

Lutheran Synod Quarterly



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Foreword

This issue of the *Quarterly* begins with an address delivered by President David Valleskey of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary during a noon luncheon at the 1999 General Pastoral Conference of the ELS. The address is entitled *The Ministry is a Splendid Task*. The speaker points out that those in the public ministry have a splendid purpose, a splendid message, and a splendid promise. This presentation was well received by the pastors of the synod.

Our readers will appreciate the essay by the Rev. James Braun of Klamath Falls, Oregon, on *Gnosticism in the Early Church*. Gnosticism was a major heresy with which the Early Church fought a life and death struggle. The results of the heresy can still be seen today when the *Gospel of Thomas* is being advocated as the fifth Gospel.

The Rev. Bruce Wilmot Adams of Glenowrie, South Australia, has written an article concerning *Companions of the Augsburg Confession*, giving an overview of early Lutheran history in England. This article is very timely in light of the fact that this Whitsunday marked the 450th anniversary of *The Book of Common Prayer* first published in 1549. It was written by Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury at that time. While *The Book of Common Prayer* is Anglican and not Lutheran, it was influenced by Lutheran theology and it in turn influenced the English Lutheran liturgy and hymnody in this country.

The fourth article in this *Quarterly* is a paper presented by the Rev. David Haeuser at the ELS Missionary Conference in Plzen, Czech Republic, in September, 1998. This essay, *Maturing the Christian on the Mission Field*, shows Missionary Haeuser's deep care and concern for Christian missions, which should be an encouragement to each of us in our mission goal.

This issue concludes with several book reviews.

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Address to the ELS Pastoral Conference

by David J. Valleskey

It's a real privilege to be asked to address you, my brothers in Christ in the ELS, with whom we in the WELS have shared a blessed fellowship in Christ – unity in doctrine and practice – for some eighty years. The best way to enjoy the fellowship we share is to practice it – to come together, to worship together, to work together, to study together. That's why I did not hesitate when asked to speak to you at this luncheon.

I want to talk to you about the joys of the parish ministry. That is a subject close to my heart. I must say that the Lord had to almost literally pull me kicking and screaming out of the parish ministry to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary back in 1984. It was my second call to the Seminary, and the Lord made it clear to me that this was a call He wanted me to take. But my heart remained, and continues to remain, in the parish (By the way, next year I am going to take a six-month sabbatical back into the parish, which I am eagerly looking forward to).

The Apostle Paul expresses well my feelings about the ministry, the parish ministry in particular, when in 1 Timothy 3 he writes, “Here is a trustworthy saying [one of five such trustworthy, faithful sayings in the Pastoral Epistles]: If anyone sets his heart on being an ἐπίσκοπος, an overseer [Beck translates this “pastor”], he desires a καλοῦ ἔργου, a good work.” A “noble task,” the NIV translates it. Another translation aptly calls it a “splendid task.”

The Ministry is a Splendid Task

To whom? Certainly not to the world. Viewed from the eyes of the world, “splendid” hardly seems to be the word with which to describe *Paul’s* ministry. A person looking back over what transpired during Paul’s years of ministry might be inclined to say, “If anyone sets his heart on being a pastor, he is asking for a heap of trouble”; or even, “If anyone sets his heart on being a pastor, he must be out of his mind.”

Think back with me to some of Paul’s experiences. He’s converted to Christianity on the Damascus Road and is now anxious to bring the gospel to his fellow Jews in Damascus. What is their response? They try to kill him. He has to be ignominiously smuggled out of the city by being lowered in a basket through a window in the city wall.

He embarks on what we today call his First Missionary Journey. In *Antioch* he is expelled from the city; in *Iconium* there is a plot to stone him to death; in *Lystra* they actually do stone him, leaving him for dead.

On his Second Journey he doesn’t fare much better. In *Philippi* he is stripped, beaten, chained, and thrown into a dungeon; in *Thessalonica* he is forced out of town; in *Berea* likewise he is compelled to flee his enemies; in *Athens* he is ridiculed for preaching the resurrection; in *Corinth* he is so vehemently opposed by the Jews that he has to leave the synagogue and devote himself to ministry to the Gentiles.

On his Third Journey, in *Ephesus*, where he spent the bulk of his time, the silversmith Demetrius incites a riot against him, a riot that could easily have resulted in Paul’s death if cooler heads had not prevailed.

After his missionary journeys, things didn’t get any better. Paul sets sail to *Jerusalem*, where he is arrested; he spends two years as a prisoner in *Caesarea*, followed by a two-year imprisonment in *Rome*. During his second imprisonment in

Rome even his friends forsake him. Only Luke is with him. And finally he is martyred under Nero.

Writing to the Corinthians at the close of his Third Missionary Journey, Paul looks back on his experiences during his years of ministry: “I have been in prison...been flogged...and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked...I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

And this is the Paul who says, “If anyone sets his heart on being a pastor, he desires a splendid task”! To which the world might be inclined to say, “Paul, you have to be kidding. If what you went through can be described as “splendid,” “noble,” “good,” then what in all the world would you call “bad”?”

It’s not hard to come up with a list of similar negatives about the ministry today. We’ve all experienced them:

1. *Your standard of living.* It is not commensurate with the training you have received and the responsibilities you have been given, certainly not compared with the income level of other professionals — doctors, lawyers, etc.

2. *The long hours you put in.* I’ve been there. The constant juggling of time-trying to give enough time to your congregation, to outreach to the community, to your own personal spiritual growth, to your wife and family. Never enough hours to get everything done.

3. *The frustrations* — of marriages falling apart in spite of all your efforts to hold them together; of new converts

quickly falling away; of straying sheep displaying a “ho hum,” “I don’t care” attitude toward Word and Sacrament; of congregational members adopting the world’s way of looking at moral issues such as pre-marital sex, live-in situations, divorce, and remarriage; the list goes on.

4. *The ridicule you face* — on the part of the world (like Paul at Athens) and even by other churches. It’s always difficult to be a minority. As pastors in the ELS, you are a minority in two respects: You are practicing Christians in an increasingly non-Christian society and you are representatives of a church body that, like the WELS, is a very small minority within Christendom, within Lutheranism, for that matter. It’s not at all unusual for charges of narrow-mindedness, rigidity, lovelessness, and worse to be hurled at those who seek to cling to the Word.

Yet, says Paul, “If anyone sets his heart on being a pastor, he desires a splendid task.” Let me give you three reasons why, in spite of all the negatives, the parish ministry is a splendid task:

1. *You have a splendid purpose.* I remember the doctor who once told me, “Pastor, I really envy you. All I can do is patch people up to keep them going for a little while longer. But it’s never going to change the end result. All of them eventually are going to die. My job just has to do with delaying the inevitable as long as possible. Your job has to do with giving people life, not merely delaying their death.”

Just think, brothers, of the number of people you are going to meet in heaven who will rise up and call you blessed because the Lord used you to *keep* them with Jesus or to *bring them back* to Jesus or to *lead* them to Jesus. I think back to the night I met with Robert and Sharon [not their real names]. They were looking for a private school for their children. I talked a little about our school that night, but mostly I talked about Jesus. At the end of the night Robert said, “Pastor, you have turned our thinking 180 degrees tonight [of course, it

wasn’t I but the Holy Spirit]. We always thought that if we had any chance at all of getting to heaven, it would have to be through what we did. Now we see that Jesus has done it all. We can never thank you enough.” On that day he and his wife began their spiritual life.

What a joy it is to be the Lord’s instrument in bringing people to new spiritual life. It happens every time you baptize an infant, doesn’t it? And it’s equally a joy to be present at the end of a believer’s life, to be able to say at the graveside of a departed child of God, “We commit this body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust in the certainty of resurrection to life everlasting.” You have a splendid purpose, my brothers, for your ministry is about life, new life and eternal life, in Christ.

2. *You have a splendid message.* The ministry is not about plans and programs, it is not about methods (though planning and programming and methodology, i.e., figuring out how you are going to do something, do have a place in the ministry). The ministry is preeminently about a message. And what a message — Jesus Christ, humble birth, holy life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, final return. The message you proclaim, the Word of God, is “living and active.” The Greek word translated “active” is ἐνεργής, from which we get our English word “energy.” The Word is “energizing;” it gets things done. It is “sharper than any two-edged sword.” And you are ministers of that Word.

You are ministers of the Gospel, which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. The Formula of Concord reminds us:

Through the preaching of...the holy Gospel...there is kindled.. a spark of faith which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel. And in this way the

Holy Spirit, who works all of this, is introduced into the heart (FC, SD, II, 54).

Luther puts it this way: “There is no need of climbing up into heaven to obtain remission of sins,” i.e., of trying to storm heaven through one’s own deeds. “God has put the forgiveness of sins into holy Baptism, into the Lord’s Supper, and into the Word” (St. Louis XIII, 2439ff., quoted in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, p. 208).

Just think of what that means, brothers. Though we will seek to speak logically and persuasively, the results are not dependent on our logical or oratorical skills. The message itself is its own power. I remember Harold in a Bible information class, Harold who had been more or less dragged to the class by his wife. He fought me every step of the way, arguing against virtually everything he heard. But then one night, when another class member questioned something I had said, Harold rose to my defense. “How can you say that?” he asked. “Don’t you see that this is what the Word of God says?” In an after-class discussion Harold said to me, “Something changed.” My response was, “Harold, something changed *you*. And that something wasn’t me. It was the Word. It was the Holy Spirit working through the Word.” The Word truly is alive and powerful. The ministry is a splendid task because you are working with a splendid message.

3. *Finally, you have a splendid promise.* The promise is directly attached to the message you bring. You know the promise: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my Word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Is. 55:10-11).

And what does God desire? He desires to gather in his

elect and to keep them in the faith until the end. And what he desires he will achieve. And, marvel of marvels, God will get his work done *through such as you and me* — even if at times it appears as if nothing is happening, even if it seems that we are spinning our wheels, treading water, perhaps even going backwards. *God’s promises are more reliable than our perceptions.* Preach the Word, brothers. Teach the Word. Administer the blessed Sacraments. The Gospel in Word and Sacrament — that’s the splendid message God has given you, and through that splendid message God’s splendid promise, that he will gather in his elect and keep them in the faith to the end, will be fulfilled.

Low pay? Probably. Long hours? Most likely. Frustrations? Most certainly. Ridicule? Yes, for all who desire to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted. Nevertheless, the ministry is a splendid task. You have a splendid purpose: You bring to people new life in Christ. You have a splendid message: The powerful, living, and active Word of God. You have a splendid promise: The Lord will carry out his work through you. Your labor in the Lord will never be in vain.

So, my brothers, rejoice. Rejoice in the splendid task of the public ministry of the Gospel. And may the Lord richly bless each of you in your own particular ministry.

Gnosticism in the Early Church

by James M. Braun

I. Introduction

This sign recently appeared on the reader board of a Klamath Falls, Oregon, Presbyterian Church whose “pastor” has publicly denied that Jesus truly did die for the sins of the world:

KNOW Dogma, NO Jesus...
NO Dogma, KNOW Jesus!

This would appear to reflect these statements reputed to have been spoken by our Lord as recorded in the second century gnostic *Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)*:

“Peace be with you. Receive my peace to yourselves. Beware that no one lead you astray, saying, ‘Lo here!’ or ‘Lo there!’ For the Son of Man is within you. Follow after him! Those who seek him will find him. Go then and preach the gospel of the kingdom. Do not lay down any rules beyond what is appointed for you, and do not give a law like the lawgiver lest you be constrained by it.” When (Jesus) had said this, he departed...And Mary began to speak to them (the disciples) these words: “I,” she said, “I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to him, ‘Lord, I saw you today in a vision.’ He answered and said to me, ‘Blessed are you, that you did not waver at the sight of me. For where the mind is, there is the trea-

sure.” (emphasis added).¹

Thus we can see that it is not only in Minnesota politics that the mind is valued over the body.

The verses quoted above have come from a collection of scriptures which were used in an Egyptian Coptic Gnostic community from at least the second century through the fifth. The existence of these texts was mostly unknown until they were brought to (scholarly) light in the late 1940s. *Ala Qumran*, it is presumed that these codices were found in a series of caves near the small town of *Nag Hammadi* part way up the Nile River from ancient Alexandria. Until then most of what modern scholarship has known of Gnosticism has been learned from the writings of especially the Ante-Nicene church fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, *et al.*

What was being combated by the fathers was the gnostic teaching that salvation could be found only by learning hidden ways, by attaining a secret knowledge (*gnosis*) of which only a select few knew, understood and could pass on.

In Christian Dogmatics, Carl B. Braaten correctly explains:

Gnosticism taught that mystical knowledge was the way of salvation. The soul aspires to salvation from its bondage to the body, which exists in a radically inferior, physical, fleshly, earth-bound form. Salvation is made possible by the descent of a redeemer from the highest æon to rescue the soul here below, giving it knowledge of the way back home. The Gnostic drama of salvation was half mythological and half philosophical. The similarity to the biblical story of salvation was too striking to miss. Christian Gnosticism is a fusion of biblical and Gnostic symbols of salvation, the

most serious heresy to threaten the gospel on Hellenistic soil. The concrete historicity and true humanity of Jesus Christ came to be of secondary importance. The church in the gnosticizing view comprised two levels of Christians: mere believers with nothing but faith (*pistis*) and the truly enlightened, those possessed of knowledge (*gnosis*).²

Despite the fact that much of “enlightened” liberal Lutheranism advocates just such a stratification of the saints, Braaten here is correct in his assessment of the ancient heresy of gnosticism in all its forms.

Why ought a study of these false teachings be of interest to us these many centuries later? Upon studying the gnostic writings which are still extant, we might be of the opinion that while these heretical scriptures may be interesting, they hardly are relevant in today’s religious landscape. That, though, is not necessarily true.

