

Foreword

In this issue of the *Quarterly* we are pleased to share with our readers the 2006 annual Reformation Lectures, delivered on October 26–27, 2006, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the thirty-ninth in the series of annual Reformation Lectures which began in 1967.

This year there were three presenters. The first lecture was given by the Rev. Prof. Joel Pless, who is professor of New Testament and history at Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He joined the faculty in 2000 after serving as pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church, Rib Falls, and Zion Lutheran Church, Marathon, Wisconsin, and instructor at Northland Lutheran High School in Mosinee, Wisconsin. Prof. Pless received his A.A. and B.A. degrees from Concordia College (now Concordia University) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and his M.Div. and S.T.M. degrees from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. He is currently completing his doctorate in historical theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, writing on the topic "The Doctrine of the Ministry in the Writings of George Stoeckhardt." Prof. Pless serves as a monthly pulpit assistant at St. John Lutheran Church, Mukwonago, WI. He has published scholarly journal articles in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, the *WELS Historical Institute Journal* and *The Lutheran Historical Conference Essays and Reports*. Prof. Pless and his wife Linda have three children.

The second presenter was the Rev. Peter M. Prange, who is the pastor of Jerusalem Lutheran Church in Morton Grove, Illinois. He previously served as pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, Florida. He received his B.A. from Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin (1994), and his M.Div. from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin (1998). The Rev. Prange serves as a member of the WELS Hymnal Supplement Committee and the Commission on Inter-Church Relations. He and his wife Tarren have a two-year-old son, Lucas.

The third presenter was the Rev. Prof. Stephen Geiger, who is professor of New Testament and Education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. He joined the faculty in 2005 after

servicing as pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Yankton, South Dakota. At that time he also served as campus ministry pastor at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion and as district secretary for the WELS Dakota-Montana District. Prof. Geiger is a contributing editor for *Forward in Christ* and is enrolled in a Masters in Classics program at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, with an emphasis in Greek. In addition he serves as co-editor of *Come Worship Christ*, a multi-media congregational course on Lutheran Worship. Stephen and his wife Anna are expecting their first child in May 2007.

The theme of the lectures was “Biblical Exegesis in the Synodical Conference.” The first lecture, presented by Professor Joel Pless, was entitled “G. Stoeckhardt: The Exegetical Task.” The second lecturer, the Rev. Peter Prange, presented “J.P. Koehler: The Exegetical Task.” The third lecture, by Professor Stephen Geiger, was entitled “R.C.H. Lenski: The Exegetical Task.”

Exegesis is a drawing out or extracting of the true meaning of the biblical text and thus a knowledge of the biblical languages is very important. It is then a study of the original Hebrew or Greek texts in order to understand the precise meaning of the words, phrases and sentences. Exegesis is the basis for systematic theology. Here the doctrines of Scripture are placed in a systematic and orderly form so that they may be logically presented with other doctrines for the purpose of teaching these truths according to the admonition of St. Paul, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13).

The Rev. Bruce Wilmot Adams of Glenowrie, South Australia, has written an article entitled *Anglo-Lutheran Confessor and Martyr Dr. Robert Barnes (1495–1540)*. This article gives valuable information concerning the early history of Lutheranism in the British Isles.

A review essay has been written by Ryan MacPherson, Ph.D., of the department of history at Bethany Lutheran College. This is a review of two books authored by Allen Quist, namely, *Fed Ed: The New Federal Curriculum* and *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom*, both of which evaluate government education standards.

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G. Stoeckhardt: *The Exegetical Task*

Joel L. Pless

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church: Good morning, fellow theologians of the cross. First of all, I would like to thank the Bethany community and more specifically, the Bethany Reformation Lectures Committee, for their gracious invitation to be one of the presenters at your annual lecture series. I am truly honored, and for the rest of my life will rejoice, that I will now have the privilege of counting myself as a “presenter alumnus” of the renowned Bethany Reformation Lectures. Before your kind invitation came to me last fall, my only other claim to fame in life was that by the grace of God I had the good fortune of meeting, falling in love with, and eventually marrying a 1981 graduate of Bethany Lutheran College, Linda Siewert. From nearly twenty years of personal experience, I can rightly say that Bethany truly produces *quality* graduates, who are committed to a life of Christian discipleship.

For the past three years I have been occupying some of my time with an extensive study of the life and writings of Dr. Karl George Stöckhardt, known here in America as George Stoeckhardt. I have had an interest in Stoeckhardt since my own seminary days and it was further enhanced by my “Walther professor” down at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Dr. Thomas Manteufel. Dr. Manteufel suggested that I write my Ph.D. dissertation on how Stoeckhardt in his various writings understood the doctrine of the ministry. I accepted the suggestion and am now finishing the first draft of the dissertation. Chapter two of this dissertation focuses on George Stoeckhardt’s exegetical method, which fits very well with my assigned topic for this morning, “G. Stoeckhardt: The Exegetical Task.”

In order to present a complete picture of George Stoeckhardt the theologian and exegete, I believe it is essential that we wait several minutes before we study how Stoeckhardt approached the task of biblical exegesis. I believe the wisest course of action is to

begin with a brief but comprehensive study of his life. Stoeckhardt spent fully half of his life in Europe before coming to America in the fall of 1878 to be the pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, St. Louis. His educational and ministerial experiences in Europe were indeed formative for his later ministry in America. The lion's share of our time will, of course, be spent examining Stoeckhardt's doctrine of Scripture and how he went about the exegetical task of mining the truths of God's Word. The third and final portion of this presentation will be a summary of what can be learned from the life, ministry and writings of Dr. George Stoeckhardt to enhance the ministries and vocations into which God has called each of us.

Part 1: The Life and Ministry of George Stoeckhardt

To date, no full-length biography of George Stoeckhardt has ever been written. Shortly after his death, a memorial book in the form of a brief biography was written by Stoeckhardt's longtime friend, Rev. Otto Willkomm. In time this book was translated into English as senior church history projects by two students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon. Willkomm's book provides the most complete information available on Stoeckhardt's life, especially his background, education and ministerial experiences in Germany. Unless otherwise noted, the information presented to you comes from the pages of Willkomm's book.¹

George Stoeckhardt was born on February 17, 1842 in Chemnitz in the Kingdom of Saxony, a full generation before Chancellor Bismarck created a united Germany. By the time of his birth, Stoeckhardt's family line had produced over twenty Lutheran pastors for the Saxon *Landeskirche*, the state church of Saxony. His parents were Julius and Rosalie Stoeckhardt. Stoeckhardt's father was a chemist but both his grandfather and uncle were pastors. In 1847 Stoeckhardt's family moved to Tharandt, Saxony where his father took a teaching position at the Royal Forest Academy. Stoeckhardt attended the city school in Tharandt. When he was fifteen he enrolled in the gymnasium, St. Afra, in Meissen. Upon his graduation, he was accepted into the University of Erlangen, Bavaria.

It was at this time that young George Stoeckhardt became active in the *Wingolf*, what today would be called a Christian student fraternity. He developed a number of lifelong friendships in this organization. Several members of this *Wingolf* organization eventually became prominent leaders in the Missouri Synod. What separated this student fraternity from other student groups in the German university system was that it renounced “academic fencing.” This was a type of ritual duel between university students which had as its objective inflicting a non-fatal wound on the face of the combatants, so for the rest of their lives the duelers had bragging scars. I trust that Bethany has never had such a custom!

The *Wingolf* in contrast was a distinctly Christian organization that sought to make a clear confession of the life and work of Jesus Christ. After spending only a year at Erlangen, Stoeckhardt transferred to Leipzig, where he spent five semesters. It was here that Stoeckhardt took the initiative of founding a Leipzig chapter of the *Wingolf*. He took pains to make sure this chapter’s constitution contained a clear confession of the deity of Christ.

During the winter of 1865–1866 Stoeckhardt took the candidate’s examination. He then did what many other well-heeled German university students did in the nineteenth century, he made the rounds of some of the other universities in Germany to get a sampling of the lectures of professors who had become famous. During this time he went to Berlin to listen to several famous names. After some more traveling he went to Bavaria and met Loehe at Neuendettelsau. It was here in Bavaria that Stoeckhardt heard about how confessional Lutheranism was on the rise in America, and it was from Loehe that he first heard how Saxon and Franconian Lutherans had founded the Missouri Synod.

After further visits to both Erlangen and Marburg, Stoeckhardt, perhaps with some assistance and encouragement from his home pastor, Rev. Ernst Seidel, accepted a position to serve as the headmaster and teacher at the Luisen Academy, a girls’ school in Tharandt. Here he taught religion and several other subjects from 1867–1870, when the school moved to another location.

After briefly considering a career as a missionary to East India, Stoeckhardt turned down an offer from the Leipzig Mission

for an assignment and instead focused on a career in the German university system. After turning down a teaching position in Breslau, Stoeckhardt applied to be a tutor at Erlangen. To prepare for the faculty examination, he moved to Paris in the late spring of 1870 to serve as an assistant pastor at a German-Lutheran church. This invitation came from one of his friends from the *Wingolf* days.

It was here in France that Stoeckhardt truly developed a heart for pastoral ministry and for sharing the Word of God. After a ministry of only a matter of weeks in Paris, the Franco-Prussian War broke out in July of 1870. Stoeckhardt and other German nationals were soon ordered to leave the city. On the way to Belgium, Stoeckhardt found his way to the Sedan battlefield where he began to minister to sick and wounded German soldiers as a hospital chaplain. It was here especially that Stoeckhardt honed his skills as a *Seelsorger*, a pastor to sick and wounded souls.

The source of information for this chapter of Stoeckhardt's life is a series of articles that eventually were collected and published as a little booklet with the title translated into English: *The Battlefield of the Sedan: Memories from the War Year*.² In these articles Stoeckhardt tells story after story of how he ministered to his countrymen who had been ravaged by battle wounds and disease, especially typhus. He and a number of other pastors made regular visits to the numerous military hospitals that were set up to care for the casualties the war produced. In one particularly memorable account, Stoeckhardt was led by a soldier to a French chateau or castle. Finding the door locked, Stoeckhardt, a young man at the time, managed to climb through a window into the building. There he found a horrifying sight. In several halls were about seventy sick or wounded Prussian and Bavarian soldiers, lying there helpless "swimming in their blood and pus." With steady compassion Stoeckhardt made the most out of this grisly scene by immediately pulling a New Testament out of his pocket and proceeding to prepare many of these soldiers for their impending death. Stoeckhardt later remarked that the dying soldiers appreciated the ministrations of a fellow countryman. In another traumatic scene, he came to the bedside of a Bavarian artilleryman whose leg had been amputated and who had suffered a severe head wound. Stoeckhardt's gentle

ministrations were greeted with shrieks from the delirious man. He then began to pray the Lord's Prayer with other soldiers who had gathered around the man's bedside. The wounded soldier heard the prayer, ended his shrieks and attempted to fold his hands. The following night the soldier died.

The major battles of the Franco-Prussian War soon ended and Stoeckhardt's work as a hospital chaplain eventually came to an end. He returned to his native Saxony and resumed his preparations to take the faculty examination. He soon began to serve as a tutor and religion instructor at the gymnasium in Erlangen. He was eventually denied the right to be a lecturer at the university because the theological faculty rejected his dissertation entitled, "The Son of Man."

New chapters of Stoeckhardt's life were beginning to unfold. In September of 1873, George Stoeckhardt was issued a call by the Saxon *Landeskirche* to serve as an assistant pastor of a congregation in Planitz, Saxony. The following month, he married Anna Koenig, a relative of his home pastor, and began his ministry as a parish pastor. Stoeckhardt's three years in the service of the state church were not happy ones. He and several other pastors immediately protested the lax moral conditions in their parishes, but largely to no avail. After protesting repeatedly and authoring pamphlets in which he described the unevangelical doctrine and practice of the Saxon state church, Stoeckhardt eventually severed his ties to the *Landeskirche* in June of 1876 and joined the nascent *Freikirche* in Saxony which had close ties with the now generation-old Missouri Synod.

In sharp contrast to his experience in the rationalistic state church, Stoeckhardt's two years in the Saxon *Freikirche* were happy and productive ones. Within a month, Stoeckhardt and two other men became editors of the *Freikirche's* new periodical. The founding of the new synod was formally completed a few weeks later. After a few months, Stoeckhardt took it upon himself to found a "Latin school," a minuscule gymnasium to prepare young men for the Lutheran ministry. It was in existence for two years before a lack of students and Stoeckhardt's call to St. Louis permanently closed it. The school met in Stoeckhardt's parsonage. During this

time, Stoeckhardt served as an assistant pastor in the *Freikirche* congregation in Planitz and busied himself with being a confessional Lutheran voice in Saxony. He soon began to accumulate enemies who tried to make life miserable for him. He was formally charged with committing slander against some officials of the state church. Only a call to be pastor of Holy Cross Ev. Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri spared him further legal trouble in Saxony.

Upon his arrival in St. Louis in October of 1878, Stoeckhardt within a matter of days began teaching Hebrew exegesis part-time at Concordia Seminary. Dr. C. F. W. Walther preached his installation sermon shortly before Christmas of that year. Stoeckhardt then began a nine-year ministry as pastor of Holy Cross, St. Louis, which was the congregation where the majority of the faculty and students of Concordia Seminary attended. During his parish ministry, Stoeckhardt was especially known for his pastoral visitations to all of his members which he conducted annually. He also began what is called today fieldwork education for the St. Louis seminary students, namely, having them make regular visits to patients in the city's hospitals. All the while he was serving the Holy Cross parish Stoeckhardt also served as a part-time professor of Old and New Testament exegesis at Concordia Seminary.

Less than a year after his arrival in St. Louis, Stoeckhardt also began writing for Missouri Synod periodicals. In 1880, at the height of the Election Controversy, Stoeckhardt began publishing articles in *Lehre und Wehre* on election. In September of that year he delivered a lengthy exegetical presentation on election at a general pastoral conference of Missouri Synod pastors in Chicago. The following year Stoeckhardt was formally called by the Missouri Synod's annual convention to serve as a part-time professor of Old and New Testament exegesis at Concordia. At the dedication of the new Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in September of 1883, he delivered a Latin address on the errors of modern Lutheran theology.

Stoeckhardt faithfully served Holy Cross Lutheran Church, one block west of Concordia Seminary, for nine years. After the deaths of Dr. C. F. W. Walther and Prof. Gottlieb Schaller in 1887, Stoeckhardt began a full-time teaching career at Concordia. With

some interruptions because of illness, he taught at Concordia for the rest of his life, from 1887–1913. Concordia Seminary catalogs during these years reveal that Stoeckhardt taught exegetical courses on numerous books of the Bible. The books of the Bible that he lectured on most will sound very familiar to students and graduates of either Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary or Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, and Romans. The regular exegetical study of these biblical books at the seminary level, all which present vital truths of God's message of salvation, could be legitimately seen as a lasting legacy of Dr. George Stoeckhardt in two of the synods that made up the former Synodical Conference.

Due to a variety of circumstances, not only did George Stoeckhardt educate future Missouri Synod pastors, but also for several years he had the opportunity to educate students from other Lutheran synods as well. During the years that the Wisconsin Synod did not have a separate seminary of its own, 1869–1878, three of the students that George Stoeckhardt taught were future Wisconsin Synod seminary professors: John Philipp Koehler, August Pieper and John Schaller. Although by the time he arrived in St. Louis, the Norwegian Synod had opened its own seminary in Madison, Wisconsin (1876), Stoeckhardt still had the opportunity to teach several Norwegian Synod students in the early portion of his career.³

Stoeckhardt's ability as a preacher was honed in Germany and he made a memorable impression on his hearers at Holy Cross. Several who heard him remarked that he had an unusual delivery in a very noticeable Saxon brogue that took some time to get used to. His sermons were characterized not by high eloquence or memorable anecdotes, but by their solid doctrinal content and his earnestness in presenting the truths of salvation. Stoeckhardt was a regular contributor to the Missouri Synod's homiletics journal and in time some of his Advent and Lenten sermons were published in book format.

In September of 1898, shortly after his adopted country's victory in the Spanish-American War, George Stoeckhardt suffered a staggering blow. Shortly before their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary Stoeckhardt's wife Anna died. Stoeckhardt and his

wife did not have any children of their own, but in America they adopted two boys. One became a pastor and the other a St. Louis businessman. Stoeckhardt dealt with his loss by immersing himself into his work to the point that he began to suffer from nervous exhaustion. In the spring of 1900 he was forced to take a leave of absence from his teaching duties at Concordia because of a nervous disorder. In the fall of that year Stoeckhardt's concerned friends and relatives had the venerable professor committed to the Missouri Baptist Sanitarium in St. Louis for treatment of this disorder. In October of 1900, after a number of weeks at this institution, the still delirious Stoeckhardt escaped one evening from the sanitarium and after a chase of several blocks was apprehended by members of the St. Louis police force and returned. One St. Louis newspaper which covered the event sympathetically concluded: "About a year ago Mrs. Stoeckhardt died and the professor grieved over her death so intensely and applied himself so studiously to his work that his present mental affection is not entirely unexpected."⁴

Stoeckhardt eventually recovered from his nervous disorder. This appears to be at least partially due to the care of a woman eighteen years his junior, Mary Kohne of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania whom Stoeckhardt married in the fall of 1901. The recovered Stoeckhardt now began the final portion of his academic career. He resumed his teaching at Concordia Seminary and he began publishing renowned commentaries which are still in use today. He was awarded an honorary doctorate in 1903 by Luther Seminary, Hamline, Minnesota. In conjunction with the work of his brother-in-law, Prof. August Pieper of the Wisconsin Synod, who published an extensive commentary on Isaiah 40-66, Stoeckhardt published a much shorter commentary on Isaiah 1-12 in 1902. Three more commentaries on New Testament epistles would follow: Romans in 1907, Ephesians in 1910 and 1 Peter in 1912. It is interesting to note that before the nervous disorder which sidelined him for over a year, the only commentary work that Stoeckhardt published was in two cursory commentaries on Old and New Testament histories, which were based on many of the morning devotions he conducted at Concordia Seminary.

While his wife of twelve years was away attending a

relative's funeral in Pittsburgh, George Stoeckhardt died suddenly of a massive stroke at his home on Ohio Street across the street from Holy Cross on January 9, 1913. Four days later, his brother-in-law and pastor, Rev. C. C. Schmidt, conducted his funeral at Holy Cross. The mortal body of Dr. George Stoeckhardt was laid to rest at Concordia Cemetery, near the tomb of his seminary colleague, Dr. C. F. W. Walther. A tall granite cross now marks his grave, symbolizing the Savior whom George Stoeckhardt trusted in and shared with the world.

Part 2: Stoeckhardt's Exegetical Methodology

George Stoeckhardt will be remembered in American Lutheranism first and foremost as an exegete. Accolades concerning his exegetical skills are legion and range across a wide spectrum of theologians: "The greatest exegete in American Lutheranism" is how O. P. Kretzmann, president of Valparaiso University, described Stoeckhardt in 1946.⁵ "The present writer has met no theologian who possessed such a knowledge of Scripture as did Stoeckhardt, especially in the New Testament, of course in the original," so wrote a former student of his, August Pieper, a longtime seminary professor for the Wisconsin Synod.⁶ Pieper went on to describe how Stoeckhardt had the ability to quote any section of the New Testament by heart in Greek, along with the section's parallel passages.⁷ "In a certain sense Stoeckhardt was the sharpest theologian in our midst. In fact, because of his complete Gospel attitude no one put the edge to the Law sharper than he," so wrote another former student, John Philipp Koehler, a seminary colleague of August Pieper.⁸ "The first exegete of the Missouri Synod," so wrote Leigh D. Jordahl, a Lutheran church historian, who served in more than one synod during his lifetime.⁹ "Stoeckhardt was a scholar of the first rank...gifted with a deep insight into the revealed truths of the Word, and he had a remarkable ability to preach and write in clear, simple language," so memorialized Wilbert Gawrisch of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on the occasion of the sesquicentennial of Stoeckhardt's birth in 1992.¹⁰ "He was a master of exegesis," is the way church historian J. L. Neve of the former United Lutheran Church described Stoeckhardt in his

American Lutheran history.¹¹ The accolades could be extended much further. Clearly George Stoeckhardt has left an indelible mark on the history and practice of biblical exegesis in American Lutheranism.

The second portion of my paper will address how Stoeckhardt regarded the Bible and will examine his exegetical methodology. Stoeckhardt's understanding of Scripture and how he went about the exegetical task has been thoroughly studied before. The most comprehensive study is the 1964 dissertation by William E. Goerss, "Some of the Hermeneutical Presuppositions and Part of the Exegetical Methodology of Georg Stoeckhardt." William J. Hassold's 1971 dissertation, "A Case Study in Exegetical Methodology: Georg Stoeckhardt and Johann Philip (sic) Koehler on Ephesians," compares how Stoeckhardt and Koehler differed in their understanding of the interpretation of Ephesians by examining their underlying exegetical methodologies. Richard Baepler's thesis, "The Hermeneutics of Johannes Christian Konrad von Hofmann with Special Reference to His Influence on Georg Stoeckhardt," provides insight to how Stoeckhardt developed his exegetical method from his most influential teacher, while all the while avoiding Hofmann's theological pitfalls.

George Stoeckhardt's view and understanding of the Holy Scriptures can be readily understood to be orthodox Lutheran. The most complete set of writings on his view of the Bible is the serial set of articles he authored in *Lehre und Wehre* with the English title: "What Does the Scripture Say about Itself?" These articles form Stoeckhardt's main polemic against the modernists of his day who denied the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Stoeckhardt presents his doctrine of Scripture in three major theses with numerous subordinate points in his lengthy journal article which was published serially over the space of half a year in *Lehre und Wehre*. Other samples of Stoeckhardt's writings could easily be cited as well. Since the essayist was assigned to present a paper on how George Stoeckhardt went about the exegetical task, it will be simply stated that George Stoeckhardt's view of Scripture is readily recognizable as confessional and orthodox Lutheran. Through his periodical articles and his commentaries Stoeckhardt consistently demonstrated a high view of the Bible and regarded it as the inspired, inerrant and

infallible Word of God. This fact also is thoroughly displayed in his pastoral ministrations and in his homiletics.

