

# Journal of Theology

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# Journal of Theology

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# The Millennium of Revelation Chapter Twenty (Part 1, vv.1-3)

John K. Pfeiffer

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

History is like a river. A river is contained by its banks and it flows to a specific destination. At times, there are floods that seem to threaten the direction of the flow. However, the waters subside and the river returns to its course. Similarly, the flow of history is contained and flows to a specific destination. At times, there are tumults and upheavals that seem to threaten the direction of the flow, but these threats subside and history remains on its course.

Just as a river follows a course of intelligent design, so too the course of history is designed. Both are designed by the Creator/Redeemer/Sanctifier. God's established laws of nature determine the course of rivers. God's established gospel of salvation determines the course of history. He maintains the flow by causing all things to work together for good to those who believe this gospel.

The enemies of God constantly try to redirect the course of history with the use of lies, deception, violence, and temptation. Throughout history, God's purpose and His goal for mankind have been threatened by wars, persecution, false doctrine, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. But, inevitably, the Savior and His gospel are triumphant, and the river of history stays within its banks, flowing toward the day when Christ will reveal Himself to all and gather His people to glory.

*"But let justice run down like water,  
And righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24).*

The book of Revelation lays out the course of history's river. It reveals the repeated attempts of Satan's forces to channel the river in a different direction, and then it celebrates the repeated triumph of Christ, His gospel, and His bride.

*Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are*

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<sup>1</sup> For this author's interpretive approach to the book of Revelation, see "Guidelines for the Book Of Revelation," *Journal of Theology*, Volume 39, Number 1—March 1999 ([https://www.journaloftheology.org/jtheo\\_arch/jt-1999-vol-039-num-01.pdf#page=12](https://www.journaloftheology.org/jtheo_arch/jt-1999-vol-039-num-01.pdf#page=12)).

*to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? (2 Corinthians 2:14-16)*

The recorder of the revelatory visions is the apostle John. At the very beginning of the book, he announces the nature of the revelations.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Basis for the Hermeneutics of the Book of Revelation**

Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός, δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ

*The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show to His servants things which it is necessary to come to be soon and He showed by signs, sending through His messenger to His servant, John (JKP).<sup>3</sup>*

**Revelation 1:1**

**Subject matter:** the revelation of Jesus Christ (the revelation about Jesus, which is all of history)

**Source:** God

**Recipient:** God's servant, John

**Manner of revelation:** Show; cause to see (each repeated refrain, "*and I saw,*" indicates a new vision)

**Beneficiaries:** God's servants (believers)

**Dependability:** It is necessary to come to be—these are things that must and will happen

**Time frame:** Soon, shortly, quickly (all terms are futuristic—the future as it pertains to John)

**Nature of revelation:** He showed by signs (σημαίνω)—signs represent the reality, but are not the reality itself

**Method of delivery:** sending through His messenger, probably an angel

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<sup>2</sup> **Author's note:** I can find nothing else in the book of Revelation that gives us a hermeneutic for interpretation—Revelation 1:1 is it. If I missed something, I welcome the reader to contact me with the information.

<sup>3</sup> Bible quotations identified as "JKP" are the author's own translation.

This is followed by a salutation to the initial recipients of the book, namely, the seven churches in Asia Minor. In the salutation John celebrates the saving grace of God and the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. Having glorified the Triune God, John turns and sees an amazing vision of the Son of Man. In the vision he beholds a spectacular, symbolic characterization of Jesus Christ.

*“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches’”* (Revelation 1:17-20, JKP).<sup>3</sup>

Then in verse nineteen, Jesus instructs John to record the things that he has seen in the past—the visions preceding verse nineteen, the things that are in his present time—chapters two and three, and the things that will take place in the future—chapters five and following

This interpretation of verse nineteen is validated by the fact that chapter four begins by repeating the thoughts that express the nature of the whole book (1:1). *“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you **things which must take place after this**’”* (Revelation 4:1).

As we follow John through his writing, we are struck by frightening visions of the enemies of Christ. However, these fears are obliterated by the clear proclamation and representation of the victory of our Lord and of His Church.

## Chapters 8-9

In order to understand chapter twenty, we need to look to chapters eight and nine. There is a close connection between chapter nine and chapter twenty. Both chapters begin by drawing our attention to the “key of the abyss.” In chapter nine, the forces of Satan—the king of the abyss—are released to torment the souls of men. In chapter twenty, Satan is bound and locked in the abyss, so that he cannot “deceive the nations.” Then, for a short time, he is released to resume his onslaught.

Chapter eight presents the first four trumpets. After a suspenseful pause of silent expectation, seven angels are appointed to trumpet the future events of

the world. Before they proceed, we see that what is about to happen on earth is a direct response to the prayers of the saints (the Church). Next, come the trumpets of judgment.

**The First Trumpet:** Man's empty pride is turned against him. False teachers appeal to man's manliness so that he begins to see himself as though he were a god (e.g., humanism, the Roman hierarchy).

**The Second Trumpet:** The law is taught among the nations as the way of salvation. Work-righteousness worms its way into the corporate church, becoming the deadly "gospel" that brings spiritual death throughout the world.

**The Third Trumpet:** False teachers put bitterness into the mouth of the Holy Spirit by producing corrupt Bible translations and promoting false principles of interpretation.

**The Fourth Trumpet:** False teachers darken the light of truth by proclaiming errors of every kind.

These first four trumpets are followed by the three-fold woe about to come upon the world. These first trumpets announced spiritual wickedness in a more general manner. The fact that the next three trumpets are singled out as three distinct woes indicates that these three will be more specific and far worse. In chapter nine, the next three trumpets announce the coming of specific, historical figures, events, or movements.

**The Fifth Trumpet:** The trumpet sounds and the first woe begins. Actually, the beginning of this woe preceded the occurrence of this vision. The "star" is in a fallen state—it *had* fallen<sup>4</sup> before the inception of the vision. This apostate teacher is already in the world. He is not like other false teachers who come and go. His power is great, although the greatest of his powers is not yet in his hands. This power is found in the "key" to the pit of the abyss—the key to Hell. As the vision begins, we see the giving of the key. With this key, the apostate teacher can release the powers of Hell upon the earth.

Hell is the antithesis of Heaven. Similarly, the anti-gospel of work-righteousness is the opposite of the gospel of forgiveness and imputed righteousness. Under the authority of the apostate teacher, the anti-gospel is proclaimed as the foundation of the organized church of the western world.

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<sup>4</sup> The perfect tense is used in Revelation 9:1, πεπτωκότα, indicating that the action took place prior to the events described in the vision.

Like a plague of locusts, his troops go forth on their deadly mission, tormenting the souls of men. Like thick smoke, their message blots out the light of truth in the hearts of those who “*refused to love the truth and so be saved . . . who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*” (2 Thessalonians 2:10,12 JKP). Fearlessly, these intelligent lords of the corporate church lure multitudes to their destruction. However, their power is limited. God does not allow them to torment His elect. Furthermore, God restricts the time of their unhindered rule.

## **Fulfillment**

The apostle Paul warned that the powers of the papacy had already begun to work in his day (2 Thessalonians 2:7). However, it took a while for the pope to work his way up to the point where almost every European and North African church acknowledged him as the leader of Christianity, as the vicar of Christ—God’s number one spokesman on earth.

When he began spreading the teaching of salvation by works, he opened the doors of Hell. Like black smoke billowing from the abyss, this teaching blotted out the light of truth for many, until the time of the Reformation. The darkening was not isolated. For centuries, it spread like smoke from a great furnace over the western world and poisoned the spiritual atmosphere.

Under the pope, many false teachers were allowed to run rampant through the earth. Like a plague of locusts, they descended to torment the souls of men. They feared no one because the papal power was behind them. They came among men as lords of their church, priest, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, pope—some even wearing crowns. Within their ranks were men of great human intelligence. In fact, during the Middle Ages, these were about the only educated men. They gave the appearance of being gentle and harmless. Yet, with their teaching of salvation by works, they ripped and tore apart the souls of multitudes. No man could stop them in their headlong rush into this warfare.

The teaching of salvation by works is agonizing like a scorpion’s sting. Martin Luther gives firsthand testimony of this agony in his hymn, *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice*.<sup>5</sup> Man, as he sees his repeated failures to lead a perfect life, is driven to despair. In those days, people desperately sought ways to escape their fears (pilgrimages, indulgences, relics), but could find no true

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<sup>5</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal*, (St Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 387.

relief. Christ crucified for the sins of the world was hidden from them. Truly, those were the dark ages.

The power over all, the king who controlled the pope and his armies, was Satan (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9). His name is “Destruction.” Spiritual destruction is Satan’s gift to the world.

However, God put limitations on the pope, his king, and his crew. They could not touch the elect. Even in the darkest of times, there were men who were brought to faith through the gracious working of God. Perhaps, here and there, in remote little parishes, were obscure preachers—though not obscure to God—who still taught the pure gospel of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. God’s protection remained over them. Even the gates of Hell cannot prevail against the Church (Matthew 16:18).

God’s control also extended to the amount of time that the pope was allowed such authority. The time would come when the unhindered onslaught of the armies of Hell would be stopped. The smoke would clear and the light of the gospel would shine again. This did not happen until the time of Martin Luther, when the bottomless pit was again sealed.