The gnostic heresies of centuries past are still with us today. For example, some of the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints are quite similar to what might be encountered in an ancient gnostic text. The doctrine of the heavenly preexistence of the soul and the dualistic nature of the relationship between Christ and the devil officially held to by the Mormon Church fall well within the pale of classical gnosticism.

Revelation of secret knowledge to more advanced disciples – a gnostic practice – is also done within Masonism, Mormonism and “Scientologism.” Few of the man-made religions of the last centuries are void of the things which made gnosticism such a damnable scourge in the first five centuries of the New Testament Church’s existence. It is *this* fact which makes a study such as this valuable for us to do today, though I’ll leave it to others to make a more extensive appli-

cation to our times.

In order to make further discussion at some other time more fruitful, this study will attempt to convey a basic understanding of the system, the teachings in conflict with orthodoxy and the history of gnosticism as it inflicted itself upon the early church. To reach this goal, primary sources as we have them most completely in the *Nag Hammadi* codices and the commentaries of the church fathers as we have them in translation will be used extensively.

II. The Gnostic System “Explained” or... Gnosticism for Dummies

“Classical” Gnosticism is generally considered to be Valentinian³ in origin. It is against this type of Gnosticism that Irenaeus produced his many volumes of refutation of its heresies. Still, there were many other forms of Gnosticism which arose alongside and after the Valentinian; yet for the sake of *some* clarity in understanding the basics of Gnosticism, the Valentinian system as understood by the church father Irenaeus will form the basis for this part of our discussion.

The Cast

The Perfect, Preexistent one is called *Proarche*, *Propator* or *Bythus*. He was invisible and incomprehensible. Neither formed nor begotten, from him came all things.

The Ennoea: These two – *Charis* and *Sige* – existed with *Bythus*. They were equal to *Bythus*, but were not *Bythus*.

In order to create the beginning of all things, *Bythus* “deposited” all things in *Sige*, who then gave birth to *Nous* (also called *Monogenes*, and *Father*, and the *Beginning Of All*

Things).

Aletheia was also produced, though not through *Sige*.

These four – *Bythus*, *Sige*, *Nous* and *Aletheia* – were equal in all ways (except that the latter three were not *Bythus*) and produced the first Pythagorean Tetrad.

Monogenes (Nous) produced on his own both *Logos* and *Zoe*, who were the very beginning of the perfect creation, the *pleroma*.

Zoe and *Logos* “conjuncted” and produced *Anthropos* and *Ecclesia*.

Bythus, *Nous*, *Logos* and *Anthropos* formed the first Ogdoad...the “root and substance of all things” each one being masculine.

The masculine-feminine “couplings” – according to Irenaeus – were as follows:

Propator-Ennoea
Monogenes (Nous)-Aletheia
Logos-Zoe
Anthropos-Ecclesia

By means of “conjunction” (notice the “planetary” language), these æons - to give glory to the *Father (Nous)* - produced more æons.

Logos and Zoe produced:

Anthropos and Ecclesia
Bythus and Mixis
Ageratos and Henosis
Autophyes and Hedone
Acinetos and Syncrasis
Monogenes and Macaria

These æons, it appears, are able to have a dual sort of

existence: the nature and the name, with the name having as complete an identity as the nature (though only in the *pleromα*). The only one not having a *knowable* name was the *Father* on account of his incomprehensibility. He had a name, but its perfection was such that it was known by no one other than the *Only-begotten*. The members of this group of 12 æons, therefore, were given these names so that they might become completed:

Paracletus and Pistis
Patricos and Elpis
Metricos and Agape
Amos and Synesis
Ecclesiasticus and Macariotes
Theletos and Sophia

Adding both lists of 12 together with the original 6 listed above, gives thirty æons about whom Irenaeus states: *Such are the thirty æons in the erroneous system of these men; and they are described as being wrapped up, so to speak, in silence, and known to none [except these professing teachers]*. This incomprehensibility, then, was the essence of the Gnostic mystery.

The *pleroma*, which was invisible and spiritual, was considered to be made up of three parts: Ogdoad, a Decad, and a Duodecad.

The number “30” also comes into play here because it was very important to the Gnostics. They saw in the thirty years of Jesus’ life of which we hear little (other than at the age of 12) a number which also becomes mystically important. His opportunity to set forth the mystery of the thirty æons. Also, by using “Million Man Math Made Easy,” they find the number “30” by adding up the hours of the various groups of workers who were sent to labor in the vineyard.

Act I

The Scene: Eternity *before* the creation of the physical world.

The *Propator* was known only by the *Monogenes* but *Monogenes* wanted to bring to his fellow æons the glories of which he alone knew. *Sige* kept him from carrying out this plan since she somehow understood that the *Propator* wanted each of the æons to *desire* to find that truth out for themselves, *not* to have it told to them. And so it was. From this time on the æons were to be content with seeing the *Propator* through the *Monogenes*:

Now the name of the *Father* is the *Son*. It is he who first gave a name to the one who came forth from him, who was himself, and he begot him as a son. He gave him his name which belonged to him; he is the one to whom belongs all that exists around him, the *Father*. His is the name; his is the *Son*. It is possible for him to be seen. The name, however, is invisible because it alone is the mystery of the invisible which comes to ears that are completely filled with it by him. For indeed, the *Father's* name is not spoken, but it is apparent through a *Son*.⁵

Yes, the desire to learn of their “creator” burned within each of the æons... but in one it burned particularly brightly.

Act II

The youngest of the æons, *Sophia*, had a passion to know the *Father* which was so great that she strove with what she termed “love” to be consumed by his essence. As he was incomprehensible, though, this was impossible. Thus by a special “power” named *Horos*, she was returned to within herself, not having attained her goal.

Sophia was so distraught that she had so striven but not attained that “amorphous substances” were produced by her which, though they were disengaged from her, were the elements which eventually produced “material substance,” that which is dreaded most in the Gnostic system. This was done when these elements were separated from *Sophia* by *Horos* and she was returned to her former place within the pleroma. Though they had been abandoned by her, these substances still retained a portion of her æonic character, yet without her form and essence. Thus, even though they existed, they were nevertheless – well, void.

So that such a thing could not happen again, *Monogenes* produced a new pair of æons: *Christ* and the *Holy Spirit*. This “conjugal pair,” as Irenaeus calls it, worked to strengthen the pleroma which, being thus strengthened, went on to even greater things. Irenaeus explains:

Christ then instructed them as to the nature of their conjunction, and taught them that those who possessed a comprehension of the *Unbegotten* were sufficient for themselves. He also announced among them what related to the knowledge of the Father, namely, that he cannot be understood or comprehended, nor so much as seen or heard, except in so far as he is known by *Monogenes* only. And the reason why the rest of the æons possess perpetual existence is found in that part of the *Father's* nature which is incomprehensible; but the reason of their origin and formation was situated in that which may be comprehended regarding him, that is, in the Son. *Christ*, then, who had just been produced, effected these things among them.

But the *Holy Spirit* taught them to give thanks

on being all rendered equal among themselves, and led them to a state of true repose. Thus, then, they tell us that the æons were constituted equal to each other in form and sentiment, so that all became as *Nous*, and *Logos*, and *Anthropos*, and *Christus*. The female æons, too, became all as *Aletheia*, and *Zoe*, and *Spiritus*, and *Ecclesia*. Everything, then, being thus established, and brought into a state of perfect rest, they next tell us that these beings sang praises with great joy to the *Propator*, who himself shared in the abounding exaltation. Then, out of gratitude for the great benefit which had been conferred on them, the whole pleroma of the æons, with one design and desire, and with the concurrence of *Christ* and the *Holy Spirit*, their *Father* also setting the seal of His approval on their conduct, brought together whatever each one had in himself of the greatest beauty and preciousness; and uniting all these contributions so as skillfully to blend the whole, they produced, to the honor and glory of *Bythus*, a being of most perfect beauty, the very star of the pleroma, and the perfect fruit [of it], namely *Jesus*.⁶

Irenaeus' interpretation of the reasons for the existence of *Christ* and the *Holy Spirit* is substantiated by the Valentinian-influenced *Gospel of Truth*, where in paragraph twenty-four it is stated:

The *Father* reveals his bosom. Now his bosom is the *Holy Spirit*. He reveals what is hidden of him – what is hidden of him is his Son

– so that through the mercies of the *Father* the æons may know him and *cease laboring in search of the Father*, resting there in him, knowing that this is the rest... Since the deficiency came into being because the *Father* was not known, therefore, when the *Father* is known, from that moment on the deficiency will no longer exist.⁷

Act III

Still, those elements of *Sophia* continued to exist and these, the Gnostics believe, were used through a variety of means to produce the physical world we see around us. In the accounts cited by Irenaeus, *Sophia* is given the name Achamoth, although it is not clear whether this name refers to *Sophia* or her passions which were stripped from her by *Horos*.

Her first act was to create a being who would be the one who would bring the creatures and substance of the physical world into being. He is given the names: *Metropator*, *Apator*, *Demiurge* and *Father*.⁸ It would appear that the *Demiurge* – being the formulator of the physical – was ignorant of ANYTHING spiritual... including the æons and especially his creator, Achamoth.

Irenaeus described him in this way:

They go on to say that the *Demiurge* imagined that he created all these things of himself, while he in reality made them in conjunction with the productive power of Achamoth. He formed the heavens, yet was ignorant of the heavens; he fashioned man, yet knew not man; he brought to light the earth, yet had no acquaintance with the earth; and, in like man-

ner, they declare that he was ignorant of the forms of all that he made, and knew not even of the existence of his own mother, but imagined that he himself was all things... (H)e (the Demiurge), being incapable of recognizing any spiritual essences, imagined himself to be God alone, and declared through the prophets, “I am God, and besides me there is none else.”⁹

Thus, the creator of all that we see and experience was borne of foolish passions which had no place among the spiritual (pleroma). And being *unspiritual*, *Demiurge* had no sense of anything other than himself... sort of an *anti-Bythus*.

Another part of this creation was the product of the grief of Achamoth: *Cosmocrator* who is the ruler of this world, the demons, angels and every *spiritual* being that exists in this place. It is interesting to note that while the devil is spiritual and has knowledge of those beings and things which are above him in the pleroma; the *Demiurge* has no knowledge of these things because he is merely “animal.” Thus, in most cases, this *Cosmocrator* is viewed in a *positive* light because of his spiritual nature.

For example, in the Garden of Eden account it was not to do evil that the tempter was tempting Eve, since the command of the *archons* not to eat of the tree was borne of jealousy. They didn’t want these two people to become as they were because they thought that they were the highest of all beings. Thus, the fall was not a fall... it was an illumination, a lifting up! After they ate, *their understanding* (nous) was opened; for when they had eaten, the light of knowledge (gnosis) illuminated them.¹⁰

Denouement

As we have already seen several times, while Irenaeus is a

secondary source, a perusal of some of the primary sources of Gnosticism as we have them today reveal that this church father gave a reasonably accurate depiction of the Gnostic system. While we will later take a look more closely at some elements of the Gnostic theology in contradistinction to orthodoxy, just a *very* few more examples should give us a further taste of that upon which Irenaeus was chewing.

In the *Nag Hammadi* library, we read this in the “Prayer of the Apostle Paul”:

(R)edeem my eternal light soul and my spirit.
And the First-born of the pleroma of grace -
reveal him to my mind! Grant what no angel
eye has [seen] and no archon ear (has) heard
and what has not entered into the human heart
which came to be angelic and (modeled) after
the image of the psychic God when it was
formed in the beginning, since I have faith and
hope.¹¹

This speaks clearly of the incomprehensible nature of the chief æon and how even his fellow æons are not able to know the fullness of his perfection.

The nature of Gnosticism, however, is not that this information about *Bythus* should remain unknown, but that it has been and will be revealed to those who *understand*, who grasp *Bythus* with the mind, that is, spiritually. From the Second Apocalypse of James:

And he the Christ took hold of me, saying,
“My beloved! Behold, I shall reveal to you
those (things) that (neither) [the] heavens nor
their archons have known. Behold, I shall re-
veal to you those (things) that he did not know,
he who [boasted, there is no] other except me..

Behold, I [shall] reveal to you him who [is hidden]. But now, stretch out your [hand]. Now, take hold of me.” [And] then I stretched out my hands and I did not find him as I thought (he would be). But afterward I heard him saying, “*Understand* and take hold of me.” Then I understood, and I was afraid. And I was exceedingly joyful. (Emphasis added.)¹²

The continual polemic against things physical which Irenaeus mentions is in some writings brought directly against the Christian Church that dares to speak of physical things having consort with the spiritual by use of physical means. Concerning baptism, The Paraphrase of Shem states:

O Shem, they are deceived by manifold demons, thinking that through baptism with the uncleanness of water, that which is dark, feeble, idle, and disturbing, he will take away the sins. And they do not know that from the water to the water there is bondage, and errors and unchastity, envy, murder, adultery, false witness, heresies, robberies, lusts, babblings, wrath, bitterness... Therefore there are many deaths which burden their thoughts. For I foretell it to those who have a heart. They will refrain from the impure baptism. And those who take heart from the light of the Spirit will not have dealings with the impure practice.¹³

Finally, through these sources, “orthodox” Gnosticism lives today having brought into their confession’s formulation both the scriptures of “Christian” and “Non-Christian” Gnostics.

From a current statement of the beliefs of the Gnostic Church:

A Brief Credo

We acknowledge one great invisible God, the Unknown Father, the Aeon of Aeons, who brought forth with His providence: the Father, the Mother and the Son.

We acknowledge the Christos, the self-begotten Son, born from the virginal and ineffable Mother in the high Aeons: who in the Logos of God came down from above to annul the emptiness of this age and restore the fullness of the Aeon.

We acknowledge the Holy Spirit, our celestial Mother and consoler, who proceeded from Herself, a gift of Herself out of the silence of the unknown God.

