- und Arbeiterverein*). He read the Bible with them, shared mission stories and applied brotherly love to improve conditions. When he once learned that many workers spent Sunday evenings in the pubs because their own homes were unheated, he provided a heated room for them in his home. The Society was declared dangerous and illegal and dissolved on 5 March 1836. His efforts were exemplary. Later he joined the Lutheran Mission Society (Dresden, 1836) and supported Löhe’s mission to the Indians in North America (59-60).

<sup>34</sup> Houghton, *Frame* 244: “Why were we sent into this world?” Houghton quotes from John Newman’s (1801-1890) preaching, “Was it merely to live for ourselves, to live for the lust of the moment ... ? [E]veryone who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman, has a mission, has a work.”

men need to be saved, today's Christians do not believe this.<sup>35</sup> To believe with the whole heart, as the early church did, and to show perfect love, as the Apostles did, ought to be every Christian's goal. "Faith without love is dead, and belongs in hell," it declared, "love without faith belongs in heaven, then there one never believes and hopes but only sees and hears. Faith with love is for this world."<sup>36</sup>

Personal piety encouraged practical Christianity and permitted the pious to disregard confessional borders.<sup>37</sup> This does not mean, however, that all differences were overlooked or tolerated. The Tract Society Movement was decidedly Protestant and largely Calvinist. It vigorously confronted divergent viewpoints. The section on "Polemics and apologetics" deals with such responses. Sceptics, infidels, and deists most frequently received blunt warnings about death and hell.<sup>38</sup> Other tracts reminded Roman Catholics that only Protestants understood the Bible correctly and worshipped God properly. This "old religion", as taught by Jesus and his apostles and contained in the Bible, appeared in the "primitive Christian church" and afterwards among those whom the popes persecuted as heretics.<sup>39</sup>

The fathers and founders of the Religious Tract Society believed firmly that "an earnest goal must be pursued earnestly".<sup>40</sup> To direct sinners to the Saviour was one such goal. These men of faith pondered the challenge of furthering Christianity by transferring an attitude of earnestness. Earnestness, defined here as zeal, intensity, and single-mindedness, is a striking and persistent characteristic of the Tract Society Movement and of

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<sup>35</sup> Wuppertal 133, *Der uralte Glaube der Christen* (Barmen, 1829) 11. The title may be translated as "The original Christian Faith." This corresponds to RTS 29, *The Good Old Way; or the Religion of our Forefathers* (n.d.).

<sup>36</sup> Wuppertal 133, 25. H. Rothert, "Die Minden-Ravensbergische Kirchengeschichte," *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Westfälische Kirchengeschichte* 31 (1930): 86, notes Volkening coined the phrase "Gerettet sein gibt Rettersinn" and continues: "Die Dankbarkeit für erfahrene Hilfe treibt, andern zu helfen. Das gewonnene Gut läßt nicht schnöde ruhen. Wahrer Glaube kann gar nichts anders, es muß in der Liebe tätig sein."

<sup>37</sup> Burkhardt Mecking, *Christliche Biographien*, Europäische Hochschulschriften 23 (Frankfurt am Main: n.p., 1983): 54, 144 notes: "Lebensentscheidend ... ist nicht das richtige Reflektieren des Glaubens, sondern ist der Lebensvollzug im Glauben. ... Das einfachste Christentum ist praktisch ausgedrückt: Gott über alles! Den Nächsten wie sich selbst lieben; an Jesum Christum glauben und die Gnade Gottes und Vergebung durch ihn erlangen. ... Wer das treu übt, wird Frieden haben, und alles dogmatische Christentum wird ihn weder irren noch versteinern lassen. ... Konfessionelle Grenzen sind deshalb leicht zu überwinden. ... Praktisch Christ zu sein, nicht Reformierter, Lutheraner oder Katholik zu sein, ist das Entscheidende."

<sup>38</sup> RTS 354, *Address to a Sceptic* (London, n.d.); RTS 156, *The Testimony of an Infidel* (London, n.d.); RTS 41, *Three Queries to Deists* (London, n.d.).

<sup>39</sup> RTS 217, *The Protestant Religion No Novelty* (London, n.d.) 2-3.

<sup>40</sup> *Winke und Erfahrungen über Traktate und deren Verbreitung, Rpt. from Neueste Nachrichten aus dem Reiche Gottes* (Berlin: Trowitzsch und Sohn, 1839) 14.

its publications. Supporters believed that the harder they tried the more effective their outreach would be. Such a viewpoint, characteristic of sectarian movements, is frequently the force which drives the movement. This earnest approach to fostering and furthering the Christian faith makes the Religious Tract Society Movement an important area of investigation in the history of missions. The members of the English Religious Tract Society took seriously what they called their "Cause on the Continent" and were convinced that their approach would have an impact wherever it was used.<sup>41</sup>

Earnestness was not all bad. It did prompt the formation of numerous Tract, Bible, and Mission Societies. But there is a boundary, beyond which acceptable earnestness becomes a kind of deadly earnestness which discourages what it seeks to instil. The burning desire to reach others at times led to insensitivity, to an unhealthy emphasis on sins, and to an apparent lack of love and concern. The founders and furtherers of the Tract Society Movement were guilty of trying too hard.

Policing morals predominated. Special tracts addressed the attitudes, actions, and state of affairs connected with specific sins and sinners. Cruelty and covetousness arose in a heart "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked".<sup>42</sup> Tholuck presented the unreasonableness of greed.<sup>43</sup> Desires led to stealing. One convicted thief confessed that the lottery was the first step to his misfortune and warned readers that "those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare" (I Timothy 6:9).<sup>44</sup> Licentiousness and lewdness led to disgrace, prostitution, and the damnation of many souls.<sup>45</sup> The unfortunate female was reminded, "the fatal step to which you ascribe the horrors of your present situation", would never be forgotten, but God Almighty said, "Come out from the wicked and be separate, and I will receive thee as my daughter."<sup>46</sup> Drinking and swearing were attacked. Drinkers were told that their favourite pastime brought them no friends, added nothing to their health, would never make them rich, and more seriously, they were thrusting away the mercies of God.<sup>47</sup> They were exhorted to be sober and watchful.<sup>48</sup> Gathering at the "watering places" should remind them that they will be

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<sup>41</sup> This phrase from reports and correspondents reflects the responsibility the founders felt towards the Continent.

<sup>42</sup> RTS 183, *On Cruelty* (London, n.d.) 2, quoting Jer. 17:9.

<sup>43</sup> Wuppertal 374, *Wider Sorge und Geiz* (Barmen, n.d. [1851]) 3-4.

<sup>44</sup> Wuppertal 81, *Die Lotterie* (Barmen, 1823) 22.

<sup>45</sup> RTS 185, *On Licentiousness* 7-8.

<sup>46</sup> RTS 9, *To the Unfortunate Female* (London, n.d.) 1, 8.

<sup>47</sup> RTS 343, *What do you get by gin-drinking?* (London, n.d.); Wuppertal 179, *Alles dient zum Besten nebst einer Zugabe über Trunkenheit* (Barmen, n.d.); Hamburg 56, *Martha Friedberg, Eine Erzählung, besonders für christliche Dienstboten*. Aus dem Englischen (Berlin, n.d.).

<sup>48</sup> Elsner, *Neueste Nachrichten* (Aug. 1825): 275.

gathered on the last day before God.<sup>49</sup> Drinking soldiers were pointed to hair-breadth escapes from battles and fevers: “God has not promised to be merciful beyond the grave; and if you continue in a course of drunkenness and swearing ... your punishment in a future world is certain, and dreadful beyond expression. It ought to make you tremble.”<sup>50</sup> Statistics were cited: annually 10 000 people in Germany died of insanity related to drunkenness.<sup>51</sup> The popular *Swearer’s Prayer* (n.d.) stressed that swearing was praying for punishment:

O God! thou hast power to punish me in hell forever: therefore, let not one of my sins be forgiven! Let every oath that I have sworn, every lie that I have told, every sabbath that I have broken, and all the sins I have committed, whether in thought, word or deed, rise up in judgment against me, and eternally condemn me! Let me never partake of thy salvation! ... O God, let me not only be shut out of heaven but also shut up in hell! ... Pour down thy hottest anger; execute all thy wrath and curse upon me; ... . Be mine eternal enemy and plague and punish and torment me in hell, for ever, and ever!<sup>52</sup>

Appropriate illustrations of answers to this “prayer” followed. Only on rare occasion could those addicted to swearing overcome their hardened hearts and be reclaimed for Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Some authors assumed the “ungodly”, that is, those who seemed not to regard human sinfulness with earnest concern, read tracts, and thus phrased them accordingly. “I assume you do not yet know the blessedness of a pure heart from your own experience”, began one, and continued: “Or can you deny that lust only all too easily draws her miserable slaves into contempt for parents, to dishonesty, to temptation, to gluttony, to addiction to gambling, to wastefulness, to defiance, to cruelty and mercilessness, to unnatural depravities, to the most shocking inhumanities, even of children, and to suicide?”<sup>54</sup> Another concluded with these pointed remarks: “Does this little tract speak to any poor transgressor—does any wretched prostitute now read this, or does it reach, what may even be considered as an unspeakably

<sup>49</sup> RTS 241, *Friendly Hints to the Visitors at Watering Places* (London, n.d.) 1.

<sup>50</sup> RTS 47, *Für Kranke zur heilsamen Erweckung und wahren Beruhigung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berlin, 1835) 2.

<sup>51</sup> Wuppertal 387, *Warnung vor einem Apollyon, einem großen Verderber und Zerstörer unseres deutschen Volkes. Eine Bitte und eine Mahnung zur Förderung der Enthaltensvereine*, von F. Sander, Pastor (Barmen, 1853) 5.

<sup>52</sup> RTS 76, *The Swearer’s Prayer; or his Oath Explained* (London, n.d.) 1-2. For the German version cf. Bremen Tractatenthau 8.

<sup>53</sup> RTS 801, *The Reclaimed Infidel; Being an Account of the Last Days of William Rose, A drummer in his majesty’s 59<sup>th</sup> regiment of foot, who died at Berhampore, East Indies, 8 January 1821*. (London, n.d.) 8.

<sup>54</sup> Berlin 30, *Die Seligkeit des reinen Herzens. Ein Wort der innigen Liebe*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Berlin, 1853) 7.

viler character still, any practised seducer—it speaks to thee, even to thee, miserable sinner.”<sup>55</sup> Sabbath breakers received similar blunt directives: “You openly insult God. ... You corrupt the neighbourhood. ... You wilfully murder your own soul!”<sup>56</sup> One tract argued that every reader must have at some time contemplated suicide.<sup>57</sup>

Piety led to paradise; pleasures threatened salvation. Not much escaped censure. Fairs and races, music festivals, and the theatre were forbidden. Observation was as sinful as participation. When little Elisabeth’s conscience prodded her to confess that she peeked into a public dance, her mother tearfully exclaimed, “Must I live to see that my children, whom I dedicated to Jesus, turn their eyes away from him to look at the sinful pleasures of this world?”<sup>58</sup> Another tract, designed to be left lying in parks, at races, dances, and other amusements asked: “Sabbath-breaker! lover of pleasure! who art rebelling against thy Maker’s law ... . WHAT DOEST THOU HERE?” (*sic*)<sup>59</sup>

Fears about the future were the presages of ruin. Not everyone could be peaceful facing death.<sup>60</sup> Not everyone was prepared.<sup>61</sup> “Give me five minutes to tell you about eternity”, pleaded one tract.<sup>62</sup> “Alas! what heart can possibly conceive, or what tongue can express the pains of those souls that are now enduring the wrath of God”, echoed another.<sup>63</sup> Repent, reader, or you too may see hell, was its message. A third asked: “Reason says you have a soul that will not die; where will it live?”<sup>64</sup> “What is your soul worth?” challenged another.<sup>65</sup> “What would you do if you knew you had one week to live?”<sup>66</sup> “Satan says, ‘You shall not die.’ Jesus says, ‘I give you eternal life.’”<sup>67</sup> Novel introductions were tried:

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<sup>55</sup> RTS 185, *On Licentiousness* 12.

<sup>56</sup> RTS 267, *Heavy Charges Against Sabbath Breakers* (London, n.d.) 1-3.

<sup>57</sup> RTS 154, *On Suicide* (London, n.d.) 1.

<sup>58</sup> Wuppertal 103, *Das Leben ... Elisabeth Schneider* 157.

<sup>59</sup> RTS 485, *The More Convenient Season* (London, n.d.) 2. Cf. RTS 32, *The Immoral and Anti-Christian Tendency of the Theatre*; exhibited in extracts from various authors (London, n.d.); 254, *Pleasure Fairs and Wakes: eight good reasons for not going to them* (London, n.d.); 256, *The Evil Consequences of Attending the Race-Course. A Christian Minister’s Appeal to his Flock* (London, n.d.); 286, *Musical Festivals and Oratorios* (London, n.d.); 335, *A Peep at the Races* (London, n.d.).

<sup>60</sup> RTS 285, *Peace in Death*. Illustrated in an authentic narrative (London, n.d.).

<sup>61</sup> RTS 289, *Preparation for Death* (London, n.d.) 1-4.

<sup>62</sup> RTS 55, *Five Minutes Consideration* (London, n.d.) 1.

<sup>63</sup> RTS 331, *For Ever !!* (London, n.d.) 1.

<sup>64</sup> RTS 65, *Friendly Advice, to All Whom It May Concern* (London, n.d.) 1.

<sup>65</sup> RTS 359, *What is the Soul Worth?* (London, n.d.) 1.

<sup>66</sup> RTS 58, *The Death of Altamont* 1.

<sup>67</sup> RTS 148, *Hopes for Eternity* (London, n.d.) 1, 4.

Mr B. laughed at the Bible  
 as long as he was well;  
 But on his death bed he cried,  
 "Oh! the burning of hell!"<sup>68</sup>

Pride was the underlying problem. "Oh! there is not a more certain indication of approaching ruin, than for the heart to be hardened against reproof."<sup>69</sup>

The great goal was happiness for now (even in death) and for ever. "My desire is to live every moment to God", the Dairyman's Daughter wrote on one occasion, "that I may, through his grace be kept in that heavenly, happy frame of mind, that I shall wish for at the hour of death. We cannot live or die without this; and to keep it, we must be continually watching and praying; for we have many enemies to disturb our peace."<sup>70</sup> Happiness is the great goal of a true Christian life. "If we believe in the Son of God", the poor were counselled, "whatever trials we may meet with in the present life, our best concerns are safe, and our happiness is sure."<sup>71</sup> The Tract Society Movement emphasized happiness as part of the narrow way to heaven, not in the ways of the world. Happiness consists in a right disposition of the heart towards God. Hence it must be sought: in the knowledge of God; in the love of God; in the service of God.<sup>72</sup> One tract instructed fathers, as the title explained, *How to Train a Family to be Happy now, and for ever* (n.d.).<sup>73</sup> Another tract compared Jesus with the "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46) for which a merchant would give up all that he possessed. It stressed that possessing Christ would make one richer than "the man who only has gold and silver", although not in a worldly sense, and invited the reader to receive this costly gift, so that he "may possess Christ who will obtain forgiveness for you, make you holy, restore you to the favour of God, and make you happy for ever."<sup>74</sup> A Berlin tract noted that, "This salvation flows into our hearts through the forgiveness of sins. Then where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and happiness."<sup>75</sup> Culmination was best observed and best awaited not in grand and glorious ways, but in quiet contentment and prayerful patience, working in pious hearts like yeast in a dough. The Tract Societies declared that their goal was "to prepare the way for God's Word through the distribution of smaller devotional writings, to

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<sup>68</sup> RTS 156, *The Testimony of an Infidel*. A True Narrative (London, n.d.) 1.

<sup>69</sup> RTS 505, *Amaziah; or, the Presages of Ruin* (London, n.d.) 4.

<sup>70</sup> Richmond 29.

<sup>71</sup> RTS 245, *A Word to the Distressed Poor* (London: RTS, n.d.) 1.

<sup>72</sup> RTS 226, *Happiness Realized* (London, n.d.).

<sup>73</sup> RTS 501, *How to Train a Family to be Happy now and for ever* (London, n.d.).

<sup>74</sup> RTS 480, *A Rich Gem* (London, n.d.) 1, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Berlin 45, *Der Trost der Sündenvergebung besonders im heiligen Abendmahl* 3.

move people to think about themselves, and to lead them on the way of happiness.”<sup>76</sup>

The ultimate source of happiness and the final delivery from all sorrows and spiritual dangers was the hope of a blessed death. Genuine faith enabled true happiness. A believer might sing: “Oh for an overcoming faith, To cheer my dying hours, To triumph o’er the monster death, And all his frightful powers! Joyful with all the strength I have, My quivering lips should sing, ‘Where is thy boasted victory, grave? And where the monster’s sting?’”<sup>77</sup> A conversation with a hay-maker in a freshly cut field centred on the thought that all people will be cut down by death: “To say I am no worse than my neighbours is a poor ground of hope. Only Christ’s blood cleanses us from sin.”<sup>78</sup> Widow Brown in *Death Beds* (n.d.) wanted to comfort every dying person. Mr Grey argued successfully that there can be no true peace and comfort without forgiveness and faith.<sup>79</sup> Tracts contained multiple examples of falling asleep in the faith, including many for children. Vivid descriptions of the evils of this world and the promises of a better life in the beyond awakened the desire to depart. The concern was for pure motives: “A Christian ... can pine for the moment of his deliverance from sadness, from lack of faith, from lack of trust towards himself or perhaps even towards the invisible hand that guides him. ... We know that the Lord ... has gracious purposes in mind. ... Our lot is therefore to wait patiently for the day of the Lord.”<sup>80</sup> Believers were to be patient, faithful, and engaged in the Father’s business.<sup>81</sup> Special grace upheld parents who lost children.<sup>82</sup> A common summary was: “He got sick ... and reached the goal of his faith through a peaceful death in faithful hope of his acceptance into glory through the merits of his Saviour.”<sup>83</sup> To die young was a great blessing. An estimated 1500 children attended the funeral for young Dina Doudney. The preacher, named Griffin, was to stress, according to her last wishes: to love Jesus, to obey parents, to avoid lying, and to think about dying and going home.<sup>84</sup> She had been a happy child, even when facing death, because she had often prayed, read the Bible, Bunyan’s works and stories about martyrs, attended

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<sup>76</sup> Wuppertal 65, *Abendgespräch* 21.

<sup>77</sup> RTS 285, *Peace in Death* (London, n.d.) 8.

<sup>78</sup> RTS 490, *A Good Hope for Eternity* (London, n.d.) 4.

<sup>79</sup> RTS 330, *Death Beds* (London, n.d.).

<sup>80</sup> Wuppertal 54, *Erbauliche Auszüge aus G. F. Hilmers Kirchenhistorischen Anmerkungen* 22, 24-25.

<sup>81</sup> RTS 289, *Preparation for Death* (London, n.d.) 2-3.

<sup>82</sup> RTS 351, *To a Christian Parent on the Death of an Infant* (London, n.d.) 5.

<sup>83</sup> Wuppertal 38, *Wunderwege des Herrn zur Bekehrung der Seelen* 24. Fortunately, as was frequently the case, “legte er die umständliche Erzählung seines Lebensganges bis zu seiner letzten Krankheit bei; aus welcher das hier Erzählte ein Auszug ist.”

