

# LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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# LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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## CONTENTS

Standard Abbreviations.....	4
Editorial Foreword.....	5
<b>SHORT STUDIES</b>	
“What is Truth?” Campus Ministry in a Post-Modern Culture .....	7
<i>Eric R. Andrae</i>	
<b>ARTICLES</b>	
Should the Lutheran Church of Australia Join the Lutheran World Federation? A Question of Doctrinal Integrity .....	14
<i>Adam G. Cooper</i>	
“Totum quod sumus et in quo sumus” The Conversion of Saul as Religious Experience .....	27
<i>James E. Keller</i>	
Ordered Community: Order and Subordination in the New Testament .....	45
<i>John W Kleinig</i>	
To the Font and from the Font: Baptism and Mission .....	60
<i>Andrew K. Pfeiffer</i>	
Great is the Gift God Gives: The <i>Seven Christmas Sermons</i> of Johann Gerhard .....	80
<i>Thomas A. Von Hagel</i>	
<i>Simul justus et peccator:</i> Did Luther and the Confessions Get Paul Right? .....	90
<i>Thomas M. Winger</i>	
<b>SERMONS</b>	
Matthew 20:1-16.....	109
<i>Reginald C. Quirk</i>	

## STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS

- AE *Luther's Works*. American edition. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958- .
- Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., edited by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957.
- BAG 1<sup>st</sup> ed., edited by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957.
- BAGD 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 1979.
- BDAG 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by Frederick W. Danker, 2000.
- BELK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. 12 editions. [Cite edition used.] Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930- .
- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984.
- LW *Lutheran Worship*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1982.
- NA<sup>27</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Ed. Kurt and Barbara Aland, et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993.
- TDNT Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964- .
- TLH *The Lutheran Hymnal*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1941.
- W<sup>2</sup> Walch, Johann Georg, ed. *D. Martin Luthers sämtlichen Schriften*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ["St. Louis"] ed. 23 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, 1880-1910.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Weimarer Ausgabe. ["Weimar ed."] Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883- .
- WA DB Weimarer Ausgabe Deutsche Bibel [German Bible]
- WA Br Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe [Letters]
- WA Tr Weimarer Ausgabe Tischreden [Table talk]

Abbreviations for the Lutheran confessional writings:

- AC Augsburg Confession
- Ap Apology of the Augsburg Confession
- SA Smalcald Articles
- Tr Tractate/Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
- SC Small Catechism
- LC Large Catechism
- FC Ep Formula of Concord, Epitome
- FC SD Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration

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## EDITORIAL FOREWORD

**A**s a journal of the seminaries of Lutheran Church–Canada, we have always striven to provide articles which are relevant to the pastors and scholars of our church. This, of course, does not mean that every article is by a pastor or professor living in Canada. It does mean that issues that our partner churches are dealing often speak to questions that are also on our minds. This issue contains numerous articles from pastors of our partner churches, some of whom have spent time in Canada. All of these pastors and scholars are addressing issues that we in Canada either must face today or may face in the near future. It is indeed a blessing for us to be able to take counsel from our fellow Lutherans from other parts of the world as they seek to be faithful to our Lord and to His Gospel in their own cultural settings.

The issue begins with a short study looking at the challenges to campus ministry are presented by a post-modern culture. Campus pastor Eric Andrae reminds us that to be faithful the church must be who the church is. He notes that the church is not the world, and that to be truly relevant we must speak words that are eternal. This involves continuing to properly distinguish between Law and Gospel.

Next, Australian pastor Adam Cooper, who earned his Ph.D. in the United Kingdom, examines the issue of membership in the Lutheran World Federation. While his immediate context is the Australian Church, and he looks at the question in view of the Theses of Agreement which were foundational to the formation of the Lutheran Church of Australia, the question has relevance for us as well. LCC and the LCA have declared their confessional agreement; therefore the questions raised here, particularly regarding a “maximalist” versus a “minimalist” understanding of the Gospel in reference to AC VII, are questions that we and all confessional bodies need to consider when looking at participation and membership in the LWF and other ecumenical organizations.

Pastor James Keller next examines the question of Saul’s conversion as “religious experience”. He addresses the issue from the standpoints of history, Scripture, and the psychology of religion, all the while taking it seriously as a God-initiated event. He thus demonstrates that it is possible to look at the events of Scripture from the perspectives of certain “secular” disciplines, all the while maintaining their factuality even as we gain further insights into the events.

John Kleinig, lecturer at Australian Lutheran College, is no stranger to Canada, having lectured here on several occasions and having served as a visiting professor in St. Catharines. In this issue he looks at the question of subordination in the church, demonstrating that Scripture’s understanding of subordination turns the world’s understanding on its head. He calls for a

rethinking of the modern obsession with individualism and empowerment, and an embracing of the blessings of ordered community.

Another lecturer from Australian Lutheran College, Andrew Pfeiffer, earned his doctorate in missiology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. In his article on catechesis to the font and from the font, he notes the obligation of a faithful, confessional church to provide instruction to the people of God both before Baptism (for adults and for the parents and sponsors of infants) and after Baptism. He rightly states that bringing people into community (“assimilating” them, in modern parlance) is a slow process of bringing people to maturity. Given the similar secularist and individualistic cultures that are on the rise in Australia and North America, his words that warn against taking shortcuts in instruction and substituting platitudes for strong Law-Gospel teaching are words that we need to hear, both as rebuke and as encouragement.

Thomas Von Hagel spent several years teaching at Concordia University College of Alberta before moving on to Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois. In his article he discusses the use of allegory in Johann Gerhard’s Seven Christmas Sermons, noting that Gerhard demonstrates how the whole of Scripture can be used to illustrate the event of the Incarnation. Gerhard’s work demonstrates how the events of Christ’s birth are indeed historical fact, but not in any sense dry and dead and confined to the past, but rather living and active in our lives today, and the fulfilment of the entirety of the Old Testament.

Next, Thomas Winger discusses the significance of the Lutheran catchphrase, *simul iustus et peccator*. He notes various ways that Luther himself used the term, and demonstrates how, though the phrase is not used in the Confessions themselves, it serves as a touchstone of a truly confessional, and therefore scriptural, theology. Again, the challenge is set before us: dare to be confessional and confessing!

Finally, the issue concludes with a sermon by the Rev. Reginald Quirk of Cambridge, United Kingdom, wherein we are shown how the parables of Jesus, and particularly the parable of the workers in the vineyard, are relevant to the church today and to our own lives, as he uses the Law and the Gospel that are present in the text itself to enlighten and enliven the hearers.

Though this issue was not prepared with a specific theme in mind, it seems that a common theme has emerged: a call to remain faithful to the Scriptures and the Confessions (which is really the same faithfulness) in the face of all temptations to water down the message or to lighten the call to discipleship in the face of a post-modern world which is hostile at worst and indifferent at best to the message our Lord has called us to proclaim.

In the spirit of II Timothy 4:1-5,

EGK

The Day of St James the Elder, 2006

**SHORT STUDY:  
“WHAT IS TRUTH?”  
CAMPUS MINISTRY IN A POST-MODERN CULTURE\***

*Eric R. Andrae*

Pilate sought no answer, nor does post-modernism. Pilate simply walked away from Christ, from the truth (John 18:38), as do the majority of college students. But at least Pilate assumed that truth, seemingly so elusive to him, existed. In that sense, our collegiate culture is worse off than Pilate and thus our challenge is greater than Christ's.

With that bit of hyperbolic pessimism stated right up front, we can go about the task of meeting the challenge of post-modernism, so wide-spread in our society and so especially and particularly dominant on our campuses, most profoundly and specifically in its pernicious attacks on the reality of objective, transcendent truth.

But, first, what is post-modernism, besides a buzzword which most everyone uses but no one defines and few understand? Briefly and generally, though post-modernism can be understood simply as a chronological development, it is chiefly a response to and reaction against the rationalism and modernism of eighteenth century Enlightenment, and even nineteenth century romanticism and scientific materialism. These “-isms” never delivered on their promises of utopia, giving us instead two world wars and a disillusioned world. Thus, post-modernism is yet another attempt, especially by intellectual academia, at addressing the quest for truth. Unfortunately, it addresses this quest in a relativistic, subjective manner that can only be described as unrealistic at best and destructive of transcendental morality and doctrine at worst.<sup>1</sup>

Well, enough of buzzwords in order to explain a buzzword. Let's put it this way: Pilate's question was: “What is truth?” Joe College's question is: “How can you even know or say there is any such thing as (universal, objective) truth?” Pilate made a half-hearted attempt at finding truth. Jane College believes that truth is already within her, defined solely by her thoughts, feelings, experiences, and felt needs. Pilate would perhaps attack Christ today by claiming he is not the truth. Mr and Ms College attack the Church, the Body of Christ, for even claiming to have the singular truth.

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\* This is an amended version of an article which was originally posted online at [www.modernreformation.org](http://www.modernreformation.org).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gene Edward Veith, Jr, *Modern Fascism: Liquidating the Judeo-Christian Worldview* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), especially 21-23, 176-77.

Truth has become understood as a personal possession which can and does vary from individual to individual. Do you see the challenge?! Perhaps I was not being hyperbolic or pessimistic, after all.

How then is the Church to respond? Specifically, for the purpose of this essay, how does the Church respond through campus ministry? With honesty and integrity, that's how; in other words, with the objective, concrete truth of clarity. For, "we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (II Cor. 4:2). Those of us involved with confessing Christ on campus must boldly declare **who we are**: we must be, believe, and proclaim who we are; we must show the form and shape of who we are; we must teach who we are. We must be confident and honest in our identity.

We must be, believe, and proclaim who we are. For,

what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:8-10).

The faith of the heart and the confession of the mouth is one act of belief. This confessional fidelity entails both a clear understanding of what and Whom it is we believe, and a consequent sharing of that faith with others. It means a commitment to Scripture, and to the creeds and doctrine of the Church as handed down to us by those who came before (I Cor. 11:2; II Thess. 2:15). It must answer both Pilate and Joe College by pointing them outside of themselves—*extra nos*—to Him who exclusively is the way, the truth, and the life, not one of many, even Jesus Christ, our Lord (John 14:6).

We must show the true form and shape of who we are. In her worship, which is her very life-breath by the means of grace, the Church gives form and shape to the faith she believes and confesses. The Church is not the world, nor does she speak like the world, sound like the world, act like the world, appear like the world, or even smell like the world. The world speaks a language of deception and common vulgarity; it sounds its pulsating reverberations for mass entertainment; it acts with individualistic power and with might that makes right; it appears scantily clad in filthy rags designed to meet the pleasure of the eye and the lust of the depraved mind; and it smells of the spilled blood of haughty violence upon the weak. But in her children's gift-receiving and thanks-giving, the Church speaks and sings biblically and uncommonly liturgically; she sounds a heavenly harmony of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven; she acts corporately and humbly and reverently; she appears in unique garments and sanctified dress; and she smells like the incense of God-pleasing repentant prayer with lifted up



hands. The Church is foolish, not being received or known by worldly wisdom, by the spiritually undiscerning, commercially driven man or student (I Cor. 2:14). Instead, she presents herself a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable only to God, not to consumer or secular culture or market-driven society; she, and we who have been begotten and borne by her through the external Word of the Father (*externum verbum*), are not conformed to this world's language, sounds, behaviour, appearance, and aroma, its worship, but are transformed by the renewal of mind and mouth and heart, proving what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2). In this way we are and will remain healthy, whole, and complete—a people, a Church, of integrity.

On an eminently practical note, research<sup>2</sup> and personal experience has shown that this liturgical integrity is very much welcomed by the Gen Xers (b. 1963-1982) and Millennials (b. 1982-2001) who populate our universities and colleges. Forty per cent of the former experienced the divorce of parents; both perceive the world to be an extremely violent place, a world of constant (technological) change and increased diversity. As such, in the midst of a constantly transitioning, chaotic world, liturgical form provides stability, safety, and security; the historic liturgy is a cornerstone for them, for all.

[T]he liturgy can be a great gift, haven, and joy to people who live in a society and a world where they can't be quite sure what things are going to be like five years from now, or whether tomorrow everything will be changed. In a world where everything has gotten to be so transitory and "throw it away tomorrow," is there anything that they can count on as lasting, that they can be sure will still be there tomorrow, next Sunday, next year, and when they die? The liturgy delivers the answer, "Yes!" Same old liturgy every Sunday. You can count on it like it's been there for a thousand years and more. When people bump into that in a world where there isn't anything else they can be sure of like that, *there* is something real! And so we decline the demands of a consumer society which has to have a new model every year or every week if you're going to sell. For then you're talking marketing, and you're not talking the church of Christ and the holy liturgy.<sup>3</sup>

Students ask for liturgy done well, thoughtfully, in the proper setting, and there is the opportunity for a truly positive response to a liturgical setting. Belonging to a group conditioned to be greatly suspicious and savvy, they can sniff out and will discard anything that smacks of artificiality, insincerity, forced contemporaneousness, and marketed irrelevance. And, in

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<sup>2</sup> Terry K. Dittmer, "Millennial Kids". LCMS Campus Ministry Staff Conference: Evangelism on the Post Modern Campus. Crowne Plaza Hotel, St. Louis. 11 July 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Nagel, "Whose Liturgy Is It?", *Logia* (Eastertide/April 1993): 7. This article is a transcription of a lecture he presented to Opus Dei (a liturgical study group on the Concordia Seminary campus) on 16 January 1989. Cf. Nagel, "Logia Forum: 'That Which Remains'", *Logia* (Reformation 1998): 66-67.

order “to be always relevant, you have to say things which are eternal’ (Simone Weil). The liturgy ..., as it bears the Word of God ..., keeps us relevant by speaking into our ears words that are eternal.”<sup>4</sup> Otherwise, as has been said elsewhere, if the Church marries the spirit of the age, she will soon be a widow: actually, the marriage of Church and post-modernism would end in a mutually deadly divorce. However, simply put, students desire the Church, in both architecture and form, **to be the Church**: to show the true form and shape of who she is.

We must teach who we are. We have the dominical mandate:

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:18-20).

The baptismal incorporation of a sinner into the life of the Church and the Body of Christ includes a life-long catechesis, an ever-present teaching of the concrete truth of the faith. The Church has no other baptism with which to baptize than the one her Lord instituted, and that one includes continual catechetical clarity.<sup>5</sup> Honest catechesis means that every Word of God shared with others will either exhort them to be baptized or remind them that they are baptized: either forward to the font or back to the font. And the movement is from the font to the world, to the uncatechized, the lost, the unlearned, the fools who say in their heart that there is no God (Psalm 14:1); and then back from the world to the font, and so on and on the journey continues.

*Bene docet, qui bene distinguit*: the one who teaches well is the one who distinguishes well. This classical maxim is especially useful in distinguishing God’s Word of the Law—His demands and requirements which, unmet by us sinners, always mean our death—and God’s Word of the Gospel—His gracious and life-giving proclamation of the forgiveness of our sin on account of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. And it is here, at the Christ-point, that distinctions truly must be clarified, especially on campus, where Allah, Buddha, the New Age, Wiccans, and many others all compete for the time and appetite of the student who saunters up to the smorgasbord of spirituality served on a regular basis. The person and work

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<sup>4</sup> John T. Pless, “Liturgy and Evangelism in the Service of the *Mysteria Dei*”, *Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart*, eds. Paul T. McCain and John R. Stephenson (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1999), 233-34.

<sup>5</sup> Pless, “Lutheran Missiology and Campus Ministry”, *For the Life of the World* (April 2000), <http://www.lifeoftheworld.com/lotw/04-02/04-02-03.htm>. I am especially indebted to this piece for the following expressions: “confessional fidelity”, “liturgical clarity”, and “catechetical clarity”.

of the incarnated God-Man, Jesus Christ, ultimately must be the centre, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all conversation, evangelism, mission, and catechesis, both with the babes and those of full age (Heb. 5:13-14). In confronting the false God of “tolerant” post-modernism—which actually means not only tolerance, but acceptance, celebration, and promotion of its dangerous and harmful utilitarian and existential ethics, while not tolerating but rejecting any transcendent principles of the Judaeo-Christian tradition—in the face of this challenge, Christ’s unique and salvific exclusivity (John 14:6), as well as His gracious, universal, and utterly inclusive invitation (Rev. 14:6-7, II Pet. 3:9), must be taught and emphasized: it’s a matter of life or death. As such, when the campus minister finds himself in the midst of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, or others, as he so often will, distinctions must be made between dialogue and prayer, between study and union—or if you will, between an ecumenical lunch meeting and leading worship together, between a book discussion group and mutual sharing in the holy things of God in the liturgy.<sup>6</sup>

It is, indeed, a matter of life and death. In the final analysis, post-modernism is simply another form of the age-old religion of man. In this variety, man determines “truth” from within himself, based on a combination of personal experiences, emotions, pleasures, interests, tastes, and desires. Of course, this “truth”, by definition, is elusive and abstract, and the only thing that is sure is that nothing is sure: doubt naturally results and despair follows soon thereafter. God’s Law, with its twin realities of sin and condemnation, crushes post-modernism and its worshipper. But out of this rubble of death, God can, and does, give a new life, a life re-created and nourished by the Gospel. The Gospel of Christianity leaves us not in doubt: we, and every student, can know who the Saviour is, what He has done and does, what He gives, and where and how He gives it. Armed with the Christian Gospel, the campus minister can confidently and concretely and honestly tell Joe and Jane that

Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is your Lord, who has redeemed you, lost and condemned creatures, purchased and delivered you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that you may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Veith, *Modern Fascism: Liquidating the Judeo-Christian Worldview*, especially 126-44, 156.

Now, you cannot by your own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, your Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, and then sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps her with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins, and at the last day will raise up all the dead, and will give to all believers in Christ everlasting life.<sup>7</sup>

This is most certainly true and the truth!

As this generation of students searches for meaning and identity, the Church gives that which they seek: In the identity communicated and manifested by the Church, people are invited to discover who and Whose they are in relation to the Father who adopts them in the waters of the font. Disoriented and disconnected by chaotic change and subtle subjectivism, today's student will find a connection with the God of all history, the One who is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13:8).<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ... [E]ven if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the

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<sup>7</sup> SC II:4, 6; adapted.

<sup>8</sup> See "Postmodernism," LCMS Office of the President, n.d., available at the time of writing at <http://www.lcms.org/president/statements/pstmdrn.asp>.

things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Cor. 4:1, 3-11, 13-18).

And so St Paul proves my (and your?) initial hyperbolic pessimism wrong, dead wrong. Instead, it is replaced with the realistic optimism and joy of life in Christ. Even in Christ's response to Pilate (John 19:11a), we are reminded that all things and all power are in His hands, the hands of the One who is gracious and all-merciful, the One "who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20). No, we are better off than Pilate, for we are still alive in the midst of opportunity: and our challenge is not greater than Christ's, for it is met and overcome in and **by Christ Himself**. Indeed, it is inevitably so, for it is **His** challenge, it is **His** mission, and **He will do it** (Luke 19:10, I Thess. 5:24). The truth will prevail.

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**SHOULD THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA  
JOIN THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION?  
A QUESTION OF DOCTRINAL INTEGRITY**

*Adam G. Cooper*

**F**rom the earliest times in theological controversy it has been recognized that what is essential for church unity is not verbal correspondence in doctrinal formulations but true agreement in doctrinal meaning and substance. When in the context of his debate with the Jesuit apologist Andrada de Payva he stated that “the words must serve and be accommodated to the matters”,<sup>1</sup> Reformer Martin Chemnitz was simply articulating what was up until his time an ancient and universally accepted rule. The obligation upon church members to “speak the same thing (τὸ αὐτό)” is inextricably bound to their being confirmed “in the same mind and in the same judgement” (I Cor 1:10). Get the sense or substance right, and the words will follow.

Where this has happened in the ecumenical efforts of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries the church of God can be truly thankful. However in the pressure to bring about measurable advancement in external church relations this rule has routinely suffered reversal. Especially when they share some common historical, linguistic, or liturgical heritage, dialogue partners have all too easily settled on doctrinal statements that employ a generic terminology, yet one understood by each in different ways. This tendency presents a grave challenge to any church body serious about theological integrity and the dangers of doctrinal syncretism. Betraying elements of the New Historicist hermeneutic of Derrida and Foucault, or the anti-transcendentalism of Wittgenstein, it is an approach that bears all the hallmarks of an aggressive deconstructionist agenda in which words carry no meaning except that subjectively ascribed to them in the “language games” played out by individual user groups. Ecclesially, such an agenda—undergirded by post-modern scepticism towards universal truth and acceptance of religious subjectivism—can only wreak havoc. Yet it is increasingly virulent in impulses that seek to propagate a homogenous form of Christianity under which, since outward form is alleged to possess no intrinsic relation to doctrinal content, each individual group is encouraged to subsume its own confessional identity. As I heard one “church-consultant” boast, the

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<sup>1</sup> “*Vocabula rebus serviunt et accomodanda sunt.*” *Concilii Tridentini* (Berlin, 1861), 111; trans. by Fred Kramer, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1 (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 349; amended.

successful churches of the future will exhibit “the same language, different theologies.” Here the lauded ecumenical principle of “reconciled diversity”, in its unchecked supremacy, has vacuated utterly all possibility of any doctrinal, liturgical, or even rational integrity.

At the recent National Convention of the Lutheran Church of Australia<sup>2</sup> (October 2003), a proposal by the Church’s Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) resolving that the LCA apply for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was put, debated, and eventually turned down by a slim margin of votes. While it could be argued that that is the end of the matter, the way in which the debate proceeded and the particular rationale that was marshalled in support of the proposal both suggest that beneath the irenic calm that prevailed there lie deep-seated divergences in doctrine and worldview. The history of the LCA’s relation to the LWF prior to and since the former’s establishment in 1966 is a story in its own right, and it is not my purpose to document it here. Nor shall I be examining the nature and doctrinal basis of the LWF as a “communion of churches”. Instead I want to examine the rationale for the proposal as it was presented in the CTICR document entitled “Membership in the Lutheran World Federation”,<sup>3</sup> and to explore attendant issues relating to the basis of the LCA’s own unity. Indeed, one of the things that became clear was that whatever consensus used to obtain concerning the status of the doctrinal basis that binds member congregations of the LCA together as a synodical communion,<sup>4</sup> such consensus no longer exists.

### THE THESES OF AGREEMENT AND CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

When in 1966, after years of more or less patient dialogue, the two former Australian Lutheran synods amalgamated to form the LCA, two documents were constituted as the basis of the union and the agreed and binding public doctrine of the new Church. While the new Church pledged adherence to the Document of Union and the Theses of Agreement only **insofar as** (*quatenus*) there was consensus on their agreement with Scripture (rather than—as in the case of the Lutheran symbols—**because** [*quia*] they agree with Scripture), the two documents were nonetheless accorded a tightly binding status, as the following excerpts show:

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<sup>2</sup> Hereon abbreviated as LCA.

<sup>3</sup> CTICR, “Membership in the Lutheran World Federation”, published under “Documents and Statements” in the agenda handbook, *Lutheran Church of Australia Inc., Fourteenth General Synod: Regular Convention 2003* (Stanwell Tops, 11-16 October 2003), 110-22.

<sup>4</sup> Viz. the Document of Union and the Theses of Agreement (in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia, 1980- [DSTO], A1-30*).

We accept the Theses of Agreement as the expression of the common consent of our two Churches on matters which were in dispute between us, and these Theses of Agreement are hereby made part of this Document of Union.<sup>5</sup>

The Theses of Agreement ... have been adopted in all seriousness and in good faith by both the former UELCA and ELCA as a unifying document. They should be respected and treated accordingly. Should amendments become desirable in the course of time, such amendments would have to be submitted to the entire Church after thorough theological examination and discussion. Meanwhile, a deliberate disregard of the Theses in teaching and preaching would appear as evidence of bad faith, and would constitute a serious threat to the unity of the Church.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, not only did the Constituting Convention resolve to regard the Document of Union as constitutive for its own new fellowship, but it also committed the new church to regard it as the doctrinal basis for any future establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship with any other church body. So Theses of Agreement V affirms that the doctrinal consensus required for altar and pulpit fellowship between the congregations that make up the LCA and any other church body “should always be regarded as the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord”.<sup>7</sup> This did not mean that the LCA must arrive at an exact verbal correspondence in doctrinal formulations with other church bodies in order to enter into fellowship with them. Rather it meant that the LCA, as a whole and in all its parts, regarded itself as committed to grounding church fellowship—*communio*—in true agreement in doctrinal substance as that substance is summed up and defined in those symbols which together comprise the Book of Concord.

That this was understood to be the case has repeatedly been confirmed by various LCA theologians over the years, both in the past and more recently. For instance, following the summit in October 1998 between representatives of the LCA and guests from Europe, Japan, and the USA, in which was discussed the LCA’s future relation to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), former Victorian District president David Stolz wrote with reference to the *satis est* in Augsburg Confession [AC] VII: “The LCA has understood sufficiency in terms of the broad sweep of the *Book of Concord*. For want of a better description, the LCA has maintained a maximalist position as the basis for structural *communio*.” By way of contrast, he added, “[t]he LWF seems to follow a more minimalist approach.”<sup>8</sup> And following that same

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<sup>5</sup> Document of Union, para. 3 (DSTO A28)

<sup>6</sup> “The Status of the Theses of Agreement and Other Doctrinal Statements”, para. 1 (DSTO A25).

<sup>7</sup> Theses of Agreement V.22 (DSTO A10).

<sup>8</sup> David G. Stolz in the “Response” to David W. Preus, “LWF Membership and Inter-Communion between Member Churches, and *Communio* in the Lutheran Confessions”, *Lutheran Theological Journal* 33.1 (1999): 23.



event, former Luther Seminary lecturer John Strelan also acknowledged with reference to AC VII that, for the congregations of the LCA,

much has hinged on what is meant by the pure preaching of the gospel. We have tended to say that this phrase, together with the phrase ‘the doctrine of the gospel’, means the whole of Christian doctrine. Pure preaching of the gospel means being orthodox with regard to the chief tenets of the Faith as they are set out in the *Book of Concord*.<sup>9</sup>

### MEMBERSHIP IN THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

In like manner, the CTICR document “Membership in the Lutheran World Federation” also acknowledged that “[i]n the history of the LCA the ‘pure’ teaching of the gospel has mostly been understood to imply the full doctrinal content of the Book of Concord.” And again, “the LCA has tended to understand the ‘pure’ teaching of the gospel to imply the full doctrinal content of the Book of Concord”, and thus “has usually made full agreement on the Book of Concord a condition of church fellowship.”<sup>10</sup> Whether or not the LCA has done this “mostly” or “usually” is, in the context of the issue at hand, neither here nor there. The point is when it has “tended” this way, it has done so in faithfulness to its own public doctrine as stated in the Theses of Agreement.

In this light it was all the more revealing to note the admission in the document that—despite it being the LCA’s commitment, as stipulated in its doctrinal constitution, to ground church fellowship in agreement in the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord—there was now being commended some “other interpretation”, one “also adopted by the LWF”, in which the sufficient condition for church fellowship is not the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord but simple “agreement in the teaching of the gospel and the ministry of the sacraments where gospel refers to the message of God’s unconditional gift of salvation in Christ.”<sup>11</sup> I say that this is revealing, because the document here admits that what it is proposing with this “other interpretation” is, in fact, a substantial departure from the Theses of Agreement, and so a reconstitution of the LCA as such.

At first blush this rationale sounds quite in keeping with AC VII. To be sure, the so-called maximalist requirement of the Theses of Agreement must be read in the light of the Theses’ own statement that their authority is

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<sup>9</sup> John G. Strelan in the “Response” to Akio Hashimoto, “The Meaning of *Satis Est* in CA VII and the Possibility of Levels of Fellowship”, *Lutheran Theological Journal* 33.1 (1999): 53.

<sup>10</sup> “Membership in the Lutheran World Federation”, 114.

<sup>11</sup> “Membership in the Lutheran World Federation”, 114.

“entirely determined by the faithfulness and accuracy with which they reflect the teaching of God’s Word, in particular the doctrine of the Gospel.”<sup>12</sup> The real question before the LCA is therefore: Do the Theses of Agreement provide an accurate interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions, remembering that it is an interpretation that precludes fellowship with any other church body which in principle or practice does not hold to the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord?

### ARTICLE VII AND THE MEANING OF “GOSPEL”

This question quite naturally takes us back to the Confessions themselves, especially to the definition of the church in AC VII and the content of the *satis est* clause which, after all, is what much of the fuss is all about. What does Article VII mean when it speaks of “the gospel”, and of it being taught “purely”?

In answer to this question, the CTICR proposal claims, without evidence, that

at the time of the Reformation, the pure gospel meant the gospel properly distinguished from the law. The gospel was taught purely when it was taught as gospel, ie as God’s offer and gift of unconditional grace and forgiveness through Christ. The gospel was taught purely when it was not confused with the law ....<sup>13</sup>

As it stands, and despite the lack of evidence, this sounds not an entirely implausible claim. Surely the Reformers were concerned to ensure that law and gospel were “rightly divided”. In this view “gospel” in AC VII refers to divine gift or promise, as opposed to law or demand. As such it is taught purely when it is “not confused with law or turned into a new demand.”<sup>14</sup>

However, it is doubtful that this interpretation of AC VII can be sustained by the evidence. As the Formula of Concord rightly explains, the word “gospel” both in Scripture and in Medieval and Reformation writings is regularly used in two different ways. On the one hand, it is sometimes used to refer simply to the preaching of God’s grace in Christ. This is called its “narrow” sense. Thus we find the definition in Apology IV:43, “The Gospel is, strictly speaking (*proprie*), the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ.” On the other hand, it is sometimes used to refer to the whole word of God or “the entire teaching of Christ.” In this

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<sup>12</sup> “The Permanent Status of the Theses of Agreement” (DSTO A26).