We seek the gathering of the sparks of light from the sea of forgetfulness and we look to the glories of eternal life in the Fullness. Amen.¹⁴

III. A Brief Historical Outline

The actual origins of the gnostic system outlined above are not well known to us for several reasons. The passage of time has erased much of the evidence of this philosophical/religious system. Also, there is no consensus regarding just *what* precisely gnosticism was as it was formulated over many generations. All the while it drew on and syncretistically incorporated traditions and scriptures from areas as diverse as

Athens and Babylon. Finally, because of the antipathy that usually arose toward gnosticism in many of the areas it invaded (including among the Neo-Platonists), it was viewed as “heretical” and thus there was a constant movement to destroy whatever documentation existed.

The earlier history of this movement is studded with several types of non-Christian gnosticism which gradually came into being in the Near and Middle East. This was especially so when Greek culture, science, religion and philosophy began to be spread throughout these areas as Alexander the Great conquered them. As those populations, governments, and religious institutions began to become more and more Hellenized — even after Alexander’s death — their preexisting institutions incorporated more and more the idealized Greek forms, words and structures into their own. Eventually a curious amalgam emerged which was neither wholly Greek nor wholly Oriental.

What we do witness at the period roughly coinciding with the beginnings of Christianity is an explosion of the East. Like long-pent-up waters its forces broke through the Hellenistic crust and flooded the ancient world, flowing into the established Greek forms and filling them with their content, besides creating their own new beds. The metamorphosis of Hellenism into a religious oriental culture was set on foot. The time of the breakthrough was probably determined by the coinciding of two complementary conditions, the maturing of the subterranean growth in the East, which enabled it to emerge into the light of day, and the readiness of the West for a religious renewal.¹⁵

This “flood” reached as far as Palestine where there was even created a Jewish form of gnosticism that appropriated the Old Testament Scriptures and reinterpreted them in light of Hellenistic thought and philosophy. It was from this fertile ground, especially in Samaria, that “Christian” gnosticism grew as watered by the heretical teachings and activity of Simon Magus.

Generally considered by the church fathers as a record of the beginnings of Christian gnosticism, Acts 8:9-24 tells of this Simon Magus and his activities as he proclaimed himself to be someone great.

Simon identified himself as the “power of God” and pretended, therefore, to be a Messiah-figure. He also proclaimed freedom from the Law. He taught that salvation came, not through good works but through faith in him. According to the church fathers Simon Magus’ teaching was the prototype of all heresy.¹⁶

Despite Simon’s labors, it does not appear as though “Christian” gnosticism gained much of a *firm* foot-hold until the early part of the second century. After this time early centers sprang up in such locations as Samaria (Simon), Syria (Saturninus), Egypt (Basilides) and Rome (Valentinus).

One important point *must* be addressed here. While “Christian” gnosticism developed over a period of time, it in *no way* preceded the New Testament Church nor her Scriptures, nor her dogma. Gnosticism’s purpose was to assimilate those elements of Christianity which were compatible to its dogma; it was not a fraternal twin to the Faith.

That fact does not stop some from positing such theories as the one which has been put forward in the Introduction to *The Gospel of Thomas*:

If one considers the form and wording of the

individual sayings in comparison with the form in which they are preserved in the New Testament, *The Gospel of Thomas* almost always appears to have preserved a more original form of the traditional saying (in a few instances where this is not the case, the Coptic translation seems to have been influenced by the translator's knowledge of the New Testament gospels), or presents versions which are independently based on more original forms. More original and shorter forms are especially evident in the parables of Thomas.

In its literary genre, *The Gospel of Thomas* is more akin to one of the sources of the canonical gospels, namely the so-called Synoptic Sayings Source (often called "Q" from the German word *Quelle*, "source"), which was used by both Matthew and Luke. Indeed, many of the sayings found in our document were also parts of this source of the gospels of the New Testament. On the other hand, *The Gospel of Thomas* also contains quite different older sayings, paralleled in the Gospel of John, in Mark 4:21,25 and even in 1 Corinthians... *The Gospel of Thomas* is, therefore, a closely related but independent collection of sayings. In its most original form, it may well date from the first century (the middle of the first century is usually considered the best date for the composition of "Q").¹⁷

In several discussions I have had, it is this sort of statement which is used to defend the "lost, gnostic, hidden" gospel collections which have come out in recent years. More than that, however, those who speak of the existence of "Q" as though it's existence was a cold, hard, scientific fact, also

use this theory as a way to attempt to destroy the authoritative, biblical teachings of orthodox Christianity.

If the struggle between gnosticism and orthodoxy was merely a fight between two similar, though opposing, theological viewpoints, then orthodoxy could lay claim to only a political, not a theological, victory. It's position simply had more votes at the Church Councils called to combat heresy in the early church. In other words: The winners wrote the history.

As early as the second century this diminution of orthodox and biblical faith was confronted and refuted by Clement of Alexandria (who himself was a *quasi*-gnostic):

Basilides... claims (as they boast) for his master Glaucias, the interpreter of Peter. Likewise they allege that Valentinus was a hearer of Theudas, and he was the pupil of Paul. For Marcion, who arose in the same age with them, lived as an old man with the younger [heretics]. And after him Simon heard for a little the preaching of Peter. Such being the case, it is evident, from the high antiquity and perfect truth of the Church, that these later heresies, and those yet subsequent to them in time, were new inventions falsified [from the truth].

From what has been said, then, it is my opinion that the true Church, that which is really ancient, is one, and that in it those who according to God's purpose are just, are enrolled... Therefore in substance and idea, in origin, in preeminence, we say that the ancient and Catholic Church is alone, collecting as it does into the unity of the one faith – which results from the peculiar Testaments, or rather

the one Testament in different times by the will of the one God, through one Lord – those already ordained, whom God predestinated, knowing before the foundation of the world that they would be righteous.¹⁸

Nevertheless, people still sought out the new, innovative, secret things which gnosticism seemed to offer them over against the apparent stodginess of orthodox Christianity. The spirit of those times was similar to that of today where so many nominal Christians seek that which “sounds” like their traditional faith but packages it in a newer, more exciting, quite *exclusive* way.

Gnosticism reached its organizational “flower” with the ascendancy of Manicheism in the third century in the East (Mesopotamia). One author says of Manicheism that it

...can be regarded as one of the four world religions known to the history of religions. This means, it shares a position with Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, but, in contrast to these, lies in the past.¹⁹

This rather independent and very popular (St. Augustine was one of its adherents for a time) form of gnosticism held to a dualistic conflict between God (light) and darkness. This struggle was manifested in the Manichean goal of

releasing the particles of light which Satan had stolen from the world of light and imprisoned in man’s brain, and that Jesus, Buddha (Manes had gone to India for a time), the Prophets and Manes had been sent to help in this task.²⁰

So popular was this sect that it is known to have survived

at least until the tenth century in Chinese Turkestan.

Today there is only one *officially* gnostic church with ties to the gnostics of early church history. The Mandaean sect exists as a small baptist (yes, *baptist*) community of about 15,000 people in the Republic of Iraq.

IV. The Doctrinal Nature of Gnosticism’s Conflicts with the Early Church

An indication of the intense division between the Gnostic and the orthodox confessions appears in Codex VI, Tractate IV of the Nag Hammadi Library. In *The Concept of Our Great Power* the author places a particularly evil archon²¹ in the west who came east first to put an end to the *Logos*, and then to attack the *supposedly* more ancient (than the orthodox) teachings of the gnostics.

The archon came, with the archons of the western regions, to the East, i.e., that place where the *Logos* appeared at first. Then the earth trembled, and the cities were troubled. Moreover, the birds ate and were filled with their dead. The earth mourned together with the inhabited world; they became desolate. Then when the times were completed, then wickedness arose mightily even until the final end of the *Logos*. Then the archon of the western regions arose, and from the East he will perform a work, and he will instruct men in his wickedness. And he wants to nullify all teaching, the words of true wisdom, while loving the lying wisdom.²²

The main point of conflict between Gnosticism and the early orthodox church can be found in the insistence of the

gnostics that the physical realm was irredeemably corrupt. This basic conflict led to other conflicts between them on cosmology, theology and soteriology, because each of these disciplines intimately relates to the physical and spiritual natures of God (Jesus Christ), man and the world.

While this conflict affects every area of the teachings touched upon by Holy Scripture, for this endeavor we shall look at three areas which were in dispute at the time of the early church: Creation, Soteriology (including the Incarnation) and Resurrection: the beginning, the middle and the end.

Creation

As mentioned in Section II of this paper, the Gnostic cosmology has little in common with that which has been biblically expounded. In Gnosticism it became necessary to picture the creator of the world as a rather addled – if not completely deranged – *Demiurge* who created something about which he did not know and who did not know that he, in fact, *also* was created.

The existence of this *Demiurge* was necessary because of the Gnostic aversion to the physical realm which was viewed as inferior to the spiritual. In other words, if the physical is corrupt, its creator must also be corrupt and *vice versa*.

In *The Gospel of Philip* it is boldly asserted:

The world came about through a mistake. For he who created it wanted to create it imperishable and immortal. He fell short of attaining his desire. For the world never was imperishable, nor, for that matter, was he who made the world. For things are not imperishable, but sons are. Noth-

ing will be able to receive imperishability if it does not first become a son. But he who has not the ability to receive (speaking of the *Demiurge*), how much more will he be unable to give?²³

Having dealt with the general propositions posited by Gnosticism in Book I of his polemic, Irenaeus began here at the Creation with his defense of the orthodox faith. In Book II of *Adversus Haereses*, he states in language similar to the Nicene Creed:

It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head, that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein... and to demonstrate that there is nothing either above Him or after Him.²⁴

For Irenaeus, there was nothing more important than to confess truth of Scripture that there is *one* God and *only* one God. None is above Him in the pleroma, were there *other* gods whom He created in order to complete himself and spiritual creation. Should this Truth be lost, then, according to Irenaeus, essence of eternal life would also be lost.

They do not believe that He, who is God above all, formed by His Word, in His own territory, as He Himself pleased, the various and diversified [works of creation which exist].. But they believe that angels, or some power separate from God and who was ignorant of Him, formed this universe. By this course, therefore, not yielding credit to the truth, but wallowing in falsehood, they have lost the bread of true life, and have fallen

into vacuity and an abyss of shadow. They are like the dog of Æsop, which dropped the bread and made an attempt at seizing its Shadow, thus losing the [real] food. It is easy to prove from the very words of the Lord that He acknowledges one Father and Creator of the world, and Fashioner of man, who was proclaimed by the law and the prophets, while He knows no other, and that this One is really God over all; and that He teaches that that adoption of sons pertaining to the Father, which is eternal life, takes place through Himself, conferring it [as He does] on all the righteous.²⁵

Thus, since the gnostics have removed “God the Father Almighty” from their cosmology, they have removed Him as well from their soteriology. If this Creator is *not* the Father of us all, then we have no right to come to Him who created all things *ex nihilo* (for he didn’t) asking Him – as His dear children – for the gifts which He has promised to give us by that same creative power through His Son. If the Gnostic cosmology is to be followed, then the only creator-god we have is one who must inspire fear in us because of *his* foolish arrogance; and so we *cannot* be responsible to one such as he. As a result, the opening lines of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds dare not be confessed by anyone since they would be thoroughly untrue: The Creator is *not* our Father.

Soteriology

From the propers for Epiphany for use in the modern Gnostic church:

THE GOSPEL is taken from the Gospel of Truth: Therefore he who is Gnostic is truly a

being from above. When he is called he hears; he answers; he directs himself to Him who calls him and returns to Him; he apprehends how he is called. By possessing Gnosis, he carries out the will of Him who called him and seeks to do what pleases Him. He receives the repose. He who thus possesses knowledge knows whence he comes and whither he goes. He understands as someone who makes himself free and awakens from the drunkenness wherein he lived and returns to himself.²⁶

Note the difference between the emphasis the Church places on the Epiphany and the Gnostic view of the same. As we will tomorrow, the Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the fact that in Christ Jesus God was manifested in order that both Jew and Gentile could see by the light of the holy Word that God indeed was born in our flesh for the purpose of saving us.

Yet in this brief excerpt from the Gnostic lectionary, we can see how the salvific essence of Gnosticism is found for them, not in the Incarnation – especially not in the Incarnation – but in the inner knowledge attained by those who are wise concerning themselves and their salvation. *By possessing Gnosis... he receives the repose... He understands as someone who makes himself free* (emphasis added).

Yes, as with orthodox Christianity, we can rightly state that Gnosticism is a religion which deals with redemption. But to what sort of redemption does the Gnostic believer aspire? Is it a redemption accomplished by another, or is there a different path that leads to attaining this perfect knowledge which was hidden by the *Demiurge’s* creation of the physical cosmos?

Kurt Rudolph calls Gnosticism a religion which demands the act of “self-realization to bring about redemption and guar-

antee salvation,²⁷ and it is for this reason that in most cases Gnostic scriptures hardly concern themselves with Jesus' incarnation and the work He did in order to redeem the world. Since redemption is something which the human animal must discover and work out for himself by finding the spark of *gnosis* that is within him... Jesus specifically as the God/Man Savior becomes not only unnecessary, but also unwanted and despised.

