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The Church’s Theological Practice of Liturgy: Clarifying Hermeneutical Boundaries

James A. Waddell

I. Introduction

We live in a time filled with challenges and exciting possibilities for our conversation about theology and practice in the church. In our theology we make the distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary authorities for norming the church’s faith and life. Scripture is the primary authority. The Lutheran Confessions are the secondary authority. What constitutes the tertiary authorities (history and tradition) is where much of the theological discussion in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod needs to be developed. We do not always agree on the tertiary authorities (i.e., the extent to which they should be allowed to norm the church’s practice). We must be candid also about admitting that we do not always agree on our readings of the primary and secondary authorities.

The recent publication of the newly translated Book of Concord (2000) brings with it both opportunity and challenge. The opportunity we have is once again to open the discussion about norming authorities. The challenge is to understand and respect each other when we disagree on the tertiary level. The challenge also is to remain open to the argument and persuasion of others, especially when that argument and persuasion are based on the hard data of texts read in their contexts, and not the uncritical, unexamined, and often-times proof-texted assumptions which drive so much of the discourse today.

It is vital to the health of our church to make a distinction between critical and uncritical assumptions. Some years ago, former president John

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*This is a modified version of a paper delivered at the Fourteenth Annual Theological Symposium at Concordia Seminary, September 23, 2003, the theme of which was “Identifying Authorities: The Limits of Theological Diversity and Confessional Unity.” Some of the modifications include the author’s response to articles published since the 2003 Symposium. It also contains a significant abridgment of more detailed analyses from three chapters of a soon-to-be published book by the same author, The Struggle to Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church: Adiaphora in Historical, Theological and Practical Perspective (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2006).

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F. Johnson called for a constructive confessional theology, one which is faithful to our confession and at the same time able to be forward-looking in its formulation and articulation.\(^2\) James Voelz, in a two-part Theological Observer in the *Concordia Journal*, clearly stated the problem of being a confessional and historically liturgical church in a postmodern, libertine culture.\(^3\) In this brief study Voelz challenges us to be rigorously self-reflective as we seek to solve the problems of our denomination. In a more recent Theological Observer, Charles Arand, Andrew Bartelt, Paul Raabe, and James Voelz reiterated this basic need for all of us to be rigorously self-reflective: “...we intend to encourage self-reflection among our readers and open discussion at both official and unofficial levels. Most important is that those who might disagree with one another, or see things differently, actually engage each other. Only through open, honest, and self-critical assessment can our Synod walk together in doctrine and practice, meet the difficult challenges of the twenty-first century, and move forward in Christ’s mission.”\(^4\)

To wield our assumptions uncritically is to make ourselves to be our own norming authority; it is to place ourselves above what has been given by Christ in Scripture and the Confessions. On the other hand, to be critical about our assumptions is to allow ourselves, in our thinking and our practice, to be shaped by Scripture and the Confessions. These primary and secondary authorities are normative for defining and giving form to all the various elements of what it means to be the church.

II. An Evangelical Catholic (Lutheran) Hermeneutic of Confession

In every generation the church struggles to articulate its identity in language that is accessible to the people in the pews. The new translation of the Book of Concord presents itself as an opportunity for us to clarify and reiterate our hermeneutic of confession in the present cultural context. While the essence of confession remains the same through time, the ongoing challenge is to apply our confession in constantly changing historical circumstances; this challenge requires us to reformulate in a thoughtful way how we articulate our confession to the world in both traditional and contemporary formulations. This point has its most tangible application, to the people in the pews and to the world, in the church’s liturgical expression of her confession. Consequently, as we clarify our


hermeneutic of confession, we will also have solid grounds for clarifying our hermeneutic of liturgy.

II. A. The Material Principle

In our hermeneutic of confession we must be able to articulate the material principle of our faith. The material principle of evangelical catholicity is the subject matter of the church’s conversation. It is the substance of the Gospel, justification by grace alone through faith alone for Christ’s sake. It is the presence of Jesus Christ as the crucified and living Word of God among His people delivering the forgiveness of sin in the divine service through the church’s pure proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of the divinely instituted Sacraments (AC VII).

Here Christ’s righteousness is given in exchange for our unrighteousness. His life was given as a ransom for our lives; in this way God has been reconciled to us, and we are made coheirs of eternal life with Christ in heaven. This Gospel as the material principle is the normissima normans of our hermeneutic of confession. It is the ultimate norming norm, because it is itself not normed by anything. The material principle is absolutely non-negotiable. It norms and informs the formal principle.

II. B. The Formal Principle

The formal principle is likewise absolutely non-negotiable. It gives form to the Gospel. The formal principle is the church’s only source and norm of doctrine; that is to say, Scripture alone is the norma normans or the norming norm. There is no other formal principle for evangelical catholicity. As the inspired and infallible Word of God, the formal principle contains and bears witness to the material principle. The Gospel as the material principle can not be known without canonical Scripture as the formal principle, since the Gospel is a particular knowledge of God revealed in the inspired and infallible Word. In our Lutheran tradition we know the formal principle to be God’s Word as Law and God’s Word as Gospel. This is the church’s “primary” norming authority.

Historically, differences over specific doctrines have arisen out of different hermeneutical approaches to reading Scripture. To have differences over specific doctrines is to be at odds over the essence of the church.

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In “What Does Luther Have to Say to Us on the Inerrancy of the Holy Scripture? (1950) Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 16,” Scripture and the Church: Selected Essays of Hermann Sasse, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series, Number 2, eds. Jeffrey J. Kloha and Ronald R. Feuerhahn (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 143, Hermann Sasse wrote: “There exists, therefore, a norm above the norma normans of Scripture, and only that person is able to understand the Scripture as ‘the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged,’ who understands the Judge above the judge, the Dominus Scripturae, who at the same time...is the content of Holy Scripture.”
Consequently, the creeds were crafted as hermeneutical keys which unlock the meaning of Scripture and which outline the essence of the church as that community in which the Scriptures are rightly interpreted. This necessitates the formulation of the confessional witness, by which the church confesses the truth and freedom of the Gospel, to preserve and articulate its orthodox identity when it experiences persecution and false doctrine.6

II. C. The Confessional Witness

As theological disputes over specific doctrines force the church to clarify its confession, the confessional witness is forged. The confessional witness consists of the three ecumenical creeds and the 1580 Book of Concord. The confessional witness is in catholic continuity with the historic Christian church.7 These writings are held to be an accurate exposition of Scripture. It is for this reason that the confessional witness is itself normative of the church’s faith and life. But it is not normative in the same sense that the primary authorities, the Gospel and Scripture, are normative. The confessional witness is norma normata, the norm which is itself normed by Scripture. It is the church’s so-called “secondary” norming authority.

6In the LCMS today there is the distinct tendency to follow the model of confession which attempts to correct an error by confessing the error’s opposite, rather than confessing straight ahead the truth and freedom of the Gospel. One problem with such a model is that, instead of correcting the error, another error is created, and we end up in the ditch on the other side. For an example of how Martin Chemnitz was critical of this method of confessing, cf. Examination of the Council of Trent, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978) I, Second Topic, “Concerning Traditions VI,” 262-263. There Chemnitz wrote: “Basil says in Letter No. 41 concerning Dionysius of Alexandria: ‘We do not admire everything about this man; yes, there are certain things which we reject completely, for they contain certain seeds of the ungodliness of the Anomoeans. The reason, I believe, was not an evil mind but that he wanted vehemently to resist Sabellius. I am accustomed therefore to compare him to an orchardist who wants to straighten the crooked shape of a sapling and then departs from the golden mean to err in the opposite direction by bending it too much.’” In the English edition, Basil’s “Letter No. 41” is Letter No. 9. Cf. St. Basil: Letters and Select Works, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 122-123. There Basil also says of Dionysius: “...he is carried away unawares by his zeal into the opposite error...he exchanges one mischief for another, and diverges from the right line of doctrine.” Andrew Bartelt suggests a model of confessing that stays on the path of the truth and freedom of the Gospel, not bending the sapling too far or falling off into the ditch on either side; see “Keeping Our Balance: Maintaining Unity in a World (and Church!) of Diversity,” Concordia Journal 30.3 (July 2004): 137-155; see esp. 143-144.

II. D. A Hierarchy of Normativity

This hermeneutic of confession demonstrates that there is a hierarchy inherent in the church’s confession. There are three norming elements—the normissima normans, the norma normans, and the norma normata. This hierarchy of normativity demonstrates that the church’s history and traditions are tertiary authorities which play a proscribed role in the church’s confession.

According to the church’s confession, the Gospel, Scripture, and the confessional witness are alone normative of the church’s faith and life. The church’s history, however, is not dismissed in the confessional literature as offering nothing to the church’s confession. The church’s history plays a valuable role in terms of its contribution to the life of the church. It is, nevertheless, excluded from the hierarchy of normativity. As tertiary authorities, the church’s history and her traditions are non-normative elements of the church’s confession.

II. E. Non-Normative Elements of the Church’s Confession

The church’s confession includes its history and traditions, that is, what the fathers of the church have written and what the church has actually done in its historic liturgical traditions. The church’s history is significant in that it makes synchronic contributions toward shaping the life of the church. This is so because, in a snap-shot sort of way, it bears witness to the church as the church has worked its way through the many theological questions arising within the various historical periods and ideological conflicts. Because the church’s history is not divinely inspired or divinely authoritative, it is not normative in the same sense as the Gospel, Scripture, and the confessional witness. Consequently, while observing a quia (unconditional) subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, the church observes a quatenus (conditional) subscription to its history. The church’s history is helpful, however, not for norming but for informing the church’s faith and practice in varying contexts.

The same holds true for the historic confessional witness. The historic confessional witness may be defined as the theological discourse taking place in the historic context of the sixteenth-century confessional witness.
for example, the writings of Luther, Melanchthon, and Chemnitz which were not included in the Book of Concord. At times the historic confessional witness corresponds to, upholds, and defends the confessional witness. At other times the historic confessional witness extends itself to the point where it no longer runs in the way of confession but in the way of personal opinion. Matthias Flacius's point of view on adiaphora and liturgy would be one example of an extreme opinion which did not make it into the confessional witness of the church.9 It is necessary to recognize this in order to separate personal opinion from genuine confession in the church’s discourse.10 It is for this reason that the historic confessional witness is not normative of the church’s faith and life. Like the church’s history and traditions, the historic confessional witness helps the church to clarify its self-understanding and consequently its confession in the context of changing times and circumstances.

Historic liturgical traditions are included as important non-normative elements of the church’s confession. Liturgy is normed by the formal principle (Scripture) and the material principle (the Gospel). In this way, as

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9Cf. F. Bente’s “Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,” Concordia Triglotta (103), quoting Flacius: “Nihil est adiaphoron in statu confessionis et scandali. Nothing is an adiaphoron in case of confession and offense.” While Bente does not give a specific reference for his quote of Flacius, it is located in Quod hoc tempore nulla penitus mutatio in religione sit in gratiam impiorum facienda, Magdeburg, Michael Lotter, 1553. Here Flacius writes: Nihil esse adiaphoron in casu confessionis et scandali. Thanks to Oliver K. Olson for pointing this citation out to me. It is also located in Flacius’s Das man in diesen geschwinden leufften / dem Teuffel und Antichrist zugefallen / nichts in den Kirchen Gottes vorendern soll, under the name, Johannem Hermannum (1548). See Olson’s Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther’s Reform (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 133. In spite of Bente’s favorable assessment of Flacius’s role in the Adiaphoristic Controversy, Flacius’ point of view and language were intentionally excluded from Formula of Concord X. The confession of FC X is that, in a case of confession, “it is no longer a matter of external adiaphora, which in their nature and essence are and remain in and of themselves free, which accordingly are not subject to either a command or a prohibition regarding their use or discontinuance” (FC SD X.14). In a case of confession, it is not that adiaphora cease to be adiaphora, but whether it is incumbent on the church to use or not to use them. Adiaphora remain adiaphora because the silence of God’s Word can not be changed. The question, rather, concerns the church’s use of adiaphora and how that use serves the church’s confession of the truth and freedom of the Gospel.

10That this is still an issue in the LCMS is demonstrated by the ongoing influence of Matthias Flacius on the language of LCMS theologians who speak and write about liturgy. See, e.g., Andrew Bartelt’s “Keeping Our Balance: Maintaining Unity in a World (and Church!) of Diversity,” 146, where Bartelt writes: “...what does FC X say, and not say, about adiaphora (including the question of when an adiaphoron is not an adiaphoron)?” This is an unmistakably Flacian way of addressing the question, and the Formulators intentionally excluded this language when they crafted FC X; see also Charles Arand, “Not All Adiaphora Are Created Equal,” Concordia Journal 30.3 (July 2004): 156-164; Norman Nagel, “Adiaphora,” in Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord: Essays in Honor of Glen Zweck on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday, J. Bart Day and Andrew D. Smith, eds. (Houston: Zweck Festschrift Committee, 2000), 137-148; see esp. 145-148, where Nagel attempts to all but eliminate adiaphora from confessional Lutheran doctrine.
liturgy is normed by the material and formal principles, liturgy is endowed with the gifts of God in the way of God’s Word as Law and God’s Word as Gospel. Equipped with this Word for the delivery of the gifts in the Gospel and the Sacraments, liturgy confesses the Christ of Scripture.

In a very small nutshell, this is our hermeneutic of confession. It is really nothing new, since the essence of confession never changes. But it is always a good thing to rehearse what we already know, to be “rigorously self-reflective.” Applying what we believe is something altogether different.

III. An Evangelical Catholic (Lutheran) Hermeneutic of Liturgy

Virtually every Christian congregation at some point is faced with a choice between traditional and contemporary forms of worship. The question is: What is our basis for making such a choice?

In order to posit an unambiguous hermeneutic of liturgy with a view toward identifying the authorities which are given to shape the life of the church, it is necessary to clarify the many prevailing assumptions which drive the church’s discourse on liturgy. The danger is not in holding prior assumptions. We all have assumptions we bring to the conversation. The danger is in not allowing the critical examination of our assumptions in the light of Scripture and the confessional witness. This is a complicated aspect of the discourse because the assumptions are deeply rooted and emotionally invested. An evangelical catholic hermeneutic of liturgy will clearly define formal and material principles of liturgy and will not equivocate in distinguishing what is normative from what is not normative; in other words, we need to distinguish what is given by God from what is given by the church.11 To apply this hermeneutic I will present a framework for applying formal and material principles to our theology and practice of liturgy.

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11I made this distinction in my article, “Identifying Authorities and Pastoral Practice in the Early Church. Two Case Studies: Basil of Caesarea and Ephrem of Syria,” Concordia Journal 31.1 (January 2005): 48-59; see esp. 57-58, where a typo in the conclusion confused the point I intended to make. The text should have read, “While it is impossible to separate lex credendi from lex orandi, in Basil’s view they may be distinguished as each had its place in his defense of his liturgical practices in different contexts. In this connection it is helpful both historically and theologically to make a theoretical distinction between what is sacramental and what is humanly instituted liturgical rite…. To make such a distinction is to raise fundamental hermeneutical questions regarding our assumptions and methodology for historic liturgical investigation as this relates to liturgical renewal and inculturating popular forms in the church today.” My comments about Didache VII and Matthew 28 (represented by the elipsis in the quote here) were mistakenly inserted into the text from footnote 34, a typo which, while it did not change the sense, significantly altered the direct impact of the point I made in that part of my conclusion.
III. A. Clarifying Assumptions

There are several assumptions about liturgy which warrant careful scrutiny. These assumptions are run all the way through the primary, secondary, and tertiary authorities as pretexts for articulating preconceived conclusions, rather than letting the hard data speak for itself. Here it is necessary to consider the weighty assumption that the church’s history and traditions are normative to the same extent that Scripture and the Confessions are normative of our theology and practice of liturgy. Such an assumption actually blurs the distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary authorities for norming the church’s faith and practice. The confessional witness is, however, quite clear that Scripture alone is normative of the church’s faith and life.12

On the other hand, there are numerous assumptions about contemporary form which are also run through the conversation. It is sufficient for the sake of brevity to touch on the one overriding assumption—that form is neutral in its relation to substance and is therefore somehow outside the scope of the discussion. This is a philosophical non-sequitur. Substance must be delivered in some form. How any form delivers substance necessarily affects the reception of the substance. In other words, form carries with it certain stigmas which may not be easily dismissed. Form conjures images of the substance with which it is typically associated. For example, square dance music brings to mind images of hay bales, cowboy hats, boots, and bandanas. Heavy metal music conjures images of tattoos, t-shirts, denim jeans, and body piercing. Grunge music evokes images of vulgar, guttural screaming self-assertion (and not to be surprised, contemporary Christian music has crossed over this harshly drawn boundary as well). This raises immediate theological questions about the relationships between reverence and familiarity, decorum and informality. Consequently, the absolute contention that form is neutral is both false and misleading.

It is, however, theoretically and theologically necessary to make a distinction between form and substance in order to gain a clearer understanding of the normative relationship between the two. To make a binary distinction is not necessarily to argue for a polarized separation. To make a philosophical distinction between substance and form is not to disconnect the two. This is simply to recognize the difficulty of the problem inherent to the relationship between substance and form. Here it must be recognized that form does not equal substance.

There have been no studies in the church to date dealing with the assertion that form equals substance as this is referenced to liturgy. What commonly happens is that this premise is stated—usually in the form of the aphorism: lex orandi lex credendi—and then a number of other asser-

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12See FC Ep, Rule and Norm, 1-8. See also SA II.II.15; FC SD, Rule and Norm, 3, 9; and FC SD II.8.
tions about the catholicity and orthodoxy of liturgical form are made, not in support of the premise but rather building on it. This is a philosophical-hermeneutical question, and one that must be addressed in order to bring clarity to the church’s discourse on liturgy.

Yet, to say that form does not equal substance is in no way to imply that there is not a normative relationship between the two. While we must make a theological and philosophical distinction for the purpose of clarifying our hermeneutic, we must avoid separating form from substance in order to justify bad practices. Here the question should be: Which is normative, *lex orandi* or *lex credendi*? This is our liturgical-hermeneutical circle.

In such a hermeneutical circle of liturgy, neither *lex credendi* nor *lex orandi* is preeminent. Both have their place in the circle. Both live large in the lives of God’s people. *Lex credendi* norms the faith and life of every Christian. It also norms what is done in the church’s liturgy. The profound blessing of the truth and freedom of the Gospel bursts forth from the heart of faith in doxological praise. The individual’s doxological praise ultimately must come to be a participation in community (the body of Christ) which expresses its praise liturgically—*lex orandi*. This leads God’s people to further reflection on the truth and freedom expressed in the church’s liturgy. This reflection in turn draws the worshiper back into Scripture and the teachings of the church—*lex credendi*, which again burst forth from the heart of faith in doxological praise.

Now, one obviously does not experience the liturgical circle as neatly as this description would suggest. Praise can and does take place in the context of theological reflection, just as theological reflection can and does take place in the context of praise. One is always leading dialogically to the other. And, in this model, contrary to the uncritical assumptions of Liturgical Theology, there is no primary or secondary theology.

The circle reflects the assumption that doctrine and liturgy are inseparably linked. That does not mean, however, that doctrine and form of liturgy are so equated with each other that the form becomes its own norming formal principle.

What is presently taking place in the church’s conversation is that historic-traditional forms of liturgy are consistently put forward as both the formal and material principles of liturgy. This is most confusing. To argue that historic liturgical form in essentially all of its components derives from Scripture is beside the point. Such an argument yet begs the question as to the catholic necessity of the usages themselves. And as a side-note I would add that using language of necessity in this way is consistent with the language of the church’s confession at *Augustana VII* (*nicht not*).

There is also confusion regarding the formal and material principles of liturgy on the other side of the issue. Often the formal principle is reductionistically circumscribed around a false understanding of *sola*
scriptura or Scripture without confession, and thereby the purity of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments are put at risk. Objective and subjective justification become confused, and the material principle is misidentified with both the Gospel and sanctification, as we engage in uncritical imitation of American Evangelical Christianity in our practices. It is this loss of our theological grounding in liturgical rites, ceremonies and traditions which in large part leads the church in the direction of license and false doctrine in our worship practices.13

III. B. A Hermeneutic of Liturgy

What is needed to bring us past the wall of reluctance (resistance?) and through the fog of imprecision in the church’s discourse on liturgy is a critical liturgical hermeneutic. The church’s hermeneutic of liturgy begins by explicitly assuming all that has gone into the church’s hermeneutic of confession. A hermeneutic of liturgy will be rigorously self-reflective. It will distinguish what is given by God from what is given by the church (primary, secondary, and tertiary authorities). It will have as its material principle justification by grace alone through faith alone for Christ’s sake, the forgiveness of sins in the death and resurrection of our Lord. The formal principle of the church’s liturgical hermeneutic is Scripture as norma normans and the Lutheran Confessions as norma normata. Liturgy itself can serve as neither the formal principle nor the material principle for a liturgical hermeneutic, since that would be a tautology, and (more importantly) since there is no evidence for such a hermeneutic of liturgy in the recognized authorities of the Lutheran tradition.

I would argue that the confusion in our discourse on liturgy in part derives from an association of our hermeneutic of liturgy too closely with our hermeneutic of Scripture. In my opinion this error is being perpetuated in the church because an explicit evangelical catholic (Lutheran) hermeneutic of liturgy has been absent from the church’s discourse. (Maybe we have been reluctant to articulate an explicit hermeneutic of liturgy be-

13In “The State of Synod: An Assessment” (133), C. Arand, A. Bartelt, P. Raabe, and J. Voelz write, “...it must be said that much of the chaos evident in the area of worship has resulted from a lack of deep grounding in Lutheran theology, not to mention the theology and history of liturgy.” This is quite true. But it also must be said that there has been a lack of positive theological guidance in the LCMS with regard to the inclusion of contemporary forms and defining the boundaries for including such forms with a clearly articulated hermeneutic of liturgy. This too has contributed to “the chaos.” The failed attempt to press Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions (the church’s primary and secondary authorities, which are normative and non-negotiable) into the mold of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Liturgical Theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (a tertiary authority, which is non-normative and most definitely negotiable) has left LCMS congregations without the “deep grounding in Lutheran theology” and the specific theological guidance on liturgy that they have needed.
cause we are uncomfortable with the uncertainty of the outcome.\textsuperscript{14}) By making our implicit hermeneutic of liturgy to parallel our hermeneutic of Scripture—that is, by holding liturgy to be its own formal principle just as Scripture is its own formal principle—this may certainly give us more control over the church’s expression of her faith in liturgy; and the logical inference of such a hermeneutical move is that liturgy is given by God just as Scripture is given by God. But this is a thoroughly flawed inference, however understandable the latent confusion may be. Liturgy is not its own formal principle. Scripture and the Confessions constitute the formal principle of liturgy and this distinction must be maintained simply and clearly.

The circularity of Scripture being its own formal principle was described in the sixteenth century with the expression, “Scripture interprets Scripture.” Confusion sets in when we make our hermeneutic of liturgy to parallel our hermeneutic of Scripture by making liturgy to be its own formal principle. Yet, if the formal principle of liturgy is liturgy, then it would be an unacceptable tautology because as we know, unlike Scripture, liturgy is not given by God. Consequently, our hermeneutic of liturgy can never be described with the recently coined aphorism, \textit{lex orandi lex credendi}. That would be to make liturgy its own norming formal principle. The Formula of Concord, rather, is unambiguous in its confession that Scripture alone is the only rule and norm of the church’s faith and life.

The evangelical catholic hermeneutic of liturgy holds that Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions are the formal principle of liturgy, and that liturgy itself can be neither the formal principle nor the material principle of liturgy, for that would be a philosophical tautology and, as we are learning in an all too painful way in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, a theological disaster.

\textsuperscript{14} In “The State of Synod: An Assessment” (133), C. Arand, A. Bartelt, P. Raabe, and J. Voelz write, “Specific worship practices directly reflect Lutheran substance. Lutheran worship will be informed by Lutheran theology. But Lutheran theology may well undergird a variety of Lutheran forms: Lutheran substance, Lutheran styles. Here is where much hard work must always be done. Too often, traditionalists refuse to engage the legitimate questions that arise in light of contemporary challenges. And, too often, those who try to deal with the realities of American culture have simply borrowed models from a non-Lutheran theological base. Others seek to develop a \textit{Lutheran} contemporary approach, but neither the Synod nor the seminaries have shown sustained interest in, or support for, dialog on the issue. Rarely have these groups engaged each other in serious discussion of the underlying theological issues.” There surely must be a conversation about the inclusion of contemporary forms. But again, the lack of dialog is in part the result of a failure of theological leadership in the Synod. I wholeheartedly agree with the problems presented by the three “categories” presented above. (I hesitate to call them “groups,” because there is nothing like an organized “group” that can be readily identified with any one of the three categories.) “Lutheran substance, Lutheran styles” is looking forward and in the right direction. But we have to move beyond just self-criticism and name-calling (“Karlstadt, Zwingli, or Finney”), to the rigorous self-reflection (e.g., looking to Scripture and the Confessions and to the positive examples of Luther and Chemnitz) and the constructive confessional theology that has been called for—doing it as opposed to just talking about it.
III. C. A Framework for Applying Formal and Material Principles

To clarify the form-substance debate I propose the following framework for applying formal and material principles to the church’s theological practice of liturgy. Here I identify three basic aspects of liturgy: referent, form, and function.

III. C. 1. Referent

The first basic aspect of liturgy is its referent. The referent of the church’s worship is the triune God delivering His Gospel-gift, justification by grace alone through faith alone for Christ’s sake—the forgiveness of sins in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

III. C. 2. Form

The second basic aspect of liturgy is form.

III. C. 2. a. Structure

Form entails structure. The structure of liturgy consists of its component parts or elements.

III. C. 2. a. i. Deep Structure

The simplest division of components in the divine service comes in the form of the synaxis—Word and Meal. Here the service of Word and Meal is comprised of these elements: Scripture readings, sermon, prayer of the church, words of institution, and distribution of the Holy Meal. On this level of form these structural elements, including the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, are non-negotiable because they reflect the basic sufficiency for catholicity or the unity and orthodoxy of the church according to Augustana VII. This is what we might call the deep structure of liturgy.

III. C. 2. a. ii. Surface Structure

Beyond this simplicity of form are the many other elements of liturgy which have been added and developed over the centuries, for example, the in nomine, the preparation or corporate confession and absolution, the introit, the kyrie, and all the other canticles, prayers, and blessings of the divine service. To this structure should be added the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. All of these structural elements of liturgy are an entailment of form. This is what historically has been called cultus and
might further be referred to as the surface structure of liturgy. Although the deep structure of liturgy is sufficient for delivery of the Gospel, the surface structure of liturgy further facilitates access to the Gospel. The Gospel is inherently incarnational. That is why this is one point at which arguments concerning respect for received liturgical traditions and continuity with the church’s historic practice, as these relate to the inclusion of contemporary forms, should be engaged.15

III. C. 2. b. Style

In direct relation to the church’s cultus, form also entails style. The style of liturgy consists in something more abstract, more difficult to define. Style is a matter of aesthetics, or the art of the form. There are clear aesthetic differences between traditional and contemporary forms. In The Structure of Lutheranism Werner Elert has written: “...even the most cautious acknowledgment of what is ceremonial brings one face to face with the problem of external form.... The form of worship is formally conditioned by artistic taste.”16

III. C. 3. Function

The third basic aspect of liturgy is function. According to the Lutheran Confessions the function of liturgy entails delivery of the Gospel, decorum.

15The LCMS Commission on Worship should be commended for the work they have done to prepare a new hymnal for the Synod. Recently the Commission provided the church with the pamphlet, Text, Music, Context: A Resource for Reviewing Worship Materials, The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, copyright © 2004 (responding to a 1998 resolution of the Synod in convention in an effort to “enable a process by which songs and liturgical materials from sources other than LCMS publications might be reviewed for acceptability”). In the section titled “Theological Overview,” the Commission makes many excellent statements about the views of worship located in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. In addition to these the Commission also includes certain assumptions of Liturgical Theology, e.g., that the sixteenth-century confessing evangelicals had a “desire to preserve the catholicity of the church that tended to result in uniformity of early Lutheran worship” (3-4). The confessing evangelicals did not define the catholicity of the church in terms of right doctrine: the purity of the Gospel and the Sacraments administered in accordance with the divine Word (AC VII), explicitly excluding in this confession humanly instituted rites and ceremonies in liturgy from its definition. Frank Senn has pointed out that in Germany alone there were some 135 worship orders between 1523 and 1555, and that it was not until the period of orthodoxy in the seventeenth century that uniformity of Lutheran liturgy began to emerge. See Christian Worship and Its Cultural Setting (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 58. Uniformity was and still is desirable, but it can only be sought on the basis of the satis est of AC VII, not on the basis of humanly instituted rites and ceremonies in the church’s liturgy. See The Struggle to Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church: Adiaphora in Historical, Theological and Practical Perspective.16

or good order in the church, catechesis, and edification.  

III. C. 3. a. Delivery of the Gospel

The primary function of liturgy is the delivery of the forgiveness of sins. This takes place through the pure proclamation of the Gospel and the Sacraments administered in accordance with the divine Word (AC VII).

III. C. 3. b. Decorum or Good Order

Function also entails decorum or good order in the church. We have the apostolic Word to the liturgical assembly: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40, KJV). Here function and style are closely interrelated. If a particular style of music functions in such a way that it obscures the delivery of the Gospel, say for example by inordinately focusing attention on the Holy Spirit (Third Article, sanctification) instead of primarily on Jesus Christ (Second Article, justification) or by stirring the emotions beyond our God-given reasonable worship (1 Cor. 12–14), or by placing the primary emphasis on our sanctified response of praise, it is inappropriate for use in the service of God’s house.

III C. 3. c. Catechesis

Function further entails catechesis. The insatiable appetite for liturgical novelty militates against teaching God’s people the eternal truths of the Christian faith. Liturgical repetition assists the worshiping assembly in its reception of the gifts and frees them to engage in a deeper and more meaningful reflection on the substance being delivered there. The inclusion of contemporary forms need not necessarily be equated with shallow, weekly liturgical innovation, if we are being conscientious about the catechetical function of liturgy, according to the Biblical and confessional mandate.

III. C. 3. d. Edification

Finally, function entails the edification of the church. Here, localized cultural expressions will impact decisions regarding edification. Some contexts are rooted in liturgical chant, incense, and ornate vestments. Others are rooted in no frills and simpler expectations. Some forms are more elaborate; some forms are more basic. It is the confessional judgment of

\[\text{Ap XIII.1-6; AC XXIV.2-3; Ap XXIV.3; FC Ep X.1, 3, 4. And as the confessions explicitly state, decorum or good order in the church also entails the avoidance of frivolity and offense in the church’s liturgical practices.}\]
the church that such forms have absolutely nothing to do with the unity
and orthodoxy of the church and that consciences must never be bound on
account of differences in forms of humanly instituted rites and ceremonies
in liturgy.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Identifying authorities which norm the church’s theological practice of
liturgy is essential for clarifying hermeneutical boundaries. By outlining a
hermeneutic of the church’s confession according to the church’s primary
and secondary authorities (Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions) and
by recognizing the non-normative character of the church’s tertiary au-
thorities (the church’s history and traditions on the basis of which so much
personal opinion has been forged) this gives us clear theological grounding
for formulating and articulating an unambiguous Lutheran hermeneutic
of liturgy.

The distinctions which are inherent to liturgy—what is normative and
what is not normative, what is given by God and what is given by the
church—are crucial for addressing the issues the church faces today. The
three compositional aspects of liturgy: referent, form, and function (with
all that they entail), might assist the church as criteria by which we may
critique newer, so-called “contemporary” forms. If the church then sets
itself to the task of including “contemporary” forms, what is adopted must
be carefully crafted according to the normative character of the formal and
material principles of liturgy, if it is to be a faithful expression of the
Lutheran ethos in the purity of the Gospel and the Sacraments adminis-
tered in accordance with the divine Word.
The Situation at the Corinthian
Lord’s Supper in Light of 1 Corinthians
11:21: A Reconsideration

Mark P. Surburg

How did the Christians at Corinth celebrate the Lord’s Supper? What problem or problems at the Corinthian celebration of the Lord’s Supper does Paul address in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34? Scholars have offered very different answers to these questions. One line of interpretation has maintained that at Corinth a meal preceded the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (the sacramental bread and cup). Another position has argued that the Corinthians celebrated a meal between the sacramental bread and the sacramental cup. Some scholars contend that in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Paul addresses a problem that revolves around the timing of the eating by different groups. Other scholars argue that timing has nothing to do with the problem and that instead the problem is based on socio-cultural issues of where, what, and how much different groups ate.

Any examination of the situation at the Corinthian Lord’s Supper must grapple with 1 Corinthians 11:21 and its use of the verb προλαμβάνω as Paul writes, “For each one προλαμβάνει his own supper while eating” (ἐκαστὸς γὰρ τὸ ἵδιον δείπνον προλαμβάνει ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν). This article will reconsider the evidence surrounding the translation and interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:21. It will demonstrate that one recent and popular approach should be rejected and will illustrate how fresh insight can be gained into the situation at Corinth when a temporal translation of προλαμβάνω (“takes before”) is combined with a bread-meal-cup order of events at the Corinthian Lord’s Supper. The temporal translation is not impossible as some scholars have argued, and in fact, this lexically stronger option fits well with the more probable bread-meal-cup reconstruction of events at Corinth. It yields the insight that the problem at the Corinthian Lord’s Supper was probably a multifaceted and interrelated complex of issues that included where people ate, what they ate, how much they ate, and when they ate.

I. A Consensus Formed and a Consensus Fractured

Few texts have benefited more from the socio-cultural exegesis of the last twenty-five years than 1 Corinthians 11:17ff. The work of scholars such as Gerd Theissen, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, Dennis Smith, and Peter

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pretation of 1 Corinthians 11:21 and its πρόλαμβάνω is inextricably linked to reconstructions of the Corinthian eucharist, it is necessary to briefly consider this issue and defend the more recent conclusion. In addition, the categorical assertions concerning the certainty of this position expressed by scholars such as Theissen, Hofius, and Engberg-Pedersen requires a defense of the qualification “more probable.”

II. Bread—Meal—Cup Order and “Probability”

The strong arguments in favor of B/M/C order can be summarized rather succinctly. First, Paul introduces 11:23 as a piece of tradition (παρέλαβον; παρέδωκα; 11:23). Second, the vocabulary and syntax indicate that Paul has not composed 11:23-24 but rather quotes a liturgical tradition. Third, the tradition describes a meal set between bread and cup (11:25 μετὰ τοῦ δείπνου), and it is unlikely that Paul would cite it this way and then implicitly assume that the Corinthians weren’t celebrating in this manner. Fourth, B/M/C order fits well with Greco-Roman meal practice in which the bread would mark the beginning of the meal and the cup would mark the transition from deipnon to symposium. Fifth, the meal/BC order rests largely on external liturgical evidence that is all open to challenge. Does Mark 14:18-26 and Matthew 26:20-30 (which omit a reference to an intervening meal) really provide a window into the liturgical practice of these communities? Is the much contested Didache 9-10 really a communal meal followed by eucharist? Finally, even if these interpretations are correct, does this information about the worship practice of other communities tell us anything about the practice in Corinth?