<sup>13</sup> “Membership in the Lutheran World Federation”, 114.

<sup>14</sup> “Membership in the Lutheran World Federation”, 114.

sense, which is called its wider sense, “the term includes both the exposition of the law and the proclamation of the mercy and grace of God ....”<sup>15</sup>

So is the term “gospel” as it used in AC VII meant to be taken in its narrow or its wider meaning? A case can certainly be made for the former. As Kurt Marquart has pointed out, the law is not unique to the church, being found in Judaism, Islam, and even in the fallen human conscience. It is not the law, but the gospel that is “the church’s distinctive mark and ‘secret’ ....”<sup>16</sup> However, as he goes on to add, “gospel” does not equate with “simply the article of justification.” On the contrary, the simple word “gospel” is expounded in AC VII in terms of “the doctrine of the gospel”, whose meaning and content Marquart claims is coextensive with “the doctrine and all its articles” of Formula of Concord X:31.<sup>17</sup> Justification, he writes,

is *the* “chief article” (Ap. IV.2), but not the only article, not even the only “chief article” of the Gospel. This means that the article of justification integrates all the articles of faith into one organic whole, so that to deny any one of them is to distort justification itself.<sup>18</sup>

If this is true, then any reductionistic or abstract understanding of “gospel” in AC VII must be rigidly excluded. Divine revelation forms an ordered, organic whole. “The gospel” is not some separate, self-contained component that can be abstracted from the whole body of Christian truth. As Sasse once rightly stated,

[t]he article of justification cannot be rightly taught where the great articles of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creed are not kept. A false doctrine of the Incarnation leads to a false understanding of justification and the sacraments. Thus the article of the standing and falling [of the] church keeps together all articles of the Christian faith and illumines them.<sup>19</sup>

Nor is this simply the voice of narrow conservative Lutheranism. It is the voice of catholic Christianity, elsewhere expressed by Orthodox ecumenist, Metropolitan Emilianos of Calabria, “Doctrine forms a completely homogenous whole. Truth demands that one cannot choose to accept certain

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<sup>15</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 558, para. 3-4 (hereon abbreviated as Tappert).

<sup>16</sup> See Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, ed. Robert D. Preus (St Louis: The Luther Academy, 1990), 53.

<sup>17</sup> Tappert, 616.

<sup>18</sup> Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, 50-51.

<sup>19</sup> Herman Sasse, “Theses on the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession”, unpublished paper, 16.

facets of truth, while rejecting others. All the aspects of truth form an organic entity; all its parts are inseparable and indissoluble.”<sup>20</sup>

To this we may add the point that it is not the purpose of the “gospel”, narrowly understood as justification or forgiveness, to function as norm and judge in matters of faith and practice. That would be to turn the gospel into a new law. Rather, the word of God as contained in the totality of Scripture is the church’s sole rule and norm, defining not only **what** the gospel is but also **how** it is to be administered. The church administers the Lord’s Supper not according to some *a priori* notion of the gospel, but according to Christ’s explicit mandate and instruction. By obeying this divine command, the church faithfully proclaims the gospel and administers forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name. It is not permissible, nor in the end even possible, to take the “gospel” (narrowly understood), abstract it from the whole word and counsel of God, and turn it into some independent, ruling article of faith.

The foregoing argument may in fact lead us to ask whether “gospel” in AC VII might better be taken in its broader sense. And indeed, such an interpretation would not be without due warrant. For a start, in practice the gospel (narrowly understood) is never found apart from the law. As the Formula of Concord explains: “Both doctrines”, the law and the gospel, “are always together, and both of them have to be urged side by side ...”<sup>21</sup> And again, “[s]ince the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinction ... We believe and confess that these doctrines must be urged constantly and diligently in the church of God”.<sup>22</sup> In other words, even the proclamation of the gospel in its narrow sense presupposes and necessitates the prior proclamation of the law, “which reveals the righteousness and immutable will of God”, “rebukes sin and gives instruction about good works”.<sup>23</sup>

Such an interpretation is further supported by the language of the Apology—the official explanation of the Augsburg Confession. There in

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<sup>20</sup> “Neglected Factors Influencing Unity”, *Eastern Churches Review* 2.4 (1969): 391. See also Samuel H. Nafzger, “LWF Membership and the Understanding of *Communio* in the Lutheran Confessions: A Missouri Synod Perspective”, *Lutheran Theological Journal* 33.1 (1999): 62, who in our context specifically reminded the LCA in fraternal exhortation of its Christian duty to “seek agreement in doctrine not only for the sake of agreement or merely out of obedience to the Scriptures but also because all the articles of faith are so integrally related to the gospel that error in the confession of any article of faith threatens this gospel.” Nafzger went on to cite Ralph Bohlmann who likewise writes (p. 62), “Biblical doctrine is not something apart from or alongside the gospel, but simply the articulation of the many aspects of the gospel. To be concerned about agreement in doctrine is to be concerned about the confession of the gospel itself.”

<sup>21</sup> Tappert, 561.15.

<sup>22</sup> Tappert, 562.23-24.

<sup>23</sup> Tappert, 561.17-18.

Apology VII the church is again defined as “the assembly of saints who share the association of the same gospel or teaching”,<sup>24</sup> with her *notae* explicated in terms of “word, confession, and sacraments”<sup>25</sup> or “the divinely instituted word and sacraments.”<sup>26</sup> It is supported still further when Melanchthon accuses the papists of wanting to keep “apostolic rites” but of rejecting “apostolic doctrine”.<sup>27</sup> So closely is the term “gospel” equated with the more plenary phrase “word of God” that the phrases “according to the gospel” (*iuxta evangelium*) and “according to the Scriptures” (*iuxta scripturas*) are used synonymously.<sup>28</sup>

Still further light is shed on the meaning of the word “gospel” in AC VII by examining its immediate literary background. Articles VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession are Melanchthon’s edited version of Article XII of the Schwabach Articles, drafted by Luther and other Wittenberg theologians in the period leading up to the Diet in Augsburg. In Schwabach Article XII the church was defined as “nothing other than believers in Christ . . . who hold to the articles and parts [of Christian teaching] mentioned above and who believe and teach them and who are persecuted and martyred in the world because of this.”<sup>29</sup> In this statement, the objective content of the faith of the true church (*fides quae*) consists in “the articles and parts of Christian teaching mentioned above”, that is, articles I-XI of the Schwabach Articles. Those articles correspond in doctrinal content to articles I-VI, IX-XI and XIII of the Augsburg Confession. Thus in AC VII, as Werner Elert once said, the Augsburg Confession is **itself** proposed to be “the standard for what constitutes the right doctrine of the gospel.”<sup>30</sup> Nor is this merely a peculiarly Melanchthonian idea. Luther too in the Smalcald Articles defines the church’s holiness not simply in terms of “faith” and the “gospel”, but as consisting in “the word of God and the true faith” (*im Wort Gottes und rechtem Glauben*).<sup>31</sup> This, I would argue, is simply another way of saying what is written in Ephesians 2:20, that the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.”

Another background document crucial to an intelligent reading of AC VII is the Torgau Articles, which in Melanchthon’s preparation of the Augsburg

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<sup>24</sup> Tappert, 169.8.

<sup>25</sup> Tappert, 169.4.

<sup>26</sup> Tappert, 175.36.

<sup>27</sup> Tappert, 176.38.

<sup>28</sup> Ap VII (Tappert: 170.16; 173.28).

<sup>29</sup> English trans. by William R. Russell in Robert Kolb and James A. Nestigen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 87.

<sup>30</sup> Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 273.

<sup>31</sup> Tappert, 315.3.

Confession functioned “like a set of preparatory or preliminary notes.”<sup>32</sup> In the Torgau Articles, “gospel” is repeatedly allied with “the Scriptures”, “the truth”, “correct Christian teaching”, “God’s Word and ordinances”, or simply “God’s Word”. As such, it is never set in opposition to “law”, but rather to “false doctrine”, “heretical doctrine”, “doctrines of human invention”, or “external human ordinances”.<sup>33</sup>

Next we must ask about the qualification “in accordance with its pure meaning” (*nach reinem Verstand*). The CTICR document claims that “pure” teaching “does not refer to the doctrinal position of a particular church body, but to how the gospel is being proclaimed.”<sup>34</sup> Such a reading however appears to betray a hermeneutic more existentialist than biblical. A further look at the Confessions reveals that the word *rein* in this usage means, as an adverb, “truly” or “rightly”, or as an adjective, “orthodox” or “unadulterated”. This is how Luther used it in the preface to the Smalcald Articles when he speaks of the light that has dawned in the churches of northern Germany “with the **pure** word and the right use of the sacraments”.<sup>35</sup> And we need only recall the Small Catechism when it speaks of “the word of God taught in its truth and **purity**” (*das Wort Gottes lauter und rein gelehret wird*).

To preach the gospel purely therefore is to preach the whole content of the revealed word of God in a way that is faithful to its true nature, content, and purpose. In the German text of AC VII the two qualifications, standing in parallel, function as mutually interpretive. The gospel is to be preached “in accordance with [its] pure meaning” (*nach reinem Verstand*); the sacraments are to be administered “in conformity with the divine word” (*dem gottlichen Wort gemäß*).

In summary, the gospel purely preached implies both “content” and “act”, “what” and “how”, since it “is a substantive and sacramental communication of revealed divine truth or doctrine.”<sup>36</sup>

## TWO DIMENSIONS OF CHURCH UNITY

It seems to me that the CTICR proposal has introduced even further confusion by continually presupposing an already existing unity between the LCA and the member churches of the LWF through faith in Christ, as though church fellowship were simply the inevitable outward expression of

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<sup>32</sup> William R. Russell, in Kolb and Nestigen, *Sources and Contexts*, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Kolb and Nestigen, *Sources and Contexts*, 94-104.

<sup>34</sup> “Membership in the Lutheran World Federation”, 114.

<sup>35</sup> Tappert, 290.10.

<sup>36</sup> Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship*, 52.

faith in the heart. But despite appearances this presupposition fails to uphold the fundamental distinction between the church as an indivisible fellowship of faith and the Spirit in the heart, whose members are known only to God (*ecclesia stricte dicta*), and the church as a fellowship in outward ties and rites, recognizable to all according to its public doctrine and practice (*ecclesia late dicta*). The proposal implies that by stitching up the divisions in the outward fellowship through formal juridical alliances we will somehow be giving visible expression to an alleged prior unity. But this is to invert a basic and biblically established order: the unity of the church is to be recognized, located, and preserved by means of its objective marks, not by local, national, or international alliances—no matter how pious the intentions or how genuine the good will of the various parties involved.

Thus the question as to what a particular Church or international communion believes, teaches, and confesses is not a theoretical question by which we speculate or judge who is a true Christian and who is not, nor does it seek merely to know which confession or creeds that body may subscribe to on paper or in its charter documents. Rather it is a question asking what actually goes on in the “body language” of that church—what is confessed, taught, and enacted in its public worship. Whose name do its gathered congregations call upon in prayer? Who preaches, and what do they preach, and by what authority? Who presides at the Eucharist, and whom do they admit and exclude from the altar? Who is responsible for judging doctrine and exercising the keys, and on what basis, and with what checks and balances?

Having mentioned this distinction between the one church conceived in its inward and outward aspects, it may be useful to point to a related distinction, also made by the Reformers. The Confessions distinguish between the unity **of** the church, that reality hidden in justifying faith, and unity **in** the church, a visible fellowship resulting from doctrinal agreement. The unity **of** the church is that essential, indivisible unity inherent to the *una sancta*, the universal assembly of saints united with Christ through faith. For this unity the Confessions use the German phrase *Einigkeit der Kirchen* or the Latin *unitas ecclesiae*. Unity **in** the church, on the other hand, is the harmony or agreement formally realized between particular Churches on the basis of shared, common doctrine and practice. For this unity the Confessions also use the German word *Einigkeit*. However it is never followed by the genitive *der Kirchen*, but with the preposition “in” plus the dative: *in der Kirchen*. Nor, when *Einigkeit* is used in this way, is it translated with the Latin word *unitas*, but with *concordia* or *consensio*, meaning harmony or agreement.<sup>37</sup> It is this latter unity **in** the church, realized

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<sup>37</sup> See A. C. Piepkorn, “What the Symbols have to say about the Church”, *Concordia Theological Monthly* (Oct. 1955): 759.

in ecclesial fellowship, that forms the concrete goal of ecumenical dialogue. So we read in the Formula of Concord:

The primary requirement for basic and permanent **concord within the church** (*Einigkeit in der Kirchen / concordiam in ecclesia*) is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God.<sup>38</sup>

And a few paragraphs on we read again:

In order to preserve the pure doctrine and to maintain a thorough, lasting, and God-pleasing **concord within the church** (*Einigkeit in der Kirchen / in ecclesia concordiam*), it is essential not only to present the true and wholesome doctrine correctly, but also to refute the adversaries who teach otherwise.<sup>39</sup>

In asking what constitutes the adequate foundation for this unity **in** the church, and thus for unity in the LCA, we cannot fail to notice the “maximalist” terms used here and repeated in subsequent paragraphs. What is needed is a “summary formula and pattern”, a “summarized doctrine”, “drawn out of the Word of God.” The Formula of Concord goes on to specify that summary in terms of the contents of the entire Book of Concord.

Of course, if you are a church body that does not hold to the Formula of Concord, all of this can be happily ignored without any qualm of conscience. The CTICR proposal advocating full membership in the LWF does just this. It is of course well known that there are Lutherans who have seen in the other confessional books and in the Formula of Concord in particular a departure from the so-called gospel impulse found in Luther and the Augsburg Confession. To them the Formula of Concord is just too restrictive in its doctrine, too tight in its wording, too unambiguous in its formulations, too thoroughgoing in its condemnations. They might be happy to call Scripture an authoritative testimony **in** which God’s Word is found, but they shrink from the Formula’s insistence that the Bible, since it is the Word of God, is “the sole judge, rule, norm and touchstone according to which all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong.”<sup>40</sup> They might be happy to see somewhere in the Augsburg Confession or the Small Catechism a pure exposition of the Word of God,<sup>41</sup> but they shrink from the Formula’s insistence upon including the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Pope, and both Catechisms as true expositions of Scripture, authentic testimonies to the truth, and the Formula

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<sup>38</sup> Tappert, 503.1.

<sup>39</sup> Tappert, 506.14.

<sup>40</sup> Tappert, 465.7.

<sup>41</sup> This deliberately ambiguous qualification (“in”) is from the Doctrinal Basis of the LWF.



itself as the their proper exposition. The point is, either the Formula of Concord is a true exposition of the preceding symbols, or it is not. The LCA's Theses of Agreement say it is. The *onus probandi* rests on those who find this conclusion wanting.

## CONCLUSION

So what does all this mean? The LCA is being urged to enter into full altar and pulpit fellowship with 136 church bodies about whom it actually knows very little, except that they hold nominally to the five line doctrinal basis of the LWF.<sup>42</sup> No one is denying that—to the extent that the gospel, narrowly understood as God's gracious remission of sins, is proclaimed among them, whether in greater or lesser degrees of clarity—there obtains between us that fundamental unity of the church that consists in communion of faith and the Holy Spirit in the heart.

The problem rather lies in our biblically motivated conviction that the true church of God may extend “the right hand of fellowship” to another body claiming the name “Church” or “Christian” only if that body holds in principle and exhibits *in actu* “the faith once and for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3), that is, if that body believes, teaches and confesses the objective, summary content of apostolic teaching, the cardinal doctrines of Scripture. To ground unity or **concord in the church** (*Einigkeit in der Kirchen*) on the basis of a shared subjective faith in Christ (*fides qua*), apart from a shared objective confession of faith (*fides quae*), is to abstract the concrete foundations of church fellowship established by Scripture and to set up in their place an intangible, purely speculative foundation. What this amounts to is little short of a capitulation to that ancient heresy called gnosticism, only dolled up in modern dress: faith without dogma; Christianity without the church.<sup>43</sup>

In summary, it must be affirmed again that none of us has any business defending Lutheran teaching simply because it is “Lutheran”. Along with the creeds our Confessions say nothing about any “Lutheran” church. Our true concern is with the teaching of sacred Scripture. Only Scripture determines what is to be taught in our churches and in the “one holy catholic and

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<sup>42</sup> Actually, it is getting shorter. In 1990, in addition to relativizing the universal primacy of the Word of God by regarding it as normative only for itself, not for **all** Christian doctrine and practice, the LWF formally struck the word “infallible” from its doctrinal basis. Presumably the dominant member Churches no longer think it a fitting term to apply to the Holy Scriptures.

<sup>43</sup> See further Hermann Sasse, “Article VII of the Augsburg Confession in the Present Crisis of Lutheranism”, in *We Confess Anthology*, volume 3, *We Confess: The Church*, trans. by Norman Nagel (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 40-68.

apostolic church.” Scripture alone determines where the boundary lines of the true church lie. As St Augustine once declared, referring to the whole canon of Scripture, “**there** let us seek the church.”<sup>44</sup> We commit ourselves to the contents of the Lutheran Confessions, the Formula of Concord included, only because we believe them to be the genuine teaching and sum of Scripture, and therefore believe them to constitute the reliable foundation for that saving ministry of the gospel to which the whole church is called. If we bind ourselves to the catholic creeds and the Confessions, it is because we find them saying **the same thing** as Scripture, even if specific terms such as *homoousion* or *manducatio oralis*, functioning as confessional shibboleths, are not found in the Bible *per se*. We are right to be concerned when we ourselves, or any other church body claiming the name “Christian” or “catholic” or “Lutheran”, deviate from the Confessions. This is not because we or they are not being sufficiently Lutheran, but because thereby the Word of God is not being “taught in its truth and purity”, nor are we as God’s beloved children “living in harmony with it.”

According to the Scriptures, true and God-pleasing ecclesial fellowship is always only the **result** of agreement in and confession of the true apostolic faith (I Jn 1:3). It is not, despite what contemporary ecumenists tell us, a **means** to it. The unity of believers for which our Lord prayed follows upon his urgent request that the Father “keep them in His name” and “sanctify them in the truth” (Jn 17:11, 16). Where this truth is preserved, there unity will follow (*ubi veritas, ibi unitas*). And so it is for the sake of that unity that we earnestly pray, with Christ, to Almighty God our Father: sanctify us in the truth; Your word is truth.

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:157. Emphasis added. Also: “let us search for the church in the sacred canonical Scriptures (*ergo in scripturis sanctis canonicis ecclesiam requiramus*).”

***“TOTUM QUOD SUMUS ET IN QUO SUMUS”***  
**THE CONVERSION OF SAUL AS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

*James E. Keller*

The scene is so familiar that many of us still refer to our own contact with the sacred as a “Damascus road” experience:

And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:3-4a NASB)

From ancient times until the present, persons have compared and contrasted their own religious experiences with that of Saul of Tarsus. There is good reason for this. The Damascus road marks a pivotal point in the development of the Christian movement that now claims some two billion adherents. Yet despite the attention it receives, the conversion of Saul remains one of the most misunderstood events in humankind’s brief history. Questions abound. Was it a valid religious experience or a psychotic episode? Was the experience apocryphal, an elaborate hoax perpetrated by the early Church? Did Saul actually see Jesus? What insight, if any, may we gain from a careful examination of Saul and his theophany?

This paper will attempt to address the questions from three perspectives—history, Scripture, and the psychology of religion.

**WHO WAS SAUL OF TARSUS?**

Other than Jesus Himself the most important figure in the early Christian era was Saul of Tarsus. Tarsus was at the end of a trade route that led through the Roman province of Cilicia, and for this reason it became a centre of some note and size. Dispersed Jews from Palestine flocked to Tarsus, owing to its location on the frontier of Roman occupied territory. While not actively involved in civil disobedience, the Jewish population of Tarsus harboured a deep and abiding resentment of Rome. The culture surrounding Tarsus may have been gentile, but the Jews within its environs remained loyal to their traditions, food laws, and Sabbath observances, and devoted to the Torah. The same was true for the young Saul.

Saul was born into a strict Jewish setting, his parents belonging to the Hebrew tribe of Benjamin.<sup>1</sup> His upbringing was steeped in the traditions of

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5.

his spiritual ancestors. The Gospel of Luke indicates that Saul was Roman-born, meaning that his father must have been a Roman citizen before him. Saul was his Jewish name; his Roman name, and the name he used for most of his life, was *Paullus*, or Paul.<sup>2</sup> Saul's Roman citizenship may shed some light on Saul's cordial attitude toward the Roman authorities even after severe personal persecution. Saul's family became somewhat successful under the protection of the Roman state, and rose within a generation to what could be termed the middle-class. Saul took up the trade of a tentmaker, and was self-supporting throughout his life.

Being raised in an orthodox home allowed the young Saul much time to study the Word of God. Tarsus may or may not have had a formal synagogue school for Saul to attend. Yet given the vast number of quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures contained in his corpus, there is no doubt he was well versed in the Law, the Prophets, and the Mishnah. His attitude toward the Scriptures and his obvious zeal for tradition led Saul to join the strict party of the Pharisees. Saul's commitment to Pharisaism often brought him into debate with the educated pagan element of Tarsus. He may even have come in contact with a group that called themselves Nazarenes after the hometown of their spiritual patriarch. He eagerly engaged in such oral contests, readily absorbing the techniques of diatribe and the phraseology of the philosophers.<sup>3</sup> But at no time during his years in Tarsus did Saul surrender his Jewish heritage.

Saul was introduced to Jewish messianism during his formative years in Tarsus. Jews from the earliest times had expected a Messiah, a Deliverer, to come and rescue Israel from its captivity. Though Israel had experienced long periods of freedom, one is forced to conclude their history was defined not by autonomy but by subjugation. The presence of Roman legions in Palestine meant a return of Pharaoh and slavery to a pagan culture. A new and greater Moses was expected to lead the nation from bondage, and Saul was caught up in the messianist fervour. For Saul the coming of the Messiah promised both religious and political revival, a permanent solution to the harsh realities of the Diaspora. Saul had no doubt heard of a radical Jewish movement formed behind one Judas Maccabeus a century before that attempted to right observed injustices and inequalities.<sup>4</sup> Maccabeus' death ended the possibility that he was the promised deliverer, but the excitement his presence engendered lingered on.

Religious life for an observant first-century Jew involved constant and rigorous moral discipline. Saul and his fellow messianists would most

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<sup>2</sup> For purposes of consistency this paper will use his Jewish name, Saul.

<sup>3</sup> Clarence Craig, "The Conversion of Paul", in Thomas S. Kepler, ed., *Contemporary Thinking About Paul: An Anthology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 134-35.

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 380-81.

certainly fall into this category. Some psychologists have perceived in this unrelenting discipline a divorce between behaviour and role within a social structure and a natural need for healthy play. Freud warned against the dangers of overexertion when he observed that whatever feelings may be cannot be easily subdued by rigour.<sup>5</sup> Yet observant Judaism, as Saul understood it, found such relaxations useless.<sup>6</sup> Freud's own assessment of Saul led him to conclude that Saul's conversion was not so much a deep psychosis or even a religious experience as an overwhelming need to overcome pathological adherence to rules and regulations which were, in sum, impossible to keep. There is some truth in this assessment.

Saul's form of messianism, in addition to demanding moral discipline, was extremely apocalyptic. The struggle of the Jew against his oppressor was part of the greater universal struggle between the God of the Jews, YHWH, and the principalities and powers of the temporal realm. Most Jews considered themselves God's instruments that He would use to rid creation of tyranny and unbelief.<sup>7</sup> Concentration on the end-times carried with it recognition of current harsh realities, but also the stubborn refusal to accept those realities as ubiquitous and unchanging:

Then Moses went up the mountain to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, "This is what you must say to the descendants of Jacob. Tell the Israelites, 'You have seen for yourselves what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to my mountain. If you carefully obey me and are faithful to the terms of my promise, then out of all the nations you will be my own special possession, even though the whole world is mine. You will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.' These are the words you must speak to the Israelites." (Ex. 19: 3-6 GWN)

When the time comes for you to lie down in death with your ancestors, I will send one of your descendants, one who will come from you. I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he will be my Son ....Your royal house will remain in my presence forever. Your throne

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<sup>5</sup> Freud: "[I]n all renunciations and limitations imposed upon the ego, a periodical infringement of the prohibition is the rule." Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (London: International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922), 81. This reality, for Freud, explained the existence and popularity of such novelties as carnivals and the devotion to Saturnalia. While the world expects production and profit at the expense of leisure, humankind must on occasion and in large measure engage their playful side.

<sup>6</sup> Rubenstein comments: "Perhaps if Judaism had allowed for periodic carnivals of the flesh, it might not have developed its persistent tendency toward messianism. Unfortunately, that kind of release was exceedingly difficult for a landless, powerless community whose survival depended entirely upon the sufferance of their hosts." Richard Rubenstein, *My Brother Paul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 36-37.

<sup>7</sup> Rubenstein, *My Brother Paul*, 37.

will be established forever .... That is why you are great, Lord God. There is no one like you, and there is no other god except you, as we have heard with our own ears. Who is like your people Israel? It is the one nation on earth that God came to free in order to make its people his own, to make his name known, and to do great and wonderful things for them. (2 Sam. 7:12-16, 22-23a GWN)

There is no doubt that, prior to his conversion, Saul knew a good deal about Jesus of Nazareth. Stories of the great miracles and wisdom teachings of this man were spreading like a brushfire in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora, and Tarsus was no exception. Saul may even have heard of claims of Jesus' Messiahship prior to the Nazarene's death on a Roman cross, even though Jesus made no specific claims to Messiahship himself during his lifetime. One need not assume Saul was pleased when he heard Jesus had been executed, but the death of the Galilean peasant would have, in Saul's mind, removed any possibility that he may have been the Chosen One.

Nevertheless, although he was a strong persecutor of the early Christians and the Church of Jesus Christ,<sup>8</sup> Saul was by no means compelled to do so. The Christians posed no immediate threat, save blasphemy. Rabbi Gamaliel, Saul's teacher and the most distinguished disciple of Hillel, warned the Jews to avoid violence against the Christian sect, and even advised a more tolerant attitude toward them. The book of the Acts of the Apostles contains the following account:

When the men on the council heard this, they became furious and wanted to execute the apostles. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up. He was a highly respected expert in Moses' teachings. He ordered that the apostles should be taken outside for a little while. Then he said to the council, "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you do with these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared. He claimed he was important, and about four hundred men joined him. He was killed, and all his followers were scattered. The whole movement was a failure. After that man, at the time of the census, Judas from Galilee appeared and led people in revolt. He, too, died, and all his followers were scattered. We should keep away from these men now. We should leave them alone. I can guarantee that if the plan they put into action is of human origin, it will fail. However, if it is from God, you won't be able to stop them. You may even discover that you're fighting against God. (Acts 5:34-39 GWN)

Gamaliel, and Saul after him, felt no unnatural compulsion to destroy the Christians and their Church. So what needs lay at the heart of Saul's persecutions? As a messianist, Paul's first reaction to Jesus would by

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<sup>8</sup> Galatians 1:13.

necessity be a poor one. A crucified Saviour was, for Saul, no saviour at all.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, if Jesus happened to be the One he claimed to be, Israel's true and only Redeemer, then mankind was no longer bound to keep the Law of Moses completely, nor was it still under the mortal curse of Adam.<sup>10</sup> In accepting Jesus as the Messiah, Saul must have been convinced the Law could not justify, and that no keeping of the Law, however perfectly, could prevent death. Saul did not want to die. The Law kills, as it did the great Patriarchs, excepting Enoch and Elijah. The central question in Saul's pre-conversion mind was not about the afterlife, whether it may take place, but if death could be defeated:

Unless a man could be "made righteous," he would be condemned to annihilation .... The transformation envisaged by [Saul] might change a man's psychological or ethical state, but that was by no means of primary importance to him. *Human mortality is what was at stake for [S]aul*. Sin brings death. The Law, though it be holy, cannot overcome death because of "our fleshly nature," which is too rebellious to achieve perfect obedience.<sup>11</sup>

Yet even if the fear of death played a role in Saul's conversion, this would still by no means be sufficient to explain his wholesale paradigm shift. Rubenstein observes that as a Pharisee Saul had much to lose if he converted to Christianity, unlike the Gentile population to which he would preach.<sup>12</sup> Saul's whole view of life, home, family, and world must be purged, and a new view raised up in its place. He would need to turn his back on the value system in which he was raised, and begin anew. Saul's conversion, then, should not be viewed as a simple shift in focus. No epileptic fit, hysterical outbreak, unresolved homosexuality issues or feelings of rebelliousness could account for Saul's conversion. It was, rather, a religious experience of the highest order mediated by supernatural engagement. Saul's conversion was of God.

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<sup>9</sup> "The world with its wisdom was unable to recognize God in terms of his own wisdom. So God decided to use the nonsense of the Good News we speak to save those who believe. Jews ask for miraculous signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, **but our message is that Christ was crucified**. This offends Jewish people and makes no sense to people who are not Jewish" (I Corinthians 1:22-23).

<sup>10</sup> Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:24; Romans 7:1-6.

<sup>11</sup> Rubenstein, *My Brother Paul*, 41. Emphasis author's.

