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In the Footsteps of the Reformers

Johannes Bugenhagen

David J. Reim

That's "wicked heresy" and this Martin Luther is "one of the worst heretics who ever lived." Was that perhaps Cardinal Cajetan or Johann Eck, avowed opponents of Martin Luther?

No, those were the words of Johannes Bugenhagen. But only 2½ years later, Bugenhagen was Martin Luther's pastor and a highly trusted partner in the Reformation. What happened? Johannes Bugenhagen's story is a wonderful demonstration of the truths expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans, chapter 10.

[I]f you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:9-17).

Paul wrote, "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). That is guaranteed, because God's salvation is perfect and complete. There is nothing more to be added by us. But, as Paul says, people will not call on the Lord if they don't believe in Him, and it is impossible to believe in Christ if they haven't heard about Him, and they will never hear about Christ unless someone tells them. In short, no one will ever come to faith and be saved if he doesn't hear the true Word of God.

This is easy to understand if one is talking about people who have never heard about Jesus. Could this also be true of someone who has grown up in the church? The life and faith of Johannes Bugenhagen demonstrates that, yes, this can be true also for those who grow up in the church.

Bugenhagen was born in Pomerania on the Baltic Sea, which is part of northern Germany and Poland today. He grew up in the church of his day and became the rector, or headmaster, of the school in Treptow. Later, Bugenhagen was ordained as the priest in the city church of Treptow and also became a lecturer in biblical studies.

In October 1520, Bugenhagen heard a reading of Luther's treatise, "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church," which points out many of the abuses in the Catholic Church especially in regard to the sacraments. That's when Bugenhagen called it a "wicked heresy" and said Luther was one of the worst heretics who ever lived. But the tract aroused his curiosity. He took it home, studied it more carefully, and compared what Luther wrote to the Scripture references. One can imagine how surprised his colleagues were a few days later when Bugenhagen told them, "Why should I make you a long speech? The whole world is blind and imprisoned in extreme darkness. This man alone has grasped what is really true." Bugenhagen was so impressed and interested to learn more that he left his positions in Treptow, moved to Wittenberg, and at the age of 35 enrolled as a student in the University where Luther taught.

Although Bugenhagen grew up in the church and was even a priest and teacher of the Bible, he didn't really know Jesus or His salvation. He was held captive under the false belief that he had to earn God's favor and forgiveness by his works. As a result, Bugenhagen never really "*call[ed] upon the name of the Lord*" for forgiveness of sins or salvation, that is, until Luther preached the gospel to him through the tracts that he wrote. After hearing the gospel from Luther's writings, Bugenhagen finally understood that sinners are saved by grace alone through faith, apart from any works that we might do. Then, Bugenhagen could truly believe in his heart and confess the Lord Jesus with his lips. Then, he could truly "*call upon the name of the Lord,*" and he was saved.

Once he had been led to the truth, Bugenhagen had to do something with it. He could not bear to just sit back and say, "I'm saved by grace, that's great." The genuine gospel changed his life, and he quickly became involved in the Lutheran Reformation.

Bugenhagen arrived in Wittenberg only a few months before Luther's appearance at the Diet of Worms and its subsequent events. He very quickly

became a trusted friend and coworker of Luther and Melanchthon, working closely with them in virtually every aspect of the Reformation. He helped them write several important disputations and official documents, including the Augsburg Confession. He assisted Luther in translating the Bible and later produced a Low German version of Luther's Bible translation.

Just two and a half years after coming to Wittenberg, Johannes Bugenhagen was called to be the pastor of St. Mary's church in Wittenberg, which also made him Martin Luther's pastor. He served at St. Mary's for the rest of his life, another thirty-five years. He also performed the wedding of Martin and Katharina, he preached at Luther's funeral, and he cared for Katharina and her children after Luther died.

Johannes Bugenhagen was not satisfied with simply furthering the reformation in Saxony, he also had a burning desire to bring the gospel message to the people of Pomerania where he grew up. He knew that the true gospel had brought him to faith, and he was committed to bring that gospel to others so that they could know the truth and believe. He wanted his family and friends and his fellow countrymen to have the same great comfort, peace, and joy that he found in knowing that Christ has done everything for each sinner's salvation. Salvation is a gift he wanted to share!

The Apostle Paul told the Romans, *"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also"* (Romans 1:14-15). Johannes Bugenhagen had that same commitment; he considered it his debt to preach the way of salvation to the people of the North. He did so with such zeal that he became known as *"The Second Apostle to the North."*

Bugenhagen remained the pastor in Wittenberg, but he left the relative safety of Wittenberg and Saxony and made many extended trips to northern Germany, Denmark, and Norway to proclaim the true way of salvation. This is even more noteworthy when you remember that not long before this, Johann Esch and Heinrich Voes were burned at the stake for teaching Lutheran theology. The northern regions did not have the same protection that Elector Frederick the Wise provided in Saxony. But Bugenhagen didn't let that stop him from bringing the true message of salvation to the people of his homeland. He was instrumental in establishing and organizing many Lutheran Churches all across northern Germany and southern Scandinavia. He also reformed the Pomeranian University of Greifswald and modeled it after the University of Wittenberg.

We too have been given the glorious gift of salvation through the gospel. We pray that we would have the burning desire of Johannes Bugenhagen and other reformers to share what we have been given wherever the Lord opens the door. There are several lessons we can learn from Bugenhagen.

First, true zeal for mission work flows from an understanding of the greatness of the gift we have received—the gift of salvation in Christ. When Johannes came to realize salvation was not something he had to earn, he was compelled to share that with others.

Remember how we too have received the most amazing gift of love. *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). There really is nothing more liberating and joyful. We were at enmity against God and are now reconciled to be His children.

Conventional wisdom suggests that if we want to be reconciled to God—if we want to be back in His good favor so that we don’t receive His wrath and punishment—we have to make it up to Him. We have to do something to show that we really do love Him and that we will do good. But that is an impossible task because God’s requirements are impossible for us sinners to meet. He requires that if we want to be with Him, we have to be perfect and holy just as God is perfect and holy. Many accounts in Scripture show how dreadful it is to be an enemy of God, but the harder we try to live up to God’s standards, the deeper our despair grows because we cannot appease Him or win His favor with our works.

What a relief to know that God has come to reconcile us to Himself. God has provided everything we need to be in His good favor. Jesus suffered the punishment for our sins and He gives us His perfect righteousness. Now He promises, *“The Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved’”* (Romans 10:11-13). Oh, the sweet joy! How can we not share that good news?

Another lesson to learn from Bugenhagen is to go to the people whom you love and about whom you care. Pomerania was his home, so naturally he longed to bring the gospel message to the people there. Your mission field begins with those who are closest to you. You want them to be saved too. Don’t put it off, share the message of salvation with them. *“Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved,”* but that also means that those who do

not call upon Him for forgiveness and salvation will be eternally lost. Will you keep silent when that is the case with people you know and about whom you care?

A third lesson to learn from Bugenhagen is that many who need to hear the gospel may be found within the churches—churches where the true gospel is no longer proclaimed. Just as it was in Bugenhagen’s homeland, there are many today who profess Christianity who don’t really know how we are saved. Many are under the same delusion that we have to be good people in order for God to love us. Just because people say they believe in God, don’t assume that they know how they are saved. Find out what they know and help them to understand more fully.

Finally, our love for souls doesn’t stop with the people around us. Bugenhagen didn’t just go to his hometown and his family. He went to cities and towns all across northern Germany, Denmark, and Norway. Jesus’ salvation is for *all* people. So we too are also very eager to reach out to people of all nations. Wherever the Lord opens the door, we are eager to go and preach the gospel.

Certainly there will be risks and a high price tag on that mission work around the world, but let’s also learn from Bugenhagen that when blood-bought souls and their eternal lives are involved, there is no risk or sacrifice too great. He gave his time, energy, and money. He even risked his life to bring the true gospel to the people of the north.

May we be ready to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to help spread the gospel in the world. What a privilege is ours, to be able to literally give salvation to thousands of people around the world through our offerings and our prayers for our missionaries. It is easy to become short-sighted and look only at the needs of our own congregations, but there is much more to do.

Let us be inspired by Johannes Bugenhagen and the other reformers to continue in their footsteps and spread the good news wherever we can. May we treasure the gospel of our salvation and be eager to share it with others, lest they never know the way of salvation. May the Holy Spirit grant us the power and wisdom to do so, and may He work through the Word which we proclaim to bring many to *“call upon the name of the LORD [and] be saved.”*



Millennialism from the Early Church to the Reformation

John K. Pfeiffer

Introduction

The desire for a heaven on earth is as old as earth itself. In the beginning, God did indeed create a paradise on earth, a place of peace, love, joy, righteousness, and harmony throughout all creation. Had all things remained as originally created, there would have been a continuance of a single kingdom of God in which God ruled and all creatures willingly and happily submitted to His rule. There all creatures would have enjoyed the endlessly abundant benefits of the Creator's loving hand.

However, man's fall into sin changed everything. It was not only man who was affected. All of *"creation was subjected to futility"* and *"the whole creation groans . . . together"* (Romans 8:20,22). At that point in time, another kingdom asserted itself: the kingdom of Satan, who is *"the prince of the power of the air"* (Ephesians 2:2) and *"the ruler of this world"* (John 12:31). Two kingdoms lay in opposition to one another, the one consisting of God and His holy angels, and the other consisting of Satan, his evil angels, and mankind.