<sup>84</sup> Wuppertal 177, *Die kleine Dina Doudney* (Barmen, n.d.) 4.

church faithfully, was very concerned about other people's salvation, understood long before her death how a sinner is made holy, and was a loving and obedient child. In Dina's case a long excursus on obedience obscured God's work in her life. Happiness came through proper piety. Jesus was hardly mentioned. Appeals were made to those attending funerals,<sup>85</sup> to those who just lost a friend,<sup>86</sup> or to those witnessing an execution.<sup>87</sup> Again and again the reader was reminded: "Let your temporal and eternal interests be fairly balanced and compared. ... Prepare for the passing of time and the entry into eternity."<sup>88</sup> One tract, describing various Bible, Tract, and Mission Societies as ecumenical, pointed out that confessional boundaries had fallen and noted: "Here all join together in a brotherly manner and actively reach out to one another to achieve the great goal."<sup>89</sup>

Religious Tract Societies did not intend their simple publications to teach deep theological truths. Tracts were to reinforce practical, everyday aspects of Christian faith and life. They were deliberately designed to portray the earnest nature of man's position before his almighty Creator and the eternally disastrous consequences of ignoring God's existence and power. Tracts directed sinners to the Bible, God's Word and a hidden treasure, and showed how it ought to be approached and applied. They spoke of a powerful and good God who sincerely desired to awaken all people from the deadly sleep of sin and to guide them to Jesus Christ, the sinner's friend. Sincere repentance and conversion prepared the way for the Spirit to create precious faith in human hearts. Faith in turn created a fellowship called the church, which could be a pious assembly with or without sacraments. The church helped sustain the believer and prepare him for the day of judgement which guaranteed heavenly riches or the insufferable pangs of hell. The believer's earnest orientation towards God's Word was made evident in a Christian life. Great reliance was to be placed on the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier of the saved. Prayer, the soul's uninterrupted conversation with God, was to be prominent. The call to follow Christ led one on the narrow way to heaven, characterized by holiness, piety, purity, and purification by affliction. This stood in stark contrast to the broad way of transgressors with its spiritual declension, pursuit of pleasures, and presages of ruin. The great goal was happiness for now (even in death) and for ever. To reinforce a right understanding of the Christian faith and life, tract societies also engaged in

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<sup>85</sup> RTS 48, *To the Spectator of a Funeral* (London, n.d.) 1, asked, "What drew you, curiosity or compassion?"

<sup>86</sup> RTS 276, *To the Believer on the loss of Christian Friends* (London, n.d.).

<sup>87</sup> RTS 61, *The Dying Criminal*. Addressed to the Spectators of an Execution (London, n.d.).

<sup>88</sup> RTS 281, *Time and Eternity* (London, n.d.) 1.

<sup>89</sup> Wuppertal 65, *Abendgespräch zwischen dem Pastor Schriftlieb und dem Ackermann Fromme* (Barmen, 1822) 20.

polemics and apologetics. Specific tracts pointed out the pretensions of infidelity in addresses to sceptics, infidels, and deists. They also clearly indicated in addresses to Roman Catholic laity that Protestantism was no novelty.

The numerous and diverse publications of the German Religious Tract Society Movement publicized and popularized the Awakening's unwritten dogmatics. These included, as Wurster noted, an emphasis on religious experience, on individualized interpretation and application of the entire Bible as opposed to a historical-critical approach, and on strict ethical principles to win over others and to better the world.<sup>90</sup> One difficulty encountered in a study of the message of the movement is the temptation to make doctrinal books out of devotional materials. Although devotional books and tracts do reflect underlying doctrines, these doctrines are not always clearly expressed. With the Awakening's emphasis on the individual believer came a certain amount of latitude, or laxity, in matters of doctrine. This approach is not far from Bentham's utilitarianism or other contemporary pragmatic philosophies which assert: What's true is what benefits you; nothing else matters. The believers' aversion to theological formulations means that the respective doctrines are more frequently presumed than stated. Doctrinal vagueness was considered proof that confessional boundaries were falling. It is possible that the lack of clear teaching on key doctrines, and the resulting insecurity about one's own salvation, may underlie some of the earnestness and activity characteristic of the times and of the Tract Society Movement.

## **VI. THE MISSION OF THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY MOVEMENT IN GERMANY**

The overall purpose of the Religious Tract Societies, to direct sinners to the Saviour, determined the content and the manner of presentation. This could mean leading a lost soul to Christ (conversion), restoring a wandering sinner through repentance, or strengthening a weak believer through Scriptural truths. Some tracts instructed church members about Baptism, confirmation, and Holy Communion. Others focussed on pastoral concerns, such as family and marriage, illness and death. Apologetic writings defended Christianity against sects, superstition, materialism, and competing thought systems or life styles. The underlying convictions of the five British Missionary Societies which began work between 1792 and 1804 are well illustrated in Bogue's *An Address to Christians on the Distribution of Religious Tracts*

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<sup>90</sup> Paul Wurster, *Die Lehre von der Inneren Mission* (Berlin, 1895) 365.

(1799).<sup>91</sup> It is not enough, he said, to relieve the temporal necessities of the poor and afflicted; one must be “most concerned for the salvation of his soul, and his eternal blessedness”.<sup>92</sup> The challenge was twofold: 1) to be so moved by Jesus’ love and one’s own eager, earnest desire to save souls as to cry out “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” and 2) to make the most of the times. He added:

This is an age of ingenuity. How many discoveries, useful to individuals and to society, have been made since we first entered upon life. ... Whatever may be said as to past negligence, let it now appear that we are busied in discovering every way of access for Divine truth into the human heart; and that we are resolved to employ all the means we can think of as conducive to that end.<sup>93</sup>

Bogue suggested that among all these means of access, none ought to be neglected, but that the distribution of religious tracts merited particular attention.<sup>94</sup> Simplicity was more important than scholarship. “The tract should be an arrow”, Lowe suggested, “swiftly winged, sharply pointed, with a head of solid, pure metal.”<sup>95</sup> A tract’s potential penetration power underscored its importance as a substitute missionary.

Supporters of the Religious Tract Society Movement desired to win readers away from obscene and other undesirable popular and political literature (*Schmutz und Schund*). This was no easy task. Doctrinal tracts could become too monotonous; apologetic tracts, too superficial. Revival tracts could bring discredit. “Good tracts are not simply produced; they are a gift of God”, Bodemann observed; “a good tract which is not boring, but penetrates and ignites all sorts of souls and many hearts, is really not easy to write. It is easier to make ten good sermons than one good tract.”<sup>96</sup>

The Religious Tract Society Movement presents a dual dynamic in terms of mission theory. The Religious Tract Society operated as both a home and a foreign mission society. The German societies, in view of the greater human needs and the more limited resources resulting from the Napoleonic wars, generally stressed mission at home versus mission abroad. Christians on both sides of the Channel were reminded of their duty to spread the

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<sup>91</sup> G. H. G. Hewitt, “Reflections on the Early History of the R. T. S.”, *The International Review of Missions* 39 (1950): 89 lists the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the London Missionary Society (1795), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the RTS (1799), and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804).

<sup>92</sup> RTS 1, *An Address* 1.

<sup>93</sup> RTS 1, *An Address* 2.

<sup>94</sup> Hewitt, “Reflections” 88, quotes Ruth Ure, *The Highway of Print*: “The strategic use of the printing press to meet the needs of a literate nucleus of enquirers and converts has been one of the distinguishing marks of Protestant missions.”

<sup>95</sup> Löwe 363.

<sup>96</sup> Bodemann 49.

gospel. The conversion of souls was the main goal of mission. Such stories as first or third person testimonials and reports of changed lives or circumstances were provided to prove the truth of Christianity.

The distribution of religious tracts was heralded as something every Christian could do and one of the best methods for him to do good to his fellow creatures. Societies relied upon distributors to be sowers of good seed. The initial attempt was to have societal supporters and correspondents be the main distributors. Because of their positions and to broaden the outreach, pastors and teachers were highly desired as tract distributors. Businessmen and others who travelled were encouraged to distribute tracts along the way. That could mean giving them away in inns or even scattering them from a coach window for pedestrians to pick up. A ready-made opportunity for even greater distribution came as other societies promoted their causes on the Continent. Thus, the Religious Tract Society made use of representatives from the British and Foreign Bible Society (London, 1804), the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews (London, 1809), and the Continental Society (London, 1817). The Religious Tract Society also sent out its own representatives. As they became more established, German tract societies sent out agents and colporteurs. Societies hoped, and prayed, that tract recipients would be bearers of good fruit. All types, situations, and conditions of local recipients were addressed. Soldiers and seamen were targeted as special groups. Bogue provided encouragement for the ordinary Christian:

A religious tract contains a plain, serious, and striking lecture on the salvation of the soul. It would require some time to speak its contents, and they might slip out of the memory, and could not afterwards be recalled. But it is given away in an instant; it may be perused and re-perused at pleasure; and the truth may thus flow through a great variety of channels, and profit even many years hence.<sup>97</sup>

When the Religious Tract Society chose Christian literature as its mission tool, it was building on basic foreign mission principles formulated by Batholomew Ziegenbalg (1683-1719). In 1705, he and Heinrich Plütschau (1677-1746), Lutheran graduates from Halle, became the first European Protestants to undertake mission work in India. Ziegenbalg's principles, which have guided mission activity ever since, included that all Christians must be able to read the Word of God. This would require education, translation, and understanding the cultural mind set. He also insisted that the aim of mission work must be the definite and personal conversion of the people. Supporters of the Religious Tract Society in England and of the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany concurred that their

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<sup>97</sup> RTS 1, *An Address* 5.

publications served these purposes. The task was, however, not as simple as it seemed. Counted among the challenges encountered during the first half of the nineteenth century must be the educational and social barriers and competition for those who could read.

The Enlightenment produced a literary revolution, but learning took place more slowly in Germany. This was especially so in the country. Teachers could hardly read themselves. Students quickly lost what they learned in the midst of all the farm chores. A Bible was only considered necessary for a child being confirmed.<sup>98</sup> Schenda's most optimistic estimate is that around 1800 about twenty-five percent of the population could read, and in 1830, about forty percent.<sup>99</sup> Few could afford to read. The size and price of books frightened even the well educated. Tracts became popular because they were small and affordable, often free. As to reading tastes, workers, weavers, and ordinary people preferred literature that lifted them out of the morass of daily existence and diverted their attention, even for a time, from their problems. Kuczynski commented:

The reader overcame his discontent with his own misery by reading entertaining literature: he enjoyed the cruel treatment given to protagonists and thereby lost the critical contrast with the real application of cruelty and power. ... The popular reading materials transmitted nothing but misunderstandings: about spirits as much as about orphans, about the heathen not any less than about murders, about soldiers as well as about miller's daughters ...<sup>100</sup>

Increased literacy, and a concern for good reading materials, created a market for religious tracts. Good literature should have something to do with religion, society supporters reasoned. It should turn attention away from this world, preach patience, admonish the sinner to repent, and turn the evil in this world into love. Industrial progress in England, for example, often necessitated a farm family's move to the city. A move created new temptations. The Religious Tract Society consoled and counselled with *The Duties and Encouragements of the Poor* (n.d.), *The Importance of Sobriety* (n.d.), and *The Immoral and Anti-Christian Tendency of the Theatre* (n.d.).<sup>101</sup> Devotional literature rejected the prevailing pessimism of the early 1800s and encouraged optimism through trust in God.<sup>102</sup> Barth illustrated this in his *Rabenfeder* (The Raven's Feather, n.d.):

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<sup>98</sup> Voss 80-81.

<sup>99</sup> Schenda, *Lesestoff* 38.

<sup>100</sup> Kuczynski 187-188.

<sup>101</sup> RTS tracts 22, 24, and 32.

<sup>102</sup> Schenda, Volk 350. He noted that the *Gülden ABC für Jedermann* (The Golden ABC's for Everyone, 1861) expressed it thus: *Allein auf Gott setz dein Vertrauen, Auf Menschen-Hilfe gar nicht bauen; Gott ist allein, der Glauben hält, Kein Glauben findest du bei der Welt.*

“You are then now without a home?”  
 “Yes, and without food; but certainly not without hope.”  
 “What is it then that you hope in?”  
 “In God.”<sup>103</sup>

The Religious Tract Society developed a Narrative Series to compete with and to supplant other popular literature among the working class. Such striking titles as *The Dying Gypsy* (n.d.), *The Effects of Infidelity* (n.d.), *The Fortune Teller's Conjuring Cup* (n.d.), *The Self-Murderer* (n.d.), *Tom Troper's Tale over his Jug of Ale* (n.d.), *The Stingy Farmer's Dream* (n.d.), and *Rhyming Dick and the Strolling Player* (n.d.), introduced exciting stories based on factual experiences.<sup>104</sup>

Tract Societies wished to clarify all misunderstandings about life by speaking forthrightly and clearly about God and his grace, about human sin and the need for faith in Jesus. The conviction, that the saving facts of the whole Christian gospel could be communicated so effectively as to result in a decision to believe, was shared by most of the early supporters of the Religious Tract Society. There were other motives in play also.<sup>105</sup> For the members and supporters of the Religious Tract Society, the outreach endeavours on the Continent, including those in Germany, presented English Christians with a foreign mission field close to home.

Tract society committees collected and circulated stories and reports as proofs of the truth of Christianity. A testimonial about a tract's effectiveness demonstrated that the conversion of souls was the main goal of mission. The underlying theory was that each account, in turn, could convert unbelievers, encourage doubters, recruit distributors, and increase donations. The common conviction was, as societies frequently stated, that their object was sowing, not reaping. Supporters and distributors only needed to be patient because “good seed must sooner or later, under the divine blessing, yield good fruit.”<sup>106</sup> Since tracts were viewed as weapons to battle the

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This may be translated: Put your trust in God alone, and do not rely on human help; God alone preserves your faith; you will find no faith in the world.

<sup>103</sup> Schenda, *Volk* 350.

<sup>104</sup> This series, better known as *Hawkers' Tracts*, created embarrassment for the RTS because they often required more time and money than the First Series Tracts and were deemed much inferior in content. Major revisions changed thousands of words between 1818 and 1820. The committee desired to retain such tracts, suspect and sensational as they were, for fear of what people might read should these be removed from circulation, and most importantly because they were able to document conversions brought about by them. See the chapter on Hawkets in Jones.

<sup>105</sup> Stuart Piggin, “Assessing Nineteenth-Century Missionary Motivation: Some Considerations of Theory and Method”, *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian*, Derek Baker, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978) offers an interesting analysis on research done to date.

<sup>106</sup> *Twenty-seventh Report* (London: RTS, 1826) 36, re. the Bremen Society.

Enlightenment's evil influences, a generous distribution was desired. On a battlefield only one out of 12 000 bullets hit the enemy; to print that many tracts was a small price to save a soul.<sup>107</sup> Proof that the societies achieved their objectives and that the tracts reached intended targets was provided in extracts of correspondence in annual reports.

The *First Report* (1800) of the Religious Tract Society reminded supporters: "What is written must be circulated with vigour."<sup>108</sup> This appealed to the new spirit arising in England in the 1790s, which called for the increased, conscientious involvement of ordinary church members. Traditionally commissions, princes, and an otherwise select few provided support. The January 1813 *Missionary Register* appealed to readers to join in all earnest endeavours for propagating the Gospel. It noted that the close of the eighteenth century, and the beginning of the nineteenth, would be "ever memorable in the history of the Church, for the diffusion of this zeal, and for the establishment of various new Societies, which give full promise of becoming important instruments in the conversion of the world."<sup>109</sup> Awakened believers concurred that the faith the outreach fostered was more important than the form of outreach. The formation of the Religious Tract Society in 1799 followed the trend of the times. In the early 1800s the voluntary association was the most popular way to go about a task. Missionary and philanthropic societies provided a cause to enlist idealism and to harness benevolence for religious ends. Societies joined churches, locally and nationally, in communal efforts. Detzler highlighted societies as the greatest English contribution to the German Awakening. He observed: "The British put into the hands of German Evangelicals the tools to express their revived faith, and the most eminent of these instruments was the voluntary society."<sup>110</sup>

The ultimate encouragement that permitted no distributor to forget the Movement's intentions or to ease up in earnest endeavours was the eternal dimension of the results, as noted in a report from the Lower Saxony Society: "Some of the good effects produced by the distribution of Religious Tracts in this country already appear; but most of its blessed fruits we shall see hereafter, when we shall no longer be permitted to print or to distribute Tracts."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Winke und Erfahrung über Traktate und deren Verbreitung* 11.

<sup>108</sup> *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years of the Religious Tract Society; Being a Compendium of its reports and extracts from the appendices* (London, 1820) 26.

<sup>109</sup> "An Appeal, particularly to Churchmen, on the Duty of propagating the Gospel", *The Missionary Register* (January 1813): 3.

<sup>110</sup> Detzler 49.

<sup>111</sup> *Twenty-eighth Report* (London: RTS, 1827) 48.

## VII. REACTIONS TO THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

What did others say about the tracts? Every mission method or tool has supporters and detractors. The reactions to the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany reinforce this basic observation. There was always an element of society desirous of a more earnest or severe expression of the Christian faith. The message and the mission of the Movement seemed to satisfy this desire because religious tracts did indeed appear to be invaluable in directing sinners to the Saviour and because they presented an apparently easy method of doing good. Tract Society reports suggested a nearly universal acceptance. “How receptive the people are for the spiritual nourishment which is offered in these little writings!” Elsner began one report.<sup>112</sup> Approval was not as universal as Tract Societies liked to portray in reports. Criticism came from the established churches. Religious tracts were frequently viewed with distrust by local pastors, regional superintendents, and other church officials with a responsibility for supervising the spiritual welfare of the German people. The tracts were considered to denigrate the church’s existing ministry and to represent doctrinal distortions. An agent named Nefeld, while active in Lemförde, was accused of flooding the area with small religious pamphlets that created “inroads for the notion that reading them is the only true devotion, and on the other hand that religious instruction in the churches and schools is either harmful or at least not helpful”.<sup>113</sup> He was also charged with distributing tracts that advocated a blind faith.

Responses to the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany ranged from enthusiastic approval to extreme disapproval. Positive responses, by individuals and the pious members of conventicles, indicate that tracts played an integral role in correcting rationalistic misinterpretations of the Bible and in edifying believers. These are documented in the testimonials and reports prepared by societies. Critics of the Movement, on the other hand, argued that the little pamphlets had a great potential for distortion. They believed that religious tracts furthered separatism, conventicles, blind faith, and misunderstandings about the biblical doctrines of man and redemption. The sharpest attacks came through the *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* (The General Church Paper), published in Darmstadt. One letter to the editor, Ernst Zimmermann (1786-1832), concluded: “What intelligent people we have these days—people to whom the Holy Spirit has

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<sup>112</sup> Elsner, *Neueste Nachrichten* (Sept. 1818): 289.

<sup>113</sup> *Hannoverschen Anzeigen* 3 Apr. 1824: 676, qtd. in “Die Aufsicht über die von auswärtigen Traktaten-Gesellschaften verbreiteten Schriften, 1824-1841”, Hannover 113, K I, Nr 1511-14.

revealed things that the Holy Scriptures know nothing about!”<sup>114</sup> Pückler-Moskau observed that it would be better if preachers taught people to think instead of just to believe.<sup>115</sup> The Religious Tract Society Movement’s distribution methods were proof enough for many of an underlying root problem: unreasonableness. Wurster spoke against the English custom of scattering and throwing away tracts. Tract distribution must be learned, he suggested. No one should distribute what he himself has not read and approved, nor without knowing something about the recipient’s faith and state of mind. The intent and possibility of further personal contact should be present. An unsuitable tract, he concluded, as true as it may be, can be more harmful than helpful.<sup>116</sup> Such concerns were at the heart of criticism by the churches.

Responses to criticism rarely addressed expressed theological or pastoral concerns. Explanations or defences contained appeals for divine help, in the face of adversity, with references to the devil’s doings. Proof of doctrinal correctness was, supporters argued, sufficiently demonstrated by examples of conversions and by successful tract distribution. Those who failed to understand this lacked divine grace. The Awakening’s failure to formulate and stimulate theological expression led to the development of confessionalism and the Free Church Movement. More serious than the criticism by churches were the controls imposed by various levels of government. These restricted both publication and distribution. Censorship and confiscation were frequently employed.

