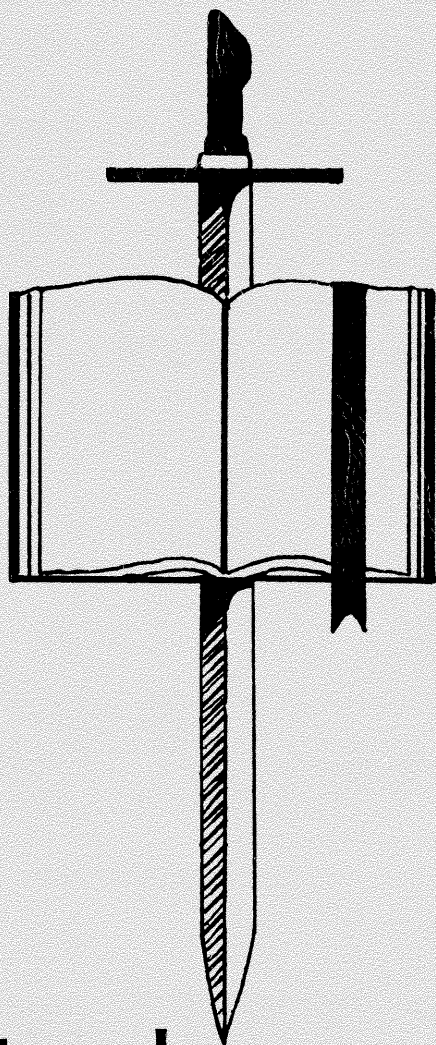


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## FOREWORD

In this issue of the Quarterly, we are pleased to bring you the 1991 Reformation Lectures which were delivered by Dr. Paul L. Maier, Professor of History at Western Michigan University. These lectures, sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, were presented on October 31-November 1, 1991, in the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center located on the campus of Bethany College.

The theme of this year's lectures was CHRISTIAN MARTYRDOM. Lecture I, entitled The First Christian Persecution, and Lecture II, The Martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, vividly describe how pagans persecuted Christians and Lecture III, Persecution from Rome to The Reformation, shows how Christians persecuted Christians. These lectures were well received by those in attendance and we are pleased to share them with our readers.

Also included in this issue is a paper entitled Children in the Bible by Dr. William Kessel. This was delivered to the 1991 ELS Teachers Conference at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota. Dr. Kessel is professor of religion and sociology at Bethany Lutheran College.

A Reformation Vespers homily by the editor reminds us of our Reformation heritage, and a chapter from Orthodox Lutheran Perspectives, entitled Orthodox Lutheran Distinction Between Law and Gospel by Ernest Bartels concludes this issue.

We also take this opportunity to wish our readers a blessed Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year in the precious name of the Christ Child in whom alone we have lasting peace and joy.

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## CHRISTIAN MARTYRDOM

The 24th Annual Reformation Lectures, Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, October 31 and November 1, 1991

Paul L. Maier

Enduring torture or death rather than surrendering belief is the mark of the martyr, and there have been many such across the history of Christianity. The "heroic" form of martyrdom -- pagan Romans dispatching innocent Christians -- will be the focus of the first two lectures in this series, while an even more tragic form of what might be called "intramural" martyrdom -- Christians persecuting Christians -- will occupy us in the third.

Both sorts of martyrdom involved victims brutalized for their beliefs. On July 1, 1523, two Augustinian monks -- Henry Vos and John van den Esschen -- were burned at the stake in Brussels for their evangelical faith, casualties of Charles V's inquisition in the Netherlands. Luther was so moved by the news -- this was only two years after the Diet of Worms -- that he wrote a hymn in their honor, Ein neues Lied wir heben an, which begins (in John Messenger's 1843 translation):

Flung to the heedless winds  
Or on the waters cast,  
The martyrs' ashes, watched,

Shall gathered be at last....<sup>1</sup>

Luther used virtually the same terms in German -- Märtyrer or Märtyrium -- as the English for "martyr" and "martyrdom," which is straight out of the Greek martys, "witness," "one who bears witness." Since the ultimate witness anyone could make was to die rather than deny the faith, Luther uses the term passim in his writings to refer also to the apostles and early Christians who suffered martyrdom, just as we do today.

Martyrdom, then, was a phenomenon linking the Reformation Era (and the contemporary church, for that matter) with the earliest Christians, and this is the link to be explored in this lecture series.

## I. THE FIRST CHRISTIAN PERSECUTIONS

Very likely, there have been more martyrs for Christianity than in any other religious system. (If we were to consider a ratio of martyrs per capita of believers, then Judaism might rank in first place.) In any case, this might have been anticipated in the case of the Founder who was martyred at Golgotha, and who had promised his followers: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (John 15:20).

Much of the first three centuries A.D.

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<sup>1</sup> Weimar ed., Luthers Werke, 35, 411 f. Messenger's version is No. 259 in The Lutheran Hymnal.

seemed a direct fulfillment of this prediction, that heroic era when apostles, elders, men, women, and children by the thousands were tortured and brutally killed in the theaters and stadiums of the Roman Mediterranean world. Rather than try to portray that cavalcade of horror in detail -- impossible in any brief lecture series -- we focus instead on the crucial first two persecutions, for they infected the Roman Empire with the notion of subverting Christianity and set a lurid precedent for the future: 1) the Judean persecution of newborn Christianity of A.D. 33<sup>2</sup> and years following, and 2) the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64 at Rome.

### 1. The Judean Persecution

Stephen is often styled the "first Christian martyr," but Jesus of Nazareth has a stronger claim to that title, and -- if priority be urged -- perhaps even that nameless first infant massacred by Herod's troops after the Nativity has the strongest claim of all (Matt. 2:16). Yet Stephen was the first victim in the priestly crackdown on nascent Christianity shortly after Pentecost, which is reported so vividly in the early chapters of Acts (4 through 8). Immediately following his martyrdom, "a severe persecution began against

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<sup>2</sup> assuming that the Crucifixion took place on 3 April, A.D. 33. See Paul L. Maier, "Sejanus, Pilate, and the Date of the Crucifixion," Church History, 37 (March, 1968), 3-13.

the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1).<sup>3</sup>

At first, this earliest persecution seemed to have largely positive results: the Christian leaders eluded confinement, and the faith spread far beyond Jerusalem. After a decade, however, James -- one of the three prime disciples -- was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa I, and Peter was imprisoned. Even though Agrippa died a short time afterward of a rapid illness -- reported not only in Acts 12:23 but in further detail by Flavius Josephus<sup>4</sup> -- the rupture between Judaism and Christianity, synagogue and church, yawned open. Paul would encounter this fracture throughout his missionary journeys, and, in fact, become trapped by it in Jerusalem, where he was arrested.

Nevertheless, an important branch of Jewish Christianity hoped to narrow the breach: the party headed by James the Just, Jesus' half brother and first Christian bishop of Jerusalem. Alas, that hope was short lived. Not long after Paul's arrest, James and several followers were stoned to death in Jerusalem under orders from the high priest Ananus, a son of the New Testament Annas, and members of the Sanhedrin. This stoning took place in the absence of any Roman governor, since the vacancy after Festus had not yet been filled.

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<sup>3</sup> Biblical citations in these lectures are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted..

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, Antiquities 19:343 ff.

When Albinus, the new governor, finally arrived, he was so angry at this lynching that he had the high priest dismissed. This event, in A.D. 62, is reported, not in the NT, but by Josephus -- another of the remarkable points of tangency between the Jewish historian and the NT.<sup>5</sup> (This episode, incidentally, from a non-Christian source, should be recalled by some misguided scholars today who seek to deprive the Sanhedrin of any role in opposing Jesus and early Christianity and, using torque instead of truth, try to place all blame for Good Friday on Pilate and the Romans.)

With the flight of Christians from Jerusalem prior to the its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D., the split between synagogue and church was complete, and the Judean persecution of Christianity ended. But did that persecution influence or cause the first great Roman persecution of Christians under Nero? After all, the year 64 is only two years removed from 62 and the stoning of James. While the chronology is close, the geography -- Jerusalem and Rome -- is not. It is certainly possible that Roman Jews, influenced by their colleagues in Judea, could have suggested to Nero that Christians be targeted for persecution. They had a near-convert in Nero's wife, the empress Poppaea, who was at least a "god-fearer," and Roman Jewish leaders were aware that, at least in

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<sup>5</sup> Antiquities 20:200. The stoning of James is reported also in greater detail by the Jewish-Christian historian Hegesippus, as cited by Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica (hereafter, HE) ii, 23.



their circles, Christianity was "everywhere... spoken against" (Acts 28:22). Apart from one apocryphal source<sup>6</sup>, however, which concerns a later persecution, there is no proof of any relationship between the Judean and Roman persecutions.

## 2. The Neronian Persecution

This, of course, is the traditional, bestial beginning of large-scale persecutions against the church. There may have been a previous general crackdown against both Jews and Christians at Rome during the time of the emperor Claudius in A.D. 49. In a famous phrase, the historian Suetonius stated:

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [impulsore Chresto], he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.<sup>7</sup>

That "Chrestus" was another from of "Christus" among Romans of that time is indicated by both

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<sup>6</sup> In the Acts of John [M.R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), p. 228], Jews at Rome are represented as redirecting a persecution by Domitian from themselves to the Christians. These Acts, however, appear to be an apocryphal work of the second century.

<sup>7</sup> Suetonius, Divus Claudius xxv.

Tertullian and Lactantius<sup>8</sup>, while the French word for Christian, chretien, reflects this mode of spelling to this day. In any case, this quarrel -- which may reflect tensions between church and synagogue at Rome -- led to the presence of Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth (Acts 18:2). While this was temporary exile for one Christian couple, it was hardly bloody persecution and martyrdom. These rather took place fifteen years later after the great fire of Rome in July of 64 A.D., an accident with far greater consequences than the scorching of central Rome.

### The Great Fire

Most scholars conclude that the conflagration, which raged on for nine days, had an accidental origin in a squalid collection of huts east of the Circus Maximus. Nevertheless, the emperor Nero was soon blamed for the fire, probably for the same reason that any political leader gets blamed when catastrophe strikes, especially in an era of poor communications. With his throne threatened, Nero and his advisors debated on how to deflect the popular fury.

Would that we could have listened in on that discussion! The conference decided to create scapegoats to save the emperor and tag them for the "arson." But who might serve as scapegoats? While the following is only conjecture, it is a likely reconstruction,

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<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, Apologeticus iii; Lactantius, Institutiones Divinae iv, 17.

based on the sources. Quite probably, Nero's advisers first suggested the use of condemned prisoners as scapegoats, much as Claudius had done when draining the Fucine Lake in central Italy.<sup>9</sup> Just as quickly, however, they would have discarded that notion, since the prisoner scheme had backfired on Claudius. Someone very likely next mentioned "the Jews" as potential victims -- many in the Roman government were anti-Semitic -- but that plan would have been vetoed by the empress Poppaea, who, as we have noted, was a near-convert to Judaism.

Christians, of course, would next have come to mind in the imperial conclave. Church was sufficiently separated from synagogue by that time to stand out as a distinct sect in Roman eyes, a small enough splinter group -- it was thought -- to serve as the perfect band of "incendiaries" for Nero's purposes. If we were to identify the person who first suggested to Nero that Christians might serve as scapegoats, it would be Ofonius Tigellinus, the depraved Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, who had taken over as principal adviser to Nero ever since the retirement of the philosopher Seneca in 62 A.D. Melito of Sardis, as excerpted in Eusebius, stated: "Of all the emperors, the only ones ever persuaded by malicious advisers to misrepresent our doctrine were Nero and Domitian."<sup>10</sup> And now

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<sup>9</sup> Tacitus, Annals 12:56.

<sup>10</sup> Melito of Sardis, Apologia, as excerpted in Eusebius, HE iv, 26. At this time, Tigellinus was certainly "malicious" as

to Cornelius Tacitus' famous record in Annals xv, 44:

Therefore, to scotch the rumor [that he had set fire to Rome], Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.<sup>11</sup>

We interrupt Tacitus only to correct him on the title he assigns Pontius Pilate, namely "procurator." As was determined when Italian archaeologists uncovered the "Pilate stone" at Caesarea in 1961, Pilate's true title was praefectus Iudaeae, "prefect of Judea," the term used until the time of Claudius, who

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well as Nero's principal adviser, and Juvenal, Satires i, 155 ff. seems to link Tigellinus and human torch deaths, which the Christians certainly suffered in this persecution.

<sup>11</sup> Tacitus, Annals xv, 44. John Jackson's translation in Loeb Classical Library.

first changed prefects into "procurators," thus an anachronism in Tacitus.<sup>12</sup> The Roman historian's extreme bias against Christianity should also be noted, but this prejudice will, in fact, become extremely useful, as we shall see shortly.

First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed, were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car.<sup>13</sup>

Some scholars, especially in the last century, have tried to deny that a Neronian persecution ever took place, and that this passage in Tacitus was interpolated. The

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<sup>12</sup> See Antonio Frova, "L'Iscrizione di Ponzio Pilato a Cesarea," Rendiconti Istituto Lombardo, 95 (1961), 419-34; and Paul L. Maier, In the Fullness of Time (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 145-47.

