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THE PATH TO POWER*

John Lau

* The "President's Address," Commencement at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, May 20, 1995.

Text - Jeremiah 6:16: Thus says the Lord, "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls."

Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

"Power" is a very important word in today's vocabulary; we hear it used almost everywhere. In our country today there is great fear of destructive power, for example, in nuclear bombs, or in earthquakes or tidal waves, or in malicious bombings such as that which recently took place in Oklahoma City. There is also great concern with political power, with local, county, state, and national governments striving to attain ever greater amounts of it. And here, on the campus of Immanuel Lutheran College, we are seeing more benign aspects of power in large earth-moving equipment engaged in preparing the site for the construction of our new Commons Building.

But earthly power is not the subject of this address. Soon we will be observing the anniversary of the first Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Spirit descended upon the first disciples and when they, endued with the power of the Spirit, preached the message of sin and grace into the hearts of 3,000 converts. This was a direct fulfillment of the Savior's promise, when He said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

Now it has been nearly 2,000 years since the Church has had the sacred commission to preach the gospel; for nearly 2,000 years the Church has been directed to carry this message to the ends of the earth and proclaim it to all races, nationalities, and classes of human beings. I think that we will all agree that 2,000 years is a long time to impress upon Christians that their only program, their only commission from the Lord, is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in its truth and purity. Yet, unfortunately, many churches today which still call themselves Christian are no longer true to Him and His Word; in many instances they have introduced messages and commissions which actually oppose the gospel; they are in that way not walking along the road on which the saints of God in the past have walked to glory. They are not seeking the power of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace, but their own puny power. To many

of these people the gospel is out of date; the Bible itself has outlived its usefulness, and its teachings have no place in modern life. Jesus Himself is looked upon, not as the God-Man, the Savior of the world, but merely a good man; and the Bible is not considered God's Book, but merely one of many systems of morality.

It is therefore well that we today should consider the subject:

THE PATH TO POWER

I. The path to power does not lie in externals.

It is indeed sad, but nevertheless true, that so many seem to have forgotten the most basic and fundamental facts regarding the Church and its work. Among the hundreds of thousands of church buildings in our country, how many are still true houses of the Lord? So many have degenerated into mere houses of men, where human theories rule out the word of God as being too ancient and therefore irrelevant for our modern age of enlightenment. It sadly has to be admitted that there are actually preachers in the pulpits who are not even sure who the true God is - and if that is true of the pulpit it will also be true of the pew - such men may not know who the true God is, but they claim most definitely that the Bible is not the verbally inspired and inerrant word of God. There are teachers in theological seminaries - yes, even in an American Lutheran church body - who ridicule fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith: the verbal inspiration of Scripture and the bodily resurrection of Jesus, to mention only two. It is indeed true that there are unnumbered churches which have given up the old paths and have sought new ways, with the result that the souls of their hearers have been bottled up in confusion and hopelessness.

There are so many materially-minded churches today: congregations that spend most of their energy and time on externals, activities which really have no or very little connection with the Lord's business and the Savior's kingdom. Some churches cater systematically to the wealthy. Built in fashionable neighborhoods, priding themselves on their elite, exclusive membership, they make no effort to win the poor and gain the slum dwellers and those who live on the other side of the railroad tracks. Some churches seem to dedicate themselves to locating their wealthiest members and sending counselors and synodical officials to advise them how to leave their wealth to the synod.

There are churches that crave power, seeking to control the state and federal representatives and officials. They want the government on all levels to act as the arm of religion in giving them the right to curtail the religious freedom our constitution promises. When Abraham Lincoln came to Washington as president, he is said to have declared: "I wish to find a church whose clergyman does not preach politics!" Yet all this still goes on today, when, as a matter of fact, what people need and desire is pastors who will give them spiritual comfort and eternal truth rather than party programs and campaign promises. - No, the path to power does not lie in externals.

II. The path to power is found in the Holy Spirit.

What we need, and what the world today needs, is the old path that leads through all the tinsel and tarnish of our modern age back to the first Pentecost and to the power of the Holy Spirit. The story of that Pentecost is a simple but remarkable one. Look at the disciples before Pentecost. They certainly were among the most timid and fearful of men. They were believers in Christ and they knew of His resurrection; even so their faith was a weak thing and their actions were nothing to be proud of. But when the Holy Ghost came upon them, what a difference! They became strong, brave men who did not fear the power of men but who rather could and did say: "We must obey God rather than men." This power did not come from external sources or from some personal inner strength, but solely from on high, from the Holy Spirit.

As the Holy Spirit descended upon the first disciples, so the Church's power still comes from above. As Peter and the other first preachers of the New Testament Church were filled with the Holy Ghost, so the ministers of today (and this indeed includes you graduates as you go out into today's world) must be filled, not with sociology and psychology (though these may at times be of some service), but with the Holy Spirit and the Means of Grace through which He works, the gospel in sacrament and word. As the message of that powerful Pentecost sermon was based on the full word of God, so today's messengers must not feed their followers with the stones of sensationalism and the scorpions of work-righteousness, but, rather, feed them with the living bread from heaven.

As Peter denounced his hearers as the ones who had nailed Jesus to the cross, so today sin must be denounced by fearless men of God who cry out: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But as that

first Pentecost sermon also proclaimed the truth that Jesus died for the sins of the world, so today, following the old path, we tell sinners (and that means all human beings) that they have been redeemed for time and eternity, not by the best that they can do, but, thank God, by the grace and mercy of Christ, Who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. His blood alone can cleanse from all sin. Today, as then, this word still stands: "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

III. The path to power gives rest to the soul.

Our text promises to followers of this path: "Ye shall find rest for your souls." The Holy Spirit, through His power in the word, brings us the greatest and best blessing that can ever come into our lives. He gives rest because He leads us to the rest-giving Savior, Who calls out to us: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." How desperately we need that rest - rest from pain and sorrow, from weakness and disappointment, from bruises of body and soul - for comfort in days of trouble, for help in times of distress, for strength in days of weakness, for rest in days of weariness and pain. All this is ours solely in the eternal Son of God, Who shed His precious blood and Who bids us to come to Him and find rest for our souls. In all the world there is no one who can help us, forgive us, and save us, but Christ - He alone can do it.

What a tremendous price He paid to give us that rest! When a famous radio preacher lay on his deathbed, he received messages of sympathy from many admirers. But the message of a humble laborer was the best of all. He wrote: "I haven't any money, but if you need any blood, you can have all of mine." That is the message of the Savior to all, as He died for all and poured out His life-blood for the sins of the world. Christ, the Son of God, by His own choice, out of love and pity for us lost and condemned sinners, died on the cross as our Substitute. He was punished for the wrongs we have done, that we might be forgiven, that we might escape the tortures of hell which our sins have deserved, that we might have life instead of death. And when He broke the bonds of death by His own resurrection, this was God's own guarantee that Jesus had fulfilled for us everything that was needed for the world's complete redemption. That is the rest we need, and that is the rest that is ours by the power of the Spirit in the word.

IV. The path to power leads us to direct others to that path.

If we have found this marvelous rest in Christ, then we have not really fulfilled the purpose of our lives until we have directed someone else to Christ to find that rest in Him. Therefore we pray that the Holy Spirit will help our infirmities and aid us in this purpose, so that others may be led along the path. So many people of the world today are sick - sick with the lust for money, earthly power, and pleasure - sick with sin. As followers of Christ, we have the only real remedy for the sickness of the world. God has given us the gospel of salvation through the blood of Christ. It is a gospel which tells us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; a gospel which assures us: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow"; a gospel that emphasizes: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

With the gospel in our hands and hearts we are to go into all the world and proclaim it. Yes, this is my charge to you graduates: Be witnesses of Christ wherever you go! Too often far too many of us take an attitude of indifference toward the spiritual welfare of our fellow men. We know from God's word that those who are without Christ are going to hell, and yet so often we remain carelessly indifferent, and perhaps to ourselves we even say: "All right, if you want to go to hell, you can go there! It is no concern of mine!" Dear graduates, it is a concern of yours; it is a concern of mine; it is a concern of every believer here! We need the kind of membership in our church today which, baptized with the fire of the Holy Spirit, will make proclaiming the gospel their most important business; which - to the Lord's question: "Whom shall I send?" - will answer: "Here am I; send me!" In that way we shall hold up the cross of Christ for all the world to see, and through the Means of Grace the Holy Spirit will bring saving faith into the hearts of those who see and hear.

Millions are walking the streets of the world. Outwardly these men and women, boys and girls, look much alike. And yet, if but for a brief moment God would give us eyes to see, we would find a vast difference among them. Some of them belong together in a fellowship that sets them apart from the rest. They are citizens of a better country. They are the Church, the communion of saints. In the gloom of this mortal life their eyes are fastened upon the Savior; they are clinging to the Rock of Ages, Who will hold them fast forever; they are walking along the old path, the path that leads to eternal glory. May the Holy Spirit lead us and keep us in that glorious company, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

ILC CHAPEL ADDRESS - ROMANS 8:28-31

Paul Koch

Someone was heard to remark that we have fifteen days to go until graduation on May 20, which produced a round of whooping sounds and high fives. Perhaps fifteen days is not enough to wrap up what we have pledged to one another this school year now so close to ending. What does it add up to for you students? What does it mean to have faculty and staff and fellow students, all of us God's children, living and learning together for 8½ months? Have these been some of the best days of your lives? Is it true what you said about this year in your friend's copy of the LANCE?

There comes a time when the Christian must stand back and evaluate his life under God and his doing in the face of God and God's children and figure out what it all means: putting it into words sometimes helps to clarify the importance of life. "What shall we then say to these things?" was asked by one of God's great persons in another context, though not entirely out of context with our life here this school year. What to say? Something religious? Personal? Typical? Oh, I don't know what to say!

No less a genius than Solomon knew there is a time to say nothing, but there is a time to speak up; and when it is time to speak up, it is important to speak thoughtfully. We all learn some of the wisdom of Solomon, to think it over first to decide if it is the time to speak or to remain silent ... and that for a reason. The larger part of wisdom in speaking is knowing whether what we feel like saying is going to be all that great. Peer pressure has a large influence on what we say in public. Now, was the apostle struck with the problem of peer pressure when he asked: "What then shall we say to these things?" His problem was not worrying about what others would agree with, lest he be thought some sort of religious oddball.

No, God did not let this apostle cringe before men at the prospect of saying something too religious, too spiritual for his public image. When the apostle asked what he should say about God, about Jesus, about salvation, about his life under God and before his friends, he was gathering his thoughts to decide where to begin! There was so much to tell he barely knew how to start or where to stop. There was so much on his heart and he had such thrilled eagerness to tell it all - he needed only to get it organized a bit ... to select some special highlights, to choose the precise gem that showed to best advantage one of God's manifold gifts. When he got the starting spot selected, he burst forth in a cascading tide of spiritual flood-waters. Hardly pausing for breath he parades before us the victory procession of God ... the grand march of our conquering Lord, tramping out the cadence of predestination, justification, glorification:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

"What then shall we say to these things?" Well, let me tell you!:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

God had filled this man's heart to overflowing with sweet waters; he had drunk deeply and thoughtfully of the fountain Jesus provides. He had received what our Savior promised: "The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

You and I have been to that spring with one another this year. Our chapel speakers and teachers have dipped into the word of God and have taken their drink and have handed the dipper over to us - to drink holy water. We have each taken as much as our thirst required. God has regularly put a full dipper into our hands, for us to take what we want, and then to hand the dipper to our neighbor.

What then shall we say to these things? What will we have to say in our handwriting in the LANCE? What will we have to say out loud to one another or to an acquaintance about our life under the

Lord Jesus this year at this Bible school? Another child of God guides us, saying: “I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.”

May God bless us through these few days left of this school term, and then through the months we are at home, or wherever we will spend the summer. And let us remember that we have something refreshing to offer others; we have God’s things to talk about as they affect our lives. May God grant us the spirit of wisdom and knowledge to vocalize the best answers to that question: “What then shall I say to these things?”

EARTHEN VESSELS

Vance Fossum

Foreword

*“God was at Moses six several times before he could get him forward; at last, after many excuses he went, but unwillingly. If I had been Moses, I would, with the aid of some lawyer, have framed a bill of complaint against our Lord God for breaking his promise; for he said to Moses: ‘I will be with thee,’ but he performed not what he promised. In like manner God comforts and encourages with similar promises in the gospel, saying: ‘And ye shall find rest for your souls.’ But, alas! We see and find the contrary, by John the Baptist, by his dearest Son, our blessed Savior Christ Jesus, by all the saints and holy martyrs, and by all true Christians; so that, according to the lawyers, our Lord God has lost the cause. Christ spake unto me as he spake to St. Paul: ‘Arise and preach, and I will be with thee.’ I have read that as an example. It is, indeed, an office exceeding dangerous to preach Christ; had I known as much before as I know now, I should never have been drawn thereunto, but, with Moses, would have said: ‘Send whom Thou wilt send.’” —
Martin Luther*

When our pastoral work is going well, we think ourselves qualified; when we struggle, we think ourselves unfit. In the midst of acceptance and successes, we thank God for putting us into this ministry; but in times of rejection and failure, we may want out. With the best of intentions we go about our Father’s business, only to be told: “Mind your own business.” We think ourselves strong, but prove to be weak. We do well in one area of our work, but another area suffers. It is expected of us that we be “right” because we are pastors; but we can expect often to be wrong, because we are men. Our Lord has spoken to us; but we do not well remember what He said. We know His law and gospel, but we do not always rightly divide or rightly apply His word. How difficult is this calling! Who is sufficient?

