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Editor: Wayne C. Eichstadt / 11315 E. Broadway Avenue / Spokane Valley, WA 99206 / editor@journaloftheology.org / (509) 926-3317

Assistant Editor: Norman P. Greve

Business Manager: Benno Sydow / 2750 Oxford St. North/ Roseville, MN 55113 / bennosydow@yahoo.com

Staff Contributors: D. Frank Gantt, David T. Lau, Nathanael N. Mayhew, Bruce J. Naumann, Paul G. Naumann, John K. Pfeiffer, David J. Reim, Michael J. Roehl, Steven P. Sippert, David P. Schaller, Paul M. Tiefel II, Mark S. Tiefel

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From the Editor

Wayne C. Eichstadt

This issue includes the return of a feature that has periodically been part of the *Journal of Theology* since its beginning—*Panorama*.

Professor C. M. Gullerud introduced *Panorama* in the *Journal's* first issue:

> "As the curtain is being raised on this department of our *Journal of Theology*, it may not be amiss to make a statement on our purpose, our policies, and our aims with respect to the reporting of the doings and sayings of men. . . . A panoramic view reveals not only those things which appear in the foreground, but also the details of the background which give to the picture its dimension as well as its perspective. . . . It shall be our aim to report historical events not for the mere purpose of disseminating information after the fashion of a news magazine, but for the purpose of discovering and evaluating the temper of our age. . . . It is our intention to report facts without prejudice and to guard against distortion. . . . It is not our wish to engage in a battle of wits with those who love to cross swords for the pleasure of it or to bother with those who use smear tactics, for nothing is gained in either case. . . . We do not propose to cover the church news so that every area is given consideration, . . . but we shall endeavor to sift and select with the view of offering that which would best serve the readers of our journal. . . . Since a certain amount of subjectivism is here involved, we invite the suggestions of our readers and solicit materials for our consideration" (*Journal of Theology*, Volume 1, No. 1, p. 41f).

We look forward to including *Panorama* as opportunity arises.

This issue also continues the *Journal's* tradition of publishing an obituary for the called servants who have been glorified and also publishing a sample of that servant's work. Pastor Keith Olmanson was called to his eternal home earlier this year, so we are publishing a brief account of his time of grace together with one of his sermons.

May the Lord richly bless your time in His Word!

In the Footsteps of the Reformers

Christian Beyer

David J. Reim

Tension was high! Every day for 40 days, the armies of Israel and the armies of the Philistines had been facing off in the Valley of Elah. Every morning and evening a giant warrior would emerge to taunt the Israelites. *"Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us. . . . I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together"* (1 Samuel 17:8ff).

What a fearful sight. Standing over nine feet tall, Goliath was a massive warrior, armed to the teeth, and well trained for battle.

All the men of Israel trembled in their boots. All except one. There was a young man who had never served in the army who was not afraid. He was not afraid because he knew a very simple, yet powerful, truth. That young man was David, the shepherd boy, and the truth that he knew was the truth that Luther confessed in *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, "But for us fights the Valiant One" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 262:2). Listen to what David had to say to this giant.

> *Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the* LORD *of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the* LORD *will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the* LORD *does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the* LORD*'s, and He will give you into our hands* (1 Samuel 17:45-47).

"The battle is the Lord's!" What a glorious truth! It is an everlasting truth. God will fight His enemies and deliver His people. The men of the Reformation knew and trusted that truth.

Tension was mounting again. Martin Luther stood up to the giants—the church leaders and the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. He boldly declared, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason. . . I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. So help me God. Amen." As a result, Luther was declared a heretic and an outlaw which meant that he could be hunted down and killed or brought in to be burned at the stake.

The declaration against Luther also meant that anyone who gave him assistance was acting in defiance of the emperor and could also be condemned. Yet, several German princes and theologians and many other people put their careers and their lives on the line to support Luther and to follow his teaching. That put them all in opposition to the most powerful emperor on earth and the even more powerful Catholic Church. Three young men had already been burned at the stake in Brussels for following Martin Luther and believing the teachings of the Bible over the Pope. The old evil Foe certainly meant deadly woe.

Martin Luther, his supporters, and all the other reformers stood up to these giants because they knew the same truth that David knew, "the battle is the LORD's." They all knew well that "With might of ours can naught be done, / Soon were our loss effected." They were no match for the Catholic Church or the Holy Roman Empire, but they also knew "[F]or us fights the Valiant One." So they did not back down from that battle that was against them.

The reformers didn't know when the giant would rise up against them, but they were pretty sure he would. In 1530, Emperor Charles V called on the princes in Germany to explain their religious convictions at a special diet to be held in Augsburg. Many of the Lutherans were very suspicious of the emperor's intentions and feared what retaliation he might make against the Lutherans. But this was an opportunity to set forth the teachings of the Bible clearly. So, trusting that the Valiant One would fight for them, they were ready to face the giants of the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire.

Under the direction of Elector John of Saxony, Martin Luther, Justus Jonas, Johannes Bugenhagen, and Philip Melanchthon wrote a summary of the Lutheran faith which was to be presented to the Holy Roman Emperor at the diet. The Augsburg Confession, as it is known, is still one of the primary

confessions of faith in the Lutheran Church, stating what the Bible teaches on twenty-eight key topics.

We are inspired by these great men, but we also need to remember that the Christian Church has always been made up of many different people in different walks of life with different talents and gifts to use in the building up of the Church. Paul said*, "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them"* (Romans 12:4-6).

So also in the Reformation, there were many other people who played important supporting roles. Many of the German princes, such as the Elector John of Saxony, the Landgrave Philip of Hesse, the Margrave George of Brandenburg, the Dukes Ernest and Francis of Lüneburg, the representatives of Nuremberg and Reutlingen—all stood beside twelve theologians with their political careers on the line. They all signed the Augsburg Confession in agreement.

Another man who played an important supporting role was Christian Beyer. Christian Beyer was a professor of law at the University of Wittenberg. He also served as the legal councillor of Frederich III of Saxony and was elected several times as the mayor of Wittenberg. He assisted the reformers in many ways and was actively involved in many of the official proceedings.

Christian Beyer also played an important role in the presentation of the Augsburg Confession. He assisted in the final editing of the confession, using his expertise in law to make the confession concise and unambiguous. Then he was chosen to read the German version of the Augsburg Confession before the emperor at the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530.

That might not seem very important or impressive until you understand the situation. The Lutheran princes wanted the confession read in public, but the Emperor and the Catholics opposed a public reading. When the Lutheran princes insisted on it being read, the Emperor chose the little chapel of the episcopal palace, which didn't have room for any spectators. Christian Beyer, against the wishes of the emperor, stood up to the threatening giants and stepped into the middle of the assembly and read the German version so loudly and clearly that every word could be heard by the large crowd who had gathered in the courtyard outside. The reading lasted for two hours. With faith

in Christ, these men all ran to meet the giant head on as David did. As a result, the truth of the gospel was heard at Augsburg and continued to grow.

Christian Beyer wasn't a theologian or pastor. He was a layman who used his gifts to help in the cause of the Reformation. Today also, it is not just the leaders of our synod and the pastors and teachers who carry on the work of our church body. It is also laymen using the gifts that God has given for carrying on the work of our church body and the proclamation of the gospel.

Just like Christian Beyer, every child of God loves the Lord and is able to be a part of carrying on the work of the Lord. Each can use his God-given gifts and talents to serve the Lord, helping and leading in homes, congregations, and our church body.

There will be some giants to face. There always seem to be giant financial challenges. There are temptations and snares that would weaken our hold on the truth of Scripture or lead us to soften our stance on some part of God's Word because it doesn't seem practical.