Not long after the deaths of the apostles, the bishop of Rome began to rise in power. Eventually, he became the supreme power and authority in the western world. He stifled the preaching of the gospel, allowing the forces of Hell to run rampant, for only the gospel can stop them. With the coming of Martin Luther<sup>6</sup> and the preaching of the gospel, this absolute domination ended. This does not mean that the “fallen star” was destroyed. The vision says that the unhindered reign of terror would last for “five months.” It is through the preaching of the gospel that the message of work-righteousness is stifled. However, the pope lives on, as does his reign of terror. The face may change, but the man of lawlessness remains unchanged.

### **Interpretations of Revelation Chapter Twenty**

Before continuing into Revelation chapter twenty, it may be helpful to review the various interpretive approaches to this chapter. It should be understood that there are more approaches, as well as a variety of definitions for each approach.

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<sup>6</sup>While previous reformers such as Waldo, Huss, Wycliff, and Savonarola may have preached the gospel, they tended to focus on the power of the pope, the moral degradation of the clergy, and the deprivation of the Bible in the language of the people—in other words, the law. Luther’s focus was on the gospel of justification by grace through faith.



## Already Fulfilled

### Preterist

The book of Revelation portrays events that happened in the days of John. The “millennium” of Revelation chapter twenty is the forty-year generation between AD 30 and AD 70.

## In the Process of Being Fulfilled

### Historist

The book of Revelation describes historical events throughout the New Testament era. Chapter twenty describes the history of the Church since Christ’s resurrection. An alternate historist view is that chapter twenty describes the history of the Church from the time of the Reformation until the end of the world.

### Nunc-millennialist (amillennialists)

The book of Revelation describes cyclical events throughout the New Testament era. Chapter twenty describes the spiritual rule of Christ which began at His resurrection and continues to the end.

### Spiritualist

Everything in Revelation should be taken metaphorically. The visions portray a spiritual—not physical—ongoing battle between good and evil, and good triumphs in the end. Chapter twenty portrays the world getting better and better until Christ comes. This is the post-millennial view.

### Allegorist

The visions are to be understood as neither literal nor symbolic of reality, but allegorically—representing abstract, moral truths.

## Not Yet Fulfilled

### Futurist

The book of Revelation, for the most part, has yet to be fulfilled. Chapter twenty is to be taken literally. This is the pre-millennial interpretation.

The following truths clearly eliminate some of these interpretations,

1. There is only *one* resurrection in which both the good and the evil will rise (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).
2. The believers will rise on the Last Day and not before then (John 6:39,40).

3. Nothing comes between our death and the Judgment (Hebrews 9:27).
4. Nowhere does Scripture speak of Christ returning twice.
5. When Christ does come again, it will be for Judgment, and not for an earthly battle (Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).
6. All the earthly days of the Christian will be days of tribulation which will increase until the Last Day (Matthew 24 and 25; Luke 21).
7. Christ's kingdom is *not* of this earth. It is spiritual and our battle is spiritual, not physical (Luke 17:21; John 18:36; Romans 14:17; Ephesians 6:12-18; 2 Corinthians 10:4).

### **A Summary of Chapter Nineteen**

Among the millennialists are those who believe that Revelation chapters nineteen and twenty are in chronological order. If this were true, then the events of chapter twenty would come after the resurrection. That would mean that there are two physical resurrections. Otherwise, the events of 20:7-9 would have to take place in heaven, which is, of course, absurd. Likewise, the literal scriptures reject the thought of two resurrections.

However, since the book of Revelation does not always proceed in chronological order, we need not assume that chapter twenty follows chapter nineteen as to time. Therefore, we will deal with chapter twenty separately and not as an adjunct to chapter nineteen.

Why, then, does chapter nineteen precede chapter twenty? It is not chronological, but merely logical. Chapter eighteen visualized the destruction of the anti-church. In direct contradistinction to this, God gives us a vision of the victory celebration of the victory of the Holy Christian Church (19:1-10). In addition, we are assured of the ultimate destruction of the Antichrist (19:11-21). In this way, God wraps up the visionary chronicle of the Antichrist and his church. Then, he proceeds with the final things.

### **Chapter 19:1-10**

#### **The Triumphant Celebration of the Justice of God and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb**

The multitudes of angels and saints praise God for His pure justice (vv. 1-6). They continue to rejoice over the consummation of the marriage between Christ and His Church (vv. 7-9). During her earthly existence, the Church

prepared herself for this moment through the preaching of the gospel. Now comes the time of glory and feasting with the Bridegroom. John is reminded that Jesus alone is worthy of worship, for He alone is the focus of all prophecy (v. 10).

## **Chapter 19:11-21**

### **The Judgment of the Antichrist and His Followers**

Jesus appears, robed in victory and ready to carry out judgment on the leader of the Antichurch. He appears stained with the blood of His enemies, having defeated them in battles carried on throughout history (vv. 11-16). The Church stands with Jesus, sharing in His victory (v. 14). His sword is the Word coming forth from His mouth by which He judges all (vv. 15,21). Each man stands or falls according to his acceptance or his rejection of that Word (John 12:48). Even as the final battle is engaged, the outcome is determined (vv. 17-18). The Antichrist musters his forces in a futile effort to storm Heaven. They are immediately seized and cast into Hell (vv. 20-21).

Here end the prophecies concerning the Antichrist and the Antichurch.

As we proceed into the exegesis of chapter twenty, we need to understand that these words are not meant to frighten us, but to comfort and assure us. William Hendrickson puts it this way,

In the main, the purpose of the book of Revelation is to comfort the militant Church in its struggle against the forces of evil. It is full of help and comfort for persecuted and suffering Christians. To them is given the assurance that God sees their tears (7:17; 21:4); their prayers are influential in world affairs (8:3-4) and their death is precious in His sight. Their final victory is assured (15:2); their blood will be avenged (19:2); their Christ lives and reigns forever and forever. He governs the world in the interest of His Church (5:7-8<sup>7</sup>). He is coming again to take His people to Himself in “the marriage supper of the Lamb” and to live with them forever in a rejuvenated universe (21:22<sup>8</sup>).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See all of chapter five.

<sup>8</sup> It seems as though Hendrickson may have intended not 21:22, but chapters 21, 22.

<sup>9</sup> William Hendrickson, *More than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1967), pp. 13-14.

**Note:** Hendrickson was a dispensationalist, but his theological errors do not arise in this quote. On the contrary, he well describes the purpose of Revelation and, for our purposes here, chapter twenty.

## Chapter 20

### The Binding of Satan

The similarities between Revelation chapters nine and twenty are helpful. Briefly and without detailing the evidence for this interpretation, the following is a summary of chapter nine.

The trumpet sounds and the first woe begins. Actually, the beginning of this woe preceded the occurrence of this vision. The “star” had already fallen,<sup>10</sup> this false teacher is already in the world. He is not like other false teachers who come and go. His power is great, although the greatest of his powers is not yet in his hands. The greatest power is found in the “key.” At the inception of this vision the fallen star is given the key to the pit of the abyss—the key to Hell. With this key he can release the powers of Hell upon the earth.<sup>11</sup>

### Comparison of Revelation Chapters Nine and Twenty

Keys open and close, unlock and lock, loose and bind. The “*keys of the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 16:19) bind or loose men’s sins thereby opening the gates of Heaven for those whose sins are loosed. The “key of the bottomless pit” opens or closes the gates of Hell.

#### Chapter Nine

The key of the Abyss is *given* by the owner to the “fallen star” (the Antichrist).

He opens the Abyss in order to release the powers of darkness upon the world.

This is followed by a reign of terror as those who torment the souls of men come out of the darkness.

#### Chapter Twenty

The key is held in the hand of the messenger as he comes down from Heaven.

He locks Satan in the Abyss, so that Satan cannot “deceive the nations” for “1000 years” (i.e., in order to contain Satan and the powers of darkness).

This is followed by the “resurrection” of the witnesses of Christ.

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<sup>10</sup> ΠΕΠΤΩΚΟΤΑ — (having fallen) is a perfect participle indicating an action that occurred prior to the events of the vision.

<sup>11</sup> For a study on the Abyss of Revelation, see *Journal of Theology* Volume 58, Issue 3 (Fall 2018).

Only the gospel of forgiveness through Christ can open Heaven for us (Matthew 18:18; John 20:23). Hell is opened by the opposite, that is, by withholding the gospel.

The gospel is withheld in two ways: 1) properly—it is withheld from impenitent sinners, and 2) improperly—it is withheld from penitent sinners and replaced with a message of salvation by good works (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church’s Sacrament of Penance; concerning a message of salvation by good works see Galatians 1:6-9; 2:16; 5:1-4). Whenever the gospel is improperly withheld, it is inevitable that work-righteousness will be taught.

Chapter nine presents the rise of the Antichrist (the fallen star). This apostate bishop of Rome put himself in the place of Christ, calling himself the “vicar [substitute] of Christ”—a power grab. He then declared that men had to earn their way into Heaven by doing good works and by paying for their sins in various ways, thereby laying the foundation for his Antichurch. Since the people realized that they could not measure up to the requirements of the law, he provided a treasury of merits that could be credited to them according to *his* will—a further power grab. These merits were eventually made available for purchase in the form of indulgences—an increase in power and riches. Finally, he declared that no one can be saved outside of the Roman Catholic Church and, therefore, without submission to him<sup>12</sup>—the ultimate power grab.