Ours is a calling of joy and sorrow, success and failure. We are both a help and a hindrance—bringing not only strength and ability, but also weakness and liability to our calling. By some we are blessed, by others cursed. At times we are full of faith, but then full of fear; filled with hope, and then near despair. Why do we carry on? How?

O Lord, You know. It is You Who have called us. You have put us into this ministry and taught us its glory as ministers of the new covenant. “For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory” (2 Cor. 3:9). Amen!

Divine grace has saved us from eternal torment! We who were “dead in trespasses and sins,” “without God and without hope,” He has made alive and raised up to the “heavenly places” in Christ Jesus! The Spirit of God working through His gospel has sealed us unto eternal life! Heavenly glory is begun in us through the righteousness of God’s Son, ministered to us in the gospel and received by faith! The “veil of Moses” has been taken away! We see that the ministration of the law which kills is **not** the last word of the holy God; the gospel ministry of Christ’s righteousness is the last and abiding word of Him who loves us!

How glorious is this gospel ministry to those who have been called to preach Christ Jesus the Lord and themselves “servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:3). This gospel neither kills nor passes away but steadily transforms poor sinners: “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. . . . 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” (2 Cor. 4:1,6).

“BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”

(2 Cor. 4:7).

I.

Vessels, not Vessel

“We have this treasure,” Paul says—not “I have this treasure.” It is a tremendous task to minister the gospel over so large a world, to so many millions, and over so long a time; many men are required over many generations until the last sheep hears its Shepherd’s voice. Neither is every vessel a Peter, a Paul, or a Luther. The Lord has not called a particular vessel, but vessels to minister His saving word.

Whether skimpy or substantial, the biographical sketches of the Lord’s vessels recorded in the Scriptures are instructive in this regard. They tell of no particular type of man “ideally” suited for the Lord’s ministry—no one “man for all seasons” without the seasoning of the sanctifying Spirit.

What did the Lord look for in the men He chose to be His vessels? Did He want an older, more experienced man? We might think so when we read that Moses was eighty when called from Midian. But Jeremiah was a young man of only twenty when “the word of the Lord” came to him (Jer. 1:6).

Perhaps the Lord sought men of high standing—important, well-known, and influential men, and exceptionally bright individuals with the education credentials to prove it. Look at the record: Moses was well-educated in the court of Pharaoh; Isaiah may have been of noble birth; Ezekiel was the son of a priest; Paul sat at the feet of the famed Gamaliel. But Elisha was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen when Elijah placed the prophet’s mantle on his shoulders (1 Kings 19:19). Amos humbly stated that he was “not a prophet,” but a herdsman and caretaker of sycamore trees (Amos 7:15). Most of the Twelve were fishermen, one a tax collector!

What of the willingness to serve as the Lord’s vessel? Did He commission only those whose life-long desire was to prophesy (preach) the Lord’s word? Were all like young and previously-dedicated Samuel, saying “Speak Lord, Your servant hears”? If so, why didn’t Moses of slow tongue mumble a “thank you” to the Lord at the burning bush, adding, “It’s just what I have always wanted”? How could gentle Jeremiah have aspired to the office of prophet in Israel during those rebellious times? Jonah ran and shipped himself away! Saul persecuted the Gospel Way!

Surely we can see how the Lord’s vessels vary. Their differing personalities or temperaments are evident. Tim LaHaye actually wrote a book (*Transformed Temperaments*, 1971) in which he used the Scripture record to label Simon “The Sanguine,” Moses “The Melancholy,” and Paul “The Choleric.” Although we cannot agree with everything LaHaye writes on this subject—particularly his theology of sanctification—his study does emphasize the variety of strengths and weaknesses found in the personalities of the Lord’s called servants, used and improved by the transforming Spirit of God.

Since “temperaments” or in-born personality traits are made up of weaknesses as well as strengths, who can say that one vessel is “ideally” suited to minister the gospel in any particular place, while another is not? How can we of limited wisdom ever fully comprehend the purposeful thinking of the Lord in this matter? “Yes,” we would say, “Elijah and John the Baptizer were certainly rugged and strong individuals in appearance and manner. They were made-to-order for the powerful preaching of repentance to which they were called.” But which of us would have chosen gentle, timid, and youthful Jeremiah to preach repentance to rebellious Israel?

All of this suggests a comparison between the way the Lord chooses His vessels in this world and the way a woman chooses her vessels at a “Tupperware Party.” The Lord sees that His vessels are all made of the same substance; the woman likewise. But Tupperware is made of durable plastic, each piece already perfectly formed and prepared for its particular purpose. The Lord’s vessels are all made of the earth; they are fragile, breakable vessels. They are variously shaped and prepared, but none is perfect—there are rough edges to be smoothed, a variety of applications to be made, and firing to endure.

We prepared for the Lord’s ministry through many years of diligent study in college and seminary. Some may have been aware of such purposeful preparations even earlier. Upon graduation from the seminary we may indeed have thought ourselves to be prepared and durable, like Tupperware. But soon we

were made aware that we are earthenware; and so soon we may have found comfort and encouragement in the revelation of Holy Scripture that, indeed, from eternity our Lord has ordained and chosen nothing but earthen vessels to minister His glorious word. We can handle this as long as He mercifully handles us—**”that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us”!**

II.

MOSES

God’s man, Moses, was a minister of the word; he was called and prepared to serve the Old Testament people of God not only as their deliverer from Egyptian bondage, but as the deliverer of God’s word to them. We have chosen a few portions of the Scripture record concerning Moses to demonstrate the Lord’s merciful handling of His chosen vessels.

God Prepares Moses for His Call

Acts 7:20ff.

20) “At this time Moses was born, **and was well pleasing to God**; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months.

21) “But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.

22) “And Moses was **learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.**

23) “But when he was forty years old, it **came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.**

24) “And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian.

25) “**For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand**, but they did not understand.

26) “And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?’

27) “But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, ‘**Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?**

28) ‘Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?’

29) “**Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a sojourner in the land of Midian**, where he had two sons.

Hebrews 11:23ff.

23) By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, **because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command.**

24) By faith Moses, when he became of age, **refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,**

25) **choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,**

26) **esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.**

27) By faith he forsook Egypt, **not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.**

“**By faith**”—that is the outstanding point to be recognized in these verses. Moses’ parents trusted in the God of their fathers. The “goodly beauty” (Heb. טוב) of their newborn child so impressed their hearts that they could not bear to have him taken from them and drowned in the Nile. Neither were they afraid of Pharaoh’s command. By great faith they set Moses on a course unknown to them and fraught with danger. They had no choice under the circumstances; their son’s life must be spared!

The Lord had a choice. He had already chosen Moses. That is the true significance of Acts 7:20: “At this time Moses was born, **and was well pleasing to God.**” The NIV gives the wrong impression by its interpretation of και ην αστειος τω Θεω as: “and he was no ordinary child.” The word αστειος (LXX: Exod. 2:2, for טוב), found also in the Hebrews 11:23 passage, is placed in the dative case here. The point in Acts 7:20, then, is not that Moses was an extraordinary or a beautiful child, but that he was “pleasing in **relation to God.**” It had to be so—the Lord, Who chooses His servants, had made Moses “well pleasing” to Himself! (Cf. Jer. 1:4,5).

“**By faith** Moses, when he became of age, . . .” (Heb. 11:24ff.)—the Lord created and preserved Moses’ faith in the midst and in spite of tremendous temptations to apostasy. By the marvelous working of God over a period of forty years, Moses was well prepared in the court of Pharaoh to lead God’s people away from Egypt; but he himself was not led astray by Egypt! We would choose to prepare potential ministers of the gospel by means of the Christian Day School, High School, and College. But the Lord

may choose otherwise for His vessels, fitting them for His special purposes. All unknown to us, He will preserve also these from evil.

It is truly to be hoped, even expected, that all public servants of the word possess “strong faith” before they are called into the ministry—a faith not unlike that of Moses:

They should be like Moses—
–“refusing” all personal honor that “might have been”;
–“choosing rather” to suffer affliction and persecution with their fellow Christians, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin;
–“considering the reproach of Christ” to be of more value than the world’s riches—looking to their eternal reward in heaven;
–having a faith that is willing to endure all contrary and fearful enemies of the gospel, because it “sees” and perceives the invisible almighty and gracious God of heaven close at hand to protect, defend, and prosper the cause of Christ and His servants.

The Lord’s men should have “**faith**” to enter the ministry—not merely refusing the honor of a secular profession in the world, in order to have honor in the Church. The Lord wants servants, not self-seeking tyrants.

They should have “**faith**”—not a prideful sense of “right” based on the intellectual grasp and knowledge of God’s word; but a deep and humble appreciation of the **righteousness** which is theirs by the experience of Spirit-worked faith alone. The Lord wants warm-hearted evangelists, not cold-hearted legalists.

Numbers 12:1ff.

1) Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

2) And they said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” And the Lord heard it.

3) **(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)**

4) Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!” So the three came out.

5) Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward.

6) Then He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream.

7) Not so with My servant Moses; **he is faithful in all My house.**

8) **I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”**

Moses was “**meek**.” “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3).

There are two stunning examples of the humility of this great leader, recorded in close proximity to one another. In the previous chapter of Numbers, the young and not-yet-so-humble Joshua, one of Moses’ “choice men,” got upon his high horse to suggest that Moses forbid Eldad and Medad from prophesying in the camp. But Moses answered: “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD put His Spirit upon them!” (Num. 11:7ff.). Here the humility of Moses immediately expresses itself. Far from feeling that he obtained his office by some merit, he wishes that all the Lord’s people could share the Spirit of prophecy with him.

In Numbers 12, the humility of Moses is demonstrated by his speechlessness. He may have been purely shocked to silence upon hearing his own brother and sister challenge his authority so vehemently. He may have been deeply hurt by the suggestion that the nationality of his wife made him unfit for his office. But could it be that humble Moses pondered for a moment whether there might be something to this charge? He thought himself no better than Miriam or Aaron. In view of the fact that neither of them was tied to a Gentile, maybe But the Lord stepped into the conversation to speak on behalf of His humble servant. For the good of all concerned, the Lord powerfully certified the call of Moses.

Without question, humility is a gift of the Spirit, so very necessary for Christ’s servants, yet rarely found. Moses was not born with humility. He was taught by God through faith, correction, and trial. Was it humility that caused Moses at age forty to kill the Egyptian, on the supposition that “his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand”? (Acts 7:25). Was it humility that moved Moses to attempt a reconciliation between his fighting Hebrew brethren on the following day? “Who made

you a ruler and a judge over us? Do **you** want to kill me as you did the Egyptian?" — Good questions! Moses may have felt some kind of "inner call" and felt himself quite qualified to be the leader of his people. But his people knew nothing of it. "Who," indeed, had appoint him?

Suddenly, he who had appointed himself the leader of Israel was forced to flee for his life! Suddenly, Moses, who "had it all," was a poor pilgrim herdsman in the land of Midian! He was destined to be the great leader of God's people, God's instrument to show forth His glory before the whole world by many power-works. No wonder the Lord took forty more years to work humility in His chosen vessel. No wonder Moses **became** humblest of all men on the face of the earth.

Without question, humility is a gift of the Spirit, so very necessary for Christ's servants whose calling often makes them especially susceptible to pride. "Ambition," writes Luther, "is the rankest poison to the church, when it possesses preachers. It is a consuming fire. The Holy Scripture is given to destroy the desires of the flesh; therefore we must not therein seek after temporal honour. I much marvel for what cause people are proud and haughty; we are born in sin, and every moment in danger of death. Are we proud of our scabs and scalds? We, who are altogether an unclean thing" (*The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, World, 1952, p. 248, #356).

It is rarely found, but the Lord has His ways of working humility into his vessels. Isaiah was mightily humbled by a vision of God's holiness. The gifted Ezekiel was often reminded of his "earthiness" as the Lord repeatedly called him, "Son of man" (אֲדָמָה). Lest Paul be "exalted above measure" by the "abundance of the revelations" he had received, he receive his "thorn in the flesh." The two sons of Zebedee and all the rest of the Twelve (minus the betrayer) thought themselves—each one—to be "the greatest"; but Christ taught them humility by correction and by example. Boastful Peter broke down in tears when the Lord "looked" at him.

The Lord adds more humility to faith in His chosen vessels by as many means as there are men to mold. Blessed are those who are so mercifully handled, that whenever they get filled up with themselves, they are not dropped and broken by their Master, but emptied!

God Calls and Strengthens Moses in that Calling

Exodus 3:11ff.

11) But Moses said to God, "**Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?**"

12) So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

13) Then Moses said to God, "**Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them,** 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name? what shall I say to them?'"

14) And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

4:1) Then Moses answered and said, "**But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'**" (The Lord proceeds to give Moses three signs to show Israel.)