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10 On a previous occasion I had advocated an agnostic position regarding the correct reconstruction (Mark P. Surburg, “Structural and Lexical Features in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32,” *Concordia Journal* 26 [2000]: 200-217, 200, fnt. 7), but further work has underscored for me the tenuous nature of the liturgical evidence and produced a shift in position.

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While this provides the stronger argument and a more probable understanding of events at Corinth, not all scholars have been content to stop there. In particular, Theissen, Hofius, and Engberg-Pedersen have pointed to the first three items mentioned above and declared on this basis that the events at Corinth must have followed B/M/C order.\footnote{It is in my opinion unthinkable, that Paul cites a sacred cultic formula, explicitly asserts that in thus and no other form he received it and at the same time implicitly expects that someone would not follow its order” (Theissen, “Soziale Integration,” 188; my translation); ‘But if this tradition is a ‘sacred cultic formula,’ a cultic aetiology establishing, standardizing, and reflecting or, as P. Stuhlmacher formulates it, ‘a piece of ritual in narrative form,’ then the liturgical order of meal celebration must have corresponded to it in the earliest church (Hofius, “Herrenmahl und Herrenmahlsparadosis,” 383-384; emphasis his; my translation); ’But furthermore, if it is in fact ‘unthinkable’ (as claimed, again rightly to my mind, by Gerd Theissen) that Paul should have quoted a holy, cultic formula with the express claim that that and no other way is how he had received it, but then gone on to presuppose tacitly a different order of the Eucharist as celebrated at Corinth—then we may also conclude that the order presupposed in Paul’s rendering of Jesus’ words is the very order in which the Eucharist was in fact celebrated in Corinth (Engberg-Pedersen, “Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 596; emphasis his).}

These scholars have taken a legitimate and common sense argument and then pushed it beyond the true load it can bear. Their principle states that the text of a liturgical tradition must describe the actual order of events. Since linguistically 11:25’s μετὰ τῶν ἐπεταύρων can only describe a taking and giving thanks over a cup after a meal, the exact same order of events must have taken place at Corinth.

However, this principle ignores an obvious and telling fact: the majority of Christian liturgies have retained the phrase “after dinner” and yet have not followed B/M/C order. The phrase occurs in the liturgies of St. Mark, St. John Chrysotom, St. James, the Egyptian Anaphora of St. Basil, the Prayers of Serapion, the Euchology of Der Baizel, the Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles, the Anaphora of Epiphanius of Salamis, Ambrose On the Sacraments, the Gallican Rite, the Mozarabic Rite, and the Mass of the Roman Rite where a meal did not stand in between the sacramental bread and cup.

While these materials date from a later period, their heritage reaches further back in time. More importantly they demonstrate that the presence of the phrase “after dinner” in a liturgical tradition does not necessitate that the community using that liturgical tradition celebrate the Lord’s Supper in B/M/C order. Other factors may come into play. At some point in the church’s history the principle utilized by these scholars fails. The “unthinkable” (to quote Theissen) apparently became quite thinkable, and in fact, normal. It becomes a question not of whether the principle fails, but when it fails.\footnote{Naturally a whole range of factors influenced this development in the pre- and post-Constantinian eras.} This fact alone should cause proponents of B/M/C order to
speak in far less dogmatic terms.13

While the fourth point above (Greco-Roman meal practice) provides a strong argument, it should be noted that some scholars use this data to make the exact opposite point in supporting meal/BC. In particular, Klauck has argued that the religiously charged double rite of bread and wine which came after the main meal marked the transition from *deipnon* to *symposium* just as the libation did in Greco-Roman meal practice.14

Finally, Hofius and Engberg-Pedersen have marshaled arguments regarding the referent of 11:21’s ἐκαστὸς and the articular infinitive phrase ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν, which they believe preclude a temporal translation of προλαβᾶνω and thus also eliminate the meal/BC interpretation. I will discuss this matter in detail below, but for the moment it is enough to say that if the referent of ἐκαστὸς is “the haves” (as I will argue, context strongly indicates), then meal/BC order remains a viable option. As long as we don’t assume a terminological distinction between the meal and the sacramental bread and cup (something which must be considered anachronistic for this early date), there is no reason why meal/BC order does not work. “The haves” (the referent of ἐκαστὸς begin eating early while the “have nots” arrive later during the meal proper and are shamed by “the haves,” but don’t miss out on the sacramental bread and cup. All of these events occur “while eating the Lord’s Supper,” that is, the meal/BC complex.

In summary, the B/M/C order offers a more probable description of the Corinthian eucharist, and the rest of this treatment will use it as a working assumption. Nevertheless, the evidence does not allow scholarship to move beyond probability on this issue. There are no definitive refutations of the meal/BC order, even though it is the weaker argument. Scholars must use care so that they don’t assert more than they have truly proven.15

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13As Paul F. Bradshaw writes, “Too often in the past over-confident assertions have been made about the nature of Christian worship in the first century on the basis of false assumptions and methods or dogmatic rather than historical criteria” (*The Search for the Origins Of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 55).


15It is worth noting that many scholars who take one of these positions do qualify their assertions and avoid categorical claims: “cannot be definitively decided” (Neuenzeit, *Das Herrenmahl*, 71; my translation); “No sure answer seems possible” (Leon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 216); “more probable” (Klauck, *Herrenmahl und Hellenisticher Kult*, 295; my translation); “one simply can’t be certain” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 541, ftnt. 52); Engberg-Pedersen’s criticism of Fee and others on this point is mistaken (“Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 597, ftnt. 16).
III. Bread—Meal—Cup Order and Translation Options for 11:21’s ἰεραμβάνω

Although agreeing on the B/M/C ordering of events at the Corinthian eucharist, adherents of B/M/C order have disagreed about how to translate 11:21’s ἰεραμβάνω and interpret the verse. In fact, they have offered three different translations and disputed whether the timing of the eating was the main problem at Corinth or not part of the problem at all.

Theissen and Lampe have translated the verb temporally as “goes ahead with” or “begins prematurely.” In this understanding the offense at the Corinthian eucharist occurs as the well-to-do begin eating their own meal prior to the arrival of the “have-nots” and the start of the “sacramental” bread and cup. Though not committing to a particular reconstruction, BDAG translates it with some temporal force: “in eating, each goes on ahead to take one’s own supper.”

By contrast, Theissen, Hofius, and BAGD have translated it non-temporally as “take,” such that ἰεραμβάνω is identical in meaning to simple ἴαμβάνω. Thus in conjunction with τῷ ἰοίῳ δεῖπνῳ it means “consume” or “eat” (I will address Theissen’s inconsistency in advocating both translations later). Here, the problem does not involve a temporal element. In an ostensibly related translation, Winter (subsequently followed by Fee, Thiselton, and Horsley) has understood ἰεραμβάνω to be intensive and so has translated it “devours.”

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17Theissen describes this eating as a private and premature event (“Soziale Integration,” 186-189) while Lampe explains it in accordance with primae mensae (“Corinthian Eucharistic Dinner Party,” 2, 5; “Das korinthische Herrenmahl,” 198-201).


19Theissen, “Soziale Integration,” 189; Otfried Hofius, “Herrenmahl und Herrenmahlsparadosis,” 386-387; W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (2d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 708.2a (here and thereafter referred to as BAGD); so also Andrew Das, “1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Revisited,” 190. Schrage considers this a possible, but lexically weaker alternative (Wolfgang Schrage, Der erste Brief an die Korinther, 3 (1 Kor 11,17-14,40) [Zürich and Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999], 14,24).

20B. M. Winter, “The Lord's Supper at Corinth,” 75-77; ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 143-148; Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 540-542 (it should be noted that Fee considers a temporal translation possible, 542); Anthony C. Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians—A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 863; Richard A Horsley, 1 Corinthians (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 159 (Fee leans toward B/M/C while Thiselton and Horsley do not appear to state a preference); so also Blue, “The House Church at Corinth,” 230-231.
In considering these three possibilities, I will first examine their lexical basis. After ascertaining the validity of each, the article will then consider syntactical and contextual concerns that impinge on the translation and interpretation of 11:21 and hence, on our understanding of the situation at the Corinthian Lord’s Supper.

IV. Temporal Translation of προλαμβάνω

Self-evidently, the compound verb προλαμβάνω combines the preposition πρό (“earlier than, before”) with the verb λαμβάνω (“take” or “receive”). The compound verb then comes to indicate a “taking or receiving before.” By extension the temporal use is then applied to actions and mental activity in the sense of “anticipate” (i.e., to perform an activity prior to something or someone, or to mentally grasp something ahead of time). This use occurs in Mark 14:8 when the woman anoints Jesus before His death.

In a small number of instances, the meaning of προλαμβάνω does not include any appreciable temporal characteristic. Here the verb means, “detect, overtake or surprise.” In most of these instances προλαμβάνω is in the passive (T. Jud. 2:5 is an exception to this) and the immediate context involves a threatening element. The citations in BDAG all fall into this pattern (Gal. 6:1; Wis. 17:16; P.Oxy 928, 8; T. Jud. 2:5). A person can be overtaken (Gal. 6:1 προλαμβάνεται; Wis. 17:16 προλαμβάνεται; P.Oxy 928, 8 προλαμβανεταινει) by transgression (Gal. 6:1), fear (Wis. 17:12) or a plot (P.Oxy 928, 3-5). In T. Judah 2:5, Judah is about to overtake a boar in order tear it into pieces just as he has killed other animals (Test. Jud. 2:5). Longenecker reports that the same situation exists in Josephus such as when the Roman Tenth Legion is “surprised/overtaken” (προλαμβανεται) by the disorderly method of Jewish attack (J W, 5.79).

Apart from this minor and contextually restricted exception, in the vast majority of occurrences the verb προλαμβάνω has a temporally influenced meaning. The translation “take before” thus stands on a very firm
V. Non-Temporal Translation of \(\pi\rho\omicron\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\)

Proponents of the non-temporal translation have frequently cited Galatians 6:1 as evidence for the non-temporal use of the verb, a use that may be significant because it is the only other time Paul employs the word. However, this argument ignores an important point. We must note the implications of the non-temporal translation of \(\pi\rho\omicron\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\) in 1 Corinthians 11:21. Advocates of the non-temporal translation are not simply arguing that \(\pi\rho\omicron\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\) is non-temporal. They are contending that the compounded \(\pi\omicron\) fails to impact the meaning of the compound verb to such an extent that \(\pi\rho\omicron\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\) means the same thing as \(\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\). However, the non-temporal translation \(\pi\rho\omicron\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\) in Galatians 6:1 “overtake” clearly does not mean the same thing as simple \(\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\). Here the compounded \(\pi\omicron\) has affected the meaning, just as in the other explicitly temporal translations. If anything, the non-temporal translation in Galatians 6:1 leads us to expect that when \(\pi\omicron\) is compounded with \(\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\) we should not expect the resultant \(\pi\rho\omicron\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\) to be identical to \(\lambda\alpha\mu\mu\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\) in meaning.

The strongest evidence which advocates of a non-temporal translation have produced is the Asclepius inscription in Epidaurus (2nd century A.D.).

In the text of the inscription Marcus Julius Apellas describes how the god healed him after he had been plagued by diseases and indigestion (1170, 3-
The god tells him to do a number of activities such as exercising by running (1170, 9), soaking in water (1170, 10), walking barefoot (1170, 12), and pouring wine on himself before going into a warm bath (1170, 12-13).

The god includes three instructions which use ἀλμάν. In 1170, 7 the man is told to προλαβεῖν cheese and bread, and celery with lettuce.32 Next the god tells the man to προλαμβάνειν the ends of the citron tree (1170, 9-10).33 Finally, in 1170, 15 he tells the man to προλαβεῖν milk with honey.34

At first glance it appears as if the “the temporal sense of προ- is felt very little, if at all” and that here προλαμβάνει serves as a synonym for the uncompounded λαμβάνει.35 The phrase would then mean “take” in the sense of “eat.”36 This assessment coheres with the general trend in the Greek of this period in which there is a “free use of compound and diminutive vocables, with loss of specifically compounded or diminutive meaning.”37

Yet the data in the inscription has led scholars to other conclusions as well. LSJ lists this text under “take or receive before,” that is, “in advance.”38 In this understanding the man was to take these various food items prior to healing and relief.

Immediately after reporting the instruction γάλα μετὰ μέλιτος προλαβεῖν (“προλαβεῖν milk with honey”) (1170, 15), the man adds, “But on the first day after I had drunk only milk, he [the god] said, ‘Put honey into the milk, in order that it may be able to have the desired effect’” (1170, 16-17).39 Did the man disobey the god by not putting honey in the milk? Or did he misunderstand the god because he took the god’s instruction to mean “prefer,” rather than an absolute command? Baunack comes to this conclusion (“praeferre”) after working with the inscription.40

Dittenberger himself comes to yet another conclusion. He thinks that the prepositions πρὸς and πρὸ have been confused. The text should then read προσλαβεῖν/προσλαμβάνειν. He reports that προσλαμβάνει is sometimes

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32τιρον καὶ ἄρτον προλαβεῖν σίλην μετὰ ἁρίσκος.
33κυτρίου προλαμβάνειν τὰ ἀκρα (in his line numbering Dittenberger miscounts and provides only three lines between 5 and 10).
34γάλα μετὰ μέλιτος προλαβεῖν.
35BAGD, 708.2a; So also Wilamowitz as cited by Dittenberger who reports that, “Wil. vim praepositionis temporalem quidemfuisse, sed labente tempore plane evanuisee... iudicat” (SIG 3.328).
38LSJ, 1488.1.1.
39μεθ’ ἐκ τούτων πίνειν μου γάλα μόνον ἔπειτα μέλι ἔμπειρεν ἐκ τοῦ γάλα ἐνα διήτημα διακόπτειν.
40Dittenberger cites Baunack, “Baun. praeferendi notion em inesse iudicat” (Dittenberger, SIG 3.328).
used in later Greek for the taking of food in place of προφέρεσθαι and we can add that one has to look no further than the New Testament itself for examples of προσλαμβάνω being used to indicate the eating of food (Acts 27:33, 36 and textual variants in 27:34). Nor is the confusion unlikely—a confusion of προσλαμβάνω and προλαμβάνω occurs in manuscripts at both places where Paul uses προλαμβάνω (1 Cor. 11:21 and Gal. 6:1).

Those who confidently assert the non-temporal meaning in the Asclepius inscription have not fully grappled with the opaque nature of these citations and their highly unusual use of προλαμβάνω. We should conclude then that while a non-temporal use in this text seems possible (and the context of food certainly brings to mind 1 Cor. 11:21), the evidence does not move beyond reasonable doubt. The data are patient of other explanations that do not require the highly unusual non-temporal translation.

The only other piece of evidence offered in support of a non-temporal sense of προλαμβάνω is Sib. Or. 3.569. In Sib. Or. 3.211 and 3.741 the idiom τέλος λαβίν (“be completed, attain maturity”) occurs. In 3.569 (a statement parallel to 3.741) we have προλάβῃ τέλος. Here προλαμβάνω and λαμβάνω are in fact interchangeable.

The non-temporal approach assumes that προλαμβάνω follows the general trend of Greek during this period in which prepositions in compound verbs lose their force and the compounded versions become virtual synonyms for the uncompounded verb. However, one cannot assume that this valid general principle holds true for every verb. One must demonstrate from the evidence that this occurs specifically with προλαμβάνω. The evidence does not bear this out. Lampe’s *A Patristic Lexicon* does not list simple “take” as a possible meaning for προλαμβάνω. In fact every meaning he offers involves some kind of temporal force for πρό.  

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41*At nescio an praepositiones πρός et πρό confusedae sint; nam pro προφέρεσθαι, quod per frequens et de cibo, infere Gelate nonnunquam προσλαμβάνων quoque occurrit* (ibid); H, L, P Y, 326, 1241, 1505, M.


44Hofius, “Herrenmahl und Herrenmahlsparadosis,” 386.

45LSJ, 1773.Π.2; 3.211 τέλος λαβίν 3.741 λάβῃ τέλος.


On the basis of the available lexical evidence, a non-temporal translation of 1 Corinthians 11:21 remains possible, but far less probable than a temporal translation. Non-temporal proponents have only been able to produce two passages in the whole of Greek literature which support a non-temporal translation of προλαμβάνω in which προλαμβάνω has the same meaning as λαμβάνω.48 The first of these, the Asclepius inscription, should only be used with caution since the data there afford a number of plausible explanations in addition to the highly unusual non-temporal translation. Sib. Or. 3.569 does seem to show synonymous use between λαμβάνω and προλαμβάνω. Here again, some caution must be used since the passage involves an idiom (τέλος λαμβάνει) which does not match the use we have in 11:21. When a first century A.D. writer used προλαμβάνω, the evidence indicates that the individual would have been far more likely to mean, “take before, anticipate.”49

VI. Intensive Translation of προλαμβάνω

The intensive translation “devours” builds on the non-temporal translation, but takes the προ- to be intensive in force such that προλαμβάνω + δειπνοῦν does not mean simply “eat” but rather “devour.”50 Bruce Winter first proposed this understanding in a 1978 article (and recently restated it in his 2001 book). Since its appearance in 1978 it has exerted an impressive influence in English language scholarship. Fee adopted it as a more likely translation in his major 1987 commentary.51 More recently, Horsley (1998) and Thiselton in his major commentary (2000) have adopted an intensive translation.52 It is important to note that none of these scholars has added additional evidence to support the translation. Fee and Thiselton both accept the translation based on the argumentation in Winter’s 1978


48Fee (who favors non-temporal but remains open to temporal) has countered the temporal translation by stating that “there is no clear evidence of the verb prolambano’s being used in this way in the context of eating” (The First Epistle, 542). This observation seems to be true, but it does not overturn the overwhelming prominence of a temporal translation and the exceedingly sparse evidence for a non-temporal translation.

49Thus the shift from BAGD 708.2a’s “in uses where the temporal sense of pro is felt very little, if at all...in eating, everyone takes his own supper” to BDAG 872.1c’s “prob. w. the temporal force of pro felt to a degree...in eating, each goes on ahead to take one’s own supper” is a move in the right direction (emphasis theirs).

50Winter, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 74-77; ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 144-148.

51Fee, The First Epistle, 540, 542 (although as noted earlier, Fee contends that a temporal translation remains possible).

52Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 159; Thiselton, The First Epistle, 863; Blue also adopts it (“The House Church at Corinth,” 230).
Winter himself has added only one small point in his 2001 re-
statement (see point six below).

Winter’s argument can be summarized in seven points: (1) The Asclepius
inscription indicates that 11:21’s προλαμβάνω does not have to be temporal
and in fact the inscription suggests a non-temporal understanding. Paul has used προλαμβάνω in 11:21 because the tradition uses λαμβάνω to
describe Jesus’ activity (11:23) and Paul would have found it inappropriate
to use the same verb to describe the Corinthians’ activity. (3) Greek tends
to join the preposition πρό, “to others for the purpose of strengthening the
meaning” and προοίδομι provides evidence for this intensive use where
διόμι means “give up” while προοίδομι means “betray.” (4) MM translates
1 Corinthians 11:21’s προλαμβάνει as “devours.” (5) E. Johnson in an 1884
Expository Times article translated it as “pounces.” (6) The verb in the
Asclepius inscription is used to describe compulsion. (7) The translation
“devours” fits the context better than a temporal translation (or simple
non-temporal) since it stresses the selfish character of their action which
occurred as the “haves” ate their own meal and did not share with the
“have-nots” present there with them.

However, Winter’s argumentation does not stand up to scrutiny. First,
the possibility of a non-temporal translation in the Asclepius inscription
must be granted, but we have already seen the tenuous basis it provides
for further argumentation.

Second, Paul’s desire to avoid using the same verb for both Jesus’ and
the Corinthians’ activities is a weak argument. One can just as easily run

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53 Horsley’s more popular commentary does not cite his source, but undoubtedly it is
Winter.
54 Winter, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 74-75; ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 144-
147. When Winter states, “It has been suggested by MM and BAGD that the prefix pro,
had lost its temporal forces by the first century. They both refer to the same Asclepian
inscription in connection with this verse,” he must surely have in mind προλαμβάνω when
used with διέλθειν in these two passages (Asclepius and 1 Cor. 11:21). BAGD does not
make such a general statement, while 708.1a and 708.1b both cite meanings used by first
century writers (Josephus, Plutarch, etc.) in which “the temporal force of pro- is felt”
(708.1). In addition, Winter himself has cited the second century A.D. writer Athenaeus
who uses προλαμβάνω to speak of taking sweet wine before dinner (Deipnosopists 2.445c)
and citron before any food (Deipnosopists 3.84) (cited by Winter, After Paul Left Corinth,
144).
55 Ibid., “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 76; ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 147.
56 Ibid., “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 76; ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 148.
57 Ibid., “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 76; ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 148.
58 Ibid., “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 76; ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 148. The
Johnson article is, E. Johnson, “The Table of Demons,” Expository Times, 2/8 (1884): 247.
59 Ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 148. Winter did not make this point in his 1978 article.
60 Ibid., “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 76; Ibid., After Paul Left Corinth 143-144,
148.
the argument the other way and say that use of the same verb (λαμβάνω) would highlight the offense by the Corinthians when contrasted with Jesus’ own actions and intent (cf. 11:23-32).

Third, Winter cites LSJ page 1465 as support for the claim that πρό- can be intensive in προλαμβάνω. However, the citation does not support Winter’s point. It does state that πρό can be placed after another preposition used adverbially in order to strengthen the adverbial force of the first preposition (cf. ἀποπρό διαπρό, and even προπρό). It also states that πρό- can be compounded with adjectives in order to denote intensity (πρόπας πρόπωρ).62

Yet when it addresses compound verbs (the specific form that concerns us) it does not list any indication of intensity. Instead they are all temporal or spatial variations on “before”: “1. of Place, before, forwards 2. forth b. publicly 3. away 4. in preference 5. before, beforehand.” Likewise, when describing the force of πρό in composition, Smyth does not list intensive as an option.64 Moulton presents the same picture for the New Testament in which πρό- in verbal compounds implies “before” of time or place.65 Finally, when Moule lists pronouns that have an intensifying force in compound verbs, he doesn’t include πρό in a list that has nine other members.66

Not surprisingly, Winter’s lone example προδίδωμι, does not withstand examination. The verb δίδωμι can indicate “give” with a wide range of contextual shading. Its compound προδίδωμι can mean “give in advance” (Rom. 11:35) or, as Winter indicates, “betray” (Mark 14:10). Note that in the first of these (“give in advance”) the πρό- compounds adds the very typical meaning of “before” in a temporal sense. By contrast, are we to believe that “betray” is then a different and unique intensive translation? Rather, “betray” is instead simply the extended use of “before” in a spatial sense. That which one “gives before” spatially, is something which is “given forth” or “handed over,” and when this occurs against someone’s wishes the extended meaning is “betray.” LSJ page 1465 offers the same analysis when it lists προδίδωμι under the compounded meaning of πρό- “away” and does not identify this as an intensive use. In short, Winter has not provided any evidence for an intensive use of πρό- in compound verbs.

Fourth, while MM does translate 1 Corinthians 11:21 as “devours,” nothing in the citation indicates that this translation is due to an intensive

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61LSJ, 1465.C.III.
62Ibid., 1465.D.II.
63Ibid., 1465.D.III (emphasis theirs).
64He lists, before, forward, for, in behalf of, in public, beforehand; in preference (Herbert Weir Smyth, Greek Grammar [rev. Gordon M. Messing; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984], 1694 Erg. 384).
67BDAG, 242.1-16.
68Ibid., 867.1; ibid., 867.2.
force of \textit{pro-}. MM never makes any claim whatsoever regarding an intensive meaning of this verb. It only repeats Wilamowitz’s claim that the temporal force of \textit{pro-} has worn off and that the verb in this instance does not have a temporal translation.\textsuperscript{70} If “devours” is to be understood as intensive, the citation has failed to provide anything that prepares the reader to understand it in this fashion.

Fifth, Winter simply states that Johnson had translated \textit{προλαμβάνω} as “pounces.” He does not cite any argumentation or data employed by Johnson which substantiates such a translation. The mere citation of a nineteenth century translation proves nothing in and of itself.

Sixth, the god does order Marcus Julius Apellas (\textit{ἐκκλείσθη; 1170, 5, 6}) to do these various activities. But if \textit{προλαμβάνω} is intensive in order to show compulsion, why are so many of the other actions \textit{not} intensive (λύσθη 1170, 9; γνωμάζει 1170, 9; χρῆσθαι 1170, 11; πηλώσασθα 1170, 12; περιπετεί 1170, 12; etc.)? Were they somehow less important? The individual verbal forms do not show compulsion in and of themselves nor does \textit{προλαμβάνω} lend itself to a pejorative sense or negative connotations any more than these other verbs.

Finally, it is true that the pejorative sense of “devours” provides a vivid description of the Corinthians’ actions.\textsuperscript{71} It would fit nicely with the context, but unfortunately for Winter, the intensive translation does not fit with what we know about the Greek language.

One final point needs to be made about Winter’s methodology which should also lead us to reject his proposal. One cannot use the Asclepius inscription as evidence for a non-temporal translation, a situation in which \textit{pro-} does not affect the meaning at all, and then turn around and load meaning onto \textit{pro-} in 1 Corinthians 11:21. If in the Asclepius inscription \textit{προλαμβάνω + δεῖπνον = “eat” just as in λαμβάνω + δεῖπνον}, then in order for \textit{προλαμβάνω + δεῖπνον} to equal “devours,” the verb must mean something like “really take.” In doing so, Winter has created a different meaning for \textit{προλαμβάνω} in 11:21 and has lost the Asclepius inscription as support, which is to say he has no support. This is evident in the fact that one cannot translate (nor has anyone else tried) the Asclepius inscription’s \textit{προλαμβάνω} intensively. If \textit{προλαμβάνω} is non-temporal in 11:21, then it must be non-temporal in the way Hofius has argued (cf. his Sybilline Oracle data).\textsuperscript{72}

Before continuing on to examine contextual considerations that impinge on the choice between temporal and non-temporal translations, two other proposals must be treated briefly. First, the exact same criticism directed at Winter’s translation should also lead us to reject Engberg-

\textsuperscript{70}MM, 542.
\textsuperscript{71}Winter, After Paul Left Corinth, 148.
\textsuperscript{72}Unfortunately, Winter does not interact with Hofius in his 2001 book, for it would have forced him to sharpen his argumentation. The Sybilline Oracle data shows the weakness of Winter’s argument.
Pedersen's suggestion. He too uses the Asclepius data to argue that προλαμβάνω “can be used identically with the simplex thus meaning just ‘consume.’” 73 However, he then adds that “in the present passage the προ- has the additional connotation of signifying taking (or consuming) ‘in preference’ or ‘for oneself.’” 74 Here again, after claiming that προ- has no force in the Asclepius inscription he proceeds to load meaning onto it in 11:21. 75 His attempt to parallel 11:21 with the use of προλαμβάνω in Galatians 6:1 is forced and unconvincing. 76

Just as significantly, the lexica have provided no sure example where προ- compounded on λαμβάνω means “in preference” or “prefer,” a point that becomes apparent when we consider Raymond Collin’s suggestion regarding the translation. 77 Collins translates the verse as “each one by preference takes.” 78 He notes the temporal and non-temporal options and then adds that it can mean, “to take by preference, as it does in Sophocles.” 79 Collins does not cite a particular passage in Sophocles, but in this translation he seems to have followed LSJ’s suggestion “take in preference” for Oedipus at Colonus 1141. 80 However, in this instance LSJ does not appear to provide the best reading. In the play, Theseus delivers Oedipus’ two girls (1096-1118). Upon their return, Oedipus apologizes to Theseus for speaking at length (μηκύνω λόγων; 1120) to the girls. Theseus replies that he is not surprised by the length of conversation (οὐκ᾽ εἰ τι μήκος τῶν λόγων ἐδού πλέον, τέκνουσι τερφθές τοιούτες, θεαμάτας ἐχώ; 1139-40). Then using προλαμβάνω he adds, οἶδ᾽ εἰ πρὸ τοιμῶν προλαμβάνει τὰ τῶν ἐπη (1141).

Given the preceding context, it seems more likely that Theseus excuses the fact that Oedipus has received their words before his (i.e., spoken with them first) rather than preferred their words to his. There is admittedly some overlap between these two options, but recent translators such as Fitzgerald, Garrett, and Lloyd-Jones (Loeb) have emphasized the temporal translation. 81 At the very least, the Sophocles citation does not provide an unambiguous example of “take in preference” and it cannot serve as the lexical basis for such a translation in 11:21.

73Engberg-Pedersen, “Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 597.
74Ibid.
75And once again, he thereby loses the Asclepius inscription as support.
76Ibid.
77Collins appears to adopt meal/BC order. He writes that, “Following the customary pattern of the Hellenistic dinner, the Christian gathering consisted of a meal, the Lord’s Supper, and a service of the word” (Raymond F. Collins, First Corinthians [ed. Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999], 418). He comments on how the “haves” arrive before those who are less well off (ibid.) and says that some “get off to a head start (pro-) without waiting for the others” (ibid., 423). However, he never makes any specific statements regarding the issue.
78Ibid., 422.
79Ibid. It should be noted that this would be a temporally influenced translation. That which one takes in preference is that which one takes before something else.
80LSJ, 1488.1.3.
81Robert Fitzgerald: “Or that you should address them before me—There’s no offense in that.” (“Oedipus at Colonus” The Complete Greek Tragedies: Vol. II Sophocles
VII. Contextual Considerations for Temporal and Non-Temporal Translations of προλαμβάνω

Lexical evidence leaves the non-temporal “take” as a possibility (the least likely of the two) along with the temporal “take before.” Does anything in 11:21 or the context require a non-temporal translation? Hofius and Engberg-Pedersen incorrectly believe that it does. Hofius points to ἐκαστὸς and ἵδον as one proof for his position. He argues that ἐκαστὸς usually operates inclusively (applying to each and everyone) and that “in Paul himself and moreover in the New Testament, where an ἵδος appears next to ἐκαστὸς (as in 11:21!), ἐκαστὸς is always meant literally and thus, altogether precisely, in a comprehensive sense.” Since “each” would have to include the rich and the poor, 11:21 could not then mean “take before,” a translation which can only apply to the rich.

This position ignores the inherent tension within 11:17-22. Paul addresses every verse to “you” plural. However, his words do not really address the whole church. Instead, he addresses the ones who are shaming the poor (11:22), namely, the rich. Paul chastises one group within the whole. In 11:21 Paul uses ἐκαστὸς to address this one group and so his words don’t apply to each and every member of the church at Corinth. Theissen has pointed to 1 Corinthians 1:12 and 14:26 as examples of this “imprecise” use of ἐκαστὸς where the referent is not all-inclusive. Only the context can determine whether the referent of ἐκαστὸς is all-inclusive or whether it is only a group within the whole. The pronoun does not in and of itself demand an all-inclusive referent with respect to the whole in every case.
Hofius will grant this “exaggerated” use on these occasions, but as mentioned above he thinks the combination of ἐκαστὸς and ἰδίος necessitates an inclusive sense. However, the addition of ἰδίος does not fundamentally change the need to determine whether in a given context ἐκαστὸς applies equally to the whole or only to a group within the whole. Hofius is correct that most often when ἐκαστὸς is used with ἰδίος it functions in a context where ἐκαστὸς refers inclusively (cf. Matt. 25:15; Acts 2:6; Rom. 14:5; 1 Cor. 3:8). However, the question at issue is whether in 1 Corinthians 11:21 and its context the combination of ἐκαστὸς and ἰδίος refers inclusively to the whole or to a group within the whole.

In 1 Corinthians 7:2 Paul instructs the Corinthians to “let each [man] have his own wife (ἐκαστὸς τὴν ἰδιὰν γυναῖκα ἐχέτω) and each [woman] have her own husband (καὶ ἐκαστῇ τὸν ἰδίον ἄνδρα ἐχέτω).” The statement has been interpreted as referring to marriage, or more recently, as a reference to sexual relations. In either interpretation, the verse illustrates how the referent of ἐκαστὸς can be non-inclusive with respect to the whole in a given context.

From the perspective of the first interpretation, Paul makes it evident in 7:7 that he does not mean that each and every Corinthian woman (or man) should marry because he wishes they were like himself—able to remain unmarried—and urges the unmarried Corinthians and widows to remain unmarried (7:8; cf. 7:9). However, Paul realizes that not all will be able to do this and so he addresses 7:2 to the group that can't abstain within the congregation. From the perspective of the second and more likely interpretation, Paul's statement does not apply to the whole congregation since it is limited to those who are married (the only groups of Christians in the proper state to have sexual relations; cf. 7:5) and specifically addresses their situation. It illustrates how ἐκαστὸς in conjunction with ἰδίος can refer to a group within the larger whole. In the same way ἐκαστὸς used in combination with ἰδίος in 1 Corinthians 11:21 has as its referent the rich who are being chastised (cf. 11:22) and not the whole congregation.

Hofius’s second argument against a temporal translation points to the ὅς μὲν...ὅς in 11:21 linked to the prior statement by a consecutive καί. Hofius

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broader context of the New Testament—Jesus does not mean that each and every person listening waters his ox or donkey on the Sabbath.

86“Herrenmahl und Herrenmahlsparadosis,” 385. Both Engberg-Pedersen (“Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 597, ftnt. 16) and Das (“1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Revisited,” 192, ftnt. 12) cite Hofius approvingly on this point.

87For a summary of older marriage position, see Fee, The First Epistle, 273; For the more recent sexual relations interpretation: ibid. 273-278; Collins, First Corinthians, 251-261; Thielson, The First Epistle, 500; Antoinette Clark Wire, The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 82-86, 90-97; Richard B. Hays, First Corinthians (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 113-114.

88I have found no other instance where a scholar has refuted Hofius on this specific point.
concludes that ἐκαστὸς is a collective concept under which ὁς μὲν and ὁς δὲ are ordered.89 The referent already demonstrated for ἐκαστὸς negates the force of this argument. 1 Corinthians 11:21a states the actions by one group (the rich), and 11:21b then expresses the result this has for that group (the rich get drunk) and another group (the poor who hunger) which together comprise the whole.