What was the content of responses to the religious tracts in Germany? Proponents of the Tract Society Movement perceived tracts as truly religious, i.e., satisfying spiritual needs and changing lives. Critics concluded that the same tracts were pseudo-religious because they ignored real needs and easily misled children and the uneducated. Supporters and distributors argued that the tracts were truth-revealing. Objections came from those who believed the tracts were truth-obscuring because they looked backwards to an unreal past or forwards to a life to come but never dealt directly with real-life issues. Earnest recipients found the religious tracts faith-strengthening. Ardent opponents viewed them as faith-weakening, noting that they were too feeling-oriented and fed zeal rather than faith. Glowing reports of the tracts’ effectiveness were offered as proof that they were edifying. Opposing reviews suggested that they were ineffective because of superficiality and exaggeration. Tract societies spoke highly of a direct and earnest approach. Tract critics found the publications, even when translated properly, much too English to address German needs.

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<sup>114</sup> A. Nitschke, “Tractatenunwesen”, *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* (22 Aug. 1829): 1075.

<sup>115</sup> Pückler-Moskau 298.

<sup>116</sup> Wurster 365.

### VIII. OBSERVATIONS

The biblical basis for mission methodology begins with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:20). Jesus Christ's "make disciples" reflects the supreme goal of Him, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:4). Further aid comes from Christ's own example. How did He approach those in need of the forgiveness He came to offer? A cursory reading of the Gospels suggests moments in which Jesus was just as earnest as any advocate of the Religious Tract Society Movement. He did not shy away from condemning sin and confronting hearers with sharp attacks on their attitudes and life styles. In fact, He began His ministry by preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). These approaches underscore the earnest nature of Christian mission. Jesus also used other approaches. He often exhorted, encouraged, invited. Jesus invited the fishermen James and John to follow Him and promised to make them fishers of men (Matthew 4:18-19). Such a call confronted their curiosity about the Christ and the claims others made about Him. Jesus dialogued with a rich young man (Matthew 19:16-30) to direct his attention to things that mattered more than wealth. His approach displayed concern, not sharp condemnation. To the woman at the well in Cana (John 4:7-38) He offered hope for a better way of life. These approaches underscore the evangelical nature of Christian mission.

Theology defines missiology and determines methodology.<sup>117</sup> The underlying theologies reinforced the outreach convictions. Mission starts were made on this basis. The German Tract Society Movement was aligned with more traditional mission theories. A common concept was that if God wants to do mission He will. Mission efforts from this theological standpoint take an informational approach. If conversion or awakening is something done by God, such as the prophet expressed it, "bring me back that I may be restored" (Jeremiah 31:18), that is, if a person is converted as opposed to converting himself, then the message should be less earnest exhortation and more evangelical encouragement. A God-centred conversion emphasizes a clear communication of the Bible. The Holy Spirit then uses this Word of God as a means of grace to bring about conversion or awakening. The job of a missionary, or the goal of a tract writer, is to provide the clearest possible proclamation of biblical truths so that this message of sin and of grace is seen to apply personally to the recipient.

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<sup>117</sup> Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965) 2, notes in addition: "Since the mission is not an entity in a class by itself, but always only an essential trait and expression of the life of the church, the faults of the church and of theology are symptomatically evident in the mission."

The cause is earnest. The approach should be evangelical. Tract writers frequently reached superficial conclusions and quickly condemned. They should have taken more time to comprehend the situation of the intended recipient. An evangelical approach suggests dialogue, not monologue. The Bible advises, "Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19). We wish we knew more about the many unnamed and unknown distributors. Their life stories would reinforce the importance of a direct, personal, evangelical approach in all forms of Christian outreach. God's Kingdom of Grace has always been best furthered by individual care and concern that communicates Christ's love. If earnest exhortation always produced awakening and conversion, then such earnestness would be a necessary ingredient in every mission appeal. Earnestness can encourage and convince one to reconsider the religious fundamentals of his life but not to reorder them. That requires a more reflective and reasoned approach. Not even Jesus had a one hundred per cent conversion rate. People confronted by his love and power sometimes still chose not to believe. Not even miracles or proofs of power were convincing. If miracles converted then surely the events of Good Friday and Easter should have eliminated the last vestige of unbelief and made Christians out of everyone. That did not happen. Some said, "How sad!" when Jesus died, and simply walked away. Despite all this, tracts remain a mission tool because the printed word can provide a persuasive, penetrating, and prolonged presentation for individuals to consider.

"Go," said Jesus, but with this new commandment, "that you love one another; even as I have loved you. ... By this all men will know that you are My disciples" (John 13:34-35). Jesus reminded His first missionaries that He came not to establish a kingdom but to call out His people. With such love, Jesus suggests, those who follow Him in faith will demonstrate beyond all doubt that they are truly concerned for the well being of others. The Religious Tract Society Movement reminded supporters of such basics by creating awareness and furthering awakening efforts. It asked believers "Who is that neighbour?" and proposed that every man, woman, and child encountered, regardless of race, creed, or living conditions, was meant. It considered religious tracts one way to reach them all. Since the task is so enormous, and the needs and people so varied, it encouraged individual efforts.

Mission and renewal movements always run their course, expanding and contracting. Can it be different? Are other approaches more effective and longer lasting? What basic assumptions may be made for missionary outreach? These questions go beyond the scope of this work on one Movement in the great century of missions. Endeavours to address such concerns, in response to Jesus' initial charge to the first disciples, "Go and make disciples", always, in time, become part of the history of ongoing outreach activity. Mission-minded Christians of any era need to apply an

approach drawn from the lessons Jesus gave us. They also need to be willing to learn from the past, from the history of missions. This study has focussed on one such undertaking. The overarching goal is expressed in the title: *Sinners Directed to the Saviour: the Religious Tract Society Movement in Germany (1811-1848)*.

## X. APPENDIX

The Appendix provides a Table of Dates relating activities in England to those on the Continent and serves as a ready reference for the overall development of the Movement.

<i>English and American developments</i>	<i>Continental and German developments</i>
1661 • Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England	1670 • <i>Collegia pietatis</i> founded by Spener
1671 • Horneck founded first Religious Society	1675 • <i>Pia Desideria</i> published
1678 • Horneck's Vestry Societies received rules • <i>Pilgrim's Progress</i> published	
1698 • Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge	1695 • <i>Waisenhausbuchhandlung</i> (Halle), founded by Francke
1701 • Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts	1710 • <i>von Cansteinische Bibelanstalt</i> (Halle)
1738 • Wesley's Conversion	1722 • Berthelsdorf print shop founded by Zinzendorf
1750 • Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor	1756 • <i>Die Gesellschaft von guten Freunden</i> (Basel)
	1773 • <i>Die Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des thätigen Christenthums</i> (Augsburg)
1780 • Sunday School Movement revived by Raikes	1780 • <i>Die Deutsche Christenthums Gesellschaft</i> (Basel)
1783 • Eclectic Society (London) • Clapham Sect	1783 • <i>Sammlungen für Liebhaber christlicher Wahrheit und Gottseligkeit</i> (Basel) appears
1792 • Baptist Missionary Society (Kettering)	
1794 • <i>Evangelical Magazine</i> published	1790s • Schirnding began tract and colportage work (Berlin)
1795 • London Missionary Society • <i>The Cheap Repository Tracts</i> , started by Hannah More	
1796 • Edinburgh Tract Society	

<i>English and American developments</i>	<i>Continental and German developments</i>
1797 • <i>A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes, Contrasted with Real Christianity</i> , published by Wilberforce	1797 • <i>Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap</i> (Rotterdam)
1799 • Church Missionary Society • Religious Tract Society	1799 • Ostfriesland Mission Society (Hatshausen) • <i>Die Gesellschaft zur Förderung und Ausbreitung des Christentums unter den nichtchristlichen Völkern</i> (Elberfeld)
1804 • British and Foreign Bible Society (London)	1800 • Janicke's Mission School • Berlin Mission Society 1802 • <i>Die Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung erbaulicher Schriften</i> (Basel)
1809 • London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews	1804 • <i>Die Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft</i> (Nürnberg) • Heidelberg Tract Society founded by Jung-Stilling • Bern Tract Society founded by Wytttenbach 1805 • <i>Die Bibelgesellschaft für die Königlich preussischen Staaten</i> (Berlin), founded by Janicke
1813 • RTS reports on new Tract Societies in Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Basel, and Zurich	1811 • <i>Der Christlicher Verein im nördlichen Deutschland</i> (Eisleben) • Elsner's and Janicke's Tract Society (Berlin) 1812 • <i>Bibelanstalt für die ärmeren Volksklassen in dem protestantischen Teil des Königreichs Württemberg</i> (Stuttgart)
	1814 • Netherlands Bible Society (Amsterdam and Rotterdam) • <i>Bergische Bibelgesellschaft</i> (Elberfeld) • <i>Die Traktat-Gesellschaft im Wuppertale</i> (Barmen) • <i>Preussische Hauptbibelgesellschaft</i> (Berlin) • <i>Der Hauptverein für christliche Erbauungsschriften in den Preussischen Staaten</i> (Berlin) • <i>Hamburg-Altonaischen Bibelgesellschaft</i>

<i>English and American developments</i>	<i>Continental and German developments</i>
1816 • American Bible Society (New York) • RTS reports on new Tract Societies in Koenigsfeld (Black Forest) and Cologne	1817 • Hanover Tract Society • <i>Neueste Nachrichten aus dem Reiche Gottes</i> (Berlin) started by Elsner
1817 • Continental Society (London)	1818 • Barmen Mission Society
	1819 • <i>Rettungsanstalt</i> (Düsselthal) founded by von der Recke-Vollmerstein
	1820 • <i>Die Niedersächsische Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung christlicher Erbauungsschriften</i> (Hamburg)
	1821 • Bremen Society for the Distribution of Small Christian Writings
	1822 • <i>Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentums unter den Juden zu Berlin</i> • <i>Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung</i> (Darmstadt) first published
	1824 • <i>Die Gesellschaft zur Beförderung evangelischen Missionen unter den Heiden</i> (Berlin)
1825 • American Tract Society (New York)	1825 • First Hamburg Sunday School
1826 • Home Missions Society (New York)	1828 • Elberfeld Mission Society • (later joined Rhine Mission Society)
	1829 • <i>Calwer Traktatverein</i> , founded by Barth
	1830 • <i>Verein für die Besserung der Straf-Gefangenen</i> (Berlin) • <i>Evangelische Gesellschaft</i> (Esslingen), founded by Christoph Hahn
1831 • Exeter Hall Missions Centre (London)	1831 • <i>Der Christenbote</i> , started by Burk
	1832 • <i>Evangelische Gesellschaft</i> (Stuttgart)
	1833 • <i>Rauhes Haus</i> (Hamburg), founded by Wichern • <i>Evangelische Bücherstiftung</i> ( <i>Calwer Verlagsverein</i> , Stuttgart)
	1834 • <i>Verein zur Verbreitung christlicher Schriften</i> (Basel)
	1835 • Sunday School Union (Berlin)
	1836 • Gossner Mission
	1836 • <i>Hamburg Traktatgesellschaft</i> founded by Oncken
1844 • YMCA founded	1844 • <i>Agentur des Rauhen Hauses</i> and <i>Fliegende Blätter aus dem Rauhen Hause</i> started by Wichern
	1845 • <i>Evangelische Bücherverein</i> (Berlin)

<i>English and American developments</i>	<i>Continental and German developments</i>
1846 • Evangelical Alliance	1848 • <i>Evangelische Gesellschaft für Deutschland</i> (Elberfeld) 1849 • <i>Wichern's Denkschrift</i> 1850 • <i>Evangelische Verein für Innere Mission</i> (Nürnberg) • <i>Schriftenabteilung der Gesellschaft für Innere Mission im Sinne der lutherischen Kirche</i> • Prussian Constitution grants full religious freedom

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**A HAPPY EXCHANGE:  
THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER  
AT CROSS AND ALTAR<sup>1</sup>**

*John R. Stephenson*

But the glory of our God is precisely that for our sakes he comes down to the very depths, into human flesh, into the bread, into our mouth, our heart, our bosom; moreover, for our sakes he allows himself to be treated ingloriously both on the cross and on the altar (Luther).<sup>2</sup>

**H**aving aligned himself with the Reformation in 1523, Cantor Nicholas Herman (ca. 1480-1561) contributed profusely to the treasure trove which is the hymnody of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. Each Christmas season many North American Lutherans gustily sing Herman's words found in *LW* 44 ("Let all together praise our God"<sup>3</sup>), stanza 4:

He undertakes a great exchange,  
Puts on our human frame,  
And in return gives us his realm,  
His glory and his name.

An early Reformation musician has here versified Luther's teaching, famously expressed in *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), of the "happy exchange" (*commercium admirabile, der fröhliche Wechsel*) whereby enfleshed God swapped places with us wretched sinners, Himself bearing

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<sup>1</sup> This article first appeared as "Ein fröhlicher Wechsel: Fürst und Bettelmann am Kreuz und Altar", in Jürgen Diestelmann and Wolfgang Schillhahn, eds, *Einträchtig lehren: Festschrift für Bischof Dr Jobst Schoene* (Groß Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung, 1997) 432-42. Luther's treatment of the ancient theme of "deification" has called forth several articles among North American Lutherans in recent years, and I am happy to have arrived at basically the same conclusions as my friend Professor Kurt Marquart, to whose recent *CTQ* contribution on this subject I wish to draw the attention of readers of *LTR*. See Kurt E. Marquart, "Luther and Theosis", *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64.3 (July 2000): 182-205.

<sup>2</sup> *AE* 37:72 (1527); *WA* 23:157.31-33: "Unsers Gotts ehre aber ist die, so er sich umb unser willen auff aller tieffest erunter gibt, yns fleisch, yns brod, ynn unsern mund, hertz und schos, Und dazu um unsern willen leidet, das er unehrlich gehandelt wird beyde auff dem creutz und altar."

<sup>3</sup> See "Lobt Gott, ihr Christen alle gleich", *Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch; Ausgabe für die Selbstständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980) 21, st. 4: "Er wechselt mit uns wunderlich: / Fleisch und Blut nimmt er an / Und gibt uns in seins Vaters Reich / Die klare Gottheit dran."

our doom and gracing us in return with a share in His native blessedness.<sup>4</sup> Yet this image of the “happy exchange” was not invented by the Lutheran Reformation, for already at the end of the second century St Irenaeus of Lyons had spoken in similar terms of the Christ “who, on account of His great love, became what we are, so that He might bring us to be what He Himself is”.<sup>5</sup>

The Reformer’s reminder in the first of the “95 Theses” that our Lord Jesus Christ wills the whole life of believers to consist in repentance applies also to teachers of theology. Throughout my first six years as a seminary professor I unwittingly imparted to my students a piece of inaccurate information which may now be corrected. As is well known, the ancient Fathers were wont to speak of salvation in terms unfamiliar and even shocking to the general run of western Christians. Thus Eastern Orthodoxy has inherited from remote antiquity the startling image of “deification” or *theosis*.<sup>6</sup> When teaching my seminary’s first course in historical theology, I have been in the habit of asserting that while, especially in his Christmas hymns, Luther availed himself of deification imagery,<sup>7</sup> the students could rest assured that the Reformer never employed the German or Latin equivalents of the term *theosis* itself.<sup>8</sup> Our religious culture stands under the shadow of John Calvin’s Nestorian Christology and of Karl Barth’s imbalanced proclamation of divine transcendence; so, since I too breathe in this air, there seemed to be no need to consult the Weimar Edition before confidently pronouncing that Luther would never have given his imprimatur to St. Athanasius’ hyperbolic assertion that “He became man so that we might become God.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> AE 31:351f.; WA 7:54.31-55.23 (Lat.).

<sup>5</sup> *Adversus haereses* V, Preface; qtd in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, ed. and trans. W. A. Jurgens (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1970) 99 (#248).

<sup>6</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968) 352; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (repr. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., *LW* 35 (“We praise, O Christ, your holy name”), st. 5. The deification nub of the “happy exchange” comes across more clearly in the German original, whose Christology is also stronger than that of the ET: “Der Sohn des Vaters, Gott von Art [The Prince, God’s very Son], / ein Gast in der Welt hier ward / und führt uns aus dem Jammertal, / er macht uns Erben in sein’m Saal [And to his royal hall we go]. Kyrieleis.” *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Kirchengesangbuch* #15, st. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Benjamin Drewery, “Martin Luther”, in: Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, ed., *A History of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1978) 326: “The communion is so close that faith, grace, and Christ—the mediator—are one: yet there is no ‘deification’, after the manner of the Greek Fathers.”

<sup>9</sup> A more extended quotation from St Athanasius somewhat qualifies his breathtaking claim: “He became man so that we might become God; and He manifested Himself in the flesh so that we might grasp the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of men, so

Since the rubber of dogmatics hits the road of the Church's life in her liturgy and hymnody, a closer look at Nicholas Herman's Christmas song would have afforded me a strong hint that the Reformer, who was neither a Calvinist nor a Barthian, may have been more patristic in his theology than we commonly suppose. For behind the watered-down English translation which specifies Christ's gift in exchange as "his realm, his glory, and his name" stands a German original which proclaims that, in His Father's kingdom, our Lord bestows on us "*die klare Gottheit*", that is, luminous divinity. A first-generation Lutheran here spoke not allusively, but explicitly, of "deification".

A team of Finnish researchers headquartered at the university of Helsinki has over the past decade ploughed a fresh furrow in Luther scholarship, pointing out that the Weimar Edition contains a generous sprinkling of positively used outright deification words spanning from 1514 to the last decade of the Reformer's life.<sup>10</sup> It turns out to be the case that, in his understanding of the ontological foundations and soteriological implications of the "happy exchange", Nicholas Herman was on the same wavelength as Luther himself who, preaching to the Wittenbergers in 1531 on the text Jn 6:51, proclaimed that Christians "eat and drink deifying flesh and blood [*fleisch und blut, das göttert*], which give the manner and power of Godhead".<sup>11</sup> Since it is itself, in the hypostatic union, "a deified flesh [*ein vergöttert fleisch*]",<sup>12</sup> the Lord's flesh "will deify you thoroughly [*wirdt dich durchgöttern*]"<sup>13</sup>

The Reformer discovered by the new Helsinki school in the Weimar Edition is far different from the figure with whom we have become familiar through the many works produced by the so-called Luther Renaissance, which a century ago was gearing up for its finest achievements. Historical data are rarely viewed with the naked eye, being glimpsed mainly through the spectacles supplied by cultural conditioning and confessional sympathy. Many leading scholars of the Luther Renaissance belonged to the theological movement founded by Albrecht Ritschl of Göttingen (1822-1889), who was

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that we might receive the inheritance of immortality." *Treatise on the Incarnation of the Word* 54:3; qtd Jurgens 322.

<sup>10</sup> Simo Peura, "Der Vergöttlichungsgedanke in Luthers Theologie 1518-1519", in: *Thesaurus Lutheri; Auf der Suche nach neuen Paradigmen der Luther-Forschung* [Referate des Luther-Symposiums in Finnland 11. - 12. November 1986; Veröffentlichungen der Finnischen Theologischen Literaturgesellschaft 153 Jahrbuch 1987; in Zusammenarbeit mit der Luther-Agricola Gesellschaft Schrift A 24], ed. Tuomo Mannermaa, Anja Ghiselli, and Simo Peura (Helsinki, 1987) 172, n. 2.

<sup>11</sup> "Sondern issest und trinckest fleisch undt blutt, das göttert, das ist: es gibt die art und krafft der gottheit." WA 33:188.19-22.

<sup>12</sup> WA 33:189.24.

<sup>13</sup> WA 33:188.35-36.

second only to Schleiermacher in the German Liberal Protestantism of the 19th century. The most famous Ritschlian of all was the Berlin church historian, Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), who argued that the Reformer's greatest achievement was to bring about "the end of dogma". Since the Ritschlians had themselves given up Christian dogma, they readily fell victim to a case of false memory syndrome which persuaded them that their national hero, Luther, had done the same.