10) Then Moses said to the LORD, "**O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.**"

11) So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?"

12) Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."

13) But he said, "**O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.**"

14) So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

15) Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do.

16) So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God.

17) And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs."

"**Who am I? . . . please send someone else.**" This was certainly not the calling that Moses had in mind when he sought the leadership of Israel so long before! Please, Lord, not me, not this! . . . Earthen vessels are often plagued with all kinds of doubts and anxieties when they consider the rigors of their calling—their assigned work in the context of their own weaknesses and inabilities. The more seriously devoted the vessels are, the more often they may question their ability.

But the deciding question is not “Who am I?” The deciding questions are, “Who is **He**?” and “Did **He** call **me**?” Once these questions are answered, there are no other considerations that should be permitted to bring us to despair of our calling. Who among all the Lord’s vessels is sufficient for any of the things He requires of them? Which vessel is described as made of heavenly material, or even gold or silver? None is sufficient to do anything of himself, “**but our sufficiency is of God**” (2 Cor. 3:5).

What Moses thought he wanted—what he once pressed himself into—but no longer, God was now pressing him to do! History shows that especially the great vessels of the Lord—the Old Testament prophets, the apostles, Luther, etc.—did not put themselves forth as workers in the kingdom. “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you,” said Jesus to His disciples (John 15:16).

Exodus 4:24

And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him.

Moses received more encouragement from the Lord’s words to him after the promise of miraculous signs for Pharaoh. His commission is repeated. He is told that those who sought his life in Egypt were all dead. He is warned of the stubbornness of the new Pharaoh, but also assured of the success of his mission by the presence and power of JAHWEH—the “I AM” eternal God of Israel.

But then we find Moses on his way to Egypt without having circumcised his son. It is probable that he and his Gentile wife had discussed the matter some time before, and Zipporah had won the argument. But when the Lord threatened to “kill” Moses suddenly, Zipporah knew what the Lord wanted! How could Moses lead God’s people when his own son was yet outside the covenant of Abraham? Did he not consider, or would he put off the safety of his son?

Moses was “meek,” but he would not be allowed to be weak, giving in to the wrong ways of his wife. It must have been difficult for Moses to hear not once, but twice: “Surely you are a husband of blood to me!” But he was to be the Lord’s man, now more than ever before.

Exodus 4:29 - 6:1

4:29) Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel.

30) And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people.

31) **So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped . . .**

5:1) Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ` Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”

2) And Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.” . . .

6) So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying,

7) “You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves.

8) And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not diminish it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, ` Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’” . . .

15) Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why are you dealing thus with your servants?

16) There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, ` Make brick!’” . . .

17) But he said, “You are idle! You are idle! Therefore you say, ` Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD’.

18) Therefore go now and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks.”

19) And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, “You shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota.”

20) Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them.

21) **And they said to them, “Let the LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.”**

22) So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me?

23) For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.”

It was a “honeymoon” start! The beginning of Moses and Aaron’s work was marked by the rejoicing of the people, who accepted their God-sent servants. Moses was relieved! But this was not the last. Pharaoh responded to the command of the Lord to let His people go by increasing the burden upon the

Israelites. The people then took it out on the Lord's servants: "Let the LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us" (Exod. 5:21).

The Lord's vessels should not expect that, with all His promises of victory in the gospel they preach, there will be nothing but successes in the work of the kingdom. While the Lord is engaged in prospering our labors in His behalf, He does not forget to humble and chasten His workers, so that they may look to him the more and be strengthened in His might.

It is clear that Moses' own faith needed strengthening. Is there ever a time in the earthly lives of God's vessels when they do not need strengthening? We venture to say that it is especially in the beginning of our ministry that our faith needs strengthening. Yet, how few are the seminary graduates who recognize this? What shall we say of our own experience upon graduation? Had we not received intense and specialized training for our ministry? Did we not demonstrate in the classroom and in the pulpit that we were prepared? Having received good grades, the commendations of teachers and hearers, and finally the divine call to serve the Lord's people, were we not anxious to "set the world on fire" with our preaching of the law and the gospel?

This does not mean that we were not aware of our weaknesses. We were perhaps quite aware that our preaching, people- and practical-skills needed improvement, to say nothing of our proficiency in the biblical languages. If someone had asked us at the time where we were lacking, we may have come up with any number of personal shortcomings. Still, we had been called by the Lord—the people would be ready to accept our pastoral correction and counsel as from God Himself!

In all that Moses spoke of his weaknesses, he never indicated that his **faith** might not measure up to the trials of the Lord's calling. This is also a rarity in the graduating seminarian. Moses thought he knew best what he lacked, in the beginning. So did (do) we, in the beginning. But the Lord knew (knows) better. Even the humblest of God's servants must continue to feel their own weakness and dependence upon their Savior to the fullest. Otherwise, how can "God's strength" be made "perfect" in them? (2 Cor. 12:9). The best time for this experience to begin is at the beginning of the vessel's service.

Exodus 6:1-8

1) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

2) And God spoke to Moses and said to him: "**I am the LORD.**"

3) I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, **but by My name, LORD, I was not known to them.**

4) I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers.

5) And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.

6) Therefore say to the children of Israel: **I am the LORD**; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

7) I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that **I am the LORD** your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

8) And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: **I am the LORD.**"

"**Then the Lord said . . .**" How did God strengthen Moses' faith and dependence upon Him when His chosen vessel suffered his first great disappointment in the ministry? The Lord **spoke** to Moses; that's all. He told Moses how He would force Pharaoh to let Israel go. He repeated the fact that He had "established" His covenant with Israel, heard their "groaning" under Egyptian bondage, and "remembered" His covenant. Most importantly, the Lord emphasized that He would make Himself known as JAHWEH—the covenant God of Israel.

In Exodus 6:1-8 we see how JAHWEH impresses this wonderful name upon Moses in speaking to him. Four times in these verses the God of Israel says: "אֲנִי יְהוָה—I AM the God Who is faithful to His promises. The covenant I made with your fathers shall be carried out because **I AM** the eternal God, the personal, continuous, absolutely self-determining existence. Do not think that because so many of your years have passed, I am late or have forgotten my promises to your fathers. For **I AM** the eternal One—my

covenant, made so many hundreds of years ago is as new today as it was then, since I live and work in the everlasting present!”

Girdlestone (*Synonyms*, p. 37) points out that “I AM” is found in such passages addressed to the patriarchs as Genesis 26:3 and Genesis 31:3, translated: “I WILL BE with you.” But the patriarchs did not yet perceive the full significance of the name, he says. — “By My name, JAHWEH, I was not known to them, “ Moses was told (Exod. 6:3). Yet now, as the Lord revealed Himself to Moses and to Israel, personally and powerfully working to fulfill the long-ago covenant promises, they would learn to appreciate the “substantial reality” of His covenant name.

Exodus 6:9-13

9) So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they would not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.

10) And the **LORD spoke to Moses**, saying,

11) “Go in, speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he must let the children of Israel go out of his land.”

12) And Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, “The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, **for I am of uncircumcised lips?**”

13) Then the **LORD spoke to Moses** and Aaron, and **gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt**, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Moses was surely encouraged. But when he relayed the message of the Lord to Israel, he got nowhere! “They would not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage” (6:9). What did the Lord do then? He simply **spoke** to Moses again! He repeated His command: “Go in, speak to Pharaoh . . .” When Moses objected once more that it was all useless because of his “uncircumcised lips,” the Lord did no more than patiently give Aaron and Moses “a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.”

One might think that what the Lord’s vessel needed at this point of early discouragement in his ministry were more visible signs of God’s power, such as the immediate removal of Pharaoh, or the collapse of Egypt. But the Lord only spoke His word to Moses, and that gospel word had a strengthening effect on him. William Moenkemoeller correctly refers to Exodus 6:14-30 as a break in the narrative, “a new chapter” in Moses’ life from that point on:

It is here that he inserts the genealogical account of his and Aaron’s ancestry. And repeatedly he remarks that these are that Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said that they should go to the children of Israel with their message and to Pharaoh with their demand. He especially stresses the fact that the Lord spoke to him saying, “I am Jehovah.” And as he views these days of soul-struggle in retrospect, it sounds as though he were mocking himself when he relates “And Moses said before the Lord, ‘Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me.’” “Is not that equivalent to saying, “Just think of it, that is what Moses said at that time and see how changed he was afterward?” (*Word Pictures of Bible Events*, 2:20-21).

From this moment of his encounter with JAHWEH’s word, we read no more of Moses’ complaining of his inadequacy, nor of any disappointment at Pharaoh’s obduracy. Moses possessed nothing but a firm and courageous resolve before Israel and before Pharaoh. In fact, although he was again assured by the Lord that Aaron would be his mouthpiece in addressing Pharaoh (7:1), the record seems to indicate that it was **Moses** who did much of the speaking before Pharaoh, as the Lord gave him strength (Cf. Exod. 8:9,26,29; 9:29; 10:9,25,29).

Moses received what he needed most for his ministry—stronger faith from the word of JAHWEH. He needed and received this strength, not only early, but also later in his ministry.

When Moses stood firm at the edge of the Red Sea, commanding Israel, “Do not be afraid, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord . . .,” his heart was trembling inside. He who searches the heart asked, “Why do you cry to Me?” and promptly gave Moses His word of command and promise once again (Exod. 14:13-15).

After the golden calf incident, the Lord announced that He would no longer “go up in the midst” of Israel to the promised land, but would only speak with Moses “outside the camp,” lest He destroy the “stiff-necked people.” Moses needed greater assurance that the Lord’s “presence” would go with His people. The Lord repeatedly spoke His assuring word to Moses. But Moses kept on reaching; he wanted **more** than the Lord’s word. Yes! A visible revelation of JAHWEH’s glory would give him the assurance and strength he needed to carry on! . . . But no! The Lord answered: “**I will make all My goodness pass**

before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live” (Exod. 33:19-20).

Moses could not endure to see the glory of God. Neither can we, although in our struggles as His earthen vessels we too may wish it. But Moses **heard** the glory of God in the gospel of God’s grace in Christ! It was all he ever really needed. It is all **we** ever need. For with the gospel word of God’s forgiveness and faithfulness in Christ comes all the calm assurance of our God’s presence with His people, **and** with His vessels.

Again and again we must flee for faith’s encouragement to the word of Him Who has revealed Himself in the New Testament as the timeless, “**I AM**” God of His believing people (Cf. John 6:35; 8:58; 9:5; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

We need constant assurance that the gospel of Christ is indeed God’s truth and powerful to work faith where He sends it, even though all the world reject our preaching of it.

We must be repeatedly convinced by the words of our Lord that our work is really His work—that in spite of our sins and weaknesses He is ever present to bless our poor efforts for the sake of His glory.

Therein we shall be reminded and moved by Christ’s Spirit to speak His saving “truth” faithfully—not fearing what man can do to us, nor weakening in the face of rejection, nor losing Christ’s love for redeemed souls—looking steadfastly to the glory that is promised by Him Who **is** and **ever shall be** the God of Abraham’s children (Cf. Gal. 3:7-9).

“And behold, **I AM** coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. **I AM** the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:12-14).

Dear Lord, to Thy true servants give
The grace to Thee alone to live.
Once bound by sin, but saved by Thee,
They go to set the pris’ners free,
The Gospel message to proclaim
That men may call upon Thy name.
They gladly go at Thy command
To spread Thy Word o’er sea and land.
Be Thou with them and make them strong
To heal sin’s ills, to right the wrong.
Thou rulest over wind and wave,
And mighty is Thine arm to save.
When all their labor seems in vain,
Revive their sinking hopes again;
And when success crowns what they do,
Oh, keep them humble, Lord, and true
Until before Thy judgment seat
They lay their trophies at Thy feet. Amen. TLH #482

**A CRITICAL SURVEY OF THE STANDARD DOGMATICS BOOK OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

Thomas Schuetze

Title of the Work: *CHRISTIAN DOGMATICS*

Name of Publisher: Fortress Press, Philadelphia.

Year of Publication: 1984.

Number of volumes: Two. (Vol. 1 has 569 pages, vol. 2, 587 pages, plus an index.)

Cost for the two-volume set: \$45.95.

AUTHORS

The following information has been gathered from a 1987 *Christian News* article. It shows that the authors of this dogmatics book are highly respected, influential theologians and professors of what were formerly the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), and what is now the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The ELCA came into being as a result of the January 1988 merger of the ALC, LCA, and AELC. *Christian Dogmatics* can therefore be seen as a reflection of what the seminary students (and, in turn, the membership) of the ELCA are being taught.

1. Carl E. Braaten (LCA), Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, IL. Professor of Systematic Theology.
2. Robert W. Jenson, (LCA), Luther Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, PA. Professor of Systematic Theology.
3. Gerhard O. Forde, (ALC), Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN. Professor of Systematic Theology.
4. Philip J. Hefner, (LCA), Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, IL. Director of Graduate Studies/Further Education and Professor of Systematic Theology.
5. Paul R. Sponheim, (ALC), Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN. Professor of Systematic Theology.
6. Hans Schwarz, (ALC), Formerly at Trinity Lutheran Theological Seminary, Columbus, OH, as Professor of Systematic Theology. Now at the University of Regensburg, Regensburg, West Germany.