Finally, Hofius thinks that the adverbial phrase ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν prohibits a translation of “take ahead of time” for προλαμβάνω and Engberg-Pedersen has further sharpened this argumentation.90 This articular infinitive phrase must indicate action contemporaneous with the main verb προλαμβάνει (the taking beforehand/taking occurs “while eating”).91 Hofius has argued that if the rich have started before the poor arrive (as often assumed in meal/BC order) then the phrase ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν cannot be translated correctly since the poor aren’t there and the phrase cannot apply to the common meal.92 Engberg-Pedersen has clarified this by correctly observing that the phrase ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν “certainly means ἐν τῷ τῷ κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν” (“while eating the Lord’s Supper”) given that the object of φαγεῖν in 11:20 is κυριακὸν δεῖπνον.93

This data rules out the specific reconstruction that Theissen and Lampe envision, namely, a temporal προλαμβάνω in conjunction with B/M/C order. There can be no eating (“taking before”) prior to the “sacramental” bread that begins B/M/C, that can be described as “while eating the Lord’s Supper.” These events can only be described as occurring before the Lord’s Supper. Lampe realizes this problem but attempts to argue that since προλαμβάνω is temporal, the understanding of ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν must instead be changed to allow it—that ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν does not describe eating the Lord’s Supper.94 However, it is very difficult to believe that the object of φαγεῖν in 11:21 is not the same as it is in 11:20, namely, κυριακὸν δείπνον. The weakness of Lampe’s position becomes painfully apparent when he goes to the lengths of arguing that 11:21’s phrase ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν is actually short for,
“when you come together in order to eat,” just like 11:33’s ἐκ τοῦ φαγέιν.\textsuperscript{95}

On the other hand, Theissen’s treatment of this matter is quite odd for two reasons. First, he attempts to assert both a temporal and non-temporal translation of προλαμβάνω.\textsuperscript{96} Second, he sets forth the exact same argumentation regarding ἐν τῷ φαγέιν marshaled by Hofius and Engberg-Pedersen but does not seem to realize that it excludes the temporal translation as he has presented it.\textsuperscript{97}

VIII. Bread—Meal—Cup Order and a Temporal Translation of προλαμβάνω: The Answer to the Conundrum

The temporal translation offered by Theissen and Lampe must be rejected. This does not mean, however, that a temporal translation is completely excluded all together. Very few scholars have perceived this possibility. In the midst of all the disagreement, scholars (with the exception of Theissen and Lampe) have agreed on one point: a temporal translation cannot be used with B/M/C order.\textsuperscript{98} They deny this because if the “haves” begin eating before the poor arrive in bread—meal—cup order, the poor will miss out on the “sacramental” bread, and surely Paul would have directly addressed this problem if it were occurring.

However, none of these scholars realize that the arrival of the poor does not provide the only reference point for “before.” “Before” could also refer to when the eating begins for each group when gathered together at the same time. Rich and poor could gather at the same time. The “sacramental” bread would be blessed and eaten. Then the communal meal in between begins. The rich who sit in the triclinium get the best food and largest quantities—and they get it first while the poor have to wait. All of this can be described as “while eating the Lord’s Supper.”\textsuperscript{99} In the material surveyed for this study, only Witherington has also perceived this possibility.\textsuperscript{100} However, Witherington did not apply this insight to a specifically

\textsuperscript{95}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{96}Theissen, “Soziale Integration”: temporal—182; non-temporal: 189.

\textsuperscript{97}Ibid., 189. Engberg-Pedersen rightly describes this both/and as “inexplicable” (“Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 597, ftnt 16).

\textsuperscript{98}Paul Neuenzeit, Das Herrenmahl, 71; Xavier Leon-Dufour, Sharing the Eucharistic Bread, 367, ftnt. 41; Engberg-Pedersen, “Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 596-597; Klauck, Herrenmahl und Hellenistischer Kult, 295; ibid., “Presence in the Lord’s Supper,” 65; Schrage, Der erste Brief, 14, 24.

\textsuperscript{99}We may use the modern analogy of a Christian wedding reception to illustrate this. The meal begins with a prayer and serving begins. If one has the misfortune of sitting at a table in the opposite end of the room from where the serving starts, we can say that while eating the meal (ἐν τῷ φαγέιν) others take before (προλαμβάνω) you.

\textsuperscript{100}Much depends on how we take the verb prolambanei. Does it mean “go before” or “anticipate,” in which case the wealthy are eating before others, or does it mean simply “take,” that is, “eat”? Lexical evidence favors the former, but even so the point may not be that some poor people are arriving late, but that while all are already present the wealthy
B/M/C ordering at the Corinthian Lord’s Supper and, hence, did not use it in order to bring together the strongest lexical evidence (temporal translation of \(\text{prolamba,} \text{n} \text{w}\)) and the most probable reconstruction of events (B/M/C) as I will do shortly.\(^{101}\)

Paul’s practical instructions in 11:33-34 provides the final contextual evidence that must be considered in translating 11:21’s \(\text{prolamba,} \text{n} \text{w}\). There, after citing the tradition in 11:23-25 and applying it in 11:26-32, Paul tells the Corinthians that when they come together to eat (the Lord’s Supper) they should \(\text{iskol} \text{che} \text{to} \text{e}\) for one another. Paul concludes in 11:34 by saying that if Corinthians hunger they should eat at home so that when they come together it does not result in judgment.

Many scholars translate 11:33’s \(\text{iskol} \text{che} \text{omai}\) as “wait for” and not surprisingly some see in this an indication that 11:21 should also be translated temporally.\(^{102}\) However, a growing portion of scholarship prefers to translate the verb as “receive.”\(^{103}\)

Both options have strong lexical support. Every use of \(\text{iskol} \text{che} \text{omai}\) in the New Testament is best translated “wait for,” including Paul’s only other use in 1 Corinthians 16:11. On the other hand, the verb’s primary meaning outside the New Testament is “receive.”\(^{104}\) 3 Macabees 5:26 uses the verb for a king’s reception of courtiers, and P. Tebt. 33.7 uses it for entertainment of an official where food is involved.\(^{105}\)

Context favors the translation “receive.” The more we see Greco-Roman meal issues of where, what, and how much located in 11:21’s \(\tau \omega \ \text{to} \text{dion} \ \text{deip} \nu \text{on} \ \text{prolamb} \nu \text{on},\) the less satisfying the instruction to “wait for one another” becomes.\(^{106}\) If the problem is not exclusively one of timing, then

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\(^{101}\)Witherington had stated in regards to the ordering of the Lord’s Supper, “The Supper was celebrated after a normal meal, in the midst of such a meal, or even in two parts before and after the meal” (ibid., 248).

\(^{102}\)LSJ, 503.4; BDAO, 300; Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, 193; Wolff, Der erste Brief, 257; Thielson, The First Epistle, 896; Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle, 276; Theissen, “Soziale Integration,” 186; Lampe “Corinthian Eucharistic Dinner Party,” 8; ibid., “Das korinthische Herrenmahl,” 205; Smith, “Meals and Morality in Paul,” 327; Klauck, Herrenmahl und Hellenistischer Kult, 328; Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 161; Neuenzeit, Das Herrenmahl, 40; Leon-Dufour, Sharing the Eucharistic Bread, 215; Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, 193; Vulgate—\textit{expectate;}\) arguing that this supports a temporal translation in 11:21: Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 161; Wolff, Der erste Brief, 261; Lampe, “Das korinthische Herrenmahl,” 193.

\(^{103}\)Hofius, “Herrenmahl und Herrenmahlsparadosis,” 388-389; Engberg-Pedersen, “Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 598; Fee, The First Epistle, 568; Winter, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 79-80; ibid., After Paul Left Corinth, 151-152; Witherington, Conflict and Community, 252; Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 163; Hays, First Corinthians, 202; Blue, “The House Church at Corinth,” 231; Das, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Revisited,” 190-192.

\(^{104}\)MM describes “receive” as the primary meaning (192); LSJ, 503.1. This holds true for the LXX as well (cf. Gen. 44:32; 3 Macc. 5:26; Ps. 119:122; Sir. 6:23,18:14; Hos. 9:6; Mic. 2:12; Nah. 3:18; Is. 57:1).

\(^{105}\)LSJ, 1.6; Winter, After Paul Left Corinth, 151.

\(^{106}\)Winter, After Paul Left Corinth, 143 and Blue, “The House Church at Corinth,” 231, make the same point.
“wait for” doesn’t really deal with the problem. This translation remains possible because Paul’s statements in 11:22 and 11:34 about eating at home can be interpreted as addressing these factors, but the inclusive nature of “receive one another” fits better with the context.107

This command to receive one another urges the Corinthians to act like Christians (and act in accordance with the Lord’s Supper’s meaning) and so end the various ways the “haves” have shamed the “have-nots”—whether by the where, what, how much of the meal...or the when. There is no need to turn the issue into one of either/or and so exclude the problem of timing from those suggested by to τὸ ἴδιον δείκτην (where, what, and how much). All four issues—where, what, how much, and when—could very well have been occurring in an interrelated complex.

I propose, therefore, that in the context of a bread—meal—cup order, the best translation of 11:21’s προλαμβάνω is “take before” where the reference point of “before” is when members start eating as they are all present together—not the arrival of the “have-nots.” Likewise, the best translation of 11:33 is “receive.”

The principal strength of this proposal is that it employs both the stronger B/M/C order and the stronger temporal lexical evidence for προλαμβάνω. It resolves the single greatest argument against B/M/C order—the need to assert the dubious non-temporal προλαμβάνω because it is believed that a temporal translation is impossible in conjunction with B/M/C order when the site of the problem is the meal in between the “sacramental” bread and cup.108 In addition, it fully recognizes that the problem at Corinth was probably a multifaceted and interrelated complex of issues that included where people ate, what they ate, how much they ate, and when they ate.

107 11:22 and 11:34’s statements would then remind the Corinthians that if their primary concern in the meal was satisfying their own hunger and getting their share (τὸ ἴδιον δείκτην) they should take care of that at home. Their behavior at the Lord’s Supper is to be commensurate with what the Lord’s Supper is really about—Jesus death (cf. 11:23-25; 26). On this, see the helpful treatments by Engberg-Pedersen (“Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 601-610 and Beverly R. Gaventa, “You Proclaim the Lord’s Death: 1 Corinthians 11:26 and Paul’s Understanding of Worship,” Review and Expositor 80 (1983): 377-387).

108 This is exemplified in Schrage’s thorough and balanced treatment of 11:17ff. He does not ultimately declare either B/M/C or meal/BC to be the correct understanding, though he does think a meal in between the bread and cup to be less probable (Der erste Brief, 25). Schrage even includes both temporal and non-temporal (the latter in parentheses) translations in his own translation (ibid., 8). Schrage’s quandary results from the fact that he finds the B/M/C argument very convincing and sees the weaknesses of the external arguments for meal/BC order (ibid., 12-14). At the same time he recognizes the much stronger lexical evidence in favor of the temporal translation (ibid., 14). Convinced that a temporal translation cannot co-exist with B/M/C order if the eating is to occur during the meal in between sacramental bread and cup (ibid., 14, 24), he has no way of answering the question that does justice to both B/M/C order and the lexical evidence for a temporal translation.
Many young pastors arrive at their first parish to discover a group of men bearing the title of elder. They frequently have no idea where these men came from (their origin), nor are they entirely sure what they are supposed to do. Usually what happens is that the young pastor asks them what their custom is and he continues along that path, perhaps making minor changes here or there. When a younger pastor asks an older pastor about lay elders, the older pastor just shrugs his shoulders and says something to the effect, “They are what they are.” No one really seems to know what the lay elder is because we have forgotten our history.

The office of lay elder is subject to much confusion. This confusion stems in part because lay elders simply do what the congregation desires them to do. In some congregations, the lay elders read the Scripture lessons, pray publicly in worship and meetings, assist in the distribution of Holy Communion (sometimes they even administer the host), assist at and witness Baptisms, and so on. Some congregations even have their lay elders preach and conduct service in the absence of their pastor. It would seem that whatever the congregation wishes the elders to do, they may in fact do. After all, the only limitation upon a lay elder is that he does not infringe on the Office of the Public Ministry. Although neither Walther nor Graebner provided any explicit examples of what might infringe on the pastor’s office, there are some hints regarding what they had in mind.

In the 1850 Synodical Convention, a pastor asked the President of the Synod (Walther) for help to settle a dispute that had arisen in his congregation. A dispute arose whether or not a lay elder could by virtue of being the head of his household lead a public prayer in the church. Apparently, the lay elder believed he had the right to lead the congregation in public prayer, while the pastor did not think he did. The pastor asked Walther, “Could the ruling elder (der regierende Vorsteher) take the liberty to lead the prayer?” Walther’s response was adopted as a synodical resolution (which presumably is still binding today). The response reads:

To begin with the official prayer-office was considered an essential part of the official authority of the spiritual priesthood, whose possession is transferred to the called preacher of the Divine Word,
therefore, that the hearers relinquished according to God’s ordinance and command all rights in this matter (with the exception of cases of necessity); on account of which the authority to pray publicly is denied also to the ruling elders (den regierenden Vorstehern), which are not at the same time fellow-laborers in the Office of the Word, except that, in cases where the preacher is not present for the congregational-assembly, the elders (Vorsteher) may read a prayer written by the preacher in his place. The prayer for the congregation is not essentially different from the rest of the public preaching and teaching.¹

According to this convention resolution, a lay elder may not lead the congregation in public prayer. To do so would infringe on the pastor’s office. As far as Walther is concerned, public prayer is not “essentially different” from public preaching and teaching. Since a “ruling elder” is not given to preach and teach, he is not given to pray publicly either. For Walther, public prayer by a lay elder in worship is unimaginable. This convention resolution deals specifically with public prayer led by a lay elder “outside” the öffentlichen Gottesdienst (“public Divine Service”). Even outside of the public worship of the congregation, according to Walther, a lay elder may not lead the congregation in prayer, for instance at a congregational meeting or some other non-worship gathering. The only exception is that when the pastor is not available for the congregational meeting, the lay elder may read a prayer prepared by the pastor. Using this convention resolution as a guide, we would conclude that anything ordinarily done by the pastor, such as preaching, teaching, the reading of the Scriptures in worship, public prayer, the administration of Holy Communion and Holy Baptism, is not permitted for the lay elder.

Another area of confusion is that of the deacon. As far as Walther, Stellhorn, and Graebner were concerned, a deacon was a lay elder. They could not conceive of a “deacon” who would take the place of a pastor. From their perspective a deacon was someone who did not labor in the

public/official preaching and teaching of the Word. Anyone who did labor in the public/official preaching and teaching of the Word was a pastor. There was no third thing.

Understanding how Walther worked through the issues concerning the lay elder may provide us with the resources to examine and evaluate questions we face regarding the role of the laity, lay elders, and deacons.

Lay Elders Among the Saxon Immigrants—The Missouri Synod

The teaching on lay elders in the Missouri Synod originates from three basic sources. C. F. W. Walther, Frederick William Stellhorn (1841-1919), and Theodore Conrad Graebner (1876-1950). Both Stellhorn and Graebner were born before Walther died, and both continued and expanded his teaching on the lay elder. Graebner bears the distinction of bringing Walther’s teaching on lay elders to English-speaking Lutherans. In many ways, Graebner is responsible for the current teaching on and practice of lay elders in the Missouri Synod, even though in the early twenty-first century Missouri’s understanding of the lay elder is based more on oral tradition than anything else. In 1986, Victor Constien wrote a book for elders of the late twentieth century to serve as a training tool and a reference guide.2 Constien, other than being another witness to the Missouri Synod’s teaching on lay elders, makes no significant theological contribution to Missouri’s tradition of lay elders, and it was likely not his intent to do so. Of the three contributors to Missouri’s teaching on lay elders, Walther was the first and the most important.

In 1858, C. F. W. Walther authored a series of articles on elders. These appeared in Lehre und Wehre.3 Although it is not the first time Walther mentions lay elders, it is the first substantial discussion of them.4 Lay elders have had a role in the Missouri Synod since her earliest days. Other Lutheran churches in America already had had lay elders sporadically since the seventeenth century. It seems unlikely that such a fact escaped Walther. Whether or not these other Lutherans in America directly influenced Walther is harder to determine. Yet, Walther did indeed draw from some of the very same sources as other Lutheran groups had to support his position that lay elders were appropriate and even needed in the Lutheran church in America.

2Victor A. Constien, “The Caring Elder,” in The Caring Elder: A Training Manual for Serving (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986). Constien’s book has no bibliography or notes, so it can not be determined if he was aware of Walther’s, Stellhorn’s, or Graebner’s contributions on lay elders, Constien may have simply based his book on Missouri’s oral tradition.
4As previously mentioned, the first occurrence we found of lay elders is in the 1850 Convention Proceedings, just three after the Synod was founded.
Now we might ask why Walther wrote a series of articles on lay elders. There is no documented controversy involving lay elders. In some ways, lay elders were the practical outgrowth of how Walther affected the organization of the Missouri Synod. Yet, this solution in America would naturally seem strange to the German immigrants who increasingly made up the membership of the Missouri Synod. Since there is scant (although Walther will claim there is some) evidence for lay elders in Germany, the concept was foreign to most German Lutherans. One can reasonably suppose that Walther’s series of articles was to explain and justify Missouri’s position to those who thought it, at the very least, odd or even non-Lutheran. In fact, it can be documented that the General Council openly wondered where Walther found lay elders in the Lutheran tradition.5 Quite simply, people wondered what these lay elders were, where they came from, and what they were to do. Walther sought to answer those questions in his article, “Ueber Laienälteste oder Gemeindevorsteher” or “Concerning lay elders or congregational leaders.”

In this article on lay elders, several different terms will be used, frequently in a synonymous way. Most commonly these terms have been translated into English simply as “elder.” The term “Laienälteste” is simply a cognate to the “lay elder.” Both translate the Latin “presbyteri laici.” The term “Älteste” is a cognate of the English “elder” and the Latin “Senior.” The Latin “presbyter” and “senior” both translate the Greek πρεσβυτέρος. The modifier “Laien” presupposes that there can be another kind of elder besides “lay.” Stellhorn will actually translate “Laienälteste” as “ruling elder.”7 The more natural term in German for a lay-leader in the congregation is “Vorsteher.” Oftentimes, this is translated as “elder” with the sense of “lay elder.” We will render “Vorsteher” as “Deacons.”9 Walther also speaks of “Diakonen” as “lay elders.” In summary, one term in Greek, πρεσβυτέρος, is translated by two terms in Latin, “presbyter” and “senior,” which is translated by at least three different terms in German (more if one includes modifiers such as “laien” and “gemeinde”): “Älteste,” “Vorsteher,” “Diakonen,” all of which are loosely rendered into English as “elder.” Occasionally the term

5The General Council did in fact have isolated occurrences of lay-elders in their congregations; however, as a whole the General Council determined that their origin was non-Lutheran. Therefore, the General Council wondered where Walther found support in the Lutheran tradition.


7F. W. Stellhorn, “Dr. Krauth und Laienälteste,” Lehre und Wehre (1875), 104. “...Laienältesten (ruling oder lay elders).”


“Kirchenvater” (literally “church father”) will be translated as “elder.” Although we acknowledge there are different ways to translate words depending on the given context, the inconsistent way this was done has no doubt increased confusion on the subject.

Walther begins his article by acknowledging that over time the idea of lay elders has been associated as a Shibboleth of the Reformed Church and their teaching on the office and church government. Walther notes that some think the institution of lay elders is strange and contrary to the teaching of the evangelical Lutheran church. From the start, Walther has an uphill battle to convince his fellow Lutherans that lay elders do not belong only to the Reformed. In typical Waltherian fashion, Walther will attempt to prove his point by making a statement followed by several quotations from various authorities. He begins by quoting Dr. Rudelbach's *Zeitschrift*.

Rudelbach states it is merely an assertion that lay elders belong only to the Reformed. He argues that a synodical form of church government cannot exist without lay elders. Since you cannot have a synod without lay elders, what does this mean for the Lutherans in America? Walther writes:

> In any case even more important here in America, where the Church and State are separated and the ecclesiastical congregation, independent and autonomous, stands beside the civil, as a consequence the lay elder must of necessity be instituted. And in any case one deviates from the right observation itself from the right to the left: in order to desire to permit to do it here, concerning this institution, of which the biblical foundation, producing [of witnesses], operation and authority, which to hear the voices of our orthodox teaching-fathers. We divide thence here a sketch concerning the witnesses in the following.

Walther concludes that the lay elder must out of necessity be instituted here in America. His assumption, his presupposition, is that elders are necessary.

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Putting aside any nefarious reasons, Walther’s intention for writing on this topic seems to explain the introduction of elders into Lutheran congregations. Clearly most Lutherans in America were unfamiliar with lay elders and thought they were an innovation. The German immigrants did not know of lay elders from their German homeland. And though lay elders had appeared in some Lutheran congregations in America during the seventeenth century, this practice was not widespread. Walther seems to think the office of lay elder is an outgrowth of the synodical system. Since he believes Luther himself envisioned the synodical system, the office of lay elders is an unfolding of Luther’s envisioned (though not realized) synodical system, even though Luther himself knew nothing of lay elders. The fact that Luther knew nothing of the lay elder is explained by the belief that the office of lay elder disappeared during the dark days of the papacy. Graebner is at least willing to admit, “[The office of the lay elder]... also rarely appeared in the Lutheran church in Germany.” One might add that it rarely appeared in Germany even after the Reformation. This, in fact, is part of Walther’s problem; why do so many Lutherans in America think he has introduced an innovation into the Lutheran church. After Walther dismisses the charge that lay elders are from the Reformed and states that the office of lay elder is necessary in America, he proceeds to cite his sources at great length. He quotes various authors beginning with Chemnitz and Gerhard to show that some early Lutherans were aware of the concept of lay elders. His quotations are less than convincing, for his Chemnitz quotation only demonstrates that there were various rankings among the clergy, while his Gerhard quotation follows the example of Calvin declaring two kinds of elder, teaching and ruling.

Walther seems most concerned with the accusation that lay elders came from the Reformed. He quotes a Swedish bishop from Copenhagen.

desselben bald zur Rechten bald zur Linken weit abweicht: um so erwünschter dürfte es manchen hier sein, über dieses Institut, dessen biblische Begründung, Stellung, Wirkungs[k]reis und Gewalt, die Stimme unsere rechtgläubigen Lehrväter zu vernehmen. Wir theilen daher hier eine Reihe betreffender Zeugnisse im Folgenden mit.” (I would like to thank the Revs. Benjamin Mayes and Charles Schaum, who answered my questions on German grammar without complaint. Any mistakes in the translations are my very own.)

14Theodore Graebner, “Elders and Dacons in the Lutheran Church,” 223. “Therefore our American Lutheran Church has done well to reinstitute the office of deacons, elders, rulers, and helpers, which had been lost sight of in those dark times when priest rule was supreme.” See also Theodore Graebner, “Vom Amt der Laienältesten oder Vorsteher,” 460. Note that Graebner’s original doesn’t read exactly the same as the English translation. “Und weil dies der Fall ist, hat unsere amerikanisch-lutherische Kirche wohl daran getan, das Amt der Laienältesten, welches im Papsttum untergegangen war und auch in der lutherischen Kirche Deutschland seine seltene Erscheinung gewesen ist, wieder aufzurichten.”

Casper Erasmus Brochmand, who died in 1652, takes up the debate regarding the two kinds of elders. Just as Gerhard acknowledged there were some who thought elders always referred to pastors, Brochmand managed to find a couple of Reformed theologians who thought the same. This is a crucial quote for Walther. If there are two Reformed theologians who erroneously deny the distinction between teaching and ruling elders then lay elders cannot be from the Reformed. Just because the Lutherans and the Reformed agreed on the interpretation of a single passage did not mean the Lutherans derived the idea from the Reformed. Bishop Brochmand cites two Reformed theologians named Adrian Saravia and Erastus. They taught that the presbytery existed not by divine institution but by human authority. These Reformed theologians claimed that the Scriptures recognize as an elder one who is in the Office of the Ministry. In other words, there are no lay elders. Brochmand (and Walther) believe these two Reformed theologians are in error. He argues that Saravia’s and Erastus’ interpretation is unnatural since St. Paul mentions other elders and speaks of a double-honor. Since all elders are worthy of honor, why would he mention a double honor unless there were two types of elders? On this point, the two Reformed theologians’ interpretation is closer to Luther’s than to that of the Lutheran bishop from Copenhagen. Nonetheless, this quotation serves Walther’s argument well.

Walther produces several more quotations from the dogmaticians, including Calov, Georg Weinrich, Johann Quistorp, Sal. Glassius, Daniel Arcularius, Jeremiah Kromayer, and Conrad Dannhauer, who was Philip Jakob Spener’s teacher. All of these men spoke of two kinds of elders: teaching and ruling. The teaching elder belonged to the Office of the Ministry and was entrusted with the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. The ruling elder, on the other hand, was entrusted with church discipline. Walther, as if realizing he does not have time to cite every Lutheran theologian writes, “In a similar way nearly all of the mentioned theologians of our church spoke out concerning the aforementioned lay elder” and finds the evidence “incontestable.” Walther concludes by saying “the institution of the lay elder is in no way, as is asserted here and there, specifically Reformed or anti-Lutheran.”

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17 Ibid., 86. “In ähnlicher Weise sprechen sich fast alle namhaften Theologen unserer Kirche über die s. g. Laienältesten aus.”
18 Ibid., “unwidersprechlich.”
19 Walther, “Ueber Laienälteste oder Gemeindevorsteher,” 112. “das Institut eines s. g. Laienpresbyterats keinesweg, wie hie und da behauptet warden will, specifisch Reformirt oder antilutherisch sei.”
Walther’s Other Writings on Lay Elders

Considering the importance of Walther’s *Church and Ministry* for the Missouri Synod, which appeared in its first edition in 1852, it is no surprise that the topic of lay elders appears. In Thesis VIII, Walther writes, “The preaching office is the highest office in the church, from which all other church offices flow.” Walther will argue from this point that all auxiliary offices in the church including that of the lay elder flows from the preaching office (*Predigtamt*). This forms the basis of Walther’s doctrinal argument for the office of lay elder.

Walther begins by first speaking of those in the public preaching office. He writes, “Therefore, in Scripture the incumbents of the ministerial office are called elders, bishops, rulers, stewards, and the like; and the incumbents of the subordinate offices are called deacons, that is, servants, not only of God but also of the congregation and the bishop.” In this passage, Walther is speaking of clergy. The terminology he uses is noteworthy: elders (*Aelteste*), bishops (*Bischöfe*), rulers/leaders (*Vorsteher*), and stewards (*Haushalter*). What is immediately apparent is that the terms elders (*Aelteste*) and rulers/leaders (*Vorsteher*), which are frequently associated with laymen, are here used to speak of the clergy. In this passage, Walther reserves the term “deacon” (*Diakonen*) for laymen. From Walther’s and Graebner’s point of view, the Missouri Synod has had a diaconate as long as she has had lay elders. In the early twenty-first century, some have suggested the institution of a diaconate to help alleviate the shortage of pastors. These deacons would be authorized to act as pastors, yet they would not in fact be ordained or classified as pastors. These men would apparently have different and shorter educational requirements than those who would be pastors. Walther and Graebner could not conceive of such an arrangement. Deacons to them were laymen.

Walther continues, “Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry,

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20 The title would be better translated *Church and Office* after *Kirche und Amt* in the original.


22 Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289.


whether it be the elders who do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17) or the rulers (Rom. 12:8) or the deacons (the office of service in the narrow sense) or whatever other offices the church may entrust to particular persons for special administration.\textsuperscript{25} In this section, Walther’s language changes. Here he speaks primarily of the laity and not clergy. What the English translation renders as “elders,” Walther writes, “Aeltestenamt,” or literally “office of elder,” which is defined as someone who does not labor in the preaching of the Word.\textsuperscript{26} The “ruler” is not “Vorsteher,” as we might expect, but “Regieramt,” literally, “ruling office.”\textsuperscript{27} Likewise, “deacons” are referred to as “Dienstamt,” that is, a “serving office.”\textsuperscript{28} The office of elder, ruler, and servant are called a “Hilfsamt” (“a helping office”) to the “Predigtamt” (“the preaching office”).

Twelve years after writing Church and Ministry, Walther wrote Die Rechte Gestalt,\textsuperscript{29} which describes the right form of a Lutheran congregation.\textsuperscript{30} In section 27 of this work, Walther describes the office of the lay elder. He writes:

The congregation has also established the office of such a kind as elders (Aeltesten) or leaders (Vorsteher), who do not work in the Word or in the Teaching (1 Tim. 5:17: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching [RSV].”), but are to help those who are in the Office of the Word in the rule and in the administration of discipline and order in the congregation (Rom. 12:8: “He that ruleth, with diligence (KJV).” 1 Cor. 12:28: [112] “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues (RSV).” The requirements to be elected to office are given in Acts 6:3, “Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty (RSV).” 1 Tim. 3:8-12: “Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain; 9 they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as deacons. 11 The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the

\begin{itemize}
\item[25]Walther, Church and Ministry, 289-290.
\item[26]Walther, Die Stimme Unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt, 1852, 386.
\item[27]Walther, Die Stimme Unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt, 1875, 342.
\item[28]Ibid.
\item[29]Ibid.
\end{itemize}
husband of one wife, and let them manage their children and their households well (RSV).”31

This passage shows Walther’s Scriptural basis for instituting the office of lay elder. Here the terms Aeltesten and Vorsteher are synonymous with lay elder. The fluidity of the terminology can introduce confusion. As we saw in Walther’s Church and Ministry, these same terms referred to clergy.

1 Timothy 5:17 is the lynch pin passage, “elders who rule well.” These are understood to be laymen who do not preach and teach. Until Calvin, no one interpreted 1 Timothy 5:17 in this way. Another important passage is Acts 6:3. The Office of the Seven are understood by Walther and others to be laymen, not clergy. Once again this passage’s interpretation has changed in the last five hundred years. After Walther quotes his support from the Scriptures, he produces a number of lengthy quotes, several of which are the same ones he used in his article on lay elders four years earlier. In the article from 1858 and the passages in Church and Ministry and Die Rechte Gestalt, we see the basis for Walther’s institution of the office of the lay elder.

The General Council’s Disagreement with Professor Walther

Walther’s writings on the lay elder did not escape the notice of other Lutherans in America, most notably that of Charles Porterfield Krauth of the General Council. Krauth held Walther in great esteem and saw him as an ally on the confessional Lutheran front. Although Krauth and Walther agreed on many things, they were not in agreement on lay elders. The Lutheran and Missionary reports, “One authority that Prof. Krauth has great reverence for—viz: Prof. Walther, of Missouri—expressed an opinion contrary to that held by the speaker.”32 The opinion Krauth held is summarized here:


Rev. Dr. Krauth spoke of the orders in the Church. That there was no Scriptural recognition of the office of Elder as distinct from that of the Pastor. That Elder Bishop and Pastor referred to one and the same office in the Church. That there are but two offices of divine right in the Church, viz: Elders and Deacons. That there is no warrant in the Word of God for the appointment of Lay Elders, nor are there any traces in the history of the Church of their appointment. Among the early Christians, “Lay Elder” was a fallacious term. The word lay is non-official. A Lay Elder, therefore, would be a non official official. The passage in the New Testament on which authority is claimed for a distinction between ruling and teaching elders is First Tim. v. 17. This passage, correctly understood, makes no distinction. You find the emphasis is on the word “well,” and shows a distinction between those of the same class, who diligently labor, and those who do not labor in the exercise of their offices.\footnote{Ibid.}

Here Krauth is simply presenting what was held for much of the church’s history. Before Calvin, the commentaries on 1 Timothy 5:17 simply considered “elder” to be one and the same as the pastor. Krauth, being an English speaking Lutheran, gives some insight into the term “lay elder” by defining it as a “non official official.” He states that this is a fallacious term. Krauth’s explanation concerning the elder who labors “well” is exactly the same as Luther’s.\footnote{Martin Luther, Lectures on 1 Timothy, 1528. AE 28, 348.} This does not describe a different type of elder, rather it describes an elder who performs his duties well, who is faithful to his calling. From this Krauth concludes there was no office of lay elder in the New Testament.

The prevailing opinion was that the office of lay elder was unknown in the New Testament church. The only passage (1 Tim. v. 17) upon which its advocates laid much stress, they had misconceived. The office of lay elder was unknown to the earlier fathers, and the earlier theologians of the Lutheran church. Its introduction into the Lutheran church had its origin in Calvinizing tendencies.\footnote{“The Convention of the General Council.”}

Krauth can find no evidence for lay elders before Calvin. He diagnoses the source of the lay elder in Lutheran churches as coming from Calvin, whose interpretation was adopted by various Lutherans and finally put into practice in America. Because of Krauth’s belief that lay elders originated with Calvin, he had to disagree with the position of the Missouri Synod.
Dr. Krauth stated that he regretted very much that he had to differ in regard to lay elderships from an authority, which he held in the highest esteem, viz: Prof. Walther, of the Missouri Synod. Prof. Walther had failed to quote in support of his position any of the earlier fathers or earlier theologians of the Lutheran church. If there was any passage in these authors favoring this position, they would most certainly have been quoted; for Prof. Walther has these authorities at his fingers’ end. He gives a passage, indeed, from Chemnitz, but that does not apply to the case in point.36

Although Krauth greatly respects Walther, he cannot agree with him concerning lay elders. He does not find Walther’s argument persuasive, nor his Evidence sufficient.

Krauth’s shot across Walther’s bow could not go unanswered, not to defend Walther’s honor, but to prevent confusion among the congregations and pastors of the Missouri Synod. Walther does not take up this challenge; rather it falls to F. W. Stellhorn. In his article, “Dr. Krauth and Lay Elders,” he writes:

Recently, we were disappointed about the author, Dr. Krauth, who in the Lutheran & Missionary published several articles about the teaching of the preaching office (Predigtamt), in which he especially seeks to demonstrate that our teaching, that is the Missouri teaching, of the lay elder (Laienältesten) has no support in God’s Word, in the writings and history immediately after the apostolic as well as Reformation times.37

Stellhorn is disappointed because he does not see Missouri’s teaching on the lay elder as fundamentally different from that of the General Council. He believes that the General Council’s teaching “only makes a distinction from what we ourselves understood of it, and as we have established the matter.”38 For Stellhorn it is a matter of differing degrees and not of substance. He argues that all preachers and pastors are elders but not all elders are pastors.39 In the end Stellhorn does not really add anything new

36Ibid.


38Ibid. “scheint nun zwar ganz verschieden zu sein von dem, was wir uns darunter vorstellen, und wie wir die Sache eingerichtet haben.”

39Ibid., 110. “Aber nicht alle aeltesten haben das Amt im Wort und in der Lehre zu arbeiten; mit anderen Worten: nicht alle sind Prediger des Evangeliums oder Pastoren. Allen Prediger und Pastoren sind aber zugleich Vorsteher, ja, sie sind die eigentlichen und nächsten Vorsteher.”
to Missouri’s teaching on elders. He simply defends the teaching first introduced by Walther.