<sup>13</sup> Tacitus, loc. cit.



overwhelming consensus of scholarship today, however, affirms both the persecution and the authenticity of this text. After all, Suetonius also refers to the Neronian persecution in stating: "Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."<sup>14</sup>

One phrase in the second excerpt above deserves particular commentary: the "vast numbers" of convicted Christians. The Latin is multitudo ingens -- huge multitude -- and a word study in Tacitus suggests that this means high hundreds or thousands. And yet the Great Fire of Rome broke out in 64 A.D., only 31 years after the Crucifixion. Nevertheless, "vast numbers" of Christians are already present in Rome, some 1,500 miles from Judea, and these are only the ones arrested, not those who escaped. Moreover, Tacitus, as a hostile source, had no brief for Christianity and would hardly have "padded" his figures on the movement. Accordingly, this positive evidence on numbers of Christians in this otherwise hostile context becomes self-authenticating, and one may conclude that the Christian movement did indeed spread across the Mediterranean with extraordinary rapidity in the mid first century.

An entire lecture series could be devoted to further commentary on this extraordinary passage in Tacitus. The citation of "Christus" and "Pontius Pilate" is of major importance, giving the lie to that old-but-

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<sup>14</sup> Suetonius, Nero xvi.

common critique of Christianity that there is no documentation for Jesus or his judge outside the NT. Here, however, our focus is on the Neronian persecution itself: when, where, how.

### The Persecution

In his magisterial Histoire des Persecutions, Paul Allard suggested August of A.D. 64 as the appropriate month<sup>15</sup>, but this would seem to follow the great fire of July too quickly. The flames were not extinguished until July 27, and it would have taken some weeks for suspicions to focus on Nero because of the vast "Golden House" he was building for himself in part of the fire-gutted area below the Esquiline Hill. On the other hand, suggestions that would delay the persecution until spring of A.D. 65 founder on Nero's diverting fresh public hatred for suspected arson on the Christians. The fall of 64 would seem most likely, with October the probable month.

Where this first great persecution took place is less of a problem. Tacitus tells us that it was at the "Circus" in Nero's "Gardens," which easily translates to the Vatican hippodrome across the Tiber at the northwestern corner of Rome. ("Vatican," of course, is neither Roman Catholic nor even Latin in origin. It was the Etruscans who named the Vatican Valley.) Caligula once

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Allard, Histoire des Persecutions (Paris, 1903), I, pp. 48 ff.

raced his horses here, a sport eagerly adopted by Nero, who used to increase attendance at his workouts by showering the fawning crowd with gift tokens that could be exchanged for everything from food to houses or ships. Clearly, the great Circus Maximus south of the palace would have been used instead of the Vatican hippodrome, since it seated over 200,000, but that hippodrome was now a cinder -- one of the first casualties of the great fire.

As to the punishments inflicted, Tacitus cites three forms: 1) clothed in animal skins, the Christians were torn to death by dogs; 2) they were crucified; and 3) by night, they were burned alive as human torches. Being thrown to the beasts and being set afire were standard penalties for arson at the time<sup>16</sup>, while crucifixion was probably deemed ever so appropriate in view of what had happened to the Founder. Several scholars have blunderingly attacked the authenticity of Annals xv, 44, claiming that luminous combustion of the human body is physically impossible. But the tunica molesta, as it was called, was well known: victims were fixed on poles wearing tunics impregnated with flammables and then set afire. The wood of the posts and the nitrates on the clothing would indeed be luminous, while the bodies themselves carbonized. This horror is reported not only by Tacitus in this passage, but also by Juvenal<sup>17</sup>, Seneca<sup>18</sup>, and

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<sup>16</sup> Digestae xlvii, 9, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Juvenal, Satires i, 155-57.

Martial.<sup>19</sup>

Christians and condemned criminals suffered not only in these three forms of torture, but in a variety of other ways as well, some of which were doubtless used in Nero's persecution since he was such "showman", desperate to please the crowds and avert suspicion of arson from himself. These might be listed as follows:

Being strapped to the horns of a wild bull like Dirce, Queen of Thebes. (She had persecuted the mother of Castor and Pollux, according to Greco-Roman mythology. This punishment is specifically cited by Clement of Rome in what is doubtless a reference to the Neronian persecution.<sup>20</sup>)

Being strapped to iron wheels that were slowly turned over flames

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<sup>18</sup> Seneca, De Ira ii, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Martial, Epigrams iv, 87.

<sup>20</sup> In his letter to the church at Corinth (A.D. 96), Clement writes: "...there was a great multitude [exactly Tacitus' phrase] of the elect, who through their endurance amid many indignities and tortures...presented us a noble example....Women were paraded as Danaides and Dircae and put to death after they had suffered horrible and cruel indignities." (I Clement 6: 1 ff.)

beneath, like Ixion. (For having tried to seduce Juno, Jupiter bound Ixion to a wheel that turned forever down in Hades. Tertullian reports this as a torture inflicted on Christians.<sup>21</sup>)

Being strapped to a pyre and burned alive, like Hercules in flames, again according to Tertullian.<sup>22</sup>

How supposedly civilized Romans could witness such ghastly spectacles may seem problematical, but any culture that could relish such "human demolition derbies" as gladiatorial combat could likely stand this as well. Still, enough was enough. At the close of his account on the Christians, Tacitus reports that finally a "feeling of compassion" (*miseratio*) arose in the crowd, since the punishment seemed "not for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty."<sup>23</sup> This change in sentiment could well be the beginning of a phenomenon that would take on increasing importance in future persecutions: martyrs as "witnesses" for the faith -- the intrinsic definition of martyrdom, after all -- giving their very lives for their beliefs, something that Roman pagans would never do for the likes of Jupiter and his Olympian colleagues. Such witness would have impressive converting power

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<sup>21</sup> Tertullian, De Pudicitia xxii.

<sup>22</sup> Tertullian, Apologeticus xv.

<sup>23</sup> Tacitus, loc. cit.



in the future, leading to Tertullian's famous statement that the blood of the martyrs became "the seed" of the church.

We have very little solid information on the first persecution beyond the sources in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Clement. The two most famous victims of Nero's cruelty -- Peter and Paul -- will be discussed in the next lecture. The extent of the first Roman persecution in terms of size and spread is only debatable. A late source gives the number of martyrs as 977.<sup>24</sup> While this figure is possible, it need not be considered accurate and might well be reduced in view of the exaggeration in such documents. An "immense multitude" (multitudo ingens) -- the phrase in Tacitus and Clement -- is rather vague, and cannot be reduced to numbers.

As to spread, Nero's persecution appears to have been limited to Rome and did not extend to the provinces. The Christian community at Rome may have feared that it would go farther, hence the circumstances behind the persecution document, I Peter, in the NT. Verse 6 of chapter One in that letter has the telling phrase: "...for a little while you may have to suffer various trials" (RSV).

The greatest damage inflicted by the Neronian persecution was the precedent it set for Christians as objects of torment in the future. Rather than correct the injustice or

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<sup>24</sup> The Martyrologium Hieronymianum (ed. Duchesne-De Rossi in Acta Sanctorum (Brussels, 1894), II, p. 84.

fault Nero for his deception, the Roman state would blandly and blindly assume that Christians were in any case a noxious sect -- whether or not they had anything to do with the great fire -- and deny them legality until the time of Constantine, two and a half centuries later. Before we leave Nero's persecution, however, we must take up the case of two of its most famous victims: Peter and Paul.

## II. THE MARTYRDOMS OF PETER AND PAUL

Paul L. Maier

The names of the victims of Nero's persecution are unknown to us -- a compounding of the tragedy -- although Peter and Paul are the probable exceptions. That St. Paul's ministry was terminated under Nero has never been doubted across the nineteen centuries of church history. The New Testament describes how the apostle had appealed to the emperor against miscarriage of justice in Judea, made the voyage to Rome, and then waited at least two years for his trial. Even though the Acts account closes at that point, evidence in the pastoral epistles -- especially II Timothy -- clearly points to his imminent martyrdom.

Peter, on the other hand, fairly vanishes from biblical view after the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) and his squabble with Paul in Antioch (Galatians 2:11 ff.). We thus lose historic track of Jesus' prime disciple from about A.D. 50 onward. If, however, Peter is the author of the NT epistle I Peter, he then surfaces again in this persecution document written from "Babylon" (5:13), though with hardly any biographical detail. But where is this "Babylon"? The Mesopotamian capital, or a cryptic name for Rome, as in Revelation 17? Church historians have argued quite passionately for one location or the other, even if a modern consensus inclines strongly to Rome. Let us first explore the evidence in Peter's case.

## 1. Simon Peter

The two most extreme views on this issue are these: not only did Peter get to Rome, but he devoted a long, twenty-five-year ministry there before being martyred under Nero. In the process, he served as first bishop of Rome, whose later title, of course, was pope. The opposite viewpoint insists that Peter never even set foot in Rome, but was indeed a missionary to Babylon in Mesopotamia, where he was probably martyred. There is no debate on whether or not Peter was martyred, since Jesus had specifically predicted this.<sup>1</sup>

Quite naturally, ultra-Protestant interpretations strongly favor Babylon, since this would also destroy any Roman Catholic claims that Peter was the first "pope." In the centuries since the Reformation, this has been a popular viewpoint among some church historians, especially Karl Heussi, author of the Kompendium of Church History used so widely in the German-speaking world.<sup>2</sup> But is it correct? There is interesting evidence pro and con.

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<sup>1</sup> John 21:18 and especially 19: "He [Jesus] said this to indicate the kind of death by which he [Peter] would glorify God." The Fourth Gospel was certainly written after Peter's death, and this verse would hardly have been included had Peter not been martyred.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Heussi, Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte (Tübingen: Mohr, 1956), p. 35.

Evidence against Peter's martyrdom at Rome would be the following. Apart from the disputed reference to "Babylon" in I Peter, the silence of the NT is significant, particularly Acts, which would certainly have reported Peter's presence in Rome had he been there prior to Paul's arrival c. 59 A.D. Certainly this is an argument ex silencio, but the silence is particularly eloquent in view of Acts' earlier focus on the activities of Jesus' prime disciple. Similarly, Paul's Epistle to the Romans would surely have cited Peter among the saints in the Roman church to be greeted had he been at the imperial capital, but he is not named in the letter. Accordingly, any twenty-five-year sojourn of Peter in Rome before his martyrdom is simply ruled out on the basis of the sources, and claims for this quarter-century leadership of the Roman church derive only from late traditions.

Additional negative evidence, though again an argument from silence, derives from Justin Martyr. It seems strange that Justin, the second-century Christian apologist who lived in Rome, made no mention of Peter's presence there in his writings.

Evidence for Peter's martyrdom at Rome is much larger than that against it. By way of "rebuttal" to the negative argumentation above, what is not ruled out by the biblical evidence (or lack of it) is Peter's possible arrival in Rome any time after 59 A.D., a time frame no longer covered by the NT. Besides the evidence of I Peter, assuming that Babylon = Rome, the crucial, early (A.D. 96) letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians strongly links the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul with those of the Roman Christians enduring the Neronian



persecution. After relating Paul's martyrdom, Clement reported that Peter "suffered not one or two but many trials, and having thus given his testimony went to the glorious place which was his due."<sup>3</sup>

A short time later, around 107, Ignatius of Antioch's Epistle to the Romans contains the very revealing phrase: "Not like Peter and Paul do I give you [Roman Christians] commands" (iv, 3). Another early though indirect witness is the first-century apocryphon, the Ascension of Isaiah, which implies that one of the disciples -- doubtless Peter -- was delivered into the hands of the matricidal Nero (iv, 2 f.)

The second century A.D. finds more references in Christian authors to the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul at Rome<sup>4</sup>, and one of these is particularly interesting. Eusebius cites a presbyter, one Gaius, who stated: "I

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<sup>3</sup> I Clement v, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, writing c. 175 A.D., claimed that Peter and Paul founded both the churches at Corinth and Rome, and "taught together also in Italy, and were martyred on the same occasion" [as cited by Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica (hereafter HE) ii, 25.] But this evidence is suspect, since they did not cofound the church at Corinth or Rome, and it is very unlikely that they were martyred at the same time. Shortly after Dionysius, Irenaeus also wrote that Peter and Paul preached at Rome (Adversus Haereses iii, 1).

can point out the monuments [or memorials, trophies -- tropaia] of the apostles: for if you will go to the Vatican hill or to the Ostian Way, you will find the monuments of those who founded this [Roman] church."<sup>5</sup> Peter and Paul are directly intended here, and the monuments marked the traditional sites of their martyrdoms and probably their places of burial as well, since Gaius was countering a claim from Asia regarding apostolic tombs in that province. Later, the emperor Constantine would erect the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul, respectively, at these locations. What is mistaken in Gaius' statement, however, is the claim that the apostles "founded" the Roman church. Neither, in fact, did, since the Roman church was growing dramatically before either Paul or Peter reached Rome.<sup>6</sup>

Balancing the evidence, the historian is justified in concluding that Peter most probably reached Rome some time after A.D. 59, followed by his martyrdom in some connection with the Neronian persecution of 64, the exact link remaining unclear, and the form of martyrdom unknown. Again, however, claims that Peter conducted a twenty-five-year ministry in the capital and opposed Simon Magus there already at the beginning of Claudius' reign are worthless, despite Eusebius' discussion of this

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5 Eusebius, loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> In Romans 1:8, Paul writes: "...your faith is proclaimed in all the world." Paul wrote this to the church at Rome some years before he ever set foot in Italy.

tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Whence, then, the popular impression that Peter was crucified at Rome head downward, because he did not deem himself worthy to suffer in the same manner as Jesus? It was Origen who first made this claim in the third century.<sup>8</sup> Aside from the late date, an upside-down crucifixion would seem an unlikely embellishment, even if such executions were not entirely unknown.<sup>9</sup> In crucifixions, the patibulum or crossbeam was usually placed over a vertical post already stationed in the ground, which would not be possible with the head downward. Since no early Roman tradition claims that Peter was crucified in this way, it would seem an unnecessary and slightly ostentatious addendum which has an apocryphal ring.