The editors of *Christian Dogmatics* are the first two men listed above (Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson). On the first page of the preface they write: “Although all of us stand within the Lutheran tradition, the differences among us, and the consequent inconsistencies in the book, are considerable...At some points the authors simply disagree, and this disagreement occasionally reaches the point of contradiction” (1,xvii)¹ In other words—the editors forewarn us—don’t be surprised if the six men responsible for writing this book don’t see eye-to-eye on a given Scripture subject. They may differ from, or even contradict, one another in the things they write. Such a statement seems terribly strange and downright heretical to us conservative Lutherans. We believe and teach that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, that every passage of Scripture has one authentic meaning, and that to “agree to disagree agreeably” in matters of doctrine is wrong. We wonder: How can those who purport to be Bible theologians say, “We find it possible to disagree”? (1,xvii) The answer to this question becomes obvious as we bear in mind the authors’ view of the Bible.

“They do indeed say, ‘The Holy Scriptures are the source and norm of the knowledge of God’s revelation which concerns the Christian faith.’ But they add, ‘The ultimate authority of Christian theology is not the biblical canon as such, but the gospel of Jesus Christ to which the Scriptures bear witness—the “canon within the canon.”’ They deny the inerrancy of Scripture and assert, ‘Today it is impossible to assume the literal historicity of all things recorded.’ Employing historical critical hermeneutics, they find the Bible to be self-contradictory: ‘Critical attention to what the texts actually say has exploded the notion that one orthodox dogmatics can be mined out of Scripture. There are different theological tendencies and teachings in the various texts. Ecumenically this has led to the practical conclusion that the traditional demand for a complete consensus of doctrine may be wrongheaded, if even the Scriptures fail to contain such a consensus.’²

With this kind of attitude towards the Bible, it’s not surprising that the authors of *Christian Dogmatics* come to the conclusions that they do in their book. Nor should it be surprising that the reading of this “critical survey” is not going to be spiritually edifying, anymore than the reading of the two 500-plus-page volumes is spiritually edifying. Something positive, however, can still come out of it. This survey can serve the constructive purpose of

¹ Here and throughout this paper, the first number in parenthesis following a quotation refers to the volume number of *Christian Dogmatics* (1 or 2) and the following number(s) to the page number(s).

² “Systematic Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No.3, Summer 1990, p.214

1) deepening our appreciation for the confessional Lutheran heritage handed down to us by our Lutheran forefathers,

- 2) moving us to praise the Lord for the undeserved mercy He's shown us in preserving His pure Word in our midst, and
- 3) leading us to realize how desperately that Word is needed by others (including other so-called "Lutherans") so that our zeal will be redoubled to go and share with them, as God gives us opportunity, what we are privileged to possess. That is the hope and prayer of this writer.

We will now go on to the actual survey. The survey consists of nine parts. Each part contains a listing of selected quotations from *Christian Dogmatics*, all of them dealing with the Scripture doctrine at hand. Each part also begins with a short indented summary of what I gather the ELCA's official position to be (as explained by their leading theologians). Hopefully, these summaries are accurate. In many cases it is none too easy to discover what the writers are trying to say!

Note: All bold-faced lettering found in the quotations was added for emphasis by the present writer.

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1. The Historical-Critical Method of Interpreting Scripture

ELCA Official Position

We must use the historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible. In other words, when we read and study the Bible we have to sort out its contents using "scientific" methods. What we find to be good we may retain. What we find to be in error we must reject.

"Inasmuch as Christian theology depends on historical sources, it is bound to use the critical methods of research common to historical science in general. **The aim of the historical method is not only to establish facts, but also to search out their meanings in their original historical context...**the historical criticism of the biblical texts and sacred traditions on which Christianity is based has been feared by conservative Christians as the destruction of the foundations of faith. Actually, however, **the historical method is an indispensable ally of Christian theology**" (1,20).

"The texts and traditions of the Christian faith must be encountered for the sake of their meaning, first in terms of their original contexts and second in terms of the contemporary context of the interpreter. **Without this process of interpretation in the historical method, we end up with a mere hodgepodge of names and dates and places and events**" (1,21).

"Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession states that 'for the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments' (BC 32). As the various communions strive to understand their own confessional heritage, they may converge on the same point which lies at the center of the faith they hold in common. **It is erroneous to conceive of the rich diversity of Christian confessions in history on the adversarial model. They may be more complementary than competitive**" (1,52,53).

2. The Doctrine of Inspiration (Inerrancy of the Scriptures)

ELCA Official Position

Not everything in the Bible stands directly as the Word of God. Therefore it cannot be said that the Bible is infallible. The doctrine of inspiration (i.e., that God "breathed into" the writers the very thoughts and words He wanted them to write down) is only a theory.

"The ancient doctrine of verbal inspiration survives. In some Christian groups **the theory of inspiration** is used to vouch for the absolute reliability of the Bible on all matters that relate to cosmology, biology, geography, chronology, and history. The Bible is used as a bulwark against the evolutionary hypothesis of modern natural science...In modern Protestant fundamentalism, which ironically claims to bear the legacy of the Reformation, the authority of Scripture is extended to include infallible information on all kinds of subjects.

"Fundamentalist biblicism is rejected by most theologians and is out of favor in most of the seminaries that train clergy for the parish ministry. They reject biblicism not merely because **historical science has disclosed errors and contradictions in the biblical writings**, but rather because the authority of the Bible is elevated at the expense of Christ and his gospel. Non-fundamentalist Protestants also accept the Bible as the Word of God in some sense, but they point out that the concept of the Word of God...cannot be confined to the Bible. **We cannot say that the Bible is the Word of God** in a simplistic way, for the concept of the Word of God bears many diverse meanings in the classical Christian tradition" (1,74,75).

“Luther believed that the literal meaning of Scripture is identical with its historical content; things happened exactly as they were written down. **Today it is impossible to assume the literal historicity of all things recorded.** What the biblical authors report is not accepted as a literal transcript of the factual course of events. Therefore, critical scholars inquire behind the text and attempt to reconstruct the real history that took place” (1,76,77).

“A deep gulf exists between the biblical world of thought and that of, say, Alexandria in the third century, Rome in the thirteenth century, Wittenberg in the sixteenth century, or New York in the twentieth century. **It is the task of hermeneutics to make an intelligible transmission of meaning** from the biblical text to the completely new situation here and now” (1,77).

3. The Doctrine of the Trinity

ELCA Official Position

God is not three separate and distinct “persons.” Rather, He manifests Himself to humans in three different ways. The phrase “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” is a slogan the early Christians came up with to describe their “three-dimensional” God.

“‘Father’ was Jesus’ peculiar address to the particular transcendence over against whom he lived. Just by this address he qualified himself as ‘the Son,’...’Spirit’ was the term provided by the whole biblical theology for what comes of such a meeting between this God and a special human of his...Thus ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’ summarizes faith’s apprehension of God” (1,93).

“‘Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier,’...is...not a name at all. It is rather an assemblage of after-the-fact theological abstractions” (1,96).

“‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’ is appropriate for naming the gospel’s God because the phrase immediately summarizes **the primal Christian interpretation of God**” (1,96).

“**‘Father, Son and Holy Spirit,’ is a slogan** for the temporal structure of the church’s apprehension of God” (1,99).

“In the Bible generally, the ‘Spirit’ is God as the power of the future to overturn what already is, and just so fulfill it...The Spirit is the power of the eschaton now to be at once goal and negation of what is. In the new Testament, **this Spirit is identified as Jesus’ spirit, as every human being has spirit...**the biblical ‘Spirit’ is the inevitable word for (the) second identification of God” (1,101).

“Thus we have a temporally three-point identification of the **gospel’s God**. If we think of an identification as a pointing operation (as in ‘Which one?’ ‘That one’), we must point with all three of time’s arrows in order to point out this God: to the Father as Given, to the Lord Jesus as the present possibility of God’s reality for us, and to the Spirit as the outcome of Jesus’ work” (1,101).

“As a piece of trinitarian language, *hypostasis* is merely an item of linguistic debris knocked from Hellenic philosophy by collision with Yahweh. Present understanding would be advanced if we replaced it with a word now philosophically active. Readers will not be surprised that we propose ‘identity’” (1,138).

“That there are **three identities in God** means that this God’s deed of being the one God is three times repeated, and so that each repetition is a being of God” (1,139).

“Truly, the Trinity is simply the Father and **the man Jesus** and their Spirit as the Spirit of the believing community” (1,155).

“Son and Spirit derive their deity from the Father” (1,156).

“God is not an event in time, nor even an event extended through all time. God is rather the event by which the world has a future, to *be* a world of time...**God is the temporalizing of the world**” (1,167,168).

“The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus; the Father is the Father of Jesus; and so the Father and the Spirit are one God. The unity of God and Spirit is trinitarian. In the church, **the Father is the givenness of God** and **the Spirit the futurity of God**; and these stand against each other only by the different ways in which each is the one and the same God” (2,148).

4. The Doctrine of Creation

ELCA Official Position

The creation account recorded in Genesis chapter 1 is a myth. God did not create the world out of nothing in six days using His almighty Word. Instead, He used the process of evolution (starting it all off with the Big Bang some 18 billion years ago). Man was “created” good in

the beginning, but he wasn't perfect. He is now tending towards a high destiny, a destiny that will be eventually realized when man is united by the creation with the creator God.

"A number of scholars have classified the myths of creation in the world's religions. Charles Long, for example, has provided five different categories of such myths, world-parent myths, myths of creation from chaos and from the cosmic egg, creation from nothing, and earth-diver myths. Within the creation-from-nothing classification, he gathers the following: the Australian myth of the Great Father, Hesiod, Rig Veda, the ancient Maya myth from the Popol Vuh, and myths from Polynesia, the Maori, the Tuamotua, the Egyptians, and the Zuni — in addition to **the Hebrew myth from Genesis**. Although there is no suggestion that all the myths are related or that they exerted influence on one another, **it is instructive to place the Hebrew-Christian primal myth of creation within the context of the universal human mythic reflection upon origins**" (1,277,278).

"Whether there is a creation out of nothing implied in the first verses (of Genesis) is **debatable**" (1,286).

"The progressive unfolding of God's work of creation in Genesis 1 renders it **congenial to modern notions of evolution** or development" (1,286).

"The four lines [of 1 Corinthians 8:6 - TRS] contain high Hebrew-Jewish tradition ('One God, the Father'), Stoic borrowing ('from whom are all things and through whom we exist'), allusion to the wisdom tradition ('through whom are all things and through whom we exist' — this could also be Stoic), and **a breathtaking leap of creative imagination** in placing Jesus Christ in this context...we are impressed by **the audacity with which the early Christians 'upped the ante' of belief claims** for their contemporaries and for us" (1,289).

"Scientific discovery in the past 150 years has opened up breathtaking vistas for a new understanding of nature (physical, biological, and social). **The concepts of the creator God and of creation must be related to this new understanding of nature if they are to be credible**" (1,318).

"Humans can claim no arrogant credit for being co-creators, with God; they *were created co-creators*. Even put in materialistic terms, humans did not evolve themselves; **the evolutionary process—under God's rule, we would argue—evolved them** as co-creators. To be co-creator means that *Homo sapiens* shares self-consciously and responsibly in the formation of the world and its unfolding toward its final consummation under God. Teilhard de Chardin has put this evocatively in his maxim that **'man is evolution become aware of itself'**" (1,326).

"The characteristics of being co-creator are in continuity within the evolutionary scheme, with previous forms of life, but at the same time unique in their precise and highly sophisticated configuration in the human species. **We suggest that this co-creatorhood is what it means to be 'in the image of God'**" (1,327).

"It is almost universally held among theologians that **the stories and concepts we have of Adam and Eve in paradise are legends and myths. The idea of humans living in a blessed primeval stage before the fall is looked on as poetical speculation, not history**...To hold to the primeval condition in Eden as a matter of history would be an intellectual impossibility and to misunderstand faith" (1,328).

"**The universe may have come into existence through the Big Bang some 18 billion years ago**; the earth's crust congealed 4 billion years ago; dinosaurs flourished 180 million to 63 million years ago; *Homo erectus*, an important ancestor of our species flourished 600,000, to 350,000 years ago" (1,354,355).

"Arthur Peacocke has suggested the most adequate picture of the creator God is that of the composer of intricate fugues, who builds on original elements while employing an almost infinite number of variations of those elements. Others have suggested the Hindu God of the dance, Shiva. In any case, **it appears that the transcendence of God the Creator may now be conceived more adequately as being 'in there,' in the very stuff and possibility of creation, rather than 'out there'**" (1,355).

"Traditional doctrine has predicated that humans were perfect in paradise, that they possessed the maximum of their abilities and their goodness at the beginning of their career on this earth. Evolutionary theory suggests that humans were primitive at their origins, particularly if those origins include humanoid forms prior to *Homo sapiens*. Consequently, **the career of the human being is an ascent toward fulfillment rather than a descent from greatness**. For this reason, we have emphasized the concept of 'destiny,' namely, that **human being was created with a high destiny, toward which it is tending**" (1,356).

"...we live in a creation that will ultimately unite us with the creator God" (1,357).

