

Foreword

On the precipice of a new millennium, with Y2K concerns abounding, people are asking what the Scripture says about the last times. Will Christ's second coming occur in the year 2000? Will Jesus reign on earth for 1000 years? What are the rapture and the tribulation? The Rev. Paul Zager of Lombard, Illinois, who is a member of the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, speaks to these issues and many more as we near the eve of a new millennium. The essay *Eschatology and Millennial Madness* is a brief compendium of both truth and error in regard to topics bound to plague pastors, teachers, and parishioners as we approach the year 2000.

We accept the Lutheran Confessions, not insofar as but because they agree with Scripture, and we believe that they are a correct exposition of the teaching of the Word of God. However, many assume that the Confessions are totally irrelevant for the church today. They are merely monuments of a bygone era in the church. In the essay *Are the Lutheran Confessions a Practical Document Today?* the Rev. David Jay Webber points out that the Confessions are indeed relevant as the church nears the dawning of a new millennium. Rev. Webber is the Rector of Saint Sophia Ukrainian Lutheran Theological Seminary in Ternopil, Ukraine. This essay was delivered at the meeting of the European Region of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference near Kyiv, Ukraine, on April 28, 1998.

The year 1999 is an important year for anniversaries in the Lutheran Church. January twenty-ninth marked the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Katherine von Bora, the spouse of Martin Luther the great reformer. This year we note the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Johannes Brenz, who was the main Lutheran reformer in southern Germany. Articles concerning both these individuals are included in this issue of the *Quarterly*.

There is a brief report of the triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) held April 20-22, 1999, in Winter Haven, Florida. The CELC is built on the same doctrinal principles as The Synodical Conference of North America, which was dissolved in 1967. The CELC consists of sixteen confessional Lutheran churches throughout the world, including the ELS and WELS from the USA.

In this *Quarterly* there are several exegetical notes by Professor John Moldstad, Jr. Also, Professor Adolph Harstad provides a study of the name “Jerusalem” in the history of the Old Testament.

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Eschatology and Millennial Madness

What Tradition, the Confessions & Scripture, and Heterodoxy tell us about Eschatology, Millennialism & Rapture

by Paul R. Zager

Let's face it: in Scripture itself we can find some justification for all the hoopla about the coming millennium. How many times have you read the phrase "forty days and forty nights?" How many people will be saved according to the well-known number in Revelation seven? How long will believers "reign with Christ?" Isn't it obvious by now? God likes round numbers! Of course! That proves it! We can expect big things from God in the year 2000.

It's sad but true that Christians are assaulted constantly with such poorly considered opinions about the end times. Adding to the Babel of confusion about the end times are conflicting definitions for otherwise helpful terms like "eschatology," "millennium"¹ and "judgment." The request for this paper was made in the hope for a brief compendium of both truth and error in regard to topics bound to plague us pastors and our parishioners as we approach the "magical" (and round) number 2000 in our western reckoning of the earth's years.

The request is appropriate. Like any other false doctrine, millennialism is a plague. As is the case with so many false doctrines, however, the plague has a more pleasing outward appearance to it for many people than does the truth. "The method used by Lindsey to raise people's expectations with his predictions supposed to be 'more up to date than tomorrow's newspapers,' but which are just as quickly outdated, only leads to disappointment and disillusionment. If this irresponsible method of using the Scrip-

ture is not vigorously challenged, there will be an ever-increasing number of puzzled Christians who ultimately will doubt, if not totally abandon, their Advent Hope."² Even though we teach the Word of God correctly and fully in our own congregations, and even though we warn our members about inherent pitfalls of millennial error as taught on so many broadcasts and in so many commentaries, nonetheless our members still have friends who accept these errors as truth. Our members at times ignore our warnings and listen attentively to "air wave religion" (which has just about as much substance to it). We do Christ's people a favor by unabashedly pointing out millennial error for what it is, and then following up the warnings with instruction in the truth.

The selection of rapture and millennialism as the sub-topics to explore under the general theme of eschatology is arbitrary. If time was not a factor, other eschatological topics could be added to this list. However, with the approach used here, these sub-topics should fill the allotted time. Within each subtopic, we will try to see what was said by some of the early church fathers and compare their wide-ranging opinions with the confessions and scripture. By adding modern heretical thought as taught by Protestants and other Lutherans, we should have a good overview of what we can expect to hear as we approach the year 2000, and how we can respond to those things we hear.

The choice of title might already give away the definition of "eschatology" used in the paper. No attempt is made here to draw sharp distinctions among "realized eschatology," "consistent eschatology," "future eschatology," and other recent interpretive approaches to the concept of eschatology. A good overview of these approaches by luminaries like Dodd, Schweitzer, Weiss, Bultmann and others can be reviewed more fully in Stephenson's recent dogmatic treatment.

But when all is reviewed, Stephenson rightly sees a false dichotomy when Weiss, on the one hand, focused only on "already realized eschatology" while Schweitzer turned to the other extreme of an imminent "futurist" "consistent eschatology."³

Stephenson notes that common terms like *παρουσία* are used for both the first and second advents of Christ. Certainly, events like Christ's death and resurrection – which are already realized – have eschatological import. They provide all the direction, and color every thought and teaching we Christians bring to our future thinking. The death of each individual Christian can certainly be labeled as an eschatological event, no matter how many thousands of years it might occur before that “great and dreadful day.” Such physical death ushers in events of narrowly defined eschatology such as the individual's judgment before God, the soul's welcome into eternity and the experiencing of the marriage feast of the Lamb. “This tension between ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ marks the earthly Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ has “drawn near” (Mt 4:17; Mk 1:15) in the sense of having actually come in Jesus' messianic deeds (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20, which are a prolepsis of the still-awaited fullness of the kingdom.”⁴ Romans 8:30 is perhaps one of the clearest presentations in brief form of this interaction between “realized” and “future” eschatology. οὐς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν· καὶ οὐς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν· οὐς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν. The aorist tense of ἐδόξασεν is significant here. It reminds us that the glorifying of the saints – which is future from our point of view – is already accomplished in God's point of view.

It is only common sense to see that a number of Christian doctrines impinge on eschatological events, narrowly defined. By virtue of such common sense, we readily acknowledge that there is much more to eschatology than merely judgment and resurrection. Yet, the common understanding of “eschatology” which our congregation members view “in the narrow sense” has more to do with those things yet to happen in connection with the second advent of Christ.⁵ It is to such “end times” events that we will address ourselves as we consider eschatology.

Rapture and millennium

A. The early fathers

It's hard to separate the two concepts of rapture and millennium. There are many different theories about the time frame for the rapture. Pre-, mid-, and post-tribulation rapture theories will be briefly described later. But while there might be some who believe in a millennial reign of Christ without espousing the rapture, it is probably safe to say that anyone who believes there will be a rapture also believes there will be some form of millennial reign of Christ on earth.

We would be blessed to be able to go back to the early fathers to find no evidence of these aberrant teachings. We would have one more bullet in the clip to shoot at heresy if we could say that the early fathers had never heard of or accepted these errors. No such luck! In fact, if we go by the “earlier is better” approach so often used by Aland and Metzger for the Greek New Testament manuscripts, we might all have to prepare ourselves for sitting on golden thrones in Jerusalem. What little could be gleaned from the writings of the ante-Nicene fathers suggests a general acceptance of the doctrine of the millennium. Five of these church fathers lend their support to one degree or another for a chiliastic doctrinal view. Among them, Lactantius also suggests a rapture not so unlike what Hal Lindsey has popularized in our own time.

But Justin Martyr perhaps gives the most clear response when he answers a question from Trypho, his Jewish sparring partner in debate, whether Justin really believed there would be a millennial [perfect] reign with Christ based in Jerusalem. After going to great lengths to assert his belief in a bodily resurrection and an immediate arrival of the soul in heaven after death, Justin goes on to assert: “But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned

and enlarged [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.”

Interestingly, Justin falls into the same pattern as later interpreters like Hal Lindsey when he reaches this conclusion. Quoting at length Isaiah 65:17-25, he concludes “We have understood that the expression used among these words, ‘According to the days of the tree of life shall be the days of my people; the works of their toil shall abound,’ *obscurely* (emphasis added) predicts a thousand years.”⁶ “Obscure” hardly seems to do justice to the difficulty one has in concluding this to be a reference to a thousand year reign of Christ and believers on earth. “Fantasy” or “*eisegesis*” seems to be closer to the truth.

But in spite of the difficulties involved, others in that era also accept the conclusion – if not the proof – offered by Justin Martyr. Referring to the same zoological marvels that Justin sees in Isaiah, Lactantius comments: “That righteous King and Conqueror will institute a great judgment on the earth respecting the living and the dead, and will deliver all the nations into subjection to the righteous who are alive, and will raise the (righteous) dead to eternal life, and will Himself reign with them on the earth, and will build the holy city, and this kingdom of the righteous shall be for a thousand years.”⁷ Of particular interest for us in this presentation, however, is the fact that Lactantius goes on within that context to assert that there will also be a rapture, the only reference to this popular doctrine the writer could find in the early fathers: “The righteous shall for a little space be concealed under the earth, until the destruction of the nations is accomplished, and after the third day they shall come forth and see the plains covered with carcasses.”⁸ While the timing certainly doesn’t agree with that presented by Lindsey – in fact Lindsey belittles those who believe in a post-tribulation rapture – the basic concept is the same for either description of the rapture. Both suggest that Christians will be spared exposure to any great or final tribulation.

Tertullian seems to draw a similar conclusion at first glance, but the holy city to which he refers is for the saints who have died

prior to the tribulation. He does not seem to suggest a rapture as such, but does make it sound very much like the thousand year reign will be something going on in heaven, where the saints rule with Christ, but only for the defined period of one thousand literal years, at which time the world will be destroyed and eternity will be ushered in.⁹

Victorinus continues the shutout victory for millennialism among the ante-Nicene fathers. But of interest to us is his intimation that our confessional Lutheran view of the thousand-year reign as an eternal reign in heaven already did exist in his era. “I do not think the reign of a thousand years is eternal; or if it is thus to be thought of, they cease to reign when the thousand years are finished. But I will put forward what my capacity allows me to judge. The tenfold number signifies the decalogue, and the hundredfold sets forth the crown of virginity: for he who shall have kept the undertaking of virginity completely, and shall have faithfully fulfilled the precepts of the decalogue, and shall have destroyed the untrained nature or impure thoughts within the retirement of the heart, that they may not rule over him, *is thought to reign with Christ.*” (emphasis added)¹⁰ Not content merely to introduce chiliasm, the Bishop of Pettau has made it clear that those who take part in the literal earthly reign of Christ will do so on the basis of works righteousness. We, however, emphasize the fact that Victorinus felt it necessary to deny the doctrine that the reign with Christ is eternal and heavenly. There would be no need to deny it unless it was a teaching which was extant at the time. Thus we have at least an oblique reference to the antiquity of the teaching we accept regarding the “thousand year reign with Christ.”

Papias (as related by Eusebius) also understands the same Isaiah references as a description of a millennial paradise on earth, but he adds yet another variation on the “timing” of this fabulous occurrence. “The same person [Justus, surnamed Barsabas] has set down other things as coming to him from unwritten tradition. Amongst these he says that there will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be

established on this earth.”¹¹

Some would argue that the views cited above are rare among the early fathers. Aaron Plueger expresses this view in his little volume, *Things to Come for Planet Earth*,¹² a rebuttal of Lindsey’s fantasies. Yet, the evidence adduced above does not support this conclusion. Rather than pretend the positions are not stated by the fathers, or base a conclusion to the contrary merely on a search of indices under the word “millennialism” in translated volumes of their works, the approach taken by C.F.W. Walther seems more appropriate. In an argument with a Dr. Seiss in which it became clear that the Iowa and Ohio synods were too tolerant of millennialism, Walther simply dared to conclude that the rather lengthy list of millennialist fathers compiled by Dr. Seiss were in error in their doctrine.¹³

The *variety* of interpretations seen even among these early fathers is openly acknowledged by Lactantius. “Although they [the number of years till the millennium occurs] vary, and the amount of the number reckoned by them differs considerably, yet *all expectation* (emphasis added) does not exceed the limit of two hundred years. The subject itself declares that the fall and ruin of the world will shortly take place; except that while the city of Rome remains it appears that nothing of this kind is to be feared.”¹⁴ We could replace “Rome” with “Jerusalem” and “days” with “years” to have virtually the same type of statement made by Hal Lindsey. As Solomon said, “There is nothing new under the sun.”

B. *The Confessions and Scripture*

But in spite of the seemingly widespread support of the earliest church fathers for some form or other of millennialism, orthodox Christianity has not – finally – accepted the doctrine. Stephenson points out ably that the Book of Concord is laced with eschatology. “The mystery of our Lord’s divine-human person in which creation achieves its consummation is the bedrock of eschatology both in the broad and the narrow senses, the onto-

logical foundation of everything confessed in the Book of Concord about the restoration of fallen human nature through the divine acts of justification, sanctification, and glorification.”¹⁵ But in article XVII of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology we find what little the Lutheran Confessions have to say *explicitly* about the matter of millennialism, and other eschatological [narrow sense] events.

1] Also they teach that *at the Consummation of the World Christ will appear for judgment*, and 2] will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, 3] but ungodly men and the devils He will condemn to be tormented without end. 4] They condemn the Anabaptists, who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. 5] They condemn also others who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed.¹⁶

This last point especially must be addressed in light of Scripture. Doing so is somewhat difficult, however, if we are trying to point out what Scripture actually *does* teach about a rapture and millennium. As those two terms are defined by dispensationalists, we simply don’t find any usage in Scripture. The best we can really do is point to the definitions used by these people, and then show that such a teaching is really not in Scripture.

According to RE 20, “The second death has no power over [those who have part in the first resurrection], but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” *RE 20:6 NIV* Then again, verses 4 and 5 tell us: “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because

of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. *RE 20:4,5 NIV*

Millennialists tend to emphasize the thousand year reign in verse six, but ignore or downplay the equally distinct references in the previous verses to an apparently *different* thousand year reign (from the millennialist point of view). Yet without even addressing those references in detail, we can see a larger problem with their interpretation by considering the surrounding Scriptural context. There is no point of delineation between the latter part of chapter nineteen and the verses of chapter twenty. Yet we are told by Hal Lindsey and others that we must understand “the thousand year reign” in a literal sense, or else bear the onus of not believing God has the power to make His declarations come true as they stand.¹⁷ Yet these same dispensationalists want to tell us that within this context it is necessary, appropriate and correct to explain that the rider of the white horse, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, with a destroying sword coming out of His mouth, must be understood symbolically, since even the most strident dispensationalist doesn’t expect Jesus to have a literal piece of sharpened Damascus steel protruding from His mouth on judgment day. The dispensationalist claim of complete and consistent literal interpretation stumbles again and again when the dispensationalist discovers it is expedient and necessary to “allegorize” after all.