Stoeckhardt's high regard for the Bible prompted him to have a very definite hermeneutic and exegetical method. Johann von Hofmann's influence on Stoeckhardt's exegetical method has already been mentioned. An influence that is much more relevant is that of another Hofmann, Carl Gottlob Hofmann, who authored a hermeneutics text in 1754, *Institutiones Theologiae Exegeticae (Institutes of Exegetical Theology)*. This book, written entirely in Latin, was reprinted by the Missouri Synod for use at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1876, two years before Stoeckhardt came to America. Stoeckhardt used Carl Hofmann's textbook on hermeneutics and exegesis in his seminary lectures. This information is revealed in William Hassold's 1971 dissertation in footnote #59, where Hassold describes Carl Hofmann's work as a "systematic survey of the principles of biblical hermeneutics from a confessional Lutheran viewpoint."¹² Hofmann's text has never been completely translated into English, but there are both German and English seminary notes extant which are largely based on the Hofmann text.¹³ It appears that this textbook on exegetical theology was *ground zero* for many of the confessional Lutheran hermeneutical principles which were taught to pastors of the former Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference.

What were George Stoeckhardt's main hermeneutical principles, which he employed in doing exegesis? Stoeckhardt's chief hermeneutical principle was to take the biblical text literally, unless there was a compelling reason not to: "One must take the text as it reads."¹⁴ This position is one that Stoeckhardt consistently follows throughout his exegetical work. In his Isaiah commentary he further explains his understanding of how Scripture uses figurative language. Stoeckhardt maintained that while the prophets of the Old Testament used a great deal of figurative language, the correct sense and understanding of it springs to the eyes of the impartial reader. William Goerss regularly comments in his dissertation that Stoeckhardt interpreted the words of Scripture in their simple sense, holding to the Word as it stands and the obvious meaning of the words as they read.¹⁵ In the introduction to his New Testament

commentary, Stoeckhardt explained at length that the Bible itself is the sole source of its interpretation principles.¹⁶

Few biblical exegetes are masters of both Old and New Testament exegesis. Usually one specializes in one or the other. George Stoeckhardt was truly a master exegete of both Testaments. In his Old Testament interpretation Stoeckhardt consistently demonstrated that the promise of the Messiah was the focal point of the Old Testament and that a red cord of redemption ran through the entire Old Testament. This red cord of redemption found its fulfillment in New Testament times in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his commentary on selected psalms, Stoeckhardt uses the German expression *Kern und Stern* (heart and star, the guiding light) to describe the preeminent place of Christ in the Bible.¹⁷

George Stoeckhardt's doctrine of Scripture and his hermeneutical principles can be legitimately described as thoroughly Lutheran. A complete study of his life reveals that Stoeckhardt never wanted to be anything but a confessional Lutheran. Since Stoeckhardt was the first prominent exegete in the history of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, how exactly did he implement his view of Scripture and his hermeneutics by doing exegesis? What precisely was his exegetical method?

Stoeckhardt's exegetical method, at least while a professor of Old and New Testament exegesis at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, can be understood with the arbitrary paradigm of having a beginning period, (1878-1887), a middle period (1887-1900) and a late period (1902-1913). Stoeckhardt began teaching exegesis at Concordia in 1878, the same month he was installed as pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church. He along with the rest of the St. Louis faculty soon became embroiled in the Election Controversy, which reached its height in the Synodical Conference in the early 1880s. In 1885, after the controversy had died down somewhat, Stoeckhardt published his article regarding a pastor's study of theology, "On the Scriptural Study of Theology." In the opening paragraph, Stoeckhardt reminded his readers: "Bible reading, the study of Scripture is also a special and holy duty of the preacher and theologian."¹⁸ He then confessed that one of the positive results of the tumultuous Election

Controversy was a renewed interest in serious Bible study:

Precisely in these days God has pointed us toward Scripture, as with an outstretched finger. The doctrinal strife of the last years has directed us once more into Scripture. We have become aware anew of the proper principle of Lutheran theology, and that is the scriptural principle. We confront face to face old and new opponents and hold fast: We let the Word remain, as it reads, and we renounce on principle all rational harmonizing.¹⁹

Stoeckhardt then attempts to prick the consciences of the readers of *Lehre und Wehre* by asking this searching question about the priority that the earnest study of Scripture receives in the economy of time for a pastor: “Which preacher has not caused himself somewhat yet the rebuke, that he, on account of other unimportant things, neglects Scripture and the study of Scripture in the press of official business, and has not given the appropriate justice to the Word which God spoke?”²⁰

Stoeckhardt then proceeds in this journal article to review how and why a theologian should study Scripture. His first point is to quote from the apostle Paul’s first letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 4:13: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” “Take up and read” the Word of God is job number one for a pastor according to Stoeckhardt. He is quick to point out that it is not enough for a pastor to be the “house father” and edify himself only by the morning and evening devotions with his family. Reflecting on his own practice to take his New Testament with him wherever he went on a trip, Stoeckhardt declared that if a Roman Catholic priest can take his breviary on a trip, then an evangelical preacher can take his New Testament on a trip as well.²¹ Stoeckhardt’s first major point in teaching the why and how of the study of Scripture is that “every theologian should walk through the Scriptures and overall be at home with them.”²²

Stoeckhardt’s second exhortation to pastors in “On the Scriptural Study of Theology” is that a theologian should meditate on Scripture day and night. A pastor should not spin threads of thought from his own wisdom, which will only produce theological hay, straw and stubble. Instead a pastor takes out godly thoughts, which God himself lays down in the Scriptures. A pastor establishes

his thoughts from Scripture and in Scripture. When this is done, a shepherd is able to perceive correctly the sense and meaning of the Holy Spirit. Thus great attention has to be shown to be sure of the connected thoughts. One easily gets into distorted ways when he rashly, as it appears, takes out intended thoughts from Scripture and then he himself disengages from Scripture, following up with his own thoughts. In the inner cohesiveness of Scripture belongs, strictly speaking, all of Scripture. Every doctrine of the divine Word has its own particular seat, and appears only then in the proper light, when one places and contemplates it in its particular place of discovery. Error originates most often, therefore, when one introduces positions of Scripture which do not belong to the subject.²³ Stoeckhardt continues by reiterating the principle that Scripture must be interpreted with other Scripture:

So one must compare Scripture with Scripture, apostles with apostles, the apostles with the prophets. And continuous reading, continuous contemplation of Scripture, namely all of the Holy Scriptures, leads here to the earliest and best success. Our knowledge and perception is and remains moreover patchwork. So no theologian should multiply the gaps excessively, in that he permits to lie neglected whole parts, whole books of the Scriptures.²⁴

Stoeckhardt's last word regarding the importance of meditation is meant to serve as a warning to pastors and theologians: "Diligent, continuous meditation brings also *tentatio* (temptation) with it, for the devil is in all respects impeding to the Word, and propels one into prayer. And so scriptural study makes proper theology."²⁵

Stoeckhardt saw the importance of using the right tools to draw out the meaning of the sacred text. He also stressed to his readers the importance of understanding the grammar and syntax in the task of biblical exegesis:

It may never be forgotten, that the divine thoughts exactly in the Word, which lies written before our eyes, like the sword in the sheath, are contained and concealed. On that account proper study of Scripture, proper meditation of manifold divine truth, is not possible without one also turning his attention to

the individual words, sentences and to the sentence structure. Whoever is always conscious that the Holy Spirit has taught, placed and arranged the words, will consider the trouble it is worth to be continuously occupied with vocables, lexicon and grammar. Whoever has not learned to read the Bible in the original text, has sufficient means of help, to investigate the precise literal sense of the Word.²⁶

Stoeckhardt concludes his article on the importance of the continuous study of the Scriptures by assuring his readers that when a pastor continuously draws from the source and norm of theology, the Scriptures, then and only then will the doctrine of Scripture be a living thing. He will be a man who is instructive, capable and qualified to teach others. The remaining portion of the article deals with how a pastor puts the continuous study of Scripture into practical use in his parish ministry and calls for him to be a daily reader and meditator of Scripture, calling the study of Scripture “inseminating” for the parish ministry.²⁷

George Stoeckhardt taught at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis for nearly thirty-five years. At the time the teaching method at Concordia was almost entirely limited to lectures, often before large classes. Several years after his death, some of Stoeckhardt’s classroom lectures on various biblical books began to be translated into English by a handful of his former students who were nearing the end of their own ministries. Rev. H. W. Degner was responsible for all of these translations. In some of the prefaces of these translations, mostly on New Testament books, Degner described how Stoeckhardt approached the exegetical task in both the middle part and the latter part of his career at St. Louis. In the 1894–1895 school year, Stoeckhardt lectured on the epistle to the Philippians. Using Gabelsberg stenography, one of the students in the class, H. E. Meyer, recorded the lectures. Degner translated these lecture notes into a running commentary on Philippians.

According to Degner and other Stoeckhardt students at the time, Stoeckhardt performed the exegetical task in class often without notes, just the original Hebrew and Greek text in front of him. At least in class, his exegetical work seemed to be extemporaneous, and often his lectures differed in detail but remained the same in substance. Degner relates his own classroom experience with Stoeckhardt as his professor of exegesis in the preface of two

Dr. Stoeckhardt never lectured with a fixed manuscript in hand. All that we students saw was the sacred text in the original before him and at times a little piece of paper with a scribbled note in his right. And we have long looked in vain for the manuscripts of his classroom lectures. All we found was a drawer filled with brief handwritten notes, rather harder for us to decipher than our shorthand records. But these notes seem to cover practically every book in the Bible. We have also discovered, when the venerable Doctor from year to year lectured to different classes on the same subject, his lectures differed widely both in diction and detail, while the substance proved to be the same.²⁸

He did not read these lectures from carefully prepared manuscripts, but he delivered them extempore, with only the original text before him. Some of his students carefully took down in shorthand every word he said. Today only these records of these lectures remain. And it is to these that this writer had decided to confine his efforts for reproducing Dr. Stoeckhardt's exegesis.²⁹

Translated notes of Stoeckhardt's exegetical lectures were eventually published for eighteen selected psalms and the book of Micah in the Old Testament and for the New Testament books of 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Titus, 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation.

The format of these lecture booklets is consistently the same. Stoeckhardt performed the exegetical task in the St. Louis classroom by reading a verse in the vernacular and then offering extemporaneous comments on the vocables and grammar. Stoeckhardt's comments on Philippians 2:9 would be typical of these lecture transcripts:

V. 9: 'Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.' (KJV) 'Therefore (dio), because of His humble mind and willing obedience,' God has exalted Him, so that that which God did for Christ corresponds to that which Christ did for God. And so God exalted Christ as He well deserved. Meyer thinks Christ merited His exaltation. However, that is not necessarily expressed in our text. God was pleased with the mind He saw in Christ, and that good pleasure He revealed by exalting Christ.³⁰

Stoeckhardt's exegesis of this single verse continued for five additional paragraphs. The main focus of his exegetical method is commenting on the doctrinal content of the verses, with often brief references to what other commentators have remarked on the meaning of the verse being studied, followed by Stoeckhardt's often polemical rejoinders. Stoeckhardt then often supplied a brief application of the verse at hand. His comments on 1 John 5:4 would be typical of the applications found in the translations of these seminary lectures:

'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.' Whoever is born of God has God dwelling in his heart, and God is stronger than the world. In the world sin and unrighteousness hold their sway. That men hate and hurt each other, as much as they can, that belongs to the way of the world. The world does not know love. And Christians, living in this evil world, are exposed to all its evils and even find in their natural heart an innate propensity towards bitterness and hatred. But then they remember that a divine germ has been implanted in their heart. They believe in Jesus Christ, and so they know that they are born of God. And the new life in them overcomes the old man. And so a Christian can suppress and overcome the old man. And so a Christian can suppress and overcome the evil that springs from his own flesh and blood. The good in Christians is stronger than the evil.³¹

This procedure and format appears to have been the way Stoeckhardt publicly taught exegesis in the seminary classroom throughout his teaching career. Some of these published transcripts came from lectures done in 1898 and some from the last exegetical classes Stoeckhardt taught before his sudden death in January of 1913.³²

In Goerss' Appendix B he provides the information that "during the academic year of 1901-1902 Stoeckhardt was unable to teach his classes because of his severe illness."³³ The severe illness was his nervous disorder which struck him shortly after the death of his first wife. After his recovery and his remarriage, (not necessarily in that order), Stoeckhardt resumed teaching exegesis at Concordia and began immediately writing biblical commentaries. After completing a commentary on the first twelve chapters of Isaiah in 1902, Stoeckhardt completed a 600+ page commentary on Romans.

In this commentary's preface, Stoeckhardt provided an analysis of how he went about the exegetical task:

The epistle to the Romans is admittedly the foremost doctrinal writing of the New Testament. And so with this explanation it is the main duty of the exegete to expound the doctrinal contents. This is indeed not possible without a thorough investigation of the biblical text and context. The undersigned has endeavored with the work at hand, first to do justice to the linguistic aspect of the epistle. Then, however, above all, to correctly bring to the full consciousness to himself and the readers the eternal, divine thoughts which have been expressed in the apostolic circular. The pure historical interest in which many modern exegetes treat biblical books, and precisely also the epistles of the apostle, cannot lay claim to glory in a particular scholarly method. Every writing desires to be judged according to its own individuality and according to its own tendency. And the tendency of the Holy Scriptures is plainly obvious by itself and is testified clearly by Paul in 2 Tim. 3:16. The followed method in the at-issue commentary, continuous, coherent interpretation and development, as it finds itself also in Hofmann, Godet, and essentially also in Philippi, to me appears precisely to correspond to the above mentioned aim of exegesis.³⁴

Stoeckhardt's Romans commentary, followed by two other New Testament commentaries on Ephesians (1910) and 1 Peter (1912) reveal a consistent, mature exegetical method. As noted in the Romans preface, Stoeckhardt's exegetical methodology began with citing the text in the vernacular, followed by explanatory comments, often extended comments and analysis of the Greek vocabulary and grammar, followed by a running commentary of the text and often several applications for the reader. Stoeckhardt's Ephesians commentary contains no lengthy discussion of his exegetical method, while his introduction to 1 Peter deals strictly with isagogical matters pertaining to the letter itself.³⁵

Stoeckhardt's exegetical method in his commentaries is far more comprehensive and complete than his recorded exegetical lectures, many of which were recorded a decade earlier. The prevailing theme regarding how George Stoeckhardt proceeded to accomplish the exegetical task was to *deliver* the divinely intended meaning from the text. Then he proceeded to develop that meaning

with doctrinal appropriations, followed by practical applications. Together with drawing the meaning from the text and context of the passage, Stoeckhardt stressed the importance of a continuous and cohesive reading by the exegete of the entire Bible. This he believed was necessary to keep the major soteriological and Christological themes before the eyes of the exegete as he performed the exegetical task on a particular portion of the Bible.

William Dau summed up Stoeckhardt's skills as a biblical exegete in the encomium he wrote after Stoeckhardt's death. Dau, who knew Stoeckhardt personally as a colleague on the St. Louis faculty, attributed part of Stoeckhardt's exegetical genius to his ability to concentrate: "Stoeckhardt's power of concentration accounts for much of his unquestioned success as a teacher of exegesis."³⁶ Dau does not attribute a laborious treatment of the text, going through the text slowly and surely, word for word, to George Stoeckhardt. Instead, Dau describes Stoeckhardt's exegetical method after presenting the courses Stoeckhardt taught and the years he taught them:

This conspectus of the academic work of Stoeckhardt shows a centripetal tendency. He follows the sound method of leading the Bible student into a comprehensive and penetrating knowledge of the principal writings of the divine revelation, and making him thoroughly familiar with those books of the Bible which embody in the most striking form the marrow and the essence of the saving doctrine. It is like taking the classes to the great mountain ranges of God's Book, and leading them to the lofty summits, whence commanding views can be had of all the surrounding plains and valleys, rivers and rivulets of the prophetic and apostolic records. Thorough mastery of even one book of the Bible means very much for the general understanding of the entire Bible. How much more a good exposition of the principal portions, or writings, of both Testaments!³⁷

Dau continued his description of Stoeckhardt's exegetical method by describing how Stoeckhardt understood and wrote about biblical history. Dau reiterated Stoeckhardt's methodology of doing justice to the main features of each story in the Old and New Testament, all the while working to preserve the connection with the whole, showing how each story relates to the course of salvation history.³⁸

Dau continues his description of Stoeckhardt's exegetical skills by pointing out that while there is an element of charm for the method of exegesis which minutely dissects every aspect of the biblical text, Stoeckhardt's method is much to be preferred:

But we believe that the short and direct method of going at the great matters in the text benefits the exegetical tiro (novice) more. It goes without saying that the application of this method not only presupposes, on the part of the instructor, a comprehensive grasp of the entire contents of his text, but it also imposes great self-restraint on him. But it is self-restraint that reveals the master in any pursuit.³⁹

In further describing why Stoeckhardt succeeded as a biblical exegete, William Dau pointed out that Stoeckhardt's method was continually guided by a burning desire to make the text of Scripture plain:

Those who have read his late commentaries know that with his method he succeeds, not only to make the text of Scripture plain, even to men who are not extraordinarily proficient in the mastery of the original languages of the Bible text, but also in laying hold with a powerful grasp on the conscience and heart of his readers by his eminent ability to exhibit the practical bearing of Scripture on all sorts and conditions of men and affairs. His commentaries can be read with relish.... Stoeckhardt's commentaries were all written with an eye to their immediate use by pastors and theologians in the work of the Church. His summing up of the contents of a division or subdivision of the text he has expounded is always a valuable hint to the homilist or preacher how to present the contents properly and effectually in a discourse before the congregation. Frequently there comes into the current of his expository remarks a pious reflection, a devotional thought, that cools and refreshes, and relieves the mental tension created by the intricate argument which had preceded it, and makes the student see and feel the point of an excursus by direct application to his own spiritual life.⁴⁰

Dau concludes his comments on Stoeckhardt's exegetical skills by declaring that Stoeckhardt was an old school theologian, "to whom theology in all its manifestations is *'habitus practicus theosdotos.'*"⁴¹ He promised to any unbiased reader that a reader of Stoeckhardt's writings would find in these writings "one of the most

earnest efforts put forth in modern times to allow the Spirit to speak His real thought to the reader of God's Book."⁴² In summarizing George Stoeckhardt's exegetical method, the overarching theme for Stoeckhardt was the importance of carefully deriving God's revelation to sinful mankind from the Spirit-inspired words of the biblical text. Stoeckhardt was singularly guided by this principle and he always considered the ultimate goal of exegesis as making the Word of God *full of meaning* to the individual reader. Important to him also, was the process of an exegete continuously reading and meditating on the entire Bible, for only then could a Bible interpreter develop a comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the soteriological themes of Scripture. It was only with this soteriological theme in mind that Stoeckhardt then proceeded to do exegesis.

Part 3: Conclusions About George Stoeckhardt and His Exegetical Task

Fellow theologians of the cross: Thank you for inviting me to this beautiful campus on a hill to share the story of George Stoeckhardt. I have been doing a considerable amount of research about him the past couple of years and I do appreciate this golden opportunity to tell his story. For the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation it is a story worth telling and worth knowing. Here are some concluding thoughts about George Stoeckhardt and his exegetical method.

The topic of the 2006 Bethany Reformation Lectures is "Exegesis in the Synodical Conference." What would this essayist like his audience to remember the most about how George Stoeckhardt approached the exegetical task? A key contribution of Stoeckhardt is that he consistently taught and practiced constant or continuous (*anhaltendes*) and coherent (*zusammenhängende*) study of the Scriptures. Stoeckhardt regarded this as the most important work a pastor could do to hone his theological and pastoral aptitudes. Clearly Stoeckhardt shared with his illustrious student, John Philipp Koehler, the belief that one of the underlying causes of the tragic Election Controversy was that some Synodical Conference pastors did not have a coherent understanding of the whole counsel of

God as revealed over the ages in the Holy Scriptures. Stoeckhardt would want everyone here to know that before a church body can articulate a systematic theology, it must first skillfully articulate a coherent exegetical theology. If he was here today, he would also want especially the young men present who are seminary students to know this: Desiring to be a shepherd of God's people means committing oneself to a lifelong, dare we say *daily*, study of the Bible, so that a man of God might be constantly prepared to share the full counsel of God with his assigned flock.

Another important lesson for all of us to learn from the life and work of George Stoeckhardt is that Stoeckhardt saw the exegetical task as having a soteriological goal. He regarded exegesis as a task not to be done in an ivory tower, but in the church and for the church, so that blood-bought souls might hear the message of the forgiveness of sins. Truly Stoeckhardt saw the exegetical task as a *habitus practicus*, a practical aptitude, to save souls. George Stoeckhardt was a man who was animated with the results of the exegetical task and he was a man who carried out the results of his exegesis on both the European and the American sides of the Atlantic. The exegetical task moved Stoeckhardt to perform ministry, which to him was not so much *Amt* (office) but *Dienst* (service). His exegesis and his understanding of the ministry moved him to bring the message of the forgiveness of sins to people who needed to hear it, whether it was sick and wounded soldiers during a war, hospital patients in St. Louis, members of his own Holy Cross congregation, or an entire generation of Lutheran seminary students.

As one studies the life of this German-American exegetical theologian, one is also struck by this truth of the Christian faith. God in his wise providence often chooses to bless people through other people. George Stoeckhardt is being remembered today as a master of exegesis. But look how he became a master of the exegetical task. His life history is a beautiful example of how God guides the events of each of his children's lives. He was born into a pious Lutheran family, received the best education available to him, was called into various ministries which tempered and honed his mettle, and was eventually blessed with a godly helpmeet, who shared his confessional Lutheran convictions. When the Lord took

this first wife from him, Stoeckhardt for a brief period of his life “went to pieces.” Eventually this exegetical master was reduced to being a patient in a mental hospital. Yet the Lord of the church still had vital work for Stoeckhardt to do. Through effective treatment and through the love and care of a young woman who became his second wife, Stoeckhardt once again became a champion for Synodical Conference Lutheranism. A clear faith lesson in all of this is the importance of truly appreciating the individuals that God sends into our lives to bless us and support us in good times and not-so-good times. To the young men who are studying to be pastors, and who have not yet been blessed with a spouse, remember the story of George Stoeckhardt. A man can be a wonderful and effective pastor without being married. No argument there! But a pastor blessed with a godly wife has many advantages. If you doubt me, remember what happened to Stoeckhardt after the death of his first wife and what he became after being blessed once again with a godly helpmeet. At this time when we celebrate the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation, we once again have reason to thank God that one of the secondary blessings of the work of Martin Luther was the establishment of the Lutheran parsonage, where pastor, wife and children live, bound together by their love for the Lord and for each other.