The real great giants that we face are the devil and his two great allies: the world and our own flesh. They are trying to stop us from proclaiming the truth of the gospel. Our society is constantly undermining and contradicting the Word of God. The devil is trying to stop the spread of the gospel in the world. But the Valiant One has already overcome the devil and the world. Our Valiant One tells us, *"In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

Perhaps the giant who does the most to stop us from proclaiming the life-saving Word and from carrying on the work of the Church is our own flesh, which shows itself in weak resignation, in fear and timidity. We just don't want to get involved. We have excuses. "I'm too busy." "I wouldn't know what to say." Remember, Christ has not only crushed the head of Satan and overcome the world, He has also crucified our flesh and conquered our sin.

May we be inspired by Christian Beyer, who didn't look at the power of Charles V to condemn him to death. Instead he looked to the far greater power of our Valiant One who fights for us. Like Christian Beyer, may we stand up and loudly proclaim the message of Christ our Savior and do His work in the world.

We too know the truth,

> With might of ours can naught be done,
> Soon were our loss effected;
> But for us fights the Valiant One,
> Whom God Himself elected.
> Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is,
> Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God;
> He holds the field forever. (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 262:2)

In Memoriam[1]

Keith Nolan Olmanson

"O LORD, You have searched me and known me. . . . For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. . . . How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (Psalm 139:1,13-14,17).

Keith Nolan Olmanson was God's gift entrusted to Bennett and Helen (Jacobson) Olmanson. He was the first of their seven children, born on July 28, 1929 in St. Peter, Minnesota.

"There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of the Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21f).

The LORD, who gave Keith his physical life, bestowed upon him spiritual life through the power of the Spirit at the time of his baptism. Keith was baptized at Norseland Lutheran Church in rural St. Peter on September 15, 1929.

Bennett and Helen were devout Christian parents who raised their son in the Lord by instructing him in the truths of God at home and by taking him regularly to worship, where his love for his Savior was further nurtured. On April 2, 1944, Keith was confirmed in the Christian faith at St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Peter, Minnesota, at which time he promised to remain faithful to his Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit enabled Keith to keep that promise.

"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Keith developed his God-given gifts during his school years. He received most of his elementary training at Kasota, Minnesota. He graduated from St. Peter High School in 1947. After finishing Bethany's two year course, Keith took a year of post-graduate work before completing his senior college work at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin. Upon his graduation from

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[1] Adapted from the funeral obituary. Pastor Paul D. Nolting, *Immanuel* Lutheran Church, Mankato, MN

Northwestern, he entered Bethany College's Seminary department in the fall of 1952, and graduated from the seminary in June, 1955. He fulfilled his year of vicarage as teacher and assistant pastor in the Jerico-Saude parish near Lawler, IA.

Keith's first call was as assistant pastor to the Jerico-Saude parish, continuing in the same role of his vicarage. His ordination was conducted at his home congregation, Norseland Lutheran Church, on July 22, 1956. Pastor Norman Harstad of Belview, Minnesota served as liturgist and read the Vita. The ordination address, based on 2 Timothy 2:15, was given by Pastor M. E. Tweit of Norseland. The ordinator was Pastor M. H. Otto of Lawler, Iowa. Pastor M. J. Wehausen of Le Sueur, Minnesota and Dr. N. A. Madson of Mankato, Minnesota assisted.

Keith's ordination announcement in the *Lutheran Sentinel* stated, "The ordained wishes to thank all those who have encouraged and helped him in the preparation for his ministry. He is not aware of having used any God-forbidden means to enter the Christian ministry. The prayers of his fellow believers that he may be found faithful to the Savior and His Word in the high calling of the holy ministry are asked by the ordained."[2]

In January of 1958, he began serving Ascension Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. During his time in Eau Claire, Keith became a founding member of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) and remained a member until his death.

Keith served several CLC congregations over the years, including Messiah in Eau Claire, Wisconsin; Faith in Nicollet, Minnesota; Salem in Eagle Lake, Minnesota; Immanuel in Mankato, Minnesota; and Faith in New Ulm, Minnesota. He also served vacancy positions in Texas, Florida, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. In all, Keith served in the pastoral ministry of the Lutheran Church for forty years.

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22). *"Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun . . . "* (Ecclesiastes 9:9a).

The Lord gave Keith a wonderful helper so very fitting for him—his wife, Sonja (Johnson). He met her while serving his first parish. They were married

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[2] *Lutheran Sentinel*, Volume 39, No. 16, August 23, 1956.

on August 11, 1957 and enjoyed nearly fifty-nine years together, setting a marvelous example for their family and their friends.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD. The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5a).

Keith and Sonja were blessed by the Lord with eight children: Karl, Daniel, Andrew, Marie, Paula, Amy, John, and Rachel, twenty-two grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. Keith was a devoted father who led his family and his congregations with the Word of God. By his faith in Christ as his only Savior, and by his example as a man devoted to his Lord, he encouraged many others to follow the path to eternal life.

"Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).

Keith was a man of many interests. He enjoyed reading, gardening, hunting, fishing, and watching football and other sports. He belonged to a local Norwegian club and the Hedmark Lag—an organization of individuals living in North American who descended from emigrants from the North Hedmark and Hedemarken areas of Norway. He translated Civil War letters written in Norwegian by his great-grandfather, Bernt Olmanson, a soldier of the Civil War. The Lord gave him numerous opportunities to travel, including a visit to Scandinavia and many parts of the United States.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Keith enjoyed the blessings of the Lord throughout his long life including, until recently, relatively good health. Keith's Savior came to escort his spirit home to Heaven in the morning of May 26, 2016. In view of God's grace and promises, we can say with confidence that he is now with his Lord!

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints." (Psalm 116:15)

A worship service of triumph and victory was held on June 2, 2016, at Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota. Interment was at Green Lawn Cemetery in Nicollet, Minnesota, prior to the victory service.

Pastor Paul D. Nolting officiated. Pastor Nolting used two texts for his sermon: Romans 10:14-15 and John 11:25-26. The theme of the sermon was "Keith Was Privileged to Preach the Glad Tidings that Jesus Is the Resurrection and the Life."

"Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them'" (Revelation 14:13).

The Apostle Paul—A Case for Grace

Keith N. Olmanson

Text*: 1 Timothy 1:12-17*

> *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Merciful heavenly Father, who sent Your only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners, grant us an abundance of Your grace so that we may trust in Him for eternal salvation and live our lives to Your honor and glory here in time and hereafter in eternity. We ask it in the Savior's name. Amen.

Most of us—probably all of us—have a case history. A medical record of a person's physical problems throughout the years is found in a doctor's office or a medical clinic. From the information that our case histories contain, the doctors are guided in making decisions to help us and possibly other members of our families. The case history is important to us as well as to the doctor.

Case histories have a wider use also. Researchers study hundreds and thousands of case histories to learn more about the cause, cure, and prevention of diseases. The results of such studies have affected the quality of life for millions of people—extending lives for years in many instances.

While these cases pertain only to physical matters, we have a case before us today which concerns spiritual welfare. The apostle Paul gives us important information on his spiritual case—information which should serve to instruct, warn, encourage, and comfort us. On the basis of these inspired words and with the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, let us consider "THE APOSTLE PAUL—A CASE FOR GRACE."

Spiritually, Paul had a very good start. His parents were concerned for his spiritual needs. He was instructed in Old Testament teachings from his youth. Though Scripture does not give all the details about Paul's early life, we can be quite sure that he was given the synagogue school education that was available.

Then he was sent to Jerusalem to study religion. He tells us that he was *"brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, [and] taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law"* (Acts 22:3). It was this education that he was completing when Jesus was conducting His ministry in Palestine.