Understanding scripture literarily in this case means to understand it as symbolic writing. God has given us permission and direction to do so at the very beginning of the Apocalypse of St. John. It is labeled by God and John as a vision. Apocalyptic literature in general is actually taken *out* of its literal [literary] context when it is interpreted “literalistically.” Obscure passages such as we find in the Apocalypse, in Ezekiel and in Zechariah are – *in themselves* – open to so many and so varied interpretations as to be confusing even to the best theological minds. For that reason,

declarations of doctrine are best not based on these sections of Scripture. Doctrines adduced from these obscure passages need further delineation from clear, unambiguous, related passages of Scripture.

In the case of this Revelation reference to a thousand year reign, we turn to the style of apocalyptic literature in general. The use of numerology, with much of its meaning paralleled in Hebrew cabalism and Gnosticism, was not something new with St. John. Such writing was already known and was purposely veiled in symbol and allegory. Repeated assertions from Hal Lindsey do not change the history of literature, notwithstanding the sheer repetition by Lindsey and others telling us that such literature must be read literally. His say-so doesn’t make it so. Well known and widely used numerological symbolism would normally look at these references to the “thousand year reign” as a picture of total, ultimately complete ruling with Christ. This gives a truly consistent interpretive approach. Both groups of believers mentioned in Revelation 20 *will* rule with Christ forever. Such ruling and royal authority begins in our lives the moment we are brought to faith and then continues on through eternity when we are taken to heaven. This is true whether it is our disembodied soul awaiting the resurrection or whether it is our complete self following the resurrection. Christians rule with Christ. Even a millennialist has no trouble admitting this. The “thousand year” reference is merely a symbolic way of saying this. The basis for this conclusion is simply that ten was considered in numerology to be a number signifying completion or full measure. Since one thousand is ten *times* ten *times* ten, it is simply a short way to express the concept of ultimate fullness or completion. In other words, Christians will rule with Christ forever.

The same careful literarily unbiased reading is also necessary when considering verses which are supposed to address the matter of a rapture of believers. Many who have written against the rapture have referred to the rapturists’ use of I TH 4:13-18 as the *sedes* for this heresy. Indeed, in a chapter titled *Predictions*

and *Promises of the Rapture*, the Thessalonians reference is the only one used by Lindsey.¹⁸ But conversations with rapture-minded everyday Christian laymen rarely include the Thessalonians reference. We are far more likely to have people draw our attention to Luke 17 (or Matthew 24) when they want to defend a belief in the rapture.

³⁰ “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. ³² Remember Lot’s wife! ³³ Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left. [Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.]” *Luke 17.30-36 NIV*

These verses should be as noteworthy to us for what they do *not* say, as for what they do say. There certainly does seem to be an indication from Christ that there will be a “time difference” in the schedule for judgment/deliverance for believers compared to what happens to the unbelievers “on the day the Son of Man is revealed.” However, any indication of what that difference might be or how it will be perceived is totally absent from the text. We have no indication here that we should assume a literal gap of one thousand years between the “taking” of the one person and the “taking” of the other. Coming to such a conclusion on the basis of this text is *eisegesis* of the worst kind. We can’t read these sections only in isolation. We need to recall also other pertinent sections of scripture, which call to mind the fact that “every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth shall mourn because of Him.” *RE 1:7 NIV*

In light of such information from God, we could – per-

haps – assume that, when Christ has returned in glory, and all people have observed the event together, God will remove the believers in judgment first, and then take care of the condemnation of the non-Christians after that. (Even this explanation is fraught with difficulties. For instance, can we even think in terms of time and the sequential nature of events in time, as we know it now, once Christ has returned in glory?) But the main point here is that scripture as a whole forces us away from considering the Luke and Matthew references as pointers to a rapture, but to consider them in terms of scriptural insistence that judgment of *all* people will be accomplished at the same time. When Christ comes to us again on earth it is not to be in secret.

In the meantime, the Thessalonians reference must be judged on the basis of its own content.

¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s own word, we tell **you** that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. *1TH 4:13-17 NIV*

Remember that Lindsey is fond of calling the rapture the “secret snatch.” If that is indeed what the rapture would be, how can this Bible text be a reference to it? “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” This verse alone would be enough to tell the average Bible reader that this reference is pointing to the last day, the

final judgment and the resurrection of the dead. Once again, it is *eisegesis* to read into these verses anything about a rapture or a millennial reign on earth with Christ.

In a sense, we can be sympathetic with those who presume a millennial reign of Christ on earth. As Luther pointed out in a sermon: “Dann dießer Wahn steckt nicht allein in den Aposteln, sondern die Chiliastä, Valentinianer und Tertulliani haben alle auch also genarret mit diesen Gedanken, daß es für dem Jungsten Tage also wurde zugehen, daß die Christen allein das Erdreich besitzen wurden, und dann keine Gottlosen sein sollten.”¹⁹ Even Luther’s oft-cited belief in a “soon-return” of Jesus Christ for judgment cannot be used against him as if proving Luther was some sort of millennialist. In an excellent footnote in the anthology *What Luther Says*, Plass points out:

J. Mackinnon correctly says in his Luther and the Reformation: “Luther’s thesis that Rome was the seat of Antichrist was no mere declaration of an apocalyptic visionary.” It is at times said that Luther’s identification of Pope and Antichrist is rooted in his expectation of Christ’s speedy return; and the term which Luther often uses, *Endchrist*, is cited as corroborative evidence. But Luther does not prove the Pope to be the Antichrist by citing the certainty of his eschatological expectations. It is rather just the other way around. Because Antichrist has now been unmasked, the end must be near.²⁰

Luther and the confessors did not form their theology first and then try to find Scripture to suit it. While Luther wasn’t afraid to express his opinion about the relative nearness of the second coming, he didn’t elevate such assertions to the level of doctrine. As pointed out by Plass, clear doctrine based on Scripture is the source for theological conclusion.

C. Modern heterodoxy

Rapture

What has happened with millennialism and the rapture in the last one hundred years or so is nowhere better popularized than in Hal Lindsey’s many volumes. One of the more infamous sections of his writings gives us these memorable words:

“There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy ... cars going in all directions – and not one of them had a driver. I mean, it was wild! I think we’ve got an invasion from outer space!”

“It was the last quarter of the championship game and the other side was ahead. Our boys had the ball. We made a touchdown and tied it up. The crowd went crazy. Only one minute to go and they fumbled – our quarterback recovered – he was about a yard from the goal when – zap – no more quarterback – completely gone, just like that.”

“As an official spokesman for the United Nations, I wish to inform all peace-loving people of the world that we are making every human effort to assist those nations whose leaders have disappeared. We have issued a general declaration of condemnation in the General Assembly concerning these heads of state. Their irresponsibility is shocking.”

“My dear friends in the congregation. Bless you for coming to church today. I know that many of you have lost loved ones in this unusual disappearance of so many people. However, I believe that God’s judgment has come upon them for their continued dissension and quarreling with the great advances of the church in our century. Now that the reactionaries are removed, we can progress toward our great and glorious goal of uniting all mankind into a brotherhood of reconciliation and understanding.”²¹

Though lacking detail or biblical reference, the fact is, it makes for exciting reading. This is the stuff Hollywood script writing is made of. It has the ability to grab the reader's attention, and did so for several years for millions of readers. This takes ideas suggested by the previous references to MT 24 and LK 17 and puts them in such a way that the average Christian layman can readily comprehend and imagine.

Imagine is a good word here. Though very concrete and couched in everyday terms, not one word of the "great snatch" quote above can be corroborated with Scripture. Every one of those concrete details is sheer fabrication from the imagination of Lindsey and other dispensationalist writers. In one sense, such presentations are hard to refute because a specific Bible verse cannot be found to refute what was never taught in Scripture in the first place (arguing from silence). The best approach to these imagined, hypothetical teachings about the rapture is the old doubtful Missouriian approach: "Show me!" The explanations and Scripture references offered by the rapturists must all be accompanied by their footnotes and arbitrary insistence on literal or symbolic interpretation as best suits their needs. Bare Scripture, taken in its context, will never suffice to defend any version of rapture teaching.

The difficulty inherent with these teachings is evident even within the rapturist camp itself. One might expect that if the teaching was as plain, simple and obvious in Scripture as Lindsey claims, there would be little or no disagreement in its presentation. But for all the claims of simplicity, there is an astounding variation of presentation with these teachings. Pre, mid and post-tribulation theories vie for supremacy as the model for understanding the rapture. (Personally, for pure entertainment purposes, I'm partial to the "partial rapture" theory, which has Christ coming back and forth from heaven like a yo-yo to retrieve small clusters of Christians in sequential order through the years.)

Apart from the theory itself, accompanying statements by

Lindsey bring into serious doubt his ability to teach *any* doctrine correctly. Consider his state of mind when he reached his conclusions about the rapture. "There were times during this search [for the Biblical truth about the rapture] that I experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in such power that I went into an ecstatic state."²² Maybe it's just part of being a stodgy, confessional Lutheran which makes "*ecstatic state*" a cautionary red flag for me. But less stodgy non-Lutherans would also do well to question the thinking ability and source of spirituality of someone who is not in control of his thought processes, and for whom control of the thought processes by Christ is at least questionable, based on his contradictions of Christ's written word.

Further, Lindsey contradicts himself and Scripture when he states: "**All** believers at the time of the rapture will escape physical death Some will regretfully be raptured while out of fellowship with God. This *may* [emphasis added] result in a loss of rewards for service, but not participation in the rapture."²³ Perhaps this statement is an outgrowth of the "once-saved-always-saved" notion of strict Calvinism. Maybe it's an example of some peculiar reformed terminology, which somehow distinguishes between being a believer in Christ and being a believer in Christ while still being out of fellowship with God. But for any of us, it will be read as an admission that one need not be a believer at the moment of Christ's return in order to enjoy a heavenly eternity, whether as the result of a rapture or the day of judgment. Such confusion is further evidenced in his use of several Bible verses as proof texts for a rapture; verses which we and most Christians over the centuries have always understood as references to the resurrection of the dead. PH 3:20-21 are cited along with I CO 15:52 and I TH 4:15-18 as proof that there will be a "rapture" of all believers before "the great tribulation."²⁴ Here, again, the burden of proof lies on the dispensationalists to convince us why centuries of Christian interpretation are wrong. Until shown otherwise, we accept these verses as references to the physical resurrection of the dead on the last day.

Millennium

The great variety of positions seen as explanation for a rapture is not as evident when we look at the stand taken on the broader concept of millennialism. If we can take Lindsey's word for it, we would say that almost no one accepts the postmillennial view. "World War I seriously shook this [postmillennial] view, and World War II all but wiped it out. It should be noted that the view is founded on a gross mishandling of the prophetic Scriptures. The allegorical method of interpretation is used throughout."²⁵

Lindsey's remarks on amillennialism are equally disparaging, not to mention inaccurate. For instance, Lindsey accuses amillennialists of believing "there will be no specific period of tribulation, no fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy about the seventieth week and no millennial kingdom." If indeed we will even accept the title "amillennial" for our position, we would have to say that we don't believe in a specific time period for the tribulation *as narrow in scope* as Lindsey's. We do not believe the prophecy of Daniel about a "seventieth week" will be fulfilled in *the same way* Lindsey believes it will. We do not believe there will be a "millennial" kingdom *on earth* the way Lindsey does. But to say that we don't believe God's Word addresses the issues of a seventieth week, a millennial kingdom or a tribulation bound to time as we know it is another example of sensationalist hyperbole used by Lindsey to sway people to his position. Who (especially among Lindsey's typical readers) wants to be accused of not believing the Bible, after all?

A great deal of this type of millennial misunderstanding must be blamed on the dispensationalist background from which it has grown. Yet this background is by no means consistent either. If we consider a few examples, we can see that there are differences, not only in terminology, but in interpretation, under-

standing and sequence of the events which form the basis for each dispensation. Dispensationalism is by no means an exact science, so it shouldn't surprise us that we find so many different approaches among dispensationalists regarding eschatology, millennialism and rapture.

Not that we can say Lutherans in the broadest sense do much better. In the Braaten/Jenson dogmatics text, produced by these scholars in publishing houses of the ELCA, virtually every approach to eschatology and millennialism described briefly by Stephenson is presented in greater detail. Typically this seems to be done without comment on correctness or acceptability. It would appear that in teaching matters of eschatology the ELCA approach is simply to present every possibility known to religious thought~ and then let the reader decide for himself which "truth" to believe. One of these truths, offered by "religious" thought (Christian or other), is presented by Hans Schwarz:

In recent years, especially under the impact of a renewed listening to the biblical documents, the idea of an immortal soul has become increasingly suspect. A human being is again seen as a unity. Karl Barth perhaps over-stated the case when he claimed that the notion of immortality is a typical thought engendered by fear. Karl Rahner puts the issue more correctly when he states that there is no rectilinear continuation of our empirical reality beyond death. In this regard death puts an end to the whole man.²⁶

The usefulness of anything like a millennial reign of Christ on earth or a rapture is immediately negated with this viewpoint. If there is no "empirical existence" beyond death, there would be nothing to be raptured or at least to remain raptured. There would be little excitement toward, or purpose for, a millennial reign if it all is to come to an inglorious end in death anyway.

In comparison with the dispensationalists and the ravings of people like Lindsey, the writings of Schwarz, Weiss, Schweitzer,

Kung, and others seem almost preferable. At least these men in their philosophical musings have tried to envision and correct inconsistencies and postulate answers which take them into account.

But in the end the positions of the liberal Lutherans and other religious philosophers deal with eschatology by eliminating eschatology in any biblical sense of the word.

Conclusion

If we veer away from the Bible, we will find eschatology to be a most disappointing subject. Following the lead of the philosophers of this and the previous century, we *could* empty the term “eschatology” of any of the usual meaning we associate with it, biblically speaking. Matters such as judgment, resurrection, glorification and eternal life can simply be forgotten, giving us our disappointment now. At the other extreme we could go the dispensationalist route. We could look forward to massive traffic jams with driverless cars, as we Christians float merrily above the whole mess. We could long for the day when we look down from heaven at a world and a society disintegrating under the weight of moral bankruptcy and evil, while we raptured Christians enjoy the bliss of perfect life in heaven. We could eagerly await the day when we thumb our noses at the enemies who have ridiculed our Christian faith while *we* sit on gold thrones in Jerusalem deciding their punishment and fate for the misery they caused us years earlier. But while these eschatological dreams (nightmares?) have certainly excited many, as evidenced by the sale of multiple millions of books by Lindsey and others, in the end, they too, disappoint. The fleshly hope of having the upper hand and perhaps a bit of revenge is not what the end times is about. Many will be disappointed not to experience this. The thought that merely because we are Christians we will be removed from this world of sin and trouble before things get too bad can only disappoint. Many are the Christians who have lived through a full lifetime of trouble

and difficulty, perhaps even persecution. If they thought they were going to escape it all, their disappointment must have been bitter.