5. The Doctrine of Sin

ELCA Official Position

Sin did not enter the world when Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. It had its origin in man himself and was given naturally when God “created” the world. (Satan isn’t a real being. All talk of the devil and demons in Scripture is symbolic.) Death is not the punishment for sin. It, too, is a natural part of God’s “creation.”

“...sin is the sort of thing that simply goes with being human” (1,389).

“While Satan may be goodness fallen par excellence, that figure explains human fallenness **only by illustration and not by causation**” (1,389).

“With Adam, God’s adventure with humankind was not perfected, but begun and well begun. **Unfallen humanity was not perfect, then**” (1,394).

“While the simplest view is to see the deed of sin as bringing its own destiny, there is a persistent biblical witness to **God’s own involvement in human death**” (1,434).

“**Death...belong(s) to the ‘shadowside of creation.’** That fits with the recognition that humankind was created ‘good, not perfect’” (1,435).

“**Death is a basic order in God’s creation...**It is difficult to think that biological death is a result of sin and the fall” (2,562).

“We need to ‘emphatically resist’ the idea ‘that the devil causes...specific events of suffering. **We have already repelled an appeal to the devil as the direct explanation for sin...**We have accepted Paul Ricoeur’s suggestion that the demonic be incorporated into the Adamic myth as a complicating factor, because such a move is suggested by the logic of temptation, the experience of the pervasiveness of evil, and the biblical witness particularly to the liberating work of Jesus...**Any simple appeal to the devil as an explanatory factor would...jettison the absoluteness of God**” (1,439).

6. The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth (The Incarnation)

ELCA Official Position

The story of the virgin birth is a myth that was added to the Bible by early Christians to enhance Jesus’ status. Since God Himself created fatherhood and looked upon it as something good, there is no reason to exclude a human father from the birth of Jesus.

“Did Jesus’ consanguinity with the human race mean that he shared the nature of humanity before the fall or that he inherited the fallen nature along with all others? In late medieval theology, Jesus’ birth of the Virgin Mary settled the issue. Sin was transmitted by the male sperm in the sexual act; therefore, Jesus was exempt, having been born of a virgin and conceived by the Holy Ghost. **This explanation is another pseudotheological example of deductive reasoning, not to mention outdated biology**” (1,522).

“There are two opposite reactions to the discovery of **the mythic character of the incarnation**. The conservative reaction is to reject the discovery in defense of traditional faith. In its simplest form, this view argues that the Bible contains truth, not myth. The incarnation was a real event of history...The liberal reaction is to acknowledge the discovery of the mythic character of the incarnation, and then to demythologize the Christian faith to make it relevant to the contemporary world...Neither the conservative denial in the New Testament, nor the liberal approach of demythologizing has proven adequate for constructive Christian theology. **A third approach is possible: an interpretation of the myth as story, without taking its symbolic elements literally but also without eliminating its historical aspects**” (1,527,528).

“Already in the second century **the church borrowed ontological categories from Greek philosophy to interpret the myth of God becoming human**, of the Logos becoming flesh. Terms like *ousia*, *hypostasis*, *physis*, *prosopon*, and *idioma* are nonbiblical categories coming from the Greek philosophers” (1,530).

“The exclusion of a human father in the birth of Jesus has become more problematic to modern Christians than it was in ancient times...**Why should the absence of human paternity make the truth of God’s presence in the incarnation more apparent?** Is God the Father in competition with the role of our human father? Did not God create fatherhood and look upon it as ‘very good’? Why then should human fatherhood be eliminated in the work of salvation?” (1,547).

7. The Doctrine of Salvation Through Christ Alone

ELCA Official Position

The authors of *Christian Dogmatics* do say that “there is one way of salvation.” However, their definition of “salvation” is so broad that it would seem to leave open the possibility of

non-Christians being “saved.” I could not find one clear-cut statement affirming that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save the world from sin and that one must believe this in order to inherit eternal life.

“Christians believe in the universality of salvation in Jesus’ name. It is God’s will that all people shall be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:4). Evangelicals generally accept universal salvation in this sense as valid in principle for all people. But they restrict salvation in the end to those who actually hear the gospel and put their faith in Christ. Under this restriction the rift that has been opened up in the world through sin will widen to an eternal chasm, splitting the one world of God’s creation into two unreconcilable halves, only God’s half will be much smaller than the devil’s, in fact only a remnant of the whole. **There is not much for the angels to sing about, if the evangelicals get what they expect—a heaven sparsely filled with only card-carrying Christians**” (1,563).

“There is spiritual danger in reducing the power and future of the universal Christ to the **pinhole size of the believer’s faith...**” (1,564).

“**If we are told there is salvation in the other religions, there is no *a priori* reason to deny the claim.** It depends on what is meant by salvation. If salvation is the experience of illumination, then the Buddha can save. If salvation is the experience of union with God, then Hinduism can save. If salvation is being true to the ancestors, then Shintoism can save...**The reason Christians are confused and have appeared so smug about salvation is that they imagined they held a monopoly on salvation**” (1,565).

“If we really believe that the uniqueness of Jesus lies in his universality, that his identity is always being mediated through the concrete events of history, then we should be open to exploring **what the non-Christian religions can contribute** to our understanding of the universal identity of Jesus Christ” (1,567).

“The identity of Jesus cannot be limited to the particular contexts of our past...New contexts have made it possible for new meanings to blossom on old texts. They relate to the concrete struggles of people for life, health, wholeness, fulfillment salvation. **In India, Jesus is pictured by some as the Avatar. To us this means practically nothing, but in India it may mean a great deal.** In many parts of the Third World, Jesus is the liberator. Liberation has become the focal image of a whole new christology. To us it may also mean something, but not exactly the same as to people suffering the conditions of poverty, exploitation, and oppression...**Every culture has to ask of Jesus in its own way, ‘Are you the One who is to come, or do we look for another?’ Every people will have to answer, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ in a language they can understand**” (1,567).

“The Old Testament is the paradigm case of how one religion of another time and place can speak of Jesus Christ in a proleptic way. If the apostles and church fathers could find anticipations of Christ in the Old Testament, **we have a right to expect a similar thing in the texts and traditions of other religions**” (1,568).

“Salvation in the New Testament is what God has done to death in the resurrection of Jesus. **Salvation is what happens to you and me and the whole world in spite of death...**” (1,566).

“There is one salvation and one way of salvation. That is the eschatological salvation valid for all through the One who came that all might find life, who died that the world might be reconciled, who was raised that hope might live for the victory of God and the restitution of all things” (1,568).

8. The Doctrine of the Vicarious Atonement

ELCA Official Position

What the Bible says concerning Christ’s death is not from God but merely a collection of Jewish “ideas” of what it means. Old Testament sacrifices and the Passover were cultic practices, not something instituted by God for the purpose of preparing the people for the coming of Christ and the once and for all sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. The teaching that God punished Jesus in our place, and that He credits Jesus’ righteousness to our account, is absurd.

“Jesus himself, though he might have and quite possibly did reckon with a violent death at the hands of his adversaries, **seems not have understood or interpreted his own death as a sacrifice for others or ransom for sin. Such interpretation apparently came as the result of later reflection...**Even in their final redaction the synoptic Gospels contain little direct or explicit interpretation of Jesus’ work. Mark 10:45 has Jesus say that the Son of Man came to give his life ‘as a ransom for many,’ and the accounts of the Last Supper speak of Jesus’ blood as his ‘blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many’ (Mark 14:24)...Such passages, in their present form at least, are usually regarded as having come not from Jesus himself but from later interpretive traditions” (2,13).

“...there was from earliest days, most probably in circles influenced by Hellenistic Judaism a tradition that interpreted Jesus’ death as **in some sense** an atonement or expiation for sin. Just exactly what that sense is seems to be **a matter for debate** among current scholars. At any rate, **this tradition drew on cultic materials**, the concept of sacrifice, covenant sacrifice, Passover, the concept of the suffering servant (Isaiah 53), and so forth, to interpret the significance of Jesus’ life and death” (2,14).

“But what is the import of this tradition?...Put in its most crass form, this view would hold that Jesus’ death is a sacrifice in which he is a substitute for us who pays the divine justice what is due for human sin, and/or appeases the divine wrath. As we shall see, there is a long tradition, especially among Western conservative Christians, which has taken this line. There seems to be a virtual consensus among contemporary biblical scholars, however, that **this tradition finds little support in the Scriptures, either in the Old or New Testament**” (2,14,15).

“**Does not the cruel death on the cross increase human sin rather than compensate for it?** What can possibly atone for the murder of Christ? Is it not cruel and unjust that any one should demand innocent blood as a ransom or be in any way delighted with the death of the innocent, that God should find the death of the Son so acceptable that through it God should be reconciled to the world?...**the vicarious satisfaction doctrine recoils on God. It...leads to a gruesome and forbidding picture of the deity**” (2,23,24).

“The transfer of someone else’s sin to the innocent is **absurd and improper**, just as in reverse the transfer of someone else’s righteousness to the unrighteous” (2,24).

“Jesus dies for us and not for God. There is not just **a little perversity** in the tendency to say that the sacrifice was demanded by God to placate the divine wrath. We attempt to exonerate ourselves from the terrible nature of the deed by blaming it on God. **The theology of sacrifice becomes part of our defense mechanism. This must now cease. Nothing in the Scriptures warrants it. Jesus’ sacrifice for us cannot be explained in that fashion**” (2,82).

9. The Doctrine of the Resurrection

ELCA Official Position

It is questionable whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead physically on Easter morning. The biblical account of the resurrection may well have been a myth and not a historical event.

“It is the task of the doctrine of the atonement to explicate the dogmatic meaning of the cross. Here we need only include it as one further stage in the kenotic self-abasing movement of the Son of God from the heights of glory to the depths of humiliation in a death by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, a death whose universal redemptive significance has been interpreted according to **Jewish ideas of atonement (sacrifice and satisfaction)** and the **gnostic myth of redemption (death and resurrection)**” (1,548).

“**Mythological symbolism contributed to the interpretation of the event of the resurrection.** The question has become acute in modern theology whether in the resurrection we are dealing only with a myth or with a truly historical event” (1,549).

“Contrary to other ‘resurrection’ stories in the Bible, **Jesus is not perceived as having returned to this life. His resurrection was not a resuscitation**, indicating that in certain exceptional instances people can be returned to their former state of life. Jesus went beyond this present life to a new state of being” (2,558).

“Whether we talk about heaven or hell, judgment or eternal life, and resurrection, these concepts do not denote parts of the physical world that we can at least potentially touch and see. **They are necessarily symbols**” (2,555).

“Since we are endowed neither with divine qualities nor with an immortal soul in the Platonic or gnostic sense, meaningful existence beyond death must be a resurrection of the dead. This hope is expressed in the Apostles’ Creed, where we say that we believe ‘in the resurrection on the body.’ **This does not mean a biological revivification**, such as is found in the case of the young man in the village of Nain (Luke 7:15) or of Lazarus (John 11:44)...A resurrection in analogy to our own present bodily existence would only perpetuate the limitations and tensions to which we are subject now” (2,567).

IN CONCLUSION

The Apostle Paul, in loving concern for the Christians of Colosse, wrote these words of earnest admonition: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which

depends on human tradition and the basic principles of the world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8 - NIV). If he were still alive we can be sure that he would give a similar “love-warning” to us, for the faith of Christians is as much under attack today as it was two millennia ago.

Christian Dogmatics — in this writer’s view — is one tool that Satan, the great Deceiver, is using to undermine and destroy the faith of present-day believers. While using the “Christian” name, it promotes ideas and philosophies that are diametrically opposed to the Christian faith—ideas and philosophies which can provide no solid hope or comfort for lost sinners.

May the Lord continue to preserve our faith from all such attacks. May He keep us faithful to Him and His Word throughout our lives. And may we, on our part, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope we have within us...a hope that is based solidly in our Savior Jesus Christ and in His inerrant and infallible Word.

Acknowledgements

1. “Systematic Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 87, Number 3, Summer 1990, pp.209-225
2. “The New Lutheran Church,” Catalog of Differences,” *The Christian News*, April 6, 1987, p.19
3. “The New Lutheran Church,” *The Christian News*, May 18, 1987, p.10

THE HERMENEUTICS OF PROPHECY*

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The assigned topic, “The Hermeneutics of Prophecy,” is too broad for anything more than cursory treatment in a conference paper such as this. Since I was not made aware of any specific interest on the part of the person who requested this paper, I approached the topic in summary fashion. Moreover, because of the lack of adequate time for thorough preparation, I leaned to a large extent on the work done by a respected teacher at Bethany Lutheran Seminary—the unpublished notes on “The Interpretation of Old Testament Prophecy in the New Testament” produced by Prof. George O. Lillegard in 1957. These notes will be cited below in italics, so as to set them off from my own comments and reactions. In addition, I have included a number of quotations from other authors.