At this time his good start came to an end. He could only benefit from studying Scripture. But then he came under the influence of teachers who were teaching their own ideas and not what Scripture taught. In fact, they were ignoring Scripture. They were the same scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus had to condemn for their unbelief.

Paul was not their only victim. Most of the people of his time had been misled by those teachers. One of the chief errors was trusting in their birth as Jews for salvation. Because they were descendants of Abraham, many of them believed that Heaven was theirs automatically.

The other common error was thinking that they could keep God's law and so be saved by their own efforts. This delusion was possible because they ignored the spirit of the law and were satisfied with keeping the letter of the law. For example, if they did not kill anyone, they believed that they were keeping the Fifth Commandment. In this way, they redefined the law so that only the grossest, public abuses were considered sin.

The people were more or less locked into these false beliefs. They simply took the word of their religious leaders and never questioned whether they were right or wrong. There was little searching of the Scriptures to see if the present teaching was truly correct. Human authority together with their own feelings and emotions were more important to them. Isn't this common today also?

This practice was reflected especially in the attitude of the people toward Jesus. Most of them rejected Jesus as the Savior because the leaders rejected Him. Paul, who was called Saul at that time, was among this majority. When Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death, we read, *"And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. . . . Now Saul was consenting to his death*" (Acts 7:58, 8:1).

The death of this follower of Jesus seemed to spur the zeal of Saul. He entered the work of persecuting the Christians with great zeal. In our text he acknowledges that he was a "persecutor" of the church. We read from Acts, *"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison"* (Acts 8:3). Later Saul is mentioned as still *"breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord"* (Acts 9:1). In his letter to the Galatians Paul admitted that he had *"persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it"* (Galatians 1:13).

Could we imagine anyone less likely to become a Christian than this Saul who was doing his best to turn all people away from Jesus? But we know that this is exactly what happened while he was on the way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there. There was that dazzling light from heaven, the Lord Jesus speaking to him, his blindness, his being healed after three days, his baptism, his preaching that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 9).

Saul had been turned around—converted. We could call it a miracle. It was! But notice that this was not a case of the Holy Spirit directly forcing faith upon a person. In Saul there was a background of God's Word with which to work. He had an excellent knowledge of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, Saul learned that he had been wrong in his attitude toward Jesus. Then it was a matter of his seeing how the prophecies had been fulfilled by Jesus. He had plenty of time to think about this during those three days during which he was blind. The Word of God was essential to his conversion.

Why did God do it? Why did he convert Saul? He certainly didn't deserve it after he had so cruelly persecuted Christians. It was only because of God's grace—His undeserved love for Paul. Paul referred to this when he wrote to the Galatians, *"[I]t pleased God, who . . . called me by His grace"* (Galatians 1:15). Paul testifies in our text, *"And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."* Grace opened Paul's mind to believe and his heart to love the Savior who had been promised and who had come in the person of Jesus.

Paul knew very well that it was God's grace that had caused the tremendous change in his life. His was indeed a case for grace. He tells us, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."* He felt that he was the

worst sinner in the world—that he was so bad that he had taxed God's grace to the limit. He spent the rest of his life thanking and praising God for this grace shown to him.

When Paul states that he is the worst of all sinners, it tends to lead those who see or hear these words to make a comparison. They compare themselves to Paul to see if they are better or maybe even worse. What conclusion is a person to reach?

Let us first consider the case of those who feel they are not such great sinners as Paul was. Their reasoning would go something like this: "I have never persecuted Christians as Paul did—arresting them, having them beaten and imprisoned, even executed. No, I'm a member of a Christian congregation, part of the Church. What Paul says of himself may well be true, but I am certainly not such a terrible sinner as he was."

There are two things to be said to the person who has come to such a conclusion. One is that when it comes to our standing before God, neither Paul's sins nor the sins of any other person has any bearing on the case. We are not going to be held responsible for the sins of others. It is our own sin that proves to be an impassible barrier to eternal life. The argument that "I am not as bad as that other person," will be absolutely useless before God.

God has clearly stated His will. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48). God is not satisfied with a lesser amount of sin. He wants the complete absence of sin. As soon as one sin is committed, the person is no longer perfect or holy. He has become altogether a sinner. James states this principle very bluntly, *"Whoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all"* (James 2:10).

So we see that any amount of sin which a person commits is too much. It makes no difference if anyone—including the person himself—judges that his sin is less than that of others. Any sin he has committed prevents his eternal salvation.

Sin is sin and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). As far as the individual and his eternal fate are concerned, he is the chief sinner on earth. It is his sins and his sins alone which condemn him. In this way, He who claims to be less sinful than Paul must admit that his case is just the same as Paul's. He is also a chief sinner.

Let us turn our attention to the case of the one who claims to be less sinful than Paul in regard to persecuting the Church. We would probably have to concede that the person had no hand in arresting, beating, imprisoning, or executing anyone because he was a Christian. But besides these direct and obvious means of persecution, there is persecution which is not so readily recognized.

We read in Romans, 2:21-24, "*You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For, 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"* If we claim to be Christians and then lead sinful lives, we are giving a bad name to Christians in general. We are causing them to suffer contempt at the hands of unbelievers, and in this way we are persecuting them.

But the sin of persecuting the church more often takes the form of omission—of failing to do those things which are expected of Christians. When we fail to support brethren in the faith who are doing what is right, we are betraying them. We do the same when we neglect the opportunity to hear God's Word and when we fail to help in the work which is to be done both by our own hands and with our contributions. We deprive the Church of what it needs in this way and so persecute it.

When we look at our sins of commission and omission, we must admit we have no reason to feel superior to the apostle Paul. We, too, are chief sinners and do not deserve God's grace. We need spiritual rebirth to be saved. We need the miracle of God's grace just as Paul.

Now, let us consider any who may wish to argue that they are *worse* sinners than Paul. One of the devil's favorite tricks is to convince people that their sins are so great that they cannot be forgiven. They are led to believe that their sins are worse than those of any other person—that God will not forgive them. They lose all hope of forgiveness.

There are passages in Scripture that show that the devil-deceived conscience of such a person is in error. Scripture declares that Jesus is, *"the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"* (1 John 2:2). Every single person without exception is covered by Christ's redemption.

We also read, *"The blood of Jesus Christ, [God's] Son, cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). Every single sin is washed away. There are no exceptions. There is no sin so great that it cannot be forgiven.

It will always be true as was written to the Romans, *"Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"* (Romans 5:20). No matter how much sin is involved, God's grace is sufficient to provide full forgiveness. Every sinner is a case for grace whether he seems to be guilty of many or few sins.

Paul's example also serves as a source of hope for the sinner who thinks his sins are too great to be forgiven. Paul says in our text*, "However for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."* Paul was to be a "pattern" or "example" to all others of the mercy and grace which God shows.

Paul was writing under inspiration. When he writes that he was chief of sinners it was not a personal opinion only. That was God's opinion. That is why it is termed *"a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance."* The conclusion that we are to draw is this: if there was grace enough in the case of Paul, there is grace enough for anyone else no matter what his case.

Every sinner is a case for grace—a case in need of God's grace. Every believer who has so greatly benefitted from God's grace is a case for thanks and praise. We, who have been led to see God's grace through the gift of faith in Jesus as our Savior, should never stop thanking and praising God for His goodness to us.