The biblical position does not and will not disappoint. God-given faith sustains us as we continue to weather temptation, our sins, the sins of others and evil in general. God-given faith takes the real-life eschatological events of Christ’s incarnation, sinless life, death, and resurrection and uses those events to direct our attention to the traditional eschatological events of our own personal bodily resurrection and our judgment through Christ unto eternal life.

These are the things Christ came for. His kingdom was not and still is not to be of this world. His kingdom in which we Christians will also rule, forever, at his side, is the heavenly kingdom. He has gone there to prepare a place for us. Will he come back to take us there in the year 2000? Maybe. Just don’t be too sure that God really likes to do things in round numbers.

Appendix A:

References for Ante-Nicene writings on the subjects of Resurrection and Judgment

The following brief references might help lead to further interesting reading in the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers in the subject areas of resurrection and judgment.

Resurrection

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 10, *The Writings of Origen*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1869, pp 268, 269. Origen, substance remains in resurrection.

Ibid., p 269. Origen, a gradual renewal toward the glorified body?

Ibid., p 272-3. Origen seems to be saying that we will attain a oneness with God even in a bodily glory?

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 2, *The Writings of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1870, pp 344-5. Justin Martyr, resurrection will remove imperfection.

Ibid., p 346. Justin Martyr, it is simply assumed and believed among Christians of his time.

Ibid., p 442-3. Athenagoras, logical proofs for an orthodox resurrection.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 22, *The Writings of Lactantius*. Vol. II. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871, p 162. Lactantius, righteous will be given the form of angels.

Ibid., p 162. Lactantius, Unjust also raised, but for eternal torment.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 14, *The Writings of Methodius*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1869, p 145. Methodius, Be like the angels after resurrection (speaking in context of incorruption).

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 7, *The Writings of Tertullianus Against*

Marcion. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870, p 171. Tertullian, Be like angels in substance in resurrection.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 14, p 168. Methodius, contra Origen, who says it will not be the same body raised to glory, but a different substance having the same appearance as the body of the past age.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 13, *The Writings of Cyprian, Etc.*, Vol. II. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869, p 466. Minucius Felix, the hope of an orthodox resurrection is well known, though reviled, by opponents of Christianity.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 3, *The Writings of Tatian, Theophilus, and the Clementine Recognitions*. Edinburgh: T. and T Clark, 1868, p. 177. Clement of Rome, Saints if pious enough will avoid dissolution of body.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 23, *The Writings of Origen Contra Celsus*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872, p 282. Origen, Resurrection to glory is understood (Celsus is saying that it's a disgusting thought that the same body after dissolution would be glorified; "old is worth less than dung".)

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 21, *The Works of Lactantius*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871, p 446. Lactantius notes immortality of the soul, as something even spoken of by Plato, though Plato had not comprehended the whole truth or purpose of immortality.

Ibid., p 453. Lactantius, soul/body separation

Judgment

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 1, *The Writings of Cyprian*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870, p 461. 464. 465.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 10, *The Writings of Origen*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869. p 263. Origen based on our works.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 6, *The Writings of Hippolytus, Bishop of Portus*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870, p 18. Origen, Statement about non-existence of hell.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 17, *The Clementine Homilies, The Apostolical Constitutions*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870, p 59. Clement, Purgatory effective to purify sinning believers; hell real; annihilation of 20% of the damned.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 2, *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872, p 367. Clement of Alexandria, Higher judgment of glory for gnostics.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts and Revelation*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, p 502. Apocryphal Revelation of John describes a normal sounding judgment day.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 14, *The Writings of Methodius*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, p 144. Methodius, “destruction” used to describe a change to a better form (new heavens and new earth. cf Origen below re: conflagration).

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 3, *The Writings of Tatian, Theophilus, and the Clementine Recognitions*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, p 320-321. Clement of Rome, Unending quality of punishment for unbelievers.

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 23, *The Writings of Origen Contra Celsum*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, p 283. Origen, conflagration at judgment serves purpose of purification (cf. Methodius, above, re: destruction of heaven and earth).

Ibid., p 284-285. Origen, There will be eternal punishment for those not saved (contra Celsus again).

Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 21, *The Works of Lactantius*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, p 454ff, Lactantius, Much material on orthodox judgment.

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Endnotes

¹ Kenelin Burridge, *New Heaven. New Earth*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1975). Burridge suggests a totally different definition of “millennialism” first used by Haddon. Based on studies of Polynesian cultures, the term “millennial” means anything which could be considered a “defining moment” in the cultural evolution of a society, especially as it relates to the overthrow of political oppression. The overthrow of a previous dynasty or the widespread acceptance of different social mores would be a new millennium according to this definition, regardless of whether the changes occurred in thousand-year or one-year intervals. *n.b.* pages 1-14.

² Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Jigsaw Puzzle: Five Predictions that Failed* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), p 49.

³ John R. Stephenson, *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, Vol. XIII, Eschatology*, (Fort Wayne: The Luther Academy. 1993) p 23.

⁴ John R. Stephenson, *Eschatology*, p 31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 25.

⁶ The Ante-Nicene Christian Library, *The Writings of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1870). Translated by Rev. Marcus Dods, Rev. B. P. Pratten and Rev. George Reith pp 199-201.

⁷ The Ante-Nicene Christian Library. Vol.22, *The Works of Lactantius, Vol.1*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1871, Trans. by William Fletcher.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 162.

⁹ The Ante-Nicene Christian Library, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus: Against Marcion*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1870). Trans. by Robert Ernest Wallis. p 171.

¹⁰ The Ante-Nicene Christian Library. Vol. 18, *The Writings of Tertullian [Vol. III] with the extant writings of Victorinus and Commodianus*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1870). Trans. by Robert Ernest Wallis. p 431.

¹¹ The Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol.1. *The Apostolic Fathers*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 38 George Street, 1870).

¹² Aaron Luther Plueger, *Things to Come for Planet Earth*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977). pp 48-50.

¹³ Michael Smith, *Flourishing Millennialism During the Late Nineteenth Century: Issues and Events Which Will Apply to the Present Decade*, A 1991 Conference paper, pp 7-10.

¹⁴ The Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. 21 *The Works of Lactantius. Vol. 1*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1871. Trans. by William Fletcher. p 481.

¹⁵ John R. Stephenson, *Eschatology*, p 29. The page following is worth looking up for extended documentation of the eschatological nature of many doctrines treated within the *Book of Concord*, even though they are not labeled specifically as being eschatological.

¹⁶ *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1921. p 51. The longer wording of the AC is given here. The Apology does not add any material.

¹⁷ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970) p 176. It is interesting to view the development of Lindsey's position. He makes several

assumptions, some of which are not universally as true or accepted as he states. Then based on those assumptions, he belittlingly classifies those who disagree with him as doubting the veracity of the LORD, Himself. ***“To us, the biggest issue is over the question, “Does God keep His promises?”*** For God unconditionally promised Abraham's descendants a literal worldwide kingdom over which they would rule through their Messiah who would reign upon David's throne . . . It is promised that Jerusalem will be the spiritual center of the entire world and that all people of the earth will come annually to worship Jesus who will rule there...” Yet we note that if you believe there is any symbolic usage in these promises or in the reference to “the thousand years,” sorry, you don't believe God keeps his promises.

¹⁸ Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture, Truth or Consequences*, (New York: Bantam, 1985). pp 39-51.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Sämmtliche Werke, Fünf und vierzigster Band*, Erlangen, Heyder & Zimmer. 1850. p 110. “This false notion is lodged not only in the apostles (Acts 1:6), but also in the chiliasts, Valentinians, and Tertullians, who have played the fool with the idea that before Judgment Day the Christians alone will possess the earth and that there will be no ungodly.”

²⁰ Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says, An Anthology*, Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 1959 p 37, note on paragraph 104.

²¹ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p 136.

²² Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture, Truth or Consequences*, pp 39-40.

²³ *Ibid.*, p 43.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 44-45.

²⁵ Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture, Truth or Consequences*, p 32

²⁶ Hans Schwarz, Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics, Vol. 2*. (Philadelphia: 1984) p 566. Hans Schwarz was the author/editor of the entire section on eschatology in the Braaten/Jenson Dogmatics.

Are the Lutheran Confessions a Practical Document Today?

By David Jay Webber

I.

Are the Lutheran Confessions a practical document today? This is the question that has been posed for the purposes of this paper, and this is the question that we will seek to answer. However, before we reach any conclusions about whether or not the Confessions are “practical,” we must first be clear on the question of what the Confessions are.

First, the Lutheran Confessions are sound Biblical exegesis. The Formula of Concord states very plainly

that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, “Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.” (FC Ep R&N: 1, p. 464)¹

The Fathers and Reformers firmly believed in the unique authority of Holy Scripture for the faith and life of the church. They accepted St. Paul’s declaration that the Scriptures “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,” and that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righ-

teousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:15-17 NKJV) As referenced in the Augsburg Confession, St. Augustine, for example, taught “that one should not obey even regularly elected bishops if they err or if they teach or command something contrary to the divine Holy Scriptures.” (AC XXVIII: 28 [G], p. 85)

²

In keeping with this principle, those who composed the various Confessional documents were always very conscious of the fact that what they were doing was providing for the church a faithful statement and exposition of Holy Scripture, in response to Gnosticism, Arianism, Pneumatomachianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, Romanism, Zwinglianism, Calvinism, or whatever else might have been threatening the apostolic and Biblical Gospel. The Lutherans at the Diet of Augsburg declare that they are offering and presenting “a confession of our pastors’ and preachers’ teaching and of our own faith, setting forth how and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, these things are preached, taught, communicated, and embraced...” (AC Pref.: 8, p. 25) The authors of the Formula of Concord echo this thought when they reaffirm their adherence “to the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession...as our symbol in this epoch, not because this confession was prepared by our theologians but because it is taken from the Word of God and solidly and well grounded therein.” (FC SD R&N: 5, p. 504) The same is true of all the other Symbols in the Book of Concord. Their only claim to authority is based on their claim to having faithfully reproduced the teaching of the Bible. As Lyle W. Lange expresses it,

We subscribe to them because they accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture. They are relevant today because they reflect the unchanging and ever timely word of God.³

While the Lutheran Church’s confessional obligation “does not

extend to historical statements, ‘purely exegetical questions,’ and other matters not belonging to the doctrinal content of the symbols,” nevertheless, “All *doctrines* of the Symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture.”⁴ Consequently, the authority of the Book of Concord, as “a confession of the doctrines of Scripture over against those who deny these doctrines,”⁵ rises or falls with the authority of Holy Scripture itself. In the words of Charles Porterfield Krauth, “We do not interpret God’s word by the Creed, neither do we interpret the Creed by God’s word, but, interpreting both independently, by the laws of language, and finding that they teach one and the same truth, we heartily acknowledge the Confession as a true exhibition of the faith of the Rule – a true witness to the one, pure, and unchanging faith of the Christian Church, and freely make it our own Confession, as truly as if it had been now first uttered by our lips, or had now first gone forth from our hands.”⁶ And as Joseph A. Seiss aptly remarks, “We do not believe *in* the Symbols; we only believe *with* them, and that for no other reason than that we are persuaded that they do fairly and truly grasp and declare what, on adequate examination, is found to be the true sense, intent and meaning of God’s holy Word on the points presented in them.”⁷

II.

Second, the Lutheran Confessions are preeminent examples of the faithful ministry of some of the most important pastors and teachers in Christian history. St. Paul writes that Christ himself

gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints[,] for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be chil-

dren, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head— Christ... (Eph. 4:11-15 NKJV)

The apostles and prophets clearly have a special status in the history of the church. Their teaching was supernaturally guided and preserved from error by the Holy Spirit in a unique way, and through the Holy Scriptures, which they penned by divine inspiration, they continue to carry out their unique calling as the foundational teachers in the Christian church. “Pastors and teachers” are, however, also a part of the divinely-instituted ministry, and when they faithfully carry out their calling, they also do so with divine assistance and with divine authority. To the extent that a pastor accurately reflects and conveys the doctrine of the apostles and prophets in his own teaching, to that extent his teaching is also apostolic and prophetic. As Krauth puts it,

Our sermons are human explanations of God’s Word, but so far as they explain it correctly, they do set forth God’s Word, and he who hears us hears our Lord. Our Confession is a human explanation of God’s Word, but so far as it correctly explains it, it sets forth God’s Word.⁸

St. Paul certainly envisions the continuation of such a teaching office beyond his own lifetime and even to the end of the age, to instruct and guide and console and protect God’s people with God’s Word. The symbolical books of the Lutheran Church were written by men who held this office, and who fulfilled its duties faithfully. To honor these books is therefore to honor the God-given and God-pleasing ministry of those who wrote them. We do not show special honor to the divinely-given ministry of apostles and prophets by disparaging the divinely-given ministry of pastors and teachers. Rather, we show proper honor to all that God

gives to his church by honoring all such ministries precisely in accordance with how God defines them and in accordance with the purposes for which he has given them. In regard to the pastors and teachers who are currently governing the church with God’s Word, the New Testament directs us to “Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.” (Heb. 13:17 NASB) In the same context, the New Testament gives us a similar directive regarding faithful ministers of the Word from the past, who are no longer with us in this earthly life:

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes, and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings... (Heb. 13:7-9 NASB)

The apostles and prophets are infallible. Those who have been and are called to be pastors and teachers, including the Fathers and Reformers who wrote our Creeds, are not infallible. But as Krauth points out,

We do not claim that our Confessors were infallible. We do not say they could not fail. We only claim that they did not fail.⁹

The Confessions are certainly not the same as the Scriptures, just as pastors and teachers are not the same as the apostles and prophets. But if the Confessions accurately reflect and convey the Biblical doctrine, then we are able to recognize that they flow ultimately from God, under divine providence, through the divine vocation of the Fathers and Reformers who produced them at critical times in the church’s history. Krauth again explains

that *correct human explanations* of Scripture doctrine are Scripture doctrine, for they are simply the statement

of the same truth in different words. These words are not *in themselves* as clear and good as the Scripture terms, but as those who use them can absolutely fix the sense of their own phraseology by a direct and infallible testimony, the human words may more perfectly exclude heresy than the divine words do. ... There is no personal Christianity in the world which is not the result of a human explanation of the Bible as really as the Confession of our Church is. It is human because it is in human minds, and human hearts — it is not a source to which we can finally and absolutely appeal as we can to God's word. But in exact proportion as the word of God, opened to the soul by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, is truly and correctly apprehended, just in that proportion is the "human explanation" coincident with the divine truth. I explain God's truth, and if I explain it correctly, my explanation is God's truth, and to reject the one in unbelief is to reject the other.¹⁰

The Reformers in the sixteenth century looked back on the earlier history of the Christian church in this way. They honored God by honoring, referring to, quoting from, and identifying with the men who had so obviously been used by God in history to preach and teach his Word. In their endorsement of the three ancient Creeds, the Concordists declare:

Immediately after the time of the apostles -- in fact, already during their lifetime -- false teachers and heretics invaded the church. Against these the ancient church formulated symbols (that is, brief and explicit confessions) which were accepted as the unanimous, catholic, Christian faith and confessions of the orthodox and true church, namely, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We pledge ourselves to these, and we hereby reject all heresies and teachings, which have been introduced into the church of God contrary to them. (FC Ep R&N:3, p. 465)

The marks of the church are discernible in history, revealing the

presence of God's people and of their faithful shepherds on the time line of human existence. The Reformers, as students of the history of the church, are thereby able to "hear" the powerful voice of Christ, not only in the preaching and teaching of the apostles, but also in the preaching and teaching of the ancient orthodox Fathers:

In order to keep the Gospel among men, he visibly pits the witness of the saints against the rule of the devil; in our weakness he displays his strength. The dangers, labors, and sermons of the apostle Paul, Athanasius, Augustine, and other teachers of the church are holy works, true sacrifices acceptable to God, battles by which Christ restrained the devil and drove him away from the believers. (Ap IV:189-90, p. 133)

Regarding the article on justification, Philip Melanchthon is able to say: "We know that what we have said agrees with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, with the holy Fathers Ambrose, Augustine, and many others, and with the whole church of Christ, which certainly confesses that Christ is the propitiator and the justifier." (Ap IV:389, p. 166) In regard to another important article of faith, Melanchthon states that "we teach nothing about original sin that is contrary to the Scripture or the church catholic, but we have cleansed and brought to light important teachings of the Scriptures and the Fathers that had been obscured by the sophistic arguments of modern theologians." (Ap II:32, p. 104) It is clear to the Reformers that God had preserved his church, and the testimony of his Word within his church, even in more recent centuries. Martin Luther writes: "God has confirmed Baptism through the gift of his Holy Spirit, as we have perceived in some of the fathers, such as St. Bernard, [Jean] Gerson, John Hus, and others..." (LC IV:50, p. 443) The second-generation Lutheran Confessors look back on the first-generation Lutheran Confessors with a similar attitude. For example, the authors of the Formula of Concord believe that "By a special grace our mer-

ciful God has in these last days brought to light the truth of his Word amid the abominable darkness of the papacy through the faithful ministry of that illustrious man of God, Dr. Luther.” (FC SD R&N:5, p. 504) The Concordists themselves, while less pretentious concerning their own importance, nevertheless know that what they are doing they are doing according to the divine authority of their divine office: “As far as our ministry is concerned, we do not propose to look on idly or stand by silently while something contrary to the Augsburg Confession is imported into our churches and schools in which the almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed us teachers and shepherds.” (FC SD XII:6, p. 633) And finally, the perspective of people like us, who live and serve in post-Reformation times, but who live and serve in a Reformation-minded church, is summarized well by Seiss:

The Symbols of the orthodox Church of Christ are the matured fruits of the deepest devotion, experience and learning of its greatest and wisest members in its most trying ages; and as we may practically learn much from the biographies of the good, so we may learn much more from the spirit-moved biography of the Church and the principles and testimonies which mark her life of faith. They are the sign-posts set up by the faithful along the King’s highway of salvation to designate the places of danger to those who come after them, to warn and admonish us where we would otherwise be liable to err and miss the goal of our high calling in Christ Jesus. They are not laws to rule our faith, for the Word of God alone is such a Rule; but they are helps and tokens to enable us the more surely to find the true import of the Rule, that we may be all the more thoroughly and sincerely conformed to that Rule. They are the human tracks which the best of the saints have left, by which we may the better detect the way which God has laid out and opened for the fallen and sinful children of men to travel, that they may fill their Christian vocation and come to everlasting life.¹¹

Krauth recognizes that the Reformers “*may* have made mistakes, and nothing but mistakes; they *may* have known nothing, and we may know every thing; but we have seen no evidence that such is the case, and until it be brought before us, we must beg indulgence for our skepticism.”¹² In the last century Charles F. Schaeffer also posed some crucial questions that are just as applicable to our time as they were to his:

Have we really made such progress in the discovery of truth since the era of the Reformation, that we understand the Scriptures more thoroughly than those who framed the Symbolical Books? When Luther and his associates were prepared to surrender their lives, but not the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Schmalkald Articles, and the Catechism, had these men of faith and prayer discovered treasures of divine truth of less extent and less value than we possess in modern times? When the Elector Augustus with holy fervor prayed to God that the authors of the Concord-Formula might be guided by the Divine Spirit in the preparation of that admirable work, was his prayer for the illumination of the Spirit less efficacious than modern prayers are? If the writers of the Symbols were unworthy of regard, or are erroneous in their exhibition of truth, who are the men that are more competent to unfold the Scriptural doctrine? What palliating features have they discovered in man’s corruption, in more recent times? What useful changes do they suggest in the doctrine of the atonement? What improvement do they propose in our old doctrine of justification by faith? What more ready access to the throne of grace have they discovered? Are we wiser, more holy, richer in divine grace, more useful through the inspiration of the “spirit of the times” than our pious fathers were? We are weary of the superior intelligence of the Nineteenth Century in matters of Christian faith.¹³

III.

Third, the Lutheran Confessions are in fact the received public confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Through them Lutherans fulfill, in large measure, the obligation we have under Christ always to “be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15 NKJV), and “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3 NKJV). At the conclusion of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutherans declare:

Certainly we should not wish to put our own souls and consciences in grave peril before God by misusing his name or Word, nor should we wish to bequeath to our children and posterity any other teaching than that which agrees with the pure Word of God and Christian truth. Since this teaching is grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures and is not contrary or opposed to that of the universal Christian church, or even of the Roman church (in so far as the latter’s teaching is reflected in the writings of the Fathers), we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above. Therefore, those who presume to reject, avoid, and separate from our churches as if our teaching were heretical, act in an unkind and hasty fashion, contrary to all Christian unity and love, and do so without any solid basis of divine command or Scripture. (AC epilog to XXI, 1 [G], pp. 47-48)

In continuity with this conviction, the writers of the Formula of Concord

again whole-heartedly subscribe this Christian and thoroughly scriptural Augsburg Confession, and we abide by the plain, clear, and pure meaning of its words. We consider this Confession a genuinely Christian symbol which all true Christians ought to accept next to the Word of God, just as in ancient times Christian symbols and confessions were formulated in the church of God

when great controversies broke out, and orthodox teachers and hearers pledged themselves to these symbols with heart and mouth. Similarly we are determined by the grace of the Almighty to abide until our end by this repeatedly cited Christian Confession as it was delivered to Emperor Charles in 1530. And we do not intend, either in this or subsequent doctrinal statements, to depart from the aforementioned Confession or to set up a different and new confession. (FC SD Intro.:4-5, p. 502)

At the conclusion of the Formula of Concord (which sets forth and includes all the Symbols in the Book of Concord), its authors declare with all seriousness and solemnity:

Therefore, in the presence of God and of all Christendom among both our contemporaries and our posterity, we wish to have testified that the present explanation of all the foregoing controverted articles here explained, and none other, is our teaching, belief, and confession in which by God’s grace we shall appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and for which we shall give an account. Nor shall we speak or write anything, privately or publicly, contrary to this confession, but we intend through God’s grace to abide by it. (FC SD XII:40, p. 636)

And orthodox Lutheran churches to the present time are not ashamed to confess the same Biblical faith, through the same Confessions. Harold Wicke speaks for the Wisconsin Synod, but not only for the Wisconsin Synod:

On June 25, 1580, the Book of Concord was officially published in Dresden, Germany, and presented to the world as the doctrinal position of the Lutheran Church. ... Today our churches still accept this book as their confession of faith. Thus the constitution of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod states: “The Synod also accepts the Confessions of the Evangelical

Lutheran Church embodied in the Book of Concord of 1580, not insofar as, but because they are a correct presentation and exposition of the pure doctrine of the word of God.” Our individual congregations have a similar article in their constitutions. Our pastors and teachers also pledge to preach and teach in accordance with these confessions. ... Though these confessions were all written in Germany, they are not German. Though they were written by Lutherans, they are not sectarian. Though they were gathered together centuries ago, they are not obsolete. If you want to believe the gospel, these are the confessions you will want to stand by. It is our conviction that the Book of Concord meets the needs of the church. This is so because it is a positive statement of what the church of God believes according to the Scripture, a rejection of those teachings which do not agree with Scripture, an accurate statement of what we must abide by when asked to give an account, a simple statement of Scripture truth to be taught our children, a clear statement of what we as pastors, teachers, and parents should preach and teach, and a faithful exposition of the word in such a way that schisms and compromises are prevented. These confessions – from the Apostles’ Creed to the Formula of Concord – are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ is their cornerstone.¹⁴

Krauth also writes:

The basis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the Word of God, as the perfect and absolute Rule of Faith, and because this is her basis, she rests of necessity on the faith of which that Word is the Rule, and therefore on the Confessions which purely set forth that faith. She has the right rule, she reaches the right results by that rule, and rightly confesses them. This Confession then is her immediate basis, her essential characteristic, with which she stands or falls. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the Catechisms and Schmalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, have

been formally declared by an immense majority of the Lutheran Church as their Confession of Faith. The portion of the Church, with few and inconsiderable exceptions, which has not received them formally, has received them virtually. They are closely cohering and internally consistent statements and developments of one and the same system, so that a man who heartily and intelligently receives any one of the distinctively Lutheran Symbols, has no difficulty in accepting the doctrine of the whole. They fairly represent the faith of the Church, and simply and solely as so representing it are they named in the statement of the basis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. ... The propositions we have just advanced, no Lutheran, in the historical sense of the word, can deny; for the man who would deny it, would, in virtue of that denial, prove that he is not in the historical sense Lutheran; for he, and he only, is such who believes that the doctrine of the gospel is rightly taught in the Augsburg Confession.¹⁵

Krauth here touches on the old question of whether a genuine Confessional subscription must of necessity include the entire Book of Concord, or if (as in the Danish-Norwegian tradition) formal subscription can be made only to the three ancient Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and the Small Catechism. In reality, a sincere and thoughtful subscription to the *chief* Symbols is a subscription to the *theology* of *all* the Symbols. On this basis the Norwegian Synod was admitted to membership in the old Synodical Conference in nineteenth-century America. Its constitution bound it formally only to the Creeds, the Augustana, and the Small Catechism. But the Creeds, the Augustana, and the Small Catechism *correctly understood* are, for all practical purposes, the whole Book of Concord. At any rate, the fathers of the Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Ohio Synods certainly saw it that way when they embraced the Norwegians confessionally and organizationally in 1872. When the Norwegian Synod, several years later, successfully resisted and overcame a destructive attack on one of the chief elements of its doctrinal basis – Confessionally

embodied most thoroughly in Article XI of the Formula of Concord, to which the Synod had not formally subscribed – the soundness of this decision was most gratifyingly demonstrated.¹⁶

As Henry E. Jacobs expresses it, “The unity of the Church does not consist in subscription to the same Confessions, but in the acceptance and teaching of the same doctrines.”¹⁷ This does not mean, however, that any particular group of Lutherans today may, if they see fit, dispense with the historic Confessions of their church and replace them with what they consider to be better or equally good Confessions – attempting all along, of course, to preserve the doctrine of the old Symbols.¹⁸ First of all, it is highly unlikely that any collection of Lutherans in our time would in actuality be able to improve on or match the wisdom, insight, and skill of the extraordinarily gifted Doctors of the Church who wrote the Confessions that have been passed down to us. And second, it would be very difficult if not impossible to protect such a project from the arrogant and sectarian spirit that would so easily and naturally lurk behind an idea of this kind. The Confessions of the Lutheran Church are not our personal “property,” to be tinkered with at will. They are, as it were, the “property” of the entire church, and those who are alive at any given time in Lutheran history are really just the stewards and temporary custodians of this noble legacy. As Wilhelm W. Petersen writes, it is important for Lutherans to be acquainted with the historic Lutheran Confessions

because the Confessions are a correct exposition, or interpretation, of the Bible and it is in our Confessions where we as a Lutheran Church publicly confess our faith before the world and confidently declare: “This we believe, teach, and confess.” They are also the banner under which we march and by which we identify one another as brethren. I believe that it is fair to say that if it were not for our Confessions the Lutheran Reformation would not have gotten off the ground and, consequently, there would be no Lutheran Church today. It is

also fair to say that if we depart from our Confessions, as many have, the time may come when there will be no true Lutheran Church.¹⁹

Also, the true loyalty of the Lutheran Church to its distinctive Confessions has little if anything to do with the supposed “German-ness” of either or both. As Wicke points out, “Though these confessions were all written in Germany, they are not German.” The Latin Church did not consider the Nicene Creed to be unimportant simply because it had been produced by Greeks. German Christians did not ignore the Athanasian Creed simply because it had arisen among French Christians. The Danish and Norwegian Lutherans did not consider the Small Catechism to be someone else’s catechism simply because it had been written by a German. The Swedish Lutherans did not refuse ultimately to adopt the Augsburg Confession simply because Sweden was not a part of the Holy Roman Empire. And the Slovak Lutherans did not refrain from embracing the entire Book of Concord simply because it had been compiled in the context of theological struggles among Germans. To dwell a bit longer on this example, the Slovak Lutherans as a group, unlike many of the ethnic Germans who lived among them, had little sympathy with the “mediating” theology of the Philippists. They wanted to make a clear confession of their faith, over against both Rome and the Reformed. As David P. Daniel notes,

After 1580, attempts to have the Formula of Concord accepted as the normative statement of Lutheran theology for the Lutherans of Slovakia resulted in a generation of debate. On the one hand, many German Lutherans of the central and eastern cities of Slovakia were reluctant to accept the very precise doctrinal definitions which had been incorporated into the Formula of Concord and accepted by the orthodox Lutherans in Germany. On the other hand, the clergy of Slovak ancestry, often supported by the leading magnates of Slovakia, and seeking a greater voice in the administra-

tion of the Church in which Slovaks were now numerically the majority, became the ardent advocates of the Formula.²⁰

Lutherans in Slovakia and elsewhere in the Slavic world have traditionally identified themselves as the “Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession.” As is self-evident, they took “ownership” of that Confession, originally brought to them from Germany, just as much as the new converts in the Grand Principality of Kyiv, at the time of St. Volodymyr, took “ownership” of the Nicene Creed that was brought to them from Byzantium.

