

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 40 SEPTEMBER 2000 NUMBER 3

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(Reviewer: David Lau)

Whatever your hand finds to do...

John K. Pfeiffer

[The "President's Address," at the graduation service at Immanuel Lutheran College, May 20, 2000.]

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going. I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all (Eccl. 9:10-12).

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is our strength for today and our hope for tomorrow, fellow redeemed and especially you, the graduates of Immanuel,

Over the past two years I have been presenting a series of chapel devotions based on the words of Ecclesiastes. Our graduates may recall the recurring theme of the book: "*Vanity of vanities,*" says the Preacher, "*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*"

This book reveals to us the futile attempts of the writer to find fulfillment in human endeavors. He experimented with human wisdom, with riches, with earthly pleasures, with labor, and more. In each endeavor, he came away feeling empty. He could not find fulfillment in anything.

The reason for this is revealed in our text: "*I again saw under the sun. . .*" He was looking at things as they appear "under the sun," that is, from an earthly perspective. Indeed, if we would erase from our minds everything that we have learned about the providence of God, we too would find only vanity . . . only emptiness in all our pursuits.

Now, this does not seem to be a very good way to begin a graduation address. I am sure that many of you are looking forward with great expectations. Whether you will be moving on to a new calling or to new employment or to more education, I am sure that you want to find personal fulfillment in these endeavors. But will you?

I believe that you will, if you follow the advice of our text:

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

Let's look at the second verse of our text first: *I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.*

How many of us have seen this happen, either in our own lives or in the lives of others. A man may have the best skills, the highest knowledge, the greatest opportunities, and yet, for any number of reasons, his plans do not come to fruition. — The swiftest runner trips or gets a cramp and loses the race. — The strongest army is tricked by a weaker force and defeated in battle. — The wisest man suffers a stroke, which disables his ability to communicate his wisdom. — Just when a man became the best typewriter repairman, someone invented the personal computer.

We hear about people getting doctor's degrees, but the only job they can find is pushing a broom somewhere. It can happen to anyone. From an earthly point of view, it seems like *time and chance overtake them all*. — It's no wonder that some people turn to drugs and alcohol, or become criminals, or become street people.

What does all this mean for you? Should you despair of setting specific goals for your future? Indeed, there will be times when you will be frustrated, because your plans don't work out. There will be times when you will worry about the future success of your plans. There will be times when it will appear as though you are the victim of "bad luck."

If our lives are subject to mindless chance, what's the sense in exerting ourselves on any particular project? Yet, we are told, *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might*. The reason that the Spirit gives is this: *for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going*. The point is that you can't do anything on earth after your dead, so do it while you are alive. I suppose this seems rather obvious, but sometimes the most obvious truths elude us.

Forget the earthly view of things; let the Spirit exalt you to heaven, so that you can see the divine perspective.

Our lifetime is a gift from God. It is the time given to us to carry out God's purpose here on earth. After we die, we cannot do this anymore.

Our strength, talents, and abilities are gifts from God. These are given so that, while we live, we may use them to carry out God's purpose here on earth. When our bodies are laid in the grave, we will not be able to do this anymore.

Therefore, NOW is the time to apply these gifts to the tasks which confront us day by day and to do it *with all our might, for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol*.

But we still might ask, "Why? Why exert myself so much, when it's all a matter of luck?" The answer is that it's not a matter of luck. When we gain the heavenly perspective, we see that things are well planned out.

God did not sacrifice His only begotten Son and then turn His back on us, leaving us to time and chance. He sacrificed His Son in order to redeem us, so that we might serve a higher purpose in this world. That purpose is to find salvation for ourselves and to bring salvation to others.

Graduates, it was an unbelievably complex series of events that resulted in your personal salvation and brought you to this commencement. Likewise, you are personally involved in an intricate plan that will result in the salvation of someone else . . . perhaps many other souls.

If you believe this, then you will also understand why the Spirit says, "*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might*." The "whatever" is that activity which the Lord places in your pathway. Apply yourself completely to it. Apply all the gifts which God gave you: the body, the mind, the talents, everything.

I am talking not only about the physical gifts, but also the spiritual. You will need to apply the spiritual gifts in order to know how to apply the physical. Your spiritual gifts will help to direct the use of the physical so that what you do will be pleasing in the sight of God.

When God gives you an activity to perform, you will probably have no idea about where this activity is going to take you. You may make your plans, but you don't know. This you do know, however: you are personally involved in an intricate plan that will result in the salvation of others. Somehow . . . somehow, your present activity fits into that plan.

Consider the life of Joseph, son of Jacob. It took Joseph many years to discover how he fit into God's plans. Although he was doing his duty as an obedient son, he was sold into slavery by his brothers. Although he was doing his duty as an obedient slave, he was thrown into prison because of the false charges of his master's wife. How could he see where these events were taking him? Nevertheless, he carried out his duties with all his might. Finally, as you know, the Lord exalted him to the second position of power in the Egyptian empire.

God alone knows where your life will take you. He alone knows the twists and turns. And He alone has a wonderful goal in mind. So, instead of revealing the details of His plans, He simply says, *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might*. Actually, God doesn't need any of us. However, in His wisdom He has decided to use all of us . . . to use our bodies and souls, our talents and abilities. Through these He accomplishes His wonderful purpose.

Summer job; more education; permanent employment; preaching or teaching ministry - *whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might*, knowing that you are doing what God wants you to do at that moment.

If you are in a race, run hard. If you don't win, so what? This may be just the training ground for a much more difficult race, one which you will win, because you have learned to always run hard.

It all comes back to faith . . . faith in the God who made you, redeemed you, and sanctifies you. *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?* (Rom. 8:32) He does not abandon you to accidents and blind luck. By your sins you made your lives empty and useless. By His atonement,

Christ made your lives full and useful for His purpose.

Your education at ILC has prepared you for such a life.

I. In the physical sciences you saw God's patterns of orderliness in nature, so you know what to expect when you apply your abilities.

II. In the social sciences you saw God's patterns of rule in this world, so that you know that all things are controlled for the welfare of God's people.

III. In the languages you saw the patterns of speech which God has ordained, so that you are able to communicate the good news of salvation.

IV. In the fine and applied arts you saw God's patterns of beauty, intended to bring joy to the lives of His people, even when things seem to be going bad.

V. In religion you saw God's pattern of salvation and how God brought everything together in Christ Jesus, including you.

We have done what we can. Now go forth and, as long as you are yet alive, *whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might*. And when there is nothing more for you to do with your abilities, you will hear the voice of God saying, "*Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your Lord*" (Matt. 25:21).

“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”:

A Critical Examination of the Methodology and Conclusions of the Jesus Seminar

David Povolny

Introduction

We are truly privileged to confess by faith that the Bible is the verbally inspired, inerrant Word of God. Jesus promised to preserve that Word for all time. We can have full confidence in the Bible we possess today because Jesus said we could. Believers everywhere have in God's faithful Word the assurance that Jesus is the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Redeemer from Sin, and the Living Hope for eternity. Our full confidence in Him rests on the firm foundation of the Scriptures.

Any heretical position of the Jesus Seminar could be dismissed out of hand by invoking the truths of verbal inspiration, inerrancy and the eternal preservation of the Word. This would be a valid and beneficial approach, and these doctrinal truths certainly underlie this paper. Their defense motivates its writing. However, this paper does not seek so much explicitly to invoke the Biblical truths concerning the Word of God as to critique the Jesus Seminar on its own terms, demonstrating that the conclusions the Seminar draws are not necessarily logical or even consistent with its own assumptions. The paper attempts to show that the Jesus Seminar is not the objective, scientific, scholarly body it claims to be. The Jesus Seminar's conclusions concerning God's Word are nothing more than the *inevitable* result of a biased, arbitrary, self-serving, and often inconsistently applied, set of liberal assumptions. It must be said that even if the scholarship were sound, disciplined and objective—which it is not—the believer would reject the Seminar's Satanic conclusions and simply invoke the prescient words of God:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1 Cor. 1:18ff.)

The Organization

The Jesus Seminar is a self-appointed convocation of religious academics. The Seminar was organized in 1985 by University of Montana professor Robert Funk¹ and is co-chaired by De Paul University professor Dominic Crossan. The academic participants--currently 100--are called "Fellows" and must apply to the Seminar for inclusion. The two stated criteria for a Fellowship in the Seminar are "a Ph.D. or its equivalent in biblical studies or a cognate discipline, and the ability to work in the original biblical languages."²

The Jesus Seminar is not affiliated with either the Society of Biblical Literature or *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, the two largest associations of New Testament scholars. Thus, despite wide media coverage and popular attention, the Jesus Seminar in no way represents "anything like a consensus view of scholars working in the New Testament."³ While the Seminar has at times included as many as 200 fellows, this small number represents only a tiny fraction of New Testament academia. The SBL alone has almost 7,000 members. Fewer than half (sometimes more, sometimes less) of the Fellows

actively participate in the Seminar's work. The Seminar's conclusions are more often than not the result of the work of only 40-70 people. "The numbers alone suggest that any claim to represent 'scholarship' . . . is ludicrous."⁴

Critics of the Seminar question not only the representativeness of the group but also the academic credentials of the Fellows. Luke Timothy Johnson, a liberal scholar but an outspoken critic of the Seminar, writes:

While the seminar can count among its members some scholars of notable reputation, the roster of fellows by no means represents the cream of New Testament scholarship in this country. Of the major graduate New Testament faculties, only Claremont is represented. Emory University had no participant for a time. Otherwise, the roster of fellows includes no present faculty at Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Duke, Union, Emory or Chicago. The faculties at such schools are not necessarily hostile to the seminar's work, but no members of those faculties are participants. The seminar does not include established scholars from England or the Continent, although it does have some members from Canada and South Africa. Most of the participants are in relatively undistinguished academic positions. Some are not in the strict sense in academic positions at all.⁵

Johnson does not seek to denigrate the serious intent of the Seminar's participants. However, Robert Funk, its founder, has made inflated claims concerning the academic credentials and representativeness of the Seminar Fellows. Funk's claims misrepresent the rather pedestrian and parochial credentials of many of his associates. D. A. Carson surmises that Funk's inflated opinion of his Fellows is his attempt to lend an unwarranted air of intellectual superiority, credibility, and representativeness to the Seminar's conclusions—all in an effort to secure broad public acceptance.⁶ The Scholar's Version (SV), the presumptuous title for the Jesus Seminar's own Bible translation, reflects the group's propensity for self-validation and the tireless appetite for subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle!) self-promotion evident in much of its published material.

For all its claims to diversity, the self-selected Fellows advocate by and large the liberal historical-critical method of New Testament textual analysis embraced by the Seminar's leadership. Many have even gone beyond form and redaction criticism—objectionable enough—to embrace a content critical approach to text. They reject a Biblical text not on the basis of internal or external analysis but merely because of its irrelevance or offensiveness to modern cultural sensibilities and values. An excerpt from the autobiographical sketch of one of the more famous Fellows is representative of the group's approach:

John Shelby Spong is Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey. Raised a fundamentalist in North Carolina at a time when the Bible was quoted to justify segregation, Bishop Spong came to believe that insistence on an inerrant, literal view of the Bible obscures truth and destroys faith. His subsequent challenges to the Church's position on human sexuality, the virgin birth, and the physical nature of Christ's resurrection had made him the target of fundamentalist hostility and fear. At the same time, it has offered hope to countless others who yearn to believe in God but reject premodern literalizations masquerading as faith. Bishop Spong is the author of several bestselling (sic) books, including *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* . . .⁷

The Seminar's "method" of textual analysis is discussed more fully under "Assumptions" below.