(Jesus [Seth]) continued: I visited a bodily dwelling. I cast out the one who was in it first, and I went in. And the whole multitude of the archons became troubled. And all the matter of the archons as well as all the begotten powers of the earth were shaken when it saw the likeness of the Image, since it was mixed. And I am the one who was in it, not resembling him who was in it first. For he was an earthly man, but I, I am from above the heavens. I did not refuse them even to become a Christ, but I did not reveal myself to them in the love which was coming forth from me. I revealed that I am a stranger to the regions below.²⁸

The Gnostic view of Jesus portrays Him as a physical human being in one sense, but not one who was conceived, born, lived, died and rose as the indivisible God/Man. In keeping with the dualistic nature of Gnosticism, the fleshly Jesus was considered to be the son of Mary and Joseph while the spiritual, psychic and good Jesus (sent from and by the pleroma²⁹) entered into the fleshly Jesus at his baptism and left him before his crucifixion. This sets up the strange scene described by the Gnostic Jesus in a discourse with Peter:

When he had said those things, I (Peter) saw him seemingly being seized by them. And I

said, "What do I see, O Lord, that it is you yourself whom they take? Or who is this one, glad and laughing on the tree? And is it another one whose feet and hands they are striking?" The Savior said to me, "He whom you saw on the tree, glad and laughing, this is the living Jesus. But this one into whose hands and feet they drive the nails is his fleshly part... he whom they crucified is the first-born, and the home of demons, and the stony vessel in which they dwell... But he who stands near him is the living Savior.. who stands joyfully looking at those who did him violence... Therefore he laughs at their lack of perception, knowing that they are born blind... what they released was my incorporeal body. I am the intellectual Spirit filled with radiant light."³⁰

This is what Jesus was saying to Peter here: "I was not crucified there on the cross, only the fleshly Jesus was. I was not suffering...NO! I was laughing in derision at those who *thought* that they were killing the light that I am."

Elsewhere in Gnostic scriptures, Jesus is described as having traded places with Simon of Cyrene³¹ just before (H)he suffered. Simon, then, suffered in Jesus' place while Christ stands watching and laughing at the crucifixion going on there. Since the real, holy, perfect Jesus was not flesh and blood but only inhabited such for a time, therefore only Simon or the son of Mary and Joseph suffered and died there. The radiant one would never have lowered himself so far as to participate in such an earthly, physical, fleshly thing as birth *or* death.

This charade was necessary so that the evil archons would think that they had accomplished their task of destroying the light sent from "above." What had actually happened according to Gnostic soteriology was that the fleshly man who was crucified signified the crucifixion of the fleshly ways and crea-

tures of the archons. Thus they crucified themselves. In this way the real nature of *this* Jesus was kept a secret and he could continue his work – his *only* work – of illuminating those on a higher spiritual and moral plain so that they could attain the *gnosis* of the Ineffable One.

The terrifying implication of all this was not lost on Irenaeus; yet it was not this Gnostic threat that forced him to systematize his and the church's understanding of how salvation is earned and distributed. Already these things were well understood by the Church at large because the liturgical foundation for such instruction had already been set down in the Old Testament Church and those practices, "fleshed out" by the Sacraments, taught the members of the Church well regarding the confidence they could have in their salvation through Christ. Though the type of theological language with which we are familiar had not been used up to this point, nevertheless the understanding and, most importantly, the *proclamation* of these truths had been continuous since the Ascension and Pentecost.³²

For Irenaeus the truths of salvation through the incarnate Son of God were a given. He did not have to invent his soteriology in defense of Gnosticism, it already existed as revealed by God's holy Word, both Old Testament *and* New:

(T)hen, [speaking of His] baptism, Matthew says, "The heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God, as a dove, coming upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." For Christ did not at that time descend upon Jesus, neither was Christ one and Jesus another: but the Word of God – who is the Savior of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon Him flesh, and was

anointed by the Spirit from the Father – was made Jesus Christ, as Esaias also says, "There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise from his root; and the Spirit of God shall rest upon Him; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and the spirit of the fear of God, shall fill Him. He shall not judge according to glory, nor reprove after the manner of speech, but He shall dispense judgment to the humble man, and reprove the haughty ones of the earth." And again Esaias, pointing out beforehand His unction, and the reason why he was anointed, does himself say, "The Spirit of God is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me; He hath sent Me to preach the Gospel to the lowly, to heal the broken up in heart, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and sight to the blind, to announce the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance, to comfort all that mourn." For inasmuch as the Word of God was man from the root of Jesse, and son of Abraham, in this respect did the Spirit of God rest upon Him, and anoint Him to preach the Gospel to the lowly. But inasmuch as He was God, He did not judge according to glory, nor reprove after the manner of speech. For "He needed not that any should testify to Him of man, for He Himself knew what was in man." For He called all men that mourn; and, granting forgiveness to those who had been led into captivity by their sins, He loosed them from their chains, of whom Solomon says, "Every one shall be holden with the cords of his own sins." Therefore did the Spirit of God descend upon Him, [the Spirit] of Him who had promised by the prophets that He

would anoint Him, so that we, receiving from the abundance of His unction, might be saved.³³

In essence, what we can see from this is that Irenaeus was operating according to the “analogy of faith,” something which is even recognized by commentators who are not necessarily sympathetic to this method.

Irenaeus’ *one-sided attitude* towards the teachings, his attempt to classify on the basis of these and to establish a family tree of the sects and their founders, but above all his polemic and apologetic intention of exposing or “unmasking” his opponents, that is, of bringing their alleged mysteries into the open and thus proving them to be errors and lies, *impose considerable limitations upon his statements*. Hans von Campenhausen aptly writes “Irenaeus attempts to set out his *Refutation* as systematically and in as much detail as possible. But he himself lacks the clarity, *unprejudiced objectivity* and capacity for orderly presentation which were needed for the task. So the book is a typical example of an involved and *tiresome* attack on heretics, which through lack of intellectual superiority gropes after any argument with which the opponents can be disparaged, brought under suspicion, or caricatured.³⁴ (emphasis added)

While some parts of Irenaeus’ argumentation indeed borders on caricatures of straw men,³⁵ this does not invalidate his argumentation based upon the “analogy.” Certainly he is one sided, but that is how it should be with the polemics of one defending the faith.

In his works, Irenaeus was mainly speaking against the Valentinian form of Gnostic soteriology. Other types of Gnosticism, though, also presented strong challenges to orthodoxy. Among these were the teachings of Simon Magus, Cerinthus, Saturninus, Marcion and Manes, whose systems were similar to the Valentinian gnosticism, but perhaps with different emphases.

In Marcion’s (and later Mane’s) gnostic “gospel,” the essence *and* totality of the Christian religion was bound up in the love of God to the exclusion of the law.³⁶ As in Valentinian gnosticism, this meant that there was really no offense given to God Himself, because the creation was bound up in ignorance through no fault of its own and was to be freed, not forgiven. In response to this, Tertullian writes:

For neither does grace exist, except after offence; nor peace, except after war. Now, both the people (of Israel) by their transgression of His laws, and the whole race of mankind by their neglect of natural duty, had both sinned and rebelled against the Creator. Marcion’s god, however, could not have been offended, both because he was unknown to everybody, and because he is incapable of being irritated. What grace, therefore, can be had of a god who has not been offended? what peace from one who has never experienced rebellion?³⁷

Thus, for the gnostics, salvation by the incarnate Son’s death for the world’s sins was an evil corruption of the true restoration of the relationship between God and (spiritual) man. Since we have not sinned against God, they might say, therefore we do not need to be redeemed... only *informed*.

If there is no real, physical act of salvation... then what of the results of the gnostic soteriology? What comes about be-

cause of the example of Jesus' non-suffering and the enlightenment which He brings?

Resurrection

Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:11-18:

This is a faithful saying: For if we die with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourselves approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer.

Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

Hymenaeus and Philetus were very early "Christian" gnostics. They were among those who taught (and some still teach today) that the resurrection is a past event for those who have attained *gnosis*. For the gnostic, there was no such thing as a physical resurrection either by Jesus in the past or for man in the future. It is rather a future, *exclusively* spiritual event which is so anticipated and believed in that it is as

though it had happened already. Apart from the Biblical evidence, the fact that gnostic resurrection is completely spiritual makes it difficult to disprove that this belief is true.

From the introduction of *The Treatise on the Resurrection*, Malcolm L. Peel writes about gnostic resurrection in a way similar to how *we* speak of the "prophetic perfect" used by the Old Testament prophets. He stated:

(U)nlike the early church, which in its resurrection hope held to an "eschatological reservation" (i.e., the notion that the full benefit of individual Christian's participation in the resurrection would await the final return of Christ), the author of *The Treatise on the Resurrection* held that for the elect believer who had proleptically participated in Christ's suffering (death), resurrection, and ascension the new reality should be dear: one already *has* the resurrection in the present. In sum, our author, like the Hymenaeus and Philetus condemned in 2 Timothy 2:18, teaches that the resurrection has already occurred! He reinforces it by means of a kind of existential proof: the believer who knows of death's inevitability should consider himself as dead already and thus as already participating in the resurrected state. Thus, the believer is to have "faith" in the reality of Christ's victory over death and its guarantee, to avoid all "doubt" to "*know*" the "Son of Man" and the truth proclaimed about his resurrection, to "practice" one's release from the inimical power of this cosmos through correct thought, and to realize the mystical unity between the experience of the Savior and that of the believer.³⁸

This is in line with the gnostic teaching concerning Jesus' resurrection. They did not believe that He rose physically; that would be too base. No, His resurrection occurred spiritually and took Him to the pleroma so that He might lead the way for us to return there as well. From the *Treatise on the Resurrection*:

The Savior swallowed up death, of this you are not reckoned as being ignorant — for he put aside the world which is perishing. He transformed himself into an imperishable æon and raised himself up, having swallowed the visible by the invisible, and he gave us the way of our immortality. Then, indeed, as the Apostle said, “We suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him.” Now if we are manifest in this world wearing him, we are that one's beams, and we are embraced by him until our setting, that is to say, our death in this life. We are drawn to heaven by him, like beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything. This is the spiritual resurrection which swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly.³⁹

The eschatological significance of all this, therefore, makes the “Last Day” something far less than the Scriptures declare. On that day, the gnostic faith confessed, the end of all things would literally *be* the end of all “things.” Everything physical in nature would be destroyed, and those who regained the “drop of light” which is the *gnosis* needed for salvation would be gathered into the greater light for eternity.

There will be no bodily resurrection, for the body is unholy and unneeded in the pleroma. As God is reported to state

in one gnostic text: “And I shall withdraw everyone who will know me, they will enter into the immeasurable light, (where) there is no one of the flesh... They will be unhampered (and) holy, since nothing drags them down.”⁴⁰

Irenaeus responds:

For it is manifest that those acts which are deemed righteous are performed in bodies. Either, therefore, all souls will of necessity pass into the intermediate place, and there will never be a judgment; or bodies, too, which have participated in righteousness, will attain to the place of enjoyment, along with the souls which have in like manner participated, if indeed righteousness is powerful enough to bring thither those substances which have participated in it. And then the doctrine concerning the resurrection of bodies, which we believe, will emerge true and certain [from their system], since, [as we hold,] God, when He resuscitates our mortal bodies which preserved righteousness, will render them incorruptible and immortal. For God is superior to nature, and has in Himself the disposition [to show kindness], because He is good; and the ability to do so, because He is mighty; and the faculty of fully carrying out His purpose, because He is rich and perfect.⁴¹

V. Conclusion

There are several modern manifestations of gnosticism in the modern world. Those that spring to mind immediately include the Latter-Day Saints (Mormon), Unitarian/ Universalists, Scientology, etc. These all posit some kind of *gnosis*

apart from the revelation of God's holy Word (if they accept it at all, that is) and promote the idea that there is a salvific reality apart from Christ... though their system may include Him to some degree.

Thus the essence of *all* gnostic teaching lies within the realm of *enthusiasm*, for, ultimately, gnosticism lets the individual be the judge of what the truth is and the desires of God for man. From the modern-day Gnostic Catechism:

LESSON IV OF GNOSIS AND SALVATION

59. What is Gnosis?

Gnosis is the revelatory and salvific knowledge of who we were, of what we have become, of where we were, of wherein we have been thrown, of whereto we are hastening, of what we are being freed, of what birth really is, and of what rebirth really is. This is an ancient definition which is still accurate.

60. Is there more than one kind of Gnosis?

The experience of Gnosis comes to human beings in individual manifestations, yet it always has common features and a common keynote.

61. Is Gnosis an experience or a doctrine?

It is both. The experience of Gnosis is mystical knowledge that liberates. This is both accompanied and preceded by a kindred kind of Gnosis that informs. These were called (by Clement of Alexandria) the Divine Gnosis and Human Gnosis respectively. The human or doctrinal part of Gnosis consists of a certain

kind of knowledge of the spiritual, psychic and material worlds and their relationships.

62. How is Human Gnosis acquired?

Primarily by way of the study and assimilation of the teachings of the Messengers of light and of the seers and sages of the Gnostic tradition and by way of the amplification of these by individual insight.⁴²

This is most certainly not true!

Our Lutheran Confessions did well to put gnosticism in its proper historical context: that it actually *began* with Adam and Eve and in so many forms *still* exists today wherever enthusiasm itself exists:

All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts, and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit, and nevertheless he accomplished this through other outward words. Just as also our enthusiasts (at the present day) condemn the outward Word, and nevertheless they themselves are not silent, but they fill the world with their pratings and writings, as though, indeed, the Spirit could not come through the writings and spoken word of the apostles, but (first) through their writings and words he must come. Why then do not they also omit their own sermons and writings, until the Spirit Himself comes to men, without their writings and before them, as they boast that He has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures? But of

these matters there is not time now to dispute at greater length; we have elsewhere sufficiently urged this subject.⁴³

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

Endnotes

¹The Gospel of Mary, 8-10, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, gen. ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), 525.

²Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, *The Heritage of Dogmatics*, by Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 30-31.

³Valentinus (2d century), an influential gnostic theologian and founder of the sect of Valentinians. A native of Egypt he lived

at Rome from c. 136 to c.160, had hopes of being elected bishop, but was passed over, seceded from the Church, and later perhaps went to Cyprus. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. E. A Livingstone (London, Oxford University Press, 1977), 532.