Risto Saarinen has uncovered the roots of the fabricated image of the Reformer popularized by much of the Luther Renaissance, pointing to the enormous influence exerted on Ritschl's theology by the Kantian philosopher Hermann Lotze (1817-1881). Lotze took over from Kant and passed on to Ritschl the view that things are completely unknowable in themselves, being indirectly knowable only through their effects, which receive their form from the knowing mind.<sup>14</sup> As applied to theology by Ritschl, the constricting epistemology of Kant and Lotze led to the notion that the biblical and churchly confession of the divinity of Christ says nothing at all about our Lord's eternal and assumed place in the life of God, but merely formulates a "value judgement" about His impact on ourselves. In Ritschlian thinking, dogma is no longer discourse descriptive of its object, but is rather a way of expressing the existential concerns of its framers.

Some of us received our first exposure to the thought of the Reformer through the pages of Paul Althaus' *Theology of Martin Luther*. Unbeknownst to ourselves, we here made the acquaintance of a Reformer who squirms in the straitjacket woven for him by the Ritschlians of the Luther Renaissance. Issued in English translation by Fortress Press in 1966, Althaus' volume could offer little help to the conservative side in the Missouri Synod conflict which was approaching its climax at that time. The sharp-witted reader should notice something fishy about Althaus' account of the Reformer's understanding of Holy Scripture, Christology, and the Sacrament of the Altar. As he treats all three of these crucial *loci*, Althaus admits that Luther sometimes said things which Liberal Protestants would prefer him to have left unsaid. But as he unfolds the Reformer's teaching on these three closely related topics, Althaus plants the suggestion in his reader's mind that Luther's true opinion was not that Holy Scripture is the Word of God, that our Lord is true God and true man in one person in the sense of Chalcedon, and that the essence of the Blessed Sacrament is Jesus' very Body and Blood under the forms of consecrated bread and wine. Try these quotations for size:

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<sup>14</sup> Risto Saarinen, "Gottes Sein—Gottes Wirken. Die Grunddifferenz von Substanzen und Wirkungsdenken in der evangelischen Lutherdeutung", in *Luther und Theosis: Vergöttlichung als Thema der abendländischen Theologie* [Referate der Fachtagung der Luther-Akademie Ratzeburg in Helsinki 30.3-2.4.1989], eds. Simo Peura and Antti Raunio (Helsinki: Hakapaino Oy, 1990) 103-19; 104ff.

Therewith Luther has in principle abandoned every formal approach to the authority of the Bible.<sup>15</sup>

Luther's basic christological confession (that the Father's heart and will are present in Christ) will always be significant. However, his dogmatic theory which describes Christ as true God and true man is not united within itself but displays contradictions. Theology had to go beyond it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 85.

<sup>16</sup> Althaus 198. Pp. 179-198 of Althaus' book merit careful scrutiny. The unwary reader is apt to be caught off guard by such statements as the following: "Luther understands the confession that Christ is God in terms of the christological dogma of the ancient church. He expressly accepts the great ecumenical creeds of Greek and Latin theology. Apart from individual concepts he expresses no criticism of the traditional christological dogmas. He agrees with Athanasius and rejects Arius. ... Luther without reservation uses the terminology of the 'two natures' and of their unification in the one person of the Lord to describe the mystery of Christ. ... He is as much concerned with the true deity of Christ as Athanasius or Anselm was and in the same sense as they" (179). "... Luther adopts the traditional dogmatic doctrine of the two natures" (193). Two pages into his account of Luther's Christology, Althaus uses high-sounding language to mask deceit: "There is a new emphasis in Luther's doctrine of Christ, even though he accepts the old doctrine. With all orthodox theologians of the church, he accepts the deity of Jesus Christ. However, he gives new and deeper insight into the meaning and significance for man of the fact that Jesus Christ is true God" (181). The Reformer is presented as sharing and yet transcending both St Athanasius' concern for Christ's sharing of God's life with mankind and St Anselm's concern for His achieving atonement between God and man: "At the center of his theology, however, the concern for salvation assumes a new form. What does God intend to do with us sinful men? What is his relationship to me? How does he feel about me? This is therefore no longer a concern about God's incorruptible and unfading life, his power, his atoning and saving grace; rather, Luther is concerned about God Himself, his will, and his heart" (181). Althaus' talk of "Luther's primary concern, to meet the Father in the man Jesus" (182f.) goes hand in hand with Sabellianism at best or Unitarianism at worst. Althaus' true colours come out in his remark that the Reformer's confession of the *genus majesticum* "remains for the most part in contradiction to the genuine picture of the man Jesus" (197). Dishonesty, hypocrisy, and sarcasm are working overtime as Althaus summarizes Luther's Christology with: "God is this man, and this man is the presence of God for us. Basically, Luther thereby transcends the doctrine of the two natures as inadequate. It says far too little and does not say what is decisive. Luther is ultimately concerned not with the relationship of the divine and the human nature but with the relationship of the person of Jesus to the person of the Father. Luther thus takes the deity of Christ and his incarnation more seriously [!] than anyone since the New Testament writers themselves" (191). Ritschl's ghost stalks the earth in the ultimately meaningless remark that, "God opens his personal being to us only in the human person [!] of Jesus" (191). The unwitting sheep of Christ can easily be led astray by such gobbledy-gook as: "The ancient dogma was concerned with the unity of the two natures in Christ. Luther teaches this as the tradition does. But it is not the 'metaphysical' unity of the two natures but rather the personal unity of the Son with the Father, of the man Jesus with the eternal God, that is ultimately decisive in the matter of salvation. We earthly men know how God thinks about us and how he relates to us only in the earthly reality of someone who is like us, that is, in the human will and activity of Jesus. For this reason, the primary and the only saving truth is that God himself is present for us in the humanity of Jesus Christ. God the Father himself is

And Althaus' treatment of Luther's 1519 sermon on the Holy Supper makes the O. J. Simpson defence team look like honest yeomen:

The presence of body and blood thus has only symbolic significance. It is not particularly important that the body and blood are received ... the eating of the bread ... symbolically assures us we are united with Christ and with all the saints. In this context, there is no place for the real presence commensurate with its significance. ... [O]ne must agree with Reinhold Seeberg that "Luther probably never again came so close to the genuine meaning of the Lord's Supper as he did in this writing."<sup>17</sup>

With these words Althaus has conveniently proved, by the way, that the Reformer would have not been such a stick-in-the-mud as was Hermann Sasse on the pan-Protestant German Church Union of 1948!

A now laicized English Jesuit took sharp aim a generation ago at Lutheranism in general and at Luther in particular with the observation that:

The fundamental difference which divides the Catholic conception of God's dealings with man from the Protestant may be described as a theology of *mediation* and *participation*. In Catholic thought, Christ's manhood, and the Church which is his fullness, and the sacraments which are his actions, form a hierarchy of created means by which the God-man communicates to men his saving activity.<sup>18</sup>

Francis Clark charged that the Reformer

arrived at a theology in which there was no place for any created reality to mediate to men God's saving action, nor for any active sharing by men in the dispensation of grace.<sup>19</sup>

In the opinion not merely of the present writer but also of the venerable recipient of this *Festschrift*, the very heartbeat of Luther's theology consists precisely in the mediation of and participation in the divine manhood of Christ through the means of grace. Moreover, the second quotation from Clark given above is an apt summary of the system of Ulrich Zwingli against which the mature Reformer consistently set his face. Yet we should be wrong to ascribe Clark's sketch of Luther's position to nothing more than pre-conciliar popish malice, for the sometime Jesuit based his account of the

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present and not merely the 'divine nature'. In this sense it is true that the reality of God for us is Jesus Christ 'and there is no other God.' 'I know of no other God except the one called Jesus Christ.' To be certain of this is to believe in Jesus Christ. This unity of Jesus with God and of God with Jesus, the presence of the heart and will of God in Jesus, is the 'deity of Christ' in the fullest sense" (190f.). Althaus appears to have achieved the feat of reconciling Luther with Paul of Samosata!

<sup>17</sup> Althaus 378.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960) 105.

<sup>19</sup> Clark 106.

Reformer's understanding of the Incarnation and the means of grace at least in part on the writings of a contemporary Danish Lutheran, who was obviously much influenced by both Lotze and Ritschl, on the one hand, and by Karl Barth's lifelong aversion to the *analogia entis*, on the other<sup>20</sup> For the sake of both inter-confessional dialogue and intra-confessional integrity, we must ask the real Luther to stand up and reveal himself. The Ritschlian Althaus and the Formula of Concord, which virtually canonizes certain post-1525 writings of the Reformer and makes of this mature Luther a towering Church Father, cannot both be right. One of the two must be suffering from false memory syndrome.

The historical Reformer was no Ritschlian before his time, and with respect to his Christology it is woefully inadequate to describe Luther as simply a loyal follower of the Council of Chalcedon. Already in 1519 the Reformer experienced an exegetical breakthrough at Phil. 2:6-7 which was fraught with momentous Christological implications.<sup>21</sup> Luther must turn in his grave each time the traditional Palm Sunday Epistle is read from NIV, which understands ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ as a reference to the divinity of Christ ("who, being in very nature God"). The Reformer led Western exegesis on a new path—a route manifestly taken by the confessors of 1577 in FC SD VIII:26—by interpreting ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ as speaking of the divine attributes borne by the manhood of Christ. For Luther, therefore, God's becoming man may not itself be equated with Christ's state of humiliation, since "in the form of God" describes the sacred manhood's setting in the matrix of the hypostatic union and thus offers a major *sedes doctrinae* for later Lutheran talk of the communion of natures and the communication of attributes. Tom Hardt has drawn attention to the mainly overlooked but hugely significant fact that through the Wittenberg Reformation "the banner of Cyrillian Christology was once again raised in the West".<sup>22</sup> In other words, Luther not only defied the coming Enlightenment by accepting Chalcedon, but also added insult to injury by interpreting Chalcedon from the diametrically opposite corner to that occupied by Reformed and Liberal Protestantism. The controversy on the real presence moved the Reformer to dot the i's and cross the t's of his Alexandrian-Cyrrilline Christology, a process which was brought to its consummation by Martin Chemnitz in his *The Two Natures in*

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<sup>20</sup> Illuminating references to K. E. Skydsgaard are to be found in Clark 104, 110, 504, and 510.

<sup>21</sup> See Tom G. A. Hardt, *Venerabilis et adorabilis Eucharistia; Eine Studie über die lutherische Abendmahlslehre im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürgen Diestelmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988) 51ff.

<sup>22</sup> Tom G. A. Hardt, *On the Sacrament of the Altar; A Book on the Lutheran Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* 28.

*Christ* and in FC SD VIII and its official appendix, the Catalogue of Testimonies.

The Smalcald Articles, which ratify the Trinitarian and Christological confession of the ancient Church, hinge on the “first and chief article” presented in II:1. The Reformer’s teaching on justification is the rich fruit of his Christology, in which his study of the New Testament led him in the same direction as the Greek Fathers and his pondering of the Greek Fathers fructified his biblical exegesis. Nothing could be further removed from Ritschlian reductionism than the glorious biblical-patristic Christology which gave Luther a ready answer to his Swiss opponents’ objection that, even if the Lord’s Body and Blood were present in the sacramental elements, yet they could impart no benefit to believing communicants.<sup>23</sup> In his great eucharistic writing of 1527, the Reformer passionately refuted the sacrilege of subsuming Jesus’ Body and Blood under the heading of Jn 6:63 (“The flesh is of no avail”). Realizing that the biblical antithesis of flesh and spirit is not in the same ballpark as the Platonic dualism of body and soul, Luther insists that:

... Christ’s body and flesh certainly are quite compatible with the Spirit; indeed, he [it?] is the Spirit’s dwelling place bodily, and through him [it?] the Spirit comes into all others.<sup>24</sup>

What the Lord’s Body is determines what the Lord’s Body gives to His people in the Holy Supper:

God is in this flesh. It is God’s flesh, the Spirit’s flesh. It is in God and God is in it. Therefore it lives and gives life to all who eat it, both to their bodies and to their souls.<sup>25</sup>

Christ’s flesh is full of divinity, full of eternal good, life, and salvation, and he who takes a bite of it takes to himself therewith eternal good, life, full salvation, and all that is in this flesh.<sup>26</sup>

For it is a blessed, divine, incorruptible flesh, ... and where it is, it must bring benefit. For there is pure benefit and good in it, except where it is without faith.<sup>27</sup>

These statements, taken from one of the writings of the Reformer to which the confessors of 1577 “profess [their] adherence”,<sup>28</sup> shed light on the explicit deification language used by Luther from the pulpit in the sermon of 1531. I do not propose that recent discoveries in the Weimar Edition should

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<sup>23</sup> AE 37:78-102.

<sup>24</sup> AE 37:95.

<sup>25</sup> AE 37:124f.

<sup>26</sup> AE 37:129.

<sup>27</sup> AE 37:130.

<sup>28</sup> FC SD VIII:3; VII:91.

prompt us to start wreaking confusion among our flocks by jabbering unguardedly about deification; but the fact that the new Finnish Luther scholars are able to plough this furrow at all suggests that we should listen carefully when Rowan Williams, the present Anglican Archbishop of Wales, reminds us that

it is of first importance to bear in mind that ‘deification’, for Origen, Athanasius and their successors, did not mean a sharing in the divine ‘substance’, a quasi-physical participation, but enjoying the divine relation of Son to Father, sharing the divine life. In this sense, it could be argued that any Christian theology worth the name will need a doctrine of ‘deification’ and it is hard to see how Athanasius’ point can be put by. Unless the relation of Father and Son is something eternally holding true of God, the relation of sonship to God cannot be realized.<sup>29</sup>

By the work of the incarnate Lord communicated to us through the means of grace, we may share to the full in the eternal relationship with the Father which the Son brought into this-worldly time and space via the temple of His Body. Becoming flesh of Christ’s flesh and bone of His bone is what the “happy exchange” is all about, and we Christians find ourselves on the receiving end of the “happy exchange” when we kneel to receive Jesus’ Body and Blood at His altar. Here, says the Reformer in 1527, our Lord “is just as near to us physically as he was to [His disciples]” during His earthly lifetime.<sup>30</sup> In his early writings on the Supper, Luther focused mainly on forgiveness as a benefit conferred through the happy exchange in Holy Communion, picking up a teaching found already in the Liturgies of Chrysostom and Basil and in other ancient Orders. The Lord suffered condemnation so that we may walk free, a fact which emboldened the Reformer of 1520 to paraphrase the words of institution:

Behold, O sinful and condemned man, out of the pure and unmerited love with which I love you, and by the will of the Father of mercies, apart from any merit or desire of yours, I promise you in these words the forgiveness of all your sins and life everlasting. And that you may be absolutely certain of this irrevocable promise of mine, I shall give my body and pour out my

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<sup>29</sup> Rowan Williams, *Christian Spirituality; A Theological History from the New Testament to Luther and St. John of the Cross* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980) 49. The “point” to which Williams refers is expressed earlier in the paragraph from which this quotation is taken: “Athanasius’ argument against the Arians is sometimes reduced to the well-known point that, if salvation is a partaking of divinity (*theosis*, ‘deification’), the Word cannot deify if he is not God (see, for example, *de synod.* 51)”.

<sup>30</sup> AE 37:94.

blood, confirming this promise by my very death, and leaving you my body and blood as a sign and memorial of this same promise.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise He endured weakness so that we may be strong, a fact which leads Luther to note in the Large Catechism that the Blessed Sacrament “is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man” (LC V:23).<sup>32</sup> And He underwent death so that we may be filled with life:

His flesh is not of flesh, or fleshly, but spiritual; therefore it cannot be consumed, digested, and transformed, for it is imperishable as is all that is of the Spirit, and a food of an entirely different kind from perishable food. Perishable food is transformed into the body which eats it; this food, however, transforms the person who eats it into what it is itself, and makes him like itself, spiritual, alive, and eternal; as Christ says, “This is the bread from heaven, which gives life to the world” [Jn. 6:33].<sup>33</sup>

If Christ’s flesh is eaten, nothing but spirit comes of it, for it is a spiritual flesh and does not let itself be transformed, but transforms the person who eats it and gives him the Spirit. Since this poor maggot sack, our body, also has the hope of the resurrection of the dead and of the life everlasting, it must also become spiritual, and digest and consume everything that is fleshly in it. And that is what this spiritual food does: when the body eats it physically, this food digests the body’s flesh and transforms it so that it too becomes spiritual, i.e. alive and blessed forever as Paul says in I Corinthians 15 [:44], “The body will rise spiritually.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> AE 36:40. See also AE 35:85—“What then is this testament, or what is bequeathed to us in it by Christ? Truly a great, eternal, and unspeakable treasure, namely, the forgiveness of all sins, as the words plainly state, ‘This is the cup of a new eternal testament in my blood, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.’ It is as if Christ were saying, ‘See here, man, in these words I promise and bequeath to you forgiveness of all your sins and the life eternal. In order that you may be certain and know that such a promise remains irrevocably yours, I will die for it, and will give my body and blood for it, and will leave them both to you as a sign and seal, that by them you may remember me.’”

<sup>32</sup> That the “strengthening” benefit of the Sacrament was taught by Luther prior to 1529 is made clear by AE 35:85f.—“... we are thereby strengthened in faith, confirmed in hope, and made ardent in love. For as long as we live on earth our lot is such that the evil spirit and all the world assail us with joys and sorrows in order to extinguish our love for Christ, blot out our faith, and weaken our hope. Wherefore we urgently need this sacrament, in which we may gain new strength when we have grown weak and may daily exercise ourselves unto the strengthening and uplifting of the spirit.”

<sup>33</sup> AE 37:100.

<sup>34</sup> AE 37:100f. See also AE 37:134—“We who believe, however, know that the body does avail for us, wherever it is. If it is in the bread and is physically eaten with faith, it strengthens the soul by virtue of the fact that it believes it is Christ’s body which the mouth eats, and so faith clings to the body which is in the bread. Now that which lifts, bears, and binds faith is not useless but salutary. Similarly, the mouth, the throat, the body, which eats Christ’s body, will also have its benefit in that it will live forever and arise on the Last Day to eternal

As the Reformer jotted down hours before his death, we children of our first parents are beggars indeed; but through the “happy exchange” we are graced and ennobled beggars, castaways elevated unimaginably high to become members of God’s Royal Family. A beautiful remark made by Luther in a eucharistic writing of 1533 prompted the title chosen for this essay which seeks to honour Bishop Jobst Schoene, whose whole ministry has been governed by the gnesio-Lutheran Christology which ceases to be a purely academic concern when understood from the vantage point of a celebrant of and communicant at the venerable mystery of the altar. The Prince became a pauper on the cross in order to make us paupers princes and princesses at His altar. Does not Luther imply something along these lines when he says that the royal priesthood present at the Supper “have, as Revelation 4[4] pictures it, our golden crowns on our heads ...”?<sup>35</sup> Truly, when one ponders the depths plumbed in God by the “happy exchange”, on the one hand, and the heights to which it raises us, on the other, one has to agree that theology is doxology, an art more aptly practised in the administration of the means of grace than in the groves of academe.

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salvation. This is the secret power and benefit which flows from the body of Christ in the Supper into our body, for it must be useful, and cannot be present in vain. Therefore it must bestow life and salvation upon our bodies, as is its nature.”

<sup>35</sup> AE 38:208.