God's kingdom is governed in righteousness and holiness. Satan's kingdom is governed in unrighteousness and unholiness. God's kingdom consists of *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"* (Galatians 5:22f JKP).¹ Satan's kingdom consists of *"sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these"* (Galatians 5:19ff JKP). The contrast could not be greater.

However, God would not have things remain as they were immediately after the fall. He provided a way that allowed the Apostle John to write, *"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"* (1 John 5:19). Without the gracious intervention of God, there would have been no "we" in this passage. However, through a monumental act of love, God provided the one and only way to rescue all who are *"under the sway of the wicked one."* God delivered up His own Son on account of our trespasses and raised Him again on account of our justification. Therefore, being declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Scripture quotations identified as "JKP" are the author's translation.

Yet, there is in man the desire to have the lost, earthly paradise back again, but not at the expense of the present evil world or of his present evil desires. Therefore, many have looked for a utopian kingdom in which their own desires would come to fruition: peace, prosperity, and pleasures. Furthermore, it is common to most of these utopians that such a kingdom would have to be established through the violent destruction of the non-believers—anyone not adhering to the beliefs of the utopians.

Through the centuries, variations on this theme can be seen in religions such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Judaism, “Christianity,” and Islam.

Zarathustra (also called Zoroaster, ca. 630 B.C.) described history as “occurring in successive thousand-year periods, each of which will end in a cataclysm of heresy and destruction. These epochs will culminate in the final destruction of evil by a triumphant messianic figure, the *Saoshyant*, at the end of the last millennial age.”²

Some branches of Buddhism (ca. 5th century B.C.) taught that there will be a series of cataclysmic catastrophes that will destroy all but the faithful. The survivors will then come under the leadership of a messianic reincarnation of Buddha (Maitreya) who will guide the world into a millennial “age of spiritual purity, incredibly long life, and material well-being.”³

Pre-Christian Jewish apocryphal writings predicted an enduring earthly kingdom for the Jews: “My Son the anointed one will be revealed along with those who are with him, and those who remain will rejoice for four hundred years” (2 Esdras 7:28, *Common English Bible*). Among the Jews in the days of the Messiah, many held the belief that the Messiah would reestablish the kingdom of David on earth.

Within Islam, “the normative branch of Shi’ism . . . adheres to the Last Imam or the Mahdi, who disappeared and went into occultation [sic] in 874. He will reappear at the end of the world and establish the messianic kingdom, and inaugurate a dynasty that will rule for hundreds of years.”⁴ Perhaps the modern Islamic hope of establishing a new caliphate is rooted in a millenarian belief.

² “Millennialism,” *New World Encyclopedia*. Accessed February 28, 2017. <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org> .

³ Catherine Wessinger, “The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism (Oxford Handbooks). pg.312. New York : Oxford University Press, p. 312, © 2011, <https://books.google.com/books>. (accessed February 28, 2017).

⁴ Wessinger, *op. cit.*, pg. 269

There has been a wide spectrum of variations on the millennial theme. However, among Jews and Christians, there are certain common teachings. Rev. Artur Villares of the Lutheran Church of Portugal lists the following:

- emphasis on Old Testament prophecy, connection of prophecy with contemporary political events
- political restoration of Israel
- a physical kingdom with a collectivistic social program
- several other doctrinal errors in connection with the millennium⁵

To this, we could add some form of “Armageddon,” a fierce, physical battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, the good always consisting of those who hold this belief.

A Confusion of Kingdoms

Since the time of Christ, we find among professing Christians those who believe that Christ will establish a physical kingdom on earth, in which the faithful will dominate in a one-thousand-year reign of temporal peace, sensory pleasures, and material prosperity. This has become known as “millennialism.”⁶ It may very well be that for some, this delusion is rooted in simple ignorance of the teachings of the Bible. However, in this author's opinion, it is more diabolical for many, being deeply rooted in a perverted interpretation of the nature of the kingdom of God. They see the kingdom of God as a combination of the spiritual, physical, and political. Their perception is distorted by *“the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the arrogance of this life”* (1 John 2:16 JKP). Governed by such desires, some of which may not be sinful in themselves (e.g., hunger, thirst), many want an

⁵ Artur Villares, “Brief History of Millennialism,” Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. CELC Europe Conference in Plzen, Czech Republic. Access April 21, 2007. <http://www.celc.info>. (No longer available, the website does not archive conference presentations.)

⁶ Among others, including the heathen, the belief has been less specific in temporal and theological terms, but still professes a form of heaven-on-earth. This is known as “millenarianism.” The Greek-based term associated with millenarianism is “chiliasm.” In this article, we will restrict ourselves to the use of the word “millennialism,” when the context addresses a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on earth. The word “millenarian” will be used when the context addresses other concepts of a divine, earthly kingdom. It is not the purpose of this article to delineate the various views that fall under the word “millennialism.” Rather, we consider them together as a common view that includes a period of temporal peace, sensory joys, and material prosperity for “the faithful.” We acknowledge that, among some, the millennium is described more in spiritual terms than material.

earthly kingdom of food and drink, i.e., of sensory satisfaction. To their detriment, they lose sight of the reality that *“the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 14:17).

As stated above, it is “diabolical,” because *Diabolos* is sadistically happy with the belief in millennialism. If he can convince people to anticipate a physical battle in this world, they will be distracted from the real dangers and real battles in this world. They will focus on political powers and physical weapons. They will be blind to the fact that *“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12). If Satan can deflect attention from this spiritual warfare, he can exercise his cunning craftiness and lead people into all manner of sin and error.

When Christ said, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, John 18:36), He was stating an eternal truth. The eternal, spiritual nature of the kingdom of God does not allow for dispensational transitions and substantive alterations. It is what it is and will always be what it is, even as its King Jehovah—*“I AM WHO I AM”* (Exodus 3:14). Yet, there are those who purport to worship the King, but are not satisfied to *“worship . . . in spirit and truth”* (John 4:23). They seek something more tangible on this side of the grave, even as many Jews did during the days of Jesus’ state of humiliation. To such Jews, as well as to millennialists, Jesus’ response to the Pharisee still stands true. The Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus replied, *“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:20,21).

It is significant that the placard nailed to the cross read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Below those words hung a bleeding, dying man. This speaks volumes about the nature of Christ’s kingdom. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the thief on the cross saw what was really taking place: Jesus was coming into His kingdom. His kingdom is one established not by the sword, but by the suffering and death and, then, the victorious resurrection of the King. Jesus establishes His kingdom not over us, but within us. He overthrows the forces of evil within that kept us captive and sets up His throne in our hearts, ruling by grace.

While we recognize that there are two kingdoms, we also recognize that the ultimate authority is God's. He is the Ruler over everything. However, He still speaks of Satan as the ruler of this world, even the god of this age (Ephesians 2:2, 6:12, 2 Corinthians 4:4).

The unbelieving world is under the sway of the devil. Spiritually, he dominates by deceiving, tempting, and misguiding those who do not believe in Christ. However, our Savior has destroyed "*him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,*" and released us who were once in bondage to Satan (Hebrews 2:14,15). Under God's control, Satan can do no real damage to God's own people. In Christ, we have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:14) and even now are crushing him under our feet (Romans 16:20) by the preaching of the gospel.

Likewise, God controls the world that surrounds the Christian. Christ said, "*[B]e of good cheer, I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). Having all authority in heaven and on earth, our Lord will not allow the world to do anything that will truly harm His people. His control of the world is largely through "the powers that be." It was so with His own chosen people, Israel. The Israel of the flesh, but not of the spirit, needed to be controlled by force. The sword in the hand of government instilled the fear of punishment and kept them in line. As for the Israel of the spirit, they needed no such control.

Even so, knowingly or unknowingly, the kingdoms of men serve God's purpose in curbing the world's voracious appetite for evil, particularly evil perpetrated against the people of God. Thus, God prevents the forces of evil from having their own way in all things.

As for God's people, we submit to the earthly authorities not only because they have a natural authority over us, but especially because God wants us to submit. We are controlled by Christ's love (2 Corinthians 5:14). It is not the sword of the government (Romans 13:4), but the sword of the Spirit that guides us (Ephesians 6:17).

So it shall be while this world stands. Two kingdoms at odds with each other: the kingdom of God ruled by God's grace through the Word and within the heart, and the kingdom of Satan ruled by the power of sin operating in and around the wicked. However, the kingdom of Satan is not autonomous, but must submit to the authority of God, who operates through the "*authorities that exist*" (Romans 13:1).

For our present consideration, this means that in order for the beliefs of millennialists to come to pass, God would have to radically change the nature of this world. The kingdom of Satan would have to be exterminated, leaving only God ruling by His Word within the hearts of believers. However, this does not appear to be in the thinking of the millennialists. Rather, they see human government being employed by God to establish the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. This means that the role of the government will change. No longer will government be God's tool for reining in the recalcitrant. In the millennial kingdom, government will be God's tool for maintaining Christ's rule.⁷

In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the servants are told not to attempt to root out the tares for fear that they will root out some of the look-alike wheat also. However, when the time of harvest—Judgment Day—comes, the difference between the two plants will be evident. Then, the tares can be rooted out and thrown into the fire.

Millennialists want to root out the tares before the time of the harvest and use the kingdoms of this world to accomplish this. Accordingly, there is among the millennialists a confusion of kingdoms. If this confusion were to be corrected, there might be no adherents to the millennial belief.