As to the location of Peter's burial, Roman Catholic scholars generally concur that his grave lies under the great altar of the present Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican.<sup>10</sup> The early, supporting evidence of the presbyter Gaius, cited above, is significant. Some

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<sup>7</sup> HE ii, 13. For further discussion, see Oscar Cullmann, Peter -- Disciple, Apostle, Martyr (Westminster, 1962); and Daniel W. O'Connor, Peter in Rome (Columbia, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> as cited by Eusebius, HE iii, 1.

<sup>9</sup> See Seneca, ad Marciam, xx.

<sup>10</sup> See Margherita Guarducci, La tomba di Pietro (Rome, 1959).

Protestant scholars agree, while others conclude that it can only be demonstrated historically that the Christian church of the second century thought that this is where Peter was buried.

## 2. Paul of Tarsus

The complication in the case of St. Paul is not whether or not he ever reached Rome -- he most certainly did -- but on what happened to him after the NT evidence breaks off. The closing verses of Acts read simply:

He [Paul] lived there [in Rome] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.  
(28:30-31)

A separate study could be devoted to the question of why the Acts account stops in this fashion, but here our task is only to present evidence on Paul's subsequent fate.

Some scholars doubt that Paul ever appeared before Nero, who would probably have been too busy with imperial duties to hear the case of an obscure Jew from the eastern Mediterranean. Others claim that Paul did indeed stand before the emperor, as was his citizen's right under Roman law.

While final proof in the matter is lacking,

the following data may be quite relevant. If Paul arrived in Italy at Puteoli in the Bay of Naples in the spring of 59 A.D. (although no absolute date is possible), Nero could not have heard his case for the next eighteen months, since the emperor had just arranged for his mother's murder, and he was afraid to return to Rome in fear of popular wrath. After a year and a half, he did return, but likely faced a huge back-up case load awaiting him. This combined delay could well account for Paul's two-year confinement before trial (citation above). So a long delay -- which may be familiar in present court procedures! -- is atypical for Roman jurisprudence.<sup>11</sup> But that Paul did finally stand before Nero seems indicated by Acts 27:24, where the apostle is told during the Mediterranean storm en route to Italy: "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor...." One doubts that the author of Acts would have included this statement if Paul never faced Nero in fact.

### Condemnation or Acquittal?

Rather than speculate on the nature of Paul's trial before Nero, we move to its

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<sup>11</sup> Suetonius, Nero xxviii; Tacitus, Annals xiv, 3-5; Dio Cassius lxi, 12-13. For further discussion, see Paul L. Maier, The Flames of Rome (Kregel, 1991), 425-426; and Maier, In the Fullness of Time (Harper San Francisco, 1991), 322-23, 353. Compare also A. N. Sherwin-White, Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), pp. 108 ff.

conclusions. What was Paul's legal fate at Rome? Again scholars are divided on whether Paul was declared guilty and executed after his appearance before Nero -- if such occurred -- or after an acquittal by Nero and following a second arrest, imprisonment, and hearing. Again we shall divide the evidence, as in the question of Peter's presence in Rome.

Evidence against Paul's Acquittal: Biblical silence in the matter has no bearing on the question, of course, but there is one reference that could suggest early termination of Paul's ministry. Toward the close of his Third Missionary Journey at Miletus, Paul stated: "I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again" (Acts 20:25). The phrase is reinforced at the close of the chapter in verse 37: "There was much weeping...especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again." This, of course, might merely rule out further Pauline ministry in the eastern Aegean, and perhaps not even that if Paul's prediction proved too pessimistic.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence for Paul's Acquittal (at his first hearing before Nero): Christianity had not yet been proscribed in the Roman Empire. Paul's appearance before Nero took place before the fire and persecution of 64, and the apostle should have been able to dispose of the charges against him (which would have been the same as

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<sup>12</sup> In II Timothy 4:20, Paul writes: "Trophimus I left ill in Miletus," so he may indeed have returned.

those raised at Caesarea) by citing Gallio's precedent at Corinth in absolving him (Acts 18). He could also have reported Agrippa's statement to Festus that Paul was "doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment...this man could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor" (Acts 26:31-32). In terms of other NT evidence, the pastoral epistles, Timothy and Titus, cannot be fitted satisfactorily into the three missionary journeys, and they strongly suggest activities subsequent to his Roman imprisonment.

Earliest patristic evidence continues in the same vein. Clement of Rome, in his epistle to the Corinthians of A.D. 96, states that Paul "reached the limit of the West" [to terma tes duseos] before he died, which, for a Roman author, would imply Spain or Portugal.<sup>13</sup> That Paul had certainly planned a trip to Spain via Rome is indicated in Romans 15:24, 28, and a second-century document, the Muratorian fragment, states:

Then the 'Acts of the Apostles' were written in one book. Luke says...that the various incidents took place in his presence, and indeed he makes this quite clear by omitting the passion of Peter, as well as Paul's journey when he set out from Rome for Spain.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I Clement v, 1-7. Cp. Strabo, Geographica ii, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Canon Muratorii xxxviii.

Possible evidence against a trip to Spain, aside from the argument that the Muratorian fragment is somewhat late, would be the absence of any significant local tradition there commemorating the apostle's visit. Yet this would have been brief in any case, and the long Moorish occupation may have expunged it.

Finally, there is no patristic or early church tradition that Paul was martyred before A.D. 64, when Christians were first declared illegal. While certainty in this matter is impossible, the balance of evidence points to the probability of Paul's release after a first trial, a brief continuing ministry in the Mediterranean west and east, and his rearrest, hearing or trial, and execution later on.<sup>15</sup>

The date and circumstances of Paul's second arrest are anything but definite. It must have occurred between 65 and 68 (the death of Nero) in the opinion of most commentators, with 66 or 67 the most likely.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not Nero was involved in the second hearing is not known.

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<sup>15</sup> For further discussion of Paul's fate in Rome, see L. P. Pherigo, "Paul's Life after the Close of Acts," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXX (1951), 277 ff.; Sherwin-White, op. cit., pp. 108 ff.; and F. F. Bruce, "St. Paul in Rome -- Concluding Observations," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library (Manchester), L (1967-68), 266-79.

<sup>16</sup> The tradition that Peter and Paul were martyred on the same day -- June 29, A.D. 67 -- on the basis of apocryphal "Acts" of the two apostles is without historical value.



Part of this time he was off on a "concert tour" of Greece, and a subordinate would have presided at Paul's hearing if he were arrested in that interim, or perhaps a subordinate in any case.<sup>17</sup>

While Philippians offers source material for Paul's first imprisonment, II Timothy provides it for the second. Although critics are wary of using II Timothy as historical evidence, they admit that the letter probably contains authentic Pauline reminiscences in verses such as 1:8 ff., 1:15 ff., 2:9, and 4:6 ff. -- which are precisely the references to a second imprisonment in Rome. An ex-Christian who "made shipwreck of the faith," one Alexander the Coppersmith, seems responsible for indicting Paul, having come to Rome for that purpose.<sup>18</sup> We do not know the nature of the

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<sup>17</sup> Because of the statement in I Clement v, 7 that Paul gave testimony "before the rulers" [epi ton hegoumenon] before he died, some scholars have argued that he was judged by Nero's vicegerents Helius and Nymphidius while Nero himself was away in Greece in A.D. 66-67. While possible, this suggestion makes too much of a phrase that is common in early Christian tradition, namely, that the apostles would have to testify "before governors and kings" (Matt. 10:18; Mark 13:9). Paul had already done this in the case of various Roman provincial governors, as well as Nero.

<sup>18</sup> This may be implied from II Timothy 4:14 ff. Alexander the apostate of I Timothy 1:19 seems intended here, rather than the Jew of Ephesus (Acts 19:33).

indictment, although merely accusing the apostle of Christianity and church leadership would have been enough after the Neronian persecution. For a former Christian to turn against Paul is well attested in I Clement v, 2, where the author states specifically that it was "through jealousy" that Paul was delivered up to death. This was written only thirty years after the event.

Evidently Paul succeeded in blunting the charges against him at a prima actio or first hearing (II Timothy 4:16-17), although he knew that the second would result in his death (4:6). Little is known of the great apostle's execution, but the tradition of beheading rather than crucifixion is most reliable in view of the fact that Roman citizens could not be crucified, and Paul of Tarsus was a Roman citizen. An early church tradition has the execution taking place outside the Ostian Gate of Rome at or near the present Basilica of St. Paul "Outside the Walls."<sup>19</sup> His grave may even be indicated under the high altar of the basilica by the fourth-century inscription, "PAVLO APOSTOLO MART." As F. F. Bruce points out, this location may be "accepted provisionally" in default of any rival tradition, and in view of the corporate memory of an ongoing Christian community at Rome ever since the event.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the fact that Paul's monument, like Peter's, lay in a pagan

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<sup>19</sup> See the presbyter Gaius' statement on the "monuments of the apostles" above.

<sup>20</sup> F. F. Bruce, op. cit., 274. See also Maier, op. cit., pp. 332-333.

necropolis -- hardly the area later Christian piety would have selected -- adds a further touch of authenticity.

Whether Paul made any last statement at his martyrdom is not known. If he did, he could not have chosen better words than those he had already written to his young co-worker, Timothy. I close this lecture with those words, since not in all of literature is the quintessence of Christian martyrdom better expressed:

The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (II Tim. 4:6)

### III. PERSECUTION FROM ROME TO THE REFORMATION

#### A Survey

Paul L. Maier

Clearly, this is no attempt to redo or update that best-seller from 1563, Foxe's Book of Martyrs, but the alliterative subtitle of that book -- Pagan and Popish Persecution -- does show the way in which Christian martyrdom will mutate across the centuries after the Neronian persecution. Foxe's book does need redoing, of course, but this is not the place. Instead, we shall survey the general trends of Christian persecution across the fourteen intervening centuries.

In the deaths of Peter and Paul, Nero's persecution shattered the apostolic links with earliest Christianity. Shortly thereafter, when the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was not attended by the Second Coming of Christ (as some predicted), Christians had to shift from oral to written traditions in order to keep sacred memories alive. The Gospels and the discipline of church history were the result. In the latter, martyrdom would always play an extraordinarily memorable role.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that, following A.D. 64, there was one, long, bloody persecution of the church throughout the whole Roman Empire until Constantine. Crackdowns against Christians were usually always sporadic: on-again, off-again

phenomena, sometimes with long intervening decades of unofficial toleration. When the Flavian dynasty took over after Nero's death, for example, no persecutions took place under Vespasian (A.D. 69-76) or his son Titus (79-81), or through most of the reign of his brother Domitian (81-96).

Why not? Several probable reasons: 1) Vespasian and Titus never tried to emulate Nero's negative example in general, possibly including Christian persecution in particular; 2) Rome may have thought that no Christians had survived; 3) the legal basis for persecution against Christians was vague in any case. Surely all "arsonists" had by now been punished, so why keep on persecuting them? Our principal source, Cornelius Tacitus, seems to have wrestled with this problem, since, after citing the charge of arson against the Christians, he reverses himself and says they were tormented "...not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race [odium humani generis]." <sup>1</sup> This was a catch-all term for any enemies of the Roman state, and had to remain the legal basis for persecution for the next two-and-a-half centuries.

Domitian, however, may well have instituted the second Roman persecution against the church near the end of his reign, which seems to be the background for I Clement and negative references to Domitian in Christian literature. The only reference in pagan annals comes from a well-known passage in Dio Cassius:

...And the same year [A.D. 95], Domitian

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, Annals xv, 44.

killed, along with many others, Flavius Clemens, the consul, although he was a cousin and had Flavia Domitilla as wife, who was also a relative of the emperor [his sister's daughter]. The indictment raised against them both was that of atheism, a charge on which many others who had drifted into Jewish ways were condemned. Some of these were put to death, and the rest were at least deprived of their property. Domitilla was merely banished to Pandateria.<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars are convinced that these members of the imperial house had converted to Judaism, as implied in the phrase "drifted into Jewish ways."<sup>3</sup> Others, however, think Christianity is definitely intended in this reference. "Atheism" was never a term used for Judaism in Rome, but frequently for Christians, who were also accused of practicing "Jewish ways." Dio never refers to Christians directly in his writings, a probably intentional slight, but church tradition grew strong in reporting a Domitianic persecution<sup>4</sup>, which is also either

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<sup>2</sup> Dio Cassius, Roman History lxxvii, 14.