<sup>12</sup> "His initial strategy was to reinforce his old commitment by attempting to root out those whom he correctly perceived to be challenging it. However, the real arena in which the Christian challenge was played out was within Paul himself. His persecutory activities can best be understood as his response to both the threat and the promise implicit in the Christian message. Fundamentally, the threat and the promise were identical. If the Christians were right, none of the institutions to which Paul had given his loyalty were any longer of the slightest consequence, for the Age of the Resurrection of the Dead was in the process of dawning." Rubenstein, *My Brother Paul*, 42.

### CONFRONTATION AND CONVERSION

In his Gifford Lectures at the beginning of the last century, the psychologist William James suggested the phenomenon of conversion comes in one of two forms—“gradual” or “sudden”.<sup>13</sup> The gradual type was, for James, a personal building process incorporating knowledge gained into a new spiritual habit. In contrast, the sudden type was *extra nos*, and featured self-surrender. Sudden conversions often featured great excitement of the senses and emotions, and resulted in abrupt turnarounds in perspective. The old life ceased to be of immediate concern. The new life was pre-eminent. The conversion of Saul is most assuredly one of the sudden variety.

On the Damascus road Saul was confronted first by light. Light is a common feature among visions of the sacred.<sup>14</sup> Controversy and disagreements abound with regard to Luke’s “light from heaven” in Acts 9:3. That a light of some description was visible is not the point of contention, but rather the quality and source of that light. A simple reading of the text gives a good deal of insight into both. Luke indicates that the light that blinded Saul “flashed” about him and those with him. To state that the light flashed brings to mind the image of lightning and the noise that results. The Scriptures contain few instances of lightning, but each of them is connected to an appearance of God in the temporal realm.<sup>15</sup> Johnson points out that while incidents of light emanating from unexplained sources was common in ancient writings, those that occurred ἐξάφνης (suddenly or unexpectedly) certainly were not.<sup>16</sup> Luke’s Gospel contains a reference to the spontaneous appearance of a heavenly choir singing praises to God at the Nativity of Jesus (2:13), as well as the unusual seizing of the youth by an evil spirit (9:39).

According to Luke the voice from the light was not without significance. The very choice of words—“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”—brings to mind another well-known encounter with a voice from beyond resulting in a commission. Prior to his sojourn into Egypt the prophet Moses happened upon a bush that burned without being consumed. A voice emanated from within: “Moses, Moses!” (Ex. 3:4). A voice of a similar quality carrying a similar message was heard on Mount Sinai at the giving of the Torah (Ex. 19:16-20). Luke is most certainly being careful to place the

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<sup>13</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans and Green, 1902), 183-217.

<sup>14</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of The Apostles* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 121.

<sup>15</sup> Lightning is a feature of the theophanies of Exodus 19, II Samuel 22, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 10 and several instances in the Gospel of Luke. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 163.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 163.



voice heard by Saul in the same category as the voice the Jews would claim belongs to God Himself. Hence the effect of the religious experience on Saul must have been at least as shattering as it was on Moses. The experience was objective, but was appropriated both inwardly in Saul's value system and outwardly in his career. Like Moses, the calling and commissioning of Saul occurred in one singular event, a fact Saul would attest to himself:

You heard about the way I once lived when I followed the Jewish religion. You heard how I violently persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it. You also heard how I was far ahead of other Jews in my age group in following the Jewish religion. I had become that fanatical for the traditions of my ancestors. But God, who appointed me before I was born and who called me by his kindness, was pleased to show me his Son. He did this so that I would tell people who are not Jewish that his Son is the Good News. When this happened, I didn't talk it over with any other person. (Galatians 1:13-16 GWN)

Despite the reference to persecution, Saul did not immediately connect the divine audition to Jesus, the object of that persecution. This would be consistent with a profound religious experience and the subsequent inability of the subject to express thoughts clearly. In the beginning Saul may not have attributed the audition to Jesus in particular, but he most certainly knew the voice was of God, if not God Himself. He clearly recognized that he was in the midst of a theophany. The others present offered no commentary on the experience, and their testimony is nowhere present in other sources. Nevertheless, while it may never be revealed if Saul actually conversed with the voice, "such dialogue within a revelatory experience clearly serves the literary function of making the import of the experience clear to the reader."<sup>17</sup> When Saul asked the voice to identify itself, the response was unambiguous: "I am Jesus."<sup>18</sup>

This paper has referred to Saul's vision and audition as a theophany. That Saul experienced God is evident. However, is it not more to the point to ascertain if Saul actually saw Jesus? Was the figure that spoke to him one that Saul could have recognized as Jesus if he had met the Nazarene before? Was Saul's religious experience more properly a Christophany than a theophany? The answer may be found not so much in the narrative accounts in Luke, but in the letters Saul wrote in his later years as he looked back on the incident.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth Saul stressed that he recognized Jesus just as Peter had. Because of his vision and audition Saul placed himself in the same category as the disciples for whom Jesus was an

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<sup>17</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 163.

<sup>18</sup> Some manuscripts add "from Nazareth."

experiential reality, and this experience lends credence to Saul's claims of apostleship and his preaching:

Brothers and sisters, I'm making known to you the Good News which I already told you, which you received, and on which your faith is based. In addition, you are saved by this Good News if you hold on to the doctrine I taught you, unless you believed it without thinking it over. I passed on to you the most important points of doctrine that I had received: Christ died to take away our sins as the Scriptures predicted. He was placed in a tomb, He was brought back to life on the third day as the Scriptures predicted. He appeared to [Peter]. Next he appeared to the twelve apostles. Then he appeared to more than 500 believers at one time. (Most of these people are still living, but some have died.) Next he appeared to James. Then he appeared to all the apostles. Last of all, he also appeared to me. I'm like an aborted fetus, who was given life. I'm the least of the apostles. I'm not even fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted God's church. But God's kindness made me what I am, and that kindness was not wasted on me. Instead, I worked harder than all the others. It was not I who did it, but God's kindness was with me. So, whether it was I or someone else, this is the message we brought you, and this is what you believed. (I Corinthians 15:1-11 GWN)

Saul reported his contact with Jesus as equivalent to that of the other apostles, but independent of them. It was a sudden, face-to-face encounter so groundbreaking it turned a persecutor into an adherent. Therefore, "[S]aul's vision and conversion are psychologically inconceivable except upon the supposition that he had been actually and vividly impressed by the human personality of Jesus."<sup>19</sup>

One fact often overlooked in the account is the lack of "preparation" of Saul and his companions for a facedown with the Divine. So many accounts of religious experience can only be thought of as induced by depravation, psychic disturbance, drugs or some other external force. Yet Luke's account leaves little room for the possibility that Saul's experience could have been induced by any of those contributors, or to a ritual act of piety such as prayer or fasting. Luke's narrative suggests that Saul and his party were simply in transit to Damascus, for the purposes of persecution, and under no undue stress. That the event should occur at midday does not mean hunger or fatigue played an unusual role in the theophany since food was doubtless consumed before departure. Luke does include a reference to fasting, but this fasting occurs after the theophany and as a direct result of it.

A question must be raised as to the reasons why those present with Saul did not experience what Saul experienced. In other words, was the theophany of the type that a disinterested observer could have perceived had

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<sup>19</sup> William M. Ramsay, "Did Paul See Jesus?" in Thomas S. Kepler, ed., *Contemporary Thinking About Paul: An Anthology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 123.

such a person been there? Sceptics have pointed to inconsistencies within the conversion reports<sup>20</sup> to mean that the divine vision and audition were obvious to Saul alone, and therefore psychosis or some other physical anomaly should be used to explain the incident. This simplistic objection does not allow for the fact that individuals reporting on events will often give remarkably different details despite witnessing identical things. Also, testimony is always shaped by context.<sup>21</sup> Luke gives the initial account of Saul's conversion in Acts 9. In the previous eight chapters Luke has taken great pains to show the spread of the Good News among the Jewish population in Jerusalem and then into Judea and Samaria. Now he must show the commissioning of Saul as the entrée of preaching to the Gentile population and to the ends of the earth. For this reason details of Saul's conversion must not only be factual, but inspirational, and involve others. The other two accounts are reports by Saul himself. Acts 22 is a missionary speech delivered on the heels of a Jerusalem riot. Acts 26 is an apology before the Roman officials. Is it not possible that Saul, or anyone under such conditions of duress, would trump up particular points and reduce others based on needs and circumstance? If Saul's experience was apocryphal as some claim, it seems more likely that Luke would attempt to harmonize the accounts to make his theological point more sound. The fact that the three accounts are close but not identical supports, not undermines, the veracity of Luke's reporting.<sup>22</sup>

According to Luke in Acts 9 the effect of the theophany was not only immediate, but also enduring. When Saul arose from the ground he was blind, a physical manifestation one might expect upon encountering light with the intensity of lightning. In addition, for a period of three days Luke

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<sup>20</sup> Acts 9 reports that those travelling with Saul "heard a voice but saw nothing." In Saul's own report in Acts 22, the exact opposite is claimed—Saul's companions saw the light but could not discern or understand the voice. Acts 26 suggests that the light did fall on each of them, but only Saul heard the voice. Details of the aftermath of the theophany differ as well. Saul's recollection in Acts 26 indicate all the travellers fell to the ground, while in Acts 22 only Saul collapses. See Appendix A for a synopsis of the three accounts.

<sup>21</sup> An individual recalling a crime will recall the occurrence with rather more candour and embellishment immediately following it than she may months or years later on the witness stand.

<sup>22</sup> "Most important to note, however, is the fact that in all three of the accounts, Luke makes one dominant point: that Christ was the one who brought about the change in the strategy of divine redemption that occurred in Paul's Gentile ministry—that is, that it was not a plan that Paul thought up or a program given him by another; rather, it was instigated by a commission that came directly from Christ himself .... So Luke emphasized the miraculous circumstances of Saul's conversion and the supernatural nature of his call." Richard Longenecker, "Realized Hope, New Commitment and Developed Proclamation", in R. Longenecker ed., *The Road From Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought and Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 27.

reports that Saul neither ate nor drank. This acknowledgement of a period of fasting is by no means incidental. Johnson comments that

[a]t the most obvious level, [fasting] shows that Paul is going through a holy period of transition, a stage of liminality, whose end is shown by his resuming the taking of food in 9:19. Fasting can be associated with a period of preparation for receiving a revelation, and also with repentance .... Paul places himself in a position to receive further guidance from the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

For some, Saul's physical self-depravation could be a manifestation of a deep depression following a psychotic episode. Yet if this were the case it seems unlikely that Luke would choose to frame Saul's reaction as he does, that is, as a voluntary ascetic act.

The appearance and involvement of Ananias also argues for the factuality of Saul's religious experience. If Saul were deemed psychotic it is implausible that a Christian third party such as Ananias would have been willing to meet with him, much less entertain the possibility that Saul could be God's chosen instrument. Luke describes Ananias as possessing a healthy scepticism with regard to Saul, a man he had come to know as a dangerous persecutor of the Christians. However, a theophany not unlike that experienced by Saul overrode Ananias' fears, and he went off to meet with Saul in Damascus. Ananias' use of the title "Brother Saul" incorporates Saul's own experience into his—one and the same person appeared to both of them. The laying on of Ananias' hands healed Saul's blindness,<sup>24</sup> who was then filled with the Holy Spirit.

The final act in Saul's divine drama was the receiving of Baptism. This in and of itself may seem trivial since ritual washing was present in many world religious traditions, and most especially in Judaism. Yet the Baptism Saul underwent was different in kind and substance. The Christian communities of the first century practised Baptism in the name of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this way they gave a nod to their Jewish roots but declared the centrality of their unique understanding of God in three persons. For Saul to submit himself so readily to the central Christian sacramental act underlines yet again the profound nature of his experience.

It is important for Luke that [S]aul—so ambiguous and dangerous a figure—be fully incorporated into the life of the community. The baptism completes

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, p. 164.

<sup>24</sup> "And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight." The statement is obviously meant to be taken as a metaphor for the overcoming of spiritual blindness by the power of God. The Light that had blinded Saul on the road was the same Light that was restoring his sight.

Paul's ritual passage out of the sacral state he was in since his vision, a return to profane existence signalled by his taking of food.<sup>25</sup>

The transformation of Saul to Paul was now complete, and the great apostle was born. F. F. Bruce, writing on the historicity of the conversion account, places Saul's religious experience into an orthodox perspective:

No single event, apart from the Christ-event itself, has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of [S]aul. For anyone who accepts [S]aul's own explanation of the Damascus road experience, it would be difficult to disagree with the observation of an eighteenth-century writer that "the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation."<sup>26</sup>

### EXPLORING VALID RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

To be fair, one who studies religious experiences should be sympathetic to social scientists and historians that depend on reproducibility to act as the standard of fact. Religious experiences are frightfully difficult to fit into categories. They are more particular than general, for reasons that shall become clear below. For now it may be stated that experience, whatever form that may take, differs from events insofar as experience tends to be applicable to individuals as individuals. In contrast, events such as plays can be defined and parameters placed around them. Analysis of events may take the form of deconstructing small segments before moving to a conclusion. Experience must be viewed, as much as possible, within a unified whole.

Experience of a particular event by multiple persons is possible only as an abstraction.<sup>27</sup> One may consider here the analogy of a stage play. No two persons experience a play in the same fashion. What might be seen as comic to one individual may be viewed by another as tragic. In the background of any one person's experience resides context, preconceptions, education, moral signatures, and a host of other modifying circumstances and feelings. Leder has suggested that what makes experience so fundamentally individual is that it is both somatic and psychosomatic.<sup>28</sup> For example, "[t]he experience of pain is not only the reflex of nerves to a stimulus, it is also the consciousness of the reflex. Hearing music is more than the simple stimulation of nerve endings in the ears by vibration; it involves as well the

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<sup>25</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 165.

<sup>26</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1977), 75.

<sup>27</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 47.

<sup>28</sup> D. Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1-99.

mental activity of somehow ‘following’ and ‘connecting’ sounds.”<sup>29</sup> For Leder the psychosomatic character of experience makes it horrendously difficult to analyse. Experience may flow from one individual to another, but it will always remain particular.

In addition to particularity, experience also features both an internal component and an external component. The body acts as so to say a “bridge” between these components.<sup>30</sup> Inward experience takes the form of apprehension, the grasping of reality at the level of consciousness. The presence of inward experience is discernible only by interview, and thus is the more subjective component of the two. Outward experience presents as physical expression. This expression might be as gentle as a nod of the head or as violent as total body collapse. Outward expression is less subjective than the inward component, but no less problematic. Body posture alone tells very little of the nature of the experience. To return to the analogy of the play, closed eyes on the part of a patron may mean several different things—thoughtful reflection, exhilaration, sensory overload, boredom or even sleep. Thus experience will always be at least partly interpolated, filtered by the experiencing subject through the limitations of language.<sup>31</sup>

Due to unavoidable subjectivity, Luke Timothy Johnson has maintained that several special difficulties exist regarding the exposition of religious experience.<sup>32</sup> First, the cause of the experience itself is not always readily available for comment or examination. Physicians treat pain with a readily definable source with much more ease and success than “phantom pain” whose source cannot be ascertained by routine examination. In the same way, those whose religious experience involves visions or auditions are hard pressed to convince others of the existence and nature of phenomena that cannot be determined clinically.

The second difficulty, according to Johnson, involves the first. Some have found that profound religious experience, true or faked, can be a source of financial gain and unwarranted attention. Religious thrill seekers, always on the hunt for the next ephemeral jolt, are especially vulnerable to the

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<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson suggests that language may enable or disable the communication of experience. He writes, “The fact that symbols *change* in meaning, sometimes slowly, sometimes with amazing speed, is the surest indication that something more than human linguistic patterns are at work and that the term *experience* points to something real in the world that is not completely captured by our preset explanations and interpretations. The traffic, in short, moves both ways .... [T]he meaning of the word “terror” is altered when I have been suddenly and brutally attacked in the night. Some experiences can be contained within old symbols as variations on a theme, but some are so powerful that they give entirely new content to a symbol. Surely the word *holocaust* now has a specific weight of meaning that was available to no reader of the Bible before 1932.” Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 53-60.

promise of excitement and mystery, whether substantiated or not. The overarching principle of particularity can serve as an effective shield for those who would claim bogus religious experiences. As a result, scepticism toward this kind of spiritual fraud is most certainly warranted.

Thirdly, Johnson states, analysis of religious experience is never absolutely neutral. Despite efforts to remain neutral, examination of the rudiments of religious experience will tend to be informed by one's interpretation of reality. If reality is observed through the lenses of classical Newtonian worldview with its emphasis on cause and effect, then a religious experience must possess a cause that is basically material. If, on the other hand, reality is understood in the post-modern vein that allows for several levels of reality to be in operation simultaneously, then a non-corporeal source for experience is more palatable. In either case, recognition of such presuppositions is necessary if the religious experience is to hold any lasting credibility.

These difficulties, however, must not prevent us from attempting to flesh out a working definition for religious experience. This paper will use a modified version of the summary offered by Joachim Wach, former Professor of Comparative Religions at the University of Chicago. In his posthumously published book entitled "The Comparative Study of Religions", Professor Wach expounds on four components he feels are necessary for something to be considered a religious experience—regard for that which is defined as ultimate, involvement of the whole person, peculiar and sustained intensity, and repositioning of personal *telos* resulting in action.<sup>33</sup>

First, religious experience cannot be considered genuine if it is self-administered. In every case the experiencer is passive and overtaken by the something he or she perceives as ultimate. As far as Wach is concerned, the power that impacts the experiencer need not fit into predetermined sacred parameters,<sup>34</sup> but must be viewed by the experiencer as in some sense exceeding him or her and in contact with a presence beyond which nothing else exists. This power or presence may be benevolent or malevolent or a hybrid of both. In any case, the student of religious experience must understand that all such experience is perceptive. Simply because one claims to have had such an experience does not make it so. Authentic religious experience always reaches beyond space and time to touch perfection.

Second, valid religious experience involves the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. This commitment of entirety is easily justified, given the

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<sup>33</sup> Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) 31-37.

<sup>34</sup> I.e. it need not fit our traditional divine parameters like "God", "The Father", "Allah", "El-Shaddai", "Brahma", or any other moniker.

individual's contact with Ultimate Reality. To interact with perfection requires one's totality. Clement Webb comments:

the religion of every religious man belongs to him not merely as a participator in an activity shared with others, but as being the individual person that he is. It belongs to him, indeed, not only as the person that he is but as being *all that he is*; with his bodily senses, his emotions, his interests, his social contacts, his affections, as well as with his understanding and with the instinct of curiosity and wonder wherein, when it is cultivated by the understanding with its power of analysis and discrimination, science and philosophy take their rise. To no part of man's life is religion merely irrelevant; not only as his total response to what is by him envisaged as the ultimate reality, embracing, in Tertullian's phrase, *totum quod sumus et in quo sumus*, our whole selves and our whole environment, can religion be what it implicitly aims at being; and not only as such must a Philosophy of Religion endeavour to interpret it.<sup>35</sup>

Thirdly, intensity is a hallmark of religious experience. For Wach this is not simply a statement which gives description, but points to the experience as the most comprehensive and shattering imaginable. The founders of religious movements almost always point to contact with the sacred as the most powerful and profound experiences of their lifetime.<sup>36</sup> This kind of honesty prompted Abraham Maslow to fold such phenomena into what he described as "peak experiences". Regardless of source, those who have authentic religious experiences describe them as monumental and permanent.

Lastly, for a religious experience to be considered genuine the experiencer must be moved to action of a kind he or she previously would not have considered. Those who have such experiences describe their desire as an imperative "ought" rather than an indicative "can". Religious experience is the organizing principle around which all things in life revolve. William James in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* speaks of conversion in this way:

Let us hereafter, in speaking of the hot place of man's consciousness, the group of ideas to which he devotes himself, and from which he works, call it the habitual centre of his personal energy. It makes a great difference to a man whether one set of his ideas, or another, be the centre of his energy; and it makes a great difference, as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him. To say that a man

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<sup>35</sup> Wach, *Comparative Study*, p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Tillich is quite correct when he states, "gods are beings who transcend the realm of ordinary experience in power and meaning, and with whom men have relations which surpass ordinary relations in intensity and significance." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Volume I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 212. William Inge insists that true religion is not so much taught but "caught" from somebody who already possesses it.



is “converted” means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy.<sup>37</sup>

In the Christian tradition James the brother of Jesus felt that action was the only means available to the convert to prove his religion true.<sup>38</sup> Action does not stand in contradistinction to contemplation, but rather to slackness, inactivity, and indifference. While Jesus could inform Martha that contemplation is the “one thing needful”, nevertheless her form of active religion is more readily recognizable.<sup>39</sup> Von Hugel correctly points out that “religion is, primarily, a need, an experience, and an affirmation of what is, and only in the second instance a command as to what ought to be. Because our Father is, and because the Blessed are and do His Will in Heaven, because of this ... are we to do this same Divine Will as nearly as we can upon earth.”<sup>40</sup>

### **RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OR SOMETHING ELSE?**

Given Wach’s parameters, was Saul’s a “religious experience?” First, it can be stated without reservation that Saul did not self-administer his experience, but rather was overshadowed by YHWH, the God of the Jews, in the form of Jesus, the Word made flesh. Saul was certainly a religious man before he became a Christian, but he was far from what one should term a religious ecstatic or even a political revolutionary. Prior to his conversion Saul believed, as did many Jewish messianists, that a wholesale recovery of penitential devotion to the Torah would bring the new and greater David to Israel. Saul sprang to the forefront of the cult of the Pharisees and became a leader in a campaign for the extermination of the followers of Jesus. His heart was firmly devoted to the teachings of his ancestors, and though he did

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<sup>37</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Electronic text found at: <http://www.psychwww.com/psyrelig/james/james8.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> “My brothers and sisters, what good does it do if someone claims to have faith but doesn’t do any good things? Can this kind of faith save him? Suppose a believer, whether a man or a woman, needs clothes or food and one of you tells that person, ‘God be with you! Stay warm, and make sure you eat enough.’ If you don’t provide for that person’s physical needs, what good does it do? In the same way, faith by itself is dead if it doesn’t cause you to do any good things” (James 2:14-17 GWN).

<sup>39</sup> Here Wach argues for balance. Aesthetics involves the first three criteria only. Asceticism places an over-emphasis on criteria four.

<sup>40</sup> Wach, *Comparative Study*, 36.

experience periods of religious “restlessness”,<sup>41</sup> he at no time prior to his conversion intimated anything but malevolence to Christ and the Christians.

Saul’s career of persecuting Christians was suddenly and permanently stopped by an event of “revolutionary importance.”<sup>42</sup> Saul would later describe it as an unmediated act of God, who was pleased to reveal His Son directly to Saul. The Damascus road experience saw Saul bathed in unspeakable glory, the object of the overshadowing power of the Divine. From the midst of heavenly glory Saul saw the face and heard the voice of God. Jesus Christ, the One Saul had been persecuting, was having His day, and rather than strike Saul down He called him to be an apostle.

[S]aul, overwhelmed with the sense of having fought against the Christ and killed his faithful followers, now finds this to be a true criticism. Jesus Christ has not destroyed him, has not blinded him for life, has not simply let him off with a threatening injunction to persecute no more. Jesus Christ has honoured him with a high commission. [S]aul’s great longing to prepare the people for the Christ’s coming is to be utilized by Jesus, only instead of preparing for it by destroying the Jesus messianic movement his is to be made a great leader in the Jesus movement.<sup>43</sup>

Secondly, Saul’s conversion was a total body experience, affecting body, mind and spirit. Of course one should not assume bodily change meant an alteration in stature or deportment. Certainly the physical ailments of which Saul complained in his letters<sup>44</sup> remained. Saul’s brush with God could not prevent the old pains of hunger, thirst, cold, or nakedness. Old age assuredly crept up on Saul as with all who live under the moral curse of Adam. What changed, however, was Saul’s attitude toward his physical nature. From the moment of his conversion Saul began to understand his suffering as a means by which God shaped in him the likeness of Christ:

But he told me: “My kindness is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak.” So I will brag even more about my weaknesses in order that

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<sup>41</sup>The letter to the Romans is a prime example of this: “I know that nothing good lives in me; that is, nothing good lives in my corrupt nature. Although I have the desire to do what is right, I don’t do it. I don’t do the good I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I don’t want to do. Now, when I do what I don’t want to do, I am no longer the one who is doing it. Sin that lives in me is doing it. So I’ve discovered this truth: Evil is present with me even when I want to do what God’s standards say is good. I take pleasure in God’s standards in my inner being. However, I see a different standard at work throughout my body. It is at war with the standards my mind sets and tries to take me captive to sin’s standards which still exist throughout my body. What a miserable person I am! Who will rescue me from my dying body? I thank God that our Lord Jesus Christ rescues me!” (Romans 7:18-28 GWN).

<sup>42</sup> Edward I. Bosworth, “Paul—His Religious Experience”, in Thomas S. Kepler, ed., *Contemporary Thinking About Paul: An Anthology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 142.

<sup>43</sup> Bosworth, *Paul*, 143.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. II Corinthians 12:7; Galatians 4: 13.

Christ's power will live in me. Therefore, I accept weakness, mistreatment, hardship, persecution, and difficulties suffered for Christ. It's clear that when I'm weak, I'm strong. (II Corinthians 12:9-10 GWN)

Through no effort of his own, "in the blink of an eye", Saul's mind was changed into the mind of Christ. This became the fundamental ideal of his life, and it framed the man he intended to be. Nevertheless, Saul was convinced that he could not achieve perfection until God, who overshadowed him, worked that perfection in him at the Last Day. Man must continue to strive to obey the will of God here in time. His faith must be animated by emotion and demonstrated in action. Therefore, Saul

gathered up his whole personality—intellect, emotion and will—and organized his ideas of God, men, right, beauty, home and country, and all others, together with his primary, instinctive emotions and ideas, into one organic compound actually functioning as a mighty power in his consciousness. The idea which performed this compounding was Jesus, the God-man .... Christ came into the separated parts of Saul, and those parts immediately fell into a compound, organically whole, faithfully functioning for an end, united forevermore in a personality, or new man.<sup>45</sup>

In the person and work of Jesus Christ Saul found what he so desperately wanted—the assurance that even though death comes to all, eternal salvation for the body and soul of humankind is guaranteed and attainable, not by adherence to the Law, but by grace through faith in Christ.

Thirdly, after a careful and honest reading of the conversion accounts is performed, none but the most rabid higher critics would call into question the intensity of Saul's experience on the Damascus road. Saul was not simply shaken. Saul was transformed by the power of the great I AM. The theme of transformation would forever shape Saul's life, and permeate his writings. In II Corinthians 3:18 Saul expresses the view that all believers in Christ shall be changed into His glorious likeness in one way or another: "As all of us reflect the Lord's glory [τὴν δόξαν κυρίου] with faces that are not covered with veils, we are being changed into his image [τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα] with ever-increasing glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." From the moment of his conversion Saul's understanding of Jesus Christ changed from one of derision to one of devotion, fuelling his desire to preach Christ who is the Glory of God.

Finally, the Damascus road experience moved Saul into a life of service to his Lord and master Jesus Christ. The Light did not leave him a spiritual catatonic, but a great weapon in the hands of God to spread the Good News

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<sup>45</sup> Arthur Holmes, "The Man Made Whole", in Thomas S. Kepler, ed., *Contemporary Thinking About Paul: An Anthology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 148.

of death defeated and life liberated.<sup>46</sup> He would be willing to undergo great hardship for his Lord, and do so without complaint.<sup>47</sup> He would continue to proclaim what he knew to be true to the ends of the earth, or die in the attempt. No psychotic episode or physical trauma could possibly account for this. Richard Longenecker makes this point clear:

What, then, should we call what [S]aul experienced? Certainly it involved a “paradigm shift” in his life and thought—that is, a different way of looking at what he had previously known, a different set of questions than he had previously asked, and a different way of evaluating all that he had previously accepted. It could, therefore, be called an “alternation” (i.e. a shift in perspective and practice, without distancing oneself from one’s past) or a “transformation” (i.e. a new perception and a marked change in outward form or appearance, but not necessarily a break with the past). For now he viewed everything from the perspective of fulfilled messianism, with Jesus of Nazareth being identified as Israel’s Messiah and the realization of the nation’s ancestral hope. Now having received a revelation from God, he could no longer live or think simply in the old ways. The revelation of “his Son in me” had taken precedence over all that he had ever experienced or contemplated.<sup>48</sup>

This is complete metamorphosis mediated by grace.

## CONCLUSION

The absolute particulars of the Damascus road must remain for ever in a cloud of unknowing. The debate as to what really happened will certainly continue. Some will continue to deconstruct the Scriptures as hopelessly biased and mythological. Others will continue to accept the teachings on faith. Yet no matter how one chooses to dissect the ancient sources the witness of history and the Church does not change—what happened to Saul on the Damascus road was of God.

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<sup>46</sup> “If I spread the Good News, I have nothing to brag about because I have an obligation to do this. How horrible for me if I don’t spread the Good News!” (I Corinthians 9:16 GWN).

<sup>47</sup> “Five times the Jewish leaders had beaten me with 39 lashes; three times Roman officials had beaten me with clubs. Once people tried to stone me to death; three times I was shipwrecked, and I drifted on the sea for a night and a day” (II Corinthians 11:24-25 GWN).

<sup>48</sup> Longenecker, “Realized Hope”, 27.