Early Christianity⁸

Within the early Christian churches, there were leaders who promoted millennialism. It is not entirely clear whether all who were labeled as “millennialists” were truly guilty of that error. It is difficult with writings of such antiquity to identify the actual authors—attributions have been proven wrong in the past. Suffice it to say that this error was being proclaimed, even if we don't know who proclaimed it.

This error and others⁹ were being espoused, just as the Spirit prophesied. *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift*

⁷ Those who make the millennial kingdom more spiritual in nature would probably disagree with this assessment.

⁸ “Christianity” applies to the visible church, including all who profess to believe in Jesus, even though many deny His lordship by rejecting His teachings.

⁹ See John K. Pfeiffer, “The Formulation of the Apostles' Creed,” *Journal of Theology*, Fall 2016, Volume 56, Number 3.

destruction" (2 Peter 2:1). Satan has always been active in his futile attempt to destroy the Church and extinguish light of the gospel. Some errors were rooted out, while others remained, festered, and spread within the organized church. Millennialism was one such festering sore.

The Impact of the Persecution

One factor in the early church that contributed to the hope for an earthly kingdom of God was the aforementioned attack against the churches. Suffering under the onslaught of persecution from without and the subterfuge of false teachers from within, some people became the victims of teachers who took advantage of their suffering. To the afflicted, these teachers held out the hope of an imminent return by Christ to establish an earthly kingdom.

Through the ages, the suffering of Christians has been a breeding ground for millennialistic doctrine. The deluded cling to the hope of temporal vindication at the hands of an avenging God.

However, "[w]ith the advent of imperial Christianity, millenarianism was pushed to the very margins of acceptable Christian thought."¹⁰

When, in the fourth century, Constantine adopted Christianity as his religion of choice, things changed for the churches. Their property was restored to them. Persecution of Christians became illegal. Christianity was socially acceptable and even popular. Since it was the religion of choice for the empire, it became the religion of choice for many people. Externally, peace reigned. Gradually, the millennial hope faded.

The Impact of the Hierarchy

As errorists besieged the early church, some felt that the solution was to be found by establishing clerical ranks. The title of "bishop" was exalted and bestowed upon those who were ranked higher than the average pastor. It was expected that the bishops would be faithful and would expose error and root it out. As the clerical hierarchy evolved, people became more and more dependent upon the clergy to maintain the truth. The higher the clerical rank, the more they were revered and trusted.

¹⁰ "Millennialism (Millenarianism, Chiliasm)," Draft of article for the Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of World Religions, 1999. Accessed March 29, 2017. <http://www.mille.org/people/rlpages/millennialism-mw-encyl.html>.

However, it wasn't long before it became evident that placing one's trust in the "princes" of the church was a fatal mistake. It was from the mouths of these very leaders that error spewed forth. Chief among the errors was the doctrine of work-righteousness.

Tertullian speaks of offering sacrifices for the dead and praying for them.

Origin speaks of works of penance and *ignis purgatorius* (fire of purgatory). The concepts of mortal and venial sins were in their early stages of development at this time.

Cyprian (Bishop): "The Holy Spirit speaks in the sacred Scriptures, and says, 'By almsgiving and faith sins are purged' [Tobit 12:9—JKP]. Not assuredly those sins which had been previously contracted, for those are purged by the blood and sanctification of Christ. Moreover, He says again, 'As water extinguishes fire, so almsgiving quenches sin' (Sirach 3:30)."¹¹

Basil (Bishop): "It is necessary to confess our sins to those to whom the dispensation of God's mysteries is entrusted [i.e. priests]. Those doing penance of old are found to have done it before the saints."¹²

Ambrose (Bishop): "But what was impossible was made possible by God, who gave us so great a grace. It seemed likewise impossible for sins to be forgiven through penance; yet Christ granted even this to His Apostles, and by His Apostles it has been transmitted to the offices of priest."¹³ Ambrose refused to allow Emperor Theodosius into church, until he agreed to do eight months of penance for the massacre of 7000 in Thessalonica.

Once the foundation of work-righteousness had been sufficiently laid, the bishop of Rome asserted himself as the head of the church, the one and only vicar of Christ. Implicitly trusting that his word was equal to God's Word, nation after nation fell under his seduction and embraced the satanic message of work-righteousness. What made this different from the pervasive, work-righteous message of all pagan religions was that this was being foisted upon the people in the name of Christ. As the nations swallowed this deadly doctrine, the governments of those nations gradually submitted to the secular

¹¹ Miguel Hidalgo, Treatise 8, Catholic Encyclopedia. Accessed September 13, 2018. www.newadvent.org/fathers/050708.htm .

¹² Confession. Accessed: September 13, 2018. www.churchfathers.org/confession .

¹³ The Early Church Fathers on Confession, St. Sophia Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. Accessed September 13, 2018. www.stsophiaukrainian.cc/resources/ecfonconfession .

rule of the Antichrist. In submission, they were willing to take arms against anyone who opposed him. So it was that dukes and counts, kings and princes, even emperors of the Holy Roman Empire used their power to crush any attempt to proclaim full and free forgiveness through the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. Thousands of people were persecuted, tortured, and killed by papal minions.

The Impact of Islam

The third member in this evil trilogy (1: work-righteousness, 2: the papacy) is the rise of Islam. This occurred simultaneously with the rejection of the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ and the rise of the papacy. Beginning in the seventh century, jihad spread like a wildfire, consuming the nations of the Middle East, Asia Minor, northern Africa, and Spain. “Christian” nations that had sacrificed the gospel message on the altar of their own work-righteousness were now made subject to the message of Mohammed.

It is the opinion of this writer that this was not mere coincidence. It follows the pattern that we observe in the Old Testament. God’s manner of contending with the nations of the world (especially Israel) had a direct relation with the Messianic promise. Time and again, when Israel would turn away from their divinely ordained destiny and run after false gods, God brought judgments on them. Likewise, when heathen nations would attempt to destroy the chosen people—through whom alone the Messiah would come—this was an attack on the Messiah, and those nations were punished. Time and again, God raised up powerful, albeit heathen, nations to carry out His vengeance.

The rise of Islam follows this same pattern: 1) God graciously spreads the gospel throughout the Mediterranean world, 2) the churches reject Christ’s works in favor of their own, 3) Islam rages through this region.

The Dark Ages (For our purposes, A.D. 500-1500)

So it was that the nations of the world came under the dominion of Satan. The heathen world was attacking Christians. The organized church was attacking Christians. Across the continents of earth, mankind was doing the bidding of Satan. Except in places rare, remote, and obscure,¹⁴ the hellish smoke of salvation by works had blotted out the light of the Son. The comfort and stability that the gospel provided was vanishing.

Persecution was once again falling upon true Christians. Those who refused to submit to the authority of the pope were made to suffer at the hands of his minions. This circumstance, together with Islamic persecution, formed a breeding ground for the resurrection of millennialistic hopes among the downtrodden.

As is stated above, when the world entered the 4th century A.D., the Western Church became amillennial. For the next six hundred years or so, the promotion of millennialism was pushed back into the theological shadows. It was not until the rise of persecution and the crushing of the poor by the nobility that the millenarian hope began to reappear in Europe. Perpetuated by such as Joachim of Fiore (12th century) and John of Ruppescissa (14th century), along with groups such as the Apostolic Brethren, Spiritual Franciscans, Beguines, Beghards, and the Taborites (Hussites), the hope for an extended era of earthly peace, purity, and prosperity was renewed.

Joachim's views may have been the seed that would give rise to a new twist in the millennialistic spectrum: dispensationalism. He taught that the Old Testament era was the "Age of the Father" and the New Testament era is the "Age of the Son" and that there will be a coming era which will be the "Age of the Holy Spirit." It is in this final age that the Kingdom of the Spirit will arise and be characterized by a "dispensation of universal love" in an egalitarian utopia. He divided each age into forty-two generations, placing the inception of the Age of the Spirit at A.D. 1260.

¹⁴ One such remote place was Ireland in the days of Patrick and thereafter, when Irish missionaries evangelized Europe and, possibly, North America (i.e., Brendan). The fact that the Roman church "kidnapped" servants of God and transformed them into "saints" of the Catholic Church does not change reality. Many servants were not papists, but served the Lord and proclaimed His Word. Evidence of this can be seen in reports of Irish missionaries evangelizing in Italy of all places. Cf. Warren Fanning, "Saint Patrick -- Could He Be One Of Us?" *The Lutheran Spokesman*, March, 1999. (lutheranspokesman.org)

“The Franciscan order split over interpretations of Joachimite prophecy, one branch becoming inquisitors, the other becoming revolutionary millenarians. Angelic popes and messianic emperors (some to return from death) were seen by lay and clerical constituencies as part of Joachim’s plan. By the end of the 13th century, millennialism had reached a fevered pitch, especially among the Spiritual Franciscans and their lay counterparts, the Apostolic Brethren, as well as among the more mystical elements of the Beguines and Beghards. The execution in 1300 of the founder of the Apostolic Brethren, Gerard Segarelli, by Pope Boniface VIII set the stage for a particularly violent round of millennialism under the leadership of Fra Dolcino in the early 14th century.”¹⁵

It is said that on his way to the Third Crusade, Richard the Lionheart met with Joachim to discuss the book of Revelation. One wonders how many connected a millennial belief to the crusades—capturing Jerusalem for the millennial coming of Christ. Like all such perverted beliefs, this effort ended in tragedy for all concerned, except the Pope, as well as certain “entrepreneurs,” who used some crusades to open trade routes to Africa and Asia. However, absolutely no utopia resulted, and Christ did not come.