**Graebner Brings the Lay Elder to English Speaking Lutherans**

As the language of the Missouri Synod shifted from German to English, there was the need to bring the teaching about lay elders into English as well. Theodore Graebner first took up this task in his 1915 *Der Lutheraner* article, which was translated into English for the *Lutheran Witness* in 1916 by Rev. W. Cook. In this article, Graebner presents Walther’s teaching on lay elders in a format for the lay people of the church. He begins by stating, “That elders in the Christian Church are an ancient usage is noticeable from the fact that even the very first congregation in Jerusalem had elders.” The seven men mentioned in Acts 6 are also counted among the lay elders. He also considers that Judas and Silas mentioned in Acts 15:22 were examples of lay elders in the apostolic church. Graebner presents what has become the standard interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17, namely, that there are two kinds of elders: teaching and ruling. He identifies that the office of lay elder came from the synagogue:

In the synagogue there was no specific office for the purpose of preaching the Word, as we are accustomed to have it in the New Testament; hence the new office received a new name from the Greek
language, the official title of overseers of cities, the word bishop, *episcopos*. That first committee of seven almoners, or elders, did not receive a new title, for that office was an old institution in Jewry. Nor was this office introduced by divine command, but rather in the exercise of Christian liberty. The seven elders performed such services as the twelve apostles were unable to do for want of time. In order to emphasize the fact, we repeat that this office of eldership was not divinely appointed, nor instituted by God’s command, as is the office of the ministry. It simply was inaugurated to supply help for the office of the ministry; it is an *auxiliary office* thereof, instituted by the Church itself according to the liberty which it has in Christ Jesus.\(^{46}\)

Originally, the office of lay elder came from the synagogue but now is understood to exist according to Christian freedom. It is an auxiliary office instituted by the church. Here he reflects Walther’s teaching in *Church and Ministry*. He acknowledges that the Scriptures do not command the existence of lay elders, nor do the Scriptures describe their duties.\(^{47}\) In fact, according to Graebner this freedom is what distinguishes the Lutheran teaching on lay elder from that of the Presbyterians. He writes:

> From the viewpoint of the Church, a congregation may be a Christian congregation without elders or trustees; the office of lay eldership is not a mark of orthodoxy, nor is it an essential part of the nature of a Christian congregation. Right here you notice one point of difference between our doctrine and the doctrine of the Presbyterians, who believe that the existence of elders, with spiritual powers, *e.g.*, in church-discipline, is an indispensable characteristic of a Christian congregation.\(^{48}\)

This understanding forms the defense against the view that the Missouri Synod adopted the lay elder because of “calvinizing tendencies.” The difference for Graebner is that, although he agrees with Calvin’s interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17, that is, there are teaching and ruling elders, such an arrangement is not necessary for the church to exist. The Calvinist view holds there must be two kinds of elders or the church is not the church. Although the Office of the Public Ministry is necessary for the church, indeed, it is a mark of the church. On the other hand, the office of lay elder is not necessary; rather, it is beneficial for the church. The church may

\(^{46}\)Ibid., 222.

\(^{47}\)Ibid., 269. “When a Christian congregation institutes in its midst the office of eldership, it does so according to the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. There is no command in Scripture for it, neither expressed nor implied. Neither does the Word of God prescribe the number of elders nor the manner in which to elect them. The divine Word does not even contain specific instructions for, and duties of, elders and deacons.”

\(^{48}\)Ibid. 270.
have lay elders or not have lay elders according to their needs and desires on the basis of Christian freedom.

Just as Walther revisited the lay elder later in life, so too did Graebner. Thirteen years after he wrote his article for Der Lutheraner, he wrote a Handbook for Congregational Officers.49 He states that this book grew out of the articles he wrote in 1915 and was written because “no literature on this subject was extant in our midst.”50 The lack of literature on the subject of lay elders helps to demonstrate its newness in the Lutheran church. Graebner begins his book with a statement many new pastors have pondered, “I wonder whether the voters ever stop to think how this office, the office of elders, originated.”51 As the congregations transitioned from German to English, people began to ask where lay elders came from. To make matters more complicated, different congregations use different terminology. “The men called elders in some congregations are called deacons in others. In German we have no equivalent for deacons, but we speak of Vorsteher and Vorstand, of Gemeindeaelteste and Gemeinderaat.”52 Just as Stellhorn did not wish to quibble over terminology, neither does Graebner. All of the aforementioned terms refer to the same office of lay elder.

Although Graebner’s book on congregational offices is much lengthier than his article on lay elders, his argument is basically the same. He does spend more time discussing the role and duties of the elder, but these “duties” are always under the control of the rubric of whatever the congregation desires, provided these duties do not infringe on the pastoral office. It seems likely that Graebner’s book informed the oral tradition regarding elders and other lay-officers in the church, which still governs how most congregations in the Missouri Synod operate today.

Conclusion

Graebner stated that every Lutheran voter should be able to give an intelligent answer about the origin and duties of the lay elder.53 Just as Graebner was confronted by a lack of resources in his day, we too find that “no literature on this subject was extant in our midst.”54 Although the oral traditions about lay elders live on in our congregations, our collective memory about the origin of the lay elder has become clouded. We have sought to offer some resources for the reader to “be able to give an intelligent answer” about the lay elder.

50Ibid., iii.
51Ibid., 2.
52Ibid., 3.
53Ibid., 3. “They are questions to which every Lutheran voter at least should be able to give an intelligent answer.”
54Ibid., iii.
Walther is most helpful to us when we see how he worked through the difficult problems that confronted him. In the case of lay elders, we see that he needed a way to organize the church here in America without the assistance of the government. Lay elders formed part of his solution. As Walther himself stated, the Scriptures do not command the institution of lay elders; the church is free to have them or not. Walther cited Scripture passages that he believed described lay elders in the early church. Unfortunately, there is no historical precedent for his interpretation of these passages before John Calvin. Nonetheless, we need not agree with Walther’s interpretation to retain, utilize, and be thankful for the lay elders who serve in our congregations. Walther’s introduction of lay elders to the Lutheran church in America was not based on particular Scripture passages that instituted this office; rather, it was based on the church’s freedom in Christ. Walther’s teaching on auxiliary offices formed the basis for the lay elder.

For all intents and purposes, Walther did indeed introduce lay elders. He took a practice that appeared in isolation and was regarded with the suspicion of being non-Lutheran and brought it into widespread use in the Lutheran church. Instructed by the way he faced the challenges of his day, one may then face our lack of clarity with similar concerns: what needs to be safeguarded, the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, and between what is a doctrine and what is not. Walther’s concern that the lay elder not infringe on the Office of the Public Ministry should still guide us today. According to Walther, the ruling elders, that is, those who were not called into the Public Ministry, were not to act as if they were. Walther’s concern to keep “the Office of Teaching and Preaching” distinct and separate from the “Ruling Office” would guide us well, and also clear the way to a clearer recognition of the specific and invaluable role lay elders play in the life of our congregations.
Review Essay

Concordia: A Reader’s Edition

Charles P. Arand and Paul W. Robinson


The idea of producing a reader’s edition of the Book of Concord for those who may not be familiar with the Lutheran Confessions is outstanding. It stands within the best tradition of the Missouri Synod reaching back to C. F. W. Walther who did everything he could to place the Confessions into the hands of parishioners. If a reader’s edition of the Confessions is to serve the non-professional, it needs to be packaged in a reader friendly and easily accessible format. On this point, the McCain edition¹ scores high marks. Its layout is accessible while its timelines, charts, and pictures are very eye appealing. But stylish packaging is not enough. The goal is to help readers treasure the Lutheran witness and become lifelong students of the Confessions. To achieve this goal, the non-professional reader deserves the best that contemporary confessional scholarship has to offer in terms of reliable texts, faithful translation, and accurate notes. On this point, the McCain edition must be given much lower marks. Where it adheres to the Dau-Bente Triglotta² edition on which it is based it provides a reliable text. But where it “updates” and thus departs from Dau-Bente in terms of texts, translation, or notes, the McCain edition proves to be an

¹Referring to the new edition of the Book of Concord from Concordia Publishing House as the McCain edition reflects a standard way of referencing the different editions in American Lutheran scholarship. These include the Henkel edition (1851), Jacobs’s edition (1882), the Dau-Bente edition (1921), the Tappert edition (1959), the Kolb-Wengert edition (2000). In Germany, it was common to refer to editions by their place of publication such as the Dresden edition (1580), the Leipzig edition (1584), or Göttingen edition (1930), as well as by editor such as the Detzer edition (1830) or the well-know Mueller edition (1847).


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inferior text with unreliable translations and inaccurate notes. We will consider each of these three issues in turn.

**Issues of Text and Canon**

The most direct way of acquainting people with the Confessions is to provide readers with the confessional texts themselves. The McCain edition opted to use the texts of the 1580 and 1584 Book of Concord as found in the venerable Dau-Bente edition of the Lutheran Confessions. Best known as the *Triglotta*, the Dau-Bente volume provided a serviceable study edition of the confessions for several generations of pastors in the Missouri Synod during the mid-twentieth century. Upon comparing the two editions, however, it becomes apparent that the Dau-Bente edition shows greater respect for the confessional texts in the 1580 and 1584 editions of the Book of Concord than does the new McCain edition.

**Alterations to the Texts**

The most troubling feature of the McCain edition is the way in which the editors have frequently modified the confessional texts in such a way that the novice reader cannot distinguish between that which actually belongs to the confessional writings and that which does not. These modifications most often take the form of editorial insertions within the texts. At times these insertions are editorial comments or notes. At other times the insertions are taken from the German version of the text and then merged into the Latin version of the text (or vice versa). In this way, German and Latin texts are conflated into a single English edition. The seriousness of this problem lies not so much in the fact that the editors have inserted material into the text that is not original to it, but that they fail to inform the reader where it occurs. As a result, the McCain edition provides the reader with something of an altered Book of Concord (a veritable *Concordia Variata*!)

The McCain edition most frequently inserts subheadings into lengthier texts like the Apology, the Treatise, and the Formula of Concord. Unfortunately, no distinction (by means of brackets or notes) is made between those subheadings inserted by the reformers and those inserted by the editors. This can easily give the impression that all of the subheadings

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3For example, to Justification in Apology IV, we have the subheadings: What is Justifying Faith? Faith in Christ Justifies. We Obtain Forgiveness of Sins by Faith in Christ. Scripture Affirms This Teaching. The Church Fathers Affirm This Teaching. The Adversaries Reject This Teaching. Love and Fulfilling the Law. No One Can Keep the Law Perfectly. Church Fathers and St. Paul Affirm Justification through Faith. Reply to the Adversaries' Arguments. Passages the Adversaries Misuse. The Adversaries' Teaching Based on Reason and the Law. Results of the Adversaries' Teaching. Salvation is by God's Mercy. The Adversaries' Other Arguments. Conclusion.
belong to the original text or none of them do. In either case, they mislead the reader about what belongs to the actual confessional texts. But even if they were placed in brackets in order to identify them as editorial insertions, would they contribute to a better understanding of the text? Consider Apology IV, one of the most important articles in the Book of Concord. Not only are eleven subheadings (Melanchthon only had five) inserted by the editors, but notes are occasionally provided for them. Neither the subheadings nor the content of the notes beneath them assist the reader in understanding how Melanchthon builds his case against the Contradiction step by step. Instead, these insertions undermine the rhetorical structure of Article IV. Melanchthon published a book on rhetoric the same year in which the Apology was published and many of the examples in that book are taken directly from the Apology. It is here that one can find appropriate subheadings as well as identify where to insert them in order to help the reader discern the Apology’s structure or outline.4

Not only do the subheadings inserted by the editors interrupt the flow of the text, they provide a particular “spin” for an entire document. For example, following Article 21 in the Augsburg Confession, past editions have included (in brackets) a subheading like, “Summary of Part I.” This is a neutral statement that picks up on the paragraph that follows. The McCain edition, however, changed this to “Summary of the Conflict.” This has the effect of providing a slanted interpretation on the purpose of the Augsburg Confession that reflects the situation post-1531, but not the situation at Augsburg in 1530. It implies that Articles 1-21 intended to detail the areas where the Lutherans disagreed with Rome. But that is not at all the way in which the Augsburg Confession was written. Articles 1-21 laid out the Lutheran contention, “our doctrine is scriptural and catholic, so we don’t think that you can disagree with us on these articles.” Note the opening lines of the summary, “This is nearly a complete summary of the teaching among us. As can be seen, there is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the church catholic, or from the Roman church, insofar as we can tell from its writers [K-W, 59 Latin].5 Moreover, Melanchthon’s structure of the document works with the assumption given our teaching is Biblical and catholic; the disagreement rests with certain practices that we have brought into line with our teaching (but without the permission of the bishops). Still, the gauntlet is thrown down. Should the opponents reject the AC, they would reject their own catholicity.

In previous editions of the Book of Concord, Biblical references were added only when the confessional texts quoted a passage from Scripture or made a direct allusion to some passage from Scripture. The McCain edition departs from that practice and inserts many other passages through-

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5Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., The Book of Concord (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).
out the confessional writings and thus goes far beyond helping the reader to identify the passage of the Bible that the confessors quote. It is claimed that these references “will help church professionals discover how the Reformers interpreted and applied God’s Word” (18). One might question whether or not the insertion of a reference shows how the Reformers interpreted God’s Word. The insertions show which passages the editors think are pertinent, but they are not necessarily the passages that the Reformers had in mind. If they were, why not quote Romans 10 in AC V since that one is actually cited in the Schwabach Articles and was a key source document for the AC? Instead, the editors insert passages of their own choosing.

Again, the insertion of these texts can easily confuse the reader with regard to what is part of the confessional text and what is not. The reader has no reason to assume that these were not part of the text written by the Reformers. Moreover, the inserted texts can lead to a particular interpretation of the confessional text at best and a distortion of its meaning at worst. At times the inserted Scriptural references even contradict the confessional use of those texts. For example, the editors inserted the reference to the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13) in AC 8 which deals with the topic of the church and how hypocrites and evil persons are mingled in with the believers to the point that at times the Sacraments may even be administered by evil men. Yet, Apology 7, 19 refers to this passage and stresses that the “field” in this parable refers to the world and not the Church [sic]!

Throughout the volume the reader will also come across words and phrases that are placed in italics. At first glance, it would appear that the editors added them for the sake of emphasis. But upon closer inspection, many of the words placed in italics do not necessarily make sense (e.g., special faith in Ap 13, 21; visible word in Ap 13, 5; priesthood in AC 13, 7, confirmation, extreme unction in Ap 13, 6 etc.). But this was not entirely the fault of the editors. They simply carried them over from the Dau-Bente edition. But what was their reason for placing some words and phrases in italics? Was it purely arbitrary? A check of the 1584 Latin edition does not provide any clues since nothing in the text is placed into italics. But as soon as one opens the 1580 Dresden edition the answer jumps off the page. In the German edition, the editors/printers italicized all of the Latin terms used (fides specialis, doctrina, etc.)6 The practice of italicizing Latin terms carried over to the English even after the Latin terms had been translated into English. But the editors apparently did not notice and so they give no explanation for this practice.

Oddly enough, Dau-Bente translates the Latin terms in the German text into German and places them in bold. But then the Latin terms in the Latin text are put into italics unlike the 1584 edition. The practice apparently goes back to the Mueller edition, which had the same practice.
Eclectic Selections of Texts

Although the Dau-Bente edition no longer provides the reader with the best texts of the confessions available to the church today, it does present the time-honored texts from the 1580 and 1584 editions of the Book of Concord in parallel columns. The editors of the McCain edition altered these texts in a number of ways. In some cases, they blended together the German and Latin texts. In other cases, they made changes that amount to a textual reductionism of the confessional documents that may appear (at times) designed to rule out certain interpretations. And in still other cases, the editors have added some materials to their edition that were not part of the original Dau-Bente edition.

The Dau-Bente edition provided a single English translation (based extensively, at times word for word, on Jacobs's edition7) of either the German or Latin text depending upon the original language in which it was written. If there was a weakness in this edition, it is that Dau-Bente did not provide a separate translation of both versions. They compensated for this by placing variations from the other text into brackets within the English text. The McCain edition “deleted this bracketed material in most cases and focused on providing an English version for either the Latin or the German” (680). By deleting the bracketed material, it may be asked whether or not the McCain edition has deprived the reader of parts of the Lutheran Confessions. After all, the differences between the German and Latin at times highlight critical theological tensions and important theological nuances that are part of the Lutheran Confessions!8 But note that the editors indicated they removed the bracketed material “for the most part.” In many cases, the McCain edition simply exchanged the brackets for parentheses9 and retained the material from the other version of the text thereby creating a hybrid text. The reader has no reason not to assume that the material in parentheses is not from the original text.

Examples of a selective omission of the bracketed material abound in the McCain edition. In AC XXIII, the editors inserted a German text at paragraph 6, but chose not to include the lengthier German text at paragraphs 13, 14, 18, 21, or 22. In AC XXIV, they then insert another text from the German at paragraph 27. Consider how this plays out in one article like Apology VII. There are seven places where the McCain edition conflates the Latin and German textual traditions into a single English version. In these instances, the reader cannot distinguish the parenthetical material that belongs to the original Latin text (e.g., Ap VII, 24, 27, 32, 42) from the parenthetical material that belongs to the German text (Ap VII, 12, 14, 23, 25).

7The Book of Concord; or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, edited by Henry Eyster Jacobs (Philadelphia: G. W. Frederick, 1882).
8Many lay readers are accustomed to study Bibles with several translations.
9Why parentheses instead of brackets is curious. It’s not that they don’t use brackets elsewhere (see p. 179 “[The antichrist]”).
The only criteria that seem operative in the McCain edition for determining whether the bracketed material is included or excluded is either theological or brevity. Perhaps it is simply a case of a hastily produced text. In any event, the end result is that the editors freely blend selected German texts into the Latin texts of the AC and Apology thereby creating a new text and do so without informing the reader.

The issue of whether to use the German text or the Latin text is especially important with regard to the Augsburg Confession. They were prepared somewhat independently of one another for different audiences. German was the diplomatic and political language of the Diet and so the German text has in view the audience of the electors, princes, and other political authorities. Latin was the language of the theologians and thus has in view the representatives of Rome. The German was read aloud on 25 June, and then both were presented to the emperor. So does one translate both texts or does one pick and choose one over the other. Jacobs (whom Dau-Bente followed) believed that the Latin text was more authoritative because the compilers of the German Book of Concord had mistakenly used a manuscript they thought was the original read on 25 June 1530, which turned out to be a copy and not the authentic text. Since then, it has been shown to be a very good copy even if its direct lineage cannot be proven. By providing only a translation of the Latin text, the McCain edition does not allow readers to compare the similarities and differences between the two texts. This contrasts starkly with other editions like Tappert and Kolb-Wengert which respected the integrity of the Latin and German texts of the Augsburg Confession by translating both of them for the reader.

The Apology presents special problems as to what actually constitutes the official text. The FC pledges itself to the Apology that “was published in 1531.” Two Latin texts and one German translation were published that year. Melancthon first published what is known as the quarto text of the Latin Apology in April 1531 (also known as the editio princeps) in order to meet the emperor’s deadline for the Lutherans to accept the Confutation by 15 April. He revised this text over the summer with significant input from Luther and published the “octavo” text of the Latin Apology in September 1531.10 Within a couple of weeks, Jonas published a German translation of the Apology that is patterned largely on the octavo text (see articles 4, 10, and 28). These three texts of the Apology find their way into different versions of the Book of Concord. In 1580, the Jonas’s translation (September 1531) was incorporated into the official German edition of the BC in 1580. In that same year, the octavo edition (September 1531) was incorporated into an unofficial Latin edition prepared by Selnecker. The quarto-edition (April 1531) was incorporated into the 1584 official Latin edition.

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edition of the Book of Concord.

But the Apology did not acquire its confessional status when it was first incorporated into the Book of Concord. It was received into the Book of Concord because everyone recognized that it had become an authoritative expression of the Reformation. Although the Apology initially appeared as a private writing, it quickly acquired an authoritative status within the church as the official defense and commentary of the Augsburg Confession. It is clear that the text which was regarded as the authoritative Latin text for the reformers from 1531-1580 was the octavo text. It was the “received text” of the church during the Reformation era. The quarto text of the Apology acquired its authoritative standing only upon its inclusion into the Latin edition of the Book of Concord in 1584. And so the issue can be put simply: Do we use the same Latin edition of the Apology that the reformers themselves used between 1531 and 1580 or do we use the Latin edition that became current only after 1584? The last several decades have witnessed a growing consensus in the field of confessional research to give pride of place to the octavo edition over the quarto edition of the Apology.11

By following the Dau-Bente edition, the McCain edition puts itself at odds with the best results of confessional research, and more importantly, at odds with the reformers themselves.

Several textual issues are raised by the McCain edition in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope. First, the McCain edition departs from Dau-Bente and the Latin text at a critical juncture and uses the German text in a way that could have significant theological ramification. The Latin reads, “the church is above [supra] its ministers.”12 This is how Dau-Bente rendered it. The McCain edition, however, borrows from the German and translates it, “the church is more than [mehr dann] its ministers.” It might be argued that this makes the Latin text clearer. But how is the Latin text unclear? The argument in this section is that the pope is not above the church, to the contrary, the church is above the pope and his bishops. In fact, the next sentence immediately states, “Superiority or lordship over the church...is not attributed to Peter.” Having said that, mehr dann was a legitimate German translation of the Latin supra in the sixteenth century (it has lost that sense in modern German).13 Both expressions stressed the superior authority of the church as the possessor of the Keys and the right to call ministers. If one goes with the German mehr dann, it would be better to translate it as “greater than” as Dau translated

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11Recent editions include the official German edition, Evangelische Bekenntnisse, Teilband 1, (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1997). The Kolb-Wengert edition also made it the primary basis of its translation. The next critical edition of the Lutheran Confessions, Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelischen Kirche will also utilize the octavo text the primary text of the Apology. Following 1584, nearly every subsequent edition of the Lutheran Confessions utilized the quarto-text (editio princeps).

12McCain, 321, para 11.

it in Walther’s *Church and Ministry*. The problem with the English “more than” can imply not only that the church is superior to the ministers, but that the church is wider or larger than the ministers, a sense that does not fit the argument of the Treatise.

With regard to the second example, the McCain edition not only departed from the Latin in favor of the German, it departed from both the 1580 and 1584 editions for its textual selection. This is interesting because the McCain edition followed Dau-Bente by relying primarily on the 1584 Latin Book of Concord (which contained the first edition of the Treatise published in 1540) instead of Spalatin’s manuscript from 1537. And so the McCain edition follows the Latin (1584) in Treatise 66, which reads that bishops are “enemies of the church” where the Spalatin manuscript from 1537 reads: bishops are “enemies of the gospel.” In this instance, the McCain edition chose the 1584 text over Spalatin. But a few paragraphs later (Tr 72), they depart from Dau-Bente by choosing the Spalatin manuscript in BSLK over the 1580 and 1584 editions of the Book of Concord.

Dau-Bente: “From all these things it is clear that the church retains the right to elect and ordain ministers. And the wickedness and tyranny of bishops afford cause for schism and discord...” (Triglotta, 525).

McCain: From all this, it is clear that the Church retains the right to elect and ordain ministers. *Therefore, when the bishops are heretics or refuse to administer ordination, the churches are by divine right compelled to ordain pastors and ministers for themselves by having their pastors do it* [italics added] (330).

This raises two questions. First, why did the McCain edition suddenly switch to a different text? It appears that they quote BSLK because it has the clause “by having their pastors do it” which the Latin 1584 does not. Yet this would seem to go against a “textus receptus” approach to the Book of Concord.15

Two textual issues stand out here with respect to Luther’s catechisms in the McCain edition. First, in 1540 Luther’s printer Schirulentz inserted a section into the Table of Duties following entitled “What the Hearers Owe to Their Pastors.” In 1542, he added a section entitled “What the Subjects Owe to Their Rulers.” Neither of these sections appeared in earlier German editions of the Small Catechism nor in the 1580 Book of Concord.14

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14The Latin clause reads: *adhibitis suis pastoribus*. A more literal translation, the churches are by divine right compelled to ordain pastors and ministers in the presence of their pastors.

15The Kolb-Wengert edition, which relies on the Spalatin manuscript, accidentally omitted the phrase “*adhibitis suis pastoribus*” in the first printing, but included it in the second printing where it is rendered as “in the presence of their pastors.”
They first appeared in Latin translations of the SC and for that reason found their way into the Latin editions of the Book of Concord (1580, 1584; cf. Bente, 205). By placing these texts into brackets Dau-Bente acknowledged that these texts were not part of the original catechism or the 1580 edition. The McCain edition carries these texts over from Dau-Bente but removes the brackets thereby making them appear to be a part of the original text of the SC. Thus the reader is led to understand that these were parts of Luther’s original catechism.

This preference for the Latin edition carries through in another instance as well. Nearly every edition of the SC published during Luther’s lifetime included the baptismal and marriage booklets, which found their way into early copies of the Dresden (1580) Book of Concord. Several princes, including Ludwig VI of the Palatinate and some of his Calvinist leaning theologians, objected to the baptismal booklet on account of its references to exorcism (K-W, “editor’s introduction,” 346-347). Partly as an accommodation to Elector Ludwig VI, both booklets were removed from editions produced outside Dresden as well as from later Dresden editions. In the latter case, provision was made to include or omit them at the discretion of the local political authority. Following Dau-Bente the McCain edition also excludes the baptismal and marriage booklets.

While the McCain edition followed Dau-Bente (and the Latin 1584 edition) by excluding the marriage and baptismal booklets, it departed from Dau-Bente and the 1584 edition by inserting the “Brief Exhortation to Confession” into the Large Catechism. To be sure, there is good reason for doing so if one does not repristinate the 1584 edition. Luther added this exhortation to the second edition of the Large Catechism in 1529 (along with an expansion of the introductory material for the Lord’s Prayer in §10-11). Even though this section appeared in the second edition of the Large Catechism, it was not included in either the German edition (1580) or the Latin edition (1584) of the Book of Concord. No reason is given for these eclectic textual decisions.

The Translation

The McCain edition does not claim to offer a fresh translation of the Confessions. Instead their goal was to provide a “simpler, clearer text” of the Dau-Bente translation (680). In a sense, what they offer is an English translation of an English translation of German and/or Latin texts! The editors believed that they could best accomplish their task of providing a clearer text by simplifying sentence structures and updating the vocabulary. Two questions must be asked. First, does the “updating” remain faithful

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17Based on Holy Week Sermons of 1529 (see CPH edition).
to the original texts? Second, does the “updating” provide clearer and more readable text?

Issues of Faithfulness to the Thought World of the Texts

Since the McCain edition only set out to “update” the English translation of Dau-Bente, one might rightly assume that it will be a faithful and accurate translation. And indeed, where the McCain edition closely follows Dau-Bente, it is a fairly reliable if archaic translation. Unfortunately, in those places where it seeks to “update” the translation and departs from Dau-Bente it frequently introduces errors into the text. In these instances, the translation either gets the text wrong or it provides a misleading interpretation. This happens partly because the editors show less of a familiarity with the thought world of the sixteenth century and partly because they were less at home in the original languages than were Jacobs-Dau-Bente. Several examples can bring this out.

In the Second Commandment of the Large Catechism, the McCain edition explains that to “take God’s name in vain” means among other things “to curse swear, summon the devil” (zaubern). Now zaubern literally means “to conjure.” This is how Dau-Bente translated it. But what does that mean? Luther certainly did not mean, “summon the devil.” After all, this commandment involves calling on God’s name, not calling on the devil’s name! The visitation records around Saxony as late as 1592 reveal what kinds of superstitions Luther is addressing. The visitors discovered that people (especially in rural areas) were using God’s name like a magical formula or a magical incantation. By means of various liturgical formulae (especially the triune name and Lord’s prayer, etc.), they claimed that they could recover stolen goods, protect homes from fire, remove hexes from soured milk, and expel elves (which were considered to be responsible for all kinds of troubles). In other words, Luther is addressing a superstitious use of God’s name that occurs without faith, thus blurring the lines between incantation and prayer. In Luther’s other catechetical writings (1520, 1522), he deals with matters like summoning the devil and witchcraft under the First Commandment where it belongs—after all, they are matters of idolatry.18

A translator of the Confessions also needs to be familiar with the vocabulary and conceptual world of the reformers’ opponents. At times, the McCain edition betrays an ignorance of the technical language used by Nominalists in the late Middle Ages with the result that it supplies not only an odd translation, but a misleading one. For example, the Nominalists asked the question, “when God rewards our works, is it because our works compel God to do so or because this is how God has chosen to set up

the system to work and so he will not arbitrarily go against it.” In other words, you can count on it. The technical distinction was between “necessity of coercion” and a “necessity of unchanging order.” The McCain edition, however, has translated this text (Ap IV, 11), “God must give grace to a person who does such works, not that He is forced to, but that God will not change” (italics added). That God will not change? This gives the impression that we are talking about an attribute of God, namely, God’s immutability. Dau-Bente got it right: “God necessarily gives grace to one thus working, by the necessity not of constraint, but of immutability.” If this was not clear, the German would have helped. Again, Dau-Bente reads, “not that He is constrained, but that this is the order which God will not transgress or alter” (Dau-Bente, 123). Yet while the McCain edition consulted (and even inserted) the German at other places, it does not do so here where it is very helpful.

A good example of how an insertion of a phrase from the German text into the Latin can affect one’s understanding of the text is found in Apology II, 12. The McCain edition reads, “After the Scholastics mixed philosophical speculations about the perfection of nature (the light of reason) with Christian doctrine....” The parenthetical remark (“light of reason”) is not part of the Latin text. It is inserted into the translation from the German. But its placement here implies that it explains what is meant by the “perfection of nature.” A reading of Jonas’s translation would immediately reveal that he is not using the phrase “light of reason” to define the “perfection of nature” nor explain where it comes from. The Jonas text reads, “the scholastics mingle much philosophy with the Christian doctrines, and speak a great deal about the light of reason and the actibus elicitis, they place too much confidence in free will and their own works” (Henkel, 59).19 The phrase “light of reason” here is not included in the clause about mingling philosophy (Aristotle’s acquired righteousness) and Christian doctrines (original sin). Jonas now shows how that mingling plays itself out, namely, that the light of reason informs the will about the correct course of action to take and thereby elicits moral activities from the will (Aristotle). This can occur, because in the fall reason was darkened not blinded, and the will was weakened not destroyed (Scholastics). In this case, the McCain edition merged two different thoughts and two different points into a single translation.

In the Large Catechism (II, 66), the McCain edition offers a translation that seems aimed at debate raised by Atlantic District President David Benke regarding whether or not Muslims worship the same God as Christians. In order to exclude President Benke’s interpretation, the McCain edition has rendered the text in question, “Even if we were to concede....” This goes beyond translation. Every English translation before the McCain

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19S. D. Henkel and Brs., The Book of Concord, (Newmarket, Shenandoah, VA: Solomon D. Henkel and Brs., 1851).
edition simply put it, “even though they believe in and worship only the one true God....” McCain’s edition even rules out the possibility that “false Christians and hypocrites” know the true God. Luther had in view here the monks of the late Middle Ages, who certainly confessed the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. In the desire to exclude Muslims, they have also excluded the monks. In any case, it would be far better to translate it as it has been in the past and allow people of good faith to debate Luther’s interpretation.

**Issues of Clarity for Today**

One of the primary goals of the McCain edition is to update the English translation of Dau-Bente so as to make it more readable. Some of the translation concerns here may appear at first to be rather minor, but as the saying goes, the devil is in the details. And when it comes to matters of the confessional texts that norm our theology, these concerns become matters of some importance. Moreover, like baseball, little things in translations have a cumulative effect upon the whole. Again, when the McCain edition stays with Dau-Bente, it presents the reader with a fairly accurate if unclear text (after all, the Jacobs’s translation is nearly 125 years old). But as in the previous section, when the McCain edition departs from Dau-Bente, they not only introduce inaccuracies, they often introduce ambiguity and confusion into the text.

On occasion, the McCain edition inserts words into the text thereby creating more of a paraphrase than a translation, but a paraphrase that is not always clear. For example, it translates Apology II, 31 (105) as follows: “The intelligent reader realizes easily that to be without the fear of God and without faith are more than passive ‘actual guilt.’ They are actively abiding defects in our unregenerate nature” (italics added). This is not what the text says. The words “passive” and “actively” are not part of the Latin text (has non tantum culpas actuales esse sunt enim durabiles defectus in natura non renovata). It should read, “The discerning reader can easily see that to be without the fear of God and without faith is not merely actual guilt but is an abiding deficiency in an unregenerate nature” (K-W, 116). The addition of “actively” and “passive” push the reading more into the realm of commentary than translation.

In other instances, the McCain edition looks to the German word inserted in brackets by Dau-Bente for clarification of meaning, but not to the German text in which it that word or phrase is found. As a result, the translation does not make sense. For example, Ap VII, 22 reads: “Although wolves and wicked teachers become violent in the Church, they are not properly Christ’s kingdom.” The Latin would be better rendered “run rampant” (this make more sense in the context). It appears that the McCain edition again relied on the German but took it out of context. Henkel, who translates the German (1851), is much clearer. “The wolves and false teach-
ers, although they rage and do injury in the church, are not the church” (135). Note that Henkel’s translation, “they rage and do injury in the church,” makes more sense than “become violent” in the church within the context of Melanchthon’s discussion. In other words, shifting to the German at times not only interrupts the flow of the Latin reading, it also misses the flow of the German text!

There are many instances where the McCain edition chooses a translation that is not accurate in order to avoid a rendering that the editors do not like. For example, in Ap IV, 48 the McCain edition has translated *assentiri* (to assent) as believe. It seems that the concern was that such a translation would imply that faith is only intellectual assent. What is of interest here is that Melanchthon is arguing precisely against this view of faith when he uses the word “assent.” The key to avoiding such a view lies with the object of faith. Thus, is the object of faith the historical narrative of Christ or the promise of the forgiveness of sins on account of His life and death? Melanchthon argues for the latter. Faith is not assent to historical facts; it is assent to the promise of forgiveness. Substituting “believe” for “assent” does not strengthen Melanchthon’s argument. His opponents would readily concede that to have faith is to believe the story about Christ. If Melanchthon had wanted to say “believe,” he would have used *credere*. But he did not. Had the editors wanted to avoid a contemporary understanding of “assent” as intellectual knowledge, they might have consulted the German and gone with something like “embrace” or “grasp” the promise which captures both the head and the heart of the believer.

Part of the task of updating a translation is to remove archaic English words that are no longer used today. There are many instances, however, where the McCain edition continues to use archaic terms that can hardly be clear today. For example, in Ap IV, 9, the McCain edition reads, “Besides that, they *pretend* reason can love God above all things without the Holy Spirit” (italics added). Pretend? The Latin *affingunt* makes more sense when rendered “invent” or “fabricate” (Dau-Bente). In today’s usage, the word “pretend” has the connotation of “make believe.” Melanchthon may be accusing his opponents of inventing these doctrines. But he is not accusing them of pretending that these things are not true. They truly believe that this is how it works. The same applies to Ap IV, 48. “The adversaries pretend that faith is only a knowledge of history. Therefore, they teach that it can coexist with mortal sin.” Here Dau-Bente does not help when they use “feign.” Here the word “imagine” or “suppose” would better capture both the notion that the opponents have invented this definition and that they really believe it.

In other instances, the translation must take into account the context of a given statement. In the early paragraphs of Apology IV (the *narratio* portion of his rhetorical argument), Melanchthon explains how his opponents seek righteousness through grace-assisted works of love in which Christ appears to have little if any role at all in this process. Melanchthon
then states in paragraph 17 (according to the McCain edition), “Yet the adversaries do not give up on Christ completely. They require a knowledge of the history about Christ” (italics added). The context makes it clear that the point of this text is that the Scholastics do not bypass or avoid or ignore or exclude Christ completely from their doctrine of salvation. Dau-Bente got it right with the translation, “not to pass by Christ altogether.” The McCain translation sounds like Christ has failed in some way but the opponents will not give up on him. The McCain text then continues with the awkward translation, “They credit him by writing that from His merit a way of life is given to us or as they say, ‘first grace.’” In fairness, Dau-Bente is not especially helpful here. Compare this with another recent translation, “So that they do not bypass Christ entirely, the opponents require a knowledge of the story of Christ and credit him with meriting for us a certain disposition [habitus], or as they call it, “initial grace…” (K-W, 122).

