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Circulation Manager Benno Sydow (bennosydow@yahoo.com)
2750 Oxford Street North
Roseville, Minnesota 55113

Correspondence regarding subscriptions, renewals, changes of address, etc., should be directed to the circulation manager.

When Should I Repent?

Matthew 26:69-75 and Acts 17:30-31

Frank Gantt

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

In 1541 Muslim invaders, who had already conquered most of the Middle East, all the northern parts of Africa, and a sizeable portion of eastern Europe, were threatening the borders of Germany. The leader, Suleiman the Great, had led his army into Asia Minor the previous year and was showing no signs of being stopped. The threat that Islam was posing against Germany in the 16th century was far greater than any threat posed against America in the 21st century so far.

Martin Luther was certainly no pacifist. He supported Germany's right to defend itself, and in a pamphlet entitled "Appeal for Prayer Against the Turks," he even encouraged the various feudal lords to send troops to protect the towns and cities of eastern Germany. Yet most of that pamphlet was devoted to another subject; it was the matter of repentance on the part of the Germans. Even though the enemy was known to be cruel and ruthless, regarding neither the life of men or women who confessed the Christian God, Luther called on his own countrymen to repent. He was very pointed in the kinds of sins that should be confessed and turned from, both public and private. He knew the history of nations and found that God's judgments have consistently fallen on those nations who abandon His Word, even to the point of using pagan nations to bring about those judgments.

Luther understood what many Christians today seem to have forgotten: We are *always* in need of repentance. We cannot point the finger of blame in another direction, for we all daily sin much and do deserve God's temporal and eternal judgment. This reality leads us to the next question in our series on repentance, and that question is this: *When should I repent?* We begin to form an answer by considering the first text, recorded in Matthew 26:69-75:

> ***Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.*** (ESV)

Poor Peter. *Peter* is the Greek form of the Aramaic name *Cephas* that Jesus gave to him when they first met (John 1:42). At a later time Jesus addressed him both as Simon and as Peter when he had made that great confession about Jesus being the "Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16-18). Now Peter's name means "rock." Perhaps Peter had let the commendation of Jesus go to his head, as though Jesus referred to him as being a rock. Jesus did not, and Peter was not. He was bold, but often impulsive, even arrogant, quick to trust, but also quick to doubt. So when Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him that very night, Peter avowed that he would die before doing so.

Peter must have still believed the lie he had created in his mind, for he went right into the camp of the enemy, right to the courtyard of the high priest's house, where Jesus was being questioned. How courageous, one might say, but oh how foolish!

Then came that servant girl who said, "*You also were with Jesus the Galilean.*" Peter denied it. His cowardice now became evident. This was just a girl, with no weapon in hand by which to threaten his life. No doubt, Peter was considering what it would mean to be linked to Jesus. He saw what was happening to Jesus Himself, and he didn't want the same to happen to him.

Two more times Peter was questioned about his relationship with Jesus, and two more times Peter denied any personal association to the Lord Jesus. Even to the point of calling curses upon himself, Peter disavowed his discipleship.

But then a rooster crowed for the second time. At that moment Peter remembered the words that Jesus had spoken to him only hours before: "*Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.*" Then, according to Luke's account, Peter noticed the eyes of Jesus focused on him. How that look must have pierced his heart, as Jesus' words and his own bravado echoed in his ears, for we are told that as soon as he saw Jesus, he went out and wept bitterly.

Everything Peter said and did up to this point that evening is a warning for all of us here today, as he displays the path of pride, arrogance, selfishness, and faithlessness. But in a turn of God's mercy and grace Peter also becomes an example to every Christian who falls to temptation, and so he gives us the answer to the question we are considering this evening. When should I repent? The time is *now*!

Right now, while being aware of your sin, is when you should repent. Right now while the guilt of your sin is weighing on your conscience. Right now, even in the midst of your fear that God will no longer accept you because of your sin. Now is the time to repent. Always *now*!

In Psalm 32 King David addresses the sorrows of holding onto sin, waiting and refusing to confess it and repent of it. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba and attempted to cover it up by having her husband, Uriah, killed in battle. We don't know how long he had "kept silent," but it appears to have been some time before the Lord sent His prophet Nathan with the pointed accusation: "*You are the man.*" Later, after the Lord had brought him to repentance, David described his miserable, unrepentant state in these words: "*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*" (Ps. 32:3-4 ESV).

David foolishly held on to his guilt, and because of his impenitence he burdened himself with enmity against his God. It is understandable that he would do this. After all, he had sinned against the *holy* God, who threatens and carries out punishment against all who sin. But enmity against God is foolish, for God is the only one who can do anything about sin. God is the only one who can provide reconciliation for it. Peter's repentance came immediately upon his recognition of guilt. There was no good reason to put it off. He had sinned; he knew it and Jesus knew it and he knew that Jesus knew it.

This brings us to our second text, found in Acts 17:30-31, the account of what the Apostle Paul said to the men of Athens:

> ***"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*** (ESV)

When should I repent? Paul too says: Now! But why repent now if there are so many others not repenting? I mean, look at the world around us, living in all manner of sins, and they don't seem to be suffering any consequences for it. They get to keep on in their greed and lust and pride and covetousness, and in many cases, it would seem, increase in happiness and pleasure as they do.

I suppose that's true. But then again, recall the fact that what makes for happiness in this world and this life is often at odds with what makes for happiness in the next life. What many people in this world perceive to be happiness is really just separation from God. In terms of eternity that's a pretty accurate description of hell—separation from God, which will happen in the chosen place of God's eternal judgment against those who reject His forgiving grace.

When you think about it, that's what Peter was after at first, wasn't it? Something in his mind and heart told him that at the moment he was questioned about his relationship with Jesus, he would be much happier if he could be separated from Jesus.

That is ultimately what Satan hopes that we count on as well. It's the thought that I can abandon Jesus and be happy in this sin or that sin. I can put a little distance between God and myself for the sake of a little pleasure or comfort or relief right now. The longer we hold on to this foolish attitude, the more it weakens our faith, for it is essentially the opposite of what faith is. Faith doesn't seek to be separate from God, but relies on forgiving grace from God as the foundation for a continuing relationship with God. Faith doesn't seek happiness apart from Jesus, but knows that ultimately one's happiness is tied

intimately and inseparably to Jesus. This is why we should repent now, right now, every day right now. Repentance is an ongoing, daily turning from sin and being reunited with God by the merits of Christ's suffering and death.

The day is coming when the foolishness of living a life apart from God will be revealed openly. Those who sought happiness in a life of sin—which is to say they sought happiness in a life of enmity against God—will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be called to account for their unrighteousness. That day will reveal not only the seriousness of sin, but also the seriousness of not believing in the One whom God sent into the world to reconcile sinners to Himself. That day will also reveal the wisdom of living a life of ongoing repentance, as it becomes quite clear to all that those who so lived by God's grace will enter into the glory of everlasting life.

Forgiveness of sins was won by Christ's suffering and death for us. At the same time that Jesus was being denied by His disciples, He was gaining forgiveness for all of us. Though forgiveness is freely given, it is by no means cheap. It was purchased at a great price. The price of forgiveness was not the bitter tears of Peter. It was the holy blood of Christ offered in Peter's place, and in your place too. The sorrow of a sinner never took away a single sin. Rather, it was the holy sorrow of the Sin-bearer that took away the sin of the whole world on the cross of Calvary.

For Jesus' sake God never fails to forgive the sins of anyone. That fact gives us the confidence of John who wrote: "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" Thus we should repent now, and keep on repenting, for daily we sin much and indeed deserve nothing but God's judgment, as Luther rightly said. We should repent now and keep on repenting also because God always is faithful to forgive us all of our sins for Jesus' sake. Amen!

Where Do I Obtain Repentance?
Luke 23:32-43 and Acts 10:44

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

During our Wednesday Lenten services this year we have listened to what the Bible tells us about repentance. We have considered this important subject by asking basic questions and finding the answers to those questions in the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and also by the practice of the Church revealed in the book of Acts. Admittedly, some of the meditations have been somewhat difficult, inasmuch as repentance itself is a difficult subject. Repentance is an activity, but it's a spiritual activity. It would be much simpler if repentance were more of a physical activity like kneeling, or speaking, or making a list. In fact, that is what some churches have turned repentance into, but it's not repentance as determined by God and revealed to us in the Bible.

Tonight our meditation becomes so much more practical and, hopefully, will be more easily apprehended. We consider the next question: *Where do I obtain repentance?* Our first text is found in Luke 23:32-43:

> ***Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*** (ESV)

In asking the question "*Where do I obtain repentance?*" I don't mean to ask: Where am I supposed to be when I repent? We are so self-centered in our thinking that we tend to think of repentance in such narrow terms. Instead, we ought to think of it from God's perspective and realize where God is with His forgiving grace when I repent. Where is His forgiveness to be found? Since true repentance is a combination of godly sorrow for sin and faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, and since both godly sorrow and faith in Jesus can only be worked in us by God the Holy Spirit, it is of utmost importance that we go to where the Holy Spirit is.

So where do we go? Since true repentance is basically all about obtaining the forgiveness of sins, we must distinguish between forgiveness gained and forgiveness given. God must be the one to forgive our sins, but before He grants that forgiveness, it must be gained for us. This is what Jesus did when He suffered and died on the cross. He became our substitute—He took our place—and God punished Him in our stead. Because of that sacrifice God has considered the payment for sins to be complete. Jesus has taken away the sins of the world. So forgiveness of sins has already been gained for us over there—on a cross on a hill outside of Jerusalem.

Now it seems we have another problem. Our problem is not getting God to forgive our sins. That's a fool's game, the most blasphemous and foolish pursuit in which a sinner can be engaged. Think about it! What do people typically do in an effort to get God to forgive them? They pray harder and with more frequency; or they make more promises to do better; perhaps they give more money. These are the kinds of things people do in the vain attempt to get God to forgive them. But can such things actually cancel out the sin that has been committed? If I steal something from a business owner, can I make up for it by going in the next day and buying something from him? Does the drunk who wakes up in the morning with a hangover suddenly not have a hangover because he promises that he will never drink another drop? Does the murderer bring back the life he took when he pleads with the jury for leniency? God does forgive sins, but not because sinners pray to Him or make promises to Him or even because they try to do some good things for Him. God forgives sins because Jesus gained that forgiveness by taking the full guilt and all the punishment for every sin ever committed.