## **ORDERED COMMUNITY: ORDER AND SUBORDINATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT\***

*John W Kleinig*

**Y**ears ago when I was working as a chaplain at Saint Peter's Lutheran College, I had a conversation with three Aboriginal girls about their difficulties in fitting into the boarding school and feeling at home in it. In the course of the conversation one of them remarked that as soon as they set foot on the campus, they had to switch from "we" to "I", from thinking of themselves as part of a community to regarding themselves as individuals apart from their community.

We, I hold, must do the reverse, if we are to make sense of the New Testament teaching on subordination. Subordination presupposes the primacy of community over individuality, the need for communal solidarity for the wellbeing of each person. Unlike many modern western thinkers, the writers of the New Testament assume that we can only truly be ourselves as persons, and find lasting personal fulfilment, in community. None of us is ever independent and autonomous; we are all interdependent, like the leaves and branches in a tree, in our family, our workplace, our society, our nation, and our church. We are, as the New Testament reminds us, members of a body. This applies for our life in the human family as well as for life in God's family. Our prosperity comes from receiving and giving in community. We suffer if we separate ourselves from our given social matrix. We damage our community if we go our own way and refuse to cooperate with each other under the supervision of our leaders. We threaten the health of the church if we, like a cancerous organ, disorder its ecology by taking what we want from it for ourselves, without giving what is required of us for its wellbeing. Community depends on subordination. Without subordination there is no true community.

The term subordination, like the Christian teaching about it,<sup>1</sup> has, I concede, fallen into disrepute. Most people equate subordination with

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1978), asserts: "Of all the Spiritual Disciplines none has been more abused than the Discipline of submission. Somehow the human species has an extraordinary knack for taking the best teaching and turning it to the worst ends. Nothing can put people into bondage like religion,

destructive subservience to authoritarian leaders, enforced servitude to power-mongers, and a disabling sense of inferiority in a hierarchy of domination. It bespeaks all that we abhor most. Yet, if I may put my case most provocatively, the proper practice of subordination, as taught in the New Testament, contributes much more to our experience of love, joy, contentment, and peace than we realize. It has to do with a good conscience that comes from living a God-pleasing life in our station and vocation (Rom. 13:5; Col. 3:19; I Pet. 3:18-21; I Clem. 41:1). Subordination supplies the context for self-giving love to flourish in our families and our church, without the abuse of power. In fact, I maintain that the practice of subordination is a bulwark against authoritarianism, with its abuse of power and authority in the church.

The apostolic teaching on subordination should not be identified, as is commonly done, with inferiority, or subservience. It is possible to be subordinate and yet equal. So, for example, I am subordinate as a lecturer to the principal of the Australian Lutheran College, just as I am subordinate to my national president as a pastor and to my pastor as congregational member. But that does not make me inferior to any of them, a lesser person, or lesser Christian, or lesser pastor than they. Even though I respect and obey them, I am not subservient to them, nor do they run roughshod over me as if I were their underling. None of them has ever dominated or exploited me, just because I am subordinate to them.

Subordination involves our willing acceptance of our given communal leaders and our whole-hearted cooperation with them because they are our leaders. We are subordinate to those who are our heads,<sup>2</sup> because they occupy an office<sup>3</sup> over us, a divinely instituted position of leadership in our community. We are subordinate to them in their office.

Since headship exists in community and works for its common good, it depends on that community for its existence and its legitimacy. Like the head of a body, leaders who exercise headship must be responsive and

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and nothing in religion has done more to manipulate and destroy people than a deficient teaching on submission" (96).

<sup>2</sup> See I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:10. The sense of the Greek word κεφαλή in the New Testament has been the subject of some debate. While some have followed the lead of Catherine Kroeger in arguing for the use of this term in the sense of a "source" rather than "a person in authority", this has been challenged lexically by the work of Wayne Grudem. See Catherine Kroeger, "Head", in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid eds, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove and Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 375-77; and Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of Kephale ('Head'): A Response to Recent Studies", in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways Books, 1991), 425-68.

<sup>3</sup> This is Luther's favoured term [*Amt, officium*]. It is still by far the best term for this reality, because it puts the accent on the position of leadership rather than on the person of the leader.

responsible, accessible and accountable, to the people that make up their community, for they cannot lead effectively unless they gain and retain their acquiescence and cooperation, their willing subordination.

My basic premise is that God has instituted certain basic orders for community, such as the family, government, and the church, with offices for leadership within them, for the delivery and distribution of his blessings to the people who live and work in them. By their subordination to these offices people receive and share God's blessings. That is the purpose of subordination.

In this paper, which is a tribute to my teacher and dear colleague Vic Pfitzner, I would like to explore the startling teaching on subordination in the New Testament. It is offered to him as a token of appreciation for showing me that it is possible to engage in theological controversy in a peaceful godly way. Even though we have stood on opposite sides in the debate on the ordination of women, his generosity of spirit, his brotherly love, has kept us from falling out with each other but has, in fact, drawn us closer to each other in Christ. And so I thank him most warmly for reflecting God's loving kindness and patience in his interaction with me.

This is, in many ways, an exercise in the rehabilitation of a teaching that has fallen out of favour among us. There are three reasons for this exercise. First, subordination is one of the key terms in the two texts that have been used to restrict the ordained ministry to men, which is presently under discussion among us. Second, the apostolic teaching on subordination provides some very helpful orientation in the rather contentious areas of debate about marriage, family, and ministry in our society and the church. Third, the concept of certain divinely instituted communal orders that is implied by this term, could, in the future, prove to be useful in evangelizing some of the young people in our society, who are so fed up with disordered freedom that they long for a given social ecology, a cosmic order that provides a measure of harmony and stability for them.

## 1. CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

The New Testament uses a whole body of words in its teaching on subordination. As they all interact with each other semantically, they help to define what is meant by this term.

The idea of order is basic to all talk about subordination.<sup>4</sup> The Greek word for this is *τάξις*. This is basically a military term (I Clem. 37:1-4).<sup>5</sup> It

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<sup>4</sup> See Gerhard Dellling, *ὑποτάσσω*, *TDNT* 8:42; John Howard Yoder, "Revolutionary Subordination", in *The Politics of Jesus: Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 172; and John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with*

was used, most commonly, in the Hellenistic world for the order of a military unit, a century, under its officer, a centurion. It does not usually refer to the ranking of soldiers in a military hierarchy, but to the organization of a unit in battle order, around its commander and under its standard. He usually led from the centre of front line for battle, with his soldiers around him. This is how that word is used in a few places in the LXX (Num. 1:52; II Macc. 8:22; 13:21).<sup>6</sup> At the time of Christ Jewish writers had also begun to use τάξις for the liturgical order of the synagogue. It described the set pattern of leadership in prayer with communal responses, and in reading from the Scriptures and the exposition of them with communal silence, as well as the custom of sitting to teach and standing to pray.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the noun τάξις is used as a liturgical term in the New Testament. Thus, while Luke 1:8 tells us that Zechariah was officiating as a priest on duty in the “order” of his division, Hebrews contrasts the priestly “order” of Melchizedek (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 17, 21) with the priestly “order” of Aaron (7:11). Paul instructs the Corinthian congregation that in their worship everything must be done according to the right pattern and in “order” (I Cor 14:40;<sup>8</sup> see also I Clem.

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*Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 486f.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, and Carlisle, Paternoster: 2000), 1168.

<sup>6</sup> It was also used in the LXX for God’s heavenly army (Judg. 5:20; Job 38:12; Hab. 3:11).

<sup>7</sup> The best compilation and analysis of the data on this comes from Gerhard Dautzenberg, “Das Einhalten der schönen Ordnung beim Gottesdienst”, in *Urchristliche Prophetie: Ihre Forschung, ihre Voraussetzungen im Judentum und ihre Struktur im ersten Korintherbrief*, BWANT 104 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1975), 278-84.

<sup>8</sup> I Clement 40-42 shows how this concept of a liturgical order was understood in the Early Church by reference to the service at the temple: “Now that we have looked into the depths of divine knowledge, we ought to do all those things in **order** [τάξις] that the Master of the House has commanded to be performed at **ordered** [τεταγμένους] times. He did not command that the liturgical offerings should be performed arbitrarily or **disorderly** [ἀτάκτως], but at appointed times and hours. By His supreme will He Himself has appointed where and through whom He wished them to be performed, so that they may all be done devoutly with His approval and be most acceptable to His will. Therefore those who make their offerings at the **ordered** [προσ τεταγμένους] times are most acceptable and blessed, for, since they follow the regulations of the Master of the House, they do not go wrong. For to the high priest has been given his own liturgical tasks, and their own place has been **ordered** [προστέτακται] for the priests, and their own ministries have been assigned to the Levites, while the layperson has been bound by lay **orders** [προστάγμασιν]. Let each of us, brothers, be well-pleasing to God in our own **order** [τάγματι], with a good conscience, without transgressing the appointed rule [κανόνα] of our liturgical service, and with reverence. . . . The apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent from the Father. So Christ is from God, and the apostles are from Christ. Both came to be in a **well-ordered** way [εὐτάκτως] by the will of God. After they had received their instructions and been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and convinced by the Word of God, they went out with the full assurance of the Holy Spirit and preached the good news that the kingdom of God was



40:1). This instruction does not just insist that their worship should be orderly, which would mean that any order was acceptable. It implies that the service should be done according to an established order, God's order, the right pattern for speaking and hearing God's Word and for giving and receiving Christ's Body and Blood. Paul also tells the Colossians that he rejoices in their "order" as a congregation (Col. 2:5).<sup>9</sup>

The opposite of τάξις is ἀκαταστασία "disorder", whether it be political (Luke 21:9; II Cor. 6:5), social (II Cor. 12:20; see Jam. 3:8), liturgical (I Cor. 14:33), or spiritual (Jam. 3:16; see 1:8) in character. Those who refuse to work for a living act ἀτάκτως "disorderly" in their community (II Thess. 3:6, 11), while those who disrupt its worship are ἀτάκτους "disorderly" people (I Thess. 5:14; see I Clem. 40:2).

The noun τάξις is connected with verb τάσσω, which means to put or arrange a person or thing in a set place (BAGD, 805). It can also mean to establish an office (e.g. Rom. 13:11) or to appoint a person to a position, like the centurion in Luke 7:8, or for a particular task (Acts 15:2; 22:10).

From τάσσω comes the compound verb ὑποτάσσω, which means to put someone or something in a position **under** someone or something.<sup>10</sup> In its active voice it is used only of God in the New Testament (I Cor. 15:27, 28; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 2:5, 8; see Herm. Man. 12:42; Diog. 10:2).<sup>11</sup> Likewise its passive voice is used only for God's placement of angels (I Pet. 3:22) and the whole universe (I Cor. 15:27, 28; Heb. 2:8) under Himself and Christ. The verb ὑποτάσσω, however, is most commonly used in the middle voice for self-subordination, the voluntary placement<sup>12</sup> of oneself under God or His appointed agents (Rom. 8:7; 10:3; 13:1; I Cor. 14:34; 15:28; 16:16; Eph. 5:21, 24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5, 9; 3:1; Heb. 12:9; Jam. 4:7; I Pet. 2:13, 18; 3:1, 5; 5:3). The noun from this verb is ὑποταγή "subordination" (II Cor. 9:13; Gal. 2:5; I Tim. 2:11; 3:4; see I Clem. 37:5; Ign. Eph. 2:2). With respect to

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about to come. So, as they preached from region to region and from town to town, they appointed their first fruits, after testing them by the Spirit, as bishops and deacons."

<sup>9</sup> The connection in Col. 2:5 of "order" with "firmness of faith in Christ" does not make sense unless we take the order as the firm foundation for the stability of their faith in Him.

<sup>10</sup> While Thiselton quite rightly recognizes that the notion of divine "order" is implied by the use of this verb, he ignores the force of the prefix ὑπο- and so argues that in I Cor. 14:34 ὑποτασθήσθεσαν should be translated: "let them keep their ordered place" (1153-55). He therefore disconnects Paul's term from any implied link with the reality of headship as authority. Yet the regular use of this verb with the dative for the person as its indirect object shows that it always describes the acceptance of two things: the order of a community and the leadership of those who are responsible for its maintenance. Subordination is therefore always associated with an ordered community and its legitimate leadership.

<sup>11</sup> All these passages allude to the Messianic Psalm 8:6, an indication of the importance of this text in the development of the teaching on subordination in the Early Church and its connection with Christology.

<sup>12</sup> Delling, *TDNT* 8:42.

Christ, no human being is ἀνυπότακτος, exempted from His headship and “independent” from Him (Heb. 2:8). So those who refuse to accept God and the positions of leadership established by Him are also regarded as ἀνυπότακτος “insubordinate” (I Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:6, 10).

From this overview of the terminology we may conclude that subordination has to do with order. God subordinates people to Himself and His agents in the orders that He has ordained for human life on earth. Subordination is a voluntary act by which people cooperate with God by fitting into His arrangement for them in the world and in the church.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. THE PATTERN OF SUBORDINATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The references to subordination in the New Testament show that there are three basic temporal orders which have been ordained by God, two that belong to the realm of creation, the world, and one that belongs to the realm of redemption, the church.<sup>14</sup> St Peter maintains that each of these is ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει;<sup>15</sup> they are not human inventions but divinely established

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<sup>13</sup> The question remains whether the words “subordinate” and “subordination” are the best English translations for ὑποτάσσω and its cognates. Translators have used terms such as “be subject/subjected”, or “submit/be submissive/submission”, or “be obedient/obedience”. Yet as Yoder, 172, has shown, none of these translations is entirely satisfactory. Subjection conveys the notion of forceful debasement and domination by a person in power. Submission suggests passive subservience to the will of another person. Obedience touches only on one aspect of subordination in some contexts, for even if people carry out the commands of another, they can still be inwardly insubordinate and refuse to accept their situation. The advantage that the term subordination has over all these, despite its possible modern connotations of inequality and inferiority, is that, as Elliott, 487, notes, it carries with it the notion of adjustment to an order, rather than subservience to a person.

<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the medieval teaching on the holy order of the monasticism, Luther maintains that there are three divinely instituted “holy orders”: the order of the ministry, the order of marriage, and the order of civil government. These holy orders are instituted by God’s most holy Word, the same word that sanctifies them and the believers who faithfully do the work of God in them. They and their work are sanctified by God’s Word and faith in it. Luther’s teaching on these three holy orders is summarized most succinctly in his “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper” of 1528 (AE 37:364ff.). This teaching has confessional status by virtue of its inclusion in part nine of the Small Catechism in “The Table of Duties”. Kolb and Wengert translate Luther’s heading accurately by stating that these passages are God’s Word for the “holy orders” that God has established. See Bayer and Wannenwetsch for two perceptive analyses of Luther’s teaching on these three holy orders.

<sup>15</sup> While Peter’s call for Christians to be subordinate “to every divinely instituted authority” clearly refers to the Roman emperor and the governors under him, his use of “every” shows that it also introduces his call for the subordination of slaves to their masters (2:18), wives to their husbands (3:11), and church members to their presbyters (5:5).

positions of leadership, offices created by God for humanity (I Pet. 2:13).<sup>16</sup> This means that there is no single general order of creation.<sup>17</sup> Each order differs from the other. What applies to one does not necessarily apply to the other. Likewise there is no general concept of subordination. It means something different in each different context.

First, we have **the order of the household**, the family. In keeping with the definition of the household by the tenth commandment in Exodus 20:17, it includes three different sets of relationships: wives and husbands (Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; I Pet. 3:1,5); children and parents (Luke 2:51; Tit. 2:9; I Pet. 2:18); servants and masters (Tit. 2:9; I Pet. 2:18). The husband, whose head is Christ (I Cor. 11:3), is the head of the wife (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23). Surprisingly, the call for subordination of a Christian wife to her husband does not focus on her obedience to him, but on her respect for him as her head (Eph. 5:22, 33; I Pet. 3:2). Its purpose is for her to receive his love (Eph. 5:24-27), and, if she is married to an unbeliever, to gain his conversion (I Pet. 3:1-2). While the father is the head of the family, both parents are the heads of their children. Like Jesus with his parents (Luke 2:51), the subordination of children to their parents involves reverence (I Tim. 3:4) and obedience (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). Its purpose is the reception of prosperity and enjoyment of longevity in the family (Eph. 6:1-3). Since slaves are considered part of the family,<sup>18</sup> their status is similar to the children. Their subordination to their masters also involves obedience (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20) and reverence (I Tim. 3:4), as well as acceptable behaviour and utter reliability (Tit. 2:9, 10). Its purpose is the reception of Christ's approval and his reward (Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:24; I Pet. 2:22). In all these cases the attitude of subordination results in the kind of behaviour that is appropriate to the relationship.

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<sup>16</sup> The German text of Article 16 of the Augsburg Confession echoes this by asserting that the government and the family are "true orders of God" (*wahrhaftige Gottesordnung*) in which each person, according to his own calling, is required to "manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life" (Tappert, 38).

<sup>17</sup> Elliott quite rightly observes that "[t]he societies of the Greco-Roman period were greatly concerned with the establishment and maintenance of 'order' (*taxis*) in all areas of public and private life as a replication of an ordered universe (*kosmos*)" (486). He therefore assumes that this world view was adopted uncritically by the Early Church. Yet that does not quite fit the evidence. The apostles Peter and Paul and the apostolic authors, such as Clement and Ignatius, did not urge Christians to harmonize themselves and their behaviour to the natural order of the world or even its created order, but called on them to align themselves with the risen Lord Jesus as the head of the church and the cosmos by subordinating themselves to those whom God had set over them as their heads in the family, government and the church. They therefore did not promote the principle of order but the word of God that ordered the foundational communities for human life in the world and conveyed his blessings to those who lived in them.

<sup>18</sup> See Ex. 20:17.

Second, we have **the order of government** (Rom. 13:1, 5; Tit. 3:1; I Pet. 2:13). The subordination of Christian citizens to their rulers involves obedience with four kinds of good works (Tit. 3:2): the payment of taxes, the payment of custom's duties, respect for them, and honouring them (Rom. 13:7). In this they do exactly what all good pagan citizens do. They, however, differ from them by their acceptance of their rulers as God's agents, His ministers (Rom. 13:4) and assistants (Rom. 13:6). The purpose of their subordination is the reception of benefits from God through their rulers and the possession of a good conscience before God (Rom. 13:3-5; I Pet. 2:14).

Third, we have **the order of the church** (I Cor. 14:40). Here the risen Christ is the head (Eph. 5:24; cf. Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:19) with God the Father as His head (I Cor. 11:3). Within that order everybody is subordinate to some others (Eph. 5:21).<sup>19</sup> The congregation is subordinate to God the Father for the reception of life from Him (Heb. 12:9; Jam. 4:7) and to Christ for the reception of its salvation (Eph. 5:24; see 4:15-16). Its subordination involves adherence to God's Word (Rom. 8:7) and the Gospel as it is confessed in the creedal statements of the church (II Cor. 9:13).<sup>20</sup> The members of the congregation are subordinate to its leaders who teach God's Word (I Cor. 16:15, 16;<sup>21</sup> I Pet. 5:5;<sup>22</sup> see Ign. Eph. 2:2; Ign. Mag. 2; 13:2;

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<sup>19</sup> The participial clause in Eph. 5:21 can be construed in two ways grammatically, either as the fifth consequential participial after the imperative, "be filled with the Spirit" in 5:18, or as a new participial imperative that serves as a summary introduction to the instructions in 5:22-6:11 (Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary [New York: Doubleday, 1974], 608f.; and Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Bible Commentary [Dallas: Word Books, 1990], 365). I take it to function both ways. Over the last fifty years this verse has been understood as a call for mutual, reciprocal subordination either for husbands and wives to each other in marriage, or else for all members to each other in a family. This interpretation, however, is questionable, as has been shown by Daniel Doriani, "The Historical Novelty of Egalitarian Interpretations of Ephesians 5:21-22", in Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossways Books, 2002), 203-31; and Wayne Grudem, "The Myth of Mutual Submission as an Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21", 221-31, in the same volume. It is contradicted by the specific call for the subordination of wives to husbands in 5:22, 24, without any corresponding call for reciprocation from their husbands. It has, traditionally, been taken to mean that all Christians are to be subordinate to those others who are their leaders. This remains a viable interpretation, since the pronoun ἀλλήλοις is not only used reciprocally to refer to "each other" and "all others". It can, in some cases, also be used distributively to refer "each to another/each to some others" (see Matt. 24:10; Luke 2:15; 12:1; 24:32; I Cor. 11:33; Gal. 6:2; Rev. 6:4). I Clem. 2:1 seems to paraphrase Paul's admonition: "You were all humble-minded and not at all arrogant, subordinating yourselves rather than subordinating others, giving more gladly than taking." See also its elaboration in I Clem. 38:1-2.

<sup>20</sup> See Victor C. Pfitzner, *Strength in Weakness: A Commentary on 2 Corinthians* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1992), 135.

<sup>21</sup> I Clem. 42:4 tells us that the elders in the church at Corinth came from the "first converts" there, who, according to Paul in I Cor. 16:15, were from the household of

Ign. Tr. 2: 1, 2; 13:2; Ign. Pol. 6:1; I Clem. 1:3; 57:1, 2; Pol. Phil. 5:3).<sup>23</sup> This includes the silent subordination of women (and men!) to the men who teach God's Word in their congregation (I Cor. 14:34; I Tim. 2:11). The purpose of subordination is the reception of all that Christ gives to the church through his Word.

Three things are worth noting from this data. First, the New Testament does not teach that there is a general universal order of creation. Second, it does not speak of the general subordination of all women to all men but only their subordination in particular relationships, according to their station, such as wives to husbands. There is therefore no theological reason why women cannot be leaders in government. Third, subordination means different things in different contexts and different relationships. While a woman may not speak as teacher in the liturgical assembly, she may question her husband at home (I Cor. 14:33-35) and teach younger women to be good wives and mothers (Tit. 2:3-5).

Besides the earthly orders of family, government, and the church, there are three heavenly orders, **the order of the church triumphant, the angelic order, and the order of the Holy Trinity**. In the order of the church triumphant God the Father has made Jesus the royal head of the universe for the benefit of the church and its mission to the world (I Cor. 15:25-27; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 2:5-8; I Pet. 3:22). In the angelic order all the angels and the all things in the cosmos are now subordinate to Christ (I Pet. 3:22; I Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22; see Phil. 2:9-11). In the order of the Trinity God the Father is the head of His Son, His royal deputy (I Cor. 11:3). In His vice-regal office Christ Himself is, in some sense, operationally subordinate to the Father, until He finally hands back that office to the Father after the destruction of the last enemy, which is death (I Cor. 15:24-28). This will occur only after the whole created order, together with the church in Christ, has been included in the order of the Holy Trinity, without disrupting and changing that order.

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Stephanas. So, when Paul urges the Corinthians to be subject to the household of Stephanas, he, most likely, refers to the elders in Corinth (Grudem, "Myth", 226, n. 10).

<sup>22</sup> The contrast between "elders" as pastor-teachers in I Pet. 5:1-4 and "younger men" in 5:5 is rather puzzling. As Elliott has shown (838-41), the comparative adjective νεώτερος could refer to those who were later converts. It is used in Luke 22:26 for those who are led, in contrast to the "great", those who lead. This pair of terms reflects the common Hebrew idiom, "small and great" (Gen. 19:11; I Sam. 30:2, 19; I Kgs 22:31; II Kgs 23:2; 25:26; I Chr. 25:8; 26:13; II Chr. 15:13; Job 3:19). As in Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians 5:3, Peter most likely uses it to refer to the lay members of the congregation.

<sup>23</sup> For an analysis of the teaching of Ignatius on subordination to the leaders of the church, see Adam Hensley, 'Submission to Bishop, Presbytery and deacons in the Letters of St Ignatius of Antioch', *Lutheran Theological Journal* 35.2:75-86.

### The Semantic Field of Subordination in the New Testament

Relationship of Subordination	Order	Nature of Subordination	Benefits of Subordination
Wives to husbands	Family	Respect	Husband's love Husband's conversion
Children to parents	Family	Reverence Obedience	Prosperity Longevity
Slaves to masters	Family	Reverence Obedience Winsomeness Fidelity	Christ's approval Christ's reward
Christian citizens to rulers	State	Tax payment Duties payment Respect Honour	God's gifts Good conscience
Christians to God and His Word	Church	Obedience (?)	Life from God
Christians to Christ	Church	Love (?)	Salvation
All Christians to the men who teach them	Church	Silent listening	Learning as disciples
Universe to Christ	Church triumphant		
Angels to Christ	Angelic order		
Jesus the Son to God the Father	Trinity		

### 3. SUBORDINATION AND THE GREAT REVERSAL

In the New Testament most of the teaching on subordination is found in the so-called *Haustafeln*, the house tables, the tables of domestic duty (Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1; Tit. 2:1-3:7; I Pet. 2:11-3:22; 5:1-5).<sup>24</sup> They seem to reflect the tradition of catechesis in the Early Church. While they do

<sup>24</sup> See Elliott, 503-11, for a recent summary of the debate about the origin, nature, and function of the so-called house tables as well as a bibliography on them and subordination in them.

reflect some common aspects of ethical teaching in the Ancient World, they themselves are quite unique in their form and content.<sup>25</sup>

First, they are not primarily addressed to those free individuals who enjoy the independence and power that come from an assured income and a high position in society, and allow them to exercise benevolent patronage with their dependants and clients. Instead, they first address those who are dependent on others for their livelihood, wives, children, and slaves. They treat these “subordinate” people as moral agents, people who are responsible for social cohesion and communal solidarity. Only then do they speak to the people who are the leaders, their husbands, parents, and masters. Thus we have matching sets of instructions that presuppose reciprocity and focus on the importance of the rank and file members of the family for its prosperity.

- Wives → Husbands (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; I Pet. 3:1-7)
- Children → Parents (Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21)
- Slaves → Masters (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1<sup>26</sup>)

Second, the moral philosophers in antiquity did not call on wives, children, and slaves to be subordinate, because they had no choice but to submit to their superiors. In contrast, the call for subordination by Paul and Peter arises from their equality before God.<sup>27</sup> Through Baptism and union with Christ each Christian has gained the same royal status and worth. All the saints share the same status as Christ the Son because they are all “sons” of the heavenly king and coheirs with Him (Gal. 3:26-4:7). They then have even greater freedom and dignity than the aristocracy in their society. This makes them people that matter, holy people who make a difference, God’s co-workers.

Third, while the teaching of moral philosophy in antiquity tried to prevent a social-political revolution upwards in which the ruled displaced their former rulers, the apostolic teaching on subordination presupposes a spiritual revolution downwards that was accomplished by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of God’s Son. Through Him the original order of the human

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<sup>25</sup> Delling makes this claim about the teaching on subordination in the New Testament: “This word which belonged originally to the sphere of worldly order is now filled with new content as a term of order” (45). In what follows I am much indebted to the work of Yoder on the revolutionary teaching on subordination in the New Testament.

<sup>26</sup> Note that in I Pet. 2:18-25 and Tit. 2:9-14 the mention of slaves is not followed by the mention of their masters.

<sup>27</sup> Yoder, 175. It is worth noting that there is very little explicit teaching about equality in the New Testament. Jesus never mentions it. The apostles teach about five aspects of it: the equality in divinity of the Son with the Father (Phil. 2:16; see John 5:18), the equal bestowal of the Holy Spirit on Jews and Gentiles (Acts 11:7), the equal possession of faith by all Christians (II Pet. 1:1), the equal provision for the needs in the church through the offering for the poor in Jerusalem (II Cor. 8:13), and the equal treatment of slaves by their Christian masters (Col. 4:1).

family has been redeemed and transformed so that it now provides the framework for the life of God's heavenly family here on earth. In this new order the abuse of power is arrested and undone by self-sacrificial love.

In their epistles St Paul and St Peter promote a kind of revolutionary subordination that involves a complete reversal of social values.<sup>28</sup> In the ancient world the ideal person was an independent man, with economic resources and political clout, a self-sufficient autonomous person. Yet in the church this is reversed. There the ideal human being is a dependent person, someone who is subordinate and reliant on others, such as a wife or a child or a servant. Thus the church is the bride of Christ; all Christians are children of God and servants of Christ. The ideal state for the Christian is now no longer to be a master, with legally assured status, wealth and power, but to be a servant, free from enslavement to social status, wealth, and power (I Pet. 2:16). Subordination has therefore become the normal condition in the church. All Christians are subordinate to Christ (Eph. 5:21, 23), to God the Father (Heb. 12:9; Jam. 4:7), and to the orders that God has established (I Pet. 2:13). So, every Christian is in subordination to someone else. All are under headship and authority. None are self-sufficient and autonomous.