The Jesus Seminar meets under the auspices of the Westar Institute. Founded in 1986 and located in Sonoma, California, "the Westar Institute is a member-supported, non-profit research and educational institute dedicated to the advancement of religious literacy. Westar's twofold mission is to foster collaborative research in the field of religious studies and to communicate the results of the scholarship of religion to a broad, non-specialist public."⁸

The Jesus Seminar is only one of the Westar Seminars. Westar also hosts the Paul Seminar, which is investigating the letters attributed to Paul, and a Canon Seminar, which is reevaluating the canonicity of all of the New Testament books. A Creeds Seminar and an Acts Seminar began deliberations in 1999. "Jesus Seminar on the Road" educational programs bring Westar Fellows to communities across North America for lectures and workshops. The Institute and the Seminars are supported by a \$25 membership fee (resulting in an "associate membership"), event fees, donations, and by sales of literature produced by the Institute's Polebridge Press.

Purpose

The Jesus Seminar has two goals. First, the Seminar seeks to evaluate the accuracy and validity of the New Testament's account of Jesus' words and deeds. Second, the Seminar seeks to "raise the public literacy level" concerning the conclusions of modern Biblical textual analysis, "disseminating knowledge . . . [which] has been hoarded by scholars for years."⁹ The group's two-day seminars have been conducted throughout the nation.¹⁰

The above paragraph reflects the Seminar's *ostensible* purpose—a valid one if carried out objectively according to responsible hermeneutical and historical-grammatical exegetical principles. However, its *real*, underlying goal was already discernible in Funk's keynote address, "The Issue of Jesus," delivered at the first meeting of the Seminar in Berkeley, California, in March 1985.¹¹ Funk saw the work of the Seminar as "liberty for millions" from the constraints of ignorant faith. His goal has been a "reinvention of Christianity" that would supplant traditional Christian theology and practice.¹² From the beginning, the Seminar has sought to "set Jesus free" from the "scriptural and creedal prisons in which we have

entombed him. We aspire to no less than roll away the stone from the door of the rock-cut tomb.”¹³

From the start, then, we see that the agenda of the Seminar is not disinterested scholarship, but a social mission against the way in which the church controls the Bible, and the way in which the church is dominated by a form of evangelical and eschatological theology—that is, a theology focused both on the literal truth of the Gospels and the literal return of Jesus—this Funk finds intolerable.¹⁴

The Seminar’s publications frequently reflect a “Jesus, we’re doing you a favor!” tone. In an interview Funk declared: “We must begin by giving Jesus a demotion. He asked for it, he deserves it, we owe him no less. As divine son of God . . . cosmic judge seated at God’s right hand, he is insulated and isolated from his personality as the humble Galilean sage . . . A demoted Jesus then becomes available as the real founder of the Christian movement. With his new status, he will no longer be merely the mythical icon.”¹⁵

The aspiration to “liberate” Jesus from credal straitjackets is entirely in keeping with the form critical assumption that the gospel accounts do not reflect the real (“historical”) Jesus but rather a more fully evolved theology of the first and second century church. In other words, “Christ” is the invention of the church superimposed upon a Jewish teacher named “Jesus.” “Jesus” evolved into “Christ” and was then memorialized through an embellished, redacted set of accounts we now call the Synoptic Gospels. Funk seeks to liberate Jesus from the “mythology” which he believes has developed around Him (Funk would write “him”—small “h”) over the past 2,000 years, labeling the Seminar’s work as a “new Reformation.”¹⁶ Robert J. Miller, a Seminar Fellow and religion professor at Midway College in Kentucky, “described the historical Jesus as a remarkable but thoroughly human teacher, one more interested in the plight of the poor than in speculation about an afterlife.”¹⁷ The Jesus of the Church is no more than “an imaginative theological construct, into which have been woven traces of that enigmatic sage from Nazareth—traces that cry out for recognition and liberation from the firm grip of those whose faith overpowered their memories.”¹⁸

The Seminar has, from the outset, had a clear purpose—an agenda which prejudices its selection of Fellows, and which, more importantly, *predetermines* the outcome of its analysis of the Synoptic Gospels. The conclusions of the Seminar are not the surprising, revolutionary result of rigorous, objective and dispassionate analysis of text, but are nothing more than the inevitable result of the Seminar’s biases. The Seminar’s results reflect its true purpose. The Seminar ends up with a naturalistic Jesus because that is precisely what it wanted to find.

Process

Seminar Fellows meet semi-annually to consider the topic at hand. During the early phase of the Seminar, the group analyzed the historicity of the words of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. The Seminar has since analyzed the actions of Jesus, gone on to assess the canonicity of the Book of Revelation and is considering whether a reconstructed Q should be published. Fellows prepare topical papers between meetings, present them at the Seminar, discuss texts and then vote on the texts under consideration using colored beads. Texts under consideration vary from one or two words to whole blocks.

When dealing with the words of Jesus (1985-1993), the Seminar voted on over 2,000 texts using bead colors which indicated the following:

red	=	3 points:	That’s Jesus
pink	=	2 points:	Sure sounds like Jesus
gray	=	1 point:	Well, maybe
black	=	0 points:	There’s been some mistake. ¹⁹

The ultimate fate of a text was determined by weighted average: the points were totaled, divided by the number of votes, and the average converted to a scale of 1.00. Texts were then color-coded based on the resultant average:

red:	.7501 and up
pink:	.5001 to .7500
gray:	.2501 to .5000
black:	.0000 to .2500

The voting system is inherently biased toward rejecting a text. “It is a process biased against the authenticity of the Gospel traditions. It is in the very nature of scholars to vie with one another to be more critical, to be ‘harder graders.’ The procedure forces sayings to prove their authenticity, rather than assuming their authenticity and placing the burden of proof on arguments for inauthenticity.”²⁰ While a weighted average approach means that each vote counts (as opposed to a majority or plurality decision which has only winners and losers), black votes can pull an otherwise high average down. This is viewed by the Seminar as an advantage of the weighted average system. The editors of *The Five Gospels* write, “this shortcoming seemed consonant with the methodological skepticism that was a working principle of the Seminar: when in sufficient doubt, leave it out.”²¹

Results

The Jesus Seminar has published two major works: *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (1993) and *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds* (1998). *The Five Gospels* contains the color-coded text and accompanying form critical commentary which are the result of the Seminar's 8-year analysis of the words of Jesus. The "canon" begins with Mark (not Matthew), reflecting the Seminar's acceptance of the two- or four-source theory of the origin of Matthew and Luke. The so-called "fifth Gospel" is the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas. Discovered in 1945 at the library at Nag Hammadi, the Coptic Gospel of Thomas is entirely unlike the canonical Gospels. It contains 114 sayings of Jesus with little narrative. Conservative (and many liberal) scholars generally consider it a product of early Gnostic heretics, postdating the canonical Gospels (probably mid-2nd century). Why did the Seminar include the Gospel of Thomas since it contains only 5 red sayings, all of which are found also in the canonical Gospels? "Its inclusion seems to make primarily a political or 'culture wars' point: the Gospels are to be considered of value only insofar as they are sources for the historical Jesus, and the Christian canon should be reconstructed on that basis."²²

The language of *The Five Gospels* is "earthy, colloquial English—definitely on the 'functional equivalent' rather than the 'literal' side of the translation spectrum."²³ Often it is simply inaccurate, repulsively crude or even "deliberately iconoclastic."²⁴ For example, Jesus' response to the leper is, "Okay—you're clean" (Mark 1:41). The salt of the earth has "zing." To the Pharisees Jesus declares "You scholars and Pharisees, you impostors! Damn you" (Matt. 23:13-14)!

According to *The Five Gospels*, only 18% of the words ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels may actually have been spoken by Him. Most of these sayings are only probably authentic (15 are marked in red; 75 more in pink²⁵). The book of John contains nothing original to Jesus. In fact, the Seminar considers "the Fourth Gospel as alien to the real Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth."²⁶ Mark records only one authentic sentence: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17). In the Sermon on the Mount, the only red-lettered words were "Our Father," "Love your enemies," and four additional sayings.²⁷

According to the *Acts of Jesus*, only 10 of Jesus' 176 acts are historical.²⁸ The Seminar "concluded that the Jesus of history is very different from the icon of traditional Christianity: Jesus did not walk on water, feed the multitude, change water into wine, or raise Lazarus from the dead. He was executed as a public nuisance, not for claiming to be the son of God. And in the view of the Seminar, he did not rise bodily from the dead . . ." ²⁹ The Fellows speculate that Jesus' body was in reality eaten by dogs at the foot of the cross.

The resurrection account is variously explained as:

1. "the visionary experiences of Peter, Paul, and Mary";³⁰
2. a tradition of the first century church which was nothing more than "an effort to promote the vitality of Jesus' message";³¹
3. or "according to various theories [of the Seminar Fellows], Jesus' followers mistakenly went to the wrong tomb and thought their teacher had risen, female disciples mistook their subjective grief experiences for actual post-death appearances, and early church leaders spread resurrection stories to counteract their own guilt—Peter having denied Jesus three times, Paul for having persecuted believers."³²

The account of Jesus walking on the water was inspired by a Homeric tale.³³ Jesus is credited with the ability to heal, especially those with psychosomatic illnesses. None of his healings are, however, miraculous. All can be explained naturalistically: Jesus had a gift for healing "emotional ills through acceptance and love."³⁴

The naturalistic portraits of Jesus which emerge from *The Five Gospels* and *The Acts of Jesus* are only slight variations of the age-old "Great Teacher" heresy:

- ◆ Fellow Marcus Borg: the historical Jesus was a "spirit person, subversive sage, social prophet and movement founder."³⁵
- ◆ Co-chair John Dominic Crossan's opinion summarized in *Time Australia*: "Jesus was a revolutionary peasant who resisted economic and social tyranny in Roman-occupied Palestine. He was a Jewish cynic who wandered from town to town, teaching unconventional wisdom and subverting oppressive social customs. He was a preacher who proclaimed 'God's radical justice' and lived the idea so powerfully that it inspired a movement that changed the course of history. And if the clarity of his life and message, now long obscured, could be fully grasped today, the same would happen again."³⁶ "As envisioned by Crossan . . . Jesus was less concerned with his Father's kingdom, as traditionally understood, than with bucking 'the standard political normalcies of power and privilege, hierarchy and oppression, debt foreclosure and land appropriation, imperial exploitation and colonial collaboration.' This Christ did not so much heal illnesses as cure false consciousness . . . Crossan has summarized his message as 'God says, "Caesar sucks."'"
- ◆ Fellow Lief Vaage: Jesus was "a party animal, somewhat shiftless, and disrespectful of the fifth commandment: Honor your father and your mother."³⁷
- ◆ Chairman Robert Funk's view summarized in *U.S. News*: "the historical Jesus of Nazareth . . . was probably more akin to a Jewish Socrates—or perhaps a Lenny Bruce—than the divine Son of God."³⁸ In his book, *Honest to Jesus*, Funk writes, "Jesus was perhaps the first stand-up Jewish comic . . . not political, not programmatic . . ." Starting a new religion 'would have been the farthest thing from his mind.'"³⁹

Assumptions

The introduction to *The Five Gospels* includes a list of the “rules of evidence” “formulated and adopted” by the Jesus Seminar.⁴⁰ These rules are used to judge the historicity of written texts and guide the Fellows in voting red, pink, gray or black. The rules are necessary because the Seminar makes the basic assumption that the Gospels themselves are not primary sources. They are “hearsay evidence” which must be judged for validity by this set of principles:

The evidence provided by the written gospels is hearsay evidence. Hearsay evidence is secondhand evidence. In the case of the gospels, the evangelists⁴¹ are all reporting stories and sayings related to them by intermediate parties; none of them was an ear or eyewitness of the words and events he records. Indeed, the information may have passed through several parties on its way to the authors of the written gospels Because the evidence offered by the gospels is hearsay evidence, scholars must be extremely cautious in taking the data at face value.⁴²

All the “rules of evidence” indicate a complete rejection of verbal inspiration, Biblical inerrancy and Jesus’ promise to preserve the Word intact. Furthermore, the conclusions or inferences drawn from the rules are frequently speculative or illogical.