God also gives what Jesus has gained. But the location of His giving and our receiving is not the place where Jesus gained it, not in the geographical sense. While we rightly rejoice in the cross of Christ, that cross is no more. Christ's suffering for the sins of the world is finished, complete. The blood which He poured out cannot be scooped up and purchased for any fee. We simply cannot go back to the actual cross for forgiveness. The cross is where Christ gained forgiveness, but it is not where God gives it. The sins of those who crucified Jesus and of those who were crucified with Jesus were certainly forgiven, but not because they were so near to the cross. They were forgiven because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. So also, repentance leading to eternal life was obtained by one of those two criminals, but not because he was so close to the cross of Jesus. Rather, at just the same place where we obtain repentance is where he obtained it too. It is at this point that we consider our second text, what is written in Acts 10:43-44:

> ***"To him*** [Jesus] ***all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.*** (ESV)

Let's go back to the question that we considered earlier. In the question "*Where do we obtain repentance?*" this is what I mean: Where is the Holy Spirit at work when we repent? Only the Holy Spirit can work repentance in the sinner's heart. So it is vital for us to know where the Holy Spirit is when He works that repentance. These words tell us specifically that the Holy Spirit falls on those who hear God's Word. The Holy Spirit is where God's Word is, particularly the Gospel. The Gospel is the vehicle through which God gives to us the forgiveness of sins that Christ gained for us on the cross.

Think of it this way. On the hill on the northwest corner of town stands a water tank. This is where water is gathered and kept for the whole town. Pumps pump and fill the tank with water. The water in the tank is for everyone. No one climbs up the tank hill, though, to get the water. In fact, I doubt if

there's even a spigot on the side of the tank to get a glass of water. No, the water that is in that tank comes to us through the pipes that run from the tank to our homes and to the faucets in our homes. When we want a drink, we simply walk to the faucet, turn the knob, and the water flows.

So it is with the forgiveness of sins. The pipes that bring to us the forgiveness that God gives and that Christ gained are the preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments. Where do we obtain repentance? We obtain repentance where the Holy Spirit is, for only the Holy Spirit can work true repentance in our hearts. Thus we obtain repentance at the baptismal font because that's where God pours out upon us the forgiveness Jesus gained for us on the cross. We obtain repentance where we hear the Gospel preached, because faith, the second half of repentance, comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. We obtain repentance where God gives us Christ's body and blood which were given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. Though we cannot return to Calvary, God brings Calvary to us in His Word and Sacraments.

There is no other place, then, to obtain repentance, and obtain it we must. For as we have heard in a meditation a few weeks ago, unless we repent, we will all perish. This is why our gathering together here at church is so important for all of us. It's not the building that is important. It's the activity taking place within the building, the preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the Sacraments. It is in them and through them that we obtain true repentance because it is in and through them that God seals to us the forgiveness Christ gained for us on the cross. Thus we take with us from here the certainty of the forgiveness of our sins, which keeps us living in a state of repentance in order that we may always possess the full and free forgiveness that is ours in Christ.

Thanks be to the Father for planning our salvation and to the Son for purchasing our redemption and to the Holy Spirit for working repentance and preserving saving faith in our hearts. Amen!

The Importance of Christian Education

(A sermon at the ground-breaking of North Hall at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, WI)

Paul F. Larsen

* The following is a reprint offered here in memoriam. Rev. Paul Larsen, acting on behalf of the ILC Board of Regents, preached this address at the construction site of the men's dormitory that was about to be built that year. The sermon was then printed in the June 1980 issue of the *Journal* (20:2, pgs. 26-30), the title of which has been changed above to be the theme of the sermon. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

The Text: Psalm 78:1-7

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength, and His wonderful works that He hath done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and forget not the works of God, but keep His commandments.

Greetings to each and every one of you in the name of our risen and living Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

In a few short minutes we are going to do something that is, in itself, not very great or of any important consequence. We are going to put a small shovel into the ground and with it turn over an equally small amount of dirt. We are going to witness the groundbreaking for the beginning construction

of a new dormitory for men on this campus. I say again: In itself it is not a very great or important thing we do.

Why do it then? Why all the fuss and ado about such a thing as turning over a bit of ground? It is because of the opportunity connected with it! We have a God-given moment today to reflect on the purpose of this building to be erected, and what the presence of all the buildings here on the ILC campus should mean to us.

We are children of God—of that we are sure. We are also children of the Reformation, in honor of which we celebrate the publication of our book of confessions (*Book of Concord*) this anniversary year [of 1980]. From the era of the Reformation we see how God has restored to each and every one of us a special blessing through education—such education as is described in our text. What was at one time denied to the common folk for hundreds of years was finally given back to them when God raised up Martin Luther to educate once again in the knowledge of the mighty works of God. We are now the heirs of that education which came to light again through the Reformation. We are now the children who have heard the mighty works of God as He guided the history of Israel and the world to bring about the full completion of His plan of salvation.

It is in the interest of this vital education of our souls that we remember what our God has done for us. Because of this we also want to educate our children; because of this we turn over a bit of dirt today and initiate the building of a dormitory. The shovel and the dirt are nothing—but the opportunity to educate and learn from the Word of God is everything!

This afternoon, then, let us lend our ears and our hearts to the Holy Spirit, who speaks to us through the mouth of His prophet Asaph, telling us something about *THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.*

I. In the first place, if our God thinks it important enough to tell us His intentions through the history of Israel, we should be concerned that we listen with hearing ears.

The psalmist prophet says to us, "*Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old.*" These words were addressed to the older generation, first of all, but were also for the sake of the children, so that the praise of God might be impressed upon each new generation. What Asaph said to the children of Israel in his time, we now remind ourselves of today.

All education is beneficial if we receive it in the right attitude. Every secular interest that is needed by us to live peacefully and successfully in this life is to be received with all seriousness. But we are reminded again that we are Christians, children of God, and our peace and success as such people will be sadly lacking if we do not educate ourselves and our children in the importance of God's activities in history. For all that God has done does indeed affect our daily lives; it gives us divine and eternal direction. Our goal is heaven.

What we hear and learn from the Word of God is to lead us to praise God our Lord for His strength and wonderful works. It is certainly part and parcel of our Christian education here that when we hear of what God has done for us, we express the innermost thoughts of our hearts by glorifying and praising Him.

God tells us that it is important that we be taught the things He did in the history of Israel. What He did was to be a terror to His foes—and a comfort and consolation to His people. These mighty works of God begin with creation and the preservation of the world. It continues on with the manner in which God dealt with sin when that entered into our history. Our own fathers and mothers have educated us in the same facts of history: how God promised a Savior to the world, repeated that promise to individuals such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The coming Savior from sin, Jesus Christ, is portrayed in prophecy throughout all the record of God's dealing with His chosen nation of Israel. The salvation which God brought about in the work of redemption by His Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit by which our hearts are sanctified, all of these are certainly wonderful works of God by which He wants to educate us in the way of salvation. He thus wants us to take this matter seriously.

As the Psalmist points out to us these things "which we have heard and known and our fathers

have told us," he implies at the same time that if we withhold from our children these wonderful works of God, irreparable harm will come to them. This fact should fill us all with the zeal of spiritual concern. When God tells us how He made a covenant with His people in which He promised to be their God, and the God of their children, He then placed upon us all a solemn responsibility to train the next generation in the knowledge of God, in the knowledge of His wisdom, and in the knowledge of the truth that leads to salvation. This concern is expressed also by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6: "ye fathers . . . bring them (your children) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." What else is this but to teach our children the whole Word of God, both Law and Gospel, in order that they might be keenly aware of the deadly nature of sin, and also keenly aware of the manner in which God has saved us through the redemption in His Son Jesus Christ.

To assist Christian parents in carrying out this solemn duty, the Church comes to their aid. For we, of the Church, have received the same command from our Lord to "teach them to observe all things," and to "feed My sheep, feed My lambs." If God wants to educate us in these things, you can rest assured that He also wants us to pay attention to His Word.

II. In the second place, *Christian education is important* because its goal is to lead to eternal life.

Our text says, "*That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born*." How shall the generation to come know these truths except they be taught? This question is the same one Paul asked when he wrote to the Romans: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" It is the same question Philip asked of the Ethiopian in the desert: "Do you understand what you are reading?" And the African answered with another question in kind: "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Therefore we ask ourselves also: How could you and I know the history of God's plan of salvation if the former generation of Christians had not taught us? What would become of the Christian Church if we today neglected to continue that education with our own children? This goal of educating our children is our God-given duty and joyful responsibility—and we see it being acted out in the ground-breaking today.

The whole purpose is seen in these words: "*That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments*." The Lord's way of continuing the Church here on earth is by consistently bringing into the picture of education more confessors and teachers of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Paul also says: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

We cannot take lightly what we do today, and if we do, we ought to take stock of our concern. It is certain that our own Church of the Lutheran Confession will not endure long if we do not give our children the opportunity to a thorough Christian education so that they in turn will be able to tell it unto theirs. To teach our children to "set their hope in God" simply means that they should learn to know God as their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier; and that through faith in Him they will finally reach their goal of eternal life. For this temporal life is no goal at all; like the grass and flowers it withers and fades away. But the life which is to come is the hope held out to us by a loving God—and it cannot be ours without knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who said to us: "No man cometh unto the Father except by Me."

Let none of us forget the works of God which He did in Israel, and which He has continued to do in the New Testament Church down to our day. Let none of us forget that every little thing we do in the interest of Christian education, the erecting of a building, the turning over of a shovel full of dirt, is not so great in itself, but the greatness is seen in the remembering of the mighty works of God. For by His mighty work He has saved us. Amen.

The Holy Spirit and Christmas: A Series for Advent

Paul Tiefel, Jr.

Any worthwhile Advent series will prepare the people of God to worship the new-born King at Christmas. Most series have a theme centering on Jesus, perhaps to stress various aspects of His coming, or to point to His three-fold office as Prophet, Priest, and King, or to focus on the Old Testament prophecies that light the way to Bethlehem.

This series takes a different approach in putting the focus on the Holy Spirit, who works behind the scenes to glorify Jesus by taking what is His and making it known to us (John 16:14). In its own unique way, then, this series also prepares the people of God for Christmas worship and celebration. May the Spirit of God so bless and use it to the glory of our Savior and the edification of His people.

The Holy Spirit works sight unseen to make Christmas possible.

The overall theme above covers the series. Each of the Advent sermon themes below is a variation of the series theme, with some distinction made as determined by the sermon text.

I. Sermon Theme: *The Holy Spirit works sight unseen to make the first Christmas possible*.

The content of this sermon will focus on the incarnation of Jesus in this way: The *Holy Spirit conceives the Christ-Child in the virgin Mary's womb*. The text and other details of the service are as follows:

Sermon Text: Luke 1:26-27, 30-32a, 34-35 (see below);
Scripture Reading: John 1:1-14 (The Word who is God became flesh);
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 8 (The promised Christ is true God);
this can be sung from the *Worship Supplement*, page 27;
Sermon Hymn: *TLH* 98 "Of the Father's Love Begotten"; see the first two stanzas below.

The LORD God countered mankind's problem of original sin with the virgin birth of His Son, Jesus the Messiah. The conception by the Holy Spirit gave Jesus the birth without sin so that He would be the Savior for all born with sin. We find these truths recorded in these verses from Luke 1:

> **Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary**. . . . **Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest**. . . . **Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God**. (Luke 1:26-27, 30-32a, 34-35)

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the Source, the Ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see Evermore and evermore.