⁴The Gospel of Philip, 53, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 142. Names given to the worldly are very deceptive, for they divert our thoughts from what is correct to what is incorrect. Thus one who hears the word “God” does not perceive what is correct, but perceives what is incorrect. So also with “the father” and “the son” and “the holy spirit” and “life” and “light” and “resurrection” and “the church” and all the rest - people do not perceive what is correct but they perceive what is incorrect, unless they have come to know what is correct. The names which are heard are in the world... If they were in the eternal realm, they would at no time be used as names in the world. Nor were they set among worldly things. They have an end in the eternal realm.

⁵The Gospel of Truth, 38, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 49.

⁶Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I.2.5-6.

⁷The Gospel of Truth, 24, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 43.

⁸In later Gnostic literature he [in an androgynous sort of way] would be called *Yaldabaoth*: “When the ruler (*Yaldabaoth*) saw his magnitude — and it was only himself that he saw: he saw nothing else, except for water and darkness — then he supposed that it was he alone who existed.” On The Origin Of The World. 100-101 in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 173.

⁹Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.5.3-4.

¹⁰On the Origin of the world, 118-119, in *The Nag Hammadi*

Library, 184.

¹¹The Prayer of the Apostle Paul in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 28.

¹²The (Second) Apocalypse of James, 57, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 274.

¹³The Paraphrase of Shem, 37-38, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 357.

¹⁴Stephan A Hoeller, *The Gnostic Catechism* [collection online] (Los Angeles, California: *Ecclesia Gnostica*, 1998, accessed 25 December 1998) Available from <http://www.gnosis.org/eghome.htm>.

¹⁵Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 23.

¹⁶Hagglund, Bengt, *History of Theology*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 35.

¹⁷Helmut Koester, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction in The Nag Hammadi Library*, 125.

¹⁸Clement of Alexandria *Stromata*, VII. 17

¹⁹Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature & History of Gnosticism*, ed. Robert McLachlan Wilson, trans. P. W. Coxon, K. H. Kuhn, R. McLachlan Wilson (Edinburgh, England: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1984), 326-327.

²⁰*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 318.

²¹The archons were concentrated in different areas. The main

group inhabited the seven planetary spheres, but other archons were afoot elsewhere. Following the Resurrection and Ascension, Jerusalem was a center of archonic activity as they attempted to stamp out the light which the Gnostic Jesus ignited.

²²The Concept of Our Great Power, 43-44, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 315-316.

²³The Gospel of Philip, 75, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 154.

²⁴Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* II.1.1.

²⁵Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* II.11.1.

²⁶*Meditations: The Epiphany in The Lectionary of the Ecclesia Gnostica*. [collection online] (Los Angeles, California: *Ecclesia Gnostica*, 1998, accessed 25 December 1998) Available from <http://www.gnosis.org/eghome.htm>. This work is a collection of online meditations and Gnostic scriptures which are appointed for use in the weekly services of the *Ecclesia Gnostica*. Currently there are three Gnostic sanctuaries listed for the United States: Los Angeles, Portland (OR) and Salt Lake City.

²⁷Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature & History of Gnosticism* 113.

²⁸*The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, 51-52, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 363-364.

²⁹Each æon of the pleroma gave a portion of its light to the spiritual Jesus who *was* sent into the earthly Jesus.

³⁰*Apocalypse of Peter*, 81-83, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*,

377.

³¹Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* I.24.4

³²“The idea of salvation through knowledge, an idea heavily dependent upon contemporary Platonism, definitely affected the early doctrine of the church. But indications are that these rather ‘vapid expressions’ of Christian doctrine represent an apologetics to the outside pagan world, but that inside the church, the liturgy and confessions of faith actually contain the deeper, fuller content of the Christian faith, though not yet fully expressed in the church’s teaching. For while second century culture and the Gnostic threat gave early motivation for Christian soteriological teaching to develop along the lines of Greek anthropological thought, within the church the liturgy and sacraments made clear that mankind needed the grace of God given in Christ for obtaining salvation...It was an indisputable point for the second and early third century fathers that the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, both given in baptism, were the necessary first step in the process of salvation.” Mark Nispel, “*De servo arbitrio* and the Patristic Discussion of Freedom, Fate, and Grace,” *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology*, Vol. VII, No.4 (Reformation 1998): 15.

³³Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* III. 9.3³⁴Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 12.

³⁵This collection [of passions] they declare was the substance of the matter from which this world was formed...For from her tears all that is of a liquid nature was formed...(W)hen I perceive that waters are in part fresh, such as fountains, rivers, showers, and so on, and in part salt; such as those in the sea, I reflect with myself that all such waters cannot be de-

rived from her tears, inasmuch as these are of a saline quality only. It is clear, therefore, that the waters which are salt are alone those which are derived from her tears. But it is probable that she, in her intense agony and perplexity, was covered with perspiration. And hence, following out their notion, we may conceive that fountains and rivers, and all the fresh water in the world, are due to this source. For it is difficult, since we know that all tears are of the same quality, to believe that waters both salt and fresh proceeded from them. The more plausible supposition is, that some are from her tears, and some from her perspiration. And since there are also in the world certain waters which are hot and acrid in their nature, thou must be left to guess their origin, how and whence. Such are some of the results of their hypothesis. Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* I.4.2 & 4.

³⁶*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 321.³⁷Tertullian, *The Five Books*, V.5.25.³⁸Malcolm L. Peel, Introduction to The Treatise on the Resurrection in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 52-53.³⁹*The Treatise on the Resurrection*, 45-46, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 54-55.

⁴⁰*The Concept of Our Great Power*, 45-48, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 316. In addition to the relationship between heaven and the pleroma, there is even the implication of something akin to purgatory in some gnostic scriptures as seen in the following: “And he will release the souls that are being punished, and they will come to be in purity. And they will see the saints and cry out to them, ‘Have mercy on us, O Power who art above all powers.’ ...But we have acted according to our birth of the flesh, in the creation of the archons which gives law. We also have come to be in the unchangeable æon.”

⁴¹Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* II.29.2-3.

⁴²Stephan A. Hoeller, *The Gnostic Catechism*.

⁴³The Smalcald Articles, 5-6, in *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 495.

Companions of the Augsburg Confession

by *Bruce Wilmot Adams*

A surprising phenomenon of the late twentieth century is the emergence of sub-cultures within the multi-cultural western societies. People of all ages, but especially young people, are aspiring to a sense of discovering their roots, amidst a process of cultural self-demolition, leaving secularized societies devoid of any clear direction. Graham Cray has stated an obvious fact: “We will not have a sense of future until we regain a sense of rootedness.”¹

One expression of these sub-cultures is the recognition accorded to English history, personalities, events, literature, and films reflected in the Jane Austen revival, which portrays a very English image of family attachments and friendships belonging to another era. Throughout the world there is an awakening “to a greater or lesser extent to England’s vast cultural heritage.”² Combined with this is an increasing awareness in some scholarly circles of the far-reaching influence of Martin Luther upon the early English reformers. Such a spiritual lineage can be traced back to Prior Robert Barnes, Thomas Garret, William Jerome, Miles Coverdale, and John Rogers, the latter two serving a pastorate in Lutheran churches in Europe. Carl Truman writes: “Thus the earliest English Reformation theology is, in the broadest sense, Luther’s legacy.”³ Also, the English church historian, A. G. Dickens, observes that “The relations of England with Lutheranism (as with so many continental movements) had a wholly unique character. During the early twenties the Augustinian friar Robert Barnes headed at Cambridge the first English group which can properly be called Protestant. He was a genuine

Lutheran, who after his escape from English persecutors spent some time in Wittenberg. There he was especially helped by the ever-enterprising Bugenhagen, who was in touch with other early English disciples.”⁴

The emergence of familiarity with the Anglo-Lutherans should prove a source of exhilaration and emulation by those of confessional conviction and adherence. Within England itself, in the reign of Charles II, Lutherans came to bear the title of “Companions of the Augsburg Confession.”

The Charter Authorized

Anglo-Lutherans had to wait until the 17th century before witnessing the erection of their first Lutheran churches. Previously in the reign of Henry VIII, Lutheran confessors, of the calibre of Robert Barnes, Thomas Garret, William Jerome, had been martyred for their adherence to the Augsburg Confession on July 30, 1540.

The mid-17th century had proved to be a harrowing era in English history. The civil war between the Monarchists and the followers of Oliver Cromwell had plunged the land into chaos and suffering. The war ended with the victory of the Parliamentarians under Cromwell.

On a cold January morning in 1649, the Stuart king, Charles I, was executed. In the hour of death he displayed both dignity and courage. His final word to the executioners was “Remember!” During the military protectorate, which lasted for 11 years, churches were frequently desecrated and used as stables for the cavalry.

In 1661 the English people celebrated the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II, but again tragedy struck. In the first years of his reign the Plague infested London, only to be followed by the Great Fire in 1666. Throughout these turbulent years there continued to be a faithful people who

had steadfastly subscribed to the teachings of the Augsburg Confession. The problems facing them seemed insurmountable. The centre of historic Lutheranism had focussed on “The Steelyard” and the church of All Hallows. Both were gutted during the Great Fire of London. From the ashes there started to emerge a new London giving expression to the genius of Sir Christopher Wren.

Despite the permissive lifestyle of Charles II, on September 13, 1672, he issued a Charter granting freedom for the “Companions of the Augsburg Confession” to erect their own church in Trinity Lane. Included in the Charter are the words:

Permit all the companions of the Augsburg Confession, of what nation soever professing the same faith and religion, and the same sacred rites to use and enjoy the said Temple being so built as aforesaid, and there to meet together, and there to celebrate the interpretation of the holy Gospell and the administration of the Sacraments, and to perform other rites and Ecclesiastical matters of their Religion according to the custom received amongst them.⁵

It is of interest that in this Charter the word “Lutheran” does not appear. However, faithful Lutherans were granted the status of being “Companions of the Augsburg Confession.” In the Charter it will also be observed that no limit was placed on their national or cultural affiliation, whether the “Companions” derived from Scandinavia, Germany, or were English-born. The Congregation was authorized to appoint “a Minister and Priest, Dean, and Incumbent in the said Church so to be built as aforesaid.”

The Charter Accepted

The Companions commenced the construction of the church in November 1672, under the direction of a Danish Lutheran Caius Cibber, who was privileged to be Sir Christopher Wren's chief sculptor during the reconstruction of London. Thirteen months later it was dedicated and designated Trinity or Hamburg Lutheran Church.

In the West end of London the foundation of a second Lutheran church eventuated in 1694, solemnly dedicated and consecrated on the 19th Sunday after the Festival of the Holy Trinity, to be known as St. Mary Savoy. The confessional nature of this congregation is enunciated in its constitution and church order. The first section of the Church Order reads as follows:

Of the doctrine which is to be preached in this Congregation as the Basis of our Churches.

1. The called pastors of this congregation shall regulate and arrange all their sermons and teaching according to the rule of the divine Word and of the Biblical prophetic and apostolic writings.
2. At the same time, they shall teach and preach in accordance with our symbolical books, namely the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as delivered to Emperor Charles V in the year 1530, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles and Formula of Concord, also according to both Catechisms of Luther, etc., these fully and thoroughly, nothing contrary to them, whether secretly or publicly, also not to introduce or use any new terminology or modes of speech which are contrary to the Confessions or contradict them.⁶

Both of these congregations proved to be the forerunners of many Lutheran congregations founded in England during the Victorian era.

The Charter Applied

The risen Christ gave his clear direction to the apostles to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19 - NASB) St. Paul enunciated that "through whom (Christ) we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name." (Rom. 1: 5 - NKJV)

Unlike people of Welsh, Scottish, and Irish descent, people of Anglo-Saxon background are not so easily distinguished culturally, politically, and religiously. Yet there remain, amidst the secularization of all western societies, elements which filter through to identify expressions of an Anglo-Saxon culture to which the Gospel must be applied. St. Paul's compliance to accommodate himself to varying cultural customs for the sake of the Gospel is spelled-out in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

For the sake of mission (not "church growth") and integration, it is essential for Lutherans in this age of swelling national identity, or sub-cultures, to realize the long history of those sensing an amicability with the Anglo-Lutheran tradition. It has been tragic that the confessional writings of the English Lutheran reformers, particularly Dr. Robert Barnes, with their commitment to Luther's theology, have been impounded to some ecclesiastical ghetto. The writings of Robert Barnes are of extreme importance. He prepared his works while studying in Wittenberg (1528-31) and should be remembered for "The Supplication unto King Henry VIII (1531)." Included in "The Supplication" is the essay entitled

“Only Faith Justifieth Before God,” described by Dr. Marcus Loane as “the finest piece of writing in all his works. It was the most able exposition of the doctrine on the part of any early English writer, and it reflects how much he had learned from Luther.”⁷ References to the Scriptures and the church fathers abound.

In 1537 Bishop Hugh Latimer wrote of Barnes as a preacher: “Mr. doctor Barnes has preached here with me at Hartlebury, and at my request at Worcester, and also at Evesham. Surely he is alone in handling a piece of Scripture, and setting forth of Christ he has no fellow. I would that the king’s grace might once hear him.”⁸ Upon his martyrdom on July 30, 1540, Luther referred to his friend as “this holy martyr, St. Robert.”⁹ Likewise as a liturgist “St. Robert” deserves recognition: “In 1536 he became the first to introduce the saying of the Mass, and the rendering of the “Te Deum” in English.”¹⁰

It will now be obvious that “The Companions Of The Augsburg Confession” relate their succession of faith and liturgical expression to earlier Anglo-Lutheran confessors such as Robert Barnes (1495 - 1540) and his colleagues. It is the contention of Neelak Tiernagel that, “as the martyrologist John Foxe recognized, Robert Barnes had a far-reaching influence on the development of the Anglican church. His fervent wish that England might become Lutheran was not literally realized.”¹¹

Epilogue

Within the increasing swell of a search for identity, the words of William B. Kessel may be applied: “This process of relating the Word of God to the cultural context of the hearers is called contextualization. As various authors have shown, contextualization involves accomodating oneself to another

culture. It does not mean altering the Word of God or trying to make the message of the cross more rational or less offensive. It does mean being especially sensitive in matters of adiaphora and learning to approach people.”¹² For this writer it is imperative within our diverse cultural milieu to incorporate an English expression of confessional and evangelical Lutheranism. Such will give modern successors of the “Companions of the Augsburg Confession” a sense of familiarity and belonging.