Among the heathen, work-righteousness has always been the pseudo-pathway to paradise. However, by dragging work-righteousness into the sphere of Christianity, the Pope unleashed the powers of Hell. It began in the Western Church (North Africa and Europe). Then in the centuries that followed, it spread throughout the world. Like the black smoke of a mighty furnace (Revelation 9:2), the message of work-righteousness obscured the light (sun) of the gospel for many. A vast multitude of souls have been and continue to be tormented by the fear of death and the uncertainty of salvation. However, in the midst of all this, the elect—those who are sealed—are always being protected by God.

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<sup>12</sup> Pope Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam* (November 18, 1302), “Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”

## Revelation 20:1

Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ.

*And I saw a messenger coming down out of heaven, having the key of the Abyss and a huge chain upon his hand. (JKP)*

### Verbal Action

The aorist is translated in the past tense when John is speaking about his own activity—"I saw." However, within the confines of the visions, the aorist is translated in the present tense in order to exhibit the vision in a more vibrant manner—John saw the events unfolding in real time. There are some instances in which the context demands the past tense. These will be noted.

Generally speaking, within the visions of Revelation, the **aorist** expresses a singular action in present time; the **present** tense expresses an ongoing action that is unfolding as John watches; the **future** tense expresses an action that is contemplated, or prophesied, and waiting to take place, and the **perfect** tense expresses an action that took place in time previous to the events portrayed in the vision, and the action has resulted in the subsequent state of affairs.

καὶ εἶδον — **and I saw**, aorist active indicative (the action took place at a specific time in John's day).<sup>13</sup> This expression is used by John to introduce a new vision or a new scene in a vision.

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<sup>13</sup>The following quote is found in an article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. It presents the views of Frank Stagg. I was struck by the fact that Stagg, while impugning the punctiliar nature of the aorist, still seems to support it, though not admittedly. At times, what he describes as linear action could be understood as punctiliar, if one considers the action as singular and yet covering an extended period of time, such as the statement of an extended fact.

Frank Stagg, "The Abused Aorist," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume 91, Number 2, 1972, pp. 222–231, [www.jstor.org/stable/3263206](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3263206) (footnote continues on the next page)

"For example, in Mark 1:11 it is stated that Jesus at his baptism heard the heavenly voice saying, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα. If the aorist be 'once for all,' then the meaning would be 'I was once [or once for all] pleased with you!' If the aorist indicative must be preterite, then God's pleasure would refer to the past, but the context obviously relates it to the present. God's pleasure is neither momentary and a single action nor limited to the past. His pleasure is not punctiliar. All that may be said of the aorist here is that it refrains from describing" (p. 228). (footnote continues on the next page)

Καταβαίνοντα—**coming down**, present active participle of καταβαίνω. John saw the messenger in the process of coming down.<sup>14</sup>

This would indicate that the messenger began to descend already in John's day. There is nothing in this verse to show at what stage of descent the messenger was when John saw him. This verse does not reveal the timing of the binding of Satan. However, John and subsequent readers could be assured that the messenger was on his way to carry out this mission. No matter how current events appear to our physical eyes, God is in control. All things will serve His purpose, which is to bring His children to our heavenly haven, even though by way of storm-tossed seas.

ἔχοντα—**holding**, present active participle of ἔχω. The action is parallel to the previous action. As the messenger is coming down, he is holding the key.

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I contend that in Mark 1, the aorist is punctiliar, in that it is a singular fact. The temporal extent of the pleasure of God in His Son covers Jesus' life as a single unit up to this point in time. I believe that other examples given by Stagg can be understood in a similar manner.

The following quotes are presented without approval or disapproval, but merely for the readers' reflection.

"The aorist is well suited to action which in itself is punctiliar whereas some other tenses, e.g., are not. But the aorist is also suited to actions which are in themselves linear, unless one wants to stress its linear action. It follows, then, that the action covered by the aorist may or may not be punctiliar, and the presence of the aorist does not in itself give any hint as to the nature of the action behind it. Contextual factors are primary for any attempt to go behind the aorist to the nature of the action itself.

"If, as indicated by the primitive nature of its stem, the aorist is the oldest Greek tense, it is understandable that it is also the simplest. It simply points to the action without describing it. To stress such matters as duration or state of completion, other tenses were developed. Consequently, these later tenses are more significant for the notion of the action than is the aorist. To state it otherwise, departure from the aorist is exegetically more significant than the presence of the aorist" (p. 231).

The 'aorist' is a term happily suited to the primitive form which it labels. It is 'a-oristic,' i.e., undetermined or undefined. The aorist draws no boundaries. It tells nothing about the notion of the action under consideration. It is 'punctiliar' only in the sense that the action is viewed without reference to duration, interruption, completion, or anything else. What is 'aoristic' belongs to semantics and not necessarily to the semantic situation. The aorist can properly be used to cover any kind of action, broken or unbroken, completed or open-ended. The aorist simply refrains from describing" (p. 223).

<sup>14</sup>Greek participles are frequently used as verbal adjectives—I saw a descending messenger. Nevertheless, the verbal nature of the participle should not be ignored.

The present participle would also imply that the messenger was in possession (ἔχω) of the key before descending from Heaven. This means that he possessed it in heaven. The key was not given to him as it was to the star in chapter nine (9:1). This would imply, also, that the messenger is Jesus, for He alone has personal ownership of the keys of death and Hell (Revelation 1:18, ἔχω—I have / possess).

### Other Terminology

ἄγγελον—*messenger*. In chapter nine, it was a *star* that *fell* from Heaven. Revelation 1:20 reveals that the *star* symbolizes a *messenger* (ἄγγελος). In chapter twenty, the messenger (ἄγγελον) did not fall. Rather, he is seen in the process of “coming down,” i.e., having a heavenly or divine mission. This is an additional reason to understand that this messenger is Christ.

It is important to note that ἄγγελος is used in a several ways throughout the book of Revelation. At times, such as in Revelation chapters two and three, the ἄγγελοι are the pastors of the seven churches whose ministry is to bring the message of God to each of the churches. Other times, ἄγγελοι refers to heavenly spirit-beings (angels) who bring messages of God from Heaven to earth (e.g., Revelation 5:2). At still other times, ἄγγελος may refer to Christ, who is both the message and the messenger (e.g., Revelation 10:1, 20:1; cf. Malachi 3:1, John chapter 1).

κλεῖν—*key*. Keys lock and unlock, bind and loose, close and open. In Matthew chapters sixteen and eighteen and in John 20:23, the keys of the kingdom of heaven are used to release sins from the sinner or to bind them to the sinner. The resultant effect of these actions is that Heaven is opened to the loosed and closed to the bound.

ἄλυσιν μεγάλην —*a huge chain*. The chain and the key go together. These are not the same chains as are found in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6—the Greek words are different in each instance. Furthermore, Peter and Jude are speaking of something that happened shortly after creation. John is speaking of something happening much later.

While the chain is said to be resting upon the messenger’s hand, it is not revealed in what manner he was having the key. We need to know only that he was in possession of it. Furthermore, let there be no doubt about the sufficiency of this chain to keep the devil bound. It is a “mega-chain.”



Christ is continually coming down to aid His people. In His control is the gospel message. The gospel-key means freedom for those who believe, loosening their bonds to sin and death. For those who reject it, the bondage to sin and death remains. Also for Satan, it means bondage. He cannot stand up against the message of his own destruction.

### Chapter 20:2

καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη,

*And he seizes the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is devil and Satan, the one leading the whole world astray, and he binds him a thousand years.*

(JKP)

### Verbal Action

ἐκράτησεν—**he seizes**, aorist active indicative of κρατέω—**to seize with a powerful hold**. In verse one, John employed present participles to express what he saw. The use of the aorist in this verse indicates that at some specific point in the descending process, the messenger seizes Satan. The exact moment in time is not revealed here. The descending process could be a long or a short period of time. In addition, it is not revealed whether the descending stopped at the moment of seizure or whether it continued. The seizing is sudden and in a moment. κρατέω shows complete dominance. This is one more indication that this messenger is probably Christ.

ἐστὶν—**he is**, present active indicative. This is a simple statement of fact regarding the perpetual identity of this dragon.

πλανῶν—**leading astray**, present active participle serving as an attributive adjective, describing the activity of the devil, the misleading one. The present tense indicates that this is an ongoing activity of Satan. The indicative is used to reveal his identity, and the participle is used to describe his activity.

ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὄλην. This clause is not found in the Nestle-Aland nor in the major English translations. It is found in the Byzantine Majority Text.<sup>15</sup> It might be argued that some scribe copied Revelation 12:9 for

<sup>15</sup> <http://textusreceptusbibles.com/TRNTV/66/20>

an unknown reason, “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world (ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὄλην); he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

It might be argued that since the author of Revelation 12:9 is the same as the author of Revelation 20:2, He repeated himself for emphasis so there will be no mistake about who this dragon is and what he keeps doing. Whether or not this clause was in the autograph of chapter twenty, its uncontested presence in chapter nine demonstrates that it is true. The devil roams the whole earth (Job 1:7) searching for people to lead astray (1 Peter 5:8).

ἔδησεν—**he bound**, aorist active indicative. (See notes on ἐκράτησεν, p. 17.)