Oh, that birth forever blessed
When the Virgin full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bare the Savior of our race,
And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed His sacred face Evermore and evermore (*TLH* 98:1-2).

II. Sermon Theme: *The Holy Spirit works sight unseen to make every Christmas possible.*

The second sermon highlights the verbal inspiration of the Bible in this way: *The Holy Spirit accurately records and preserves the details about the Christ-Child.*

Sermon Text: 2 Peter 1:19-21 (below);
Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18-2:14 (The Word of God leads to the new-born King);
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 84 (God's House—God's Word—God's Blessings); see *Worship Supplement*, page 38;
Sermon Hymn: *TLH* 285 "How Precious Is the Book Divine" (see the first two stanzas below).

Without the Biblical record we would have no knowledge of the virgin birth of Christ. The Spirit has carefully recorded and preserved the truths pertaining to the birth of Jesus so that the Bible would be able to guide, as a star, the seekers from the East and inform anyone reading the Bible (the chief priests and scribes back then, you and me today). In the midst of all the man-made stories and tall tales that come up at Christmas time, the Spirit of God is responsible for the true-for-all-time account of Christmas, as we learn from the text of 2 Peter 1:

> **And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit**. (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

How precious is the Book Divine,
By inspiration giv'n!
Bright as a lamp its doctrines shine
To guide our souls to heav'n.

Its light, descending from above
Our gloomy world to cheer,
Displays a Savior's boundless love
And brings His glories near (*TLH* 285:1-2).

III. Sermon Theme: *The Holy Spirit works sight unseen to make my Christmas possible*.

The final sermon in the series has as its central topic the conversion of unbelievers and does so in this regard: The *Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to place the Christ-child in my heart*.

Sermon Text: John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13-14 (below);
Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-20 (The Savior's birth announced by angels to shepherds and told by shepherds to others);
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 146 (I will praise the LORD); see *Worship Supplement*, page 41;
Sermon Hymn: *TLH* 234 "Holy Ghost, with Light Divine" (see the first two stanzas below).

The birth of Jesus without sin would have occurred and the record written by the Holy Spirit would have remained pure, but it all would have passed us by—except that the Holy Spirit has entered our hearts and replaced the darkness of unbelief with faith in the Light and in the way that Jesus foretold to His disciples in these verses from the Gospel of John:

> **"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you**. . . . **But the Helper,**

the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:16-17, 26)

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. (John 15:26)

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-14)

Holy Ghost, with light divine
Shine upon this heart of mine;
Chase those shades of night away,
Turn the darkness into day.

Let me see my Savior's face,
Let me all His beauties trace;
Show those glorious truths to me
Which are only known to Thee (*TLH* 234:1-2).

* This series was preached at Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, during the Advent season of 2012.

The Relation of Christ's Incarnation to His Humiliation

David Baker

* Pastor Baker presented his assigned essay in October of 2012 to the Minnesota Pastoral Conference of the CLC. The title of it was a question: "Is There Scriptural Support for the Catechism Teaching that Jesus 'Becoming Human' Is in Itself Not Part of His Humiliation?" What is offered below is a revision of the essay to conform to MLA citation guidelines. See Works Cited on pages 36-37 for full documentation of quoted material. Some of the lexical notes, the paragraph on Philippians 2:8, and Addendum B have been added by the editor.

Introduction

The intent of the assignment given is probably something like the following: An examination of the Scriptural support, if any, for the Catechism (Sydow Edition) teaching that Jesus "becoming human" is in itself not part of His humiliation. Notice that the essayist has inserted in parentheses the words "Sydow Edition" for this reason: Though Luther's Small Catechism in various editions does not have this question, the Sydow Edition of Luther's Small Catechism does. It is also noteworthy that of all the editions of Luther's Small Catechism that I checked, the Sydow Edition is the ONLY one that directly touches upon whether or not the humanity of Jesus is or is not part of His state of humiliation.

The question asked in the assignment of my paper (either in its original form or as amended by the presenter) focuses on question #153 in the Sydow Edition that is now called *Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine*. It reads: "153. What is the 'state of humiliation'?" A series of six Bible narratives then follows. They are Luke 1:26-38, Luke 2:1-21, Matthew 26:57-68, Mark 15:1-20, John 19:17-37, and John 19:38-42, along with brief comments about each narrative. Then comes the answer to the question:

Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried."

Since He retains His humanity also in His exaltation, *His humanity is in itself not part of the*

humiliation. His humiliation is the lowly manner in which He came as well as His lowly manner of living. It consisted of His not using His divine power fully. (Sydow 125, ital. added)

In the explanation of question #153 the humanity of Christ is excluded from His humiliation. According to the answer given to this question, His humiliation consists of the "lowly manner" of His coming and the "lowly manner" of His living. I suppose that if insisted upon, one could squeeze the incarnation of Christ into the "manner in which He came" into this world, but that is certainly not the intent of the author of this edition of the Small Catechism.

The second paragraph in the answer to question #153 is the crux—in particular, the clause that I put in italics: "*His humanity is in itself not part of the humiliation*." The reader should note that there are no Scripture passages listed to support the content of the second paragraph. All the Bible narrative passages listed for this question seem to support only the first paragraph of the answer to question #153. To wit, we can trace the following:

1. Luke 1:26-38 – Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary;
2. Luke 2:1-21 – Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and circumcised on the eighth day;
3. Matthew 26:57-68 – Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate;
4. Mark 15:1-20 – Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate;
5. John 19:17-37 – Jesus was crucified and dead;
6. John 19:38-42 – Jesus was buried.

It would seem that none of the passages listed under question #153 support the contention that *His humanity is in itself not part of the humiliation*; they merely state, either directly or indirectly, that the Son of God took on humanity.

So the question remains: What, if any, is the Scriptural support for this statement in the Sydow Edition of the Small Catechism?

Theological Considerations

The second paragraph in the answer to question #153 raises a fine theological point. It is one which, most likely, is studied only at the seminary level for our pastoral candidates, and is probably not even touched upon at all in some seminaries around the world. That point pertains to these questions: To what extent did Christ humble Himself? In what and in how much did His humiliation consist? These questions can be touchy theological issues for some.

In addition to the fine theological point raised by the issue in question, there is also a theological dilemma involved. The author states the dilemma with the words "Since He retains His humanity also in His exaltation. . . ." If the humiliation of Christ consisted (in whole or in any part) in the *act itself* of His taking on humanity, then since He was exalted in His human nature and not just in His divine nature, Christ would remain in humiliation after having entered into the state of exaltation. The exaltation consists of these five steps as stated in the Apostles' Creed: (1) He descended into hell, (2) He rose from the dead, (3) He ascended into heaven, (4) He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and (5) He will come to judge both the living and the dead. But since all five steps in His exaltation include the complete Jesus (both His divine and human natures), and not just His divine nature alone, it seems to be a contradiction to maintain that the taking on of human flesh by Jesus is, *in itself*, part of the humiliation, for He would then have entered into the state of exaltation while still in the state of humiliation. Could it be that to avoid a possible theological dilemma, the Sydow Edition of the Small Catechism has wording that excludes from the humiliation the act of Christ taking on human flesh?

Other Considerations

Aside from the theological accuracy of the statement in the Sydow Edition of the Small Catechism, there is a secondary issue: the wording of the question, answer, and comment itself. To review: Question #153 asks "What is the 'state of humiliation'?" The answer given is: "Jesus was 'conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead,

and buried.'" By the sheer weight of the answer itself the Sydow Edition of the Small Catechism (along with all other editions) seems to imply that the incarnation of Christ *is* part of His "state of humiliation"; otherwise, the words "Jesus was 'conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary'" would not be included in the definition of the "state of humiliation." The question and answer seem to be self-defeating to the comment under scrutiny that "His humanity is in itself not part of the humiliation. His humiliation is the lowly manner in which He came as well as His lowly manner of living. It consisted of His not using His divine power fully" (Sydow 125). If Christ's state of humiliation is limited to His "lowly manner in which He came as well as His lowly manner of living" and to "His not using His divine power fully," then there seems to be a contradiction to include the words "Jesus was 'conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary'" as part of the answer to the question "What is the 'state of humiliation'?"

Some Analysis

The Lutheran Confessions

Concerning the relationship of the incarnation of Christ to His humiliation, the Formula of Concord has this to say in the Epitome, Article VIII, "Of the Person of Christ":

> Hence we believe, teach, and confess that the Son of Man is *realiter*, that is, in deed and truth, exalted according to His human nature to the right hand of the almighty majesty and power of God, because He [that man] was assumed into God when He was conceived of the Holy Ghost in His mother's womb, and His human nature was personally united with the Son of the Highest. (*Triglot* 821 ¶10)
>
> This majesty He [Christ] always had according to the personal union, and yet He abstained from it in the state of His humiliation, and on this account truly increased in all wisdom and favor with God and men; therefore He exercised this majesty, not always, but when [as often as] it pleased Him, until after His resurrection He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not the [human] nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and declaration of the divine majesty, and thus entered into His glory, Phil. 2, 6 ff., so that now not only as God, but also as man He knows all things, can do all things, is present with all creatures, and has under His feet and in His hands everything that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth, as He Himself testifies Matt. 28, 18; John 13, 3: *All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth*. And St. Paul says Eph. 4, 10: *He ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things*. And this His power, He, being present, can exercise everywhere, and to Him everything is possible and everything is known. (*Triglot* 821 ¶11)

The statement of paragraph 11 that Christ "after His resurrection entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not the [human] nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and declaration of the divine majesty, and thus entered into His glory" makes it rather clear that the authors of the Formula of Concord believed that the incarnation, in and of itself, is not part of the humiliation of Christ, for they state that "after His resurrection," when Christ "entirely laid aside the form of a servant" (that is, no longer in the state of humiliation), He did not also lay aside "the [human] nature." He still has the human nature, even as He fills all things in all ways. Note that the Formula of Concord at this point refers to Philippians 2:6 as the proof passage, a passage to which we invariably will return in this discussion.

Dogmaticians of More Recent Times

Noted dogmaticians of more recent times have addressed this matter as well. We consider the following quotations from John T. Mueller, John Schaller, A. L. Graebner, and also Edward Koehler.