Endnotes

- ¹ Ray Simpson, *Exploring Celtic Spirituality* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p. 22.
- ² Raymond Tong, *This England* (printed in Cheltenham, Glos., Spring, 1992), p. 25
- ³ Carl R. Truman, *Luther's Legacy — Salvation and English Reformers, 1525-1556* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.6.
- ⁴ A. G. Dickens, *Martin Luther and the Reformation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), p. 129.
- ⁵ Copy by Courtesy of the Guildhall Library, London.
- ⁶ E. Geo. Pearce, translated to Commemorate the 300 Anniversary of the Lutheran Church in the United Kingdom, 1969, p. 1.
- ⁷ Marcus L. Loane, *Pioneers of the Reformation in England* (London: Church Book Room Press Ltd., 1973), p. 65.
- ⁸ James E. McGoldrick, *Luther's English Connection* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), pp. 59-60.
- ⁹ Henry E. Jacobs, *The Lutheran Movement in England* (Philadelphia: Revised General Council Publication House, 1916), p. 187.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 183.
- ¹¹ Neelak S. Tiernagel, *The Reformation Essays of Dr. Robert Barnes* (London: Concordia Publishing House Ltd., 1963), p.16.
- ¹² *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, September 1996, Vol. 36, Number 3, p. 71.

Maturing the Christian on the Mission Field

by David Haeuser

Even though Greek philosophy does not achieve the fullness of truth, and does not have in itself the power to fulfill the commandment of the Lord, nevertheless, it at least prepares the way for that teaching that is truly real in the best sense of the word, since it makes a man capable of self control, it molds his character, and predisposes him to accept the truth.

We can put it this way, Greek philosophy makes possible the preliminary cleansing of the soul and the necessary training to be able to receive faith: and on that base the truth builds the structure of knowledge.¹

These paragraphs, from Clement of Alexandria, a writer of the second century, are a good illustration of the confusion which can easily undercut true Christian growth on the mission field. The ways in which these errors show up today may be different, but the errors themselves remain and can have a subtle effect on our thinking.

The true basis for maturing the Christian on the mission field is the same as at home. Maturing the Christian is simply another name for growth in sanctification, and the means of producing that growth are essentially the same whether it occurs in a foreign mission field or at home.

All growth in sanctification is a result of the correct application of law and gospel to the Christian. Let's give that

statement a little more examination. First the mention of the word Christian. Only the Christian can become mature in the faith. In other words, Christian growth presupposes conversion. It is not difficult to recognize the error in the quotes above from Clement of Alexandria. He posits a type of spiritual growth through philosophy which actually prepares for conversion. The Scriptures deny that this is possible. The carnal mind is and remains at enmity with God until the law has crushed the mind and heart of the unbeliever. Only then does the Spirit, working through the gospel, create faith in the heart, so that where before there was only flesh, there now also exists a new creature, variously called spirit and the new man, in addition to the sinful flesh.

For growth to occur, it is necessary to continue preaching the law to the Christian. The continued existence of the flesh, which is not a whit better in the believer than in the unbeliever, makes this necessary. The Christian must always be conscious that he is not yet perfected, that he daily sins much, that due to his daily sins of weakness he continues to be as much in need of divine forgiveness as he was before his conversion, and that the call to the amendment of his sinful life remains valid until the day of his death. We need to beware of falling into an antinomian message. When we see the chains of legalism preached by so many churches in the area in which we work, we may wish to emphasize the gospel so much that the people no longer hear the message of the law. Since their sins are no longer pointed out to the people, they can become complacent with a substandard level of Christian living, or finally convert the gospel itself into nothing more than a license to sin, with the result that they finally lose the gospel too. So the clear and forceful preaching of the law continues to be necessary. Nevertheless, this is only a part of what is needed, and if this is considered the prime means of producing maturity in the believer on the mission field, it is doomed to failure. The law in itself is as incapable of moving to obedience and producing the Christian life in the believer as it is in the unconverted. Nevertheless, though the role of the preaching of the law is negative in that it produces

a sharpened consciousness of sin, without in any way being capable of truly correcting that sin, it is a necessary prerequisite for the proper application of the preaching of the gospel, the only true means of producing growth and maturity in the Christian.

Only the gospel is capable of producing real growth. True Christian growth is a result of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Every time the law undresses us by taking away our own righteousness, the Gospel covers us anew with the resplendent robe of Christ's own righteousness. As the Christian over and over again becomes aware of his own miserable and sinful condition, he rejoices all the more in the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ which is proclaimed to him in the gospel. His love for the Savior grows, and with it his desire to please the Lord and live according to his will. When this disposition, which is created by the gospel alone, grows and strengthens, then instruction in Christian living, the third use of the law, will aid the believer in growing in a more consistent Christian life.

What are some of the pitfalls in promoting the maturing of the Christian on the mission field? Perhaps one of the chief dangers is that of giving the new Christians predigested answers to the questions on Christian life that the national believers raise. Our tendency will be to respond to a situation presented by the national believer in terms of our home society and customs. We may or may not actually have apprehended the true issues involved in the new Christian's society, and the suggestions we make may be inappropriate in terms of his culture. Harold Cook, in his book *Missionary Life and Work*, cautions the foreign missionary who is asked for counseling: "Ask questions to clarify any points that are not altogether clear and to secure any additional information... He doesn't realize how little of the background you may know. So even though it takes time, ask enough questions to get a reasonably complete picture of the problem. Try to understand the person and his situation... We can try

to see the problem from his point of view, so as to help him work out a solution... What we might do in a similar situation might be of no help to him because he can't do it...*Point out the fundamental issues at stake...* The most important thing is not to tell him what to do but to get him to see what his action will mean. *Do not attempt to dictate a decision.* Try to get the person to the place of making his own choice. If there are two or more possible choices, state the advantages of each one, but leave the decision to him...Deciding is what builds character."²

We must beware of confusing superficial cultural changes with spiritual growth. Any time two cultures come into contact, there will be cultural change. People may see the evident prosperity of the North American missionary and begin to emulate certain aspects of his behavior in the hopes of improving their prosperity or social status or job prospects. Becoming more like us is not to be confused with growth in sanctification. It cannot even be confused with conversion. We caution against confusing reform with conversion in ministries carried on in our home culture; the same caution is necessary in our world mission fields. In fact, it may be more necessary, because we are likely to feel more comfortable with people who are more like us, and so overlook the need for the application of law and gospel also to such people.

Melvin Hodges points out the danger of simply imposing rules and confusing this with growth in Christian life. "It is vital that the converts themselves reach an understanding of the Christian life, based on the Scriptures, so that their faith is firmly grounded and they are able to 'give an answer to every man that asketh ... a reason of the hope ...' 1 Pet. 3:15. The standard of doctrine and conduct must be an expression of the converts' own concept of the Christian life as they find it in the Scriptures. It is not enough that it be the missionary's belief. This is a vital distinction. There is nothing to be gained by taking our ideas and forcing them on the converts, as much as to say, 'Here is our set of rules. If you are to be a member of our church, this is what you must do.' Instead, we must

come together and patiently sit with them, a day or a year, as the occasion requires, until we have reached an understanding. It is to be *their* church, so it must be *their* standard. They are to carry on after we are gone. If it is the missionary's standard, and not their own, they will do nothing about it when the missionary is not there to see that it is enforced, but if the truth of the Scriptures has gripped the mind of the convert, then he will feel: 'I must do this, not because the missionary says so, but because it is the teaching of God's Word.'"³

A very subtle error can affect our mission planning. We may choose fields because we think a certain type of people is more ripe for conversion. Since we are mostly middle class in our home culture, the thought is often expressed that we should work in the middle classes in a target country. The feeling behind this may be that people with middle class values are closer to our goal of establishing congregations that are self-supporting and vigorously self-governing than would be the case if we were to direct our efforts to the very poor. It is not difficult to see that this is only a modern version of Clement's idea that Greek philosophy was a preparation for conversion and the Christian life. Just substitute middle class values for Greek philosophy. Nor is it any more Biblical to ignore the middle and upper classes due to sociological studies that show greater numerical church growth among the poor. The truth is that all individuals in all the strata of society are inimical to the Gospel by nature and thus in need of the gospel if they are to be saved. No matter what the social class of the person, through the constant application of law and gospel, not just this or that aspect of outward conduct, but the whole value system and way of looking at life, he needs to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). It is this renewing of the mind which will then make it possible for rich or poor, upper, lower or middle class people, to "test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will."

But how does growth, this renewing of the mind and thus testing and approving what God's will is, occur in those who

have been converted? David Hesselgrave, in his book *Planting Churches Cross Culturally* has a chapter which he calls “The faith confirmed.” In it he breaks down the process into categories. While we will not agree with everything that he says, there is usefulness in his general categories: instruction, worship, service, witness, stewardship.

It should be obvious to us that continuing instruction is necessary if there is to be growth in the maturity of the Christian in the mission field. Disciples are made by baptizing and by teaching. The word of God must dwell in abundance in our people if they are to grow. This certainly includes growth in doctrinal knowledge. Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12 that the Christians present their bodies as living sacrifices, for example, is preceded by thorough instruction on sin, justification, the relationship of justification and sanctification and many other matters. But, as Paul leads the Roman Christians to do, the believers in the mission fields of today also need to be led to reflect on how this change in their relationship with God will also change their relationship with each other, with their material possessions, with their families, with the unbelieving society that surrounds them. This can occur only when there is continued study in the Scriptures in a format which invites reflection on the practical application of the doctrinal truths which are presented. In the Latin American fields there is a beginning toward producing materials which are structured to promote this kind of reflection in the form of an adaptation of the new Christ-Light curriculum from Northwestern Publishing House.

The church is to seek to reach out into the world and convert the unbelievers, but cannot neglect the active and continued instruction of those who have already been won, whether they be adult converts from the world, people who have joined our fellowship after some acquaintance with the Gospel in another church, or our baptized children who grow up in the congregation. While a congregation may appear to

grow numerically for a time while the growth and maturity of those who are already members is neglected, such growth will be largely an illusion. On furlough this year I saw an imposing oak tree, lying on the ground, the trunk broken, revealing that behind the imposing exterior, the inside had been dying and rotting, so that it was unable to resist the winds of the severe storm of June 27th. Our mission congregations will also be subject to being uprooted and carried about by every wind of doctrine if they are not thoroughly and continually instructed in the word of God.

Hesselgrave mentions a distinction in the levels of learning made by Edward T. Hall, the anthropologist: “the formal level (mistake correction); the informal level (imitation of models); and the technical level (from a teacher). One of Hall’s major contentions is that a far greater proportion of learning than we may suppose takes place at the informal level. One of the implications of this is that much more attention needs to be given to the modeling of Biblical truth. Unless truth is exemplified and modeled in terms of changed behavior, its mere recitation probably is not nearly as effective as we ordinarily suppose. This is especially the case in the pioneer situation”⁴

A conclusion from this which Hesselgrave does not draw, but which appears to me to be valid, is that strengthening the parents will go a long way toward strengthening the next generation. Not all instruction is formal, and the example in a Christian home will go a long way toward producing mature Christian congregations.

Hesselgrave’s second area is worship. According to him, there are three erroneous assumptions concerning worship in missionary situations. “The first assumption is that if people come to faith in God through Christ they will naturally know how God desires to be worshipped. This is true only in part, if at all. Instruction is needed. The second assumption is that the worship which is part of the missionary-evangelist’s tradition is biblical worship. The likelihood is that genuine biblical worship would entail much more participation, spontaneity, and feeling. The third assumption is that all aspects of indigenous worship are inherently wrong. Not nec-

essarily so. Silent prayer, drums and other native instruments, and certain forms of drama and dance may be used to make worship more biblical and meaningful. In short, neither Western nor indigenous forms of worship should be introduced or discarded uncritically.”⁵

While the first point is well taken, a few comments are necessary regarding the second and third. Our Lutheran understanding that it is not necessary for the unity of the church that rites and ceremonies be the same in every place, but rather that the condition for unity is the pure doctrine of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments should give us an adequate theoretical basis for instruction and modeling in worship. All of our present ELS mission fields are conducted in areas where a highly developed liturgical tradition exists. We can ignore that and try to impose a more American Evangelical informality only with risk of great loss for the developing churches. We do far better to follow the example of Luther and use the forms that are available but make the Gospel central, so that the whole service truly becomes a matter of God serving us with Word and Sacrament, producing in us the response of worship and praise. We do not need to reproduce the Lutheran Hymnal or the Hymnary, but the basics of the liturgy that has served the church well for centuries are not lightly to be discarded. We will also wish to adapt to native forms where possible, but always with great care so that the true doctrine that is proclaimed in the sermon is not undermined by false doctrine in hymns chosen only for their attractive melody, while the poor or false doctrinal content is overlooked.

The worship service is essential for producing growth and maturity in the Christian in the mission field. For some it is the only means of continued instruction in the Word. It is in the worship service that the sacrament is administered to “strengthen and keep in the true faith unto life everlasting.” While our usual terminology for Word and Sacrament is

“means of grace,” they are also, as the Lutheran pietist writer Starck so often expresses it in his *Prayerbook*, “means of sanctification.” Through the use of law and gospel preaching, good application, confession and absolution and participation in the body and blood of our Lord, the Holy Spirit touches and changes hearts, and thus produces true spiritual growth and maturation. Moving to a subjective, touchy-feely type of “worship service” would be to downgrade the means which God has actually given to produce growth and maturity in the Christian.