It should, perhaps, be mentioned that Prof. Lillegard’s notes were compiled from the works of still earlier scholars, such Prof. W. M. H. Peterson of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, and Dr. L. Fuerbringer of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Might this suggest that these notes are dated and therefore of little value, inasmuch as they do not present the insights which have been offered by recent scholars in the area of Biblical prophecy and its interpretation? I do not think so. For I have read bits and snatches in the current literature on the subject—which is all that I have had time to do—and I am often disappointed with what I find. Some, if not many, of the writers seem to have retreated from the Scriptural truth that the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, has the Holy Spirit as its true and only author, and that the holy writers served precisely as writers—the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit, as our Lutheran fathers have put it. As soon as the exegete of Scripture loses sight of this fact, serious things begin to happen in his approach to the text. In his discussion of the hermeneutics of the Lutheran dogmaticians of the 17th century, Dr. Robert Preus rightly says:

All that has been said so far concerning Scripture—its divine origin, authority, and sufficiency; its Christological and doctrinal unity; its clarity and inerrancy; also its power and ability to authenticate itself—all constitutes a series of hermeneutical presuppositions of gigantic proportions that will and should totally determine the interpreter’s attitude and approach to the Sacred Scriptures.¹

I have said that some recent writers express themselves in ways which do not seem consistent with a conviction that the Holy Spirit is the real author of the Bible. Let me cite some illustrations from an evangelical scholar by the name of Walter C. Kaiser. In several of his writings he lays much stress on the principle of “antecedent theology,” affirming that the exegete should not employ later-written Scripture in determining the meaning of a given text. He deplors, for example, the practice of imposing on an Old Testament text insights gained from a related New Testament text, pointing out: “The reader will notice

that we have deliberately avoided all references to using later texts, such as the NT in order to interpret the OT. . . . We reject the all-too-prevalent practice of using the NT fulfillment as an ‘open sesame’ for OT predictions.”² To do so, he feels, constitutes a form of “canonical eisegesis”—bringing into a text insights or meanings from subsequently written Scripture that do not properly belong to it.

In a similar vein, Kaiser rejects the idea that the Old Testament writers may not have fully comprehended the meaning of some of the things which they wrote. He repudiates the conviction of E. W. Hengstenberg, based on the text in 2 Peter 1:19-21, that the prophets did not always understand nor were they able to interpret their own words.³ Kaiser does not believe that the meaning of a passage can go beyond the so-called truth-intention which was present in the mind of the writer when he penned the passage.

We frankly think that Kaiser has placed unnecessary constraints upon Scriptural exegesis, and in particular upon the interpretation of prophecy. Since the Holy Spirit is the single author of the Old and New Testaments, it is surely appropriate and proper to let one part of the Bible, whether antecedent or subsequent in time, shed light on another. To illustrate, it would surely not be wrong to use Kaiser’s book, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, published in 1985, to shed additional light on some of the statements which he made in his *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, published in 1981. Nor would it be wrong for me to use later letters from a friend to understand more fully statements which he made to me in an earlier letter. (In these illustrations I am assuming, of course, that the truth-intentions of Kaiser and of my friend have remained the same over the years—something which we may, of course, assume in the case of the Holy Spirit.) Preus observes how the Lutheran dogmatists selected their passages freely from all parts of the Bible in doing their work. After affirming their belief that times change, but not the faith, Preus states:

This means that Lutheran orthodoxy will, when tracing any theme or motif, quote indiscriminately from all over Scripture, not ignoring the differences in style and background and progression of thought in the different passages—the Lutheran theologians are careful to note these factors when they think it is important—but nevertheless recognizing that the theology (doctrine) of the different authors will not differ; and therefore their procedure is perfectly justified. Classical Lutheran orthodoxy holds that such a procedure, based on the conviction that all Biblical theology is one, is Scriptural; it is the practice of the New Testament Scriptures and of Christ as they explain the Old Testament Scriptures. The procedure will, of course, materially affect their use of Scripture. For instance, one might be surprised to find Quenstedt employing almost as much Old Testament evidence as New Testament evidence in developing the doctrine of the vicarious atonement. And Calov will at times employ almost exclusively New Testament evidence (e.g., John 5:39; Luke 16:29; Acts 10:43; 26:22; Rom. 4:6; 10:11; etc.) to show that justification by faith was taught in the Old Testament. And so a procedure that to many today might appear to be hopelessly unscholarly, aprioristic, and circular is really quite in order. Why not, if both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures are the Word of one God, pointing to one Christ, reflecting one theology . . . , the theology of very God? We must recall that for classical Lutheranism, Scripture, strictly speaking, is not man’s word about God but God’s Word to man about Himself; He, the one true God, is the author of all theology.⁴

Over against Kaiser’s approach, I would ask that we keep in mind the oft-cited principle of St. Augustine when we interpret the Old Testament: “In the Old Testament the New is concealed; in the New, the Old is revealed.” Again, in the words of Preus:

The New Testament explains and interprets the Old. And such exegesis of the Old Testament is final and unassailable. All Lutherans during the age of orthodoxy were content to read the Old Testament Scriptures trustingly and ingenuously in the light of their fulfillment in Christ, and this as interpreted in the New Testament. It never occurred to them to distrust or question the validity of any New Testament interpretation of the Old. . . . The New Testament, then, is the key to understanding these Old Testament prophecies; it is an inspired interpretation of these prophecies in the light of fulfillment.⁵

I myself do not find a problem with Hengstenberg’s suggestion that the Old Testament prophets may at times have spent time meditating upon their own writings, so as to discover the full meaning which the Holy Spirit had placed into them. Notwithstanding Kaiser’s comments on 1 Peter 1:10-12, I would agree with these conclusions of Lenski:

Two great thoughts are here stated: 1) the Holy Spirit was in the prophets when he testified as he did; 2) these prophets studied their own utterances and writings to discover what they contained. This comprises the entire doctrine of the Inspiration of the Scriptures. The Spirit spoke through the prophets; much that he said the prophets themselves did not at once grasp, but they studied to discover it, somewhat as a messenger may study some message he is ordered to transmit. “For not by man’s will has prophecy ever come, but, being borne along by the Holy Spirit, men made utterance from God,” 2 Pet. 2,21.⁶

According to this passage, 1 Peter 1:10-12, even the angels themselves bend over and look into the truths contained in the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ!

If the points which I have affirmed in the above paragraphs are correct, then we can accept with confidence the following helpful hermeneutical rule concerning the interpretation of prophecy: "In respect to past prophecies already fulfilled, interpret in terms of history; in case of future prophecies yet unfulfilled, interpret by analogy of faith."⁷ To put it in other words: predictive prophecies which have already come into fulfillment should be interpreted in the light of their recorded fulfillment; predictive prophecies which remain unfulfilled should be interpreted in the light of Scriptural truth. Our interpretation of the latter class of prophecies may at times have to remain tentative; yet, if we interpret according to what Scripture elsewhere teaches, we will not be introducing new ideas out of our own imaginations. Let us look, now, at the notes by Lillegard.

I. There is a close connection between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment, which God Himself has established and which, therefore, no man dare change or set aside. The same connection exists between the prophecy and the inspired account of the fulfillment. Therefore the Christian exegete must maintain both that the event which is reported as a fulfillment of prophecy has taken place by the premeditated counsel and plan of God; and also that the report of the fulfillment is decisive for the understanding and interpretation of the prophecy. Compare Hos. 11:1 with Matt. 2:15; Jer. 31:15 with Matt. 2:17-18; Isa. 11:1 with Matt. 2:23 and John 1:46; Num. 21:8-9 with John 3:14-15; Gen. 22:18 with Gal. 3:16; Ps. 41:9 with John 13:18.

Each of the above New Testament passages includes an affirmation of prophetic fulfillment or a specific reference to a passage in Old Testament Scripture—for example, Matthew 2:15: ". . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt I called My Son'"; or John 3:14-15: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Concerning the first of these passages, a legitimate question can be raised as to whether the words of Hosea 11:1 ("When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son") are a direct Messianic prophecy without reference to Old Testament history, or whether the prophet's words are to be understood typically—fulfilled first in the case of Old Testament Israel and then in the case of Christ. The general question of direct prophecy vs. typical prophecy is discussed by Lillegard in a succeeding section. What he intends to affirm here is that the connection between an Old Testament prophecy and its New Testament fulfillment is ordained by God, and that the report of the fulfillment must be allowed to determine our interpretation of the prophecy. With this we have no quarrel! Lillegard continues:

II. Besides this, one must also observe especially the following rules:

- A. In the interpretation of a prophetic word or section of the Old Testament, one must investigate whether there is in the New Testament any report of an event which is expressly declared to be a fulfillment of the prophecy. If this is the case, the exegete is relieved of further labors and investigations, and the meaning of the individual words is definitely established. Compare Isa. 7:14 with Matt. 1:22-23; Micah 5:1-2 with Matt. 2:5-6. In this matter the parallel passages listed in the ordinary Bible editions are often of great service. But it is still necessary always to make an independent investigation to determine whether the parallels are real and not only seeming.*
- B. If one cannot find a passage in which a prophecy is expressly said to be fulfilled, one should then ascertain whether all the essential elements of the prophecy are found again in a certain person or in a certain event; and in such a case one is justified in applying the two to each other, particularly when no other historical manifestation fulfills all the elements of the prophecy. Compare Dan. 11:36-39 and 12:1 with 2 Thess. 2:3-4; 1 Tim. 4:1-3 and Matt. 24:15,21-22 with Dan. 7:25, 9:27, 12:7,11, Rev. 11:2-3 and Rev. 12:6,14.*

Time will not permit us to examine the passages which Lillegard cites in point B. I would, however, like to inject the following observation. The kind of exegetical task that he speaks of in these points requires much prayerful, careful, and diligent Bible study. At times, I think, we look for a quick out—whether traditional exegetical opinion, or doctrinal presuppositions, or the consensus of commentators—and fail to do the homework that is required. One of the most important prerequisites for the interpretation of prophecy is a thorough knowledge of Holy Scripture. I think of how a former professor at Immanuel Lutheran College may not have had recourse to a large number of commentaries; but he knew his Bible well, and his students sat in rapt interest as he led them through the prophets of the Old Testament. The

exegetical ability which he continually manifested was the Spirit's own gift to him through a searching of Scripture itself!

- C. *Wherever the Old Testament prophecy speaks of the abrogation of the Levitical forms of worship and the end of the Old Covenant, we may recognize a prophecy which refers to the time of the New Testament. Cf. Jer. 31:31-34 with Heb. 8:6-13. Likewise, wherever the coming of many heathen to the salvation of Israel is treated, or where a glorious restoration of the kingdom of Israel and Judah is proclaimed. Cf. Isa. 11:10-12 with Rom. 15:9-12; Amos 9:11-12 with Acts 15:14-17. This is important especially as against the Chiliasts.*
- D. *The Old Testament prophets have often expressed prophecies concerning the blessedness of the kingdom of Christ, both the kingdom of grace and that of glory, in words which apparently speak of temporal success and earthly glory, but which in the exegesis must be understood and explained in a spiritual way. Cf. Isa. 2:2-5; 11:6-9; 60:17-20; Joel 3:23; Amos 9:13-14; Micah 4:1-5; and also Luke 17:20 [cf. also vs. 21]; John 18:36.*

Several years ago I presented a paper to this conference on the subject which Lillegard treats in these points: "Principles of Interpretation in regard to Prophecy with Special Reference to Millennialism."⁸ I do not intend to repeat what I said in that paper, but I do wish to remind you of what Pastor Paul F. Nolting said on this matter in an article on the prophecy of Zechariah:

The dispensational school of interpreters excludes all vision of the Church in the prophetic pictures of the future, and that by dogmatic fiat consistent with their theological presuppositions. They find in the prophecies only a great and glorious renewal of the nation of Israel in the millennium after the rapture and the great tribulation. We are compelled by reading the Old Testament prophecies in the light of the fuller New Testament revelation to categorize these expectations as religious fiction.