Mueller states in his *Christian Dogmatics* under the heading "Erroneous Views Regarding Christ's Humiliation":

> The humiliation must not be regarded as identical with the incarnation, for in that case the humiliation would pertain to the divine nature inasmuch as it assumed the human nature (ἐπίδοσις), and the glorification would consist in the putting aside of the human nature. It is true, Christ's incarnation did imply a most wonderful condescension, and sometimes this truth has been expressed even in orthodox

circles by the term "humiliation" (*exinanitio sensu ecclesiastice accepta*). However, when Scripture speaks of the humiliation of Christ in its proper sense (*exinanitio sensu biblico accepta*), in which it stands in contrast to the exaltation, it means that Christ became man in poverty and wretchedness, or that He assumed the form of a servant (μορφὴ δούλου), though He possessed the form of God (μορφὴ θεοῦ), as Phil. 2, 6. 7 attests. Strong rightly says: "We may dismiss as unworthy of serious notice that view, that it [the humiliation] consisted essentially in the union of the λόγος with human nature; for this union with human nature continues in the state of exaltation." (*Syst. Theol*., p. 701.) (Mueller 289)

John Schaller in his book *Biblical Christology* states in part II.2 (The Two States of Christ) under §19, Note 3, the following:

It follows [from a discussion that "the divine nature could not suffer humiliation or exinanition" – DB] that the *incarnation as such* was not part of the exinanition. Being an *act of the Logos*, it was not humiliation, but a demonstration of supreme power. Though the human nature of Christ entered upon the state of exinanition at the first moment of its existence, logically the beginning of its existence *preceded* its humiliation, or exinanition. Surely it was not a disgrace for the Son of God to become man, nor was he made inferior to the two other persons of the divine essence by his incarnation; for the union took place without any change in the essential character of either nature (after Kromayer).

The objection from Philippians 2 that Jesus Christ took upon himself the *form of a servant*, is quite irrelevant, since Jesus Christ is the name of the Logos *incarnate*; nor should it be forgotten that Christ subsequently *deposed* the servant's form, but *not* his human nature.

Nor does John 17:5 ("O Father, glorify thou me with . . . the glory which I had with thee before the world was") indicate an exinanition of the Logos. Since the *man* Jesus speaks these words, they would rather prove *pre-existence* of his human nature (with implied denial of the reality of the incarnation!) than a humiliation of the Logos. On the other hand, this *man* could truthfully, by virtue of the personal union, call the divine glory of the Logos his own; and since he prays for glorification, these very words declare the exinanition of his human nature! (84, emph. orig.)

Schaller's assertion that "the *incarnation as such* was not part of the exinanition" is not contradicted by subsequent statements in *Biblical Christology* such as these:

The state of exinanition began with the moment of Christ's *conception*, and continued to his *burial* (88).

The *conception* of Christ has been commented upon before (§11, note 2, 3). Exinanition *began at the moment* when Christ's human nature became united with the divine nature and was endowed with the "form of God," i.e. *in primo instanti conceptionis*. *In that same moment*, the human nature of Christ took upon itself the "form of a servant"; for otherwise it could not have conceived in the body of Mary. . . . Conception is a phase of Christ's exinanition, since his human nature was not, like Adam's, produced fully developed by a mere act of God's volition, but began to exist and grew in the womb of the Virgin like that of any other human child. In this manner, he took upon himself the *infirmities* of our human nature, and sanctified our sinful conception (Ps 51:5). (90, ital. orig.)

Both statements above merely define the time period of the state of humiliation—not the content, extent, degree, or substance of the humiliation.

A. L. Graebner in his *Outlines of Doctrinal Theology* defines the "States of Christ" and the "State of Humiliation" as follows [the superscript numerals below do not refer to endnotes in this article]:

Though the human nature of Christ was at all times essentially the same, Christ was not at all times in the same state, but to a certain period of time in a state of humiliation, and from a certain time in a state of exaltation, according to His human nature. (113 §107)

The state of humiliation[1] was that state in which Christ, according to His human nature,[2] personally united with His divine nature, voluntarily,[3] and in a measure which was requisite for the performance of the work of redemption,[4] abstained from the full and constant[5] use of the divine perfection communicated to His human nature.[6] (113 §108)

In direct correlation with the six notes used in §108, Graebner quotes several proof passages. Of significance to our present study are the passages presented in the first two (which are printed also on p.

113 in the KJV). These are: #1: Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 5:7, 2 Corinthians 5:16; #2: Hebrews 2:6, 9, 1 Peter 3:18, Luke 2:52, Malachi 3:6.

We consider these passages from the New King James and how they relate to the phrase or words to which they are linked. #1) That Christ was incarnate during His humiliation is, according to Graebner, taught by:

> Philippians 2:8: And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.
>
> Hebrews 5:7: Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear.
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:16: Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

#2) That the state of humiliation took place according to the human nature is taught by:

> Hebrews 2:6: But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him?"
>
> Hebrews 2:9: But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.
>
> 1 Peter 3:18: For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.
>
> Luke 2:52: And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
>
> Malachi 3:6: "For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob."

Now in the text of paragraph 108 Graebner indicates, at least obliquely, that the incarnation of Christ was an integral part of His humiliation; but none of the passages he has listed speak to this precise point.

In his annotated *Luther's Small Catechism* Edward Koehler says under the heading "The Savior in the State of Humiliation":

> Christ's humiliation did not consist in this that He became man, for the humiliation came to an end with the burial of Christ, but He did not then cease to be man (Luke 24:39). Incarnation is not identical with humiliation. — Humiliation is a state or condition in which a person of high degree and position humbles himself and becomes lowly, as when a king, who has great power, refrains from using this power, and acts and lives like a poor peasant. (151)

The consensus of these more recent Lutheran dogmaticians appears to be that the incarnation of Christ is not, in itself, an essential part of the humiliation of Christ.

Exegesis of passages that support the statement of the Sydow Catechism

Invariably, the discussion returns to Philippians 2:5-8, the famous *kenosis* passage as the primary proof text to support the view that Jesus becoming human is in itself not part of His humiliation. The passage reads in the New King James Version: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Years ago I memorized the passage in the King James Version: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." A respected layman pointed out to me his misgivings about the NKJV rendering of verse 8, "And being found *in appearance* as a man," thinking that this wording implies that the *appearance* is different from the *reality*. He may have something.

Another passage that has been advanced by some is 2 Corinthians 8:9, which reads in the NKJV: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

Brief Exegesis of Philippians 2:6-8

The lexicon information given under the heading "Notes" has definitions in regular font, suggested *glosses* in italics, and is keyed as follows:

BDAG = Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon (3rd Ed.);
Fri. = Friberg lexicon available on BibleWorks 5.0;
L-N = Louw-Nida lexicon available on BibleWorks 5.0.

Verse 6: **ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ**

Notes:

μορφή ῆς ἡ *form, outward appearance, shape* (BDAG); "of the nature of something, used of Christ's contrasting modes of being in his preexistent and human states *form, nature*" (Fri.); "the nature or character of something, with emphasis upon both the internal and external form – 'nature, character'" (L-N).

ὑπάρχων pres. act. ptc. m. nom. sing. of ὑπάρχω (1) "to really be there, *exist, be present, be at one's disposal*; (2) to be in a state or circumstance, *be*" (BDAG).

ἁρπαγμός οῦ ὁ (1) "a violent seizure of property, *robbery*" [a sense deemed to be impossible in this verse], (2) "as equal to ἅρπαγμα, something to which one can claim or assert title by gripping or grasping, *something claimed; booty, (a) grab; a piece of good fortune, windfall, prize, gain"* (BDAG); used "figuratively . . . of Jesus' equality with God οὐχ ἁρπαγμόν . . . as not forcefully retaining something for one's own advantage *something not to be held onto, not a piece of good fortune*" (Fri.); "that which is to be held on to forcibly—'something to hold by force, something to be forcibly retained'" (L-N).

ἡγέομαι *lead, guide; think, consider, regard* (BDAG).

ἴσα neut. pl. of adj. ἴσος; "the neut. pl. … functions as an adverb. . . with dative" (BDAG); "being equivalent in number, size, quality, *equal*" (BDAG).

Translation:

KJV: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God"
NKJV: "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God"
RSV: "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"
ESV: "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"
NIV: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped"
D. Baker: *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God*.

Commentary:

The relative pronoun ὃς ("Who") refers to "Christ Jesus" in verse 5. From the beginning He was ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ. Rationalists and all others who deny the deity of Christ do whatever is deemed necessary to divest these words of their meaning. In point of fact the words themselves, as they stand and in their simple meaning, teach that the Christ Jesus referred to by the relative pronoun is true God! Plain and simple [For more on ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων and its relation to verse 5, see Addendum B, part 1].

The form ἁρπαγμὸν is a descriptive and somewhat challenging word. The KJV translates it "robbery." NKJV has "robbery" with the marginal note "or something to be held onto." The RSV has "a thing to be grasped." The ESV, which is an updating of the language of the RSV, has the same thing. The NIV follows in line with the RSV, as it usually does, and renders it "something to be grasped" [For more on the sense of ἁρπαγμὸν, see Addendum B, part 2].

As I understand the meaning of the word ἁρπαγμὸν, none of these renderings fully grasp its

meaning. All are subject to possible misunderstanding. For instance, to *grasp* may mean: to reach out and take something which one does not possess; or it may mean: to reach out and take something which one has no right to possess. It certainly cannot be said that Jesus initially was not "equal to God" (ἴσα θεῷ) and that He must therefore grab or rob from God (ἁρπαγμόν) and seek to have what He does not (did not) have by nature, namely, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ. Regarding the translation of the word as "robbery," one can sense that from a modern perspective this word would have a certain negative connotation. "He *thought* it *not robbery*" could be construed to mean or imply that Jesus actually *did* commit robbery in making Himself "equal" with God, but in His own mind He did not see it that way, i.e., He did not see His action as constituting robbery. Such a thought, however, can be ruled out in view of the rest of Scripture and in view of the context.

In effect St. Paul is saying that Jesus need not seize equality with God (ἁρπαγμὸν. . . τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ) because in and of Himself He *already is* ἴσα θεῷ. There is no need to strive to possess or achieve that which one already possesses. His "being in the form of God" qualified Him to "be equal with God" [For more on τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, see Addendum B, part 3].

Note the interesting contrast with the double usage of μορφή in verses 6 and 7: μορφῇ θεοῦ and μορφὴν δούλου. If the usage of μορφή with θεοῦ in verse 6 means that Christ Jesus is *something less than* θεός, then one *must* see Him likewise as something less than δοῦλος in verse 7! But such an interpretation would defeat the whole purpose of St. Paul in writing these words, for he attempts to enlighten the Christian regarding the exhortation of φρονεῖτε that he or she is to have, which is that of δούλου, in imitation of Christ!

In addition, note that the words μορφὴν δούλου are not a reference to the incarnation. Philippians 2:6 does not read μορφὴν ἀνθρώπου or μορφὴν σαρκός. This is precisely where the verses of Philippians 2:6-7 fit appropriately into this discussion. We refer again to what Mueller says, that "when Scripture speaks of the humiliation of Christ in its proper sense (*exinanitio sensu biblico accepta*), in which it stands in contrast to the exaltation, it means that Christ became man in poverty and wretchedness, or that He assumed the form of a servant (μορφὴ δοῦλου), though He possessed the form of God (μορφὴ θεοῦ), as Phil. 2, 6. 7 attests" (289). Assuming the form of a servant (μορφὴ δούλου) is not identical with "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." Remember that the purpose of the passage is to encourage Christians to have the same mindset (φρονεῖτε) as Christ. How does a Christian do that? Verse 7 gives the answer: by *taking the form of a servant* (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών). This certainly can not be achieved by means of our own incarnation, since we are already incarnate. It must mean something else than incarnation, which brings us to verse seven.

