

Journal of Theology

Fall 2018 Volume 58 Number 3

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Journal of Theology

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The *Journal of Theology* is published four times annually (Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter) by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI 54701/ www.clclutheran.org).

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Journal of Theology
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The Battle between Flesh and Spirit in the Christian

David T. Lau

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Galatians 5:16-26

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Muslims regard Mohammed as a prophet of God. They believe that his book, the Quran, is the word of God.

The Mormons regard Joseph Smith as a prophet, and they believe that his writings are the word of God.

The Christian Scientists read the words of Mary Baker Eddy alongside the Bible and believe they have equal value.

The Seventh Day Adventists regard Mrs. Ellen White as a prophetess and believe that her words came from God.

In this Reformation season, we ask the questions: Do Lutherans regard Martin Luther's writings as the word of God? Do we consider Martin Luther's interpretation of the Bible to be the right interpretation of the Bible simply because it is *his* interpretation?

Certainly, we all agree that Martin Luther's writings are *not* the Word of God, nor equal to the Word of God, but we do have to be careful that we do not make an idol of this gifted man. Just as we dare not follow the old Roman

Catholic slogan that said, “The pope has spoken, the case is settled,” so we dare not formulate a new slogan, “Luther has spoken, the case is settled.”

Jesus’ brother James wrote concerning the prophet Elijah, “*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours*” (James 5:17). Likewise, when Cornelius bowed down before the apostle Peter, Peter replied, “*Stand up; I myself am also a man*” (Acts 10:26). If Elijah and Peter, who were chosen by God to speak His Word to men, are described as ordinary men, how much more so is this not true of Martin Luther? Luther had the same nature as we do, he was subject to the same temptations as we are, and he never claimed to be anything more than that.

As we study Paul’s description of **The Battle between Flesh and Spirit in the Christian**, we shall look at Martin Luther, not as a god nor as a man who unflinchingly spoke God’s Word, but as a Christian who faced this same battle.

First of all, we note that the sinful flesh in every Christian has the potential to commit faith-destroying sins. Paul says, “*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish*” (Galatians 5:16-17).

Paul is speaking to Christians who have the Holy Spirit living in them. He says to these Christians that they have a sinful flesh that is at war with the Holy Spirit working in them. Their sinful flesh makes it impossible for them to fully succeed in doing the things that they really want to do as Christians. It is just as Paul wrote in his letter to the Roman Christians, “*To will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice*” (Romans 7:18-19). Christians with the Holy Spirit dwelling in them still do evil when they want to do good because of the sinful flesh still living in them. Therefore Paul has to confess about himself, “*With the flesh [I serve] the law of sin*” (Romans 7:25).

This sinful flesh of ours is capable of committing every kind of sin in the book. “*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12). The author of the Twenty-Third Psalm, King David, lusted after another man’s wife and fell into adultery, murder, and impenitence that lasted about a year. The leader among Jesus’ disciples, Peter, declared under pressure that he did not even know who Jesus was (Matthew 26:72). Even years later in Antioch, Peter caved in under pressure and denied the gospel of Christ (Galatians 2:11ff). Are we to think that we are above such failures?

What is the sinful flesh capable of doing? Listen to Paul's list. *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:19-21)."

Our flesh is capable of committing all of these sins. Any one of these sins is sufficient to destroy our faith and plunge us into eternal destruction if we continue in them without repentance. *"Those who practice such things,"* Paul says, *"will not inherit the kingdom of God."* If this is the way people live, if such is their lifestyle, if these things are characteristic of their lives, then the flesh has overcome the Spirit and they need to be born again all over again, otherwise they will be lost forever.

Martin Luther had a flesh like this, just as we do. Before he learned to know the true gospel of Jesus, he was nothing but sinful flesh. He later admitted that his earlier years as a monk and as a priest were characterized by continued idolatry. He later regarded the so-called sacrifice of the Mass as nothing but idolatry. Likewise his prayers to the saints and his adulation of the pope had been idolatry. As pious as his outward life had been, he had not known the true God nor His Son Jesus Christ. Any conception of God is idolatry if it does not include Jesus as God's Son and as our loving Savior.

Even after Martin Luther became a Christian through faith in Jesus Christ, his sinful flesh remained with him. It constantly urged him into paths of sin. Martin Luther does not seem to have been tempted very much by the sins of greed or adultery or drunkenness. Rather, Satan tried to get Luther to commit spiritual sins like heresy and false teaching and doubt and despair. Surely there were those heroic moments in his life when the Holy Spirit took over and he nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door, or he clung firmly to the truth in the face of extreme danger and said, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me." But these heroic moments were matched by days of deep depression when he struggled against Satan's temptations. On one occasion, Katy Luther dressed in black as if in mourning. When Martin asked his wife why she had dressed in black, she replied that God must be dead since Martin was in such a gloomy mood. This made Martin realize that his sinful flesh was gaining the mastery over him and that he needed to quickly slay the dragon of doubt and despair with the sword of the Spirit—the comforting word of the gospel.

Paul says there is only one way to fight against the flesh and that is in the power of the Holy Spirit. *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Galatians 5:16). The Spirit in the Christian resists the flesh and produces wonderful fruit. Paul says, *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another”* (Galatians 5:22-26). Paul also says, *“If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law”* (Galatians 5:18).

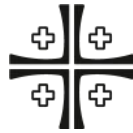
The Holy Spirit is involved in a person’s becoming a Christian. *“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:3). But then the Holy Spirit’s work continues. He makes the body of the Christian His temple, and He influences the thoughts, words, and deeds that come from the Christian. The Holy Spirit’s tool in the remaking of the Christian from within is the gospel—the good news of Jesus. Paul wrote to the Romans, *“The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us”* (Romans 5:5).

As the Holy Spirit teaches us God’s love for us in connection with Jesus—His willingness to suffer and die for our sins—a corresponding love for God is created in us. *“We love Him, because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). Love for God is always coupled with love for our neighbor. Love is always the first fruit of the gospel, the first fruit of the Spirit. Where love is, the rest of the fruits are sure to follow: joy, peace, longsuffering, and more! Those whom the Spirit leads and guides in this way do not have to be afraid of the law’s curses, nor are they forced to do good by the law’s commands. The force working in them is greater than any law. The Spirit is at work in them and great and wonderful are His accomplishments.

Martin Luther is a prime example of the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit converted this miserable, self-righteous, despairing monk into a believing, loving, joyful child of God. Through Luther and others, the Spirit brought about a revival of God’s saving truth in greater fervor and depth than at any time since the days of the apostles. The gospel was spread by preaching, by word of mouth, by books, and by hymns—until the whole continent of Europe was filled with this teaching.

There was evidence of true Christian joy and peace and longsuffering in Martin Luther’s personal life as well. He never became perfect in this life, but

he was a saint in the true Christian meaning of the term. That is, he was a forgiven sinner. He was perfectly righteous through Christ's forgiveness. At the same time, he was imperfectly righteous in his Christian life as the Spirit struggled against the flesh in him. But now he possesses the kingdom of God as his inheritance together with all true Christians. Amen.



Editor's Note:

The following pages are *In Memoriam* of Pastor Rollin Reim.

Rollin's family prepared a booklet for his memorial service. This memorial booklet, titled *Rollin A. Reim—A Faithful Spokesman, A Loving Shepherd*, shares pictures, key dates in Rollin's time of grace, and a collection of his writings which are representative of his work in the ministry. The short articles on the following pages (pp. 9–14) are among the writings that the family included in their book. These selections originally appeared in the *Lutheran Spokesman*. The date of publication for each article is noted at the end of the selection.

Rollin also contributed lengthier writings for pastoral conferences. One notable work is, *Freedom and Form, Our Work in the Gospel from the Viewpoint of Christian Liberty, Notes of a lecture given at Pastoral Conference, Spring 1964*. This paper can be accessed at journaloftheology.org (under the "Focused Topics" tab).

Rollin's active participation in the work of Christ's kingdom continued throughout his life, even after retirement. Just one month before the Lord called him home, Rollin sent the following in a handwritten note to the *Journal of Theology* editor: "With Luke's permission I am sending a sermon. *Journal of Theology* might have use for it as an example of preaching the gospel with a James text. Blessings on your fine work!" The sermon Rollin recommended for publication appears on page fifteen in this issue.

In Memoriam

Rollin Arthur Reim

(1922-2018)

Rollin Arthur Reim was born on September 11, 1922 in Fox Lake, Wisconsin to Edmund and Selma (Schaller) Reim. He was baptized on October 1, 1922 at St. John's Lutheran Church, Fox Lake, Wisconsin.

Rollin attended Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Thiensville, Wisconsin.

On July 8, 1950, Rollin married Ruth Engelhardt at St. James Lutheran Church, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

Rollin was ordained into the pastoral ministry on July 3, 1949 at Calvary Lutheran Church in Mapleview, Minnesota. During his ministry Rollin also served congregations in Sioux City, Iowa; New Ulm, Minnesota; and Mountain View and Hayward, California.