Again I thank you for inviting me to Bethany to speak on how George Stoeckhardt approached the exegetical task. My dissertation is on George Stoeckhardt’s understanding of the ministry, but his understanding of Scripture and his method of interpreting it certainly have much to do with how he understood the ministry. As we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation, we have come to see, through the life and work of George Stoeckhardt, what a true heir of Luther and the Reformation he was in regard to his understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the exegetical task which he employed to interpret them. To the fine young men who are present here preparing themselves to be workers in the Lord’s vineyard, I say this: After twenty years of being in the ministry, I have developed a very short list of books that I feel I must regularly return to in order to stay grounded as a theologian of the cross. My short list is composed of four books, Bo Giertz’s *The Hammer of God*, Walther’s *The Proper*

Distinction Between Law and Gospel, the *Book of Concord*, and most of all, the Holy Scriptures. George Stoeckhardt would insist that the Bible is the book that must be mastered *first* in order that one may be a true theologian of the cross. I do not think anyone here would disagree with that sentiment. Let us honor the memory of this master of exegesis by following in his humble footsteps.

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- ³⁵ George Stoeckhardt, *Kommentar über den Brief Pauli an die Epheser*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1910); cf. *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, trans. Martin S. Sommer, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952); *Kommentar über den Ersten Brief Petri*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912), 1-17.
- ³⁶ William Dau, "Dr. George Stoeckhardt. III," *Theological Quarterly* 18, no 1 (January 1914): 19.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 17-18.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 18-19.

- LSQ 47: 1
³⁹ Ibid., 21.
⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.
⁴¹ Ibid., 23.
⁴² Ibid.

John Philipp Koehler and the Exegetical Task: *The Science and Evangelical Art of Biblical Hermeneutics*

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It is truly fitting that the 2006 Bethany Reformation Lectures should explore “the exegetical task,” since the Lutheran Reformation was, above all, built on the foundation of proper biblical hermeneutics.

Consider, for instance, the first of Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” Luther was simply exercising proper biblical hermeneutics by asking himself and others the question: What did our Lord really *mean* when he said “repent”? For too long the church of Rome had not used proper hermeneutics to answer that question.

Luther’s struggle to discover what the Apostle Paul meant by “the righteousness of God” was a hermeneutical struggle. As long as the reformer used the faulty hermeneutic he had inherited from the church of Rome, he wrestled mightily with those words. Once he took a proper hermeneutical approach it was, Luther recalled, “as though I had been born again, and I believed that I had entered Paradise through widely opened doors.”¹

When Luther was later called to account at Worms for his evangelical preaching, he asserted the same hermeneutical approach: “Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures or evident reason . . . I am bound by the Scriptures adduced by me, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God.”²

His famous debate with the Dutch scholar Erasmus over “free will” was much more about hermeneutics than dogmatics. Erasmus argued that Scripture itself – its *content* – is obscure in some places, even beyond the reach of hermeneutics. Luther granted “that many *passages* in the Scriptures are obscure and hard to elucidate, but

that is due, not to the exalted nature of their subject, but to our own linguistic and grammatical ignorance; and it does not in any way prevent our knowing all the *contents* of Scripture.”³ Luther insisted that proper, biblical hermeneutics was the answer to this apparent Gordian knot. The Wittenberg professor stressed: “Everywhere we should stick to just the simple, natural meaning of the words, as yielded by the rules of grammar and the habits of speech that God has created among men.”⁴ Indeed, “the usual and natural sense of terms must be retained, unless proof is given to the contrary.”⁵

As a final example, consider Luther’s battle with other would-be reformers over the meaning of four simple words spoken by our Savior, “This is my body.” It proved to be a pivotal battle revolving almost exclusively around biblical hermeneutics. Against these fanatics, Luther again plainly asserted:

In Scripture we should let the words retain their natural force, just as they read, and give no other interpretation unless a clear article of faith compels otherwise. . . . Since these words, ‘This is my body,’ according to the nature and style of all languages mean not bread nor sign of the body, but Christ’s body, they must be allowed to remain there and not be interpreted differently unless Scripture requires otherwise.⁶

On one side, Luther was fighting a false hermeneutic employed by the church of Rome for a thousand years, only to be forced on the other side to fend off the false hermeneutical approach employed by the likes of Zwingli and Karlstadt. As confessional Lutherans it comes as no surprise to us that – at its essence – the Lutheran Reformation has navigated the narrow straits of proper biblical hermeneutics.

Like Luther before him, Professor John Philipp Koehler (1859-1951) fought false hermeneutic principles in his own day, though in his case they were being employed within conservative American Lutheranism. In the course of this essay we will consider some of the hermeneutical battles Koehler fought, primarily through the pages of his seminary’s theological journal, the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. We will explore how he led his seminary colleagues in calling American Lutheran theologians to reinvigorate the science of biblical hermeneutics, while also encouraging them to pursue its

evangelical art. This historical overview will allow us to discover Koehler's approach to the exegetical task.

A Call to Reinvigorate the Science of Biblical Hermeneutics

In 1900 J.P. Koehler accepted a call to serve as a professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, having already served eight years as pastor at Two Rivers, Wisconsin, and twelve years as a professor at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin. The fact that his arrival at the Wauwatosa Seminary coincided with the advent of the free conference era within Midwestern Lutheranism is a deeply significant backdrop to all that follows. These conferences gave the new Wisconsin professor a first-hand opportunity to observe how American Lutherans, especially in the Midwest, were "doing theology" and to consider how the differences in theological perspective and approach had arisen. In 1904 he outlined his initial observations in the first volume of the *Theologische Quartalschrift* with an essay entitled "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present."

In this signal essay Koehler offered his historical impressions of how most of American Lutheranism had arrived at its twentieth-century theological method. He noted that "from 1840 to 1880 dogmatics ruled supreme in the theological efforts of the Lutheran church in this country almost without opposition."⁷ That dominance arose, in his opinion, "because opposing positions and polemics were involved." For instance, "[Pastor Johannes] Grabau [of the Buffalo Synod] had come to his position and his method in his struggle against the Prussian Union. [Pastor C.F.W.] Walther [of the Missouri Synod] had been moved by his pietism to take a stand against Saxon rationalism."⁸ In offering these observations, Koehler was not being unduly critical. He eagerly acknowledged that "circumstances brought this about and in one respect it was a blessing. Firmness and clarity in confession and the right attitude toward Scripture were maintained thereby."⁹

It should be strongly noted at this juncture that Koehler is

often unjustly accused of disparaging the study and use of dogmatic theology. Those charges are simply unfounded. Koehler never advocated an emphasis upon the historical studies (exegesis and history) to the exclusion or denigration of solid Lutheran dogmatics. He simply insisted that a balance be struck, as an overemphasis in either direction will lead to ruin. “Where there is no balanced combination of the two, [historical studies] will result in a skeptical uncertainty which cannot quickly come to firm opinions; [dogmatic studies] will result in always insisting that one is right and show a fanatical zeal which is not always able to understand the other party.”¹⁰

Koehler noted that in the history of the church this theological balance had been elusive. I am under the impression that very rarely can one find the same person gifted with both aptitudes in an outstanding manner. I find them both in Luther and would like to consider him both the greatest exegete and the greatest dogmatician. Otherwise, however, it seems to me that either one or the other activity is always predominant, and in my opinion in the great period of our American Lutheran church it was dogmatics.¹¹

The seminal event within American Lutheranism that led Koehler to this conclusion was the Election Controversy of the late nineteenth-century. Without rehearsing all the details of the controversy,¹² let it simply be noted that the early combatants on both sides – chiefly Professors F.A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod and C.F.W. Walther of the Missouri Synod – wielded mostly the theological sword of dogmatics. Only as the controversy deepened did Professor Adolf Hoenecke of the Wisconsin Synod lead the way in calling “attention to the necessity of making sure that careful exegesis received due attention in doctrinal controversies. [Missouri’s George] Stöckhardt put this into practice as teacher of exegesis and author of exegetical treatises and books.”¹³ Sadly, the stubborn reluctance of some to use proper biblical hermeneutics led to an early and later disintegration of Synodical Conference fellowship.¹⁴ Leigh Jordahl, who had numerous opportunities to visit Koehler in his retirement, asserted that the Wauwatosa professor “was thoroughly convinced that the disastrous effects of that

controversy as well as the subsequent inability to overcome these effects themselves constituted concrete proof that new beginnings were necessary.”¹⁵

In 1904 Koehler outlined the pitfalls of dogmatics dominating the American Lutheran theological scene.

A degree of **mental inflexibility** (Geistesstarre) has begun to assert itself, coupled with a **hyperconservative attitude** which is more concerned about rest than about conservation. This is always the case at the end of a period of mental development. The masses get into a rut which has been worn by what had long been customary. In our case it was dogmatics. This mental inflexibility is not healthy, for if it continues it will lead to death. Both in the mental activity of an individual and of a community, fresh, vibrant, productive activity is a sign of health.

The **inertia** of which I am speaking shows itself in a **lack of readiness** again and again **to treat theological-scholarly matters or practical matters theoretically and fundamentally without preconceived notions**. This is necessary if we are to watch and criticize ourselves. For in the course of time, circumstances change and our views also change. For example, words and expressions change their meaning. And if we do not again and again rethink in detail the most important theological matters and our way of presenting them, it can happen that **all of this can become mere empty form** without spirit or life. As we practice such self-criticism, we shall find that the divine truths which we draw out of Scripture indeed always remain the same, but that the manner in which we defend them, yes, even how we present them is not always totally correct. Here we can and must continue to learn.¹⁶

Koehler’s remedy for these theological pitfalls should come as no surprise. He believed that historical studies would create the necessary balance. “Our theological students dare not be satisfied with acquiring a knowledge of dogmatics ... Exegesis and history have their proper place in the course of study and deserve to be pursued in a deeply imaginative and earnest manner.”¹⁷ Koehler pointed out that the benefits of the historical disciplines went beyond the theoretical; they were eminently practical, working hand-in-hand with dogmatics.

While dogmatics promotes sharp thinking and ... leads to a clear, unambiguous presentation, both historical branches train the mind to probe, to criticize, to be cautious in judgment. They promote modesty, gentleness, and patience in judgment and thus in the mental attitude supplement what dogmatical study has produced.¹⁸

That the science of biblical hermeneutics needed new life within American Lutheranism became most apparent to Koehler when he began attending the free conferences that cropped up in the Midwest from 1902-1906. The doctrine of election was again the chief sticking point, and many of the veteran combatants reengaged, including Professors F.A. Schmidt (now of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church), Adolf Hoenecke, George Stöckhardt and Missouri's *Wunderkind* theologian, Franz Pieper.¹⁹

At the Watertown free conference (April 29-30, 1903) Pieper was the featured essayist, presenting a paper entitled "Fundamental Differences in the Doctrine of Conversion and Election." His presentation was said to have "elicited a wide-ranging, 'rather haphazard' discussion during the two days of sessions."²⁰ When an Ohio Synod pastor questioned the St. Louis professor, suggesting that his essay did not square with the so-called "analogy of faith," the man did so, Koehler noted, "without saying what this analogy is."²¹ This was the crucial moment of the entire debate, especially since the men of the Ohio and Iowa Synods were making use of the so-called "analogy of faith" to defend their "darling doctrine" in this controversy, that is, the opinion that God's eternal election took place *intuitu fidei* (on the basis of a person's future and divinely-foreseen faith). Armin Schuetze explains what was at stake.

The Ohio-Iowa spokesmen defined 'the analogy of faith' as the 'aggregate of Scripture' ('*das Schriftganze*'). This consisted of all the important doctrines clearly revealed in Scripture. These are in complete harmony with one another. The analogy of faith comes into use when we recognize a lack of harmony between a less clear doctrine and the 'aggregate of Scripture.' The theologian then has the responsibility to interpret the passages on which the less clear doctrine is based in such a manner that the latter is brought into harmony with the clearly revealed doctrines or 'aggregate of Scripture.'²²

While the Ohio and Iowa men conceded that the *intuitu fidei* concept is nowhere expressly stated in Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions, they could “prove” the correctness of their doctrine of election by means of the entire Scripture.²³ Especially prominent was the argument that if election was not somehow based upon foreseen differences within human beings, God’s grace would become arbitrary and no longer universal. The difference must be in man, not in God!²⁴ This so-called “analogy of faith” was employed to solve the conundrum. “Dr. Schmidt even went so far as to say that God gave man the ability to reason so that he might harmonize contradictory statements in Scripture. In fact, rational man not only had the right to do so, but this was his responsibility.”²⁵

When Franz Pieper responded to the pastor’s objection, he asserted that “virtually ‘the analogy of faith’ is the doctrine of justification with which every teaching must be in harmony.” J.P. Koehler, who attended the second day of the conference, recalled the upshot of the debate.

[Not everyone] agreed to this answer, even though no one questioned the significance of the doctrine of justification in Lutheran teaching. So then, when the time of adjournment approached and the subject of discussion at the proposed fall meeting was under consideration, Prof. Koehler suggested “The Analogy of Faith” as the topic. At the second meeting [held in Milwaukee on September 9-11, 1903] there were as many opinions on the subject as speakers.²⁶

Especially disconcerting was the notion that understanding the Scripture correctly is somehow only the prerogative of theologians. Dr. F.W. Stelhorn of the Ohio Synod would declare: “The Christian doctrines form for the Christian, especially for the theologian, a recognizable, harmonious whole or system which is composed of doctrines drawn from perfectly clear passages of Holy Scripture. This organic whole is the highest norm of Scriptural interpretation.”²⁷ Dr. Schmidt “referred Rom. 12:6 to the objective consciousness of truth” and explained that “it is the business of theology to bring the individual doctrines of Scripture into agreement.”²⁸

Koehler’s chief complaint with the entire discussion was that “no one had thought of carefully examining Rom. 12:6, where

the phrase is used by St. Paul, and presenting his findings.” The Wauwatosa professor did not hesitate to offer his take on the impasse: “The indiscriminate use of this principle in the attempt to explain the mysteries of Bible truth had served to emasculate some of its most vital teachings, e.g. the doctrine of election. The proper interpretation of the misapplied Scripture text became imperative.”²⁹ Simply put, many Lutheran theologians since the Reformation seemed to be under the impression that it was impossible for the Scriptures to contain any logical contradictions. Common sense seemed to dictate that all the doctrines of Scripture must conform to a logical rule, and they appealed to Paul’s words in Romans 12:6 in an attempt to support their idea of this “analogy of faith” as a rule of interpretation.

Koehler heartily disagreed. And so it was that, in the inaugural issue of Wisconsin’s new theological journal, the Wauwatosa professor offered both the Synodical Conference and American Lutheranism their first taste of what would later be dubbed “the Wauwatosa Gospel.” He did this by means of an epic essay aptly entitled “The Analogy of Faith,” which Jordahl has described as Koehler’s “clearest statement of hermeneutical methodology.”³⁰ Most readers, both outside and within the Synodical Conference, would find the article and the daring Wauwatosa approach hard to stomach because it ostensibly “declared war” on a 400 year-old Lutheran tradition of using the so-called “analogy of faith” as *the* hermeneutical rule.

Koehler began his ground-breaking article by setting down what he saw as the opposing views of Scriptural interpretation found at the free conferences of 1903.

The Synodical Conference maintains that in explaining the so-called ... sedes doctrinae one may not ... deviate from the grammatical-historical sense that is immediately and clearly contained in these passages. And if these passages contain terms that according to our human understanding even seem to contradict other doctrines of Holy Writ, one may not modify (umgestalten) these terms according to these other doctrines ... Now it may happen that according to purely human understanding a difficulty is present which consists in this: that this doctrine according to our reason cannot be brought

into harmony with other doctrines. Then it is part of correct interpretation and presentation of doctrine to establish this difficulty and make it known.

The position of the opponents is as follows: Not all doctrines are revealed with the same measure of clarity. The doctrine of justification is central to all doctrines and is unconditionally clear. It is not the case with the doctrine of election by grace. Now, the doctrines of Scripture cannot contradict one another, but must be in harmony with one another. It is, therefore, the task of the theologian to discover this harmony, which must also be recognizable to our reason, and present the doctrines in this sense. . . . the expressions that contradict the clear doctrines of Scripture will have to be stripped of their usual, immediate meaning and be weakened or modified according to the pattern of other clear doctrines of Scripture. . . . It is the purpose of this investigation to discover which is the correct manner of interpretation.³¹

By means of an extended exegetical study of the passage in dispute, Koehler first of all demonstrated that Romans 12:6 “furnishes no rule of interpretation.”³² Instead Paul’s point is that every Christian should use his God-given gifts as a member of the Body of Christ for the building up of his fellow members. Christians “should confine themselves in their prophesying, its content, scope, and exercise, to the measure or degree of faith with which they were endowed, by virtue of which they could exercise such gift through the Spirit; they should not try to go into higher flights of their own (Ro 12:3).”³³

Next, Koehler asserted that the Synodical Conference was taking the proper approach to biblical hermeneutics, “hold[ing] fast to the *clear wording* in all doctrinal passages of Scripture, [while] the opponents place *above this wording the analogy of faith*. . . . We say that the exegete simply has no other duty than to say: ‘Speak, Lord; for your servant is listening.’” With regret Koehler added, “I cannot but charge our opponents with reading something into the text (*konstruieren*) although they deny this charge.”³⁴

Finally, as to the use by Luther and other church fathers of the phrase “the analogy of faith,” Koehler concluded that “what our fathers call *analogy of faith* frequently amounts to an explanation of Scripture by Scripture. But what does that mean? Nothing else than

that we are not to say anything that conflicts with a clear Word of God.”³⁵

Later, when he reflected on these exegetical findings, Koehler expressed the hope that his essay would “have a general influence on us, not so much in the interest of our position in this controversy about the analogy as in the interest of stimulating us to an impartial style of exegesis.” He would opine that “the traditional interpretation of Romans 12 is for me a characteristic example of the style of mechanical exegesis that has come down to us from most ancient times, which does not correspond to the linguistic resources and consequently not to the claims that one today must place on the hermeneutical art.”³⁶

Not surprisingly, Koehler’s conclusions were almost immediately questioned. What is perhaps surprising is that many of his own Synodical Conference brethren disagreed the loudest, apparently resenting what they considered to be Koehler’s dubious depiction of the “Synodical Conference position.”³⁷ Koehler recalled the comments of his chief challenger, Franz Pieper, who “told my father-in-law that he was afraid that I was venturing onto dangerous ground which might threaten the Lutheran doctrinal position.”³⁸ Jordahl also reports that “the article received sharp attack including a formal protest, later ambiguously withdrawn, from the Faculty of Concordia Seminary.”³⁹

Even Koehler’s own Wauwatosa colleagues expressed reservations. In his 1930 *Retrospective*, Koehler recalled how “Hoenecke disagreed with [his] views because they were new to him. [Koehler’s seminary colleague and Franz’ brother August] Pieper made no reply at all, but it did cost him some effort to overcome his reservations later.”⁴⁰

Outside the Synodical Conference, opposition was predictably rabid. Koehler recounts how at the April 1904 Detroit free conference “[August] Pieper again tried to bring the subject [of the analogy of faith] up for discussion, but did not succeed. [F.A.] Schmidt, [F.W.] Stelhorn, and even Hoenecke and Franz Pieper were leery of it.”⁴¹ When Koehler was introduced to Schmidt at the conference, he was asked if he had been the author of the controversial article. “The affirmative answer elicited no further comment but the cryptic: ‘Well

– so you wrote that!”⁴² Koehler also remembered how an exegete of later fame, R.C.H. Lenski, approached him “for a private talk on exegetical matters and particularly on the ‘analogy of faith.’” The Wauwatosa professor “recognized the Ohio man’s deep interest in the subject ... The *intuitu fidei*, however, and ‘the analogy of faith’ were never surrendered by Lenski.”⁴³

One encouraging reaction to Koehler’s presentation was registered by his old St. Louis professor Stöckhardt, who told the author privately: “It was a good thing that you set people straight on that question of the ‘analogy.’”⁴⁴ Few others apparently agreed, however, and the simple fact remained that a vast majority had not been “set straight.” Koehler himself recognized that “it was not very promising for the future that many closed their minds to new insights that might have promoted a more original and independent study of the Scriptures and thus invigorated the life of the church.”⁴⁵

So was Koehler asserting that the Scriptures offer no guidance in the matter of biblical hermeneutics? Certainly not! The Scriptures give all the necessary hermeneutical guidance we need, just not any special “hard-and-fast rules,” as those who would trumpet the idea of an “analogy of faith” would have us believe. In Koehler’s observation such rules naturally open the door for modifying “unclear” passages so that they jibe – at least in our minds – with clearer ones. Sadly, Koehler witnessed this type of hermeneutical mischief being employed by not a few Lutheran theologians of his day. Naturally, this mischief persists today, an ongoing result of the devil’s work among us from the days of Eden.⁴⁶

To uncover the proper approach to biblical hermeneutics Koehler pointed – in his “Analogy of Faith” – to the examples of Jesus and the Apostles. Based on his study of their exegesis of the Old Testament, Koehler observed these two simple principles employed: “(1) Scripture knows of no right to force the meaning of a passage (*Konstruieren*), (2) Theological hermeneutics must return to the simplicity of the method as it is found in the self-evident, unbiased, general art of interpretation that everyone applies when he hears or reads another’s words.” In Koehler’s opinion, many people make biblical hermeneutics out to be more difficult than they really are.

Biblical hermeneutics are nothing but the application of the natural art of interpretation to Holy Writ. The laws of understanding, which are nothing else than the laws of thinking and speaking, must be applied to the words of Scripture exactly as to all other words, and are practiced by the unbiased simple man just as by the scholar. It is only reserved for a later development of science to deviate from these self-evident thoughts, and to make of biblical hermeneutics an artificially mysterious edifice of rules that only the initiated can apply because it is a matter of God's Word. ...