**FROM APOSTOLIC WITNESS  
TO CHRISTIAN CONFESSION  
I JOHN 4:1-6<sup>1</sup>**

*Thomas M. Winger*

**MODERN-DAY GNOSTICISM**

In Canada we're not used to religion making the news, as it does so often in our neighbour to the south. And when the Christian Church makes the news nowadays, we learn to brace ourselves for the onslaught! Call me cynical, but I can't help thinking that the media plan their nasty attacks on the Church to coincide with major Christian festivals like Christmas—or is that too obvious? Well, it seemed that way last October [1997], when the *Ottawa Citizen* published its extensive editorial interview with Rev. Bill Phipps, the new moderator of the United Church of Canada—just as we were beginning to plan for Christmas. And a certain anti-Christian agenda was unmistakable when the 15 December 1997 issue of *Macleans*' magazine appeared in my mailbox, with a picture of Christ on the cover, and the provocative headline: "Is Jesus Really God? Believers battle over the divinity of Christ." And, of course, Bill Phipps was the centre of attention.

Now, you may have had your fill of Bill, but I just can't help turning again to his candid comments, because they're so very appropriate to this Bible Study and to the theme of this weekend workshop. For Bill Phipps's approach to religion helps us with two important aspects of any Bible Study: historical background, and present-day application. That is: (1) his false teaching is very much like the false teachings which plagued the church at the end of the first century, and which led St John to pen his first epistle. So we're helped in understanding the historical background of the text. And, (2) Bill Phipps is representative of how most **modern** people view religion. And so, if his religious viewpoint is similar to the one John deals with, then John's epistle must be very helpful for us as we today "talk about our God" to a modern world.

Listen to how Bill Phipps separates religious meaning from the earthly, physical reality of the New Testament message. He speaks of Christmas:

I can celebrate Christmas as joyfully and vigorously and with as much wonder as the most awestruck five-year-old or 80-year-old. All the biblical

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is a transcript of a two-part Bible Study presented at Lutheran Church–Canada, East District's "Ventures in Outreach" conference in Waterloo, Ontario, 14-15 February 1998. The theme of the conference was "Talking about our God."

stories surrounding the birth of Jesus evoke wonder and awe and majesty. But as soon as you want to reduce them to literal fact, they lose their power.

For him, the story has power as a myth—**because** it's mysterious and incomprehensible. In other words, the power comes from the feelings which well up within himself as he hears it. But as soon as you insist that the story has meaning and power outside of him, that it has an historical reality, he loses interest. Now listen to his words about Easter:

The Resurrection is mysterious and powerful and if you try and reduce it to some provable event, you lose its power. There's no question that Jesus' followers were turned from people who were afraid, bewildered and defeated into people willing to risk their lives. That is more than just an interesting dream or vision or hallucination. They believed with all their being that Jesus was alive and with them and energizing them to carry forward his ministry. Something very real happened to those people and it has been giving power to the Christian community ever since. But the body that he was crucified with—dying and coming back and walking around the earth and then ascending into heaven in a three-storey universe—that doesn't make sense. If I have to put it in those terms, it loses its power because it's not credible to me.<sup>2</sup>

What's going on here? Well, there's some of the same thing: it's the personal feelings of the disciples that count, and the powerful feelings that they inspire in him. But more fundamentally, Phipps objects to the importance of Christ's physical body. He can't understand how faith can be based on something so crass as a corpse coming back to life. It's not only difficult for him to believe; it's not what he **wants** to believe. He doesn't **want** to believe in a physical resurrection because that's no longer mysterious, it's no longer "spiritual" enough for him.

Now, I said that Bill Phipps's ideas were a lot like the false teachers that St John was combating in the first century. Let me explain. The most dangerous false teaching in the early church, the one that all the early Christian writers talk about, is called "Gnosticism". "Gnostics" claimed to have secret **knowledge** about the universe that could lead to a sort of salvation. And at the heart of their system was the belief that this physical world was created by a "lesser god [demiurge]", or even an angel. The true spiritual god, on the other hand, keeps his distance from this world. So to the Gnostics, the earth itself is soiled (pardon the pun), creation is tainted, evil, and the best thing that could happen, their definition of salvation, would be to get rid of this physical body and live as a spirit forever, way up high with the true god. So in John's day, the last thing these Gnostics would ever accept is that the Saviour would die, and then come back to life again in the

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<sup>2</sup> Bill Phipps, quoted in *Maclean's* 110.50 (15 Dec. 1997): 43.

flesh. Why in the world would He want to hang on to this physical body? Sound familiar? It's the sort of thing that Bill Phipps is saying. He doesn't like the idea of Jesus' real, physical body coming back to life and ascending to heaven.

And this is very much the way people around us think. What's the popular view of heaven? Angelic spirits floating around on clouds. And when people talk about a great new interest in "spirituality" in our society in the '90s, it's not a return to the biblical faith, but an interest in crystal balls and witchcraft and demons and angels and ghosts and so on ... all things that are disconnected from the physical world.

### ST JOHN'S EPISTLE RESPONDS

Now let's turn to John's own description of the false teachers he was concerned about:

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits [to see] whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone forth into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: **every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God**, 3 and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This [latter] is the [spirit] of the antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.

4 **You** are of God [*i.e., you have the true confession*], little children, and have triumphed over them; for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

5 **They** are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them.

6 **We** are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

(I Jn 4:1-6)

The key is in verse 2. The problem those Christians were facing is that certain false teachers were pushing a message that had a spiritualised Jesus. He was a sort of phantom. They thought they had a better Jesus because their Jesus wasn't "confined" by flesh and blood. But John rejects such a notion, and says that if anyone denies the fleshly reality of Jesus, he's not of the true God.

If we jump for a moment to another of John's letters, we'll find an even more concise description of the problem.

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh: this is the deceiver and the antichrist. (II John 7)

There's a subtle difference here. Now John doesn't just talk about Jesus' one-time, past-tense "having come" in the flesh (His birth and earthly life),

but he talks about Jesus' **continual** coming in the flesh. These false teachers deny that Jesus goes on being with us in the flesh, as true Christians confess that He does ... especially in the Lord's Supper. So John has pressed the point that the sort of Jesus we have is, in both the past and the present, one who comes in the flesh. And in his Revelation, John will go even farther to talk about Christ coming again in the future "in the flesh", in order to take us home to heaven "in the flesh". "The one who was and who is and who is to come"—in the flesh.

Now let's go back to I John 4 for a moment. In verses 4-6 John talks about three groups of people. There's "you" in v. 4, that is, the Christians to whom he writes, who have been taught the truth and believe it. Then there's "them", the false teachers, who are of the world, not of God. Then in v. 6, there's a "we". Who's that? That's a vital question! John might simply be talking about "us Christians", which he often does in this letter. But here he seems to be talking about a distinct group of people, of which he is a part, who can offer a message of certainty which will help the Christians to whom he writes to know the truth. And he warns those Christians to listen to "us" and not to "them". And in order to answer the question of who the "we/us" is, we turn, finally, to our theme verse.

### OUR TEXT – I JOHN 1:1-4

1	What was from the beginning,
2	what we have <b>heard</b> ,
3	what we have <b>seen</b> with our eyes,
4	what we have <b>observed</b> and our hands have <b>touched</b>
5	concerning the Word of <i>life</i>
6	—and the <i>life</i> was manifested, and we have <b>seen</b> and we <u>testify</u>
7	and we <u>announce</u> to you
8	the eternal <i>life</i> which was with the Father and was manifested to us—
9	what we have <b>seen</b>
10	and we have <b>heard</b> ,
11	we <u>announce</u> also to you, that also you might have <i>fellowship</i> with us.
12	And our <i>fellowship</i> is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
13	And these things we write, in order that our joy might be fulfilled.

(The numbers down the left hand side aren't verse numbers, obviously, but are line numbers, to help us find our way around.) What I've done here is taken the first four verses of John's letter, and printed them out in a special way to help you see the themes that John is highlighting. This whole thing is just one big sentence in John's original Greek, and he's clearly put a great amount of work into making the introduction of his letter just so. Now, the

basic message beneath this great big long sentence is simply what's in lines 1 and 11: "What was from the beginning ... we announce also to you, that also you might have fellowship with us." But in between is a great big explanation of the whole thing. In response we might ask John, just what is it that "all of you" are announcing? And how can we trust your message?

The answer to that lies in lines 2 through 10. In those lines, John repeats a few words, and when he repeats something, we sit up and take notice. First of all, look at the centre, lines 5-8. Here, John repeats the word "life" three times. The message, the "Word of God", is life itself, and it brings life to everyone it touches. And if you're familiar with John's Gospel, you know that "the Word of God" is none other than the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, Jesus Himself. So, John says, this Jesus existed from the very beginning. He always was life. He was revealed on this earth, and so brought God's life to mankind. And through the proclamation of this message, John brings this life to his hearers. That's the goal of the message. And he unfolds this goal even further in lines 11-13 at the end. He wants his hearers to join in the fellowship that he and his colleagues in the Gospel already have with God the Father and the Son. And that, of course, is the goal of all mission and evangelism, to accomplish the same enlarging of the fellowship of life with God, and so we're particularly interested in knowing just how John intends to do this.

So let's back up and look at some more words that John repeats in lines 2-10. To make it easy, I've bold-faced them for you: "heard" (2x), and "seen" (3x). In fact, John has a progression: from hearing to seeing to touching. John, and whoever else is to be included in the "we", have done four things with respect to the Word of Life, that is, Jesus Himself:

- ① "We have heard".
- ② "We have seen with our eyes" (in case anyone thinks he's speaking figuratively, or about a vision, he emphasizes, "with our eyes").
- ③ Then he pushes it even further in line 4: "we have observed" (that means, analysed closely).
- ④ And finally, "our hands have touched".

What does that last assertion remind you of? Christ's invitation to St Thomas to place his fingers into the wounds so that he might be certain that the flesh standing in front of him is the very flesh that was crucified and now is risen from the dead. And with that clue, we start to understand who the "we" is that John is talking about. The "we" is those who actually heard, saw, inspected, and touched the flesh of the Son of God who rose from the dead, that is, the eyewitnesses of the resurrection, the apostles and a small circle of other followers.

Now, how is this important to the message St John wants to get across? Well, if someone is denying that Jesus was actually a physical human being,

who was born and who walked about and who died and who rose from the dead in the flesh, the best thing to do is to appeal to eyewitnesses, people who were actually there. So that's what John does. He boldly asserts that he and many others actually did these things. They were living proof. And he intends their "testimony" to be persuasive, to give his Christian hearers a firm foundation for their faith. That's what it means in line 6 when John writes, "we testify". That's law court language. It's equivalent to saying, "I solemnly swear ...." And he expects his hearers to put their confidence in a message that has such eyewitness testimony behind it, rather than in the wild speculations of the false teachers, who didn't even know Jesus in His earthly life.

That's really something, isn't it? That God wanted us to have absolute certainty in our faith. I often think that that's the simplest way to explain the Lutheran Reformation. The issue was certainty of salvation. The mediaeval Roman church said that no one could ever be certain that he was saved. And Luther called that a "monstrous uncertainty". The Gospel is meant to bring us comfort and confidence, not doubt. Being Lutheran means having a sure and certain hope, so that we don't trust in ourselves—which is like building a house on quicksand—but that we trust in something immovable and unchangeable, that Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is a rock-solid foundation. And the apostolic witness, the sort of eyewitness account which John talks about here is a good part of the certainty of the Gospel message. That's what people need today—something they can count on, something unchanging, trustworthy and strong. But that's getting ahead of ourselves. What I would like to do for a moment is to show you how great a role such "witness" and "testimony" talk plays in the Scriptures.

### **"WITNESS" TO GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Let's start in the Old Testament. From the very beginning God was concerned to give His people a firm, objective basis for their faith. The worship of the Old Testament was therefore to be centred upon something called "the ark of the covenant", also known as "the ark of testimony". I always used to wonder what that name meant, as well as wondering why the tabernacle was called sometimes "the tent of testimony". Let's take a look. God's command to Moses to make the ark is given in Ex. 25:10-22. Let me point out a few things about the ark's description. The ark is a wooden box, overlaid with gold. On top of it is the "mercy seat", flanked on either side by two golden cherubim, whose wings stretch out over the seat. And God promises to sit (invisibly) upon this seat in order to speak to His people:

There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you of

all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Ex. 25:22 - RSV)

So we might think that it's called the ark of the testimony because from it God will testify to His people, because from it God's Word sounds forth. And this is partly true. But in verse 16 there's a better explanation:

And you shall put into the ark the **testimony** which I shall give you. (Ex. 25:16 - RSV)

What does this mean? What's this "testimony" that is put into the ark? Well, if you've seen the movie you probably remember what's inside the ark. Now we could trace it all through the Old Testament in order to find out,<sup>3</sup> but the simplest thing is to go to Hebrews, whose author tells us about the contents of the Tabernacle:

Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. (Heb. 9:3-5)

What was the importance of these three things: manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets of the Law? Immediately we notice that they all come from the time of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness after they were rescued from Egyptian slavery. So they were reminders of the Exodus. And what was the Exodus? The pivotal event in the history of God's people. The greatest saving event which God ever accomplished short of the death of Christ itself. So, on the one hand, they were factual evidence of God's saving work in history, tangible things which proved that God really had fed His people in the wilderness, that He really had parted the Red Sea and brought forth water from a rock. And then, secondly, the tablets were factual evidence of God's speaking to His people, the bedrock, as it were, upon which God's continued speaking to them from the mercy seat was based. God did not want His people to believe in fairy tales or myths, uncertain legends or pious imaginings. But He provided a focus for their faith by giving concrete testimony to His gracious, saving action in the past.

Now this is an example of so-called "physical evidence", or "circumstantial evidence". But God in the Old Testament also makes use of

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<sup>3</sup> Deut. 10:1-5 (where Moses is told to put the tablets of the Law in the ark); Ex. 16:32-34 (where it is said that the manna is kept as a remembrance of what God had done, and placed before the "Testimony"); Num. 17:10 (Aaron's rod as a sign of the call of God, a witness against the rebels). See also Deut. 31:26 (where the whole book of the Torah is placed beside the ark as "testimony"). In I Kings 8:9, when it's brought into Solomon's temple, there's nothing left in the ark except the tables of the Law. Were the other items removed by the Philistines? Cf. I Sam. 5 & 6.

human eyewitnesses to these same events—for without people to interpret the physical evidence, its meaning remains in doubt. Perhaps the best place to turn to see God’s use of eyewitnesses is the mock courtroom of Is. 43:9-13. Here God envisions a courtroom in which all the nations of the world are gathered. The pagans are to prove that their gods are true, and Yahweh, the God of Israel, calls upon His people to testify in His favour:

9 Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble. Who among them can declare this, and show us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them hear and say, It is true. 10 “You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “and My Servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. 11 I, I am the LORD, and besides Me there is no saviour. 12 I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are My witnesses,” says the LORD. 13 “I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is none who can deliver from My hand; I work and who can hinder it?” (Is. 43:9-13 – RSV)

In verse 12 God connects His people’s witness to His past work of salvation. That is, they can testify in God’s favour that He actually rescued them in the past from actual foes. And I believe God is referring primarily to the Exodus. Israel is to proclaim before the nations that God did these great things to rescue them, and the nations will be left speechless—because their gods have never accomplished anything real.

But then God talks also about His Servant. Sometimes in Isaiah, God refers to the people Israel as His servant. But here, God speaks to His people, and then refers to His Servant as someone else.

“You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “and My Servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. (Is. 43:10)

The Church has traditionally understood Christ to be this Servant (as in the Suffering Servant of Is. 53). How is it that Christ will finally be God’s witness, testifying to God’s saving actions before all the nations of the world? Well, we’re getting a little ahead of ourselves, but let’s just say for the moment that the Greek word for “witness” also sometimes means “martyr”—that is, someone who testifies to the truth by shedding his blood. Christ, God’s Servant, becomes the ultimate witness by shedding His blood. And Christ’s death and resurrection has always been seen as a fulfilment of the Exodus—Christ suffering the slavery of sin on the cross, and then earning and experiencing freedom from slavery by rising from the dead. Easter is our Exodus, the Christian Exodus. When God raises Christ from the dead, the living Christ with His living Body becomes the ultimate testimony to God’s saving work. And anyone who has seen and experienced this Christ, becomes a witness as well.

**“WITNESS” AND “TESTIMONY” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT*****Christ as Witness to the Father***

In the Gospel according to St John, Jesus repeatedly speaks of Himself as a witness to God. That is, Christ is the only one who has ever seen the Father. And so, if you want to know about God the Father, you look to Christ to find out. In the beginning of his Gospel, John explains that this was Jesus' role:

No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known. (John 1:18)

So Jesus has come to earth to solve the problem of our separation from God. There's no salvation without knowing God; but there's no knowing God without salvation. In Jesus, however, the gap is bridged. God comes down in the flesh to reveal to us what God is like and to bring us salvation. So Jesus can say:

“If you have known Me, you will know My Father also; henceforth you do know Him and have seen Him.” Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:7-9)

That is to say, if you've seen Jesus, you've seen God, because Jesus is His authorized witness; and, in fact, Jesus and the Father are one. Likewise, Jesus says to Nicodemus that His words about heaven should be believed because He has actually been in heaven and come down from there:

11 Truly, truly, I say to you, We speak of what We know, and bear witness to what We have seen; but you [pl., i.e., the Jews] do not receive Our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 And no one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:11-13)

***The Baptizer's Witness to Christ***

Then there's John the Baptizer. He himself is sent to be a witness to Jesus, testifying from his divine knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. John's Gospel describes the Baptizer's role this way in its prologue.

There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, that he might testify concerning the light, in order that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but [he came] that he might testify concerning the light. (John 1:6-8)

John was sent from God so that we might be certain that Jesus also is from God. And so John the Baptizer's message is simply to confirm that Jesus is God's witness. John says about Jesus:

“What He has seen and heard, this He testifies, yet no one receives His testimony. He who receives His testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For He whom God has sent utters the words of God.” (John 3:32-34)

What a wonderful thing it is that God is so concerned that we should know Him for what He is, that He has revealed what He is like in Christ, that we might know for certain the good news of salvation. That’s the sort of thing that “witness” is about and why God so often provides us with witnesses.

With that we’re getting back to the sort of witnesses that I John talks about: those who actually saw Jesus in the flesh both before and after His death and resurrection, and so could confirm the truth of the Christian claim concerning their Messiah. John the Baptizer is this sort of witness to Jesus before His death. When the Jews think that the Baptizer might be making messianic claims for himself, they send priests to him who demand a testimony from them. First, John testifies about himself, saying simply, “I am not the Christ” (John 1:19). Then, he gives his most important testimony. When Jesus appears at the Jordan, John speaks the message that he has been given by God concerning this Jesus of Nazareth:

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who bears the sin of the world! 30 This is He concerning whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who has been before me, for He was prior to me.’ 31 And I myself did not know Him; but for this reason I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel.” 32 And John **testified**, saying, “I **saw** the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and He remained on Him. 33 And I myself did not know Him; but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you **see** the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I have **seen** and have testified that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:29-34)

John claims simply to be a faithful witness. He points out that his message doesn’t come by his own authority (as if he should be trusted because he knows Jesus personally). Rather, John’s testimony is to be trusted because he actually saw the promise of God being fulfilled; and so John is a witness to the faithfulness of God. And he can do nothing but pass on this testimony.

### *The Apostolic Eyewitness to Christ*

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus surrounds Himself with people who will later be His witnesses. How many occasions can you recall when Jesus takes a few of the disciples with Him when He goes to perform some miracle? Let me remind you of a few:

**Healing Jairus’ daughter:** And He allowed no one to follow Him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. (Mk 5:37)

**The Transfiguration:** And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And He

was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light. ... And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one what you have seen until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." (Mt. 17:1-2, 9)

**The Garden of Gethsemane:** Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to His disciples, "Sit here, while I go yonder and pray." And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. ... And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and He said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour?" (Mt. 26:36-37, 40)

These are only the special occasions when Jesus reduces His company to three. And it seems to me that on these occasions He chose only the closest three because He was particularly concerned that they keep secret what they had seen until after the Resurrection, because these were such momentous events in revealing what Christ was really like.