Rollin was installed as the Church of the Lutheran Confession's (CLC) missionary and pastor of the San Francisco Bay Area on September 12, 1965. Pastor Reim became the founding pastor of both St. Stephen Lutheran Church of the San Francisco Peninsula (Mountain View, California), and St. Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay (Hayward, California). At times, he also helped serve members in the Central Valley and Southern California.

Rollin's ministry spanned more than fifty years of full-time service. He fully retired from the public ministry in 2007, but remained very active in his congregation. He continued to faithfully help further Christ's kingdom through his words and actions until the day His Savior called him home.

The Lord blessed Rollin and Ruth with four children: Sue (Michael) Slattengren, Jean, John (Carolyn), and Grace. They were also blessed with six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Rollin was preceded in death by his wife, Ruth, and daughter, Jean.

Rollin will be remembered for his encouraging spirit, his friendly, outgoing nature, and the exemplary way he lived out the of Jesus Christ in his life and ministry. He dearly loved his Savior, his family, and all the people he was called by God to serve.

Rollin's life serves as a good example for all of us. He endured his pain patiently, trusting in the Lord's gracious good will for him. In His mercy, the Lord answered Rollin's prayers and delivered his soul from this world to his eternal home with Him in heaven on Tuesday, November 27, 2018 at the age of ninety-six. "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints*" (Psalm 116:15).

The Gospel—God's Power to Save

At one time churches of the Lutheran Reformation took great care to include the word *evangelical* in their name. Perhaps your official church title has it, for many still do. It was a way—a good way—to declare that you, together with the apostle Paul, "*serve [God] with [your] whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son*" (Romans 1:9 NIV).

The practice is changing. The young church of which I am a member did not include it when the congregation was incorporated. The reason? Because the word is now widely used to represent what frequently differs from the scriptural definition of gospel as we know it. *Evangelical* has become a catchall reference for a widely disparate range of conservative Christian groups. One of these groups has even made common cause with a denomination which openly advocates Unitarianism! Sometimes you are robbed of a good word when its usage can cause misunderstanding.

By whatever means, faithful Christians want the world to know their conviction that the gospel, and the gospel alone, is able to do the work of God—the salvation of fallen, lost people. Many deride the gospel as a foolish remedy for the ills of the world. The Jews want signs. The Greeks demand wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). In contrast, the apostle makes *his* boast, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*" (Romans 1:16 NIV).

The gospel is God's very own power (literally, "dynamite")! Just think of it. God has placed upon our lips the single dynamic force which He employs to save people from eternal death and bring them to life and glory. The Bible knows no other such "Means of Grace." This is the only weapon God has given to us so that we may defeat the very gates of hell. The gospel's power is such

so that none other is needed. It can, and it does prove its ability to “call, gather, enlighten, sanctify and keep in the faith” the people of God (*Small Catechism*, Third Article).

The secret of the gospel’s power lies in what it does. *“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is from faith to faith, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’”* (Romans 1:17 NIV).

The gospel is a divine power because it reveals something—something so great that the very revelation of it changes things. The lost are found and brought home. The heart is turned to God. New life is engendered where there had only been death in trespasses and sins. Faith replaces fear. Joy takes the place of sorrow. Hope supplants despair. God-glorifying fruits of faith abound where only law-works were known. Salvation! and only gospel-revelation can do it! How could anyone be ashamed of such power?

What is this “righteousness of God” which the gospel reveals to us? One could say that it is everything that God in His faithfulness and perfection of holiness has done for our salvation. These are *“the wonderful works of God”* which were so ably proclaimed on Pentecost (Acts 2:11). But it is Paul himself who defines that righteousness best, *“Christ Jesus . . . has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption”* (1 Corinthians 1:30 NIV).

This, praise God, is ours by the simple taking of faith (“from faith”), and that too is a gift of God (“to faith”). We are certainly honoring God rather than ourselves when we share the ringing affirmation that *“The righteous will live by faith!”*

When can we rightly say that a church is “evangelical”? Surely when Christ is preeminent in its preaching, when the works of God are the great occupation in pulpit and pew, when law is kept in its proper place—demonstrating the universal need for what the gospel alone can do, when good works are seen as fruits of faith—motivated by the gospel alone, when we are encouraged to see ourselves for what we are in Christ rather than what we ought to be in ourselves, and when the talk is of privilege rather than duty. “Evangelical” is often a matter of attitude and manner as well as words.

Do you qualify? If we say we are Lutheran we claim that we do.

(Lutheran Spokesman March 1991)

The Gospel—God’s Secret, Hidden Wisdom

“What can you say about Him?” asked the teacher, pointing to a painting of Christ on the cross.

“That’s Jesus. He died for me,” replied the student, whose face was radiant with apparent joy.

Is this a remarkable exchange? Certainly so, under any circumstances. Especially in this case, when the student was an eleven year old resident of a Christian home for people with severe cognitive challenges. It is remarkable when you know that this expression of basic gospel faith came from a child who couldn’t tell you the day of the week. Her understanding was the outcome of five years of patient instruction in the Word.

This writer witnessed that scene fifty years ago, yet it remains vivid in memory. What a wonderful work of God that such a child should know, comprehend, and believe the most essential truth in all of life! It is especially wonderful when you know that the gospel is so grand, so lofty, so profound that the human intellect could never have come up with it. Quantum physics it can deal with, transporting men to the moon is within its range, sublime beauty in the arts can flow from its creative soul, but the gospel is beyond it—always a hidden mystery. *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”* (1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV).

The apostle took these phrases from two places in the book of Isaiah (64:4, 65:17), where the prophet spoke of the nations arrayed against Israel. Though “religious,” they did not believe that there could be a God like Jehovah who would actively intervene on behalf of His people. They had only their intellect. They lacked the revelation of the LORD’s prophets. They were, therefore, completely ignorant of the LORD’s providential care for those who love Him. In his epistle, Paul broadens the application to include the whole gospel.

Paul’s first readers were plagued by the intellectually arrogant people in Corinth, who apparently ridiculed the simple gospel of Christ crucified as unworthy of them. Later in history there were teachers who denied the Bible was the only safe source of divine truth, arguing that the human intellect was not corrupted by the fall into sin and so would remain capable of producing religious truth not taught in the Word (purgatory, for example).

In some Protestant circles you hear much talk about people making “decisions for Christ” as though their natural intelligence gives them the ability to evaluate the claims of Christ and then draw the right conclusions. Dame Reason has tried numerous ways to make false claims on divine truth. The Reformation countered with “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him” (*Small Catechism*, Third Article).

Let all who hunger for life and salvation take heart! What otherwise would remain a hidden mystery, “*God has revealed to us by His Spirit*”—The Spirit who “*searches all things, even the deep things of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:10 NIV).

You will recognize that the second chapter of 1 Corinthians, especially verse thirteen, is a treasured reference about the what and the how of revelation. The company of the apostles speak of “*what God has freely given us*” (1 Corinthians 2:12 NIV) “*not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words*” (1 Corinthians 2:13 NIV). So the writers of our New Testament scriptures became “*spiritual men*” with “*the mind of Christ*,” were thus fully qualified to “*make judgments about all things*,” and were in no way “*subject to any man’s judgment*” (1 Corinthians 2:15-16 NIV).

This, then, is the way God chose to reveal His secret, hidden wisdom—the gospel of our salvation—in all of its blessed detail of creation, redemption, and sanctification—all in Christ Crucified. Christians dare speak of their Bibles as “verbally inspired.” The Holy Spirit did not merely give the writers of God’s Word a general idea of what they should write. He taught the very words they should use, so that they could “*express spiritual truths in spiritual words*” (1 Corinthians 2:13 NIV).

The Holy Spirit has “called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith” (*Small Catechism*, Third Article). He revealed His secret, hidden wisdom to that little girl whose mental powers were so severely limited. Coming to faith, fortunately, is not an intellectual exercise. The Holy Spirit could make her and all of us, children who are “*wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 1:16 NIV), and that makes us wiser than the wisest of the world!

(*Lutheran Spokesman* March 1993)

Propitiation

It is a big word, to be sure. But then it does describe a mighty big thing!

If you aren't familiar with the "old" King James Version of the Bible, you have not met this five syllable giant of a word in your Bible readings. Even there it only appears three times. Modern translations shy away from using it. The New International Version (NIV) prefers "atoning sacrifice." The Revised Standard Version (RSV) prefers "expiation." In this case, for a change, the bigger word can serve us best, if we once get comfortable with it.

*"He is the **propitiation** for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world!"* (1 John 2:2). Could there be anything bigger than that? Is there something large enough to cover the sins of the whole world? Could anything greater be said to the honor and glory of Jesus, the world's Redeemer?

"Well, obviously not," you say, "but you haven't explained it yet."