Fourth, the revolutionary character of the apostolic teaching on subordination is most evident in the content of the house tables. Even though the apostles accepted the given structure of the family and their societies, they called for a change in the attitude of those who lived in these communities. There are two surprises! On the one hand, by their subordination to their heads, wives, children, slaves, and citizens are expected to do nothing more than what was normally required of them. In one very significant case the usual demands have been lightened. Thus, in a society where wives were often expected to serve their husbands sexually and to use their sexual assets to gain what they wanted, the apostles merely urge wives to "respect" their husbands (Eph. 5:33) and to be fearless in doing what is good, without using their sexuality to manipulate their husbands (I Pet. 3:1-7).<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the apostles required much more of husbands, fathers, and masters than what was demanded by custom and law. They were, in fact, to act as if they stood in the shoes of their subordinates. Instead of requiring their wives to demonstrate their love for them, husbands were to love their wives demonstrably and self-sacrificially, like Christ with the church (Eph. 5:25-28; Col. 3:19); instead of expecting their wives to meet their needs and honour them, they were to honour their wives and consider their needs (I Pet. 3:7). Paul does not demand that children should avoid provoking and angering their fathers; instead, fathers

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<sup>28</sup> See Yoder, 185-87, and Foster, 101-5.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, in I Cor. 7:3-4 Paul teaches that Christian husbands and wives should, by common consent, provide mutual sexual access to each other.



should not provoke and anger their children (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). Most radically, masters were not just urged to treat their slaves fairly as if they were equals<sup>30</sup> (Col. 4:1), but to do God's will by wholeheartedly "serving" them (Eph. 6:9).<sup>31</sup>

Fifth, even though the apostles teach that God has created the order of the family and government (Rom. 13:2; I Pet. 2:13), they do not base their teaching on how and why Christians are to be subordinate to their leaders on God's creation of these orders or on a universal cosmic order. Instead, they find both the reason for subordination and the model of right subordination in Christ and His self-sacrificial service (Eph. 5:21-27; Tit. 2:9-10; 3:1-7; I Pet. 2:13, 21-25). Since they are in Christ and have Him as their Lord (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:18), they are to be subordinate to others out of reverence for Him (Eph. 5:22). Subordination is the apt thing to do for those who are in Christ (Col. 3:18). Since willing subordination reflects Christ's attitude and character, it sends out the right message to the world and so promotes the mission of the church (Tit. 2:4-5, 9-14; I Pet. 2:13-15; 3:1-2).

If Christ is the basis and the model for subordination, then only those who are in Christ can be truly subordinate, for they alone have been transformed by Him and conformed to Him by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:1-7). Thus in Ephesians 5:18-21 Paul associates subordination with the communal performance of thanksgiving to God the Father through Jesus, and regards both as products of the Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup> As we are filled with the Holy Spirit we receive the ability and desire to practise full subordination.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

When the apostles Peter and Paul teach subordination, they do not thereby sanction the social, political, economic status quo, but, in fact, acknowledge how riddled it is with sin and the abuse of power. They do not propose a social or political agenda for the reformation and transformation of a society by the behaviour of its lower classes. Nor do they reinforce cultural roles or stereotypical patterns of behaviour in marriage, family life, and society at large. Instead, they show how Christians can already now, by faith, live with God as citizens of heaven within the earthly orders of a fallen world, because Christ has transformed the whole human life cycle from the womb to the tomb by His incarnation and His exaltation. Christ does not abolish the old divinely instituted orders of family and government to free His disciples from life in community, but He redeems these orders so that they can

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<sup>30</sup> While the term *ἰσότης* can mean "fairness" and "equity", it may also mean "equality".

<sup>31</sup> The phrase *τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε* refers back to *μετ' εὐνοίας δουλεύοντες* in 6:7.

<sup>32</sup> See footnote 19.

accomplish their proper purpose. In practical terms, the apostles do not assimilate the church to the patriarchal family, which is modelled on the state with its coercive structures of power. On the contrary, Christ rules as the head of all principalities and powers in all governments and all families for the sake of the church (Eph. 1:20-23). The family and government are meant to serve Christ and His church. By fulfilling its vocation of serving others in self-giving love, the church provides the model for life in community as it reflects the order of self-giving in the Holy Trinity.

In sum: the apostolic teaching on subordination does not establish a chain of command for the exercise of power by those who sit at the top; it promotes a chain of transmission from the triune God for the delivery of blessings through His appointed agents in the church and in the world.

No one has summed this whole teaching up more vividly and aptly than Clement in his First Letter to the Corinthians. He writes these glowing words to that congregation which had been riddled with insubordination (37-38):<sup>33</sup>

Brothers, let us therefore campaign most strenuously under the Son's blameless **orders** [προστάγμασιν]. Let us consider those who campaign with our leaders, with what **good order** [εὐτάκτως], with what willingness, and with what **subordination** [ὑποταγμένως] they fulfil their **orders** [διατασσόμενα]. They are not all generals or colonels or captains or lieutenants, or so forth; but each one in his own **order** [τάγματι] fulfils the **orders** [ἐπιτασσόμενα] given by the emperor and the leaders. The great cannot exist without the small, nor the small without the great. There is a kind of mixture that is beneficial to all.

Take our body! The head without the feet is nothing; likewise, the feet without the head are nothing. Even the smallest parts of the body are necessary and useful to the whole body. But all breathe together and act in single **subordination** [ὑποταγῇ], so that the whole body may be saved.

So let our whole body be saved in Christ Jesus, and let each person be **subordinate** [ὑποτασσέσθω] to his neighbour, as appointed with his gift [χαρίσματι]. Do not let the strong neglect the weak, and let the weak respect the strong. Let the rich provide for the poor, and the poor give thanks to God, because He has given them someone to fill up what they lack. Let the wise show their wisdom in good deeds rather than in words. Do not let the humble-minded speak about themselves, but let others speak about them. Do not let those who are sexually chaste boast, knowing that it is someone else who grants them this self-control.

So brothers, let us consider how we were begotten, how we entered the world, how God has shaped and created us from a dark grave and brought us into his world, where He had prepared His benefits for us before we were

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<sup>33</sup> This translation is a slightly modified version of the text in Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation* (London: The Independent Press, 1950), 67f.

even born. Since therefore we have received all these things from Him, we ought to give thanks to Him for everything, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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## TO THE FONT AND FROM THE FONT: BAPTISM AND MISSION\*

Andrew K. Pfeiffer

### INTRODUCTION

In his excellent article, “Holy Baptism: Promise big enough for the world”,<sup>1</sup> Mons Teig tells the good news story of an agnostic man who is overwhelmed as he witnesses his wife giving birth to their first child. He literally walks in to church, asks to see the pastor, and says:

Today I saw the birth of my first child. And I wondered if I should have him baptized. In fact, I don’t know if I am baptized. Maybe I should be baptized too.<sup>2</sup>

The story suggests this man lives in a “Christian” culture or at least the remnants of it. Otherwise, how does he know about Baptism?<sup>3</sup>

Teig uses this incident to remind the church that we now face the mission challenge of working with adults who were not baptized as children. The challenge is actually a significant opportunity, as he demonstrates when he describes what happened in the case of this man:

The pastor discovered that this man was a local manager of a retail chain. After further conversations, preparations were made to baptize both the father and the newborn son. Catechesis continued as this young family began a life of worship. Eventually the young father became active, teaching Sunday school, attending Bible study, and even serving as president of the congregation.<sup>4</sup>

Teig suggests that our normative experience has been with infant Baptism and with the role of catechesis in nurturing the faith. However, he reminds us of the outward, mission thrust of Baptism and catechesis where contact with

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<sup>1</sup> Mons Teig, “Holy Baptism: Promise Big Enough for the World”, in *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission*, ed. Thomas Schattauer (Fortress, 1999), 39-58.

<sup>2</sup> Teig, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a Catholic priest I heard of recently is not so far off the mark. He has a small shop in a suburban shopping mall as his main office/study. Nothing exceptional there. However, outside his shop he has a sandwich board which says something like this, “Want your child baptised? Want to talk about marriage? Come in and talk to a priest.”

<sup>4</sup> Teig, 51.

unbaptized adults can, provided we work from a sacramental focus, lead to conversations and teaching that may result in Baptism and faith. The outward missionary thrust of Baptism and catechesis is the subject of this paper.

## A. THE CENTRALITY OF BAPTISM IN GOD’S MISSION

Before we explore the concept of Baptismal conversations with adults, I want to reflect briefly on the integral connection between Baptism and mission.

### 1. *The Words of Institution*

We are accustomed to thinking of the Words of Institution with respect to the Lord’s Supper (Mt. 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk. 22:17-20; I Cor. 11:23-25). There are also Words of Institution for the sacrament of Baptism.<sup>5</sup> The Small Catechism teaches that after His death and resurrection Christ instituted the sacrament of Baptism in Matthew 28:18-20. Baptism is not water only, but it is water used together with God’s Word and by His command. What is this Word? In Matthew 28 our Lord Jesus Christ says: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (SC IV:1).

Christ says disciple all nations, teach the ἔθνη, baptizing them with water and the Word. This institution of Baptism as a sacrament is supported by other significant Scripture passages (Mk 16:15-16; Tit. 3:4-7; Rom. 6:3-4; I Pet. 3:21; c.f. Gal. 3:27; Eph. 5:26).

When Christ institutes Baptism in Matthew 28 He not only gives the so-called mission mandate but also the mission means. Since Christ’s institution, Baptism has been central in mission thinking and mission practice throughout the history of the church. Disciples are made by

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<sup>5</sup> Melancthon defined sacraments as “rites, which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added”, Ap XIII:3. This is why he could speak at times of three sacraments: Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Absolution. Luther also understood that the Absolution was in fact the spoken Word, whereas Baptism and the Lord’s Supper included a visible sign: water, bread, and wine. He often quotes Augustine approvingly, “The Word is added to the element, and a sacrament results”, SA III.v:1; LC IV:18; LC V:10. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he begins by speaking of Baptism, penance, and the bread as sacraments and then concludes, “there are strictly speaking but two sacraments in the church of God—baptism and the bread. For only in these two do we find both the divinely instituted sign and the promise of forgiveness of sins” (AE 36:18, 124). Of special interest to this writer is his thought that all sacramental thinking is really an extension of the presence of Christ in the church (AE 36:18). From this perspective he can speak of a single sacrament (Christ) with three sacramental signs (presumably water, Word, bread).

baptizing surrounded with teaching. Leske reminds us that “Jesus’ words of institution of Christian Baptism are both words of direction and words of promise.”<sup>6</sup> They are command and gift. The church is given a mission statement by God: make disciples, baptizing. The church is given the means to fulfil its God-given mission task: make disciples, baptizing.<sup>7</sup> A rigorous theology and practice of Baptism keeps the church mission-minded and evangelistic.

I was recently given the privilege again of being a godfather. I now have a special relationship with little Rachel. From day one I was left in no doubt about the centrality of Baptism in the mission thinking of the pastor and parish where she was baptized. The pre-Baptism session was an excellent context for catechesis. The pastor led us briefly through the rite and then allowed space for questions. And the questions flowed. As we entered the sanctuary on the day of Baptism we couldn’t miss the font, front and centre, or the artistic display to one side depicting the various elements of Baptism. The rite was led faithfully and fully and Christ enacted what He instituted. The children crowded the font, the congregation sang the faith, and the day is etched in the memory of all who attended. And the catechetical questions flowed. Have I been baptized? When? Where? Why not? We experienced the missionary magnetism of the sacraments.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Australia’s Baptismal context**

People can, however, be confused by what they experience with respect to Baptism, and this can lead them to question the significance of Baptism as the central focus in mission thinking and practice.

On the one hand, the predominant experience of Baptism, especially in the Lutheran Church, is still infant Baptism. When we think of Baptism it is very difficult to think beyond a baby because that is what we most often see. The baby is not unimportant, and we dare never undermine any Christian’s view of their own Baptism as an infant. Luther is right when he says:

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<sup>6</sup> E. Leske, *Sacramental Theology*, Lutheran Teacher’s College reader (1985), Unit 3, point 2.3.

<sup>7</sup> I thank my colleague Michael Hassold for drawing my attention to F. D. Bruner’s commentary on Matthew at this point (*Matthew: A Commentary* [Dallas: Word, 1990]). Bruner observes that “the usual missionary terms are not employed here: ‘preach,’ ‘convert,’ ‘win,’ etc. A slower, lower profile verb is used, an almost scholastic, schoolish word, ‘disciple.’ To disciple means ‘to make students of, bring to school, educate.’ The word pictures students sitting around a teacher” (2:1096). It means to “take your time with people, work carefully with them, bring them along gently” (2:1102).

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Professor Kurt Marquart for this thought, which I first heard in a lecture he gave titled “The Missionary Magnetism of the Sacraments”, Adelaide, South Australia, 1992.

Baptism gives every Christian enough to learn and practise for a lifetime. He [sic] has to keep on working at it so that he really believes what Baptism promises and provides: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's favour, Christ in his totality, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts. In short, the gifts of Baptism are so immense that, if our timid self thinks about them, it may doubt whether they can all be true .... We should draw comfort and strength from [Baptism] when our sin or our conscience puts pressure on us, and should say: 'In spite of everything, I've been baptised! And if I've been baptised, I have the promise that I'll be happy for ever, and have eternal life for my body and soul' .... No other way of life and no other deed in the whole world could bring this about.<sup>9</sup>

The baby is not insignificant, but Baptism is also a sacrament of disciple-making for the adult and the young mum and the youth. I'll never forget the impact on the people of Holy Trinity, Hampstead, when a six-foot-six, sixty-year-old man leant over the font and received the blessings of Baptism. They saw it. It happened. God works in the lives of adults. God baptizes adults. They began to see the significance of inviting adults to learn Christ.

There is one other factor in our context, however, that can distract from the centrality of Baptism in mission. Baptism without the accompanying teaching can lead to poor discipleship. Poor discipleship can lead us to question the effectiveness of Baptism or the centrality of Baptism in discipleship, especially with adults. We all pastor some baptized people who make us want to cry out with Paul, "you did not come to know Christ that way" (Eph. 4:20). We all know people who make the mistake of seeing Baptism as an historical artifact rather than a daily washing. We have all experienced the barbecue conversation where a person seems more interested in convincing us they are connected to the right Lutherans rather than to the right Saviour. And these people are baptized.

There is a temptation to allow this context to lead us away from a baptismal approach to mission and evangelism. Hopefully it can also have the opposite effect. It can lead us to re-evaluate our Baptismal disciple-making, to re-affirm it, and to work at it so that we might shape and form Christians who are baptized believers.

Many years ago Trygve Skarsten, a visiting Lutheran theologian, wrote an article titled "The evangelization of the baptized". It was and remains an instructive article for those who want to reflect on the mission context that we find ourselves in.<sup>10</sup> Skarsten helped us see the two mission fields that lay before us. Yes, some Australians were unbaptized unbelievers (and increasingly so), but many Australians were baptized unbelievers or baptized

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<sup>9</sup> *Luther's Large Catechism* (Openbook Publishers), 174-75.

<sup>10</sup> *Lutheran Theological Journal* 17:45-55.

unchurched or baptized under-churched. Whichever way we put it, they had been baptized, but not formed in the faith.

This remains a significant mission field in Australia, and in some ways it complicates our thinking and practice. These people have been baptized but they are not worshipping, many are not praying, many do not see the Word of God as their book of life, and many are not aware of the way their Baptism relates to their daily life. They, too, need formation in the faith.

### ***3. Teach-baptize-teach***

It was Hermann Sasse who said “We baptize children as if they were adults, just as we baptize adults as if they were children.”<sup>11</sup> His article was actually focussing on the issue of Baptism and faith,<sup>12</sup> but his comments have implications for Baptism and catechesis.

Our Baptismal practice sometimes gives the impression that in the case of infants we baptize and then teach, whereas in the case of adults we teach and then baptize. In actual fact, in the case of all people we teach, baptize, teach. Baptism is surrounded by teaching for the whole of life. We are teaching to the font and from the font. The rite of Baptism does not come out of a book into a vacuum on Sunday morning. At the very least it is taught to parents as they present their child for Baptism. And the catechetical questions flow. From our perspective: Have you heard this Gospel which is now brought to your child (and to you)? Have you been baptized? What does your own Baptism mean to you? Do you know the commandments? Do you pray the Lord’s Prayer? Do you confess the Creed? From their perspective: Why does this happen in the church? Can a person steeped in New Age thinking sponsor the saving faith and life? Where can I learn more so I can help my child?

Historically, we have had two strengths in our Christian education programmes. We teach children well after they are baptized, and we teach adults reasonably well before they are baptized. The challenge is to work from these strengths and learn the value of teaching parents before their

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<sup>11</sup> Hermann Sasse, “Holy Baptism”, in *We Confess: Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 46.

<sup>12</sup> Sasse, 46. Sasse points out how Luther walks the lonely way between the “hierarchical safeguards” of Rome and the “psychological safeguards” of the Enthusiasts by stressing that everything rests on the Word, even for what is humanly impossible, namely faith. “Only in this way can the Lutheran Church hold together the objectivity of the sacrament and the sola fide, whereby we do not forget that justifying faith is not the matter of a single moment, but the substance of our whole lives. Such faith is not some act of our commitment to God that is particularly perceived and experienced in some isolated moments of our life. Rather, it is a constant though always clouded reliance on the gospel’s promise of grace. Repentance also, according to the gospel, is not just a single act but goes on our whole life long. So also Baptism is not an isolated act, but something that goes on in all our life” (46-47).



children are baptized and of continuing to teach adults after they are baptized. Our disciple-making will be significantly enriched as we teach-baptize-teach. After all, disciples are made by baptizing and teaching (these are two aspects of one action).

#### ***4. Being a Baptismal church***

In spite of suggesting above that we have taught adults reasonably well before they are baptized, my interest in the field of adult disciple-making was first stimulated by the realization that adults need a level of catechesis that can sustain them as they begin the journey of faith and face spiritual attack, which is inevitable for all the people of God, but especially for new Christians.

Jeff Gibbs has drawn attention to minimalistic and inadequate approaches to adult Baptismal instruction in his excellent brief article, "Microwave Christians". It seems he is an avid reader of church bulletins that get sent to him (an interesting hobby!). The bulletins have told him a story and shown him a trend:

The trend is the requiring of shorter and shorter periods of adult instruction prior to adult confirmation. One church offers three evening sessions. Another that recently came to my attention was getting the job done through two evening meetings and one Saturday, morning and evening. Still another confirms new adult members after a learning process that occurs on two Saturdays, morning and afternoon.<sup>13</sup>

I don't quote this to offend anyone, but if he has just described your parish please hear him out. His concern is not that this is the plan for adults who have been catechized and are transferring membership from congregation to congregation, but that it's the plan for the previously unbaptized or uncatechized. As such, it is not sufficient to form the faith and life necessary for new Christians to survive as people of faith in the contemporary Australian mission field.

Gibbs encourages a more extensive adult catechesis which passes on the full faith to prospective members and keeps them growing strongly to Christian maturity. He has four basic reasons:

- the joy of it all;
- the importance of it all;
- the urgency of it all;
- because of the end of it all.

I find his argument persuasive in our current mission context. In a time when our society is departing further from its Christian moorings, and there are

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<sup>13</sup> Jeff Gibbs, "Microwave Christians", *Concordia Journal* 22 (Jan. 1996): 9.

fewer societal supports for the faith and less family support of the faithful, Christians need formation that equips them for a daily Christian life of witness which will not be lived on easy street but increasingly in a testing and challenging environment. When the heat is on, will the faith we have passed on sustain the faithful?

The significant issue is that Baptismal instruction is not just about the imparting of Christian knowledge. Charles Arand believes that the shorter time devoted to the catechesis of adults is a symptom of, or evidence of, an underlying intellectual understanding of the faith which assumes that making disciples is simply about downloading information rather than spiritual formation.<sup>14</sup> It takes time for the truth of God to penetrate and begin to work on people's worldview and re-shape them from the inside out. It takes time for the formation of Christian disciplines like worship, prayer, and baptismal living. It takes time for unbaptized unbelievers to become baptized believers.

Theologically we are a baptismal church. We have a strong and developed theology of Baptism that can even better inform our approach to mission and discipleship. The third section of this paper outlines the strengths of the catechumenate as one process that works with a sacramental approach to mission over a significant period of time for the purpose of Christian formation. However, before we turn to the catechumenate, let's reflect further on the way a focus on Baptism helps us in our evangelistic conversations.

## **B. BAPTISMAL CONVERSATIONS FOR EVANGELISM**

### ***1. Have you decided?***

Any basic web search for evangelistic resources leads quickly to material grounded in decision theology. I will not explore in detail the theological discussion about so-called decision theology.<sup>15</sup> It is enough for our purposes to record three impressions I have as I move around the church. Firstly, the Lutheran Church of Australia [LCA] is talking a lot about mission. Secondly, the LCA is using a lot of mission material that operates from the basis of decision theology. Thirdly, many pastors and leaders have concerns about decision theology.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Arand, "Does catechesis in the LCMS aim for the *Ars Vivendi Fide?*", *Concordia Journal* 22.1 (Jan. 1996): 57.

<sup>15</sup> Readers attention is drawn to the excellent study by the late Wilhelm Stoll, "The Conversion Theology of Billy Graham in the Light of the Lutheran Confessions", *Concordia Student Journal* Monograph series 2 (1980).

<sup>16</sup> If this is you then you will benefit from reading an excellent paper by Pastor David Bryce, the Director of Mission in the Victoria District, titled, "What must I do to be saved?"

One of the concerns with approaches to personal evangelism that are based on decision theology is that from the outset they give the impression people are neutral in their current spiritual state. They can lay a foundation of faith that is too much grounded in human activity and too little grounded in divine action. It is as though all that needs to happen for conversion is to set before people two ways of living and persuade them with sufficient conviction to follow the true way.

This ignores the reality of the bondage of the will and actually downplays the difficulty of conversion. Given the bondage of the will it is a miracle that anyone is saved. The Confessions lead us to think not so much in terms of human will in conversion but divine will. God wills that all be saved and He wills to work in people's lives through His missionary means. Our task is to bring those means to people and people to those means. Disciples are made by baptizing and teaching.

It is an excellent thing to be talking about mission. It is an excellent thing to be focussed on bringing Christ to others. It is an excellent thing to take our part in God's mission. It is a more difficult thing to develop biblical and confessional mission strategies. Such strategies need to take into account the following confessional realities:

I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel. (SC, explanation to Third Article)

Just as people who are bodily dead cannot on the basis of their own powers prepare themselves or dispose themselves to receive temporal life once again, so people who are spiritually dead in sins cannot on the basis of their own strength dispose themselves or turn themselves toward appropriate spiritual, heavenly righteousness and life, if the Son of God has not made them alive and freed them from the death of sin. (FC SD II:11)

Scripture denies to the natural human mind, heart, and will every ability, aptitude, and capacity to think anything good or proper in spiritual matters by themselves or to understand, begin, will, undertake, do, accomplish, or cooperate in them. (FC SD II:12)

Mission strategies also need to take into account the confessional direction that is offered for mission and evangelism.

Therefore on the basis of God's Word we now want to give a further account of how the human being is converted to God; how and through which means (namely, through the oral Word and the holy sacraments) the Holy Spirit desires to be active in us and to give and effect true repentance, faith and the

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Does the Lutheran Church have anything to say to the evangelist?" (available from the author).

new spiritual power and capability to do the good in our hearts; and how we should respond to such means and use them. (FC SD II:48)

It seems to me this implies that we begin our evangelistic conversation from the perspective of sacrament and Word rather than intellect and will.

## ***2. Are you baptized? Have you learnt Christ?***

When we begin our evangelistic conversations from the perspective of sacrament and Word it means we ask different evangelistic questions. We no longer train people to see their conversion in terms of “giving their life to Jesus”, “inviting Jesus into their heart”, “accepting Jesus as their personal Saviour”, or some other human activity or co-operative action which they later get confused about when they read the Scriptures and the catechisms. Rather, we work with them from a sacrament and Word perspective.

First, are you baptized? This is a primary question for the church to place on people’s agenda if it is not already there. It may be raised by asking about past church involvement. Or perhaps, like the priest I mentioned in footnote three, it may simply be placed on the public agenda by a church that promotes Baptism to the community on its promotional boards, in its school newsletters, and congregational bulletins. Disciples are made by baptizing and teaching.

- A young couple enrol their child in a Lutheran school and find a question on the enrolment form: is (name) baptized? In their pre-entry discussion with the principal and pastor the issue is talked about again and they are also gently asked, how about you, are you baptized?
- A woman calls to seek counselling. Part of the pastoral discussion is oriented to discovering if she is baptized.
- A young couple rings about a possible marriage. The pastoral discussion has in mind the need to do pre-marital guidance and to teach the Rite of Marriage, but also to discover if this young couple are baptized and what their Baptism means for their approach to marriage.

This is the key evangelistic sacramental question. Are you baptized?

There is a closely related evangelistic question. The “sacramental question” is, are you baptized? The “Word question” is, have you been catechized, have you been taught the faith, have you learnt Christ? If the answer to the sacramental question is “Yes, I’ve been baptized”, then the Word question becomes significant. It can be opened up by asking if the person has gone to Sunday School or been confirmed or whether they confess the Creed or pray the Lord’s Prayer. There is no way to plot the pathway of these evangelistic conversations except to know what our beginning and concluding points are.

At the beginning we are involved in pastoral and missiological diagnosis from a Word and Sacrament perspective for the sake of people's salvation. Every person the Lord brings across our path who is not currently baptized, or has not been taught the faith, or is not living the faith in terms of regular worship and baptismal living, is a potential catechumen. They are potential invitees to come and learn Christ, to gather together to be immersed in the Word week by week as the church teaches the faith, and to gather and walk with others to the font, or, if they are already baptized, to walk with others to admission or re-admission to the Lord's table.<sup>17</sup>

Our ultimate conclusion is that people worship, learn to listen to Scripture, pray with the church, and live baptismally in their daily lives. In all likelihood, few people we come into contact with are doing this and so we have a penultimate goal which is to invite them to learn Christ with other catechumens, with Christian sponsors, with pastors and lay catechists, and with a congregation of people praying for them and their salvation. Every contact is a potential catechumen who from now on is invited to learn Christ every time an opportunity is offered. Some will be unbaptized and uncatechized. Some will be baptized and uncatechized. Some will be baptized and catechized but in need of re-formation.

## C. BAPTISM AND CATECHESIS

### *1. The Catechumenate*

So what do we invite people to? Five years ago I joined a group of unchurched people being nurtured in the faith to study how they were taught the faith and especially how they were formed as Christian disciples. They were involved in something called the Catechumenate.<sup>18</sup>

The theory of the Catechumenate suggested it involved laity, was visible in the public worship life of the congregation, and gradually formed Christian behaviours like worship, prayer, listening to Scripture, and Baptismal living. It was therefore a compelling study for anyone with an interest in missiology.

What is the Catechumenate? One definition reads:

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<sup>17</sup> In pastoral practice I have often found that the rite of re-admission to the Lord's Supper is very helpful in working with people who have experienced a renewal of faith and ask for re-baptism. This rite enables us to work with their desire to "go public" in their re-entry to the church, but it works from a solid theological foundation of one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and from a corporate/communal understanding of church, by re-introducing them via the sacramental and confessional life of the congregation.

<sup>18</sup> This was the field component of my doctoral research and was done in a Catholic parish in Adelaide since this was the best available example to observe at that time.

The Catechumenate is an apprenticeship in the Christian faith focussing on the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It stresses the catechesis and formation of adults preparing for Baptism and involves the entire Christian community in which the Baptism takes place.<sup>19</sup>

The Catechumenate has been described as a journey. A journey into the Word, into the Christian faith, into the Christian church, in preparation for the journey into the world as a baptized child of God.<sup>20</sup> It has taken many shapes over history but I observed it in the Roman Catholic church where it goes by the name RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Significant factors for me were the involvement of laity as sponsors (and sometimes as catechists), the public nature of the journey with its small rites of blessing and prayer along the way in the context of public worship, and the formation of baptized believers who worshipped, prayed, listened to the Word, and with God's help lived baptismally.

Whenever a congregation offers instruction in the faith to people who are not baptized, it is offering a form of the Catechumenate. In one form or another every congregation does this. The key is to reflect on what we are currently doing and seek to do it better so that new Christians are nurtured and equipped for the difficult mission field they face in their daily lives.

The Catechumenate works with the unchurched or under-churched as its focus. It is focussed on a sacramental approach to mission. It aims to prepare the unbaptized for Baptism, and the baptized unchurched for admission or re-admission to the Lord's Supper. Existing members are significant in the journey, especially in terms of bridging newcomers to the church's instruction and acting as interpreters of the faith.

The group I observed had 25 people. Ten were non-members (two unbaptized, six baptized but not worshipping, 2 baptized "sporadic" worshippers). Interestingly, they came for four main reasons:

- their children were going to a Catholic school, and they as parents were encouraged to learn the faith their children were being exposed to;
- they were invited by a workmate, friend, family member, congregational leader, or the priest;

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<sup>19</sup> R. Hofstad, "Introduction to the Catechumenate", unpublished lecture (1997). See also F. Senn, "A Catechism on the Catechumenate", [http://www.worship.ca/docs/f\\_32\\_fs.html](http://www.worship.ca/docs/f_32_fs.html).

<sup>20</sup> For general introductions, read M. Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate* (Sadlier Press, 1979), and W. Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Pueblo Press, 1995). For specifically Lutheran reflections, read the Fall 1998 issue of *Lutheran Forum* titled "The Baptismal Catechumenate", and A. Pfeiffer, *The Catechumenate in Lutheran Missiology: a study of the RCIA assessing its appropriateness and usefulness in Lutheran Missiology* (1999), available from Löhe Memorial library, Luther Seminary, Adelaide.

- they had attended an Easter or Christmas service, and what they experienced led them to reflect again on the role of the Sacraments in their faith and life;
- they were on a spiritual journey and were looking for a church that didn't "dumb down" the faith in preaching, teaching, and worship.

Ten of the group were Christians acting as sponsors for those preparing for Baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>21</sup> There was a small team of laity who led various aspects of each session (e.g. opening devotion, discussions in smaller groups). There was a lay leader and a priest as part of the group. The focus of the group was the catechesis of the ten new people into the Christian faith. As part of my research I observed this group of normal Australian people for six months as they were instructed and formed in the Christian faith, baptized and/or re-admitted to the Sacrament of the Altar, and began their new life of faith.

