

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 48

SEPTEMBER 2008

NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

Sermon Series: The Ten Commandments
The Anointing of Jesus
The Meaning and Use of *Mystery* in the New Testament
The Doctrine of Church Fellowship

Frank Gantt
Egbert Schaller
Vance A. Fossum
Paul Tiefel, Jr.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Church Comes from All Nations
Why I Am a Lutheran—Jesus at the Center
A Lutheran Looks at Episcopalians

By Martin Luther
By Daniel Preus
By James Pope

(Reviewer: David Lau)

Corrections to the June Issue (Vol. 48, No. 2)

Several errors in the last issue of the *Journal* are hereby acknowledged with the needed corrections given below and the inserted or changed words noted with underlining.

- Near the top of page 12, the heading "Making the Word of God fully known *in a spirit of humility and gentleness*" should be numbered with a Roman numeral III.
- On page 16, at the end of the paragraph just beneath the translation of verse 11, the last clause is missing the pronoun "he" and should read: "as he had done previously in Galatians by accounting for the visits he had made to Jerusalem."
- On page 19, second line from the bottom, the wording should be: "singular ending rather than the 3rd plural."
- On page 22 in endnote 12, the last sentence should read: "Emphasis in italics is by the author."
- On page 26 in the second full paragraph, lines five and six require two changes and should read as follows: "caused the person's fall from faith. The flesh has flared up in open rebellion to a command of God, has fanned that sin into stubborn"

Sermon Series: The Ten Commandments

Frank Gantt

Editor's Note: From time to time, especially during the non-festival part of the church year, both preacher and congregation may welcome a departure from the traditional and established pericopes, while holding to the discipline of a well-balanced series of sermon texts. To achieve such a goal, a sermon series based on Luther's Catechism could serve well to edify the congregation on the principal truths of law and gospel and the chief doctrines of confessional Lutheranism. We hope this series on the Ten Commandments provides an example of homiletical material that can meet the essential goals of a pericope (cf. *Journal*, 48:2, p. 45, endnote 2), even though it covers fewer Sundays than a typical pericopal series would cover.

The First Commandment: *You shall have no other gods.*

Readings: Daniel 3:1-18; Matthew 19:16-26

Sermon Text: Isaiah 44:6-17

Very recently we were privileged to have in our service a brief review of the catechism, as our lone confirmand was examined before us and answered questions relating to the six chief parts of Christian doctrine. Not only was that examination a demonstration of what he had learned, but it also gave good opportunity for each one of us to review in our minds the things we had learned in our own instruction in the Word of God.

During this non-festival half of the church year we intend to do a similar thing with a bit more detail involved. Today we begin with a review of the First Commandment. The Word of God which we will consider for our meditation is found written in Isaiah 44:6-17: ***Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one." Those who make an image, all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit; they are their own witnesses; they neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed. Who would form a god or mold an image that profits him nothing? Surely all his companions would be ashamed; and the workmen, they are mere men. Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, they shall be ashamed together. The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. The craftsman stretches out his rule, he marks one out with chalk; he fashions it with a plane, he marks it out with the compass, and makes it like the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak; he secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself; yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; indeed he makes a god and worships it; he makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat; he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"***

Several years ago I read an interesting article that was published, I believe, in *U.S. News and World Report*. The article contained a survey in which college freshmen were asked to rank the Ten Commandments by order of importance. Their ranking was rather telling, as it averaged out to the following order:

1. You shall not murder.
2. You shall not steal.
3. Honor your father and mother.
4. You shall not commit adultery.
5. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
6. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
7. You shall not make any graven images.
8. You shall have no other gods.
9. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
10. You shall not covet.

The survey itself is flawed, obviously, because asking a person to rank the Ten Commandments leaves the impression that some sins aren't as damning as others. It makes man the master of morality. And, secondly, what I especially want to point out is the place of importance that the First Commandment was given: 8 out of 10. This indicates a profound lack

of fear, love, and trust in the one true God, which, of course, leads to all manner of immorality, the evidence of which we can witness in our nation and society. It would seem that in our nation, where we have the freedom to worship as we please, many take it as freedom not to worship. It's a freedom of ignoring God, which is still idolatry.

Of course, it's not just the United States that displays a problem with idolatry. The history of the world is plagued with examples of idolatry. You remember how God saved the children of Israel from the venomous snakes by giving them the bronze serpent on a pole. Well, do you recall what eventually happened to that bronze serpent? Eight hundred years later King Hezekiah destroyed it because the people had been worshipping it as God. That's typical of human behavior down through the ages. An inanimate object, harmless in and of itself—even given by God as a blessing—becomes the object of sinful, rebellious mankind's love, respect, and trust. Isaiah had it right: idolatry is the fool's religion.

Idolatry is foolishness because idols are either the work of men's hands or the imagination of men's thinking. Consider the thousands upon thousands of idols that adorn the Hindu temples of India or the totem poles used by the first settlers of this hemisphere or the statues of Athena and Zeus that once dotted the Greek and Roman Empires. What do they all have in common? Somebody had to go and cut out a stone, or cut down a tree, or dig up some iron from the ground and then shape it. They had to give the image eyes, ears, a mouth, arms, hands, legs, and feet. Then they would call the very things which they fashioned their "God." As we read through this forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, we would be tempted to laugh if it weren't such a serious issue and such a sad commentary on humanity. Again and again man has invented and built for himself gods that cannot see, cannot hear, and cannot speak. These man-made images are powerless and motionless, which makes it all foolishness. Even worse, since it replaces the true God and robs Him of His glory, it merits eternal condemnation from Him, the only God there is.

Let us not forget, however, that judgment begins with the people of God. We need to ask ourselves if there are any idols that we have set up—if not in a temple, then in our hearts. An idol does not have to be a heathen god or a carved image. It can be anything or anyone that we fear, love, or trust in within our hearts. Money and wealth are common idols, not just of the rich but also of the poor. Your television, video games, and computers become idols when you serve them either by slothfulness on the one hand (sitting in front of them hours on end and not doing those things that God would have us do) or by obeying them (taking in whatever filth they hold before us). Your work becomes an idol if ever you use it as an excuse not to do those things that God requires of you in connection with your fellow man, such as instructing your children in God's truth or visiting the sick or helping the poor. Intelligence and personal accomplishment are two common idols that often become an opportunity for one to direct glory and praise toward oneself rather than to the God who gives wisdom and blesses our efforts. There is truly no end to the number of idols we can and often do set up within our hearts. That kind of idolatry is equally foolish, and its condemnation just as deserved as the idolatry committed by those who do not confess Christ.

In the opening verses of our text the only God issues a challenge, not just to the pagans of the world, but also to each one of us. Listen again to His challenge: **"I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them."** Do you understand the challenge? Essentially, the Lord Jehovah says, "Let's question these so-called gods to see if they can give an answer concerning the origin of all things and the future of all things. Let's see if they know anything at all." The answer, of course, is that they do not know. They give no answers concerning the reason for our existence. They give no answer concerning eternity, or the welfare of our souls, or the problem of our sin.

Yet in the midst of that challenge we find a sweet promise also. Listen to how the true God introduces His own proclamation: **"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts."** Then He goes on to say, **"Indeed, there is no other Rock;**

I know not one.” Here we see how Jehovah stands out from all the idols of the world, including our secret idols. First of all, He is the ruler of His people rather than being ruled by His people. Man fashions a god and then has to say what the god is like, what its qualities are, and what its limitations are. The Lord of heaven and earth is above man and has no limitations whatsoever. He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He is holy and just, yet gracious and merciful.

Secondly, the Lord is also man’s Redeemer. That is a word we are accustomed to hearing, but let it never become just a word to us. That word signifies the abundant love of our God in that He planned for and sent Someone to save rebellious mankind from sin and eternal condemnation. All the idols of the world—be they open or secret—will take and take and take. The Lord *gave*. He gave *Himself* in the person of His Son to ransom us from the punishment we deserved. He sent Jesus to bear the load of this world’s sin and punished Him in the place of each one of us. He removed sin from our record and restored us to the position of sonship, that is, each believer adopted as God’s own son through faith in Christ Jesus.

Finally, the Lord is a Rock. No, He is not saying that He, like so many idols, is a statue made of rock or some lifeless stone. Rather, He is reminding us that He is a constant source of stability and security in the lives of His people. He created and He continues to preserve what He made. He promised salvation and then sent a Savior. He sees us in our various troubles and sorrows and lovingly exercises His power and might for our benefit.

The things our Lord has made—the stars in the heavens and the trees in the forest and the minerals in the earth—were not given for us to worship. They were given to testify to the One who alone is to be worshipped. So also, our possessions, our talents, the roof over our heads, and the food on our tables, while they certainly are not to be despised since they are gifts from our good and gracious God, neither are they to be consumed selfishly and greedily to our glory. They are His gifts and are to be received with thanksgiving to Him. He has given them to us that we might glorify Him, not only for giving them to us, but even by our use of them. We live among idols, but are not to serve them. We have been ransomed from such folly and called to serve the One who is the source of every good gift, including life itself. May God ever occupy His rightful place in our hearts through faith in Jesus Christ, so that we fear, love, and trust in no one and nothing above Him. Amen!

The Second Commandment: *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.*

Readings: Exodus 34:1-9; John 17:1-11

Sermon Text: Exodus 20:7

This past week I was doing a little research into my family genealogy. It’s an interesting pastime, especially the chance one has to learn how surnames came to be. Years ago surnames—or what we refer to nowadays as last names—were given for many different reasons, such as place of origin, occupation, or father’s first name. It’s a practice that is essentially gone among us, though we still carry remnants of it with us. For example, the German surname “Schmidt” means “smith,” a word once given in both English and German cultures to one whose occupation was being a blacksmith. Among the Native Americans this practice of giving surnames is still used. When I lived in White River, a town just north of the Rosebud Reservation, I got to know a man who received his last name, not from his father, but from his grandmother. His name was Ted First-in-trouble.

When we talk about a person’s name, we don’t limit in our mind the reason why he has that name. When we hear a person’s name, we certainly don’t think about the letters that make up that name and the sounds which those letters represent. For example, when I say “George Bush,” that name brings up a host of thoughts and images and emotions—in some minds good ones, in other minds bad ones. The point to keep clear is that a person’s name is more than a combination of letters and sounds; it’s a designation that calls to mind what we know about that person.