To get the glory of this wonderful word, we need to look at something in the tabernacle of Moses' time. There, guarded by splendid cherubim, was the golden cover of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 25:17-22). Known as the Mercy Seat, this was the place of God's own presence. It was His throne, the point from which He spoke through Moses to His people. On the great Day of Atonement, the blood of sacrifice was sprinkled upon it. There was no other way to assuage the fierce wrath of God.

When the New Testament book of Hebrews speaks of that Mercy Seat, it carefully uses our word, *propitiation* (Hebrews 9:5). This is said in high praise of *"the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God"* (Hebrews 9:14 NIV). What an eloquent way to declare that Jesus, in His sacrifice at Calvary, is everything that the Old Covenant sacrifices prefigured in their shadow-like way!

When our word is used to describe the redeeming work of our Lord it helps us first to see the effect of the sacrifice on sin and the sinner. The guilt of sin is cancelled and the sinner made pure—fit for association with his holy God. But there is more. Much more! There is an effect also on God. This comes through clearly in our word, *propitiation*.

Much of today's superficial religion has trouble with the idea that the God who "so loved the world" (John 3:16) could actually be angry. Perhaps that

explains in part why the word *propitiation* has fallen into disuse, for it states so forcefully that anger was there, and that something had to be done about it.

The Bible is full of reference to God's wrath. "*For forty years I was angry with that generation . . . So I declared on oath in my anger, They shall never enter my rest*" (Psalm 95:10-11). The LORD said that about the Children of Israel. In Romans 1:18 His fury glows in white heat, "*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness of men, who suppress the truth by their wickedness*" (NIV).

Would you say that something needed to be done about God's personal and passionate reaction to man's sin, His wrath and His fury? Something that would allow Him to lift up His countenance upon us, and make His clouded face shine upon us? This calls for a *propitiator*—someone who has the power to "turn away God's wrath forever" as a hymn has it.¹ Without much prompting we confess,

Could my zeal no respite know,
 Could my tears forever flow,
 All for sin could not atone;
 Thou must save, and Thou alone!²

The happy truth is that God Himself "*presented Him (Christ Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement*" (Romans 3:25 NIV). That is, as a *propitiation*. The fifth chapter of Romans, verse nine, declares that we are all "*saved from God's wrath through Him*" (NIV). Our Christ "*gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*" (Ephesians 5:2 NIV).

Propitiation. What a wonderful word. What would we do without it?

(*Lutheran Spokesman*, April 1986)



¹ *The Lutheran Hymnal*, (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 311:1

² *The Lutheran Hymnal*, (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 376:2

Wisdom from Above

Luke A. Bernthal

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James 3:13-18 (ESV)

“Prove it.”

“Show me.”

If you had to summarize the book of James with just a couple of words, these may be some of the words you would use. Earlier in his letter, James wrote about showing our faith by our works. “If you claim to have faith, prove it. Show me by your works,” James says (James 2:17-18).

The book of James is all about what it looks like to live by faith—real, genuine faith in Jesus. James is not speaking about just a head faith, or a word-only faith, or a Sunday-only faith. Rather, he speaks about a faith that is lived out in real life by real love and real actions.

In this section of chapter three, James again speaks about the believer’s life of faith, and here he focuses on one important aspect of it: wisdom.

Wisdom can be described as the ability to live out knowledge and understanding. Wisdom is the ability to understand and to discern what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. So again, James emphasizes, “Don’t just say you have wisdom. Show me. Prove it.” He wrote, “*Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom*” (v. 13).

If we know God, if we have been given His divine **Wisdom from Above** to understand and believe the things He has told us in His Word, then we also show it by our behavior and the way we live our life. The word James used for “show it” is in a position of emphasis in this sentence. James used the same

word used earlier when speaking about showing our faith. *“Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”* (James 2:18 ESV). The true test of faith is works, not words. The same is true concerning wisdom. Don’t just say you have wisdom, show you are wise by how you live your life.

Before we continue to James’s inspired instructions from God as to *how* we live out God’s wisdom from above, let me first remind you of some good news from some of the very first words of James’s letter. He reminds us, *“If any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives it to all without reservation and without finding fault, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5 EHV). Which one of us doesn’t lack wisdom at times in our lives? Which one of us doesn’t need help living with godly wisdom and using it in our lives? We all do! So, let us begin by doing what James encourages us: Let us ask God for His wisdom and the ability to live out His wisdom in our lives:

Dear Heavenly Father, You alone are the source of true wisdom. We come to You at Your invitation asking that You would make us wise with Your wisdom through Your Word and Your Holy Spirit. Fill our hearts and minds so full of Your wisdom that it spills over into our lives. Help us to live wisely so that our words and actions benefit others and bring glory to Your name. Give us Your Spirit to understand and apply these words of wisdom from You that we are about to study. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

James begins this section by reminding us that we show godly wisdom not only by how we live our lives, but that this wisdom shows itself in meekness. James encourages us, *“By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom”* (v. 13).

“Meek” and “wisdom” aren’t words that often go hand-in-hand. More often, those who think that they are wise are anything but meek and humble. However, James’s words remind us that God calls us to live *“in the meekness of wisdom.”* In the Bible, *meekness* describes a condition of mind and heart—the character of spirit in which we accept God’s dealings with us as good and we do so without disputing or resisting. This attitude of heart toward God then extends to others.

Godly behavior is not “in your face,” but persuades with a meek spirit and humility of the heart. Think of those you have known who displayed this meek wisdom in their lives—a gentle friendly wisdom that just made you feel better every time you were around them and talked to them. I had a Greek professor

in college who lived and breathed this type of gentle, meek wisdom. I've known pastors who have displayed this gentle, meek wisdom, and I've known plenty of Christian men and women who display this gentle, meek wisdom as well. I hope that you can think of a number of this type of people in your life as well—teachers, pastors, parents, fellow Christians. Think of how influential and impactful these people are to your life.

How do you think you will impact and influence those around you—believer and unbeliever alike—if you conduct your life in gentle, meek wisdom? How much more encouraged will your fellow believers be, how much differently will the world around us look at us as Christians if our words and actions were filled with gentle, meek wisdom?

James goes on to remind us that this type of wisdom is truly wisdom from above—wisdom from God Himself. Look at his words in the last two verses of our text: *“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”* (vv.17-18).

Contrast this with the wisdom that is not from above. A so-called “wisdom” that comes from our own sinful nature, our sinful self. It is not characterized by purity, peace, or gentleness. This self wisdom does not demonstrate a willingness to listen to others or be *“open to reason.”* It is not *“full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”* It certainly does not produce a *“harvest of righteousness.”* Rather it is characterized by *“bitter jealousy”* and *“selfish ambition”* (v. 14). James reminds us, *“This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice”* (v. 15-16).

Think of how frighteningly true these words are. Think of how many churches, marriages, families, friendships, careers, and even souls have been destroyed or at least irreparably damaged by *“bitter jealousy”* and *“selfish ambition.”* An attitude of, “I want what you have” (jealousy), and “I want to be first” (selfish ambition) is dangerous and destructive.

Nor is this a new problem. Paul warned against it several times in his letters. He wrote to the Corinthian congregation, *“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy*

and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?" (Corinthians 3:1-3 ESV). He wrote to the Galatians, *"But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another"* (Galatians 5:15 ESV).

We've seen all of this in our own hearts, in our own lives, and in our own congregations. What is the answer, what is the cure? It is the wisdom from above, not the wisdom of our sinful self. The devil can convince us of the lie that because I thought it, because I want it, because I said it, or because I did it, therefore, it must be good and it must be true. But how does the fact that it popped into our heads or came out of our mouths make something good or true? This doesn't even make sense. So we need to turn to a wisdom that is not from self but from above.

Remember, the wisdom from above begins and ends with Jesus! Remember that *"the Holy Scriptures . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"* (1 Timothy 3:15 ESV). Jesus lived God's wisdom from above and proved who He is—the Son of God, the Savior—not just by His words, but also by His actions. He displayed gentle, humble wisdom in everything He said and did—perfectly keeping God's Holy Law in our place. He displayed perfect love by sacrificing Himself for our sins and the sins of the whole world by dying our death on the cross. He has given us a guaranteed entrance to the everlasting home of the wisdom from above, Heaven itself, where we will know even as we are known.

Mankind's ways of jealousy and selfish ambition produce a harvest of disorder and every evil thing. God's ways produce a harvest of peace, purity and righteousness. It's obvious that the world around us does not live by the wisdom from above. The evidence is in the fruit it produces: disorder and every evil thing.

What kind of fruit is the wisdom by which you live your life producing? Disorder, strife, envy, and selfishness? Or are you living by the wisdom from above? We do well to look for ways to show that we are living by the wisdom from above in our walk of faith. It will be a blessing to us and others when we do. It will be a harvest of righteousness and peace. It will also bring glory to God and show others the gentle, humble wisdom and love of Jesus, their Savior.

May the Lord fill us all, always with His **Wisdom from Above**. Amen.