In chapter nine, we saw the key being used to unleash the powers of Hell, resulting in the suppression of the evangelism. Thus, the western (Japhethite) world was plunged into darkness. In Revelation 20:2, the key is used to bind Satan. This is not a physical binding, but a spiritual one. Satan is released when work-righteousness becomes the message of “corporate Christianity.” He is bound by the opposite, namely, the preaching of salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ’s vicarious atonement. Wherever this gospel is preached, there Christ enters the human heart and there the devil is powerless. He is bound up and locked away (cf. Ephesians 6:20ff; Luke 10:1,17-19; 11:20-22; Acts 26:18; John 8:31-32).<sup>16</sup>

## Other Terminology

τὸν ὄφιν τὸν ἀρχαῖον—Byzantine Majority Text

ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος—Nestle-Aland, 27th ed. (Alexandrian text)

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<sup>16</sup> “A number of scholars do not agree that the binding of Satan implies that he is rendered totally inactive but suggest rather that it speaks of a radical curbing of his power. William Hendriksen is one of the leading exponents of this view. He points out that elsewhere in the New Testament the way Satan’s power was curtailed by the coming of Christ is described in terms that are strikingly similar to the description in Revelation 20:1-3. Of particular importance is Jesus’ speaking about the binding of the strong man in Matthew 23:29 [*sic*, apparently Matthew 12:29 was intended] where the same word is used for “binding” as in Revelation 20:2. Support for this interpretation is found in the fact that Revelation 20:3 appears to specify the respect in which Satan’s power is limited, namely, ‘that he should deceive the nations no more.’ Hendriksen takes this to mean that the devil’s influence is not eliminated altogether, but that it is limited so that he is not able to prevent the extension of the gospel throughout the world.” — Sydney H.T. Page, “Revelation and Pauline Eschatology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. Vol. 23. No. 1. p. 33. March, 1980. <https://www.etsjets.org>, accessed 08/09/2018.

The following is quoted without prejudice, but only for the reader's consideration.

"The inconcinnity of the nominative, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, read by A.02 1678 1778 2080 virtually alone is a solecism. But it is a characteristic of the author to use the nominative for a title or proper name in apposition to a noun in an oblique case. See 1:5; 2:13 and also with participles at 2:20; 3:12; 8:9; 9:14; 14:12,14. Pedantic scribes altered this to the grammatically correct, τὸν ὄφιν τὸν ἀρχαῖον, **Ⲙ.01 P.025 046 051 Maj** (whence *Textus Receptus*)."<sup>17</sup>

χίλια ἔτη—**1000 years**. This is a long and specific period of time during which evangelism is being carried out in a manner rivaling that of the early Christian Church.

This writer has struggled with the number 10 and its multiples (e.g., 1000 = 10x10x10, ten to the third power, completion + God = a complete period of time determined by God). In the literal scriptures, the number ten appears to be linked to the law, judgment, and tribulation (ten commandments; ten plagues; Numbers 14:22; 1 Kings 11:31; Daniel 7:7; forty (4x10) years in the wilderness; forty days and forty nights in the wilderness). That ten is a number of completeness is almost universally accepted. However, what is the distinction between ten and seven when seven is the number of completeness in God's (3) dealings with the earth (4)? Could ten be the number of completeness related to law/judgment/tribulation? (If so, I am not sure how this would fit Revelation 5:1.)

### Revelation 20:3

καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ ἔκλεισεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ ἵνα μὴ πλανᾷ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη· καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον.

*And he casts him into the Abyss and shuts and seals over him, so that he should lead the nations astray no longer until the thousand should be completed; and after this it is necessary to loose him a brief time. (JKP)*

### Verbal Actions

ἔβαλεν—**he casts**, aorist active indicative. This coincides with ἐκράτησεν (cf. verse 2, p. 17).

<sup>17</sup>J. K. Elliot, "Revelations from the Apparatus Criticus of the Book of Revelation, How Textual Criticism Can Help Historians," <https://Usqr.utsnyc.edu>.

ἔκλεισεν—**he shuts**, aorist active indicative.

ἔσφράγισεν—**he seals**, aorist active indicative.

The actions of the preceding verbs, including ἐκράτησεν, indicate an abrupt change in the state of affairs. Considering the historic events of the Reformation, one could say that this was abrupt. For approximately one thousand years (not the thousand years of this verse), the doctrine of work-righteousness prevailed within the organized church. Suddenly, and unexpectedly from a human perspective, the gospel message exploded in Germany and sent shockwaves throughout Europe and beyond. Indeed, over the next centuries, it went to the ends of the earth—from Europe to the Americas, Australia, Africa, and Asia. *“Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world”* (Romans 10:18).

πλανᾷ—**he should lead astray**. The Byzantine text has a present subjunctive. The Nestle-Aland 27th Edition text has an aorist subjunctive. The former sees the misleading as an ongoing activity. In the latter, the activity—though covering a considerable amount of time—is seen as a unit, a single action.

Deception is the chief tool of Satan (1 Timothy 2:14; 2 Corinthians 11:14; Revelation 12:9—ὁ πλανῶν, the Deceiver). He does not present himself as evil, breathing fire and brimstone, but as “sweetness” and “love,” as one who really cares about us. Thus, he fools the ignorant and unsuspecting. Likewise, the most successful servants of Satan are those who pass themselves off as nice, caring people. *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light”* (2 Corinthians 11:13-14).

Deception is the tool of Satan’s servants also. Jesus said, “False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24, cf. Matthew 24:4-5,11).<sup>18</sup> The apostle Paul made the connection between Satan and his servants, *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron”* (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

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<sup>18</sup> Arguably, Jesus is speaking of the same time period as that which we find in Revelation 20:3.

Of the different verbs that are translated “to deceive,” πλανᾶω speaks of deception in the sense of leading someone down the wrong pathway (cf. 1 Peter 2:25). ἁπατάω speaks of deception in the sense of seducing a person (cf. 1 Timothy 2:14). ἑξαπατάω (cf. Romans 16:18) is a strengthened form of ἁπατάω.

## Interpretation and Grammar

ἄβυσσος—**abyss**. This is another name for the realm of the dead (see ἄβυσσος word study in the *Journal of Theology*, Volume 58, Number 3). Here Satan is “shut up.” He is denied the right to come and go as he pleases. A seal is placed upon him to ensure that he cannot deceive the nations. The nature of Satan’s limitations is indicated by the context, he should lead the nations astray no longer.

ἐσφράγισεν—**seal**. Seals were used by those in positions of power. The purpose was to make something official and to deny to all inferiors the right to change the decree. By placing the seal on the abyss, the Lord is making this an unchangeable decree which only He has the authority and power to break.

ἵνα μὴ—Negative purpose is expressed by ἵνα μὴ. It was God’s purpose to deny Satan his ability to deceive the nations.

πλανᾷ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη—There are three periods in history when Satan has had the nations at his beck and call.

1. The first was during the days of the Old Testament when the only nation on record not under Satan’s spiritual control was a small nation on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea—Israel.<sup>19</sup> The rest of the world was his stomping grounds. He was able to deceive not only the individuals within a given nation, but also the entire nation.
2. The second period was the period of the Antichrist, a thousand year period (approximately, AD 500-1500) when the Pope had a stranglehold on the churches of the West (Europe and North Africa). The Pope was under Satan’s control, the nations were under the Pope’s control. Because the Pope was hindering the preaching of the gospel, Satan was free to spread his venom throughout the “Christian” (Japhethitic) world,

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<sup>19</sup> Unless one considers Melchizedek’s Salem as a nation, or repentant Nineveh at the time of Jonah.

as well as the heathen world. The Byzantine world had, for the most part, succumbed to the Mohammedans during this time period. Therefore, it too, was under Satan's control.

3. Revelation chapter twenty addresses the third period which lay in the future (from John's perspective).

μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον—In the divine plan for the history of mankind, the loosing of Satan is necessary. On the matter of the necessity of “negative” things (nothing is truly negative in God's plan), consider the following.

**1 Corinthians 11:19**—*For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.*

**Matthew 24:6**—*And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

**Luke 17:25**—*But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.*

**Luke 24:7**—*The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.*

**Acts 9:16**—*For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.*

In this exegete's opinion, the binding of Satan began when evangelism was freed from papal bondage through the Reformation. Martin Luther was God's chosen tool to be a champion of the gospel. Beginning with his evangelism in Germany, mission work exploded through Europe, sending shock waves throughout the world. Nation after nation was freed from the tyranny of the devil. From Europe to the ends of the earth, multitudes have been rescued from the grip of Satan.

To further the gospel's spread, God allowed this to be a time of world exploration by Columbus and others. The sea lanes were charted and traveled, which resulted in many new doors being opened for the gospel. Exploration gave birth to colonialism. European nations (Japhethites) became dominant over the heathen as Noah had prophesied (cf. Genesis 9:27, referring also to the Japhethites coming into possession of the spiritual inheritance of Israel). Colonialism made it possible for missionaries to enter previously “forbidden” nations. On the coattails of the explorers came the missionaries, not by the will

of man, but by the will of God. All of the activity on the part of the secular world served the Lord and His Church. Even though kings and princes had their own goals—and they were often of evil intent—it is God who used them to serve His own purpose, namely, the spreading of the gospel’s saving light.

### The Missionary Era was the Millennium

The millennium of Revelation chapter twenty is not a thousand literal years, but rather a complete and long period of time designated by God for the evangelizing of the world. As the Savior says, “*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, Revelation 14:6), and Satan could do nothing to stop it.

ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη—The subjunctive does not indicate uncertainty as to the *reality* of the completion. Rather, the subjunctive is used with ἄχρι to indicate a *temporal conditioning* of the verbal action—one thing doesn’t happen until the other takes place. Until the thousand years have been completed, Satan is unable to lead the *nations* astray. He can lead individuals and groups astray, but he is not able to dominate nations as a whole. However, upon the completion of the millennium, Satan is loosed to dominate the nations.

At the time of the writing of this article, the fulfilment of this has already begun as one nation after another has come under his tyranny or is in process of coming under his tyranny once again (more on this in connection with verse eight).

—to be continued



## Panorama

### **A Review of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles* and Its Restatement**

*Bruce J. Naumann*

At the Church of the Lutheran Confession's (CLC) Convention in 2018, a major topic was consideration of the proposed *Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship* with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). The CLC neither adopted nor rejected the *Joint Statement* at that Convention. The resolutions concerning this matter included, "Whereas there are other doctrinal issues that continue to separate us, including but not limited to, membership in Thrivent and also the role of women in society . . . "

The doctrinal issue on the role of women in society has to do with the WELS' teaching as found in portions of its statement titled, *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*. Recently, the WELS published an expanded restatement on this subject. The following timeline will help to establish the order of events as it relates to CLC concerns.

**1978-1991**—Beginning with *The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture* in 1978, a series of studies and pamphlets were produced in the WELS. Successive conventions requested a final document for synod approval.

**1993**—The WELS adopted *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*.<sup>1</sup>

**2006**—A memorial was submitted to the CLC Convention, asking for a reaction to the WELS position.

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**Editor's Note:** *The Journal of Theology* continues to fill unpublished issues of the past and make our publication schedule current. At the same time, the issues are being read in the current year and we wish to include timely publication of present-day matters. This issue is dated "Winter 2018" but the article that begins on this page is current in the summer of 2020. We look forward to catching up in our publication schedule and removing this potential for confusion.

<sup>1</sup> <https://wels.net/about-wels/what-we-believe/doctrinal-statements/man-and-woman-roles>



**2007**—The CLC General Pastoral Conference considered a paper by Pastor Michael Roehl, titled *God’s Plan for Men and Women in Secular Society*, which is critical of the WELS position.

**2008**—The CLC Convention stated its position:

The 2007 General Pastoral Conference adopted the following as a summary statement pertaining to Scripture’s principles of male and female roles, “Although Scripture applies the male headship principle to the home (Ephesians 5) and to the church (1 Timothy 2), Scripture does not apply the headship principle to the roles of men and women in society. Where God does not establish a principle, consciences ought not be bound. RESOLVED, The summary statement of the 2007 General Pastoral Conference is a correct expression of Scriptural teaching.”<sup>2</sup>

**2015**—Meetings began between representatives of the CLC, WELS, and ELS. While the doctrine of church fellowship was the foremost topic of discussion over the course of these meetings, the matter of the role of women in society was also discussed, without agreement.

**2018**—The WELS’ Council of Presidents (COP) commissioned a study committee to produce a restatement of *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*.

**2019**—WELS President Mark Schroeder announced in the December issue of *Together* magazine that a proposed restatement on the doctrine of man and woman is available, as well as an accompanying Bible study on the subject. He wrote, “The decision to produce a restatement was not meant to question or debate the doctrine, nor was it merely a reaction to any specific challenge to the doctrine. The COP viewed a restatement as an opportunity for congregations and called workers to restudy and reapply this important doctrine. . . . After the COP has considered the feedback and the discussions at district conventions, the COP plans to present a restatement on the doctrine of man and woman to the synod convention for adoption in the summer of 2021.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Twenty-Eighth Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession *Proceedings*, p.57.

<sup>3</sup> President Schroeder’s announcement: <https://wels.net/restatement-of-scriptural-principles-of-man-and-woman-roles>. The “Restatement” document and the Bible study can be downloaded: <https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo>

We now proceed with an evaluation of the pertinent sections of the original *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*, which will be followed by some observations on the newly proposed *Restatement*. The sections under discussion from the original statement are these:

God established roles for man and woman in His creative plan before He united them in marriage and before they fell into sin (Ge 2:7,18,22; 1 Co 11:3,8,9). Therefore God’s assigned roles apply beyond the marriage relationship and in every period of history.<sup>4</sup>

We reject the opinion that male headship and female submission apply only to marriage or only to marriage and the church (1 Co 11:3; 1 Ti 2:12)<sup>5</sup>

We reject the opinion that the principle of role relationships applies only to some people, only for some periods of history, or only to certain aspects of Christian life.<sup>6</sup>

Scripture leaves a great deal to our conscientious Christian judgment as we live the role relationship principle in the world. In Christian love we will refrain from unduly binding the consciences of the brothers and sisters in our fellowship. Rather, we will encourage each other as we seek to apply this principle to our lives in the world.<sup>7</sup>

In order to shed light on the core issue, we will consider the suitability of 1 Corinthians 11:3,8-9 and Genesis 2:7,18,22 as proof texts for the WELS’ position that God’s assigned roles of headship for men and submission for women “apply beyond the marriage relationship and in every period of history.” First, a brief analysis of Genesis 2:7,18,22.

### Genesis 2:7

וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשִׁמַת חַיִּים  
וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*

The use of the article of course compels us to render הָאָדָם as definite, “the man,” rather than as the proper noun “Adam.” Yet we know that “the man” referenced in this chapter definitely was Adam—there were no other men

<sup>4</sup>Statement #3 <sup>5</sup>Rejection #6 <sup>6</sup>Rejection #8 <sup>7</sup>Statement #21

extant. The use of the generic term “the man” cannot be seen as supporting the thesis that the relationship between Adam and Eve represents God’s ideal for all other man-woman relationships.

### Genesis 2:18

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנַגְדּוֹ:

*And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”*

The verdict of God on Adam’s solitary state (לֹא־טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ) and His proposed solution to the problem (אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנַגְדּוֹ) obviously presage not only the creation of woman but also the divine institution of marriage. The phrase rendered “helper comparable” (עֵזֶר כְּנַגְדּוֹ) is a beautiful and somewhat enigmatic expression, admitting a range of interpretations—all of which have to do with marriage. What is clearly out of place is the idea that this verse somehow describes the relationship of “males and females wherever they would partner in his world,” and that it sets up a standard for men and women generally “in their God-given callings in the world.”<sup>8</sup> The idea that God intended women to be “helpers comparable” to men outside of the marriage relationship is quite foreign to the context.

### Genesis 2:22

וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח מִן־הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבָאָהּ אֶל־הָאָדָם:

*Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.*

### 1 Corinthians 11:3

θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.

*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

Ἀνὴρ can properly be translated “man” or “husband,” depending on the context. Likewise, γυνή can be either “woman” or “wife.” Because the same

<sup>8</sup> *Restatement*, Statement #30 (p. 12, line 169ff)

words are used in verses four and five to describe men and women praying in church, most translations render the words in this verse simply as “man” and “woman.”

Κεφαλή, “head,” has been the subject of much discussion about whether or not it carries the idea of authority. *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles* correctly asserts, “Scripture teaches that headship includes authority (1 Co 11:3,10; Col 1:18; 2:10; Eph 1:22; 1 Ti 2:11,12). Authority should not be used to dominate but to serve others (Mt 20:25-28).<sup>9</sup>

Κεφαλή δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός—This mysterious phrase speaks of the risen and glorified Christ who is co-equal with the Father and the Spirit in power, honor and majesty. Yet, the Son looks to the Father as His “head.” That is to say that the Father has a role of authority and leadership in relation to the Son. How this can be is part of the mystery of the Trinity. Placed as it is in this verse, it does, by comparison, show that a man’s exercise of leadership and authority over a woman is not a matter of male superiority.

### 1 Corinthians 11:8-9

οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἀνὴρ ἐκ γυναικός, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ ἐξ ἀνδρός καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἀνὴρ διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα.

*For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.*

God gives us the reason for this teaching about the leadership and authority of the man. It is not because of the customs of a first century patriarchal society. It is not because of the personal opinions of the apostle Paul. It is because of the God-ordained order of creation. The fact that God made Adam first and then Eve is foundational for what is taught here, namely, that in Christian congregations the men are to exercise a leadership role and the women are to submit to that authority. It is no surprise that today’s higher critical scholars reject this principle since they also reject the historicity of the Genesis account.

### Hermeneutical Considerations

It is a true principle of biblical interpretation that passages must be considered in their context. Though section headings are not part of the

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<sup>9</sup> Statement #10

inspired text, the New International Version (NIV) translators correctly identified the subject matter in 1 Corinthians 11 with the heading “Propriety in Worship.” The Spirit-intended meaning of 1 Corinthians 11 has to do with God’s will for male and female roles in the Christian congregation. There is no hint in this chapter that the Spirit-intended meaning extends to a teaching concerning the roles of men and women in secular society. The same is true for every other New Testament passage offered to support the assertions in *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*. Consider the following table.