We must understand that in the interpretation of Scripture no other principles prevail than those which every intelligent person uses when hearing or reading any word of man. There is only one special consideration; namely, that Scripture is God's infallible Word.⁴⁷

From a "scientific perspective" Koehler argued that the science of biblical hermeneutics requires no special rules. Koehler insisted that it was "a matter of prime importance to bring the hermeneutical method back to its natural simplicity,"⁴⁸ commenting that a child uses the exact same method "even before he can speak."⁴⁹ In other words, stop making this more complicated than it truly is.

That Professor Koehler practiced what he preached is evident from a casual perusing of his scholarly commentaries on Paul's letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, now available from Northwestern Publishing House in one volume. An interesting study can be made by simply comparing even Stöckhardt's classic commentary on Paul's letter to the Ephesians to that of J.P. Koehler's. The reader will instantly notice a marked difference. Stöckhardt has copious quotations from other exegetes; Koehler has practically none. Stöckhardt spends much more time on the fine points of grammar and syntax; Koehler deals much more with the interrelatedness of Paul's thought and the application of its saving truths to our lives as Christians. Stöckhardt reads as if he's delivering a lecture aimed principally at the mind; Koehler sounds like he's delivering a sermon aimed principally at the heart.⁵⁰

In his 1925 opening address to the seminary student body, Koehler expounded on the subject of biblical hermeneutics.

[He assumed that his audience would] very likely expect a hermeneutical discussion in the usual fashion, in which one speaks of language and objects, or of biblical philology and biblical history writing and their mutual influence upon the understanding of Scripture. We omit that here, because there is, after all, only one hermeneutics, only one art of interpretation in the world. As far as these things are concerned, biblical exegesis is no different from the exegesis of any other writing.⁵¹

This was certainly not meant to disparage the science of biblical hermeneutics. Koehler absolutely insisted that grammar and syntax are essential to good, Scriptural exegesis, but even they can become a wooden science apart from an historical appreciation of Scripture in which the history of God's plan of salvation in Christ is the main theme (John 5:39,40). One must not make more out of this or any other "science" than is actually there.

That said, there was no dispute that the "professional" exegete "must be well versed in the languages of the original text," though Koehler certainly did warn "against a specialization which easily strays from intensive knowledge of Scripture."⁵²

It would be awful, of course, if those who did not know Greek and Hebrew would not be able to grasp the message of the Gospel, but the professional teachers of the Gospel should make it their business to proceed with teaching the Bible truth on the basis of exegetical examination of Scripture's statements, lest they get into wrong mental processes and into conflict with the Bible. And that applies not only to the original languages of the Bible but to the translations as well and all teaching of the Scriptures.⁵³

Along with proficiency in the original languages, Koehler emphasized the necessity of understanding the history and context of the author and his words. "If we do not know the author's point of view and manner of expression, we shall again make our own manner determinative to the detriment of correct understanding."⁵⁴ In summary, "a correct biblical hermeneutics is simply the application of the generally accepted rules of exposition to the Holy Scriptures."⁵⁵

So, if the science of biblical hermeneutics is so easy, then why is it so hard? Why can't all who claim to be Christians agree on

every single point of doctrine, much less all confessional Lutherans? After all, don't we all use the same Bible?

Naturally, differences will result when the science of biblical hermeneutics is not properly applied, but often there is a more fundamental disconnect according to Koehler, a problem which has less to do with science and more to do with art.

An Encouragement to Pursue the Evangelical Art of Biblical Hermeneutics

Christ's words cannot be appraised, judged, or measured by reason. They are not to be probed and scrutinized by you. ... They are past finding out, beyond comprehension and above judgment. You must believe; only faith conquers and appropriates these words. Without faith you will forfeit them forever. ... Faith seems to be a trivial matter. But just try to show how easy it is, and you will discover that faith is a power of God and not of man. Though many assume that it is easy to believe, a Christian will say: How difficult it is to master the art of believing these words!⁵⁶

In a May 1531 sermon on John 6:64 Martin Luther put his finger on the jugular of proper biblical hermeneutics, exposing its quintessential challenge: "How difficult it is to master the art of believing these words!" Hermeneutics is much more than a science; it is primarily an evangelical art, a gift inspired by the gospel.

As only he could, the Wittenberg professor and preacher pointed out how, for instance, the Christmas story offers wonderful models of proper biblical hermeneutics in action; no "scientists" need apply!

For example, the teenaged Mary "held fast to the word of the angel because she had become a new creature. Even so must we be transformed and renewed in heart from day to day. ... This is for us the hardest point, not so much to believe that [Jesus] is the son of the Virgin and God himself, as to believe that this Son of God is ours."⁵⁷ "If anyone has faith and thinks he knows enough, let him take a lesson from this mother."⁵⁸

Dirtied and unschooled shepherds also serve as tenured professors in the seminary of biblical hermeneutics. "This is a

great miracle that the shepherds should have believed [the angel's] message. ... I know I would have appealed to common sense and I would have said: 'Who am I compared to God and angels and kings? It is an apparition.' But the Holy Spirit, who preached through these angels, caused the shepherds to believe."⁵⁹

Finally, the whole scene of salvation left the "scientist" within Luther stupefied.

Why does [God] do such preposterous things? ... Our common sense revolts and says, "Could not God have saved the world some other way?" ... The Christian faith is foolishness. It says that God can do anything and yet [it] makes him so weak that either his Son had no power or wisdom or else the whole story is made up. ... [God] sends, as it were, an earthworm lying in weakness, helpless, without his mother, and he suffers him to be nailed to a cross. ... God is amazing. The Babe is in a manger, not worthy of a cradle or a diaper, and yet he is called Saviour and Lord. The angels sing about him, and the shepherds hear and come and honor him whom no maid serves as he lies with an ox and an ass. If I had come to Bethlehem and seen it, I would have said: "This does not make sense. Can this be the Messiah? This is sheer nonsense." I would not have let myself be found inside the stable.⁶⁰

The point of Luther's satire is clear: proper biblical hermeneutics finally comes down to the proper attitude toward the Scriptures. What attitude will I take toward the very words of the Almighty God? Will I scientifically dismiss them as illogical nonsense, as inapplicable to my existence both here and hereafter? Or will I believe in the spirit of Mary (Luke 1:38) and the shepherds (Luke 2:15) that God's Word is unequivocally true – even in the face of paradox and apparent contradiction – simply because it is God's Word? Christian faith is the God-given keystone of proper biblical hermeneutics that Luther here identifies for us.

Almost four hundred years later Professor John Philipp Koehler recognized the same challenge and virtually echoed the sentiments of Luther.

To believe is the greatest art on earth ... [With faith] one can understand what all legal terminology about the agreement of

God's righteousness with his holiness cannot explain, that God forgives the sins of the sinner who clings in faith to the beloved Son of God. With faith one understands the greatest things in heaven, one penetrates through the Holy Spirit into the depths of the Godhead, by it one will then also understand the divine things on earth.⁶¹

While the science of biblical hermeneutics certainly has its proper place, as do all the other theological sciences, above all the art of biblical hermeneutics – namely, Christian faith – must be diligently pursued and humbly prayed for: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

Koehler pointed out that it is, of course, the Holy Spirit who alone freely and graciously grants such faith and understanding according to his own divine economy.

Behind the words of Holy Scripture stands the Holy Spirit. In a miraculous way he works the understanding of his words. This is accomplished primarily, of course, by means of the human understanding of the human language in which Scripture is written. But even here there is present the direct influence of the [Spirit's] personality ... Here too, as otherwise, the Holy Spirit works where and when he will. Just for this reason this influence is hidden from our observation and judgment. ... We must pray for the interpretation.⁶²

Along with Luther, J.P. Koehler frequently observed how challenging it is to have and maintain the proper attitude toward Scripture, that is, humble faith. So often we ourselves are guilty of approaching God's Word too casually, as though this Word holds not much more weight than any other word! But God's Word is not just one life-approach or worldview in the marketplace of ideas “that we may take it into consideration, ponder it, and finally, according to our knowledge, make up our minds about it; rather, Scripture deals with facts, which we are persuaded to acknowledge and embrace by the power of God, even by the power of God in these facts.”⁶³

The fact that God speaks in Scripture so that his truth attests itself to the heart ought to fill us with great seriousness, lest we use his Word wantonly, and again it ought to fill us with comfort and confidence when we recognize his grace. Thus the man of

God is trained ... always immediately from the life of the Holy Spirit, who is working in him.⁶⁴

Only in an evangelical manner, by continually bringing these thoughts [about the truthfulness and seriousness of God's Word] into connection with the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, can we understand and discuss these thoughts aright, hence, not with the intellect alone, and not with the purpose of achieving results through strict logical reasoning ... The sole essential for the acceptance of truth is faith worked by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵

Professor Koehler would no doubt have heartily concurred with the sentiments of a Reformation hymn later written by one of his students, Pastor Werner Franzmann.

In trembling hands, Lord God, we hold our heritage, your gift of grace,

Your gospel, bringing wealth untold: All blessings here, in heav'n a place.

"In trembling hands" – for how could we retain your gift by our own power?

The pearl of priceless worth would be soon lost – attend us ev'ry hour!

"In trembling hands" – with joyous awe, like Luther, we behold your Son:

For us he kept your holy law, in dying full salvation won. "In trembling hands" – and yet we cling with grip of steel, which you must give,

To Christ, our all, our ev'rything, to Christ, the life in whom we live.⁶⁶

In direct contradistinction to this proper attitude of humble Christian faith is the attitude of dogmatic cocksureness that Koehler scorned both privately and publicly, especially as he saw occurrences of this attitude cropping up in his own life and in the lives of his Synodical Conference brethren.⁶⁷ How different this attitude is to the humility of faith! How vigorously we must fight against this legalistic inclination within our own hearts and in our own circles!

The attitude of cocksureness which, on its own, has everything figured out and thus in its back pocket, is not the same as certainty of faith, neither in manner of utterance nor in matters

touching reliability. Cocksurenness on the one hand is selfish and loveless in its off-hand positivity, and on the other, lacks inner moral reserve, and in the face of surprise onslaught, it collapses internally. The certainty of faith, by contrast, is a rock-bound confidence which bases itself upon an alien message, and in fact, upon a message of alien grace, coupled with a modest recognition of its own deficiency, even in cognition and comprehension, and so, for all its confessionally faithful decisiveness, it remains open to discussion with other believing Christians. To a systematic temperament this conception appears to be paradoxical. And in a sense in fact it is paradoxical but so is human life in its entirety, also our Christian life down to its most intimate associations. Given the two-sidedness of our total being, comprising sin and grace, the divine and human, it could hardly be otherwise.

So far as I know, it is Luther alone who actually possessed this cast of mind sufficiently to live and speak and act from it as if dipping from a fresh well of life, and this is the measure of his greatness.⁶⁸

It is fascinating to note that Koehler's hermeneutical hero was still pondering this important matter on his deathbed. Here the great reformer summed up the only proper approach to God's Word and all faith-life: "Let no one think he has sufficiently grasped the Holy Scriptures unless he has governed the churches for a hundred years with prophets like Elijah and Elisha, John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles. Don't venture on this divine Aeneid, but rather bend low in reverence before its footprints! We are beggars! That is true."⁶⁹

Conclusion

Luther's and Koehler's hermeneutical battles were not unique in the history of the Church, of course. Jesus himself was forever fighting the false hermeneutic principles employed not only by the "liberally-minded" Sadducees, but especially – and, perhaps for our purposes here today, more importantly⁷⁰ – by the "conservatively-minded" Pharisees.

To the Sadducees Jesus said: "You are in error because you

do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). History suggests that these men were not particularly interested in either the science or the art of proper biblical hermeneutics.

The Pharisees Jesus also reproached on several occasions: “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” (Matthew 9:13); “You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:24); “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ... You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that” (Mark 7:9,13). When our Savior was asked on one occasion, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” he responded with the basic hermeneutical question: “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” When Nicodemus failed to use proper hermeneutics, Jesus gently chided him: “You are Israel’s teacher and do you not understand these things?” (John 3:10).

It was not that these religious leaders of Jesus’ day were unscholarly or that they didn’t know their Hebrew. In the Pharisees’ case, they were even ultra-conservative scholars! It was not that these men had never pored over the Old Testament Scriptures with a fine-toothed comb. Jesus conceded that they “diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life” (John 5:39). Indeed, St. Paul would later observe how many “are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge” (Romans 10:3), “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5).

So what was missing in their approach to the Scriptures? Proper biblical hermeneutic principles, which involve not only an understanding of the original words and grammar of the Scriptures within their proper historical context, but also require this key ingredient: humble, Christian faith worked by the Holy Spirit; yes, the attitude of young Samuel, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10). Jesus summarized his concern about the Pharisaical approach to the Scriptures this way: “These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39,40). Later on, to some of his own wavering disciples, Jesus said, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe. ... This is why I told

you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him” (John 6:63-65). Paul would later explain how his message – yes, the message of the entire Scriptures – is “not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:13,14).

Simply put, proper biblical hermeneutics is not merely a *science*, requiring a keen understanding of language and history, an understanding that can be gained by any “biblical scholar.” No, proper biblical hermeneutics is primarily an *evangelical art*, a gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift that, ironically, the Father often chooses – according to his “good pleasure” – *not* to give to the “wise and learned” but instead “to little children” (Matthew 11:25). A true understanding of God’s Word does not come with a scientific pursuit by “the brightest and the best,” instead it comes “with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” since God’s “message of wisdom” is a hidden message, a mystery to the “wisest” of any age. “None of the rulers of this age understood it,” Paul comments, “but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2).

My dear friends, along with Professor John Philipp Koehler and others, we must humbly recognize that our own proper understanding of the Scriptures is not primarily an understanding that has been gained by our great learning, ingenious thought and hard labor. Instead, it is an undeserved gift of God’s amazing grace, an evangelical art generously bestowed by God our Father (Matthew 16:17) through his Holy Spirit.⁷¹ “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

When this fundamental truth is forgotten – that proper biblical hermeneutics is not simply an academic science but primarily an evangelical art – the proper approach to and understanding of the Scriptures will soon be lost.

When this truth is remembered, then exegesis stops being a “task” and becomes our greatest and our only true delight (Psalm 1:1-3)!

Endnotes

¹ Quoted in Ernest Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 268.

² Quoted in Schwiebert, 504-505.

³ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1957), 72. Or see AE 33:25.

⁴ Luther, 192. Or see AE 33:162

⁵ Luther, 263. Or see AE 33:237.

⁶ AE 37:270.

⁷ Joh. Ph. Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present," *The Wauwatosa Theology: Vol. III* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 434.

⁸ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 432.

⁹ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 434. When Koehler's essay was "understood as a derogatory criticism of the Missouri Synod" and "taken to imply that Walther and his coworkers practiced a dogmatics which produces mental inflexibility and death," Koehler explained how he was not "wanting to describe any one person or group of persons" (439). In particular, Koehler "did not want to say that Walther did not draw his theology out of Scripture and did no exegesis," instead asserting that Walther "and his coworkers are Bible theologians" (441).

¹⁰ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 429-430.

¹¹ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 442.

¹² For those interested in the details, see Joh. Ph. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Printing Company for the Protes'tant Conference, 1981), 157-161; S.C. Ylvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace: Brief History of the Norwegian Synod* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), 61-62, 95-118, 166-199; and Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 91-112. For the Ohio-Iowa perspective, see J.L. Neve, *History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Burlington, IA: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), 207-221. An extremely helpful, recent study that details the theological antecedents of the debate is David Liefeld's "Saved on Purpose: Luther, Lutheranism, and Election," *LOGIA* 15, no. 2 (Eastertide 2006): 5-16.

¹³ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 433. See also especially Jonathan Schroeder, "The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference," <http://www.wlstheologia.net/vol2no2/SchroederJHoenecke.pdf>

¹⁴ The Ohio Synod, a prime mover in the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872, dissolved its relationship with the Conference in 1881. The Norwegians also continued to struggle with questions about the doctrine of election for the next forty years, finally resulting in the infamous *Opgjør* or Madison Settlement of 1912, which was nothing more than a compromise document.

¹⁵ Leigh Jordahl, “John Philipp Koehler, the Wauwatosa Theology and the Wisconsin Synod,” Introduction to John Philipp Koehler’s *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Printing Company for the Protes’tant Conference, 1981), xx.

¹⁶ Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines,” 434-435. Emphasis added.

¹⁷ Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines,” 437.

¹⁸ Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines,” 438.

¹⁹ The fact is Franz Pieper was already nearing his fifties by the turn of the century, but he had already by this time served as a professor of systematic theology at Missouri’s St. Louis Seminary for twenty-five years.

²⁰ Schuetze, 180.

²¹ Koehler, *History*, 212.

²² Schuetze, 183. See also Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 215.

²³ Dr. H.A. Allwardt of the Ohio Synod stated: “It may be admitted that the writers of the Formula of Concord purposely left out the *intuitu fidei*,” suggesting that “when the Formula of Concord was written that term was not yet needed” (Neve, 216).

²⁴ In this assertion these theologians were following in the footsteps of Philipp Melancthon who argued that “there must be ‘in us some reason for the difference [that explains] why Saul is rejected and David is accepted, that is, it is necessary that there be some dissimilar action in these two individuals” (Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and the Wittenberg Theological Method* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005], 94).

²⁵ Schuetze, 183.

²⁶ Koehler, *History*, 212.

²⁷ Neve, 219.

²⁸ Koehler, *History*, 243.

²⁹ Koehler, *History*, 212.

³⁰ Jordahl, xxi.

³¹ Joh. Ph. Koehler, “The Analogy of Faith.” *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. I* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 221-222.

³² Koehler, “The Analogy of Faith,” 237.

³³ Koehler, *History*, 212. Koehler would no doubt look with favor on the New International Version's translation of this phrase: "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it *in proportion to his faith*."

³⁴ Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," 242. Koehler's regret is exposed in the next sentence: "It is embarrassing for me to say this."

³⁵ Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," 244-245.

³⁶ Joh. Ph. Koehler, "Addendum to 'The Analogy of Faith,'" *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. I* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 272.

³⁷ Many, if not most, in the Synodical Conference adamantly believed that Romans 12:6 *does* offer a Scriptural rule of biblical hermeneutics, contrary to Koehler's findings. The Wauwatosa professor noted that "while all agree in principle on how one is to teach and interpret, namely 'in conformity with faith,' one group [within the Synodical Conference] finds this instruction in Romans 12, and the other does not. ... But whoever on the side of the Synodical Conference believes that this rule is in Romans 12 still does not explain the passage in the same way as the opponents of the Synodical Conference. ... But," Koehler added, "it ought not to be said on our side that one can take Romans 12 either way. The passage obviously has only one meaning, and I am certain that it is the one that was established in my article" ("Addendum," 272).

³⁸ Joh. Ph. Koehler, "Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 75, no. 6 (November/December, 2002): 17. This comment is also found summarized in Koehler's *History*, 212. According to Koehler's "Retrospective" Franz Pieper would never surrender his understanding of the "Analogy of Faith" (see *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 [March/April, 2003]: 20).

³⁹ Jordahl, xxiii. It could well be that the "protest" to which Jordahl here refers was actually a protest voiced by Stöckhardt to Koehler's essay of that same year, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present." See footnote 9 and Koehler, *History*, 212.

⁴⁰ Koehler, "Retrospective," 17. Koehler outlines the nature of Hoenecke's concerns. The elder professor "called his colleague's attention to the fact that the article was in conflict with the practically unanimous opinion of the dogmaticians regarding the use of two vital concepts of the Scriptures: *pistis* (faith) and *charis* (grace)," though Koehler also suggests the "Hoenecke did not offer his comment in the way of objection" (*History*, 212). The exact nature of August Pieper's "reservations" about Koehler's presentation remains unclear since Pieper would have seemingly voiced strong agreement with Koehler's main point already at the September 1903 Milwaukee free conference. Here Pieper stated: "If in any passage of Scripture there is anything taught that I cannot bring into harmony with the analogy of faith, then I must accept it nevertheless and say, 'Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth.' Therefore, accused be such a principle that I cannot accept the declarations of Scripture in regard to special election [unless] I, *with my reason*, can see their harmony with the 'analogy of faith'" (Neve, 219). Along with others in the Synodical Conference, Pieper's contention with Koehler's findings may

have been that the former believed Romans 12:6 offered an “interpretative rule” (see footnote 37).

⁴¹ Koehler, “Retrospective,” 17.

⁴² Koehler, *History*, 212.

⁴³ Koehler, *History*, 213.

⁴⁴ Koehler, *History*, 212. August Pieper, Stöckhardt’s brother-in-law, would also report to Koehler, “Stöckhardt takes the same view on the passage as you do” (Koehler, “Retrospective,” 17).

⁴⁵ Koehler, *History*, 212.

⁴⁶ Hermeneutical mischief saw its genesis in the serpent’s question to Eve: “Did God really say ...?” Is Eve’s response the first example of the ruinous fruits of an “analogy” approach to hermeneutics, which draws logical conclusions but then naturally goes beyond the clear Word of God? “God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, *and you must not touch it*, or you will die’” (Genesis 3:3).

⁴⁷ Koehler, “The Analogy of Faith,” 259-260.

⁴⁸ Koehler, “The Analogy of Faith,” 260.

⁴⁹ Joh. Ph. Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. I* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 207.

⁵⁰ Martin Westerhaus has also observed that in Koehler’s own work as a “professional” exegete he strove for simplicity. See “The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message,” *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. I* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 36-38.

⁵¹ Joh. Ph. Koehler, “The Connected Study of Holy Scripture: The Heart of Theological Study (2 Timothy 3:15-17),” *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. I* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 107.

⁵² Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 203.

⁵³ Koehler, *History*, 242.

⁵⁴ Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 196.

⁵⁵ Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 208.

⁵⁶ AE 23:177,179.

⁵⁷ Roland Bainton, ed. *Martin Luther’s Christmas Book* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1997), 15-16.

⁵⁸ Bainton, 43.

⁵⁹ Bainton, 40.

⁶⁰ Bainton, 40-41.

⁶¹ Koehler, “The Connected Study of Holy Scripture,” 108.