Finding Eloquence in the Biblical Writers: Augustine, Maclean, and August Pieper

Peter E. Reim

One interesting challenge in studying the Bible is that of weighing the nature of the text as a rhetorical endeavor. How is the reader to think about the persuasive impact of the text in terms of ethos, logos, and pathos¹ as a function of being “God-breathed”? (θεόπνευστος, 2 Timothy 3:16)

If, as the Holy Spirit “carried along” (φερόμενοι, 2 Peter 1:21 NIV) the thoughts and pen of the holy writers, He gave them the nouns, verbs, prepositions, and syntax that students of scripture so assiduously examine, what about the myriad rhetorical, often poetic, devices that are evident to thoughtful readers? Did He intend for the reader, twenty centuries later, to respond positively to a certain style as well as to grammar? Furthermore, critics of the Bible, old and new, have found ways to dismiss or subvert the content of the law and the prophets and the gospels and epistles. Does the rhetoric of the Bible provide a response?

In the following review of three who comment on parts of the Bible, I intend to share their observations about rhetorical devices in a few passages that show that there is design, not merely to the grammar and language, but also to the stylistic arrangement of these verses so as to enhance the rhetorical² impact upon the hearer. By doing so I certainly do not mean to undermine the central importance of careful grammatical exegesis of Scripture, but rather to enhance our appreciation for a stylistic aspect of the Scriptures that those who “*search the Scriptures*” (John 5.39) perhaps overlook or fail to appreciate, especially in our era’s too-pragmatic habits in communication.

¹ Classical Greeks generally classified the main rhetorical “proofs” this way: *ethos* refers to the author’s credibility; *pathos*, to the emotional impact upon the reader; *logos*, to the appearance of reasonableness of the argument.

² To speak plainly, I might use “persuasive” in place of “rhetorical” here, but I don’t want to cloud the biblical truth that it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately persuades the heart through His Word “*not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 2:13). One might speak of that doctrine as the *inner* persuasiveness of Scripture. With the term “rhetoric,” I mean to address an *outer* persuasiveness of Scripture.

Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) was bishop of Hippo, in North Africa (present-day Algeria). He was not a Christian until age 32, he was classically trained, and throughout his life he maintained great admiration for the Roman statesman Cicero. During this period in the early church, some church fathers—notably Tertullian and Jerome—dismissed training in classical rhetoric. This was partly because of its association with the pagan culture that they rejected, as well as because of the scurrilous reputation of some practitioners (the Sophists) who had deployed their rhetorical skills in an ethically and logically slippery manner—a practice that Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and others also regarded as a violation of a speaker’s responsibilities.

It was Augustine who found himself defending the value of a classical training as a tool for those who were charged with discerning from the Scriptures their “wisdom”—a term which, according to Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, comprised “the understanding of the Bible.”³ With that in mind, Augustine encouraged the study of logic and believed that to study rhetoric, or “the rules of eloquence,” “is to point out how God has made human nature amenable to persuasion.”⁴

To prove his point about the value of rhetoric, Augustine, in his work *De doctrina christiana* (On Christian Teaching), goes one step beyond simply arguing for the usefulness of rhetorical training and provides numerous examples that demonstrate that the biblical writers themselves, though perhaps not classically trained, deployed rhetorical skills to equal the best of Greece and Rome’s statesmen and philosophers.⁵ In *De doctrina christiana*, Book IV, Augustine takes up several passages from the apostle Paul. There was apparently some argument in Augustine’s time that Paul was not rhetorically trained, and thus could not be viewed as being rhetorical—a supposition that Augustine demolishes: “Some may ask whether our authors, whose divinely inspired writings, with saving authority, make up the Canon, should be ranked merely as wise, or also as eloquent men?”⁶ In response, Augustine analyzes the following passage from the epistle to the Romans:

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:3-5).

³ Patricia Bizzell, Bruce Herzberg, *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, pp. 451-485 (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), 451

⁴ *Ibid.*, 453 ⁵ *Ibid.*, 452 ⁶ *Ibid.*, 458

The first thing Augustine notes about this comforting passage is Paul's use of *gradatio* (Greek, κλιμαξ), noting the escalating linkage of each key term: "for example, here we see patience connected with tribulation, trial with patience, hope with trial."⁷

Another device that Augustine discerns quite frequently is phrasal structure, particularly with attention to strategic groupings, stops, and pauses. He notes how the passage in question is marked in elements which he describes as *membra* (limbs, parts) and *caesa* (cutting). These correspond, he says, to the Greek κῶλα and κόμματα. In the above passage he treats each short clause as a *membra* and points out its series of short *membra*. The first is "since tribulation worketh patience; the second [verb supplied] and patience, trial; the third, and trial, hope."⁸ That series is followed by a περιόδός "whose *membra* are held suspended by the voice of the speaker, until completed by the last one. The first of which being and hope confoundeth not; the second, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts; the third, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us."⁹ Augustine concludes by observing, with a clever touch of understatement, "but this, and things of this kind are set forth in the art of oratory. So, though we do not say that the Apostle followed the rules of eloquence, still, we do not deny that eloquence followed close upon his wisdom."¹⁰

Augustine addresses the rhetorical skill of Old Testament writers by taking up one of the prophets, namely Amos. The choice of Amos is strategic, for as Augustine notes, Amos likely did not have formal training in rhetoric and communication, being merely a shepherd and arborist (Amos 7:14). In introducing the eloquence of the prophets, Augustine points out that their messages are often "cloaked in a metaphorical style."¹¹ Such figurative language can provide the reader and interpreter difficulty in attaining the Spirit-intended meaning, but the arriving at an understanding has its own reward: "The more . . . that they [such passages] seem obscure by the use of figurative expressions, the more pleasing they are when their meaning has been made clear."¹² Augustine focused on Amos 6:1-6:

Woe to you *who are* at ease in Zion,
And trust in Mount Samaria,
Notable persons in the chief nation,
To whom the house of Israel comes!

⁷ Ibid., 460

⁸ Ibid., 460

⁹ Ibid., 460

¹⁰ Ibid., 460

¹¹ Ibid., 462

¹² Ibid., 462

Go over to Calneh and see;
 And from there go to Hamath the great;
 Then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
 Are you better than these kingdoms?
 Or is their territory greater than your territory?
 Woe to you who put far off the day of doom,
 Who cause the seat of violence to come near;
 Who lie on beds of ivory,
 Stretch out on your couches,
 Eat lambs from the flock
 And calves from the midst of the stall;
 Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments,
 And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David;
 Who drink wine from bowls,
 And anoint yourselves with the best ointments,
 But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

Augustine's first observation after quoting the passage in full is to query detractors of the Scriptures who dismiss Amos as unlettered and unskilled in speech. Were *they* to compose a denunciation of complacent and wicked people, would they ever have composed anything to equal Amos's rhetoric? Here was a Hebrew shepherd who could have held his own in the Senate or the Areopagus!

The first specific observation Augustine makes is "with what a clash does the mere denunciation beat against senses deadened, as it were, in order to arouse them: *Woe to you that are wealthy in Sion.*"¹³ Next, Augustine notes how Amos, using names of specific locations, underscores how those who inherited Palestine had no reason to look enviously upon the lands of nearby Philistines. Then, again parsing the structure in terms of *membra* and *periods*, he notes the strategic pairings: the first pair that points to the coming conqueror ("throne of iniquity" v. 3), the second that calls attention to the Israelites' love of luxury ("beds of ivory" v.4a), and the third points to their gluttony ("eat the lambs" v. 4c). In particular, Augustine notes how, had the pronoun been used once, the six consecutive *membra* would have worked out acceptably.

"you that are . . . separated . . . that approach . . . that sleep . . ." etc.; but that by repeating the pronoun three times, "the speaker is free

¹³ *Ibid.*, 462f

to [sic] either to complete each separately, and have six clauses, or to suspend by his voice the first, third, and fifth, and by connecting the second with the first, the fourth with the third, the sixth with the fifth, to make. . . three periods of two clauses each: one, to point out the impending calamity; the second, the unchaste couch; the third, the luxurious table.”¹⁴

The prophet’s patterned arrangement of clauses gives a certain cadence to the passage that serves its reproachful nature.

One more observation by Augustine is worth citing. He notes that when the prophet castigates the people’s indulgence in music (Amos 6:5), “[Amos] with admirable propriety checks his flow of invective” by turning back from direct address and observing, as a warning to the pious, “they think they have” instruments of music like David. In other words, Amos recognizes the danger of broadly condemning the love of music, but focuses rather on the wicked who imagined that their impious music might somehow have been the equal of what the righteous have in David.¹⁵

The mention of David brings me to another study of Biblical rhetoric and the observations of the writer Norman Maclean. Maclean might seem to be an odd choice to pair alongside Augustine and our third commentator, August Pieper. Maclean was not a theologian by vocation, nor was he likely to have held the same views on the verbal inspiration of Scripture as the other two men.