Likewise, there were other Medieval disruptions which contained strains of millennialism. “But the better-documented, and in some ways more surprising, aspect of medieval millennialism was its use by lay and ecclesiastical elites to support their own authority. Starting with the Gregorian Reform in the 11th century, papal reformers employed apocalyptic imagery both to brand their enemies as Antichrists and to wrap their own efforts in messianic promises. Similarly, royal and even comital [a popular assembly having legislative authority] courts used eschatological prophecy as propaganda. William the Conqueror consciously used themes from Revelation, including his crown and Domesday Book, to buttress his conquest of England. Supporters of Thierry of Alsace, the count of Flanders, spread prophecies claiming that his (Carolingian) dynasty was the last barrier to the Antichrist. At the time of the Second Crusade, a French prophet evoked the Tiburtine Sibyl to predict that Louis VII would conquer the Orient in the fashion of the great Persian king Cyrus II.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Richard Landes. “Millennialism,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., February 24, 2005, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/millennialism>. (accessed April 02, 2017).

¹⁶ Richard Landes. “Millennialism,” Op. cit.

Reformation

As time wound its way into the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church was officially amillennial. However, there were those who had been influenced by the prophecies of Joachim. Christopher Columbus was one such. In his book, *El Libro de las Profecias*, (Book of Prophecies),¹⁷ written after his discovery of America, Columbus revealed his spiritual side. Although he was not a full-blown millennialist, he did cling to millenarian views. His book demonstrates that his motivation for exploration was not only scientific, but also spiritual. Apparently, he believed that he played a significant role in the events preceding the coming of Jesus.

Columbus conveyed the medieval notion that in order for the end of the world or the second coming of Jesus Christ to occur, certain events must first be enacted:

1. Christianity [i.e., Catholicism - JKP] must be spread throughout the world.
2. The Garden of Eden must be found. It was the common belief in the Middle Ages that the biblical Garden of Eden must have been on the top of a crag or mountaintop so that it would not have been affected by the first destruction of the world by flood.
3. A final crusade must take back the Holy Land from the Muslims so that Christ can return to Jerusalem.
4. A last world emperor must be chosen. He would be necessary to lead the crusade against the Muslims and to greet Christ at Jerusalem.

Having died in 1506, Columbus did not see the Reformation, but one wonders what he would have thought, given his millenarian views.

When Martin Luther came on the scene in Saxony, millennialism was not a German issue. Neither he nor his comrades tied any millenarian or millennial considerations to the Reformation. Luther focused on bringing the kingdom of God to the hearts of men through the preaching of the gospel. In the beginning, his thoughts and energies were consumed with his attacks on the peddling of official, papal documents granting forgiveness in exchange for gold and silver. The thought that one can buy God's favor was repugnant even to

¹⁷Christopher Columbus, *El Libro de la Profecias*, trans. Delno C. West and August Kling (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991).

his limited knowledge at the time. It was not until the appearance of the Anabaptists that millennialism became an issue for Luther.

Based on Acts 3:21, "*whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began,*" Anabaptists expected that the age immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ would be one of the restitution of all things. To them, this meant above all a restoration of the faith and practice of the New Testament church. Ever since the conversion of Roman emperor Constantine in the fourth century, the church had no longer been a sect of committed believers, a church of martyrs, but a state church. In such a church [namely, that envisioned by the Anabaptists—JKP], the distinction between clergy and laity would disappear; in its place, the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit would guide men and women in matters of faith and practice.¹⁸

While not all Anabaptists were millennialists in the strict sense of the word, many held to millenarian principles, such as the belief in a theocratic, utopian society. Radical Anabaptists took it upon themselves to establish this utopian theocracy, even to the point of taking arms against their opponents.

"One example is the theocratic regime briefly established by the radical Anabaptist and self-proclaimed messiah, John of Leiden, in the German city of Münster in the early 16th century. Imposing mass baptism on adults, expelling or executing any who would not convert, burning all books aside from the Bible and coercing women into polygamy, Leiden's Kingdom of God practised [sic] a type of repression with few precedents in the medieval world."¹⁹

Luther confronted millennialists with the implication that they became millennialists because they were envious of heathen domination in the world.

"This false notion is lodged not only in the apostles (Acts 1:6), but also in the chiliasts, Valentinians, and Tertullians, who have played the fool with the

¹⁸ Richard A. Landes, ed. *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*. Published in 2000 by Routledge, 29 West 35th Street, New York, 10001. Accessed March 28, 2017. <https://www.politicalavenue.com> .

¹⁹ John Gray, "Isis: An Apocalyptic Cult Carving a Place in the Modern World," Opinion, *Guardian News and Media*, August 26, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/26/isis-apocalyptic-cult-carving-place-in-modern-world>.

idea that before the judgment day the Christians alone will possess the earth and that there will be no ungodly. And what moved them to harbor this idea is this, that the ungodly are so fortunate in the world, possess kingdoms and worldly authority, wisdom, and power, while the Christians are of no account in comparison with them. So they thought: Surely, all the ungodly will be rooted out so that the pious may live in peace.”²⁰

“Luther complained against the Schwärmer of his time: ‘Their teaching is nothing other than worldly goods, temporal, fleshly and earthly promise, which the mob gladly hears—namely that they . . . imagine a kingdom on earth in which all the godless are slain and they alone are to have good days. Who wouldn't want that? That is indeed, however, an open, palpable lie, for Christ has prepared for His own not a worldly kingdom, but rather a heavenly kingdom and says, ‘In the world you will have anxiety and distress’ [John 16:33]; likewise, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ [John 19:36].”²¹

Once again, it can be seen that millennialists have a perverted view of the kingdom of God, viewing it not in spiritual terms, such as righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, but in material things, such as food and drink (Romans 14:17). The psalmist expresses the emptiness of such thinking: “*But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked . . . Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end*” (Psalm 73:2,3,17).

Andreas Karlstadt, the Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Muentzer, and others like them went on a rampage of destruction. Picking up on such millenarian beliefs as the equal distribution of wealth, thousands of peasants took up arms against an oppressive nobility in the Peasants War. Luther sympathized with their cause, but not with their methods.

In an article in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Rufus M. Jones writes about fanatical Anabaptists, who believed that they might hasten the millennium by armed violence.

²⁰ Edward M. Plass, ed, *What Luther Says, An Anthology*, vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), pg. 284, #836.

²¹ George Wolfgang Forell, “Justification and Eschatology in Luther's Thought.” *Present Truth* magazine, volume forty-four—Article 4. Accessed June 28, 2017. <http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XLIV/44-4.htm> .

Melchior Hoffman . . . became the prophet of an intense chiliasm, and even proclaimed that the sword might be used to hasten the expected Kingdom of God. His Dutch disciples, Jan Matthys and Jan Bockelson, pushed the fanaticism of the radical wing to its wildest limit, and gave to the world by the spectacle of the Münster kingdom, a reason for the horror of Anabaptism and an excuse, after the fact, for its method of thorough extermination.²²

The Anabaptists that survived intense persecution, including the Mennonites and Hutterites, purged themselves of this fanaticism and have tended toward pacifism. This change can be observed already in the *Formula of Concord* by the way in which the confessors addressed the errors of the Anabaptists (Article XII).

Such a blending of the political and the spiritual could not have been further removed from Luther's understanding of the world. Luther wrote of two kingdoms which function in completely contrastive ways. The contrast between the two kingdoms is so great that attempting to make one kingdom function with the ways and means of the other will lead to inevitable tragedy.

Martin Luther's teaching has been summarized as follows:

The teaching of the Two Kingdoms, in short, is this: God has both a left and a right hand by which He works in our world. With the left hand, He uses temporal authority—authority which He establishes for the sake of restraining evil in society. This temporal authority is given the tool of the sword (enforcement power) so that it might be taken seriously and have real, not theoretical, power. This authority is exercised in rulers, public servants, judges, law enforcement, and the military. God's left hand is used for the punishment of wrongdoers; it is not for the restraint of true Christians because true Christians are set free by the Gospel and do not need external law.

God also has a right hand by which He works in our world. This right hand operates through the power of the Gospel, which the Kingdom of God on earth—the Church—delivers. This is a kingdom of peace, love, and self-sacrifice. Because Christians are free from the burden of the Law and from its punishments, and because everything is

²²Rufus M. Jones, "The Anabaptists and Minor Sects in the Reformation." *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1918, pp. 223–246, www.jstor.org/stable/1507487.

theirs in Christ, they no longer need worry about the frantic pursuit of self-interest. Although they do not need the Law to restrain them anymore, they willingly submit to it out of love for their neighbor.²³

Of course, this is all about law and gospel. The law, in its function as a curb, is the primary tool in the “left hand” of God. The gospel is the primary tool in the “right hand” of God.

This brings us to the central doctrine of the Bible: justification. Every teaching revolves around the doctrine of justification, just as the rim of a wheel revolves around the hub. It may be difficult to find the spoke that connects a specific rim-doctrine to the hub, but it is there. Luther looked at all of Scripture through the lens of the doctrine of justification.