<sup>3</sup> So E. Mary Smallwood, "Domitian's Attitude Toward the Jews and Judaism," Classical Philology, LI (January, 1956), 7 ff. Smallwood suggests that they may not have been full converts to Judaism, but only "God-fearers" on the fringe.

<sup>4</sup> I Clement i, 1; Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica (hereafter, HE) iii, 17 f. See also Maurice Goguel, The Birth of Christianity

reflected or anticipated in the New Testament Book of Revelation. An ancient Christian catacomb was also uncovered in 1852 which proved to be the "Cemetery of Domitilla," the very person named in Dio.<sup>5</sup>

Of prime importance, obviously, is this most probable evidence of upper-class conversions to Christianity. Indeed, the victim Flavius Clemens might well have become the next emperor, in which case a "Constantine" would have appeared two centuries ahead of schedule! No longer was the faith limited to slaves, servants, commoners, and heroic apostles.

### The Second Century

From A.D. 96 to 180, Rome enjoyed her "Golden Age," so-called, under the emperors Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. It was also something of a prolonged "breather" for the church in terms of persecution. One famous indication of Rome's attitude is the correspondence between the Younger Pliny, provincial governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, and his emperor, Trajan. In A.D. 112, Pliny wrote from Bithynia, asking

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(New York, 1954), p. 532, and Paul L. Maier, The Flames of Rome (Kregel, 1991), pp. 442-443.

<sup>5</sup> De Rossi discovered an inscription in the catacomb "ex indulgentia Flaviae Domitill[ae]", CIL, vi, 948, 8942, 16246. The cemetery had been dug on land that had belonged to Domitilla, which she had given to her dependents as a burial ground.

Trajan what to do about these "Christians" who were brought before him. Ought they be punished, as the law required, or spared? He continues:

A great many people of every age and class, both men and women, are being brought to trial, and this seems likely to continue. It is not only the towns, but villages and rural districts too which are infected through contact with this wretched cult. I think, though, that it is still possible for it to be curbed and directed to better ends.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, Trajan's reply has also survived, a remarkable testimony as to how the political climate had somewhat improved for the church in the second century:

You have followed the proper course of procedure, my dear Pliny...Christians... must not be hunted out. But if they are brought before you and the charge against them is proven, they must be punished. Yet in the case of anyone who denies that he is a Christian, and makes it clear that he is not by offering prayers to our gods, he is to be pardoned because of his

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<sup>6</sup> Pliny the Younger, Letters x, 96. This is a remarkable indication of Christianity's spread in Asia Minor only 79 years after the Crucifixion, affecting even the "rural districts" whose residents -- the pagani -- were supposedly the last to convert to Christianity, hence the term "pagan."



repentance, however questionable his past conduct may have been. But notices [against Christians] circulated anonymously must play no part in any accusation. They create a most evil precedent and are quite out of step with the spirit of our age.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, this spirit of semi-toleration did not prevent martyrdom for some of the great Christian leaders of the second century. While common Christians might largely escape persecution, some of the far more visible apostolic fathers, bishops, and apologists became obvious targets for enemies of Christianity -- often pagan priests -- who were eager to indict them before Roman authorities. Once arrested, the law "had to take its course," in line with Trajan's prescription, and the magistrates sentenced them to death, sometimes reluctantly.

In this manner, Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, was arrested and taken to Rome for trial and execution (c. 110 A.D.) En route, he wrote letters ahead to Rome, requesting that the Christians there do nothing to prevent his martyrdom:

Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain unto God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the wild

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<sup>7</sup> Pliny, op. cit., x, 97. Hadrian, the next emperor (A.D. 117-138), delivered a similar reply to Fundanus, proconsul of Asia, upon receiving a similar inquiry, according to Eusebius, HE iv, 9.

beasts that I may be found the pure bread of Christ...

Come fire and cross and grapplings with wild animals, wrenching of bones, hacking of limbs...only let me attain unto Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Thus begins the heroic strain in Christian martyrdom, which will eventually lead in some cases to a positively sacredly suicidal zeal for martyrdom.

Similarly, Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who had met Ignatius on his way to Rome, also met his own martyrdom under Antoninus Pius between 155 and 160. But this was at Smyrna, not Rome, and only after a hostile crowd in the amphitheater there demanded it was the aged, saintly bishop burnt at the stake and stabbed to death. He was the twelfth of eleven previous martyrs at Smyrna and Philadelphia in Asia Minor.<sup>9</sup>

A short time later, the apologist Justin won the cognomen by which he would ever afterward be known -- Justin Martyr -- about the year 165, and a decade after that a virulent persecution broke out in Gaul at Lugdunum (Lyons, France). Plague and barbarian invasions had frayed the nerves of the citizenry there, and, as often happened, Christians got blamed. A parade of false accusations followed, including cannibalism and incest. The governor inquired of emperor Marcus Aurelius what to do

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<sup>8</sup> Ignatius, Epistle to the Romans iv-5.

<sup>9</sup> The Martyrdom of Polycarp x - xix.

with the Christians. His reply was the same as Trajan's: release any who recanted, enforce the law for those who didn't. Christians who were Roman citizens were merely beheaded. Others were tortured horribly: the rack, beasts, fired iron chairs that sizzled human flesh. A slave girl, Blandina, who had been cut by whips and knife, was thrown to a wild bull, which tossed her until she died. There were 48 victims in all.<sup>10</sup> Christians could only be grateful that this persecution was localized and atypical of the second century.

### The Third Century

The 200's A.D., however, saw a very dramatic increase in Christian persecution and martyrdom. This is the century that witnessed increasing local persecutions across the Roman Empire under the Severii, particularly in Egypt at Alexandria, where Origen's father was beheaded, and his mother had to hide Origen's clothes so he could not go out in public and be martyred too.

The reason for this anti-Christian virulence is not difficult to fathom. Rome was starting to come apart at the political seams: in one fifty-year period, there were twenty-two emperors, twenty of whom died violently. Although they had nothing whatever to do with this civil war at the summit, Christians were again blamed, if only because the pagan gods of Rome were obviously frowning on the capital. Christians as scapegoats became the most

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<sup>10</sup> Eusebius HE v, 1.

consistent reason for their persecution ever since Nero. No one put it better than the North African church father, Tertullian:

If the Tiber reaches the walls [of Rome],  
if the Nile does not rise to the fields,  
if the sky doesn't move or the earth  
does, if there is famine, if there is  
plague, the cry is immediately heard:  
"Christians to the lions!"<sup>11</sup>

The emperor Decius (249-251) bears the opprobrium of instituting the first, systematic, empire-wide persecution of the Christian church. Hitherto, as we have seen, all persecutions were sporadic and local in nature, here and there but not everywhere. But in January, 250, Decius issued an imperial edict ordering all citizens to perform a religious sacrifice in the presence of appointed commissioners, who then issued a certificate (libellus) that they had done so. What followed seems to have been a house-by-house, block-by-block dragnet across the entire empire. This, in any event, was the aim, though Decius did not live long enough to carry it out en toto.

Many, especially new or half converts, obeyed the edict and were termed the lapsed (lapsi) by Christian writers. Others bribed the commissioners to issue them certificates without actually sacrificing, and they were called "certificaters" (libellatici). These were deemed little better than the lapsi by conservative Christians, who wanted them

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<sup>11</sup> Tertullian, Apologeticus xl, 12.

excluded from the church.<sup>12</sup> However, a significant majority defied the government with varying results. Death befell many of the church leaders, and the bishops of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome lost their lives. Origen and many others were arrested. The persecution was particularly fierce in Egypt, where Eusebius quotes a long extract from Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria reporting the bewildering variety of tortures inflicted on the Christian martyrs.<sup>13</sup> Mercifully (for the church), Decius was killed in a war with the Goths, and his successor did not further implement Decius' scheme.

#### The Fourth Century: Triumph and Transformation

After several scattered crackdowns, the last persecution -- under Diocletian (284-305) -- ranks among the worst. It began when pagan augurs at the imperial palace in Nicomedia, unable to ferret out the future, complained of hostile Christian influences. Diocletian furiously ordered his staff and army to offer sacrifices (a la Decius), demanded the destruction of churches and the burning of their sacred books, and imprisoned the Chris-

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<sup>12</sup> This led to the Novatianist schism. Novatius, a presbyter in the Roman church, thought all lapsi doomed. Bishop Cornelius and the majority thought otherwise, and Novatian was finally excommunicated.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius, HE vi, 41 ff. Among tortures listed are: burning with quicklime, decapitation, scraping and whipping, and impalement.

tian clergy. This was in the winter of 303, and both Eusebius and Lactantius give us grisly details on the forms of torture.<sup>14</sup> Eusebius adds that the Romans had second thoughts about all this horror and finally abandoned the death penalty, preferring disfigurement instead. Now the Christians merely had their eyes gouged out, their legs maimed, their feet branded, or were sent off to the mines.

Small wonder, then, that with the momentous Edict of Toleration in 311, halting all this horror, and the conversion of Constantine, that this emperor will take on larger-than-life dimensions in Christian annals. The persecution of the church was finally at an end in the Roman Empire. Indeed, Christianity not only enjoyed toleration in the 300's but also triumph. Except for Julian the Apostate (361-363), succeeding emperors were Christian, and most of the Empire with them. Finally, Theodosius (379-395) issued a string of anti-pagan laws, culminating in 392, when he forbade anyone to offer sacrifice or otherwise honor the old pagan gods. Shortly afterwards, the

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<sup>14</sup> Cp. Lactantius, On the Death of the Persecutors; and Eusebius, HE viii. Forms of torture listed by the latter include: cudgeling to death, flogging with whips, the rack, scraping, battery, decapitation, butchery, picked to death by sherds, stocks, dismemberment of limbs, dragging through streets, pouring vinegar and salt into wounds, burnings of various sorts, strangling, drowning, starving, crucifixion, choking, driving reeds into fingers, scorching by molten lead, feeding to beasts.

pagan temples were closed and the Olympic games suspended. Many have pointed to the sad irony that "the persecuted now became persecutors." Still, this was no vast affair, because hardly any pagans were left.

### Later Forms of Persecution

Christian martyrdom, however, had not become extinct. Rather, it would indeed "mutate" into various forms across the next thousand years up to the Reformation. One strain, however, would remain directly parallel to the "heroic" martyrdom of the first three centuries, that is, pagan persecution of Christians.

Even after Constantine, for example, some 16,000 Christian martyrs were reported during the reign of Sapor II (310-379) in Persia, where Zoroastrianism held on stubbornly.<sup>15</sup> Certainly the Christian missionaries fanning out across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East often encountered pagan opposition, imprisonment, torture, and even death. As late as 997, missionary bishop Adalbert of Bohemia was done to death by pagan Prussians. Even later, Bishop Henry of Uppsala, founder of the Finnish church, suffered martyrdom in the 1200's, as did Franciscans and Dominicans in

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<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper, 1953), p. 103. Cp. also the standard work, W. H. C. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965).

India.<sup>16</sup> The explosive rise of Islam, the conquests of the Ottoman Empire, and the Khanate of the Golden Horde present additional panels of persecution.

But why limit this phenomenon to the pre-Reformation era? It is a tragic commonplace to point out that persecution and martyrdom are no dusty relics of the past, but continue today in the twentieth century. The long list of martyrs extends from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany and Communist victims in Russia and China to the 300 refugee Christians slaughtered some months ago in a Lutheran church in Nigeria. With Christianity's global outreach, "heroic" martyrdom very likely continues at some scattered places even as I lecture to you.

### Martyrdom by Christians

More tragic than martyrdom of Christians, however, is martyrdom by Christians. This took on various forms, the first being persecution against pagans. This began, as previously noted, in the fourth century when triumphant Christianity outlawed paganism in the Roman Empire. Scattered examples occurred across the centuries up through that Arawak Indian chief in the Caribbean who was executed for resisting conversion to Christianity a dozen years after Columbus landed in the New World.

Another form was persecution against other monotheists, that is, against Jews and Muslims. Aside from ghettoization and pogroms against Medieval Jews, one of the most sordid chapters

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<sup>16</sup> LaTourette, op. cit., pp. 398-403.



in church history portrays the Roman Catholic Inquisition in Spain, which forced conversion of Jews to Christianity -- the marranos or conversos -- as well as Muslims -- the moriscos. Whenever such conversions became suspect, Torquemada's tortures and the stake were waiting.