Maclean (1902-1990) was born in Iowa but was raised in Missoula, Montana by his mother and his father—a Scottish Presbyterian minister. He became a professor of English Literature and spent his forty-six-year academic career at the University of Chicago. In retirement, at the age of seventy-four, he published recollections of his youth amidst the timber and waterways of the Northern Rockies in *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*. In a short article published in *Chicago* magazine in 1977, he offered a reflection on his homeschooling, the writing of *A River Runs Through It*, and his father’s influence on both. He addresses that influence in three points.

1. “Being Scot, he taught me to write economically”
2. Since his father was a Scottish immigrant who was eager to adopt his new American identity, he “was taught to listen and then listen

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 463

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 463

some more to American speech—its idioms and turns of phrase, its grammatical structures and its rhythms.”

3. Finally, “it was my father from whom I first learned rhythm, perhaps without his or my quite knowing it.” Maclean explains that his family twice a day engaged in “family worship” in which his father read “from the Bible or from some religious poet such as Wordsworth” followed by prayer on bended knee.¹⁶

In this manner Maclean developed an ear for Scripture thoughtfully read. “Of course, when I was between six and ten and a half I didn’t know anything about superimposed rhythms; I only know when I heard my father read the 23rd Psalm that I could hear the still waters moving and pausing, and the Lord comforting me.”¹⁷

Apart from one comment Maclean makes about the use of modifiers in the Twenty-Third Psalm,¹⁸ his rhetorical analysis of this psalm revolves around what he calls “superimposed rhythms.” He identifies three concurrent rhythms “in the harp of David.” They are listed as quantitative, grammatical, and accentual.

He explains the quantitative rhythm as “a patterned recurrence of speech groups of almost the same length or quantity.” Thus, one reads, “The Lord is my Shepherd / I shall not want” (six and four syllables, Psalm 23:1, KJV), and “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures / He leadeth me beside the still waters (eleven and ten syllables, Psalm 23:2, KJV).

This is coupled with a grammatical rhythm—“the repetition of subject, verb, and predicate in that order.” But being aware that neither of these structures is rigidly applied, Maclean states, “But listen now to the lovely variants of patterns so that the song is a song and not a singsong of mechanical

¹⁶ MacClean, N., *The Woods, Books, and Truant Officers*, in R. Macfarland & H. McNichols (Eds.), *The American Authors Series: Norman Maclean*, pp. 81-87 (Lewiston, ID: Confluence Press, 1988), 83

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85

¹⁸ “. . . by the way with only two adjectives, *green pastures and still waters*, both of them immortal, which is the right way to use adjectives if you can’t stay away from them.” *Ibid.*, 85

repetition,” and he points out that the one or two-word subjects of Psalm 23:1-4a are dropped in favor of a six word subject, “Thy rod and thy staff, they’ so the verb is only one word and the predicate only one, ‘comfort me.”^{19, 20}

Maclean then addresses the third rhythm, accentual rhythm, which in English poetry is “what we used to say in school ‘the stuff that scans,’”²¹ i.e., can be analyzed in terms of units of stressed and unstressed syllables. The basic unit of such analysis is the “foot,” consisting of two or three syllables with a specified pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Maclean notes that the King James Version of Psalm 23 operates with iambs (two syllables, the second syllable stressed) and anapests (three syllables, the third syllable stressed). Thus the first line, Maclean explains, opens and closes with an iamb, and features two anapests between the iambs: “*The Lord / is my shep / herd: I shall / not want.*” “There are, then, at least three kinds of rhythms going on at the same time in this translation of David’s psalm—quantitative, grammatical, and accentual. Three rhythms all at once are a lot of rhythms for a little poem that is marked as being six lines long. . . . It is perhaps enough to say here that the Twenty-third Psalm does not bang out its rhythms, but hovers about them.”²²

Maclean concludes this rhetorical analysis with several axioms. Wryly noting “you don’t have to believe them, but you can bet they’re true,” he states,

1. All prose should be rhythmical.

2. One should practically never be consciously aware of the rhythms of prose; one should only be aware that it is a pleasure to read what one is reading.

3. There are, of course, exceptions [to #2]—and he gives an example of a fairly showy sentence he wrote, of which he admits he couldn’t have written many such “poetic” sentences in a row “without getting challenged.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85

²⁰ This grammatical rhythm is a feature of the English translation, not the inspired Hebrew text. What MacClean observes is undoubtedly part the reason why older English translations are treasured for their poetic flow, particularly in the psalms.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 85

²² *Ibid.*, 86-87

4. There are places in prose where the reader not only will accept, but also will expect a great deal of rhythm; where an absence of rhythm would be perceived not only as a deficiency in the writing, but also as a deficiency in the author. His closing remark is “If an author writes out of a full heart and rhythms don’t come with it, then something is missing inside the author. Perhaps a full heart.”²³

Most likely, the “full heart” imagined by Maclean has something more to do with the transcendentalist views of Wordsworth and Emerson than with a heart and pen that are “carried along” by the Holy Spirit. It might be tempting to dismiss Maclean’s highlighting of poetic style in the Bible because it is not the work of a sanctified exegete. However, his basic idea—that the presence of such rhetoric is a natural and critical feature of the Scriptures—is supported, not just by Augustine, but also by another august figure, namely, August Pieper.

August Pieper (1857-1946) taught at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin—later, Thiensville, Wisconsin—from 1902-1943. He was a masterful Hebrew exegete, and among other contributions to the Church, he produced the commentary *Isaiah II*, which provides a vivid exposition of chapters 40-66 of the prophet Isaiah. In this work, set against modernist views that maintain a pseudo-Isaiah and post-captivity authorship, Pieper contends for the traditional view of the book. That view posits that this portion, as well as the first thirty-nine chapters, are the work of the historical person Isaiah, whose prophetic ministry extended from 740 through 680 B. C.

In the introduction to his work, Pieper speaks of “the glorious, organic structure” of the book. “In spite of the modern critics, I still hold that the book is uniformly arranged in the form of a trilogy.”²⁴ Pieper maintains that the contents are arranged in “three times nine sections” which are in “substantial agreement” with the chapter divisions recognized by several Jewish and Christian editors of the Hebrew Bible in the Middle Ages.²⁵ He also explains that these chapters mark the “basic unit” of the prophet’s narrative which is the “discourse.” He finds it noteworthy that of the twenty-seven chapters which this arrangement produces, the middle chapter is the theologically crucial chapter fifty-three, displaying the Suffering Servant of the Lord.²⁶ Pieper

²³ Ibid., 87

²⁴ August Pieper, *Isaiah II: An Exposition of Isaiah 40-66*. (E.E.Kowalke, Trans.), (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), 54

²⁵ Ibid., 54

²⁶ Ibid., 55

also labels such a discourse unit as a major strophe, but notes that an even more important division is the minor strophe: “this is similar to a hymn and consists of one, two, three, or four or more lines which together constitute a shorter or longer unit of thought.”²⁷

Another literary feature Pieper mentions is the well-known Hebrew poetic parallelism, in which verses of Scripture are arranged in pairs or triads in ways that build or intensify meaning in a synonymous, antithetical, or progressive manner (Psalm 1:1, Psalm 1:6, and Isaiah 44:8 respectively). He also mentions, as a rarer occurrence, chiasm, in which a passage represents paired content in A-B-B-A form.

Pieper maintains that Hebrew poetry does have a kind of meter, although not in the measured form that Maclean noted in English poetry. The difference, Pieper says, is that in Hebrew verse only the stressed syllable in a word is counted. The usual line has three, four, or sometimes more stresses.²⁸

On the relationship of the “divine truths” contained within Scripture to the poetic form by which they are conveyed, Pieper suggests that “the poetic form and the rhetorical figures of speech are hulls or shells from which one must extract the more or less abstract or concrete truth lying within.”²⁹

I consider Isaiah chapter forty to be one of the most rhetorically stirring passages in Scripture. An examination of Pieper’s commentary on that passage to see what poetic features he identifies does not disappoint. Space allows for only a few examples. The entire chapter, Pieper notes, “is constructed with a dramatic artistry that is unusual for Isaiah.”³⁰

One example of Isaiah’s potent style in chapter forty, Pieper notes, is in vv. 12-18—a minor strophe, in which the first half is a series of rhetorical questions.

Verse 12: Who measures the waters in the palm of His hand?

Verse 13: Who measures the spirit of the Lord?

Verse 14: With whom does He take counsel?

Regarding such rhetorical questions, Pieper points out, “they take the place of positive statements, and their purpose is to impart to the thought expressed greater pathos, emphasis, and dignity.”³¹ Pieper goes on to state that, in this

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72

³¹ *Ibid.*, 109

passage “[Isaiah] confronts the spirit of man as such, as *genus*” whereas, in the second half of the strophe, which drops the rhetorical questions in favor of direct assertions, he speaks to men *en masse*, as to the nations.

Verse 15: Truly, the nations—like a drop are they in a bucket.

Verse 16: All of Lebanon is not sufficient for . . . a burnt offering.