## ***2. Formation in the Catechumenate***

The key issue for formation is the content of the Catechumenate. In the Small Catechism we have been given a special gift for evangelism. The catechism is structured in such a way that it first teaches people the core of the faith in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. Then people are taught how God brings the gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to them through Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. Finally they are prepared for daily life through daily prayer and biblical study on their life situation and calling. We know this as the Table of Duties which means the context of Baptismal living. This is where you start to live your faith.

The Catechumenate aims to develop four aspects of Baptismal living:

- regular worship with the people of God;
- listening to Scriptures;
- prayer;
- relating the Christian faith to daily life.

The Catechumenate develops this approach to Baptismal living communally. The formation of the individual flows out of the communal gathering around the Word of God, firstly in weekly teaching sessions, and then also as new people begin to join the people of God in weekly worship. Confession of faith is shaped by the faith of the church in the Creed; prayer is grounded in the Lord's Prayer; and approaches to daily life as a Christian are developed with the help of the wisdom of mature Christians.

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<sup>21</sup> Many of our members will make excellent sponsors with the confidence they gain from a little encouragement from us as their pastors and mentors in the faith.

There is no doubt that the Catechumenate had a far-reaching impact on the people I observed as far as worship, prayer, Bible reading, and daily baptismal living was concerned. People change in different ways and at different rates, but each person showed evidence of growth and change in all four aspects.

People who had not previously worshipped developed regular worship patterns. People who had not previously prayed began to pray more than just in crisis situations. Those who had been used to praying found their prayer concerns enriched and broadened. People were taught to listen to the Gospel as God's Word for them, and this strengthened their worship and also private Bible reading. Most people's lives didn't change dramatically in terms of behaviour, but all reported they now had a different worldview and different reasons for doing what they did and being who they are in their family and their workplace.

There were some specific things that helped bring about the change in people and form them in their discipleship. I'd encourage you to reflect on these four aspects as you invite others to learn Christ.

#### *a. Worship*

None of the ten people I observed worshipped regularly at the start of their catechesis, and yet nearly all were worshipping regularly by the end of the catechumenate. Some of the reasons given were these:

- The weekly teaching sessions began with the Gospel for the coming Sunday, which alerted people to the idea of the church year, to the life of Christ as central in worship, and to the coming sermon as the place where the Gospel was further explored.
- The regular brief rites associated with the catechumenate (e.g. rite of welcome, rites of blessing, rite of enrolment, rites of scrutiny, rite of Baptism and admission to the Lord's Supper) served to invite the new people gradually but regularly to worship.
- Sponsors invited those they were sponsoring to worship when they judged the time appropriate and sat with them and helped interpret for them.
- Some sermons during the catechumenate were preached specifically with the new people joining the church in mind.
- Liturgical practices in the weekly teaching sessions were consistent with practices in the Sunday liturgy; for example, invocation, prayers, Gospel reading, blessings, use of seasonal colour, choice of opening and closing hymns/songs.
- Through interaction with sponsors and leaders people came to appreciate God's work in the church through the sacraments, and their desire to receive God's blessing through the sacraments increased and deepened.



*b. Listening to Scriptures*

The Catechumenate does not focus so much on the concept of reading the Bible as on listening to the bible. This means one of the key foci is leading people to listen to God speaking to the church through the Scriptures in public worship.<sup>22</sup> This focus seems to have been very effective in also promoting change in people's personal habits of Bible reading. More often than not people spoke of beginning to read the Bible because they wanted to read what happened around the Gospel reading or because they wanted to read the Sunday readings again. In this way the communal public life of the church was effectively shaping and guiding the personal devotional life of individual Christians and there was a significant connection between the two. Reasons people gave for the change in their Bible reading patterns included these:

- The Gospel for the coming Sunday was always read as the opening of each weekly teaching session.
- The reading was always followed by one or both of these questions, "What does this mean?" and "What does this mean for you now in your own life?"
- The church gave the catechumens a Bible as a gift early in the process, and this indicated to many of them the significance of the Bible in Christian living.
- Some sponsors invited the person they were sponsoring to additional Bible study.
- The teaching session enabled people to listen to Scripture in church with understanding and to begin to read the Bible with blessing.
- The Bible was used in the sessions to model the fact that God's Word speaks to daily life.

*c. Prayer*

The people I observed also changed their approach to prayer as a result of the Catechumenate, although many indicated they had previously prayed, even though not attending worship regularly. That is consistent with statistical analyses of spirituality in Australia, which consistently shows over 60% of Australians pray in some way even if fewer than 20% attend church regularly.

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<sup>22</sup> Examples of the approach taken can be seen for example in K. Hinman-Powell and J. Sinwell, eds, *Breaking Open the Word of God: resources for using the lectionary for catechesis in the RCIA* (Paulist Press, 1986), and P. Jackson, *Breaking open the Journeybread for the Shadowlands: The readings for the Rites of the Catechumenate* (Liturgical Press, 1993).

The most significant fact reported by people with respect to prayer was their change from what one person called “disastrous prayer” to a prayer life that was broader and deeper in focus. We all pray in crises. It takes time to learn the discipline of daily prayer which prays for all the people of God in their needs and which returns to God in thanksgiving for His daily gifts.

The simplest and yet most brilliant resources we have to model prayer and teach people to pray are in our own catechism and liturgy—Luther’s morning and evening prayers, prayers for meals, the Lord’s Prayer, the Collect, and the General Prayer. These rich resources, when taught, studied, and used, can profoundly impact and shape the prayer life of individual Christians. Of course, there is also the side benefit that they begin to understand the way some of these resources are used in the liturgy.

#### *d. Baptismal Living*

We often speak of learning to relate our faith to our daily life. The significant fact emerging from the experience of the people I observed was that this didn’t refer so much to changes in patterns of behaviour (with the exception of regular worship), but to simply having a different worldview. By this they meant a different way of seeing things, a different framework for life, a different belief system to think through issues, problems, and relationship concerns. This varied from simply not worrying so much or enjoying the sense of peace about the past that comes from the forgiveness of sins, to reflecting intentionally on what it means to be a Christian in a specific place and a specific life situation like singleness or becoming elderly.

This is interesting. By most objective criteria some Australians are basically good people. They are good citizens. They support charities and volunteer for service organizations. They coach sports teams for children and youth. They treat their neighbours with respect and try to offer something back to the community. We sometimes find it hard to evangelize them because outwardly their life is much the same as ours, except for regular worship. Yet there is a difference. There is a different worldview which is shown precisely by the non participation in weekly worship. It is an issue of the first three Commandments.

The formation of Christian discipleship does not always mean people find themselves doing things in life a lot differently. However, it does mean they have a different reason for what they do. This is very closely related to the concept of Christian vocation. Christians begin to see their daily life in the family, workplace, school, community, sports club as the places where they are God’s servants to those people God brings across their path. This change in worldview from primarily self service, or even community service, to service of the living God is the result of Baptismal teaching and being a new creation in Christ.

One of the best resources we have at this point is Luther's approach to daily baptismal living which begins each day with baptismal renewal through the invocation and morning prayer, and ends each day in baptismal grace through the invocation and evening prayer.

*e. The Rite of Vocation of the Baptized*

The final rite of the Catechumenate is offered after a period of instruction following Baptism and admission to the Lord's Supper. It is called Affirmation of the Vocation of the Baptized in the World.<sup>23</sup> I mention it specifically because it highlights the point that Baptism has an outward missionary thrust. The theology and practice of Baptism keeps the church looking outward to those not yet baptized or catechised. In this final rite of the Catechumenate we see those newly baptized and catechized now being sent out themselves into the world to take their own part in God's mission by taking their place as His baptized people in the world. It is not hard to see how appropriate this rite is after a period of instruction in the final section of the Small Catechism, namely the morning and evening prayers and the Table of Duties (or the context of Christian living).

The strength of the Rite is gained from the opening address to the catechumens and the prayer.

Dear Christian friends .... It is our privilege to affirm those who are endeavouring to carry out their vocation as Christians in the world. Let us pray,

Almighty God, by the power of the Spirit you have knit these your servants into the one body of your Son Jesus Christ. Look with favour upon them in their commitment to serve in Christ's name. Give them courage, patience, and vision; and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and service to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

This is the missiological rite of the Catechumenate. The baptized are not baptized into a cloister but for service in the world, and they go out to serve the world in which God has placed them as His baptized people. This is the final link in Baptism's outward missionary thrust.

### **3. Our role in the Catechumenate**

- The Catechumenate is sacramental. It centres around Baptism and it leads people to the Lord's table.

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<sup>23</sup> *Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate* (Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 58-60.

- The Catechumenate is communal and public. As people are catechised they are also introduced to and integrated into normal congregational life.
- The Catechumenate shapes and forms a Christian life where the focus is on regular worship, listening to Scripture, prayer, and daily Baptismal living.
- The Catechumenate is useful in God's mission because it nurtures people for their daily vocation by grounding them in God's Word and God's church.

Every congregation that has any sort of "inquirer's class" or "pastor's class" is involved in a type of Catechumenate. However, to shape and form the Christian faith in people who have not previously been Christian takes the energy of the whole congregation over significant periods of time. Here are a few thought starters on the various roles the people of God can play in walking with others as God joins them to Himself and His church.

- Encourage all God's people to have such confidence in the Scriptures, the Small Catechism, and the liturgy of the church that they gladly use them in their own life and invite others to join them in doing so.
- As pastor think of every Baptism, marriage, funeral, and pastoral encounter as God-given opportunities to be in touch with people who need to learn Christ.
- Encourage school leaders to intentionally invite all new families to learn Christ.
- Pray intentionally as a congregation for those who are learning Christ for the first time.
- Identify sponsors for people learning Christ for the first time. Sponsors are not perfect Christians, they simply believe in the triune God and believe He is at work through the Lutheran Church and its teachings.
- Encourage all God's people to be learners themselves (Lk. 11:1).
- Encourage all God's people to practise the art of being Philips (Jn 1:45-46).

## CONCLUSION

Baptism has an outward missionary thrust for the church and for individual Christians. A Baptismal approach to mission keeps the church seeking the unbaptized to bring them to the font, to Christ their Saviour, who gives them forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. It also means the church is on the lookout for those who have been baptized but are not living in their Baptism before the Lord. Both need catechizing, and the church has the privilege of passing on the faith it has received.

Baptism has an outward mission thrust for individual Christians who have been baptized, catechized, and formed in Christian discipleship, because it is the fountain for their daily lives as the baptized people of God. In their daily vocations they serve Him, are faithful witnesses, and invite others to journey with them and learn Christ with them. The Catechumenate is one process of disciple-making which is inherently sacramental and oriented to the formation of such a rigorous Christian faith and life.

Whatever cap the baptized wear in daily life (and we usually wear several), we have opportunities for Baptismal living .... Ultimately the gift of Baptism is to be expressed through the lives of ordinary people .... This extraordinary gift of God is for our ordinary days. Thanks be to God.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Teig, 55-56.

**GREAT IS THE GIFT GOD GIVES:  
THE SEVEN CHRISTMAS SERMONS OF JOHANN GERHARD**

*Thomas A. Von Hagel*

**A** biblical sermon is biblical in every aspect and from every perspective. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost is biblical, not only because it is in the Bible, but because it is thoroughly saturated with the Bible. Peter preached the Old Testament and Jesus and Baptism: the Old Testament David prophesied of Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension in the New Testament, and the benefits of Jesus' life are applied to the hearers through Baptism (Acts 2:14-39). Peter's sermon is biblical because it gets to the heart of the Bible—Jesus—and gives this same Jesus to its hearers.

While Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) is, no doubt, best known as a champion of seventeenth century Lutheran Orthodoxy, he is a biblical preacher. This is clearly shown in his *Seven Christmas Sermons*. While this title of the translator identifies the liturgical locus of this little collection of sermons, the subtitle, *Scripturally-Saturated Sermons Celebrating the Birth of Christ*, reveals Gerhard's method: extensive use of Holy Scripture. In addition, this subtitle proves provocative for at least two reasons. It enkindles interest in his extensive utilization of biblical imagery and allegorical interpretation. And very much related to the first, it raises a concern: is Gerhard's overabundant use of imagery and allegory merely a literary tool, or is it theologically driven? This article will show that there is an intentional order and a theological purpose behind his literary style: it illustrates and illumines the great gift God gives.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Johann Gerhard, *Postille*, reprint, pt. 1 (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1870), 63. Johann Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons*, trans. Elmer M. Hohle (Decatur, IL: Repristination, 1996), 22. In his sermon for Pentecost 5 (also in the same *Postille* as the *Seven Christmas Sermons*), Gerhard shows both the nature and value of this gift: "If God the Lord would have known of something greater and more dear than His Son and the Holy Spirit, truly He would have given it to us out His great, incomprehensible love. God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are of one Essence and of equal majesty and glory with the Father. Therefore, in sending the Son and the Holy Spirit, we were given a gift of God Himself. That truly must be a tremendous love!" *Eleven Easter and Pentecost Sermons*, trans. Elmer M. Hohle (Decatur, IL: Repristination, 1997), 132-33.

## EPILOGUE

Gerhard published these sermons with an epilogue attached to them in his *Postille* (1613).<sup>2</sup> The publication of these *Seven Christian Sermons* within a larger assemblage of sermons intimates a closely connected collection. This is supported by Gerhard's brief epilogue. It serves not so much as a summary of the seven sermons, but rather, it provides a few, key examples which clearly illustrate his order and purpose in this short series of sermons.

At the forefront of the epilogue is the image of the Lord's brightness:

2 Cor. 3:18: **Now, then, all the Lord's brightness mirrors through us and we become transfigured into the very same image etc.;** that is, just as a mirror is able to reflect an image, so also our heart is able to reflect the knowledge of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately following, Gerhard names Caesar Augustus, Bethlehem, and the virgin Mary in a series of allegorical interpretations. Two examples will suffice:

Just as Christ was born at a time when every man acknowledged Caesar Augustus as a lord by means of taxation, so also does Christ become spiritually born in us as we acknowledge Him as our own Lord, Redeemer and Savior.<sup>4</sup>

Christ was born at Bethlehem in a "bread-house" [in Hebrew *Beth Lechem* means house of bread], so also He becomes born in a spiritual manner within us as we acknowledge Him as the Bread of Life, having a spiritual hunger for Him.<sup>5</sup>

The pattern is readily apparent. In the first, the Lord's brightness shines into the hearts of men and then reflects back to the Lord. In the two which follow, he teaches the same, only with much more figurative language. And so, Gerhard demonstrates that the Lord's brightness will be his principal image, and the plethora of other biblical images and allegorical interpretations are to be interpreted in relation to it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>*Postille*, 116-17. This epilogue is unique in that Part 1 (Advent to Pentecost) of this *Postille* includes three other series of sermons for a particular day in the church year—Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost—and yet none but the Christmas series are so appended.

<sup>3</sup>*Postille*, 116. *SCS*, 97. (Hohle's translation faithfully preserves the bold print from the original text.)

<sup>4</sup>*Postille*, 116. *SCS*, 97.

<sup>5</sup>*Postille*, 116-17. *SCS*, 97.

<sup>6</sup>In the Foreword to Part 1 of this *Postille*, Gerhard writes of the great homiletic value of the *modum docendi catecheticum* and *modum docendi mysticum*: "Wo nun jemand fragen wollte, was für eine Art zu lehren wir in dieser Postille gebraucht haben, dem geben wir zur Antwort, daß die katechetische und mystische (geheimsinnige), die siebente und zehnte Art in derselben vereinigt gebraucht sind. Ist etwas nützlich darinnen, das zur Ehre Gottes zur

The epilogue also accentuates the soteriological nature of the Incarnation:

Whoever in faith seizes this word, **The Savior is born for you today**, Christ is spiritually born in such a person. The words of faith: You are my Christ, my Savior, My Salvation-Maker.<sup>7</sup>

In this example (and the last two citations from the epilogue), the birth of Jesus is neither a heart-warming narrative only nor simply a harbinger of the real work of Jesus. Instead, Gerhard connotes that the Incarnation reveals and performs the salvific work of the Holy Trinity, albeit allegorically in this example.

These two—imagery/allegory and soteriology—are tied together: the first serving the latter. It will be shown that Gerhard’s “saturation” of these sermons with imagery and allegory is not merely a literary tool, but rather, he utilizes the image of the Lord’s brightness, along with other biblical images and allegorical interpretations, in an intentional order, to illustrate vividly the soteriological nature, the theological purpose, of Jesus’ birth.

### IMAGERY AND ALLEGORY

Biblical images and allegorical interpretations super-abound in these sermons: one after another and in multiple series. In the second sermon, Gerhard seizes upon the images surrounding Jesus’ nativity and interprets them allegorically; e.g. Jesus’ swaddling clothes are the Holy Scriptures.<sup>8</sup> Again in the second sermon, he compares the hiddenness of Jesus’ divine nature beneath His human nature to the divine gifts hidden under the common elements in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.<sup>9</sup> In the sixth sermon, he explicates a series of Isaian titles that prophesy of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> This assortment of examples is but a brief sampling of Gerhard’s employment of imagery and allegory. Nonetheless, they whet the appetite for his style and more importantly begin to show that Gerhard’s imagery and allegory are not without order, but rather, revolve around and point to Jesus and His nativity.

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Erbauung der Gottseligkeit gerichtet ist, so wolle der gottselige Leser neben mir Gott dafür danken und zu seinem Nutz gebrauchen”, *Postille*, x. See also the brief analysis of this Foreward by Erdmann R. Fischer, *The Life of John Gerhard*, trans. Richard Dinda and Elmer Hohle (Malone, TX: Repristination, 2001), 380-81.

<sup>7</sup>*Postille*, 117. *SCS*, 99.

<sup>8</sup>*Postille*, 67. *SCS*, 27.

<sup>9</sup>*Postille*, 67. *SCS*, 26-27.

<sup>10</sup>*Postille*, 100-107. *SCS*, 72-82.



*Brightness of the Lord*

Even a casual survey of these sermons shows that the brightness of the Lord is Gerhard's favourite image. It must be noted that it takes numerous forms, e.g. fire and light, inflame and shine. It occurs primarily in theophanies. And the theological use of this image is twofold: (1) it shines from God to humanity and then reflects back from humanity to God; and (2) it manifests the Law and the Gospel.

The first sermon, the commencement of all seven, begins with this divine brightness in the image of fire: the burning bush (Exodus 3) is compared with the Incarnation. Gerhard argues that the fire corresponds to Jesus' divine nature while the bush His human nature. And just as the fire did not consume the bush, so Jesus' divine nature did not consume His human nature. From a slightly different angle, the fire that entered but did not consume the bush signifies the Holy Spirit who conceived Jesus in Mary, but did not violate her virginity.<sup>11</sup> Out of both the burning bush and the Incarnation shines the brightness of the Lord:

The Lord is calling to us and admonishing us that if we want worthily and beneficially to observe these divine miracles, we should take off the shoes of unclean thoughts and draw near with bare feet, that is, with humility and sanctity. With Moses, we should also go into the wilderness; that is, we must allow worldly concerns and thoughts to travel away.<sup>12</sup>

Gerhard's use of the burning bush, an Old Testament event, in the introduction to the first sermon anticipates his method throughout these sermons: the entire Old Testament, in fact all of Scripture, is fair game for illustrations which typify the nativity of Jesus.

Gerhard also contrasts darkness and the light which is Jesus. The darkness refers to the condition of the entire world: Jesus was born "in the winter time in the darkness of night" which symbolizes the shadow of death.<sup>13</sup> The darkness also symbolizes the darkness of human reason, the heart, and love grown cold. Into these darkensses, the brightness of the Lord shines as a celestial beacon:

[Jesus] was called the **Star from Jacob** by Balaam in Num. 24.17, because He is the **bright Morning Star** in Rev. 22.16, who was born of God the Father as Light of Light, and thereafter, as He was born of Mary in the fullness of time as true man, brought forth the true light to us poor humans who sat in darkness.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Postille*, 48,100-1. *SCS*, 1-2,73.

<sup>12</sup>*Postille*, 49. *SCS*, 3.

<sup>13</sup>*Postille*, 52. *SCS*, 7. See also *SCS*, 48.

<sup>14</sup>*Postille*, 83. *SCS*, 48. See also *SCS*, 47.

This light is not without effect. It shines upon us and “simultaneously enlightens [us] to confess God and inflames us to love God.”<sup>15</sup>

In both, the brightness of the Lord is neither an arbitrary luminance nor merely a brilliant spectacle at which to marvel. Instead, it shines out of God enlightening human flesh and finally reflects back toward God from human flesh. It will also be shown that the brightness of the Lord reveals God according to the Law and the Gospel: His threats of punishment and His gracious promises.

The brightness of the Lord is singular, and yet, it is seen in contrasting fashions. On the one hand, the unshaded brightness of the Lord is much too brilliant for humanity:

Just as God may not be properly honored [glorified] apart from Christ, in the same manner there can be no true peace of heart apart from Christ. If a person wants to deal with God apart from His Son, one finds nothing but a consuming fire.<sup>16</sup>

On the other, the brightness of the Lord, properly shaded by the flesh and blood of the Incarnation, can be gazed upon and appreciated, for from Jesus “shines forth the friendliness of God”.<sup>17</sup> Apart from Jesus in His nativity, fallen man cannot endure the brightness of the Lord. Covered, though, with the flesh and blood received from Mary, the brightness of the Lord is toned down, it is warm and comforting. According to Gerhard, the brightness of the Lord is Law apart from Jesus, but emanating from Jesus it is Gospel. And this light of the Gospel which emanates from the flesh and blood of Jesus shines upon and into the flesh and blood of humanity, and then out of the same in their Christian lives, like unto Jesus:

In the same way, and even much more, we would have been terrified if, without means, this divine Light had appeared to us, especially since it is the kind of light to which **to man can come near** (1 Tim. 6:16). That’s why this Light clothes itself and conceals itself in our flesh and blood, as in a lantern, so that it then might be carried by us.<sup>18</sup>

This Law-Gospel portrayal of the brightness of the Lord is manifest also in angelic beings. Gerhard notes numerous biblical examples wherein the brightness of the Lord shining through angels exceedingly frightens their human audience: the cherubim wielding a sword of fiery flames before the Garden of Eden, the angelic host before the shepherds outside of Bethlehem, and the fiery horses and carriages before Jacob.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, humanity is

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<sup>15</sup>*Postille*, 52. *SCS*, 7.

<sup>16</sup>*Postille*, 76. *SCS*, 39.

<sup>17</sup>*Postille*, 67. *SCS*, 26. See also *SCS*, 18-19.

<sup>18</sup>*Postille*, 82-83. *SCS*, 48.

<sup>19</sup>*Postille*, 58-59, 63, 70. *SCS*, 15-16, 21, 31.

shielded from this overwhelming brilliance with the precious words of divine comfort:

Thereupon follows the angel's sermon. To begin with he says to the shepherds: Do not be fearful. The brightness had frightened them; that's why the angel consoles them again. Just as God gladly comforts the shattered and humble hearts, so also the angels do the same thing.<sup>20</sup>

One theme stands out: the intimate relation between the Law and the Gospel in regard to the brightness of the Lord. In both, the brightness of the Lord is too much for fallen humanity. In both, the brightness of the Lord is muted by the Word—in the first the Incarnate Word, and the spoken Word in the second—and favourably received by humanity. The brightness of the Lord is Law and Gospel.

In sum, the brightness of the Lord is most graciously revealed to fallen humanity in the nativity of Jesus. It brings light to a darkened world. It comforts and consoles a sinful people. It reflects back from an enlightened people toward God. And all of this because the brightness of the Lord has shone forth from the flesh and blood of Jesus, born of the virgin Mary.

### *Virgin Mary*

Gerhard does not ignore Mary in his *Seven Christmas Sermons*, but rather, she is oft mentioned. Mary carried the Son of God under her virginal heart; her virginity is unspoilt; and she is an esteemed saint.<sup>21</sup> Gerhard, though, is not interested in Mariology. Instead, he utilizes a variety of Marian images which further shed light upon the mystery of Jesus' nativity.

In his first sermon, Gerhard reels off a list of Old Testament images which typify the virgin Mary: the budding of Aaron's rod, Gideon's fleece and the morning dew, the unconsumed burning bush, the torn rock, and the forming of Adam from the then uncursed soil.<sup>22</sup> He is not concerned only with literary flair, but rather, he shows that the virgin birth of Jesus to Mary is the fulfilment of the promise first made to Eve in the Garden of Eden:

All which denote that Christ was to be born of a virgin. That's why in the first promise in Gen. 3:15 He is called a Seed **of the woman**—to indicate that He was not to be born of the blood of mankind nor of flesh, but that He Himself would prepare the temple of His body out of the sanctified and cleansed blood of Mary.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>*Postille*, 63. *SCS*, 21. "This is to be a light of joy and happy brightness, not a consuming fire", *SCS*, 22. See also *SCS*, 16-17.

<sup>21</sup>*Postille*, 52; 48, 75, 100-1; 108. *SCS*, 7-8; 2, 38, 73; 83.

<sup>22</sup>*Postille*, 54-55. *SCS*, 10-11.

<sup>23</sup>*Postille*, 55. *SCS*, 10-11.

The virgin birth is not an end in and of itself. Instead, it serves the first promise, the Gospel.

Gerhard depicts Mary with additional biblical imagery. Despite the apparent contradiction, he emphasizes on numerous occasions the intriguing truth that Mary is simultaneously virgin and mother.<sup>24</sup> The purpose of such terminology is not cleverness, but rather, theological: she symbolizes the church and Jesus. Concerning the former, Mary is like unto the church who is “a virgin, for she does not live in sin with the Devil through idolatry; a mother, for she daily conceives children of God the Lord (Gal. 4.27)”.<sup>25</sup> Concerning the latter, the mystery of Mary being both virgin and mother parallels the mystery of Jesus being both God and man.<sup>26</sup> In addition, a third parallel exists: faith in the human heart that believes that Mary is both virgin and mother, and that Jesus is God and man.<sup>27</sup> For Gerhard, the apparent contradiction of Mary’s virgin birth is an historical event and a doctrine which supplements and parallels others, particularly the nativity of Jesus. And consistent with the image of the brightness of the Lord, this mystery reflects back toward God through the Christian’s faith.

In sum, Gerhard surrounds Mary with numerous images and allegories. The emphasis is clearly upon the role of her virginity in the birth of Jesus. This should be expected in light of the context: Christmas. At the same time and of great import, all of these Marian images point to Jesus. All of this is for the single purpose of salvation: the birth of Jesus is necessary for the salvation of the entire world, including the virgin who gives birth to Him.<sup>28</sup>

### *Others*

Gerhard’s utilization of biblical images and allegorical interpretations seems endless. He employs great variety, but there is clearly a concerted effort that image after allegory illumine the nativity of Jesus.

Gerhard utilizes Caesarian imagery in both the epilogue and the first sermon. In the former, he compares the lordship of the two. In the latter, he likens the relation between their kingdoms, power, establishment of peace, and taxation (or lack thereof).<sup>29</sup> The lesser always points to the greater: Caesar to Jesus. With an allegorical interpretation, Gerhard demonstrates that God’s hand is similarly at work in both:

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<sup>24</sup>Gerhard notes that the twelfth century abbot and mystic, Bernard of Clairvaux, spoke of Mary in this fashion. *Postille*, 75, 100. *SCS*, 38, 73.

<sup>25</sup>*Postille*, 55. *SCS*, 11.

<sup>26</sup>*Postille*, 75, 100. *SCS*, 38, 73.

<sup>27</sup>*Postille*, 75, 100. *SCS*, 38, 73.

<sup>28</sup>*Postille*, 108. *SCS*, 83.

<sup>29</sup>*Postille*, 49-51. *SCS*, 4-6.

That Christ was born under this powerful caesar occurred because He was the Son of the almighty God and wanted to call the entire world to the fellowship of His spiritual kingdom. ... By the fact that He also wanted to be born during such a peaceful time, He thereby indicates that He is the true **Prince of peace** (Isa. 9:6).<sup>30</sup>

Caesar is predominately mentioned, but he is not the main character. He is overshadowed by Jesus.

In these sermons, Gerhard provides variable allegorical interpretations for a particular biblical image. Caesar's tax registration can be interpreted in two fashions. It contrasts the temporal Caesar who taxes his citizens with the eternal King who has come to remove all debts, but also, the registration for tax parallels those whose names are "registered in the Book of Life".<sup>31</sup> Again, the shepherds typify the Arch-Shepherd and these "poor shepherds" symbolize the recipients of the benefits of Jesus' birth.<sup>32</sup> And again, the manger in which Jesus is born is an allegory of the church,<sup>33</sup> and in addition, the manger is the location wherein post-Genesis three life begins to be restored to pre-Genesis three life:

As the mother was to give birth, she was directed away from the place of human habitation to a stall which had been built for mindless cattle, in order that through His birth, this little Child might bring us—who because of are likened to irrational cattle in Psalm 49:21 [v. 20 in English Bible]—our proper dwelling in the heavenly Paradise.<sup>34</sup>

In sum, there are many components to the story of Jesus' nativity: Caesar and tax registration, shepherds and manger. According to Gerhard, none are greater than the story, but none are unimportant. Each plays an integral role literally and allegorically, while the latter is a bit more interesting and greatly assists in helping to unravel the mystery of the Incarnation.