A third form was persecution against genuine heresy. The Inquisition, in fact, had earlier been assigned the task of dealing with the Albigensians, a weird perversion of Christianity in southern France which dualistically opposed a god of evil -- the Old Testament Jehovah -- to a God of good -- Jesus. Eschewing meat since it was a material product of sexual reproduction, they tried to overcome the problem of producing little Albigensians by dividing the sect into the perfecti, who were celibate, and "believers" who could indulge. Innocent III (1189-1216) launched a crusade against them, and when someone wondered how to determine who was Catholic and who Albigensian in a conquered town, the local bishop responded: "Kill them all! The Lord will know his own!"<sup>17</sup>

A fourth form was persecution against assumed heresy (read "genuine fellow Christians"). In the 1170's, Peter Waldo (or Valdes), a wealthy Frenchman who, like St. Francis, had exchanged his property for poverty, began preaching a proto-Protestantism

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<sup>17</sup> The Albigensians much resembled the Paulicians, an earlier sect south of Armenia in the later seventh century, whose first leader, Constantine Silvanus, was stoned to death.

in Lyons that anticipated many forms of the later sixteenth-century Protestantism. His followers, the "Poor Men of Lyons" -- later called Waldensians -- were ruthlessly persecuted, and 80 of them were burned alive at Strasbourg in 1211. Still, they crossed the Alps and persisted, and remain a large Protestant church in Italy to this day. They also provide one convenient answer to that anti-Protestant taunt, "Where was your church before Luther?"

This, of course, brings us to that familiar triad of "reformers before the Reformation": Wycliffe, Hus, and Savonarola. Two of them were martyred, one had at least his bones martyred. John Wycliffe (c. 1329-1384) was a master at Oxford who taught that the Bible was the only authority for faith and who worked for its translation into English. He also attacked the papacy, indulgences, and monasticism, and thus was amply qualified for his epithet, "the Morning Star of the Reformation." Wycliffe was extremely lucky, so far as Christian martyrdom is concerned: he died of a stroke. Forty-four years later, however, his body was exhumed, burnt, and thrown into the Swift River.

Jan Hus (1373-1415) was not so fortunate. He had read Wycliffe's writings, and urged similar reforms in Bohemia. Cited to appear before the Council of Constance, Hus debated about his safety. But his own king, Wenceslas, urged him to attend, and he was given safe-conduct both ways by the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund. When he arrived in Constance, Hus found the council torn with the problem of what to do about three concurrent "popes." Churchmen there were not about to hear any

Protestantizing preaching from the likes of Hus, and he was burnt to death at the stake despite Sigismund's safe-conduct. His last audible words were: "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit," reflecting the words of Stephen, the church's first martyr.

With Jerome Savonarola of Florence (1452-1498), we have less a reformer of dogma than one of morals. Opposing the conduct of the Medici and Borgia popes with oratorical flourish, Savonarola for a time commanded the allegiance of the Florentines, who made a "bonfire of the vanities" in 1496, burning their gaming cards, cosmetics, wigs, and lewd books. Two years later, however, there was another bonfire: this time, Savonarola and two associates were hung and burned in Florence's Piazza Vecchio.<sup>18</sup>

The martyrdom of proto-Protestants would inevitably lead to persecution of Protestants themselves. Luther was warned of it throughout his post-95-theses career. In 1524, when someone suggested that he get married, Luther declined, not because he was a "sexless stone," as he put it, or was hostile to the estate, but because he daily expected martyrdom. And when in fact he did marry Katherine von Bora the following year, he did so for those three well-known reasons: to please his father, to spite the pope and the devil, and to seal his witness

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<sup>18</sup> For one of the most recent studies, see Robert Kolb, "'Saint John Hus' and 'Jerome Savonarola, Confessor of God'" -- The Lutheran 'Canonization' of Late Medieval Martyrs," Concordia Journal, 17 (October, 1991), 404-418.

before expected martyrdom<sup>19</sup> --hardly the most romantic reasons for marriage!

Spared martyrdom, Luther died a natural death in 1546, but other Protestants were not so blessed. At the beginning of these lectures, reference was made to Henry Vos and John van den Eschen, for whom Luther penned Ein neues Lied. Hundreds, no, thousands of Protestant martyrs would follow in the religious struggles and wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer and the English reformers during the reign of "Bloody Mary" come immediately to mind, as do the French Huguenots during the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572, or the cruel Spanish persecution in the Netherlands. But even the general areas and occasions of persecution are too numerous for listing here.

One final category of martyrdom by Christians must, astonishingly and regrettably, include persecution against heresy by Protestants. This was a sad parallel to the fourth-century precedent of once-persecuted Christians becoming persecutors of pagans, but the numbers of victims in this classification were, thankfully, small. The most famous, of course, was Michael Servetus (1511-1553), a Spanish theologian-turned-physician who discovered pulmonary involvement in blood circulation. As doctor to the Archbishop of Vienne in France, he secretly wrote works opposing the doctrine of the Trinity as well as

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<sup>19</sup> Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abingdon, 1950), p. 287.

infant baptism. Discovered, he was arrested and put on trial, but he managed to escape, and the Catholic authorities could only burn him in effigy. Next, he surfaced in Geneva, where he was also arrested and put on trial. Years earlier, John Calvin had told his associate Farel that if Servetus ever came to Geneva, he would not permit him to leave alive. Consistent with that pledge, Calvin pressed for Servetus' execution, "mercifully" arguing only for beheading. But Servetus was burned alive on October 27, 1553, a tragic, though by no means final, example of the religious intolerance of the age.

Christian martyrdom, then, which had begun as stunning instances of total sacrificial dedication and witness to the faith -- so noble that it actually assisted in the conversion of the Roman Empire -- became a progressively inglorious phenomenon across the centuries once pagan oppression had ceased. Indeed, the early heroic martyrs would themselves have shuddered at what subsequent ages would do with their life sacrifices. By the fifth century, martyr cults started developing when converts from paganism transferred their attentions from gods and goddesses to Christian martyrs. Their tombs attracted pilgrimages, their relics were revered, their intercessions with God were invoked in prayer, and their healing miracles implored. (No blame for this, of course, dare be imputed to the early Christian martyrs, whose brilliant though tragic nobility will never dim.)

The record of those who caused martyrdom in subsequent centuries -- particularly the Medieval church -- was much worse than any

martyr cults, and remains a pungent, nauseous odor in the nostrils of God and man alike. Somewhere, these fanatics forget all about the Fifth Commandment in their fractured view of religious reality.

The overriding lesson of history is this: persecutors, whether pagan or Christian, are always wrong, and never right. Force must never be used against faith. Religious or philosophical beliefs must be matters of free opinion under all circumstances. The world should have learned this lesson ever since the death of Socrates in 399 B.C., who could well be termed a pagan martyr. The road to full religious toleration is long, winding, fraught with peril, fragile in the extreme, and we have arrived at its destination only comparatively recently. It behooves us to keep that road in excellent repair.

## CHILDREN IN THE BIBLE

My fellow Christian educators, I greet you on this occasion. I call you "fellow" educators, for none of us here can claim exclusive rights to a child's mind and, therefore, life. The process of educating a person is too complex and the responsibility too grave for any one of us to achieve by himself. Teachers, rather, form a noble fraternity dedicated to this most magnificent, frightening, and, at the same time, rewarding task.

I referred to you as my fellow "Christian" educators, and that you are. No education is or can be devoid of basic presuppositions and moral implications. Either a child has only this life or he has an immortal soul. Either a child has value in and of himself or he has value in being a child of God.

As we address the topic at hand, "Children in the Bible," let us look beyond the quest for purely academic information. Let us, rather, seek knowledge which we can use together in order to change the hearts and lives of our students. To this end we pray:

Lord, speak to me that I may speak  
In living echoes of thy tone;  
As thou has sought, so let me seek  
Thy erring children lost and lone.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach  
The precious truths thou dost impart,

And wing my words, that they may reach  
The hidden depts of many a heart.

O fill me with thy faithfulness, Lord,  
Until my very heart o'erflow  
In kindling thought and glowing word  
Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.

--Frances Ridley Hevergal  
(Lawson 1933:177)

## 1. THE STATUS OF CHILDREN IN THE BIBLE

A person's "status" is his or her position in society relative to other people. Children in the Bible had a grand status. In his classic study of educational ideals in the ancient world, William Barclay commented about the Jews. "No nation has ever set the child in the midst more deliberately than the Jew did. It would not be wrong to say that for the Jew the child was the most important person in the community." Barclay continues, "The Jew was sure that of all people the child was dearest to God" (Barclay 1959:00).

As we examine the pages of the Old Testament we come to the conclusion that Barclay was correct in his assessment. At the very dawn of man's existence and prior to his fall into sin, God ordained marriage and the family. "Be fruitful and increase in number" was not a suggestion but indeed a divine command (Gen. 1:28). More than a demographic necessity, however, children were considered a blessing. "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth.



Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Ps. 127:3-5). Daughters are included under the umbrella of the blessing. Jeremiah 29:6 reads, "Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters." A woman who was both a wife and a mother was held in highest regard. "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house" (Ps. 128:3). But barrenness was a source of sorrow and pain to wife and husband alike and could be eased only through the pains of childbirth (Gen. 21:107; 30:1-24; I Sam. 1).

Parents in the Bible, thus, were expected to hold their children in the highest regard--as blessings from the Lord. They also were to love them. One needs only remember the love of Abraham for Isaac (Gen. 22:2), Isaac for Esau and Rebekah for Jacob (Gen. 25:28), and Jacob or Israel for young Joseph (Gen. 37:3). Interestingly, the word 'love' in these examples is the Hebrew word *ahab*. It is the same word used in the Ten Commandments where we are told to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5). Again, *ahab* is used in connection with the second table of the law, "but love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). The word 'love' is also used when referring to the affection of a husband for his wife (Gen. 24:67), a wife for her husband (I Sam. 18:28), a slave for his master (Exod. 21:5), and a daughter-in-law for her mother-in-law (Ruth 4:15).

In connection with the word *ahab*, Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer makes an insightful observation. He says, "Notice that nowhere is the love of children toward parents mentioned. Rather, they are to honor, revere, and obey" (1981:14). This is a concept worthy of extensive thought and contemplation. Does this imply that children are not to love their parents? No, not at all. The second table of the law requires that all people, including children, have love for fellow human beings, including family members. What this does mean, however, is that the primary responsibility of a child toward his parents is summarized in the Fourth Commandment. We immediately think of Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism.

Honor your father and your mother, that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise our parents and superiors, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love and esteem them (ELS 1981:9).

In the Large Catechism, Luther compares and contrasts 'love' and 'honor.' In simple words he expounds on a most profound concept.

To fatherhood and motherhood God has given the special distinction, above all estates that are beneath it, that he commands us not simply to love our parents but also to honor them. With respect to brothers, sisters, and neighbors in general

he commands nothing higher than that we love them. Thus he distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to himself. For it is a much greater thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love but also deference, humility, and modesty, directed (so to speak) toward a majesty hidden within them. It requires us not only to address them affectionately and reverently, but above all to show by our actions, both of heart and of body, that we respect them very highly and that next to God we give them the very highest place. For anyone whom we are whole-heartedly to honor, we must truly regard as high and great (Tappert 1976:379).

According to their relative status (no pun intended) parents are to love their children and to regard them as gifts from God, while children are to honor their parents.<sup>1</sup> As we search the Scriptures we find that in almost every instance where a child is portrayed the story serves as an illustration of the Fourth Commandment. Isaac was obedient to his father even when it meant allowing his own life to be put on the altar (Gen. 22). Absalom, on the other hand, dishonored his father and met with a justifiable end (2 Sam. 13-18). The little Hebrew slave girl honored her pagan owners by referring them to Elisha the prophet (2 Kings 5). Forty-two little boys, however, dishonored Elisha, their superior, and were mauled by bears (2 Kings 2:23-24). Young Samuel faithfully

ministered under Eli (1 Sam. 2-3). Jacob deceived his father, Isaac (Gen. 27), and was himself the victim of deception by ten of his children (Gen. 37).

Children in the Bible were expected to love, honor, serve, and obey their parents, for on a higher level this is what God desires of all His children. "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11). If children are to honor their parents who gave them life, then all people are to honor and glorify the creator of all life. We might go one step further and say that as children learn to honor, serve, and obey their parents, they are rehearsing the attitudes and actions which believers should have toward God.

## 2. THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN THE BIBLE

To the Old Testament believer, a child was a blessing and gift from God. The recipient of God's providential goodness, however, was not at liberty to do with the gift as he or she pleased. God expected parents to "Train a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6), which means "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). It is not accidental that the Hebrew word *hanak* is translated as 'to educate' or 'to train' (as in the Proverbs passage), for the Hebrew word has the primary meaning of 'to dedicate' or 'concentrate.' To spiritually train a child is tantamount to dedicating that

child to the Lord or setting that child apart for God's good purpose. The word *hanak*, furthermore, comes from a root word meaning 'palate' or 'mouth.' When a child "began to be instructed in the Torah, the Hebrew law, honey and sweet cakes were used as incentive" (Hayes 1981:28). The psalmist combines the various levels of meanings of *hanak* when he writes "How sweet are your promises to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psalm 119:103). Likewise Ezekiel ate an instructional scroll (3.3) and found that it tasted "as sweet as honey" in his mouth. The apostle John had a similar experience (Rev. 10:9).