But the rest of the events in Jesus' ministry are witnessed by **all** the apostles. And Jesus says that this is one of the main reasons why He keeps them in His company. In His farewell words before the crucifixion He reminds them of their role in the coming days:

26 But when the Comforter comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify concerning Me; 27 and **you also are witnesses** [lit. "are going to be testifying"], because you have been with Me from the beginning. (John 15:26-27)

Now, remember how the beginning of Mark's Gospel defines "the beginning":

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God. Just as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold I am sending My messenger before Me, who will prepare your way ...". (Mk 1:1-2)

And then Mark goes on to describe the ministry of John the Baptizer. That was the "beginning". Jesus' apostles had been with Him since that very time. Some of them had even been disciples of John first. So the line of witnesses continues unbroken from John the Baptizer to Christ Himself to the apostles and eyewitnesses who accompanied Him.

At the other end of Jesus' earthly ministry, when He has risen from the dead and is about to ascend into heaven, Jesus speaks to the apostles once more about their job of testifying. He reminds them of everything He had taught them from the Scriptures, and of the things they had seen in His earthly ministry, and He gives them a job to do:

44 And He said to them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that it was necessary for everything written about Me in the Torah of Moses and the prophets and the psalms to be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures; 46 and He said to them,

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance towards the forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations. Since you began from Jerusalem<sup>4</sup> 48 you are **witnesses** of these things. 49 And behold, I am about to send the promise of my Father upon you. But as for you, stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Lk. 24:44-49)

This mandate from Christ that the apostles are to be His “witnesses” is repeated in the parallel account of the ascension:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My **witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

The double report of these events and Christ’s words make this into a pivot between Luke’s Gospel and his book of the Acts of the Apostles. That is, the Gospel records the ministry of Christ, and the Acts records the apostles’ witness to the same. As He ascends, Christ hands off the ball to them, so to speak.

We’ve come very close to understanding what’s going on in I John, our primary text, when we realize from these verses that **the primary role of the apostles (and the small crowd of other eyewitnesses) was to testify to the world the truth of the facts about Jesus, the Christ**. They would ground the Gospel message in certainty and provide assurance to the faith of those who hear. We can confirm this picture by looking at the account of how the apostles and the other disciples chose a man to replace Judas, who fell from the company of the twelve by his act of betrayal. St Peter stands up amongst the pre-Pentecost company of Christians, which numbered about 120, and reminds them that the fall of Judas was prophesied by Scripture. Nevertheless, there must be twelve again, as the Scripture also says, “His office let another take” (Acts 1:20; Ps. 109:8). How are they to choose from the 120 Christians? Can just anybody be an apostle? Peter says:

Therefore it is necessary—from the men who accompanied us during the whole time when the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the Baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us—[it is necessary] for one of these to become a **witness** of His resurrection with us. (Acts 1:21-22)

“It is necessary” for it to be so. That’s the way it is with apostles. They are people who went with Jesus the whole time, and so are able to serve as

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<sup>4</sup> Note: here I go with the punctuation given in the Nestle-Aland text, offered in the RSV footnote—for ἀρχάμενοι is plural, and so it must go with ὑμεῖς (cf. Lk. 1:2; Jn 15:27). The apostolic witness is said to “begin” with the events of Jerusalem: the crucifixion and resurrection. Nevertheless, it is also true that their witnessing starts in Jerusalem and then goes out from there (see Acts 1:8).

eyewitnesses to these events for the sake of the Church. And the company of the 120 puts forward two men who fulfil these qualifications, and the Holy Spirit chooses Matthias to take up the office left vacant by Judas.

You know, I think this is the reason why Paul felt like “the least of the apostles”. He had the same calling as they. He had been “sent” by the resurrected Jesus Christ, whom Paul saw in the flesh on the road to Damascus. He had the same Gospel to preach. But Paul was not one who accompanied Jesus during His earthly ministry. He was not an “eyewitness” to the facts of the faith. And Paul admits this on one occasion. When he preaches in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch on his first missionary journey, he refers to the fact that there are other people who actually were with Jesus and are now witnesses of His resurrection:

But God raised Him from the dead, who appeared for many days to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now His witnesses to the people. (Acts 13:30-31)

Paul doesn’t include himself under the title of “witness” in this narrow sense. He preaches the Gospel. He draws upon the witness of the Old Testament. God’s Word is mighty through him. And he takes great comfort in knowing that there are actually men walking upon the earth who can testify to the very facts of which he preaches.

On the other hand, there are a few occasions when Paul is called a witness—not to the facts of Christ’s life, but to the wondrous works which the resurrected Christ continues to do through St Paul. Paul quotes what Christ said to him when he was converted and commissioned to be an apostle:

“15 And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this reason, to appoint you as a minister and a **witness** to the things in which you have **seen** me and to those in which I will **appear** to you, 17 delivering you from the people [the Jews] and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’” (Acts 26:15-18)

Paul will have the same apostolic commission of preaching the Gospel for the forgiveness of sins, but his witness will be only to what Christ does in delivering him. Otherwise, he continues to appeal to those who were eyewitnesses of Christ, and he takes great comfort in their testimony.<sup>5</sup>

Now back to the twelve apostles. When I discovered this major task of the apostles in giving their testimony for the church, I decided to search the New Testament to find out where we have the most talk about “witnessing”. And,

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<sup>5</sup> For Paul as “witness”, see also Acts 18:5; 20:21, 24; 22:15, 18; 23:11; 28:23.

no surprise, it turned out that the Acts of the Apostles had by far the most references. John's Gospel comes a close second—and that's because of all

<i>Book</i>	<i>Number of Verses</i>
Acts of the Apostles	38
Gospel of John	35
Revelation of St John	17
Hebrews	12
I Timothy	7
I John	7
I Thessalonians	4
II Timothy	4
III John	3

*Books of the New Testament containing  
"witness, testify" vocabulary*

Jesus' talk about testifying to the Father, and the Father testifying to Him, and so on. And considering how small it is, John's first epistle has a significant number of references as well—which confirms that we're on track. So we're going to conclude this section by looking at a few examples of the apostles' giving testimony in the book of Acts.

Let's start at Pentecost. In preaching to the Jews gathered in the Temple courts, Peter makes a twofold appeal: to Scripture, and to his eyewitnessing of Jesus' life. First he refers to the words of King David from Psalm 16, that God wouldn't let "His Holy One see decay"—which must be taken of Christ's resurrection, for everyone there present could see the tomb of David with their own eyes. Then Peter appeals to his own special knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are **witnesses**. (Acts 2:32)

... referring to himself and the other eleven apostles standing up front. Then there's Peter's next sermon, which he preached on Solomon's porch. He accuses the Jews of murdering God's Messiah, but then offers the Gospel response that Jesus nevertheless rose from the dead:

But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are **witnesses**. (Acts 3:14-15)

An early description of the Jerusalem church is intriguing, where the role of the apostles as eyewitnesses is distinguished from the general love for the brothers which all the Christians gave:

32 Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles would give the **testimony** of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:32-33)

And then St Peter's sermon to Cornelius is extremely revealing. For Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, has heard the message about Christ, but God in His wisdom wished this first Gentile convert to hear the clear

proclamation that Peter, an apostle and eyewitness, could give. In Peter's sermon to him, the term "testify" or "witness" appears four times:

"... 36 You know the Word that He [God] sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), 37 the matter that happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the Baptism that John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 And we are **witnesses** of all the things which He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. Whom also they put to death by hanging [Him] on a tree, 40 **this One God raised up on the third day and made Him manifest**; 41 **not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead**. 42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to **testify** that He is the One ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets bear **witness** that every one who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name." (Acts 10:36-43)

In this clear example, the special role of the apostles as eyewitnesses is distinguished from all the rest of the people. To their witness is added the witness of the Old Testament prophets who "saw" Christ ahead of time. And the goal of both witnesses put together is that people believe and receive the forgiveness of sins. And that's what it's all about!

There's one final story from the book of Acts, which I only came to understand this way during a recent Bible class at my congregation. In chapter 8, when the Christians are scattered from Jerusalem because of the great persecution that arose under the hand of Saul, Philip spearheads the preaching of the Gospel to the Samaritans. And many believe and are baptized (Acts 8:12). But a curious thing happens when the apostles in Jerusalem hear about the conversion of the Samaritans: they send Sts Peter and John to Samaria, who pray and bring down the Holy Spirit with His miraculous signs. Now in reading Acts 8, we often become caught up with this miracle and with the story of Simon, who wishes to buy their power. But it seems that the apostles had another purpose in coming down to Samaria. They weren't there simply to give approval to the mission. Nor were they there primarily to perform this miracle. I think the real reason for their coming is given in the concluding verse of the account:

Now when they had given their **witness** and spoken the Word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, and they were preaching the Gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. (Acts 8:25)

Imagine, if you will, those new Christians in Samaria, who had certainly heard the message preached and believed it. The apostles wanted this new community of faith to be firmly grounded upon the certainty that their eyewitness testimony offered. So two of their company went down to give

this witness and shore up the faith of these new believers. That's the reason, I believe, why the apostles remain centred in Jerusalem: so that they might oversee the spread of the Gospel throughout the world and make their testimony available to the places that needed it. They were the pillars of the church (Gal. 2:9) and her foundations (Rev. 21:14).

### THE CO-TESTIMONY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

All of this lays very much to rest the notions we began with—that the message of Christianity is beyond all rational proof, or that blind faith is somehow better than anchored faith, or that “just believing” is good enough, even if there's no truth behind what people believe. But now that we've pretty much exhausted that idea ... there's perhaps a danger that we make the proclamation of the Gospel a little too “scientific”. The last thing I want to do is to give the impression that the Gospel converts by “proving” beyond all doubt what it says about Jesus, that we can logically compel people to believe by arguing them into it. We all know that “the bare facts” rarely accomplish this even in everyday affairs. So there is a second powerful testimony which we must never leave out of the equation—even if we only touch briefly upon it. The importance of this second testimony is clear from the fact that even Christ appeals to it:

If I testify concerning Myself, My testimony is not true; there is another who testifies concerning Me, and I know that the testimony that He testifies concerning Me is true. (John 5:31-32)

Of whom is He speaking? This becomes clear when He tells the apostles of their witness to Him:

26 But when the Comforter comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify concerning Me; 27 and **you also are witnesses** [lit. “are going to be testifying”], because you have been with Me from the beginning. (John 15:26-27)

In both cases, Jesus appeals to the Old Testament rule that no one may be convicted without the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut. 19:15). In the case of the Gospel, the “two witnesses” that convict people of the truth are the testimony of the eyewitnesses and the co-testimony of the Holy Spirit, who works through their Word to create faith.

Peter appeals to the same twofold testimony when he's put on trial for preaching the Gospel, saying to the Jewish council:

Both **we** are witness of these things and **the Holy Spirit**, whom God has given to those who heed Him. (Acts 5:32)

And with this we're brought back to our starting point, I John, for John himself argues that, as persuasive as human testimony may be, God's testimony is far greater:

9 If we receive the testimony of men—the **testimony** of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that He has testified concerning His Son. 10 He who believes in the Son of God has the **testimony** in him. He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the **testimony** that God has testified concerning His Son. 11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life. (I John 5:9-12)

If the goal of giving eternal life is to be reached, the two forms of testimony can never be separated. The Holy Spirit works through the Word of truth, and the Word of truth is nothing without the Spirit. But where the two work together, there faith is created, sustained, and is brought to its goal.

### FROM WITNESS TO CONFESSION

So where does this leave us, would be the next question? Did all the faith-building benefits of having eyewitness testimony die with the first generation of witnesses? One way to get at the answer is to ask whether the Church existed only where the apostles were able to visit in person. And the answer, of course, is no. The Gospel couldn't have been constrained by their physical limitations. It spread throughout the inhabited world. From the very beginning the apostles had to appoint pastors to care for all these churches (Tit. 1:5), and other assistants to take over things like caring for the widows, etc. (Acts 6). So how did their testimony make it throughout this vast area? Through the written Word. The letters that the apostles wrote were handed around from one church to the next (Col. 4:16). The beginning of John's first epistle doesn't talk about testimony that he once gave sometime in the past, but testimony that he now is giving through the reading of this very letter. Today John is still giving his testimony to us as we hear his words. And that gives us the kind of confidence that we need to face the kind of scepticism and unbelief we talked about at the beginning of this study. For the apostolic testimony is not dead. St Paul attaches equal authority to his spoken word and to his writings:

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, whether through our word or through our letter. (II Thess. 2:15)

This testimony is absolutely real, and powerful, and is accompanied by the co-testimony of the Holy Spirit.

The best description of all this is given by St Luke in the introduction to his Gospel. Whoever “Theophilus” was, he had apparently heard the message of Christ already. But St Luke was concerned that he receive the certainty of faith that comes with receiving the testimony of the eyewitnesses:

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative concerning the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and became ministers of the word, 3 it seemed good also to me, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know certainty concerning the things of which you have been catechized. (Luke 1:1-4)

The Gospel accounts are reliable reports of what the eyewitnesses saw, written down and passed on to us, so that there might be no doubt whatsoever that what we have been taught is true.

The Greek word for “certainty” is at the root of the English word “asphalt”. This sort of “surety” is like bedrock under our feet. We can stand upon it without fear of sinking into the mud and mire of uncertainty. And the first place this becomes important is on the day when we ourselves stand before the judgement throne of God. The apostolic **testimony** produces a sure and certain **confession** in us. John writes of this in the conclusion of his letter:

14 And we have seen and are **testifying** that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world. 15 Whoever **confesses** that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ... 17 ... in order that we may have confidence for the day of judgement. (I John 4:14-17)

So also St Paul speaks of the Word producing faith, which goes on to confess, which confession leads to eternal salvation:

For with the heart one believes resulting in justification, and with the mouth one confesses resulting in salvation. (Rom. 10:10)

Paul’s words seem to be based on Christ’s own words:

So every one who confesses Me before men, I also will confess before My Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 10:32; cf. Rev. 3:5)

So there’s a connection between our confession of faith here and now, and our eternal welfare. And if we can be this confident about how we will fare before the judgement seat on the Last Day, how much more confident can we be each day of this life? The unknown author of the letter to the Hebrews offers us complete and utter confidence before God and men:

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure

water. [Baptismal talk!] 23 Let us hold fast the confession of the hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (Heb. 10:22-23)

And when we look upon all those who have shown such faith in the past, continues Hebrews, “so great a crowd of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1) will press us on to the final confession of faith unto salvation.

Finally, John’s own first epistle pursues this theme, as he writes to his “dear children” things like:

23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who **confesses** the Son has the Father also. 24 You yourselves, what you heard from the beginning, let it abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is what He has promised us, eternal life. (I John 2:23-25)

Like a loving father, the elder John wants his dear children to have what they need to endure into eternal life. And so he hopes that his testimony will lead to their confession, that they might have the same life which he has. Do you hear echoes of our theme verse again?

Now, this movement from witness to confession has a second aspect that draws together this weekend’s theme of “talking about our God”. For a great burden is lifted from us when we realize that we today don’t have to “witness” but only to “confess”. A witness tells what he personally has seen. He’s put on the stand and grilled by defence attorneys—just as the apostles were called before Jewish and Gentile courts to defend their message. He’s pressed to the point where he’s tempted to doubt himself. Only if he’s strong will his testimony hold. What a gift of God it is that we’re not required to give such testimony. The testimony has been given. It’s inscribed in books and available to all of us. And it has the witness of the Holy Spirit working with it, bringing it to life, so that we can be confident that it will accomplish what God said it will.

Our calling in these latter days of the Christian Church, is to hold fast to this witness and **confess**. Let’s look for a moment at what St Paul writes to young pastor Timothy:

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. (I Tim. 6:20)

Hold on to the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been **entrusted** to you through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. (II Tim. 1:13-14)

First, the truth of the apostolic testimony must be held in all its fullness. It reminds me of President Barry’s motto in the Missouri Synod: “Keep the message straight, Missouri; get the message out, Missouri.” You can’t have one without the other. Hold fast what has been handed down. And then **confess**.

“To confess” means to speak back what has been given you to say. Recall the Gospel text that is read for the celebration of the “Confession of St Peter” (18 January). After three years of putting His teaching into the disciples, Jesus asks them to give back what they’d received:

“But you, who do you say that I am?” And Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 16:15-17)

In other words, Jesus says to Peter, you didn’t come up with these words on your own. Your preaching isn’t based on “flesh and blood”, on your own wisdom or experience or strength. This message was given to you, and you have simply spoken it back. That’s what it means to “confess”.

When we continually make our confession before God, saying back to Him what He has said to us, the world has a tendency to “overhear”. Or they literally draw it out of us. We can’t help but confess, as St Peter puts it:

Always be prepared to make a defence to everyone who calls you to account concerning the hope which is in you, but with meekness and reverence . . . (I Pet. 3:15)

When our faith is called into question by the world, we make our confession for their ears as well. It’s as if the apostles were being put on trial again in us, just as Christ was put on trial again in them. But Peter’s warning about “meekness” and “reverence” remind us of the difference between “witness” and “confess”. We simply speak the truth that has been given to us.

As we draw this study to a close, then, it is worthwhile for us to consider how the Christian is equipped to make this confession.

1. He must pay great heed to receiving the testimony of the apostolic witnesses. That means he must hear and study the Holy Scriptures. Like Theophilus, he must found his faith upon the certainty that is available through God’s Word.
2. The Christian confessor will also wish to be filled with the teachings of the apostles as they have been handed down to us in the creeds confessed by generations of Christians in ages past. In other words, the simplest confession is the Apostles’ Creed itself. There’s no better way to confess than to have these words internalized. And together with the Creed itself, we learn its meaning as confessed by Luther in his Small Catechism. Learning these brief questions and answers equips the Christian confessor to give answer concerning his faith every single day in whatever situation he’s placed in.
3. The Christian confessor must, by contrast, place far less importance on his own personal experience. Although the woman at the well reported to the townspeople of her own meeting with Christ (John 4:28-30,39-42),

this merely served to draw them to the place where Christ was still available to be met. Faith itself came through hearing the words of Christ. The Gospel that converts is the message of Christ Himself, not the report of the believer's personal experience.

4. The Christian confessor must put his trust in the "co-testimony" of the Holy Spirit, who alone works faith through the message that is preached. It is not the facts or the speaker's persuasiveness that converts, but the Spirit who uses the Gospel as His channel.
5. The Christian confessor will, therefore, wish to be filled with this Holy Spirit. St John's own words direct us to where the Spirit is to be found:

This is He who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one testifying, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three who testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three are one. (I John 5:6-8)

The Spirit is found where the water and the blood is: in Baptism and in the Lord's Supper. The confessing Christian is strengthened by the Holy Spirit in these Holy Sacraments. And these Sacraments connect us to the physical realities of Christ, Himself, so that in a sense, by Word and Sacrament, we, too, can say that we have heard and seen and touched the Word of Life.

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## HOLDING FAST TO THE WORD OF LIFE<sup>1</sup>

*Glen E. Zweck*

### I. THE ORIGIN OF THE ILC CHURCHES.

#### *1.1 The Prussian Union*

Many of the International Lutheran Council [ILC] churches originated from the Prussian Union. This was an attempt to unite the Lutheran and Reformed churches into one church. Although initial resistance prompted many revisions and modifications, our fathers finally determined that they could not remain in this united church and remain Lutheran. Therefore, they sought leave to exercise the right of emigration granted them by the Religious Peace of Augsburg 1555. There are critics today, as there were then, who insist that it was not necessary for them to take such drastic action.