Verse 7: **ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος**

Notes:

ἐκένωσεν 1st aor. act. indic. 3 sg. κενόω; "1. to make empty, *empty*, of divestiture of position or prestige; 2. to cause to be without result or effect, *destroy*, *render void* or *of no effect*" (BDAG); according to BDAG Rom. 4:14, 1 Cor. 1:17, 1 Cor. 9:15, 2 Cor. 9:3 convey the second kind of meaning; "to completely remove or eliminate elements of high status or rank by eliminating all privileges or prerogatives associated with such status or rank – 'to empty oneself, to divest oneself of position'" (L-N).

λαβών 2nd aor. act. part. nom. m. sg. λαμβάνω; *take, receive* [see also Addendum B, part 4].

ὁμοιώματι neut. dat. sing.; "the state of being similar in appearance, *likeness*, *image*, *copy*, *form*, *appearance*" (BDAG).

γενόμενος 2nd aor. depon. part. nom. m. sg. γίνομαι *be, become; be born, be made; come, come about, happen, be done* [see Addendum B, part 5].

Translation:

KJV: "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made

in the likeness of men."

NKJV: "but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."

RSV: "but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

ESV: "but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

NIV: "but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

D. Baker: *but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, coming in the likeness of men.*

Commentary:

ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν From the interpretation of these words we get the infamous *kenosis* debate. Upon examination of the structure of this clause, I for one firmly believe it is a mistake to ask the question: Of what did Christ empty Himself? These words do not demand the answer to a question; they are a statement of fact. Christ "emptied Himself" (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν)—we are not told that it was of this or of that or of anything. It is not a matter of what He emptied Himself, but rather **how**! In what manner did Christ empty Himself? To that an answer is given in the words μορφὴν δούλου λαβών—He took "the form of a servant." This is *how* Christ emptied Himself. At first glance it is possible to conclude that the form of a servant means becoming incarnate, until we notice the next clause in the verse, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος. This latter clause is the incarnation, and by its presence we sense the distinction between the incarnation of Christ and the humiliation of Christ. Paul is not repeating himself by way of different words in saying ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν **μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος**. The two clauses in boldface, each with its own aorist participle, are parallel thoughts with some distinction from each other. It can be argued that the second clause has a relation to the first. But the second clause (the words ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος) does not define how Christ emptied Himself. At most they explain in what manner or in what outward way He took on "the form of a servant."

Also pertinent is the input of **verse 8**: "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." When Paul describes Jesus as "being found in appearance as a man" (σχήματι εὑρεθείς ὥς ἄνθρωπος), he is not denying or questioning the reality of Christ being human. Rather, the focus is put on what the people saw when they encountered Him. A feature of the Lord's incarnation back then was that His humanity was plainly visible, which is not the case anymore. We can't see the human Jesus. Well, during the time of His incarnation in plain view of others, "He humbled Himself" (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν). This is surely parallel to "He emptied Himself" in verse 7. And thanks to the participle that modifies the main thought of ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν, we know what it means that Jesus "humbled Himself." He did so by becoming "obedient to the point of death" (γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου). That is, He submitted to the will of His Father in all things, obeying Him at every turn during His time on earth, even when it required the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. That, Paul notes at the end of verse 8, was the pinnacle (or shall we say the deepest depth) of the humiliation. In taking note of that, one must conclude that the incarnation and the humiliation of Christ are simultaneous but not identical.

Such a conclusion has been drawn not only by Lutheran dogmaticians, but known exegetes too. Lenski, for one, states: "Paul clearly distinguishes 'got to be in men's likeness' (the Incarnation) from 'took slave's form' (the Humiliation). Both are simultaneous, but the two are not identical. Christ is still incarnate, but no longer in the form of a slave which once he took for his redemptive work. The slave's form he dropped, not his human nature, to which God gave a glorified form. 'He got to be in men's likeness' does not define 'he took slave's form,' nor does the former state purpose: 'he took slave's form in order to appear in human likeness'" (*Philippians* 786).

A Brief Consideration of 2 Corinthians 8:9

2 Corinthians 8:9 is sometimes used as a proof passage to assert that the incarnation of Christ is part of His humiliation. In the NKJV the passage reads: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." We examine this passage on the basis of its Greek text:

γινώσκετε γὰρ τὴν χάριν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι δι' ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὤν, ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε.

Notes:

ἐπτώχευσεν 1st aor. act. indic. 3 sg. πτωχεύω; "to be or become poor as a beggar, *be (extremely) poor*" (BDAG).

πτωχείᾳ fem. dat. sg. "prim.: 'beggarliness'. . . *poverty*" (BDAG).

πλουτήσητε 1st aor. act. subj. 2 pl. πλουτέω; *be rich*.

Commentary:

As far as the scope of this essay is concerned, the crux of this verse is the understanding and interpretation of the word ἐπτώχευσεν. Does the "poverty" which the Lord Jesus willingly took upon Himself consist in His incarnation, or was it in something else? If it consists in His incarnation, as some contend, then this verse is viewed as a proof passage that the incarnation of Christ is part of His humiliation. If the "poverty" that Jesus willingly took upon Himself does not consist in His incarnation but rather in something else, then this verse would not rule out an affirmative answer to the question raised in this essay.

Quite often the cognates of ἐπτώχευσεν (πτωχός, πτωχεία) are used in the New Testament with reference to having a lack of this world's goods. See Mark 12:42—the "poor widow" who gave two mites to the Temple treasury. In his *Word Pictures* A. T. Robertson says of the noun in 2 Corinthians 8:2: "*Ptocheia* is old word from *ptocheuo*, to be a beggar, as of Jesus in 8:9 (from *ptochos*, cowering in fear and poverty, as in Luke 14:13, but ennobled by Christ as in Matt. 5:3; II Cor. 8:9). Poverty down deep" (243). In his treatment of the same word in reference to Christ, we note Lenski: "It was not the Incarnation by which Christ became poor, although this idea is often offered. He is incarnate now, and certainly not poor in his incarnate glorified state. He became poor by entering the state of humiliation. He entered this state simultaneously with his Incarnation, but the two dare not be confounded or made identical. Christ entered the state of humiliation in order to be able to work out our redemption" (*Corinthians* 1173).

I believe the next to last sentence of Lenski sums it up: "He entered this state simultaneously with his Incarnation, but the two dare not be confounded or made identical." The "poverty" (πτωχείᾳ) which Christ endured while incarnate is not identical to His incarnation. The "poverty" which He endured was His "taking the form of a servant (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών) in Philippians 2:7. 2 Corinthians 8:9 is not a proof passage that the state of humiliation consists in Christ's becoming incarnate. It is a proof passage for the fact that Christ did endure the state of humiliation and for the reason why He did this.

Concluding Observations

In view of all of the above, a straight, plain, simple answer to the question referred to at the beginning is, yes, there is Scriptural support for the Sydow Edition Catechism teaching that Jesus "becoming human" is in itself not part of His humiliation. The proof passage is Philippians 2:6-8. In addition, the Formula of Concord and the Lutheran dogmaticians of more recent times concur with this assessment. 2 Corinthians 8:9 is not a proof passage for this assessment, but one that merely teaches the fact that Christ endured the state of humiliation and shows the reason why He did this.

One might justifiably ask the question: Why was this statement put into the Sydow Edition of the Small Catechism in the first place? What is gained by its presence? What is lacking if this comment were not included? It is my firm belief that this edition of the Small Catechism could be improved by deleting the first sentence of the second paragraph in the explanation of question #153: "Since He retains His humanity also in His exaltation, His humanity is in itself not part of the humiliation. *His humiliation is the lowly manner in which He came as well as His lowly manner of living. It consisted of His not using His*

divine power fully" (125, ital. added). Such a deletion of the first sentence above would leave the italicized words as the doctrinal definition of the "state of humiliation" referred to in question #153.

Although the wording as we now have it in the Sydow Edition of the Catechism is theologically accurate, it can be somewhat confusing and is most likely above the comprehension level of most confirmands. The shorter wording would be an improvement in my opinion, since almost all child confirmands have not yet reached a degree of doctrinal maturity to understand the many facets of the humiliation of Christ as it relates to His incarnation.

Addendum A

It seems to this observer that the wording of the Apostles' Creed lends apparent support to the view that the humiliation of Christ would *include* the incarnation, although it is true that the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed does not claim to be a statement on the two states of Christ. The Creed lists (if the humanity of Christ is understood as part of the humiliation) these six steps in the Lord's state of humiliation. They are: (1) Conceived by the Holy Spirit, (2) Born of the Virgin Mary, (3) Suffered under Pontius Pilate, (4) Crucified, (5) Dead, and (6) Buried. This is the same wording used in the Sydow Edition of the Small Catechism as part of the answer to the question "What is the state of humiliation?" The second point above, that He was "born of the Virgin Mary," seems to state or at least imply that the humanity of Christ was part of His humiliation. It may be further observed that there would have been no suffering and He would not have been "crucified, dead, and buried" apart from His first being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. The incarnation of Christ, though not constituting His humiliation, was a necessary step in having the humiliation of Christ take place for our salvation.

Addendum B

The content of this addendum has been added by the editor. It contains additional exegetical information compiled from a few other sources. Each numbered section below is meant to be self-contained and does not relate directly to the other numbered sections. Each relates directly to a jumping-off point indicated in brackets within the body of the essay.