Luther’s view on the two kingdoms and his view on justification are perfectly compatible. However, the doctrine of objective justification is not compatible with millennialism. Therefore, the doctrine of the two kingdoms and the doctrine of millennialism are not compatible. The gospel of justification, by its own spiritual power, frees man from the dominion of Satan and brings him under the gracious ruling of God. To employ the political sword in this endeavor will have the opposite effect: keeping man in the dominion of Satan. It is little wonder that those who want to mix church and state are the same ones that deny objective justification. As soon as objective justification is denied, men begin to look for other tools, e.g., government, to wrest the wicked from their evil. The gospel is treated as impotent. In line with that, the sacraments are treated as impotent, as mere symbolism or, in the case of Rome, as a good work (*ex opera operato*).

Likewise, Luther’s view of apocalyptic prophecy was through the lens of the doctrine of justification. This includes God’s teachings regarding eschatology. If an interpretation of the book of Revelation undermined this doctrine, Luther was sure to reject it. Therefore, it is no wonder that in his first (1522) preface to Revelation, Luther writes:

“Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit gives him to think. My spirit cannot fit itself into this book. There is one sufficient reason for me not to think highly of it—Christ is not taught or known in it; but to teach Christ is the thing which an apostle is bound, above all

²³Rebecca Florence Miller, “How Luther’s Two Kingdoms Challenges Fundamentalism’s ‘Christian Nation’”, Patheos.com, October 28, 2014.

else, to do, as He says in Acts 1:8, 'Ye shall be my witnesses.' Therefore I stick to the books which give me Christ, clearly and purely."²⁴

Later, as his knowledge and understanding grew, Luther changed his mind and wrote a second preface to the Book of Revelation. Nevertheless, his interpretation remained gospel centered. The book for him was all gospel oriented: promotion of the gospel vs. opposition to the gospel, disciples of Christ vs. enemies of Christ, members of the Holy Christian Church vs. enemies of the Church. Even if he interpreted certain visions as referring to specific political figures and events in history, he still viewed everything in the sphere of the Church and her proclamation of the gospel.

He concludes his second preface with these words,

"In a word, our holiness is in heaven, and not in the world, before men's eyes, like goods in the market. Therefore, let there be offenses and tumults and heresy and faults, and let them do what they can! If only the word of the Gospel remains pure among us, and we love and cherish it, we are not to doubt that Christ is with us, even when things are at their worst; for we see, in this book, that, through and above all plagues and beasts and bad angels, Christ is with His saints, and wins the victory at last."²⁵

When the Reformers came to the Diet of Augsburg, they were prepared to counter any accusation that they were chiliasts. They addressed the issue in Article XVII: Of Christ's Return to Judgment.

Also they teach that *at the Consummation of the World Christ will appear for judgment*, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He will condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils.

²⁴ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Revelation of Saint John," *Works of Martin Luther*, The Philadelphia Edition, Volume 6 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1932), p. 489.

²⁵ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Revelation of Saint John," *Op. cit.*, p. 488.

They condemn also others who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the World, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed.²⁶

John Calvin, on the other hand, believed in a kind of modified theonomy (the civil laws of the Old Testament were intended by God to be guidelines for all nations). Present day Calvinistic Reconstructionists are more radical. Calvin demonstrated his theonomy in the restructuring of the government in Geneva. The laws were derived from the Law of Moses (Calvin himself determined which laws and how to modify them to their circumstances) and the city was governed by church leaders. Although Calvin rejected millennialism, calling it “puerile” and not deserving his attention, his theonomic view was millenarian in itself. He seems to have believed that what he was starting would grow and blossom into a kind of divine utopia.

“Calvinism, from Geneva to Massachusetts Bay to the present day theonomists, demonstrates repeatedly the Calvinist conviction that it is the Church’s mission to Christianize the world, (via the kingdom of the left) and that gradually a golden age of peace and prosperity will usher in the return of Christ. Only then will the final judgement and eternal reign in heaven occur.”²⁷

Besides this basic perversion of the nature of the Kingdom of God, there was, and continues to be, a misunderstanding about the role of the Mosaic Law in the lives of the children of Israel. That nation had been established for one purpose only: to bring forth the Savior of the world and then to bring forth the Savior *to* the world.²⁸ The entirety of the Mosaic Law was meant to lead Israel down this pathway to its culmination in the birth of Jesus and its effectual result of bringing salvation to the nations through the preaching of the gospel. “*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Galatians 3:24). The moral law was to govern their interpersonal relationships as they pursued their destiny. The ceremonial law

²⁶ *Concordia Triglotta*, (St. Louis:, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 51.

²⁷ Larry Nichols, “Sectarian Apocalypticism in Mainline Christianity at the Millennium’s Dawn.” Accessed June 8, 2017. Issuesetc.org .

²⁸ Because Israel as a nation failed to acknowledge their Savior and failed to carry out their destiny, God rejected them and turned to the Gentiles for the promotion of the gospel.

was to govern their religious lives as they pursued their destiny. The civil law was to govern their civil lives as they pursued their destiny. It is all about Christ.

When this truth is not recognized, everything in the Old Testament will get bent out of shape. This is one of the reasons why the dispensationalists and millennialists distort Old Testament prophecies to fit their beliefs. They take passages that applied solely to the people of Israel and apply them to modern nations. For example, *“Blesséd is the nation whose God is the LORD, The people He has chosen as His own inheritance”* (Psalm 33:12). This passage is declaring that the nation of Israel—God’s people—is blesséd. Yet, many use it as a kind of rallying cry for making the United States a “Christian nation.” This is one of the ways they take prophecies which apply to the New Testament Israel, the Holy Christian Church, and apply them to the physical nation of Israel in connection with their millennialistic view. Millennialism turns everything upside down.

Heirs of the Reformation

As the clock has ticked toward the end of time, the tide of millennialism has ebbed and flowed. This was typically connected with some political or religious upheaval, when people began hoping for something better in this world. This vain hope fueled the engines of millennialism and turned hearts away from the real kingdom of God and from the message that causes the kingdom of God to be at hand.

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel!’” (Mark 1:14-15).

Which is the chicken and which is the egg? Did the reliance on earthly powers come first or did the lack of confidence in the power of the gospel come first? Millennialists do not proclaim objective justification nor do they rely on this gospel (“the right hand of God”) as the means whereby the Spirit works in the hearts of men. They look for a physical, earthly kingdom, which will be established by means of the “left hand of God.” Therefore, they involve themselves in politics and push for religion in government schools. They want the kingdoms of this world to promote Christianity. They pressure the politicians to ally the United States with Israel since that is supposed to be the focal point for the millennial kingdom. They, especially the dispensationalists, believe that the nation which sides with Israel will be partake in the glory that

Jesus is supposed to bring. When their imagined Armageddon comes, they want the armed forces of the United States to be on the side of Israel and, therefore, on the side of Jesus.

It is clear that they have a vision of the kingdom of God that tends toward the physical and temporal. On this account, they cannot but misapply passages of Scripture that speak of the kingdom of God. Neither will they be alert to the many deceptions of the devil, by which he attempts to assert his kingdom of darkness. If one is looking for a physical battle, fought with physical weapons, and resulting in a physical kingdom, then he will not be alert to the reality of a spiritual battle nor will he gather to himself the spiritual weaponry needed to fight.

As heirs of the Reformation, we have been entrusted with the gospel of the kingdom of God: justification through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is our mission to share with the whole world this message: *all* sins are forgiven. God has declared *everyone* to be righteous. *Everyone* who believes this gospel will be saved. These believers have proceeded from sin to salvation, from lost to found, from death to life. We owe all of this to the super-abounding grace of God in Christ Jesus, who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.

With this message, we make plain to the world that there will be no utopia on this sin-laden planet. Jesus clearly contrasts what we have in Him with what we have in the world: *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

The nature of this world is radically different from what the Creator intended. What was created to be full of life and purpose and fruitful to the glory of the Creator was plunged into emptiness when man fell into sin. *“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now”* (Romans 8:20-22). Life gave way to death, purpose gave way to futility, fruitfulness gave way to sickness, decay, rust, corrosion, oxidation, and rot. That is the world that exists today. That is the world which the millennialists desire to become the thousand-year kingdom of Christ.

The heirs of the Reformation must continue to tear down this false view of the kingdom of God. The only way to do this is through the proclamation of universal justification found at the empty tomb of our Redeemer. The millennialist will not do this. Millennialism and objective justification are incompatible. The message of justification is compelling toward world-wide evangelism. Millennialism assumes a time when the saved and the fallen will be separated, the sheep from the goats. Then what happens to evangelism? It is difficult to wade through the many theories of millennialism. However, it is the opinion of this writer that the doctrine of millennialism does not allow for evangelism during the millennium. This would fit Reformed views on the means of grace, limited justification, and double predestination.

The truth is that as long as a man is alive on this earth, he has a time of grace. Therefore, the gospel will continue to be proclaimed. Souls will continue to be gathered into the kingdom. When the last of the elect is gathered in, the end will come. *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come”* (Matthew 24:14).²⁹

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14).



²⁹ Not all regard this verse as referring to the end of time.

The Relation between Verbs and Their Objects Applied to Holy Scripture's Use of Σκοπεῖν

Timothy T. Daub

The Role of Linguistics in Scriptural Interpretation

The purpose of all Scripture is to make man *“wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:15). This relation between the Bible and man is not intended to be a one-time encounter, rather one *“must continue in the things which [one has] learned and been assured of”* (2 Timothy 3:14). All teaching of Scripture is intended to preserve the believer in this same saving faith, as it *“is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). To effect this life-giving nature of Scripture, God inspired the authors of the Old and New Testaments so that these *“holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:21).