In still other instances, the McCain edition updates Dau-Bente with a translation that is both inaccurate and ambiguous. In the opening paragraph of Apology 28, the McCain edition reads, “The adversaries cry out violently here about the privileges and immunities of the Church estate, and they add these condoning remarks, ‘All things are vain which are stated in the present article against he immunity of the churches and priests.’ This is a sheer lie, for we have argued about other things in this article” (italics added) (273). A number of questions can be raised here. First, what does it mean to “cry out violently”? Here McCain stays with Dau-Bente’s lack of clarity. A contemporary rendering might translate this as “rant and rave.” Second, what are “condoning remarks”? Dau-Bente is more accurate, if less clear to the modern reader, with their reading, “they add the peroration.” Dau-Bente is accurate in that a peroration is a rhetorical term referring to the conclusion of a speech or writing. But unless one is familiar with rhetoric that term is not clear. The Latin reads, “addunt epilogum.” This would seem to point the way for a translation. Perhaps the editors of the McCain edition meant to render it, “concluding remarks.” Third, the McCain edition then stays with Dau-Bente’s translation of “vain.” To update “vain” to “false” would seem to be clearer. Fourth, where McCain has “a sheer lie” Dau-Bente correctly has “calumny.” This is a false statement made with malicious intent. In other words, it involves more than a lie, it involves—to use a contemporary term—slander. Compare the McCain edition with Kolb-Wengert:

Here the opponents rant and rave about the privileges and immunities of ecclesiastical status, and they conclude with the summary: “Everything that the present article states against the immunity of churches and priests is false.” This is sheer slander for in this article we were arguing about other things (K-W, 289).
Other Examples

The following are examples of where Dau-Bente could have been updated in order to bring about more clarity. In AC 27 on monasticism, the McCain edition reads, “This rigor displeased many good people before this time, who saw that young men and women were thrown into convents for a living” (italics added). “For a living”? The Latin (propter victum) would be much clearer if rendered “for the sake of survival” or “in order to keep them alive.” There are also many examples of archaic English expressions that no longer accurately translate the original for today are easy to find. The McCain edition translates LC I, 237 (cf. par. 226). “This will also be the result for mechanics and day laborers.” The German has handiwerksleuten (people who work with their hands) the Latin has artificibus.” Here McCain stayed with Dau-Bente by translating it as mechanic. But today, it would seem too narrow as it brings to mind images of an auto mechanic. “Artisan” or “craftsman” is broader and not so anachronistic. Similarly, “it is one’s own art that makes everyone an artist” (McCain, 172, 22). The use of the Latin ars refers to one’s field or discipline. The point is that one’s own field of study makes that person an expert. In Apology IV, Melanchthon argues that just as the style of German clothing is not a matter of worship so people can be righteous “even though they use a costume that is not German, but French.” Wouldn’t it be clearer simply to say clothing? “Costume” brings to mind images of the theater or Halloween parties. In AC XXVI is “service” sufficient to capture “cultus” or is it better to go with “devotional acts” or “religious activities”?

The following from Apology IV, 43 is simply awkward English: “Otherwise, why would there be a need to promise?” (Alioqui quorsum opus erat promittere). This may be literalistic Latin, but not good English. It should be a need “for a promise.” The German could help here. Later, the McCain edition reads, “Now, when the grounds of this case have been understood (the distinction between the Law and the promises, or the Gospel), it will be easy to resolve the adversaries’ objections” (Ap IV, 62, McCain, 136). The Latin has diluere. “Resolve” does not make sense. It would be better to use “remove,” or “clear up” the opponent’s objections. A little further on, which of the following is clearer? “But a final reply can be made to all opinions about the Law. I mean that the Law cannot be kept without Christ” (McCain, 136). “To all their statements about the law we can give one reply: the law cannot be kept without Christ” (KW, Ap IV, 184). Elsewhere, LC I, 263 (415) reads, the “commandment forbids” us to “injure or confront our neighbor” (italics added). Wouldn’t it be more clearly expressed as “injure or offend”? Many more examples could easily be adduced.
Notes, Helps, and other Resources.

The editors of the McCain edition sought to provide commentaries and essays “on the important ideas and guiding principles necessary for a proper understanding of the Lutheran Confessions” (7). Historical introductions and explanatory notes are not only helpful but necessary in an edition of the Book of Concord intended primarily for the non-professional. A book that is made up of different texts composed for different occasions more than four hundred years ago will not be immediately accessible to the average American reader without such helps. Much of the historical material contained in the McCain edition is, of course, boilerplate names and dates that are hard to get wrong. Too much, however, is inaccurate or tendentious. The worst problems are found whenever three topics are addressed: medieval/modern Catholicism, Philip Melanchthon, and John Calvin.

The McCain edition is often plagued by the desire to make immediate applications untroubled by historical complexity to Roman Catholicism, whether medieval or modern. Lutherans, and lay people especially, need to understand that the positions of the Roman Catholic church in the sixteenth century and today are not identical. In other words, your Catholic neighbor does not necessarily hold the same beliefs criticized in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. Yet, in many cases, the McCain edition gives precisely that impression by encapsulating in a paragraph or two on doctrinal developments that spanned centuries. The introduction to the Apology on Free Will (Article XVIII) is a particularly egregious offender. To move immediately from mention of Rome’s Pelagian attitudes in the sixteenth century to the statement, “This remains Rome’s view of free will,” bolstered by a mention of the 1994 Catholic Catechism, is misleading at best (McCain, 223). The statement in the next paragraph that “Rome is now careful to speak of God’s grace as being responsible for initiating the relationship between God and man” merely adds to the confusion (McCain, 223). Has the Roman Catholic articulation of this doctrine changed or not? The introduction wants to say that it has not, but by mere assertion rather than by clear and sufficient explanation. The introductions simply refuse to recognize that the Catholic church has changed and moved from its sixteenth-century positions. To say, for example, that the Council of Trent “set in stone the doctrinal position of the Roman Catholic Church as it is known today” is insupportable (283). It completely ignores the developments initiated by Vatican II. There are, to be sure, still fundamental and significant differences between Lutheran and Catholic doctrine, but misrepresenting an opponent’s position is never helpful. Part of the problem with the references to Catholic theology in this volume is that they are sporadic and do not appear to follow any particular pattern. It is remarkable, for example, that the introductions to the Justification article (Article IV) in both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology say nothing...
about the Roman teaching that drove Luther and Melanchthon to respond.

Perhaps we should be glad for the omission if the introduction provided for Luther's Small Catechism is any gauge of the editors' acquaintance with medieval church history. It is suggested that medieval approaches to catechesis required the memorization of lengthy explanations and that Luther greatly simplified the catechism to aid people in doing this. This is simply not the case. No medieval cleric expected more from the average lay person than a memorization of the Lord's Prayer, Creed, and the Ten Commandments themselves. Explanations were provided to aid priests who were charged with catechizing (meaning teaching, not memorizing) from the pulpit and during confession. This is Luther's approach, too. He did not necessarily intend the explanations he provided to be memorized. The further suggestion that during the Middle Ages catechesis took place among young people in a classroom setting is patently false for all but the minuscule percentage of the population destined for careers in the church. Making this approach of explanations memorized in a classroom more or less synonymous with catechesis was a development of the Late Reformation, and even then catechetical sermons were a regular part of church life.

A similar problem besets most of the references to Calvin found in this edition. Calvin appears to be used as shorthand for the Reformed churches. At least that seems to be the best explanation for the several references to the Genevan reformer in connection with the article on the Mass in the Apology (XXIV). Nevertheless, such references can only be confusing to the reader who does not approach the text with a detailed knowledge of the Reformation. Calvin is in no way in view in the Apology's treatment of this matter. When the Apology was written, Calvin was a student at Paris, known only to his fellow students and professors; it would be another decade before he gained fame as a Protestant reformer. Such material is misleading, but other mentions of Calvin are simply inaccurate. One of the more jarring is the assertion that "Calvin...would later defend Zwingli's views" on the Lord's Supper (179). Although the views of the two Swiss reformers have a certain consonance when viewed dogmatically, even a cursory reading of their works shows that they had very different reasons for rejecting Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper. Calvin's failure to agree with Luther hardly constitutes a defense of Zwingli, even "in a more refined manner" (179). Calvin, far from defending Zwingli, relied heavily on Augustine for what he wrote on this topic in the *Institutes*. It might be worth pointing out to the reader that there are more than the traditional three possibilities (Catholic, Lutheran, Zwinglian) for explaining how Christ is present in the Supper. In fact, on this same point it should probably be observed that FC VII is not intended as a strict historical account but a brief dogmatic summary of various Sacramentarian positions. When historical complexity is avoided, Calvin appears as a straw man, invoked only to make the point that other Protestants deviated from
Luther on this important doctrine.

The approach to Philip Melanchthon employed here has a long history in Lutheranism. Melanchthon is portrayed as weak and vacillating, willing to make peace at almost any price, including compromising the Gospel. Although such characterizations can be found throughout the book, the real Melanchthon bashing begins in the introduction to the Formula of Concord. “Tragically, Philip Melanchthon was willing to compromise with Rome for the sake of peace. His courage failed him and he soon became the leader of a group of Lutherans known as Philippists, who looked for ways to compromise with Rome. They were willing to surrender a number of key points of biblical teaching so that they might save themselves” (476). Those key points of Biblical teaching are not listed, but it is suggested that Philip and his followers were even willing to accept the Interim’s denial of justification by grace. It seems odd that such an inveterate compromiser would even attempt to avoid complete capitulation, yet the introduction later on explains that Melanchthon did just that with the so-called Leipzig Interim. The goal “was to craft a document that would allow Lutherans to avoid the demands of the Augsburg Interim and, supposedly, retain the doctrine of justification by grace, while yielding in other matters” (479). The other matters, of course, involved ceremonies and the like that gave their name to the adiaphoristic controversy that erupted from Melanchthon’s attempt at negotiation. The fact that the adiaphoristic controversy is relegated to a section titled “Controversies and the Formula of Concord,” which is entirely dogmatic, instead of being treated at this point highlights the ahistorical approach of much of the material found in the McCain edition. That’s not to say that historical material is not included but that it is not dealt with historically. The argument over Melanchthon’s character and behavior has more to do with the conflict between liberal and conservative Lutherans in the nineteenth and twentieth (and now the twenty-first!) centuries than with what happened in the sixteenth century. This is history as propaganda—interested entirely in explaining the present without first doing the hard work of dealing fairly with the past. In this case, that would mean taking account of recent scholarship on Melanchthon and providing, at the very least, a bit of nuance to his portrayal.

Several other matters are worth mentioning. First, the caption to a picture of Duke George states that Ducal Saxony is “northeast of Electoral Saxony” (215). In fact, the opposite is true. Second, the introduction to Apology XVII, Christ’s Return for Judgment, states, “During the Reformation, radical groups made numerous predictions about the end of the world. Such foolishness still plagues the Church today” (McCain, 223). True enough, but why mention that here? Neither this article nor the corresponding article in the Augsburg Confession has in view the folly of predicting when the end will come. For that matter, Luther himself was convinced that the end would come during his lifetime, even though he avoided picking a
specific date. Third, the introduction to the Apology implies that Melanchthon wrote it on the basis of detailed stenographers’ notes since the Confutation was not published until the 1570s. Two errors could have been corrected on the basis of Bente’s own *Historical Introductions*. He points out on the basis of Melanchthon’s conclusion to his first draft that the notes were not all that detailed. In fact, they were somewhat sketchy. He also notes that Melanchthon acquired a copy of the Confutation at the end of October that sent him back to the drawing board (Bente, 97). This enabled Melanchthon to deal in a reliable manner with all the questions involved, and spurred him on to do most careful and thorough work.

The charts are also a good idea but oddly executed. The one that explains “Temporal and Spiritual Leadership in the Holy Roman Empire” is misleading on at least two counts. To state that “the early Christians distinguished temporal leadership...from spiritual leadership” and then immediately equate that spiritual leadership in the West with the bishop of Rome, identified as the pope, leads one to ask what is meant here by the phrase “early Christians” (McCain, 312). There is no indication given that the bishop of Rome and the pope are not necessarily equivalent ideas. No timeline for the development of the office of bishop and the rise of the papacy is offered, even though many Catholic historians point out that Rome was probably not under the authority of a single bishop until the second century and, further, that bishop exercised no spiritual authority beyond Rome until about the fifth century. Another difficulty with this material is the use of the term “spiritual estate.” As used in the Middle Ages, “spiritual estate” meant the clergy, and a person was a member of either the temporal estate or the spiritual estate. Luther’s argument about the priesthood of the baptized was focused on eliminating this distinction, and it had the related goal of lifting up the vocations of lay Christians by insisting that what they did in faith was also spiritual. The laity should not be included as members of the “spiritual estate” in a discussion of the medieval worldview as they are in this explanatory material because that phrase is synonymous with clergy rather than church.

Also consider the one that compares the Roman mass with the Lutheran form of the mass (1523). The introduction (245) directs readers to “compare the medieval Mass with Luther’s Divine Service for the Church at Wittenberg.” This statement is not wrong, but it is misleading. True, the *Formula Missae* was introduced into the church at Wittenberg in 1523, but only into the Latin service and only for a while. It would soon be replaced with an order of service in the language of the people, namely, the German Mass of 1526. Even though the former does stand within the Lutheran tradition, the German Mass points in the direction that Luther was taking the service and is more representative of the Lutheran tradition by the time the Apology was written than the *Formula Missae*. A comparison of the Roman Mass with Luther’s German mass would have been more appropriate.
Conclusion

Concordia Publishing House is to be commended for commemorating the 425th anniversary of the Book of Concord with a Reader’s Edition. It offers an inexpensive entry to the Lutheran Confessions with attractive pictures, helpful timelines, and other resources. But as the saying goes, “you can’t judge a book by its cover” (or format). In this case, the volume’s “substance” does not match its “style.” The McCain edition allows casual readers to “get their feet wet” with the Lutheran Confessions. But if the reader wishes to become a student of the confessions and undertake a closer reading of their texts, history, and theology, they (like their pastors) will need a more reliable volume containing the best that the current state of confessional research has to offer in terms of authoritative texts, accurate history, and clear translations of our confessional documents. Bente commanded what was available in his day quite well. He was aware of and utilized the best of the confessional scholarship available to him in his day. We should not demand less of our generation. Editions like the Triglotta or Kolb-Wengert edition can better accompany them in their growth from casual reader to serious student of the Lutheran Confessions.20

20This in spite of the fact that while the Dau-Bente version was commissioned by Synod in convention, whereas, this is primarily an in-house production.
Philemon

Larry W. Myers


The Rev. Dr. John Nordling, classics professor at Baylor University, has managed to squeeze 380 pages out of this short letter to Philemon in his recent addition to the Concordia Commentary series. Nordling brings the training of a classicist to the text and background of Philemon, and (for this reviewer) that alone makes the price of the volume ($42.99) worth every penny. It has been a number of years now since the LCMS has truly profited in the field of New Testament exegesis from one trained in classical languages. It used to be, until the appearance of Th.D.s in the 1930s, that virtually all LCMS New Testament exegetes were trained classicists. It is not so any longer—and thus it is delightfully refreshing to see at least the beginnings of resurgence in classical languages being brought to bear on New Testament exegesis.

John Nordling is primarily a Latinist, and that fact shines through in so many ways in his commentary on Philemon. Although he is equally comfortable in the Greek language and the Greek world, nevertheless it is the Latinist in him that produces a wealth of applicable information from Roman literature, Roman history, and Roman culture. It is doubtful that a fuller commentary on Philemon exists that incorporates as much information from the applicable epigraphical, papyrological, commercial literary, and other extra-Biblical evidence—not just from the Roman world but from the Greek world as well. Nordling himself newly translates many of the cited inscriptions and papyrus fragments into English. He has invested years in research and, it seems, nearly a full year in sabbaticals and leaves of absence in order to complete this volume.

One of the chief benefits of Nordling’s classical training in this commentary is some 100+ pages on the topics of “Slavery in Ancient Society” and “Theological Implications of Slavery in the New Testament.” Dr. Nordling introduces the best of this recent research to the serious student of Philemon and makes solid application of it to the pages of the New Testament and their historical context. The primary scholarly names are

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there: Bradley, Finley, Garnsey, Hopkins, Treggiari, Westermann, and Wiedemann. The names that are not included in the twenty-page bibliography or not cited in the text can be found by reading the works of the names just listed. More than likely it will be this section of the commentary for which it will be best known and most used.

Dr. Nordling greatly assists the reader of the New Testament in understanding the reality of slavery in the Greco-Roman world, how intertwined were the relationships between masters and slaves, and how one must not equate or confuse the modern American experience of slavery with Greco-Roman slavery. The insights he provides into Roman slavery in particular shed much light on the text and historical background of the letter to Philemon.

Of greatest benefit, however, is a basic attitude toward the Biblical record that seeps off the pages of Nordling’s commentary. That attitude is best revealed in the following quotation: “Hence, we cannot adapt (distort) the teaching of St. Paul on slavery to suit the demands of certain ‘voices’ of today, each stridently insisting on being ‘heard’ at the dawn of the third millennium A.D. No, faith submits to what the Word of God has always said through the passing of the ages and does not gladly suffer the plain meaning of Scripture to be twisted to suit constantly changing societal norms—a particular American ‘mentality,’ for example” (68-69). Scripture’s meaning does not change through the centuries, a fact that John Nordling’s commentary takes absolutely seriously.

That seriousness about the continued meaning of the text and its applicability for today find special meaning in “Theological Implications of Slavery in the New Testament.” In this section Dr. Nordling carefully weaves the implications of Christ’s own servant- (slave-) hood for early Christians. Also addressed are the centrality of slave imagery in the household codes in the New Testament, attitudes toward menial labor in both Scripture and extra-Biblical texts, and Luther’s doctrine of vocation in light of Biblical slavery (110-139). These pages provide rich material not just for Bible classes but for sermons as well. This is not the only place where one finds an abundance of Luther quotations. They are scattered throughout the commentary, together with generous references to, and quotations from, the Lutheran Confessions and the writings of C. W. F. Walther.

Dr. Nordling accepts a traditional dating for the composition of Philemon—A.D. 53-63 (5). In addition, he postulates Rome as the most reasonable location for Paul’s imprisonment from where he writes Philemon (7). After a careful investigation of John Knox’s major points in Knox’s own doctoral dissertation, Nordling concludes that the slave “Onesimus did indeed run away from Philemon and that Paul wrote this letter not only to reconcile in Christ this slave unto his master, but also to restore to Christian unity a congregation seriously fractured by Onesimus’ theft and criminal flight to Rome” (19).

Concerning exactly “What Circumstances May Have Caused Onesimus
to Run Away from Philemon” (140-148), Dr. Nordling is careful not to rush to any definitive conclusion. However, he does sift through an abundance of research in recent years that demonstrates the similarity between the language used by Paul in writing to Philemon and that of legal trade contracts (cf. especially the work of Peter Artz-Grabner). This recent research leads Nordling to conclude that Onesimus may very well have been a slave of high position in Philemon’s household, that he committed extremely serious injury to Philemon and the entire household when he ran away, and that he became a Christian through Paul’s sharing the Gospel with him.

The strictly commentary portion of the volume consists of a phrase-by-phrase textual analysis of each major section of the letter and extensive comments on the same. Each and every word and all grammatical structures and possibilities are carefully examined, with conclusions explained. Nordling follows the ancient Greco-Roman format of letters (salutation, thanksgiving, body of letter, and final greeting) in presenting this material.

Nordling carefully examines how Paul utilizes the three-part salutation of ancient letters with adaptations. He postulates that Paul’s self-identification as δέσμιος (used only in Philemon) makes him even less in status than Onesimus. He also suggests that the use of the term συνεργός in addressing Philemon probably refers to an “equality of service among Christians of all honorable vocations” (164) but not to involvement in the pastoral office.

Nordling relies on the work of Paul Schubert in analyzing the thanksgiving section. He suggests that Paul’s thanksgiving in Philemon “shares six of the seven syntactical units identified (by Schubert)” (193). Dr. Nordling discounts the seventh unit, the “final clause,” arguing that ὁσπικίω instead introduces an “object clause” whose preceding verb form can be understood from the verbal noun, προσευχήω. In later Classical Greek, a clause introduced by ὁσπικίω begins to replace the ACI (accusative with infinitive) construction. However, from this reviewer’s knowledge of Classical Greek, there is always a finite verb form preceding ὁσπικίω, even if it’s only in participial form. Grammar is certainly descriptive rather than prescriptive; therefore, one would like to see at least one example (and preferably two) of a ὁσπικίω clause in Greek that is preceded by a verbal noun and where the verbal action must therefore be understood rather than explicitly stated. Neither Nordling nor any of the scholars whom he cites (Lohse, Moule, Harris, and Bartling) provide such an extra-Biblical example. This would be a good TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae) research project. In spite of the attending logical complications, this reviewer is of the opinion that the seventh unit is indeed there in Paul’s thanksgiving and that ὁσπικίω introduces a purpose clause. The usual suggestion for the preceding verb form is ποιεῖμενος. However, perhaps εὐχαριστῶ itself might reasonably be proposed as the preceding verb form, emphasizing the effective and purpose-
ful nature of the prayer of thanksgiving in the Eucharist. It is doubtful that we will ever resolve the translation problem here and, in any case, it is certainly true that verse 6 in Philemon is the most highly debated verse among all twenty-five verses.

In the body of the letter, Nordling sees Paul using polar opposites (see 228) to persuade Philemon. Paul presents himself as an ambassador and servant in a triangular relationship (Paul-Philemon-Onesimus) in order to convey the forgiveness of sins to two feuding Christians. Paul identifies himself with Onesimus and lays his very self at the disposal of Philemon (just as Christ did for all humankind). Paul anticipates that Onesimus might well remain the slave of Philemon, even after reconciliation, but hopes that Philemon might in turn serve him (Paul) through Onesimus.

Nordling is very helpful and enlightens the reader by showing how Paul utilizes legal contract language (e.g., “partner,” “with my own hand,” “charge this to me”) as a promissory note to repay all injury that Onesimus has caused. The “obedience” anticipated by Paul on the part of Philemon (v. 21) is a “willing” obedience and not one that is commanded. Nevertheless, Nordling’s translating ἀρετήν as “willing obedience” can be seen as interjecting interpretation into an otherwise literalistic translation—perhaps okay for a commentary but arguable for any authorized translation. “Paul appeals to Philemon on the basis of the Gospel, which deals with the participants as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ (vv. 1-2, 7, 16, 20) or even as ‘saints’ (vv. 5, 7)” (289). Paul’s anticipated visit is not a threat but perhaps even part of his promise to repay Onesimus’s debt in his own person (292). Finally, Nordling demonstrates how Paul’s dealings with Philemon and his entire household provide a “paradigm” for how all pastors ought to conduct themselves on behalf of their people in the Office of the Holy Ministry (and their people on behalf of them).

Nordling systematically and carefully investigates every aspect of the final greeting and blessing. He argues that the inclusion of the names of “Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke” in the final greeting and their specific order have great significance in terms of their relationship with Philemon and their functioning responsibilities with Paul (cf. Col. 4:10-14).

The commentary concludes with an extensive discussion of the probable outcome in Philemon’s household, including the conjecture (based on ancient tradition) that Onesimus eventually became a bishop at Ephesus. This concluding section also addresses the importance of the canonical issues associated with Philemon. That Philemon was accepted into the New Testament canon attests to its “usefulness” and its “use” by the early church. Nordling’s detailed study of the letter therefore reveals that Philemon is an absolute gem that demonstrates not only the significance of slavery and its imagery for our earliest brothers and sisters in Christ but also the importance of Christ’s forgiveness in our relationships with one another, regardless of our vocations and stations in life.
The bottom line is this: Dr. Martin Scharlemann, another trained classicist, used to try to drum into the heads of his students that one can accumulate all sorts of information about the Biblical text. That’s the “what.” However, he insisted, until the exegete deals with the “so what” he/she is not doing theology. John Nordling not only provides the “what” of Philemon; he also provides the “so what.” This “so what” is so rich that a parish pastor can easily utilize it not only for Bible class preparation but for sermonic content as well. If one does not have Nordling’s commentary on Philemon on the bookshelf (and does not use it for study of the letter), both one’s library and one’s personal understanding of this little letter are incomplete. The reader of this review is thus encouraged to get it, read it, and use this new commentary on Philemon.
Grammarian’s Corner

Word Order, Part II
Adjectives

This issue’s look at Greek grammar continues the theme begun last time, *viz.*, word order. Here we focus on the relative positions of articles, adjectives, and nouns.

Key to the basic understanding of Greek sentences is the recognition of the difference between attributive and predicate position. Generally speaking, an adjective in attributive position modifies a noun directly (an example of direct modification in English would be “the good man”). One in predicate position does not; instead, it modifies the noun as part of the predicate (e.g., in English, “the man is good”). In structural/word order terms in Greek, an adjective in attributive position stands directly behind the article: ὁ καλὸς ἀνήρ, while one in predicate position is not so positioned: ὁ ἀνήρ ἐστι καλὸς. Note that the attributive position adjective creates, with the article and noun, a simple phrase, while the adjective in predicate position is part of a full or complete clause. Indeed, because the positioning is so distinctive, in the case of the predicate position adjective, the verb “to be” is very frequently omitted, which means that that the previous Greek sentence is frequently rendered ὁ ἀνήρ καλὸς (present time is assumed unless context clearly suggests otherwise). One further basic of observation must also be made, *viz.*, that two versions of attributive and predicate position also exist. For attributive, the standard Greek order is ὁ καλὸς ἀνήρ; the alternative is ὁ ἀνήρ ὁ καλὸς. For predicate, the standard order is ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐστι καλὸς; the alternative is καλὸς ἐστιν ὁ ἀνήρ. For the attributive pair, normal Hellenic style treats the alternative as emphatic, while in literature composed in a Semitic context the alternative corresponds to Hebrew/Aramaic structure (with the adjective following the noun) and is properly seen as a secondary Semitism. In all Greek, the alternative predicate position (adjective-article-noun) is emphatic.

Now consider the following examples:

a. Attributive, regular: Matt. 27:53: ...εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν... (...they went into the holy city...).

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1The word “good” is often classified as a predicate nominative in such a sentence, because it must use the nominative case in order to modify the subject, even though it is in the predicate of the sentence.

2It is possible for an adjective to be in attributive and predicate position with no article present, but that is not the focus of the current essay.

3A secondary Semitism is a structure which is possible in Greek, but is much more frequent in occurrence than what would be expected from a native Greek speaker. (By contrast, a primary Semitism is bad Greek and would not be uttered by a native Greek speaker.)
b. Attributive, alternate: John 10:11: ἐγώ εἶμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς (I am the noble shepherd).

c. Predicate, regular: Matt. 7:27: καὶ ἦν ἡ πτώσις αὕτης μεγάλη (And its fall was great).


We may add two further examples, comprising predicate position adjectives without the verb “to be” explicitly expressed:

e. Predicate, regular, w/o verb: Matt. 9:37: οἱ ἐργάται ὅλοι (The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few).

f. Predicate, alternate, w/o verb: Matt. 5:3: μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ ἐν πνεύματι...(Blessed are the poor in respect to spirit...).

Several things may be noted relative to these examples:

1. The two attributive position possibilities are almost equally likely in NT literature, especially in the Gospels, where some sort of Semitic substratum (whether written or oral) is present. It may be noted, however, that the alternative, answering to Semitic structure, is frequently found on the lips of Jesus, while the evangelists often employ more normal Hellenic order.

2. Predicate position adjectives are regularly used without the verb. Indeed, that may be seen as “normal.” It is, in fact, difficult to find examples of d, above; much more common is f.

3. What comes first when the adjective is in predicate position is normally the focus of the sentence. Thus, in e, above, the harvest and the workers are the focus. By contrast, in f (and all of the Beatitudes), the focus is on the fact that people in positions normally thought of as undesirable are actually μακάριοι, not in bad shape, or accursed. One might translate Matt. 5:3 thus: “The poor with respect to spirit are actually blessed/in good shape—for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Don’t let the familiarity of the KJV rendering fool you!

James W. Voelz

4Many manuscripts put οἱ δοῦλοι before εἰσίν, which only reinforces the example.

5Note the word order of the last clause, with auvtw/n before the verb in the emphatic forward position. The kingdom is theirs, not the possession of the seemingly well off.
Homiletical Helps on LW Series B  
—Epistles

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany  
1 Corinthians 9:16-23  
February 5, 2006

Textual considerations: For the apostle Paul the proclamation of the Gospel was not a basis for boasting on his part but a matter of necessity, constraint, obligation. “... he is under divine constraint which he cannot escape” (TDNT, I, 340). “This is his mission” (TDNT, II, 718). “εἰσαγγέλζομαι is not just speaking or preaching, it is proclamation with authority and power...” (TDNT, II, 720).

The content of the Gospel—the “Good News”—is not spelled out in this text. Other passages in the writings of the apostle Paul provide the necessary information (e.g., Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 6:14; 15:1-4, 20). See also the accounts of the substitutionary life, suffering, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels.

For Paul original sin prevents the proclamation of the Gospel. He considered himself to have been entrusted with a commission, a stewardship, a sacred trust.

Paul answered the question: “What’s in it for me?” with the words: “It is the chance to preach the good news free of charge” (1 Cor. 9:18, CEV). He also wrote, “I do all things on account of the gospel, so to that I may be συγκοινωνόν (a sharer, a partner) of it (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον)” (1 Cor. 9:23).

Paul was “free” ελεύθερος yet a slave in order that he might win over “the more” (Cf. 2 Cor. 3:17).

Paul’s evangelism strategy was designed to meet the people where they were—whether Jews, people under Law, people without Law, or people who were weak. Yet he did not sacrifice his integrity, but remembered his relationship to his God in Christ Jesus. His aim was by all means to save some.

Liturgical considerations: A verse from the Introit that is helpful is “Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds delight in His commands.”

In a portion of the Collect the worshipper joins in praying that God the loving Father would enable him to do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

The Psalm for the Day, Psalm 147, begins and ends with an invitation to the worshipper to “Praise the LORD!” (ESV).

Job 7:1-7, the Old Testament Lesson in Lutheran Worship, is a reminder of the condition of people who have no hope.

In Mark 1:38 of the Gospel for the day (Mark 1:29-39) Jesus refers to His mission: “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (ESV).

Suggested outline:

The Proclamation of the Gospel

I. Not something that can be done
   A. Voluntarily because of original sin.
   B. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ.
II. Done
   A. Under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit.
B. With explicit references to the Gospel.

III. Done with integrity
   A. By meeting people where they are.
   B. By remembering one’s relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Arthur F. Graudin

The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
1 Corinthians 9:24-27
February 12, 2006

Introduction: Running is a sport that requires training, strategy, discipline, and endurance. And, of course, in running there are those who win and those who lose. Perhaps a frequent spectator of the athletic events of his day, Paul employs the metaphor of running to the Christian life. While holding himself up as an example (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1), Paul exhorts the Corinthians to do everything they can to win the prize. Come what may, the baptized must run!

Liturgical context: Being called and empowered—in Paul’s case to run—is how the Collect of the Day is structured: “… grant that they may know and understand the things they ought to do and also may have grace and strength to accomplish them.” We do not run alone. Psalm 32:7, 10—from the Introit for the Day—promises that we are surrounded with Yahweh’s ἀγαπή (“loyal steadfast covenant love and faithfulness”) and ἀλληλοον (“songs of escape, release, deliverance”). But where is our running to take us? In a word, it takes us to the lost. The first lesson of the day, from 2 Kings 5:1-14, is one of the most stunning Gentile conversions in the Old Testament. Through the testimony of a small young girl (ηπίδρα γυνή—v. 2)—who was compelled to go to Naaman and proclaim the good news—this Syrian general trusts in the word of promise connected with physical means (2 Kings 5:14). His response is recorded in 2 Kings 5:15: “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.” This same intensity to “run with the Gospel” marks the leper cleansed by Jesus in the Gospel reading from Mark 1:40-45. After our Lord strongly warns him (ἐμμησάω) not to say anything, he takes the posture of a herald and begins spreading the word (ἐπούσαν πολλὰ καὶ διαφημίζετων τὸν λόγον—v. 45). Come what may, people possessed with the Gospel must run!

Biblical context: In chapter nine Paul continues the discussion he began in chapter eight, namely, the need to temper Christian freedom with Christian love. Chapter nine is an excursus in which his own life and example confirm the main points of the previous chapter. By means of a series of rhetorical questions Paul establishes his right to privileges others have assumed, yet he has declined to make use of any of these rights because of his commitment to the Gospel. Paul’s self-defense becomes his plea for the Corinthians to exhibit greater maturity in their walk with Christ. Gordon Fee (1 Corinthians, NICNT) rightly comments that the words in 9:23—“all things for the sake of the gospel”—identifies “the singular passion of his [Paul’s] life.” Paul—so possessed with the Gospel—must run!

Comments on the text: Verse 24: Paul begins his rhetorical question with οὐκ which assumes the answer of “yes” from the Corinthians who knew about running from their local Isthmian Games that were held in their city every two years. These contests were one of the four great Pan-Hellenic festivals, ranking second only to the Olympic Games and above those at Delphi and Nemea. The prestige of the Isthmian Games was enhanced by a tradition which went back to the sixth century
B.C. The word ἐν στάδιω may be translated “in a stadium” or “in a race” and alludes to the stadium in which the Isthmian Games were held. If this means “race,” then Paul is referring to a sprint of some two hundred yards. The apostle assumes there is a difference between running and running for a prize (βασίλειον); cf. Galatians 5:7, Ἐγέρετε καλῶς τις τιμᾶς εἰςκοφεῖν ἀληθείας μὴ πείθεσθαι (“You were running an excellent race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?”).

Verse 25: “All” (πάντα) is the catchword for chapter 9. Fee writes: “As the athlete exercises self-control in ‘all things’ for the sake of the victor’s wreath, so Paul does ‘all things’ for the sake of the gospel.” The only other place the verb ἐγκρατεῖται is used in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 7:9. In Galatians 5:23 the noun is listed as a fruit of the Spirit (ἐγκρατεία). Plato notes that any athlete who entered Greek games was required to go into ten months of strict training and was subject to disqualification if he failed to do so (leg. 8401). In this context “self-control” refers to controlling the attitude that says, “I have a right to eat the idol meat from the pagan temples” (cf. chap. 8). The “perishable crown” (φθινόπωρον στέφανον) was normally made out of parsley or wild celery; the “imperishable” (ἀφθορον) wreath is “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14), given on the last day. Paul uses the term φθινόπωρον again in 1 Corinthians 15:42 and 53 to describe the body which decays in contrast to the resurrection ἐν ἀφθορίᾳ. The widespread use of the “crown” in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Pet. 5:4; Jas. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10) signifies the crown of victory and not royalty.