Keep this in mind because it is an important part of understanding just what our God forbids and requires in connection with the Second Commandment. We find that commandment expressed in Exodus 20:7, which is our text for today: ***You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.***

Last Sunday we began our Trinity season series on the catechism with a review of the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods." In his *Large Catechism* Martin Luther captures the logical connection between the First and Second Commandments when he writes: "As the First Commandment has inwardly instructed the heart and taught faith, so this commandment leads us outward and directs the lips and tongue into the right relation to God. The first things that issue and emerge from the heart are words."

However, to understand the full scope of this commandment, we first need to consider two important words expressed in the commandment. The first we have already touched upon briefly; it's the word *name*. When we speak about God's name, we do include every expression by which He identifies Himself and by which we refer to Him: e.g., Lord, Jehovah, God Almighty, Jesus Christ, and others. But there is more to God's name than the sequence of letters that form a specific word. God's name is also everything that God has revealed to us about Himself in His Word. Our Old Testament lesson from Exodus 34 is a striking example of this. When God revealed His name to Moses, it was not simply a name spoken, but a description of who and what God is. So by extension God's name also entails His Word, because it is mainly in His Word that He reveals Himself to us. This commandment, then, directs us concerning both God's Word and His names.

Now another term we need to consider before we begin to apply this commandment to ourselves is the word *take*. Typically, when we consider what God is commanding and forbidding by this commandment, we think in terms of our words and speech. That certainly is one way by which we take God's name. However, just as there are many idols in the world, so also there are many ways to take God's name. We take God's name when we enter into a relationship with Him through faith in Christ. We take God's name when we come before His altar in marriage. We take God's name when we swear to tell the truth in court. And since God's Word is part of His name, we take God's name in our hands and into our hearts and mouths when we read it for ourselves and teach it to others.

Note well that God does not forbid that we use His name in these ways. What He forbids is the using of His name *in vain*, that is, for useless, mindless, empty expressions and promises and also for cursing and lying.

People often think that cursing means using vulgar words. Understood literally, cursing is to ask God to bring down His judgment upon a person or thing, since God alone can damn. People, however, will mindlessly invoke God's name and call down His wrath in fits of anger. Or they throw about this horrible judgment as though it were an adjective of contempt on a person or thing. To damn is a serious matter, which God would not have us take lightly.

Related to cursing is the flippant and careless use of God's name as an expression of disgust on the one hand, or of surprise on the other. How often do we hear people say "O my God" with no intent of addressing Him or talking about Him? God tells us that He gives us His name, including His Word, for three purposes: to pray to Him, to praise Him, and also to bless us and other people. Any use of the name of Jesus Christ or God Almighty other than these is a misuse of God's name and a violation of His commandment.

Many people, however, try to excuse their vain use of God's name by claiming that they don't really mean anything when they speak these words, which is exactly the point and purpose of the Second Commandment. God wants our hearts in it when we call on His name.

Now what about those other ways in which we take God's name? How can they become a vain use of His name? How, for example, can this happen in marriage? When a man and a woman vow to be faithful to one another until death, they do so not only before human witnesses, but ultimately before God. That, of course, is not a vain use of God's name. The vain

use of God's name comes when they forsake their vows to one another and to God. That is, when they have made a promise in His name and then have broken that promise through adultery, desertion, or divorce.

Taking up God's name in our hands and in our mouths when we read, speak, and teach His Word is certainly a good thing that should be done. Yet it is possible that we do these things in a useless and mindless manner as well. For example, when you open your Bible in the morning to read from it, if that is nothing more than a routine like brushing your teeth and combing your hair, then it has become a misuse of God's name. As I said before, God wants our hearts in it whenever we use His name. He wants us to read His Word for guidance and direction, for assurance and peace. Closely related to our personal use of the Word is the use of Scripture passages and prayers as nothing more than decorations on our walls. If all they are is decoration, it's a misuse of God's name. I'm not saying that we shouldn't put up such reminders of God's promises and cherished Bible verses, but it shouldn't be just a show of piety, a thing to make us look better to the people who enter our homes.

So also, when through faith we take on the name of Christ and call ourselves Christians, there is certainly nothing wrong with that. The vain use comes, however, when as disciples of Christ we do not flee youthful lusts, do not deal charitably with our neighbor, and do not glorify God by our words and actions. In the Old Testament God had much to say to Israel for blaspheming His name by their idolatry, sexual immorality, and injustice, which took place within the sight of the Gentiles. God considered it an attack on His name and told them point blank that it was they who caused His name to be blasphemed among the nations.

Finally, God forbids other things in connection with this commandment that involve not the misuse of His name specifically, but rather the avoidance of His name. For example, one can point to the practice of witchcraft or astrology, or to the belief in superstitions. These are a violation of the Second Commandment because God commands that we rely on Him for help, guidance, and blessings. Recently I read a chain mail e-mail message which promised that if you read a particular prayer ten times and then send it out to ten people, you will receive a special blessing from God. What is that but silly, devilish superstition which tries to make God into a genie in a bottle? Do not be deceived! Tarot cards, fortune tellers, palm readers, and the like, if they ever actually predict something, you can be sure that it does not come from God. He has revealed what He wants us to know about the future in His Word and invites us to leave everything else in His hands. **"Do not worry about tomorrow,"** Jesus said. **"Sufficient for today is its own trouble"** (Matt. 6:34).

It is unfortunate that we must spend so much time on the things God forbids in this commandment that we have little time left to focus on the positive. It is necessary because of all the ways in which Satan has managed to enter into our lives, so that we see this commandment as applying to very little. Still, we need to look briefly at the positive side of this commandment, and it starts with this important fact: God's name is a source of blessing.

When God gave Aaron that blessing which we continue to use at the close of our worship services, He kept His promise that **"in every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you"** (Exod. 20:24). The chief blessing that we receive through the name of the Lord is forgiveness of our sins and eternal salvation. In Christ God not only revealed Himself as the God of grace who keeps His promises. He came down to the earth in person and ransomed mankind from sin and death by offering His holy life as our substitute. His promise now is that everyone who "calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). This blessing alone gives us great reason to call on His name often according to His promise.

Yet there are other blessings which we receive through the name of the Lord. A main example is our use of God's name in prayer. Jesus told us that when we pray to the Father in His name, He will answer our prayer and grant our requests. Peace is also a great blessing that comes through the name of the Lord. All the world is looking for peace, but can't seem to find it. If you want peace with your neighbor, peace with a family member, peace between the nations, then it must begin with peace between you and God. That peace is granted through the name of the Lord, as it is He who is **"merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in**

goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exod. 34:6-7).

Finally, God's name is also given to us that we may praise Him, our Maker and our Savior. Throughout the world mankind offers praise to gods that have no power and no ability to save or even to help man out of his misery. Jehovah, the faithful and eternal God, has revealed Himself to us as the source of life and of all things, and also as the Helper of the afflicted. That we are granted the privilege of lifting our voices in praise and thanksgiving to God is an amazing thing. In grace and mercy He has permitted you and me to know Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. This is eternal life, and for this we praise His name. Amen!

The Anointing of Jesus

Egbert Schaller

Editor's Note: The article below first appeared in the *Journal* (Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 1-11) in 1968. It is offered here as a reprint with the author's citing of some sources documented as endnotes, his lone footnote converted to endnote form, and other minor revisions of format. His use of the King James Version has been retained throughout the article.

The Apostle Peter, preaching in the house of Cornelius at Caesarea, opened his summary of the Gospel story with the words:

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all): That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (Acts 10:36-38).

Included in this segment of Peter's sermon we find one of the few passages of the New Testament Scriptures which explicitly affirm the act of God the Father in anointing the man Christ Jesus. In the preceding issue of the *Journal* a brief study of John 3:34 touched upon this matter, finding also in this verse a clear allusion to the same subject.¹

A search through the Lutheran theological literature immediately available to us has yielded the impression that, while there have been many references to the Anointing of Jesus, relatively few extended discussions of this Scriptural truth have been undertaken. It is possible, of course, that in the vast bulk of patristic writings, theological studies and essays which could not be exhaustively explored, some adequate treatment of the subject may lie hidden. But there is no reason to feel that a new discussion of this topic would represent an unnecessary effort, and the subject is not unimportant. It goes to the heart of Christology.

Thus Peter, in offering an exposition of Psalm 16:8-10 to his Pentecost audience, was moved by the Holy Ghost to say:

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him [David], that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ [Messiah, the Anointed], that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses (Acts 2:30-32).

And again:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

This is the supreme title of Him whom Christians are taught to call "Captain of their salvation." He is designated as the "Christos" in more than half a thousand instances in the New Testament; and repeated debates with or concerning Him, from the time of His birth (Matt. 2:4) through His ministry (John 4:25; 7:27, 42; 12:34) to the hour of His death (Luke 23:35, 39), centered in His right to that title. That He was indeed the Anointed One foretold in promise from ancient days is the enabling factor in His soteriological work throughout. It was Christ who redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13); it was Christ our Passover who was

sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7); and the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15).

At the same time it must be pointed out that Scripture offers us a minimum of detailed information regarding the Anointing itself. In addition to Acts 10:38 already cited, we hear the congregation at Jerusalem in its prayer speaking to God of "thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed" (Acts 4:27); but no further definition of the divine act is given. These and the reference in John 3:34, Luke 4:18, together with the Old Testament quotation in Hebrews 1:9, contain the New Testament specifics on the subject. What answers are thus supplied for the questions that may properly concern us:

1. When did the Anointing take place?
2. What effect did His Unction with the Holy Spirit have upon Jesus?

1. When did the Anointing take place?

There is no statement of Scripture which expressly notes when our Savior was anointed; and from this fact some might conclude that the question is speculative and its answer a matter of opinion. Yet the matter cannot be casually dismissed. Sometimes Scripture reveals a truth by means of other truths, compelling its acceptance by leaving no Scriptural alternative. It behooves us to inquire whether, perhaps, in what we are told about the Unction of Jesus by the Father, our question may not after all be explicitly answered, especially since there have been inconsistencies in the teaching of this matter in Lutheran circles.