1) Clearly the antecedent of the relative pronoun in verse 6 is "Christ Jesus" in verse 5. Some have debated whether the description "being in the form of God" refers to the pre-incarnate Word or specifically to the Word made flesh. Arguing for the second view is the thorough exegesis of F. W. Wenzel in his commentary on Philippians. His treatment of Philippians 2:5 lays out five reasons for thinking of "Christ Jesus" as the historical Christ, the incarnate Word, thus making the description in verse 6, "being in the form of God," pertain primarily to the <u>God-man</u> during His state of humiliation (64-5). His interpretation of ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων includes the following observations:

> The present tense used [ὑπάρχων] would exclude the thought of being *originally*. He still *is* ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ. Most commentators ignore this durative present tense and explain it as a preterite, as something which Jesus once upon a time had. (65, ital. orig.)
>
> "Μορφή here means that expression of being which is identified with the essential nature and character of God and which reveals it" (Vincent). . . . Essence or nature is the being itself, μορφή is the form wherein it appears, as e.g., fire is the essence, and the light and heat it gives, the form under which it appears. . . . The form of God is His manner of acting, or revealing Himself, the outward expression of an inner nature. (65)
>
> Since the early times of Church History this clause*: existing in the form of God* has been interpreted of the preexistent, the eternal Logos, meaning to say that before His incarnation, He existed in the form of God, and when He became incarnate, He divested Himself of the original form of God in order to take upon Himself the form of a servant. Thus the incarnation is identified with the humiliation; the very act of incarnation was lowering of Himself. There are, however, some serious objections to this view. . . . Can it really be said that Christ as the eternal Son was *in* (ἐν) the form of

God? . . . The peculiar phrase, to exist *in the form of God* hardly is an appropriate phrase to be used of the pre-incarnate Christ, who *is* God from eternity, and therefore self-evidently is in possession of the form of God. . . . However, if this phrase is understood of the incarnate Christ, of the Word made flesh, it is a very fitting expression of a most unusual fact, namely, that the man Christ Jesus had an existence *in* the form of God; that when He became man, He did not lay aside His divine nature or leave it in heaven apart from the human nature, but that when the eternal Logos became flesh, the divine nature was intimately united with the human nature that it assumed. The *human* nature thus was ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ. The human nature was not the form of God itself, but it was *in* the form of God. (65, ital. orig.)

In his commentary on Philippians Lenski holds a similar view that the description "being in the form of God" applies to the human nature of the incarnate Christ (*Philippians* 781-2).

2) Part of the challenge in rendering ἁρπαγμὸν into English is that it's a *hapax*. This is the only occurrence in the Greek New Testament. And there is no usage to compare in the LXX. There appears to be good evidence to support what BDAG and others contend, that in the Koine period ἁρπαγμὸς can express the same sense as the cognate ἅρπαγμα, which is passive in meaning: something robbed, or seized forcibly, or plundered in battle. According to Wenzel, the Latin Church Fathers favored this idea, but the Greek Church Fathers interpreted the word in a different way: something already won that is to be retained, or "ostentatiously displayed" (Wenzel 66). Thankfully for us, knowing for sure the intended meaning of ἁρπαγμὸν is not crucial in understanding Paul's flow of thought or the doctrine he teaches in this passage.

3) While ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων and τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ are certainly parallel, are they identical? It would seem from verse 7 that when Jesus "emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave," He was relinquishing the rights of His "being equal with God," while continuing to be "in the form of God." The difference, it should be noted, would be a matter of status— not a matter of identity, or nature, or capability. In taking the form of a slave, He would not be in the role of boss. And so He would be the Law-keeper rather than the Law-giver (even though He was the Law-giver). He would be the one giving (and being) the sacrifice, not the one receiving it. He would submit to and obey His Father's will, even to the point of death by crucifixion. A similar position is taken in Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, page 635, footnote 56.

4) There may be something of a paradox here, or at least a play on words: Jesus "*emptied* Himself" by "*taking*." Grammatically, the aorist participle λαβών has the markings of a *participle of means*; i.e., it comes after the controlling verb (ἐκένωσεν) and explains it, answering the question How. As such the action of the participle is simultaneous with the action of the main verb (Wallace 629-30).

5) Wenzel and others see the participle γενόμενος as subordinate to λαβών: "Jesus emptied Himself by taking upon Him the form of a servant, and this in turn is defined as having been made in the likeness of men" (Wenzel 68).

Wenzel also offers the following in regard to the phrase ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος:

> Γενόμενος states what Jesus *became*. It is contrasted to ὑπάρχων. While always being in the form of God, He in time became man and entered a new state. But Paul does not state this just that way. He says that Christ became *in the likeness of men*. . . . He was in the form of a servant, and μορφή cannot be thought of without the essence which the form expresses. And yet he here speaks only of the *likeness* of men, for though Jesus was truly man, He was more than man; He was the God-man. The expression likeness "leaves room for the other side of His nature, the divine, in the likeness of which He did not appear. His likeness to men was real, but it did not express His whole self" (Vincent). This way of speaking of the humanity of Jesus is evidently chosen to express the fact that when the Word was made flesh, He did not assume a *person*, but a *nature*. The eternal Son of God always was the

Son of God and remained so when He became man. There exists only *one* Logos. The incarnate Logos is only *one* person, but in this person there are two natures. The human nature alone is not the Logos. And therefore Paul very properly says that He became in the *likeness of men*, because He still was true God. (Wenzel 68, ital. orig.)

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"Blest" or *"Blesséd"*?
A Study of the Use of אַשְׁרֵי and μακάριος

John Pfeiffer

Considering the Question

One could point to numerous passages as we consider the question before us. We begin with Psalm 1:1 in an interlinear format:

אַשְׁרֵי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בַּעֲצַת רְשָׁעִים

wicked ones / in the counsel of / walks / not / who / the man / blessed

וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמָד וּבְמוֹשַׁב לֵצִים לֹא יָשָׁב׃

sits / not / mocking ones / and in the seat of / stands / not / sinners / and

Our question, which has a focus on the matters of both understanding and translation, is this: Is the psalmist saying that the man described is the recipient of a blessing: "*having been blessed*"? Or is the Lord here describing the condition, status, and/or spiritual standing of this man? This matter involves both Testaments, as we see in the next sample verse.

Matthew 5:4

μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες· ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

Blessed the mourning ones; because they, they shall be comforted.

Is Christ saying that those who mourn are the recipients of a blessing? Or is He here describing the condition, status, and/or spiritual standing of the mourning ones?

Is the translation "b-l-e-s-s-e-d" in either of these passages describing what a person has received, or is it describing what a person is? It will be the purpose of this article to examine the concepts found in the words אַשְׁרֵי or μακάριος and attempt to arrive at an acceptable translation for either or both.

The Issue

The English word "*blesséd*" (accent intentional) seems to be quickly disappearing from the vocabulary of American people. Its usage is largely isolated to the Bible and the subject of religion. Even in the oral reading of Scripture, fewer and fewer people are actually enunciating the final syllable *-ed*. Many make no distinction between the past tense of the verb *bless* (i.e., *blessed*; *blest*), and the adjective (*blesséd*). They enunciate both as if they were spelled "b-l-e-s-t."

In the Greek New Testament the words μακάριος and εὐλογητός are commonly translated with the letters "b-l-e-s-s-e-d." Nevertheless, these Greek terms are not synonyms. The concepts represented by each are distinct from one another. The same can be said of the Hebrew terms אֶשֶׁר and בָּרוּךְ; these also express different concepts. When no distinction is made in translating or enunciating these terms, the English reader is deprived of a portion of divine revelation.[1] How, then, can we help our hearers note the distinction and gain the full flavor of these words that the Spirit uses? What are the distinctions?

* Does אֶשֶׁר (אַשְׁרֵי) mean the same thing as בָּרוּךְ?
* Does μακάριος mean the same thing as εὐλογητός?
* Does "bless-éd" mean the same thing as "blessed" (*blest*)?

Lexical Information

In the lexical information below the sources referenced are not documented per MLA guidelines and the Works Cited page at the end. A few of these sources are keyed as follows:

BDB = Brown-Driver-Briggs
KB = Koehler/Baumgartner
TW = *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

<u>The verbal root</u>: אשׁר

- Gesenius: *to be (*or *go*) *straight, be right*; *be successful*; *prosper*;
  in Piel: *guide* or *lead straight*; *pronounce fortunate* or *happy*.
- BDB: *go straight, go on, advance*; in Piel *go straight on, advance; lead on, set right, righten*; *pronounce happy, call blessed*.
- KB: *walk straight (ahead)*; *pronounce happy, call blessed.*
- Others: *to congratulate*.

<u>The cognate term</u>: אַשְׁרֵי אֶשֶׁר

- The plural construct (אַשְׁרֵי) is the only form of אֶשֶׁר used in the Old Testament.
- There is a bit of a dispute over whether it is a noun or an adjective.
- This is a **state declared** by God; it is descriptive of the situation in which a man may find himself. Regardless of how he may **feel** at the moment, his **status** is a good one, a desirable one, the best of circumstances. It is lined up straightly with the will of God.

BDB: *happiness, blessedness of.*

Davidson: אֶשֶׁר *happiness, blessedness;* found only in the construct plural (אַשְׁרֵי) "in the character of an interj. *O the happiness of . . . .*"

Fuerst: *fortune, happiness,* hence as an interjection in the construct state: *hail! happy!*; before the nouns אִישׁ or הָאִישׁ Ps. 1, 1; 112, 1; אָדָם 32, 2. . . .

Gesenius: *happiness*; has the force of an interjection: *O the happiness of. . . .*
Holladay: introduction to word of blessing*; fortunate, blessed is (he who), are (they who).*
KB: introductory word of blessings, *blessed, happy is who. . . .*
Vine: *blessed, happy*; in his *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* this author goes on to state:

> Basically, this word connotes the state of "prosperity" or "happiness" that comes when a superior bestows his favor (blessing) on one. . . . The state that the blessed one enjoys does not always appear to be "happy". . . . One's status before God (being "blessed") is not always expressed in terms of the individual or social conditions that bring what moderns normally consider to be "happiness." So although it is appropriate to render [אַשְׁרֵי] as "blessed," the rendering of "happiness" does not always convey its emphasis to modern readers. (Vine 19)

Similar term: בָּרַךְ
Holladay: 1. *blessed,* filled w. power, 2. (God) *be praised*.
Gesenius: *to bend the knees; to kneel down; to invoke God, to ask for a blessing, to bless.*
BDB: Qal: *kneel, bless*—Niph.: 1. *bless* God, adore with bended knees; 2. God *blesses* a. men b. things; 3. men *bless* men; 4. *salute, greet;* 5. *bless*, with the antithetical meaning curse.
TW: *to kneel, bless, praise, salute,* and even *curse* (used euphemistically).

BibleWorks recognizes 83 verses using בָּרוּךְ. In these verses 45 have בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה. The remainder refer to God blessing man or man blessing man.

When the action of בָּרַךְ originates with God, it is an effective blessing; when it originates with man, it cannot effect that which is spoken, but can only express his thoughts and desires.

Consider a small sample of passages using בָּרַךְ:
Gen. 1:22 *God blesses animals, enabling them to reproduce*.
Gen. 1:28 *God blesses Adam and Eve, enabling them to reproduce* (also Gen. 9:1).
Gen. 2:3 *God blesses a day and sets it apart* (Ex. 20:11).
Gen. 9:26 *Noah blesses Jehovah* בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה (in praise, as the expression of his faith).
Gen. 12:2 *God promises to bless Abram* (divine enabling).
Gen. 17:16 *God promises to bless Sarah with descendants (*divine enabling).
Gen. 18:18 *God promises to bless all nations in Abraham* (divine enabling).
Gen. 22:18 *God promises to bless all nations in the Seed of Abraham* (divine enabling).
Gen. 39:5 *Potiphar's property is blessed by God for Joseph's sake* (divine enabling).
Ex. 23:25 *God blesses bread and water* (divine enabling).
Deut. 7:13 *God blesses the fruit of the womb and of the land* (divine enabling).