Verse 26: By placing the word ἔγώ (’Γ) first in this sentence Paul is picking up the theme of his personal example (9:15-23). Linking his remarks with what he wrote at the end of verse 25 concerning Christians in general, Paul now sets forth what he does himself. His first strategy is not to run ἀδηλώς (“aimlessly”). The adjective is used of graves which are not seen (Luke 11:44), so the idea is that the race must have a clear and visible goal. Fighting (παρίζω) was also one of the Greek games where the obvious goal was to hit the opponent, not strike out against the air (οὐχ ἐρατο δῆμων). Paul does not engage in “shadow boxing” but seeks to drive home every punch. With this imagery the apostle likely wants to expose “the strong” at Corinth who parade γνώσις (“knowledge”) rather than ἐγκατ (“love”; cf. 8:1). If there is no love, life is more vain than shadow boxing; it is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).

Verse 27: The highly colorful verb ὑστερεύω means to deliver a hit right under the eye in order to make it black and blue. The apostle’s mixed metaphor literally means that he seeks to “give his body a black eye.” Paul wants to control his body, literally to bring it into bondage (δουλεύω). Following Thiselton (1 Corinthians, NIGTC) the best understanding of τὸ σώμα (“body”) here is “day-to-day life as a whole in the public domain, the life of the whole person without reduction” (cf. this interpretation of τὸ σώμα in 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 12:12, 13, 24-27; 15:38-44). All of this to the end that Paul is not disqualified (ἀδηλώς), which in this context means apostasy (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-13).

Homiletical development of the sermon: A big, brute, bruising bully is as American as baseball, hotdogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet. You know the kind. He’s twelve years old and he’s already shaving. Ninety percent of the male voices in your junior high or middle school sounded like altos and sopranos but this guy’s voice bellowed like a bazooka. The bully in my boyhood backyard was Greg Pruitt.

One day in eighth grade I made the brilliant observation that Greg resembled one of the characters in a popular movie at the time, The Planet of the Apes. The resemblance was uncanny, once you thought about it, and word of my astute insight brought howls of appreciation from my fellow classmates. My stock skyrocketed.
until news reached the ears of Greg. Words weren’t exactly Greg Pruitt’s favorite form of communication. He preferred knuckle sandwiches. A one-round knockout fight was inevitable with my stock going lower than 1962 New York Mets! Little did I know at that point, the next words out of my mouth had been spoken some two thousand years earlier by St. Paul, “I do not run like a man running aimlessly!” No, much like Paul I began running with purpose, with principle, with the prize in mind—the front door to 2690 Pierce St.—my home! Block after city block my mantra was this, “Come what may, I must run!”

Determination to run is the theme of the day; determination, in this case, not to find a safe haven from a bully, but to carry the message of salvation to those who need it most. (Here reference the notes under Liturgical context).

Paul was determined to run with the Gospel as well; in fact, he says in words right before our text, “I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (9:16b). The apostle was not only determined but prepared to run. (Here reference the Comments on the text.)

Paul ran from Tarsus to Syrian Antioch, Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Jerusalem, the Galatian province, then, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Jerusalem, Caesaria by the Sea, Malta, Rome.

Whew! Such running simply wears us out! We’d much rather be couch potatoes and watch others while we go to the fridge and pork down on more nachos and dip. Besides, that kind of running takes practice and discipline and, “No thank you! Forget Paul! My motto is, Come what may, I must have fun! And by the way, pass another cinnamon bun!”

There’s a side to everyone here that seeks the easy chair, the recliner, the couch, and the remote control. Our sinful flesh longs for the painless evangelism program, the pushover parish plan. Be consumed with the euvagelion of Jesus the Christ? Run as a possessed person with a message of victory?

“That sounds like swollen knees and shin splints and gut aches and that’s simply too high a price to pay.” And so it goes. You and I are all too often content with a mission that equals a quick jog around the block, an easy 5K at the park, a workout that doesn’t break a sweat.

Just where is the long distance runner who is tough and disciplined and so consumed with victory that he must run? There He is. Look, He’s running to announce victory to the defeated, forgiveness for the guilty, power for the weak, freedom for the captives.

The first recognition of His run comes in Luke 2:49—“Did you not know that I must (dei) be about my Father’s business?” Thirteen more times in the third Gospel the impersonal verb dei marks the Savior’s fierce determination to complete His course. For example—Luke 9:22: “The Son of Man must (dei) suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law and he must be killed.” Luke 22:37: “It is written, ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’—and I tell you that this must (dei) be fulfilled in me.”

Split-lipped and blood-soaked, the final lap ends on the Via Dolorosa. Spit is caked to His cheeks, thorns are jammed onto His head, dice are tossed at His feet, and a sponge is thrust into His face. And we see the Runner finish His race with one word for the ages—τετέλεσται (“It is finished”—John 19:30). Alive on the third day, the run goes on. Jesus doesn’t run over us or by us or past us. He’s running toward us and with us, looking into our eyes again just now and saying, “I love you—I love you—I love you!”
We run, because Jesus first ran for us (cf. 1 John 4:19 and Heb. 12:1-3).

A two-time divorced woman lives in a rusted out trailer, and she’s longing for love. An internet porn surfer is in bondage and longing for freedom. A widow is in the throws of death and longing for comfort. A teenager is in a broken home and longing for just one hug. We are empowered to run to these people with the Gospel of the Messiah’s victory over every deception of the devil, over every stronghold of the serpent because the liar is going down into the lake of fire!

Our race ends when by the grace of God we will cry out with St. Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race.” There will be parched throats and lungs screaming for air. But so forgiven, so called, so filled, so loved; come what may, we will run!

Reed Lessing

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
2 Corinthians 1:18-22
February 19, 2006

In this modern day of electronic mail, internet, and speedy means of communication, we all experience the deluge of “meaningful” emails that are meant to be either expressions of faith, means of comfort, or some other egocentric phenomenon. I received one like that just the other day. As most pastors do, I receive them regularly from current or former parishioners who read them and believe they are wonderful threads of theology woven through the electronic media.

This particular one is titled, “God Said No.” It is made up of several little one- or two-line verses expressing God’s “no.” For example:

I asked God to take away my habit.
God said, No.
It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole.
God said, No.
His spirit is whole, his body is only temporary.

I asked God to grant me patience.
God said, No.
Patience is a by-product of tribulations; it isn’t granted, it is learned.

The piece goes on, but you get the idea. I pondered it a bit and thought of the text at hand.

No stranger to controversy, Paul, who seemingly was hounded endlessly by those who would seek to find flaws in his teachings, was writing his second letter to the church at Corinth. He is about to explain his own actions and decisions after being accused of not being able to be trusted. But first he leads us into the text of today as a reminder of God’s faithfulness and the reliability of His Word.

Paul gets right after it with as positive a statement you will find by affirming “God is faithful.” The faithfulness of God and His Word is what is being challenged in Corinth, but after all, Paul preaches not himself but Christ and Him crucified! He has preached a steady and faithful message about a faithful God and did not
Paul next makes the strong confession, proclaiming Christ as God's Son, affirming the relationship of the one “sent” by the Father to redeem that which was lost. In doing so, Paul gives us the authority of the Gospel being preached, that of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy rightly preached Christ to the church in Corinth. Christ did not become “yes and no,” but in Him, in Christ all things have become Yes. Here Paul stresses the consistency of the Gospel, and the faithfulness of their preaching. Though many things had been said, preached, and challenged, the message from God's Word was consistent, a message that is never changing, never one and then the other, always “yes.” It is a reflection of a faithful God's consistent message of hope in Christ. Here, consistency can be used as the measure by which those who would detract from Paul's message can be judged.

For all of this we give all glory to God! Especially since we know that no matter what promises God has made, nor how many, they are always “yes” in Christ. All that God has promised, all that His Word has brought to us we give thanks to God by adding our amen, yes, yes, it shall be so! Since we have been baptized into Christ, anointed and marked with the sign of the cross on our foreheads and on our hearts, the promises of God have been made ours. Through the use of God's infallible and inerrant Word we not only receive the blessings from God, but we are entrusted with a responsibility of living life in God's way (Eph. 2:8-10).

Did God say no? No, sin said no. God's “yes” to us is much more important than any “no” that may be communicated in some misguided ditty to make one feel good. God's “yes” is His promise to us that He will do what He says, and all promises are fulfilled. Looking forward to Lent and Easter we see God's “Yes” in action, fulfilling promises made, promises made for us and for our salvation, freely given, out of love and faithfulness.

Michael L. Kumm

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
February 26, 2006

The apostle Paul stated that he was bold because of hope. The hope he had was not wishful thinking but hope based on God's promises. St. Paul also had confidence that his readers were bold in their proclamation of the fulfillment of God's promises in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul understood that believers no longer have a veil over their faces like those who see God's Law as a program for winning God's favor or as a ladder or bridge to heaven. The veil has been lifted for believers through the faith in Jesus Christ that has been worked in them by the Holy Spirit.

While the word *καρδία* in verse 15 has been translated by “heart”/“hearts,” the heart, strictly speaking, is a pump. People think with their “mind”/“minds.”

Verse 16 should not be understood as indicating that people can somehow turn to the Lord by their own reason or strength. The “when” should be understood in the temporal sense. Because of original sin, people cannot turn to the Lord on their own. The Holy Spirit is the initiator and sustainer of saving faith through the proclamation of the Gospel through Word and Sacraments.
The meaning of the words ὁ ἐκ κυρίου τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν in verse 17 has been debated. Some have understood the ὁ ἐκ κυρίου to refer to the previous verse where they see reflections of Exodus 34:34 with a reference to ὙΗΘ (YHWH is the Spirit). Others understand that the phrase refers to Jesus Christ and see the phrase pointing to the unity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity. The first explanation seems to be less acceptable because of the ὁ ἐκ which indicates a change in direction.

The meaning of τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου at the end of the verse is determined by the genitive κυρίου. Most translators understand this to be a genitive of possession. The Spirit of the Lord has been distinguished from Jesus Christ in Luke 4:16-19. The Spirit of the Lord is the agent of freedom/liberty through the Gospel. For other comments by Paul regarding “freedom” see Galatians 5:1 and 13.

In the Gospel for the day, Mark 9:2-9, Jesus is transfigured (μεταμορφόθη) before Peter, James, and John. Jesus gives them a glimpse of His glory before His suffering, crucifixion, and death.

In verse 18 of the text, the apostle Paul refers to himself and all believers when he wrote: “And we all with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed (μεταμορφοῦμαι) into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (ESV).

Those who by God’s grace have been brought to faith are being transformed into the image of the glorified Christ “from glory to glory” by “the Lord who is the Spirit.” Beginning with the Water and the Word of Holy Baptism and continuing with the Word and the Word in, with, and under the Bread/Body and Wine/Blood of the Holy Supper, the believers are nourished as they await the summons to the full experience of eternal life.

Meanwhile the believers who by God’s mercy have been called to ministry/service (διακονίαν) do not get discouraged or lose heart. Believers renounce disgraceful and underhanded ways. They refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s Word. They proclaim God’s truth openly by lip and life.

**Suggested sermon titles:**

Transfigured for Ministry/Service
The Ultimate Makeover

Arthur F. Graudin

**First Sunday in Lent**

**Romans 8:31-39**

**March 5, 2006**

*Context:* This well-known and much-beloved reading opens with the rhetorical question of verse 31 that links the text with what has preceded it. In three parts, then—verses 31b-32, verses 33-34, and verses 35-39—Paul responds to his own question, “What shall we say to these things?” Before considering the structure and message of the apostle’s answer to his question, we should consider the matter of “these things.” The text is a response to “these things”; to what does ταύτα in verse 31 refer? The near demonstrative pronoun is almost certainly retrospective, referring back to what Paul has already said. But how far back does the reference go?

Commentators seem very willing, given larger structural analyses, to take
“these things” back to 5:1-11 (Schreiner, Romans, 456), or even as far as 1:16-17 (Cranfield, Romans, 434-35). This is likely correct, but in a sense, too large to be of use for any given sermon. The near context is really our best ally. The present justification of all believers (8:1-2), the life in the Spirit that is marked by struggle (8:3-16), our hope-driven existence in a groaning, struggling creation and the promise of God’s ultimate purposes to transform and ultimately glorify all believers in the image of the Son (8:17-30)—these hard-nosed, realistic truths are “these things” that invite a response on the part of Paul and his readers.

Structure: The first part of Paul’s response comes in 8:31b-32, and we can label it, “God Who Gives.” God, Paul declares, is on the side of believers; He is “for” them. If that is the case, then no enemy can overthrow or destroy the Christian. Verse 32 is an argument from the greater to the lesser. God handed over His own Son into death for all. Since God did that, it follows that God will also give all His gift to His believers. The use of the verb “handed over” (παρέδωκεν) invites reflection. In 1 Corinthians 11:23, it likely means “betrayed,” and there it was Judas who “handed over” Jesus. In Galatians 2:20 and Ephesians 5:2, 25, Christ “handed over” Himself, and there the Lord’s free self-giving is stressed. Here, God the Father is the one who did not spare His Son, but He delivered Jesus to sin-punishment for the world and even to death itself.

In light of the magnitude of what God has already done for believers, it follows that He will also give them “all things.” In context, this must mean “all things that will work together for good and that are needful for their salvation and their being conformed to the image of the Son” (8:29-30). It does not mean “all things that would make their lives easy or happy according to the American dream.” The context is realistic; the creation and believers themselves continue to groan. But the confidence is supreme, based on God’s giving of Christ into death for us all. God is the Giver now, and He will at the final judgment be the eschatological Giver!

The second part of Paul’s response comes in 8:33-34, and we can call it “God Who Will Acquit.” Here, forensic language comes to the fore, and the force is even strongly eschatological. The future indicative (“Who will charge God’s elect?”) and the future participle (“Who [is] the one who will condemn?”) both express the ultimate question of God’s final verdict on the Last Day. Both questions are answered on the basis of what every believer can already know about God. God is the one who justifies; Christ Jesus is the one who died, rose, ascended to glory, and who now intercedes.

Paul here assumes that his readers believe a very basic fact about the cosmos, namely, that it is under the rule and reign of God and that on the Last Day, God the Judge will issue a verdict over everyone. On that final day of reckoning, the believer will not fear. If God in Christ will not condemn us, then no one will!

The third section of the text (8:35-39) widens the proclamation to embrace more fully the present moment. Does God love me now? Will we ever in this life (or the next) be beyond the reach of His care and compassion for us? Will anything be able to separate us from His love? Paul’s answer, flung defiantly in the face of trouble and persecution and the fallenness of the cosmos, is a resounding “No!” Faithfulness to Christ will increase the trouble that believers face, as the citation from Psalm 43:22 reveals. But none of these things can overthrow and conquer the believer in his or her relationship with God. God’s love and loving action in our lives remains victorious—even when it is most hidden by external or internal sufferings. “God Who Loves” is Paul’s proclamation here in the third part of the reading.

The key in each section is Christ! Christ was not spared, but delivered up for
us all—this establishes God as Giver. Christ died, rose, ascended and intercedes—
this establishes that God will acquit us on the Last Day. As for the love of God? It
is nothing more (and certainly nothing less!) than the love of God in Christ Jesus our
Lord.

Suggested outline:

“God in the Midst of Trouble”

I. God is on your side, even when others are against you!
   A. At times, other people may be against you.
   B. But if God did not spare His own Son, then He will surely be on your side!
II. God will hear your plea, even when others accuse you!
   A. Many voices are eager to remind you of your genuine, troubling sins.
   B. Only God’s voice will matter, especially on the Last Day—and He will
      acquit you!
III. God will love you, even when hatred surrounds you!
   A. Our God gives no guarantees of ease or safety or comfort. He does not take
      us out of the world, and others may hate you.
   B. But no one, and nothing can separate you from the God who will continue
to do good for you, conforming you to the image of His Son—Jesus Christ,
who loved you!

Jeffrey Gibbs

Second Sunday in Lent
Romans 5:1-11
March 12, 2006

After presenting Abraham as the great Old Testament example of someone who was justified by faith, Paul turns his attention to the blessing which follows justification: peace with God. This peace with God is not a subjective experience of calm, for as the text indicates, this peace embraces tribulation and hardship. Instead, this peace is the end of hostilities between God and the sinner. As the Christmas hymn puts it, “Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.”

Given that we now stand reconciled to God, however, how does this peace help us deal with the hardships that we face in life? At first glance, it would appear that it helps us in two ways. It leads us to boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, it leads us to boast in suffering. There are two roads, apparently, an easy road and a hard road. Our natural tendency would be to want to take the easy road. We would rather boast in glory than in suffering.

But what does it mean to boast in the glory of God? The glory of God is not success. Paul tells us elsewhere that Christ in you is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). He also says that our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). To boast in the hope of glory is to boast in something we cannot see. To boast in the hope of glory is to recognize that the fulfillment of who we most deeply are can never come from the things of this world because the world is shot through with sin and decay. This hope means giving up on the quest for fulfillment and self-gratification and instead waiting eagerly for the day when Christ will be revealed and when we also will be revealed with Him in glory (Col. 3:4).

So boasting in the glory of God turns out not to be an easy road. The second
road, the hard road, turns out to be the only road. We boast in suffering (cf. 1 Pet. 1:6; 2 Cor. 12:9). Our first reading that there is a road of glory and a road of suffering turns out to be wrong. We rejoice in glory and suffering not because they are two roads, but because suffering is the road to glory. For suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. God sharpens His tools. Suffering galvanizes our hope in Christ because it crushes the possibility of trusting in anything or anyone else.

But why does hope not disappoint us? Is it because God pours into our hearts love towards Him and towards our neighbor? Is it because God pours the Holy Spirit into our hearts? Not exactly. God pours out His love. He does not pour it in. The Holy Spirit is already in our hearts through Baptism. Once there, He becomes a source of living water, welling up to eternal life. He testifies with our spirits that we are the children of God. In other words, the Holy Spirit gives us peace by giving us the confidence that our lives, which are hidden with Christ now, will one day be revealed in glory when we are finally freed from bondage to sin and decay. With that confidence, we can rejoice that the sufferings of this life are unable to touch what is most important to us.

David R. Maxwell

Third Sunday in Lent
1 Corinthians 1: 22-25
March 19, 2006

First, let’s take a look at the context of the book, chapter, and verses. The city of Corinth, like many cities that thrive on trade, had a reputation for sexual immorality, religious diversity, and corruption. The church that Paul planted there (Acts 18) floundered under all of these influences and began to divide over various issues. Paul’s first letter to the church there, addresses many of these issues that were dividing the church.

Paul greets the readers (the leaders of the church) in Christ Jesus, as brothers baptized into Christ, enriched and sustained by a faithful God. He appeals to them for unity in mind and confession that they not quarrel and cause division among them. He points them to Christ and somewhat sarcastically asks, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (v. 13 ESV). Paul brings the focus immediately to Christ and to the cross.

It behooves us to stretch this text back to verses 17 through 21, where Paul points out the clarity of God’s Word proclaimed to the church in Corinth. Not with “eloquence” (as those who would divide the church and rob it of Christ’s influence would do) lest “the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (v.17 ESV). It is interesting how it all comes back to the cross. The power of God is demonstrated in the sending of His Son to die that we might have life. Through Christ’s death on the cross, the devil, death, and hell itself are defeated and hold no power over us in Christ Jesus.

It is worth hearing the words Paul quotes from Isaiah in verse 19: “For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ ” For now we see in our text that the Jews seek signs and the Gentiles wisdom. It makes me laugh actually…signs? We want to shout, “Come on! Open your eyes! How many signs do you need? Water to wine…heal the sick…the lame to walk…the blind to see…the lepers cleansed…the dead raised to life!” But the
Jews wanted to see signs that they were right—signs that supported their belief just like the Gentiles who strained to understand, to rationalize and to interpret by human knowledge that which was happening before their own eyes. Yet, Christ crucified proved to be a bump in the road that they just could not seem to get over. They just didn’t “get it.” God has called Jew and Gentile. The work of His Son, Jesus Christ is for all, and in Christ is the power and wisdom of God. There is nothing our human knowledge and reason can understand, and that is what God is assuring us of in Isaiah’s passage.

To those whom God has brought to faith, Jesus Christ is God’s power and wisdom. He is the Word made flesh, who by His death on the cross accomplished what we could never do for ourselves. Our punishment became His punishment, giving us peace and pardon in His sacrifice. Only God’s wisdom could plan this, and only God’s power could make it work.

Throughout our lives, we can look for answers to life’s questions in all the wrong places. We can look within our own thoughts, wisdom, and knowledge, but we would find only confusion and frustration. We trust God. We trust in the work of His Son, Jesus Christ, for the only way to salvation is by grace through faith in Him. Therefore, the only real answers, the only effective answers, are found in Christ who is the power and wisdom of God.

Michael L. Kumm

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Ephesians 2:4-10
March 26, 2006

Context: The first three verses of Ephesians 2 give the sum and substance of the participial phrase at the beginning of verse 5 in the assigned text: “And you, although you were dead in trespasses....” The emphasis in Ephesians 2:1-3 is on the former life of the believers when they were dead to God, completely given over to sin and children of wrath; notice the past-time indicatives “in which formerly you walked” (v. 2), “among whom also we all lived” (v. 3), and “we were children of wrath by nature” (v. 3).

This contextual contrast is important because the strongest emphasis of the reading is upon the change that has taken place through baptismal union into both the completed and the future work of Christ. Lutherans are (rightly) quick to keep the simul justus et peccator in the forefront of our thinking, speaking, and preaching. But this text is almost completely given over to the justus, to a celebratory proclamation of how our identity and our relationship with God has been reversed. We believers were one thing; now we are another. We were dead; but now in Christ, we are alive.

Textual notes: The text readily divides itself into three sentences: verses 4-7, verses 8-9, and verse 10. Verses 4-7 proclaim in three main verbs the transforming action God has taken toward us, and to what purpose: God made us alive with Christ, He raised us with Christ, and He seated us with Christ in the heavenly places, in order that He might show in the coming ages His gracious favor toward us. The accent falls completely upon what God “co-did” for us; notice the συν compound verbs (συνεζωοποίησεν, συνηγεράρθησεν, συναίωσεν) that emphasize our (implied) baptismal union into the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. God had an end-time purposes in mind when He did this for all believers; His rich grace will...
continue to be revealed in the coming ages. This is all God’s doing and all God’s purpose. It is all “by grace.”

Verses 8-9 begin with “for” (γὰρ), showing that Paul will now be offering some sort of explanation of verses 4-7. What is the apostle explaining or elucidating? The “by grace” of it all! In emphatic first position in verse 8 is the dative of means, “by grace”! The divine, gracious, monergism of this text receives repeated and remarkable emphasis in these familiar verses. “By grace” is one obvious example. But then there is “you (have been and) are saved”; the passive voice verb lays all the credit at God’s door. “This whole thing” (tō/το) in verse 8b is neuter singular and so it likely refers to all of verse 8a—including both “grace” and “faith” (feminine nouns) which is God’s gift by which we receive His gifts. “This whole thing” is not “from you.” By concise and stark contrast: “God’s gift.” We play no fundamental role at all in being made alive, and so any and all human boasting or comparison is excluded.

Paul is not content with this much emphasis upon God’s activity in our current status and future hope; verse 10 further explains, beginning again with “for” (γὰρ). As in verse 8, an emphatic first element sets the tone: “for his workmanship are we!” Often Greek nouns that end in -μα (as with “workmanship,” ποιήμα) emphasize the result of an action, and that is the case here. God did it, and we are the result of His doing. The passive voice participle “having been created” lends even more emphasis to God’s action, as if that were necessary. God has re-created us in Christ, and He has even prepared good works for us in advance, in which we may walk. Our new life, our identity, our future, and our purpose in life is all the result of God’s action for us in Christ. The closer one looks at this text, the more gracious it becomes.

“God from the Beginning, to the World without End”

I. God intervened, to give us life!
   A. Our role? Helplessness!
   B. He is the doer; His is the grace and mercy!
II. God had a purpose, to keep on showing us life!
   A. What is your destiny? Where are you headed?
   B. God has ages and ages to come, and we will enjoy His mercy, body and soul!
III. God has a plan, to lead us through this life!
   A. He is the worker, the workman, the shaper of our lives.
   B. He plans for us to do good works in the place where He has put us.

Jeffrey Gibbs

Fifth Sunday in Lent
Hebrews 5:7-9
April 2, 2006

Introduction: In Hebrews 4:14 Jesus is called the “great High Priest.” It is a prominent title in Scripture passages and Christian hymns. Some in the sermon audience, and certainly many outside the church, will wonder why Scripture and the church make so much of this “job description” of the Savior. Our purpose here will be to explain its significance and comfort. In the Old Testament temple regu-
lations the High Priest was selected from among men and appointed to represent them before God, and his work was to teach and offer sacrifices for sins (Heb. 5:1). As the book of Hebrews explains, Jesus was designated in Messianic prophecies to be the ultimate High Priest.

**Jesus, Our Great High Priest**

I. This great High Priest offered Himself as the offering for sin (vv. 7-8).

A. He is the God-Man who became human in order that He might undergo suffering, which would be the atoning offering for sinners (Heb. 2:9, 14-15). In this way He performed the role of the High Priest (to represent men) more fully than it has ever been carried out before or since. He was the incarnate Son of God (Heb. 1:5-9; 5:5) and deserved no suffering, but took it on in the place of all us sinners. He is both the Offering and the Offerer, the Victim (sacrificial offering) and the Priest. This is the task laid on Him by the will of God the Father, who deeply longs for the reconciliation of sinners to Himself (Heb. 10:7-10). The sacrifice is pure and acceptable because of the righteousness of the Son.

B. He prayed vehemently as He made this offering. The God-forsaken suffering of the cross was dreadful for the Messiah to contemplate. His prayers were answered: He was delivered from it by victorious resurrection, so that He lives as the successful Redeemer (Heb. 9:12) and Intercessor (Heb. 7:25) in heaven, in whom we put our trust forever (Heb. 4:14-16).

II. This great High Priest is the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him (v. 9).

A. The obedience here is faith. In Scripture, the Word that calls for faith is sometimes called a “commandment” (1 John 3:23). But this is not part of a salvation by works, in which one is to rely on one’s own good deeds, rather than on Jesus and free grace (see Heb. 2:9; 9:26, 28; 4:16; 13:9, 25; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:28). The “command” in this case is called that because it is an expression of God’s earnest, fervent desire and will that sinners be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Trust in Him is called for by the Law, as Luther’s famous explanation of the First Commandment shows. But this command to believe cannot be fulfilled by some decision of man’s corrupt will to obey it (see Rom. 8:7), but only by the joyful response that gladly receives the gift of salvation (Acts 16:34; Rom. 5:2), which is always brought about by the creation of God (1 Cor. 12:3; John 1:12-13).

B. As the God-Man, Jesus is the great example of obedience for us human beings to follow both in believing and in serving God. Not that following an example is the way of salvation, but His obedience to His Father’s will (Heb. 10:7-10; 5:8) provides the pattern of the life into which the Spirit brings us (1 Pet. 2:21-23; Matt. 11:29; 16:24; Heb. 12:2).

Thomas Manteufel
The goal of the sermon is given in verse 5: that the hearers may have the mind of Christ. In order to pursue this goal, we need to engage in some preliminary reflections on the form of God (μορφή Θεοῦ) and the form of a slave (μορφή δούλου). The NIV over-interprets these phrases to mean “very nature of God” and “the very nature of a servant.” However, this translation does not work because Christ retains the divine nature when He takes on the form of a slave, and He retains His human nature when He puts aside the form of a slave at His exaltation (vv. 9-12). The point of “form of God” is not simply that Christ has a divine nature, but that His divine nature is displayed in an obvious way. He “looks” like God, so to speak. He has all the powers and prerogatives of God.

But what does God “look” like? How should we understand what it means to be God? This gets us to the heart of the sermon. In the popular imagination, God is a heavenly ruler who is more or less an enlarged version of a benevolent dictator on earth. He is concerned about protecting His own power and glory, and within those confines, He generally wants good things for His subjects. Worship consists in giving Him the praise that belongs to Him. Obedience is another way of acknowledging His power and authority. The focus of human existence, then, is to give to God what rightfully belongs to Him. If we extend that pattern into our relationship with our neighbors and model ourselves after God, then those relationships are primarily about receiving from others what rightfully belongs to us. This is a view of God and the world that is characterized by getting. God gets what rightfully belongs to Him, and we get what rightfully belongs to us.

This view stumbles on our text, however, because the mind of Christ revealed there is not concerned with getting. If it were, the cross would be a blip on the radar screen, an exceptional event that interrupts the power and glory Christ had from eternity and the power and glory He has at His exaltation. The real business of being God would be found in Christ’s exaltation.

If, however, we follow the text, then we must conclude that the cross is not merely a step on the road to glory but that it actually reveals to us something about what it means to be God. Christ had the power of God, but He did not think that this was something to be used for His own advantage (οἷς ἄρσενῶν ἐγγεγένη), but for the advantage of others. What happens when we allow this fact to shape our understanding of what God is like? We get a view of God and the world which is characterized by giving instead of getting.

God is not primarily concerned to get what rightfully belongs to Him, but His concern is to give of Himself to His creatures. Worship no longer means giving to God what is His, but it now means, first and foremost, receiving from God the gifts He would give us. Obedience is no longer an attempt to please God by meeting His demands but is now fundamentally a process of being shaped into the mind of Christ by all the benefits that God bestows on us. We do not worry so much about pleasing God because that is not His primary concern. Christ came to serve us, not that we might serve Him.

Once we are so shaped, we extend that pattern of giving into our lives. Our lives in this world are no longer about receiving what rightfully belongs to us. We are free to focus on the needs and concerns of others without worrying about getting what we deserve. Luther says that a Christian lives his whole life outside himself: “He
lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love” (The Freedom of a Christian, Luther’s Works 31, 371).

In order to get these points across, the suggested sermon outline lays out a description of two views of God and the universe, one characterized by the getting God and the other characterized by the giving God. The introduction casts these options as Christian and Satanic, respectively, by placing side by side two slogans, one from St. Augustine (“Love, and do what you will”), and one from the Church of Satan (“Do what you will and harm none”). They sound similar because both tell you to do what you will, but the satanic slogan assumes life is about getting, while St. Augustine’s slogan, by adding the word love, makes life about giving.

**Suggested outline:**

**Introduction:** Two slogans. “Love, and do what you will.” “Do what you will, and harm none.” One of these slogans comes from St. Augustine, the other comes from the church of Satan. Can you tell the difference? “Love, and do what you will.” “Do what you will, and harm none.” What is the difference between a saint and Satan?

I. The satanic view of God and the universe.
   A. God gets what rightfully belongs to Him.
      1. Worship as flattering God.
      2. Obedience as attempting to please God.
   B. We get what rightfully belongs to us.
      1. Respect.
      2. Success (etc.).

II. The Christian view of God and the universe.
   A. God gives to us.
      1. Worship as reception of God’s gifts.
      2. Obedience as free response rather than requirement.
   B. We give to others.

**Conclusion:** Only when God and the universe are about giving are we free.

David R. Maxwell

The Resurrection of Our Lord
1 Corinthians 15:19-28
April 16, 2006

While one would be remiss to ignore the Gospel reading from St. John for Easter Day, the strength of this text for the Resurrection of our Lord is that it makes very apparent that the proclamation of the Gospel includes centrally the resurrection of the incarnate Christ and the bodily resurrection of all believers in Christ. As this Word of God makes clear, the bodily resurrection is in fact the way God the Father rules over His creation. The preaching of this text becomes a celebration of God’s reign over all His enemies. The text emphasizes our physical, bodily inclusion in that reign. The text is structured in such a way as to move the hearer from the despairing thought of faith in Christ apart from bodily resurrection to true faith in God’s victory over all our enemies, including death itself.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is contending against notions in the Corinthian community that there is no bodily resurrection from the dead. They hoped for
spiritual resurrection only in this life. While Christians today might publicly affirm the bodily resurrection, it is often a misplaced stepchild of our teaching and confession. The therapeutic and relativist orientations of modern American culture lead us toward the kind of spiritualist notions prevalent in Corinth. How does hoping in Christ only in this life manifest itself among us? It manifests itself in a faith which considers Christ no different than a nutritional or herbal supplement. Christ becomes an add-on or addition to our spiritual and emotional desires who helps us to achieve oneness with God or happiness or contentment or empowerment for life. For such approaches to the Gospel, the bodily resurrection is irrelevant. These salvific schemes (self-help spirituality) are no different than the disembodied resurrection of the soul or spirit confessed at Corinth. Such schemes deny the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In fact, they are blatant lies against the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who created all things through His Word and rejoices in the goodness of His creation. To deny the resurrection of our human bodies is to deny that the Father and Christ are one and that the Son was sent to accomplish the works that the Father gave Him to accomplish (John 5:36). Denying the resurrection of the body is tantamount to denying that the Son came to do the re-creative and regenerative work of His Father upon His creatures and the entire creation. If these lies were true, they would veil us from our powerlessness and isolation in light of the promise of life which would be just an illusion.

The tendency to spiritualize the resurrection of the body ought to induce us to consider preaching in the context of ritual practices that would counter those tendencies. For example, some LCMS congregations have congregational cemeteries. What better way to counter such spiritualizing than to begin the service of light during the Easter Vigil in the cemetery? The same practice could be engaged for an Easter sunrise service. What better place to greet the rising sun than in the place of death where the Son's resurrection victory over the last enemy—death—will be manifested? Congregations which do not have a congregational cemetery could pursue using the local cemetery most utilized by congregational members. Such a ritual context for the beginning of the Vigil or Sunrise service brings the tactile, olfactory, and optative senses into connection with the preaching of the bodily resurrection of Christ. This would allow the preacher to draw upon the assembly's experience of the imprisoning stranglehold of death and the futility of hoping only in Christ in this life.

But the Gospel which Paul preached and the church in Corinth received, in which it is standing (one might say solidly anchored), and through/by which it is being saved (1 Cor. 15:1) is the Gospel of the Christ who was buried and raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:4). It is not a Gospel only for this life. The complete Gospel which culminates in the bodily resurrection of Christ by the authority and power of God the Father begins the reversal of the enslavement of the creation to all the forces opposed to God. The most powerful of those forces is death because, unlike the other forces of evil and apart from God's intervention, humans cannot be delivered from death's hold now or in eternity. As with one man (Adam) came death, so by one man (Christ Jesus) comes the resurrection from the dead. Christ's resurrection is the beginning, the firstfruits, of the reversal of our subjugation: from the reign of death to the reign of God through life.

Like the harvest of the first fruits, only the initial grains of the harvest are seen. The full harvest is hoped for eschatologically on the basis of the first fruits. This eschatological harvest is the delivery and subjugation of God's people in and through Christ to the Father. In the Old Testament (Lev. 23:9-21; Num. 18:12-13),
the feast of first fruits (the harvest of barley) points to the new harvest’s (harvest of wheat) culmination on the Day of Pentecost. In the New Testament the goal of this initial harvest (the resurrection of Christ) is its culmination in the final harvest of life at the resurrection of those who belong to Christ at the end where God will be the all-ruling and reigning God for His people and we will be His faithful people.