By implication as well as by direct affirmation some have taught that the Anointing took place at the time of our Lord's Baptism. Thus R. C. H. Lenski writes: "That anointing took place immediately after the Baptism of Jesus."² The Gausewitz catechism, edition of 1956, permits this view by offering as Scripture reference Matthew 3:13-17 with the comment: "Christ anointed with the Holy Ghost at His Baptism." The old Schwan catechism carefully avoids the question of the "when" altogether, and the Synodical Catechism of the Missouri Synod (1943) makes no reference to the Baptism in this connection, citing instead the words in Matthew 17:5. The new catechism of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (1966) uses Matthew 3:16-17 as reference, without further explanation, for the question: "How was Jesus anointed?"

A scanning of some of Luther's statements in his sermon on the Baptism of Christ (1526; Walch II, 2128ff.) may leave the impression that he, too, would regard the Anointing as coinciding with the time of the Baptism. He says:

And there [namely, with the Baptism of Jesus] the New Testament actually begins; wherefore also Mark and John make little mention of His childhood. Peter and Paul write nothing of this. Not that they despise what Matthew and Luke report of it; but they hasten at once to the critical point [*zu dem vollkommenen Stueck*] at which the office goes into action. For though He was born a child, the office did not yet begin; nor did He presume to administer it until He was called to it by the Father. In short, at His Baptism the office begins; there He becomes our Christ, our Savior, for which purpose He had come, as Isaiah says, 61:1, a passage which Christ applies to Himself in Luke 4:18, 21 when He says: The Lord sent me . . . etc. To preach this gracious year, which opened with the preaching of John the Baptist, for this He had come, as Luke says in Acts 1:22; and Mark opens his Gospel with John's preaching and Christ's Baptism, Mark 1:1ff.

But why does Mark begin there? Because here Christ begins to act as a Christ, here He is consecrated and enters His office; and God the Father wanted to let the world know with certainty, that there might be no doubt whatever with regard to Christ, since God Himself has confirmed Him.

Luther here proceeds in his usual broad, sermonical manner; and one must weigh his words carefully in their context lest one ascribe to him things which he neither said nor meant to say. Nowhere in this sermon does Luther mention the Anointing. He does, however, speak of the office of Christ; and this in a limited sense, namely, insofar as it concerned the activity by which He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. Involved was His public ministry, the preaching of the Gospel,

the forgiving of sins, the healing of the sick and wounded, the deliverance of the captives. Until Jesus was publicly certified by the Father, says Luther, He did not enter upon the work of His public ministry upon His own initiative. It is very evident from the sermon, however, that Luther did not intend to say that Jesus was not the Christ until He was baptized. And we know enough of Luther's theology to be certain that he would never have suggested that Jesus did not suffer for us or fulfill all righteousness in our stead before the time of His Baptism.

Although it is hardly necessary to furnish evidence for Luther's position in this matter, we offer a few statements from a sermon on the Christmas Gospel, also cited by F. Pieper:

Our salvation was brought about by this very thing, that Christ and the believing heart are so united that what the one has, is given to the other. And what do they give each other? Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth; man's birth is unclean, sinful, cursed, as David says Ps. 51:5, which cannot be healed other than through the pure birth of Christ. . . . Thus, then, Christ takes from us unto Himself our birth and sinks it into His birth, and gives us His birth that we might become pure and new in it, as though it were our own . . . (St. L. XI:127).³

Similarly Luther speaks of the Circumcision of Christ: ". . . that Christ for this purpose accepted circumcision so that He might deliver us from it, that thereby our faith might be strengthened" (Walch II, 2101).

That Jesus was anointed for the purpose of serving us as our Prophet, Priest, and King is a truth which we need not re-establish here. And since He thus served us before His Baptism, we must conclude that He was anointed before His Baptism, not during or after it.

Our thoughts return at this point to the Scripture with which we introduced this discussion, specifically the words of Peter: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power." The mention of Nazareth was made for the benefit of Peter's audience and served the hearers as an identifying adjunct of the name Jesus, which was not uncommon among the Jews. We certainly may not regard it as a basis for claiming that the Savior was anointed at some unknown moment during His childhood in that village. For us the stress lies upon the name Jesus. This is the name He was given by the angel at the announcement of the Lord's conception. It was Jesus who was anointed, just as it was Jesus who became our Savior, not the preexistent Logos as such, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. Jesus is the name of the God-Man. He it is who served and serves as our Prophet, Priest, and King. And this He did from the moment He became Jesus, namely, from the moment of His conception in the womb of Mary. It was this mode, this method of the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten Son of God which initiated the work of the Christ in a state of humiliation, as we constantly confess in the Apostolic creed. At the point in time when the union of the divine and the human natures took place, He became Jesus the Anointed, and not someone else who in course of time reached a stage of life when He was ready to receive the Chrism of the Holy Ghost.

To hold otherwise would be to alter radically the Scriptural doctrine of our redemption as we proclaim it and confess it in song and story. Why do we in our Christmas hymns and prayers call Him the Christ-child? Did not even Herod seek to resolve the "problem" posed by the Magi through research to determine the place where "Christ should be born?" When we accept that view of the Christmas event, do we do so with reservations? Would we consider it to have been more accurate to inquire where He who was to become the Christ should be born? We have long since disavowed the heresy of those Monarchianists who held (and hold) that Jesus was born a man who was later inspired and exalted by God; and of the autohypostasists who hold that the Son of God and the man Jesus gradually grew together and became the Christ. How then is it possible to defer the hour of the Anointing to the time of our Lord's Baptism, or for that matter to any period subsequent to His conception?

Dr. Pieper puts it very succinctly. He writes: "Christ's official duties did not begin with His Baptism, which was His solemn induction into His *public* ministry, but with His incarnation, with which His humiliation coincided. Christ was the Christ for us in His very conception, birth, circumcision, filial obedience, etc."⁴

2. What effect did His Unction with the Holy Spirit

have upon Jesus?

As we now approach our second question, we should note that to a degree the two questions are vitally interrelated. For if we now ask: What effect did His Unction with the Holy Spirit have upon Jesus? we find it necessary to examine further the position of those who relate the Unction to the events that took place at the Lord's Baptism.

The argument in support of this view points to Peter's sermon from which our chief text was taken. Here Peter speaks of "the word" which "ye know" (namely, the members of Peter's audience), the word which "was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached." The point is made that the Anointing must have been a public event which, like the other events of Christ's ministry, was reported and constantly retold by His disciples and apostles, so that it had become common knowledge. Moreover, the public event is attached by Peter himself to the circumstances surrounding the baptizing activity of John.

This may seem to reflect a natural impression which might have been created by what Peter said. But we must reaffirm the compelling evidence of Scripture which is supplied by the clear teaching that Jesus was the Christ from the moment of His Incarnation. And we ask: Does Peter's reference to the Anointing conflict with that truth? We can agree, indeed, that the fact of the Anointing had become public knowledge, so that Peter could well say: "Ye know. . . ." We also concede that such knowledge was related in point of time to the Baptism of Jesus, after which through His public ministry He preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, presenting Himself as the Messiah of God.

The remarkable event that transpired after Jesus came forth from the Jordan after His Baptism publicly proclaimed the fact of His Anointing. For we read that "the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him." Whether the people who were present, apart from John the Baptist himself, saw this phenomenon is nowhere recorded. But John did see it "and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:32-34).

It is readily perceived that from that moment the Anointing of Jesus became advertised, not by John or Jesus only, but by the disciples. This does not mean, however, that Peter designated the hour of the Lord's Baptism as the time of His being anointed. Nor does the account of the event itself as much as hint at it. Rather, the occasion simply affirmed the truth that this was God's Son, the Anointed, whereof the appearance of the Holy Spirit was the witness. The Father also spoke, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," but these words do not declare that Jesus became God's Son only in that moment.

Unfortunately, this very view is represented by those who through the ages of the Christian Church have continued to promote the ancient heresies to which we referred above. Against these and similar errors we must be on our guard also when we discuss the effect that His Unction with the Holy Spirit had upon Jesus. The view that the Unction occurred at the Baptism is not only without Scriptural support; it may also serve to minimize the significance of the Anointing.

As the union of the divine and human natures in Christ Jesus must in essence continue to be a profound mystery, so also the Anointing of Jesus according to His human nature is a truth into which we cannot probe too deeply without courting the danger of drifting into serious aberrations. It is well that we say no more about it than has actually been revealed or is required by the doctrinal context. Jesus was anointed in order that He might thus serve as our perfect Savior and administer His divine office. For this the Anointing made a necessary contribution. To ask why it was so is to wander into the realm of theological speculation where the swamps of confusion await the unwary.

On the other hand, we can and must declare what the Anointing did NOT do for Jesus. It did not demonstrate, to Him or to us, that during the state of His humiliation He somehow ceased to be God, or had not yet attained to the rank of Deity at a given point, and therefore possessed the gift of the Holy Ghost as His sole source of guidance and power. No Lutheran Christian at home in Scripture would assess the effect of the Unction in that manner. Nor may

the question be answered in this way, that in order to make His humiliation a genuine exinanition, Jesus wholly renounced the use of His divine attributes, so that he was able to function in His office only as a man might function when endowed with the powers of the Holy Spirit.

There are those who would let such a view of the purpose and effect of the Unction follow from what they consider to be the proper measure of Christ's humiliation. Thus they would hold that in this state He made no use whatever of divine ubiquity, omnipotence, or omniscience, and that His work and miracles were performed essentially by means of the same power, though possessed in greater measure, which served the Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles, namely, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. F. Pieper, in his *Christian Dogmatics*, has pointed out that "Reformed theologians in general declare that the miracles of Christ, in so far as His human nature is considered, are on the same level as the miracles of the Prophets and Apostles" (2: 261). They, of course, derive this false opinion, not from their view of the Anointing and its effect, but from the rationalistic principle that "*finitum non est capax infiniti*" and their consequent rejection of the Scriptural doctrine of the *unio personalis*. They hold that "the divine power of the Son of God exercises itself through the human nature as water flows through a pipe . . ." (Pieper 2: 262). But an unscriptural view of the Anointing may, without endorsing the Reformed error regarding the *unio personalis*, lead by another route to the same conclusion.

It is not our purpose here to pursue such related issues of Christology. But we must emphasize the fact that the Unction of Jesus did not provide the God-man with a supply of such power for His work as He already possessed through the communication of attributes and which He on occasion also used. In saying that Jesus was "anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power," Scripture simply sets forth the truth that He carried on His work in cooperation with the Holy Ghost (as with the Father) and with the power which He shares with Him (as also with the Father). Thus Scripture testifies to the uninterrupted unity of the Trinity and the participation of the three Persons of the Godhead in the work of our salvation.