Hesselgrave’s third category is service. He states: “When we come to a localized ministry such as planting a new church, the matter of service ministries both within and without the church is often disregarded or unduly delayed. *As soon as men and women are converted*, the matter of their service within and without the church should be considered. As George Peters writes, ‘Service is not only for the perfect, it is a means of perfecting the saints.’ The fact that service has often been neglected should not be allowed to set the precedent. Scripture is our guide. Even the emerging church should constitute itself as a caring community. Every believer should have something to do for Christ.”⁶

Our instruction should lead to the members of our mission congregations being filled with gratitude and a desire to serve their Lord. But there is a dangerous obstacle that can stand in the way of the people taking an active part in serving. Because they are new, or because they may approach the solution to a problem in a different way than we would, as missionaries we may monopolize many of the areas of service which the new national Christians could actually handle. Things may take longer to get done, or mistakes may be made. Nevertheless, it is generally an error for missionaries, or national pastors for that matter, to hang on to responsibilities and services that the national believers are capable of handling. How will they grow, if they are never given the oppor-

tunity and responsibility of caring for their place of worship, visiting the sick and aged to comfort and strengthen them, serving on a church board, deciding how to distribute scarce resources for social help, etc.?

Robert Kolb reminds us that a correct understanding of the blessings which we have in the gospel is fundamental for a correct attitude toward Christian service. “As the disciples of Jesus go forth into His world, their attitudes, and thus their actions, are shaped by their confidence that Jesus has exchanged their unrighteousness for His righteousness. Confident that they may relax in the presence of their Father, they need not be tense about whether they are using people around them to ingratiate themselves with their Father. They can concentrate on the needs of the neighbor because God has concentrated His love on them. If we believe that our identity and our security will be affected by the way we treat the neighbor, we will always regard our neighbor with one eye looking at God and the other at ourselves. Only when faith rests secure in Jesus’ hand can we truly function as God designed us to function, as the image of God which pours out its love, care, and concern on the fellow human creature without any regard for self at all.”⁷

Though there are many opportunities for Christian service within the congregation, there are many more outside of it. It is a mistake to think that a person who does not have specific services and duties in the congregation is for that reason necessarily unoccupied with Christian service. Everything that is done for another out of love for Christ, though it be only giving a glass of cold water to a thirsty child, is Christian service. How Luther stressed that the mother changing her child’s diaper in a spirit of thanksgiving to God is serving Christ as truly as the pastor who preaches in the congregation! As we seek to promote the growth of the Christian on our world mission fields, it will be helpful if we remind our members of the dignity of all honest work; that faithful ser-

vice in their vocation, whatever it may be, is service to Christ through their neighbor who is benefited by their work and the faithful carrying out of their responsibilities in the family, in the workplace, in the organizations of which they are members, and even in government if they have a place of responsibility there. A member who serves faithfully in his job may not bring publicity to the congregation as a church project may, but it is no less a result of growth and maturity in the Christian believer, and no less genuine Christian service.

Hesselgrave continues with the category “faith and witness.” In the book of Acts we read that when the persecution that led to Stephen’s death occurred, the apostles remained behind in Jerusalem, while “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” Hesselgrave reminds us: “And it should be remembered that those believers were still young in the faith.”⁸

At the very beginning of a mission, the first converts usually are very enthusiastic about bringing the message they have just found to their friends, neighbors and family. That initial enthusiasm, however, can easily become dampened when the response they meet is more negative than positive. Positive modeling of evangelism, and support and training in sharing the good news are necessary to keep a goodly percentage of the congregation active in sharing the good news and preventing the congregation from stagnating. “While there were distinctions in the early church which were analogous to the distinction we make between the clergy and the laity today, the difference was not that the ‘clergy’ did the witnessing and evangelizing while the ‘laity’ simply supported them in such endeavors. Rather, there was a spontaneous witness on the part of the believers that was little short of earthshaking in the Mediterranean world. In the manner of Christ, who instituted the ‘master plan of evangelism,’ the leaders of the early church both served as models and pre-

pared the believers for these tasks (I Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:11, 12). Had the witness of the early church been confined to that of the apostles and evangelists, the picture of growth of that church would have been very different from that which we see in the New Testament.”⁹

Finally, Hesselgrave presents the matter of training in stewardship, particularly of material possessions. He states: “There are some pronounced tendencies in many church planting situations which betray the fact that missionary- evangelists do not give enough attention to basic biblical and psychological principles as they relate to stewardship.”

He goes on to say: “There is a tendency to postpone instruction concerning stewardship of money and material goods. This is perhaps more pronounced in the Third World, but it is not confined to the Third World. There are various reasons for this tendency. One reason is that salvation is a free gift of God (though it cost heaven’s best) and we want people to understand that they cannot buy it or merit it. Another reason is that religion in the East, and increasingly in the West, is associated with begging and money-making; and we want people to understand that we are not charity seekers or charlatans.

“Of course, we do not err when we do not seek money for God’s work from people who do not know God. But we do err when instruction in Christian stewardship is not given to those who do know God and when we do not encourage them to give proportionally, generously, and gladly.”¹⁰

Certainly we must avoid legalism, such as fixing a quota as a requirement for membership, or demanding a tithe, since these are not required in Scripture, and anything forced retards rather than promotes true growth in Christian maturity. But God’s will must be clearly taught, and the people led to reflect on what that will means for them as grateful Christians in their particular circumstances. It does not help the long-term health of the church if the missionaries take the

attitude that the people are too poor to have the needs of Christ’s church presented to them, and so never teach and never challenge to a life of stewardship. The Macedonians were poor, too, but “out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.” (2 Cor. 8:2-4). Once more, a quote from Hesselgrave: “All believers should be provided with information and materials designed to encourage them to exercise generous stewardship on a regular basis.”¹¹

At the same time as we encourage growth in stewardship among the national Christians, we must remember that stewardship of material possessions does not necessarily mean only monetary contributions. Particularly in rural areas, people do not always live in a money economy. A pastor could be helped by contributions of produce, meat, and other agricultural products. Where there are scarce material resources, people can contribute time and know-how in the construction of chapels and furnishings. J. P. Koehler describes just such a situation in the early days of the Wisconsin Synod. In fact, he says that the pastors suffered more when people began to be integrated into a money economy, because people were less inclined to share their money than their livestock and produce.

Nor should we discourage the contribution of time and energy in special fund raising activities that conform to local patterns of support for special needs, particularly for social needs such as emergency medical help, etc., even when such activities may also invite the participation in the activity of those who are not members of the congregation. An example would be the *polladas*, chicken meals with a price per plate, to raise funds for special needs in Peru. While there is danger of such activities replacing growth in systematic giving, for many people who have few material resources the time and

energy they can expend in these activities can be a genuine response of love for the Lord and their neighbor.

An article in the magazine *Missiology* reveals the importance of stewardship training from the beginning. I shall quote several paragraphs from an article on stewardship in the churches of Africa.

In the African churches, is there a consciousness of stewardship having some priority for Christians? When I posed this question in group meetings, the answer was almost unanimously “yes.” Christians felt that Christian families would use their funds in ways which differed from others (non-Christians), and that part of this difference would lie in the fact that Christian families gave some money to their church and its work. Most Christians in Africa do, in fact, make some little contribution through offerings at public worship. Some bring produce: corn, manioc, yams, etc. Most bring small sums of money. Among elite groups, often educated by the churches’ schools, there is often a tendency to continue to give just the small token gift given in days of poverty or of school days, a symbolic gesture more than a regular or proportional gift.

Present practices of stewardship in the African churches vary a good bit, according to past teachings or present pressures. In some areas, the Church was built with solid instruction and encouragement toward giving and eventual self-support. Though inflation may have hurt, these areas are often well along in supporting at least the work of their own church, unless

there is a lack of confidence in those who handle the church’s funds.

Some younger churches, “orphaned” in World War I or II, had to face very early the issues involved in stewardship and autonomy. In some sense, these were privileged to “root hog or die.” Some of these same churches, however, are now dependent in part on project gifts and support from European churches and/or governments.

In some areas, early Christian teaching in an area tended to minimize (or even scorn) any considerations of given, regular offerings or regular salaries for African full-time church workers. I have heard Africans in certain geographic regions say this so frequently that there must be some solid basis for such neglect. Only in recent years have these infant churches begun to be forced to examine their own Christian role and responsibility for self-support, and indeed for works of mercy elsewhere.

Some churches have been planted and sustained on a totally paternalistic basis. All planning, most personnel and the vast majority of funds have come either from church headquarters or from government funds or both. An illustration is the Roman Catholic work in Zaire. In 1966, I was talking with a professor of Practical Theology from the theological faculty at Lovanium University, and asked when the Roman Catholic church in Zaire (then Congo) would begin teaching stewardship training and

eventual self-support. He smiled and said, “In about fifty years or so perhaps.” Bearing out his statement was the fact that when the Roman Catholics of Kinshasha (then claimed to number over 800,000) were urged to give toward a special charitable offering, they gave a creditable 850,000 francs in all (then about US \$1,700). I did not tell my friend that I had seen that much raised in one Protestant church at Christmas in one offering, in a poorer region.¹²

These excerpts raise a number of questions. Are we harming, rather than helping, our brothers and sisters in their personal growth by making it too easy to have all needs supplied from foreign sources? Do we give the impression that the mite which many nationals can give is so insignificant as not to be worthwhile, since there is foreign money available anyway? Or, would a too rigid refusal to share our bounty rather unnecessarily delay the Gospel reaching many people? Hard questions, indeed, and finding the proper balance will not be easy. But one thing is sure. If there is a lack of instruction in Biblical stewardship on the supposition that the people we are working with are too poor to be stewards, and there is a lack of significant opportunities to demonstrate personally their gratitude for salvation in responding to the needs of their neighbor through the church, the new believers will be stunted in their maturation and the whole church will suffer.

Finally, a few cautions on the danger of short-circuiting true Christian growth and maturation by confusing sanctification with the adoption of U.S. middle class values. There is an interesting article in the April 1990 issue of *Missiology* magazine with the title: “A Model for Understanding Cross-Cultural Morality.” The author of the article outlines five steps to “aid in the process of adopting cross-cultural biblical and

developmental perspectives in relation to the moral behaviors of those in alien cultures.” The five steps are: 1. Discover ways the moral behavior of the alien culture contrasts with American Christian standards. 2. Explore cultural rationale for behavior. 3. Relate rationale to Biblico/ethical principles. 4. Connect behavior with a particular level of moral development. 5. Formulate Biblico/cultural and moral developmental perspective on the behavior.

Regarding stage 1, the discovery of contrasting moral behaviors, he uses several examples. One is that “in ancient Israel, one could pick and eat fruit or grain while passing through another man’s orchard, but it would be considered theft in the United States.” Another example: “In America it is common for siblings to leave the care of their parents to the state, but those in New Guinea consider this a serious sin.” Despite his emphasis on Biblical principles, the author’s seeming approval of polygamy when it is a cultural pattern contradicts a principle of marriage enunciated by our Savior Himself in the New Testament.

In determining moral interpretations cross-culturally, Kenneth Pike suggested that a missionary should study the “ethical reactions” of a people. In this light, Dye mentions certain questions a missionary should systematically ask: “When and why do people feel offended, unfairly treated or exploited? What makes them seek revenge? What do they consider fair? What sort of offenses do they think cause illness or crop failure? What are their cultural taboos?”¹³

Regarding number 2, exploration of cultural rationale, he mentions a case of a Thai couple, the birth of whose first child was too soon if reckoned from the date of the official wedding. “The missionaries condemned the couple and humiliated them. But had the missionaries bothered to investigate, they would have discovered that in the Thai culture, betrothal is considered as binding as marriage and that sexual relations during that time are not considered improper.” Similar problems face the missionaries and national pastors in evaluating the complex attitudes to marriage and the place of

the civil wedding ceremony and church wedding in Peru.

Mr. Fortosis gives this advice: “In building a cultural understanding of sin, the missionaries should begin as learners in order to discover what behaviors already prompt guilt or shame among the nationals. Second, they must identify moral behaviors which are not, as yet, points of conviction, though in conflict with biblical principles. Third, they must recognize honestly the moral aspects of the culture which are motivationally compatible with the Christian faith, though possibly quite offensive to the missionary. What could appear, on the surface, as a blatantly immoral act may actually be proven perfectly legitimate when the cultural background and motivation are revealed.”¹⁴

A particularly revealing look at the way in which the same correct principle may be applied differently in different cultures is mentioned in connection with the third stage: relating rationale to Biblical principles. Levi Keidel (1971) served as a missionary in the Congo for 12 years. In his book *Stop Treating Me Like God!* He describes the moral difficulty he had in coming to terms with the Congolese mode of dress. At a village worship service, Congolese men and women danced naked to the waist. To Keidel, this practice seemed immodest and seductive – surely anything but worshipful. It was not until Keidel heard the Congolese brand the uncovered legs of an American woman as “the nakedness of shame” that he began to realize that even sexual immodesty is not viewed identically in every culture.