God created man with a language faculty. Adam spoke to God on the sixth day of creation, the first day he existed. The facts that the people before the destruction of the tower of Babel had the same language and that the language was only diversified by the power of the Word of God show that language is a crucial element of the creation of man. It is governed by the Word that makes and preserves all things. Grammar, then, the intrinsic order to language, is a creation of the God of order. To study how language operates is to behold a masterpiece and wonder of God, *“The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them”* (Psalm 111:2).

The language faculty of man, completely distinct from forms of communication employed by animals, has an eternal character as it was given together with the *“breath of life”* (Genesis 2:7) that separated man from the rest of creation. God employs language to convey His eternal truth to man: *“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). Again, it is not just the thoughts God gives in verbal inspiration for mere men to organize into words, but also the words themselves. *“These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but [words] which the Holy Spirit teaches”* (1 Corinthians 2:13).

If *“the very hairs of your head are all numbered”* (Matthew 10:30) and given their exact place with respect to each other, how much more so every word of

Holy Writ! They find their place in relation to one another knit together in a grammar given by God. *“But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it”* (Deuteronomy 30:14).

The language faculty is part of the human reason with which God has endowed man. God uses this gift in conveying the truth of His Word to mankind. *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17). Thus, Lutherans have taught that God calls human reason into action for the very purpose He put it there when He speaks to man. *“Who among us has ever denied the proper use of reason in theology? Do we not use reason as often as we give attention to the peculiarity of the language or the structure of the entire context?”*¹

The orthodox Lutheran church has always employed the historical grammatical method of Scriptural interpretation in order to ascertain and defend the intended sense of every utterance of God in the Bible. *“We must everywhere adhere to the simple, plain words of Scripture and its peculiar style and meaning, which the letter or the grammar (*grammatica*) and the natural way of speaking (*usus loquendi*) convey, as God has created language among men.”*²

The Distinction Between Magisterial and Ministerial Linguistics

Whenever human reason is discussed, one must be aware of the sharp divide between the *usus rationis ministerialis*—reason as servant to Scripture, and the *usus rationis magisterialis*—reason as master over Scripture. The Scriptures clearly describe the ministerial use of reason as an apprehending or receiving instrument, *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17).

On the other hand, Scripture clearly condemns any use of reason that twists the plain reading of the text. *“If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”* (Revelation 22:18-19).

¹ Balthasar Meisner, *Disputio de Calvinismo fugiendo Thesis 83*, F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 198.

² Martin Luther, “On the Bondage of the Will” (Luther’s reply to Erasmus’ 1525 tract, “On the Freedom of the Will”), *Luther’s Works*, Volume 32 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1968).

One can describe this distinction in other terms by saying a ministerial use of reason seeks to employ deductive logic, while a magisterial use of reason seeks to employ inductive logic. Deductive logic takes a clear utterance of God from His Word and then says things that must be true based on that, i.e. exegesis. Inductive logic takes a premise from outside God's Word and then investigates how Scripture might support that claim, i.e. eisegesis.

As part of the historical grammatical method, the Lutheran church has adhered to the linguistic usage in its interpretation of words and sentences. Linguistics as an academic field, then, must be examined in these two categories of the ministerial and magisterial use of reason when employed in the study of Holy Scripture. It is interesting to note that there are two major fields of linguistics popular today.

The school of philosophical linguistics, predominant at Cambridge, claims language does not have an inherent meaning but only the meaning which the listener applies to it. This approach to language is popularized in such reader-response models like that found in James Voelz's *What Does This Mean?*, a hermeneutics primer used in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) seminaries. Likewise, this school of linguistics is also popular among the faculty of Valparaiso University.

On the other hand, the school of generative linguistics, predominant at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), claims that language does indeed have an inherent meaning, that the meaning is somehow conveyed, and that the job of the linguist is to investigate how and with what devices this wonder of nature occurs. One must certainly be on guard against the claims of any secular field, but it is interesting to note that, although an atheist, MIT linguist Noam Chomsky claims that by an honest study of language, it is ridiculous to claim that human language evolved from any form of animal communication. He says it simply started one day (cf. Creation). Likewise, he and others admit that deductive logic can be employed to see that the vast majority of languages have come from a variety of original languages (Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, etc.), but that those original languages are so different from one another that they could not have come from one original tongue (cf. Tower of Babel).

Generative linguistics shows that when translating a language, it is not merely a question of mapping one word to another. Any Lutheran pastor knows this to be the case by the choppiness of the interlinear translations of the Greek and Hebrew. Words in language do not stand independent of one

another but are held together in sentences by grammar. Words and phrases are governed by other words and phrases which is the point in sentence diagramming—a practice now largely fallen by the wayside. Language is so tightly knit together, words so dependent on grammar, that they are not only governed by one another, but bound to one another. An individual word looks for the other words it needs.

Lexicons on which we rely³ assume this binding nature of words. Not only are there primary and secondary meanings of some words, but the meaning of a word can depend on what other words are used with it, as in types of nouns, prepositions, and cases surrounding it. It is not as if the context around a word coldly alters the meaning of the word. Rather, the intended sense of the word itself, which is there and employed by its own right, seeks and necessitates other things around it.

It is best to see this in action with how specific verbs seek specific arguments.

The Relation Between a Verb and Its Object in Generative Linguistics

Language is woven together in such a way by God's design that no word stands alone but rather is bound to what is around it. One example of this is the verb. The verb as an action word needs nouns, actors. In this sense, we discuss the valency of a verb. Valency is what a particular verb needs in order to function. Every verb has its own specific valency as part of the meaning of the word. When investigating the meaning of a verb, one must ask what types of nouns and noun phrases it governs. Or, in another sense, for what types of nouns and noun phrases a verb looks.

First, all verbs have a subject. Sometimes, it is spoken: "I go to school." Sometimes, it is understood: "(you) Go to school!"

Next, is the verb intransitive or transitive? If transitive, is it monotransitive, having two arguments: "I ate a cake." Ditransitive, having three arguments: "I made him a cake." Or tritransitive, having four arguments: "I traded with him, a cake for an apple." These various traits are unique to the verb itself.

Sometimes, arguments can appear to be optional, but they are actually always there. They are the things for which the verb inherently looks. Pronoun dropping (pro-drop) is a phenomenon in which a language can omit pronouns

³ e.g., *Strong's Concordance with Hebrew and Greek Lexicon*, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Arndt-Gingrich), *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

or nouns altogether when the “missing” argument can be contextually inferred. The pro-drop phenomenon shows that verbs are looking for particular objects. In pro-drop, a pronoun can be missing, but it is still understood by the listener. In a wider sense, this phenomenon is known as null anaphora, since the dropping is not exclusively restricted to pronouns, but can be any kind of understood word or phrase.

Pro-drop is not merely that pronouns are optional—that you can use them, or not, however you wish. When they are dropped, it means something. When they are there, it means something.

Greek could be considered a default pro-drop language because the common usage is to drop a pronominal subject. For instance, βλέπω does not by default need the ἐγώ to be vocalized. The pronominal subject is bound to the verb and is understood by default. To say, “ἐγώ βλέπω” creates an emphasis on the pronoun in some way, e.g., setting apart the subject from others, “I, on my part, am seeing. . . .” Or, it may even be akin to shouting as if you were in an argument over who it was who was doing the seeing.

In the reverse, if a language does *not* use pro-drop by default as English does not, pro-drop is still used, but then dropping the pronoun is a matter of emphasis. We say, “I see!” But if someone were to say “See!” without the pronoun, it would be emphatic. If the verb is in a context suggesting that it is akin to shouting, the subject’s absence stresses the verb as if you were in an argument over what it was you were doing.

All languages have pro-drop. In some languages, pro-drop features are by default. In such cases, including the pronoun is meant for emphasis. In other languages where pro-drop features are not by default, pro-drop is then used for emphasis. When an infant speaks just with verbs, it is not as if they do not understand nouns at all. They are using pro-drop phenomenon as a natural function of language. They just have yet to learn how pro-drop is properly used in the language they are still in the process of acquiring.

Pro-drop shows that in some usage, verbs have an inherent object and, overall, an inherent sense of an object. This inherent object is so strong that there is always a default referent in the pro-drop itself.

Korean is a heavy pro-drop language, and the verbs do not conjugate for verb-subject agreement. For example, *saranghaeyo* (사랑해요) is the active present verb “love.” Its subject and its object could be anything, but the verb always still conveys meaning. By default, even with minimal context, the

listener will understand a subject and object for the verb. If your family is enjoying a meal at a Korean restaurant, you can, in terms of proper grammar, simply say the verb, "*saranghaeyo*," to convey how much the entire family loves the food. But if it is the first word out of your mouth to the waiter, he will be taken aback by your outburst of personal affection toward him. The default, or most natural, meaning is "(I) *saranghaeyo* (you)." There would have to be a use of nouns, or a conversation building up a certain context, for him to take the intended sense of your love for the food.

The same object-seeking nature of verbs is found in English. Take for instance the statement "He painted." It is not known exactly what he painted due to the lack of a vocalized object, but there is an inherent object—something that is painted—on account of the nature of the verb itself.