That the Holy Ghost did indeed work with and through Jesus is evident from a number of passages. Thus our Lord told the Jews: "But if I cast out devils by [literally: 'in connection with'; NOT 'by,' KJV] the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). On another significant occasion Jesus quoted Isaiah as referring to Him: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me . . ." (Luke 4:18).⁵ But the Lord in similar manner speaks of the Father working with and through Him (John 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:10, *et al.*). At the same time, in many instances, displays of divine power exhibited by Christ in His state of humiliation are described as originating from the use of the innate divine attributes of the incarnate Son of God (John 2:11; John 5:19; John 12:37-41, *et al.*).

The interrelated and integrated nature of the activity of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity in the work of our Savior is as indisputable as it is beyond our power of analytical dissection. We do well to refrain from such an effort, just as we will be careful not to ascribe to the Unction of Jesus an effect which, by implication or deduction, goes beyond or contrary to what is clearly stated in Scripture concerning His work. It is enough to say that, at the moment of His coming into the world, Jesus was endowed by the Father with a measureless Unction of the Holy Spirit because He came to serve mankind in unqualified, unlimited perfection in the saving office and work established by God for this purpose. Precisely what that Unction contributed to the work, or how its power factor functioned, is not revealed to us.

Endnotes

¹ Egbert Schaller, "John 3:34," *Journal of Theology* 8.1 (1968) : 7-11.

² R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934) 418.

³ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951) 2: 331-332.

⁴ Pieper, 2: 331, emphasis Pieper's.

⁵ Heb. 9:14: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Consistent with what Scripture repeatedly affirms is this clear assertion that in

bringing the redeeming sacrifice our Savior Himself performed the all-sufficient offering, yet at the same time did so through the Holy Spirit. The argument of commentators who attempt to rule out this reference to the Holy Ghost by translating *pneuma* as “spirit” (with lower-case *s*) is wholly unconvincing.

The Meaning and Use of *Mystery* in the New Testament

Vance A. Fossum

Introduction¹

In his captivity letter written to the Colossians, Paul declared this truth about his ministry as a preacher of the gospel:

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, *the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Col. 1:24-27).

Some have understood *the mystery* in this passage to be the gospel of Jesus Christ. Others have regarded *the mystery* in this passage as the long hidden revelation that the promise of salvation belongs not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. With such difference of interpretation in view, the main purpose of this essay is to examine the meaning and use of *μυστήριον* in the New Testament, paying particular attention to its usage in the parallel passages found in Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians.

According to Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, *μυστήριον* in its classical and pagan usages was “primarily that which is known to the *μυστης*, the initiated (from *μυεω*, to initiate into the mysteries . . .)” and was to be kept secret by the initiated. But, as Vine also states, “In the N.T. it denotes . . . that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by Divine revelation. . . . In the ordinary sense a mystery implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed.”²

Vine’s conclusions generally agree with those expressed by the Thayer, Moulton-Milligan, and Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich lexicons. A very comprehensive treatment of the origin, usage, and meaning of *μυστήριον* can be found as an excursus in J. A. Robinson’s commentary on Ephesians.³ Compiling the information gleaned from all these sources yields the following summary.

- The pagan usage of classical Greek made *μυστήριον* a religious technical term that referred to “a ‘secret’ or ‘secret doctrine’ known only to the initiated, which they are not at liberty to disclose” (Moulton-Milligan). Koine writings extant in the papyri and inscriptions indicate that the pagan usage continued on into later times when the Septuagint was made and the New Testament was written.
- Other Koine usage, however, reveals that *μυστήριον* could also refer to a secret of any kind—not just religious but political secrets, military secrets, or personal secrets. But like the pagan usage mentioned above, a retained feature of the word was still the connotation that the “secret” was something not to be revealed.
- **New Testament usage**, on the other hand, links *μυστήριον* with its natural counterparts, words like *ἀποκαλύπτω*, *ἀποκαλύψις*, and *γνωρίζω*, and thus creates numerous contexts to show that *God’s mystery* was the truth to be revealed to people, not kept secret from them.
- Finally, we are confident that the usage in the New Testament will demonstrate the validity of an often used working definition for *μυστήριον*: A “mystery” in the New Testament is a *truth hidden from man which God must reveal in order for man to know*.⁴

In the entire New Testament *μυστήριον* appears up to 28 times.⁵ Though ten of these occurrences can be found in Ephesians and Colossians alone, it seems useful to consider in some detail all the ways in which *μυστήριον* is used by Jesus in the Gospels, by Paul in his epistles, and

by John in Revelation.

I. Jesus in the Gospels

It is generally agreed that the passages below are parallel and comprise the answer Jesus gave to His disciples when they questioned Him in reference to the parable of the sower and the seed. Compare the similarity of context given in Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:1-18. Though some differences in wording exist between the three Synoptic accounts (e.g., plural τὰ μυστήρια in Matthew and Luke but singular τὸ μυστήριον in Mark), we can still regard them as the only statement Jesus made with this word that is recorded in the New Testament.⁶ He was the first to call divine truth the “mysteries” revealed to believers, yet hidden from unbelievers.

Matthew 13:11

He answered and said to them, “*Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (ὅτι ὑμῖν δέδοται γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν ἐκείνοις δὲ οὐ δέδοται), but to them it has not been given.*”

Mark 4:11

And He said to them, “*To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God (Ἐμῖν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ); but to those who are outside, all things come in parables.*”

Luke 8:10

And He said, “*To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God (Ἐμῖν δέδοται γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ), but to the rest it is given in parables, that *‘Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’*”*

Note: In these three Gospel narratives Jesus is recorded as speaking of the μυστήρια or μυστήριον (always with the article) in connection with the parables about the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven). Our Lord states that whereas the truths about God’s gracious rule through His gospel-Word cannot be known or understood by the *multitudes* (Matt. 13:2) or those *outside* (Mark 4:11), yet to His disciples it is *given to know* these mysteries. In fact, that is the only reason why they can and do know them. If the mysteries had not been revealed to them, they would not have known them either.

II. Paul in his epistles

The great majority of the New Testament appearances of μυστήριον—be they singular or plural, with or without the article—are found in Paul’s epistles. We consider these occurrences in three sections:

- A. The various mysteries (secrets known to God) that must be and will be revealed;
- B. The use of the term as it applies to God’s great plan of redemption which He has chosen to reveal through Christ and His Word;
- C. The use of the term in the parallel passages of Ephesians 1-13 and Colossians 1:24-27.

A. The various *mysteries* (secrets known to God) that must be and will be revealed.

Romans 11:25 *For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of **this mystery**, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, **that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.***

Οὐ γὰρ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο . . . ὅτι πῶρως ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρις οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ

Note: While it is true that the whole Jewish nation should be made to disappear from the face of the earth for their rejection of the Christ, the *mystery* here is that the nation will continue on earth under a special judgment from God, namely, their spiritual “petrification in part” (πῶρως ἀπὸ μέρους) until the “fullness of the Gentiles”—that is, all the elect among the Gentiles—has been gathered into the invisible Church of Christ. The Gentile believers need to keep in mind that God has done this to Israel in order to “graft” the Gentiles in (Rom. 11:17). They are not to get the idea that something in them or about them sets them above Israel in the eyes of God. Therefore Paul reveals to the Gentile believers the secret of God’s treatment of physical Israel for the sake

of “all Israel” (Rom. 11:26).

1 Corinthians 13:2 *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all **mysteries** (καὶ εἰδῶ τὰ μυστήρια πάντα) and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

1 Corinthians 14:2 *For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks **mysteries** (πνεύματι δὲ λαλεῖ μυστήρια).*

1 Corinthians 15:51 *Behold, I tell you a **mystery** (ἰδοὺ μυστήριον ὑμῖν λέγω): We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.*

Ephesians 5:32 *This is a great **mystery** (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν), but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

2 Thessalonians 2:7 *For the **mystery** of lawlessness is already at work (τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας); only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.*

Note: In several of the examples above specific truths are called a “mystery,” for they are things hidden which we cannot know unless God reveals them to us. For example, through the apostle God reveals the mystery that some believers will be alive on the Last Day and that all believers will be perfected. Likewise, the parallel connection of husband and wife to Christ and the Church is a “great mystery” unknown to us unless revealed. The coming and revealing of the Antichrist, the “man of sin” and lawlessness, are a mystery already at work in Paul’s day that would be revealed by the fulfillment of predicted events.

B. The use of the term as it applies to God’s great plan of redemption which He has chosen to reveal through Christ and His Word

The passages listed under this section apply the word *mystery* either to Christ Himself or to the gospel about Christ or to God’s plan of salvation carried out by Christ and proclaimed to people through the gospel.

Romans 16:25-27 (NKJ) *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the **mystery** kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*

* The Greek text of this passage and the author’s translation below are given in a format meant to set off the first two *κατα* phrases from the main clauses that comprise the doxology at the end of Romans:

Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑμᾶς στηρίξαι
κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,
κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου χρόνοις αἰωνίοις σεσιγημένου,
φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν διὰ τε γραφῶν προφητικῶν κατ’ ἐπιταγὴν τοῦ αἰωνίου θεοῦ εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως εἰς
πάντα τὰ ἔθνη γνωρισθέντος,
μόνῳ σοφῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς
αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

Translation (V. Fossum):

Now to Him who is able to establish you—

according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,

according to a revelation of mystery concealed for long ages,

but now made manifest, and through the prophetic Scriptures, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith—

To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

Note: 1) In the New Testament ἀποκάλυψις is used predominantly in Paul’s epistles. According to Trench the word *revelation* “always” has the sense of “an unveiling by God of Himself to His creatures.”⁷ This is exactly what God has done through Paul’s gospel-proclamation

of Jesus Christ, who is Himself *the* Declarer and Revealer of God out of heaven. For so Christ says in His high priestly prayer: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

2) Paul's gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ were **according to**, or in keeping with, a **revelation** of the **mystery** that had been concealed for long ages. Paul's message was not something new, but an eternal mystery that had been revealed through him and manifested (aor. pass. gen. ptc. φανερωθέντος agreeing with gen. μυστηρίου) through the writings of the Old Testament prophets, to which he often referred in his letters. Paul emphasizes once again at the close of his letter to the Romans that his gospel proclamation was not his idea; neither was it his brainstorm that this mystery of salvation be made known (aor. pass. gen. ptc. γνωρισθέντος also agreeing with μυστηρίου) to the Gentiles. But to God alone belongs the glory, whose idea and command it was to reveal this mystery concerning Himself also to the Gentiles for their obedience to the faith.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 (NKJ) *And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony [NRS **mystery**] of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

Note: In the Greek text of verse 1 we encounter a variant reading of some significance: καταγγέλλων ὑμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ *vs.* καταγγέλλων ὑμῖν τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ θεοῦ. The NKJV, NIV, and NASB have "testimony" as the translation of μαρτύριον, which is the Greek word occurring in both the Textus Receptus and the Majority Text. Noting the similarity of sound and spelling between the two words, one can see how a copyist could inadvertently change one to the other. See the critical apparatus for identification of the witnesses which support the two readings. Both readings appear to have ancient and widespread support going back to about AD 400. But the Church Fathers listed in support of "mystery" date back to the third (AD 235) and fourth centuries (AD 374), and these, along with Papyrus 46 dated to AD 200, indicate older support for μυστήριον that also appeared in more than one region of the Mediterranean world.