⁶² Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 208.

⁶³ Koehler, “The Connected Study of Holy Scripture,” 105-106. Luther pointed out a classic example of the difference between these two approaches when he discussed original sin in the *Smalcald Articles* (III,I,3): “This inherited sin has caused such a deep, evil corruption of nature that reason does not comprehend it; rather, it must be believed on the basis of the revelation in the Scriptures” (*Kolb-Wengert*, 311).

⁶⁴ Koehler, “The Connected Study of Holy Scripture,” 107.

⁶⁵ Koheler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 197.

⁶⁶ *CW* 199:1-4.

⁶⁷ The most famous and insightful of Koehler’s words on this important topic are found in his monumental “Legalism among Us,” *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. II* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 229-282.

⁶⁸ Joh. Ph. Koehler, “Church History Textbook,” *Faith-Life* 66, no. 1 (January/February, 1993): II-III.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Martin Marty, *Martin Luther* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004), 185.

⁷⁰ I write “more importantly,” because, in my opinion, our greatest temptation as conservative, confessional Lutherans is always to say more than the Scriptures themselves say, just as did the Pharisees of old. That John Philipp Koehler was of a similar opinion, see his “Legalism Among Us.”

⁷¹ That this has been the perspective of confessional Lutheran theologians and exegetes since the time of Luther see Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, Vol. I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 319-321.

Richard Charles Henry Lenski: *The Exegetical Task*

Stephen Geiger

A New Home

On April 12, 1872, Jesse James and his thieving band entered a bank in Columbia, Kentucky, and then left with \$1500... of other people's money. That same month Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, died. Those spring days also saw two significant patents issued, one for the gasoline engine and the other for dried milk.

The fourth month of 1872 witnessed at least one more noteworthy event, the arrival to the United States of a family from Europe. Higher wages and reluctance to serve in the German army played parts in motivating a father to move. When Richard Charles Henry Lenski arrived in his new country, he was seven years old. Born in Greifenburg, Prussia, on September 14, 1864, Richard Lenski joined his younger brother Paul and his parents William and Ernestine in making a new home in Jackson, Michigan. Richard's dad was a tailor. Richard's mother inspired these words, written by her soon-to-be-prolific son when he was eighteen:

My mother sits
 And knits
 A pair of mitts
 For me.
 The coal-stove glows
 And shows
 In sweet repose
 Her face.
 That face well known
 Has shone,
 When I was lone,
 A star,
 My soul to guide
 Beside
 The foaming tide

Of sin.
 Life's cares erase
 The trace
 Of quiet grace
 From some;

Her eyes so meek
 Still speak
 The peace I seek
 And love.
 When sorrow pressed
 My breast
 And broke my rest,
 When friends
 Left me to bear
 My care
 Alone, that fair
 Sweet form
 'Midst all my woes
 Arose
 And brought repose
 Once more.
 O image dear
 Appear
 And even cheer
 My life!'

Loves of a Lifetime

Richard attended Capital College in Columbus, Ohio, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1885. Two years later he had graduated from the seminary, a course of study compressed due to the urgent need for Ohio Synod pastors.

During the fall months of 1886, in his last year at the seminary, he penned these lines:

MARIETTA

Rich heart and true and tender, I shall taste
 Thy sweetness all my days. For when the blast
 of wintry disappointment long has cast
 To earth the fickle promise-bonds that graced
 Fair days of others, thy love rich and chaste,
 Thy sweetness ripe and full unchanged shall last

Till all the hungry days of want are past
 And new Spring feeds with plenty Winter's waste.
 Oh, I shall love thee ever! Thy rich soul
 Shall nourish all my high resolve and crown
 Achievement with its loving, fond caress;
 The strong wine of applause, the hemlock-bowl
 of failure or neglect shall never drown
 The lips that kiss thy tear-gained tenderness.²

On February 1, 1888 he and Marrietta Young were married. Of their five children, Gerhard and Oscar became pastors, Esther and Miriam married pastors, and Lois became a well-known writer and illustrator of children's books.³

In her autobiography, *Journey into Childhood*, Lois recalls moments as a young girl in the Lenski household. "Around [the large kerosene lamp] we clustered to read or study each night after supper in the cold months. Papa and Mama sat reading in comfortable rocking chairs.... After school work was done, we played games—no playing cards (they were wicked!) but flinch, dominoes, or parchesi. My father was a great chess player, but alas! none of his children learned to play. After games, Papa would pull out his watch and say, 'Time for bed, children.' We rose dutifully to kiss our parents good night. 'Good night, Mama.' 'Good night, Papa.' Each in turn. A light kiss for each."⁴

Describing her father, Lois writes, "My father was very strict about moral matters.... He was harsh in dealing out punishments. When he was angry, he could strike fear into the heart of a child. When he expected obedience, you obeyed, and instantly, without question, delay or argument. He was cold and undemonstrative in affection. It was hard for him to show the soft side of his nature."⁵ She also notes, "Each night after supper, we had family worship. My father read from the Bible, spoke a prayer, and we all prayed the Lord's Prayer together."⁶ Lois adds, "As a child, I felt that I had the right kind of father. He always had a good supply of pins under the lapel of his coat, a sharp penknife in his pants pocket, and half-a dozen pencils in his vest pocket. All these things came in handy when a little girl had need of them. On his desk there was a big jar of library paste, which he used for mounting photographs. That came in handy, too, especially when Papa wasn't looking."⁷

The Fourth of July was a special occasion in the Lenski household.⁸ “In the evening everybody came to our house for my father’s sensational display of fireworks.... Our front yard and the whole street filled up with people. They sat in rows on our lawn, they perched on our picket fence, boys climbed trees and telephone poles, and old ladies crowded neighboring porches. Suddenly my father appeared on the little second-story porch over the bay window of our house, which made a perfect stage for his performance. The firing of each skyrocket, Roman candle, and pinwheel was met with shouts of surprise and wonder from the excited audience, many of whom had never seen the like before. Sometimes three or four fireworks were shot off in unison—marvelous!”⁹

Family life took a tragic turn in March of 1923, when Marrietta suffered a stroke. The following year daughter Lois wrote, “last spring I went out and helped to take care of her for six weeks. She has been a helpless invalid all winter. Of course, we could not wish that kind of life to be prolonged. But she was so young—only sixty.”¹⁰ Richard’s dear wife had died on Easter evening, April 20, 1924.

The loss of one love was soon lightened by the entrance of E. Helen Gruner into Richard Lenski’s life. On June 10, 1925, the newlyweds set off on a honeymoon trip to Europe. They traveled for over two and a half months, starting in England, traversing western Europe, sailing to Greece, hitting highlights in Syria and the Holy Land, and ending up in Egypt. The happy husband kept copious notes. To peek into his diary is to discover a mind never far from the passion, as well as the new love, of his life.

Monday, July 6, 1925.

Rome – the Old Harlot, Babylon of John’s Revelation, Mother of the Inquisition, Seat and Symbol of the Great AntiChrist. Memories of Luther who came to visit Rome!¹¹

Sunday, July 19

Dr. Perry calls us together on various occasions for little preachments, instructions, and statement of what we will do [the] next day, etc. Some people have questions, often silly

ones. Once Miss Hawkins asked when Saul changed his name to Paul. Dr. Perry asked me to answer it. I explained that he had always had both names. Miss Hawkins could not believe it. – LITTLE had a silly question and quoted his Dr. Denny. This was passed up to me. I declined to answer. So every little bit we have had meetings. Dr. Perry tries to make his remarks Biblical, but it is always the “human” side that he tries to bring out in a passage; he has never mentioned the divine side. – Since this is a Masonic bunch, and the Presbyterians seem to think themselves a rather superior lot, and all arrangements for services are made without me anyway, Helen and I have attended none. She wanted to go, as one would go once to some other church; but I told her, this was a different case entirely, as we are known and are members of a party. I mean, in no ways to countenance their doings. Their Masonry is an abomination to me.¹²

Near the end of the trip...

A couple of days more, a short week perhaps, and we will be back home – two happy, thankful people for all that we have seen and heard on our great wedding trip. The Lord has been very, very good to us, that we have gone so far both safely and happily and with so much enrichment to our little lives. The journey is a memory now, but one that will grow more precious the older it becomes for us. Thank God for it all!^{13,14}

Near a Capital to Capital

Lenski began his ministry in 1887 at Concordia Lutheran Church in Baltimore, Maryland. He subsequently served in Trenton and then in Springfield, Ohio, moving in 1899 to Anna, Ohio, where he would serve at St. Jacob Lutheran Church for twelve years.

His daughter Lois described his pastoral work during these years. “My father was a great student. He spent long hours at his desk, and even though surrounded by children, he had the ability to concentrate.”¹⁵ “My father’s ‘study’ was his *sanctum sanctorum*.¹⁶ We were allowed to come in whenever we liked, if there were no visitors, and if he was not too busy. If we saw him writing, we knew we had to be quiet. Miriam and I learned to read each other’s lips across the room. Papa spent days and days writing at his desk, and we wondered what he was writing about.¹⁷ He never told us.”¹⁸

She also developed a perspective on his public interaction. “Personally, while he was a serious man, he also enjoyed a great sense of humor. He was a popular preacher... his intense blue eyes seemed to look right through a person. He could make a guilty individual feel very uncomfortable. He was a determined man and held fast to his own opinions, fighting hard against his opponents or those who differed with him. Because he had the courage of his convictions, he made enemies. But in spite of his enemies, there were hundreds who loved and admired him.”¹⁹

In 1909, during his time in Anna, he was elected president of the Western District of the Joint Synod of Ohio and served for four years. Then, in 1911, Capital University and the Seminary Board extended a call to Lenski to become Professor of Languages. He accepted, and in September of that year he began his teaching in Columbus, Ohio. He offered courses in exegesis, dogmatics, apologetics, and homiletics. In 1919 he became Dean of the Seminary, and in 1921 course loads shifted so that he taught classes exclusively for seminarians. After 1928 he bore the title “Professor of Systematic Theology.”

In 1935 Lenski received a letter, dated June 18, from the Capital University Board of Regents. It read, in part, “... the Board accepted your resignation as Dean and Full Time Professor and appointed you Dean emeritus with the understanding that you should be used in the active service of the Seminary as your physical condition warranted.” Lenski had suffered from diabetes for a number of years. Ill health now limited his ability to serve.

Of the Making of Many Books

“Dedicated to the Class of 1928 of the Theological Seminary, Capital University, who read First Corinthians with me in 1927-1928 with such enthusiasm as to inspire the task of interpreting eventually the entire New Testament. I finished the whole New Testament by completing *The Interpretation of Revelation* on January 12, 1934.”²⁰

This dedication in his commentary on First and Second Corinthians charts a life’s work that was completed in a relatively

short time. Beginning with *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, published in 1931, Lenski marched through the New Testament canon to create a series of commentaries that became a starting point for those seeking conservative Biblical scholarship in the English language.

The Rev. John Brenner, one of the founders of the *The Northwestern Lutheran* and president of the Wisconsin Synod from 1933 to 1953, offered reviews of Lenski's volumes in the synodical magazine. Referring to *The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels*, Brenner writes, "As far as we have been able to peruse this volume, and we have read liberal portions, we have found that it measures up well with the author's *Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel*, which we reviewed last year. Again we have admired the thorough scholarship of Dr. Lenski. But even more highly do we value his uncompromising stand for the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and his clear-cut testimony to the divinity and the redeemership of Christ our Lord."²¹ Brenner paid additional compliments to the author, speaking of a "thorough and comprehensive knowledge" and "command of the Greek language." He described the writing as "scholarly" and "simple, direct, forceful," and he appreciated the "refreshing style."

Brenner also noted with some regularity areas of disagreement. In his review of the Revelation commentary, he writes that "one may not always agree that his explanation of certain symbols is the only one the text will permit."²² On occasion he identified specific concerns, being particularly explicit with reference to the doctrine of election.

Lenski's commentaries capped a career of published writing that launched when he was only 31. In 1895 he offered *Biblische Frauenbilder*,²³ followed in 1898 by two volumes in English, *His Footsteps* and *Studies for Edification of the Life of Christ*.²⁴ Between 1910 and 1927 he published at least five sermon text-study volumes,²⁵ adding *Epistle Selections of the Ancient Church* and *Gospel Selections of the Early Church* in 1936. He also wrote books entitled *St. Paul; Active Church Member; The Sermon; and Kings and Priests: The Universal Priesthood of Believers*. Besides authoring books, Lenski also wrote with some regularity for

a number of periodicals and served from 1904 to 1924 as the editor of the Ohio Synod's magazine, the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*.

Conservative in Context

In 1966 Pastor John Raabe of Mequon, Wisconsin, and Pastor Gerhard Geiger of Mishicot, Wisconsin, published a selective index of Lenski's New Testament commentaries. This effort attempted to remedy, in some small way, the absence of a thorough index which had been anticipated but never published.²⁶ On the introductory page the compilers state, "Lenski's commentaries are generally accepted in all conservative Lutheran circles as the finest New Testament commentaries. It is a scholarly work, issued by a man who loved the Lord and His verbally inspired Word, and it is found in the libraries of many of our pastors."²⁷

It is in this spirit that many in the Synodical Conference no doubt received Lenski's volumes. With currents of historical criticism intent on crossing an ocean and polluting the American Lutheran stream, those loving the Word found much to admire in Dr. Lenski's doctrinal positions.

In his role as Professor of Systematic Theology at Capital Seminary, Lenski prepared a set of dogmatics notes for students to use when participating in class.²⁸ Lenski's commentaries offer much insight into his theological positions. His class notes present in concise form a summary of what he confessed. Under the section entitled "Inspiration," he writes, "... the Word of God is NOT IN SCRIPTURE, but the Word of God IS SCRIPTURE, and SCRIPTURE IS THE WORD OF GOD [emphasis original]."²⁹ Under the subsection "Verbal Inspiration," he notes, "It is often, by opponents, called 'the verbal theory'; but it is no theory at all... It is a simple fact."³⁰ "Verbal inspiration then is simply this [sic] that the divine act, moving, enlightening, controlling and governing the holy writers, extended to the words which they used, so that only those words were chosen which God wanted for the conveyance of the thought."³¹

Lenski knew who his enemies were. "[Verbal inspiration] is much raged against; hardly a Professor in the German theological

schools today believes it.”³² “Moreover, if the thought is said to be inspired, and not the words, we can never be certain even as to the thought at any point, for it often turns on a single word and comes to us wholly in words... seed, not seeds; Christ argues from the term ‘sons of God’; ‘is’ in the Lord’s Supper; etc.”³³ “It may seem safe to some to admit that the holy writers erred in minor points. But he that is not, or cannot be faithful in that which is least, how shall he be faithful in that which is greatest? (Argument from the minor to the major.) The Holy Ghost is never careless, inefficient, etc., as men are.”³⁴ “But no real truth of science is contradicted in the Bible; theories are not truths, but guesses at the truth. Never hurry to revise your Bible totally with claims of scientists. Learn a lesson from Halley’s comet, which appeared in the West when scientists were sure it would still appear again in the East.”³⁵

In his published volume which includes Paul’s letters to Timothy, and in particular, in reference to the words of 2 Timothy 3:16, Lenski proclaimed to the world what he confessed in class: “The Scripture is thus absolutely incomparable: no other book, library, or anything else in the world, is able to make a lost sinner wise for salvation; no other Scripture [non-Biblical “scripture”], since it lacks inspiration of God, whatever profit it may otherwise afford, is profitable for these ends: teaching us the true saving facts—refuting the lies and delusions that deny these facts—restoring the sinner or fallen Christian to an upright position—educating, training, disciplining one in genuine righteousness. The character of the source (God-inspired) is matched by the profit produced; the profit attests the character of the source.”³⁶

Lenski’s commitment to accept the Scriptures as verbally inspired and without error positioned him well to offer commentary. To read through any of his New Testament volumes is to recognize the wealth of helpful study material offered, surely much of it historical and linguistic and rich in information from Lenski’s vast reading, but possessing its greatest value as it comes together to bring to light treasures from heaven itself. The list of doctrines aptly and accurately defined and proclaimed is long.

Shadows Significant

This makes one wonder whether one is being almost unfair, then, when venturing into areas that cast significant shadows over an otherwise bright presentation of divine truth.

Yet to read and to attempt to digest the subtle and intricate claims that Lenski makes in some key doctrinal areas is to be reminded of the truth that error is genuinely dangerous. Perhaps this reminder is particularly needed when what is false is surrounded by so much that is good.

Consideration of such matters may also be especially appropriate in light of the passage of time. In days gone by, the areas of doctrinal divergence reflected in Lenski's commentaries were prominent issues in the church. Differences over the doctrine of election took the Ohio Synod out of the Synodical Conference in 1881. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod was born from the fires of the election controversy, joining the Synodical Conference in 1920. The doctrine of justification was on the front burner as well in the early part of the twentieth century. The 1930s saw the Missouri Synod and the Ohio Synod in its new form, the American Lutheran Church, engaged in doctrinal discussions to determine if union was possible. The importance of identifying divergent views of justification in these discussions became the focus of Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly articles.

Because these issues were so prominent and because, in the process, orthodox pastors had so thoroughly immersed themselves in relevant Scriptural truth, it might be argued that such a group of spiritual leaders was exceptionally prepared to sift out bad from good in these areas.

One wonders in our day, with the controversies more distant, whether additional care is well exercised to understand the issues and to recognize how saving truths are in fact at stake.

Reason's Role

It would appear that the starting point for Dr. Lenski when approaching certain doctrinal questions was his understanding of

the Analogy of Faith. This phrase is found in Romans 12:6. In translation, the passage (ἔχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν διάφορα εἶτε προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως)³⁷ reads, “and having different gifts in line with the grace that was given to us: if [the gift is] prophesying, [let him use it] in proportion to the faith.”

An initial interpretative challenge is in the understanding of “the faith.” Some have read the verse as referring to *fides qua*, that is, the faith by which things are believed. J.P. Koehler felt quite strongly that this was the correct interpretation.³⁸ Others suggest that “the faith” could be *fides quae*, that is, the body of doctrine which we believe. Dr. Lenski took this position.

While it may seem, then, that orthodoxy hinged on which direction one went with “the faith,” in fact this doesn’t seem to be the crux on which doctrinal divergence occurred. One can make a solid argument for understanding a *fides quae* interpretation properly: when one proclaims God’s message, one must speak in conformity with the Scriptural body of doctrine.

Where then did the divergence occur? Koehler describes two sides:

The Synodical Conference maintains that in explaining the so-called *loci classici* or the *sedes doctrinae*³⁹ one may not, when it is a question of obtaining a doctrine, deviate from the grammatical-historical sense that is immediately and clearly contained in these passages. And if these passages contain terms that according to our human understanding even seem to contradict other doctrines of Holy Writ, one may not modify (*umgestalten*) these terms according to these other doctrines, provided that they are clearly present in these *loci classici* and are integral parts of this particular doctrine.

An adequate (*entsprechend*) comparison may be made only between passages dealing with the same doctrine, and in such cases the more obscure passages must be interpreted according to the clear passages.

Now it may happen that according to purely human understanding a difficulty is present which consists of this: that this doctrine according to our reason cannot be brought into harmony with other doctrines. Then it is part of correct interpretation and

presentation of doctrine to establish this difficulty and make it known.

The position of the opponents is as follows: Not all doctrines are revealed with the same measure of clarity. The doctrine of justification is central to all doctrines and is unconditionally clear. That is not the case with the doctrine of election by grace.

Now, the doctrines of Scripture cannot contradict one another, but must be in harmony with one another. It is, therefore, the task of the theologian to discover this harmony, which must also be recognizable by our reason, and present the doctrines in this sense.

Thus it cannot be but that the discovery and presentation of the less clearly revealed doctrines finds a criterion in the wholly clear doctrines that form the heart of Scriptures. Of course, this does not mean that the clear doctrines of Scripture are somehow the source from which other doctrines could be evolved and constructed. But in the explanation of the so-called *loci classici* of the less clearly revealed doctrines, the expressions that contradict the clear doctrines of Scripture will have to be stripped of their usual, immediate meaning and be weakened or modified according to the pattern of other clear doctrines of Scripture.⁴⁰

As Koehler describes it, the one side is ready to accept Scriptural claims in their most naturally understood sense even should such a claim challenge the natural conclusions of human reason. The other side permits movement away from the simple understanding of a verse in order to achieve a system that is perceived to be more consistent. The one side rejoices to profess only what is consistent with the body of Scriptural doctrine. The other side focuses on an element of Scriptural doctrine and permits the subtle adjustment of other clearly revealed truths to better integrate the system.

The actual point of doctrinal divergence, however, may be more elusive than simply to note that Lenski permitted reason a higher position than is proper. Lenski many times exalted truth in the face of human reason. He happily accepted mystery. He rejoiced in the mind-numbing reality of the Trinity. He treasured the virgin birth. The danger of his approach could not be described as

universal discomfort with revelation that surpassed reason. Rather, the danger of his approach appears to be that he became comfortable finding mystery in a place where God had not positioned it. Consider the case of predestination.

Conversion Is Key

In Ephesians 1 Paul praises God because in Christ he blessed us with every spiritual, heavenly blessing. In Greek Paul then inserts an “equal” sign.⁴¹ What is it that could be equivalent with God blessing us in every spiritual way? God reveals an action that is the very definition of being blessed in every way: “He chose us in Christ before the creation of the world in order that we might be holy and blameless in his sight; all of this happened in the realm of God’s love for us.”⁴²

What a stunning thought. Before I even existed, God graciously determined to make me his child, all in the realm of what Christ did. God graciously chose to bring me to faith. God graciously chose to preserve me in faith. God graciously chose to bring me to heaven when I die. In all this, Christ is the key. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for my sins, and not for my sins only, but for the sins of the entire world. I am forgiven. And what peace to know that salvation, in every respect, depends completely on my God. I am weak. I am tormented by doubts. Satan can suggest that my weakness is evidence I will never make it to eternal life. The Holy Spirit assures me that human weakness is not the evidence of exclusion because my salvation is the work of God, not of me.

As the doctrine of election assures me that my personal salvation is completely and entirely, without any qualifications, a gracious act of God, it fits perfectly with all Scripture reveals about conversion. “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

To such a verse Lenski would claim whole-hearted subscription. He professes such a divinely authored conversion often.