Initially, the union of these two churches was planned to be voluntary. The following Royal Order was issued by King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia to the church councils, superintendents and synods, on 27 September 1817, in time for the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation:

My enlightened ancestors, now resting in the Lord (the Elector Johann Sigismund, the Elector Georg Wilhelm, the Great Elector, King Friedrich I and King Friedrich Wilhelm I), as the history of their lives and of their reigns proves, had already made an earnest endeavour to join the two separated Protestant churches, the Reformed and the Lutheran, into one Evangelical-Christian Church. Honouring their memory and their beneficial intention, I am gladly adding my name to theirs with the wish to bring about a God-pleasing work to the glory of God and the welfare of the Christian Church in my estates. In the past, this has been hindered by the insuperable difficulties of the sectarian spirit; now, under the influence of a better spirit, which is able to push aside the non-essential and is able to retain the essential, in which both confessions are in agreement, a start is to be made at the coming secular celebration of the Reformation.

Such a true religious union of both Protestant churches, separated only by external differences, is in accordance with the great purpose of Christianity, it meets the first intention of the reformers, it is found in the spirit of Protestantism, it promotes interest in the church, it is wholesome for piety in

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered as the keynote address to the 18<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Lutheran Council held at Westfield House, Cambridge, England, on 7 August 1999.

the home, and it is to be the source of many improvements in church and school, now so often hindered by the different confessions.

This wholesome union, so often sought in the past, but never realized, and now again so eagerly desired, is not a union in which the Reformed Church is to be absorbed by the Lutheran Church, nor the latter by the former, but both are to be absorbed into a revived Christian Church in the spirit of its sacred Founder. When both parties earnestly and honestly in a true Christian sense desire it, then there will be no hindrances in the nature of the cause and in a worthy way it will express the gratitude owing to Divine Providence for the inestimable blessings of the Reformation, and through it their great founders will be honoured by the continuation of their undying work.

Much as I desire that the Reformed and the Lutheran Church in my states may share my well-approved conviction, at the same time, acknowledging their right and freedom, it is far from me to press it upon anyone or to decree or to determine anything in this matter. This union, then, will be of true value only if it is neither by persuasion nor indifference, but only if it proceeds from the freedom of a personal conviction, and is not one only in external form, but if it has its roots and vital powers in the union of the heart, in accordance with genuine Christian principles.

As I myself, in this spirit, will celebrate the secular festival of the Reformation in the former Reformed and Lutheran Court and Garrison Congregation of Potsdam, now the one Evangelical Christian Congregation, and with it will partake of Holy Communion, so I hope that this my own example will have a favourable influence on all Protestant congregations in my country and will be followed in spirit and in truth.

To the wise direction of the councils, and the pious zeal of the pastors and their synods, I leave the external conforming form of the union, convinced that the congregations will gladly accede in a genuine Christian sense, and that everywhere, where the honest mind, without any impure aims, is directed to the essential and the great sacred cause, a form will easily be found in which the external will proceed from the internal in a simple, dignified, and true way. May the hoped-for moment not be too far distant when, under one common shepherd, a flock will come into existence with one faith, one love, and one hope.<sup>2</sup>

The king published his worship book in 1822. When the Lutherans in Breslau objected to the union in 1830, the king modified the Union, insisting that no one was being compelled to surrender his confession:

The Union does not intend or signify the abandonment of confessions of faith which have heretofore been used, nor does it abolish the authority which the Symbolical Books of the two evangelical communions have hitherto exercised. Concurrence in the Union is only an expression of the spirit of

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<sup>2</sup> David Schubert, *Kavel's People* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985) 56-57.

moderation and charity which no longer allows difference in isolated articles of faith to serve as a ground for denial of external church fellowship on the part of one communion toward the other . . . .<sup>3</sup>

In the face of further protests, other modifications and concessions were made. However, apart from anything else, one sticking point remained above all. A proclamation of 1831, concerning the king's worship book, insisted that pastors use the prescribed formulas under threat of punishment for disobedience to royal authority or treason.<sup>4</sup>

Note the explicit claim that the proposed union is based upon the conviction that the differences between the Lutheran Church and the Reformed Church are not essential differences. This simply expresses the Reformed conviction that the Lutheran Church and the Reformed Church are essentially one church, separated only by Luther's wilful obstinacy. The Prussian king made it plain that that was his opinion, when he accused the Lutheran dissidents, in a Royal Order on 7 February 1836, of "obstinate insubordination" and of having "blind faith in the authority of a few fanatics".<sup>5</sup>

From this point of view, it is clear that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in declaring itself to be in fellowship with three Reformed churches, is, in principle, endorsing the Prussian Union, and repudiating our fathers. In effect, they are saying that our entire history was a mistake, and that we have no right to exist as separate churches.

### ***1.2 Lutheran-Reformed Differences***

It is, therefore, appropriate to give some consideration to this thesis, that there is no essential difference between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. This thesis is a major topic in a book published by Hermann Sasse in 1934, in Nazi Germany. In this book, *Was heißt lutherisch? [Here We Stand]*,<sup>6</sup> he first refuted the thesis that the Lutheran Church is the national church of Germany, then he described the fundamental differences in theology between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. The matters he dealt with are: their understanding of the Gospel, of faith, of the doctrine of the church, of the relationship between justification and predestination, and of

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<sup>3</sup> Schubert 55.

<sup>4</sup> H.T. Wangemann, *Sieben Bücher preussischer Kirchengeschichte* (Verlag von Wilhelm Schultze, 1859), vol. I, ch. 4. Cited in David Schubert, "Should We Be Here? A new look at why the first Lutherans came to Australia", *Lutheran Theological Journal* 25.3 (December 1991): 150.

<sup>5</sup> Schubert 9.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Was heißt lutherisch?* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1934). Sasse, *Here We Stand*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, [1938, 1966,] 1979).

the incarnation and real presence. He demonstrates that, because of these differences, it is impossible for the Lutheran and Reformed churches to speak with united voice, even though both churches endorse the principles of *sola gratia* and *sola scriptura*. Any attempt for these two churches to speak with a united voice concerning the Gospel necessarily involves the use of equivocal language, because fundamental theological terms are understood differently. This kind of speaking is characteristic of the ecumenical movement. Such language was deliberately employed in the Prussian Union: the same formula in the Communion service was designed to be understood differently by the Lutherans and the Reformed.

What was begun in the Prussian Union has been continued in the ecumenical movement. For example, the 1917 Neutral Church Conference coined the phrase “unity in diversity”, to sanction this equivocal use of language.<sup>7</sup> The Lutheran World Federation later coined a similar phrase, for the same purpose. At its Sixth Assembly, at Dar es Salaam in 1977, the LWF coined the phrase “reconciled diversity”, to describe the same concept.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of the Prussian Union, loyal Lutherans considered such equivocal use of language to be disloyalty to the Gospel of Christ. They risked death, by emigration to distant lands, rather than incur this disloyalty. They sought religious freedom, in order that they might remain Lutheran.

First among the differences between the Lutheran and Reformed churches, Sasse describes their different understandings of the Gospel itself. Over against Rome and the Reformed, both of whom include obedience to the law in their definitions of the Gospel, the Lutheran Church defines the Gospel as the promise of the forgiveness of sins. While this is the obvious implication of almost any page of the Book of Concord, it is also a claim that is asserted explicitly. For example, we read in Article IV of the Apology: “The Gospel is, strictly speaking, the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> We also read: “Furthermore the Gospel (that is, the promise that sins are forgiven freely for Christ’s sake) must be retained in the church.”<sup>10</sup> Consider also what the Apology says in Article XII:

In Mark 1:15 Christ says, “Repent and believe the Gospel.” In the first part he denounces our sins, in the latter part he consoles us and shows us the forgiveness of sins. For to believe in the Gospel is not to have the general

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948* (London: SPCK, 1954) 527.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene L. Brand, *LWF Report 26: Toward a Lutheran Communion: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship*, 66. See also *Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran World Federation* (Geneva, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Ap IV:43. Cited from Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 113.

<sup>10</sup> Ap IV:120 (Tappert 124).

faith that even the demons have [James 2:19], but, in the true sense, to believe that for Christ's sake the forgiveness of sins has been granted to us; this is revealed in the Gospel.<sup>11</sup>

Over against this Lutheran definition of the Gospel as the promise of the forgiveness of sins, compare the following words of Charles Hodge:

Being a proclamation of the terms on which God is willing to save sinners, and an exhibition of the duty of fallen man in relation to that plan, it of necessity binds all those who are in the condition which the plan contemplates. It is in this respect analogous to the moral law.<sup>12</sup>

The difference between the Lutheran and Reformed understandings of the Gospel implies different approaches to the interpretation of Scripture. Karl Barth echoes John Calvin in spelling out this difference, in his repudiation of the Lutheran hermeneutic:

According to this conception, which is generally spoken of as the only evangelical conception, revelation must be regarded as a cone with its point turned toward man and containing the intelligence that his sins are forgiven. Thus the point of revelation is identical with the Gospel, the glad tidings. The law has a place before and after the Gospel—before it in order to terrify the unbelieving sinner, after it in order to guide the believing sinner—and hence it is only for the sake of understanding the Gospel that the law has any place at all in the revelation. Accordingly the real and primary attitude of man toward revelation according to the Lutheran view, is an attitude of faith which confidently appropriates the divine response to human need. *One might go so far as to say that this is an over-emphasis, made with that kind of impetuous willfulness which is at once the secret and danger of Lutheran teaching* in more than one place—an over-emphasis which cannot be substantiated either by the facts or by the biblical testimony to the facts. The precariousness of this over-emphasis has long since been demonstrated, and much as one may respect and admire Luther, we would do better not to go along with him in the theological ingenuity which he manifests here.<sup>13</sup>

As Barth notes here, the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel implies a Law-Gospel hermeneutic in the interpretation of Scripture. Again, this hermeneutic is implicit on many a page of the Book of Concord, but it is also made explicit. For example, the Apology, commenting upon Isaiah 28:21, calls the law “God’s alien work” and the Gospel God’s “proper work”: “He calls it God’s alien work to terrify because God’s own proper work is to

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<sup>11</sup> Ap XII:45 (Tappert 187-88).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1873) 2:642.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatik*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1927) I.1:326; quoted in Sasse, *Here We Stand* (1979) 120. Emphasis original.

quicken and console.”<sup>14</sup> Again, the Formula of Concord, also alluding to Isaiah 28:21, calls the law the “alien” work of Christ, and the Gospel his “proper office”:

Nevertheless, as long as all this—namely, the passion and death of Christ—proclaims God’s wrath and terrifies people, it is not, strictly speaking, the preaching of the Gospel but the preaching of Moses and the law, and therefore it is an “alien work” of Christ by which he comes to his proper office—namely, to preach grace, to comfort, to make alive. And this is the preaching of the Gospel, strictly speaking.<sup>15</sup>

In keeping with this Christological hermeneutic, we teach students, in their exegesis of Scripture, to make their first goal in the study of a pericope the discovery of its chief Gospel emphasis; then, once this has been identified, to seek the appropriate corresponding law emphasis. This is the kind of exegesis that the law-Gospel hermeneutic implies. But this procedure is not only right in principle. It is also valuable in practice, and lends life and variety to one’s proclamation.

A quick illustration will make the point. Consider the pericope of the Ten Lepers (Luke 17:11-19). A superficial survey of the pericope may suggest that the central thrust is a lesson in gratitude: a preaching of the law. However, if we approach the pericope with the understanding that Christ’s proper office is the Gospel, rather than the law, a different scenario presents itself. We soon realize that it is difficult to find anyone in Israel lower on the social totem pole than a Samaritan leper; and yet our Lord offered the Samaritan leper His grace and mercy. Perhaps, since we learn from elsewhere that Christ knows all things (John 21:17), we realize that He knew the nine would be ungrateful, but offered them His grace, nevertheless; and so we have God’s grace offered to ingrates. When we thus see the nature of God’s grace, it should help us to avoid appointing ourselves judges over who should or should not be given an opportunity to hear the Gospel. In any case, it is clear that our Lord was not structuring His evangelistic endeavours according to Church Growth principles.

This Christological hermeneutic of the Lutheran Church differs significantly from the hermeneutic of Rome, as well as from the hermeneutic of the Reformed. *Sola scriptura* means something different for the Lutheran from what it means for Rome or for the Reformed, both of whom also profess the *sola scriptura*. The Lutheran Church takes care neither to divorce the formal principle, denoting the source of our theology, from the material principle, denoting its essential content, nor to convert the material principle

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<sup>14</sup> “Andere Werk / Alienum opus; Gottes eigene Werk / proprium opus” Ap XII:51 (BELK 261; Tappert 189).

<sup>15</sup> “Ein fremd ‘Werk Christi’ / alienum opus Christi; zu seinem eigenem Amt / ad proprium suum officium” FC Ep V:10 (BELK 792; Tappert 479).

into a formal principle. The one error we may conveniently call “fundamentalism”, and the other “Gospel reductionism”.

In this context, “fundamentalism” involves ignoring the distinction between the law and the Gospel. All statements of Scripture are treated as having the same importance. In particular, this means that no distinction is drawn between the requirements of the law and the promises of the Gospel. Law and Gospel may even be treated as a continuum, rather than as opposites. With this kind of hermeneutic, no distinction is drawn between the assurance of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ, on the one hand, and regulations concerning life or worship, on the other. Instructions concerning food or dress are considered as important as the crucifixion of Christ. This kind of divorce of the formal principle from the material principle is characteristic of the Evangelicalism from which we draw so much of our spirituality.

The error opposite to this divorce of the formal principle from the material principle involves converting the material principle into a formal principle. This has been called “Gospel reductionism”. The central characteristic of “Gospel reductionism” is that, in a complete misunderstanding of Luther,<sup>16</sup> it considers only that in Scripture to be God’s Word which proclaims Christ, the implication being that there is also that in Scripture which does not proclaim Christ. Thus the material principle of Christian theology is not so much opposed to the formal principle as made into a formal principle. We may also put this another way. In orthodox Lutheran hermeneutics, Scripture is accepted as the authoritative Word of God both *quia* “because” it comes from God and *quia* “because” it proclaims Christ. On the other hand, for the “Gospel reductionist”, Scripture is accepted as the authoritative Word of God only *quatenus* “insofar as” it proclaims Christ.

For Luther, of course, the matter was far different. Luther frequently rejected some doctrinal error as being “against Christ”. For him, this was a short-hand way of saying that this error undermined the scriptural doctrine that the sinner is justified before God not by his works, but by God’s grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith.

Furthermore, as far as Luther is concerned, Christ is the whole content of Scripture. He makes statements like the following: “Christ is the sum and truth of Scripture.”<sup>17</sup> Again:

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<sup>16</sup> Glen E. Zweck, “Luther on James: A Curious Oversight”, *Lutheran Theological Review* 9 (Academic Year 1996-97): 50-74.

<sup>17</sup> WA 3:620. Quoted in Robert David Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine, and Confession”, The Twenty-fifth Annual Reformation Lectures, *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 32.4 (December 1992): 31.

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>18</sup>

This *solus Christus* principle makes of all Christian doctrine a unity. Luther likens it to a large circle, with Christ at its centre.<sup>19</sup> This means that, like a mathematical point, it cannot be divided; nor can it endure subtraction or addition:

they would know that one Word of God is all and that all are one, that one doctrine is all doctrines and all are one, so that when one is lost all are eventually lost, because they belong together and are held together by a common bond.<sup>20</sup>

Luther's *solus Christus* can hardly be summed up better than in the following words of David Scaer: "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>21</sup>

Robert Preus comments concerning this summary: "Those who might criticize Scaer as a 'christo-monist' or 'Gospel reductionist' or with some other pejorative label do indeed misunderstand Luther's entire theology of the Gospel. Luther, as seen above, sees doctrine as an organic whole, not a linear progression of ideas."<sup>22</sup> Hence, we find the phrase "agreed in doctrine and in all its articles" in Article X of the Formula.<sup>23</sup>

### ***1.3 Lessons for this Conference***

This Christological hermeneutic has obvious relevance to the major topics before this conference. In both cases, it is all too easy to become bogged down in minutiae of casuistics, if the Christological hermeneutic is ignored.

#### ***1.3a Christological Hermeneutics and Church Fellowship***

The relevance of the Christological hermeneutic to the question of church fellowship is the more obvious. According to Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, the marks of the church by means of which the issue of church fellowship is determined are precisely those marks of the church which most

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<sup>18</sup> W<sup>2</sup> 17:1070. Quoted in Preus 31.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), AE 27:38.

<sup>20</sup> Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), AE 27:38.

<sup>21</sup> David Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology", *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 49.2/3 (April-July 1985): 197.

<sup>22</sup> Preus 41.

<sup>23</sup> "in der Lehre und allen derselben Artikel / in doctrina et in omnibus illius partibus"; FC SD 10:31 (BELK 1063; Tappert 616).

directly involve the Gospel. We sometimes speak loosely of the marks of the church. Luther spoke of them often, and the list of marks varies. However, he does distinguish between the various marks in a helpful way. In his *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), Luther distinguishes between different categories of marks of the church. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession mentions those marks of the church by means of which the church is created, or constituted: the Gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Because God's Word is effective, and produces fruit (Isaiah 55:10-11; Romans 1:16-17), we know that where these marks are, the church also exists. These are the essential marks of the church. They are, in this sense, infallible marks of the church.

Luther also speaks of seven "principal" marks of the church. These are called "principal" marks of the church, not in the sense that they are all essential to the existence of the church, but because they pertain to the First Table of the Law, and will be found where the church is.<sup>24</sup>

Then, there are also "other outward signs that identify the Christian church, namely, those signs whereby the Holy Spirit sanctifies us according to the second table of Moses." These signs "cannot be regarded as being as reliable as those noted before since some heathen too practise these works and indeed at times appear holier than Christians ...."<sup>25</sup>

The point to be noted, of course, is that not all marks of the church are equally important. The marks of the church that are relevant to the fellowship issue are those marks that infallibly mark the presence of the church, since they are constitutive of the church. Works of charity, as Luther notes, are not constitutive of the church, but may even be found among the heathen.

### *1.3b Christological Hermeneutics and the Role of Women in the Church.*

It may not at first be obvious how the Christological hermeneutic is relevant to the question of the role of women in the church. Here, the "fundamentalist" approach would simply be to trawl the New Testament for laws regulating the role and behaviour of women. This was not a prominent issue in Luther's day, so he did not direct much attention to it. But there have been occasions when the church had to direct its attention to this question.

As far as the ordination of women is concerned, William Weinrich notes the verdict of the Early Church. The Early Church considered it significant that, in the Old Testament, no woman prophesied publicly. Further, in the New Testament, our Lord chose no women to be His apostles. Then, there

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<sup>24</sup> Luther, "On the Councils and the Church" (1539), AE 41:148-66.

<sup>25</sup> Luther, "On the Councils and the Church" (1539), AE 41:167.

are the texts in Paul which speak directly to this issue (I Timothy 2:11-14; I Corinthians 14:34-40).

But that is not all that St Paul has to say on this issue. He notes a direct Christological link. He notes that, when God created the human race, He created them male and female, in order that they might pre-figure the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the church (Romans 5:14; Ephesians 5:25-26).<sup>26</sup> This concept occurs so frequently in Scripture, that we are compelled to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit considers it to be important.

## II. TEMPTATIONS FOR LUTHERANS TO COMPROMISE

Throughout its history, the Lutheran Church has been tempted, again and again, to compromise its confession. Sometimes the temptation has come from the side of Rome, sometimes from the side of the Reformed, and sometimes from the secular world.

### *II.1 Rome—the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims*

An early test was one that came from Rome. After the defeat of the Protestant forces in the Smalcald War, attempts were made to re-impose the pre-Reformation theology and worship practices. Hundreds of faithful Lutheran pastors lost their parishes, rather than return to Romanism. At such times, there was a strong temptation to compromise, as far as church usages were concerned. Pastors had to decide what practices they could re-introduce, and what practices they could not re-introduce.