The battles and victories chronicled in the Book of Concord are not, at the deepest level, the battles and victories of Germans, or of Frenchmen, or of Greeks. They are the battles and victories of God, fought and won not for the benefit of one or another ethnic group, but for the benefit of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. We should never think that there is anything “ethnic” about believing

that the three ecumenical creeds, the Apostles’, the Nicene and the Athanasian, as well as the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580 give expression to the true doctrine of Scripture. Since the doctrines they confess are drawn from Scripture alone, we feel ourselves bound to them in our faith and life. Therefore all preaching and teaching in our churches and schools must be in harmony with these confessions. ... We reject every effort to reduce the confessions contained in the Book of Concord to historical documents that have only relative confessional significance for the church today.²¹

Those who suppose that the Lutheran Confessions have little bearing on the theological controversies of our time either do not know what is really going on in modern Christendom, or they do not know what is really contained in the Book of Concord, or both. Although the Book of Concord was published over 400

years ago, its teachings and explanations are demonstrably applicable to many doctrinal issues that are all too contemporary.

When Pentecostals and Charismatics make their extraordinary claims, the Lutheran Church confesses:

On the one hand, it is true that both the preacher’s planting and watering and the hearer’s running and willing would be in vain, and no conversion would follow, if there were not added the power and operation of the Holy Spirit, who through the Word preached and heard illuminates and converts hearts so that men believe this Word and give their assent to it. On the other hand, neither the preacher nor the hearer should question this grace and operation of the Holy Spirit, but should be certain that, when the Word of God is preached, pure and unalloyed according to God’s command and will, and when the people diligently and earnestly listen to and meditate on it, God is certainly present with his grace and gives what man is unable by his own powers to take or to give. We should not and cannot pass judgment on the Holy Spirit’s presence, operations, and gifts merely on the basis of our feeling, how and when we perceive it in our hearts. On the contrary, because the Holy Spirit’s activity often is hidden, and happens under cover of great weakness, we should be certain, because of and on the basis of his promise, that the Word which is heard and preached is an office and work of the Holy Spirit, whereby he assuredly is potent and active in our hearts (II Cor. 2:14 ff.). (FC SD II:55-56, pp. 531-32)

When promoters of the so-called “Church Growth Movement” assert that the Divine Service should be redesigned to serve the purposes of “entertainment evangelism,” the Lutheran Church confesses:

The purpose of observing ceremonies is that men may learn the Scriptures and that those who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so

may also pray. (Ap XXIV:3, p. 250)

Places, times, persons, and the entire outward order of worship are therefore instituted and appointed in order that God's Word may exert its power publicly. (LC I:94, p. 378)

...the holy Fathers themselves had rites and traditions...because they were profitable for good order, because they gave the people a set time to assemble, because they provided an example of how all things could be done decently and in order in the churches, and finally because they helped instruct the common folk. For different seasons and various rites serve as reminders for the common folk. For these reasons the Fathers kept ceremonies, and for the same reasons we also believe in keeping traditions. (Ap XV:20-21, p. 218)

So in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's day, and the other more important feast days. With a very thankful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances, especially when they contain a discipline that serves to educate and instruct the people and the inexperienced. (Ap VII/VIII:33, pp. 174-75)

...it can readily be judged that nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches. (AC, prolog to XXII,6 [L], p. 49)

When they similarly assert that pastors should adjust their role in the congregation in accordance with "contemporary" leadership models, shaped and driven by psychology, sociology, and modern marketing strategies, the Lutheran Church confesses that ministers of the Gospel

do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church's call, as Christ testifies

(Luke 10:16), "He who hears you hears me." When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead. (Ap VII/VIII:28, p. 173)

The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent. By the confession of all, even of our adversaries, it is evident that this power belongs by divine right to all who preside over the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops. (Tr 60-61, p. 330)

...a minister who consecrates shows forth the body and blood of the Lord to the people, just as a minister who preaches shows forth the gospel to the people, as Paul says (I Cor. 4:1), "This is how one should regard us, as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the sacraments of God," that is, of the Word and sacraments; and II Cor. 5:20, "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (Ap XXIV:79-81, p. 264)

When defending the efficacy of Christ's Word and the real presence of his body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, the Lutheran Church confesses:

"Here, too, if I were to say over all the bread there is, 'This is the body of Christ,' nothing would happen, but when we follow his institution and command in the Lord's Supper and say, 'This is my body,' then it is his body, not because of our speaking or of our efficacious word, but because of his command in which he has told us so to speak and to do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking." (FC SD VII:78 [quoting Luther], pp. 583-84)

For the truthful and almighty words of Jesus Christ which he spoke in the first institution were not only

efficacious in the first Supper but they still retain their validity and efficacious power in all places where the Supper is observed according to Christ's institution and where his words are used, and the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed, and received by the virtue and potency of the same words which Christ spoke in the first Supper. For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup, Christ himself is still active through the spoken words by the virtue of the first institution, which he wants to be repeated. (FC SD VII:75, p. 583)

...in the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly offered with those things that are seen, the bread and the wine, to those who receive the sacrament. After careful examination and consideration of it, we firmly defend this belief. (Ap X:1, p. 179)

When battling the spiritual deadness and worldliness of "cultural Lutheranism," the Lutheran Church confesses:

It is, of course, self-evident that in true conversion there must be a change, there must be new activities and emotions in the intellect, will, and heart, so that the heart learns to know sin, to fear the wrath of God, to turn from sin, to understand and accept the promise of grace in Christ, to have good spiritual thoughts, Christian intentions, and diligence, and to fight against the flesh, etc. For if none of these things takes place or exists, there is no true conversion. (FC SD II:70, pp. 534-35)

...as Luther writes in his Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, "Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing

what is good. Likewise, faith does not ask if good works are to be done, but before one can ask, faith has already done them and is constantly active. Whoever does not perform such good works is a faithless man, blindly tapping around in search of faith and good works without knowing what either faith or good works are... Faith is a vital, deliberate trust in God's grace, so certain that it would die a thousand times for it. And such confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes us joyous, mettlesome, and merry toward God and all creatures. This the Holy Spirit works by faith, and therefore without any coercion a man is willing and desirous to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything for the love of God and to his glory, who has been so gracious to him. It is therefore as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat and light from fire." (FC SD IV:10-12, pp. 552-53)

When challenged by broadcast-media advocates of the new "gospel" of self-esteem and self-improvement, the Lutheran Church confesses

that a poor sinner is justified before God (that is, he is absolved and declared utterly free from all his sins, and from the verdict of well deserved damnation, and is adopted as a child of God and an heir of eternal life) without any merit or worthiness on our part, and without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, by sheer grace, solely through the merit of the total obedience, the bitter passion, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, our Lord, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness. The Holy Spirit offers these treasures to us in the promise of the Gospel, and faith is the only means whereby we can apprehend, accept, apply them to ourselves, and make them our own. Faith is a gift of God whereby we rightly learn to know Christ as our redeemer in the Word of the Gospel and to trust in him, that solely for the sake of his obedience we have forgiveness of sins by grace, are accounted righteous and holy by God the Father, and are saved forever. (FC

SD III:9-11, pp. 540-41)

The examples could go on and on. In summary, the Confessions faithfully proclaimed and applied God's Word to the historical circumstances in and for which they were written. But since neither human nature nor the Gospel of Christ has changed since then, it should not surprise us that the Confessions faithfully proclaim and apply God's Word to the circumstances of our day as well. The Book of Concord not only was, it *is* – very definitely – the public confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

IV.

Fourth, the Lutheran Confessions are effective tools for the preservation and promotion of true Christian unity. St. Paul literally pleads with the church, “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Cor. 1:10 NKJV) Our forefathers in the faith who in every generation subscribed to the Confessions did so because they were conscientiously “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph. 4:3 NKJV) They knew that the “unity of the Spirit” is not a sentimental, man-made, superficial unity, but that it is rooted instead in the Trinitarian reality of “one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Eph. 4:4-6 NKJV) The Biblical content of the Lutheran Confessions defines and facilitates this God-given unity both within and between the churches that accept and use them. Joseph Stump elaborates on this basic point:

Confessions or symbols are official formulations of the common faith of the Church. They are public testimonies as to the manner in which the Church apprehends

and teaches the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures. ... They serve the twofold purpose of exhibiting what the Church believes and teaches, and of guarding against error and heresy. ... They are useful also as criteria by which those who hold the same faith may know one another and join together in one organization. The Lutheran Confessions are contained in the Book of Concord, and include the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Schmalcald Articles, Luther's Small Catechism, Luther's Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord. Bona-fide subscription to these Confessions is required of Lutheran ministers, because the Church must see to it that those who go forth in her name preach only the pure doctrines of the Gospel as she holds them. No one is compelled to subscribe. But if any minister refuses to do so, he thereby testifies that he is not in harmony with the doctrinal position of the Lutheran Church, and has no right to preach in her name. On the other hand, if he is a Lutheran in his convictions, he will be glad to subscribe to the Confessions and to preach the doctrines set forth in them.²²

Melanchthon very sensibly writes: “In these controversies I have always made it a point to stick as closely as possible to traditional doctrinal formulas in order to foster the attainment of harmony.” (Ap Pref.:11, p. 99) When we are able to use the same terminology with the same commonly-understood meaning, we can indeed more easily understand each other and more easily recognize a unity in faith, if such a unity does exist. For orthodox Lutherans, the formulations of the Book of Concord provide just such a working “lexicon” for fraternal discourse, encouragement, support, and cooperation:

The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word

of God. For this same purpose the ancient church always had its dependable symbols. It based these not on mere private writings, but on such books as had been written, approved, and accepted in the name of those churches which confessed the same doctrine and religion. In the same way we have from our hearts and with our mouths declared in mutual agreement that we shall neither prepare nor accept a different or a new confession of our faith. Rather, we pledge ourselves again to those public and well-known symbols or common confessions which have at all times and in all places been accepted in all the churches of the Augsburg Confession before the outbreak of the several controversies among the adherents of the Augsburg Confession and which were kept and used during that period when people were everywhere and unanimously faithful to the pure doctrine of the Word of God as Dr. Luther of blessed memory had explained it. (FC SD R&N:1-2, p. 503)

The Lutheran Confessions recognize the Biblical parameters for church fellowship, and they go a long way in facilitating such fellowship among those who mutually subscribe to them. The Confessions eschew sectarianism in all of its forms. From the perspective of the Book of Concord, church fellowship must not be withheld from those who may exhibit various forms of personal weakness if they are otherwise sound in their confession of faith:

We should forsake wicked teachers because they no longer function in the place of Christ, but are antichrists. Christ says (Matt. 7:15), “Beware of false prophets”; Paul says (Gal. 1:9), “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.” Christ has also warned us in his parables on the church [Matt. 13:24-50] that when we are offended by the personal conduct of priests or people, we should not incite schisms, as the Donatists wickedly did. (Ap VII/VIII:48-49, pp. 177-78)

...Col. 3:14, “love, which is the bond of perfection.” ... Paul... is talking not about personal perfection but about fellowship in the church. He says that love is a bond and unbroken chain linking the members of the church with one another. Similarly, in all families and communities harmony should be nurtured by mutual aid, for it is not possible to preserve tranquility unless men cover and forgive certain mistakes in their midst. In the same way Paul commands that there be love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear, if need be, with the crude behavior of the brethren, to cover up minor mistakes, lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and the hatreds, factions, and heresies that arise from such schisms. For harmony will inevitably disintegrate if bishops impose heavy burdens on the people or have no regard for their weakness. Dissensions also arise when the people judge their clergy’s behavior too strictly or despise them because of some minor fault and then seek after some other kinds of doctrine and other clergy. On the other hand, perfection (that is, the integrity of the church) is preserved when the strong bear with the weak, when the people put the best construction on the faults of their clergy, when the bishops take into account the weakness of the people. (Ap IV:231-34, pp. 139-40)

In the words of C. F. W. Walther, “The church militant must indeed aim at and strive for absolute unity of faith and doctrine, but it never will attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one.”²³ This, too, is a Confessional principle. And so, from the perspective of the Book of Concord, church fellowship must not be withheld from those who exhibit certain differences in theological emphasis, in preferred forms of theological expression, or in non-dogmatic “theological opinions,” as long as there is a genuine “fundamental” agreement in the articles of faith:²⁴

In order to preserve the pure doctrine and to maintain a thorough, lasting, and God-pleasing concord within the church, it is essential not only to present the true and

wholesome doctrine correctly, but also to accuse the adversaries who teach otherwise (I Tim. 3:9; Titus 1:9; II Tim. 2:24; 3:16). “Faithful shepherds,” as Luther states, “must both pasture or feed the lambs and guard against wolves so that they will flee from strange voices and separate the precious from the vile” (John 10:12-16, 27; Jer. 15:19). On this point we have reached a basic and mutual agreement that we shall at all times make a sharp distinction between needless and unprofitable contentions (which, since they destroy rather than edify, should never be allowed to disturb the church) and necessary controversy (dissension concerning articles of the Creed or the chief parts of our Christian doctrine, when the contrary error must be refuted in order to preserve the truth). (FC SDR&N:14-15, pp. 506-07)

Hermann Sasse recognizes the fact that there has never been one monolithic “school of thought” within Lutheranism. He notes that Melanchthon

became a genuine Lutheran theologian under Luther’s strong influence, as the first edition of his *Loci* shows. But he never ceased to be a humanist, and in the course of time the humanist tendencies of his theology came forth again. This did not matter as long as he remained faithful to Lutheran dogma; in every living church there must be room for a variety of theological thinkers, provided they are in agreement as to the dogma of the church. Thus, a difference of interest in, or emphasis on, certain points of doctrine, and even a difference of expression, could well be tolerated. Luther always felt that he and his learned friend supplemented each other. As Melanchthon had learned from him, so he had learned from Melanchthon. It has great significance for the Lutheran church that its Confessions were not written by Luther alone. As Melanchthon’s Augsburg Confession, Apology, and *Tractatus* are happily supplemented by Luther’s *Smalcald Articles* and *Catechisms*, so even the *Formula of Concord* was written by disciples of Melanchthon and of Luther. This variety in expression of one and the same truth gave the Lutheran

Confessions a richness which the confessions of other churches do not possess. Nothing is more significant for the Lutheran church’s independence of human authority than the fact that Luther approved of the Augsburg Confession although he clearly stated that he would have written it in a totally different way. It is the doctrine of the Gospel that matters, and not human theology.²⁵

To elaborate on one of Sasse’s points, we must remember that the authors of the *Formula of Concord* truly were a very diverse group in many respects. The mix included Andrew Musculus, who had said of Luther:

Since the Apostles’ time, no greater man has lived upon the earth. God has poured out all His gifts on this one man. Between the old teachers (even Hilary and Augustine) and Luther, there is as wide a difference as between the shining of the moon and the light of the sun.²⁶

The mix also included Nicholas Selnecker, who had said that one of the greatest blessings of his life was that he “had had Melanchthon as his instructor, had heard him, had come into almost daily contact with him, had conversed with him, and had consulted with him.”²⁷ The rest of the committee was comprised of people who stood between these two at various places on the “sliding scale” of Lutheranism’s sixteenth-century theological tradition. And yet, in spite of the many personality clashes, tensions, and suspicions that existed among them, and in the midst of the many controversies that had been raging for decades, the Concordists were able to hammer out a precise, clear, and Biblical statement that has been profoundly appreciated by their theological and ecclesiastical heirs ever since. The *Formula* does not represent the idiosyncratic views of any one of its authors, but is in every sense the church’s confession of the church’s faith.