Note that according to the lexicons the verb בָּרַךְ expresses the action of *blessing*, while אָשַׁר expresses the act of pronouncing or declaring blessedness. Even if one translates אַשְׁרֵי with the concept of *happiness*, it still remains a pronouncement or declaration regarding the circumstances of an individual or a group and not an evaluation of the person's emotional state.

Some Passages for Consideration

Before choosing a translation for אַשְׁרֵי, we should consider the usage found in certain Scripture passages.

Deuteronomy 33:29 "*Happy are you* (אַשְׁרֶיךָ lit. "your blessedness"), *O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places"* (NKJ).

- The NKJ and ESV translate this occurrence of אַשְׁרֵי with "happy." NAS and NIV use "blessed."
- Note that after pronouncing them *ashrey*, Moses continues by explaining what it is that makes them *ashrey*: The Lord is their Savior, their Shield, and their Sword. Having the Lord be as such is their state of being. This is the set of circumstances embracing Israel.

1 Kings 10:8 *"Happy* (אַשְׁרֵי) *are your men and happy* (אַשְׁרֵי) *are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom"* (NKJ).

When the Queen of Sheba heard all the wisdom of Solomon and saw the beauty of his handiwork, she pronounced *ashrey* those who spent time in his presence. Was she saying that they were filled with feelings of happiness? Perhaps they were, but is that what she was saying? Or was she saying that their situation was a happy or favorable one, that they were in a state of blessédness? I believe it was the latter.

Psalm 32:1-2 *Blessed* (אַשְׁרֵי) *is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed* (אַשְׁרֵי) *is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.* (NKJ)

- Is God describing the emotional state of the person who is forgiven? Or is He making a pronouncement regarding the God-given status of that person?
- When Paul refers to this passage in Romans 4:6, he writes: "*David also describes the blessedness* (μακαρισμόν) *of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.*" Thayer defines μακαρισμός as a "d*eclaration of blessedness . . .* λέγειν τόν μακαρισμόν τίνος, *to utter a declaration of blessedness upon one,* a fuller way of saying μακαρίζειν τινα, *to pronounce one blessed,* Rom. 4:6."[2] Thus David is not describing the feelings of the person justified, but is speaking of a divine declaration regarding the status of this person.

Psalm 94:12 *Blessed* (אַשְׁרֵי) *is the man whom you discipline* (תְיַסְּרֶנּוּ),*O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law.* (ESV)

Can it be said that the man whom Jehovah proceeds to discipline (Piel Impf.) is happy? Consider what the Spirit states in Hebrews 12:11: "*Now no chastening seems to be joyful* [χαρᾶς] *for the present, but painful* [λύπης - *sorrowful,* as contrasted with χαρᾶς]*; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*" In this light the question should be answered *No*. For those who think that אַשְׁרֵי is speaking of a happiness that lies in the future, coming about as a result of discipline, the translation "happy" would be appropriate. However, Psalm 94 and other passages are speaking of a present and not a future blessédness.

Psalm 72:17 *His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed* (וְיִתְבָּרְכוּ) *in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed* (יְאַשְּׁרוּהוּ).

Is this passage telling us that the concepts expressed by בָּרַךְ and אָשַׁר are synonymous? Or do they express two different thoughts? In the former clause the King (Christ, Son of David and of Solomon) is the source of blessings for all. In the latter clause He Himself is pronounced blesséd.

There are passages in which the concept of *happy* may seem to fit, but is this what the Lord is truly saying? Is He making an evaluation of the object's inner emotions, or is He making a pronouncement regarding the status of the object?

We turn next to what various commentaries have to say in regard to אַשְׁרֵי in Psalm 1:1.

Various Commentators on Psalm 1:1

אַשְׁרֵי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בַּעֲצַת רְשָׁעִים

wicked ones / in the counsel of / walks / not / who / the man / blessed

וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמָד וּבְמוֹשַׁב לֵצִים לֹא יָשָׁב׃

sits / not / mocking ones / and in the seat of / stands / not / sinners / and

Barnes: "*Blessed is the man*. That is, his condition is a happy or desirable one. The word here used, אֱשֶׁר *aishair*, means properly *happiness* or *blessedness*. . . . All who have the character here described come under the general description of the *happy* man—the man whose condition is a happy and a desirable one" (2).

Brug: "The word אַשְׁרֵי is a plural construct noun, 'the happinesses of.' It introduces a beatitude, not a benediction, that is, it is used to congratulate someone for the happiness which he has rather than to wish or pray for his happiness" (114).

Clarke: "The Word which we translate *blessed* is properly in the plural form, 'blessednesses'; or may be considered as an exclamation produced by contemplating the state of the man who has taken God for his Portion; 'Oh, the blessedness of the man!' And the word *haish* is emphatic: 'that man'; that one among a thousand who lives for the accomplishment of the end for which God created him" (461).

Gill: "Blessed is the man. . . . This psalm begins in like manner as Christ's Sermon on the Mount, Mat 5:3; setting forth the praises and expressing the happiness of the man who is described in this verse and Psalm 1:2. The words may be rendered, 'O, the blessednesses of the man,' or 'of this man' (l); he is doubly blessed, a thrice happy and blessed man; blessed in things temporal and spiritual; happy in this world, and in that to come. He is to be praised and commended as a good man, so the Targum: 'the goodness, or, Oh, the goodness of the man;' or as others, 'Oh, the right goings or happy progress, or prosperous success of the man (m),' who answers to the following characters; which right walking of his is next observed, and his prosperity in Psalm 1:3. Some have interpreted this psalm of Christ, and think it is properly spoken of him (n)."

Notice the reference to the Targum. The Jewish view of the term אַשְׁרֵי appears to be "praiseworthy," which can be observed on several websites. This would make blessedness be something rooted in the actions of men. I contend that it is rooted in the actions of God and manifested in the actions of men. Such a blessedness, however, can come only through faith in Jesus Christ (John 15:4, Rom. 8:7-8, Rom. 14:23, Heb. 11:6).

Keil-Delitzsch: "O the blessedness of so and so. The man who is characterised as blessed is first described according to the things he does not do, then (which is the chief thought of the whole Ps.) according to what he actually does: he is not a companion of the unrighteous, but he abides by the revealed word of God" (84).

Leupold: "For the plural (ashrey) literally means the full measure of happy circumstances" (34).

Luther: "Ps. 1:1 *Wohl dem* (beatus vir), *der nicht wandelt* (abiit) *im Rat der Gottlosen, noch tritt auf den Weg der Suender, noch sitzt, da die Spötter sitzen*."

> "*Der Hebrärer sagt in der Mehrheit* אַשְׁרֵי, *selige Leute oder selige Verhältnisse, als, in seligen Verhältnissen ist der Mann, welcher nicht wandelt; als ob er sagen wollte: In allem steht es wohl um den Mann, welcher u*." (222). "The Hebrew says in the majority, אַשְׁרֵי, blessed people or blessed circumstances, as, in blessed circumstances is the man, who does not walk; as if it were said: In all things it is [stands] well for the man, who etc."

Spurgeon: "The original word is plural, and it is a controverted matter whether it is an adjective or a substantive. Hence we may learn the multiplicity of the blessings which shall rest upon the man whom God hath justified, and the perfection and greatness of the blessedness he shall enjoy. We might read it, 'Oh, the blessednesses!'. . ." (1).

Stoeckhardt: "'O the blessedness of the man! Or, O what happiness comes to that man who' etc., says the Psalmist. 'Beatus vir!'" (12).

Trapp: "Oh the blessedness, the heaped up happiness, both of this life and a better, fitter to be believed than possibly could be discoursed. The Hebrew comes from a root that signifieth to go right forward, *sc*. in the way that is called holy, having *Oculum ad metam*, an eye upon the mark, viz. true and real happiness, such as all men pretend to, but he only attaineth to who is here described."

Before choosing a translation for אַשְׁרֵי, we should consider the parallel term in the New Testament.

ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ

Since μακάριος is the usual Septuagint (LXX) translation for אַשְׁרֵי, it is fitting that we consider this term also. In his *Exegetical Notes* available online Brian Stoffregen states the following in regard to the non-biblical usage of the word, which he says was "mostly taken from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*":

> In ancient Greek times, *makarios* referred to the gods. The blessed ones were the gods. They had achieved a state of happiness and contentment in life that was beyond all cares, labors, and even death. The blessed ones were beings who lived in some other world away from the cares and problems and worries of ordinary people. To be blessed, you had to be a god.
>
> *Makarios* took on a second meaning. It referred to the "dead." The blessed ones were humans, who, through death, had reached the other world of the gods. . . .
>
> Finally, in Greek usage, *makarios* came to refer to the elite, the upper crust of society, the wealthy people. It referred to people whose riches and power put them above the normal cares and problems and worries of the lesser folk—the peons, who constantly struggle and worry and labor in life. To be blessed, you had to be very rich and powerful. (Stoffregen)

Thus μακάριος conceptualizes a status or set of circumstances most to be desired. The "gods" and the wealthy were considered by the ancients as being in this most desired state. Of course, the world-view at work here believes that the desired state is one in which a person has no lack of wealth or power. However, when the Spirit took hold of this word, He transformed it from the concerns of the physical and material world to those of the spiritual world. The desired set of circumstances appears to be the opposite of that desired by the world: *poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the persecuted,* etc.

How well do the New Testament lexicons bear this out in listing glosses (in italics) and definitions for μακάριος? Compare what is given below from Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich (BDAG), Louw-Nida (L-N), Moulton-Milligan (M-M), Friberg (Fri.), and Thayer (Th.).

> BDAG: 1. pertaining to being fortunate or happy because of circumstances, *fortunate, happy, privileged, blessed*; 2. pertaining to being esp. favored, *blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged,* from a transcendent perspective, the more usual sense (the general Gr.-Rom. perspective: one on whom fortune smiles) a. of humans *privileged recipients of divine favor*.
>
> L-N: pertaining to being happy, with the implication of enjoying favorable circumstances - 'happy.'
>
> M-M: is used in the LXX for אַשְׁרֵי (Ps. 1:1, al.), "Oh, the happiness of …!", and in Hebrew thought denotes a state of true well-being.
>
> Fri.: of persons characterized by transcendent happiness or religious joy *blessed, happy.*
>
> Th.: *blessed, happy* . . . . the reason why one is to be pronounced blessed is expressed by a noun or by a participle taking the place of the subject.