If we accept the reading of μυστήριον, we also recognize that it has the article and a genitive modifier. Paul is speaking to the Corinthians of that particular "mystery of God" which he had announced to them in humble language. He would have them recall that his proclamation to them concerning "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" was not enhanced by fancy or flowery language. And yet that mystery was the very wisdom of God, as Paul goes on to explain in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

1 Corinthians 2:7 *But we speak the wisdom of God in a **mystery**, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.*

* The main clause λαλοῦμεν θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ can also be translated: "we speak God's wisdom in connection with mystery."

Note: Just because Paul did not use the ways and means of human wisdom to convince the Corinthians of the truth of the gospel—even as he declared in verses 1-5—does not mean that the gospel he brought them was not real wisdom. The next section, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, emphasizes the truth that saving faith in the true God does not come by human wisdom read in the books of men or heard in the teaching of men. Saving faith in the true God comes only by the Spirit of God, who reveals "the things of God" to man by expressing Spirit-given thoughts through Spirit-given words (1 Cor. 2:12-13). For **the wisdom about God is a hidden mystery which God Himself must reveal to man by His own Spirit-given means.**

1 Corinthians 4:1 *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

* The Greek wording οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ can also be rendered "administrators of God's mysteries."

Note: Paul's description of the public ministry in this way is consistent with his use of μυστήριον in the passages we have considered so far. God's mysteries are the secret things of God having to do with His plan for the salvation of sinners, which are to be revealed and administered through the gospel of Christ in Word and Sacrament by those who are called to be His apostles and fellow workers (1 Cor. 1:1, 3:9-10).

Ephesians 1:3-9

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us **the mystery of His will**, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself.*

Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ εὐλόγησας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ, καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ. Ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει, γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ

* The last clause may be rendered: "which He purposed in connection with Him," that is, Christ.

Note: Paul is talking about the "riches" of God's election-grace extending all the way from eternity, which He has caused to "abound toward us in all wisdom and understanding" (Eph. 1:7-8). How did He cause the riches of His election-grace to abound toward us (ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς)? By "**having made known to us the mystery of His will**" (γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ). This is the mystery which is about and belongs to (genitive of possession) God's gracious will operating from eternity in Christ, "which He purposed in connection with" Christ (v. 9), "just as He chose us in connection with Him before the foundation of the world" (v. 4).

The gracious will of God toward sinners, originating with Him and initiated by the election in Christ "before the foundation of the world," is the mystery so completely set forth in this opening doxology of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.⁸

Ephesians 6:17-20 *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer . . . for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known **the mystery of the gospel** [ἵνα μοι δοθῇ λόγος ἐν ἀνοίξει τοῦ στόματός μου, ἐν παρρησίᾳ γνωρίσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου], for which I am an ambassador in chains: that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Note: Clearly from the Greek above we understand that the "mystery of the gospel" means the "mystery which *is* the gospel." This conclusion is valid because the genitive form of "gospel" is used either in *apposition* to the accusative form of "mystery," or it is used as a *Hebraistic genitive* which gives definition to the preceding accusative.

Colossians 2:1-2 *For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting **in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself** (NASB).*

* The translation above is based on the Nestle-Aland text:

ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν, συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ καὶ εἰς πᾶν πλοῦτος τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως, εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ.⁹

Note: Some elite Judaizers or perhaps early Gnostics were afflicting the Laodicean and Colossian congregations with the charge that Paul was not giving them full knowledge and understanding through his message concerning Christ. Therefore Paul's great conflict, or struggle (ἀγῶνα), for the Laodiceans and Colossians was that their hearts would be encouraged by attaining "all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to *the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ,*" which goes way beyond anything the elitist, super-mystery errorists

could offer.

Recognizing τοῦ θεοῦ as genitive of possession, we can take τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ in the sense of *the mystery which is God's*; or it conveys the sense of *the mystery which is from God*, with τοῦ θεοῦ as a genitive of source. With either sense Χριστοῦ is appositional to the entire preceding pair of genitives, τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ. Thus the words τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ mean *the mystery of God, namely, Christ*.

In refuting the errorists, who were boasting that theirs is the religious system above all others because it plumbs the mysterious depths of God and promises all understanding and knowledge, Paul simply says: "Christ IS the mystery of God." He enlarges this truth in verse 3: "**In whom** are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He also warns in verses 8-9: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For **in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form**" (NASB).

Colossians 4:3 *Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak **the mystery of Christ**, for which I am also in chains.*

προσευχόμενοι ἅμα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου λαλῆσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι

Note: The expression τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ would seem to be a contraction of the previously used τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ from Colossians 2:2 and thus would carry the same sense: *the mystery which is Christ*. Every informed Christian and heathen back then knew what we know today in regard to Paul's *chains*: he suffered them and all which they imply because of his proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 3:8-9 *Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding **the mystery of the faith** (ἔχοντας τὸ μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως) with a pure conscience.*

Note: Here we take τὸ μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως in an *objective* rather than a subjective sense: "the faith" (πίστις with the article) *that is believed*—namely, its contents—rather than one's personal faith. It is necessary for the leaders of the church to be men who "hold" dear to themselves the doctrines of the Christian faith with a pure conscience. If, instead, a man appears to confess the doctrines of the "faith" and yet is continually being troubled in his conscience over the sins of a deceitful tongue or misuse of alcohol or greed, he is not fit for an office in the church.

1 Timothy 3:16 *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.*

* The NKJ translation above is based on the Textus Receptus reading: ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον· θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι, ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις, ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν, ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ.

Note: At the very center of the τὸ μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως (the mystery of *The Faith*), mentioned seven verses before (v. 9), is the *great τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον* (the mystery of *The Godliness*), which is Jesus Christ, "*who was revealed in flesh, justified in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed in the world, taken up again in glory!*" (author's translation).

C. The use of *mystery* in the parallel passages of Ephesians 3:1-13 and Colossians 1:24-27

These two sections of Paul's letters, which include several references to "The Mystery," are considered now against the backdrop of what is considered to be Paul's widespread and specific usage of "mystery" to refer to *the gospel of Jesus Christ*.

Ephesians 3:1-13

The book of Ephesians, the great Pauline epistle to the Church of Jesus Christ *about* the

Church of Jesus Christ, begins with a doxology praising the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the spiritual blessings that belong to the believer saints "in the heavenlies," because of their election-connection with Christ from eternity.

The second chapter places special emphasis on the wonderful, objective, darkness-to-light change that the Ephesian believers had experienced entirely by God's grace. These *Gentiles in the flesh* used to be not only *dead in trespasses and sins* and *children of wrath*, but also *formerly called "Uncircumcision"* and were *at that time apart from Christ* (χωρὶς Χριστοῦ), *being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise*. But **now** they were **in Christ Jesus**. Thus they were *no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*. They had become part of a *whole building* being fitted and built together in Christ as a temple for the Spirit of God.

So, because God has created the Church of Christ from eternity and now has made it clear that all believing Gentiles, including the Ephesian Gentiles, are included in this *dwelling of God in the Spirit* (Eph. 2: 22), Paul begins chapter 3 by saying:

For this reason [Τοῦτου χάριν i.e., because God created this spiritual body of Christ and dwelling for His Spirit, and you believing Gentiles are now joined to it]

I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you, the Gentiles [ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἔθνῶν]—*if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery* (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand **my knowledge in the mystery of Christ**), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: **that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel**, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of **the mystery**, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

V. 14) **For this reason** [Τοῦτου χάριν] *I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Note: Verse 14 not only joins verses 1-13 with verses 15-21, but it really completes the thought that Paul began in verse 1. He wanted the Ephesian Gentiles to understand his intensely personal interest in them. The God who created the Church (ch. 1) is the God who brought the Gentiles into it (ch. 2); and it's *for this reason* that Paul, a prisoner of Christ *for the sake of the Gentiles* (3:1), bows his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 14) in prayer for the strengthening of the Ephesians (vv. 15-21).

Ephesians 3:2-13 is an explanation of that simple but all important phrase at the end of verse 1: ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἔθνῶν, "for the sake of you, the Gentiles." So Paul interrupts his prayer (resumed in v. 14) to further explain:

2) *if indeed you have heard of the administration* [or stewardship: τὴν οἰκονομίαν] *of the grace of God* [τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ] *which was given to me for you,*

3) *how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery* [κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνώρισεν μοι τὸ μυστήριον] *as I have briefly written already.*

Note: The "grace of God" toward sinners, which Paul has been celebrating since the beginning of this letter, is the *gospel of Christ*. God commissioned Paul to be a steward or manager of this gospel-grace "for the sake of the Gentiles."

Surely the Ephesian Gentiles had "heard," even from Paul himself, *that by revelation* (i.e., not from the mouths of the apostles before him nor by any man speaking to him) God had

directly *made known* to Paul **the mystery** of His gospel-grace. Paul seems to say that he already had written briefly about the revelation of this mystery received from Jesus on the road to Damascus (cf. Gal. 1:12; Acts 22:4-21).¹⁰

4) by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ

* πρὸς ὃ δύνασθε ἀναγινώσκοντες νοῆσαι τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, which may be translated: "so that having read it, you are able to understand **my insight in connection with the mystery of the Christ.**"¹¹

Note: Once they read what Paul refers to in verse 3, the Ephesians should be able to understand the special *insight* which Paul had "in connection with the mystery of Christ."