### *Summary*

The breadth of the biblical imagery and allegorical interpretation in these sermons is not only vast, but delightful and, of greatest import, impeccably ordered. The brightness of the Lord first mentioned in the epilogue is reiterated repeatedly and in many variations throughout these sermons. Be it a fire or a star, bare or shaded, the brightness of the Lord is Jesus and no other. This divine light shines upon sinful humans and then reflects back toward God.

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<sup>30</sup>*Postille*, 50. SCS, 5.

<sup>31</sup>*Postille*, 51. SCS, 6.

<sup>32</sup>*Postille*, 62-63. SCS, 20-21.

<sup>33</sup>"Die Krippe ist die christliche Kirche." *Postille*, 67. SCS, 27.

<sup>34</sup>*Postille*, 56-57. SCS, 13.

This depiction of the brightness of the Lord determines Gerhard's choice and shapes his utilization of other images and allegories. Numerous Old Testament images typify the virgin. Because she bears the divine light and provides the flesh and blood that shade the brightness of the Lord so that the human eye can endure its brilliance, Holy Writ cannot remain silent literally or allegorically concerning Mary's role. Similarly, his allegorical interpretations of Caesar, the manger, and the like reveal nothing but Jesus, the brightness of the Lord. For Gerhard, biblical images from throughout the Bible are to be interpreted allegorically in light of the nativity of Jesus.

With this great wealth of images, Gerhard portrays the great gift God gives. The gift is Jesus, and for this reason, the Gospel clearly predominates in these images and allegories. And so, Gerhard's use of imagery and allegory is not only ordered, but purposeful. It shines upon the historical event of Jesus' nativity **and** it illumines the theological nature of the nativity of Jesus: soteriology.

### **SOTERIOLOGY**

This intense focus upon Jesus exposes Gerhard's penchant for salvation. The nativity of Jesus is not an isolated event in his life, and it is not devoid of salvific content. Instead, Jesus' nativity plays an integral role in the life of Jesus **and** Christian soteriology.<sup>35</sup> He shows the chronological relation between Jesus' nativity and cross: the former precedes and ultimately leads to the latter. At the same time and much more at the very heart of these sermons, he delineates the soteriological nature of Jesus' nativity. Gerhard does not intend to belittle the value of Jesus' cross, but rather, to see the full soteriological nature of his nativity in these Christmas sermons. This will be shown according to Gerhard's treatment of Jesus' three births.

#### ***First and Second Births***

Gerhard compares and contrasts Jesus' first and second births: His first birth occurs without a mother, while His second without a Father; the first is incomprehensible; and yet, the second is a great mystery.<sup>36</sup> This directly references the two natures in Christ. According to His divine nature He is eternally begotten of the Father, and to His mother He is born temporally according to His human nature. The two natures are distinct, yet intimately connected in the man Jesus according to the "communication of attributes".

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<sup>35</sup>Prior to these sermons in Sacred Meditation 15 (1606), Gerhard described various saving benefits of Christ's Incarnation, *Sacred Meditations*, trans. C.W. Heisler (Decatur, IL: Repristination, 1998), 82-86.

<sup>36</sup>*Postille*, 111. *SCS*, 88.

For Gerhard, this christological doctrine as it relates to Jesus' nativity is not doctrinaire, but rather, salvific in scope, and so, is crisply enunciated in these sermons.

In a very general fashion, Gerhard notes a number of correlations between the nativity of Jesus and humanity. Jesus' birth is for the good of humanity: Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, is the good gift God gives.<sup>37</sup> And in the second, third, and fifth sermons, he contends that all of the merits of Jesus' birth redound to the benefit of humanity.<sup>38</sup> The nativity of Jesus is not simply a precursor of his salvific work upon the cross, but is itself the bearer of divine grace.

Much more specifically, Gerhard demonstrates explicitly how salvation is given to humanity through the nativity of Jesus. It is a matter of common flesh and blood: just as the sons of Jacob could not kill Joseph, their own flesh and blood, how much more will Jesus shower grace upon those with whom He shares the same.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the birth of Jesus, not only unites His divine and human natures, but unites God and humanity. This is the means by which humanity becomes connected with God and God sanctifies humanity.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Christ became man so that humanity may become like God:

Into His assumed human nature, Christ at the same time placed the fullness of divine grace and truth. If it is to benefit us, then we must partake of the selfsame fullness; that takes place through faith (Joh. 1:16). The Lord Christ became man in order that we men might become partakers of the divine nature; if that is to occur, then we must believe.<sup>41</sup>

In sum, Jesus' divine (first) and human (second) births work in unison to bring salvation from God to humanity. The two are distinct, and yet, they are not disjunct. The second birth of Jesus conjoins His human nature with the divine nature of His first birth. In this temporal event, the eternal Son of God becomes the temporal son of Mary. The conjoining that takes place in this great mystery restores the original and favourable relation between God and humanity. It re-sanctifies human flesh and blood. And it refurbishes humanity so that the image of God shines upon humanity and once again reflects back to God the divine image. In His nativity, Jesus is the great gift God gives.

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<sup>37</sup>*Postille*, 63. *SCS*, 22.

<sup>38</sup>*Postille*, 64, 69, 93. *SCS*, 22, 30, 62.

<sup>39</sup>*Postille*, 64. *SCS*, 23.

<sup>40</sup>*Postille*, 64-65. *SCS*, 23.

<sup>41</sup>*Postille*, 65. *SCS*, 24. This relation between God and man is mentioned in the early fathers, e.g. Irenaeus and Athanasius. The Eastern Orthodox stresses this relation in the doctrine of *theosis*. And Martin Luther also addresses this perspective in his Johannine commentary.

### ***Third Birth***

Following the first two births of Jesus is a third: it is spiritual.<sup>42</sup> Gerhard describes this birth like unto Jesus taking up residence in the Christian life or the virginal Christian life becoming betrothed to her divine groom.<sup>43</sup> This spiritual birth of Jesus takes place in the hearts of Christians, but is intimately connected with the other two births. He parallels Jesus' spiritual birth with His eternal and temporal births, as cited from the German mystic, John Tauler:

In this very birth the eternal Father remained in Him in essential Oneness, and went out of Him in differentiation of Person. Thus, in the spiritual birth an exit has to take place, yes, a passage out of oneself and over oneself; for only the pure mind of God is to remain, to serve only Him and to give place only to Him, so that He may accomplish His work within you, and for this work to abide in you without hindrance. —Also, as Christ was born around midnight, when everything was quiet, so also you should be silent in order for this Word to be spoken within you and to be heard by you. —Mary, the mother of the physical birth, was a virgin; so you must denounce the Devil and your flesh to never again live in sin with them. Mary was a betrothed virgin; so also you must sink your wavering will into His divine will, which is unmoveable.<sup>44</sup>

And he collimates Jesus' third birth with His second by paraphrasing the same: both are preceded by the working of the Holy Spirit, the message of angels, and God's direction; both are followed by praise to God, growth of Jesus, and persecution.<sup>45</sup> And so, Jesus is the great gift God gives into the hearts of Christians.

### ***Summary***

Jesus' three births—eternal, temporal, and spiritual—are soteriological. The first birth reveals the divine Saviour: the Son of God. The second reveals the human Saviour: the Son of Mary. The second birth answers the how and the why that this divine Saviour enters the world: He bears flesh and blood to save flesh and blood. It shows that there are not two Saviours, but one. And

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<sup>42</sup>Throughout these sermons, Gerhard writes of a general spiritual birth of Jesus in the Christian life, *Postille*, 52, 53, 96, 108. *SCS*, 7, 8, 66, 83. Prior to these sermons, in Meditation 13 (1606), Gerhard wrote of the spiritual marriage of the soul with Christ according to numerous biblical images, e.g. wedding in Cana and marriage garments, *Sacred Meditations*, 71-75. Following these sermons, Fisher notes that Gerhard retracted this imagery when it was abused by Herman Rathmann of Danzig, *The Life of John Gerhard*, 250-51.

<sup>43</sup>*Postille*, 56. *SCS*, 12. Concerning the latter, see Sacred Meditation 14, *Sacred Meditations*, 76-77.

<sup>44</sup>*Postille*, 112. *SCS*, 89.

<sup>45</sup>*Postille*, 112-16. *SCS*, 89-95.



the third birth demonstrates that the first two births are not sterile and unrelated, but rather, together they bear salvation and deliver this salvation into the hearts of human beings. Through this third birth, Christians participate in and receive the benefits of the first two. In the birth of Jesus, human beings receive nothing more and nothing less than the great gift God gives: Jesus, the brightness of the Lord which is mercifully shaded by flesh and blood.

### CONCLUSION

In this brief homiletic series, Gerhard masterfully weaves together style and substance. Biblical imagery saturates these sermons, and it always serves the nativity of Jesus. The allegories are not a lesson in hermeneutics, but proclaim the Gospel. His copious biblical images and allegorical interpretations are intentionally ordered around the brightness of the Lord. The brightness of the Lord is Jesus and all of the other images and allegories defer to this divine brightness. The brightness of the Lord illuminates the theological purpose of these sermons: Jesus' nativity is salvific. The former serves the latter: the brightness of the Lord is a beacon unto the soteriological nature of Jesus' birth.

These two—imagery/allegory and soteriology—and their intimate relation create a structural and theological unity in these sermons. In content, they are orthodox, but they are certainly not dead. Instead, they are a biblical and spiritual preaching of the Gospel, the nativity of Jesus:

Whoever in faith seizes this word, The Savior is born for you today, Christ is spiritually born in such a person. The words of faith: You are my Christ, my Savior, My Salvation-Maker. Whoever honors God, experiences peace in his heart and finds all his pleasure in this little Jesus. In such a person Christ is spiritually born.<sup>46</sup>

Johann Gerhard is a biblical preacher after the order of Peter: he gives to his hearers Jesus, the great gift God gives.

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<sup>46</sup>*Postille*, 117. SCS, 99.

***SIMUL JUSTUS ET PECCATOR:***  
**DID LUTHER AND THE CONFESSIONS GET PAUL RIGHT?\***

*Thomas M. Winger*

Many years ago I undertook an extensive investigation of the “priesthood of all believers” as this idea appears in the Scriptures and in Luther. Many of my discoveries were surprising, but one of the most unexpected was that Luther never used the popular phrase, “the priesthood of all believers”. Neither did he ever write “the universal priesthood”, and he only rarely used the expression “the royal priesthood”. In fact, the only phrases he commonly used were “the spiritual priesthood” and “the common priesthood”. More often he simply made statements like: “we are all alike priests.”<sup>1</sup>

This example reminds us of the dangers lurking within popular phrases, and we must be aware of these dangers when we approach the slogan that means so much to Lutheran theology: *simul justus et peccator*. We certainly cannot underestimate its importance. In my opinion, this single phrase encapsulates the uniqueness of Lutheran theology as well as any other. In its essence, it is rejected by Reformed and Roman Catholic theologians to either side of us. In 1998, on the eve of the completion of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, the papal see issued a statement declaring why they could not sign the declaration. Among their reasons were that *JDDJ* came too close to expressing Luther’s hated *simul justus et peccator* idea.<sup>2</sup>

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\* This essay is the English version of a lecture first presented in Dresden, Germany, to the East District Pastors’ Conference of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK), 8 September 2004: “Die Paulusrezeption in den Bekenntnisschriften unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des *simul justus et peccator*”. The conference addressed Volker Stolle’s controversial book *Luther und Paulus*, in which he proposes that the Lutheran Church’s doctrine of justification is inconsistent with Paul, following the so-called “New Perspective”.

<sup>1</sup> The German phrases are, respectively: *das Priestertum aller Gläubigen, das allgemeine Priestertum, das königliche Priestertum; das geistliche Priestertum, das gemeine Priestertum, wir sind alle gleich Priester*. For the data see my STM thesis, “The Priesthood of all the Baptized: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation” (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1992, unpublished), chapter three. This chapter was published separately in *Lutheran Theological Review* 4.1 (Spring/Summer 1992): 129-56. My conclusion is confirmed by Brian A. Gerrish, “Luther on Priesthood and Ministry”, *Church History* 34 (1965): 421 n. 26; and more recently by Timothy Wengert, “The Priesthood of All Believers and Other Pious Myths” ([http://wwwstage.valpo.edu/ils/documents/05\\_wengert.pdf](http://wwwstage.valpo.edu/ils/documents/05_wengert.pdf)): 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Cassidy comments deftly in his letter to the general secretary of the LWF: “the Catholic response does not state that the relative condemnation of Trent remains, but that it is difficult to see how in the present presentation the doctrine on ‘simul iustus et peccator’ is not touched by the anathemas of the Tridentine decree on original sin and justification.” Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, “The Vatican and JDDJ”, *Logia* 11.1 (Epiphany 2002): 59.

Though the pope could accept that Christians “sin”, he simply could not accept that Christians “are sinners”. Only when both parties accepted the Roman church’s “Annexe”, which softened the Lutheran character of the declaration, could the pope allow representatives of his church to sign it. Even today, *simul justus et peccator* serves as a Shibboleth of the Lutheran confession.

For this reason it is quite surprising to discover that this phrase appears nowhere in the Book of Concord. So if my task were merely to explain its use in the Confessions, we could all go to coffee early! But, of course, what matters most is not the words themselves but the idea they represent, and the idea is most certainly found in the confessional writings of our church. In fact, I think it is a hermeneutical key that unlocks our Confessions at their most critical moments: the nature of man and original sin, Baptism, justification, repentance and absolution, and lifelong regeneration. Without the *simul* doctrine Christian theology falls into a moralism that is the modern-day equivalent of scholastic semi-Pelagianism. Salvation is then reduced to a process of improvement in which God and man each contributes his share, and man’s progress is measured against a scale of ever-increasing holiness. But such mathematics are incompatible with Scriptural (and therefore Lutheran) theology, which sees man as totally lost and Christ as totally Saviour.

But if *simul justus et peccator* does not appear in our beloved Book of Concord, how did it come to such prominence in our vocabulary? It is important that we answer this question before we proceed, and so we must dwell for a few moments on Luther. For he is indeed the author of this phrase, but he uses it more rarely and more diversely than we may have expected.

### EARLY USES IN LUTHER

The first clear use of *simul justus et peccator* language occurs in Luther’s early lectures on Romans (1515)—and this fact is extremely important for locating the Scriptural foundation of the idea. Surprisingly, though, it is not in his discussion of chapter seven that the phrase first occurs, but in his comments on Romans 4:7-8, which itself is a quotation of Psalm 32:1-2.

Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven [ἀφέθησαν; *remissae*], and whose sins are covered [ἐπεκαλύφθησαν]; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon [οὐ μὴ λογίσηται; *non inputabit*] his sin.

It is from the very nature of the words “forgiven”, “covered”, and “not imputed” that *simul justus et peccator* arises. For all three verbs imply that the sin remains, but that the sinner is no longer guilty for it. Each describes

God's dealings with sin with a different image. "Forgiven" in the context of the Old Testament is cultic language. It evokes an image of sacrifice, by which the blood of an animal (which foreshadows the blood of Christ) is shed to pay for the sin of man. The connotations of the verb ἐπικαλύπτω "to cover" are similar, for it translates כָּפַר, commonly used in the Old Testament for "covering sin with the blood of a sacrifice". As far as God is concerned, the sin is now blotted out, invisible, paid for, but its effects have certainly not been removed from before man's eyes. The second image, conveyed by the verb λογίζομαι "to reckon", is either financial or legal. It conveys the idea that the debt has been cancelled or that the punishment for the crime has been suspended. In both cases it is clear that the change has taken place not in the sinner but in God and in His "accounts". Thus it is clear that man has been declared righteous even though he does not appear to be righteous in himself.

Now we need finally to hear how Luther draws a picture of the Christian out of this description of justification. It is a long quotation, but it is worth hearing in full:

Thus in ourselves we are sinners, and yet through faith we are righteous by God's imputation. For we believe Him who promises to free us, and in the meantime we strive that sin may not rule over us but that we may withstand it until He takes it from us.

It is similar to the case of a sick man who believes the doctor who promises him a sure recovery and in the meantime obeys the doctor's order in the hope of the promised recovery and abstains from those things which have been forbidden him, so that he may in no way hinder the promised return to health or increase his sickness until the doctor can fulfill his promise to him. Now is this sick man well? The fact is that he is both sick and well at the same time. He is sick in fact, but he is well because of the sure promise of the doctor, whom he trusts and who has reckoned him as already cured, because he is sure that he will cure him; for he has already begun to cure him and no longer reckons to him a sickness unto death. In the same way Christ, our Samaritan, has brought His half-dead man into the inn to be cared for, and He has begun to heal him, having promised him the most complete cure unto eternal life, and He does not impute his sins, that is, his wicked desires, unto death, but in the meantime in the hope of the promised recovery He prohibits him from doing or omitting things by which his cure might be impeded and his sin, that is, his concupiscence, might be increased. Now, is he perfectly righteous? No, for he is at the same time both a sinner and a righteous man [*Non, Sed simul peccator et Iustus*]; a sinner in fact, but a righteous man by the sure imputation and promise of God that He will continue to deliver him from sin until He has completely cured him. And thus he is entirely healthy in hope, but in fact he is still a sinner; but he has the beginning of righteousness, so that he continues more and more always to seek it, yet he realizes that he is always unrighteous. (AE 25:260; WA 56:272; cf. WA 57:165<sup>12</sup>)

Do we have here a full and clearly “Lutheran” exposition of justification? We have learnt in recent years to discern an historical development in Luther’s theology. He does not get the Gospel completely clear with all its implications in just one moment. In this early excerpt from Luther’s 1515 Romans lectures we find a lot of clear Gospel in which to rejoice. Luther has drawn the sickness analogy from Augustine, who thought of justification as a lifelong process of renewal in which God is the only actor. What is new and improved in Luther is the clear emphasis on the word of promise, and the need for trust in that promise.<sup>3</sup> But while we have both *peccator* and *justus* here, it is the *simul* that is weak. Still relying on Augustine, Luther sees the Christian as **partly** sinner and **partly** saint, in the middle of a lifelong process of renewal, getting better every day. This interpretation is confirmed by Luther’s comment on Romans 3:21, “And thus we are partly righteous, but not wholly so” (AE 25:247; WA 56:259). Although man is still mostly a sinner, God declares him righteous because He foresees what He will make him to be. This idea is not new; it is thoroughly rooted in scholastic thinking. And in this scheme we rarely hear of the external righteousness of Christ which is accounted to us completely.

Between 1515 and 1519, as Luther was at his most creative in rediscovering the Gospel, we find various forms of our phrase popping up repeatedly. His understanding of imputed justification in Romans 4 leads him to read Romans 7 quite naturally as a description of the Christian’s twofold existence. In his gloss on Romans 7:16 we read: “Therefore I am at the same time a sinner and a righteous man [*Ideo simul sum peccator et Iustus*], for I do evil and I hate the evil which I do” (AE 25:63; WA 56:70<sup>9-10</sup>). The sinful flesh and the spiritual, inner man are interpreted by analogy to the two natures in Christ. By way of a sort of *communicatio idiomatum* “communication of attributes”, the whole Christian man can be called at one moment “sinner” and at another moment “saint”, “for one and the same man is spiritual and carnal, righteous and a sinner, good and evil” (AE 25:332; WA 56:343). Commenting in 1519 on Galatians 5:22, which seems to say that Christians do not sin, Luther interprets it as an utter paradox:

a man is righteous and holy and does not sin insofar as he walks in the Spirit; but insofar as he is still prompted by lusts, he is a sinner and carnal. Therefore he has sin in his flesh, and his flesh sins; but he himself does not sin. ... All the saints, therefore, have sin and are sinners; yet no one of them sins (AE 27:372; WA 2:591).

Paradoxical though it is, Luther must say it because Paul does.

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<sup>3</sup> See Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 76-77.

### LATER USES IN LUTHER

It is in his later, monumental commentary on Galatians (1535), however, that he finally escapes from Augustine, and confesses *simul justus et peccator* more evangelically. Here the saintliness of the Christian is no longer merely begun or hoped for, but a reality to be found in Christ. Commenting on the faith of Abraham by which, Paul says in Galatians 3:6, he was reckoned to be righteous, Luther concludes:

Thus a Christian man is righteous and a sinner at the same time [*simul iustus et peccator*], holy and profane, an enemy of God and a child of God. None of the sophists will admit this paradox, because they do not understand the true meaning of justification. ... We, on the other hand, teach and comfort an afflicted sinner this way: "Brother, it is impossible for you to become so righteous in this life that your body is as clear and spotless as the sun. You still have spots and wrinkles (Eph. 5:27), and yet you are holy." But you say: "How can I be holy when I have sin and am aware of it?" "That you feel and acknowledge sin—this is good. Thank God, and do not despair. It is one step toward health when a sick man admits and confesses his disease." "But how will I be liberated from sin?" "Run to Christ, the Physician, who heals the contrite of heart and saves sinners. Believe in Him. If you believe, you are righteous, because you attribute to God the glory of being almighty, merciful, truthful, etc. You justify and praise God. In short, you attribute divinity and everything to Him. And the sin that still remains in you is not imputed but is forgiven for the sake of Christ, in whom you believe and who is perfectly righteous in a formal sense. His righteousness is yours; your sin is His." (AE 26:232; WA 40<sup>1</sup>:368)

The good that Luther has learnt from Augustine is still there, but much has fallen away. His use of *simul justus et peccator* is now more comforting and more Christocentric. Most importantly, we note again that **it is a necessary consequence of a correct understanding of justification.**

Now, it is still possible for the mature Luther to speak of saint and sinner in different ways. He can still speak of man being "partly saint" and "partly sinner". But he no longer views Christian life as a simple, mathematical progression from one end of the spectrum to the other, nor is this progress seen as part of justification. His older Augustinian view has been overwhelmed by his rediscovery of Christ. So, for example, he writes on Galatians 5:16:

And so if we look at the flesh, we are sinners; if we look at the Spirit, we are righteous. We are partly sinners and partly righteous. Yet our righteousness is more abundant than our sin, because the holiness and the righteousness of Christ, our Propitiator, vastly surpasses the sin of the entire world. Consequently, the forgiveness of sins, which we have through Him, is so great, so abundant, and so infinite that it easily swallows up every sin,

provided that we persevere in faith and hope toward Him. (AE 27:68; WA 40<sup>II</sup>:85-86)

Luther's immeasurably high regard for Christ will not allow him to say that we are **equally** saint and sinner, for Christ always outweighs sin. Only in this sense can the Christian be called "partly sinner" and "partly saint". Otherwise, Luther in his later years insists on the paradoxical language of totality. These words from his 3<sup>rd</sup> *Antinomian Disputation* (1538) may be regarded as vintage Luther: "For this is true, that according to the divine reckoning we are in fact and totally righteous, even though sin is still present. ... So we are in fact [at the same time] and altogether sinners" (WA 39<sup>I</sup>:563<sup>13</sup>-564<sup>4</sup>).<sup>4</sup>

### INTO THE CONFESSIONS

We have established, then, that *simul justus et peccator* is an essential part of the Reformation breakthrough, and therefore well established in Luther's theology before the first confessional writing is produced in 1529. Why, then, does this phrase not appear in the Confessions? One answer is that although the phrase appears frequently in Luther's writings between 1515 and 1519, it mostly disappears again until 1535. In other words, in 1529 and 1530, when the first confessional writings are produced, this phrase is not on the tip of his tongue, so to speak. However, it would be a serious mistake to conclude that the idea has lost prominence. What has happened is that it has matured from a slogan that appears in certain exegetical contexts to become an integral part of all Lutheran thinking. At the same time, it is important to note that *simul justus et peccator* as an idea in the Confessions is not simply based on Romans 7. We have seen that it never was exclusively derived from Romans 7 in Luther's thought. In the various writings of the Book of Concord we find that it has a much broader Scriptural and theological foundation.

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<sup>4</sup> English translation from Lohse, 263. Lohse, unfortunately, does not clearly see the differences between Luther's early and later understanding of this phrase. Lowell Green, *How Melancthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications), 148 & 244, concurs with my judgement:

Luther's familiar paradox, *simul justus et peccator*, which had the content of an "analytic" justification twenty years previously, now received a new meaning. Then the believer was sinful in reality but perfect in the hope of future perfection. Now the believer is sinful in the eyes of the world (active righteousness), but through divine justification and in the eyes of God he is really justified and without sin here and now (passive righteousness), so that he does not have an evil conscience but knows that he is fully and unconditionally justified in the sight of God. (244)

Before we pursue the various uses of the idea in the Confessions, it is important to establish a parallel distinction made in the first article of the Formula of Concord. For just as some exegetes today have had difficulty imagining how the Christian can simultaneously be saint and sinner, so also there were those in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who misunderstood how man could be both a sinner and a creation of God. If man's nature is created by God, can original sin be part of that nature? If so, then is not God the author of sin? The Formula responds by affirming, firstly, that even after the Fall, human nature remains God's creation.

<sup>38</sup> These passages [of Scripture cited above] indicate clearly that even after the Fall God is man's creator who creates body and soul for him. ... In the exposition of the First Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism we confess, "I believe that God has created *me* and all that exists, that he has given me and still sustains my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses." ... It is of course true that this creature and handiwork of God has been miserably corrupted by sin, for the dough out of which God forms and makes man has been corrupted and perverted in Adam and is transmitted to us in this condition. ... <sup>41</sup> If there were no difference whatever between the nature and essence of our body and soul (which are corrupted by original sin) and original sin itself (by which our nature is corrupted), we should be compelled to conclude: Either that, since God is the creator of this our nature, he has created and made original sin, which thus would also become his handiwork and creature; or that, since the devil is the author of sin, Satan is the creator of our nature, our body and soul, which would also necessarily have to be Satan's handiwork or creature if our corrupted nature were unqualifiedly identical with sin itself. Both conclusions are contrary to the first article of our Christian faith. (FC SD I:38-41)

The Formula's conclusion is vital: when we say that we are "by nature sinful and unclean", we do not mean to say that sin has become a part of the human essence. We must distinguish sharply between man as a creation of God, and the sin which infects creation.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, sin is an infection which runs so deeply through man that it cannot be removed except through the grace of God in Christ. So also when we say *simul justus et peccator*, we are forbidden by article one of the Formula to understand ourselves to be "sinner" in an essential way. To say that the Christian is totally sinner is not to deny that he has been totally recreated in Christ. We are simply emphasizing that we remain "sinner" insofar as we remain in this world and in this flesh. Only God can remove the *peccator*, and He has pledged to do so only through the death of the body and the resurrection unto eternal life.

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<sup>5</sup> On this distinction, see Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 44-48.



This, incidentally, is why Luther in the Large Catechism considers “the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting” to be part of the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification, “making holy” (LC II:37, 58-59).

### **DOES SIN REMAIN AFTER BAPTISM?**

But it is the **first** death and resurrection to which we must now turn: Holy Baptism. For it is in relationship to Baptism that the question first arises of whether the Christian remains a sinner. The Augsburg Confession is initially very cautious on this matter:

<sup>1</sup> It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers’ wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit. (AC II:1-2)

The Confutation finds this last sentence rather ambiguous.<sup>6</sup> Do the Lutherans mean to say that original sin is removed through the rebirth of Baptism, or that it simply no longer condemns? They raise this question because Luther’s teaching that original sin remains after Baptism had previously been condemned.

This was no storm in a teacup. Although the Augustana had not directly addressed this question, it had used rather strong terms to describe original sin. This was quite deliberate. For the Reformation not only magnified Christ, it also magnified sin. Puny sin, puny Saviour. Big sin, big Saviour. The two go together. Luther had been trained in the *via moderna*, the Occamist tradition that exalted man’s natural spiritual powers, and diminished sin to a petty annoyance.<sup>7</sup> If this is the case, then Christ is diminished and the Gospel has little meaning. We must, therefore, give due regard to Luther’s breakthrough on the Pauline teaching about sin, not merely about justification.<sup>8</sup> Bernard Lohse comments:

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<sup>6</sup> “Also rejected is their teaching that inherited or original sin is concupiscence, if they mean that concupiscence is a sin that remains a sin in children after their Baptism.” Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 107.

<sup>7</sup> Lohse, 71, comments: “Altogether, Luther rigorously distanced himself from the Occamist concept of sin, especially from the view that by their natural powers humans are able to keep the commandments of God.”

<sup>8</sup> “In Luther’s own biography as well as in the structuring of his new theology a radical view of sin had been given pre-eminence. It is not an exaggeration to state that in his Reformation theology this new view of sin comprises the actual motif for practically all other

[O]n Romans 5:14, in an excursus on the nature of original sin, Luther wrote that the scholastics with their subtleties construed it as the absence of original righteousness. ... According to Paul and its simple sense in Jesus Christ, however, original sin is not merely the absence of a quality of will, but “a total lack of uprightness and the power of all the faculties both of body and soul and of the whole inner and outer man. Besides the inclination to evil.”<sup>9</sup>

Scholastic theology was only willing to admit that after Baptism a certain weakness remained in the Christian that inclined him to commit sins (concupiscence). For Luther, it is not enough to say that the Christian commits sins; he is a sinner.