We have learned that every sin is a cause for damnation. But we also firmly trust that Christ is the reason for the forgiveness of every one of our sins. We have as much reason for glorifying God as Paul did. We join with Paul in the last verse of our text, *"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."*

The Formulation of the Apostles' Creed

John K. Pfeiffer

The Apostles' Creed is very familiar and beloved among most who call themselves Christians. This has been true for the last fifteen hundred years. In liturgical churches, children learn it at a young age simply by hearing their elders confess their faith Sunday after Sunday. It is heartwarming to hear a young boy begin to utter the words that express his simple faith . . . to hear a young girl begin to join with the Christian Church on earth, past and present, in confessing the common conviction that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is her Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

Confessionalism

However, the need for a child to have a simple confession was not what gave birth to this precious confession. It was born of a need for the Church to combat the inroads of error. It has been so throughout history. Faithful disciples of Christ have repeatedly found it necessary to raise up a standard to which all who want to remain steadfast in the Word of our Lord and who want to make this publicly known can rally.

It is generally true that written creeds and confessions within the Christian Church are reactionary. When churches are teaching only the truth, there is no need for official creeds and confessions. The declarations of Holy Scripture, when unopposed, can stand as written without the need for systematization. It is when error rears its ugly head that it becomes necessary to "draw a line in the sand," to make a "here I stand" declaration. Confessional statements then become a measuring rod—symbol—calibrated by the Word of God and used to demonstrate if a given teaching "measures up" to the standard of Scripture. "A symbol, therefore, is a creed, or an authoritative formulation of faith or doctrine distinguishing Christians from non-Christians, or orthodoxy from heterodoxy, or denomination from denomination."[1]

Confessional statements are not drawn up to supplement Scripture, they simply organize what the whole of the Bible teaches on a given subject and present that doctrine in a systematic fashion. Thus, a confessional statement does not have an equal standing with the Bible, it is only a documented

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[1] Klotsche, E. H., Christian Symbolics, publ., The Lutheran Literary Board, p. 13

manifestation of what the confessor believes is in the Bible. It does not establish his faith, it reveals it. In a sense, a confession does not tell us what to believe, it shows others what we do believe. It does not precede faith, it proceeds from faith. *"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Matthew 12:34). *"For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:10). The Spirit, working through the means of grace, fills the heart. After that, the faith-filled heart makes confession.

Creeds vs. Confessions

Perhaps, a distinction should be made between creeds and confessions. A creed, by its very name—*credo*, "I believe"—is a statement of what the confessor holds in his heart as the way of salvation. It is the most basic and foundational statement of faith. Its purpose is to distinguish a believer from an unbeliever. It serves as a line of demarcation—those who stand on one side are believers, those who stand on the other are unbelievers.

A confession, on the other hand, is meant to distinguish the orthodox from the heterodox. Think of the *visible* church as a sphere. Creeds are found on the outer rim of that sphere, distinguishing those on the inside from those on the outside. Confessions are found within the sphere, distinguishing one *professing* Christian from another. It is not the purpose of the confession to discover who is or is not a believer, but rather to discover who is or is not advocating the truth. On the one side of the line are those who hold to the truth and with whom we practice fellowship, on the other side are those who teach error and with whom we do not practice fellowship.

Both creed and confession serve as rallying points. They are banners held high, inviting the followers of Jesus to come and stand with the faithful. They are a finger pointing out both the truth to be embraced and the error to be avoided. They are a beacon, powered by the Word of God, lighting the way of truth and righteousness.

The Background of the Apostles' Creed

Gnosticism (1st and 2nd Centuries)

Such a line was drawn, such a banner was raised, such a beacon was ignited when the Apostles' Creed was written. Its formulation was a reaction to anti-

Christian teachings that were flooding the churches of that time. In the early history of the Church, the attacks instigated by Satan were not very subtle. Many attacks were against the person of Christ: His divine and human natures. Other attacks were leveled against the work of Christ, for example, the vicarious atonement and justification.

The most notorious of the early errors was Gnosticism. The spiritually noxious fumes of this error were seeping through the nations. Coming from the East, possibly Persia or India, it was rooted in mysticism. Mysticism is the belief that by inner contemplation one can achieve a unity with the divine and discover truths that transcend normal, human knowledge (e.g., transcendental meditation, Buddhism). This is the *gnosis* (γνῶσις—knowledge) that gave rise to the name of the error.

Mysticism was and is so vague that it is hard to codify. For this reason, it was easily incorporated into any number of more defined religions. Since all religions outside of Christianity are of human origin, the idea that one can discover truths by inner contemplation is appealing to natural man. The Gnostic practitioners would simply incorporate various aspects of a given religion into their religion, producing a religious mishmash that retained the basic tenets of Gnosticism, while having an appeal to the practitioners of the targeted religion.

As the poisonous fumes of Gnosticism spread into Christian communities, eastern philosophies began to attach themselves to Christian doctrine, forming a new and deadly form of Christianity which was not Christianity at all. As Paul writes regarding Judaizing: *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ"* (Galatians: 1:6f). Many weak Christians or novices were trapped by this thinking. They had learned that, unlike their former idolatry, Christianity is not a mere external exercise, but an internal, spiritual religion. Gnosticism drew on this belief, but twisted it.

One significant distinction between Christianity and Gnosticism relates to the origin of knowledge and truth. True Christianity teaches that saving knowledge enters the heart from the outside as the Holy Spirit works through the Bible. Gnosticism proposed that by inner contemplation a man can search his own natural being and discover God and knowledge. Thus, truth finds its

origin in man, rather than in God and His Word. Once such a belief is established, a man can conjure up whatever "truth" fits his fancy.

Among the errors of Gnosticism produced by this kind of thinking were the following:

- One supreme god, many lesser deities (e.g., Jehovah the Creator, Christ, etc.
- Dualism: spirit is good; matter is evil. Therefore:
    - Christ did not have real flesh and blood (not truly human) (cf. Docetism).
    - Christ did not offer Himself as a real sacrifice for sin. He neither died nor rose again.
    - Salvation is not achieved through the vicarious atonement, but through "higher" knowledge achieved by inner contemplation.
    - Salvation is the freeing of the spirit from all matter, especially the flesh.

        Note: Modern higher critics of the Bible are gnostics in disguise.

The apostles Paul and John addressed the matter of Gnosticism in their epistles. It would appear that the Gospel of John, at least in part, may have been written to refute gnostic errors and establish the truth that God has come in the flesh.

Examples:

> *O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge* (γνῶσις—knowledge) (1 Timothy 6:20).
>
> *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which*

> *you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world* (1 John 4:1-3).

Docetism

In the second century, there arose an offshoot of Gnosticism, known as Docetism (from δοκέω—to seem, to appear). The chief error of this aberration was the teaching that Christ merely *seemed* to be human and only *appeared* to be born, to live, to suffer, to die. Of course, this would mean that the sacrifice of Christ was a sham and had no vicarious significance. By extension, the Lord's Supper would be regarded as nothing but bread and wine. Ignatius, in his letter to the church in Smyrna, writes:

> They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes.[2]

Montanism (2nd and 3rd Centuries)

In the late second century, a priest of Cybele named Montanus of Phrygia "converted" to Christianity and then began to modify it. For many, Montanism was a reaction to the libertine attitudes that were developing within some churches (e.g., Pergamos and Thyatira, Revelation 2). The apostle Paul wrote about this attitude in the sixth chapter of Romans, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"* (Romans 6:1).

The concern of the Montanists was justified, but their reaction was excessive. While the libertines had ridden the pendulum to the extreme left, the Montanists jumped on and rode it to the extreme right. They adopted rigoristic and ascetic forms of puritanism, denying to themselves many of the things of this world and insisting that all Christians do the same. Perhaps they are among the errorists whom the Spirit had in mind when He inspired the words of 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

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[2] Jurgens, W.A., "The Faith of the Early Fathers: Pre-Nicene and Nicene Eras, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1970, p. 25).

> *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."*

As often happens with religions that split from Christianity, the belief in continuing revelation was adopted by Montanus. This was necessary in order for him to propose new teachings. As one examines the religions that claim continuing revelation, we can see that the purpose is to provide some legitimacy to their new doctrines.