5) which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets

ὃ ἐτέραις γενεαῖς οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὡς νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις ἐν πνεύματι

Note: In the opinion of this writer, the relative pronoun *which*, though neuter in form [ὃ], does not refer back to the neuter τῷ μυστηρίῳ exclusively, but rather to the entire unit of thought expressed by τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Understood this way, then, it would not be the mystery of the gospel of Christ, but rather Paul's insight about that mystery which "**was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in connection with the Spirit**" (author's translation). Paul is not saying, then, that the gospel of salvation through the Messiah was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, but a more specific truth—his particular *insight in connection with the mystery of the Christ* (τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ)—was not revealed to past generations as it had now been revealed "in connection with the Spirit" to God's New Testament "apostles and prophets."

And what exactly was that special *insight* which Paul had received as part of his *administration* of God's grace (v. 2) and his *administration* of the *mystery of Christ* (v. 4) *for the sake of the Gentiles* (v. 1)? The answer is given in verse 6:

6) that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel

εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετόχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου

* Alternate translation: *that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and belong to the same body and share the promise in connection with the Christ through the gospel* (V. Fossum).

Note: This verse does not define or reveal "the mystery of the Christ," but only the specific insight so wonderfully connected to and involved with the working out of the mystery of the Christ. It is part of Paul's special stewardship of this gospel mystery to proclaim the formerly unknown truth that salvation through Christ is also for the Gentiles! According to seminary notes once used for my exegesis class on Ephesians, Professor Egbert Schaller held to a similar view on this verse.¹²

7-9) of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship [administration] of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;

καὶ φωτίσαι πάντας τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ¹³

Note: The "gift of the grace of God given" to Paul was that he was given an apostleship, first, to preach the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (i.e., the gospel) among the Gentiles and, second, to "make all see what is the *administration of the mystery.*" The *administration of the mystery* (ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου) here in verse 9 is the same as the *administration of the grace of God* (τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ) in verse 2.

So, once again and finally, Paul stresses that the mystery of the gospel-grace of God has a special *administration* which has been given to him for the sake of the Gentiles, namely, that

to him in particular is given the privilege of announcing *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel* (v. 6).

Why this privilege to Paul? And for what purpose?

10-13) *to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

Note: Verse 10 is quite a revelation! It takes us back to Ephesians 1:9-10 where Paul tells us that God has made known the mystery of His gracious will with a view *toward an administration of the fullness of the times, to the summing of all things in the Christ—things in the heavens and things upon the earth in Him* (trans. V. Fossum).

Now in Ephesians 3:9 Paul says that a purpose of God's "administration of the mystery" is "to make *all see*" what it's all about. For whereas it had been hidden from the beginning "in God who created all things through Jesus Christ," its administration has always been directed toward, or had a view toward, "the fullness of the times" (1:10) and the summing up of *all things in the Christ*, including the angels.

The angels are at the top of the creation list. We know that even the angels "desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:12) the many-sided wisdom of God as it pertains to *the mystery* of His saving will toward mankind. How wonderful, then, that by Paul's special administration and revelation of this mystery to the Gentiles, the whole Church actually informs the angels of heaven, our servants on behalf of Jesus, in regard to the wonders of the full gospel of our salvation!

Colossians 1:24-27

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

ἥς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεισάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ, οἷς ἠθέλησεν ὁ θεὸς γνωρίσαι τί τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὃ ἐστὶν Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης (vv. 25-27).

Note: What was said in the note concerning Colossians 2:1-2 does not need to be repeated here, other than to say that in both Colossians 2:2 and 4:3 Paul defines "the mystery of God" as Christ. To be consistent in relation to this later and clear definition of τὸ μυστήριον in this epistle, we should bring in the initial, parallel, and more complete thought of Colossians 1:27, namely, that Christ and the gospel of Christ are *the mystery*, and this is the *Word of God* to be fulfilled¹⁴ as Paul makes known that the **riches of the glory** of this mystery **among the Gentiles** is Christ in them, and Christ in them is the hope of glory.

Therefore the riches of the glory of the mystery concerning Christ for the Gentiles—*that the gospel applies also to the Gentiles*—is Paul's particular, God-given administration in fulfilling the Word of God for the sake of the Colossians. Here we point to Paul's expression, "the administration from God (τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ), which we have already seen in a similar form in the parallel passage in Ephesians. The similarity of expression is noted below:

Colossians 1:25 "Of which I became a minister according to **the administration from God** which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God."

Ephesians 3:2 "If indeed you have heard of **the administration** (or: stewardship) **of the grace of God** which was given to me for you"

Ephesians 3:9 "And to make all see what is **the administration of the mystery** which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ."

It is our conclusion, then, that “the mystery” delivered to the Gentiles is, first and foremost, the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we also conclude that Christ gave Paul a special *administration* (also called “insight,” Eph. 3:4) for the **Gentiles** that was part of and arose from the outworking of the gospel-mystery of God’s grace revealed in Christ. Paul would proclaim that the grace of God in Jesus Christ included the Gentiles—that they too would be included with believing Israel in “the family of God” through faith in their Savior, Jesus Christ—thus “fulfilling the Word of God.”

III. John’s use of “mystery” in Revelation

Given the unique nature of this New Testament book, it is more challenging to determine the usage and meaning of *μυστήριον* as it is used four times in Revelation:

Revelation 1:20 **The mystery of the seven stars** (τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων) *which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.*

Revelation 10:7 **But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.**

καὶ ἐτελέσθη τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, ὡς εὐηγγέλισεν τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ δούλους τοὺς προφῆτας

Revelation 17:5 **And on her forehead a name was written,**

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς

Revelation 17:7 **But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast (τὸ μυστήριον τῆς γυναίκος καὶ τοῦ θηρίου) that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.”**

We are not surprised to find that the Holy Spirit has used the word *μυστήριον* in the only book of prophecy in the New Testament. Since “the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1) is not only from Him but about Him, this book contains many wonderful *secrets* concerning the victorious future of His spiritual Body and Bride. These secrets are the hidden reality behind the cosmic cloud stirred up by the Dragon and his antichristian powers and propaganda.

In Revelation 17:5 *μυστήριον* is the *name* written on the forehead of the great antichristian seductress, a detail which suggests exactly what we see in the antichristian religions and philosophies of the world’s history: each has coveted for itself the title “MYSTERY” and has proclaimed to the world that it has the deepest *secrets* about God and the way to an eternal and blessed existence. But this “mystery” which seeks to inspire awe in the hearts of its followers is a *woman*; and the angel is not about to let even a wonder woman enlarge the fears and freeze the faith of Christ’s people. So Christ’s messenger to John rips away the mask of amazement, revealing the truth that the antichristian seduction and power represented by the whore and the beast with its heads and horns will be conquered by the Lamb who is “the Lord of Lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:6-14)!

In three of the four passages in which *μυστήριον* occurs in Revelation, the Greek article is used to designate a particular mystery: *the* mystery of “the seven stars” (Rev. 1:20), *the* mystery of “God” (10:7), and the mystery of “the woman and of the beast” (17:7).

The first and third designated mysteries are defined by what follows in their context. The second, *the mystery of God*, is not defined in Revelation 10. The concept of the mystery which is about God, comes from God, and is worked out to its completion by God is too large to deal with in the book of Revelation or even in the entire Bible. We are simply told in this verse that the finishing of this mystery of God was “*evangelized to his slaves, the prophets*” (ὡς εὐηγγέλισεν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ δούλοις τοῖς προφήταις). What they received from the Spirit of God was indeed “good news” to them! As the mystery of God continued to be worked out and revealed in the days of the apostles and as it continues with us today, it remains *good news*! And it will be *good news* to all

of God's believing children on the Last Day, an even better mystery in the end than we ever could have imagined on earth!

"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

For this is the "hidden wisdom of God," the mystery which "God ordained before the ages for our glory." Yes, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:7, 9).

Endnotes

¹ What follows in this article is a revision of Pastor Fossum's 2004 pastoral conference essay, "The MYSTERY in the New Testament," with expanded lexicographical and textual information, additional endnotes, and a few other details added by the editor. Endnotes 8, 10, 11, and 12 correspond with the author's footnotes in the original essay.

² W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 4 vols. (Oliphants, Ltd. 1961) 3: 97. Also found on page 97 is Vine's opinion that the New Testament definition of mystery "may best be illustrated" by Colossians 1:26.

³ J. Armitage Robinson, "On the meaning of μυστήριον in the New Testament," *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (James Clarke & Co., Ltd.) 234-240.

⁴ Cf. a similar definition listed under μυστήριον in the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich 3rd edition lexicon: "The secret thoughts, plans, and dispensations of God which are hidden from human reason, as well as from all other comprehension below the divine level, and await either fulfillment or revelation to those for whom they are intended."

⁵ A search of all forms of μυστήριον in the Nestle-Aland text (27th ed.) found 28 occurrences. A search for the same forms in the Textus Receptus and Majority Text revealed 27. The only place of difference is 1 Corinthians 2:1, which will be treated later in the article.

⁶ This is not to say that this is the only time Jesus talked about the divine "mysteries" in His public ministry. Perhaps He made other such statements; perhaps He made them often. But if that was the case, the statements He made are not recorded for us. We also acknowledge the fact that in all of the New Testament (and Old Testament too) we have the voice of the Good Shepherd speaking to us in every passage.

⁷ Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1960) 353.

⁸ In his commentary on Ephesians R. C. H. Lenski writes concerning the τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ in v. 9: "Paul is speaking of the Gospel, the will of grace, the mystery hid from the ages during all these generations, but now preached and published in all the world by Christ's messengers and fully manifest to the saints, Col. 1, 25-26. . . . 'the mystery of his will' is not this or that part of the Gospel, but the whole Gospel" [R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of Ephesians* (Lutheran Book Concern, 1937) 368-369].