Of course, none of this means that the *Formula of Con-*

cord, or any of the Symbolical Books, is a document of doctrinal compromises rooted in anything other than a thorough and consistent submission to God's Holy Word. As the authors of the Formula declare:

From our exposition friends and foes may clearly understand that we have no intention (since we have no authority to do so) to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and outward harmony. Nor would such peace and harmony last, because it would be contrary to the truth and actually intended for its suppression. Still less by far are we minded to whitewash or cover up any falsification of true doctrine or any publicly condemned errors. We have a sincere delight in and deep love for true harmony and are cordially inclined and determined on our part to do everything in our power to further the same. We desire such harmony as will not violate God's honor, that will not detract anything from the divine truth of the holy Gospel, that will not give place to the smallest error but will lead the poor sinner to true and sincere repentance, raise him up through faith, strengthen him in his new obedience, and thus justify and save him for ever through the sole merit of Christ, and so forth. (FC SD XI:95-96, p. 632)

The Concordists in the late sixteenth century, and we in the late twentieth century, recognize clearly (in harmony with Article VII of the Augsburg Confession) that the proper basis for church fellowship is agreement in the *pure* marks of the church, and in *all* that Holy Scripture plainly teaches – that is, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the widest sense. Lutheran churches and church bodies accordingly “will not condemn each other because of a difference in ceremonies, when in Christian liberty one uses fewer or more of them, as long as they are otherwise agreed in doctrine and in all its articles and are also agreed concerning the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known axiom, ‘Disagreement in fasting should not destroy agreement in faith.’” (FC

SD X:31 [quoting St. Irenaeus], p. 616)

Publicly preaching and teaching the Word of God in or on behalf of the church is not a right. It is a privilege, granted by God's call, through the instrumentality of his believing *and confessing* church. The church certainly expects its ministers to preach, to teach, and to carry out all other aspects of their office in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, as believed and confessed in its midst. For this reason the orthodox Lutheran Church has always demanded a *quia* subscription to the Confessions, in which the candidate for ordination declares that he embraces the Symbolical Books of the Church *because*, not “insofar as,” they agree with Scripture. The idea that someone would subscribe to a document of any kind “insofar as” it agrees with Scripture is an idea that would make sense only before the person has read and studied the Bible and/or the document in question. Once the Bible and the document have both been studied, the person can then be asked in a straightforward way, “As you now see it, do the two agree? Yes or No?” The Confessional subscription that the church demands of a pastor is not a statement of his hermeneutical method, but a statement of the *results* of his hermeneutical method. We could in all honesty subscribe to a whole host of books and documents “insofar as” they agree with Scripture, if there is even a remote trace of Biblical truth contained in them. It would, however, be nothing more than a waste of everyone's time to say that we subscribe to the Koran, the Talmud, the Book of Mormon, or the Communist Manifesto “insofar as” they agree with Scripture, even though we could say this truthfully. A subscription to the Book of Concord “insofar as” it agrees with the Bible is just as useless to the church.

The Preface to the Book of Concord, signed by Lutheran princes and magistrates, recounts the original instances of a procedure that the Lutheran Church, under various forms of ecclesiastical government, has carried out in regard to its ministers and potential ministers ever since:

...some of us have had this document read article by article to each and every theologian, minister, and schoolmaster in our lands and territories and have had them reminded and exhorted to consider diligently and earnestly the doctrine contained in it. When they had found that the explanation of the dissensions which had arisen was agreeable and conformable first of all to the Word of God and then to the Augsburg Confession as well, the persons to whom it had been presented, as indicated above, gladly and with heartfelt thanks to almighty God testified that of their own volition and with due consideration they accepted, approved, and subscribed this Book of Concord as the correct Christian interpretation of the Augsburg Confession and publicly attested this with their hearts, lips, and hands. Therefore this Christian agreement is called and also is the unanimous and concordant confession not only of a few of our theologians but generally of each and every minister and schoolmaster in our lands and territories. (pp. 7-8)

The Lutheran princes and magistrates knew, of course, that it would be improper to ask people to subscribe to a confession with which they were not thoroughly familiar. (Such a procedure would border on one of the chief sins of the Masonic Lodge, namely, requiring an oath in uncertain matters.) For this reason they asked the theologians, pastors, and teachers in their territories to study the Formula of Concord carefully before signing their names to it. For the same reason they also specify that the theological students in their territories are to be trained in the Confessions as a part of their ministerial education, in preparation for the day when the church will ask each of them in his ordination vow to confess his and its faith, and in preparation for a life of faithful service to God's people:

...our disposition and intention has always been directed toward the goal that no other doctrine be treated and taught in our lands, territories, schools, and churches than that alone which is based on the Holy Scriptures

of God and is embodied in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, correctly understood, and that no doctrine be permitted entrance which is contrary to these. ...we have directed our churches and schools first of all to the Holy Scriptures and the Creeds, and then to the aforementioned Augsburg Confession. We desire particularly that the young men who are being trained for service in the church and for the holy ministry be faithfully and diligently instructed therein, so that the pure teaching and confession of the faith may be preserved and perpetuated among our posterity through the help and assistance of the Holy Spirit until the glorious advent of our only Redeemer and Saviour Jesus Christ. (p. 12)

The Confessions, and especially the Catechisms, can and should fulfill a similar function in the religious education of the laity. In his Shorter Preface to the Large Catechism, Luther writes that it

has been undertaken for the instruction of children and uneducated people. Hence from ancient times it has been called, in Greek, a "catechism" -- that is, instruction for children. Its contents represent the minimum of knowledge required of a Christian. Whoever does not possess it should not be reckoned among Christians nor admitted to a sacrament, just as a craftsman who does not know the rules and practices of his craft is rejected and considered incompetent. ... I well remember the time when there were old people who were so ignorant that they knew nothing of these things -- indeed, ever now we find them daily -- yet they come to Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar and exercise all the rights of Christians, although those who come to the sacrament ought to know more and have a fuller understanding of all Christian doctrine than children and beginners at school. As for the common people, however, we should be satisfied if they learned the three parts which have been the heritage of Christendom from ancient times [the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer], though they were rarely taught and treated correctly, so that all who wish to be Christians in

fact as well as in name, both young and old, may be well-trained in them and familiar with them. (LC Sh.Pref.:1-2,5-6, p. 362)

Luther gives these directions to pastors in the Preface to the Small Catechism:

Begin by teaching them the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc., following the text word for word so that the young may repeat these things after you and retain them in their memory. If any refuse to receive your instructions, tell them that they deny Christ and are no Christians. They should not be admitted to the sacrament, be accepted as sponsors in Baptism, or be allowed to participate in any Christian privileges. (SC Pref.:10-11, p. 339)

According to the Formula of Concord,

Since these matters also concern the laity and the salvation of their souls, we subscribe Dr. Luther's Small and Large Catechisms as both of them are contained in his printed works. They are "the layman's Bible" and contain everything which Holy Scripture discusses at greater length and which a Christian must know for his salvation. (FC Ep R&N:5, p. 465)

But of course, the other Confessions are also accessible to the laity of the church, and should be familiar at least to the better educated among them. Let us not forget that the original audience to which the Augsburg Confession was addressed was not a clerical audience but a lay audience – Emperor Charles V to be exact — and that it was written specifically so that it could be clearly understood by him (and by laymen in general).

We have been asked if the Lutheran Confessions are "a practical document today." Now that we have spent some time considering what the Confessions actually are, we are ready to answer that question. Is sound Biblical exegesis practical in our

day? Yes. Are preeminent examples of the faithful ministry of some of the most important pastors and teachers in Christian history practical in our day? Yes. Is the received public confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church practical in our day? Yes. Are effective tools for the preservation and promotion of true Christian unity practical in our day? Yes. Are the Lutheran Confessions a practical document today? By all means, Yes!

Endnotes

¹ Standard abbreviations will be used for Confessional references. All Confessional quotations are from *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

² St. Athanasius, the great defender of Nicene orthodoxy, unambiguously stated that “the sacred and inspired Scriptures are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth.” (*Against the Heathen* I:3.)

³ Lyle W. Lange, in *Our Great Heritage*, edited by Lange (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), Vol. 1, p. 326.

⁴ *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, Section 48. Emphasis in original.

⁵ *Brief Statement*, Section 45.

⁶ Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1899), p. 169. We will be referring to Krauth quite often in the course of this paper. We beg indulgence to do so, since in our judgment he wrote so eloquently, pointedly, and correctly on the subject of the practical authority of the Confessions in the life of the Lutheran Church.

⁷ Joseph A. Seiss, “Our Confessions in English,” *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. I, No. 3 (July 1882), p. 215. Emphases in original.

⁸ Krauth, pp. 185-86. Emphasis in original.

⁹ Krauth, p. 186.

¹⁰ Krauth, pp. 184-85. Emphases in original.

¹¹ Seiss, p. 216.

¹² Krauth, p. 206. Emphases in original.

¹³ Charles F. Schaeffer, *Evangelical Review*, Vol. I, p. 482; quoted in Theodore E. Schmauk, *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 684.

¹⁴ Harold Wicke, “The Book of Concord,” *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. 1, pp. 327, 330.

¹⁵ Krauth, pp. 179-80.

¹⁶ While in the throes of the Predestination Controversy, the Norwegian Synod had tactically withdrawn from formal membership in the Synodical Conference in 1883, but remained in fellowship with the Conference and with its constituent synods.

¹⁷ H. E. Jacobs, “The General Council,” *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1914), p. 100.

¹⁸ We are not here discussing the question of whether or not a new statement may or should be *added* to the corpus of the church’s official Confessions, in response to contemporary doctrinal issues that were not matters of controversy in the sixteenth century. That is a different subject, not addressed within the parameters of this paper.

¹⁹ Wilhelm W. Petersen, “Pastor, I Have A Question,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Feb. 1985), p. 4.

²⁰ David P. Daniel, "Highlights of the Lutheran Reformation in Slovakia," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Jan. 1978), p. 28.

²¹ *This We Believe: A Statement of Belief of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod*, I:9,13.

²² Joseph Stump, *The Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1942), pp. 24-25.

²³ Quoted approvingly in the "WELS Statement on Church Fellowship" (1970); in John F. Brug, *Church Fellowship* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996), p. 168.

²⁴ "Fundamental agreement in the articles of faith" is not the same as "agreement in the fundamental articles of faith." The former concept is Confessional; the latter is unionistic.

²⁵ Hermann Sasse, *This is my body* (Adelaide, S.A.: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), p. 253.

²⁶ Quoted in Krauth, p. 311.

²⁷ Quoted in James W. Richard, *The Confessional History of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1909), p. 441.

The First Lady of the Reformation

By Gaylin Schmeling

This January twenty-ninth marked the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Katherine von Bora. She is the best known woman of the Reformation because she was Luther's wife. While Katherine has been eclipsed in history by the great fame of her husband, she was far from a wallflower. She was a rock of support at her husband's side throughout their married life.

Katherine was born in January of 1499, and at the age of ten she was placed in the nunnery at Nimschen near Grimma when her father remarried. In the 1520s the writings of Luther began to infiltrate the nunnery. The message of salvation through faith alone in Christ brought comfort and peace to the sisters' hearts. A number of them turned to Luther for advice and he counseled escape, which was shortly accomplished. On April 7, 1523, Katherine and the other sisters reached Wittenberg.

Luther felt responsible for finding suitable mates for the former nuns and managed for the most part, but this was not the case in Katherine's situation. This may be due to the fact that she had her eye on Luther. In any event Luther and Katie were married in June of 1525. Their relationship probably was not the most romantic at the start, yet years later Luther would declare, "I would not exchange Katie for France or Venice, because God has given her to me, and other women have worse faults." With this marriage the Black Cloister of Wittenberg became the first Lutheran parsonage.

With marriage came also an entirely different lifestyle for Luther. Katherine brought order out of chaos at the Black Cloister. Not only did she provide a clean house and a made bed, which were an unknown luxury for the unmarried Luther, but she also brought

about financial responsibility. She kept Luther from giving away everything they had and she put the household on a budget. Katherine helped support the household by managing a farm and a brewery.

It was not long before Martin and Katherine had still more responsibility. Within eight years they became the parents of six children. Three sons and three daughters were born to this union. They also raised a number of orphaned relatives.

Katherine was a faithful wife to Luther. In times of sickness she was his compassionate nurse. In Luther's dark periods burdened down by the struggles of life, Katie was able to comfort him with that same long hidden Gospel treasure that God through Luther had restored to the world. Katie was indeed Luther's faithful rib.

Katherine saw the death of her beloved husband in 1546 and outlived him by six years. In the summer of 1552 the plague broke out in Wittenberg. By fall Katie decided they had to leave. On the way the horses became frightened and bolted. Katie jumped from the wagon and was seriously injured. For months she lay suffering and finally died in the Lord on December 20, 1552.

One of the greatest legacies the church has received from the marriage of Martin and Katherine Luther is the Lutheran parsonage. The Luther home became the example for future Lutheran parsonages and Lutheran homes in general. The Luther house was given to hospitality. It was filled with children, students, and relatives. There was always a place for those in need. It was a place of culture and music and of joy and happiness.

This heritage continued even in the Lutheran Church in America. The early Lutheran parsonages were shelters for the needy, inns for travelers, and centers of culture. Frontier parsonages such as the home of Elisabeth and Ulrik Koren were a great blessing to the Lutheran Church. May the Lutheran home and parsonage always be a place of hospitality. This is the legacy of Katie Luther, the first lady of the Reformation.

The Reformer of Württemberg

By Günter Meinhold

In 1999 we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the birth of Johannes Brenz. This man is esteemed as the most zealous spokesman of Martin Luther in Swabia, as one of the most well-known evangelical (Lutheran) theologians of the first and second generations, and as such takes a place of honor in the history of the Reformation. This is reason enough for us to consider more closely the life and the theological work of Johannes Brenz.

On June 24, 1499 in Weil (a town near Stuttgart) a son was born to the mayor of that city, Martin Brenz, and received the name Johannes in Holy Baptism. Together with his siblings, Johannes Brenz obtained a thorough education and training. After 1514 he initially studied philosophy in Heidelberg but later studied theology there. In Heidelberg, Brenz became acquainted with Luther. Luther stayed here in April 1518 on the occasion of a disputation of his Augustinian order in the university city of Heidelberg. [Famous Theology of the Cross Disputation] This first encounter with the rising Reformer changed the course of Brenz' entire life. He became so enthralled and won over by the biblical doctrine of Luther's Reformation, that he became his faithful student who understood extremely well the theological aspirations of Luther.