The spiritual training of children was a divine mandate, a sacred responsibility, and was carried out continuously. Rather than compartmentalizing religious education, the Hebrews trained their children in informal as well as formal settings.

### Informal Instruction

In Old Testament times instruction and learning often took place in spontaneous ways and unstructured events. Even as one learns a language by being surrounded by it, so the Jewish child received religious education by being a part of a spiritual community. The myriad religious festivals, processions, costumes, odors of incense, feasting, rites, and rituals all raised questions in the child's mind and were answered by parents (Anderson 1981:37). The works of God, whether depicted in family rituals or the great Jewish festivals,<sup>2</sup> were a constant tonic of informal conversation (Eavey 1975:53).

Lest we are left with the wrong impression, we should note that such informal instruction was not only a predictable by-product of the Jewish spiritual community, but it was, in fact, mandated by God. Perhaps no passage in Scripture had as much impact on the Jewish mind as did Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Clearly, fathers<sup>3</sup> were to instruct their children as were mothers.<sup>4</sup> Even discipline became an instructional aid.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of informal, family spiritual instruction was significant. What Isch (1988:81) says of children today certainly applied in the Old Testament setting. "The family is the child's first school. His parents are his first teachers who have the most lasting impression."

### Formal Instruction

In Old Testament times not all religious instruction took place within the

framework of the family. Early in Jewish history the priests were public instructors of the people (Deut. 31:9-13). A "school of the prophets" offered specialized instruction (2 Kings 2:3-7; 6:1). God's specially chosen spokesmen, the prophets, also made public pronouncements.

It was during the exile, however, that the foundations for formal education were laid. Although a captive in Babylon, Ezra was "a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given" (Ezra 7:6). He was allowed by King Artaxerxes to visit Jerusalem, and there he taught the people. In Nehemiah chapter 8 we discover that he called the people together and read the law to them. This teaching had an impact on the people. They pledged themselves to obey it and to live by it. Thus the Jews, returned from exile, became known as "the people of the book" (Barclay 1959:23). And it was in the synagogue that the law could most efficiently be taught and explained.

The synagogue grew out of the conditions of the exile. During the time of captivity temple sacrifices were impossible, but prayer and study of God's word was possible. On Sabbath days and holy days the exiled believers congregated for purposes of religious instruction. Even after the exile, wherever Jews were present in sufficient numbers, synagogues were established. If synagogues were places of formal instruction for the believers, and especially the adult believers, then it was only a matter of time before schools for the youth were attached to the

synagogues. By the first century B.C. elementary schools which were not connected with the synagogues were widely established (Eavey 1975:63).

Historians have been able to piece together a surprisingly detailed description of these early Jewish schools. There was, for example, one teacher for every 25 students. Only boys were allowed to attend school.<sup>6</sup> Boys began school at about age six and continued until at least age ten. The school day included a morning and afternoon session. The teacher was not to be too young nor too old; he was to be married, worthy and not proud, methodical, patient and affable.<sup>7</sup> The course of instruction was standardized. Initially the student was taught how to read and write the Hebrew language. He then studied Leviticus 1-8, the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9), the Ten Commandments (Exod, 20:3-17), Deut. 5:6-21), the *Hallel* (Psalms 113-118), and the story of creation (Gen. 1-5). The majority of instruction focused on the books of Moses, but as the student matured he was expected to concentrate on other Old Testament Scriptures. Students eventually learned to read, write and work arithmetic. Pedagogically, the teachers emphasized memory work (Barclay 1959:32-45; Eavey 1975:62-66; Sherrill 1944:55-60).

Jesus Christ was a product of the Jewish educational system. Admittedly He was precocious (Luke 2:46-47), but the Bible makes it clear that according to his "State of Humiliation" He did not know everything as a child.<sup>8</sup> Thus, He



"grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52 emphasis added). Much of his learning came from the informal education provided by Mary and Joseph. Jesus almost certainly attended school as well (Wilson 1881: 55). There He learned Hebrew as well as the Aramaic dialect of his day (Matt. 27-46). He could read (Luke 4:16-20) and write (John 8:6). He was well versed in the traditions and oral law (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 38, 43) but especially in the Scriptures (Matt. 4:1-10).

### 3. THE SAVIOR AND CHILDREN IN THE BIBLE

In many respects much of the New Testament pictures children in the same light that emanates from the Old Testament. Barrenness was considered a disgrace, but motherhood was a blessing from the Lord (Luke 1:25). The relationship between the parents and their children was structured along the lines of the Fourth Commandment. Parents were to provide for their children's physical and spiritual needs (2 Cor. 12:14; 1 Tim. 5:8); 2 Tim. 1-5). in a loving fashion (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:20). Finally, informal spiritual education in the home laid the foundation for later spiritual learning (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

Notice that the majority of the passages cited above come from the pen of St. Paul. His divinely inspired writings on the subject of children would find easy acceptance among the Jews of his time. As we study the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, however, a more complete and in

some ways a more modern picture of the adult/child relationship emerges.

Jesus observed children at play and referred to them in His ministry. He recalled, for example, how some children stubbornly refused to play with their mates (Luke 7:31-32).<sup>9</sup> Jesus, perhaps drawing in part on his own experiences, referred to family life--how some children slept with their parents (Luke 11:7) and received good gifts from father and mother (Matt. 7:11).

Christ, however, did more than observe children. He also displayed his love for them by tending to their physical needs. He fed them when they were hungry (Mark 5:43; Matt. 14:21) and healed them when they were ill (Matt. 17:14-18; Mark 7:24-30; John 4:46-54). On two occasions He even resurrected dead children (Matt. 9:18-26; Luke 7:11-17).

Jesus displayed his love for children by tending to their spiritual needs as well. In one of the more poignant scenes in the Bible we find Jesus blessing the little children (Matt. 19:13; Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15). The background to the story makes the reality of his love for the little ones even more obvious. Jesus was on His last journey to Jerusalem where He knew He would be killed. His tension was apparent to His disciples. Soon a crowd gathered around including some mothers with children. The disciples tried to keep the children away because they did not want Jesus to be further burdened. Jesus, nevertheless, had time

for the young ones. He commanded his disciples, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them... And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 19: 14,16).

As Jesus tended to the physical and spiritual needs of children, He did so with sensitivity and deep emotion. In Mark 10:14 we find that He became indignant at the disciples for coming between the children and Himself. He said, "'Talitha koem'...Little girl, I say to you, get up" when resurrecting Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:41). A study of the Greek shows that here Jesus used a diminutive of affection, a term of endearment (Horne 1973:180). After His resurrection Jesus told Peter "Feed my lambs," another affectionate term (John 21:15). Finally, Jesus felt a deep sense of sorrow for the children who would be the victims of war (Luke 23:28).

Once we understand the depth of Jesus' love and affection for children we realize how natural and imperative it was for Him to teach others how to respond to them. He taught that great care should be taken in helping children spiritually. On one occasion (Matt. 18:6-10) He warned that grave consequences awaited those who caused a believing child to stumble in his faith. He, then, ordered that no one should despise children. Finally, He taught the proper regard for children. "For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." As Barclay (1959:234) suggests,

"At a king's court it was only the most favoured courtiers and officials who had at any time access to the king's presence, and who at any time saw the king's face." The fact that children's guardian angels have unimpeded access to God shows how precious the young ones are in His sight. God's attitude toward children should be imitated here on earth.

Jesus also used children as instructional aids in teaching the people. A good example of this is recorded in all three synoptic gospels (Matt. 18:1-14, Mark 9:33-50, and Luke 9:46-48). One day the disciples were arguing about which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus used a child as an object lesson in humility. He "took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then He said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all--he is the greatest!'" (Luke 9:46-48). But Jesus' instruction went beyond a lesson in humility. He taught that little children could have saving faith when He said, "if anyone causes one of these little ones who believes in me to sin... (Matt. 18:6, emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> Jesus also commanded that "all nations," including children, should be baptized as a means whereby they are saved (Matt. 28:19). This simple thought speaks volumes about how salvation is a free gift from God and not the result of righteous acts done by the individual. Using the "little ones" as the pattern of faith Jesus told the disciples, "unless you change and become like little children,

you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Finally, God's desire that every person be saved is summarized in the statement "your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (Matt. 18:14).

Jesus obviously said more about children than the few passages recorded in the New Testament (John 20:31). These verses, however, contain a wealth of information. Barclay writes, "There are comparatively few references to children in the pages of the gospels, but the few there are of first-rate importance; and in them there is set out in a way that cannot be forgotten the importance of the child" (Barclay 1959:234).

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Lewis Sherrill (1944:18) cites the passages in Scripture which unequivocally teach that children are to honor their parents (Exod. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 5:16; 27:16; Prov. 1:8-9; 6:20-22; 15:5; 19:26; 20:20; 28:24; 30:17; Mal. 1:6). Gross violations of the Fourth Commandment brought the death penalty (Exod. 21:15; 17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18-21; 27:16).

<sup>2</sup>Sherrill (1944:24-26) lists various religious rituals which would serve as stimuli for informal spiritual education. These include circumcision at eight days (Lev. 12:3), purification of a mother at 40 days (Lev. 12:1-8), weaning of a child (1 Samuel 1:22-25), taking children to the home where a child has been born and reading Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Psalm 91, tree planting

ceremonies for boys or girls, articles of apparel worn which carried spiritual symbolism (Deut. 22:12), the mezuzah or parchment attached to doors (Deut. 6:8), and the Sabbath rituals (Ezek. 20:12, 20). Meanwhile the public religious rituals of festivals which served as stimuli material for parent/child religious instruction include Passover, Tabernacles, Pentecost, Weeks, Trumpets, and Purim.

<sup>3</sup>Prov. 1:8; 4:1-4; 6:20; Deut. 4:9-10; 6:7; 6:20-25; 11:19; 32-46.

<sup>4</sup>Prov. 1:8; 6:20; 31:1-9.

<sup>5</sup>Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; Deut. 8:5; 2 Sam. 7:14, and the apocryphical book of Ecclesiasticus 30:1-13.

<sup>6</sup>Girls did not attend school. They were taught through informal instruction at home and formal instruction in the synagogue. The rabbis believed that women's duties lay in other directions, that legal subjects were not suitable for them, that coeducational education would result in too much contact between the sexes, and that "Women are of a light mind" (Edersheim 1976:132-133).

<sup>7</sup>Edersheim (1976:135-136) elaborates on the moral character of the teacher. He will be quoted here at length.

But indeed, to the Jew, child-life was something peculiarly holy, and the duty of filling it with thoughts of God specially sacred. It almost seems as if the people generally had retained among them the echo of our Lord's saying, that their angels continually behold the face of our Father which is in heaven. Hence the religious care connected with

education. The grand object of the teacher was moral as well as intellectual training. To keep children from all intercourse with the vicious; to suppress all feelings of bitterness, even though wrong had been done to one's parents; to punish all real wrongdoing; not to prefer one child to another; rather to show sin in its repulsiveness than to predict what punishment would follow, either in this or the next world, so as not to "discourage" the child--such are some of the rules laid down. A teacher was not even to promise a child anything which he did not mean to perform, lest its mind be familiarised with falsehood. Everything that might call up disagreeable or indelicate thoughts was to be carefully avoided. The teacher must not lose patience if his pupil understood not readily, but rather make the lesson more plain. He might, indeed, and he should, punish when necessary, and, as one of the Rabbis put it, treat the child like a young heifer whose burden was daily increased. But excessive severity was to be avoided; and we are told of one teacher who was actually dismissed from office for this reason. Where possible, try kindness; and if punishment was to be administered, let the child be beaten with a strap, but never with a rod.

<sup>8</sup>The ELS Catechism (1981:115) defines Christ humiliation as follows. "Jesus humbled Himself by appearing in great lowliness, by **not always using the divine attribute communicated to His human nature**, and by becoming obedient to the point of death" (emphasis added). One of His divine attributes would be His perfect knowledge of all things.

<sup>9</sup>The scene referred to in Luke 7:31-32 has been described by Arndt (1956:214). "One is reminded,

says He, of the complaint voiced by children in the market place about their non-cooperative playmates: they could not get them to join in their little games; a game of joy and merry laughter appealed to them just as little as one mimicking sadness; they simply would not play along."

<sup>10</sup>The Greek word used in this section (Matt. 18:2) is *paidion*, a diminutive of *pais*, meaning a little or young child. As Vine (n.d.;180) notes, the word can also mean an infant just born, as in John 16:21. Here, since Christ had the child "stand beside him," the translation "little" or "young child" is to be preferred. It is significant, however, that in Luke 18:15 Jesus said that the kingdom of God belongs to *brephos*, 'little children.' This word denotes unborn children, as in Luke 1:41-44, and infants of nursing age (Brown 1982:283-284).