“Though the Bible warns against sexual immodesty (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:2-3) it does not define specifically what constitutes immodesty. Surely immodesty would involve whatever is considered seductive or improper within a given culture. If the uncovered breasts do not pose a sexual temptation in the Congolese culture, can we legitimately demand that the women adopt the Western mode of dress?”¹⁵

I will not take the time in this paper to include his long

discussion of the application of a certain theory of moral development, his fourth stage. Regarding the fifth stage, formulation of Biblico/cultural and moral developmental perspective, however, he states: “The final step in the model involves combining the implications of the biblical principles related to the behavior with the implications of the stage of moral development which the behavior reflects. Thus the missionary has studied three basic areas in gaining a final perspective on a cross-cultural moral behavior. These include cultural rationale, biblical principle, and moral development. Each area constitutes an important part of the learning.”¹⁶

Fortosis uses as an example the situation with a Masai boy who has broken a window. The headmaster of the school calls him in and carries on a rather indirect conversation. “Hello, Ndangoya, how are you? — Fine. — How are you doing in your studies? — Better. I’m getting much better marks in arithmetic. — Good. How is your health? — Not bad. The food here is good. I’m getting big and strong. I can now kick a football fifty yards. I kicked it through a window.” Because of the high value the Masai culture places on words to maintain social relationships, the author states that the most probable result of a direct confrontation and accusation would have been a denial, “not because he intends to lie but because he is trying, with his own words, to repair the social damage the headmaster is doing with his.” Why? “His culture has taught him that confession of wrongdoing is done by his own initiative in a planned but non-confrontive atmosphere. If the Masai is approached in a sensitive manner, he can admit his fault and still preserve a dignified relationship with the wronged party ... There is a desire to tell the truth, but the desire may be severely frustrated by what is considered a rude or totally humiliating confrontation.”¹⁷ This reminds me of something that Dr. Bill Kessel referred to on one occasion. Some WELS Apache missionaries committed a cultural *faux pas* by scolding fathers for not disciplining their children when they were unruly in the worship service. What they didn’t know was that in Apache culture the person who carried out that function was, I believe,

the mother's oldest brother. Not only was the object of better behavior on the part of the children not achieved, there was resentment over the violation of a cultural norm.

A more fortunate but accidental result in the Apache mission occurred when I was a vicar in Canyon Day. Despite constant admonition to children and their parents about the importance of the children attending Sunday School, attendance was a constant 5 or 6. Nothing seemed to help. Until we decided to have Sunday School on Monday night. Suddenly attendance shot up to over 40, and averaged 25 after that. It wasn't until that same conversation with Dr. Kessel that I found out why. According to Apache custom religious matters were discussed on winter evenings. The Monday night time slot was culturally more appropriate than our traditional Sunday morning time. Once the opportunity to have the children learn God's word was presented to them in a way that was a little less "foreign," parents were glad to have the children attend, and the children themselves were enthusiastic. Insisting on doing it the way we have always done it, when there is a culturally more appropriate way to achieve the same goal, puts an unnecessary obstacle in the way of growth in sanctification for the national Christians. Our goal must be national Christians expressing their faith in Christ in Christian living, not northamericanization.

Though this paper, particularly in the last section, has tried to point out a few potential pitfalls on the way to producing a mature Christian believer on the mission field, and has appealed for cultural sensitivity in seeking to reach the goal of having mature Christian believers in our various world mission fields, I wish to reiterate what I stated at the beginning of the paper. We need law and gospel preaching. We need national leaders thoroughly trained in the proper distinction and application of law and gospel. We need educational opportunities for those who have been won which not only present Biblical facts, but through them confront the learners with the condemnation of God's law and the comfort of the gospel, as well as guide such comforted sinners in appropriate ways to express their gratitude to God for the salvation they have

in Christ in their concrete cultural and personal situation. Law and gospel, that fundamental message, is what we really need to produce mature Christians from those who were once non-Christians. It is only by the proper use of law and gospel that the church will grow, in numbers and in maturity, or it will not grow at all. True, the outward organization may grow, but the true church of Christ, and the believers who make it up, will be stunted, and may wither and die. Let us not tire of seeking true sanctification, and take no shortcuts through an ineffective, though sometimes outwardly impressive, legalism.

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Endnotes

- ¹Clement of Alexandria, in *Los Padres de la Iglesia*, p. 210-211. Translation mine.
- ²Donald Cook, *Missionary Life and Work*, p. 339-340.
- ³Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, p. 27-28.
- ⁴David Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, p. 309.
- ⁵*Ibid.*, p. 217-318.
- ⁶Hesselgrave, p. 328
- ⁷Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, p. 193.
- ⁸Hesselgrave, p. 330.
- ⁹*Ibid.*, p. 330-331.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 340. Hesselgrave gives an example of two churches from Asia. "One was founded some twenty-five years ago by a dear missionary lady who appealed for support from the homeland but did no more than pass the collection plate in her congregation of nationals. The other was started somewhat later by a missionary and a national pastor working as a team. In this church, as soon as people became believers, they were instructed concerning stewardship and challenged to give so God's work might prosper. Several years ago leaders of both churches were interviewed. Both congregations included some prominent and well-to-do people within their membership. But the first congregation had about thirty members and an average Sunday offering of about ten to twenty dollars. It was still without a pastor because the members 'could not afford' to

hire one. The second congregation numbered almost two hundred members and had an average offering of fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars. And in addition, it was starting two daughter churches!” p.340-341.

¹²John Crawford, “Stewardship in Younger Churches: Observations and Caveats from an African Perspective”. *Missiology*, Volume 9 Number 3, July, 1981. p.300-302.

¹³Steve Fortosis, “A Model for Understanding Cross-Cultural Morality.” *Missiology*, Volume 18 Number 2, April, 1990. p.165.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 168.

¹⁷*Ibid.* p. 169.

Book Review: Which Way, Lord?

by Norman A. Madson

Ernst H. Wendland, *Which Way, Lord?* Milwaukee: Kremer Publications. 88 pages.

Order from our Bethany College Bookstore at 1-800-944-1722. Price: \$9.69

Prof. Wendland is a retired WELS pastor and professor. He served for many years on the foreign mission field in Africa, and also on the faculty of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at Mequon, Wisconsin. He has written several books on missiology and Bible study courses. He has a beautiful command of the English language, and a style of writing that keeps the reader interested throughout.

His latest little work — *Which Way, Lord?* — is an autobiography, telling how the Lord directed him into his life’s calling, the pastoral and teaching ministry. He zeroes in on the year of his life that was the most influential, and that was the year from September, 1938 to August, 1939. It was the year that he spent in Germany following his graduation from Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin. It was also the memorable year of Hitler’s rise to power, and the prelude to World War II. Early in his book, Prof. Wendland contrasts the cross in Luther’s famous symbol and the cross in Hitler’s swastika:

Two symbols, two men of German history,
each using a cross as a symbol, with similar
colors, each symbol representing an entirely

different kind of kingdom, one the state, the other the church. This book contains the story of a time when the two symbols and their followers came into serious conflict and how this affected the lives of many people, including my own.

After his graduation from college, because of a restlessness which he claims has dogged his entire life of some 80+ years, he decided to spend a year abroad in Germany, where he might carefully think through the matter of committing himself to a life of unselfish service to the Lord. He spent the year at the Saxon Free Church Seminary, which was located in a suburb of Berlin.

In a delightful narrative he relates the many, many interesting things that he experienced in that twelve month period. There was the storm at sea on his trip to Europe; his life and work at the seminary, and adjustment to the ways and attitudes of his German classmates; seeing Hitler in person and listening to one of his spell-binding speeches; shaking hands with some of Hitler's famous cohorts (he does not treasure those handshakes today!); witnessing the aftermath of the famous KRISTALLNACHT, the night when Hitler's soldiers pillaged hundreds of Jewish synagogues, homes and shops in Berlin; his visit to Wittenberg and all of the famous places in Lutherland; a bicycle tour of Germany during spring break at the Seminary; and finally his return to America in August of 1939.

After this action-packed year in Germany, he was good and ready to return to his homeland of America. And he would return with a mind made up to pursue the calling in life which is the most noble calling of all — serving His Lord and Master full time in the ministry of the Word. Prof. Wendland sums it all up in these words:

For me the year under the swastika was over.

A year under the guidance of the cross was to come. I had decided without any questions or reservations at all to continue my theological training at our Lutheran Seminary in Thiensville. Somehow, after experiencing the egotistical, destructive, anti-Christian strivings of man, as symbolized by the swastika in Germany, the “gentle whisper” of the cross seemed so much more appealing. It also needed to be told!

We highly recommend this little volume to you. You will not be disappointed in the brief amount of time spent reading its 80+ pages.

Book Review: His Word Our Delight

by Prof. John A. Moldstad, Jr.

John A. Braun, editor, *His Word Our Delight* Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998. 247 pages.

Order from our Bethany Lutheran College Bookstore at 1-800-944-1722. Price: \$10.99

Another devotional — this one primarily for called church workers — has come off the press from Northwestern Publishing House. This book of sermonettes consists of a collection of chapel talks given by members of the 1994-95 Northwestern College faculty. Besides providing comfort and strength for those who are preparing for, or are presently engaged in, the work of preaching and teaching the Word of God, the addresses will also be treasured by those who formerly attended morning chapel at Northwestern over the years. (This reviewer is among them.) As most of our readers may be aware, the last year of Northwestern College's existence was the 1994-95 school year. At the present time Martin Luther College in New Ulm serves as the Wisconsin Synod training school for both the pastor and teacher tracks.

Are you as a pastor or teacher looking for a good devotional for your own private meditations each day? We would recommend that you order *His Word Our Delight*. Beginning with an excellent series on the doctrine of election, examples of other subjects covered under their fitting texts are: the purpose of the church, evangelism, the power of the Word for sanctified living, Luther's favorite psalms, great hymns of faith and Old Testament names and titles of God. To whet

your interest we offer the following extended quote from "The Sanctifying Word in Colossians" by Prof. Joel Fredrich. The text is Colossians 3:1-4.

...Do it yourself methods of being good are nothing other than an attempt to overcome your sinful will by an exercise of your sinful will. It's as hopeless as trying to lift yourself off the floor by pulling up on your own shoelaces. The gravity of sin will defeat you every time.

But Christ our Lord is unaffected by that gravity. He has a secure place in heaven, anchored in the holy will of God, and from that position of strength he reaches down to you with his gospel skyhook. When you grasp that skyhook, it is possible for you to defy gravity too. For when you take the ascended Christ seriously as the God-given answer to your helplessness in the face of sin, amazing things happen to you. His will begins to take shape in your mind as the God-pleasing alternative to sin. His promises assure you that his power is there, enabling you to put that alternative into practice. His love is there to convince you that it really will be better and more blessed for you to do as he wishes rather than as your flesh desires. Put it all together, and you have the exuberance of faith that moved Paul to say, "I can do all things through him who gives me strength." (p. 114)

Speaking especially to those who are called publicly to serve with the Word, *His Word Our Delight* is a book de-

signed to (as stated on the back cover) “remind the reader that the servant’s work is joyful.” If you would like such a reminder in the middle of trying times and the hectic pace of the day by day ministerial duties, why not delve each morning into *His Word Our Delight*?

Book Review: Where in the World is God?

By Steven P. Petersen

Harold L. Senkbeil, *Where in the World is God?* Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999. 148 pp.

Order from our Bethany College Bookstore at 1-800-944-1722. Price: \$9.99

The Psalmist lamented, “My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” (42:10) Harold L. Senkbeil responds to that discouraging sentiment, current even today among the people of God, in a collection of seventy meditations entitled *Where in the World is God?* The purpose of these brief devotions, distilled from Sunday sermons, is to provide help “to Christians searching for hope and healing in the rubble of their lives.” (Introduction) Senkbeil succeeds in the endeavor, chiefly for three reasons.

First, he consistently directs his reader to Law and Gospel. For the troubled Christian, no landmarks are more profitably read than these two clear words from God. The Law defines the nature and source of the Christian’s trouble while the Gospel provides comfort in Christ. Senkbeil is generous with the Gospel, directing the reader to both the active and the passive obedience of Christ in our place as the truest source of relief.

God loves the truth. That’s why he always
begins with the law and ends with the gospel.
First the truth about who we are and what we

have done, then the truth about who he is and what he has done. First his judgment, then his grace. First the demolition, then the reconstruction. First his wrath against our sin, then his love by which he creates us all over again in the righteousness and true holiness in his holy Son, Jesus Christ.(p. 99)

Secondly, these devotions, each about as long as this review, turn the troubled Christian to Word and Sacrament as the touch point of the Savior in the sinner's life. How could we find any blessing if God had not granted the Means of Grace through which He daily deals with His world?

Today the Lord Jesus goes on being the servant of all, serving us through the means of his grace. Here is our heavenly waiter, dishing up heaping helpings of the rich abundance of an eternal banquet that begins here and now in his church. Our servant Jesus serves up life out of death — life in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting through faith. He remains the servant of all in his holy church. Behind every sermon preached in his name, behind every Baptism done in his name, behind every Supper eaten in his name stands Jesus himself, dispensing his very life in our world of death. (p. 21)

Thirdly, Pastor Senkbeil succeeds in providing comfort because he uses down-to-earth language to apply Scriptural truth to modern life. Sometimes he writes in “catechism” language we all can understand. Sometimes he crafts entire paragraphs, sentence after sentence, from familiar Bible verses

we all can recognize. Wisely he avoids complicated illustrations which can overpower brief meditations; instead he relies on engaging language to draw the reader along from the opening Scripture through the devotion to an appropriate closing prayer. One seeking comfort during affliction would be thus led by this kind of language:

The path of suffering for the Christian leads ultimately to glory; that's the encouragement. But it is not our cross-bearing that earns us a crown, and therein lies the comfort. For one day at Calvary all hell broke loose. All the ugly power of sin, death and the devil was unleashed on God's own sinless Son. All the weight and burden of our guilt was heaped on him. God himself was given over into death so that he might give us his own life to live. First the cross, then the crown. And there is a crown for everyone who trusts in him; that's what lies ahead for all Christ's own. But not yet. None of us knows what life may bring. But we do know what Christ will bring. 'Be faithful, even to the point of death,' he says, 'and I will give you the crown of life' (Revelation 2:10). (p. 32)

Readers (perhaps pastors especially) will find helpful the “Index to Scripture References” and the “Topical Reference by Chapter.” All who face the challenge of living day to day, asking, “Where in the World is God?” will discover encouragement and comfort exactly where He has promised to be found: in His Holy Word and Life-giving Sacraments.