To the above we add a few pointed observations from Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* that are given under the heading "The Word Group in the New Testament":

> The special feature of the group μακάριος, μακαρίζειν, μακαρισμός in the NT is that it refers overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God. . . . The noun μακαρισμός is found . . . at [Galatians] 4:15 for the blessedness of receiving the message of salvation, and at [Romans] 4:6, 9 with reference to the remission of sins. (Hauck 367)
>
> As in Gk. macarisms, there is often contrast with a false estimation as to who is truly blessed. . . . A clear difference from the Gk. beatitudes is that all secular goods and values are now completely subsidiary to the one supreme good, the kingdom of God, whether it be that the righteous man may hope for this, is certain of it, has a title to it, or already has a part in it. The predominating estimation of the kingdom of God carries with it a reversal of all customary evaluations. Thus the NT beatitudes often contain sacred paradoxes. (Hauck 368)

In all these verses [Matt. 16:17, John 20:29, Luke 11:28, et al][3] the light of future glory shines over the sorry present position of the righteous. Thus the NT beatitudes are not just intimations of the future or consolations in relation to it. They see the present in the light of the future. (Hauck 369)

Just like its Hebrew counterpart **אַשְׁרֵי**, the New Testament word μακάριος and its cognates are part of the vocabulary of the Gospel of Christ and thus worthy of closer inspection. The study of what these words express and how best to translate them will continue in the next installment.

(To be continued)

Endnotes

[1] This is true whether the terms are translated "blessed" or "blesséd." Examples of μακάριος and εὐλογητὸς being translated "blessed" (NKJ) are found in the following:

Luke 6:20 Καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἔλεγεν, **μακάριοι** οἱ πτωχοί, ὅτι ὑμετέρα ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. *"Bless-éd are the poor . . . ."*

Ephesians 1:3 **Εὐλογητὸς** ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ. *"Bless-éd (be) the God and . . . ."*

Examples using **אַשְׁרֵי** and **ברוך**:

Psalm 1:1 *Blessed* (**אַשְׁרֵי**) *is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.*

Psalm 18:46 *The LORD lives! Blessed* (**ברוך**) *be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted.*

[2] The Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon (BDAG) has something similar: "pronouncement of being in receipt of special favor, *blessing*."

[3] Matt. 16:15-17 *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*

John 20:28-29 *And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Luke 11:28 *But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*

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Book Review

D. A. Carson: *The Intolerance of Tolerance*; William B. Eerdmans Publishing; 2013; soft cover, 196 pages.

About twenty years ago a professor of mine shared his thoughts with the class on the concept of tolerance, especially the tolerance of religious teachings. He explained that, historically, to tolerate other religious beliefs in a society meant to allow them to stand even if you did not agree with them. (We might think of Jesus' parable of the weeds and the wheat as a classic example of the historic understanding of tolerance in which the unrighteous are allowed to stand beside the righteous until the judgment.) Yet in the last decades this historic view of tolerance is tragically becoming fast forgotten. Today the concept of religious tolerance in most circles means not merely to allow that someone else may hold a different religious view, but it further demands that *everyone agree that the religious beliefs of everyone else are equally valid*. Under this new definition of tolerance any who claim that their views have more merit or are more acceptable than the views of another are immediately labeled as intolerant. Christ Himself, of course, is labeled by the "new tolerance" as the greatest Intolerant of all, for He had the nerve to claim that the way to heaven was only through Him and He would accept no other ways as valid.

D. A. Carson's book *The Intolerance of Tolerance* unravels and exposes the shallow foolishness of those who claim that to be a tolerant person means one must agree with and accept everyone's beliefs equally and without question. He reveals with stunning clarity that those who claim to be the most tolerant (often, but not limited to, the media, the modern university system, and the government) actually end up being the least tolerant of all, not allowing views contrary to theirs even to be heard.

In the early chapters Carson sharpens the difference between the old definition of tolerance and the new. He rightly observes:

> This shift from "accepting the existence of different views" to "acceptance of different views," from recognizing other people's right to have different beliefs or practices to accepting the differing views of other people, is subtle in form, but massive in substance. To accept that a different or opposing position exists and deserves the right to exist is one thing; to accept the position itself means that one is no longer opposing it. The new tolerance suggests that actually accepting another's position means believing that position to be true, or at least as true as your own. We move from allowing the free expression of contrary opinions to the acceptance of all opinions; we leap from permitting the articulation of beliefs and claims with which we do not agree to asserting that all beliefs and claims are equally valid. Thus we slide from the old tolerance to the new. (3-4)

It is easy to see how this change in society's definition of tolerance can have an effect on a Christian's faith and life. Going forward, Christians are not going to be attacked, persecuted, and marginalized only on account of the content of their teaching, but now also because they deign to say, "I do not agree." Carson continues by presenting analyses of situations in the domain of education, the media, and sexuality in which contrary ideas (namely, those that are Christian) are not even discussed, but are simply branded as intolerant and brushed aside.

Now if the purpose of Carson's work were only to grouse about how badly Christians have it in the world, there would be little of interest in it, for Jesus has already told us that Christians will have it badly. The author, however, adds value to the discussion of tolerance because He has a good understanding of such crucial teachings of Scripture as law, gospel, and the atonement. Thus he makes it one of his primary purposes to show that the "new tolerance" is a real threat to the very gospel message of the Lord. It might be said that it is as much a threat as evolution, false teachings concerning the sacraments, or any other threat. The new tolerance is, in fact, finding its way today into mainline

churches. It even finds it way, dare it be said, into the minds of conservative Lutherans and can shake their faith in the one and only Savior. Carson makes a similar observation: "Nowhere is this conflict deeper than in the competing views of religion in general and of Christianity in particular" (98).

The charge of intolerance so frequently leveled today undermines Christian truth claims, the right understanding of sin, matters of church discipline, and the forgiveness of sins itself. These aspects are covered in a chapter entitled "The Church and Christian Truth Claims." Consider the author's measured, gospel-centered response to the oft-heard claim that Jesus is infinitely tolerant of sin and impenitence, accepting such as an alternative to godly living:

> Another central myth of our time is that God is infinitely tolerant, that Jesus is infinitely tolerant. Despite his unlimited power and untarnished holiness, the tolerance of God is displayed in his forbearance with sinners (Romans 3:25; Acts 17:30). He might be expected to provide instant justice, but instead he is long-suffering (to resurrect a word that has largely gone out of use), longing for our repentance (Romans 2:1-4). Scripture repeatedly says he is "slow to anger" (e.g., Exodus 34:6). He is so much more forbearing than his own people are that sometimes they are driven to question his justice (Habakkuk 1:2-4, 13). Nevertheless God's forbearance is not infinite. Scripture also declares that "he does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Exodus 34:7). The Bible anticipates the coming of a day of wrath "when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16; cf. Acts 17:31; Revelation 14:18; 19:1-3; 21:8). More important yet: God is better than tolerant. He does not merely put up with our sin and anarchy; rather, he is unimaginably kind and loving, demonstrated most overwhelmingly in the fact that he has sent his Son to pay the price of our sinfulness and restore us to himself. To talk about the tolerance of God apart from this richer biblical portrayal of God is to do him an injustice. His love is better than tolerance; his wrath guarantees justice that mere tolerance can never imagine. (102-103)

The new tolerance puts pressure on the Christian to dumb down, dilute, and minimize the gospel in order to make it acceptable and more palatable to those who do not believe it. The new tolerance threatens anyone who suggests that there are moral absolutes, that there is sin, and that there is a Savior from it. For if you believe that there is sin and a Savior, you are saying that man's ways and ideas can be wrong—and that is blatantly intolerant by the newly minted definition!

Because the new tolerance cannot speak of sin and grace, there has arisen a philosophy termed "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (MTD), which Carson notes is largely dominating the religious life of American young people. MTD's core theology includes such statements as "(3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. (5) Good people go to heaven when they die" (114).

The author responds:

> By contrast, the truth of the Bible, as we have seen, focuses on our rebellion and need as God sees them, and on God as the ruler, sovereign, judge, and gracious Savior who alone can rescue us from our sin and reconcile us to himself. These things can be tested by the systematic study of Scripture. Those who hold, for instance, to MTD, or to the essential equivalence of all religions, simply cannot make their case out of any holistic reading of the Bible, but only by the most egregious and subjective proof-texting. (114)

Besides his spot-on evaluations of the trouble this "new tolerance" causes in American churches, schools, society, and government (among all major political parties), we can also appreciate the author's balanced criticism of those Christians who react to the charge of intolerance leveled against them with over-the-top moral outrage and harshly unloving actions rather than with a calm, clear presentation of God's Word. In the last chapter he sums up the thoughts he has discussed in detail earlier and gives ten suggestions as to how thoughtful Christians might respond to the new tolerance. We consider briefly a number of these below (underlining added):

> <u>Expose the New Tolerance's Moral and Epistemological Bankruptcy</u>. While acknowledging the small amounts of good that the new tolerance has accomplished, we must constantly expose its moral

and epistemological bankruptcy, arguing instead for a return to the older understanding of tolerance. (161)

Insist That the New Tolerance Is Not "Progress". . . . We always end up thinking that no one understands anything substantial as well as we do; we talk ourselves into thinking that our stances are the most mature, the most balanced, the most informed. We lose any penetrating grasp of the doctrine of sin and its effect in all of us. So part of our task . . . is to call into question this delusional supposition that ours is the best society because it is becoming the most tolerant society. (166-7)

Distinguish between Empirical Diversity and the Inherent Goodness of All Diversity. For what we must see is that there is no logical connection from the observation of the undisputed diversity to the entirely disputable dogma that every axis of diversity is equally good. (168)

Practice and Encourage Civility. Christians ought to encourage and practice civility. Such civility is not to be confused with a weakening of Christian convictions or a distinct lack of courage that simply ducks all the hard questions. It means, rather, courtesy, respect, winsomeness, *not least* when we are affirming that another's position is indefensible. (172, ital. orig.)

Evangelize. [O]penly declaring the gospel to others in an effort to win them to Jesus Christ constitutes a reminder, both for ourselves and for others, that the gospel is supremely important. One of the dangers of a book like this is that its author and readers may begin to think that forging a more responsible track toward older or classic tolerance is one of the most important activities, if not *the* most important activity, in which we could be engaged. It is not. If we treat it as if it were, we begin to act like functional atheists ourselves. (173)

A refreshing aspect of this book in contrast to some others that also point to man's degenerate society and empty philosophy is that Carson understands it is only the gospel that can truly turn this ship around. We know that too. For as much as it may make a concerned Christian's blood boil to see the examples here of our Savior being mocked by those around us, our faith and hope are in God. "Our ultimate confidence is not in any government or party, still less in our ability to mold the culture in which we live" (176). American Christians may have more suffering ahead of them, but it is not more than our Savior suffered. And should open persecution of Jesus' disciples ever increase in our land, may we be glad to bear it for our Lord. As Carson writes with an obvious smile, we would "learn a little better how to do evangelism in our prisons" (176).

- David Schaller