Rules of Evidence⁴³ (in bold):

- 1. The evangelists frequently group sayings and parables in clusters and complexes that did not originate with Jesus.** Clustering is used as evidence for a later redactor interested in “controlling the interpretation”⁴⁴ rather than as evidence for the complexity and ingenuity of the Savior’s teaching style or the Spirit-inspired grouping of thematic material for didactic purposes. Is it not equally plausible that Jesus Himself clustered his teachings around “catchwords” like “salt” or “lost” (sheep, coin, son) or “blessed” (beatitudes)? This teaching technique would be suitable especially to oral teaching in which the same (or similar) subject is treated from many facets so that the hearer can better absorb the essential content. We, who now *read* the accounts, likewise benefit. Matthew, for example, is clearly thematically organized, but it is the Spirit who controls the organization of content, not the holy writer or a later editor.
- 2. The evangelists frequently relocate sayings and parables or invent new narrative contexts for them.** The Seminar assumes that Jesus’ disciples could not remember the context in which He uttered His teachings. The evangelists therefore created narrative settings “into which they imported Jesus as the authority figure.”⁴⁵ Essentially then the evangelists are acting in a dishonest manner, never disclosing their practice of embellishment to an unsuspecting readership. Nothing in the Biblical context ever suggests that the narratives should be considered fictitious additions. In discounting the narrative portions of the Synoptics, the Seminar reduces the Gospels to a collection of sayings which can then be shuffled and reorganized to produce almost any Jesus the critic would like to create. The Jesus who emerges will of necessity be a mere man as the narratives contain much of the supernatural content of the Synoptic accounts (e.g. the miracles). “By giving up the framework of the canonical Gospels, and conceiving of the sayings and deeds of Jesus as free-floating bits of historical data, the figure of Jesus becomes infinitely malleable. Without the narrative provided by the Gospels, the various ‘traditions’ of words or deeds of Jesus lack context and can be arranged at will according to whatever principle or logic is deemed reasonable by the scholar.”⁴⁶ Moreover, could the historical Jesus possibly have spoken only in “single aphorisms”?⁴⁷
- 3. The evangelists frequently expand sayings or parables, or provide them with an interpretive overlay or comment.** The Seminar’s commentary on Mark 2:19-20⁴⁸ assumes that 19 was spoken by Jesus because it has no specific Christian content. Jesus and His disciples fasted. Verse 20 was added later by Mark (or someone before him)—a “Christian” expansion to justify the renewal of the Jewish Christian practice of fasting. This logic is typical: the Seminar does not believe Jesus was the Christ, therefore Jesus could not have spoken as the Christ, therefore everything Christian was added later. The introduction to *The Five Gospels* states: “This axiom bears repeating: Jesus was not the first Christian.”⁴⁹
- 4. The evangelists often revise or edit sayings to make them conform to their own individual language, style, or viewpoint.**
- 5. Words borrowed from the fund of common lore or the Greek scriptures (i.e. LXX) are often put on the lips of Jesus.** It is assumed that “if a saying could have been uttered by [Jesus’] contemporaries, there is no particular reason to think it came from him.”⁵⁰ This is patently absurd as Jesus’ language would naturally have been the product of his cultural surroundings. As true Man, raised in Nazareth, He would have used the idioms and lore of his day. The result of this assumption is that “the only sayings scholars may judge to be authentic are those that are idiosyncratic.”⁵¹ It is assumed that Jesus did not quote from the Old Testament of His own accord: “. . . the gospel writers did not hesitate to take words from the Greek scriptures and put them on the lips of Jesus, because these words, too, were sacred words.”⁵² Why then didn’t the redactors “fill in” Jesus’ words as a youth in his first visit to the temple, for example? Would this not have been a redactor’s dream opportunity to deify the peasant from Nazareth? If the evangelists were trying to make Jesus into God, this account would have been an opportunity to do so. As it stands, it is a “hole.”
- 6. The evangelists frequently attribute their own statements to Jesus.** However, determination of who said what on the

basis of internal evidence is purely subjective and frequently results in conflicting opinions among scholars. Who can determine, using stylistic analysis, etc., what is originally from Jesus' mouth and what came later?

7. Hard sayings are frequently softened in the process of transmission to adapt them to the conditions of daily living.

In other words, the Christian community softened the absolute sayings of Christ to make them practical and palatable. For example, Mark would have added, "Everything's possible for God" (SV Mark 10:27) to Jesus' original "hard sayings" in Mark 10:24-27⁵³: viz., that the rich man should sell everything; and that it is easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. The Seminar's implication seems to be that the rich in the early church would have felt burdened by Jesus' "hard sayings" (vv. 24-25) and therefore Mark added verse 27 (i.e. a way out of having to sell all). That Jesus was not uttering a universal principle but was simply addressing this particular rich sinner's personal "hot button" is never considered.

8. Variations in difficult sayings often betray the struggle of the early Christian community to interpret or adapt sayings to its own situation. The "assumption of liberal scholarship is that the early church had little or no interest in transmitting information about Jesus *per se*, but that it remembered and even invented Jesus material to reflect its needs and experiences. Suffice it to say that there are a number of 'quality controls' in the New Testament that argue strongly against such fanciful inventiveness. The gospel writers did not wildly invent material about Jesus, but they were quite careful with the Jesus tradition. This is shown by the following:

- ◆ Many eyewitnesses of Jesus were still alive when the Gospels were written. These witnesses functioned as gatekeepers and custodians of 'the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints' (Jude 3). The wild inventiveness supposed by the radical critics is not found in the New Testament, but rather in certain second-century documents (e.g. the Infancy Narratives of Jesus, the Protoevangelium of James) that were produced later where Jesus traditions circulated in communities separated from the apostolic church.
- ◆ The rabbinical method of teaching by rote favored accurate and careful transmission of Jesus traditions as opposed to novel interpretation.
- ◆ The presence of embarrassing and even problematic material in the Gospels (Mark 9:1; 14:71) speaks against the inventiveness of the early church, even when the church might have profited by it.
- ◆ The absence of parables in Acts and the Epistles (and other early Christian literature) is the strongest possible argument that the parables in the synoptic Gospels were not projected onto Jesus from the early church, but rather derived from Jesus.
- ◆ A comparison of the Epistles with the Gospels reveals that neither Paul's words nor those of other New Testament writers have been projected back onto the mouth of Jesus. No passage from Paul (or any of the other New Testament letters) can be found in the Gospels or on the lips of Jesus. No Pauline concept, such as the 'body of Christ,' 'righteousness by faith,' 'under the law,' or 'flesh' is attributed to Jesus. This is a strong argument against the assertion that the Gospels are the early churches' stories projected onto Jesus. If the early church were avidly and indiscriminately putting words into the mouth of Jesus, we should expect to find at least some of the material from the Epistles in the Gospels or on the lips of Jesus. Since we do not, we ought to conclude that the gospel material is not extrapolated from the early church then and projected onto Jesus.
- ◆ Paul is careful to differentiate between instruction from the Lord and his own opinions (1 Cor. 7:10, 12, 25). Surely Paul was not an exception in this matter, but typical of the church as a whole. Paul could scarcely have won acceptance from the Twelve and the Jerusalem leaders had he been known to play loose with the Jesus tradition.
- ◆ . . . the supposed inventiveness of the early church meets a final stumbling block in the Gentile question. According to Acts and the Epistles, the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles and their admission into the church was the burning question of the early church. This issue, however, is virtually absent from the Gospels. Had the church actively engaged in framing 'Jesus material' according to its needs and interests, surely it would have developed sayings on the Gentile question. The fact that such sayings are virtually absent in the Gospels argues in favor of the historical reliability of the material that is there."⁵⁴

9. Sayings and parables expressed in "Christian" language are the creation of the evangelists or their Christian predecessors. Jesus, it is assumed, did not consider Himself the Christ. This concept is a theological development of the 1st century Church. In other words, "if it is demonstrably in line with later church teaching, it is best to suppose that the church created the saying."⁵⁵ "To turn around and say that Jesus must not sound like the church . . . is to assume that perhaps the most influential man in history never said anything that the church believed, cherished, and passed on The fellows of the Jesus Seminar seem to think that the witness of the Gospels' writers cannot be accepted because they are passionately committed to what they are saying. Passionate witnesses, the fellows assume, distort the evidence: they are likely to write down whatever they want you to believe, simply because they believe it themselves so strongly. But counterexamples are not hard to find. The first survivors of the Holocaust were passionate in their witness, too. But by and large, their passion drove them toward great accuracy and carefulness, precisely because they wanted others to

believe them Moreover, where did all the wonderful teaching and reflection in the Gospels come from Was Jesus a moralizing twit, while the church proved wonderfully creative? The anemic Jesus of the Jesus Seminar could not possibly have generated the robust, death-defying faith of the believers in the early church.”⁵⁶

10. **Sayings or parables that contrast with the language or viewpoint of the gospel in which they are embedded reflect older tradition (but not necessarily tradition that originated with Jesus).** The Seminar posits that 1 Cor. 15:3-5 is the written record of the earliest version of the oral gospel: “*For what I received I passed on to you* as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.”⁵⁷ Paul passed on the oral tradition he had received “from his predecessors” (the assumption is that Paul did not receive it from the Savior in Acts 9 but from oral tradition; or, if he did receive it from the Church, the Church did not receive it from Jesus) to Mark or a similar “evangelist.” The fact that Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33 are Mark’s insertions based on Paul’s theology rationally explains their prophetic and “Christian” character.
11. **The Christian community develops apologetic statements to defend its claims and sometimes attributes such statements to Jesus.**
12. **Sayings and narratives that reflect knowledge of events that took place after Jesus’ death are the creation of the evangelists or the oral tradition before them [but after Jesus’ death].** Examples of “postmortem” insertions which Jesus could not have foreseen include persecution of the disciples (Mark 13:9), world evangelism (which the Seminar claims started with Paul; Mark 13:10; Matt. 28:18-20), and betrayal of family members (Mark 13:12-13).

Miscellaneous Assumptions

In addition to these explicit “rules of evidence” which govern the assessment of the *written Word*, a number of additional assumptions underlie the Seminar’s work and are either explicitly admitted or clearly evident. The Seminar posits:

1. **that historical reconstruction is the “ultimate criterion of truth against which the Gospels must be judged** The more literalistic fundamentalists believe the Gospels can be proven historically true; the modern skeptics [like the Jesus Seminar] believe they can be proven historically false; but both believe that history is the ultimate judge of the truth of the Gospels. This is a burden that history (as a discipline) simply cannot shoulder.”⁵⁸ The truth and the inerrancy of the Gospels can only be comprehended by faith.
2. **that Jesus was not an eschatological figure (i.e. a Person who “worked in view of a future triumph of God’s will”⁵⁹) and his understanding of the kingdom of God was non-eschatological.** Any eschatological references are dismissed out of hand as inauthentic. The Seminar’s logic is astoundingly counterintuitive: “although John the Baptist had an eschatological mission, and although the earliest Christian traditions understood Jesus eschatologically, Jesus the disciple of John (the Baptist) and teacher of the church had a completely noneschatological and indeed counter-eschatological understanding of God’s kingdom. A less sophisticated logic might naturally conclude just the opposite: if Jesus’ mentor was eschatological and Jesus’ followers were eschatological, it would seem logical to suppose that Jesus was eschatological.”⁶⁰ In fact, the Seminar dismisses the supernatural entirely. “Like the previous quests for the historical Jesus before it . . . is dominated by the presuppositions and methods of naturalism. Admissible evidence is ‘from below’ only, that is, what can be known about Jesus from history, literary sources, anthropology, and reason. Evidence ‘from above’—the faith claims of the Apostles’ Creed, for instance—falls outside admissible evidence, unless such evidence can be verified apart from the authority of the church, creed and confession.”⁶¹
3. **that there is a sharp contrast between written and oral cultures.** The Seminar assumes that Jesus operated in a strictly oral culture (30-50 C.E.). However, “this represents a highly simplistic division of ancient culture [into either oral or written] that the majority of students in the Mediterranean world and of first-century Palestine would reject.”⁶²

For further detail on the Seminar’s axioms guiding the assessment of oral transmission, see *The Five Gospels*, 25ff. Chief among them are:

- ♦ oral transmission is assumed to be inherently inaccurate and therefore long passages are eliminated; “shorter, punchier passages were more likely to be accurate.”⁶³ However, oral cultures are renowned for memorizing long epics and for astounding accuracy of transmission.⁶⁴
- ♦ sayings with multiple attestation are considered earlier or more likely original.