Such a departure from the *sola scriptura* principle requires another error. If one cannot have confidence solely in the objective words of the Bible, he has to look outside of the Bible for assurance of salvation. This gave rise to the promotion of charismatic principles, particularly speaking in tongues.

Also found within Montanism was the belief in the early return of Christ to inaugurate a millenialistic reign on earth. The adoption of such a belief may have been based on the hope that there would be a time of purity during which the Montanists would rule.

Monarchianism (3rd Century)

The term *Monarchianism* is derived from the word *monarch* meaning "rule by one." Monarchianism was a Unitarian belief that there is only one person in the Godhead. There were two views of this belief: *Dynamistic* Monarchianism and *Modalistic* Monarchianism.

Dynamistic Monarchianism held the belief that the Father is the only person of the Godhead. They taught that although Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, He was not God, but rather a sinless man imbued with a δύναμις ("power"), that is "divine power." Due to the view that Jesus was then adopted by the Father, this error is also called *Adoptionism*.

This version of Monarchianism is believed to have been originated by Theodotus of Byzantium (ca. 200) and later espoused by Paul of Samosata (ca.

260), bishop of Antioch in Syria. The latter's name has been associated with this error: Samosatianism.

Modalistic Monarchianism taught that Father, Son, and Spirit are merely three modes or ways in which God makes Himself known to men. Thus, God acted as the Father in the work of creation, He acted as the Son in the work of redemption, and He acted as the Spirit in the work of sanctification. According to the modalists, the Father displayed Himself as the Son by being born of Mary. Their view of God is like that of the sun: at one time we see the sun as round, at another as bright, and at another as hot.

One of my sons once had a "Masters of the Universe" action figure called "Man-E-Faces." Man-E-Faces had three different faces, each of which he used according to the need of the moment. The action figure had a full-head helmet with an opening at the front. Inside the helmet was a head with three faces. As one turned the knob that controlled the head, one face at a time appeared in the helmet opening. Behold, Modalistic Monarchianism.

This error ". . . was taught by Praxeas, a priest from Asia Minor, in Rome about 206 and was opposed by Tertullian in the tract Adversus Praxean (c. 213), an important contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity."[3] This version of Monarchianism has been called, *Patripassianism*, signifying that the Father is the one who suffered, not the Son. It has also been dubbed, *Sabellianism*, after the assumed founder of this belief, Sabellius (Rome and Lybia). Heirs of this heresy were Michael Servetus (Spain at the time of the Reformation) and Emanuel Swedenborg (ca. 1750).

Throughout the centuries, there have been many variations of Monarchianism. The modern heirs of this religion are the Unitarian-Universalist Church, the United Pentecostal Church, and some branches of Congregationalism. One might include the Mormons as Adoptionists.

Donatism (4th Century)

The final error addressed in the Apostles' Creed is Donatism, named after its author, Donatus. The bishop of Carthage, Donatus, developed his own version of Christianity, making it a religion of perfectionism. Anyone who failed to

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[3] Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016, www.britannica.com/topic/Monarchianism.

measure up to the standard set by Donatus would be excluded from the church. In keeping with perfectionism, he taught that the validity of the sacraments depended on the upright character of the officiant.

Again the pendulum swings. As with Montanism, this appears to have been a reactionary religion. To the far left swing those who, when threatened with persecution or even death, denied Christ in various degrees. These were given the label *Lapsi* (Latin: *lapsus*—a falling) because they lapsed from the faith. To the far right were the Donatists, who denied forgiveness to repentant Lapsi. They took this legalistic approach also toward those who had committed what they defined as a "deadly sin."

The Donatists regarded persecution as a mark of salvation. Indeed, some of them *sought* to be persecuted and martyred. This fits their attitude toward the Lapsi, for if persecution is a mark of salvation, then evading persecution would be a mark that one is not among the saved.

Apostles' Creed vs. Error

Article of Truth	**Error Refuted**
Maker of heaven and earth	Gnosticism
His only Son	Monarchianism
Conceived by the Holy Ghost	Modalistic Monarchianism
Born of (ἐκ) the Virgin Mary, suffered, ascended	Docetism / Gnosticism (Son born)
Sitteth at the right hand of God	Gnosticism
Come again to judge the living and the dead	Montanism
Holy Ghost	Gnosticism
Forgiveness of sins	Gnosticism / Donatism
Resurrection of the body—The early church used the word "flesh" instead of "body" because of Gnosticism.	Gnosticism

The Formation of the Apostles' Creed

The form of the Apostles' Creed which we use today was finalized around A.D. 750. While the name implies that it can be traced back to Christ's apostles, the apostles did not formulate this creed. There is no mention nor even a hint of its existence anywhere in the New Testament nor in the writings of the early church fathers. We retain the name because the creed expresses the teachings of the apostles. This does not mean that there were no creedal statements antedating the finalized form of the Apostles' Creed.

Precursors from Scripture

The following passages are considered by some to have been used as formal declarations of faith. However, this author could find no evidence that these were ever adopted and repeated as confessions. Nevertheless, it seems logical that some might have been used, especially in the midst of a controversy.

Hear O Israel, Jehovah is our God, Jehovah is one (Deuteronomy 6:4).[4]

Jehovah, He is God; Jehovah, He is God (1 Kings 18:39).[4]

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16).

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel! (John 1:49).

You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (John 6:68f).

My Lord and my God! (John 20:28).

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:36f).

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household (Acts 16:31).

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[4] Translation by the author.

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6).

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and . . . He was buried, and . . . He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:6-11 NASB).

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory. (1 Timothy 3:16).

Precursors from the Church Fathers

Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 AD): "Be deaf, therefore, when any man speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of heaven and on earth and below the earth; who also was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who will raise us also in like manner who believe on Him."[5]

Irenaeus (ca.180 AD): Irenaeus confessed his faith "in one God, the Father Almighty, who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all the things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who made

[5] "Symbola—Creeds," www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Symbola.htm

known through the prophets the plan of salvation, and the coming, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father to sum up all things and to raise anew all flesh of the whole human race."[6]

Tertullian (ca.200): "The Rule of Faith is altogether one, sole, immovable, and irreformable, namely to believe in one God Almighty, the maker of the world; and His Son, Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, on the third day raised again from the dead, received in the heavens, sitting now at the right hand of the Father, coming to judge the living and the dead, also through the resurrection of the flesh."[7]

Cyprian (250) produced a formula which reads: *"Credo in Deum Patrem, in Christum Filium, in Spiritum Sanctum et Sanctam Ecclesiam, remissionem peccatorum, vitam aeternam*."

The heretic Novatian (260) produced the following: *"Credo in Deum Patrem, Dominum omnipotentem, in Christum Jesum, Filium Dei, Dominum Deum nostrum, in Spiritum Sanctum."*

In 325, Emperor Constantine, in his self-proclaimed role as Pontifex Maximus (Highest Pontiff—transforming it from a pagan title to a Christian one), called a council in the city of Nicaea to resolve the error attributed to Arius, namely, the teaching that the Son is of a different essence/substance (ἑτερούσιος) from the Father. The formulation of the Nicene Creed was intended to resolve the controversy by confessing that the Son was of the *same* essence as the Father (ὁμοούσιος). This formulation rejected also *similar* essence (ὁμοιύσιος) which was an attempted compromise.[8]

Following the formulation of the Nicene Creed, a number of attempts were made to modify the simpler creed—the Apostles'. The Council of

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[6] "Creeds in the Bible," Creeds of Christendom, www.creeds.net/ancient/bible.htm

[7] Schaff, Philip, "The Creeds of Christendom: Greek and Latin Creeds," Volume II, pg. 17

[8] Since the Nicene Creed is not being examined in this article, little will be said about it. However, we look forward to publishing "Formulation of the Nicene Creed" in a future issue.