Up to and including the moment of conversion the will of man is passive; i.e., it is wrought upon by grace. Changes indeed

are wrought in the will by the influence of grace, but yet not the change that the will actually wills to embrace Christ; this vital change takes place in the moment of conversion.⁴³

Man can do nothing with his own corrupt natural powers towards his conversion. Synergism supposes that he can do at least something: *facultas applicandi se ad gratiam*;⁴⁴ *voluntas non repugnans*,⁴⁵ etc.⁴⁶

The will in conversion. All the powers of man, the intellect, the sensibilities, and the will are affected in the work of conversion, but the will in particular as the very center of our personality and being is changed in conversion. The change may be briefly described: The unwilling are made willing (*ex nolentibus facit volentes*). Every case of conversion mentioned in the Scriptures corroborates this description, as also in their way, the cases of resistance [sic], Matt. 23, 37: “Ye would not.”⁴⁷

It is at this point that his words take on a tone of concern. “Just how this inner change is wrought cannot be stated fully. An element of mystery always remains.”⁴⁸

Initially one might wonder, “What mystery is he speaking of?” Is he simply marveling at how the Spirit through the Word miraculously creates faith? That is a miracle to be wondered at, in which one rejoices. He continues, “But the following can and should be said: Man in his sinful condition is able to read and hear the Word of [God.] God makes use of the natural power; he brings the Word with its regenerating and converting power to bear upon the sinner. Mark 16, 15: ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’”⁴⁹

The quotations which follow will further clarify. Already here, however, hints at what he identifies as “the mystery” are given. The mystery which Lenski is grappling with is the question of why some are converted and why some aren’t. While he doesn’t explicitly state the link, he appears to imply some connection between the answer to that question and the fact that people, even as sinners, can choose to come to a Christian church or not, can choose to open a Bible and read or not, can choose to ask a Christian friend a question or not. So, can the question, “Why are some converted and some aren’t?” be answered in part by saying, “Some sinners choose to

expose themselves to the Word and some don't?" Focus is moving from God's grace to man's action.

The danger grows. "The first effect [is] the *motus inevitabilis*.⁵⁰ The power of the Word, in Law and Gospel, stir the heart of man, his thought, feeling and will, and this effect cannot be avoided; it is inevitable, may even be called irresistible. When this *motus inevitabilis* sets in, the sinner may completely cast off the Word and its power. Then the work stops."⁵¹ While we certainly confess that the word has effect, being to some "the smell of death" and to others "the fragrance of life,"⁵² we hesitate greatly to imply that those varied reactions to the word constitute a peek into the initial stages of the "process" of conversion.

Lenski goes on. "But here the very first mystery appears: some do thus cast off the Word, others do not, and we are unable to explain why this difference appears. The same mystery appears at every stage, and even after conversion, for even then man's will may cast off all God's grace and fall back into the old stain of sin."⁵³ The question, "Why are some saved and others aren't?" has appropriated first place in the discussion.

Consider the line of thought which follows: "In considering the will in conversion we must hold fast that up to the point of faith the will remains hostile, does not aid or help the divine power or grace, but strives against it. This is natural resistance, called natural because due to our sinful and depraved nature, and thus found in all sinners alike, with never an exception. Yet the grace of God in the Word keeps hold of the sinner's will, working upon it by means of the Law and the Gospel. In this work there may be great fluctuations. Now the Word may draw man's will forward, now that will may draw back again. But the work proceeds as long as man does not by a special determination on his part break the contact for good. Matt. 23, 37: "How often would I have gathered," Gen. 6, 3: "My spirit shall not always strive with man." John 6, 44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me, draw him." The work ceases when man WILFULLY RESISTS [caps by Lenski], i.e., when by a set and lasting determination he casts off the Word and its converting power. The resistance begins with a special wicked volition, which deepens to a set determination. Matt. [2]3, 37; Felix; Agrippa;

etc. No man is able to explain how in the wills of some men such resistance arises. This mystery is the same as that in Satan, when as a good angel he nevertheless fell from God; and in Adam, when though holy and righteous, he yielded to temptation. But the fact of willful resistance, as something specific and rising over and above our natural resistance, is beyond denial, and attested in all Scripture where reference is made to those who turn permanently against God's saving grace. Where this resistance does not arise, the power of God succeeds in changing the will, working contrition and faith, thereby converting the will."⁵⁴

One need not deny that certain individuals may take more violent visible actions against the truth than others. One need not deny that there are elements of revealed truth which we might call "mysteries," things that go beyond our human reason. But it is a far different matter, after raising the question of why some but not others, to identify as the mystery the fact that some resist with only natural resistance while others resist with willful resistance, with the implication that this difference in human resistance has something to do with the fact that some are saved.

Scripture handles the question by dividing it. Why are some saved? The answer is in God. "It is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8). "For he chose us... to the praise of his glorious grace" (Ephesians 1:4,6). Why are some damned? The answer is in man. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).

Human reason wishes for more. Human reason seeks "sensible" solutions. Human reason looks to locate the answer to both parts of the question either in God or in man. Calvinism chooses to connect both the salvation of one and the damnation of another to a predetermined divine decree. Arminianism connects both the salvation of one and the damnation of another to a choice of the human will.

Lenski so much wants to be neither. After the quotations included above, Lenski immediately adds, "In the entire process nothing in man aids the work. The sole power operative toward

conversion is God's grace in the Word (*sola gratia*). All synergism is a delusion, not in harmony with the reality as the Scriptures reveal it. Monergism alone is the reality."⁵⁵ Yet while he longs to avoid the synergistic label, to locate the answer to both the "why saved" and the "why damned" questions in the nature of human resistance is already to have picked a side.

Election Is Affected

Conversion is intimately connected with election. The Scripture, in describing God's gracious election to eternal life, connects the choice in eternity with God's actions in time. As God's choice of us in Christ before the creation of the world brings praise to his glorious grace (Ephesians 1:4-6), so his choice of us inevitably results in bringing us to faith. "Those he predestined, he also called" (Romans 8:30). Luke also notes the connection between a previous gracious determination by God and the creation of faith in speaking of new converts in Pisidian Antioch: "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

God's gracious choice of us in eternity, then, is that which brings about the creation of faith in us in time, through the powerful Word and Sacraments.

Lenski taught, "As to why God elected the one and not the other, the reason for this is not in God (this would be Calvinism in some shape or other); not in any merit of man however slight (this [sic] Pelagianism in some form or other); not in inclination, willingness, or preparation, however slight, on the part of man's natural powers (this would be synergism in some form). God could not elect certain men, because His grace could not bring them to faith and retain them in faith. Why not? This is hidden from us, but the mystery lies in man, not in God, not in the Means of Grace."⁵⁶

One recognizes immediately the consequences of not dividing the "why some, not others" question. Not only must one say that the cause of damnation is not in God, which is accurate. One must also say that the cause of salvation is not in God, which is not. One also recognizes how one's understanding of faith proves key

in one's understanding of election. While Lenski will repeat again and again that faith is "wrought wholly by God Himself; never... a product in the least degree of man's own powers, or bearing any merit before God in itself,"⁵⁷ yet he cannot then locate the reason for man's salvation completely in God. Why not? Because he has connected faith, which he professes to be completely the work of God, to the fact that some only naturally resist and others willfully resist. Whenever Lenski speaks of the necessity or the importance or the role of faith, then, he is never really speaking only about faith in its proper, God-given, sense. Always in the background is the fact that there is something—or the absence of something—in man that makes it possible for faith to be present.

Lenski taught an election *in view of faith*.⁵⁸ In eternity God used his omniscience to look forward and see who would come to faith. Having observed that reality in eternity, he then from eternity marked those who would come to faith as "chosen." To hear Lenski say that faith is "wrought wholly by God himself" is first to wonder, "Well, maybe he still, though speaking in unusual ways, is finding the cause for salvation completely in God." To understand the natural/willful resistance backdrop to every discussion of faith, however, is to understand why Lenski really didn't believe that election to eternal life was solely and completely due to a gracious choice by God. To say in view of faith was to say, "In view of the fact that God knows some will only naturally resist and others will willfully resist, God looked ahead in time to see what people would do and then made his choice based on what he saw."

Lenski also taught that predestination should be presented according to two modes of formulation: "a) The wider is based on antecedent will—embraces the entire plan of salvation—properly includes that faith flows from predestination (i.e. as here defined) emphasizes that God alone is active in our salvation—is directed against all synergistic views. b) The narrower is based on consequent will—restricts itself to the last step in the plan of salvation—properly considers foreseen, persevering faith in the atoning merits of Christ as the mark for the *discretio personarum*⁵⁹—emphasizes man's ability to decline grace and salvation of God—is directed against Calvinism."⁶⁰

He further defines antecedent will as universal and notes that it is for all. It “shows what men ought to do.” Consequent will is “particular, all do not accept and use.” It “deals with what men do do.”⁶¹

This additional distinction brings one no closer to the Scriptural presentation of predestination. In the first formulation, Lenski appears to equate predestination with God’s sincere and gracious will that all be saved. In the second formulation he employs that concept of faith which is attached to an action—or the absence of an action—in man. This distinction is employed in Lenski’s application of his understanding of predestination to individual hearts.

Souls Are a Target

The Scripture presents clearly two powerful tools that are to be used by Christians according to their operating instructions. The Law is given for my warning. The Law teaches, “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). We recognize that because of the continued presence of our sinful flesh, we are constantly in danger of misusing the wonderful promises of God. Our flesh longs to transform forgiveness into a free pass to sin whenever possible. God’s warning is sincere. You can fall.

There are also moments when we are terrified. Trials can foster doubt and despair. Struggling faith recalls the warning that Christians can fall. A conscience brings to mind every failure to trust. A soul is tormented by guilt. A soul becomes certain that faith is being lost. “Look, the Bible says I can fall.” But at that moment a faithful friend in the Word will remind the sorrowing soul that 1 Corinthians 10:12 comes with operating instructions: “If you think you are standing firm...” A faithful friend in the Word will say to the fearful conscience, “God forbids me from speaking 1 Corinthians 10:12 to you.” You are not the audience described in that verse’s operating instructions. Were I to whisper to you a word of it, the syllables would be of Satan. God commands me to announce to you words that are offered to the weary and the heavily burdened:

“Come to me, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “If anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). Be at peace. You are forgiven.

But I’m so weak, my friend in Christ. I’m so weak. To see how quickly I can fall is to wonder if I can remain strong.

What joy for a Christian friend to remind such a soul, “God is faithful. He will keep you strong to the end. Look not to yourself. That’s part of the trick. Know that salvation is God’s doing, not yours. In fact, listen to this: so much is your salvation God’s doing that he chose to save you, to bring you to faith and to keep you in the faith, before the world began. Be at peace. God is your strength. That’s Gospel. The Gospel is given for comfort.

Just as the Law can be used unrighteously to torment troubled hearts, so the Gospel can be wielded unrighteously to enable continued rebellion. But the misuse of either denies the truth of neither. They are tools, powerful truths, that come with operating instructions. What danger when the truths are misused or mixed.

In his dogmatics notes, under the heading *Preservation*, Lenski writes, “Preservation is the work of the Holy Spirit by which He keeps us from falling away, and helps us to grow and increase in faith. This work culminates in the hour of death. One of the blessed fruits of this work of the Spirit is the believer’s certainty of salvation.”⁶²

The text goes on: “This certainty is unconditional when we look to God; He will omit nothing to keep us to the end. It is conditioned when we look at ourselves and our frailty. When this certainty is connected with the doctrine of predestination in its first form (F.C.), we see the unconditional certainty resting on God, in Sec. 45, and the conditioned certainty as regards ourselves, in Sec. 21 (7th of the 8 points): “*Wo sie an Gottes Wort sich halten etc., si mode.*⁶³ [sic] In the second form (*intuitu fidei*), the certainty centers in the questions: Will I be found in faith when I die? The answer is exactly like that involved in the first form. Speaking generally, it is *eine Glaubens-gewissheit.*”^{64, 65}

What is given by the Lord to use as certain comfort and

pure gospel is represented as something offering both certainty and uncertainty. The altered definition of faith, with its context of natural and willful resistance, directs one's eyes only more to one's self and to the weakness of human flesh. Finally, our peace does not come from recognizing that we could look at things either from our perspective or from God's perspective. The judgment of the Law against our human frailties is just as much "from God's perspective" as is the Gospel. Our peace comes from knowing that when the Law has crushed us, the rock-solid promises of the Gospel are the only sounds to be heard.

Limited Innocence

The heart of the Gospel is the fact that Jesus Christ took the guilt of every single human being who has ever lived or will ever live, made it his, suffered the eternal punishment owed the heavenly Father, and rose again as evidence that the whole world through Christ had been declared innocent.

Writing in the June/August, 1906, edition of the *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Rev. Lenski attacked the Missouri Synod for teaching that in Christ the whole world had been declared innocent. He aimed at Romans 5:19. "Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι' ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἄνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα οὕτως καὶ δι' ἑνὸς δικαίωματος εἰς πάντας ἄνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς ⁶⁶

Literally, the verse reads, "Then, therefore,

as through one transgression	to all people	for condemnation
through one act of righteousness	to all people	for righteousness of life."

Lenski wrote, "εἰς κατάκριμα – we know (12) [Romans 5:12] that condemnation has come; εἰς towards, to, has actually reached πάντας ἄνθρώπους but the same cannot be said concerning the δικαίωσιν ζωῆς; it too, like the κατάκριμα was pointed, directed εἰς, towards, to all men, but it has reached and actually realized itself, as all the foregoing (and subsequent) teaching of Paul shows only in 'many,' not in 'all.'... This we find indicated in verse 19⁶⁷

where the word “all men” is dropped and οἱ πολλοί appear, as the same ‘many’ appeared already in verse 15. By the disobedience of the one man sinners were the many constituted (and we have already learned from Paul’s explicit statements that no less than all are comprehended here in the ‘many’); by the obedience of the One righteous shall be constituted the many δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί—and equally Paul has already shown us explicitly and fully that not all are constituted righteous, for all do not believe.”⁶⁸

Lenski teaches that “all” means one thing in its first occurrence and something different in its second, though both occurrences are in the same verse and clearly parallel. The inexact claim on context does not overturn the simple and consistent meaning of “all.” To know that one transgression brought condemnation to every single human being is to know that one act of righteousness brought a declaration of innocence to every single human being.

While the Scripture presents a clear case, it can seem difficult to discover clarity in Lenski’s position. In his quoted words on Romans 5:19 he expressly denies the teaching. At other times he laid claim to the term and professed allegiance to it. He spoke approvingly of words composed by Rev. H.A. Allwardt, who was responding to Dr. Stoeckhardt’s reference to a previous doctrinal document: “That Report indeed defends the doctrine of a ‘universal justification,’ but to that Ohio has no objections. Only we maintain that that is not the justification of which we usually speak... Universal justification, however, is first of all and properly speaking the acquittal of Christ from all further punishment for our sin and guilt; His sacrifice for our guilt was acknowledged by the divine righteousness as sufficient. But since He was our substitute we all in a certain sense were justified with Him, namely, in the sense in which 2 Cor. 5, 14 declares: If One died for all, then are all dead.”⁶⁹

In these words, universal justification is described not as in Romans 5:19, a declaration of righteousness to all people, but rather as a declaration of righteousness to Christ. A similar line is taken by Lenski with regard to 2 Corinthians 5:19: “that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” Lenski speaks against understanding these words to teach a personal imputation of righteousness to sinners. With disapproval he notes,

“... Missouri places the personal imputation into the atonement.”⁷⁰

What does he confess 2 Corinthians 5:19 to mean? “The phrase: ‘not imputing their trespasses unto them,’ namely the world, is an explanation of what God did in the work or act of reconciliation. A further explanation is in verse 21: God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin. The Scriptures speak of this transfer of our sin and guilt elsewhere: ‘The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all,’ Is. 53, 6, cf. verses 4-5, and 10; Matt. 8, 17; Heb. 9, 28; 1 Peter 2, 24. Hunnius writes on the Corinthian passage: *Non imputans eis peccata, id est, peccata illorum rejiciens super Christum, et Christo imputans et imponens* [trans. Not reckoning sins to them, that is, throwing their sins onto Christ, and imputing to and placing [them] on him].”⁷¹ Lenski professes that “not counting their sins to them” means that something was done to Christ but nothing of personal benefit was done for humans.

If God does not count our sins against us, he looks at us and tallies up zero sins. If God does not count our sins against us, then I can say with confidence, “In Christ God is no longer counting sins against the world. We are reconciled. Believe it!” Surely Christ received our sins, but to suggest that the words “not counting their sins to them” point to that side of the transaction and not at all to those of whom it can be said, “their sins,” is to pass over the clear and evident meaning of the words.

As Lenski introduces subtle but dangerous re-definitions of terms, one begins to see how some statements can sound so orthodox while others seem so wrong, yet in both cases they may be something less than a precise presentation of the truth.

J.P. Meyer, writing in regard to some of Lenski’s comments about justification and faith, noted, “All of these words, although a harmless interpretation may be found, leave a peculiar after-taste... it seems necessary to call attention to the danger that may lurk in them.”⁷² There are also times when a harmless interpretation would miss what the writer was attempting to communicate.

Faith in Facts

In identifying the danger of denying objective justification, one desires in no way to demean subjective justification. The fact

that benefiting from what Christ has done for us occurs only by faith is a joy-filled proposition and worthy of the greatest of note. “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

And yet objective realities are at the heart of Spirit-given faith. We need to know what it is we can trust. Of what can we be certain? Faith finds certainty in things that are certain whether one believes them or not. Faith rests on facts. The fact is that all people have been declared innocent in Christ. Praise God! Believe it!

He was...

An article found prominent position in the August 29, 1936 edition of the *Lutheran Standard*. Titled “Dr. R.C.H. Lenski—A Great Champion of the Scriptures,” it read, “Dr. Lenski was a hard worker, and a thorough scholar, and above all a conservative Lutheran Christian. He was a great champion of the Scriptures and of the Lutheran Confessions which are drawn from the Scriptures, and of a practice which was consistent with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. He was the foe of unionism and near unionism, and stood opposed to any union movement which in any way sought to compromise what he held to be the clear teachings of God’s Word. He was constant foe of all those societies which purposely omit the name of Jesus from their prayers and which seek to put all religions on a level. He had very positive convictions, and when he spoke on a question, there was no doubt as to where he stood.”⁷³

Two weeks earlier, on August 14, 1936, Richard Charles Henry Lenski had died.

Wisconsin Synod President John Brenner, in his September 13, 1936 review of Lenski’s *The Gospel Selections of the Ancient Church* in *The Northwestern Lutheran*, wrote, “A few hours after the arrival of the review copy of this book came also the news of the death of the author. The name of Dr. Lenski will go down in history as that of one of the outstanding men in the Lutheran Church in America, far beyond the bounds of his own church body, formerly the Ohio Synod, now the American Lutheran Church.”⁷⁴

Christ is Dead.

Bend the knee,
Bow the head
Fearfully —
Christ is dead.
Mockery
Has assailed him,
Cruelty
Has upmailed him
O'er the tree;
And he died
A crucified.
Earth in pain
Trembles, groans;
Massive stones
Burst in twain;
Dead arise
And proclaim
Him whose eyes
Broke in shame;
Hands unseen
Rend the veil
Hung between
Bliss and bale. —
Crown of thorns
That adorns
Jesus' head,
Nails that drew,
Piercing through,

Streams of red,
Spear that' pierced
Jesus' side,
Found him dead —
Mine the guilt
That has spilt
Jesus' blood,
And the woe
That arose
Like a flood
O'er his soul,
Over me
They should roll
Ceaselessly!
But he bled
In my stead,
I am free.
Flow, then, flow,
Tears of sadness,
For the woe
None can guess,
Tears of gladness
Never ending,
For transcending
Blessedness
Bloodily
Bought for me!

March 9, 1887.

From a Distance

We rejoice in such a confession.

We also reflect on how carefully crafted yet subtly defective presentations of doctrine can lead away from such a proper, simple confession of truth.

To remember personal susceptibility to error is to pray always for those who can bring to our eyes Bible truth. To know our many failings and falls is to thank our Lord for his undeserved forgiveness.

To know how error is dangerous to faith is to be on our guard. To know how error can be mixed within such a large supply of truth is to be particularly awake.

As souls are at stake, let us be humbly bold to speak truths of God that blow the mind but comfort the conscience. Let us state what Scripture says even when it seems to violate a construct of human reason. Let us know that the greatest marvel, the objective reality of God's gift to us in Christ, is our greatest treasure.

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Endnotes

¹ R.C.H. Lenski. Handwritten poems.

² R.C.H. Lenski, Handwritten poems, 42.

³ A recent search of Amazon.com found close to forty titles currently available for purchase. In 1946 Lois won the coveted Newbery Medal for her book *Strawberry Girl*. The award is presented by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.

⁴ Lois Lenski, 25-26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸ This event occurred with regularity at the Lenski home in Anna, Ohio.

⁹ Lois Lenski, *Journey into Childhood*, 61-62, as quoted by Ferne, 14.

¹⁰ Lois Lenski, 121.

¹¹ R.C.H. Lenski, *My Trip Abroad*, 22.

¹² R.C.H. Lenski, *My Trip Abroad*, 46.

¹³ R.C.H. Lenski, *My Trip Abroad*.

¹⁴ When the Lenskis met customs officials in New York City, Richard had to go to a special line for non-citizens. Having lived in the United States now for 53 years, he finally received his Certificate of Naturalization on September 24, 1925, two months after his honeymoon trip was over. The official document describes the applicant—Richard Charles Henry Lenski: Age, 61 years; height, 5 feet, 9 ½ inches; color, white; complexion, light; color of eyes, blue; color of hair, white; visible distinguishing marks, bald.

¹⁵ Lois Lenski, 39.

¹⁶ Holy of holies

¹⁷ In 1898 he published *His Footsteps* and *Studies for Edification of the Life of Christ*. In 1910 he published two volumes of *Eisenach Gospel Selections*. He began his editorship of the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* in 1904, and no doubt among other things, he wrote a four-issue series of articles regarding objective justification for the *Columbus Theological Magazine*.