However, these standards for assessing the oral record are not consistently or objectively applied. Luke Timothy Johnson writes:

The level of scholarship employed can be illustrated as well by the odd inclusion of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35) among the ‘red’ (authentic) sayings of Jesus. It is ranked ninth among the sayings receiving this positive rating. But how can this be? It is found only in the Gospel of Luke, therefore failing to meet the (we thought essential) criterion of multiple attestation. Furthermore, it is fairly lengthy, certainly not a ‘short aphorism’—the only sort capable of being remembered accurately . . . ! Why then is it included? The only answer possible is that it fits the

seminar's preconceived notion of who Jesus must have been. The seminar has not consistently followed the very criteria it established.⁶⁵

4. **that Messianic and divine status does not go back to the historical Jesus.** As noted above, it is assumed that the Godhead of Jesus was a secondary development. The peasant from Nazareth did not consider Himself Christ.

Liberal scholarship has generally regarded Jesus' elevated self-concept—his forgiving sins, or presuming to speak and act with God's authority, for example—as unthinkable in first-century monotheism. Anything smacking of divine awareness could not have come from Jesus, it is asserted, but only from subsequent tradition ascribed to him by Hellenistic Christianity.⁶⁶

The divinity of Christ is an article of faith and is well attested throughout the Scriptures. The entire Gospel of John testifies of Jesus' divine Sonship. No attempt should be made to supplement the testimony of Scripture with rational argument in demonstrating Christ's divinity. The Word alone is and must remain sufficient. However, there are also historical and rationalistic arguments (*i.e.*, fighting the liberals on their own turf) which suggest that a liberal scholar need not *automatically* assume that Jesus did not have an "elevated self-concept."

- ◆ Comparative studies of Messianically-minded zealots of Jesus' day reveal that they often had an elevated self-concept. This idea was not unthinkable in first century Judaism and cannot be dismissed out of hand on the basis of liberal scholarship's incorrect analysis of the religious climate of Jesus' day.
 - ◆ The way Jesus called his disciples is utterly unique. Rabbis did not call disciples; rather, disciples chose their rabbi. In addition, rabbis were viewed as nothing more than a "vehicle of the commandments of God in Torah."⁶⁷ Jesus, by contrast, called his disciples, directing them to himself and not Torah. Jewish rabbis assumed that their disciples would succeed them. Jesus said, "It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master" (Matt. 10:25). "The undisguised prominence of Jesus in the call of the disciples leads to a single conclusion: their response to Jesus is their response to the kingdom of God itself."⁶⁸
 - ◆ Jesus used "amen" in an entirely unique way. "Thus says the Lord" was typically used to conclude Old Testament pronouncements as a stamp of divine authority. Jesus assumed this authority for himself, introducing many of his remarks with "amen, amen." This is without parallel in the rest of the New Testament or in Jewish literature.⁶⁹
 - ◆ Jews did not normally go around killing peasant philosophers. There was one ground for capital punishment: the charge of blasphemy. "This, of course, is the very charge that the earliest Gospel preserves, after Jesus affirmed that he was the Son of God who would come on the clouds of heaven (Mark 14:61-64). All the Gospel accounts agree that Jesus threatened the Jerusalem authorities the most with his attack on that temple institution. What might have caused Jesus to presume to challenge the most sacred site of Judaism? Mark 11 clearly indicates that Jesus understood his person to supersede the temple itself, and that makes sense only if Jesus understood himself to be divinely appointed and empowered. The Jerusalem authorities, of course, took both the deed and the word justifying it as a blasphemous presumption of Jesus' part, justly punishable by death. But the charge of blasphemy remains an unmistakable testimony—even from his opponents—revealing Jesus' true mission and purpose."⁷⁰
5. **that the rest of New Testament evidence concerning Jesus is inadmissible evidence.** Paul is considered to have "no interest in Jesus."
6. **that Jesus is solely a product of his culture.** However, "a social context is only a stage setting; it is not the plot of the play or the actors in it. To assume that social context—even a correctly perceived one—captures the meaning of a person is like supposing that a resume divulges the essence of an applicant."⁷¹

Consequences

◆ For the blasphemous heretics within the Seminar whom only God can discern:

2 Peter 1:16-2:22: We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them-- bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)-- if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.

Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed-- an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey-- a beast without speech-- who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity-- for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

◆ For the Church:

Romans 8:35-39: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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Notes

¹ Of Blass, DeBrunner, Funk fame.

² westarinstitute.org

³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Christian Century*, 16. It should be noted that the page references in the footnotes refer only to the first page of the article cited and not to the actual location of the citation within the article (unless otherwise noted). This is because all of the articles were printed from EBSC, an on-line source which does not reflect the original pagination of the source document. EBSC does, however, indicate the number of the first page of the article in question (e.g. 16 in this footnote).

⁴ Johnson, *Christian Century*, 16.

⁵ Johnson, *Christian Century*, 16.

⁶ D.A. Carson, *Christianity Today*, 30.

⁷ westarinstitute.org

⁸ westarinstitute.org

⁹ Jeffrey L. Sheler, *U.S. News and World Report*, 55.

¹⁰ Deal W. Hudson, *Crisis*, 6.

¹¹ The complete address is available on the Seminar's website: westarinstitute.org.

¹² Sheler 55.

¹³ Sheler; Mike Tharp, *U.S. News and World Report*, 46.

¹⁴ Johnson, *Christian Century*, 16.

¹⁵ David F. Dawes, *Alberta Report Newsmagazine*, 31.

¹⁶ Dawes, 31.

¹⁷ Dawes, 31.

¹⁸ David Van Biema, Richard N. Ostling, *Time Australia*, 50.

¹⁹ These crass and imprecise designations of the meaning of each bead are not mine!! They are taken from the introductory material (37) of the Seminar's own publication, *The Five Gospels*; the crudely colloquial language is typical of the Seminar's careless irreverence toward Jesus and His Word.

²⁰ Robert L. Wilken, *Commonweal*, 19.

²¹ Robert W. Funk, et al. *The Five Gospels*, 37 (actual page).

²² Johnson, *Christian Century*.

²³ Carson.

²⁴ Johnson, *Christian Century*.

²⁵ Johnson, *Christian Century*.

²⁶ James R. Edwards, *Christianity Today*, 14.

²⁷ Van Biema, Ostling.

²⁸ Hudson.

²⁹ westarinstitute.org

³⁰ westarinstitute.org

³¹ Steve Rabey, *Christianity Today*, 45.

³² Rabey, 45.

³³ Carson.

³⁴ Russell Watson and Martha Brant, et al, *Newsweek*, 53.

³⁵ Lost the citation.

³⁶ Van Biema, Ostling.

³⁷ Johnson, *Christian Century*, 16.

³⁸ Sheler, Tharp.

³⁹ Sheler, Tharp.

⁴⁰ Funk, *et al*, *The Five Gospels*, 16 (actual)

⁴¹ Here used by the Seminar to mean whoever ultimately compiled the Gospels

⁴² Same as 41.

⁴³ Same, 19ff.

⁴⁴ Same, 19.

⁴⁵ Same, 21.

⁴⁶ Wilken.

⁴⁷ Funk, *et al*, *The Five Gospels*, 28 (actual).

⁴⁸ Mark 2:19-20: "And Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.'"

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 24.

⁵⁰ D.A. Carson.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 23.

⁵³ Mark 10: 24-27: "And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, 'Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, 'Who then can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.'"

⁵⁴ Edwards.

⁵⁵ Carson.

⁵⁶ Carson.

⁵⁷ Emphasis added.

⁵⁸ Sheler.

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Christian Century*.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Christian Century*.

⁶¹ Edwards.

⁶² Johnson, *Christian Century*, 16.

⁶³ Van Biema, Ostling.

⁶⁴ Van Biema, Ostling.

⁶⁵ Johnson, *Christian Century*, 16.

⁶⁶ Edwards.

⁶⁷ Edwards.

⁶⁸ Edwards.

⁶⁹ Edwards.

⁷⁰ Edwards.

⁷¹ Edwards.

Beware the Man of Sin!

Exegetical Study of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Wayne Eichstadt

Introduction

"At the end of the valley lay blood, bones, ashes, and mangled bodies of men, even of pilgrims that had gone this way formerly; and while I was musing what should be the reason, I espied a little before me a cave, where two giants, Pope and Pagan dwelt in old times; by whose power and tyranny the men, whose bones, blood, ashes, etc. lay there, were cruelly put to death. . . [Pope] though he be yet alive, he is, by reason of age, and also of the many shrewd brushes that he met with in his younger days, grown so crazy and stiff in his joints that he can now do little more than sit in his cave's mouth, grinning at pilgrims as they go by, and biting his nails because he cannot come at them" [The Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan].

John Bunyan's deathly description of the carnage which Pope and Pagan left in their wake is not an overstatement. Pope and Pagan have destroyed many souls through their campaign of deceit. The Papacy in Bunyan's day had lost much of the power it once possessed and so he pictured Pope biting his nails; but make no mistake, he is as deadly as ever. It is this same kind of deadly danger which God ascribes to the Man of Sin in this passage of Thessalonians.

It stands as a matter of Lutheran confession that the Man of Sin is the Antichrist, is the papacy. Like so many other

points of scriptural confession this one too is being swept under the rug in this age of "reconciliation" and ecumenical desires. There is a definite foolishness in not heeding a warning and Paul's warning of danger could not be more clear. The dark foreboding and serious consequences are present throughout. In the context of this passage one can quickly see why Luther spoke with such strong words against the papacy and with such a sense of urgency. Bunyan would have shuddered if, in his "dream," a pilgrim would have approached Pope's cave and cozied up to the deadly old man with a loving embrace. It is quite frightening to hear Paul's sobering words about the Man of Sin and at the same time hear and see countless souls embracing him and plunging themselves into his destruction.

The study presented in these pages does not propose to be a complete treatment of the Man of Sin/Antichrist. Nor will we deal in depth with the other "sedes doctrinae" for the Antichrist beyond what is necessary to shed light on this passage. Our goal is to glean what God has here written for our learning and so be strengthened in confessing the truths of Scripture so that "*holding fast to the faithful word as we have been taught, we may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict*" (Titus 1:9). May the Spirit bless our efforts.

I. HIS COMING IS BEFORE CHRIST'S RETURN (1-3a)

Verses 1-2

Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ' αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ μὴ ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦς μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν, ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου. Μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἐξαπατήσῃ κατὰ μηδένα τρόπον. ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ ἔλθῃ. . .

Text Comparison

Verse 2:

a) The Nestle (N) text reads: τοῦ νοῦς μήδε. The Majority (M) and Textus Receptus (TR) read: μήτε. The N text was chosen as the preferred reading. There is no difference in meaning between the two variants.

b) The last two words in the N text read τοῦ κυρίου. The M & TR read τοῦ χριστοῦ. The N text was chosen. There is a significant difference in the two words but not in what the verse teaches since, in the context, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior is certainly understood by either of the two words.

Now brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together with Him, we are urgently asking you that you not be quickly shaken in your thinking nor be troubled; not by spirit, nor by word, nor by a letter (as though it came through us) *speaking* as if the Day of the Lord is imminent. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way because the Day of the Lord will not come. .

The verb ἐρωτάω and other verbs of entreaty use εἰς τὸ plus the infinitive to indicate the object of the verb. The usual "purpose" nature of this construction is also present so that the subject of Paul's plea, as well his purpose for making it, is that the Thessalonians not be quickly shaken or troubled by false ideas and reports concerning Christ's second coming. The emphatic position of the verb underscores the urgency of Paul's plea.

Word Study ~ παρουσία: Literally, this word signifies a "being" (ουσία) "with" (παρά) someone or something — "being present." In usage, the word refers to a coming/arrival and the resulting presence. Most often the word is used in reference to Christ's second coming to judge the world. His "coming" is the primary focus, yet His "being with us" is also implied in the term, παρουσία. Therefore we have a comforting picture of Christ's παρουσία because not only will He come but "*we shall always be with the Lord*" (1 Thess. 4:17).