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## REFORMATION VESPERS, OCTOBER 31, 1991

Romans 1:16-17

Text: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: As it is written, The just shall live by faith."

\* \* \* \* \*

In Christ Jesus, fellow-redeemed and fellow-heirs of the Lutheran Reformation,

It was 474 years ago to the day when Martin Luther posted 95 theses on the church door of the Schollosskirke in Wittenberg, Germany, and it was this action that sparked the Lutheran Reformation. What really precipitated this act on the part of Luther was the sale of indulgences that was going on in Germany at the time. Sanctioned by the church, people were led to believe that they could buy the forgiveness of sins. Luther protested this, preached against it, and then on October 31, 1517, nailed these theses to the church door. This has been described as "the hammer blows that shook the world."

But there was a deeper, much more personal, reason behind this action. It centered around the question: "What must I do to be saved?" or, put another way, "How can I, Martin Luther, sinner that I am, be justified in the sight of a holy and righteous God?" Luther had been taught to believe that the answer to this question depended, in part, upon man's works. Yes, Christ's sacrifice for sin was necessary, but not sufficient. Man's works

must pick up the slack. Consequently the question that haunted him was, "How can I be sure that I have done enough?" It almost drove him out of his mind. Later he wrote,

Grief drove me to despair, and I  
Had nothing left me but to die;  
To hell I fast was sinking.

So he decided to enter a monastery, thinking that surely he would find the peace he was looking for. It was taught at that time that monastic life was superior to ordinary life and that those who entered the monastery and devoted their lives to the full service of the church could not only earn the needed works, but could also store up a few extra and transfer to those who came up short. This was called the doctrine of supererogation. But even this did not bring him the desired peace; it only exacerbated his problem.

Through a continued study of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit in time led him to see the beautiful truth of our text; namely, that it is not the righteousness that God demands of us that saves, but rather the righteousness that he gives us in his Son and which becomes ours through faith. Later he wrote in his commentary on the book of Romans.

Then I at once felt that I had been born again, and had found an open door to paradise; and I now took an entirely new view of the precious word of God. While I had in fact hated the term "God's righteousness," it became the greatest pride and joy and comfort of my heart; to me this passage from St. Paul became in truth the gate to paradise.

This does not mean that Luther discovered something new. No, Luther was not an innovator but a

renovator; that is, he simply restored what had always been there but which had become hidden under the rubbish of man-made doctrines.

In our text St. Paul says that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and explains why: "It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." The word for power in the original is *dunamis*, from which we get our word "dynamite." The gospel is not impotent and effective like many human philosophies. No, it does what no other message can do; it not only reveals and brings to us the righteousness of Christ, but it also works the faith to accept it and make it our own.

This righteousness, then, is not the righteousness of the law which no man can attain to, but it is the righteousness of faith, as our text says, "from faith to faith." Natural man is ignorant of this righteousness and in his blindness seeks to establish his own righteousness which the Bible describes as "filthy rags." It is true that the Bible says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12) That way is the way of the law, the way of works, but the problem is it doesn't work. We need a perfect righteousness if we are to be saved, and the good news of the gospel is that Christ has obtained this righteousness for us by his redemptive work and it is offered to us sinners as a free gift and becomes ours through faith. The same apostle writing to the Corinthians says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (II Cor. 5:21) If we could obtain the needed righteousness to stand before God by our own works, then Christ's work would have been totally unnecessary, as Paul wrote to the Galatians "Christ is become of no

effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4)

By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit Luther was led to see that it is Christ's righteousness - not Martin Luther's - that saved. Listen to what he wrote after this marvelous discovery:

I must fix my eyes on nothing but Jesus Christ, the crucified Savior, who rose again from the dead. For if I turn my eyes from Christ, I am undone. Learn to say confidently and fearlessly: I am Christ; not personally, but in the sense that the righteousness, the victory, and the life of Christ are mine. For Christ says: I am this needy sinner; that is to say: His sin and death are my sin and death; through faith he clings to me, and I dwell in him." (Quoted in Book of Family Prayer, by N. J. Laashe, p. 515)

Listen again to what Luther wrote to a troubled friend, an Augustinian friar by the name of Spenlein, who was experiencing the same spiritual agony that he had gone through:

Therefore, my dear friar, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to praise him, and despairing of yourself, say, "Lord Jesus, you have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not." Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells among sinners. Meditate on this love of his and you will see sweet consolation. For why was it necessary for him to die if one can

obtain a good conscience by our works and afflictions? Accordingly you will find peace only in him and only when you despair of yourself and your own good works. Besides, you will learn from him that just as he received you, so he has made your sins his own and has made his righteousness yours. (LW Vol. 48, p. 12)

What Luther wrote to his troubled friend was the most beautiful Gospel that can be preached. It is, as Dr. Walther says, "sterling gold and pure honey," for it declares that Christ has come in behalf of everyone, that he has borne every man's sins, that he calls all to believe on him, to rejoice and rest assured that his sins are forgiven and that in the hour of death he will depart saved.

It is of tremendous comfort to know and believe that the righteousness that a holy and righteous God demands is the righteousness that he offers and gives us in the Gospel and which becomes ours through faith, as it is written "The just shall live by faith." This righteousness is the solution to our problem of sin and death. Now we can live confidently and die peacefully. Yes, we can joyfully sing as we journey to our heavenly home,

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
Midst flaming worlds of these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in that great Day,  
For who aught to my charge shall lay?  
Fully thro' these absolved I am  
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

When from the dust of death I rise  
To claim my mansion in the skies,  
E'en then this shall be all my plea;  
Jesus hath lived and died for me."

-- Wilhelm W. Petersen

## ORTHODOX LUTHERAN DISTINCTION BETWEEN LAW AND GOSPEL

A modern classic item of orthodox Lutheran literature is a volume written by C.F.W. Walther entitled, "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel."<sup>1</sup> Confessional orthodox Lutherans see this distinction as a key factor in their theology. Dr. Alwin M. Reimnitz, who has been president of the North Dakota District of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod for over twenty years, exemplifies the importance attached to this emphasis. In orientation sessions for new ministers in his District, he urges that pastors re-read Walther's book in its entirety at least once each year. His advice typifies the high concern and regard that orthodox Lutherans have for the correct distinction regarding these doctrines.

This concern is not without good reason, not only in the parish, but throughout the church at large. A. R. Kretzmann says, "There is now a united front against the Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel."<sup>2</sup> The Pietists and Rationalists, Friedrich Schleiermacher at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Albrecht B. Ritschl at the end of the same century, Karl Barth who proclaimed a dialectical theology, and Rudolph Bultman who advocated that the Gospel be demythologized, all agree on one thing. They all reject the basic distinction between Law and Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel is not something which developed within orthodox Lutheranism. It was an integral part of the theological approach of Martin Luther himself. The matter of the proper role of the



Law, and that of the Gospel, received his attention at a fairly early date during the Reformation. Johann Agricola was the individual who raised the question. He criticized Melanchthon for stressing the preaching of the Law in the Saxon Visitation Articles of 1527. Agricola held that the Law should not be stressed because the Gospel alone calls forth obedience and righteousness of life in the hearers. Luther was displeased with the continual criticism of Agricola. He called Agricola and others like him "Antinomians." Luther saw the necessity of preaching both the Law and the Gospel to forgiven sinners, but he maintained that the proper distinction should be kept between them.<sup>4</sup> Ewald M. Plass says that, "Few, if any, theologians have insisted more emphatically than did Martin Luther on the indispensable necessity of sharply defining the areas with which the Law and Gospel were designed to apply."<sup>5</sup>

Luther stated, "It is . . . highly necessary to distinguish properly between these two words. Where this is not done, neither Law nor Gospel can be understood, and the conscience is lost in blindness and error . . . These two . . . cannot be confused or one substituted for the other without corruption of doctrine."<sup>6</sup> In a New Year's sermon in 1532 he spoke of the Law and the Gospel, saying that the "difference between the Law and the Gospel is the height of knowledge in Christendom . . . If this ability is lacking, one cannot tell a Christian from a heathen or a Jew; of such supreme importance is this differentiation of these two messages and on not mixing them together . . . without the Holy Spirit the attainment of this differentiating is impossible."<sup>7</sup> In another sermon he said, "The ability to differentiate these comes down from above, from the Father."<sup>8</sup> In his exposition of Galatians, Luther wrote, "Oh, for the man who can distinguish well

here and does not look for the Law in the Gospel but keeps the two as far apart as heaven is distant from the earth!"<sup>9</sup>

Luther also remarked that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is greater than the difference between contradictory statements. His words are that they are "greatly different from one another and more separated from one another than contradiction, and very closely joined in the heart."<sup>10</sup> Commenting on Luther's concept of the contradictory nature of the Law and the Gospel, Siegbert W. Becker uses the phrase, "The paradox of law and gospel."<sup>11</sup> He says that the greatest contradiction in the Bible is that which exists between the Law and the Gospel. Both are the Word of God. Both are necessary. They must be together. However, it is imperative that they be kept distinct."<sup>12</sup> Becker says that, "To keep them separate and to distinguish clearly between them is 'rightly to divide the word of truth,' as the Apostle Paul says."<sup>13</sup> The words of the Apostle to which Becker refers are recorded in II Timothy 2:15.

Because true Lutheranism, following in the footsteps of Luther, continues to stress the paradoxical nature of the Christian faith as it is exemplified by the distinction between the Law and the Gospel, some have tried to draw a parallel between the doctrines of orthodox Lutheranism and Kierkgaardian neo-orthodoxy. There is, however, no real similarity. Though Soren A. Kierkegaard was a Lutheran, and delighted in paradox, he never came to a clear knowledge of the difference between the Law and the Gospel. He consistently commingled them. Ultimately all that he taught was Law, and his stress was on asceticism, self-imposed suffering and work righteousness.<sup>14</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions have much to say regarding the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel. Many statements in the Book of Concord echo the words of Luther. Ralph Bohlmann says that "Melanchthon's argumentation in the whole Apology is closely bound up with the distinction between the Law and the promises."<sup>15</sup> The Apology states, "All Scripture ought to be distributed into the two principal topics, the Law and the promises" (IV (II):5).<sup>16</sup> Also, "we must separate, on the one hand, the promises of God and the grace that is offered, and, on the other hand, the Law, as far as the heavens are from the earth" (III:65).<sup>17</sup> In the Formula of Concord we read, "We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church with great diligence" (Ep. V:2).<sup>18</sup> The Formula carries this summary statement, "The distinction between law and Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy apostles may be explained and understood correctly. We must therefore observe this distinction with proper diligence lest we confuse the two doctrines and change the Gospel into law" (SD: V:1).<sup>19</sup> The Formula further says, "both doctrines are always together and both of them have to be urged side by side, but in proper order and with the correct distinction" (SD: V:15).<sup>20</sup>

The Lutheran theologians of the era of orthodoxy also maintained the importance of properly distinguishing between Law and Gospel. Chemnitz held that the source of all error lies in the confusion of the Law and the Gospel. He said, "The desire to reconcile the doctrine of the Law and of philosophy with the Gospel is the source and origin of all corruptions."<sup>21</sup> David Hollaz

speaks of Law and Gospel "as far as they are adequately contradistinguished."<sup>22</sup> John Gerhard stated, "The distinction between the Law and the Gospel must be maintained at every point."<sup>23</sup> He also wrote that, "commingling Law and Gospel necessarily produces confusion of consciences, because there is no true, reliable, and abiding comfort for consciences that have been alarmed and terrified if the gracious promises of the Gospel are falsified."<sup>24</sup>

Orthodox Lutherans of the modern era concur with Luther and the orthodox theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Walther told his students, "Only he is an orthodox teacher who not only presents all the articles of faith in accordance with Scripture, but also rightly distinguishes from each other the Law and the Gospel."<sup>25</sup> He gave this practical advice, "There must be a proper division of Law and Gospel. Be careful to follow this rule in writing your sermons."<sup>26</sup> Again, there arises a third substance (teritum genus), when Law and Gospel are confounded in a sermon. The new substance is entirely foreign to either original substance and causes both of them to lose their virtue."<sup>27</sup> He says, "You may correctly state what the Law says and what the Gospel says. But when you commingle both, you produce poison for souls."<sup>28</sup> He also states that, "the matter of decisive importance is this, that these two words be properly distinguished and not commingled; otherwise the true meaning of neither will be known nor retained; yea, imagining that we have both, we shall find that we possess neither."<sup>29</sup> Pieper wrote that, "it must be pointed out that the differentiation between Law and Gospel is necessary to correctly understand the Scripture."<sup>30</sup> John H. C. Fritz states, "Whoever . . .

presents the Law and the Gospel in a tangled and mixed form; even though he otherwise preach the Law and the Gospel and even defines it correctly, . . . is guilty of preaching false doctrine."<sup>31</sup> Mayer cautions that, "The danger of mingling and confounding the two doctrines is very real, because both doctrines must always be preached side by side."<sup>32</sup> Preus remarks, "That by adopting the Scriptural principle, one rules out traditions, reason and all extra-Biblical sources as norms for judging Christian doctrine does not immediately guarantee one's orthodoxy. One must be able to distinguish between Law and Gospel."<sup>33</sup> Kretzmann says, "The doctrine of Law and Gospel is much more than a theological distinction, some obstruct philosophic or academic question. It is vital to the life of the church for we are here dealing with life itself."<sup>34</sup>