Antioch (341) tried to produce an alternate form. Some among them believed that ὁμοούσιος was inadequate since it was being used by a party who believed that there was *one* essence which was divided up between the Father and the Son. The resultant formulations of this council had little effect, since they did not adequately address the doctrinal differences.

Marcellus (341), Bishop of Ancyra and opponent of Arianism, formulated this version:

> Πιστεύω εἰς θεόν πατέρα παντοκράτορα, και εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, τόν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν, τὸν γεννηθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου, τὸν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου σταυρωθέντα καί ταφέντα, καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστάντα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἀναβάντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοῦς, καὶ καθήμενον ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ πατρός, ὅθεν ἔρχεται κρίνειν ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς, καὶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, ἁγίαν ἐκκλησίαν, ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν, ζωήν αἰώνιον.

In Marcellus's creed, we see attempts made to formulate the creed in such a way that no self-respecting Arian would take it upon his lips. Since creeds were used to determine who would or would not be accepted into the fellowship, Marcellus's creed probably served its purpose by excluding Arians.

It is difficult to understand why, after the formulation of the Nicene Creed, Marcellus would find it necessary to formulate his own version of the Apostles' Creed. Since the Council of Nicaea did not actually remove the Arian heresy from the world, Marcellus may have found a new creedal formula necessary to address particular errors affecting his congregation.

Early Creeds

Old Roman Creed / Rufinus's Creed

By the beginning of the fifth century, a common symbol called "The Old Roman Creed," was being used. Rufinus of Aquileia (ca.400 AD) is credited by some as the author. However, there seems to have been minor distinctions between the creed of Rufinus and the Old Roman Creed. This writer was

unable to determine which came first or, for that matter, if there was one that preceded both (probably) and on which they were based.

> *I believe in God almighty* [*the Father almighty* (Rufinus)]*,*
>
> *And in Christ Jesus, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried and the third day rose from the dead, who ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, whence he cometh to judge the living and the dead.*
>
> *And in the Holy Spirit, the holy church, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, the life everlasting.* [Rufinus omits the final phrase.]

Gallican Creed

The Apostles' Creed as we have it today was developed in Western Gaul (Gallican). Whether or not there was a single author is not known to this writer. However, evidence exists that it proliferated in Gaul during the sixth and following centuries. It had reached Ireland by the seventh century.

> *I believe in God the Father almighty,*
>
> *I also believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell, rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, sat down at the right hand of the Father, thence he is to come to judge the living and the dead.*
>
> *I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh and life eternal.*

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed is the result of years of struggle against false doctrine. Instigated by Satan and advanced by his slaves, attacks against the Godhead were launched against every aspect of the divine nature. Faithful Christians searched the Scriptures. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they learned the truth and used the sword of the Spirit to fight back. In the process, they began to formulate confessional statements. These served as a mirror, reflecting the light of Scripture and exposing the errors that were plaguing Christians. As

errors increased, the formulations were expanded and made more precise. This is the process that effected that precious credal statement that we call the Apostles' Creed.

> *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.*
>
> *And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*
>
> *I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.*[9]

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[9] Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: German-Latin-English, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1921.

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Panorama

CLC Convention Considers the Joint Statement—The Inside View

Wayne C. Eichstadt / Norman P. Greve

The Fall 2016 (Volume 113, Number 4) issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (WLQ) included a review of the 2016 Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) Convention and particularly its consideration of the *Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship*. It is often interesting to learn how others see you and how your words and actions resonate in their minds. This review of the CLC's position and course regarding *the Joint Statement* is no different. Having seen how certain actions were understood, we offer the view from "the inside."

There has been widespread and intense interest in the discussions between the CLC and WELS/ELS—rightly so. One reason there is such interest is because of the intense desire to uphold Scripture's truth and not lose a single part of it. Another reason for this interest is the prospect of achieving God-pleasing unity and the exercise of fellowship among confessional Christians in the ever-darkening world around us.

The energy—for some excitement, for some fear, for some wariness, for some skepticism, for some optimism—surrounding these discussions has at times "jumped the fence" and reached unwarranted conclusions. The fact that a committee of three men from each synod has agreed on a statement of doctrine has led some to conclude that there is no longer a doctrinal division between the synods, that the exercise of fellowship can immediately be restored, and that any differences that still remain are not divisive of fellowship.

Some have suggested that the *Joint Statement* was presented to each synod as an agreed settlement of the differences that have divided the CLC from the WELS/ELS over the last 56 years. The *Joint Statement* itself refutes this claim. The *Joint Statement* is a statement of a doctrine—a statement of what Scripture says in regard to the termination of fellowship. The *Joint Statement* does not draw a conclusion regarding the historic past, nor the coming future. The *Joint Statement* is intended as a declaration of scriptural truth. It does not speak to application of the doctrine in practice, nor does it suggest a restoration of fellowship.

Regarding a restoration of fellowship, the *Joint Statement* is at most a stepping stone—the first of what would be many. To say more or to draw more conclusions from this is to say too much. The introduction to the *Joint Statement* says: "[The Joint Statement is] offered as a scripturally sound presentation on matters of church fellowship that have separated us for many years. Agreement on this doctrine would be a necessary *first step* (emphasis added) toward the restoration of God-pleasing fellowship relations."

The WLQ observations of the CLC Convention include, "the ELS and WELS will have to wait patiently for an answer, as the CLC wrestles longer with the issue" (WLQ, p. 307). The CLC Convention chose a course that would allow for more study of Scripture *"to find out whether these things were so"* (Acts 17:11). Our desire to examine Scripture and to thoroughly consider the *Joint Statement* meant that it was an unrealistic expectation that the CLC Convention would deliver a final decision on the *Joint Statement* at the 2016 Convention.

The CLC treasures its ability to involve the laity in the work of the body, its decisions, and confession. Indeed, we find lay involvement essential. The 2016 Convention was the first opportunity for the body—including lay representation from its congregations—to consider and discuss the content of the *Joint Statement*. The Convention discussion helped define areas of question and concern among laity and clergy alike.

Having had the opportunity to discuss these things as a body, the Convention outlined a course of further study and discussion which includes the CLC Board of Doctrine offering its counsel and regional pastoral conferences undertaking studies in this area. The 2017 CLC General Pastoral Conference will study and review the statement, share its study and conclusions with the local congregations and the 2018 Convention, where, Lord-willing, the whole body will again undertake the matter and offer its conclusion (cf. Church of the Lutheran Confession's *Proceedings* of the Thirty-Second Convention, p. 70).

During this time of study and review, it is prudent for all—even those who believe they have already reached a conclusion in these matters—to continue reviewing and studying and with the light of Scripture evaluate and test all of what the *Joint Statement* says, and perhaps also what it does not say.

One place to direct such ongoing study is the doctrinal difference that lies at the root of the division between church bodies. The WLQ states, "WELS has

never been able to see that there has been a difference in the doctrinal principles taught by the two church bodies" (p. 308). However, we firmly believe there was a doctrinal difference—it was perhaps not understood that way by all, especially now with years of separation, but a difference nonetheless.

Herein lies the crux of the matter: Is it possible for separate church bodies today to find doctrinal agreement on the truth of Scripture while also disagreeing whether there ever was a doctrinal difference for the past fifty-plus years, and each body simultaneously declaring that it has not changed any teaching—that today's confession is the same as it has always been?