Scriptural Principle concerning submission of woman to man	God’s will clearly defined for the Christian home	God’s will clearly defined for the Christian congregation	God’s will clearly defined for secular society
<p><i>“...the head of woman is man”</i>  <b>1 Corinthians 11:3</b></p>	<p>Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.  <b>Ephesians 5:22-23</b></p> <p>Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands . . .  <b>1 Peter 3:1</b></p> <p>Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.  <b>Colossians 3:18</b></p> <p>. . . that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.  <b>Titus 2:4-5</b></p>	<p>But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head . . .  <b>1 Corinthians 11:3-4</b></p> <p>Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.  <b>1 Corinthians 14:34</b></p> <p>I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting . . . Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve . . .  <b>1 Timothy 2:8-13</b></p>	<p>[NONE]</p>

*Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles* repeatedly cites these New Testament passages to support its contention that the Bible teaches that it is God's will for men to exercise headship and women to be in submission in every circumstance of secular society for all time. However, in their context these passages speak only of God's will for the differing roles of men and women in the home and in the church.

Another correct principle of biblical interpretation is that "Scripture interprets Scripture." When a difficult passage is encountered, the proper method of finding the true meaning is to consult other clear passages that speak of the same thing. The lack of such passages concerning anything pertaining to God's assigned roles in secular society speaks volumes. The WELS statement attempts to draw a wider principle from 1 Corinthians 11 by comparing it with Genesis chapter 2, citing the order of creation—Adam first, then Eve. This is problematic, however, for at least two reasons (emphasis added in the following passages).

1. In Genesis, the primary focus is on Adam and Eve's relationship to each other as husband and wife, not on their relationship with any other men or women (of which there were none at that time).

**Genesis 2:25**—*And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

**Genesis 3:6**—*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*

The Holy Spirit, through Moses, indicates that the intent of this account in Genesis 2 is to relate God's principles for the marriage relationship; no reference is made here to relationships with other men or women,

**Genesis 2:24**—*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

In His 2007 CLC General Pastoral Conference paper, Pastor Michael Roehl makes this salient point.

The headship of man within that marriage relationship:

**And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper . . . "** Genesis 2:18

**"And he shall rule over you."** Genesis 3:16

Not specifically addressed was the relationship between men and women in society. God's Genesis 3 pronouncements were very pointedly limited to a woman's relationship to her husband, rather than to "all men" or "every man" (Note the 2<sup>nd</sup> person feminine suffix in וְאֵל-אִשְׁתּוֹ — "The man of her" or "Her husband"). In fact it is more eisegetical than exegetical to use Genesis 3 as instruction regarding anything other than the husband-wife relationship, especially given the fact that the Holy Spirit here limited His pronouncement regarding rulership to a woman's own husband. It is untenable to imagine God as here saying, "*Your desire shall be for every man, and every man shall rule over you.*" On the contrary, her desire would be directed towards [sic] her man, and that is the man who would rule over her.<sup>10</sup>

2. Genesis chapter two cannot rightly be interpreted as speaking to God's will for male authority and female submission in secular society because there was no secular society at the time. In Adam and Eve we have the first people, the first marriage, the first government (theocratic, in this case), and the first church. The first identifiable mention of secular society occurs in chapter four with the lineage of Cain.

An additional hermeneutical point is that we ought to be able to support every doctrinal assertion with a *sedes doctrinae*—a passage or passages that are not only easily understood, but cannot reasonably be misunderstood. *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles* makes a broad assertion about God's will for men and women in society with far-reaching implications, but it fails to cite a *sedes doctrinae* to support its position. Instead, it relies on an exegetical opinion about a comparison between New Testament passages concerning male and female roles in the home and the church and the Genesis creation account—a time when the only two people present were a husband and his wife and secular society did not yet exist.

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<sup>10</sup> Michael J. Roehl, *God's Plan for Men and Women in Secular Society*, Church of the Lutheran Confession General Pastoral Conference, 2007 (p. 4).

## Practical Considerations

Once again, here are some excerpts from *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*:

God established roles for man and woman in His creative plan before He united them in marriage and before they fell into sin (Ge 2:7,18,22; 1 Co 11:3,8,9). Therefore God's assigned roles apply beyond the marriage relationship and in every period of history.<sup>11</sup>

We reject the opinion that male headship and female submission apply only to marriage or only to marriage and the church (1 Co 11:3; 1 Ti 2:12).<sup>12</sup>

We reject the opinion that the principle of role relationships applies only to some people, only for some periods of history, or only to certain aspects of Christian life.<sup>13</sup>

From this it would necessarily follow that the "assigned roles" of male headship and female submission are an expression of God's immutable will for all people of all time. Presumably, any woman who would act outside of her assigned role would be acting contrary to the will of God. However, the WELS statement does allow for certain exceptions to the principle:

We reject the opinion that every woman is always subject to every man. Other scriptural role relationship principles and the injunction, "We must obey God rather than men" (Ac 5:29), also govern our actions.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the point is made that there may be occasions where a woman is not required to subject herself to a given man, depending on the situation, such as when God's revealed will supersedes that of male authority, and perhaps other circumstances, though this line of demarcation is left unclear.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Statement #3   <sup>12</sup> Rejection #6   <sup>13</sup> Rejection #8   <sup>14</sup> Rejection #12

<sup>15</sup> See the *Restatement* (line #255ff): ". . . we reject as a caricature any understanding of this in terms of authority alone, as if automatically every male must always be recognized as an authoritative head over every female in every setting (e.g. Proverbs 31:16; Ephesians 6:1; Titus 2:5)."

The footnote to this paragraph reads "In Proverbs 31:16 (in fact in that whole chapter in multiple places), we see a believing woman carry out her family's business in the world. She would easily have been paralyzed in carrying out that work if she needed to treat each man she met in her transactions as if God had put that man into a position of authority over her."



However, there is an additional and very important point in play here. The teaching espoused in *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles* does not allow for a situation where a woman would actively exercise authority over a man—any man—in secular society. In other words, a woman’s lack of submission may be justified depending on the circumstances, but the willful exercise of authority over a man is never justified according to the principles as the WELS states them. Although both the original document and the *Restatement* speak vaguely about “other scriptural role relationship principles” that might influence a woman’s behavior in the world, this question is never forthrightly addressed: Under what circumstances, if any, can it be in harmony with the holy will of God for a woman to purposefully exercise authority over a man?

To state the question another way, if it’s really true that at creation God established a role of authority for men and submission for women that goes beyond the marriage relationship and applies in every period of history (a major premise of the WELS document), then how could a Christian woman ever be justified in choosing to exercise a position of authority over men?

For instance, there is no “other scriptural role relationship principal” which would compel a woman to seek a managerial position at a corporation where she would exercise authority over male employees and in so doing violate the supposed principle of male authority and female submission in the world.

Likewise, there are no other biblical principles which would compel a woman who is a private in the army to refrain from seeking advancement to a higher rank—a rank in which she would have authority over those men who are under her in the chain of command.

Again, no woman is compelled by other biblical principles to seek an elected office in government which would give her authority over her male constituents.

Under the premises of *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*, there would be no excuse in these and other scenarios for a woman to place herself outside of the role to which God has assigned her. To do so would be contrary to God’s will and therefore a sin.

The WELS statement does seem to soften the impact of its assertions, in this way:

Scripture leaves a great deal to our conscientious Christian judgment as we live the role relationship principle in the world. In Christian love we

will refrain from unduly binding the consciences of the brothers and sisters in our fellowship. Rather, we will encourage each other as we seek to apply this principle to our lives in the world.<sup>16</sup>

While this may seem to mitigate the consequences of the principles as stated, it actually makes the document self-contradictory. In effect, these principles state that it is the will of God that women are not to exercise authority over men in any area of life, but then decline to assert that Christian women are obligated to obey this will of God in their secular associations.

If a woman's exercise of authority over men in society always violates the revealed will of God, it cannot be an optional matter that is left up to "conscientious Christian judgment."

Consider this parallel situation: We actually do have scriptural direction about the will of God when it comes to the differing roles of men and women in the Christian congregation. It is a scriptural principle, with application to all ages and places, that women are not to teach men or exercise authority over men in the church (1 Timothy 2:11-14). If women in our churches were to act contrary to God's will in this matter, we would not be speaking to them about "other scriptural role relationship principles" that excuse such disobedience to the Word of God. Instead, we would lovingly seek to correct them with Scripture. If they refused scriptural correction they could be subject to church discipline and would certainly not be allowed to continue as members of the congregation.

When we have clear principles of Scripture to follow, it is entirely appropriate to "bind consciences" to the Word of God. Yet this document and its *Restatement* both assert that we have clear scriptural principles to follow with regard to the role of women in society, but then refrain from "unduly binding consciences" in this matter. Why? Would they also refrain from unduly binding consciences when it comes to women serving as pastors? If the assertion about God's assigned roles in society is truly and scripturally valid, why would a church or church body bind consciences in one case but not the other?

### **Observations on the *Restatement***

The title of the proposed restatement of the WELS' doctrine is *Male and Female in God's World, A Summary of What We Believe Scripture Teaches*

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<sup>16</sup>Statement #21

*about Being Male and Female*. As President Schroeder noted in his announcement in the December 2019 issue of *Together*, it is not a modification of 1993's *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*, but rather an expanded explanation and affirmation of it. It is remarkable for its voluminous footnotes and the often-repeated phrase "interdependent and complementary partnership," which is used more than sixty times. There is much in this document with which the CLC would agree. However, it exhibits the same problem of going beyond what the Scriptures clearly reveal when it addresses the role of women in society.