Luther's writings are very clear regarding the Law and Gospel content of the Bible. Bohlmann says that this distinction underlies his contrast of the Ten Commandments and the Apostles Creed in the Large Catechism.<sup>35</sup> Luther says, "the Creed is a very different teaching from the Ten Commandments. The latter teach us what we ought to do; the Creed tells us what God does for us and gives to us (LS: II: 67)."<sup>36</sup> In the Smalcald Articles he explicitly describes the functions of both the Law and the Gospel. He calls the Law a "thunderbolt" which "destroys both open sinners and false saints" (III: III 2),<sup>37</sup> and he refers to the Gospel as "the consoling promise of grace" (III: III 4), which "offers consolation and forgiveness" (III: III 8).<sup>38</sup>

An entire article of the Formula of Concord is devoted to the Law and the Gospel. The Formula is in full agreement with Luther regarding the definition of both. The writers of the Formula

say that in its proper sense, "the law is a divine doctrine which reveals the righteousness and immutable will of God, shows how man ought to be disposed in his nature, thoughts, words and deeds in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God, and threatens the transgressors of the law with God's wrath and temporal and eternal punishment" (SD: V 17).<sup>39</sup> The Gospel is defined in its strict or proper sense as, "the kind of doctrine that teaches what a man who has not kept the law and is condemned by it should believe; namely, that Christ has satisfied and paid for all guilt and without man's merit has obtained and won for him forgiveness of sins, the 'righteousness that avails before God,' and eternal life."<sup>40</sup>

The orthodox fathers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries concur with the definitions of Luther and the Book of Concord. One example of each will be given. Hollaz said of the Law in its strict sense, "The divine Law is the command of God, in which the supreme Lord and Legislator prescribes that which is to be done by men, and prohibits that which is to be avoided, binding them to render a perfect obedience, or in the deficiency of this, visiting them with punishment."<sup>41</sup> John W. Baier briefly defines the Gospel as follows, "The Gospel is the doctrine of the grace of God and of the gratuitous pardon for sin for the sake of Christ the Mediator, and his merit apprehended by faith."<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, orthodox Lutheran theologians of modern times agree with Luther and their orthodox predecessors. Pieper wrote, "The Law in the proper sense (lex proprie accepta) is the Word of God in which God demands of men that in their nature and in their thoughts, words and acts they conform to the standard of His commandments and pronounces the curse on those who fail to comply."<sup>43</sup>

Meyer says of the Gospel, "The Gospel is the Word of God by which He, out of free grace for Christ's sake, pronounces the transgressor of the Law righteous. This is the Lutheran definition of the Gospel on the basis of Scripture."<sup>44</sup>

In the Missouri Synod Catechism, which is primarily used for instructing children in the faith, the question is asked, "What is the difference between Law and the Gospel?" The answer given is: "1. The Law teaches what we are to do and not to do; the Gospel teaches what God has done and still does for our salvation. 2. The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God. 3. The Law must be preached to all men, but especially to impenitent sinners; the Gospel must be preached to sinners who are troubled in their minds because of their sins."<sup>45</sup>

In dealing with the differences between the Law and the Gospel, orthodox Lutherans point out a number of contrasts between them. Among these items of contrast are the following. The Law is known by nature because it is written in human hearts, but the Gospel is a mystery which is not naturally known to people.<sup>46</sup> The Law demands perfect obedience, and the Gospel only offers the grace of God and makes no demands.<sup>47</sup> The Law promises salvation and eternal life to persons who obey all its demands, while the Gospel promises eternal salvation to persons who have broken the Law.<sup>48</sup> The Law says that keepers of the Law shall be justified, and the Gospel says that those who have not kept the Law will be justified.<sup>49</sup> The Law tells people that God will not forgive sins, nor acquit sinners; the Gospel says that all people are acquitted, and that the sins of the whole world have been forgiven.<sup>50</sup> The Law says that every sinner is cursed, but the Gospel

says that all are blessed by Jesus Christ.<sup>51</sup> The Law tells sinners that God hates them, while the Gospel tells all people that God loves them.<sup>52</sup> The Law says that God is angry with sinners, and the Gospel says that God is favorably disposed toward all people and reconciled to all.<sup>53</sup> The Law arouses people against God, but the Gospel reconciles people with God.<sup>54</sup> The Law is intended to terrify people, and does terrify them; the Gospel is intended to cast out all fear, and does.<sup>55</sup> The Law must be preached to distress those who are comfortable in their sins, but the Gospel comforts those who are distressed in their sins.<sup>56</sup>

This kind of distinction is not a Lutheran sectarian peculiarity,<sup>57</sup> although it may seem to be almost a unique Lutheran emphasis. The authors of the Formula of Concord say that, "Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinctions" (SD: VI 23).<sup>58</sup> Orthodox Lutherans believe that the distinction which they make between Law and Gospel should be made by all Christians. It concerns them that other Christians in the wider church do not make the distinctions that they do. In their estimation the majority of Christians in the church at large fail to properly distinguish between the Law and the Gospel. They include among these the Catholics who mingle Law and Gospel in their teaching of work righteousness and the uncertainty of salvation. Also included are strict Calvinists who deny universal grace and the operation of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Likewise, they include Synergists who deny the doctrine of grace alone and make salvation depend on the sinner's own decision for grace.<sup>59</sup> They also include all Modernists who deny the vicarious



atonement of Christ and consequently teach salvation by works.<sup>60</sup>

In the opening lines of this chapter, reference was made to Walther's "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel." This book consists of a number of lectures which he delivered to his students at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. The manuscript of this treatise was built up out of stenographic transcripts made by a student, Theodore Claus, who listened to the lectures. The book was first published ten years after Walther's death.<sup>61</sup> In the main these lectures consisted of elaboration on theses in which Walther gave twenty-one different ways in which Law and Gospel are not properly divided. The material presented by Walther is not all negative in nature, but he supplied practical, helpful advice on how to avoid the errors of which he warns.

Walther says that Law and Gospel are confounded when Christ is turned into a Lawgiver, and the Gospel is turned into a teaching of meritorious works. The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is not preached in its full severity and the Gospel not in its full sweetness, but instead Gospel elements are mingled with the Law and Law elements with the Gospel. The Word is not properly divided when the Gospel is preached before the Law. The Word is improperly divided when the Law is preached to persons who are already in terror because of their sins, or the Gospel is preached to individuals who are living securely in their sins. When sinners have been struck down and terrified by the Law, it is wrong to tell them to keep on praying and struggling until they feel that God has received them into grace, rather than directing them to the Gospel Word and Sacraments. The Word is not rightly divided when faith is described as though mere

inert acceptance of truth, even by one living in mortal sins, rendering such a person righteous before God, or, as if faith makes one righteous and saves him because it produces love and reformation in his life style.<sup>62</sup>

Walther further maintains that it is an improper division when the preacher is disposed to offer the comfort of the Gospel only to those who have been made contrite by the Law, not from fear of God's wrath and punishment, but from love of God. It is wrong for a preacher to represent contrition alongside of faith on a cause of the forgiveness of sins. An appeal to believe which is made in a manner suggesting that a person could make himself believe is an improper dividing of the Word. The Word of God is divided wrongly when faith is required as a condition of justification and salvation, as though a person is righteous before God and saved, not only by faith, but on account of, for the sake of, and in view of faith. It is improper when the Gospel is turned into a preaching of repentance. If a preacher tries to make people believe that they are converted as soon as they are rid of certain vices and in their place engage in pious works and virtuous practices, the Word is being wrongly divided. It is a wrong division when faith is described in a way that does not fit all believers of all times. The Word is divided incorrectly when the universal corruption of humanity is described in such a way that the impression is created that even true believers are still under sin's spell and sinning on purpose. The Word is not rightly divided if a preacher speaks of certain sins as if they were not of a damnable, but of a venial nature.<sup>63</sup>

This orthodox theologian taught that it is an incorrect division of the Word of God when the

salvation of an individual is made to depend on association with the visible orthodox Church, and when a person who errs in any article of faith is denied salvation. When it is taught that the Sacraments produce salutary effects by the mere outward performance of a sacramental act (ex opera operato), this is a wrong division of the Word. The Word is not rightly divided when a false distinction is made between awakening and conversion, and when a person's inability to believe is mistaken for his not being allowed to believe. It is a wrong distinction when the demands, threats, or promises of the Law are used to induce the unregenerate to put away their sins and to become godly by engaging in good works. Likewise, it is wrong if an attempt is made to urge the regenerate to do good by the Law's commands rather than by the Gospel's admonitions. The Word of God is not rightly divided when the unforgiven sin against the Holy Ghost is explained in such a way as if it could not be forgiven because of its magnitude. It is a wrong division of the Word when the teacher of the Word does not permit the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.<sup>64</sup>

Walther's approach, though extremely scholarly and profoundly theological, was eminently practical and primarily pastoral. His deepest concern was the spiritual well being of the hearers in the pews in the churches where his students would one day serve.

In a book of sermon helps for pastor, E. J. Friedrich, who served on the St. Louis faculty at a later time than Walther, said, "The greatest need in the church today is solid, substantial, thorough preaching of the Law and the Gospel on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and with

forthright, pointed applications to the problems of our people."<sup>65</sup> This statement is one with which all orthodox Lutheran will agree.

-- Rev. Ernest Bartels

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ewald M. Plass, What Luther Says: An Anthology 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 2:733.

<sup>2</sup>A. R. Kretzmann, Law and Gospel (n.p.: Faith Forward Executive Committee The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, n.d.), iv.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Bergendoff, 119.

<sup>5</sup>Plass, 2:732.

<sup>6</sup>Kretzmann, i.

<sup>7</sup>Plass, 2:732.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 744.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Siegbert W. Becker, The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982), 141.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 225-226.

<sup>15</sup>Bohlmann, 69.

<sup>16</sup>Bente, 121.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 801.

<sup>19</sup>Tappert, 558.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 561.

<sup>21</sup>Preus, Post-Reformation, 1:98.

<sup>22</sup>Heinrich Schmid, Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 3d rev. ed. 1875. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, rpt.), 511.

<sup>23</sup>C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 37.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 41.      <sup>25</sup>Ibid., 30.      <sup>26</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 35.      <sup>28</sup>Ibid.      <sup>29</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>30</sup>Pieper, 3:245.

<sup>31</sup>John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology: A Handbook of Scriptural Principles (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), 69.

<sup>32</sup>Mayer, 166.

<sup>33</sup>Preus, Post-Reformation, 1:261.

<sup>34</sup>Kretzmann, 22.      <sup>35</sup>Bohlmann, 71.

<sup>36</sup>Tappert, 419.      <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 304.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.      <sup>39</sup>Ibid., 561.      <sup>40</sup>Ibid., 478.

<sup>41</sup>Schmid, 511.      <sup>42</sup>Ibid., 517.

<sup>43</sup>Pieper, 3:222.      <sup>44</sup>Meyer, 2:41.

<sup>45</sup>E. W. Koehler, Catechism, 34.

<sup>46</sup>Becker, 227: Theodore Laetsch, ed., The Abiding Word: An Anthology of Doctrinal Essays 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946-1960), 2:110-111; Meyer, 2: 45.

- <sup>47</sup>Becker, 227; Meyer, 2:45; Mueller, 475.
- <sup>48</sup>Becker, 227; Engelder, 79; Meyer, 2:45; Mueller, 473-474.
- <sup>49</sup>Becker, 227; Engelder, 70; Laetsch, 1:112; Meyer, 2:45; Mueller, 473.
- <sup>50</sup>Becker, 227; Meyer, 2:45; Pieper, 3:232.
- <sup>51</sup>Becker, 227; Laetsch, 1:112; Meyer, 2:45.
- <sup>52</sup>Becker, 228; Meyer, 2:46.
- <sup>53</sup>Becker, 228; Laetsch, 1:112; Meyer, 2:45.
- <sup>54</sup>Becker, 228; Kretzmann, 11; Meyer, 2:46.
- <sup>55</sup>Becker, 228; Kretzmann, 11; Meyer, 2:46; Mueller, 473; Pieper, 3:232.
- <sup>56</sup>Becker, 228; Laetsch, 1:105, 114; Meyer, 2:46; Mueller, 473; Pieper, 3:232.
- <sup>57</sup>Bohlmann, 72.                      <sup>58</sup>Tappert, 562.
- <sup>59</sup>Meyer, 2:47; Mueller, 484; Pieper, 3:247-249.
- <sup>60</sup>Mueller, 484; Pieper, 3:241.
- <sup>61</sup>Walther, Law and Gospel, VIII.
- <sup>62</sup>Ibid., 1-2;            <sup>63</sup>Ibid., 2-3;            <sup>64</sup>Ibid., 4.
- <sup>65</sup>Sermonic Studies: The Standard Epistles  
2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957-1963).