Prof. Egbert Schaller, on the other hand, limited the *mystery* to the election: "The means for the fulfillment are present. He has fulfilled in us σοφία (understanding/ knowledge) and φρονήσις (the ability to use knowledge). The fulfillment is in the γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ. He abounded toward us by having made known to us the mystery of His will. We as His children take Him at His Word. Therefore we know of the election mystery spoken of previously. If we ask any question as to how this mystery can possibly work, let us think of the foundation or pilings under the skyscraper, which are hidden, yet are in architects' blueprints. The things that are hidden are what count. . . . There is no angle here. God has no need of an angle to do the good things He does. They are a mystery and Paul plays this fact up, being comforted that it is a mystery. The pattern was set in eternity. Now everything works for and according to the election. What could man do about the election even if he could understand it?" (Notes from exegesis class on Ephesians, Immanuel Lutheran Seminary, 1969-70).

⁹ The NKJV's rendering, "to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ," is based on the Textus Receptus reading, τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ **καὶ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, which is also the reading of the Majority Text.

¹⁰ Galatians was written before the captivity letters, possibly even before the Jerusalem Council, and arguably could be the earliest of Paul's letters to be written. Ephesians and Colossians were written about AD 61, and Acts may have been written at about the same time. Lenski and others believe that when Paul refers to what he had already written "briefly," he is pointing to the first two chapters of Ephesians or specifically to chapter two. While this is certainly possible, this writer is of the opinion that Paul refers to his account of the Damascus "revelation" in Galatians 1:11-17.

¹¹ Lenski distinguishes "*the mystery*" of verse 3 and "*the mystery of the Christ*" of verse 4: ". . . if the two were meant to be the same, then 'the mystery of Christ' should come first, since with its genitive it is the fuller term, and 'the mystery' should come second as merely referring to 'the mystery of Christ.' Reversing the two expressions differentiates them" (pp. 468-469).

¹² "The mystery of verses 3 & 4 is the gospel and the εἶναι (v. 6) goes back to the τὴν σὺνεσίμ μου (v. 4). It is his insight which now speaks as that which was before in the gospel, but not fully appreciated or understood, namely, the promise also to the Gentiles" (Exegesis class notes, Immanuel Lutheran Seminary, 1969-70).

¹³ The Nestle-Aland text and Majority Text both have οἰκονομία rather than κοινωνία, which is the reading of the Textus Receptus.

¹⁴ Also of note is the fact that "the mystery" in verse 26 is appositional to "the Word of God" in verse 25.

The Doctrine of Church Fellowship
How a loving God protects His children
Paul Tiefel, Jr.

In one of our local middle schools a health education teacher announced to her seventh grade class that she was a lesbian. It created a stir in our usually conservative Midwestern community, but not for the reasons one might expect. The incident elicited a flurry of letters to the editor of our local paper. There were some who decried it, but it appeared that about 75% or more of the responses were in favor of what the teacher said.

Surely the reaction would not have been the same if an English teacher had encouraged the youth of his class to write hate mail against a particular race. And, likewise, would the same number approve of a math teacher encouraging his students to defraud the government of the appropriate amount of income tax? These two examples involve the Commandments which are on either side of the one the health teacher had profaned. It is sad when the morality of the Ten Commandments is not allowed to be upheld in the public schools. It is even sadder when the teachers are able to promote the immorality that these Commandments condemn.

It reminds one of the axiom that at first error only demands equal footing with the truth, but once that foothold is gained, error then seeks to replace the truth. And as much as our public institutions are under such attack, the church and the individual Christian are under even more intense pressure. As protection against these attacks the LORD God has established and given the teaching of church fellowship. And as we shall see, the enemies of God craftily attack this teaching too with the goal of weakening the very means of protection ordained by God.

May the Spirit of God bless our study of His Word as we review the truths of the Bible on this important doctrine.

Truth #1: *The love of the triune God for lost sinners moved all three Persons to enact a rescue plan.*

The Father's love has caused Him to send His only-begotten and beloved Son into this world. The Son's love has caused Him to exchange places with the sinful human race. In the substitutionary death of Jesus as the sufficient payment for all sins, the Father has declared all sinners not guilty. The Spirit's love has caused Him to bring sinners to faith in their Redeemer Jesus and His work.

Note carefully: If separated from this essential truth of the triune God planning and securing our salvation, the teaching of church fellowship will lose its purposeful meaning and could be misconstrued as a mere human invention to protect the church's "turf," so to speak, and even be seen as a rigid attempt to justify the church's existence and keep its members within its walls.

Truth #2: *The Spirit of God uses the Word of God, and in particular the gospel of Christ, to accomplish His work of bringing sinners to repentance and faith.*

The two great teachings of the Bible are the law and the gospel. The law—both that which is written by God on the heart of the sinner and that which is written by the Spirit in the Bible—is the tool employed by the Spirit to bring the sinner to a knowledge of his own sin and to realize that the just punishment of his sin is eternal death.

The chief tool of the Spirit in the work of conversion, however, is the gospel of Christ, the good news which announces the person and work of Jesus. This gospel is the effective Word of God given as the means of grace, which we have as the gospel expressed in the Bible, the gospel used with the earthly element of water in Baptism, and the gospel used with the earthly elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

Note carefully: We might well expect our spiritual enemies to attack the means of grace, since it is the supply line of the Spirit's work in our hearts.

Truth #3: *The love and work of the triune God are bitterly opposed by powerful forces of evil.*

The Bible reveals the extremely wicked designs of Satan and the other evil angels. Satan, the adversary—also called the Devil, the accuser—is described by God as crafty, a roaring lion, a murderer of souls, the father of lies, a killing dragon, and a bitter-to-the-death opponent of God.

The Bible also reveals the fierce hatred which the world has for Jesus. Consequently, the kingdom of darkness is in ceaseless opposition to the kingdom of light, and the world's hatred of Jesus has transferred to any who follow Jesus. Thus we see and experience the ongoing conflict of two diametrically opposed outlooks on life: evil vs. good, unbelief vs. faith, wickedness vs. righteousness, a man-centered lifestyle vs. a God-centered lifestyle.

Finally, the Bible reveals that the very thing which causes the world at large to hate God is contained within each human being, believers included. It is the flesh, which is present within us 24/7 until death. The flesh is dead to all good, while claiming its own standard of good. And while the flesh knows the law of God, at least in part, it will not be subject to it.

Note carefully: While we are powerless to defend ourselves against any one of these enemies of God, each of them is powerless against the gospel of Christ.

Truth #4: *Because the gospel is the power of God for our salvation and because the gospel overpowers our spiritual enemies, it becomes the focus of their attacks.*

The flesh, be it the collective flesh of the world or the individual flesh of the Christian, arrogantly dismisses the gospel as mere foolishness.

The devil, however, is not so foolish, and so he launches a relentless flood of attacks against the gospel. The devil finds a ready ally in the many false prophets gone out into the world and a mighty force of spiritual deception in his pawn, the Antichrist.

As a master of deception, the father of lies seeks only to get his foot in the door with just a little false teaching, but his ultimate goal is always the eventual undermining of the gospel that he dreads so much. Once there is a crack, he seeks to spread the damage further. He doesn't care if the fall from Scripture is to the left or the right, just so that there is a fall.

Note carefully: The devil probes for a weakness here or there, trying to get that foot of deception in the door of a Christian fellowship. Name any Bible doctrine, and there can be found one or more attempts by the devil to perpetrate lies about it. If God were to be the least indifferent and tolerate, let us suppose, *only one* false teaching per generation of Bible students in the New Testament era, we of the 21st century would have inherited something between forty and sixty false doctrines. How wisely our God has provided the way to protect His Word from admixture with human words. That means of protection is His teaching on church fellowship.

Truth #5: *Knowing the intent and wiles of our spiritual enemies, especially the devil, God has given for our own welfare the teaching of church fellowship by which the Scriptures are protected from the intrusion of false teaching.*

The Spirit has inspired each word of Scripture, preserved it among His people until now, and will do so until the end of this world.

God has repeated in several places the instruction not to add to or subtract from His Word. Adding to, subtracting from, or changing the Word results in false teaching. God does not distinguish between a little false teaching or a big false teaching. Rather, He reveals how false teaching will spread like gangrene or cancer (2 Tim. 2:17) and like leaven or yeast (Gal. 5:9).

In warning His people of the dangers of false teaching, God instructs believers to separate from those who promote false teaching. His warning and instruction include the following directives.

- **"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves"** (Matt. 7:15).
- **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.** For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As

God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

- Now I urge you, brethren, **note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.** For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).
- **Reject a divisive man** after the first and second admonition (Titus 3:10).
- Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. **If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;** for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

The doctrine of church fellowship can be viewed as the immune system of the soul. The body's immune system works to fight infection. If the immune system breaks down, the body is truly left defenseless and can be overwhelmed by the simplest disease or infection. Even so, the doctrine and faithful practice of church fellowship provides the soul with its only defense against false teaching. But if this teaching and its practice have been lost, then the floodgates are open for the infection of false teaching and false practice to enter and do damage to people's souls.

Note carefully: Sometimes we speak of the negative and positive side of church fellowship. By *positive church fellowship* we mean the God-pleasing and spiritually edifying benefits of having true fellowship around the pure Word and right use of the Sacraments. By *negative church fellowship* we mean the separation from false teaching. But really the so-called negative is a positive. Church fellowship properly understood is a win-win kind of teaching. On the one hand, through the practice of true fellowship we enjoy the blessings of a Spirit-wrought unity; on the other hand, through the practice of separating from error we have the blessing of God's defense from Satan's attacks.

Truth #6: **Love is the dominating purpose of church fellowship.**

What God gave to protect us from harm was not only the result of His love at work; it involves love all around:

- Love from God to protect His Word that imparts His love to the sinner;
- Our love for God, as we follow His instructions;
- Our love for the Word of God so that we do not pollute it;
- Love for like-minded Christians so that we seek to share the blessings of true fellowship with them;
- Even love for those promoting error, supporting error, or unwittingly entrapped by error, so that we warn them of error's deception also by separating from them in religious matters.

Note carefully: It is really a form of *loveless* arrogance to rationalize against God and His Word when any of these human suggestions are made, often under the guise of Christian love:

- I can fellowship with those who hold to some errors but confess Jesus as Lord.
- I can join in some aspect of fellowship (usually joint prayer is suggested), while avoiding other aspects of fellowship (Communion, for example).
- I can fellowship on the basis of a private confession, while ignoring that same person's public confession evidenced by his membership in a heterodox church.