¹⁸ Lois Lenski, 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁰ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, dedication page.

²¹ *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. XXI No. 6, 94.

²² *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. XXII No. 24, 382.

²³ *trans. Biblical Pictures of Wives*

²⁴ Ferne, 4-5.

²⁵ The books noted in this section are identified by Ferne without an indication that the list is comprehensive.

²⁶ The 48-page index was officially titled, *Index (Selective) of R. Lenski New*

Testament Commentaries and A Glossary of "isms."

²⁷ Geiger and Raabe, introductory page.

²⁸ Two sets of dogmatics notes are stored in the archives of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, which is the new name for Capital Seminary. The first appears to be an earlier version, typed out with very little white space. The second set has an official cover page identifying itself as notes prepared by Lenski and appears to be a later edition, with improved layout. In both cases the notes have handwritten additions made by the student or faculty member who used the notes. All quotations from Lenski's dogmatics notes come from the second set. In the notes, not all words are phrased in complete sentences and punctuation is on occasion irregular. Notes are quoted "as is."

²⁹ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³² *Ibid.*, 31.

³³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁶ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, 852.

³⁷ Black, Romans 12:6.

³⁸ See J.P. Koehler's "The Analogy of Faith" in the *Wauwatosa Theology*, Volume I.

³⁹ "places belonging to the highest class" and "seats of doctrine," i.e. the first passages one might read to identify or explain a particular doctrine

⁴⁰ Jahn, 221-222.

⁴¹ καθὼς Black, Ephesians 1:4.

⁴² καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ Black, Ephesians 1:4.

⁴³ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 224.

⁴⁴ *trans.* ability to apply oneself to grace

⁴⁵ *trans.* the will not fighting against

⁴⁶ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 224.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵⁰ *trans.* inevitable movement

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵² 2 Corinthians 2:16

⁵³ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 226-227

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 227

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵⁸ *intuitu fidei*

⁵⁹ *trans.* separation/distinction of persons

⁶⁰ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 151.

⁶¹ All quotations in paragraph from Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 150.

⁶² Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 240.

⁶³ quoting the German and Latin of Section 21, Article XI of the Thorough Declaration. In English the section reads, “That He will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work which He has begun in them, if they adhere to God’s Word, pray diligently, abide in God’s goodness [grace], and faithfully use the gifts receive.” Note that Lenski is introducing a conditional sense to a section that is identifying characteristics of Christians. God doesn’t encourage good works in us from the cause-effect perspective: “if you do good works, I will strengthen you.” Rather, he notes, for example, that where the hearing of the word is occurring, faith is being strengthened. (The “if” is reflected, in the primary German translation, as “wo” = “where”)

⁶⁴ *trans.* certainty of faith

⁶⁵ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 241

⁶⁶ Black, Romans 5:18.

⁶⁷ ὥσπερ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί, οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί.

⁶⁸ Lenski, *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 & 4. 146-147.

⁶⁹ Lenski, *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Vol. XXV, No. 6. 333.

⁷⁰ Lenski, *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 & 4. 148.

⁷¹ Lenski, *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 & 4. 148.

⁷² Meyer, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, “Objective Justification: Part I,” Vol. 37:1, January, 1940.

⁷³ *Lutheran Standard*, XCIII, August 29, 1936, p. 2, as quoted in Ferne, 6.

⁷⁴ *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. XXIII No. 19, 302.

⁷⁵ R.C.H. Lenski. Handwritten poems.

Anglo-Lutheran Confessor and Martyr Dr. Robert Barnes (1495-1540)

Bruce Adams

The reminder of Hermann Sasse written in 1933 during the darkening emergence of Nazism may serve as directive for confessional Lutherans living in an age when a frenzied culture is locked into the momentary: “The confessions are about the Reformation of the church. They do not intend to lay the foundation for the German national church. They desire, rather, to proclaim the pure doctrine of the Gospel, which ought be the same for Christianity **among all peoples.**”¹ (emphasis added)

It will therefore be the purpose of this essay to illustrate how the important link between Wittenberg and England was realized in the English Lutheran reformer Friar Robert Barnes. Korey D. Maas offers the suggestion as to the why for the general forgetfulness of Robert Barnes: “The reason, I will suggest, is that Barnes was one of what is still a very rare breed: An English Lutheran.”²

No monument serves as a sentinel guarding the mortal remains of Dr. Robert Barnes. Like Moses “no one knows the place of his burial to this day” (Deuteronomy 34:6b), save that Barnes died by burning in Smithfield, London, in 1540. Apart from a restrained re-awakening of interest in his life and confession, Barnes’ writings have been largely confined to an ecclesiastical ghetto. But tributes to his influence as a confessor in England are by no means wanting. James E. McGoldrick refers to Robert Barnes as “perhaps the most significant agent for the transmission of Martin Luther’s influence in England.”³

What is currently apparent is an escalating interest in some aspects of Anglo-culture, inclusive of history, literature, and ceremony, disclosed in films depicting the plays of William Shakespeare and novels by Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Jane Austen. The “Church Times” (London), 10 March, 2000, quotes the historian Christopher Brooke: “Austen’s ‘Englishness’ is surely the key to her success during a national identity crisis on

this side of the Atlantic and a renewal wave of Anglophilia on the other.” Despite much decadence, there appears to be a growing awareness of the Christian giants of the twentieth century: G. K. Chesterton, Evelyn Waugh, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, T. S. Eliot, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Malcolm Muggeridge.

As a consequence, there persists an urgency for evangelical and confessional Lutherans to recognize a distinctive Anglo-Lutheran heritage scattered throughout the world, fused together with a Lutheran liturgical and sacramental heritage. One essential avenue prompting such a sensitivity is particularized in the English Lutheran reformer and martyr, Dr. Robert Barnes. Obedience to the explicit commands of our Lord make this an imperative: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt.28:19); “And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:47): “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:15, 16a). When St Paul preached in Athens he was prepared to engage the Greek mind before preaching the gospel. (Acts 17:16). He introduced the gospel in terms that the Athenians would understand by quoting Greek poetry. As a consequence, the pressing need to proclaim the gospel within the context of the entire Lutheran Confessions offers a challenge among those dispersed throughout this planet for whom the English milieu remains an inheritance to be neither squandered nor ignored. For this to eventuate, Dr. Barnes remains a vital link. Having made the English Lutheran Reformation a lifetime study, N. S. Tjernagel concludes that “late Tudor historiography recognised Barnes as one of the fathers of the English Church; only in very recent years have modern historians taken serious notice of this martyr, whom Martin Luther referred to as ‘St. Robertus.’”⁴ The English historian A. G. Dickens referred to Thomas Garret and Robert Barnes as “pillars of early English Lutheranism.”⁵

A Profile of Barnes' Early Life

Robert Barnes was born in the ancient market town of Bishop's Lynn (now King's Lynn), Norfolk, in the year 1495. At

the age of 19 he was enrolled in the Austin Priory in Cambridge. Because of his partiality to learning, the youthful Augustinian was directed for advanced study to the University of Louvain in Brabant where he pursued humanist studies and languages, being awarded a Doctor of Divinity at Louvain in 1523. On his return to Cambridge with a fellow student, Thomas Parnell, he was appointed prior of the Cambridge house of the Augustinian Order. In 1523 Barnes was awarded a Doctor of Divinity at Cambridge by incorporation.

Influenced by Erasmus and the ethos of humanism, Prior Barnes introduced the friars of the Augustinian House, among them Miles Coverdale, to Terence, Plautus, and Cicero. But a transformation was in process. Along with Miles Coverdale, the Prior was prompted to read the Pauline Epistles, thus gradually schooling himself in the Scriptures. Meantime a Master Thomas Bilney had come to embrace some ingredients of the reformation theology. Bilney sought to make converts to Christ among the students, priests, and scholars in the University. Being a Fellow of Trinity Hall, Foxe relates that it was through Bilney's instrumentality Barnes was "converted to Christ."⁶ He was one of Bilney's two most distinguished converts at the time, the first being Hugh Latimer, University Chaplain, keeper of the schools and Cross bearer of the University. Barnes was granted a warm reception by a group who met in the White Horse Inn for study of the Scriptures and the writings of Martin Luther. It soon behoved him to preside over the "heretical circle" nicknamed "little Germany". "Both Barnes and Latimer were of that temperament which friends label 'prophetic' and enemies 'fanatic.'"⁷

A dramatic event was to ensue in the life of Barnes. On Christmas Eve 1525 Barnes was invited by Hugh Latimer to exchange pulpits and preach in St. Edward's Church, Cambridge, belonging to Trinity Hall. During the sermon Barnes vilified the besetting medieval practice of litigation, the indulgences, clerical wealth, with an additional tirade against the pomp and circumstance of Cardinal Wolsey. While selecting Luther's Postille on the Epistle, *Gaudete in Domino*, Friar Barnes' exhortation was hardly prudent, though mirroring for the occasion the influence of Martin Luther.

Such a brash venture on the part of Barnes resulted in the enemies of reform piecing together twenty-five offensive articles

against Barnes on counts of heresy. His confrontation with the university authorities eventuated in his arrest and expulsion to Westminster to stand trial before Cardinal Wolsey. During a personal interview with the Cardinal, Prior Barnes was offered Wolsey's assistance if he would submit to his authority. While Dr. Barnes politely thanked his superior for his goodwill, he added: "I will stick to the Scriptures and to God's book according to the talent God hath lent me."⁸ Barnes' refusal to comply with the Vice-Chancellor resulted in words "which must have chilled the hearer and which brought into his life a dark shadow which never again lifted until it was fulfilled, 'then you must be burned.'"⁹ It was either revoke all or face the stake. At this point of time Barnes chose submission and recanted. Even then the consequences were harsh. Cajolery finished in public penance in St. Paul's Cathedral, where he was partnered with four merchants from the German Steelyard, who had been condemned at the same time as Barnes for propagating Luther's writings. "On the day of the recantation Bishop Fisher of Rochester "preached a sermon against Luther."¹⁰

For six months Prior Barnes was committed to the Fleet Street prison, afterwards serving as a 'free' prisoner in the House of the Austin Friars in London. But Barnes could not remain an arcane figure. There he indulged in distributing copies of Tyndale's English Bible. Buyers were not wanting. For such a crime the prisoner was transferred for confinement in Northhampton.

It was during the third year of imprisonment that Barnes escaped to Antwerp and across to Wittenberg where "he was cordially welcomed and hospitably entertained by the Wittenberg theologians, notably by Bugenhagen, who already had contact with the English Reformers."¹¹

He even lodged with Luther under the assumed name of Antonius Angelus. Enrollment at the University of Wittenberg for Barnes issued in achieving some influence with Frederick I of Denmark as well as the Elector of Saxony. Marcus Loane (a former Anglican Archbishop of Sydney) claims that "there was a bond between Barnes and Luther in the fact that they had both once belonged to the Augustinian Order, and Barnes was to provide the main personal connection between the English and Lutheran

A Precis of Barnes' Theology

Whilst in Wittenberg there was initiated from the pen of Friar Barnes in 1530 the *Sentences*, a pamphlet of 152 pages embracing a series of 19 Theses defending historic and catholic Lutheran theology. For the *Sentences* Bugenhagen furnished a preface. Three quotations from the *Sentences* suffice to illustrate Barnes' grasp of subjects central to Lutheran theology:

“1. Faith alone justifies . . . 4. Free will of its own powers can do nothing but sin . . . 17. The true (*wahrhaft*) Body of Christ is in the Sacrament of the Altar...” A second and paramount publication was entitled: *Supplication to Henry VIII*, 1531, which encompassed a range of current theological issues. The aim was to win over Henry VIII and the English people to the evangelical faith of the Wittenberg reformers. In the words of Carl R. Trueman, “A Supplication offered him a way in which to place a compendium of Reformation theology in English hands.”¹³ The final literary composition by Barnes was his *Vitae Romanorum Pontificium* (Lives of the Popes) in 1535 for which Martin Luther prepared an introduction. The genius of Robert Barnes was his competence to so tailor Luther's theology as to fashion it in accord with English expression and culture.

Before amplifying two emphases from *A Supplication unto the most gracious Prince King Henry VIII*, it is both timely and fitting to recall that after 1535 Barnes became recognized as an accomplished preacher of the Gospel of God's grace in Christ. Bishop Latimer of Worcester commended this Lutheran preacher of the Word. In a letter to Thomas Cromwell dated 15 July, 1537 Latimer mentioned that “Dr. Barnes, I hear say, preached in London this day a very good sermon with great moderation and temperance of himself. I pray God continue with him, for then I know no man shall do more good.”¹⁴ Expressing his wish that the king might hear Barnes preach, Latimer commented “Surely he is alone in handling a piece of Scripture, and in setting forth of Christ he hath no fellow.”¹⁵ In her well researched book entitled *Latimer - Apostle to the English*, Clara H. Stuart envisages a scene in Worcester Cathedral when Barnes preached:

The Cathedral came into sight, towering majestically above the surrounding buildings. Prior Holbeach welcomed them. The monks were in their places in the choir, hidden by the stone screen that separated choir from nave. The nave was crowded. Barnes held the attention of the crowd from the first word. His voice made the arches and high vaulting ring. The message from the Word of God poured forth with earnestness and seemed to touch every heart, An awe-filled silence hung over the place as the service ended.¹⁶

The Works of Robert Barnes encompass a variety of theological subjects which still address the Christian Church in its mission to this day: Justification by grace through faith alone; the Nature of the Church, particularly expressed in Barnes' answer to Master Thomas Moore; the Office of the Keys; Free Will and Election; the necessity for all to read Holy Scripture; the need to receive Holy Communion in both kinds; the legality of priests to marry; Barnes' answer to praying to the saints, yet incorporating remembrance of them; temporal and religious authority; the origin of the Mass and its translation into English.

Within a confined space, this article will highlight Barnes' all-important contribution to Justification by faith, and from other sources than his *Works*, as well as his insistence upon the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Barnes affirmed that the objective ground of our justification is the meritorious, substitutionary, and atoning death of Christ on the Cross. Let Barnes speak: "The Lamb has alone died for us; the Lamb alone shed his blood for us; the Lamb alone redeemed us. These things has he done alone. Now if these be sufficient; then he alone made justification, and is alone worthy to be our redeemer and justifier."¹⁷ Central to justification is the Cross of Christ: "And therefore to purchase us favour he died on the Cross and so did not Moses."¹⁸ In accord with AC Article IV, Barnes declared the doctrine of grace by quoting Rom.3:24 and Rom. 11:6. Then in true Tudor style Barnes continues: "What does it mean that all men have sinned and yet are justified freely? How shall a sinner do good works? How can he deserve to be justified? What is meant by the word freely... What is meant by grace? If it be any part of works, then it is not of grace. For as St. Paul says 'Then grace were not grace (Rom.1 1:6).'"¹⁹

To assure his readers that the subject of grace is not simply an academic exercise Barnes quotes the personal testimony of St. Bernard: “By grace he justified me freely, and by that he has delivered me from the bondage of sin.”²⁰

The Anglo-reformer detailed the fact that justification and all its blessings are received through faith in Christ alone. As a Lutheran theologian Barnes never wavered on the issue that any human being is justified except by grace alone, through faith alone: “Therefore I conclude that by the Scriptures and these doctors, that the faith we have in Christ Jesus, and his blessed blood, both only, and sufficiently justify us before God, without the help of any works... The very true way of justification is this. First, comes God, for the love of Christ Jesus, solely by his mere mercy gives us freely the gift of faith, whereby we do believe God, and his holy Word, and stick fast to the promises of God... and yet God shall be found true, for this faith’s sake: be we the elect children of God.”²¹

As regards works, Carl Trueman explains that “In emphasizing both the objective basis of salvation in Christ’s work and God’s grace, and its subjective appropriation by the believer through God’s gift of faith, Barnes carefully precluded any notion of a justification involving works. However, in order to avoid accusations that he sanctioned antinomianism, he continues to emphasize that works are not an optional extra for the believer but an essential accompaniment of salvation.”²² This observation aligns with Barnes’ articulation of the necessity of good works: “Now unto this do we all agree that faith alone justifies before God, which in time and place does good works, yea it is a living thing of God which cannot be dead, or idle in man.”²³

Barnes grasp of Scripture and the church fathers contributed to making his first chapter of the *Supplication* “Only Faith justifieth before God” an outstanding achievement. Marcus L. Loane concludes that “It was the most able exposition of the doctrine on the part of any early English writer, and it reflects clearly how much he learned from Luther.”²⁴

Of Barnes insistence on the Real Presence in the Lord’s Supper, Carl L. Trueman is adamant that among English reformers Barnes retained “a Lutheran view of the Eucharist.”²⁵ In the

Sentences, which proved to be a manual of Reformation theology for English readers, in Article 17 there appears the phrase “In the Sacrament of the Altar is the true body of Christ.”

While writing to John Frith in 1533, William Tyndale the English translator of the Scriptures warned his friend: “Of the presence of Christ’s body in the sacrament meddle as little as you can, that there appear no division among us. Barnes will be hot against you. The Saxons be sore on the affirmative.”²⁶ Tyndale was apprehensive lest John Frith should disrupt the reformation movement in England by indicating support for Zwingli’s sacramentarianism and so isolating Barnes the leading English Lutheran theologian. Carl R. Trueman concludes that “Certainly Luther’s emphasis on the real physical presence of Christ in the eucharist did not find English soil conducive.”²⁷

Of profound significance that Barnes defended the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is unfolded in Article VI of the Wittenberg Articles of 1536. Though never officially recognized, the Articles amounted to a reflection of agreement between the English theologians Edward Fox, Nicholas Heath, and Robert Barnes in collaboration with the Wittenberg reformers, Luther, Melancthon, Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, Cruciger and others. Article VI states: “We firmly believe and teach that in the sacrament of the Lord’s body and blood Christ’s body and blood are truly, substantially, and really present under the species of bread and wine, and that under the same species they are truly and bodily presented and distributed to all who receive the sacrament.”²⁸

A second formula of faith was compiled in London in 1538 between the English and German representatives which included Robert Barnes among the German delegates. Article VII of *The Thirteen Articles* recapitulates the agreement reached in *The Wittenberg Articles* Article VII.²⁹

After an erudite analysis of Barnes’ tenacious stand on the Eucharist, Carl R. Trueman deduces: “In a way, he was England’s own answer to Martin Luther, for he too was prepared to break with his fellow protestants simply over the issue of the eucharistic presence. He also contradicts the view that English Protestantism, for whatever reason, was inherently predisposed to Reformed Theology

and that even those who started off spiritually in Wittenberg ended up in Zurich.”³⁰ John R. Stephenson complies that “The sixth of the Wittenberg Articles presents us with a slight amplification of Augustana X, being a straightforward avowal of the Real Presence in the Lutheran sense.”³¹ Historically it remains a tragedy that Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, along with some of his clergy, later came to espouse the radical Zwinglian view of the Lord’s Supper, thus distancing the Anglican Church from the Eucharistic dogma of Luther, Barnes, and the church catholic.

A Proto-Martyr of English Lutheranism

The writer to the Hebrews beckoned his readers to “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” (13:7) The prophet Isaiah bids the faithful to “Look to the rock from which you were hewn”(51:1). Amidst a western, secular society caught up in its post modernism denial of absolute truth, it is becoming apparent that many are searching for their roots. Alister McGrath expresses his conviction that “Roots are important for continuity and stability; they nurture the conditions under which growth and maturity may develop.”³² Particularly for those for whom the Anglo- Lutheran Reformation remains crucial and relevant for our times, Robert Barnes is honoured as the champion of Lutheran reform within an escalating global English milieu. Such roots need to be not merely recalled, but acted upon by confessional Lutherans. Though dead, yet Barnes still speaks. His life and writings serve as an Anglo-mirror of the theology of the Wittenberg reformers.

Charles S. Anderson demonstrates that “Although they were personal friends, it is not Luther the friend but Luther the theologian and reformer who finds a place in Barnes writings and in his attempts to influence his countrymen.”³³

In 1535 Dr Barnes was granted the status of royal chaplain to King Henry VIII. As such he exerted his position to persuade King Henry VIII to accept the *Augsburg Confession* as a basis for political and theological negotiations. His efforts failed to materialize. Such an endeavour the English Monarch spurned, leaving Barnes to eke

out a somewhat penury existence dependent upon the good offices of a William Barlow, resulting in the reward of a Welsh prebend to the value of 18 pounds per year. In truth, Barnes' confession of the faith served only to generate the hatred of King Henry for his chaplain.

During 1538 Barnes prevailed for the first time to introduce the practice of saying the Mass and the *Te Deum* in the English language. This proved a liturgical achievement for which little credit has been accorded to the English reformer.

By 1539 the situation in England spelt danger for the English Lutherans. Lord Thomas Cromwell had intensified his disfavour with the King; while his efforts to assist Barnes increased their mutual peril. Rather than seek exile from the menacing atmosphere of London, Barnes boldly proclaimed Lutheran doctrines which brought him into direct conflict with Bishop Stephen Gardiner of Winchester. As Barnes had an acute awareness of the New Testament teaching of the suffering church throughout his doctrinal treatises, these prepared him to suffer in person for his Saviour. Gardiner openly flouted the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which entailed a provocative attack on Barnes. E. Gordon Rupp notes that "Barnes replied in kind with something of that eloquence which Cranmer and Melanchthon noted in him."³⁴ The interchange between Bishop Gardiner and Dr. Robert Barnes resulted in King Henry VIII, as a self-styled Supreme Head of the Church of England, demanding both a recantation and an apology on the part of Robert Barnes. It became the implacable resolve of the English King to rid himself of Thomas Cromwell and Barnes. Cromwell was arrested in 1540 and beheaded the following month. In May, 1540, Robert Barnes, Thomas Garrett, and William Jerome were arrested and incarcerated in the Tower of London, under the terrible Act of Attainder. Along with three Roman Catholic priests, the three English Lutheran reformers were condemned to die by flames in Smithfield on 30 July 1540. N. S. Tjernagel offers this moving tribute: "Standing before the place of his execution, he spoke the words that are remembered as *Dr. Barnes' Protestation at the Stake* a confession."³⁵ Despite the trough of anguish, Barnes spoke with refined simplicity and verbal eloquence.