A Sensible Young Man

Luther himself noted in Heidelberg that the youth (besides Brenz there was above all Martin Bucer) no longer followed the old "honorable" theologians but followed Luther. Confidently he writes to Spalatin on his return from Heidelberg: "I have a great hope that as Christ went over to the Gentiles when he was

rejected by the Jews, so now too His true theology (which those opinionated old men reject) may pass over to the younger generation.” (St. Louis. 15, 2394; Luther’s Works 48, 63; hereafter St. L. and LW) In September 1522 Brenz was called to the preaching station in Schwäbisch-Hall. Here he could fully carry out his Reformation agenda. Not suddenly or in a stormy manner, but with a calm firm hand Brenz began to reform the church of Schwäbisch-Hall. Above all he laid the fundamentals of a proper faith through the pure preaching of God’s Word and thus brought it about that the Roman misuses would gradually be abolished. Christmas of 1525 was the first time the Lord’s Supper was distributed under both forms (i.e., with bread and wine). A year later the first church agenda for Schwäbisch-Hall was prepared. Eventually Brenz provided material for the Christian examination of the youth in his *Fragestücken des christlichen Glaubens* (Questions Concerning the Christian Faith) (1527/28) even before Luther formally circulated his catechism.

Thereby the work of the Reformation was preliminarily accomplished in Schwäbisch-Hall through Brenz. Because of this, Brenz already in his early theological days created for himself a firm place in the Lutheran Reformation. As a result of this, Brenz was put into a position where he was able actively to extend the Reformation even beyond the city walls of Schwäbisch-Hall.

A Clear Confession

In 1525 a Swiss theologian, Oecolampadius, wrote a book *Über die schriftmässige Erklärung der Worte: Das ist mein Leib usw* (Concerning the Scriptural Explanation of the Words: This is My Body, etc.). He sent it to Brenz and other Evangelical preachers in Swabia. Oecolampadius attempted to prove that the words “This is My Body” were to be understood figuratively. Through these words the fruit of the atoning death of Christ was only symbolically illustrated, and this means of grace

was offered only for spiritual nourishment.

Brenz composed in the same year a counter reply, in which he confessed his faith that through the Words of Institution Christ’s body and blood are really present in the Lord’s Supper (Real Presence). Therefore neither the faith of the recipient effects the body and blood of Christ in the outward elements of bread and wine, nor may the Words of Institution somehow be interpreted figuratively. Brenz totally followed Luther on this doctrine.

At an assembly in Schwäbisch-Hall, fourteen preachers from Swabia agreed with his interpretation and signed a document by Johannes Brenz which is called the *Schwäbische Syngramma*. [The Swabian Treatise] (St. L. 20, 522-581, English translation not available; hereafter N/A). By means of this document the pure doctrine of the Lord’s Supper gained a firm foothold in Northern Swabia and Franconia. For German translations of the *Syngramma* Luther provided prefaces, in which he recommends this fine little book to every Christian. (St. L. 20, 520 and 576, LW N/A)

Through these prefaces Luther entered into the inner-evangelical discussion of the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper for the first time. After that he became the main spokesman against his opponent Ulrich Zwingli. The Marburg Debate in 1529 was to settle this dispute. Brenz too was present in Marburg. There he saw Luther for the second time and stood doctrinally at his side. In Marburg Brenz became acquainted with Duke Ulrich from Württemberg, whom he would advise in following years concerning the Reformation.

A Sought After Reformer

Under the advisory assistance of Brenz the first Reformation church orders of Württemberg originated in 1536. For almost a year (1537-38) he took a leave of absence to reform the University of Tübingen. This work of reform was concluded in

1553 through the call of Brenz, by the new Duke Christoph from Württemberg, as Provost at the Stiftskirche (the monastery church) in Stuttgart. As a result of this, Brenz became a higher ranked clergyman and the bishop-like leader of the church of Württemberg. With all the doctrinal connections to the Lutheran Reformation he still tried to preserve the original character of the simple Württemberg liturgy.

These years of reformation activity were overshadowed for the Dukes of Württemberg by the personal fate of Brenz during the time of the interim (temporary solution). Against the imperial interim, which focused on leading the evangelical region back to the Roman Catholic faith, he raised his conscience bound by God's Word. Brenz was of the opinion that this religious arrangement was not an interim, meaning a temporary solution, but an *interitus*, meaning a corruption and destruction.

Brenz was able to avoid his threatened capture in June of 1548 only by fleeing from Schwäbisch-Hall. Since a price was set on his head, he had to hide himself in the forest during the day. Once more Brenz requested that the Council of his city join him in opposing the introduction of the interim. But the Council declared that this was impossible. After twenty-six years of service in the office of the ministry, Brenz now saw that it was necessary to take leave from the congregation in Schwäbisch-Hall. Leaving his family behind, he entered into the Duchy of Württemberg under the protection of Duke Ulrich, where he found refuge in different places. This uncertain and very dangerous period of hiding ended in 1551. In this difficult time his wife died. For the sake of his children, he married a second time. As the Interim came to a close through the breakdown of the imperial political situation, Brenz could once more carry on the pastoral ministry. At this time, his main work was preaching. Until he was sixty-seven years old (1566) Brenz preached in the pulpit of the Stuttgart Stiftskirche. Towards the close of 1569 he suffered a stroke. Brenz lived only a few more months, but as one who scarcely belonged to this transitory world. In his testament he was especially thankful that God allowed him

to live in this time, when the light of the gospel shone forth again through Martin Luther. On September 11, 1570, Johannes Brenz was called to his eternal home. He was laid to rest next to the pulpit in the Stiftskirche in Stuttgart.

Great Praise

Concerning the importance of Johannes Brenz, Luther's assessment will be given before all others. In his prefaces to countless theological works of Brenz, Luther showed that he treasured greatly the person and work of the Württemberg Reformer. Luther wrote in his preface to Brenz' commentary on Ecclesiastes that he would gladly withdraw with his own commentary because he knew Brenz' exegesis of this Biblical book was excellent.

For I am greatly comforted that Christ our Lord will give to us something good through this same man. For Brenz is so richly endowed with both of the proper gifts of a bishop (cf. Titus 1:9), namely, that he is strong in handling the Holy Scriptures and is thus admirably equipped to fight against the heretics. And he employs both gifts with all humility, diligence, and meditation. (St. L. 14, 164; LWN/A)

In 1530 Luther wrote a preface for Brenz' commentary on the Prophet Amos. Again he gave him great praise. Compared with the commentary by Brenz, Luther's appeared despicable in his own eyes. This was because of their different linguistic styles. Luther said that Brenz wrote with an educated and rhetorical style. His language flowed pure, rich, and clear. It moved and delighted. In contrast Luther regarded himself as inexperienced and uneducated in the art of speaking. His speech was unorganized and passionate. He said that his speech was like a forest with unorganized piles of words similar to one who fights against innumerable monstrosities. This difference was also seen in Luther's comparative assessment of the character of both men. Luther said, "I am in

the manner of the fourfold spirit of Elijah (I Kings 19:11 ff) the great strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire, which tear the mountains and the rocks to pieces. On the other hand, you (Brenz) are the still gentle wind that refreshes.”

As a summary Luther praised Brenz for his emphasis on the righteousness of faith.

For this article of doctrine is the head and cornerstone, which alone begets, nourishes, builds up, preserves, and defends the church of God... Therefore, I ask you, dear brother Brenz, that you may continue diligently to emphasize this article of doctrine concerning righteousness... in all things even where you are only able to do a little... Because otherwise the whole world is sufficiently full of writers who quite boldly set aside this article of doctrine... persecuting, hiding and corrupting it. (St. L. 14 166ff; LW N/A)

Luther had also written a preface for two other writings of Brenz with theological and practical content: *Von Ehesachen* (Concerning Matrimonial Matters 1531) [St. L. 14, 318; LW N/A] and *Türkenpredigten* (Sermons on the Turks 1531) [St. L. 14, 322ff; LW N/A]. These prefaces again exhibit the complete agreement of Luther with the theological content of both writings of Brenz. He especially recommended, concerning his *Türkenpredigten*, that all God-blessed Christians should read them diligently. These constituted a proper warning to awaken Germany from its impenitence and false security as it faced a new attack of the Turks.

Likewise in his Table Talks Luther continued regarding Brenz: “No one among all the theologians of our time explains and handles the Scriptures as Brenz. For he presents them so simply and clearly that I often admire him and doubt my own abilities.” (St. L. 22, 1568; LW N/A) When Luther praised others, his purpose was not to lift them into heaven nor to set his own light under a bushel. Rather Luther praised them because it was very com-

forting for him to know that he did not have to stand alone in the strenuous work of the Reformation but that he had many likeminded coworkers in the faith beside him. Johannes Brenz was one of these men.

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Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

by John A. Moldstad, Jr.

Bulgarian Lutheran Church
Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria
Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (Mexico)
Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (Russia)
Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Finland)
Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Puerto Rico)
Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (Germany)
Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia
Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Peru)
Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA)
Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Malawi Conference)
Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Zambia Conference)
Lutheran Confessional Church (Scandinavia)
Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (Japan)
The Lutheran Church of Cameroon
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA)

To many of our readers, Winter Haven, Florida, is known as the location of beautiful Cypress Gardens and also one of our growing home mission congregations, Resurrection Lutheran Church. But this past April 20-22 Winter Haven also became known as the location for the third triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). Under the onsite arrangements made by Pastor Thompson and his fellow parishioners at Resurrection, together with assistance from other neighboring ELS and WELS churches in the Orlando area, participants and guests from sixteen churches around the globe gathered at the Admiral's Inn (Best Western). Although the view

of Cypress Gardens across the street was wondrous, a far more wondrous event was taking place in the large meeting room of the hotel. About 120 people attended the three day session where seven essays were presented and discussed focusing on the theme, "Come, Holy Spirit, God and Lord."

The opening worship service was conducted by Prof. Gaylin Schmeling, with Prof. David Valleskey delivering the sermon, based on John 20:19-23. Valleskey emphasized that we all need the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is the one who brings us to Christ. In fact, the sum total of the work of the Holy Spirit is always the honoring of Jesus Christ. All that we have as comfort from the Spirit and all that we have as work laid out before us by the Spirit is always and only centered in the gracious forgiveness of sins accomplished by Jesus Christ once and for all at the cross. The closing hymn of the opening service included the words: "Grant me grace, O blessed Savior, and Thy Holy Spirit send, that my walk and my behavior may be pleasing to the end."

In his report to the convention, Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch, chairman of the CELC, drew attention to the doctrinal unity which binds together the member churches. He called to mind what David exclaims in Psalm 133: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" Immediately following his report, the newly formed Bulgarian Lutheran Church officially was received into membership. The Bulgarian representatives, Vicar Vacil Bunkin and Rev. Arno Wolfgramm, came forward and were given a hearty welcome.

Another highlight of the convention was the unanimous adoption of the doctrinal statement, "The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century, Article I. Holy Scripture." Each member church will ratify its adoption of the 40-page document at its respective synodical convention. In a day and age when the vast majority of Lutheranism has abandoned the doctrine of holy Scripture's verbal inerrancy, "The Eternal Word" stands as a bold and necessary testimony to the truth.

Among those visiting the convention were Rev. Gundars

Bakulis of the Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia and Rev. David Webber representing the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. Both of these churches have expressed interest in officially joining the CELC.

The closing Communion service was held at Resurrection Lutheran, with Pastor Matthew Thompson serving as liturgist and Rev. Steven Petersen giving the sermon. Denise Thompson, Pastor David Lillegard (violin), his wife Ione (piano) and Ruth Gudeman (flute), together with a male choir, further beautified the service.

The newly elected officers of the CELC are: Prof. Armin Panning, chairman; Prof. Adolph Harstad, vice chairman; Prof. John Moldstad, Jr., secretary; Rev. Walter Westphal and Rev. Daniel Koelpin, members of the Planning Committee.

ὑποταγήσεται in I Corinthians 15:28

By John Moldstad, Jr.

Christians who naturally abhor any heretical notions of subordinationism or Arianism in connection with the doctrine of the Person of Christ often have puzzled over the meaning of this verse. At issue is how to understand the future passive indicative ὑποταγήσεται in the phrase τότε [καὶ] αὐτὸς ὁ υἱὸς ὑποταγήσεται τῷ ὑποτάξαντι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.

Briefly summarizing the three questions which have arisen in connection with this word, we list them as follows: 1) What is the grammatical identity of the word? 2) How should the word then be translated? 3) What is the doctrinal import of this verse in relation to the entire realm of Christology? After observing the Greek of verses 27 and 28 and providing the rendering of five versions, we will attempt to address ourselves to each of the above questions.

I Corinthians 15:27 πάντα γὰρ ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. ὅταν δὲ εἴπῃ ὅτι πάντα ὑποτέτακται, δῆλον ὅτι ἐκτὸς τοῦ ὑποτάξαντος αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.

I Corinthians 15:28 ὅταν δὲ ὑποταγῇ αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, τότε [καὶ] αὐτὸς ὁ υἱὸς ὑποταγήσεται τῷ ὑποτάξαντι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, ἵνα ἢ ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πάσιν.

KJV

I Cor. 15:27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

I Cor. 15:28 And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then **shall** the Son also **Himself be subject** unto Him That put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

NIV

I Cor. 15:27 For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

I Cor. 15:28 When he has done this, then the Son himself **will be made subject** to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

NKJV

I Cor. 15:27 For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.

1 Cor. 15:28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself **will** also **be subject** to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

GW

I Cor. 15:27 Clearly, God has put everything under Christ’s authority. When God says that everything has been put under Christ’s authority, this clearly excludes God, since God has put everything under Christ’s authority.

I Cor. 15:28 But when God puts everything under Christ’s authority, the Son **will put himself under** God’s authority, since God had put everything under the Son’s authority. Then God will be in control of everything.

NASB

I Cor. 15:27 FOR HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are

put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.

I Cor. 15:28 And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also **will be subjected** to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.

1. What is the grammatical identity of ὑποταγῆσεται?

This future passive indicative of ὑποτάσσω unfortunately has been classified by some as an “unusual middle.” R. C. H. Lenski, for example, cites Robertson (R. 809) and labels the form future middle. He does so because “here the thought calls for the middle sense” (p. 683). H. A. W. Meyer, on the other hand, takes issue with Hofmann who, like Lenski, sees the form as middle: “ὑποταγῆσεται is to be left passive. God is the ὑποτάσσων. Comp. Rom. viii. 20. But Christ is subject ἐκῶν” [willingly] (p. 362).

To argue that the middle form appears more appropriate because it presents less of a problem dogmatically is to shirk our responsibility to the precise wording of the God-inspired text. The form is future passive, not middle. The future middle would appear as ὑποτάξεται.