Now consider the sentence, "He painted a horse." The inherent object of the verb "paint" drives the mind to think of a picture of a horse being put on canvas. It is possible that he is applying paint to the back of a live horse, but this is not the default understanding, because horses are not things to which one typically applies paint.

Even in ambiguous cases, it is not a free-for-all to assign meaning to the sentence. "He painted a bridge." Is it a picture of a bridge or is paint being applied to the bridge itself? Context informs which, but the context does not control the grammar out of nowhere, it only informs one of two reasonable options based upon what the verb expects.

Objects can be used that are outside of a verb's expectation, but it is obvious when they are, further proving the expectation of verbs.

God commanding Ezekiel to eat a scroll is inherently striking (Ezekiel 3:1), because scrolls are not things that are eaten. In general, this is often how humor works. The linguistically unexpected presents itself where it is not sought. For instance, one may purposefully use an object that does not belong to describe a enormous steak dinner, "I just ate a cow."

Context certainly informs the object, but there is an inherent object because the verb needs a particular type of object to match its intended sense. The context simply links to what the verb is already seeking. Thus, lexicons for various languages detail several meanings for any given verb dependent on what is used with it, because a particular verb's usage places certain requirements on its object.

The Lord Jesus' promise that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35) is a promise of the verity of His Word, but also of its internal integrity. The words He has chosen to place in relation to one another are not forced upon each other, but rather make sense according to their natural usage and also as a unit--a whole according to God's intent when He inspired them.

The Relation between Σκοπεῖν and Its Object

What does σκοπεῖν seek? Let us investigate how Greek uses the word in general and how the New Testament uses the word in particular.

First, we look at the *usus loquendi* of the verb itself because God chose to use a word that already had a meaning and purpose designed by Him in the Greek language before it was first penned by the apostle.

Etymologically, σκοπεῖν comes from an older Greek word σκόπελος, a high rock. Σκόπελος remains in Greek usage today. The resort Skopelos Island, and other towns bearing a similar high lookout, testify to this fact. The σκόπελος is where the sentinel or watchman (σκοπός) was set. From a high vantage point, one could keep watch for the enemy.

One was sent as a sentinel with a purpose and that was to σκοπεῖν. The sentinel was not sent to his high station to take in the view in the scenic sense of a tourist. Rather, he was to keep watch for (present active infinitive) something in particular, and he knew what it looked like. Otherwise, they would have sent someone else who did. Likewise, when the enemy was spotted, specific action was to be taken immediately on account of the identification.

There was a sense of urgency with the identification, and the sentinel needed to know that for which he was put on watch. There was an inherent purpose for his watch.

There was such a sense of the watchman knowing what he was on watch for that there was a linguistic bond between the two. Thayer presents a primary and secondary use of σκοπός. The primary use of σκοπός is the watchman himself. The secondary use of σκοπός is the purpose for his watch, that which he has in mind to watch out for while on duty.

Just as God had the apostle use the military term ὑπόστασις to convey the Scriptural truth of our submission to one another in a way English cannot convey in one word, so too in His perfect wisdom, God had Paul use the

specific term σκοπεῖν in Romans 16:17 when other Greek words for “looking” or “noticing” could have been used.

Greek literature accords with this *usus loquendi* of σκοπεῖν. Thucydides, in his 431 B.C. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, uses σκοπεῖν to convey the importance of his literary work. He says that his history provides the reader with a “clear view” (σαφής σκοπεῖν) in preparation for all that they would encounter in future history. His readers were sentinels now equipped for a “critical looking into matters that do not provide ready or obvious evidence.”⁴

From having read his work, they were equipped to have a different view from others who did not read it and to act accordingly: “Whoever shall wish to have a clear view (σαφής σκοπεῖν) both of the events which have happened and of those which will someday, in all human probability, happen again in the same or a similar way—for these to adjudge my history profitable will be enough for me.”⁵

A watchman is prepared for his task. He knows what he is on watch for. And this allows him to see the world differently from those not given this task.

Second, we investigate how σκοπεῖν is used in Holy Scripture, because this is how God Himself uses the word. For instance, the *usus loquendi* of βαπτίζω is revealing, but God clearly implements βαπτίζω in a distinct manner. We will see that with σκοπεῖν, however, there is not such a divide. The object of σκοπεῖν is given focus by the illuminating character of the Word of God as its foundation, distinguished by what is in accord with the Word and what is contrary to it.

In his 1957 essay on Romans 16:17,⁶ Paul F. Nolting presented a thorough survey of the Scriptural usage of σκοπεῖν. Each analysis matches with the *usus loquendi* of the word in terms of urgency, an object already known to the watchman, and something to be done immediately upon identification.

Nolting emphasized the personal nature of σκοπεῖν for the sake of the soul. I posit further that the personal nature is that it is a fruit of faith and that the object of the σκοπεῖν is always in terms of the distinction between what is

⁴ *Knowing Future Time In and Through Greek Historiography*, Lianeri, Alexandra, ed., online publication without page numbers (<https://books.google.com>).

⁵ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides, Loeb Classical Library Book I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 41 .

⁶ New Ulm Pastoral Conference, September 25, 1957

in accord with and what is contrary to the Word of God: “*for whatever is not from faith is sin*” (Romans 14:23). And again, “*He who is not with Me is against Me*” (Matthew 12:30). The scriptural object of σκοπεῖν concerns itself with the divide between that which is of faith and that which is against faith, according to Scripture and against Scripture, pure doctrine and false doctrine. These are the orders given to the Christian watchman. This is the kind of object σκοπεῖν demands.

In Luke 11:35, the Lord Jesus says to “*take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness.*” The Christian is to keep watch over his own soul. For what is he to keep on watch? That which is contrary to the Word. Jesus gave an example of such danger in Luke 11:29—looking for signs other than Christ Himself, but this is not an exhaustive description of what to watch out for. The description of an antichrist’s false doctrine in 1 John 2:22 is not exhaustive either. The Lord Jesus says that the Christian hears and knows His voice by faith (John 10:4, 16). The saving faith trusts the entirety of the Word by the grace of God, whether the individual is conscious of all of its individual articles of doctrine or not. Any degree by which the individual grows in Scriptural knowledge and can discern the difference between what is according to it and what is contrary to it, is a fruit of that faith. When the Lord says, “take heed,” He instructs the new man to test his heart in the light of the whole of Scripture.

In Galatians 6:1, Paul concludes Luther’s *Epistelchen* with a call to Christians to keep an identical watch over their own souls: “*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, **considering** yourself lest you also be tempted.*” In this instance, the object of σκοπεῖν is not the self, properly speaking. The Christian is called to keep watch for the false doctrine outlined throughout the epistle in his own soul. Paul has given the instructions of what is to be avoided throughout the previous five chapters. “Now,” he says, “watch for it in yourself.”

In Philippians 2:4, the Christian is to “*look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*” In context, Nolting rightly comments that the keeping watch is “expressed in the negative with the positive implied.” The Christian is to keep on watch for the selfishness and division that Paul teaches against just verses earlier.

In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul urges Christians not to “*look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.*” Here, the contrastive nature of σκοπεῖν in the light of Scripture is employed by the apostle to turn away from

that which the mere human eyes see to look at what faith sees by the Word. The only way one can know what not to look at in this passage is by the illumination of the Scriptures. When one sees the object of faith—Christ—and all that He gives—forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation—this light clarifies the fleeting nature of temporal things. Thus, it is a fruit of faith to turn away from the persecutions Paul clarifies earlier and look instead at the eternal things.

In each of the above uses, σκοπεῖν looks for those things which are contrary to Scripture with an immediate response to avoid it. The verses do not clarify the complete nature of what is to be watched out for in the sentence itself. Most of it comes not just from preceding context but from the *analogia fidei* as a whole.

The only case that does not exactly fit this “keeping watch for that which is contrary to Scripture” is Philippians 3:17. Here, σκοπεῖν is used as keeping watch for a positive: “**Note** those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” The object is not what is against Scripture but what is according to Scripture. However, this does not contradict the expectations of the verb, because although a sentinel was most commonly put on post to watch for the enemy, he may very well have been put on watch for something positive, such as the return of a search party. There is still the sense of urgent action upon identification, and there is still the sense of the clear distinction between what is according to Scripture and what is against it.

Similar to the Philippians 2:4 use, there is an inherent negative to this positive. There is behavior to avoid as one is drawn to the positive object of the watch. The evidence shows that σκοπεῖν looks for what is against Scripture by default, and even when looking for what is in accord to it, there is a sense of what is to be avoided. There may very well have been an oxymoronic sense in using σκοπεῖν for the positive to emphasize the intensity with which to follow the pattern of the walk of others.

The use of σκοπεῖν in Romans 16:17 matches with the plainest reading, that the object is that which is against Scripture: “**Now I urge you, brethren, note** those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.” Paul’s appeal to keep watch comes with the context of all of the doctrinal distinctions Paul made throughout Romans and the entirety of Christian doctrine as a whole. In other passages, the σκοπεῖν was applied inwardly. Here, it is now applied outwardly to teachers, individuals to avoid. The language is specific, “*who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned,*” but the object to be watched out for is on

account of Scripture as a whole. This is supported by Paul's use of *"doctrine which you learned,"* which appeals to previous knowledge.