As far as the meaning of church usages is concerned, the issue was decided as much by popular perception as by reality. For example, a Lutheran pastor, at the time of the Interims, could argue, quite validly, that the wearing of a surplice had a respectable history in the church. Nevertheless, the popular perception in some parts of Germany was that the wearing of a surplice was a concession to Rome: and that decided the issue. Lutheran pastors in those areas refused to wear the surplice, even though Lutheran pastors elsewhere may have continued to wear it.

The Interims failed to achieve their purpose because the Lutherans refused to surrender their Confession. Their persistence won for them a provision in the Religious Peace of Augsburg 1555, which granted a legal right to exist to adherents of the Augsburg Confession.

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<sup>26</sup> William Weinrich, “*It is not Given to Women to Teach*”: a *Lex in Search of a Ratio* (unpublished).

### ***II.2 Reformed—the Antwerp Martinists.***

It is disappointing, therefore, to learn how early the Lutheran Church took on board ideas that are characteristic of Reformed spirituality. The Reformed endeavoured, one way or another, to be included under the provision of the Religious Peace of Augsburg. The emperor had sworn to permit this new imperial law concerning the adherents of the Augsburg Confession also in his other territories, such as the Netherlands.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, under threat of revolt, Prince William of Orange extracted from the regent the extension of this law to Antwerp. Accordingly, by the “September Accords” of 1566, three Lutheran and three Reformed congregations were established in Antwerp, with their own churches within the city boundary.

In response to Roman pressure, such as the memory of the Interims, and the threat of the armies of the Inquisition, there was strong motivation for the Lutherans in Antwerp to make common cause with the Reformed. There was even the prospect, in that case, of alliances with neighbouring princes, in order to deter the army of the Inquisition.<sup>28</sup>

The result was that, as early as 1566, the three Lutheran congregations in Antwerp surrendered a number of church usages that were not directly commanded in Scripture, in a vain attempt to make the Augsburg Confession more palatable to the Reformed. In practice, therefore, the Lutheran congregations in Antwerp adopted the Reformed position on church usages, in a number of respects. For example, the following were surrendered as *adiaphora*: the use of candles, the elevation, chasuble, and surplice.

### ***II.3 Reformed and United—the Barmen Declaration.***

During the time of Nazi dominance in Germany, there was strong motivation for the Lutherans to make common cause with the Reformed against the “Deutsche Christen”. The “Deutsche Christen” endorsed the Nazi philosophy, and supported the programme of the Nazi party. Hermann Sasse happened to have become editor of the *Church Year Book* in 1932. In his first editorial, he emphatically repudiated the infamous Article 24 of the Nazi Party programme.<sup>29</sup> In August of the next year, he joined with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others, in drawing up the Bethel Confession, a Lutheran document which repudiated the Nazi philosophy.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Oliver K. Olson, “The Rise and Fall of the Antwerp Martinists”, *Lutheran Quarterly* 1.1 (Spring 1987): 98-119.

<sup>28</sup> Olson 99.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Matheson, ed., *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981): 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, trans. John Bowden (SCM Press [1977] 1987), Volume I: 1918-1934, p. 456.

This document was not accepted, even in a watered-down form. Instead, a joint Lutheran-Reformed-United document was preferred, which was drawn up largely by Karl Barth. Sasse saw the disastrous consequences for the Lutheran Church in Germany which such a project posed. He, therefore, sought to have it amended, so that there were separate Lutheran and Reformed objections to Nazism. What concerned him was the Confessional integrity of the Lutheran Church. He correctly foresaw the disastrous consequences which eventually ensued, with the eclipsing of the Lutheran Church in the EKID. When he was refused permission to voice his objections to the assembly, he left the meeting. Helmreich, without even mentioning Sasse's name, dismisses the episode with the comment: "above all a spirit prevailed which would not succumb to obstructive petty confessional differences."<sup>31</sup> As we see from this comment, to the world, confessionalism is always regarded as "obstructive petty confessional differences". However, one beneficial result of this episode is that we now have his book, *Here We Stand*, in which he clearly and incisively spells out, not only the proper estimation of the Lutheran Reformation, in opposition to the view of the "Deutsche Christen", but also the theological differences between the Lutheran and Reformed churches.

#### ***II.4 Rome—Justification: the Joint Declaration.***

With the changed attitude toward biblical studies evident in the Roman Catholic Church in this century (the Catholic Biblical Association in Britain has celebrated its fiftieth anniversary), some hold out hope for progress on the ecumenical front: who would dare to set limits to what the Holy Spirit may be able to achieve through an increased study of the Scriptures?

The most tangible result of these hopes and endeavours is the recent publication of the Joint Declaration on justification. Several member churches of the ILC have already published their critiques of this document. However, one of the clearest critiques is the assessment by Robert Preus, *Justification and Rome*.<sup>32</sup> He describes systematically, phrase by phrase, how the critical concepts are understood differently by the two churches. In fact, even informed Roman Catholic scholars have expressed the conviction that those Lutherans who participated in these talks have surrendered the historic Lutheran doctrine of justification.

The fact of the matter is that, for the greater part of this century, Reformation scholars, including Lutheran theologians, have been asserting that the true Reformation doctrine of justification is found in the young

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<sup>31</sup> Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979) 162.

<sup>32</sup> St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997.

Luther. Drawing their support largely from works that pre-date his mature Reformation consciousness, such as the Lectures on the Romans (which Luther never even published), they attribute to him a doctrine of “analytic” justification—of justification as a **process** within the sinner—rather than the doctrine of forensic justification elaborated in the Confessions. Thus, there are many Lutheran scholars who find themselves more in sympathy with Rome’s doctrine of justification than with that of the Lutheran Confessions.

Nor does the matter end there, because something is also happening on the popular level. It is well known that, in his progress toward the Reformation doctrine of justification, Luther for a while espoused a doctrine that has been called a doctrine of humility. This theology of humility is evident in the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), and in the *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* (1518), and culminates in the *Sermon on Three Kinds of Righteousness* (probably September of 1518), but has disappeared by the time of the *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness* (probably January or March of 1519). This theology, in which the cross of the Christian is the basis of his hope of salvation, rather than the cross of Christ, and in which one is justified by approving God’s sentence of condemnation, is something that one still meets in popular piety, even on the part of some who profess strong antipathy to the pope.

### ***II.5 Evangelicals: Justification and Evangelism.***

Occasionally one hears charges of “Romanism” levelled against this or that pastor or congregation, because he or it has adopted some church usages that are deemed to be “High Church”. This is particularly noticeable in the case of many Evangelicals. There are some who evince an intense dislike for Rome, largely on the basis of church usages that are deemed to be “High Church”. Even among Lutherans, the assertion is sometimes made, either implicitly or explicitly, that the spirituality of the Book of Concord is not truly Lutheran, since the Confessors were still too close to Rome. That, of course, is precisely the Reformed contention: that the Lutheran Reformation was incomplete, and needed to be completed by the Reformed!

However, there is something strange about this attitude. It is true that the meaning of church usages is determined by perception, rather than by reality. For this reason, they must be taken seriously. Anyone who wishes to change these church usages, or introduce new ones, or re-introduce discarded ones, will find it advisable to follow the injunction of Article X of the Formula of Concord. Article XV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession had stipulated that prevailing customs should be observed.<sup>33</sup> The Formula stipulates that changes should be made only when this can be done without

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<sup>33</sup> Ap XV:1 (BELK 297; Tappert 215).

offence, and when it will contribute to the edification of the church, and promote good order, Christian discipline, and evangelical decorum in the church.<sup>34</sup>

However, one will find surprising things on the list of usages that raise opposition. High on the list is the use of incense in worship, a practice thoroughly founded on Scripture, which we sing about every time we sing our Evening Prayer: “Let my prayer rise before you as incense” (*Lutheran Worship*, p. 253). Also high on the list is signing oneself with the sign of the cross—something which is commended in the Book of Concord: “make the sign of the cross”.<sup>35</sup> Then there is the adoration of the Body of Christ, approved in Article VII of the Formula of Concord: “Of course, no one except an Arian heretic can or will deny that Christ himself, true God and man, who is truly and essentially present in the Supper when it is rightly used, should be adored in spirit and in truth in all places but especially where his community is assembled.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, there are all sorts of usages which are the common heritage of the Christian Church, which are mistakenly labelled “Roman”. Genuine Lutheran spirituality may be catholic without being Roman, but it is also evangelical without being Evangelical. At the very least, one is entitled to suspect that our catechesis has been deficient.

But there is more to it than that. Particularly in the case of Arminian Evangelicals, it is noticeable that their “pet hates” of Rome are so often peripheral matters of ceremony. Yet they share with Rome fundamental doctrinal positions, such as the doctrine of the freedom of the will, and the confusion of justification and sanctification. One is entitled to wonder whether there is not a guilty conscience at work subconsciously. One is also entitled to wonder whether this evident infiltration of Reformed and Arminian ideas into the Lutheran Church is not a more serious threat to her Confessional integrity than the sporadic attempts of this or that pastor or congregation to recapture some of the historic usages that are the common heritage of all Christians. Preus’ warning is timely:

A good look at Luther’s *solus Christus* theology might do much to stave off a potential controversy which could engulf all of American Lutheranism. Atomistic, wooden, Arminian fundamentalism is no friend of Lutheran doctrine, nor of the *sola scriptura* or the *sola fide* or the *sola gratia* or what embraces these three principles and all Christian doctrine, practice, and worship as well, the *solus Christus*.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> FC SD 10:9 (BELK 1056; Tappert 612).

<sup>35</sup> “Morning and Evening Prayers”, BELK 521, 522; Tappert 352, 353; LC I, Second Commandment: BELK 578, 579; Tappert 374).

<sup>36</sup> FC SD VII:126 (BELK 1016; Tappert 591).

<sup>37</sup> Preus, “Luther: Word, Doctrine, and Confession” 45.

### III. CONCLUSIONS.

At this point, it would be appropriate to compile a check-list concerning our guardianship of our heritage. However, that will have to be left to someone better placed and better informed. Perhaps each church will be best placed to make its own assessment.

Nevertheless, certain items catch the eye. It is surely an endorsement of the action of our forefathers, that pastors and theologians from Eastern Europe and Scandinavia are been trained for the Office of the Public Ministry in a seminary of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. This is surely one of the notable mission endeavours of modern times.

#### *III.1. Recapturing a Lutheran Spirituality.*

In keeping with what has been written above, it is surely to be approved that a project has been launched to compile a set of books on *Confessional Dogmatics*, to supplement the standard dogmatics text-books. It is also a hopeful sign that a project has been launched to provide a set of scholarly commentaries.

But if we wish to recapture a truly Lutheran spirituality, a good place to begin is with Martin Luther, the first and greatest teacher of the Lutheran Church. The Formula says of him:

Since Dr. Luther is rightly to be regarded as the most eminent teacher of the churches which adhere to the Augsburg Confession and as the person whose entire doctrine in sum and content was comprehended in the aforementioned Augsburg Confession and delivered to Emperor Charles V, therefore the true meaning and intention of the Augsburg Confession cannot be derived more correctly or better from any other source than from Dr. Luther's doctrinal and polemical writings.<sup>38</sup>

#### *III.2 A Lutheran Theology of Evangelism.*

It is high time that we cease borrowing our theology of evangelism from the Evangelicals, and construct one on the basis of Lutheran doctrine and principles. A Lutheran theology of evangelism must begin from Article V of the Augsburg Confession: "In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel ...."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> FC SD VII:41 (BELK 984-85; Tappert 576).

<sup>39</sup> AC XV:1 [Latin text] (BELK 58; Tappert 31).

This concept, that the church proclaims the Gospel by establishing congregations and calling pastors, is also the pattern taught in the New Testament. Take, for instance, the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). Apart from anything else in this text, it is clear that the church is to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. Baptizing and teaching are functions of the Office of the Public Ministry. Therefore, the Great Commission implies that the church is to carry out this commission by establishing congregations and calling pastors, who will baptize and teach.

The case of those who fled persecution in Jerusalem is similar: “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4). For some interpreters, this conjures up images of refugee Christian laymen, gathering at the dockside, or on street corners, like groups of Open Air Campaigners, proclaiming the Gospel. However, the verb employed here (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν λόγον) is not predicated elsewhere in the New Testament of laymen, but only of ordained persons.<sup>40</sup> The clear implication is that these Christian refugees established Christian congregations wherever they went, and called pastors to proclaim the Gospel in their midst.

This is indeed the pattern described explicitly in the New Testament: “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders [πρεσβύτεροι ‘pastors’] in every town, as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). See also Romans 10:14-15.

### *III.3 Holding Fast to the Word of Life.*

As we survey the history of our churches at the dawn of a new millennium, we are able to see that our history is not simply an error or mistake. Our fathers were justified in confessing in the way that they did. They held fast to the Word of Life, and the Living Word sustained them. What we can still ask is whether we have been in the past, and are now, as faithful in our guardianship of our heritage as we should have been. If we are convinced that our heritage is worth preserving, we have an obligation to do what we can to extend it. This, of course, is beyond our power. It is not we who preserve the Word of Life, but the Word of Life preserves us. Therefore, may the Lord of the Church, who has graciously blessed us in the past, continue to do so in the future.

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<sup>40</sup> Kurt Marquart, “Church Growth” as Mission Paradigm: A Lutheran Assessment (Houston: Our Savior Lutheran Church, 1994) 44 n. 39.

**SERMON**  
**JAMES 2:1-18<sup>1</sup>**  
*Reginald C. Quirk*

**A** festival of Harvest is not a uniquely Christian celebration. Anyone who believes in God, in any God, recognizes how important it is to gather in the year's harvest. Jews mark this season, and Hindus do, and here we are as Christians, mimicking the ceremony laid down by God for His people when first they came into their promised land and tasted its fruitfulness. They were told to take the first fruits and bring them to the priest as an offering of thanksgiving to the God who had blessed them with the land and its richness.

For anyone in the business of farming this is a crucial time. There is thanksgiving, yes. But there will also be a feeling of relief if they managed to beat the autumnal rain in their harvest. And more than that, a feeling of exhaustion, because getting in crops is hard work, a climax to a hard season, and now there may be a little respite—though if there is, farmers would never admit it.

My point is that men and women worked hard to produce food like this. God, of course, gave the earth in which it could grow, and He sent the rain, both on the evil and on the good, and the sun, and everything we remember in these seasonal hymns. And every year we see a new chapter in His creation, remembering that on the third day God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds" [Gen. 1:11]. And of course, it was so. So God from the outset gave the mechanism by which the blueprint of His kindly gift could be passed from generation to generation, and harvest after harvest provides bread for the eater and seed for the sower. So no one can say that they have done it alone, or even that God has not done much the greater part. But still, the farmer must labour to produce the harvest, and we must all labour to buy it and benefit from it.

How did God break it to Adam, after his fall into sin? "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life" [Gen. 3:17]. And once again, of course, it was so, and it **is** so. But God is gracious, and there is in the heart of His warning great mercy: despite all the cursed ground and painful toil bit, the message is "you will eat". So

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was preached on 8 Oct. 2000 at Resurrection Lutheran Church, Cambridge, England, for Harvest Festival. The text is the Epistle for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.

God and man do it together—His creative genius, our hard work, and here is the result.

But there is a point at which the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is completely unlike that of any religion. And it is this: what we say about God's material blessing—food and all the rest of it—we cannot say about His spiritual gift. Now the religions of the world would say this: they would say that once again, God and man do it together. If we are to be rewarded with God's favour, we must work for it. We must do the right things and avoid doing the wrong things. If we are to escape condemnation in God's judgement, we must be good enough—at least the good must outweigh the bad we do. If we expect God to embrace us as His people, maybe even to have us as His own beyond this life, it must be because we earn that privilege in the way we serve Him and the way we treat others. God may give us a helping hand, but He expects us to do our part, too—just like growing vegetables. But we know this to be quite untrue. God loves us, not because we are good, but because He is loving. He calls us His own, not because we are worthy, but because He chooses to do it. We escape His eternal judgement by His grace, not by our efforts. We have the gift of eternal life as precisely that—a gift, unearned and undeserved. Good news indeed, because we never need to worry if our life is good enough, pure enough, religious enough. It is irrelevant. God's gift is all. We know that.

And then, we find in the epistle for today this passage from the New Testament letter of St James, and our confidence gets all shaken up again. "What good is it", he asks "if a man claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" [Jas 2:14]. It is a rhetorical question, and James goes on to answer it. Such faith, he says is dead, and it is useless. And so we begin to think that being good, and doing good things, and not doing bad things, they must be important after all, if we are going to be saved from the judgement of our sin and the sentence of death. And it is no accident that Martin Luther did not like this book of James, as far as one is allowed not to like books of the Bible, and he didn't really recommend people to read it. You could almost see it undoing all the effects of the clear preaching of the Gospel, which says that we are saved by God's grace and not by our works.

So what is a Lutheran preacher to say about it?

There is a tradition in Cambridge, going back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, of preachers being dragged from their pulpits when the congregation thinks their sermons are heretical. Now I am going to make two statements that may sound just about heretical enough to warrant such an action. I would only ask that you wait until the end of the sermon before seizing the preacher and lighting the fire.

Now here are the two statements: We are not saved by faith. That's one. And we are saved by works. That's the other. We are not saved by faith, and

we are saved by works. Before I explain those two radical statements, I just want to say that little words sometimes make a lot of difference.

Let's look at the second statement first. We are saved by works. Here there is a little word I didn't say. I did not say that we are saved by **our** works. The fact is, we are saved by **Christ's** works. This is vitally important. His works can save; our works can't. His works are perfect; ours amount to what Isaiah called "filthy rags". His work was to be born into our human life; to live it as we should live it, but as only He can; to suffer, not for His own failings, for He has none, rather for ours; to die the death that we have deserved; and to be raised to life in permanent conquest of sin, death, and the powers of the devil. His work was to be tempted in every way as we are, yet without sinning. His work was to empty Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. His work was to be raised from the dead as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. If you can do that, then perhaps you can be saved by your own works. But of course, we can't and we are saved by His works.

Now what does James say in this awkward passage of the Bible? He says that faith without works is dead and useless and unable to save. And we can read his words in two ways. We can read it in the way of the flesh and the way of the law. That is, we can look to our own works as the focus of our faith, and hope they will be good enough. But in this lesson James himself shows us that is impossible, when he says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all." One strike and you're out. Obviously that is impossible, and no one could be saved. But we can also read his words in the way of Christ and the way of the Gospel. Now faith, apart from the works of Christ is dead and useless and unable to save us. The whole point of faith is that it leans upon the great gift of Christ. Faith, in fact, rejects our own works in favour of His. What faith does is to put Him in our place, and before God to have nothing to declare but His righteousness.

And this brings us to the first of my controversial statements. I said that we are not saved by faith. Again, the little words are really important—I don't mean as a word game, just toying with prepositions for the fun of it; no, it really matters. We are not saved **by** faith. We are saved **through** faith. Mere playing with words? I don't think so. James, I think, wrote his letter partly because people had a funny idea of faith, as if faith could save them—but that makes faith a work, a saving work which we ourselves do and present to God. No, Christ's work saves us, completely as a gift. We are saved **by** His grace, and **through** our faith. Now the people with the funny idea of faith did not realize what faith is—they thought it was one work that could stand in place of every other work. We know this because he gives an example: the demons. They know who God is. In a sense they believe in

Him. Their faith is that there is only one God. So are they saved? No, that would make faith the one work to stand in place of every other. But in fact faith simply stands Christ's work in place of every other.

It is not some sort of intellectual conclusion reached by being convinced of all the arguments in favour of God. That has nothing to do with faith. And God does not "reward" it with forgiveness and life and the gift of heaven. But God does reward the offering of our Lord Jesus with life for us, through faith in Him. We trust Him and what He has done, never ourselves and what we might do.

So in the end, the spiritual gift is not so very different from the material one. Someone worked to make the produce of the harvest ours. And someone worked to make the friendship and forgiveness of God ours, too. That someone was Jesus Christ, to whom we owe more thanks than we can know.

Amen.

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