Our being gathered together with Christ is connected to His coming, as Paul had more fully described to the Thessalonians in his first letter, chapter four. The addition of ἐπὶ to the verb συνάγω does not result in a sharp difference of meaning, but does suggest an emphasis on the place at which the gathering is made. In this case, the emphasis is even more prevalent because of the repetition of ἐπὶ. The place of gathering is with our Lord Jesus. This verb is also used for a hen gathering her chicks (Matt. 23:37) and the gathering of the elect (Luke 13:34).

ταχέως contributes to the sense of urgency in these verses. It is an adverb which indicates swiftness — "quickly, at once, without delay." Paul used this word to rebuke the Galatians as they were on the brink of being led astray by the Judaizers, "*I marvel that you are turning away so soon. . .*" (Gal. 1:6). Paul does not want the Thessalonians to be hasty in accepting what they were hearing from other sources and so be shaken from the understanding he had given them (νοῦς = faculty of thinking/mind). Being shaken from their thinking concerning the Lord's second coming would lead to inward turmoil, fear, and uncertainty (θροεῖσθαι).

ἐνέστηκεν is the perfect active of ἐνίστημι which is literally "to stand/set in." Robertson notes in his *Word Pictures* that it is used as an intransitive verb "to stand in/at/near." Robertson quotes Lightfoot's translation for this verse, "imminent," which seems proper for the context.

The Thessalonians had eschatology on their minds, which is evident in both of Paul's letters. In the first letter, Paul

addressed their misunderstanding and concern regarding those who died before Christ's return. He also reminded them that the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night. In this second letter, Paul again deals with the timing of Christ's coming, apparently in response to a false notion that He would return immediately. Paul gives specific warning against three possible means of deception. **1) A spirit:** A false prophet in the same sense as John urges, "*test the spirits*" (1 John 4:1); **2) A word:** Conversations or thoughts of others. Perhaps some had misconstrued Paul's words in the first letter, ". . . *we who are alive and remain shall be caught up*" to imply that Christ would definitely return in their lifetimes. **3) A letter,** as if it came from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. Perhaps there had been a letter which was supposed to be from Paul or perhaps Paul was simply warning against the possibility. It made no difference from where the deception came, the warning was the same. "Don't let anyone deceive you in any way." The double negative at the start of verse 3 creates the all-inclusive warning. The preposition of the compound verb *εξαπατάω* also intensifies the warning.

It would appear that the Thessalonian congregation had not yet been led astray because Paul addressed them as "brothers." His warning was to prevent any deception and subsequent falling away from the truth. If anyone was to try to convince the Thessalonians that Christ would soon return, he was wrong and they were not to be deceived. Paul gave the Thessalonians an event which would necessarily take place **before** Christ's return was even a possibility. At first glance, a specific pre-cursor to Christ's return seems to contradict Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord would come as a thief. Rather than a contradiction, it is an example of the "two-ditches of error." On the one hand it is wrong to assume that Christ will never come back and to live accordingly. Peter had to deal with this "ditch" in his second letter. On the other hand, it is wrong to assume that Christ will without doubt return in the immediate future and so ignore the tasks and responsibilities of life. This was the ditch over which the Thessalonians were tottering and so Paul gave them the pre-cursor which he, and we, will now discuss further.

II. HIS PROFILE IS WICKEDNESS (3-4)

Verses 3-4

Μή τις ὑμᾶς ἐξαπατήσῃ κατὰ μηδένα τρόπον. ὅτι εἶν μὴ ἔλθῃ ἢ ἀποστασία πρῶτον καὶ ἀποκαλυφθῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀμαρτίας, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, ὁ ἀντικείμενος καὶ ὑπεραιόμενος ἐπὶ πάντα λεγόμενον θεὸν ἢ σέβασμα, ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς θεὸν καθίσει ἀποδεικνύντα ἑαυτὸν ὅτι ἐστὶν θεός.

Text Comparison

Verse 3:

The N text reads: ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας; The M & TR replace ἀνομίας with ἀμαρτίας. The Majority Text reading was chosen as being better supported. This variant provides an excellent example of Scripture itself diffusing the fear of corrupted texts. 1 John 3:4 reads, ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία.

Verse 4:

The M reading, which is well supported, adds ὡς θεόν, "in the temple of God **as God**. . ." Another variant between M and the other texts involves a movable-n and has no real significance.

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way because *the Day of the Lord cannot come* unless the turning away comes first and the Man of Sin, the Son of Destruction, is *first* revealed. He is the one who opposes and puffs himself up with great pride over against everything which is called god or is an object of worship. For this reason, he sits as God in the temple of God publicly declaring that he **is** God.

Verse 3

The conditional clause is a negative third class condition and undetermined with the probability of fulfillment. As Paul was writing these words, the turning away and uncovering had not yet taken place, but whenever they did then the condition necessary for Christ's return would be fulfilled. The *apodosis* of the conditional sentence is missing, but can easily be supplied by the context of the previous verse. *πρῶτον*, though only written once, modifies both sides of the *καὶ* in the *protasis*.

A two-pronged event must first take place before Christ's return. Both are interrelated and "form a single phenomenon" [Moffatt, *Expositors' Greek Testament*] because the turning away produces the Man of Sin and he leads others to turn away. *ἀποστασία* is only used one other time in the New Testament, Acts 21:21, ". . . *you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying they ought not to circumcise*. . ." The word is used in secular writing for political revolts and denotes a "rising up in open defiance of authority and acting in complete opposition to its demands" [Louw-Nida]. This fits very well with what Paul says in verse four. "Rebellion" is a legitimate translation, but opens itself to a wide range of error in millennial thinking. Paul uses a definite article with *ἀποστασία* indicating a specific "turning away" and, as we find out in verse five something of which he had already previously spoken.

The second prong of which Paul speaks is the bringing to light of the Man of Sin/Son of Perdition. ἄνθρωπος eliminates any contention that Paul is speaking of a non-human threat. The definite article is used in both titles thus referring to a specific entity. The genitives in both titles are subjective, that is, describing the deeds which the Man/Son does. These

genitives give a profile of "the man." The Man of ἀμαρτία is a man who misses the mark of God's law and whose very nature and way of life is in opposition to God. The Son of Perdition's actions have their roots in the wickedness of hell. This title also describes the ultimate end of everyone who opposes God. ἀπωλείας signifies a complete destruction but it is a destruction not of "being" but of "well-being" [Vine]. The Son of Destruction is a son of damnation who will spend eternity with his "father" in the never ending torments of hell. Speaking of Judas, Jesus said, (John 17:12) ". . . none of them is lost except the son of perdition (ἀπωλείας).

Verse 4

The Man of Sin is further described as the one who is in opposition to God, similar to the Antichrist described by John (1 John 2:18). This "opposing one" makes divine claims for himself and therefore can certainly be equated with the Antichrist. The preposition ὑπέρ intensifies the verb. At the same time, there is the unique construction of a second non-identical preposition following the verb. This kind of non-agreement in prepositions is always worthy of note. Here, not only is the Man of Sin "hyper-proud" [in modern slang we might say he is "mega stuck on himself"] but he also demonstrates that pride "against" (ἐπί) everything that is called god or is an object of worship.

The Man of Sin is not content just to oppose the true God, as are most false teachers, but he opposes **all** gods and **all** objects of worship and makes himself God. ὥστε in combination with the infinitive expresses result. The result of the Man of Sin's pride is that he makes himself God in the temple of God. The article is absent in λεγόμενον θεὸν but is restored in εἰς τὸν ναὸν because it is the temple of THE true God to which reference is made. Both aspects of this verse are necessary for a proper identification of the Antichrist. Someone may "sit in the temple of God" and act contrary to God's Word but not be the Antichrist. Similarly, if someone proclaims himself to be God but that claim comes from without "the temple of God" neither can he be the Man of Sin. ἀποδείκνυμι is to "show publicly, proclaim, demonstrate." The Antichrist's public proclamation from the temple of God reveals him to be the Man of Sin.

Word Study ~ ναὸς ἱερὸν: Of the two words commonly translated as "temple," ἱερὸν is the more broad. It refers to the whole temple enclosure including the outer courts, porches and related buildings. ἱερὸν is never used figuratively in the New Testament. ναὸς is used for the inner temple — the habitation of God. Trench notes that this distinction is upheld in secular writings as well. Josephus, commenting on the Samaritans request to help rebuild the temple, wrote that they were not allowed to assist in building the ναὸν but were allowed to enter the ἱερὸν for worship. Other examples: Luke 1:10 — Zacharias was in the ναὸς, the people in the ἱερὸν. Matthew 26:55 — Jesus preached in the ἱερὸν and Matthew 21:12 — Jesus drove the money-changers out of the ἱερὸν but, since Jesus was not a Levite, did not enter the ναὸς. ναὸς does not bring attention to a physical building but rather to the holy habitation of God. This holds true in its figurative uses as well. ναὸς is used to refer to the Holy Christian Church (Eph. 2:21, etc.), Christ's body (Matt. 26:61) and our bodies, the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). A proper understanding of ναὸς does away with any supposition that the Antichrist will exalt himself in a physical temple in a rebuilt Jerusalem during a millennium. Nor would such a physical temple be in accordance with the wily nature of the Antichrist as described in verse nine. The nature of ναὸς and passages of Scripture in which it is used support the understanding that "the temple of God" as used in this verse is the Christian church.

Arrogant opposition to God is unavoidable wherever there is self-righteousness and salvation by works. Jesus told the people, "*The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat*" (Matt. 23:2), now the Man of Sin sits in the temple of God and displays similar arrogance. The ways in which the Roman Catholic papacy's conduct matches verse five leaves no room for doubt that this prophecy has found its fulfillment in the papacy.

The official words declared by the papacy are put on equal footing with the very words of God recorded in Scripture. Surely this is declaring oneself to be God from the temple of God. The Papacy declares itself to be the "vicar of Christ" and yet it places a curse on the very Gospel of Christ. "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sin for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema" (Council of Trent).

The papacy not only exerts itself against the true God but over all gods. "It is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman Pontiff" (Pope Boniface VIII, as quoted in *2 Thessalonians*, The People's Bible, David Kuske, p.92). "[The Antichrist] has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ, because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God. This is, properly speaking, *to exalt himself above all that is called God*, as Paul says, 2 Thess. 2:4. Even the Turks or the Tartars, great enemies of Christians as they are, do not do this but they allow whoever wishes to believe in Christ, and take bodily tribute and obedience from Christians" (Smalcald Articles, p. 475 Triglott).

Another example: "This law concerning perpetual celibacy is peculiar to this new pontifical despotism. Nor is it without reason. For Daniel, 11,37 ascribes to the kingdom of Antichrist this mark, namely, the contempt of women" (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Triglott p. 371). [cf. 1 Tim. 4:1ff., ". . . *in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy. . . forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving. . .*"]

"In the first place, The Pope rules in the Church, and by the pretext of ecclesiastical authority and of the ministry has established for himself this kingdom. . . Secondly, the doctrine of the Pope conflicts in many ways with the Gospel, and [thirdly] the Pope assigns to himself divine authority in a threefold manner. . . 1) the right to change the doctrine of Christ. . . and wants his own doctrine and his own services to be observed as divine. 2) He takes to himself the power not only of binding and loosing in this life, but also the jurisdiction of souls after this life. 3) The Pope does not want to be judged by the Church or by any one. . ." (Smalcald Articles, Triglott pp. 526-517).

III. HIS WORK IS RESTRAINED (5-7)

Verses 5-7

Οὐ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ἔτι ὢν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ταῦτα ἔλεγον ὑμῖν; καὶ νῦν τὸ κατέχον οἴδατε εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ καιρῷ. τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας· μόνον ὁ κατέχων ἄρτι ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται.