That, in turn, brings the charge of liberalism, specifically abandoning the literal interpretation of the prophecies by spiritualizing them. That charge is mechanically repeated by laymen under the influence of their premillennial and dispensational teachers. The literal/spiritual dichotomy is, however, but a smoke screen designedly or inadvertently obscuring the nature of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God (of Heaven or of Christ) is spiritual and has been from day one and shall be throughout both time and eternity. During the Old Testament times the Kingdom of God was veiled within the nation of Israel—Israel itself being a spiritualized name! The Kingdom of God was veiled within outward, material, visible, tangible forms—the nation of Israel, Jerusalem, Zion, the temple, the priesthood, circumcision and Sabbath, sacrifices and rituals, and the institutions and very history of the people. But always the Kingdom was spiritual—the temple with the cloud indicating the presence of God who is spirit, the Passover lamb symbolizing Christ our Passover, the economic and political welfare of the nation dependent upon their spiritual relationship to their God who is spirit. The spiritual, which is invisible and intangible, was the real thing at all times and in all places. All things that were visible and tangible, including capital city, temple and people, land and institutions, were but the temporary props until the time of the Messiah. As the spiritual Kingdom of God (of Heaven) was veiled under the forms of a chosen nation, city, and temple, so the prophets used those same visible, material, tangible forms to prophesy of the coming era when all such forms would fade away, to be replaced by the greater reality of the spiritual perceived by faith, not by sight. That era is the times of the Messiah, the entire New Testament era, in which the King established His Kingdom that is not of this world (John 18:36) and that is not "food and drink" (Romans 14:17). The concrete gave way to the spiritual, the shadowy form of the concrete to the greater spiritual realities, the nation of Israel to the Israel of God, the land of Palestine to the ends of the earth, the temple made with hands to the Temple built by the Spirit of God, the holy Christian Church made up of both Jew and Gentile. The highly touted "literal interpretation" became a carnal interpretation which sought fulfillment only in the outward, the visible, the tangible and so missed the mark, as the Apostle Paul sorrowfully testified to the Jews at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:27). It was "literal interpretation" that caused the Jews to reject and to crucify their Messiah; it is this same "literal interpretation" that blinds thousands today to the fact that they are living in the times of the fulfillment, while they vainly hope for a Jewish fulfillment of prophecy in a future age.⁹

In speaking about matters of Biblical interpretation, we must be careful of our terminology. One of the cornerstones of Biblical hermeneutics is the principle that the Spirit-intended meaning of a passage is single, and not double or multiple. We generally refer to this single sense as the "literal" sense of the passage. In no way may we depart from this literal sense, by imposing upon the passage some "higher" meaning which the Spirit did not intend to convey. But we must recognize that this single literal sense may be conveyed also by words that are used metaphorically or figuratively. For example, on one occasion Christ called Herod a "fox" (Luke 13:32). From the context we discern that Christ was not referring to a four-legged animal but rather to a human being. Therefore we must understand the word "fox" here, not in a literal sense, but in a metaphorical sense—a sly and scheming (foxy!) person. The literal sense of

Christ's remark, "Herod is a sly and scheming person," is conveyed by means of a word that is itself used figuratively.

Bernard Ramm offers the following rule to guide us in determining whether the words of a prophecy are to be understood literally or metaphorically: "Interpret prophecy literally unless the evidence is such that a spiritual interpretation is mandatory, e.g., where the passage is poetic or symbolic or apocalyptic in literary form, or where the New Testament evidence demands a spiritual interpretation."¹⁰ I have no problem with these guidelines. For example, compare the poetic language of Isaiah 2:2-4. This passage is clearly employing at least some figurative language, for how could nations literally "flow like water" upward to the LORD'S house which has been established at the top of a mountain? How unwarranted, then, for millennialists to insist that the "beating of swords into plowshares and of spears into pruning hooks" must be understood in a strictly literal sense: namely, as a cessation of armed conflict among the nations of the world.

It must be recognized, of course, that the Old Testament prophets do not always distinguish between the physical and the spiritual, between temporal deliverance and eternal salvation, but often unite these elements in a single picture. In prophecies of this kind, the physical and temporal serve to typify the spiritual and eternal, and the preliminary fulfillments in the earthly life of the Old Testament nation serve as God-intended foreshadowings of the culminating fulfillment in the heavenly life of the New Testament kingdom of Christ.

E. To the right understanding of Messianic prophecies, the exegete must not let himself be misled by the circumstance that they often stand directly alongside of historical or temporal statements which have no prophetic import. Compare the framework or context of Isa. 7:14; Micah 2:12-13. The exegete must likewise guard against the perversions of many exegetes who in just such prophecies assume a two-fold or multiple sense, and set aside the direct Messianic application. Compare the typical interpretation of 2 Sam. 7:12-17 and Ps. 22.

Lillegard raises an issue here which has challenged the best efforts of even the most capable exegetes: Which messianic prophecies are to be taken as having direct and exclusive application to Christ, and which are to be understood typically? Sometimes the answer is easy. It would, for example, be inappropriate to understand Psalm 22 typically, as if it referred initially to King David as a type of Christ. For even though David did suffer much at the hands of men, the God-inflicted anguish of soul expressed in the psalm goes far beyond what any mere human—thank God—has ever had to endure. Similarly, it would border on blasphemy to find in the "servant" of Isaiah 53 anyone other than Christ Himself!

In other cases the answer is more difficult. Compare, for example, the passage from Matthew 2:15 which Lillegard cited above. Matthew states that God's preservation of the infant Jesus from the wrath of Herod in Egypt was a fulfillment of Hosea's words: "Out of Egypt I called My son" (11:1). Theodore Laetsch, a respected Missouri-Synod theologian, argues strongly that the prophet's words are a direct messianic prophecy:

In our day the typical mode of interpretation is favored generally. Israel's history is regarded as the type of Christ's life, and therefore, as Israel took refuge in Egypt and later was brought back to the Promised Land, so Christ fled to Egypt and later returned to His own country. Yet Matthew does not say that a type was fulfilled. He says that what was spoken by the prophet was fulfilled by Christ's sojourn in Egypt. He speaks of the fulfillment of a historical fact prophesied by Hosea, the historical fact: Out of Egypt have I called My Son.¹¹

It is true that Matthew does not say that an Old Testament type was fulfilled through Christ's sojourn in Egypt. But does that exclude the possibility that a type is involved? Preus informs us:

Hos. 11:1, "Out of Egypt have I called My son," was taken by the majority of [17th-century Lutheran] commentators—Calov, Quenstedt, A. Pfeiffer, et al.—as predictive prophecy. Their arguments were that "my son" in this context cannot refer to the backsliding Israel but only to the pure and holy Son, Christ. The term cannot be both collective and individual, and it is understood individually in Matt. 2:15. Furthermore, Matthew prefaces his citation of these words with "in order that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet." Michael Walther, on the other hand, takes the verse as an example of typology where Israel's calling from Egypt foreshadows what took place in the life of our Lord. He avers that son often refers to Israel in the Old Testament (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9) and does in this case also. It is perfectly permissible, he says, to use the term collectively in reference to the type (Israel) and individually in reference to the antitype (Christ) as Matthew does. The term seed, for instance, is used collectively in Gen. 28:14 and at the same time refers to the individual, Christ. That Matthew speaks of Christ fulfilling the prophecy from Hosea fits in perfectly with a typical interpretation, for type is a mode of prophecy.

We might ask why Calov, Quenstedt, and others failed to follow Walther's more convincing exegesis of Hos. 11:1. The answer is clearly their fear—in this case unfounded—of violating the *unus sensus* principle.¹²

Some may feel that we are in some way attenuating the import of a passage like Hosea 11:1 if we regard it as typical rather than direct messianic prophecy. This is not so, for also in the case of typical prophecy it can be said—as Matthew indeed does—that such and such “happened in order that it might be fulfilled.” We must remember that the type/antitype relationship does not involve an accidental or incidental resemblance, but rather a God-intended prefiguring. Only that can be a type of Christ which was ordained by God from the outset to be a type. If Israel in Egypt is a type of the infant Savior in Egypt, it is such only because God so intended it already at the time of Israel's sojourn there. It can actually be a faith-strengthening thing for a Christian to observe how God foreordained such parallels between Old Testament types and their New Testament antitypes!

Where are we to look for typical prophecies in the Old Testament, if such indeed exist? Surely they will be found especially in those prophecies which contain covenant terms such as the following: firstborn, son, seed, servant, and heir. These terms are used in Scripture at times of the covenant people Israel, or of some representative individual such as David or Solomon; they are, of course, used also and especially of that one in whom the covenant centers—the promised Savior, Jesus Christ. To ascertain whether or not a specific Old Testament messianic prophecy is typical, we must examine it carefully in its context. If the context indicates an earlier fulfillment in the life of the covenant people or of one of its representatives, then we may regard it as typical.

Yet, the exegete must guard against extending the area of typology unduly. To regard anything in the Old Testament as a type of Christ, there must be some Scriptural warrant for doing so—a topic which is covered at some length in most hermeneutics courses. Sometimes, in fact, Scripture tells us not to find a typical element in a given Old Testament messianic prophecy. Compare the well-known example in Galatians 3:16: “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” This passage informs us about the Holy Spirit's meaning in such prophecies as Genesis 13:15: “All the land which you see I [the LORD] give to you [Abraham] and to your seed forever.”¹³ The word “seed” in this promise of the land is not to be understood in a collective sense (“seed” in the sense of “descendants”), but rather in the singular number—as a direct reference to that one seed of the woman in whom the covenant promise centered. The promise concerning the land was made to Abraham and to Christ, and Isaiah affirms this fact when he refers to Canaan as “your land, O Immanuel” (Isa. 8:8).

In point E above, Lillegard speaks also of many exegetes who assume “a two-fold or multiple sense” in some Old Testament prophecies. We must, of course, reject anything like a two-fold or multiple sense for a passage of Scripture, for the literal sense of a given passage is always one! But we can recognize the existence of a two-fold or multiple fulfillment of a number of Old Testament prophecies—which brings us into the topics of generic prophecy and of prophetic perspective and foreshortening.

Kaiser presents a helpful discussion of so-called “generic” prophecy in his volume on *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*. He accepts the following definition of the term: “A generic prophecy . . . is one which regards an event as occurring in a series of parts, separated by intervals, and expresses itself in language that may apply indifferently to the nearest part, or to the remoter parts, or to the whole—in other words, a prediction which, in applying to the whole of a complex event, also applies to some of its parts.”¹⁴ He cites Jeremiah 31:15 as an example of generic prophecy: “Thus says the LORD: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.’” Kaiser points out that Rachel had wept over her children prior to the time of the Prophet Jeremiah, she continued to do so in his day with the sacking and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and she would do so in the Messianic period when the opponents of God's kingdom would again lay their cruel hands upon her children.

An Old Testament prophetic term that probably marks a number of generic prophecies is the phrase “the day of the LORD.” Does this term refer only to the culmination of all things on the last day—the final redemption and the final judgment? Or does it encompass also the many other “days” in the history of this world when the Lord Jehovah has entered into the stream of events with judgment or with blessing so as to move forward His eternal purposes of salvation? The latter understanding surely seems to be the correct one.

We need to consider also the topic of prophetic perspective and foreshortening. Louis Berkhof rightly points out that the element of time is not an important consideration in the prophets: “The prophets

compressed great events into a brief space of time, brought momentous movements close together in a temporal sense, and took them in at a single glance. . . . They looked upon the future as the traveler does upon a mountain range in the distance. He fancies that one mountain-top rises up right behind the other, when in reality they are miles apart.”¹⁵ This feature of prophecy is known as “the prophetic perspective.” The term “prophetic foreshortening” is also appropriate, insofar as the prophetic view encompasses simultaneously two or more events whose fulfillments may be widely separated in time.

The words of August Pieper are to the point, and I shall quote him at length:

Prophecy frequently has a way of locating future events of the same general kind in the same level of time, regardless of the actual date of their occurrence. The most familiar example is found in Matthew 24, where the judgment upon Jerusalem and the Day of Judgment are combined in a single picture, since the lesser event is in its characteristic features a faithful picture of the greater event, and therefore foretells and gives positive assurance of its subsequent occurrence.¹⁶

Pieper finds that throughout Isaiah 40 to 66,

prophecies pertaining to the physical restitution of the exiled people are constantly intertwined with those pertaining to the spiritual renewal of the New Testament Church. The two prophecies are, in fact, a part of each other. This is so, because God and man, grace and sin, the Gospel of salvation and the rage of the devil do not change, but remain the same throughout all times. There is really nothing new under the sun. History keeps on repeating itself till the Last Day. . . . Therefore the history of man will produce only sin and grace, unbelief and judgment. The saints alone will escape the general doom, although they share in all the experiences common to humanity. Human history reaches its climax in the cross of Christ and comes to its final conclusion on the great Day of Judgment. Until then the history of mankind is a constant repetition of the offer of grace and the call to repentance, of the rejection of grace and of judgment. Only the historical, geographical, ethnic conditions, the external and individual peculiarities vary; the essence of what takes place is always the same.

Since Christ crucified is the culmination of every demonstration of grace, every prophecy of grace must terminate in Him; and since Christ on the Last Day is the culmination of every act of judgment, therefore every prophecy of judgment also terminates in Him. Both kinds of prophecy, whether of grace or of judgment, are alike in that they culminate in the person of Christ. The prophecies may treat the earlier historical events as being contemporary with the final Day of Judgment, or they may treat the earlier occurrences separately, without, however, severing their inner connection with the great climactic event. The earliest of the holy prophets, Obadiah, for example, combines the imminent judgment upon Edom with the Lord’s judgment upon all gentiles (verse 15) and with the final Day of Judgment (verse 21). That combination becomes routine in the prophets after Obadiah. Indeed, since salvation and judgment are both an expression of the identical zeal of our gracious God, the day of grace and the day of judgment are often presented as one thing, occurring simultaneously, cf. 42:1-9; 42:10-17; Joel 3 (2:28-32); Malachi 3:1ff; 4:1-6.