But there is an order to the harvest of life. By virtue of this order, we have full and complete faith in the final harvest’s delivery, the end or goal of God’s plans. This order begins with the first fruits. God the Father reigns over His creation in the Passover from death to life—the death and resurrection—of His Son Jesus Christ. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, God has subjugated the powers of evil and has delivered us and the whole creation from their thrall. In Christ’s resurrection, the Father has begun the process of delivering us from death’s reign. At the end the resurrected and all-reigning Christ will destroy death’s sway and offer the entire harvest of His resurrected and now eternally living sons to his heavenly Father. Then our faith and hope will have been proven not to be in vain. Under God the Father’s eternal reign through Christ His Son we will live by the Spirit of life. God will be the source of our life and the aim and end of our life forever. In the words of St. Augustine from the City of God, “In this house God’s people shall everlastingly dwell with their God and in their God, and God with his people and in his people, God filling his people, his people filled with God, so that ‘God may be all in all,’ the consummation of all our desiring—the object of our unending vision, of our unwearying love, of our unwearying praise.”

Made Alive—Christ Is Risen!

I. Left for dead: believing in Jesus Christ as a spiritual-nutritional supplement
   A. Is incomplete Gospel.
   B. Leaves the church with false hope: a faith that is in vain!
   C. Calls the Father of Christ a liar (so we live in the Adam by whom death came: we are all liars).

II. Made alive: delivered and subjected to God.
   A. The beginning of the great reversal from death to life: the man by whom comes the resurrection of the dead/by whom we are made alive.
   B. Delivering us from the rule of death to the rule of life in God the Father (The order of eschatological hope).
      1. First: Christ the Firstfruits of the harvest has been raised.
      2. Second: The gathering of the complete living harvest of those who belong to Christ.
      3. Third: The handing over by Christ of the entire harvest of life to the Father and the destruction of all the enemies of the God of life, including death itself.
   C. The end of true faith and hope in the God and Father of our risen Lord Jesus Christ who will be our all in all—the source of our life and the end and aim of our life.

Kent J. Burreson
Second Sunday of Easter
1 John 5:1-6
April 23, 2006

“Three Witnesses”

Preliminary considerations: In the glow of the resurrection of her Lord, the church, called by the Holy Spirit and gathering around the Word and Sacrament, celebrates the new life she has freely received. Today’s selected reading from Acts 3 narrates how the Christ’s resurrection power through faith manifests itself in the community of believers, as Scripture foretold. The blessing of the covenant the Lord made through Abraham’s offspring has overflowed to all the peoples of the earth, even though in ignorance the Jewish leadership of the time disowned, denied, and repudiated God’s Anointed One. In the familiar Gospel lesson from John 20, however, our Lord declares to His disciple Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,” announcing the spreading of the Christian faith in the future generations. The Introit of the Day also exhorts believers to make known among the nations what the Lord has done, as the Lord remembers His covenant forever.

Notes on the text: The false teachers the letter addresses apparently rose from within the church and presented themselves as spiritual people, claiming some kind of prophetic, as well as apostolic, authority. They had the form of pious, spiritual, and faithful church leaders as they claimed they were spirit-endowed (4:1). Nevertheless, they were bewitched by a certain Cerinthian heresy that conjectured that Jesus was but a man among men. At His baptism, the “heavenly Christ” descended on Him and endowed Him with spiritual and divine powers, [but left Him only with human powers] at the time of His passion and crucifixion.

However, John, who has been an eyewitness to what the Incarnate Lord said and did, perceived easily the fallacy of such false claims. Already in the prologue to the Gospel that bears his name, John inscribed that Jesus was the Word Incarnate and people had seen His glory and His unfailing love for humanity in His teachings and the miracles He performed. In that same vein, he began this letter with the assurance that he was reporting that the Life that was from the beginning had appeared and that his own eyes had looked at and his own hands had touched that Life. Furthermore, at the conclusion of our text (v. 6; cf. v. 8) he calls on three witnesses to prove his point: the testimony of the Spirit, of water, and of blood.

Verse 6 therefore presents these witnesses concomitantly and posits them as combined evidence of our Lord’s redemptive work. The water in this text stands for our Lord’s Baptism and the inauguration of His public ministry. The blood signifies His death on the cross, the culmination of His act of redemption. Resurrected, the Lord has sent His Spirit into our hearts that we may believe He is the Christ, the Son of God (vv. 1, 5).

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ believes so as he or she is begotten of God. Faith—itself a gift from God, instilled and nourished by the Holy Spirit—is indication that the children of God are reborn. The Spirit enables them willingly to obey His commands and daily to overcome the struggles and pressures of the world. In this new life, faith is acting in love, enabling us to love the Lord with our whole heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is clear witness of a resurrected life in Christ (vv. 2-5).
Homiletical considerations: Jesus’ own Baptism, His atoning death on the cross, and the Holy Spirit’s testimony concerning the two are the three witnesses that this text presents as evidence of God’s love for the world. From a Biblical perspective, a matter must be established on the basis of two or three witnesses. For God’s way of saving mankind in Jesus Christ from sin and death, we have more than three witnesses. In fact, a great cloud of witnesses is surrounding this truth.

1. The witness of what God has done ultimately in His Son continues in the post-resurrection season. In the Easter spirit, the baptized of God go forth into the world declaring the victory the Lord has won over flesh and blood by His blood.

2. Cerinthisan tendencies grow rampant in our day both within the church and without. In many Christian circles, the temptation prevails to view the resurrection more as an experience than as a historical event. Human reasoning gets them stuck with the “empty” tomb and no further. Such reasoning is to be pitied, as it puts its hope in Christ only for this life (1 Cor. 15:19).

3. Others think of Jesus as the example of a good life well lived. Jesus was more than a man. As the New Age teachers claim, Jesus grew up to become “Christ.” To be able to do good for others, they propose a process of “Christification.” The testimony of Scripture works contrary to this proposal (Acts 17:3).

4. Nevertheless, the church’s witness is founded on the witness of eyewitnesses (1 John 1:1-4). Beginning with the first Easter, the church throughout the world celebrates Christ’s ultimate victory over sin and death. By His death, He demonstrated God’s love for mankind. By His death and resurrection He has overcome death for all whose destiny it is to die.

5. Moved by the Spirit of truth, Christians go on bearing the fruit of the Spirit. They do so as they have been given the Spirit to know that God sent His Son as Savior of the world (4:13). They declare in deeds of love their victory that has been won over the world.

6. A life of resurrection means a life of obedience to God’s commands. As children of God, Christians obey their Father’s will, demonstrating their love for Him and for their neighbor. This is their baptismal blessing, sustained in them and nourished by the Lord’s Supper. Everyone born of God overcomes the world, that is, everyone who believes that Jesus is Son of God. Our faith is our victory! That is our witness to the world.

Victor Raj

Third Sunday of Easter
1 John 1:1-2:2
April 30, 2006

Introduction: The poet Tennyson told how he was on vacation in a certain place and asked his hostess one day what the news was. She replied, “There’s only one piece of news that I know—that Christ died for all men.” He said, “That is old news and good news and new news.” Why is the Gospel message good news, and precious to so many people? St. John is answering this question when he calls the Gospel “the Word of Life” and says that it is about Jesus Christ, who is the Life, bringing eternal life to us from His Father. John says that he has actually seen Him and touched Him and known Him and now is proclaiming the news about Him (1:1-2). It is news that can change your life.
Suggested outline:

The Gospel Message That Brings Fellowship

I. We sinners need fellowship with God and with one another.
   A. Without the Christ of the Gospel we walk in darkness (1:5-6). God is in the
      light and can be called Light, the light of holiness and wisdom. But fallen
      human beings, affected by a sinful nature, live in the darkness of sin and
      foolishness, again and again causing harm and ruin by self-centered be-
      havior, cruel actions, haughty attitudes, unrepentant hardness of heart,
      and other forms of vice.
   B. We cannot honestly deny this dreadful truth (1:6, 8, 10). To deny it is to
      make a liar out of Him who calls us sinners and wants to save us from His
      wrath.

II. The message of Christ brings fellowship.
   A. The Gospel brings us into fellowship with God the Father and His Son,
      Jesus Christ (1:3, 7, 9).
      1. It brings sinners into fellowship with God, reconciliation in which we
         receive His gracious forgiveness and His sanctifying help for the on-
         going restoration and purifying of our lives. Fellowship (koinonia in
         Greek) basically means “sharing,” and through faith in the Gospel we
         obtain the marvelous privilege of sharing light with God and being in
         the light, as He is in the light (1:7). We share the light of holiness,
         being forgiven and then sanctified, and the light of wisdom, in recog-
         nizing the truth that He forgives and restores out of His love for us.
      2. This fellowship is based on Christ’s work as Propitiator and Defender,
         (2:1-2). He shed His divine blood for sinners, and for His sake we
         receive forgiveness and cleansing and communion with God. There is
         a story that Martin Luther saw Satan coming to him with a great
         scroll that had all his life’s sins written on it and saying, “There is no
         hope of your going to heaven.” Luther, it is said, was filled with anxi-
         ety over this, until he remembered a verse from our text, and gave a
         bold answer: “One thing you have forgotten: The blood of Jesus, His
         Son, washes us clean from every sin.”
      1. The fellowship with the Father and Christ is also a fellowship of
         believers in Christ (1:3, 7). Those who share life (1:1-2) through the
         Gospel of Christ share it in common with each other (1:3). This is good
         reason to love, encourage, and help each other.
      2. The Gospel gives abundant help for living righteously (1:9) and avoid-
         ing sin (2:1). It lives in us (2:14). It tells how the Savior came to
         destroy the devil’s work (3:8), to set a pattern for our lives (2:6; 3:16)
         by His love and obedience, to live in us and give us His Holy Spirit to
         help us (3:24). By all this we are strengthened to do good to our fellow
         believers and, in fact, to all people (Gal. 6:10). Like Hedley Vicard,
         the army captain long ago, we can read 1 John 1:7 and be moved to
         say: “If this be true for me, henceforth I will live, by the grace of God,
         as a man should live who has been washed in the blood of Jesus
         Christ.”

   Thomas Manteufel
“On the reading of many books...”


The texts of the Old Testament (OT) were not written in a literary, social, cultural, historical, political, or theological vacuum. OT narratives, laws, poetry, love songs, hymns, covenants, prophecies, royal annals, laments, wisdom sayings, etc.; all have Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) counterparts. These ANE “parallels” are extremely useful for the study of the OT as they highlight significant similarities and differences in form and content.

One recent book that provides a broad, relevant collection of ANE texts is Readings from the Ancient Near East by Arnold and Beyer. This anthology is the companion text to their college level introduction to the OT entitled Encountering the Old Testament. The goal of this anthology is “to give our readers a basic knowledge of the ancient voices, not to retranslate these texts” (9). As such, the editors have compiled ninety-one important ANE texts from previous translations. The only editing Arnold and Beyer have done to these translations is to remove archaic English words and bring consistency to punctuation and spelling.

The ANE texts in this collection reflect a broad spectrum of linguistic cultures: Assyrian, Babylonian, Sumerian, Egyptian, Persian, Hittite, Canaanite, and Israelite (extra-Biblical). Many of the ANE texts appear in full. Only those that are rather long (e.g., Laws of Hammurabi) appear as selected excerpts. Narrative texts appear in paragraph form, while indented lines visually identify the parallelism of poetic texts.

To assist the reader in connecting ANE texts with OT texts, the editors have sorted the ANE texts according to the four sections of the English (Protestant) OT: Pentateuch, historical books, poetic books, and prophetic books. For example, under the Pentateuch section there are twelve ANE texts pertaining to the topics of creation and the flood. These not only include standards like the Babylonian Enuma Elish, Epic of Atra-khasis, and Epic of Gilgamesh, but Sumerian (e.g., Eridu Genesis), Egyptian (Memphis Creation Story), and Ugaritic (e.g., Baal Cycle) texts as well. Other topics under the Pentateuch section are the Tower of Babel, ancestral customs, epic literature, covenants and treaties, law codes, and cultic texts.

The section for the historical books contains royal records, chronicles and historiographic lists, non-Hebrew monumental inscriptions, letters, and other Hebrew inscriptions. The poetic books section contains wisdom literature, love poems, and hymns and prayers. Finally, the prophetic books section includes prophecies, visions, apocalypses, divinations and incantations, and laments.

To enhance the reader’s understanding of the ANE texts and make specific connections to the OT, the editors have provided a brief introduction to each ANE text. They have also provided a map of the ANE, some photographs of ANE locations and texts (e.g., the eleventh tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh), five pages of endnotes, a three-page bibliography, and a four-page index.

All of the above may be considered strengths of this ANE anthology. There are, however, two things that the editors could have included that would help the reader even more. First, the lines and paragraphs of the ANE texts need to be enumer-
ated. Having used this text in class, it proved somewhat difficult to direct the students’ attention to specific lines or sections. Second, since the ANE world is so foreign to the general reader, it would be helpful to have a glossary that briefly defines the major gods, places, concepts, items, practices, etc. of the ANE.

On the whole, this ANE anthology is a rare gem. While there are many collections of ANE texts available, none provide such a well-selected, canonically arranged collection of ANE texts at such an affordable price. Any student, pastor, or layperson interested in situating and illuminating the OT in light of its ANE context will surely benefit from using this volume.

Scott A. Ashmon
Bronxville, NY


The author has lived in Palestine all his life, except for seven years doing diaconia studies and preparation for Lutheran ministry in Finland. For some years he has served as the Bishop of Jerusalem of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan.

Younan states, “By the time I finished my studies, I was not only equipped to be a pastor, I also understood my identity as a Palestinian Christian. I had traveled to the ends of the earth, where I learned to be a witness in Jerusalem” (37).

Chapter 1 provides an overview of two thousand years of Christianity in Jerusalem, and also the arrival and growth of Islam in Palestine. It includes the effect of the Crusader Period and the Ottoman Rule and the changes in the twentieth century after the war in 1948, also the result of the UN partition vote. This included Israel taking over and controlling 78% of the land with 22% being annexed to Jordan. Jerusalem itself became a divided city.

During the very difficult conditions in the latter part of the twentieth century the Lutheran Church in Palestine keeps on struggling. Its members chose to organize as an independent church in affiliation with the Lutheran World Federation as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan (ELCJ).

Chapter 2, “We Have This Cloud of Witnesses,” provides information on Younan’s family history, their life in Palestine, his schooling at the Martin Luther School in Jerusalem and then in Beit Jala, his studies in Hebrew, and later on his theological studies in Finland. While working on his dissertation, he learned the difference between theological Israel and the political Israel. He learned to understand his role as a Lutheran pastor and as a Palestinian Christian.

The emphasis of chapter 3 is on “A Theology of Martyria” (Witness), especially in the challenging setting of the political situation of a divided Palestine. He briefly records and discusses witness in the Acts of the Apostles, in the Old Testament, Christ as a model of witness, witness as a minority, as living, for justice, in witness I am strong, and witness to the resurrection. He describes also the location and the role of the historical Lutheran church of the Redeemer in the Old City of Jerusalem.

In chapter 4, “Witness in the Land,” the author takes up the issue of land in the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For some, God’s promise to give Palestine to Abraham and his descendants is considered to be ongoing. The present conflict
between Israelis and Palestinians is centered on the land. The Israelis believe that they are the true heirs to God’s promises to Abraham and that they “will find peace and security only by occupying the land” (63).

The author goes on to say that since Biblical times, Palestine had always been a pluralistic population of people living alongside the Jewish people. For Palestinian Christians, “The future of the Christian presence is in a just peace, not in occupation and war” (61).

Chapter 5 takes up “Witness for Justice: The Political Situation.” On January 5, 1998, the writer made his inaugural sermon as bishop at Jerusalem. Integral to his call is his role as witness to justice, which is the crucial prerequisite for enduring peace. In the twentieth century no fewer than fifty different peace proposals were offered to settle the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict but all failed to begin with the principle of justice for the Palestinians.

The writer has consistently stressed the following as crucial for justice: (1) End of occupation; (2) A two-state solution; (3) International legitimacy; (4) An end to Jewish settlements; (5) A just settlement for refugees; (6) A shared Jerusalem.

Chapter 6 stresses the role of witness for non-violence and moderation, and ends with a listing of five basic principles for Christian witness.

Part III discusses principles of applications: witness in the face of terrorism; witnessing to a terrorist; principles for witness in theological trialogue; witness to the Muslim and also to the Jewish community.

This book is an extremely important resource for a better understanding of the very sad situation of Palestine divided between the Palestinians and the Israeli, and the ongoing urgent need to clearly face the issues and seek to justly arrive at a true and lasting peace with proper fairness to the Palestinians.

Erich H. Kiehl


This volume is part of a prominent series—Library of Ancient Israel—that aims to illuminate the social realities of life experienced by Israelites. Biblical studies of various sorts touch on aspects of ancient political life, and any investigation of Israel’s history must deal in some way with political developments, but few if any authors have described Israel’s politics so comprehensively and systematically as Gottwald does here. In a couple of brief introductory chapters, he spells out his general approach and defines his concept of politics. In chapter three he surveys the general impression given in Biblical sources regarding Israel’s political history. He devotes chapter four to an analysis of the ancient Near Eastern matrix and chapter five to a critical imagination of Israelite politics in light of this larger world-historical context. A brief epilogue is followed by extensive endnotes and bibliography, plus indices of primary source citations, authors of secondary sources, and subjects.

Gottwald defines politics as the public exercise of power, coupled with the legitimation of its use, within a given social and territorial space (7). His analysis focuses on the relationships between this and other spheres of communal power, including economic, social, military, and ideological networks. With this concept of politics, Gottwald analyzes each of the three major phases of Israel’s political history: the prestate phase (thirteenth through eleventh century B.C.), the state
phase (eleventh through sixth century B.C.), and colonial phase (sixth through first century B.C.). Gottwald does not ask if the narratives are accurate with respect to the events they specifically report, but only if they are realistic with respect to the political conditions they generally reflect. To determine this, he first attempts to distinguish what the narratives show about the political conditions of a particular phase from the narrator's retrospective judgments made on theological or ideological grounds. This residue of information is then evaluated in terms of the extent to which it is congruent with patterns of political development known from Israel's ancient Near Eastern context. On the basis of this comparison, Gottwald critically imagines the politics of ancient Israel, phase by phase, in terms of the various aspects of power relationships that are defined in his concept of politics.

Gottwald recommends this approach because it moves beyond the positivistic impasse that has characterized modern Biblical scholarship, between the historical positivism that wants to limit itself to demonstrable hard facts and the religious positivism that wants to take every incident reported in Biblical narrative as hard fact. He argues that the fact-fiction dichotomy presents interpreters of Biblical historiography with a false choice. He believes that the narratives are informed by an ideologically biased perspective far removed from the time they describe, while also claiming that this does not necessarily preclude their recalling political conditions with verisimilitude. The ability to walk this fine line depends on the possibility of distinguishing politics from religion with respect to their separate spheres of power, despite the fact that they are often inextricably interrelated from the perspective of both the historical figures in the narrative and the narrator. This distinction is presupposed in Gottwald's analytical concept of politics, and by means of it he attempts to separate the narrator's evaluation of the interrelation between these two spheres from the supposedly less tendentious information about the various ways in which they were interrelated in each phase of Israel's political development.

As Gottwald works his way through the three successive phases of the Israelite political trajectory, his description of tribal, monarchial, and provincial polities is not all that different from what one would find in other sources. Because of his distinctive approach, however, he can delineate more sharply and systematically the interrelationships between various power structures. For example, it is commonplace to note that Yahwism provided the basis for a critique of the monarchy, but Gottwald describes this phenomenon in terms of a systemic process. The monarchies based their claim to legitimacy at least partly on their formal adherence to the cult of Yahweh, but at the same time they adopted political forms and practices that put them at odds with Yahwistic tradition. As they became tributary states, in accordance with the pattern followed by other small to medium-sized states in Syria-Palestine from the tenth through the sixth century B.C., the monarchies inevitably tended to violate the traditional protections of the kin and village social network that were embedded in various versions of the Yahweh cult.

The author's conclusions are largely stated in terms of the impasse between historical and religious positivism, which he initially set out to avoid. In opposition to the latest version of historical positivism, he reaffirms that the colonial narratives provide authentic glimpses of social life in tribal and monarchial times, as well as authentic vestiges of the ideologies from these two periods. In opposition to various expressions of religious positivism, he denies that Yahwism shaped polity decisively enough to establish an ideal of covenant politics that can transcend the particular forms in which it was anciently manifest. For Gottwald there
really are no Biblical principles of politics. In the final analysis, all that can be said of Israel’s political development is that it was typical for its time and place. Israel’s distinctiveness lay rather in its literature and religion. Without this literature and religion, ancient Israelite politics would hardly be worth a second look.

The meagerness of Gottwald’s conclusions raises the issue of whether this kind of approach might not have reached the point of diminishing returns. Can one really separate the realistic information in the Biblical narratives from the supposedly more ideologically tainted perspective of the narrator, so as to gain some kind of epistemological superiority over the historiographer? For example, Gottwald takes it as self-evident that Israel’s political development had a tribal prestate phase. However, even when it comes to such basic information, we know about this period and its political conditions only because it suited the theological presuppositions of the Deuteronomistic Historian to let us know. From the Chronicler’s theological perspective, this same information was not significant at all, and if we had only the Chronicler’s History we would scarcely know more than the simple fact that Israel must have had a prestate phase. Why not recognize that the Biblical historiographers are in a much better position than we are to make judgments about Israel’s political development?

Of course, at the root of Gottwald’s problem is his assumption that events reported (narrated time) and the setting of those reporting (narrators’ time) are so far removed from one another that the capacity to reconstruct Israel’s history is thrown into doubt. As such, Gottwald believes that the Hebrew Bible was fashioned by post-exilic Judahites who successfully squelched dissident voices from the North. This means that—to a large extent—Israel’s tribal and monarchic traditions are largely fictitious accounts intended to provide a foundational charter for the colonial post-exilic community of Yehud. And yet, Gottwald does not discount the history portrayed in the documents entirely. For example he notes that the fragment of an Aramaic stela from ninth-century Dan referring to the “House of David” conclusively rules out the view that David was a purely fictitious figure. He also cautions those who naively assume that “the hard facts” of archaeology are more easily and definitively demonstrated than the obscurities of Biblical texts. That is to say, archaeological interpretations have a high amount of subjectivity to them as well.

All that said, Israel was never able to develop a political structure that matched the creativity and novelty of their culture and religion. But this “failure” is not in any way surprising. Nowhere in antiquity is there any political innovation with the exception of Greek democracy. This is perhaps the conclusion of the matter; and this means Gottwald finally offers no substantial breakthroughs that change the current understandings of Israelite politics.

Reed Lessing


Just four years ago The Prayer of Jabez by Bruce Wilkinson hit the book market and became an instant success. Concurrent with its popularity was the rise of the WWJD formula, making me unsure at the time whether the “J” in that usage stood for Jesus or for Jabez. Although I tend to resist best sellers and prefer to busy myself with books that have stood the test of time, I flipped through its
ninety-three pages and decided to risk the brief investment of effort the book required. It turned out to be an innocuous enough activity. Although I liked Wilkinson’s clear, direct style and “non-doctrinal sounding” treatment of prayer, I frankly could not see what all the shouting was about. The slender volume tells the average Christian little more than he already knows about prayer (but probably too often fails to practice). It contained no new insights or profundities. Certainly, I had to concede that the book familiarized me with a Biblical character whose name had hardly been a household word in my prior experience. I did feel uneasy about the incompleteness of the book. So much more needed to be said about prayer. But, after all, the book was not meant to be a dogmatics text. Whether intended or not, Wilkinson’s book, I suspected, owed much of its success to its appeal to a results-oriented readership steeped in power-for-living, positive-thinking, theology of glory, “what’s right for me” religion. I half-heartedly hoped someone somewhere would greet the book not just with a compliment but also with a complement.

Well, that complement has arrived in, A Letter to Jabez: Response to a Prayer, by Neal E. Snider, Pastor Emeritus of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Maryville, Washington. Though clearly intended as a critique of Wilkinson’s book on prayer, A Letter to Jabez could serve as a companion to it. The two books—despite the doctrinal imprecision of the Wilkinson work and the occasional overstatements of the Snider response—balance, “correct,” supplement each other, and provide a picture of prayer as both a God-given tool for Christian living and an act of worship in our Jesus-provided relationship with God. Each book serves as “the rest of the story” for the emphasis of the other.

Pastor Snider’s response is delightfully easy to follow; each chapter of his slender volume correlates to the corresponding chapter in the prior Wilkinson publication. Actually, Pastor Snider’s approach is more than easy to follow—it is clever. Instead of directing his remarks to the author of The Prayer of Jabez, Snider writes a letter to the subject of that book, Jabez himself. That way Snider avoids direct confrontation of the author; it softens his criticism by putting a buffer between him and Wilkinson. Also the letter-approach provides for folksy comments and winsome passages, such as the occasional explanations Snider “courteously” provides to Jabez of items he could never have heard of back in his Old Testament days (e.g., the United States Congress, the Enlightenment, the Second Vatican Council, and Playboy Magazine). Pastor Snider ends his brief book with the quip (Jabez now in heaven, of course), “Thanks for taking the time to read such a long letter, Jabez. Oh well, I guess time means nothing to you.” In short, Pastor Snider has found a technique that helps him to carry out the Biblical directive of “speaking the truth in love.”

The advantage Pastor Snider gains through this technique he jeopardizes by the occasional use of the expressions “baloney” and “rancid baloney” as a way of showing his distaste for Wilkinson’s erroneous points of view. These expressions are totally out of character with the otherwise subtle and gentle approach Snider employs in dealing with Wilkinson’s doctrinal imprecisions. Calling a spade a spade is an acceptable method of combatting nonsense, but not consistent with an adopted strategy of gently needling one’s opponent (it might have helped if Snider had explained to Jabez what baloney is!).

The most common doctrinal imprecision in Wilkinson’s The Prayer of Jabez is his habit of synergistically taking away with his left hand the tributes he makes to sola gratia with his right hand. For example, after clarifying in chapter 3 that all
power belongs to God, to God working through us rather than with us, and after emphasizing in chapter 5 that only God’s resources, not our own, can be depended upon for the deliverance from evil for which we pray, Wilkinson makes a synergistic slip in chapter 7 in summing up a successful ministerial venture by calling it “evidence of what grace and Jabez praying can do.” Pastor Snider rightly pounces upon the imprecise theology of the phrase, although I believe Wilkinson’s usage to be more the product of careless writing than of erroneous conviction.

Like Pastor Snider I have trouble with Wilkinson’s success stories, stories not only of answered prayers but of instantly answered prayers. These accounts are too glib, too pat, and, despite the humble words accompanying them, often too ego-inflating. The story that bothered me the most was Wilkinson’s prayer during Atlanta interstate congestion that his plane would leave late so that he might still make his flight—which is what happened. Granted that Wilkinson caught his plane and granted that he was able to counsel a desperate woman because of the delay in departure, still what numerous inconveniences might many other passengers have experienced if God had delayed the flight in response to Wilkinson’s prayer?

The most serious flaw in Wilkinson’s book is its minimal talk of the saving work of Jesus Christ and its impact on the doctrine of prayer. Wilkinson talks much of God (a term that can be as specific or as vacuous as the contemporary reader wishes it to be) and often of the power of the Spirit, but little of the life, death, and work of Jesus. No discussion of prayer can be complete minus the Gospel. For it is Jesus who has made prayer possible by establishing a Father-child relationship between us and God. It is Jesus who is the reason God entertains and answers our prayers. It is Jesus who buttresses our prayers with His intercession. The power of prayer dare never be severed from the power of Jesus’ cross and empty tomb. Pointing out this truth was the outstanding contribution of Pastor Snider’s response to the Wilkinson book.

We Christians must always guard against two extremes in our view of prayer: on the one hand, stripping prayer of the miraculous altogether; on the other hand, converting prayer into a sort of Aladdin’s lamp through which we reduce God to a mere genie at our beck and call. Prayer has power—the power of the triune God, which God because of Jesus allows us to tap. Properly understood, there is “magic” in prayer. As Pascal has put it, God has kindly conferred upon us the dignity of causality. I am grateful to Wilkinson’s The Prayer of Jabez for reminding us of God’s clear and simple promise, “Ask, and it shall be given you”—a truth that more sophisticated Christians sometimes overlook or consider beneath them. But prayer should always be spoken in the context of God’s saving will for us and others, allowing for the possibility that a specific prayer may not always be answered “our way.” Prayer is always an expression of faith, an act of worship demonstrating our dependence upon God and our recognition that it is Jesus who has made us God’s sons and daughters. I am grateful to Snider’s A Letter to Jabez for emphasizing the faith and worship aspects of prayer, aspects that more fundamentalistic Christians sometimes neglect.

That is why I feel that the two Jabez books can be companion pieces. Unfortunately, Snider’s book will probably not experience the sales and readership Wilkinson’s book has. Such an outcome will not be due to the inferiority of the one book to the other but due to the results-oriented, power-for-living, positive-thinking, theology of glory, “what’s right for me” publication climate in which we live.

Francis C. Rossoow

In April of 1865, the South was looking for a “savior,” someone to lead them to victory over the North. They believed General Robert E. Lee was that man. Lee, however, led the South not in victory, but in surrender to the North. In that act Lee not only was a “savior” of the South, but of the Union as well. President Abraham Lincoln, General Ulysses S. Grant, Lee, and many more were led by God to take actions that united a broken, divided nation and helped to make it whole again. Winik’s book is the story of the reunification of North and South, of enemies who became friends, of individuals who treated one another with honor, respect, Christian charity, and yes, even with love and forgiveness. Why? Because it was good for the nation.

The question at the end of the Civil War was, “how to reunite two separate political, social, and cultural entities that had been bitter military enemies just days before.” Lincoln said that there is “no greater [task] before us” (xii). Winik’s book details the events and people who in April of 1865 “saved America.” In April we see Lee (who had considered guerilla warfare to the death) surrender. We see Grant being gracious to his fierce foe and to those who had borne arms against him. We see the outpouring of sympathy for a “nation” vanquished and a president slain (the first ever assassination of a President). We see an orderly succession of power during wartime. We see the “hoarse cry of vengeance” (xiv) silenced so that respect, honor, Christian love and charity prevailed.

Winik begins his book by tracing the disunity of the United States before the Civil War. In this period the nation was not a nation—but more like a confederacy (3-26). Thus in April of 1865 there was no guarantee that one nation would arise from the ashes of the Civil War. One nation could only have arisen had all the events in April 1865 occurred as they did. And by God’s hand they did. This is why April 1865 is as important to the United States as is 1776, perhaps even more so.

One might wonder, “What is a review of a book about the end of the Civil War doing in a religious journal of the LCMS?” I submit that we in the LCMS can learn something from this profoundly moving book. This book can teach us peace in our own battle-scarred church body as we study the peacemaking done at the end of the most bitter internal strife our nation has ever known. Anyone interested in peacemaking, whether it be in our nation or in our church, would benefit from reading Winik’s book.

Reading about the confluence of events in April of 1865 helps us to see and to understand that the hand of God is at work in history, in people’s lives, and in the nations of the world. We are also reminded that if any of these historical events had turned out differently, then the North may have exacted terrible acts of vengeance on the South, and the South might have carried on a lengthy, bitter guerilla warfare that would have prevented our nation from ever being the United States of America. Bitter guerilla warfare was the order of the day for Mosby’s Raiders, Quantrill’s raiders, and countless others. Missouri, then called “Bloody Missouri,” was decimated by the guerilla warfare that pitted Northerners against Southerners, brother against brother, son against father. This guerilla warfare had encouraged the most brutal and murderous bestiality which left a pathway of devastation and death in its wake. Almost no one in Missouri trusted anyone else as the conflict raged (146-166).

Some today feel that the United States has degenerated into an endless array
of special interest groups that are out for themselves, and that there is little if any sense of national unity and concern for others. In this age of culture wars, special interest groups demonize the opposition with inflammatory speech and language. The feelings of hatred and the cries for vengeance and retaliation in the days of the Civil War parallel those heard today in church and state. In such an age, Winik’s book becomes mandatory reading for all who wish to mend the moral and civil fabric of our society so that greater civility may be found as battles are fought, and so that combatants see one another as honorable people, not enemies to be demonized and hated. This is necessary so that there can be a return to a more united and civil state as battles are concluded. Peacemaking needs to be learned before battles are ended.

Much can be learned from the peacemaking of Lincoln, who “understood most poignantly, it is not merely how arms are taken up, and why, but equally how they are laid back down, and why. And what then follows” (383). Grant and Sherman carried out Lincoln’s gracious and conciliatory “River Queen” doctrine for peace and reconciliation. Lincoln refused “to gloat, or smugly indulge in celebration, or demonize his foe” because he had one goal in mind—the overcoming of enmity which would achieve reconciliation between North and South. Nor did the leaders of the Confederacy (most notably Robert E. Lee) demonize their foes (375). Lee, in fact, termed the assassination of Lincoln as the foulest of crimes. Many other Southerners recognized that in the death of Lincoln, they had lost their greatest champion for peaceful reconciliation and reunion.

Lincoln, Grant, Lee, Sherman, Johnston, and many more set the tone that made April 1865 “one of America’s finest hours.” Ultimately it was not “the deranged spirit of an assassin that defined the country at war’s end, but the conciliatory spirit of leaders who led as much in peace as in war, warriors and politicians who, by their example, their exhortation, and their deeds overcame their personal rancor, their heartache, and spoke as citizens of not two lands, but one, thereby bringing the country together” (379).

Some in our Synod believe that the conflict in our Synod has been too long, the hurts too painful, the scars too torn and open, the wounds too deep and bleeding for any healing to occur. A recent study of our Synod indicated a serious lack of trust among clergy, professional church workers, and members in the Missouri Synod, which has caused some to doubt that the breaches of the past can be healed. Some speak of our Synod as being divided into two irreconcilable camps. Some speak of our Synod fracturing because we already have “them” and “us.” Almost any disagreement is turned into an ad hominem argument which often demonizes the other person and twists the discussion into an interpersonal battle instead of an honest debate about the issues at hand. But if God’s hand can bring our nation healing after years of bloody hatred and conflict, then God’s grace is certainly strong enough to heal our beloved Synod, and to reconcile individuals to one another. It is that same grace of God which changed the man who murdered Christians for a living (Saul) into the greatest missionary the world has known (the apostle Paul—Acts 9). As Lutherans our own history is one replete with God’s gracious reconciliation and reunification (as seen in the Formula of Concord) after years of rancorous theological struggle.

Winik writes from a long history of governmental service in which he has seen and studied the aftermath of vicious, bloody, and hateful civil wars. He writes from the perspective that asks the question: “how to bring peace to countries in the wake of a civil war’s bloody aftermath” (xv). Indeed that same question vexes the Mis-
souri Synod years after its spiritual civil war. How can we bring a godly and Biblical peace to our Synod after the battles of the past and the present?