Such a scenario is difficult, because something has "to give." If each body maintains that it has held a consistent position in its confession and teaching for the past five decades, but there was separation then and unity now, then something has changed. Either the evaluation of consistency is incorrect or something else has changed the landscape. If it is something else, then that factor needs to be clearly identified, understood, and satisfactorily answered by Scripture.

The interpretation of history comes into play. WLQ posits, "Maybe it is enough if we each charitably recognize the validity of the other's historical interpretation, and confess that there were unfortunate, imperfect, statements and actions on all sides" (p. 308). Without question, there were statements and actions taken in the church bodies' histories that were imperfect and sinful—such is the case in any dealings of mankind. A clear and solid scriptural answer to the question, "*Is* it enough if we each charitably recognize the validity of the other's historical interpretation?" would go a long way toward a better understanding of where we are as church bodies confessionally and in relation to the *Joint Statement*.

WLQ also states in connection with history, "We admire men on both sides who courageously stood up for their convictions and followed their consciences in trying times" (p. 308). One can certainly admire these men, but also with the understanding that convictions can be wrong and consciences can be misguided. Strength of conviction and conscience alone do not address doctrinal difference.

Addressing the divide in historical understanding will not result in every historical question being answered—even if all the forefathers were yet

walking the earth that may not be possible. However, there also must be of necessity more than a casual tipping of the hat to differences of historical interpretation. This is part of the wrestling that the CLC is granting itself time to accomplish through study and restudy of Scripture. Again, it is prudent for all to revisit the history, and reconsider and study the teachings for the benefit of all. In doctrinal discussions of such magnitude, none dare be spectators waiting for others to lead or to catch up, but rather it is necessary for all to be engaged in the work at hand.

Our differences in outlook, historical interpretation, and even the doctrine itself have in various circles and at various times been portrayed as being a matter of generational divergence—the old clinging to the past, the young ready to move forward. While such differences may appear to fall along generational lines at times and in certain circumstances, doctrine is not generational. It is timeless.

The joys and the concerns of the present discussions, the *Joint Statement*, and our ongoing study of the Word are not defined by youth or age. Too many things within the external church have been so defined, even fostered, and that is to the detriment of all. While traditions, preferences, modes of communication, and other such things may be largely generational, our Savior is not, nor is the truth of His Word. If and whenever doctrine is made generational or when generational issues supersede doctrine, then the commission of our Savior is hampered, and our witness is weakened.

All who treasure the fellowship and bond of Christ desire to enjoy exercising that fellowship with others of the same mind and heart. How glorious it would be if error were corrected, division were mended, and our fellowship with like-minded and confessional believers expanded! It would be the work of the Spirit and to His glory. That work is done through the truth of Scripture. May the same Spirit so bless our ongoing study of His Word!

Lord Jesus, help, Thy Church uphold,
For we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold.
Oh, prosper well Your Word of grace
And spread its truth in ev'ry place.

(*The Lutheran Hymnal* 292:3)

Book Reviews

David T. Lau

John A. Braun: *Luther's Protest: From 95 Theses to Reformation*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI, 2016, paperback, 189 pages, 8 preliminary pages.

No doubt many new books about Martin Luther will be coming out in the next few months in connection with the five-hundredth anniversary of October 31, 1517—when Martin Luther nailed ninety-five sentences to the church door, calling for a discussion of the church's practice of selling indulgences. *Luther's Protest*, John Braun's brief account of the church-changing events of those days, is a reliable guide to what transpired.

Braun's book is organized according to the categories of space and time. Each chapter centers on one place and one event. For example, Chapter One is titled, "Rome, Italy—April 18, 1506." Chapter Two is titled, "Basel, Switzerland—March 1, 1516." The penultimate chapter, Chapter Twenty, is titled, "Augsburg, Germany—September 25, 1555." This is followed by the last chapter, which summarizes Martin Luther's life, "From Monk to Beggar,"—from self-righteous devotee of the papacy to a humble penitent recognizing that Christ owes us nothing and that we owe Him everything. This is demonstrated by some of Luther's final written words before he died, "We are beggars, that is true!" (p. 180).

Since each chapter refers to a certain place and a certain time, each chapter is preceded by a helpful page that features a map including that specific place and a time-line listing important events around that specific time. The most familiar incidents of Luther's career are covered, of course, such as the nailing of the theses in 1517, the Leipzig debate of 1519, Luther's heroic stand at Worms in 1521, and the public reading of the *Augsburg Confession* in 1530.

Other lesser known events are treated also, such as the activity of the popes during this time and the history leading up to the Roman Catholic Council of Trent which began meeting in 1545, the year before Luther's death. We usually think of Philip Melanchthon, Luther's good friend and co-worker, as caving in to Roman Catholic demands after Luther's death—and there is good evidence for that. But Braun informs us that when Emperor Charles V ordered the Lutheran leaders to go to Trent in 1547, Melanchthon wrote a document

that became known as the *Saxon Confession.* Of this document Braun says, "This confession did not step lightly; it was a refutation of Rome's assertions . . . Melanchthon wrote that their confession excludes justification by works and earning satisfaction by a Christian's service to Christ. . . . They turn away from the political and secular concept of Rome and its assertion of superiority. Instead, they asserted that the church was a spiritual communion of believers in Christ" (pp. 168-169). "Melanchthon was also ordered to attend the Council of Trent in January 1552 and went to Nuremberg to await instructions. But he never went on to Trent" (p. 169) because of other events that took place at that time.

From *Luther's Protest* the reader may learn other interesting and important facts about Martin Luther and the times and places in which he lived and worked. I enjoyed reading this book, and I am sure many others will enjoy it also. It led me to praise our Lord and God anew for guiding this history in such a way that the saving gospel of Jesus Christ was once more brought to light, and in fact it is still shining among us to this day.

Mark E. Braun: *Time between the Testaments—Connecting Malachi to Matthew*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI, 2016, paperback, 107 pages.

There are three sections in this book. The first section summarizes the history between the time of Malachi and the conception of the Christ. During this time the Jews in Palestine were under the rule of the Persians, the Greeks, the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, the Maccabees, and finally the Romans. With the exception of the Maccabees, these rulers were all foreigners, and the Jews would have been happy to have a Messiah like David who would drive out these heathen rulers. This section includes some helpful maps, chronological tables, and family trees (the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, and the Hasmoneans, who were the descendants of the Maccabees). The Jewish historian Josephus is the source for much of this history.

The second section gives a brief description of each of the so-called apocryphal books. First and Second Maccabees are books of history, but the history in Second Maccabees does not come after the history in First

Maccabees, it actually precedes it and coincides with it. For example, the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple in 164 B.C. is presented in both First Maccabees and Second Maccabees. Braun points out: "The style of 2 Maccabees is clearly different from that of 1 Maccabees. Unlike the straightforward historical approach taken by the author in 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees contains appeals to readers' emotions" (p. 40).

Concerning the books of Judith and Tobit, Braun says: "Both contain such obvious mistakes that readers can only conclude that they were written as works of fiction" (pp. 43-44). There are clear errors in both the history and the geography. An angel named Raphael makes his appearance in the book of Tobit, but this angel is never mentioned in the canonical books of the Bible.

The author discusses 1 Esdras, the Prayer of Manasseh, Additions to Daniel, Susanna, the Prayer of Azariah, Bel and the Dragon, and the Additions to Esther. Two books of wisdom literature are included in the apocryphal books, The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus) and the Wisdom of Solomon. These books were often quoted by early Christians and even by early Lutherans. But their contents do not always agree with Scripture. Braun writes: "In view of the many confusing and inaccurate statements one finds throughout the book (Ecclesiasticus), it seems ironic that the early church considered this book useful as an instruction manual by which Christians should live their lives" (p. 63). Of the Wisdom of Solomon, Braun says, "Some parts of the Wisdom of Solomon agree with canonical teaching" (p. 65), and "yet the most important element for all Christian faith and teaching—the Redeemer from sin—is absent from the Wisdom of Solomon" (p. 66).