This manner of presentation is especially characteristic of Isaiah. Throughout the second part of his book he links together Old Testament manifestations of grace with New Testament grace, and Old Testament acts of judgment with the Last Judgment.¹⁷

III. *In the quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, it is to be noted that not all by far are literally and exactly reproduced in the New Testament. Compare Lev. 18:5 with Rom. 10:5; Ps. 32:1-2 with Rom. 4:7-8. In this respect great freedom and variety prevail. Still these differing forms of the quotations do not conflict with the right teaching concerning verbal inspiration, but rather confirm it. For they can be explained only in this way that the Holy Ghost, the author of the whole Scriptures, quotes Himself and can hence quote freely.*

Note that in certain cases, the Old Testament text is expanded in the quotations, compare Luke 4:18 with Is. 61:1. In other cases it is contracted, cf. Matt. 4:15 with Is. 9:1. Oftener the clauses are rearranged, cf. Rom. 9:25 with Hos. 1:10 and 2:23. Or two passages are fused into one and are introduced under one name, cf. Matt. 27:9-10 with Zech. 11:12-13 and Jer. 32:6-15 [Prof. Lillegard observed in class: The statement in Zechariah is based on statements in Jeremiah]; Mark 1:2-3 with Mal. 3:1 and Is. 40:3. At times a passage may also be cited with opposite wording, but correctly according to the sense, cf. Matt. 2:6 with Micah 5:2. In very many quotations the translation of the Septuagint is retained, cf. Rom. 4:7-8 with Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 10:5 with Lev. 18:5. This is done even in cases where the Septuagint does not translate accurately, but has hit upon the intended sense of the original text; cf. Luke 3:6 with Is. 40:5 and 52:10; Heb. 10:5 with Ps. 40:7. However, where the Septuagint has not hit upon the intended meaning, the quotation is made in an accurate translation from the Hebrew, cf. Matt. 2:15 with Hos. 11:1; Rom. 11:35 with Job 35:7. There are cases, too, where the Holy Ghost has not bound Himself either to the Septuagint or to the original Hebrew text, but has alluded freely to an Old Testament passage,

cf. Eph. 5:14 with Is. 60:1. Or He has reproduced a Scripture truth freely, cf. John 7:38 with Is. 12:3, 58:11, 44:3 and 55:1. Or He has used Old Testament words in a new sense, cf. Rom. 10:6-8 with Deut. 30:11-14; 1 Cor. 14:21 with Is. 28:11-12.

I appreciate how Lillegard speaks here about the Holy Spirit as author of both testaments. Anyone who recognizes this fact will not take offense at the freedom with which the New Testament at times quotes from the Old. When a human author quotes himself, he has the right to quote freely. Surely we will not stand in judgment, then, on what the Holy Spirit has chosen to do!

A common charge made by modern scholars against the New Testament writers is that in quoting from the Old Testament they frequently disregarded the original contexts and imposed upon the citations meanings which the Old Testament writers never intended. How often, for example, do we not read in contemporary theological literature that the Apostle Paul repeatedly employed the questionable exegetical practices of the Jewish rabbis of his day.

A Christian who knows that the Holy Spirit is the true author of the Bible will immediately reject such charges as false and even blasphemous; he knows a priori that the New Testament quotations of the Old must be consistent with truth. This is the conclusion, moreover, which he will reach also a posteriori, after he has studied the Old and New Testament contexts in careful fashion. Here, perhaps, lies the chief value of the volume by Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*. He gives careful study to several instances of New Testament quotation from the Old, and he shows convincingly that the New Testament is faithful to the meaning of the Old in these citations. Some of the insights which he offers regarding the Old Testament contexts make portions of his book well worth a careful reading.

With these observations I have come to the end of Prof. Lillegard's notes and the end of my comments. I ask the readers to excuse the rambling nature of these paragraphs, for the assigned topic covers a wealth of material. I request also that you pardon me for the lengthy quotations which I have made from others. Not only have they said things better than I could have done; they have also saved me a good deal of time--and that is no mean consideration!

ENDNOTES

¹ Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, c1970) 316f.

² Walter C. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, c1985) 69f.

³ Kaiser 74.

⁴ Preus 332f.

⁵ Preus 333f.

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, c1938) 47.

⁷ Meyrick in *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*. I jotted this quotation down years ago and have not been able to verify it or to secure volume and page numbers.

⁸ Reprinted in *Journal of Theology* 21:4 (Dec. 1981) 2-28.

⁹ *Journal of Theology* 26:2 (June 1986) 27-29. See also the excellent discussion of this topic by August Pieper in his *Isaiah II* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, c1979) 345-348. This volume contains much helpful material on the hermeneutics of prophecy!

¹⁰ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Wilde, c1950) 172. I have not been able to find this specific passage in the current edition of Ramm's book.

¹¹ Theo. Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: the Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia, c1956) 88.

¹² Preus 328-329. In the original, Preus cites the Greek of Matt. 2:15. I have chosen to reproduce it in English.

¹³ In this paper I have been quoting routinely from the NKJV translation. Here, however, it was necessary to depart from it. The NKJV unfortunately translates the Hebrew word *zera* with "descendants."

¹⁴ Kaiser 56.

¹⁵ L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952) 150.

¹⁶ Pieper 84. Not all interpreters would agree with Pieper that the events of 70 AD and of the last day are combined into a single picture in Matthew 24. They would find the first event described in verses 4-35, and the second in verses 36ff.

¹⁷ Pieper 84-86.

PSALM 51 SERMON SERIES

Paul Fleischer

IV. Psalm 51:5-6

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

“You can’t tell a book by its cover.” “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.” These common maxims express the fact that surface impressions can be seriously wrong and misleading. “Things are not what they seem” on the surface. One must get on the inside of things--to the heart of the matter--to discover if it is genuine or not.

While mankind in general will grant this fact in just about every area of life, it does NOT come naturally for man, in his fallen state, to grant it when it comes to his religion. He must be taught it. We ourselves must be taught it again and again lest we allow appearances to deceive and lead us away from the truth. I would refer you to our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters five through seven. So different from the Scribes and the Pharisees, the Lord takes the commandments of the second table of the law, one by one, and spiritualizes them. He gets beneath the surface and into the heart of the matter. Only from this vantage point can sinners see themselves as God sees them, and only then are they prepared to receive that righteousness which exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus our Savior.

Perhaps we can illustrate the point from an instance in the early life of David. Do you recall the Lord’s words to Samuel the prophet when it came time for him to anoint David as King of Israel? In 1 Samuel 16 we read that all of Jesse’s sons passed by, many of them appearing to be kingly stock: “But the LORD said to Samuel, Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” That word was spoken to Samuel the prophet, but it was a truth that David, the shepherd lad, would gradually have to learn. And he did learn it, but it was brought home to him not before he committed his dual sins of adultery and murder against Uriah and Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba.

In our continuing study of David’s confession of sin in the 51st Psalm, we see that the king is humbled to confess the root cause of his actions, or what we might call:

THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM: ORIGINAL SIN

The text says: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.” Let us consider...

I. The Teaching of Original Sin Itself

You can never take too much for granted in teaching religion. I had always thought that the truth taught in this verse was obvious. So I thought until someone told me that they took this Bible verse to mean that David’s mother sinned in the process of David’s conception in her womb. But no! What is here said by David is that he had come to understand that his whole nature was entirely and altogether impure from his very birth. It is what we call “original sin” in our catechism and dogmatics books. “Original” has to do with origin, coming into existence, the beginning of something. Original sin is that sin which you and I inherited from our sinful parents.

And we must be careful here lest the finger of blame be put on God for this sad state of our “original” condition. That very thing is the error which caused Article I of the Formula of Concord to be written over against the false teacher Flacius who went too far when he taught (now you must listen carefully) that “the rational soul in its highest state or principal powers is original sin itself.” Can you see how this leads to the devilish notion that God Himself is the creator of sin?! Over against this, the true teachers of the Lutheran Reformation maintained instead that “Since the Fall (original sin) is something in the nature, body and soul of man.” Putting it that way spares God the terrible insult of His being the creator, author, or cause of sin and leaves the blame on man, the sinner. For this reason Dr. Luther preferred to call it “nature-sin” or “person-sin.” God created man holy. Man fell, yea, all mankind fell in Adam’s fall, after which the Scriptures teach that he (Adam) begat sons and daughters in “his own image,” that is, sinful and unclean. It is that to which David gives confession now in our psalm.

And just how bad is our human nature now? It is described as follows in the Formula of Concord, Article I (Yes, the first article--for NO OTHER DOCTRINE of Holy Scripture will be rightly understood unless this one is!): "Original sin is...a deep, wicked, horrible, fathomless, inscrutable and unspeakable corruption of the entire nature and all its powers, especially of the highest, principal powers of the soul in the understanding, heart, and will, so that now, since the Fall, man inherits an inborn wicked disposition and inward impurity of heart, evil lust and propensity; that we all...are enmity against God, especially as regards divine and spiritual things..." Christian friends, let us keep the emphasis on the word "spiritual." That man has been given marvelous understanding, power and ability in natural, external things--non-spiritual matters--is not to be denied. BUT in spiritual things you can hardly think of enough synonyms of evil to describe the sinful human nature.

II. Some Practical Applications and Considerations of this Doctrine

This teaching of Holy Scripture is most offensive to proud mankind. Little wonder that it has caused controversy in the church time and again. Why do you think it is so offensive--yes, also to us by nature? Is it not because it leaves not a trace of credit for man to contribute anything toward his salvation?! By nature (and don't let the force of that two-word phrase escape you as often as we use it)--by nature, that means, according to the flesh and blood that we have as a result of our human birth for "that which is born of flesh is flesh"--by nature sinners can do nothing even to bring themselves to faith at its very beginning. Conversion is wholly and entirely God's work, as Christ taught Nicodemus: "Assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" for only "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:3 & 6).

We can no more help ourselves to this new birth than we contributed toward our first birth according to the flesh. Therefore, as St. Paul teaches: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-9). Since, because of our fallen nature, we can do nothing, God must and does do it all, from our very conversion to the faith, to our being sanctified and kept therein, to our final and ultimate salvation. Therefore true religion is RECEIVING from God; true religion is a divine and spiritual thing; it is all wrought by God Himself "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). True religion--true Christianity--works from the inside out, from the heart which has been born again through baptism, and cleansed through faith in the innocent suffering and death of Jesus Christ, our Savior. It is in the heart that God desires truth and would bring sinners to know true wisdom, as the sixth verse of our psalm has it.

All of this, as has been said, we must be taught. It does not come naturally for "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). The practical aspect of it all is that the Christian believer is driven to a regular and faithful use of the word of God and the sacraments which alone can keep his faith alive; the Christian believer is ever fearful of his naturally-depraved heart which is described as "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). The Christian believer knows that his heart by nature (that phrase again) is described in the words: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). David's problems began, you see, when for but a moment he let slip the fact that his own heart had these roots and seeds of sin lying dormant, waiting to erupt. Now (in our verses!) he has come to understand well the germs of ungodliness within him, for which he had no solution but a forthright confession of guilt for his sins, and his sinfulness, and a prayer that God would "make me to know wisdom" in the inward, hidden part.

Furthermore, the Christian believer sees that the practical application of his inward corruption means that his every good work is shot through with sin, corrupted with sin, for so deep is the power of his sin. He sees that he has no righteousness whatever of his own to put on display before God; no righteousness to merit forgiveness or salvation, such as the proud Pharisee in the temple claimed to have. No, the Christian believer joins the tax collector in confessing: "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13) He confesses with St. Paul: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" (Rom. 7:18); and with Isaiah the prophet: "We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6); and with Job: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!" (Job 14:4). The Christian believer knows that the only righteousness which avails before God--the only righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees--is that which comes by faith in Christ Jesus.

Those whose spiritual understanding has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit to the truths of this text will have no difficulty with the false teachings it exposes. In their oath the Scouts promise on their honor to do their best to do their duty to God and country, to obey the Scout law, to help other people at all times; to keep themselves “physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.” Taking into consideration what we have been reviewing here, what is the “best” a scout can do? According to what we have just reviewed, how morally straight can man, by nature, keep himself? Notice also the presumptuous statements of the Scout Law which reads: “A Scout is trustworthy...is loyal...is kind...is obedient...is clean...is reverent...” Try to match those words with Psalm 51 and see how you do! The Scout Law absolutely contradicts Psalm 51, doesn't it? The problem, of course, is that the religions of Scoutism, and of lodgery as well, seek to inculcate a surface religion like that of the Scribes and Pharisees. But the Savior says: “Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20).

Don't you see also how the insights to which the king has helped us expose the superficiality of many of the “conversions” claimed by those who summon people to make their “decisions for Christ”? “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Believing in Jesus is entirely the work of the Holy Ghost in our hearts through the Gospel. We don't first invite Jesus through prayer into our hearts, but He comes to us through the Gospel: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The greatest gift of the Holy Spirit is the conversion of the sinner, and His sanctifying and keeping us in the true faith unto eternal life.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side which flowed
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.

Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfil Thy Law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly--
Wash me, Savior, or I die! (TLH 376:1-3)

Prayer of Dr. Luther “For a true acknowledgement of sin”:

Dear Lord God, I cannot count the sins that I have done and still do. I have forgotten most of them and no longer feel my guilt. All that is in me and all power that is not grace is sin and is condemned. My works and my powers only make me despondent. I do not know what else to do but to hope and pray for your mercy. As grace and faith control me, I am devout through Christ. Where these fail me, I know and confess that nothing good is left in me. No matter how long I live, it will never be different. If I had the holiness of all monks, there would still be nothing good in what I think, speak, live, and do, if it did not have your divine grace and power. All my sins are forgiven out of pure grace. This is the joy and comfort which you gladly grant to me, a poor sinner. Amen.