Verse 17: The nations, all are as nothing before Him.

Furthermore, in connection with verse 14, Pieper notes a case of chiasm: “That he impart to Him understanding / And *instruct* Him in the path of judgment / And *teach* Him to understand / And cause Him to perceive the way of insight.” “Instruct” and “teach” are translated from the same Hebrew word. Pieper makes note of this because some critics have argued that the repetition of this word, *וְיָלַם מְדַרְהוּ* is “clumsy” and a later “interpolation.” But Pieper sees the chiasmic construction as necessary: “The poet is interested in mustering all his poetic technique to extol the unsearchable sovereign counsel of God, and to do that he varies the usual parallel arrangement of a pair and weaves into the description a chiasmus.”³²

More examples could be offered of how Pieper, the exegete, discerned not only the verbal and grammatical meaning of Isaiah’s message, but also the poetic and rhetorical artistry that adorns the prophet’s inspired words.

We have, then, three examples of readers and interpreters of Scripture who were able to recognize that Scripture often expresses itself, not only in verbal and linguistic clarity and precision, but also rhetorical and stylistic mastery. To the Bible student and pastoral shepherd of our day, I believe this suggests a few things.

First of all, a thoughtful and skilled awareness of this rhetorical aspect has something to say for the apologist. The Scriptures that have been handed down through the ages are decidedly not the work of purported hacks who cobbled together legends and tales two or three centuries after the historical periods of these prophets and apostles.

Secondly, the student of Scripture will do well, for his own edification, if he can learn to recognize these devices at work as he studies the Word. In this way, there is a deepening of appreciation for the potent message the words contain—although Augustine and Maclean would both agree that this

³² Ibid., 117

analytical sophistication is not necessary, as long as the reader experiences a “pleasure” at what is read).

Finally, the minister of God does well to develop an awareness of Scripture’s rhetorical excellence, and to let that influence his own preaching and writing as the Lord gives him ability.

It has always struck me that the biblical writers, all led by the Holy Spirit, nonetheless spoke each with his own distinct voice. For example, Paul, with irrefutable logic; Peter, with warmth and imagery; and John, with profound concepts in simple words. Augustine must have felt much the same and saw this in terms of rhetorical “eloquence”:

Here, some perhaps may ask whether our authors, whose divinely inspired writings, with saving authority, make up the Canon for us, should be ranked merely as wise, or also as eloquent men. For myself . . . this question is, of course, easily settled. For when I understand them, it seems to me that nothing can have more wisdom or even more eloquence. And I venture to state this also, that all who rightly understand what these writers say, understand too that they could not have spoken otherwise. . . . With such eloquence have our authors spoken. No other is fitting to them, nor is theirs, to others; for it perfectly accords with them; but as it seems the more lowly, so it the more highly transcends others, not by its inflation, but by its solidity.³³

Solid, indeed! For it is through these powerful words that the Church’s faith is grounded on the Rock. May that continue among all who read this until He comes.



³³ Bizzell, P. and B. Herzberg, 459

The Abyss in the Book of Revelation

John K. Pfeiffer

In preparation for an article on the twentieth chapter Revelation, a study of the term ἄβυσσος became necessary. The following are exegetical notes regarding this word and parallel terms in Greek and Hebrew.

ἄβυσσος occurs nine times in the New Testament, seven of which are in the book of Revelation (9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3). In these passages, ἄβυσσος is clearly used as a destination for destruction, or a source of evil.

The other two New Testament uses of this term are in Luke 8:31 and Romans 10:7. Before considering these two passages, we will look at the uses of ἄβυσσος in the Septuagint (LXX) and the Hebrew terms which are so translated.

Lexicon definitions of ἄβυσσος¹

Arndt-Gingrich: *unfathomable depth, abyss, underworld abode of the dead*

Friberg: Literally, *bottomless pit*. Transliterated into English as *abyss*: 1) as the place where dead people go, *depths, underworld*; 2) as a place for shutting away the devil and evil spirits, *abyss, bottomless pit, very deep and large hole*

Liddell-Scott-Jones (Classical Greek): *with no bottom, bottomless, unfathomed . . . generally, unfathomable, enormous*

Louw-Nida: A location of the dead and a place where the Devil is kept, the abode of the beast as the antichrist, and of Abaddon, as the angel of the underworld, *abyss, abode of evil spirits, very deep place*.

Lust-Eynikel-Hauspie (Septuagint Lexicon): *bottomless, deep; the (cosmic) deep, the abyss*

New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance: Alpha-privative and *bussos* = ἄβυσσος --*the bottom or depth of the sea; the sea itself, the deep sea*. Definition: *boundless, bottomless*. New American Translation: *abyss* (7), *bottomless* (2).

¹ Bibliographic information for the cited lexicons is located on pp. 38-39

Strong's: *the abyss, unfathomable depth*, an especially Jewish conception, the home of the dead and of evil spirits.

Thayer (Classical Greek): adjective: *bottomless, unbounded; the pit, the abyss*

An unique expression occurs in the ninth chapter of Revelation—ἄβυσσος is combined with φρέαρ: τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου—*the pit of the abyss*. This is the only time these two words occur together.

Outside of Revelation chapter nine, φρέαρ occurs three times in the New Testament, each time it refers to a physical well. The Septugint uses φρέαρ as a translation for the Old Testament בְּאֵר (well, pit). In most instances, בְּאֵר refers to a physical well. However, it also refers to a metaphorical well, e.g. Proverbs 23:27, “For a harlot is a deep pit, And a seductress is a narrow well.”

Lexicon definitions of φρέαρ

Arndt-Gingrich: *well, pit, shaft*

Friberg: 1) a place for storing runoff water, *cistern, reservoir, a sealed-in well*, distinguished from πηγὴ, (*spring, fountain*). 2) as the opening into a deep hole in the ground, *shaft, pit*

Liddell-Scott-Jones (Classical Greek): 1) *a well* (distinguished from κρήνη, *a spring*). 2) *a tank, cistern, reservoir*

Louw-Nida: deep constructions, often walled with stone, at the bottom of which was a pool of water, *well*

Lust-Eynikel-Hauspie (Septuagint Lexicon): (*artificial*) *well, pit*

New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance: *a well, the pit of the abyss*

Strong's: of uncertain derivation, *a hole in the ground* (dug for obtaining or holding water or other purposes), i.e. a cistern or well. Figuratively, *an abyss* (as a prison), *well, pit*

Thayer (Classical Greek): from the Homeric hymn Cer. 99 and Herodotus 6, 119 down; the Septuagint for בְּאֵר and . . . בּוֹר (a pit, cistern), *a well*: . . . τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου, *the pit of the abyss* (because the nether world is thought to increase in size the further it extends from the surface of the earth and so to resemble a cistern, the orifice of which is narrow)

Uses of ἄβυσσος in the Septuagint

In the Septuagint, ἄβυσσος occurs fifty times. In most instances, it is the translation of מְדִיִּתָּהּ which means *the deep; the chaotic waters*.

In Genesis 1:2, we understand that the מְדִיִּתָּהּ was planned, controlled chaos. “For He is not the God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

In Job 36:16, there is no word in the Hebrew text corresponding to the Septuagint use of ἄβυσσος.

In the historical books, ἄβυσσος refers to a physical *abyss*, a seemingly bottomless chasm or a broad and very deep ocean.

In some passages, it can be seen that water is not conceptualized in the use of מְדִיִּתָּהּ. These are passages in which מְדִיִּתָּהּ is a descriptive term for the grave and also for Hell. The Old Testament concept of the grave and Hell seems to be that of a pit. Death begins when one descends through the mouth and into the upper part of the pit, i.e., the grave. From there, death continues as the victim goes down the “sides of the pit” (cf. Isaiah 14:15 below) where the eternal fire is found. The concept of degrees of suffering seems to be implied with expressions like the “sides of the pit” and the “lowest pit” (cf. Psalm 88:6 below).

Without divine intervention, everyone who goes into the grave will continue downward until he reaches the flames of hell or unless there is divine intervention. Thanks be to God, the divine intervention was accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Having been declared guilty of all our sins, Jesus endured the lowest pit while on the cross (cf. comments on Psalm 88 below). However, He did not remain there, for “in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears (“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.”) to Him who was able to save Him from death (better: out of death—ἐκ θανάτου), and was heard because of His godly fear” (Hebrews 5:7). Thus, He defeated the pit and has been rescuing sinners from the grip of death since the beginning.

בּוֹר = בְּצֵר

Psalm 30:3 — *O LORD, You brought my soul up from the grave (שְׂאוֹל); You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit (בּוֹר—grave/pit; Septuagint—λάκκον).*

Poetic parallelism indicates that שְׂאוֹל and בּוֹר are, at least, similar. The reference to the soul casts doubt upon the New King James' translation (grave) of שְׂאוֹל. Translating שְׂאוֹל as "the realm of the dead" is more neutral and leaves it to the reader to interpret.