Don't you remember that when I was still with you I used to tell you these things? And as it now stands, you know what is holding *him* down in order for him to be revealed in his own appointed time. You see, the mystery of this lawlessness is already actively working. The one who holds him down is the only thing *restraining him*. *He does this now and* until he is out of the middle. . .

The imperfect ἔλεγον recalls Paul's instruction when he was with the Thessalonians. These things were not completely new to the Thessalonians. Paul was asking them not to be shaken (v. 2) from what he had already taught them. Paul's time in Thessalonica was relatively short (Acts 17) and yet he had instructed them on this point. Kuske observes, "Obviously, then, this was not a doctrine only for advanced Christian knowledge. And it surely is not to be classed as one of the "problems" of theology and the Bible as many suggest today. It was and is a matter which concerns every Christian, including those just new to the faith" (2 *Thessalonians*, The People's Bible p. 93).

νῦν is connected with οἴδατε. If νῦν is understood in a temporal sense, it would imply that **now** the Thessalonians knew something that they didn't know before. This would contradict what Paul had just said in verse five. νῦν is often used to represent not so much the present time but the situation pertaining to a given moment (Arndt-Gingrich).

There is an unnamed thing (neuter) which was restraining the Man of Sin. The purpose (εἰς τό with the infinitive) of this restraint was that the Man of Sin would be revealed in his appointed time. καιρός speaks of "time" as a season or opportunity. It refers to a time period marked by certain features and emphasizes quality. The Man of Sin's time was the time when he would be revealed. The thing restraining the Antichrist delayed the revelation until that God-appointed time.

Word Study ~ μυστήριον: A μυστήριον has to be revealed. The "mysteries" are those things which are hidden from human reason and comprehension and must be revealed to those for whom they are intended. Jesus taught the disciples the mysteries of the kingdom of God but they were hidden to the unbelievers in parables (Mark 4:11). Paul uses μυστήριον twenty-one times to describe those things which are beyond our human understanding. *"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory"* (1 Tim. 3:16).

Paul's use of the article in τῆς ἀνομίας points back to the lawlessness discussed in the previous verses. μυστήριον and ἀνομίας are positioned at either end of the sentence for emphasis. At the time of Paul, this lawlessness was a "mystery" because it was still unrevealed but even then was actively working behind the scenes.

H.A.W. Meyer notes that verse seven is divided into two halves. The first half forms a concession (the mystery is already working) and the second is a limitation established by μόνον. μόνον is an adverb which either limits the action to the one indicated by the verb or, in the case of nouns or pronouns, separates one person or thing from another. μόνον here separates the participle which is functioning as a substantive and the subject of the sentence. The one who is restraining the Man of Sin was the **only** thing holding him back. The one who restrains the Antichrist is like a barrier separating him from full revelation. The barrier will only be in place so long and since it is the only thing restraining the Man of Sin, once the "barrier" is removed from between the Antichrist and full revelation, he is out in the full light.

Who or what is the thing that restrained the Antichrist? Paul used the neuter in verse six and the masculine in verse seven. An answer to this question cannot be found in this text alone since Paul gives no further indication of who or what it is to which he refers. Three thoughts as to the "restraining one" have gained some following.

1) The restrainer is the Holy Spirit. τὸ πνεύματος does coincide with Paul's neuter in verse 6 and it is thought that the masculine is a reference to ὁ θεός. There seems to be little to support this view in any of the texts which speak about the Antichrist and strikes this author as a "stab in the dark."

2) Kuske (the People's Bible) believes that the neuter refers to the people's love for the truth of God's Word. As long as this love for the Word was present, the lawlessness of the Antichrist was held at bay. However, once this love grew cold the opportunity was right for the Man of Sin to come forward. Kuske understands the masculine restrainer to be Jesus. "Since his ascension Christ has been given the task of ruling all things for the good of his church. At Paul's time Christ did not permit the Antichrist to blossom even though his secret power of lawlessness was already at work. But the time would come when Jesus would step out of the way and permit the Antichrist to flourish for a while. . ." (p. 95). This viewpoint is

certainly scriptural. One wonders however, whether Christ's permitting the Antichrist to flourish would be described as "being out of the middle" as if He were no longer a "player" in the matter. A variation of Kuske's approach is mentioned by Arndt-Gingrich, namely, the neuter refers to the preaching of the Christian missionaries and the masculine is the Apostle Paul.

3) The traditional understanding of the ancient church is that the neuter refers to the Roman empire and the masculine to the Roman emperor. This view corresponds well with Daniel 7, ". . . *the fourth beast. . . with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet; and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which the three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words. . .*" (v. 19-20). There is no dispute that the fourth beast is representative of the Roman Empire. In Daniel's vision there is a close association between the beast and the horn representing the Antichrist. We know that the Roman Empire was God's tool in other ways: the decree of Caesar Augustus, the crucifixion of Christ, and the destruction of Jerusalem. The Roman Empire and the Emperor were such that there was no room for another "power." This is what scared Pilate when the people charged that Jesus declared himself a king and said that if Pilate would let Him go he was no friend of Caesar. This also was involved in the charge brought against Paul's teaching in Thessalonica: "*Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus*" (Acts 17:7). Once the Roman empire began to crumble and the emperor lost his supreme power there was a vacuum which the papacy filled. The groundwork for the Antichrist was already being laid in Paul's day, but he and the Thessalonians knew that it could never rise to power as long as Rome was powerful, but once Rome was "out of the middle" then look out!

4) The presence of several acceptable views also reminds us that there are sometimes in the Scriptures things that were known in Bible times but are not necessary for us to know today. Similarly there may be things revealed to the apostles which were not intended to be passed on to us (Rev. 10:4).

IV. HIS END IS REVELATION AND DESTRUCTION (8)

Verse 8

καὶ τότε ἀποκαλυφθήσεται ὁ ἄνομος, ὃν ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἀναλώσει τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργήσει τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ,

Text Comparison

a) The N text includes Ἰησοῦς and the M and TR do not. N places the word in brackets to indicate that the originality of the word is not entirely certain. The N reading was chosen as best supported.

b) The N text reads: ἀνελεῖ the future indicative of ἀναίρω. The M and TR texts read: ἀναλώσει, the future indicative of ἀναλόω. The verbs are synonyms, the M/TR text was chosen.

and then the Lawless One will be revealed: whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of His mouth and He will wipe him out in the appearance of His coming;

The one who was holding back the Man of Sin would one day be gone and then, at that time, he would be revealed. The shift in name to "the Lawless One" is still a clear reference to the same entity of the previous verses and the definite article is still retained.

The ὃν clause presents the next two steps in the history of the Antichrist. The first step is that the spirit or breath of the Lord Jesus would destroy him. Unlike the ἀπωλείας of verse three, the destruction of ἀναλόω is a destruction of "being." The instrument by which Jesus would carry out this destruction is the breath of His mouth — His all-powerful Word! The breath of Jesus' mouth is the word which does not return to Him void (Isa. 55:11) and which goes out of His mouth "a sharp sword" (Rev. 19:15). With the benefit of history we see the destruction of the Antichrist's death-grip through the restoration of scriptural teaching brought about by the Reformation. Before the Reformation, the condition of the visible church had fallen to an all time low as it sat oppressed by the anti-Christian doctrines being taught in the church. The truth of God's Word had not been lost but the teaching of it had been. Our Lord, working through Luther and others, brought the power and beauty of the Gospel to the forefront once again. With the breath of His mouth, our Lord destroyed the Antichrist's dominating control over the church.

The destruction brought to the Man of Sin through the Reformation was a large set back but not a complete destruction. The complete destruction will wait until Christ's reappearing. καταργέω is an intensified compound verb signifying "to abolish, wipe out." When Christ returns in His παρουσία the Man of Sin and all of his works will be completely destroyed. Since the complete destruction of the Antichrist will not take place until the end of time, his existence spans many years. This truth combined with the specific entity indicated by earlier verses strengthens the conclusion that the papacy is the Antichrist. None of the other "proposed antichrists" can fit both aspects.

V. HIS LEGACY IS DELUSION AND DEATH (9-12)

Verses 9-12

οὗ ἐστιν ἡ παρουσία κατ' ἐνέργειαν τοῦ σατανᾶ ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει καὶ σημείοις καὶ τέρασιν ψεύδους καὶ ἐν πάσῃ

ἀπάτη τῆς ἀδικίας ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις, ἀνθ' ὧν τὴν ἀγάπην τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἐδέξαντο εἰς τὸ σωθῆναι θύτους. καὶ δια; τοῦτο πέμπει αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς ἐνέργειαν πλάνης εἰς τὸ πιστεῦσαι αὐτοὺς τῷ ψεύδει, ἵνα κριθῶσιν πάντες οἱ μὴ πιστεύσαντες τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ἀλλὰ; εὐδοκῆσαντες ἐν τῇ ἀδικίᾳ.

Text Comparison

Verse 10

The N text reads: ἀπάτη ἀδικίας τοῖς . . . The M and TR texts read: ἀπάτη τῆς ἀδικίας ἐν τοῖς . . . The M/Tr text was followed.

Verse 11

The N text has the present πέμπει and the M and TR texts have the future πέμψει. Ultimately there is no difference since the context would indicate a prophetic present tense if it were not future. The M/TR reading was followed.

Verse 12

The N text omits the preposition ἐν and the M and TR include it. The M/TR text was followed. There is another insignificant variant involving a movable-v.

whose coming is according to the work of Satan with every powerful deed and signs and lying wonders and with every deception of unrighteousness toward the ones who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the truth for the purpose of being saved; and because of this, God will send the working of delusion to them in order that they will believe the lie in order that all who did not believe the truth but rather took pleasure in the unrighteousness will be condemned.

The antecedent of οὗτος is the Lawless One of verse eight. The relative clause elaborates further on the Lawless One. The Lawless One also has a παρουσία just like Christ but the nature of it is dramatically different. The coming of the Lawless One is *in accordance* with Satan but is not Satan himself contrary to some theories regarding the Antichrist. The activity already underway in Paul's time came from the active working of Satan (cf. ἐνεργεῖται, v.7). The whole matter of what Paul has just discussed has Satan at its very root. Satan uses every deception which he can muster in the attempt to drive souls away from the truth. Satan has used lies and half-truths to deceive from the very beginning. He **must** use deception because a straightforward approach would frighten his victims away. The subtle craftiness which proved to be Eve's downfall is evident in the wickedly ingenious deception of someone sitting in the "temple of God" doing the work of Satan. The deceitful methodology of Satan and whomever he uses is what Paul warned against right from the very start (ἐξοπατήση, v.3). Satan's deceitful ways come as no surprise because "[The Devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44) **and** "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).

Word Study ~ δύναμις, σημεῖον, τέρας: All three of these words are also used to characterize the miracles which Jesus did and which His disciples did in His name. "God also bearing witness both with **signs** (σ) and **wonders** (τ), with various **miracles** (δ). . . ." (Hebrews 2:4). "Truly the signs (σ) of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in **signs** (σ) and **wonders** (τ) and **mighty deeds** (δ)" (2 Cor. 12:12). Christ performed His miracles as a testimony to His person and to convince people of the truth for their well-being and eternal salvation. The purpose of the signs and miracles flowing from Satan's activities through the Man of Sin is deception and destruction and is anti – Christ. According to Trench's *Synonyms of the New Testament*, these words don't depict different kinds of miracles but rather portray the same from different perspectives. The δύναμις portrays the power behind the miracle. σημεῖον expresses a token of something. The τέρας is something extraordinary that arouses surprise. In this context the τέρας depicts pseudo or lying wonders. The papacy has no difficulty filling this description of the Antichrist either. Consider, for example, such things as statues of Mary which are claimed to weep and the requirement for "sainthood" that at least three miracles be established which took place through the prayers of the candidate [Kuske, p. 97].

The victims of the deceptions of unrighteousness are the ones who are perishing because (ἀνθ' ὧν, lit. "in return for which") they had no love for the truth. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing..." (1 Cor. 1:18). No lie can stand before the truth. No deception can survive being exposed to the light of truth. The truth guards, protects, and rescues from every one of Satan's schemes and from his planned destruction. The truth would have saved those who are perishing if they had listened. God provides His truth for all to hear, follow, and love. Those who despise God's truth and are deceived by the lies of unrighteousness have only themselves to blame.