Other books discussed include Baruch, The Letter of Jeremiah, and 2 Esdras. Our Lutheran fathers quoted the apocryphal books quite often. Braun points out, "It has been only during the last two hundred years that Protestants—including Lutherans—have avoided the Apocrypha completely and are now unfamiliar with its contents" (p. 74). But he also maintains, "Lutherans have rejected the apocryphal books from the Canon chiefly because of the questionable doctrinal statements some of the books contain and the historical mistakes found in them" (p. 72). For this reason Christians do not really need to know much about the Apocrypha at all.

The third section of Braun's book deals with the four groups that emerged among the Jews during the period between the Old Testament and the New: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, and the Essenes. To their credit "the

Pharisees accepted all the books of the Hebrew Bible—our 39 Old Testament books—as inspired and authoritative," but to their discredit "the Pharisees also embraced a growing collection of traditions and rules as equal or nearly equal to the Hebrew Scriptures themselves" (p. 77). The Sadducees, on the other hand, "refused to accept the 'traditions of the elders' as authoritative" (p. 83). It is sometimes said that "the Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures" (p. 84), but Braun disagrees with that claim because "Josephus nowhere charged the Sadducees with rejecting any of the Hebrew Scriptures" (p. 84), even though he detested the Sadducees and would have accused them of that if it had been true.

Braun's book is certainly a reliable guide to the intertestamental history and books. But I do wish that there had also been a fourth section, pointing out how God gave the prophet Daniel much of this history in advance. In fact, since the book of Daniel is part of Holy Scripture, breathed out by the Holy Spirit, Daniel's prophecies concerning what would happen in the years before the Messiah came are bound to be even more reliable historically and doctrinally than the apocryphal books or the writings of Josephus. Chapters 7-12 of the book of Daniel are not well-known among us, but the intertestamental history is there in prophecy, including the Persians, the Greeks, the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, the Maccabees, and the Romans. The coming Messiah is there also, as we read in Daniel 9: 25-26.

Edward Engelbrecht: *One True God—Understanding Large Catechism II.66*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO., 2007, paperback, 150 pages, 9 preliminary pages.

Ever since the tragedy that destroyed the World Trade Center in 2001, a controversy has raged among some Christians as to whether the god of the Muslims is the same as the God of the Christians. Even some leaders in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have made the claim that Allah and the God of Christians are one and the same God, and they have defended joint worship services in which supposedly Christians and Muslims have prayed to the same God.

Martin Luther's *Large Catechism* has been used by some to support the opinion that Luther himself conceded that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. The key passage is paragraph 66 in the Second Part, which deals with the Apostles' Creed. This paragraph reads in English according to the Kolb—Wengert edition of 2000,

> "These three articles of the Creed, therefore, separate and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside this Christian people, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites—even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God—nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing, and therefore they remain in eternal wrath and condemnation. For they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit" (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert edition, p. 440).

Even though the obvious thrust of this paragraph is to make a separation between Christians and all others, including Muslims (referred to as Turks), the English translation seems to concede that even the heathen, Turks, and Jews *"believe in and worship only the one, true God."* In an effort to clarify what Luther meant by this statement, Edward Engelbrecht, a senior editor at Concordia Publishing House, has written *One True God*, which leaves no stone unturned in answering this very specific question: Did Martin Luther believe that Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Perhaps even more important is the related question: *Do* Christians and Muslims worship the same God?

Engelbrecht delves into the setting of Luther's *Large Catechism*, Luther's writings on the natural knowledge of God and other related topics, Luther's style of writing, and a detailed analysis of the controverted paragraph. In the opinion of this reviewer, Engelbrecht proves his point from every possible angle. His conclusion is that Luther taught that "Christians are the only people on earth who genuinely believe in and worship the one true God" (p. 6) and that this is what Luther was saying in his *Large Catechism*. The Kolb-Wengert translation is misleading. A better translation, supported by numerous grammatical and rhetorical arguments, is this translation found in *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*: *"Even if we were to concede that everyone outside Christianity—whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and*

hypocrites—believe in and worship only one true God, it would still be true that they do not know what His mind toward them is and cannot expect any love or blessing from Him" (p. 93).

The key grammatical point is that the clause introduced by "even though" is a concessive *contrary-to-fact* clause Luther often used in dialectical and rhetorical argumentation. To make it even more clear, one could translate, "Even if we were to concede that everyone outside Christianity believes in and worships only one true God—which, of course, is impossible—it would still be true that they cannot expect any love from Him." Understanding the paragraph in this way makes perfect sense, since it makes Luther agree with himself, with the Lutheran confessions, and with Scripture. Unfortunately, Engelbrecht's thorough examination will probably not convince those who want to believe apart from all evidence that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Their number is legion.

Bo Giertz: *To Live with Christ* (Devotions), translated by Richard Wood with Bror Erickson, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo., 2008; hard cover, 830 pages.

Bo Giertz lived from 1905 to 1998. The Foreword by John Pless tells us that Giertz "journeyed from atheism to become the bishop of Gothenburg in the Lutheran Church of Sweden" (p. 5). During his years as bishop he tried to bring the Church of Sweden back to orthodox Lutheranism. One of his last struggles involved his opposition to the movement to ordain women as pastors. It seems he lost that struggle as well as many others. He realized, as few did, what had been lost. He wrote: "I wonder if ever a church, which has been given such a rich inheritance, has been so careless about it. . . . Everything else is submitted to the law of change, but His Word will remain—and it is for us to hold on to that steadfast to the end. This faith is on a collision course with some of the pet dogmas of our time: the belief that everything is relative, that everything is continually changing, which at the same time means progress, even in new concepts of faith and altered codes of morality" (pp. 6-7).

In this large book there are short devotions for every day of the church year, beginning with the First Sunday in Advent. There are additional devotions for special days on the calendar. Each devotion is based on a larger section of

Scripture (unprinted) and a Bible passage (printed) and concludes with a prayer. My wife and I have made use of these devotions during this past year and have found them worthwhile, especially the prayers that are included. There were only a very few places where we questioned his exegesis; for example, in his understanding of the baptism of John the Baptist and his explanation of the Antichrist.

As we should expect, the devotions preach law and gospel. Those who have read *The Hammer of God* by Giertz know that he has a solid grasp of the gospel. These devotions also emphasize that the gospel of forgiveness does not give us a license to live as we please in the hope of future forgiveness. True faith in Christ always produces fruits of faith. That is, the Holy Spirit through the gospel produces the fruits of faith in us.

After a devotion on truth based on Jeremiah 5:20-31, we find this prayer, which is typical for the kind of plain language that is used in these prayers.

> "Help me to never cheat in Your presence—and You are present everywhere. You know how easy that is for me. I postpone what I should do. I find something else to do when You give me something to do. I try to think of something else and make excuses about having other duties to perform when You chastise me for what I've neglected. I blame my problems on not being able to understand when following Your Word doesn't suit me. That's my old Adam. You know that, Lord. Help me to always be honest and truthful so I love Your truth and acknowledge You in everything" (p. 502).

Here is another prayer to help us live as forgiven children of God.

> "Lord Jesus, I realize I can never be right before You and can never have anything to plead for, except You. If I believe that everything can be as it used to be because You're so good and forgiving, I'm wrong. If I believe I have to be completely different because You're so strict, I'm wrong again. Only You can teach me Your truths and allow me to receive forgiveness so completely and for nothing that I rejoice and am willing to do anything. Help me, Lord. Give me a faith that is active in love. Glory be to Your name" (p. 470).