When someone is told to "Keep your eyes open for cockroaches, and squish them," the person does not ask to see a picture of a cockroach in order to know what it is that should be squished.⁷ Rather, the imperative is to keep watch for an enemy that is known before the command was given. Similarly, as we teach our people true doctrine, we are teaching against false doctrine and giving them the image to which Romans 16:17 refers. It is not a cold command that comes upon the Christian unaware.

Another passage conveys a similar concept without a vocalized direct object. *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Peter 5:8). Note that neither *νήψατε* nor *γρηγορήσατε* has a direct object penned by Peter. The object is inherent based on doctrine as a whole, because it is God's Word spoken to a believer. It is a watchful state in regards to all that is against Scripture. Luther comments: "You must rather know that you have not been placed in a garden of roses here, but in the midst of heavy conflicts, where you must be on your guard, always watchful and prepared for resistance."⁸

Luther again writes, "One's soul is drunk when he lives in carnal security, without thought and anxiety as to whether he have [sic] and hold [sic] God's Word or not; when he asks no questions, either about God's wrath or his grace; and when he, moreover, lets himself be filled with the sweet poison of false doctrine through the mob of evil spirits Satan employs for this purpose, until he grows numb, loses faith and clear judgment and finally becomes overfull of drunkenness and spews it out upon others."⁹

God makes it clear to the Christian what is to be avoided. He does so by giving him a vivid picture of the enemy, and He is the One who brings the Christian to the awareness that what is before his eyes is the danger he must flee.

A Christian watchman is prepared for his task by the Spirit of God. He knows what he is on watch for by the Word, and this allows him to see the

⁷ This is an analogy used by Immanuel Lutheran College Professor Emeritus, Clifford Kuehne.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, Volume 8, Third Sunday after Trinity 1 Peter 5:5-11, ed. John Lenker (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 76.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78

world differently from those not given this task. This is the kingdom of God, which is nothing other than faith in the heart. Σκοπεῖν is a matter of clarity given by His Spirit as a fruit of faith.

Σκοπεῖν Has an Inherent Object as a Fruit of Faith

If σκοπεῖν is a fruit of faith, and faith has an object, how can σκοπεῖν have none? In Scriptural use, the direct object of σκοπεῖν is always defined by Christ and His Word, the object of faith. This means that the Holy Spirit causes us to keep on watch for all that is against Christ and His Word. Postmodern faith claims to have no object. The God of love would never give such a faith, because it cannot save. Likewise, the Holy Spirit cannot produce postmodern fruits of faith. Such are figments of the philosophy of man. The fruits of faith have objects, either toward God and neighbor or against the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh.

Throughout Scripture, the identification of and separation from false teachers is God's work alone. In the Old Testament, the Word of God separated false teachers like Korah, Abiram, and Dathan by means of fire. In the believer's heart today, the Spirit of God calls the watchful soul to attention by giving it the fruit to see the false teacher with clarity and avoid him. Remember, our Lord Himself said of the working of the Spirit that *"the wind blows where it wishes"* (John 3:8). Hence Paul F. Nolting rightly said that σκοπεῖν as a fruit of the Spirit "is personal, private, and for the benefit of the observer."

In the years leading to the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), pastors and laymen left their former fellowships which they had identified as heterodox. These individuals left their former fellowships, not because it was a subjective judgment on their part, but because the Spirit enlightened them individually in his own wise way.

There is no degree of human judgment involved in the fruits of faith. It is not human judgment but the working of the Spirit that leads one to σκοπεῖν a false teacher and thus separate himself. God alone works His will in man. When man's will conflicts with God's will and he disobeys God, he also seeks to justify the disobedience.

These truths underlie the long-standing doctrinal difference between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Professor Thomas Nass writes, "From the WELS point of

view, it is interesting to note that different people left WELS at different times—all the way from 1955 through 1961. To us this illustrates that **there is a degree of human judgment involved in the timing of separation** (emphasis added). Different Christians, operating with the same doctrinal principles, can come to differing opinions about when separation is necessary because a church body has become guilty of causing divisions.”¹⁰

This approach of the WELS incorporates human judgment into the work of the Spirit and confuses man’s work with his sanctification.

God gives His children the gift of recognizing a false teacher for what he is. There may very well be admonition by a brother involved in the way God brings you to that realization, but not as a formula. It simply is not in the verse. Any admonition of a false teacher that happens after the identification is done from outside that fellowship. There is no human judgment involved. God gives pure doctrine. God reveals false doctrine. God sheds light on false teachers. Once He has done that in a believer’s heart, that watchman must avoid them.

May God keep you in His pure Word. May He keep you on watch for all that is against it. God, by His Spirit of grace alone, will keep you faithful to Him.

And bid Thy Word within me
Shine as the fairest star;
Keep sin and all false doctrine
Forever from me far.
Help me confess Thee truly
And with Thy Christendom
Here own Thee King and Savior
And in the world to come.

The Lutheran Hymnal, 130:6



¹⁰ A Primer on the History Behind the CLC With Some Personal Observations / <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/4260/NassCLC.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

Book Review

David T. Lau

Jesse Yow: *Standing Firm – A Christian Response to Hostility and Persecution*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 2015, paperback, 216 pages.

We all know that Christians are being persecuted and even tortured and killed in many parts of the world today, in part simply because they are Christians and want to remain Christians. What about our own country? Dr. Adam Francisco maintains in the brief Foreword to this book, “Christianity may someday soon find itself no longer tolerated” (p. 11) anywhere in the world, just as in the early days of the church in the Roman Empire. Francisco predicts, “The real persecution Christians will face in the future will be much more formal. It will come from the state, will challenge the Church legally and financially, and will be driven by an ideological secularism. It is already happening” (p. 12).

Dr. Jesse Yow, a member of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, agrees with the above observation and has written *Standing Firm* for the purpose of examining the present situation and suggesting various options Christians may choose to respond to hostility and persecution in a Christian manner. The value of the book is enhanced by the many Scriptural references to persecution in Bible times and examples of how Christians in the past responded to their plight.

Yow recognizes that at present, Christian church services are freely tolerated, but “Christians in North America face increasing pressure to keep their faith to themselves – to practice Christianity in private and not speak of Jesus in public” (pp. 16-17). But Jesus’ disciples did not continue to meet behind locked doors, as on Easter evening. They were very public about their testimony, as it is written: “[T]hose who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

The first section of this book describes the present situation in North America and other parts of the world. Yow points out that we should not be surprised by hostility from the world, since Jesus plainly told His disciples, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:19).

Yow gives special attention to those areas in the world where hostility has evolved into severe persecution: the middle East, central Africa, southern Asia,

as well as eastern and northeastern Asia. It is good to know that some of the confessional Lutheran groups we are working with in these countries face such persecution. We must not forget them in our prayers and in our support.

But as it was once said that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church, Yow points out that “our Lord is at work behind the scenes to rescue people from the darkness of sin. For example, rumors keep surfacing about Muslims, sometimes in large numbers, professing faith in Jesus Christ” (p. 45).

The second section of the book is titled “Theological Understanding of Hostility.” It is particularly in this section that Yow takes us through the Scriptures, beginning with the hostility of Satan against God displayed already in the Garden of Eden. Satan is still God's enemy, so it is not surprising that Satan stirred up trouble for the missionary Paul wherever he went with the gospel of Christ.

The last four sections deal with the proper Christian response to hostility as illustrated by the response of Christ and the early Christians. Yow says, “We find the answers we need in God's Word, which He uses to assure, comfort, and guide us. . . . We need to seek God's mind and heart” (p. 97). “We are part of God's plan for reaching the world; we live out God's plan by His love and His enabling” (p. 101). “We pray for one another. We stay in touch with one another; listen to one another's fears, problems, and concerns; and encourage one another with words and with material support” (p. 112).

Obviously, our attitude toward persecution and those who persecute or harass us is of paramount importance. Yow discusses such spiritual disciplines as prayer, self-examination, forgiveness, witness, and support. Forgiveness in particular may be difficult, but “by God's grace, our response to hostility or persecution should include forgiveness. We forgive because we follow the command and example of Jesus. . . . Refusing to forgive means not sharing God's grace even though He offers us that grace so freely and abundantly” (pp. 134-136).

To his credit Yow emphasizes the importance of knowing well the truth of Scripture for which we are being oppressed. He says, “The forces that try to move us away from God's truth will usually combine some mix of truth and error in a deceptive, appealing combination. . . . We need to stick to God's truth. . . . The best way to spot a counterfeit is to know the genuine article so well that we can immediately spot anything that is different” (p. 144).

Since it seems hostility and persecution will become a large part of our Christian life in the near future, it is wise to think ahead as to how we are going to react and respond. Yow warns us, “Our first reaction to hostility might often involve defensive attitudes and behavior. . . . We could get into arguments and risk coming across as mean-spirited and selfish” (p. 148). Yow presents and discusses the following possible options: turning the other cheek, invoking our rights, disengaging, playing better defense, stepping up the proclamation, making common cause with those with whom we are not in total agreement otherwise, shaking the dust off our feet and leaving, or staying and enduring. There is no one option that is best for all circumstances, as we learn from various Biblical examples.

Each section includes discussion questions. There are several appendices, one that lists organizations that are useful for learning information about the persecution of Christians around the world, and others that list Scripture passages of comfort and warning. This book is recommended, especially to young Christians, as a useful tool for preparing themselves for the seemingly inevitable escalating hostility to Jesus Christ and His teaching, both law and gospel. “Above all, our choices must imitate Christ as we take up our cross and follow Him” (p. 187).