Of particular interest for this review is the section titled "We reject the following as denials or caricatures of selfless leading and selfless yielding."<sup>17</sup> Fourteen points then follow, most of which do not touch on objections raised within the CLC. It is appropriate here to comment on two of the points that do touch on those objections. The first is concerning prescriptive and descriptive passages from Scripture:

While we give thanks for the many ways Scripture testifies to how God used the gifts of both male and female in this interdependent and complementary partnership, we reject the attempt to set such narrative passages of Scripture (descriptive passages) in opposition to passages that establish God's unchanging will for male and female (prescriptive passages).<sup>18</sup>

The distinction between descriptive and prescriptive passages is valid (See the footnotes to this quote in the document for the example of the *prescriptive* biblical principle of one-man one-woman marriage along with various *descriptive* passages of Old Testament polygamous relationships.). However, the point being made about men's and women's roles begs the question by assuming that the Bible contains clearly prescriptive passages that govern male/female role relationships in secular society. As demonstrated previously, it does not. For this reason, the biblical examples such as Deborah, the exemplary wife of Proverbs thirty-one, Priscilla, and Lydia offer some valid insights into what a woman's role in secular society can be with God's blessing.

The second point has to do with Scriptural guidance for the behavior of men and women in the world:

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<sup>17</sup> *Restatement*, p. 18, lines #206-207

<sup>18</sup> *Restatement*, p. 18, lines #208-212

While we give thanks that God claimed us in Christ as his holy and free children, we reject the idea that we are free to ignore God's created design for male and female. . . .<sup>19</sup>

While we recognize that the home is the prototypical place for the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female, we reject the attempt to limit the principle as if it only applies in the home, or only in the home and the church.<sup>20</sup>

If God has indeed created us uniquely to function in this interdependent and complementary partnership, to ignore that reality of our creation anywhere we go is to rule out a significant part of how God fashioned us to live. We don't cease being uniquely created for this interdependent and complementary partnership when we step over the threshold of our homes or our churches. The more we understand how God has uniquely formed us as male and female, the more we begin to grasp why it is loving to help one another ponder how this principle impacts how we will live in all our various callings in God's world as we interact as male and female.<sup>21</sup>

These and other statements charge that those who disagree with this position are denying that there is any Scriptural guidance for how men and women should conduct their lives outside of the home and church. Of course, that is not so—*all* believers are to be salt and light to the world, they are to submit to God-given authority and model the love of Christ to all people. When Christian women, as well as men, strive in all that they do to reflect the grace and love of Christ in their daily interactions, there will be no room for a rebellious spirit or callous disregard for those with whom they interact. However, to state or even imply that women are acting outside of God's assigned roles whenever they are in a position of authority over men in society is to go beyond God's revealed Word.

Also of note is the argument that having different standards of behavior for the roles of men and women in the home and in the church, without also applying the same standard for their roles in secular society, would constitute

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<sup>19</sup> *Restatement*, p. 20, lines #216-217

<sup>20</sup> *Restatement*, p. 21, lines #226-228

<sup>21</sup> *Restatement*, p. 12, footnote to line #175

a return to a paradigm of Old Testament ceremonial law.<sup>22</sup> To this it may be answered that, yes, we do recognize that God has clearly revealed His will for the differing roles for men (loving headship) and women (loving submission) in the home and in the church. We also recognize that He has not revealed His will in the same manner for society at large. Simply choosing not to speak where God has not spoken bears no relation to matters of clean and unclean foods, Sabbaths, circumcision, and festivals, nor does it constitute the imposition of a ceremonial law on the church.

It is also plain that the WELS' position in actual practice results in a markedly different application for the Christian woman in secular society, compared to home and church life. Since in practice the WELS principles inexplicably allow a Christian woman to be the president of a corporation but not of a congregation, they would then be involved with the same "ceremonial law" conflict, if there were one.

## Summary

*Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles* and its proposed *Restatement* share two fundamental flaws:

1. They add to the Word of God by asserting that it is contrary to God's revealed will for a woman to exercise authority over a man in secular society:

God established roles for man and woman in His creative plan before He united them in marriage and before they fell into sin (Ge 2,7,18,22; 1 Co 11,3,8,9). Therefore God's assigned roles apply beyond the marriage relationship and in every period of history.<sup>23</sup>

We reject the opinion that male headship and female submission apply only to marriage or only to marriage and the church (1 Co 11,3; 1 Ti 2,12).<sup>24</sup>

We reject the opinion that the principle of role relationships applies only to some people, only for some periods of history, or only to certain aspects of Christian life.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Briefly put, the Jews had distinctively different and additional rules for everyday life which did not apply to the Gentiles. These were in effect until, with the coming of Christ, such ceremonial laws were fulfilled and set aside (Colossians 2:13-17). On this topic, see footnote 17, point 5, on pages 13-14 of the *Restatement*.

<sup>23</sup> *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*, Statement #3

<sup>24</sup> *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*, Rejection #6

<sup>25</sup> *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*, Rejection #8

2. They teach that there can be an expression of God's holy will that we are not necessarily conscience-bound to obey:

Scripture leaves a great deal to our conscientious Christian judgment as we live the role relationship principle in the world. In Christian love we will refrain from unduly binding the consciences of the brothers and sisters in our fellowship. Rather, we will encourage each other as we seek to apply this principle to our lives in the world.<sup>26</sup>

When the Bible speaks clearly on any given subject, that is what we should follow and do. Scripture speaks clearly in the area of God's assigned roles for men and women in the Christian home and the Christian congregation. Because the Bible does not clearly reveal the will of God concerning authority and submission with regard to the role of men and women in secular society, our obligation is to remain silent on this subject as well.

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<sup>26</sup> *Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles*, Statement #21

## Book Reviews

David T. Lau

**Herman Selderhuis, Editor: *Psalms 1-72 (Reformation Commentary on Scripture—Old Testament VII)*, Inter-Varsity Press Academic, 2015, hard cover, 561 pages, 57 preliminary pages.**

This volume in the Reformation Commentary on Scripture gives us exegetical comments on the first seventy-two psalms by Reformation-era exegetes—Reformed, Anabaptist, Anglican, Catholic, and Lutheran. As always in this series of commentaries, Martin Luther is quoted extensively. But many of his comments in this volume come from his early lectures on the Psalms, dated 1513-1515, when Luther was still using the four-fold interpretation method and was only beginning to understand the gospel. There are also some of Luther's more mature comments which are much more understandable and dependable.

The Lutheran commentator that is most helpful in this commentary is Nikolaus Selnecker (1530-1592)—one of the authors of the *Formula of Concord* (1577). The biographical section included in this volume (pp. 503-538) mentions that Selnecker was at first suspected of following Philip Melanchthon in his faulty views on the Lord's Supper. Selnecker even lost his position at the University of Jena because he was considered to be sympathetic to the Crypto-Calvinists. But later, under the influence of Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae, he definitely became a solidly orthodox Lutheran teacher, commentator, pastor, and hymn writer. One of his hymns is especially suitable for the times in which we live. "In these last days of sore distress / Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness / That pure we keep, till life is spent, / Thy holy Word and Sacrament."<sup>1</sup>

Selnecker wrote a volume titled, *Der ganze Psalter (The Whole Psalter)*, which is a commentary on the book of Psalms. This Reformation Commentary quotes *The Whole Psalter* generously.

On Psalm 2 Selnecker says, "From this psalm we are to learn the following. First, we should not let ourselves be afflicted so severely even when pagans and all the world rage against the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Second, we look to our Lord Christ, know Him and understand that He is eternal God and true man, our King and Priest, the eternal Son of God, who is begotten today—that is,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 292:2

continually from eternity—by God the Father. . . . Third, we also serve this Lord and King with fear and trembling and rejoice in Him. . . . This is called ‘kissing the Son’ when we embrace Him with faith and the fruits of faith are not absent” (pp. 28-29). Notice that Selnecker understands the words “*Today I have begotten You*” as referring to what we confess with Martin Luther, namely, that Jesus is “begotten of the Father from eternity” (*Small Catechism*, Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed).

Selnecker accepted the words of the Psalms as thoroughly Christ-centered and coming from the Holy Spirit. With reference to Psalm twenty-two Selnecker wrote, “The Holy Spirit through David—almost 1,230 years [*sic*] before Christ’s suffering and death—proclaimed this exact suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ with the same words that were used in Christ’s suffering concerning Christ Himself and His enemies. This is a special teaching and proof that divine prophecy must precisely correspond with its end and fulfillment. . . . We teach and know truly and simply that this psalm is the Lord Christ’s song, lament and mourning, which He composed because He had to suffer and die for our sin” (p. 166).

Commentators of our era have a hard time finding Christ in the psalms. But together with Martin Luther and Lutherans of the Reformation era, Selnecker had no doubts that many, even most, of the Psalms deal with Christ. This is what he has to say about Psalm forty-one: “Some people have expounded this psalm about good works. . . . About whom, however, this psalm should particularly be understood, Christ indicates in John chapter thirteen. There He says of His betrayer Judas to His disciples, ‘The Scripture must be fulfilled. He who eats My bread tramples Me with his feet.’ These words stand in this psalm. . . . Christ Himself speaks here and laments His betrayer, Judas, as well as His compatriots by whom He will be crucified” (p. 319).

Selnecker has similar comments concerning Psalm sixty-nine, in which we also hear Selnecker’s orthodox testimony. “We all are by nature miserable, poor and captive. We are bound by the devil, strangled by death, conquered by sin, devoured by wrath. There is no counsel or help. There is only the Lord Jesus Christ for you! He defeats the devil, death, hell, and destroys the entire kingdom of the devil, redeems us from sin, from the curse of the law and from eternal death. He also gives us His true righteousness and grants us the Holy Spirit, strengthens in us the covenant of grace and crafts in us a good joyous conscience toward God, a brave, living heart. He renews our life, consoles, refreshes, sustains, guards and teaches us. He gives us eternal salvation, eternal peace, joy and happiness” (p. 477).