Paul told the Thessalonians that because of the lack of love for the truth, God would send delusion upon the people who despised it. The purpose for this activity of God is first of all, so that the people believe the lie; secondly, so that believing the lie they will stand condemned at the final judgment. The Man of Sin and his work is a judgment of God upon all who do not have an all-encompassing love (ἀγαπάω) for the truth, who do not believe it, and who please themselves by following their own unrighteous ways.

One of the subtle dangers of deception is its gradual approach which slowly yet continually hardens the heart against the truth. The writer to the Hebrews warns, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in

departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily while it is called 'Today' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12-13). In his arrogance, Pharaoh hardened his heart to the truth of God's Word. After Pharaoh had himself hardened his heart, God then hardened his heart so that Pharaoh would be judged for his sin and God be glorified through the mighty acts He would perform. *"Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD"* (Exod. 14:4). In a similar way, those who *"suppress the truth in unrighteousness"* are given up by Him *"to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts. . .[and] vile passions"* thus bringing upon themselves their own destruction.

The names ascribed by Paul and John give the profile — the Man of Sin, the Son of Destruction, the Lawless One, the Antichrist. The methodology betrays the motive — powerful deeds, signs, lying wonders, and every deception of unrighteousness. The victims are those who do not believe the truth but take pleasure in unrighteousness. The legacy left behind is death. Beware the Man of Sin!

Conclusion

The sobering truth given by Paul in this passage leaves us with a rather bleak end to our study. We can not leave it here. Take a glimpse into the next section, which Paul begins in the very next verse: *"BUT we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved in the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. . .Therefore brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle"* (2:13,15). A sobering realization of what our souls stand against can only heighten our thanksgiving and joy at the salvation which our Savior has provided. It can only increase our resolve to hold fast the confession of the Gospel of Christ which is the power of God for our salvation and our most precious possession. It can only renew in fuller measure the appreciation for all that God accomplished in the Reformation to restore the Gospel treasure. It can only create a greater sense of urgency in our hearts as we strive to share the truth with those who still follow unrighteousness.

The identification of the papacy as the Antichrist is a matter of Lutheran confession, but it is also scriptural. Many would like to claim that Luther just reacted to the Pope's attacks and named the papacy as the Antichrist because the Pope was his biggest enemy. In truth, the heart of the Gospel itself was at issue. It should be noted that Luther's conclusion that the papacy is the Antichrist was not made hastily. His suspicions grew and deepened until he became certain. Nor was Luther the first to come to this conclusion. Wycliffe, Huss, and the Waldensians (13th century) came to the same understanding. However, the earlier men made their conclusion more on the basis of the papacy's wicked life rather than its heretical doctrine. The papacy matches every facet of Paul's description in 2 Thessalonians as well as the other supporting passages.

Beware of the Man of Sin and look to the Man of Righteousness *"who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2).

Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.

[Lit: Preserve us, Lord, with Your Word and curb the Pope and Turk's (pagan's) murder. They want to tumble Jesus Christ Your Son from Your throne.]

Lord Jesus Christ, Thy power make known,
For Thou art Lord of lords alone;
Defend Thy Christendom that we
May evermore sing praise to Thee.

O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth.
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life. Amen [TLH 261]

BOOK REVIEWS

Mary Todd: *Authority Vested*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000, paperback, 336 pages.

If you want to read a history of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS) as written by a present-day feminist in that synod, this is the book for you. Mary Todd is a professor of history at Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois. The Foreword, written by the prominent historian Martin Marty, states that she is “a partisan for ordination of women” in the LCMS (xii).

Her thesis seems to be that the LCMS, even from its beginnings in the days of Martin Stephan and C. F. W. Walther, has had difficulty in defining its concept of ministry. Martin Stephan wanted to be an authoritative bishop, and all the younger pastors, including C. F. W. Walther, went along with Stephan’s concept of ministry at first. The unveiling of Stephan as a power-mad adulterer, together with some very strong opinions on the priesthood of all believers held by some of the leading laymen in the colony, forced Walther to set forth a practice of church and ministry in the LCMS that was radically different from what they had experienced in Germany.

One can enjoy Mary Todd’s presentation of various tidbits of LCMS history without agreeing with her thesis or her feminist partisanship. This reviewer especially appreciated the detailed description of the behind-the-scenes activity that led to LCMS approval of woman suffrage at its 1969 convention.

At the 1938 LCMS convention J. T. Mueller, the convention essayist, reaffirmed the traditional LCMS prohibition of woman suffrage, based on the apostle Paul’s teachings in 1 Timothy 2:12: “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” (See also 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35.) One convention delegate objected to Mueller’s presentation, but the matter was not resolved at the time.

By the time of the 1953 LCMS convention a resolution stated that “there is a sincere difference of opinion among clergy and laity concerning the full and correct application of these texts (1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 14: 34-35) to the question of woman suffrage in the church” (152). We see, then, that when the beginnings of unscriptural practice are not nipped in the bud, it happens almost without fail that the false practice spreads, as the apostle Paul warned: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9).

In the early 1950s only a few congregations in the LCMS practiced woman suffrage. An attempt was made on the part of some to hold the Scriptural line on this matter. But little by little, through all kinds of committees and reports and position papers, woman suffrage in the LCMS became a reality, and it is hard to imagine that the LCMS will ever reverse itself on this question. Mary Todd writes: “The 1965 convention had repudiated woman suffrage as contrary to scripture when it involved the exercise of authority over men” (196). But in 1969 a synodical committee stated: “We find nothing in Scripture which prohibits women from exercising the franchise in voters’ assemblies. . . . Women ought not to hold the pastoral office” (196). This report was accepted by the convention.

It is clear that Mary Todd is hoping that the same gradual evolution of thinking will take place on the question of the ordination of women pastors as took place in the matter of woman suffrage. In fact her book is surely intended to help hasten this process.

Nevertheless, I did not find in her book any scriptural reason or argumentation for disagreeing with what C. F. W. Walther wrote way back in 1862: “For active participation in speaking, deliberating, resolving, and voting in such congregational meetings only the adult male members of the congregation are to have the right; women and teenagers are to be excluded” (C. F. W. Walther: *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 47). 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 and 1 Peter 5:5 are listed as Bible references for this part of the presentation. Of course, if woman suffrage is denied, women pastors are also prohibited.

A valuable appendix to Mary Todd’s book includes Walther’s 1875 theses on church and ministry, the 1945 Chicago Statement, and a comprehensive bibliography.

John A. Maxfield, editor: *Pietism and Lutheranism*, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Mo, 1999, paperback, 184 pages.

This book is Volume 3 of the Pieper Lectures, co-sponsored by Concordia Historical Institute and the Luther Academy. Volumes 1 and 2 are also available. Volume 2 is entitled *Church Fellowship* and Volume 1 is entitled *The Office of the Ministry*. All three volumes are concerned with topics that are of special current interest to leaders and members of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS). The Pieper who is being honored by these lectures is Dr. Francis (Franz) Pieper (1852-1931), long-time leader in the LCMS both as synodical president and as president of Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis. Among us this Pieper is known chiefly as the author of *Christian Dogmatics* (4 volumes), the English translation of his *Christliche Dogmatik*.

Volume 3 includes seven lectures by seven lecturers on various aspects of Pietism, a seventeenth century movement in the German Lutheran church. Leaders of the movement were Philip Spener (1635-1705) and August Francke (1663-1727). There is no doubt that the German Lutheran church was in need of revitalization at that period in time. The pietists, however, went too far in their criticism of orthodox Lutheran teaching and practice. They believed that the problems in the church

were caused by too great an emphasis on right doctrine or orthodoxy. So the pietists stressed godly living or sanctification rather than justification by faith. They stressed the conversion experience rather than the use of the means of grace, the gospel in Word and Sacraments. They stressed prayer meetings and small groups studying the Bible rather than the standard Sunday morning liturgical church service. The excesses and false emphases of the pietists were opposed by orthodox Lutheran teachers such as Valentin Loescher (1673-1749), whose book against Pietism is now available in English translation, namely, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*, Northwestern Publishing House, 1998, a big book of 454 pages.

The pietism of the German Lutherans of that day spread into the Scandinavian countries and into America and even into Japan. In fact the last chapter in *Pietism and Lutheranism* was written by a Japanese Lutheran, Naomichi Masaki, who gives an eye-opening account of a pietistic school in Norway that he attended for a time. There were daily devotions, weekly prayer meetings, and the desire to live holy lives. But most students did not go to church on Sundays. They celebrated the Lord's Supper in their homes, not in church. There were no regular sermons by pastors, but different individuals in the group were selected by the leaders to share what they had learned from Scripture. Masaki says of his experience with the Norwegian pietists: "I was not taught the importance of the means of grace. The liturgy had not shaped my baptismal life" (166).

The same thing was true of the work of the Norwegian Lutheran missionaries in Japan. "Doctrinal apathy" (166), "doctrine was not important" (167), says Masaki. One of the main tools the missionaries used in their work was a Japanese catechism based on the famous pietistic Pontoppidan catechism of 1737, which stresses sanctification rather than the forgiveness of sins. The baptismal covenant as an act of man is emphasized, and confirmation is spoken of as the renewal of the baptismal covenant. "Pontoppidan ... condemns such things as reading romances, amorous books, card playing, dancing, and theaters" (168), thus laying down laws for holiness that go beyond God's Word, just like many holiness churches today.

In conclusion Masaki says: "We may note that orthodox and confessional Lutheranism has not found a home in Japan, at least where Norwegian missionaries have left their footsteps. ... The influence of Pietism has gone far and deep, not only within Lutheranism in America, but also in Japan. The great lesson for us today is to know that it took only a shift of the accent. May the Lord protect us from our own *schwaermerisch* tendencies. May the Lord permit us to rejoice in the gifts which come to us from outside without measure, so our confidence is grounded outside ourselves and only in Christ. Only there does it hold unshakably" (172).

The rest of the lectures in this book are also helpful in pointing out the differences between confessional Lutheranism and Pietism. Martin Luther had the right balance, as pointed out on page 106 of this book. Luther's explanation of the First Petition stresses both true doctrine and holy living.

Adolf Hoenecke: *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics, Volume IV*, translated by Joel Fredrich, Paul Prange, Bill Tackmier, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1999, hard cover, 401 pages.

Adolf Hoenecke (1835-1908) received his theological training at the University of Halle in Germany. One of his teachers was Friedrich A. G. Tholuck (1799-1877), who opposed rationalism and yet favored the union of the Lutherans and the Reformed. Young Hoenecke was sent to Wisconsin by the Berlin Missionary Society, but very soon he opposed the unionism of his teacher and the German mission societies and became a truly confessional Lutheran. He served as pastor of Wisconsin Synod congregations in Farmington, Watertown, and Milwaukee. His learning and confessionalism made him the natural choice to head the Wisconsin Synod seminary, first from 1866 to 1870 in Watertown, and then again from 1878 to 1908, first in Milwaukee and then in Wauwatosa. For many years he was the editor of the Wisconsin Synod's *Gemeindeblatt*. As seminary director he was instrumental in founding the journal of theology known as the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, which continues to this day as the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

One of the seminary subjects taught by Hoenecke was Dogmatics. He had gathered extensive notes on the entire field of systematic doctrine, and after his death two of his sons published his work in four volumes written in German with many Latin quotations from German Lutheran dogmaticians such as Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) and Johann Quenstedt (1617-1685).

Volume IV of Hoenecke's *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik* has now been put into English for the first time. May we assume that the other three volumes will be making their appearance soon?

Obviously a work of this kind is worthy of our careful study. Franz Pieper's three-volume *Christian Dogmatics*, which first appeared in German in 1924 and in English in 1950, has been our standard seminary textbook for many years. But our heritage from the past certainly also includes such Wisconsin Synod dogmaticians as Adolf Hoenecke, who was succeeded by John Schaller (1859-1920), who was followed by John P. Meyer (1873-1964), who was the teacher of many of our older pastors in the Church of the Lutheran Confession, including this reviewer.