All of these rationalizations set aside God's Word and His love by drawing distinctions which God has not made or recognized, namely, big vs. little doctrines, levels of fellowship, or a so-called private confession overruling a public confession.

Truth #7: **God alone judges hearts. His followers are to judge words and deeds, not hearts.**

Saving faith is a matter of the individual heart and all judgment regarding faith and unbelief, and heaven or hell, has been placed into the hands of Jesus. It is obvious that we

humans cannot see into the heart. For this reason, then, we recognize that there may be some who fellowship with us now but are hypocrites and do not believe what we and they outwardly confess. They do not belong to Christ, which is a reality that Jesus Himself will see, expose, and judge. Likewise, we recognize that there are those separated from our visible fellowship by being involved in error and yet in their hearts still cling to faith in Jesus. We acknowledge that the Lord knows all those who are His, both within and outside of our visible church fellowship.

Because we cannot see faith in the heart, God has instructed us to judge only on the basis of what we do see and hear. When an individual confesses faith in Jesus and His work, we rejoice. When that same person holds to error, something which God hates and which He expects His children to avoid, we are saddened. What shall we do when a person sincerely claims to be a Christian and yet tolerates error either by teaching it, supporting it, or unknowingly being involved with it? Shall we presume to read the heart and issue a ruling that saving faith is present and that we can therefore fellowship with the erring individual? That is not our call! And thankfully so, for we cannot see the heart. God, in so many words, tells us to leave that judgment call to Him and to do what He commands. We are to warn of the error, avoid fellowship with the errorist and those who support him, and preach the Word—all in love for God, for His Word, for our fellow Christians and for the errorists too.

Note carefully: Our human reason fights against obedience to God on this teaching, as it often does with other Bible teachings (e.g., the Trinity, the person of Christ, original sin, the virgin birth, objective justification, election, *et al*). Separation from error seems loveless. Avoiding fellowship seems contrary to the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. But we cannot expect our human reason to be an accurate guide in any Bible matter. There the only accurate guide is the Spirit of truth using the Word of truth. After all, the same Jesus who said to make disciples of all nations by baptizing in the name of the triune God went on to say: *“teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”*

God’s teaching on church fellowship is like every other teaching of the Bible. It has been established and revealed to us because God loves us. To set aside any teaching or any portion of any teaching is a presumption that we know more than God and is a sure way to invite disaster upon ourselves. It is also a variation on Satan’s original deception of Adam and Eve, as he continues to sow doubts about God’s love for us. He hates the basic truth of this simple hymn: *“Jesus loves me. This I know. For the Bible tells me so.”*

Therefore, if the devil can erase the source and supply of our knowledge in the Bible, perhaps he can also erase our knowledge of Jesus’ love. False teaching has become the devil’s eraser. The Bible’s principles and practice of church fellowship are God’s sure way to protect His people and tell Satan to take his eraser and go away.

God’s Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way,
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations. Amen (TLH 283).

Book Reviews

Martin Luther: *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission,*

compiled by Volker Stolle, translated by Klaus Detlev Schulz and Daniel Thies, Concordia Publishing House, 2003, paperback, 111 pages.

Lutheranism is often accused of not having been active in world mission work. This little book shows that even though there is abundant evidence for this accusation against Lutheranism through the centuries, Martin Luther himself should not be blamed for this lack. In 1983 Volker Stolle gathered and published a number of quotations from Luther's writings on the subject of world missions, and these quotations have now been put into English by Klaus Detlev Schulz and Daniel Thies. Most of the excerpts are quite short. They are taken from Luther's sermons, catechism, "table talk," and writings that were occasioned by circumstances in his time. Luther, above all, recognized that Jesus died for all, that the gospel of Christ needed to go out to all, and that this "all" definitely included also the Jews, the Muslims, and all the heathen everywhere. Moreover, Luther realized that world mission was not something only for missionaries, but the privilege of every Christian. For everyone who has been called out of darkness into the light of Christ shows forth the praises of his Savior (1 Pet. 2:9).

Daniel Preus: *Why I Am a Lutheran—Jesus at the Center*, Concordia Publishing House, 2004, hard cover, 224 pages.

In the preface the author of this small-sized volume states his aim: "I have attempted, as much as is possible, to limit myself to demonstrating one simple, yet profound truth: Jesus is at the center of all that is truly Christian" (p. 10). At the same time the author wants to show that Jesus is also at the center of all that is truly Lutheran.

Much of the material is arranged in three sections that correspond to three biblical mountains: Mount Sinai, Mount Calvary, and Mount Zion. In the first section Preus discusses God's law and points out how modern society has tried to evade God's commandments. He says: "Society has done all it can to eliminate God's Law and thereby extinguish God's anger. . . . Thus the message of Sinai is silenced. The thunder can no longer be heard. The lightning cannot be seen. The quaking cannot be felt" (pp. 32-33). But, as the author rightly contends, if we want to be Christian and Lutheran, we must continue to proclaim God's law. In our age the doctrine of original sin must still be taught, as our Lutheran Confessions teach it. It is only Jesus who can keep and has kept God's commandments.

In his discussion of the second mountain, Mount Calvary, Preus stresses Jesus' suffering and death as the substitute for the human race. C. F. W. Walther's emphasis on Jesus' resurrection as the absolution of the entire world is highlighted. In the author's words: "We see the glory of Mount Calvary as we look to Jesus, who alone is holy and just, who alone redeems, saves, and justifies. He has done everything necessary for our salvation. Apart from Jesus there is no hope, no forgiveness, no eternal life" (pp. 50-51). Surely this is an important point to make in these days when so many consider all religions to be good.

The third section, which presents Mount Zion, is by far the longest. Using the terminology of Hebrews 12, Preus tells us that Mount Zion refers to the people of God, the Holy Christian Church. In this section Preus takes aim at Charles Finney and the false teachings associated with decision theology. As Preus rightly contends, we simply are unable to come to faith in Jesus by our own powers. Faith in Jesus Christ is a gift of God worked by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Through that same gospel the Holy Spirit produces the fruits of faith in us, which flow from a love for our Savior and a desire to do what He wants. Through that same gospel the Holy Spirit strengthens us in the trials and difficulties that inevitably come our way because we are Christians.

In keeping with the title of his book, Preus shows in some detail why he is a Lutheran as far as Baptism and the Lord's Supper are concerned. He argues on the basis of clear Scripture that Baptism is for all, including infants and small children. "It is wrong to deny the benefits of Baptism to children because it steals the mercy and grace of God from little children, who need it as much as any of us" (p. 111). Likewise, in discussing the Lord's Supper, Preus demonstrates from Scripture that the Lutheran confession on this doctrine gives glory to God and His Word and puts Jesus at the center.

In the last chapters of his book Preus gives attention to the Christian ministry, the liturgy, and the hymns of the church, emphasizing that genuinely Lutheran worship puts Jesus and His work at the center, whereas much of the so-called "contemporary" worship music has little content. A choir director is quoted as saying, "Many of the songs use Jesus' name and praise Him, but none of them talk about who Jesus actually is and they don't talk about what He did" (p. 184).

Throughout his book Preus illustrates his points by referring to incidents that took place in family life and congregational life. His very last pages describe the funeral service of his father, the theologian Robert Preus, which, according to his son Daniel, "from beginning to end, was focused on Jesus Christ" (p. 199).

In spite of the fact that we can agree with almost every word stated in this book, we are still troubled by the fact that when the author wrote it, he was a high official in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Even though he must be aware of the deviations from the Lutheran confession that are tolerated by his church body, he still remains in it and promotes it to this day. In his book he demonstrates some understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship, when, for example, he calls for closed Communion rather than open Communion. Nevertheless, his book would be improved by stronger testimony against fellowship with false teachers and, above all, by personal action on his part to separate himself from a church body that has clearly shown itself to be heterodox.

James F. Pope: *A Lutheran Looks at Episcopalians*, Northwestern Publishing House, 2008, paperback, 107 pages.

The author of this brief volume was not satisfied with examining the official position of the Episcopalians based solely on their published confessions and doctrinal statements. While James Pope gives the reader the basic history of the Episcopalian Church in this country, quotes some of their documents, and tells about their organization, he has done much more. He has gathered information from various Episcopalian pastors through a survey done in 2004. He interviewed the bishop of the Minnesota Diocese as well as an Episcopalian pastor in Mankato, Minnesota. He was given permission to conduct a focus group of members in a Mankato congregation. Thus it is stated that members of St. John Episcopal Church in Mankato participated in a focus group conducted at St. Mark Episcopal Church in Mankato (cf. p. 93 with p. vi).

What, then, do we learn about the Episcopalians from Pope's research? Mainly that they are not very much concerned about doctrine or confession. In America the "broad church" faction seems to have triumphed over "high church" and "low church." There are individuals who for themselves hold the essentials of the Christian faith, and yet even these are tolerant of differing views. It seems all Episcopalians use *The Book of Common Prayer*, which is perhaps the best thing they have going for them. But when it comes to their views on salvation, the Bible, the sacraments, and on current issues such as homosexuality and abortion, both pastors and members tend to be openly on the liberal side.

We offer just a few examples to give our readers a flavor of the book's observations. One Episcopalian pastor says: "I can't see God rejecting someone because they did not know of Jesus" (p. 33). Another clergyman states: "God speaks in a myriad of ways, through different traditions" (p. 45). On the subject of homosexuality a pastor remarks that it is "part of the wonderful diversity reflecting the image of God" (p. 54). There is this remark by another on the subject of abortion: "I think that women have the right to do what they want, but I personally will miss all those babies" (p. 64). To be sure, there are some better answers given by others, but in general the idea of tolerance for any and all does prevail. The lay members, with a few exceptions, follow the same pattern of expressing acceptance of anything and tolerance for all.

In several places within the book the confessional Lutheran position on these matters is briefly stated. It is my opinion that the author should have devoted a little more space to refuting the various false opinions on the basis of Scripture. His aim was to make us aware of the views of Episcopalians in our world today, and in this he does succeed. But it seems to me that Lutheran readers of this book who are less familiar with Scripture may consider the opinions

of the Episcopalians to be more enlightened and even more "Christian" than the views of their confessional Lutheran pastors. There is no doubt that the Episcopalian views here presented are more in line with what most Americans believe. More opportunity, therefore, should be given to the Holy Spirit to speak God's words that clearly rebuff and refute what the devil is suggesting through our tolerant Episcopalian neighbors.

David Lau