This is a conviction that arose not simply from Luther’s personal traumatic experience in the Sacrament of Penance, as so many scholars have asserted. Though it indeed agreed with personal experience, it was the result of a decade of preparing lectures on the Bible in Wittenberg, from Psalms, to Romans, to Hebrews, to Galatians. By 1521 Luther was regularly preaching it to his people:

[H]ereditary sin or natural sin or personal sin is the truly chief sin. If this sin did not exist, there would also be no actual sin. This sin is not committed, as are all other sins; rather it *is*. It lives and commits all sins and is the real essential sin which does not sin for an hour or for a while; rather no matter where or how long a person lives, this sin is there too. (AE 52:152, *Sermon on the Gospel for New Year’s Day* [1521/22])

Thus, when the Confutation put the question to the Lutherans, Melanchthon answered in no uncertain terms:

<sup>38</sup> But they maintain that concupiscence is a penalty and not a sin, while Luther contends that it is a sin. We have said earlier that Augustine defines original sin as concupiscence. Let them argue with Augustine if this position displeases them! <sup>39</sup> Besides, Paul says (Rom. 7:7), “I should not have known lust if the law had not said, ‘You shall not lust.’” And again, “I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members” (Rom. 7:23). <sup>40</sup> No quibbling can overthrow these proofs. For they clearly call lust sin, by nature worthy of death if it is not forgiven, though it is not imputed to those who are in Christ. (Ap II:38-40)

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themes. Luther arrived at his new interpretation partly through critical self-examination and partly through intensive study of Paul.” Lohse, 248.

<sup>9</sup> Lohse, 70. The quotation is from AE 25:299; WA 56:312<sup>1-11</sup>; Scholia on Rom. 5:14 (1519).

**EXCURSUS ON ROMANS 7**

This is the first reference to the controversial seventh chapter of Romans in the Book of Concord, and so it is worth taking a brief moment to consider its exegesis. (Unfortunately, we don't have time to consider this issue in the thoroughness that it deserves.) The critical question is the referent of the "I" who is the subject of Romans 7:14-25. Simply put, is the speaker of this passionate chapter the pre-Christian man or the Christian man? If we conclude with Luther and the Confessions that it is the latter (Paul speaking as a Christian man), we would still need to ask whether this is a description of a normal or abnormal Christian life. But we must not be in any doubt about the significance of this decision. Like the *simul* doctrine itself, the exegesis of Romans 7 is a shibboleth that divides Lutheran theology from both Roman and Reformed.

While there have been a large number of theologians throughout history who have found the life described in chapter seven to be incompatible with the liberation from sin that Paul had previously described, we must not ignore the fact that the most important theologians in Christian history have agreed with Luther. The list of those who believe Paul is speaking about himself as a Christian include Methodius, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Augustine, Aquinas, and even Calvin.<sup>10</sup> Only since Kümmel's monograph of 1929<sup>11</sup> have Lutherans even been tempted to abandon this great tradition of exegesis. Having studied the question for many years, I am still persuaded that Luther's exegesis is unassailable. Consider, for example, his major argument in the 1515 *Lectures on Romans*:

*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?* (v. 24). This even more clearly than the preceding statements shows that a spiritual man is speaking these words, for he laments and mourns and desires to be delivered. But surely no man except a spiritual man would say that he is wretched. ... But the carnal man does not desire to be liberated and set free but shudders terribly at the freedom which death brings, and he cannot recognize his own wretchedness. But when Paul says here, "Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" he is saying the same thing that he says elsewhere: "I desire to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). Thus it is astonishing that the idea could have come into anyone's mind that the apostle is speaking these words in the person of the old man or a carnal man, words which are of such great perfection, as if the apostle like a hypocrite had to think and say nothing but good things about himself, that is, to commend

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<sup>10</sup> See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1:345-46. The most thorough recent study of the matter is Michael Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> W. G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (Leipzig, 1929).

himself and deny that he is a sinner, so that he does not commend grace but denies it. (AE 25:335; WA 56:346)

Nonetheless, since theologians of all sorts continue to be blind to this simple argument, consider the following brief exegetical points in favour of Luther's interpretation.

(1) The order of Romans. There can be no doubt that Romans is the most carefully organized writing in the Pauline corpus. Having demonstrated that all men, both Jew and Greek, are condemned equally by the Law and unable to save themselves by works (chapters 1-3), Paul teaches that both Jew and Greek are justified through faith (ch. 4) in the reconciling work of Christ (ch. 5). This work is applied to men through Holy Baptism, in which they die and rise again to a life without condemnation (ch. 6). Naturally, chapter seven is then to be understood as describing the life of one who has been baptized. Chapter seven follows chapter six. Though the Christian struggles with sin throughout life (ch. 7), ultimate victory is his through the love of God in Christ (ch. 8). If chapter seven referred to the pre-Christian life, it would be completely out of place in the order of Romans.

(2) The meaning of τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον "the inner man" (Rom. 7:22). Proponents of the view that Paul is describing the pre-Christian experience in this chapter typically assert that "the inner man" is a psychological description of the will of any man that opposes the baser desires of his flesh. However, there is no support in New Testament theology for such a Manichaean divide between human flesh and human spirit. They are together either addicted to sin or redeemed by God. In fact, in the only other NT occurrences of the phrase, Paul clearly applies it to the Christian as he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16). Within the immediate context of Romans, "the inner man" is surely the opposite of "the old man" inherited from Adam through original sin (Rom. 5:12) and crucified with Christ in Baptism (Rom. 6:6). It is thus equivalent to "the new man" described by Paul elsewhere (Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:22-24). The simple fact that the Spirit is not mentioned explicitly in chapter seven is not sufficient to exclude Him, especially as both surrounding chapters (6 & 8) are filled with the work of the Spirit.

(3) The assertion that this interpretation contradicts Paul's teaching that the Law no longer has dominion over the Christian (Rom. 6:14) does not stand up to scrutiny. For already in chapter six Paul has taught the continuing validity of the Law's proclamation to Christians, lest they fall back into the old life (Rom. 6:15-23). Paul's brief description of this old life in 7:5 is immediately followed by a statement of the Christian's present condition: "But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (Rom. 7:6). Clearly, Paul does not believe that freedom from the Law's "dominion" means that the Law has no place in the Christian life.

In fact, the main point of chapter seven is that despite all outward appearances, though we struggle daily with sin, we are not slaves to sin, the Law does not condemn us (8:1), and victory remains in Jesus Christ (7:25).

(4) There is nothing in the text itself to support the idea that Paul has suddenly “flashed back” to his pre-Christian life, or that he is speaking of a hypothetical experience of a Christian who seeks to combat sin with his own strength. Those verses that might be interpreted as referring to Paul’s pre-Christian life are clearly marked by the past tense (7:8-13), while the rest of the chapter is consistently in the present tense (7:14-25).

(5) Finally, we must not fail to note that our Christian experience, if we are honest, confirms this interpretation.<sup>12</sup> My life is a continual struggle against sin, in which I consistently fail to live up to the demands of the Law, despite my pious desire. I am frankly astonished that there are Christians who do not recognize their own lives in this chapter.

Romans 7 certainly deserves more of our attention. But if we are seeking the Pauline foundation of the *simul* doctrine in the Lutheran Confessions, it is important that we do not become fixated on this one passage. For Luther does not begin in Romans 7 and work outwards. Rather, he has come to this interpretation because he first listened to Paul’s description of justification in chapter four. It is therefore important that we look at Melancthon’s description of justification in Apology IV, to see whether he draws the same implications for the Christian life as Luther did.

#### APOLOGY IV

Melancthon’s clearest definition of justification is found towards the end of Apology IV, where he roots his forensic definition clearly in the writings of Paul:

<sup>305</sup> In this passage [Rom. 5:1] “justify” is used in a judicial way to mean “to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous,” and to do so on account of someone else’s righteousness, namely, Christ’s, which is communicated to us through faith.<sup>306</sup> Since in this passage our righteousness is the imputation of someone else’s righteousness, we must speak of righteousness in a different way here from the philosophical or judicial investigation of a man’s own righteousness, which certainly resides in the will. Paul says (1 Cor. 1:30), “He is the source of your life in Jesus Christ, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” And 2 Cor. 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”<sup>307</sup> Because the righteousness of Christ is given to us through faith, therefore faith is righteousness in us by

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<sup>12</sup> Melancthon appeals to Christian experience in Ap IV:166-68.

imputation. That is, by it we are made acceptable to God because of God's imputation and ordinances, as Paul says (Rom. 4:5), "Faith is reckoned as righteousness."<sup>13</sup>

Melanchthon is challenging the scholastic teaching that "righteousness" is an attribute of the human will. To be righteous would therefore necessitate desiring to do what is right. Melanchthon argues that this is not necessarily the case, for in Paul's teaching the righteousness that justifies remains external to us and our will. Our righteousness is Christ's righteousness. His will is pure in place of ours. If we refuse to recognize ourselves as sinners, we can lay no claim on the righteousness that justifies, because Christ only takes the place of sinners who need Him. Thus we must avoid the temptation to describe Christian righteousness in a philosophical or ethical way.

If righteousness is "imputed", Melanchthon argues, then one should not expect it to be visible. It remains outside the sinner, and is only "applied" to sinners. This is Melanchthon's way of confessing *simul justus et peccator*. If one is justified, one must be a sinner. Now, like Paul (Rom. 6), Melanchthon is at pains to explain that we should not therefore desire to sin! In fact, obedience to the Law does begin after faith, and we should expect it to increase (Ap IV:124, 136), and this very statement implies that a struggle will now ensue. There is no struggle in the pre-Christian man, for he is only under the dominion of sin. But once the Spirit enters through the waters of Baptism, then the struggle begins (Ap IV:146). As Paul says, the redeemed man sides with the Spirit—or better said, the Spirit takes our side and leads us to oppose sin (Ap IV:142-44, 169-70).

To deny that man remains a sinner after Baptism is to violate Melanchthon's cardinal rule: it diminishes the value of Christ as our Redeemer. For then His redeeming work becomes either restricted to the past or only occasionally of value. "Christ does not stop being the mediator after our renewal" (Ap IV:162), he writes. In fact, only the baptized can recognize how much he needs a mediator. Faith thus grows stronger in the recognition that we are sinners.

The faith of which we are speaking, moreover, has its existence in penitence; that is, it is conceived in the terrors of a conscience that feels God's wrath against our sins and looks for forgiveness of sins and deliverance from sin. This faith ought to grow and be strengthened in these terrors and in other afflictions (Ap IV:142).

If one cannot confess himself to be a sinner, then one is not truly righteous. Melanchthon quotes Jerome: "We are righteous, therefore, when we confess that we are sinners; and our righteousness does not consist in our own merit, but in God's mercy" (Ap IV:173). It is impossible, therefore, to replace

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<sup>13</sup> See also the definitions in FC SD III:9, 17.

*simul justus et peccator* with a temporal succession: first a sinner, then a saint.

### SMALCALD ARTICLES

If anyone claims that he used to be a sinner, but now he's a saint, he is ripe for the preaching of John the Baptist. Luther's famous application of John's preaching in the Smalcald Articles is perhaps the most important exposition of the *simul* doctrine in the entire Book of Concord:

<sup>30</sup> Here the fiery angel St. John, the preacher of true repentance, intervenes. With a single thunderbolt he strikes and destroys both. "Repent," he says. [Mt. 3:2] On the one hand there are some who think, "We have already done penance," <sup>31</sup> and on the other hand there are others who suppose, "We need no repentance." <sup>32</sup> But John says: "Repent, both of you. Those of you in the former group are false penitents, and those of you in the latter are false saints. Both of you need the forgiveness of sins, for neither of you knows what sin really is, to say nothing of repenting and shunning sin. None of you is good. All of you are full of unbelief, blindness, and ignorance of God and God's will. For he is here present, and from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace [Jn 1:16]. No man can be just before God without him. Accordingly, if you would repent, repent rightly. Your repentance accomplishes nothing. And you hypocrites who think you do not need to repent, you brood of vipers [Mt. 3:7], who has given you any assurance that you will escape the wrath to come?" (SA III.iii:30-32)

This Scriptural parallel is most appropriate. John the Baptist was sent to preach repentance to those who were, in fact, the people of God. They thought of themselves as saints, but not as sinners. Luther finds the same attitude in his Roman opponents and in his own parishioners. Against such self-righteousness he applies Romans 3:10, "None is righteous, no not one", and Acts 17:30, "Now He commands all men everywhere to repent." No one is exempt from this call. Nor is there is a distinction between those who need to repent partially and those who need to repent wholly. Luther continues:

<sup>36</sup> This repentance is not partial and fragmentary like repentance for actual sins, nor is it uncertain like that. It does not debate what is sin and what is not sin, but lumps everything together and says, "We are wholly and altogether sinful." We need not spend our time weighing, distinguishing, differentiating. ... <sup>37</sup> And so our repentance cannot be false, uncertain, or partial, for a person who confesses that he is altogether sinful embraces all sins in his confession without omitting or forgetting a single one. <sup>38</sup> Nor can our satisfaction be uncertain, for it consists not of the dubious, sinful works which we do but of the sufferings and blood of the innocent Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (SA III.iii:36-38)

There is no room for mathematics in either repentance or justification. If we count or weigh sins, then our redemption will be given only in part. But if repentance is total, then redemption is total.

The Christian who knows his Saviour will therefore express the most complete confession. His recognition of sin cannot be equalled by the unbeliever. Luther concludes:

<sup>40</sup> In the case of a Christian such repentance continues until death, for all through life it contends with the sins that remain in the flesh. As St. Paul testifies in Rom. 7:23, he wars with the law in his members, and he does this not with his own powers but with the gift of the Holy Spirit which follows the forgiveness of sins. This gift daily cleanses and expels the sins that remain and enables man to become truly pure and holy.<sup>41</sup> This is something about which the pope, the theologians, the jurists, and all men understand nothing. It is a teaching from heaven, revealed in the Gospel, and yet it is called a heresy by godless saints. (SA III.iii:40-41)

Luther has reached the point that he cannot imagine any Christian who would not recognize himself in Romans 7. He repeats this Pauline reference again and again (SA III.vii:1; III.viii:2). Edmund Schlink sums up Luther's thinking well: "Contrition does not grow smaller, but greater. In daily contrition the Christian recognizes himself more and more as a total sinner who stands under God's wrath and is in need of forgiveness."<sup>14</sup>

### THE SMALL/LARGE CATECHISMS

Luther's insistence that the Christian is in daily need of repentance is played out in his arrangement of the catechisms. Firstly, there is the important matter of where the Ten Commandments belong. For it is now well known that, though the Small Catechism is conservative in most respects, it differed from all its predecessors in its ordering of the chief parts. Augustine, for example had famously lined up the chief parts with Paul's trio of faith, hope, and love (I Cor. 13:13). The creed comes first, laying down the historic Christian faith, and indicating that the catechism is for Christians. The Lord's Prayer comes second, describing the Christian's future hope. Then, finally, comes the Decalogue, laying down the rules by which the Christian exercises his faith and hope in love. In Augustine's thinking, the Law has been tamed, Christianized, and reduced to a guide that aids in one's gradual justification.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Schlink, 123.

<sup>15</sup> See Charles P. Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000), 124-25.



Augustine's understanding of the Law prevailed throughout the Middle Ages, leading all mediaeval catechisms to put the Decalogue in third place.<sup>16</sup> Luther, however, dramatically broke with this tradition by moving the Decalogue into first place. Why? Already in 1520 in his *Brief Explanation of the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer*, he offers this explanation:

In order for a man to be saved, it is necessary for him to know three things. ... In this respect, he is like a sick man. A man who is sick needs to know what his illness is and what he can and cannot do. ... Thus the commandments teach a man to recognize his sickness so that he may know and understand what he can and cannot do, what he ought to do and ought not to do. In this way he comes to recognize that he is an evil and sinful man. After this, the creed shows and teaches him where he can find the medicine or the remedy that he needs, that is, the grace which will help him become a righteous man ....<sup>17</sup>

The Decalogue has taken on a completely different meaning. Its primary purpose now is to show man his sin, the purpose of the Law that Luther has learnt from Paul (e.g. Rom. 3:20; 7:7). The Law leads man to repentance in order that he might perceive his need for the righteousness of Christ which is proclaimed in the Creed.

But does this mean that the Law applies only to man before conversion? This is not at all what Luther means. Firstly, his explanations of the commandments clearly demonstrate that they are directed to Christians, for the unbeliever cannot "fear and love God". Secondly, Luther himself claims that he prays the catechism daily, thus applying to himself both Law and Gospel (LC Longer Preface 7-8). Thirdly, Luther explicitly directs the Christian to examine himself regularly on the basis of the Decalogue in the Small Catechism's brief order of Confession. This is *simul justus et peccator* lived out in daily life. In the fourth question of the Small Catechism's treatment of Holy Baptism, Luther concludes the section by quoting Romans six. For Luther, it is obvious that if we have died to sin in Baptism, then we must daily turn away from sin and keep on drowning the old man.<sup>18</sup> The Catechism's treatment of Confession and Absolution flows out of Holy Baptism in the same way that Romans seven flows out of Romans six. This is what it is like to be a baptised child of God who is continually undergoing

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<sup>16</sup> See Arand, 125-29.

<sup>17</sup> Philadelphia Edition 2:354-55. This explanation is repeated in the various editions of the *Betbüchlein* from 1522 onwards. See AE 43:13; WA 10.2:376-77.

<sup>18</sup> We cannot digress into the question of whether Luther is correct in reapplying Romans 6 this way. Lohse, 302, notes the problem, but is sympathetic to Luther: "Of course, in noting this difference, we must take into account the situation of Paul and of Luther: Paul was speaking to new Christians who had just experienced a decisive change in their life; Luther was speaking to a Christendom become sluggish." See also Althaus, 356-59.

the Holy Spirit's restorative work. In the Large Catechism Luther describes it in words that might be a layman's version of *simul justus et peccator*:

Now we are only halfway [halb und halb] pure and holy. The Holy Spirit must continue to work in us through the Word, daily granting forgiveness until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness. In that life are only perfectly pure and holy people, full of goodness and righteousness, completely freed from sin, death, and all evil, living in new, immortal and glorified bodies. (LC II:58)

### FORMULA OF CONCORD

Lastly in our survey of the Lutheran confessional writings, we turn to the Formula of Concord. By the pure measurement of volume, the Formula has more to say about the *simul* doctrine than the rest of the Book of Concord put together! This is the nature of the beast. The Formula sums up, recapitulates, analyses, and defends the teaching of the confessional writings that went before, in the light of new controversies. Since we have just completed a rather thorough survey of our own, it is not necessary for us to repeat the Formula's effort. However, it will be valuable to describe the way in which the *simul* doctrine is absorbed and used by the second generation of our Lutheran fathers.

The first six articles of the Formula form a logical unit as the authors group together controversies that revolve around the same basic issue of sin and justification. Recall the order of those articles: (1) Original Sin, (2) Free Will, (3) The Righteousness of Faith Before God, (4) Good Works, (5) Law and Gospel, and (6) The Third Function of the Law. In each of the articles we find a well-settled understanding of the Christian's dual nature as saint and sinner. In each article this understanding is repeated in similar words with similar proof texts in order to help answer the specific controversy. The following example from article six should be sufficient:

<sup>7</sup> But in this life Christians are not renewed perfectly and completely. For although their sins are covered up through the perfect obedience of Christ, so that they are not reckoned to believers for damnation, and although the Holy Spirit has begun the mortification of the Old Adam and their renewal in the spirit of their minds, nevertheless the Old Adam still clings to their nature and to all its internal and external powers. <sup>8</sup> Concerning this the apostle writes, "I know that nothing good dwells within me." And again, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Likewise, "I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin." [Rom. 7:18-19, 23] Likewise, "The desires of the flesh are against the spirit and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would." [Gal. 5:17] (FC SD VI:7-8).

The passages quoted here to demonstrate that man is still a sinner after conversion, Rom. 7:18-23 and Gal. 5:17, are regularly accompanied in the Formula by:

- Rom 8:7 “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God”
- Ps. 119:71 “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes”
- I Cor. 9:27 “but I pommel my body and subdue it”
- Heb. 12:8 “If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons”

Parallel to this is a regular list of passages that describe justification by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness through faith:

- Gal. 3:27 “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”
- Rom. 8:14 “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God”
- Phil. 3:9 “and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, ...”
- Rom. 1:17 “in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’”
- Rom. 4:6-8 “David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: [Ps. 32:1-2]

The use of these passages among Lutherans appears to be well-established by the time of the Formula. These proof-texts are quoted without the need to defend their exegesis, as Luther needed to. This should not be the occasion for ridicule, as some Lutheran exegetes are inclined to do. If anyone disagrees with the Formula’s judgement, its authors expect him to return to the writings of Luther that it quotes; a thorough explanation can be found there. This is not necessarily the way theology must always be done, but it is an example of a mature confession, confident that the Holy Scriptures are clear and have been correctly applied. If today we find some new insights into Paul’s theology, we have cause for rejoicing; but it is sheer arrogance to presume automatically that our “unsophisticated” forefathers could not have understood Paul without them. Even less should a new interpretation of one particular passage (such as Romans seven) be allowed to overturn the rich and thorough reading of the Scriptures contained in the first six articles of the Formula.<sup>19</sup> For the Formula merely reflects and summarizes the broad biblical basis that we find in the entire Book of Concord for Luther’s incomparable teaching.

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<sup>19</sup> The reader is advised to pursue a further investigation of *simul justus et peccator* in the Formula, focussing on the following key passages from the Solid Declaration: II:17-18, 63-69, 85; III:22-23, 32; IV:19; VI:7-8, 12-14, 18-24.

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**SERMON:**  
**MATTHEW 20:1-16\***

*Reginald C. Quirk*

**I**n this matter of the complaint of the early shift workers against the owner of the vineyard, I represent the defendant, the owner of the vineyard. To summarize the complaint, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to put yourself in the position of these workers, casual labourers. It's not that they didn't want a regular job, I'm sure, but this is the nature of the farming industry—you take work when you can get it. So you went to the job centre and were lucky enough to get a full day's work, and, more importantly, a full day's pay. And you worked in the vineyard in the heat of the long day. But in this vineyard, as the day went on, there seemed to be more and more work to do, and so again and again, more labourers were hired, arriving throughout the day. Even at 5 o'clock, with just an hour's more work to do, new hands were being taken on. At six o'clock you finally end the long day, exhausted. Your employer, my client, calls the work force, and pays first of all the last to arrive, those who worked only an hour, and he pays them exactly what he promised to pay you. Naturally you are expecting something extra. But in fact your pay packet contains exactly one denarius, exactly what you had agreed to work for. Unfair. It is clearly unfair that you are paid no more for having worked all day than these people who hadn't seen the vineyard before an hour ago.

At least, ladies and gentlemen, that is the complaint against my client. Now I ask you to look more closely at this complaint. The first shift workers maintain that they should have been paid more than the last shift workers. But where is their grumble?—surely not with their own wages, because they were paid exactly what was agreed at the beginning of the day. No, their grumble is about somebody else's wages—the wages of the labourers who were hired later in the day. And that, we maintain, is none of their business. As my client very properly said at the time: "I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?" And then he added a comment that put his finger exactly on the problem: "Or are you envious," he went on, "or are you envious because I am generous?"

*That's it, isn't it? The first Jewish Christians saw the gentiles standing alongside them in the Kingdom of God. The gentiles who had not been*

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*through what they, the Jews had been through. They hadn't been circumcised, and they hadn't struggled with an almost intolerable law. They hadn't sat at home every Sabbath day, frightened to move for fear of working and breaking the holy day. They hadn't worried about what they can and cannot eat; no, they happily ate their pork or whatever without even a thought, while we have been struggling with a rule book nearly 250 pages long. They haven't prayed every day, or made sacrifices again and again in the holy Temple. Their ancestors didn't die in the onslaught of their neighbouring armies because they believed in the one true God. And now, the Gospel rewards them all alike, just the same as us who have born the heat of the day. And it is said, all of a sudden, that God shows no favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him. Well, it's not fair on us.*

*And the first disciples saw the company that Jesus kept, and those of whom His kingdom was to be built—tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, beggars, criminals, enemy soldiers, lepers, and all sorts. And perhaps they thought, it's not fair, because up until now these people have done nothing to deserve such favour, while we have born the heat of the day, and been virtuous and self sacrificing all our lives.*

*And today, as we are challenged to dispense the Gospel to all conditions of men and women, there may be some we look at and recoil in distaste. For that would not be fair, would it, to make them equal to us? And perhaps we look at the progress of the Gospel throughout the world, to parts of Africa and South America where it is being heard for the first time and it is being eagerly accepted into soul after soul, and we think that this, here, is really a Christian country—has been since the 5<sup>th</sup>. century. No matter that we struggle to fill our cathedrals, or to find a moral lead in our communities, is it fair to make these others equal to us?*

“Or are you envious, because I am generous?” So asked the vineyard owner. It has nothing to do with what he gave to you, only with the fact that he chooses to give it also to others. But that, ladies and gentlemen, will not be my client's defence this morning.

No. I would like you to consider a joke. You've perhaps heard it, or one like it. It's about this chap who says to his friend, “I've just got a new job, tasting every batch of beer from the brewery.” “Fantastic”, said his friend, “how much an hour?” “A pound,” replied the first. “That's not much.” “No,” his companion agreed, “but it's all I can afford.”

Now, think about this vineyard. Maybe you have been picturing some place where workers sweat and toil and grow tired. And it is. But the thing is, it is simply the most fun place to be. There is plenty of work. In fact the vineyard owner's son is known for saying that we should pray for labourers in the vineyard. But it is the kind of work that brings joy and fulfilment. If people knew, they would pay to work here, like the man who tasted beer at

the brewery. If anything, people who have the chance to labour here all day should be paid less, not more, because this work is its own reward.

And those Jews, who were jealous that the gentiles could have what they had—they should rather have been thankful that they had had it so much longer. Some of them did. In the Psalms there are poems about how they delight in God's Law, and how living under the rule of God is sweeter than honey in the honeycomb. And those who enter the vineyard at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, those who find the grace of God, or rather are found by it, when their whole life had been sad and unfulfilled, they should rather be jealous of those who had been there all day. For there in the vineyard they don't know anxiety, only the security of a loving father. They live with purpose and with hope—with work, I grant you, but work with a point, an eternal point. If those in the vineyard for one moment wished they were elsewhere, I wonder whether they were really in the vineyard at all at that moment.

And when the workers complained to the owner of the vineyard that they thought they should receive more, he might simply have answered—"but you did." Your work was its own reward. But that, ladies and gentlemen, is not my client's defence this morning.

You know, this complaint may not just be about time. It may not be simply about working hours. It could have to do with job descriptions and wage differentials. You see, there are lots of different jobs in the vineyard. Some of the workers are skilled vine pruners, with lots of diplomas in vine pruning. Now, you can't expect them to be paid only the same as the pickers up of sticks. And then, of course, there are some who have to be in charge, and to tell the vine-pruners where to prune and the stick pickers where to pick, and they need to be paid more again, naturally. Are they all to receive a denarius?

Well, again, you may think that this is an odd sort of a vineyard, but in this vineyard, we recognize that we need all of those people. You can't always convince the people in charge about this, but if we had only managers, we wouldn't get much done. And the stick pickers can't always see it, but without the pruners, they would have nothing to pick up, and without someone being in charge, it would be a bit of a mess, and so on. In fact, in this vineyard, we have a certain corporate ethos, that sees the place like a body. Look, it's here in the 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthian working directive, section 12, subsection 14:

For the body is not one member, but many.... If the whole body [were] an eye, where [were] the hearing? If the whole [were] hearing, where [were] the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him.

Does it happen sometimes in God's vineyard, that its workers seek a certain reward, namely the reward of recognition, of honour in proportion to the job they do within the body? Because if they do, and if, from time to

time they feel that they do not receive the recognition they deserve, if, in fact they grumble inwardly in their discontent and they think that they should receive more—then the fact is that they have no right to, because that is not what was agreed with them at the outset. Again, if I might quote from their contract:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the gentiles lord it over them .... Not so with you. Instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

And then a precedent is cited:

For even the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

So, if that is part of the complaint, it is not justified. But that is not the defence of my client this morning.

By the way, does anyone know the time? Of course, I know it is about 11:40; but I meant, does anyone know what hour it is, what shift it is in the Lord's vineyard. Does anyone know how long there will be before we are all called to the owner of the vineyard to finish our labour and receive our reward? Is this the first shift, or the last, or somewhere between?

The fact is, you do not know when the end of the day will come. Jesus said that no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son, only the Father in heaven. And whatever people may tell you, if Jesus didn't know when the end would be, neither do they. But this much we do know. We know that we must work, while it is day, before the night comes when no man can work. There is urgency in the vineyard, but oddly enough, we're not sure whether it is morning or afternoon, or maybe the sun is beginning to set on the last shift. To put it another way, we know what has gone before, but we do not know what is to come. Who knows whether countless more will be found standing idle and brought to work in this wonderful enterprise, or whether we are just about it—the last workers to be hired? So, it would be a bit early, would it not, to start speculating about how the rewards should be allocated. Only God has even seen the time sheet. I meant, of course, to say, the vineyard owner, my client—only he has seen the time sheet. But that is not his defence this morning.

No, in fact, my client will not be entering a defence at all this morning. If he is charged with being unfair—absolutely, that's true. He's not unjust. He's not ungracious. But there is no human understanding of fairness you can apply to him. Who wants the wages they have earned? The wages of sin is death. It's not that the work in the vineyard wasn't up to scratch. He knows we're only human, and expects no more. It's rather that we kept sneaking out of the vineyard, to do the things that cannot be within it, to think the thoughts that are unthinkable inside it, to say the things that will not be heard inside, and sometimes, even to damage and frustrate the growth



of the vines that make it what it is. And all the time, the door was open for us to come back, and, if we did not realize it, the vineyard owner went out here with us, and gently shepherded us back. The wages of sin, is death. But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. No reward for anyone, only a free gift.

For by grace we have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It’s not fair, is it? Amen.

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