A comparison of Hoenecke with Pieper reveals that whereas Pieper's favorite source of quotations was Martin Luther

and the Lutheran confessions, Hoenecke likes to quote Johann Gerhard and Johann Quenstedt. His favorite source for Roman Catholic doctrine seems to be Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), the Jesuit scholar who defended the decrees of the Council of Trent. (Incidentally, our seminarians will be happy to know that all the Latin quotations have been translated into English.) Hoenecke's method is more systematic than Pieper's, in that he generally presents all topics by means of doctrinal theses followed by antitheses, whereas Pieper gets into his topics from various angles, sometimes historical, sometimes polemical, sometimes doctrinal. A weakness in Hoenecke's work is that Bible passages proving his points are listed, but the specific argumentation showing how each passage proves the points he is making is not usually spelled out. Thus, although the doctrinal points may be based on sound exegesis of Scripture, the conclusions that are reached give the appearance of being derived from the writings of the Lutheran fathers. No doubt in his classes Hoenecke orally showed more exactly the connection between the Scripture passages and the doctrinal statements. We will get the most value from this book if we look up and study in their context the many Bible passages cited by Hoenecke.

The topics discussed in Volume IV include the Means of Grace (Word and Sacraments), the Church, and the Last Things.

Items that I noted in a quick reading of the book include the following:

In connection with Galatians 3:24 the text says that the law "fulfills a second purpose, to be a *taskmaster* on the way to Christ, a *Zuchtmeister auf Christum*" (34). This seems to make the law a positive force in conversion, and some English translations do the same thing. The New King James Version, for example, translates: "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ." According to the context, however, the best translation would seem to be: "The law was our tutor (or taskmaster) until Christ," even as Galatians 4:25 explains: "After faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." The law's function is strictly negative here. "The letter kills" (2 Cor. 3:6).

In connection with the discussion of Sunday, Hoenecke shows that he does not always go along with Gerhard and Quenstedt. Gerhard apparently wanted to forbid work on Sunday, whereas Quenstedt wanted to forbid work on one day out of seven. But Hoenecke points out, on the basis of Colossians 2:16-17, that "the obligation asserted by Quenstedt for us Christians to celebrate one day out of seven does not exist at all. The only obligation left with the Third Commandment is that we Christians should have preaching and corporate worship" (37).

In contrast to the Romanizing Lutherans of the Buffalo Synod, Hoenecke on the basis of 1 Peter 2:9 stresses the priesthood of believers, saying that dogmatician David Hollaz (1648-1713) was "entirely right to justify Baptism by laymen on the basis of the universal priesthood of all believers" (71).

In view of this, it seems somewhat strange that in his discussion of the Lord's Supper, Hoenecke states emphatically: "Our dogmaticians, therefore, have decided that if a sick person desires the Lord's Supper and a pastor cannot be reached, we should convince him that spiritual partaking is enough for him and that more anxiety than comfort must come from a partaking of the Lord's Supper that departs from the order of God" (140-141). It seems to me that since the keys and the means of grace have been given to believers, the believers can and should appoint ("call") one of their number to administer the Lord's Supper to a sick person in the absence of any called pastor. Why should this cause anxiety rather than comfort?

On pages 89-90 Hoenecke corrects Gerhard's discussion of the essence of Baptism. Gerhard had included in his discussion of Baptism's essence that "the one who is baptized is obligated by Baptism to honor the triune God." Hoenecke sees this as mixing in a human work with God's work and says: "Insofar as Baptism is a sacrament of grace (and it is that first and foremost) the obligation that arises from it must be kept far from it and from the baptismal formula in order not to endanger the comfort of Baptism."

On the question of whether the body and blood of Christ are present before the distribution Hoenecke follows Quenstedt in stating absolutely: "Bread and wine are not bearers of the body and blood of Christ before they are eaten and drunk" (132). Perhaps we should rather say: We have no sure proof that bread and wine are bearers of the body and blood of Christ before they are eaten and drunk.

I was a little surprised by Hoenecke's statement on page 163 that "the church cannot fall into error." The Scripture passages adduced prove only this that the Holy Christian Church (the *Una Sancta*) is indestructible and that the elect will be preserved in their faith. Gerhard's quotation used in support says only this: "The entire church never errs in such a way that there are not those who ... retain the basis of salvation." In other words, there will always be Christians in the world. But at the same time there may be periods in history when there are no orthodox visible church organizations. Hoenecke himself agrees with this, for he says on page 175: "It can happen ... that there is no visible assembly with pure teaching on the face of the earth."

In connection with suspension from the Lord's Supper Hoenecke says: "Today by suspension we understand a *temporary* refusal of the Lord's Supper, which a pastor exercises from his sole authority as a caretaker of souls" (209). But then, instead of supplying Scriptural proof for this practice, he says the pastor does this "because he thinks he will get good results by doing it that way. It must not be extended to a long period of time." Surely there must be a better basis for such a practice than what the pastor "thinks."

Hoenecke's discussion of the Last Things reflects, of course, the errors that were prevalent in his time, not ours. Today we need more discussion of the elaborate future agenda dreamed up by the dispensational premillennialists. But Hoenecke does carefully point out the Scriptural teaching of one bodily resurrection rather than two, and eternal damnation of the godless rather than annihilation. On the meaning of "the sign of the Son of Man ... in heaven" (Matt. 24:30) Hoenecke gives some answers made by others: "Many interpreters say" that the sign of the Son of Man "is the Son of Man himself. ... Most expositors explain the passage as referring to an appearance of the cross in the sky. ... Still others ... understand the sign as a special star." Hoenecke does not give his own view here, but says only this: "Between the judge's sign and his coming, there will be no turning toward salvation on the part of unbelievers" (293).

With reference to the end of the world Hoenecke definitely teaches annihilation rather than transformation, saying: "The essence of this destruction (*Vernichtung*) goes beyond a change in the present form of the world. It is not merely a transformation or an alteration of characteristics. As the word *Vernichtung* in its full sense indicates, the substance of the world will be done away with (*substantiae abolitio*) and completely reduced to nothing (*totalis annihilatio*)" (355). I did not find any reference at all to Romans 8:21 in this connection, where the apostle Paul specifically says that "the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." This does not sound like total annihilation to me. In his *Christian Dogmatics* Franz Pieper allows both views as possibilities, saying: "Our old Lutheran theologians are not agreed on whether this passing away is to be defined more specifically as a total annihilation or only as a transformation or conversion" (F. Pieper: *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, 542). Even Johann Gerhard, a strong proponent of annihilationism, had to admit: "We do not defend our opinion of the destruction of the world according to its substance as an article of faith" (quoted in F. Pieper: *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, 543). It seems to me that in this case the dogmatician Hoenecke is too dogmatic.

I have made no attempt to compare the English translation of Hoenecke with the German original. No doubt it was not at all easy to make the transformation into readable English.

For our part we are very happy to have Hoenecke (at least Volume IV) available for the use of our seminary students and pastors, many of whom have not had the training in German or Latin to be able to read this in the original. Very possibly our students will be able to discover in Hoenecke the origin of some of our own Dogmatics notes (based on J. P. Meyer, based on John Schaller, based on A. Hoenecke). We encourage all of our theologically trained readers to buy this book and, with Bible in hand, learn theology from one of our fathers.

Dennis Hudson: *Protestant Origins in India*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000, hard cover, 220 pages.

The author of this book is a teacher at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. The subheading of the book tells us that the specific subject matter covered by the author is the progress of Christian mission work among the Tamil Evangelical Christians from 1706 to 1835. Tamil is the language of a large number of people in southern India and Sri Lanka. One of the political divisions of India is Tamil Nadu, which is located between Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Some of the Indian place names mentioned in the book are Madras (Chennai), Pondicherry, Cuddalore, Nagapattinam, Tiruchchirappalli, Palaiyankottai, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, and especially Tranquebar [Tarangambadi] (about 50 miles south of Cuddalore), and Tanjore [Thanjavur] (about 60 miles northwest of Tranquebar).

The missionaries who began the work in this part of India in 1706 were two young Lutheran Pietists, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (24 years old) and Heinrich Pluetschau (29 years old). King Frederick IV of Denmark, head of the Lutheran Church of Denmark and Norway, had sent and financed these two young men who had been trained in Halle, Germany, the center of Lutheran Pietism in the days of August Herman Francke (1663-1727), for foreign mission work.

Under the providence of God the two young missionaries became acquainted first of all with the Velalans, a caste made up of the elite in that part of India. One Tamilian told Ziegenbalg why most Tamilians did not embrace Christianity: "Because we see that Christians do not observe such distinctions of castes, but bring everybody to one level, and although there is a big difference between the male and the female sex, they gather them all without distinction into one congregation, we do not like to embrace such a religion" (93).

Nevertheless, the Lord blessed the work of the two missionaries and their successors, so that by 1732 there were 1,478 members: some of them Europeans, some of them pariahs or outcasts, many of them Velalans. Five schools were in operation with a total of 196 students of both sexes. There were 9 European missionaries and 25 native assistants, who served as catechists and schoolmasters. In 1733 the first native Velalan pastor was ordained, and by 1825 there had been 13 other Velalans who became ordained pastors.

Although the first missionaries were Lutherans and trained the first congregations according to the teachings confessed in the *Augsburg Confession*, they did not try to foist European culture on their converts. In fact they had to admit that most Velalans lived more moral and civilized lives than the European colonists, merchants, and traders, who often deported themselves in drunkenness and debauchery and thus blackened the name of Christ. The missionaries did not entirely do

away with the caste system either, for it became their custom to maintain a distinction between the Velalans and the pariahs, “the former sitting on mats and the latter sitting directly on the floor” (90). With reference to the Lord’s Supper “Velalans were most likely served before pariahs. Perhaps even two cups were used, one for each group” (91). One reason for the continuation of the caste system was to prevent turning off mission prospects, who had known nothing but the caste system their entire lives. The Velalan Christians defended their usage on the basis of what the apostle Paul had done in his zeal for mission work among the Jews: he had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).

A very serious controversy broke out in the mission congregations in the 1820s. One cause of this was that after more than 100 years of direction from Lutherans (the Danish-Halle mission and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) the sponsorship was turned over to an Anglican group, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Hudson says: “Without consultation, about 20,000 people, mostly Lutherans, ... had become Anglicans” (141). Other difficulties were brought about by an enforced change in translations of the Bible, hymnal, and prayer book, and by the factor that Hudson depicts most extensively: an insistence on an immediate end to all practices and customs that still separated one caste from another. “New missionaries ... had tried to force all the castes or nations of this country to be of one caste to make them eat and drink together and to have those of higher and lower classes connected with each other in marriage” (129).

At this time the leader of the Velalan Christians was a long-time seminary head and recognized poet of the Tamil language, Vedanayagam Sastri (1774-1864), whose interesting biography is told in great detail in Hudson’s book. Sastri resisted the changes and as a result he and his followers were removed from the church, and Sastri quit his post as seminary head in 1830. Sastri charged the new missionaries with four cruelties: “The first cruelty ... was to persist with their translations, removing the old versions from the schools and replacing them with their own. ... The second cruelty was to try to unite Pallar and Parayai (both low status castes) and every description of people into one caste, and to excommunicate from the Lord’s Supper those who maintain their customary differences. ... The third cruelty ... was to restrict the celebration of festivals ... and to prohibit the use of flowers in festivals, weddings, and burials as sin. ... The fourth cruelty was to try to remove Tamil music and lyrics from worship and festivities” (148-151).

As we read about the details of this controversy in Hudson’s book, we come to realize how dangerous and upsetting it is for Christian leaders to simply push their notions and ideas through, without consideration of the ordinary Christian, who, I suppose, is considered too ignorant to understand weighty matters of doctrine and custom and language and liturgy. How hard it is and how important it is for Christians of one culture to try to understand other cultures!

This book is recommended reading for all those interested and involved in Christian mission work in other countries of the world.

- David Lau