Psalm 40:2 — *He also brought me up out of a horrible pit (בּוֹר), Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.*

This is probably a metaphor. On the other hand, since the writer to the Hebrews quotes vv. 6-8 as Messianic, one might consider the whole psalm to be such. If so, this verse could be referring to Christ's deliverance from the agonies of Hell, or from the grave, or both.

Psalm 55:23—*But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit (בְּאֵר) of destruction; Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; But I will trust in You.*

לְבֵּאֵר שְׁחַת, the well of (the) pit, which the Septuagint renders with φρέαρ διαφθορᾶς, the well/pit of decay. The English translations of the Hebrew reflect the Septuagint's choice of terms. The apostle Paul appears to verify this translation of שְׁחַת (Psalm 16:10) in Acts 13:35-37. On this basis, we understand the psalm to be referring to the grave, the place of decay.

Psalm 69:15—*Let not the floodwater overflow me, Nor let the deep (מְצוּלָה/βυθός) swallow me up; And let not the pit (בְּאֵר) shut its mouth on me.*

The pit (בְּאֵר) is viewed as something that can close its mouth around a person. Therefore, we envision an opening into which the victim descends. In addition, this passage has the word βυθός (deep), which is a translation of מְצוּלָה, meaning the deep, the depths of the sea. There is a clear connection between the pit and much water in many uses of this term.

Psalm 143:7—*Answer me speedily, O LORD; My spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, Lest I be like those who go down into the pit (בּוֹר).*

If the psalmist is speaking of the grave, this would mean that when the Lord hides His face from him, a man dies. I do not understand this to mean that

the LORD hides His face from the man's spiritual existence, but from his physical existence. The body lives because the face of the LORD continues to smile upon it, to sustain physical life. The prolongation of physical life is not determined by biological factors, but by divine factors. Even regarding the lives of animals, this is true. Speaking of animals, the psalmist says, *"You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust"* (Psalm 104:29).

Psalm 88:4—*I am counted with those who go down to the **pit** (בֹּרַי); I am like a man who has no strength (grave).*

Psalm 88:6 *You have laid me in the lowest **pit** (בֹּרַי), In darkness, in the depths (Hell).*

It seems that Psalm 88 is Messianic. If so, we can understand references to the pit as being a combination of the grave and Hell. Beginning with the grave, the pit descends into the lowest depths of *Sheol*, namely, Hell. Jesus was in the depths of Hell when on the cross. He was abandoned by His Father *"Adrift among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave (קִבְרִי), Whom You remember no more, And who are cut off from Your hand. You have laid me in **the lowest pit**, In darkness, in the depths"* (vv.5,6).

Jesus endured the wrath of God. *"Your wrath lies heavy upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves"* (v.7). *"LORD, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me? I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught. Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off"* (vv.14-16). It would be hard to apply this to anyone but the Savior. These are His thoughts during the three dread hours of darkness. This psalm parallels Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 14:15—*Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To **the lowest depths of the Pit** (יִרְבְּתֵי-בֹרַי).*

If the pit is the grave, then what are the lowest depths of the grave? יִרְבְּתֵי-בֹרַי = *the sides of the pit* This must refer to Hell and to the degrees (the *sides* as the condemned descend) of punishment therein.

Isaiah 38:17-18 —*Indeed it was for my own peace That I had great bitterness; But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption (בִּשְׁחַת בְּלִי, pit of wearing out), For You have cast all my sins behind Your back. For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the **pit** (בֹּרַי) cannot hope for Your truth.*

If שְׁחָתָה (see below) means *corruption*, why add בְּלִי? The use of נֶפֶשׁ in this verse would indicate that Isaiah saw the *pit* as more than the grave. נֶפֶשׁ is the immaterial part of man (the soul) which exists after death. The use of שְׁאוֹל would appear to verify this. Hezekiah sees the whole of the realm of the dead including the grave and Hell. He praises God for redeeming him from all of it by *casting his sins behind His back*, the sins that would condemn him to Hell.

Jeremiah 38:6—*So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the **dungeon** (בְּוֹר) of Malchiah the king's son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire.*

The *dungeon* or *pit* (בְּוֹר) was a cistern. Jeremiah was cast into its murky depths.

שְׁחָתָה — 1. *pit* (to trap animals), 2. *pit, grave*: abode of the dead (= *Sheol*)

שְׁחָתָה: (verb) *become corrupt, spoiled*

Psalms 30:9—*“What profit is there in my blood, When I go down to the (שְׁחָתָה) **pit** (grave)? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth?”*

The reference to dust indicates that the psalmist is talking about the grave—the mouth of the pit.

Psalms 49:9 *That he should continue to live eternally, And not see the **Pit** (Hell?)*

Verse eight speaks of the soul (נֶפֶשׁ). This leads me to believe that the psalmist is speaking of the entire realm of the dead, not merely the grave.

Psalms 94:13 *That You may give him rest from the days of adversity, Until the **pit** (Hell?) is dug for the wicked.*

Ezekiel 32:18-32

In Ezekiel chapter thirty-two, several of the terms seem to be used interchangeably. Some of them would be identified as the physical graves that we see in cemeteries. Others refer to the more expansive concept of the realm of the dead, and then there are terms that appear to be speaking of Hell. Yet, they all seem to be speaking of the same place or different aspects of the same place.

בְּוֹר—*pit*

קֶבֶר—*grave*

נִתְּנוּ קְבֻרָתֵיהֶּן בְּיַרְכְּתֵי-בֹר—*her graves are set in the sides of the pit*

אֶרֶץ תַּחְתִּיּוֹת—*lower/lowest parts of the earth*

שְׂאוֹל—*Sheol*

מִתּוֹךְ שְׂאוֹל—*midst of Sheol*

מִשְׁכָּב—*bed*

Moreover, certain statements are made about those who go down to the pit. These indicate that there is a state of consciousness among those in the pit.

Those in the midst of Sheol are speaking (Ezekiel 32:21).

Those in the pit bear their shame (Ezekiel 32:24-30).

Their iniquities will be on their bones (Ezekiel 32:27).

Pharaoh (who is in the pit) will see others and be comforted (Ezekiel 32:31).

The interchange of terminology and the various statements about the dead give the distinct impression that the abyss is not merely the 6x6x4 hole in the ground, or niche in the crematorium, or tomb in the rock, but is much more. It begins with the physical grave and then descends to various depths; and those who are found in it have an other-worldly consciousness. Even if one would assert that Ezekiel is speaking in figurative language, his prophecy—when it is coupled with things that are said elsewhere in the Old Testament—lends credence to this impression.

The Use of *ἄβυσσος* in the New Testament outside of the Book of Revelation

Luke 8:31

καὶ παρεκάλουν αὐτὸν ἵνα μὴ ἐπιτάξῃ αὐτοῖς εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον ἀπελθεῖν.

*And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the **abyss**.*

It is difficult to determine what “abyss” references in this verse. On the one hand, the pigs do run into the sea, and *ἄβυσσος* is used with reference to the sea in the *Septuagint*. On the other hand, the use of *ἄβυσσος* in the book of Revelation and in various places in the *Septuagint* leads one to conclude that the demons are referring to the prison of fallen angels, i.e., Hell (compare Revelation 20:3, 7—the abyss is called Satan’s prison). Why, after all, would spirit beings fear being cast into a lake?

Romans 10:6-7

ἡ δὲ ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοσύνη οὕτως λέγει, Μὴ εἴπῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, Τίς ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; τοῦτ' ἔστιν Χριστὸν καταγαγεῖν· ἢ, Τίς καταβήσεται εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον; τοῦτ' ἔστιν Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναγαγεῖν.

But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, "'Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

When placed in juxtaposition with Heaven, the abyss seems to be Hell, or at the very least, the realm of the dead which includes Hell and the grave. We don't have to go to the highest of highs to find righteousness nor to the lowest of lows. The message that brings forgiveness and righteousness and salvation is with us and in us and on our lips.

Paul is not quoting Deuteronomy 30:13. Rather, he—or more properly, the Holy Spirit—is using words and phrases that are a reflection of those that the Spirit gave to Moses. However, whereas Moses uses these words to speak of the Law, Paul uses them to speak of the righteousness of faith.

The *Septuagint* translation of Moses' words uses θάλασσα for **בְּיַם**. However, Paul uses ἄβυσσος. θάλασσα does not fit the Spirit's intent. By refraining from using θάλασσα, Paul makes it clear that he is not speaking of crossing a body of deep water to find Christ. The deep water concept sometimes connected to ἄβυσσος is not intended in this passage. Had Paul intended to convey the same concept as Moses, θάλασσα would have been appropriate. This is significant for our understanding of ἄβυσσος. Were it not for this passage, we might be hard pressed to ignore the concept of water in this term.