2. How should ὑποταγῆσεται then be translated?

In spite of the future passive identification, some translators prefer to reflect the meaning as if it were a middle. The version *God’s Word* does this: “...the Son will put himself under God’s authority...” The predecessor of *God’s Word*, *GWN*, does the same: “...the Son will subordinate Himself to Him...”

Rather than force the middle sense here, a sense which we understand and confess from the “analogy of faith” on the doctrine of the Person of Christ, it is best to keep the normal rendering of the future passive as set forth by the KJV or the NIV. We may, however, prefer to use the English word “subordinate” as

better capturing the sense of ὑποτάσσω. So we translate: “and then the Son himself will be made subordinate.”

3. What is the doctrinal import of this verse?

In His state of humiliation Jesus made the remark, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). But the context of the passage before us (I Cor. 15:28) is that of Christ’s exaltation. The post-ascension Christ, yes, even the Christ of the Last Day, is described here by St. Paul as being “subordinate.” But in what sense? And how can this square with the fact of Christ’s supremacy and the equality of Persons in the blessed Trinity?

The March 1998 issue of *Journal of Theology* contains an article by Rev. John K. Pfeiffer entitled, “Christ’s Subordination to His Father.” In his Appendix 2, Pfeiffer gives his personal “see through the glass darkly” understanding of this verse: “Jesus Christ, in His role as Redeemer and Mediator of the world, is actively involved in subduing all the enemies of Himself and of His Church. When death itself is finally eliminated, Jesus will lay all things at the feet of His Father, including His role. In this sense He will subject Himself to the Father. Henceforth, the role of Redeemer/Mediator will no longer be needed and God will be all in all” (p. 30).

Pfeiffer’s explanation is certainly in keeping with a proper Christological understanding of Christ’s relationship with the Father, and with the fact that Christ’s absolute supremacy must be upheld. A number of good Lutheran theologians would share this explanation of I Cor. 15:29. Probably an even more popular explanation offered by Bible scholars is that “Christ according to his human nature” is meant. The problem with the latter, however, is suggesting a meaning which is detrimental to the personal union of the two natures in Christ.

This writer would like to suggest that the best explanation of this difficult passage is found in Martin Chemnitz’ treatment of the same in his *De Duabus* (Concerning the Two Natures in Christ).

[See pages 275 and 276 in the J. A. O. Preus translation, CPH 1971.] Chemnitz approvingly cites Augustine: “This statement [I Cor. 15:28] was made...so that no one would think that the form (habitus) of Christ which he received from the human creature was going to be converted into the deity itself after a time.”

The accompanying ὡς purpose clause in v. 28, “so that God may be all in all,” seems to support this explanation as being “worthy of all exegetical and dogmatical acceptance.” The Trinity, with its distinction of the Persons, is held absolutely intact, *even when* the total supremacy of “the Lord of Glory who bought us” is demonstrated for the whole world at the Final Day.

The ῥῆμα of Romans 10:17

ἄρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀκοή διὰ ῥήματος Χριστοῦ.

by John A. Moldstad, Jr.

Every good Lutheran has learned to appeal to the verse above when showing proof for the Scriptural teaching of the means of grace. Many of us have the Authorized Version embedded in our memory bank: “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” From days of confirmation we have learned to see in this passage the doctrine that faith in Christ is worked only by use of Word and Sacrament. There is no other vehicle which the Holy Spirit uses in performing the miracle of faith in a person’s heart. The words from Dr. Luther are familiar: “Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and Sacrament is of the devil” (SA, Part III, Art. VIII, 10; Tappert, p. 313).

But is there an added thought here in Romans 10:17? When the apostle Paul discusses the heathen coming to faith through preaching, is he not also making reference to the doctrine of the divine institution of the public ministry? The immediate context favors such an interpretation, and the reading of the Greek can properly be construed accordingly. Two translations which appear to reflect such a notion are Prof. Julian Andersen’s *New Testament - Every Day American English* and also *God’s Word to the Nations*. Professor Anderson has: “And so faith comes from hearing the message and the message comes by Christ’s command.” *GWN* states: “So then faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.”

In its context Romans 10:17 finds easy reference to the doctrine of the public ministry. Verse 15 contains the apostle Paul’s penetrating question, “How will they [the heralding ones] preach,

unless they are sent? (πῶς δὲ κηρύξωσιν ἐὰν μὴ ἀποσταλῶσιν;) Paul’s term for sending indicates not just a departure, but an actual commissioning. In comparing the New Testament usage of the synonyms ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω, Kittel reminds us that on the whole πέμπω seems to be used when the stress is on sending, and ἀποστέλλω when it is on the commissioning, especially when it is God who does the sending.¹ By the quotation of Isaiah 52:7 (“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”), the apostle Paul further emphasizes the importance of divinely called workers to preach and teach the Word of God. Our Lutheran confessors wished to underscore Paul’s point: “It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call” (AC, Art XIV, Tappert, p.36).

Then, in verse 16, we read: “But not all have obeyed the Gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report [τῆ ἀκοῇ ἡμῶν]?’” There has been much discussion among commentators as to how ἀκοή should be translated the three times it appears in the two verses of 16 and 17. The KJV and the NKJV treat ἀκοή in its first appearance as “report,” but then opt for simply “hearing” in the other two instances. One need only refer back to verse 8 (“The Word is near you...”) and also verse 16 (εὐαγγελίῳ) to see that saving faith never arises merely out of the *act* of hearing, but always out of *what* is heard—the Gospel.

This brings us to the interesting phrase: διὰ ῥήματος Χριστοῦ or διὰ ῥήματος θεοῦ (depending on which variant is preferred; the first slightly better attested). Do we take the term ῥῆμα here as “command” or “utterance” in the sense that the Lord (Christ or God) must do the official, divine sending of the public ministers of the Word when they go out with the ἀκοή or εὐαγγέλιον? Or, is ῥῆμα to be understood as simply appositional to ἀκοή?

Either scenario, of course, is in keeping with what we learn of both the doctrine of the means of grace (I Thess. 2:13, I Cor. 2:13) and the doctrine of the public ministry (Acts 20:28,

Eph. 4:11) as presented throughout the whole of Scripture. And in this sense too – we hasten to add – both are mutually *inclusive*. But if Paul uses ῥῆμα here not simply synonymously for λόγος or ἀκοή, or εὐαγγέλιον, then we may see in its usage what H. A. W. Meyer (1800 - 1873) apparently saw. In connection with this verse (17) Meyer makes the observation: “Preaching is brought about by God’s behest, set to work by the fact that God commands preachers to their office.”² Meyer argues that the interpretation “preached word of God” is incorrect for ῥήματος θεου, because the phrase would then be no different from the term ἀκοή. He feels Paul is not merely being redundant with the two phrases in verse 17. He is adding the thought as to how the Gospel is proclaimed publicly for people to hear and come to faith: i.e., only by means of the Lord’s official command and sending.

One might counter that the term ῥῆμα appears in verse 8 (in the LXX quote of Deut. 30:14) in the sense of “the Word as actually uttered when preached.”³ But does not the ἀποσταλῶσιν of verse 15 lend credence to the fact that the “uttering word” in the last part of verse 17 is not simply the preached Gospel per se but the divine commission (the *mandatum Dei*, if you will) for public ministers to go out with the life-giving proclamation?

In the opinion of this writer, what we have in the ῥῆμα of Romans 10:17 is a parallel – yes, even an answer – to Paul’s earlier question: “How will they [the heralding ones] preach, unless they are sent (ἀποσταλῶσιν)?” True, God has instituted *both* his universal priesthood of all believers (I Pet. 2:9) and the public ministry. But the context here speaks of the latter. For the pastor, teacher or public servant of the Word, how great is the comfort and assurance that the Gospel work this individual is promulgating *on behalf of the group of believers* (what is meant by publicly) is also and foremost because God has done the calling/commissioning (ῥῆμα) into his service. The called worker of the Word is put into the service by Christ himself!

Endnotes

¹ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged edition by G. Bromiley, Eerdmans: 1985, p.68.

² *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans* (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament), reprint by Henrickson: 1983, p.415.

³ R. C. H. Lenski’s *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, Augsburg: 1961, p.654.

Jerusalem/ ירושלים

by Adolph Harstad

The Name

The name “Jerusalem” appears for the first time in the Bible in Joshua 10:1. In the OT, “Jerusalem” occurs 641 times in Hebrew and 26 times in Aramaic (ירושלם). (ES 495-496) The LXX form is Ἱεροσολήμ/ Hierousalem. The Aramaic and LXX forms seem to reflect early pronunciation more closely than the MT Hebrew with its vocalization. The medieval Masoretes have pointed the name in our Hebrew texts as a dual form (minus the characteristic *yod*). The dual form may suggest the eastern and western ridges of the city that are separated by the Tyropean Valley (“Jerusalem of the twin ridge”?).

Early extra-biblical references to Jerusalem appear in the Eblaite texts from about 2300 B.C. (*U-ru-sa-li-ma*), the Egyptian Execration Texts of the 19th-18th centuries B.C. (*Urushalimum*), the Amarna letters of the 14th century B.C. (*Urusalim* and *Beth-Shalem*), and on the prism of Sennacherib who ruled 704-681 B.C. (*Ursalimmu*).

The etymology of the name Jerusalem/ ירושלים has more than one layer. The pre-Israelite meaning seems to be “Shalem has founded” or “foundation of Shalem.” The first element in the name appears to be derived from the verb ירה (“throw”) and relate to throwing or placing foundation stones (cf. Job 38:6). The West Semitic god Shalem (“completion”) is known from the Ugaritic texts of about 1400 B.C. Shahr and Shalem were twin deities seen as the morning and evening stars. The early Canaanite population of Jerusalem evidently worshipped Shalem as the patron of the city. Ezekiel 16:3 alludes to this heathen history of Jerusalem.

The name for Jerusalem in Hebrew evidently came to connote “foundation of peace,” with the second element losing its tie with the god Shalem and becoming associated with the more abstract noun שָׁלוֹם/shalom/peace. In Lk 19:41-42 Jesus connects the city’s name with the concept of “peace” in his tear-filled lament over the unbelieving city. The city whose name refers to “peace” had rejected the only one in whom its true peace could be found.

Others explain the name Jerusalem as meaning “possession of Shalem” or “possession of peace.” In that etymology, the first element in the name is derived from the root ירש, whose noun forms mean “possession” or “inheritance.” The letter ש in that case does double duty by ending the first element and beginning the second.

Moses in Gen 14:18 calls Melchizedek the king of “Shalem” (spelled without the “h” in most English translations). In Ps 76:2 (v. 3 in Heb. text) the term “Shalem” is parallel to “Zion.” By the logic that two things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, S(h)alem is a shortened form for Jerusalem, since Zion and Jerusalem are often equated. Gen 14:18 is thus the earliest biblical reference to Jerusalem. The author of Hebrews in 7:2 equates the name “Shalem” with “peace,” as he shows that Melchizedek king of Shalem prefigured Jesus “king of peace.” Some scholars associate the S(h)alem of Genesis and Hebrews with Salim (Jn 3:23) and place it east of the Jordan (Jn 3:26). That idea does not do justice to Ps 76:2, which equates S(h)alem with Zion (Jerusalem).

In Jos 15:8 and 18:28 Jerusalem is called “the Jebusi” after its pre-Israelite inhabitants. The MT explicitly identifies “the Jebusi” with Jerusalem in those texts.

A later name for Jerusalem, Zion, occurs over 150 times in the OT. Its exact meaning and etymology are uncertain. “Zion” has been a flexible term. At first Zion referred to the City of David (2 Sam 5:7) on the southeast hill of the city. The topo-

graphical name for that location of Zion is Ophel, literally “bulge” or “projection.” At times the Temple Mount to the north was known as Zion. Still later and continuing to the present, the name Mount Zion has been applied to Jerusalem’s high southwestern hill west of the City of David. Zion may also refer to the ancient city as a whole. By metaphor, Zion stands for the invisible Church.

The Site

Jerusalem rests on the central mountain ridge that is the backbone of the land. The city is located about fifteen miles west of the northern portion of the Dead Sea and about thirty-five miles east of the Mediterranean. The Kidron valley on the east and the Hinnom valley on the south and west gave the site a secure position on its limestone plateau about 2500 feet above sea level. The Gihon spring was and still is a constant source of water. Another spring, En Rogel, was a secondary source. The Gihon spring was massively fortified already in the Canaanite period as early as 1800 B.C. The system of aqueducts and channels from Gihon was highly sophisticated and well protected already then. Ample water, military security, and a road junction thus seem to have encouraged early settlement.

The site has been occupied since the end of the fourth millennium B.C. The earliest discovered city wall encircled the Middle Bronze Age city, which was confined to the narrow southeastern ridge known later as the City of David. The wall, at points 10-feet thick, dates to about 1800 B.C. According to the estimates of M. Broshi, the Jebusite city covered about 12 acres and held a population of about 1,000; the city of David expanded to about 15 acres and 2,000 inhabitants. More recent archaeological interpretations however estimate the size of Canaanite Jerusalem to have been about 30 acres.

Early Israelite Period

When Egypt’s power waned about the time of Joshua and the Amarna Age, the independence of Jerusalem and other Canaanite city-states increased. Even after Adoni-zedek, the king of Jerusalem, was killed by Joshua, the Israelites did not capture the city. Nevertheless, according to Jos 18:28 it was assigned to the tribe of Benjamin. Judges 1:8 later relates that the tribe of Judah captured Jerusalem, but v. 21 further explains that the Jebusites living there could not be dislodged by the Benjaminites. It remained for David to bring the city under Israelite control about 1000 B.C. (2 Sam 5:6-9).

Significance

As the location of the temple and the earthly dwelling place of the LORD, Jerusalem became in OT times the world’s most significant city. (1 Ki 8:13; 14:21; Ps 48:1-2 [2-3 in Heb]; Isa 14:32; Ezek 5:5). It had strategic position in the ancient world with potential for great witness to the living God and the saving faith, since it was set “in the center of the nations” (Ezek 5:2) As Creator, God himself had prepared the site; and as the covenant LORD of grace, he established his presence and protection there. Even from an earthly perspective, the city was impressive. Pliny the Elder called Jerusalem “by far the most renowned city of the ancient East.” (ABD III 747)

While OT Joshua could not occupy Jerusalem, his NT namesake did. By his divine authority, Jesus cleansed its temple both at the start and close of his earthly ministry (Jn 2: 12ff; Mt 21: 12ff). As the lowly servant, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death at the Holy City. Jesus’ presence at Jerusalem and his dying and rising nearby have given the city its greatest glory. At that site whose name has to do with “peace,” he established objective peace between God and the sinful world. Through his shed blood and bodily rising at that earthly spot, he earned our

eternal citizenship in the great, new, holy, and free “Jerusalem” that is above (Gal 4:26; Rev 3:12; 21:2; 21:10).

(ES, TDOT, TWOT, Dic. of Biblical. Arch., ABD, BAR May/June '96 p 36ff and May/June '97 p 22ff.)