We would do well to ponder Winik’s words about the combatants in the Civil War—{“Both read the same bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other” (35.).} These words aptly describe many members of the LCMS. But though many Northerners and Southerners shared a common Christian faith, often they only saw one another as the enemy. Thus, as on the issue of slavery and on other issues, any moderate ground ‘became hostage to the passions of the two sides. Reason itself had become suspect; mutual tolerance was seen as treachery. Vitriol overcame accommodation’ (50). At times these words describe the circumstances in our Synod, as people in one camp demonize those in the other. How to bring a godly and Biblical peace to our Synod is, sadly, a question that seems not yet to have been answered. We seem to be very able to wage “war,” but where are the peacemakers? Thankfully there are some, but we have need of many more.

We all need to reflect on the reconciling words Nathan Bedford Forrest spoke to his forces as he surrendered: “Civil war, such as you have just passed through, naturally engenders feelings of animosity, hatred, and revenge.... It is our duty to divest ourselves of all such feelings, and to cultivate [good] feelings toward those with whom we have so long contested and...so widely but honestly differed” (322). Though not overtly stated, the ability of Grant, Lee, Lincoln, and others to honor and respect, to treat lovingly and kindly one’s foes, to put away hatred and animosity, and to forgive after being wronged came from the Christian ethos and faith of these men.

In our own Synod the cure is found in God’s reconciling love for us, exemplified by Jesus’ prayer from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). It is found in God’s Word which says, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32). It is to be found in honest and sincere confession of our own faults and sins of hatred and rancor as expressed by one of the soldiers at Appomattox, “How could we help falling on our knees, all of us together, and praying God to pity and forgive us all!” (198).

May the Gospel of Jesus Christ produce such a harvest in our lives, and in the life of our beloved Synod. By God’s grace may He raise up in our beloved Synod more peacemakers like Lee, Grant, Lincoln, and many others who by His blessing will help us see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, will lead us to a godly and Biblical peace, will enable sinful human beings to be reconciled to one another, and will unite our Synod under the healing power of His love and grace. As the United States is a beacon light, a country attracting freedom-loving refugees and people from all over the world, so our Synod can continue to be a beacon which attracts those living in the darkness of sin and unbelief to the spiritual light and freedom of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. May God so bless our Synod in future days as He blessed our nation in April of 1865.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the Children of God” (Matt. 5:9).

Armand J. Boehme
Almaty, Kazakhstan

A compelling interpretation of the book of Revelation, indeed of the entire Bible, was offered in 1995 when Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins published Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days. At the start of this book, on a 747 bound for London’s Heathrow Airport from Chicago, the flight attendants suddenly find half the seats empty, except for the clothes, wedding rings and dental fillings of Christians who had been suddenly swept up to heaven. The pilot of the 747—Rayford Steele—soon comes to the sickening realization that the rapture has just occurred. The next ten books in the series (with the twelfth and final book—Glorious Appearing—released in the spring of 2004) chronicle the tribulations suffered by those left behind and their struggle to survive as they seek to spread the Gospel of Christ to a dying world. According to LaHaye and Jenkins these novels, with their fictionalized accounts of the rapture and the rise of the antichrist during the subsequent seven-year tribulation, reflect the true teaching of the Bible. In serializing the tribulations of the book of Revelation the Left Behind novels have become the all-time best-selling Christian fictional series. It is estimated that in all, over fifty million copies of these books have been sold by Tyndale Publishing House.

This understanding of the end times rests upon these presuppositions: (1) a “literal interpretation” of the Scriptures; (2) the church and Israel are two distinct groups for whom God has a divine plan; (3) the church is a mystery, unrevealed in the Old Testament; this mystery age intervenes within the main program of salvation that is directed toward the Jews; (4) the mystery age of the church must be completed before God can resume His main program with the Jews and bring it to completion.

Riddlebarger engages this Left Behind idea of the end times by making a compelling case for amillennialism. Part one of his book includes definitions of key theological terms associated with the millennial question, including an overview of millennial viewpoints. This is followed by a discussion of hermeneutics which grapples with the question, “How do our theological presuppositions affect our understanding of the millennial age?”

Part two develops a number of Biblical and theological matters which foster an amillennial understanding of the Biblical data. Against John Walvoord (a leading premillennial/dispositionalist) who believes the kingdom of God, though present in a mysterious form, is formally postponed until the millennial age following the second advent of Christ, Riddlebarger notes that with the first advent of Jesus the last days arrived and that the kingdom of God is “the presence of the future.” The idea is that what the Old Testament writers proclaimed as one movement must now be seen as two stages, one present and one future. Throughout the messianic era the two ages overlap. Hebrews 6:5 gets at the idea when it states that Christians have tasted “the power of the age to come.” Riddlebarger sums up the discussion with these words: “The coming of Christ brought a new eschatological age, which is a deposit guaranteeing a glorious and tumultuous end to this age as we know it” (67). In contrast, the dispensational understanding of eschatology relegates the kingdom of God to the millennial age after the second coming of Christ, effectively removing a present or realized eschatology.

In his discussion on Daniel 9, Riddlebarger notes that the “seventy sevens” is correctly understood not as “seventy weeks (of years),” but simply “seventy sevens.” Thus, the seventieth should be thought of as the entire Christian era, of undetermined length. Moreover, in light of Leviticus 25, Daniel is speaking about ten jubilee years, with the emphasis falling on the ultimate jubilee yet to come after 490 years, the messianic age. A misunderstanding of these “sevens” allows for the gap or parenthesis theory that the church age was unforeseen and runs between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of years. The seventieth is said to be yet future. The premillennial/dispensationalists say it cannot begin until the church is raptured and a ten-nation confederacy emerges (the toes of the image in Dan. 2) as a revived Roman empire. However, the seventy consecutive weeks are an unbreakable unity, much like Daniel 9:2. Had there been a gap in Jeremiah’s prophecy (25:10) that Daniel is reading in chapter nine of his book, a gap in Daniel’s would make more sense. Additionally, Old Testament prophecies fuse their messianic ideas without considering the interval between the two which gives no rationale to create a gap between the specific time periods in Daniel 9.

Riddlebarger’s exegesis of Revelation 20:1-10 is outstanding. The strength in this section lies in his argument that an important clue to interpreting Revelation correctly is to notice its use of different visions that cover the same period, namely, the New Testament era beginning with Pentecost and culminating on the last day. To make this point the author discusses how Revelation 12:7-11 and Revelation 20:1-6 are parallel in the following ways: Revelation 12:7 and 20:1 both are heavenly scenes; Revelation 12:7-8 and 20:2 depict angelic battles with Satan; Revelation 12:9 and 20:3, 7-8 portray Satan as “the great dragon…that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan”; Revelation 12:12 and 20:3 speak of Satan as having a “short time”; Revelation 12:10 and 20:4 tell of how Satan’s defeat results in the kingdom of Christ and His saints; and finally, Revelation 12:11 and 20:4 describe the faithfulness of the saints. Hence, both Revelation 12 and 20 depict the same events and mutually interpret one another, thus denoting that the book is structured around parallel visions and is not a historical narrative that describes sequences that chronologically occur one after another. This structure is sometimes called “recapitulation,” in which the same basic pattern is repeated in a variety of formulations.

The clarion call throughout this book is that Christ’s Second Coming is not the inauguration of a halfway step on the road to consummation called a “millennium.” Christ’s return is the consummation.

From first to last, and not merely as an epilogue, Christianity is eschatology. It is forward looking and forward moving in such a way that the present is entirely revolutionized. Riddlebarger’s book is a must for all pastors who seek to teach this eschatological message in ways that debunk the errors of Left Behind theology.

Reed Lessing


The Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary series promotes visually stimulating and user-friendly studies that are as close to multimedia in print as possible. The goal of the series is “to make available serious, credible biblical scholarship in an accessible and less intimidating format” (xv). Each commentary in the series
employs a wide array of art, photographs, maps and drawings to illustrate the truths of the Bible for a visual generation of believers. Accompanying each commentary is a CD-ROM that reproduces the commentary text, the sidebars (more involved discussions) and the visuals. It also offers searching and research tools and is fully indexed.

Milton Horne’s commentary on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is the most recent addition to this series and features introductions to these Biblical books that outline the necessary historical information, literary design, and theological significance of each book. Each chapter then explores a textual unit and the discussion centers around two sections: commentary and connections. The connections identify themes helpful for sermon planning and Bible teaching. In these sections Horne draws on many fields and relevant issues (e.g., famous literature, theater, church history) as he connects the Word to the world. After each unit additional resources for further investigation are included such as books, journals, websites, organizations, and societies. No translation is offered, but there are a number of sidebars where Horne discusses textual difficulties and possible emendations. Still other sidebars significantly interface with the greater world of the ancient Near East; some of these include “The Gilgamesh Epic,” “The Ancient City Gate,” “The Jaws of Death,” “The Protests of the Eloquent Peasant,” “Persian Loan Words in Ecclesiastes,” and “Water and Chaos.”

To begin, Horne notes that the sayings in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are distinctive in their consciousness of the human perspective. Yet the sages are also aware that there are limitations to human wisdom and areas that only Yahweh understands (e.g., Prov. 16:1-2, 22; 19:21, 23). Behind the human perspective there seems to exist a “self-righting” universe that is bound to principles of equity, justice and piety. And this universe only offers two ways of living: one that accords with righteousness, for instance, and one that does not (e.g., 11:10, 23; 12:21); one that accords with the traditions as passed on through parents and teachers (e.g., 15:31-33), and one that does not (e.g., 13:1, 13; 16:5).

In his introduction to Proverbs, Horne offers an example of his methodology from Proverbs 20:5 which states, “The purposes in the human mind are deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out.” The word for “draw” is used in reference to the drawing of water elsewhere (e.g., Ex. 2:19) with the implication that the intelligent person penetrates beneath the various human facades to understand what cannot be seen on the surface. The author goes on to note that this idea of “doubling” is frequently employed in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. That is, the first half of a verse creates a metaphor (or simile, numerical saying, imperative, or instruction) while the second half of the verse makes a statement that both assumes the preceding metaphor and offers an implication of the statement. And yet a deeper appreciation for the technique of doubling requires attention to still other kinds of rhetorical devices. In addition to defining reality through observations that make explicit comparisons and contrast, techniques of alliteration, paronomasia, and rhyme are also used to create irony, parody, and humor.

Horne’s rhetorical analysis stems from his ongoing and thorough structural analysis of each text. The following is a typical statement: “Recognizing such deliberate organization of the text invites a deeper appreciation of the poetic aspects of this kind of instruction” (25). Again, “The task for readers is not simply to reflect upon individual sayings, but to attend to such themes, terminology, and patterns in order to recognize larger groupings and relationships within the collection” (140).

Several examples of his structural insights are as follows. First, the macro-
structure of Proverbs 1-9 is framed by the reference to two women, Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly; cf. 1:20-23 and chapters 8 and 9. Second, the phrase yir’at Yahweh—“the fear of Yahweh”—frames the first nine chapters (cf. 1:7 and 9:10), as well as the entire book (1:7 and 31:30). Hence, how the book communicates is at least as important as what it communicates. In this case, Horne notes that the fear of Yahweh is therefore not simply a first step beyond which one eventually moves. Rather, it is the beginning in the sense of the foundational and most important principle that permeates the entire scope of one’s search for wisdom. Third, Proverbs 16 is at the middle of the book as noted by the Massora at 16:17. “Such a strategic position in the center of the book might explain why the number of Yahweh sayings increases so dramatically in this chapter. Eleven of the total thirty-three sayings are Yahweh sayings in the chapter (vv. 1-7, 9, 11, 20, 33)…. Clearly this chapter asserts the fear of Yahweh is the fundamental principal of wisdom” (201).

Fourth, Horne states that it may be possible that the poem to the “able wife” in Proverbs 31 is really a double entendre for Lady Wisdom herself. Consider that both poems assert her value as being above that of jewels (3:14-15 and 31:10); both make reference to the work and benefits of her hands (3:16 and 31:19-20); those who have her are happy and her children call her happy (3:18 and 31:28). Finally, the opening and concluding poems of Ecclesiastes offer reflections upon creation (1:4-11) as well as the human dilemma and its implications within that creation (11:9-12:7).

Horne’s introduction on Ecclesiastes is very helpful. He states that Qoheleth is like Job in that he subverts the views of this community of faith. The author goes on to write: “In no way can readers think of Qoheleth, the sage behind the book of Ecclesiastes, as a systematic theologian” (375). Rather, Qoheleth calls attention to the dangers of absolutes and the vulnerability of unquestioned assumptions. “The strategy for readers is therefore not so much one of finding a logical argument as much as listening to a sage debate with himself…. But even more than detecting some resolution in Qoheleth’s thinking, readers themselves learn by experience a process of deliberating on life’s and faith’s riddles” (378).

Word studies, though rare, are insightful. For example, the Hebrew word mashal in Proverbs 1:1, 6 may mean (1) “to rule” or “to reign” (e.g., Gen. 37:9; Judg. 8:22), thus reinforcing a proverb’s authority; and (2) “to represent, or be like” (e.g., Ps. 49:12, 20; Is. 46:5), thus wisdom’s way of describing and defining the world. In Ecclesiastes Horne’s discussion on vanity argues that one translation for the Hebrew word hebel (“vapor, vanity, midst”) is “absurdity.” On the phrase “striving after the wind” Horne states that “the idea has to do with great exertion for little more than a breath of air in return” (398).

Disappointing is Horne’s discussion on Proverbs 8:22 as he fails to mention that this was one of the most important verses in the great Christological debate of the fourth century that pitted Arius against Athanasius. He does say, “Verse 24 uses the imagery of birth, however, implying that wisdom was procreated instead of created. The implication is that she is Yahweh’s offspring” (127). And again, “The implication is that Wisdom, begotten by Yahweh, was a kind of craftsman who assisted Yahweh in creation” (127). And yet he fails to make a full Christological connection.

Finally, while Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are practical and down to earth, they are almost impossible to interpret if considered in isolation as they lack explicit hermeneutical indicators. In spite of the goal that this series of commentaries seeks to “speak primarily to Christians” (xvi), this reviewer found too few connec-
Concordia Journal/January 2006


For more than two hundred years controversy has raged over the reliability of the Old Testament. Questions about the factuality of its colorful stories of heroes, villains, and kings have led many critics to see the entire Hebrew Bible as little more than pious fiction. These so-called “minimalists” (such as Israel Finkelstein and P. R. Davis) hold that the Hebrew Bible is a product of Jewish literary romantics of the third and fourth centuries B.C. who created a late Perso-Hellenistic series of books. Noted ancient Egyptologist, archaeologist, historian, and Ancient Near Eastern scholar Kenneth Kitchen defines the hermeneutic of these critics as follows: “One must approach texts always with a hostile suspicion, against the grain, denying integrity where possible in favor of dissonance and in search for inner contradiction” (471).

Reed Lessing


For more than two hundred years controversy has raged over the reliability of the Old Testament. Questions about the factuality of its colorful stories of heroes, villains, and kings have led many critics to see the entire Hebrew Bible as little more than pious fiction. These so-called “minimalists” (such as Israel Finkelstein and P. R. Davis) hold that the Hebrew Bible is a product of Jewish literary romantics of the third and fourth centuries B.C. who created a late Perso-Hellenistic series of books. Noted ancient Egyptologist, archaeologist, historian, and Ancient Near Eastern scholar Kenneth Kitchen defines the hermeneutic of these critics as follows: “One must approach texts always with a hostile suspicion, against the grain, denying integrity where possible in favor of dissonance and in search for inner contradiction” (471).
Readers of this journal know that “If Christ is not raised, your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:17). Just so, if Abraham was part of a mythic past, if the Exodus event was purely legendary, if the walls of Jericho never fell, etc., etc., then the Christian faith is in vain! In this one-of-a-kind book, Kitchen “deconstructs the deconstructionists,” and offers convincing arguments for the historicity of many Biblical events. In a detailed, comprehensive, and entertaining manner, Kitchen draws on an unprecedented range of historical data from the Ancient Near East—the Bible’s own world—using it to soundly reassess both the Biblical record and the critics who condemn it. Working back from the latest periods (for which hard evidence is readily available) to the remotest times, Kitchen systematically shows up the many failures of favored arguments against the Hebrew Bible and marshals the pertinent evidence from antiquity’s inscriptions and artifacts to demonstrate the basic honesty of its writers.

Kitchen’s methodology takes into consideration two kinds of evidence: explicit/direct and implicit/indirect. Explicit or direct evidence is the obvious sort; i.e., a mention of King Hezekiah of Judah in the annals of King Sennacherib. But implicit or indirect evidence can be equally powerful when used rightly. For example, in two thousand years Ancient Near Eastern treaties passed through six different time phases, each with its own formal treaty or covenant. Based on over ninety documents, the sequence is consistent, reliable and securely dated. Within this fixed sequence Biblical covenants may be historically located.

A complete study on the book of Joshua contains many interesting facts. For example, Israel’s crossing of the Jordan River as narrated in Joshua 3:1-4:18 has been described by many as pure fantasy. And yet this phenomenon directly reflects known reality. Some sixteen miles north of Adam (Joshua 3:16) is the present-day Tell ed-Damieh. It is in this area that the high banks of the Jordan have been liable to periodic collapses, sufficient to block the river for a time. This occurred in A.D. 1267, 1906, and again in 1927. In 1927 the west bank collapsed, taking the road with it, while just below it a 150-foot section of riverside cliff fell across the river, damming it completely for twenty-one hours. Such an event in the day of Joshua would have readily facilitated Israel’s crossing.

In defending the historicity of Kings and Chronicles, Kitchen notes that it was a common custom for Ancient Near Eastern kingdoms to keep a series of running records on an annual basis. Writers could draw from these detailed running series of “annals” in order to compose their own works on historical matters. Thus there is good reason to credit Israel and Judah with the same practices as everyone else in their world, namely, keeping running records upon which others could draw for data in writing their own works. The idea is that the Deuteronomistic Historian and Chronicler interpreted Israel’s history—but they didn’t make it up.

The chapter on the united monarchy is appropriately called, “The Empire Strikes Back,” as Kitchen defends the historicity of Saul, David, and Solomon. One of many arguments in this chapter is as follows. Many scholars dismiss direct Solomonic connection with Proverbs as they follow Moshe Weinfeld’s view that the writers of Proverbs were part of the scribal circles that contributed to the creation of a seventh-century Deuteronomy and subsequent Deuteronomistic History. The main argument is that distinctive verbal and conceptual ideas are shared only by Proverbs and Deuteronomy. However, over forty works of ancient Near Eastern wisdom have been retrieved, half of these deriving from Egypt, and all closely dated from the third to first millennia. These works divide into two series; those with prologues, and those without, which proceed directly to the main text. These
enable the establishment of an outline history of this entire genre of writing and to
eliminate most of the guesswork where Proverbs is concerned. The evidence of all
these works shows that short prologues dominate in the third and second millennia,
and long ones in the first. Parallelism is the dominant poetical form (especially in couplets) during the third and second millennia, but much less so in this
class of texts in the first millennium when one-line epigrams and miniature essays increasingly replace parallelism. Solomon I (Prov. 1-24) contains a prologue (chaps. 1-9). This then makes it a transitional work, as it has a traditional exhortative prologue (as in third- and second-millennium texts), which is relatively long (as in first-millennium texts). He uses parallelism (especially two-line couplets) mainly throughout, which is again traditional for the third, second, and early first millennia. Hence, Solomon I belongs squarely in the hinge between the third/second millennium and the first which is close to Solomon’s historical date. No one ever added prologues to any of these extant works at some later date. Any such procedure is excluded by the entire corpus of evidence. As for Solomon II (Prov. 25-29), Hezekiah’s time (late eighth, early seventh century) is late enough. By the sixth century the use of parallelism begins to wane. So the headings at Proverbs. 1:2 and 24:1 may be understood as factual statements.

Also in this chapter Kitchen interacts with those who point to the fact that
there is no external evidence indicating the existence of a united monarchy. Kitchen
writes in response: “The reasons for this are stunningly simple and conclusive.
From Mesopotamia, no Assyrian rulers had had direct contact with Palestine
before 853—and so could not mention any kings there” (156). And from Egypt there
are no references to Palestinian powers from 1153-924. That Saul, David, and
Solomon are not mentioned does not prove their non-existence. He goes on to cite
numerous explicit facts that indicate how the kinds of “cultural detail” described
in the Biblical accounts of these kings correspond exactly with neighboring kingdoms of that time. In the next chapter Kitchen notes that the same argument is
put forth when critics say, “There is no trace of Israel ever being in Egypt.” Egypt’s
East Delta is an alluvial fan of mud deposited through many millennia by the
annual flooding of the Nile. Hence the mud hovels of brickfield slaves and humble cultivators have long since gone back to their mud origins. Moreover, as pharaohs never monumentalize defeats on temple walls, no record of the successful exit of a large group of foreign slaves would ever have been memorialized by any king.

As it is one of the foundations of critical dogma, time and again Kitchen takes aim at the opinion that Deuteronomy is a seventh-century document. He argues that because Deuteronomy is patterned after second-millennium Hittite treaties that were only in use between 1400-1200 B.C. it cannot be used to create a different understanding of Israel’s history. He opines that “this ancient canard of 1805 [the year that De Wette first postulated the late date of Deuteronomy] should be quietly given a decent burial” (401).

In the chapter entitled “Founding Fathers or Fleeting Phantoms—the Patriarchs” Kitchen concludes: “The overall date of about 1900-1600 for Abraham to Joseph is consistent also with the internal data” (359). In the next chapter on prophecy Kitchen systematically studies prophecy in Mari, Assyria and Egypt and then dismantles the critical idea that a “group of disciples” expanded upon and edited Israelite prophetic books.

In the chapter “Back to Methuselah—and Well Beyond” Kitchen compares Genesis 1-11 with other primeval proto-histories and concludes that it could have only been composed around 2,000 B.C. and not any later. Using what is known of
the Tigris, Euphrates, Gihon, and Pishon rivers, the author’s vast geographical skills enables him to even postulate a location for Eden!

The endnotes are almost one hundred pages in length and include over fifty pictures. Within the body of the text, the author presents thirty-four tables where he systematizes Yahweh’s plagues against the Egyptians, Ancient Near Eastern treaty documents that relate to the book of Deuteronomy, Joshua’s battles, the period of the Judges, etc., etc.

At times the book reads somewhat like a dictionary, as Kitchen meticulously marshals fact after fact; yet after the plethora of data he consistently steps back from the details and analyzes the bigger picture. His inevitable Scottish wit and one-liners keeps the book moving along. Statements like this abound: “I hardly know where to begin with all this rollicking, silly nonsense” (456).

After decades of minimalism it is refreshing to have these words of refutation: “Hypercriticism of the Hebrew data is wrong in attitude, methods and results alike” (51). Pastors will find this a “one stop” resource when needing information on virtually any section of the Old Testament. I would encourage every reader of this journal, “To taste and see that Kitchen’s book is good; blessed is the reader who takes refuge in his many convincing arguments that counter the onslaught of post-modern minimalism!”

Reed Lessing

A HISTORY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: Volume I. The Ancient Period.

Gerhard Ebeling asserted more than sixty years ago that the history of the church is the history of Biblical interpretation. With the first of a projected series of four volumes, Eerdmans provides an orientation for the beginning reader with a good background in Biblical studies to probe the state of the discussion of the traditions of exegesis and hermeneutics within the Jewish and Christian communities. These volumes follow a design increasingly in use in historical studies, the collection of essays from experts in specific fields. What such a book loses by sacrificing the unitary approach of a single author, both from the standpoint of method and topics analyzed, it more than gains back by providing views from the authorities in the particular fields of focus within the larger sphere of inquiry. In this volume, seventeen American, British, and Norwegian contributors, from both Jewish and Christian circles, proceed from a variety of commitments to faith and modes of practicing their disciplines, exhibiting a range of vantage points from which to examine developments in the use of Scripture from the Old Testament texts themselves to the period of Jerome and Augustine. These essays come from scholars whose own interests target questions of exegetical method and content, hermeneutics, the extent and manner of using Scripture, development of the canon, translation, and the place of Scripture in the life of the community. Readers are guided through the whole by the editors’ extensive introductory survey, which distills each essay and underscores its contributions to the larger discussion of the issues upon which it touches. The method of citation of the literature employed places the titles used in a handy bibliography at the end of each article, making the volume easily usable for instruction and further study.

The volume begins with eight essays on the interpretation of the Old Testa-
ment (here called the ‘Tanak’ in deference to Jewish colleagues), in Old Testament
texts, in the Septuagint translations, and within the Jewish world of thought, from
Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls to the exegetical practices of the rabbis and the
Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. The New Testament documents also pro-
vide exegetical reflections on Old Testament texts, the first of seven topics from the
patristic period. In addition to assessments of current discussions of the develop-
ment of the New Testament canon, authors explore the use of the Old and New
Testaments in apocryphal and gnostic writings from the period, in the Apostolic
Fathers and the Apologists, in Jerome and in Augustine, as well as the differences
and commonalities in Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis. Authors not only offer
readers their own analysis of critical questions regarding their topics, but most
also highlight crucial disputes among the experts in current discussions so that
readers can understand where the fault lines lie in the movement of research in
their fields.

The abundance of topics covered in the volume discourages comment on any
single one, and every reader will wish for more on some specific concerns not exten-
sively covered by the essayists. A comparison of the use of Scripture in different
tasks of the proclaiming and teaching communities would reveal perhaps signifi-
cant insights into outreach to potential converts, catechesis, conceptualizing of
structures, the exercise of authority, and other vital elements of the life of syna-
gogue and church in the periods under study. Although touched upon, in some in-
stances by noting the absence of Scriptural argumentation in certain authors, the
ways in which Biblical authority was conceived in theory and in practice are not
treated in more than summary fashion. Part of the benefit of the volume is that it
suggests an agenda for future research.

In introducing the volume, the editors note that Biblical interpretation al-
ways takes place within a complex social setting. The environmental influence on
the exegetical and hermeneutical tasks most noteworthy in several of the essays is
that of the spiritualizing worldview that took form in Platonism, Neoplatonism,
and Gnostic schools. This is but one of several examples that can point discussion
toward synthesis of the materials sketched in these essays.

This volume is a handy tool for those engaged in the history of Biblical inter-
pretation, and it contains provocative and stimulating challenges to our thinking
not only of the way the Bible was used and understood in olden times but also
today. Because historical scholarship of this sort reveals as much about contempo-
rary researchers as it does about previous generations, it also calls readers to
reflection and dialogue on a host of issues regarding the use of the Bible at the
beginning of the twenty-first century.

Robert Kolb

Edited by David M Howard, Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti. Grand Rapids: Kregel,

Brimming with insights, this volume by evangelical scholars explores a broad
range of Old Testament (hereafter OT) studies. The contributors explore method-
ological issues, survey five major eras in Israel’s history, and focus on specific
issues related to understanding OT historical texts such as the dating of the Exo-
dus, the use of large numbers during Israel’s monarchy, and the literary features of
the book of Esther. The book concludes with discussions on what it takes to preach faithfully from the Old Testament’s narrative historical texts. Compiled in honor of Eugene H. Merrill, Giving the Sense helps “give the sense” (in the words of Nehemiah 8:8) to many perplexing OT historical issues. In this way, the work counters what is termed in OT scholarship as “minimalism.” Minimalists believe the Biblical account of Israel is mostly legendary, and they reduce Israel to a theological construct and a product of the imaginations of post-exilic Judahite writers.

In his essay, “Factors in Reading the Patriarchal Narratives: Literary, Historical, and Theological Dimensions,” Richard Averbeck argues that there is good reason to believe that the patriarchal age preceded Moses. Averbeck uses internal Biblical evidence to state his case. He notes that certain Israelite customs found in the legal portion of the Pentateuch contradict what is recorded in the patriarchal narratives. For example, the inheritance law in Deuteronomy 21:15-17 states the first-born son is to be given a double portion of his father’s inheritance. This was not the practice prior to the Mosaic Law (Gen. 48-49). Again, in the account of Jacob’s deathbed blessing in Genesis 49, Jacob’s sons by his wives Rachel and Leah and their handmaids share equally in the inheritance. This is harmonious with the pre-Mosaic time reflected earlier in the Laws of Hammurabi in the twentieth century B.C. but far different from the Mosaic legislation reflected in the Pentateuch. Finally, in the Mosaic legislation, a man was prohibited from marrying his wife’s sister (Lev. 18:18). This law was not part of the legal consciousness in the patriarchal period, as demonstrated by Jacob’s marriages to Leah and her sister Rachel (Gen. 29:21-30). This article also seeks to defend the authenticity of the patriarchs by means of Andrew Shryock’s study of genealogy in modern Jordanian Bedouin culture that offers a forceful attack against those who argue that “tribal historicity” is not to be taken seriously because it is oral and, therefore, by definition, not historically accurate. Shryock found that the genealogies themselves, as well as many of the genealogical stories that tribesmen told him in 1989-1990, were told in “roughly the same form” to other researchers since 1812, whose records he consulted. Thus, tribal history can be a received tradition—not an invented one—a rich canon of memorized stories and poems.

Several essays address the date of the Exodus and Conquest, with the most brilliant one by William H. Shea entitled “The Date of the Exodus.” The dilemma is that even in its classical form, the Late-Date Exodus/Conquest Model (as put forth most famously by Albright) does not fit much of the Biblical data—thus forcing texts to be massaged, reinterpreted, and even judged as fictional. Because of this—but chiefly because of the archaeological data—many have abandoned this model in favor of what are termed the “Peaceful-Infiltration Model,” the “Peasants Revolt Model,” or the “Agriculturist-Resettlement” Model. Shea counters by beginning with the Bible’s own testimony that dates the Exodus at 1446 and the conquest in the first half of the fourteenth century. He notes that the problem with this is the lack of evidence of wholesale destruction in Canaan form 1400—1350. The answer lies, to some degree, in reading more closely the Biblical narrative which makes it most clear that the conquest was accomplished without major damage to structures (e.g., Deut. 6:10-11; 19:1; Joshua 24:12-13) though populations themselves fell to the sword. Neither proponents nor opponents of an early conquest find support in the archaeological evidence. Most likely the carnage reflected by the archaeological record is to be dated to the days of Deborah and Gideon and the upheavals caused by Israel’s enemies at that time.
One more example will suffice. Regarding the numbers of Israelites as recorded in Samuel and Kings, often it appears as though the Scriptural record and demographic analyses (especially by Broshi and Finkelstein) are mutually exclusive. Both cannot be true. It is the hypothesis of the article by David Fouts in “The Incredible Numbers of the Hebrew Kings” that the large numbers appearing in these historical contexts very likely reflect numerical hyperbole, a common ancient Near Eastern literary convention appearing in royal inscriptions. The idea is that the large numbers glorify Yahweh, who in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant caused His people to multiply to the point of being as numerous as the stars of heaven (cf. Gen. 15:5) or as the sand on the seashore (cf. Gen. 22:17).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the field of OT studies is in an unsettled state of methodological pluralism. In this environment scholars tend to focus upon only one methodology (e.g., literary, archaeological, historical, or theological issues). Unfortunately there is a tendency to isolate these dimensions of texts and treat them as competitive endeavors, sometimes even mutually exclusive. One of the goals is to put this methodological “Humpty Dumpty” back together again; namely, to embrace different disciplines in order to arrive at a proper interpretation. *Giving the Sense* sets the standard for this pursuit as it puts many of “the pieces back together again.”

Readers whose OT interests lean toward larger general issues or more focused technical questions will find much to like and learn in this volume.

Reed Lessing


Fernando has been the Director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka since 1976, in addition to serving as the pastor of a Sinhala-speaking Protestant church for many years. He also serves pastors and Christian workers, including counseling and conducting seminars for pastors.

In this study of *Jesus Driven Ministry* Fernando stresses that ministry includes the personal lifestyle and that this must reflect a professional excellence that favorably adorns the Gospel and commends Christ to the present generation.

The first chapter underlines the necessity to positively identify with people through the ongoing work and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He discusses the crucial role of marriage in the service of Christian workers and the need to always keep this in mind, as well as never to follow wrong paths to be successful in ministry.

The author stresses the crucial importance to be saturated in God’s Word and to faithfully share the Gospel, to grow in effectively serving as a team in ministry, to carefully use the Scriptures in seeking to prepare members to become good leaders, to serve the sick and those who may be demon-possessed. He also stresses the ongoing need to visit members in their homes to more effectively serve them and seek to prepare them for sharing the Gospel in their lives and words.

His final chapter underlines the priority of prayer in Jesus’ life and ministry. This factor is also a crucial part of faithful and effective ministry to carefully plan for ongoing time for prayer for God’s ongoing guidance and strength in both our personal family life and in effectively serving in ministry. This includes thanksgiving, supplication, and intercession, as well as God’s guidance, strength, and comfort to prevent burnout in the ongoing challenges of faithful ministry.
This is an invaluable resource for providing guidance and strength for all who serve as pastors or in other forms of ministry.

Erich H. Kiehl


The Primer by Croy is a good grammar for New Testament Greek in a classroom situation. In my estimation, it is not for individuals who want to learn on their own unless they have some basic understanding of Koine Greek or someone to help them answer their questions about morphology and syntax.

His procedure is similar to that of grammars with which I am acquainted, though there are some exceptions. He starts with the basics of alphabet, pronunciation, vowels, etc. He adds a brief introduction to the Septuagint. (The use of the Septuagint is a great plus, for it helps students to get to know the Old Testament in Greek dress.) Next, he proceeds to the verb and the noun. He reverses the order of nominal presentation, giving the first declension first and then the second. While the order of some items is different, his basic approach is like that of other grammars. They proceed from the less difficult to the more difficult, from first to third declension, from the present to the perfect, from the active to the passive, and from the indicative to the subjunctive. He also has something to say about the optative.

Here are some items that impressed me about this grammar. The chapters are laid out well. The prose explanations are to the point with a modicum of examples. For each lesson, the author makes available abundant review exercises (Greek to English and English to Greek) and practice exercises together with vocabulary. He provides a good paradigm section, grouping verbs by mood and voice, a Greek to English and an English to Greek vocabulary, a fine index, and a bibliography on lexicons and grammars.

The following are some deficiencies as I see them. The author does not group the function of cases into one or two areas but presents them as the occasion arises. The same thing holds true for conditional clauses. The index does ameliorate the problem some. While the descriptions are good with some examples, they are not enough to help students on their own grasp the point. They would have to depend on the professor to clarify the matter under study. He presents the more difficult, the first declension before the second declension, though he divides the first declension into two lessons. He does not always explain peculiarities, e.g., the future third person singular of ἐγείρω (67), nor does he indicate what “primary” endings are. He does not require a review of morphology and syntax. There is no principal parts chart: for irregular verbs in the paradigm section, only in the text. He dismisses the optative in half a page of lesson 32 (199). Finally, he does not clarify the relationship between first and second aorist.

My conclusion is that this would be a good grammar for a classroom situation (where the professor can provide students with the necessary explanations of the process), in view of the fact that the author introduces students to the Septuagint, provides a clear and unencumbered layout, has an index of topics, and makes the paradigms easily accessible.

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Books Received