Considering Luke 8:31 and Romans 10:7, I am left with the conclusion that ἄβυσσος in the New Testament is equivalent to Hades, the Old Testament *Sheol*. However, it is a different view of the realm of the dead. Depending on the context, Hades refers to the grave, or to Hell, or to both. By using the word ἄβυσσος, the Spirit is referring to that whole realm—the entire abyss, including the prison prepared for the Devil and his angels.

Conclusion

The Old Testament concept of the grave and Hell is visualized as a bottomless pit, an unfathomable abyss, with the grave at the top and the depths of Hell at the bottom. Between the top and the bottom are the sides of

the pit, whereon are found degrees of suffering—the lowest pit is the worst of the suffering. Without divine intervention, everyone who goes into the grave continues downward into Hell where the wrath of God remains unextinguished.

However, thanks be to God, there has been divine intervention. It is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In Psalm 88, the Messiah pre-scribed (i.e., written beforehand) His endurance of God's wrath: *"You have laid me in the lowest pit, In darkness, in the depths. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. . . . LORD, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me? I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught. Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off"* (Psalm 88:6-7, 14-16).

Upon the cross, the Messiah suffered the agony of the lowest pit, the depths of Hell, for us. We will not descend into the abyss, for *"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us"* (Galatians 3:13).

In the book of Revelation, the abyss is seen as a place of evil. The evil of torment is found in it. The evil of Satan and his lies arise from it. In Revelation chapter nine, the abyss is opened by the Antichrist and the evil of work-righteousness belches forth as smoke from a furnace, blotting out the light of the gospel for many. In Revelation chapter twenty, Satan is locked up in the abyss and is denied the ability to deceive the nations with his dark message.²

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² We will consider this further in an exegesis of Revelation chapter twenty which begins in the next issue of the *Journal of Theology*

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Book Review

Paul D. Nolting

Victor I. Vieth: *On This Rock—A Call to Center the Christian Response to Child Abuse on the Life and Words of Jesus*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2018, paperback, 62 pages, 9 preliminary pages.

Victor Vieth is a former prosecutor. He also directed the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse. He founded the National Child Protection Training Center, and he is the president of the Academy on Violence and Abuse. This book is a thesis which was written to fulfill the requirements for a Master of Arts degree from Wartburg Theological Seminary.

Vieth begins by quoting the words of Jesus, *“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me”* (Mark 9:36-37). He contends that Jesus is referencing ancient Jewish customs involving messengers, namely, that messengers were received with the same respect as those sending the messengers. He suggests that we should receive children as Christ’s chosen representatives. In so doing, Vieth further suggests that he is proposing nothing new, but that the church today should address child abuse with a commitment to Jesus’ teachings on children.

In advancing his argument, Vieth develops two propositions: 1) Jesus is not a mere mortal but the Word incarnate. Therefore, His teachings should not be regarded lightly by Christians or viewed as optional. 2) In view of the Christian community’s frequent failure to adhere to Jesus’ teachings on the maltreatment of children, both law and gospel should be applied to the situation. Vieth hopes that people will, thereby, be led to genuine repentance, receive God’s forgiveness, and thereafter be renewed by the Holy Spirit, so that new affections might arise toward God and toward the children He has entrusted to us.

Vieth goes on briefly to describe the physical, emotional, and spiritual impact of child abuse on victims. He cites the work of Dr. Vincent Felitti, who developed the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) testing procedure. He discusses child abuse in ancient societies—secular and religious. He speaks of the impact of Jesus’ incarnation and the proclamation of the gospel on the treatment of children, as well as the response of the early church to the child abuse that was so common in the first century. He reviews the often-sad record of modern Christianity’s response to child abuse and calls upon the church to deal with this evil based on the words of Christ.

Vieth concludes his book with the following ten suggestions, which he believes, if implemented, would dramatically improve the lives of children.

- 1) Seminaries should implement rigorous courses on child maltreatment.
- 2) Churches should have child protection policies.
- 3) Churches should require child abuse prevention training for all staff and volunteers who work with children.
- 4) Churches should have policies for monitoring convicted sex offenders attending services or other church activities.
- 5) Pastors should preach sermons and conduct Bible studies on various aspects of child maltreatment.
- 6) Churches should condemn false doctrines which have contributed to child abuse, e.g. teachings that forbid medical care, prevent survivors from using mental health professionals, etc.
- 7) Churches should implement programs to assist abuse victims and their families.
- 8) Churches should have resources available for families impacted by abuse.
- 9) Churches must answer the call to work with child protection professionals in meeting the needs of maltreated children.
- 10) We must communicate to the world that we believe our treatment of children reflects our view of God.

The book is a quick-read dealing with a weighty topic that is often inadequately addressed in confessional Lutheran circles. It is thought-provoking and worthy of discussion and necessary follow-up.

Book Review

David T. Lau

Cheryl D. Naumann: *In the Footsteps of Phoebe—A Complete History of the Deaconess Movement in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 2008, 601 pages, 9 preliminary pages.

The main reason this reviewer wants to make mention of this book is to recount the experience of several deaconesses of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod who exposed the false teaching involved in the deaconess training program at Valparaiso University. They also took the necessary steps to persuade the Missouri Synod establishment to develop a new deaconess program that would be controlled by the Missouri Synod.

The book has three parts: Part One covers the years from 1919 to 1979. One can learn very much about the history of the deaconess movement in this section. During the early years of this period, a deaconess program was begun to serve all Synodical Conference congregations, including those in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. At first these deaconesses were trained at various locations. Beginning in 1944 and extending to 1979, all Missouri Synod deaconesses were trained at Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana. During these years the Wisconsin Synod faded out of the picture.

In 1979 the Missouri Synod Convention authorized a deaconess program operated by the Missouri Synod with instruction to be given at Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois. The history from 1979 to the writing of this book is detailed in Part Three.

It is in Part II that we learn of the valiant effort of a few deaconesses that were troubled by the gradual movement of the Valparaiso faculty away from Scripture to a doctrinal position that espoused cooperation with false-teaching churches, support of the Seminex faction that fostered historical-critical study of the Bible, and promotion of the concept of women's ordination to the pastoral ministry. Even though they were in the distinct minority and received no support or encouragement from the Valparaiso faculty, these few confession-minded deaconesses found each other. They conscientiously drew up documentation of the false teachings and practices that were in the education program of those who were training to be deaconesses.

These deaconesses learned quickly that it is hard to stand up for the truth of Scripture against forces that are determined to follow their own way. This is the testimony of one first-year student in the deaconess program. The professor asked the question, "What is the Bible?" This student responded by saying, "The Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God." The student then reported: "For what seemed like an eternity, the professor dissected and belittled my answer in front of the whole class" (pp. 411-412).

Finding themselves opposed by faculty and the other students, four students met for a half-hour every afternoon. "We talked about what went on in our theology classes, cried and laughed together, consulted the Lutheran Confessions, read passages from Scripture, and always finished with prayer. . . . Fearing public rebuke from other students, we kept our meetings secret" (p. 417).

When one student took her complaints to the head of the theology department, he had no sympathy for her position. She reports, "Daily, Dr. Keller ridiculed an image of conservatives. He was unaccepting of any differing points of view. . . . I was isolated as a conservative. . . . None of the old faithful four were around for support. . . . I had to struggle through—just me and my God" (p. 418).

Another deaconess reports, "I thought it was strange that Catholic priests and nuns partook of Holy Communion at the Liturgical Conferences held at Valparaiso. . . . We were taught in theology classes . . . the 'JEDP' theory. . . . I don't remember any other deaconess students questioning what we were taught. I was alone in my thinking. . . . The general theme of dorm conversation was that deaconesses should be equal to pastors. . . . One of the deaconesses announced she was going to attend seminary to become a pastor" (p. 421).

The organization for deaconesses was called the Lutheran Deaconess Association (LDA). The protesting deaconesses received no support from this organization either. One deaconess reports, "At the California conference in 1975, I was upset by how the women disregarded clear Biblical teaching and the doctrine of our church. . . . I started crying. . . . I explained that I just couldn't attend the closing Communion service with them. . . . I was overwhelmed with a terrible feeling of loss, and began to go through what can only be described as a mourning process. I had come to the conclusion that the LDA was not going to change" (p. 425).

Eventually in 1979, with the help of a few key Missouri Synod officials, these protesting deaconesses stated their case at the Missouri Synod convention. The entire transcript of the convention discussion on deaconesses is printed on pages 399-407. The result was the formation of a new deaconess program that has no ties to Valparaiso University and its heretical views. Nine deaconesses then formed the Concordia Deaconess Conference. One of the nine is the author of this book, Cheryl Naumann.

These nine fought a good fight back in the 1970's. I wonder whether any of them realize by now that the Missouri Synod itself has drifted from the Scriptural position (*Brief Statement* of 1932) in which these women were raised in their youth. There is no indication in this book of any dissatisfaction with the Missouri Synod position of more recent years. And yet the record indicates that the Missouri Synod tolerates still today some of the heretical teachings and practices of the Valparaiso faculty against which they protested.