Another orthodox Lutheran who is quoted quite often is Tilemann Hesshus (1527-1588). Hesshus studied under Melanchthon, but later aligned himself with the orthodox Gnesio-Lutheran party. “Unwilling to compromise his strong convictions, especially regarding matters of discipline, Hesshus was regularly embroiled in controversy. He was expelled or pressed to leave Goslar, Rostock, Heidelberg, Bremen, Magdeburg, Wesel, Koenigsberg and Samland before settling in Helmstedt, where he remained until his death” (p. 518).

Listen to the testimony of Hesshus on Psalm twenty-two: “Because the heart of Christ was burdened with the sin of the entire world and experienced the full wrath of God, He would not have been able to stand in such a battle, lest [*sic*] at the same time He was omnipotent and eternal God. . . . By choosing a simile of an earthen vessel, He shows that He was emptied of all His strength. The anguish of a bad conscience is the greatest of all anguish. It obsesses with its inadequacy and feels God’s dreadful wrath. All the world’s sins had already been placed on Christ’s shoulders. And He experienced the full wrath of God, poured into Him, aflame on account of my sin, your sin and every person’s sin. Thus, Christ’s anguish was immeasurable” (p. 176).

Since comments from Selnecker and Hesshus and other lesser known Reformation figures are not readily available in English, we appreciate being able to become better acquainted with them and the testimony they gave in the sixteenth century, almost five hundred years ago.

**Herman Selderhuis, Editor: *Psalms 73-150 (Reformation Commentary on Scripture—Old Testament VIII)*, Inter-Varsity Press Academic, 2018, hard cover, 488 pages, 54 preliminary pages.**

This volume of the Reformation Commentary completes the exegetical comments of the Reformers on the Psalms. Some of the featured writers are familiar from earlier volumes, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Philip Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, Johannes Bugenhagen, and Nikolaus Selnecker. But there are other commentators not so well known such as Hieronymus Weller, whose remarks are quoted on Psalms 73, 77, 79, 91, 92, 94, and 137. Weller was one of Luther’s students who lived with him and tutored one of Luther’s sons. After he left Wittenberg, he served at Freiburg and wrote commentaries on thirteen books of the Bible, including Psalms.

In discussing why the wicked prosper and the upright suffer, Weller makes this comment: “Only the word of God gives us the real reasons why. . . . When you see the most wicked of people are so blessed, rich, and esteemed—you

should rush immediately to the word of God, and put their terrible destruction before your heart” (p. 7). Weller says this on the basis of Psalm 73:17-20.

In his comments on Psalm seventy-seven, Weller compares the situation of the Israelites when the Red Sea was in front of them and the pursuing Egyptian chariots behind them to the crisis Christians face many times in their lives. He says, “This is a beautiful picture of the church as it wends its way surrounded by the world. On one side the church is being attacked by the devil, on the other by the enemies of the gospel. From one quarter the flesh draws nigh, from where, as if from his citadel, Satan assails us, from another come dangers and tribulations both in public and in private. In the midst of these she is kept safe only by the aid of her shepherd, Jesus Christ” (p. 37).

In his comments on Psalm ninety-one, Weller explains why some godly people die a sudden death. He says, “God allows an upright person to die by a sudden death to prevent them from being forced to hear the devil examining their sin and talking about the anger of God. . . . We should consider it a great blessing that God sometimes takes certain upright people away out of this disastrous life by means of a sudden death in order to prevent them suffering from the harsher and more drawn-out affliction they would have suffered at the hands of the devil if they had been brought to naught by some long drawn-out kind of death. . . . The saints are always every day and at every moment ready for death and are properly armed with the word of God against the devil. . . . The church prays for those who are not yet instructed and strengthened enough in the word of God. She also prays for those who have not yet sufficiently repented. For such people sudden death is dangerous” (p. 122). These remarks indicate that Weller is more interested in dealing with the questions of his readers than a word-for-word exegesis of the Hebrew words. This is probably true of most of the authors in this commentary. Their remarks tend to be devotional and practical rather than focused on word study, or grammar, or sentence structure.

Another figure from Reformation history that is featured in this volume is Viktorin Strigel who faced Matthias Flacius in a debate on free will. Neither Strigel nor Flacius were right in their thinking. Flacius was condemned for his false views on original sin, and Strigel erred on the side of synergism. Later, Strigel left Lutheran teaching altogether and accepted the Reformed teaching on the Lord’s Supper. Nevertheless, his comments in this volume seem to be in line with the truth.

Two Lutheran women contribute brief remarks in this volume—Catharina Regina von Greifenberg (p. 321) and Argula von Grumbach (p. 357). Both of

these women lived in Austria—von Grumbach from 1490 to 1564 and von Greiffenberg much later, from 1633 to 1694. Both were well-educated for their time—the one writing letters in defense of a Lutheran teacher and the other studying the Bible languages and writing poetry on the sufferings of Jesus.

As always, the Reformation is given a very broad definition, so that this commentary includes even such anti-Reformation writers as the Roman Catholic Cardinal Cajetan against whom Luther contended, and Robert Bellarmine whose writings Johann Gerhard examined and found to be in serious disagreement with Scripture.

**Scott Manetsch, Editor: *1 Corinthians* (Reformation Commentary on Scripture—New Testament IXa), Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2017, hard cover, 508 pages, 62 preliminary pages.**

In his introduction to this Reformation Commentary, Scott Manetsch points out that the reformers disagreed on their understanding of the two chapters of First Corinthians that deal with the Lord's Supper (chapters 10-11). He says. "The Lutheran delegation, represented by such luminaries as Martin Luther, Philipp Melanchthon, Justus Jonas, and Caspar Cruciger, insisted that Scripture taught the corporeal presence of Christ's body in, with, and under the sacramental elements. On the other side of the table, the Reformed delegation, represented by Huldrych Zwingli, Johann Oecolampadius, Martin Bucer, and Caspar Hedio, rejected this Lutheran interpretation and insisted instead that Christ's resurrected body remained in heaven, that the bread and wine were ordinary elements that symbolized Christ's death for sinners" (p. xliii).

Both parties, Manetsch says, "insisted that the Scripture, as God's holy Word, must be the *norma normans*—the ruling authority for Christian faith and practice. . . . They believed that the careful study of the Christian Scriptures, in their original languages, was necessary for recovering the Christian gospel and achieving the reformation of the church" (p. xlv).

In today's world, however, most Lutheran and Reformed scholars have veered far away from the consensus of their ancestors, and their very serious disagreements have been minimized to the point of doctrinal indifference. This commentary, featuring exegetical remarks by both Lutherans and Reformed, as well as a few Catholic, Anglican, and Anabaptist writers, should help to direct our studies to the Scriptures themselves, which the Holy Spirit wants to use to create true doctrinal unity.

As usual in this series of commentaries, Luther and Melancthon among the Lutherans are given ample opportunity to make their testimony, but the chief spokesman for Lutheran confessionalism in this volume is Tilemann Hesshus (1527-1588) who wrote a commentary on First Corinthians.

In the controversies among the Lutherans after Luther's death, Hesshus took the side of the so-called Gnesio-Lutherans—the genuine Lutherans—who opposed the compromises of Melancthon and his followers. Nevertheless, toward the end of his life Hesshus had difficulty with the 1577 *Formula of Concord*, even though he had previously affirmed it. For this reason C.F.W. Walther and other stalwart Lutherans considered Hesshus a traitor to the Lutheran cause. But in this commentary the comments of Hesshus seem to be in perfect agreement with our Lutheran confessions.

With reference to the controversy on the Lord's Supper, Hesshus says, "This passage (1 Corinthians 10:14-22) . . . very powerfully defends the true meaning against the tricks of the Calvinists. . . . One person twists Paul's words this way, someone else twists them a different way; but all Calvinists drive out and banish the body and blood of Jesus Christ from the sacred Supper. . . . The apostle's words must be interpreted literally, not figuratively" (p. 215).

In a lengthy excerpt from his comments on chapter eleven, Hesshus contends, "Now, if, as the Calvinists contend, we only eat the flesh of Christ spiritually by faith; and if we receive in the sacred Supper only the power and efficacy of Christ's absent body; and if the consecrated bread is only a *symbol* of Christ's body, which has been carried into heaven and is located far from us, then one must necessarily conclude that people who are unworthy, negligent, hypocritical, or without saving faith are not made participants in the Lord's body and blood. . . . But Paul clearly teaches that not only believers but also the unworthy and negligent are made participants of Christ's body in the sacred Lord's Supper. For the apostle warns the Corinthians with the severe statement that those who eat this bread in an unworthy manner are condemned on account of Christ's body. . . . Now, if Christ's body and blood are absent [from the elements], and unworthy people only eat bread and drink wine, how are they condemned on account of Christ's body and blood?" (pp. 259-260).

Comments like these from teachers of the Reformation era remind us that as we contend for the faith in our day, we are fellow-partners with many from the past who share the same convictions as we on Scriptures as the Word of God and as the only basis for our teachings. Of course, even Calvin and Zwingli can be good teachers when they let Scripture itself be the only basis and source of their teachings.