Contained in Barnes' *Protestation* is the reformer's rejection

of the anabaptists, confessing that,

I believe in the holy and blessed Trinity, three Persons and one God, that created and made the world, and that this blessed Trinity sent down the second person, Jesus Christ, into the womb of the most blessed and purest Virgin Mary. For I believe that he was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and took flesh of her . . . And I believe that this his death and passion was the sufficient ransom for sin of all the world. And I believe that through his death he overcame sin, death and, hell, and that there is no other satisfaction unto the Father, but this, his death and passion only; and that no work of man did deserve anything of God, but his death and passion only, as touching our justification. For I know the best work ever I performed is impure and imperfect.

I believe that there is a holy Church, and a company of all them that do profess Christ; and that all who have suffered and confessed his name are saints . . . And that our Lady, I say was a virgin immaculate and undefiled, and that she is the most pure virgin that ever God created, and a vessel elect of God, of whom Christ was born.³⁶

Barnes also professed the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. Such a confession of the Faith never erodes with the passing years but rings down through the arches of time. As proclamation precedes action, so the surge of faith serves as a preamble to valiant deed. Action and confession were wrought out at the stake on July 30, 1540. Among the final words to be heard from the lips of the Anglo-Lutheran martyr included this confession: “Wherefore I trust in no good work that I ever did, but only in the death of Christ, and I do not doubt but through him to inherit the kingdom of heaven.”³⁷

When Barnes’ *Protestation* was published in Germany immediately after his death, Martin Luther wrote a preface in which he referred to Barnes as “St. Robert, our good pious table companion and guest of our house.”³⁸

A Postscript

E. M. Blaiklock (formerly Professor of Classics in Auckland, New Zealand) in his study of Psalm 90 concludes that “Nothing

is without purpose. God permits suffering not in idle and fruitless retribution, but in order that vital lessons may be learned. Moses is anxious that wisdom should be woven into his people's consciousness by what they have passed through, that their history should have significance."³⁹ What lessons may be learned from Barnes' gallant stand for the truth as a Lutheran confessor? Two observations are offered.

First, Dr. Barnes' commitment to the theology of the Wittenberg reformers through his preaching of the Scriptures added to his gift of adapting the theology of Augsburg for English consumption. Shortly after Barnes' execution in 1540, John Standish, a fellow of Whittington College, London, attempted to refute the final confession of faith at the stake in Smithfield uttered by the martyr. He bitterly repudiated the *Protestation*, attacking in particular the doctrine of justification by faith alone. A friend of Barnes, Miles Coverdale, later bishop of Exeter, but a former Augustinian student of Barnes in Cambridge, defended his mentor. Coverdale stated "that the words of Dr. Barnes spoken at the hour of his death, and here underwritten, are good, wholesome, according to God's Holy Scripture and not worthy to be evil taken, it shall be evidently seen, when we have laid them to the touchstone, and tried them by God's Word. Dr. Barnes last will and testament, whereon he taketh his death is this; there is no other satisfaction unto the Father, but the death and passion of Christ only."⁴⁰ As Barnes faithfully expounded the truth of God's Word, supported by the church fathers, his testimony did not wither in England. As Luther wrote in his great hymn, *Ein Feste Burg*, "The Word shall stand despite all foes." No matter what faithful Lutherans may be called upon to suffer in the second millennium, their testimony will live on until the Last Trumpet sounds.

Second, though Lutherans in England remained a minority for the next 150 years, the Lutheran church was to re-emerge on 13 September, 1672, when King Charles II issued a Charter granting freedom for the "Companions of the Augsburg Confession" to erect their own church in Trinity Lane, London. Included in the Charter are the words:

Permit all the Companions of the Augustan Profession, of what nation soever professing the name and faith and religion, and

the same sacred rites to use and enjoy the said Temple being so built as aforesaid, and there to meet together, and there to celebrate the interpretation of the holy Gospell and the administration of the Sacraments and to perform other rites and Ecclesiastical matters of their religion according to the custom received amongst them.⁴¹

The efforts of Dr. Robert Barnes to give Luther's confession an Anglo-expression needs to germinate once more. Like the revered martyr of former days, modern. "Companions of the Augsburg Confession" throughout the globe will be challenged in the new millennium to perpetuate within a Confessional framework an Anglo-Lutheran profile of the Faith, particularly involving liturgy, hymnology, and historic tradition. Every Lutheran calendar should commemorate the memory and martyrdom of the sainted "St. Robertus Barnes" on 30 July, 1540.

In 1951 the English Luther scholar, Gordon Rupp, penned the prophetic words: "There is a Catholic Luther, and there is a Protestant Luther, but he himself is bigger than any superimposed pattern. If his voice were allowed to break in, rough, disconcerting, but alive, on our English theological conversation, it might be that this would be yet another Luther whose authentic message, would men observingly distil it out, may be of power and force towards the mending of the Church and the healing of the nations."⁴² Since then God has raised up Luther scholars of no mean stature, among them James Atkinson, A. G. Dickens, John R. Stephenson, Carl R. Trueman, Alister McGrath, and Korey D. Maas, who have rediscovered and promulgated the face of Luther for English readers. Mention should also be made of Neelak S. Tjernagel and his detailed studies on Anglo-Lutheran relations during the Reformation, especially on Robert Barnes.

For this aging pastor emeritus it would appear imperative therefore, for confessional Lutherans committed to the Book of Concord, never to become a prey of post-modernism, whereby "Our contemporary social system has lost its capacity to know its own past, [and] has begun to live in a 'perpetual present' without depth, definition, or secure identity."⁴³

Whilst in Australia biblical and confessional Lutherans witness the afterglow of the Anglican Church, there could be many

Anglicans searching for a spiritual home within Lutheran churches which still remain faithful to their biblical, confessional, and liturgical heritage. In this turbulent 21st century, Dr. Robert Barnes may still serve as a bond between Wittenberg and those Australians who continue to treasure their Anglo-Christian inheritance within an increasingly multi-cultural society. Liturgically the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* could be a role model.

To summarize, it would seem expedient to quote the words of R. G. Eaves and Korey D. Maas:

Barnes thus helped make a Lutheran mark on the theology of the Reformation in England. Through his writings, he helped popularize Lutheran thought in England. He was a famous preacher with popular appeal and a flair for the theatrical. Hugh Latimer wrote to Cromwell saying Barnes had no equal as a preacher of Scripture. Barnes was likeable and made friends and converts among whom was Miles Coverdale. In addition to Cromwell and Latimer, other exalted persons such as Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon and Johann Bugenhagen held Barnes in high regard.⁴⁴

“What, then, is the particular significance, if any, of Robert Barnes? If he has no other significance (and he certainly does), he stands as an important reminder that Lutheranism need not be only a German or Scandinavian faith . . . But it certainly appealed to the Englishman Robert Barnes. So much so that he devoted the most active decade of his life to promoting it among his countrymen.”⁴⁵

May the example and courage of Robert Barnes serve to awaken among confessional Lutherans in these consumer-ridden and secular times a will to share the Faith and Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ among people of all nations.

Endnotes

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- ³ *Historical Dictionary of Tudor England* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) p. 45.
- ⁴ N. S. Tjernagel, “Robert Barnes and Wittenberg” (*Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol.XXVIII September 1957, No.9) p.643.
- ⁵ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (Collins, Fontana Library, 1970) p. 248.
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- ¹⁰ M.L. Loane, *Pioneers of the Reformation in England* (Church Book Room Press, 1973) p. 58.
- ¹¹ E.G. Rupp, op. cit. p. 38.
- ¹² M. L. Loane, op. cit. pp.61-62.
- ¹³ C. R. Trueman, *Luther’s Legacy - Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994) p. 157.
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- ¹⁵ N. S. Tjernagel, *ibid* p.116.
- ¹⁶ H. Stuart, *Latimer: Apostle to the English* (Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, 1986) p.1 55.
- ¹⁷ *The Works of Robert Barnes* (edit. by John Foxe, London, 1573) p. 227.
- ¹⁸ John Foxe, *ibid* p. 229.
- ¹⁹ John Foxe, *ibid* p. 228.
- ²⁰ John Foxe, *ibid* p. 233.
- ²¹ John Foxe, *ibid* p. 235.
- ²² C. R. Trueman, op. cit. p. 166.
- ²³ John Foxe, op. cit. p. 239.
- ²⁴ M. L. Loane, op. cit. p. 65.
- ²⁵ C. R. Trueman, op. cit. p. 54.
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- ²⁷ C. R. Trueman, “The Saxons Be Sore On The Affirmative: Robert Barnes on the

Lord's Supper" (*The Bible, The Reformation And The Church-Essays In Honour Of James Atkinson*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, edited by W. P. Stephens) p.291.

²⁸ N. S. Tjernagel, *Henry VIII And The Lutherans* (Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis 1965) p.269.

²⁹ N. S. Tjernagel, *ibid* pp. 293,294.

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³⁴ E. G. Rupp, *op.cit.* pp.44 -45.

³⁵ N. S. Tjernagel, "Robert Barnes and Wittenberg" (*Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol XXVIII, Sept. 1957, No. 9) p. 651.

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³⁸ N. S. Tjernagel, *op. cit.* p.651.

³⁹ E. M. Blaiklock, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Scripture Union House, London, 1977, Vol.2) p. 38.

⁴⁰ N. S. Tjernagel, *op. cit.* pp. 17- 18.

⁴¹ Copy by courtesy of Guildhall Library, London, EGP 2/1969

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⁴⁴ R G. Eaves, "The Reformation Thought of Dr. Robert Barnes, Lutheran Chaplain and Ambassador for Henry VIII" (*Lutheran Quarterly*, May 1976, Vol. XXVIII, No.2) p. 165.

⁴⁵ Korey D.Maas, *op.cit.* pp.86,87

Book Review Essay: ***Training Children As They Should Go?***

Evaluating Government Education Standards That May Impact Lutheran Elementary Schools

Ryan C. MacPherson, Ph.D.

Quist, Allen. Fed Ed: *The New Federal Curriculum*. Foreword by Phyllis Schlafly. St. Paul, MN: Maple River Education Coalition, 2002. \$12.00.

Quist, Allen. *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom*. Chaska, MN: EdWatch, 2005. \$12.00.

Order from the Bethany Lutheran College Bookstore at 1-800-944-1722.

Introduction

As a U.S. history professor, the husband of an Elementary Education major, and a Christian father, I had many reasons to devote close attention to two recent books by Allen Quist. *Fed Ed: The New Federal Curriculum* (2002) explores the implications of the Goals 2000 Act, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and the Improving America's Schools Act (each passed in 1994) by tracing the history of their implementation through the restructuring of state education standards. In *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom* (2005), Quist recaps the principal conclusions of *Fed Ed*, discusses additional developments resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, and leads readers into a deeper investigation concerning the manner in which moral relativism, pantheism, and neo-Marxism, among other contested ideologies, receive privileged treatment in federally subsidized and state-mandated curricula. A chapter entitled "Home Schools and Private Schools" reveals that parents seeking an alternative to public schools may not be able to insulate their children from these recent education

reforms as effectively as they may suppose. His argument therefore has obvious relevance for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), which presently operates eleven preschools/kindergartens, thirteen elementary schools, one liberal arts college, and one theological seminary in the U.S. Several ELS congregations also have partnered with Wisconsin Synod churches to fund and manage area Lutheran high schools. Moreover, the ELS resolved at its 2005 convention to establish, under the guidance of Lutheran Schools of America, two new elementary schools per year for the next half century.

In this review essay, I shall first summarize Quist's history of the "education standards" movement during the past decade and a half. Because some of his claims are rather startling, I also shall provide citations to original sources that substantiate those claims, based on my own efforts to check the accuracy of Quist's account. I shall next identify and evaluate the chief concerns that Quist raises concerning the new federal curriculum, comparing Quist's evidence with some of my own. Finally, I shall suggest some useful applications of Quist's insights for Christian home schools and Lutheran elementary schools, such as those being founded through Lutheran Schools of America.

Before beginning, a few points deserve mention. First, Quist has in recent years served as a lay delegate on the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. That committee presently is preparing a study of postmodernism, based in part on the research by Quist that is being reviewed in this essay. That committee's work, obviously, involves explicit reference to Holy Scripture as the authoritative norm by which to judge the merits and demerits of postmodernism. Quist's books that are here being reviewed, by contrast, were written for the public square. Properly refraining from commingling church and state, Quist draws upon natural law principles as God's guides for civic affairs without appealing to Scripture. Remembering that natural law and biblical morality have God as their common author, readers of this article may choose to apply Quist's insights in either church or state, though any applications intended for congregational use would be improved by incorporating the Scriptural principles that the Doctrine Committee presently is exploring.

Historical Background

In 1994, Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed three significant bills that laid the groundwork for a *de facto* federally standardized curriculum. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act established a framework for competency standards that were to be expected of all American students at grades 4, 8, and 12.¹ The Improving America's Schools Act, an education funding bill, required that schools receiving federal dollars conform their curricula to the Goals 2000 standards.² The School-to-Work Opportunities Act provided a framework for integrating classrooms and workplace environments in order that public education may benefit the employment sector more directly.³ These U.S. laws served, in part, to implement the Framework for Action to which the U.S. committed itself when President George H. W. Bush signed the UNESCO World Declaration on Education for All in 1990. (The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization—UNESCO—exists to recommend, among other things, global educational policies.) The UNESCO Framework for Action called upon all nations of the world to establish educational standards and implement testing programs to ensure that outcome benchmarks were met by all the world's students across the full socioeconomic spectrum.⁴

During the 1990s, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, National Council for the Social Studies, and similarly named organizations for other disciplines developed standards that would soon be incorporated under both the federal Goals 2000 Act and corresponding state legislation.⁵ American textbook publishers, in turn, aligned their scope and content to fulfill the objectives identified by those standards. Tests, both textbook-based and standardized, similarly were rewritten to adhere to the new standards. The U.S. Dept. of Education reported to UNESCO in 2000 that both textbooks and assessment instruments had largely completed the transition called for by the 1990 Framework for Action.⁶ In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the bi-partisan No Child Left Behind Act that further imbedded these national standards into local school curricula by requiring districts to demonstrate their students'

ability to meet those standards in order for schools to maintain federal funding.⁷

Although the standards ostensibly had been developed by private, non-governmental organizations, Quist documents numerous similarities between UNESCO documents and U.S. standards, suggestive of more than mere coincidence. In 2003, U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige reported to UNESCO that NCLB had brought into being a nationwide curriculum in keeping with the 1990 Framework for Action; as Quist demonstrates, NCLB also accorded with UNESCO's more recent Dakar Framework, which President Clinton signed in 2000.⁸ Quist is alarmed by the fact that NCLB mandated a specific non-governmental organization—the Center for Civic Education—to create educational standards concerning America's founding political principles. The act did not permit the Dept. of Education to consider other organizations' bids on this federally subsidized project, nor did the act call for an independent scholarly peer review process that would evaluate the resulting curriculum.⁹

Equally disturbing, discussion and debate among the parents, teachers, and school board members whose students must now meet the new standards were largely absent from the political process that brought the new standards into being. In a report submitted to UNESCO in 2000, the U.S. Dept. of Education acknowledged that had the American public been informed that the recently developed state-level curriculum standards resulted from any sort of federal mandate (not to mention a UNESCO mandate), “political backlash” would have been “unleash[ed].”¹⁰ Quist objects not only to a procedural bypass of the “consent of the governed”¹¹; he also warns that the substance of the new education standards—a *de facto* federally mandated curriculum—has dubious academic and pedagogical merit and functions politically to undermine numerous values that mainstream Americans traditionally have held dear.

Chief Concerns

Natural Law and Human Rights. Quist, an adjunct professor of political science and former Minnesota legislator, draws special

attention to the federal curriculum's departure from America's natural law foundation for human rights. Quist repeatedly highlights the distinction between the U.S. Declaration of Independence (1776) and U.S. Constitution (1787), on the one hand, and the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), on the other hand.¹² The Declaration of Independence asserts that fundamental human rights are grounded in natural law: "all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights [including] ... life, liberty, and [property]." The U.S. Constitution defines, separates, balances, and limits the powers of government in an effort to maximize the protection of those natural rights. This is in accord with the claim in the Declaration of Independence that "to secure these rights governments are instituted among men."¹³

The U.N. Declaration, by contrast, reverses the relationship between the people and their government with respect to human rights. It defines rights as privileges created by government, rather than defining government as an instrument created by the people's consent to protect their pre-existing, natural rights. Having reduced "rights" to government-created privileges, the U.N. includes "rights" to a paid vacation and government-subsidized compulsory elementary education on equal par with "rights" to free speech and religious liberty. Despite some lip service to "the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family," the U.N. Declaration concludes that "These rights and freedoms [i.e., all of those listed in the document] may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations."¹⁴ That limitation, argues Quist, is functionally equivalent to the following passage from the socialist constitution of Cuba: "Citizens have freedom of speech and of the press in keeping with the objectives of socialist society. Material conditions for the exercise of that right are provided by the fact that the press, radio, television, cinema, and other mass media are state or social property and can never be private property. This assures their use at exclusive service of the working people and in the interests of society."¹⁵ Quist seems to have a point. The flight of hundreds of thousands of Cubans to Florida suggests that government-owned media agencies have not adequately served "the working people." By the Cuban constitution, Cuban citizens have

no real right to free press or speech, a fact that has drawn criticism from international human rights organizations.¹⁶

On the question of human rights, the federal curriculum conforms to the U.N. Declaration, rather than to America's founding documents, despite the long-standing refusal of the U.S. Senate to ratify the U.N. Declaration and a recent decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals insisting that the U.N. Declaration lacks any binding force whatsoever within the United States.¹⁷ The U.S. civics curriculum developed under federal dollars and federal mandate, by the process outlined above, treats the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution as quaint historical artifacts produced during a bygone era when people used to believe in natural rights. "As fundamental and lasting as its guarantees have been [not "are," but "have been"]," reads the Center for Civic Education's *We The People*, "the U.S. Bill of Rights is a document of the eighteenth century, reflecting the issues and concerns of the age in which it was written." The CCE encourages today's students to consider alternative political principles. "In many Asian countries, for example, the rights of the individuals are secondary to the interests of the whole community. Islamic countries take their code of laws from the teachings of the Koran," and so forth.¹⁸

The CCE thus presents historical truth (the Bill of Rights was an eighteenth-century document, and emerged from that historical context) mixed with a political agenda (whether the Bill of Rights should be dismissed in favor of more contemporary alternatives is debatable). I agree with Quist that the CCE takes out of context certain late-eighteenth-century reflections concerning the Bill of Rights. The founding fathers are said to have considered the Bill of Rights "of little importance," and James Madison, its chief author, is said to have thought the process of adopting the Bill of Rights was a tiring and "nauseous project."¹⁹ If not properly explained, this quotation easily can be misconstrued to support the historically false idea that the founding fathers did not value the protection of natural rights. To find the CCE's explanation of Madison's statement, one must page back to an earlier chapter, which explains that some of the framers assumed the federal government would not have any powers except those that were specifically listed in the Constitution.

For example, since the Constitution nowhere states that the federal government would have the power to censor the press, it seemed unnecessary to have freedom of press listed in the Bill of Rights. “There is no reason to lists rights that the government has no power to violate.”²⁰

That might explain why some of the founders supposedly regarded the Bill of Rights as being “of little importance,” but the CCE neglects to teach America’s children a very profound reason for early opposition to the Bill of Rights—a reason fundamental enough to make Madison’s task of securing congressional approval for the Bill of Rights “nauseously” difficult. It all comes down to the nature of the rights themselves. As I emphasize in my American history courses, many leaders in the founding generation worried that a listing of rights in the U.S. Constitution might give the false impression that the government could *create* (and therefore also *destroy*) rights, rather than only *protect* what are in fact inalienable, natural rights.²¹ To explain more accurately the natural law basis of inalienable rights that the founders had in mind, the CCE could (but does not) quote the following passage from Thomas Jefferson’s Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, passed by the State of Virginia in 1786: “We are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted [i.e., for religious freedom] are of the natural rights of mankind, and [that if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right.”²² The founding fathers disagreed on many things, and both the Constitution and the Bill of Rights resulted from political compromises, but their disagreements generally dealt with how the state and federal governments ought to best protect people’s inalienable, natural rights, not whether inalienable, natural rights exist in the first place.²³ Noah Webster—who was on the opposite extreme of the political spectrum from Thomas Jefferson—felt just as certain that natural rights pre-existed governments, and therefore could not be created or destroyed by them. Webster satirically proposed the following amendment to demonstrate how absurd it seemed to list obviously natural, inalienable rights in the Constitution: “Congress shall never restrain any inhabitant of America from eating and drinking, *at seasonable times*, or prevent his lying on his left side,

in a long winter's night, or even on his *back*, when he is fatigued by lying on his *right*.”²⁴

The *process* of writing, revising, and ratifying the Bill of Rights may have nauseated Madison, but the *substance* of those rights, together with the notion that governments exist not to create or destroy rights, but only to protect them, was the very lifeblood of eighteenth-century Whig political thought and the American Revolution that it produced.²⁵ Consciously or not, the CCE has made a political choice to favor the recently developed U.N. model (“rights” that amount to privileges created or destroyed by government) over the historic British-American model (natural rights, to be protected both by and from government). Moreover, the CCE claims that the natural rights asserted by the founding fathers were of little value in comparison to the “rights” (or “privileges,” as often has been the case) established by twentieth-century Supreme Court decisions.²⁶ In other words, what the government creates and destroys matters more than what the Creator has embedded into human nature itself. If future generations are to preserve the founders’ natural law foundation of fundamental rights, they will be indebted to Quist’s research that has exposed the federal curriculum’s subtle but effective dismissal of the Bill of Rights as a quaint document that even its old-fashioned contemporaries supposedly found “nauseating.”

The misunderstanding of American political foundations conveyed by the popular textbook *We the People* finds an echo also in the halls of a public elementary school in my district. In celebration of Constitution Day 2005, the principal announced to the students, falsely, that the Constitution is the document by which the government tells the people what they may and may not do. Two centuries earlier, the framers and ratifiers had been so certain that the Constitution would be the document by which We the People tell the government what it may do (e.g., enact tax laws, regulate trade, declare war, and make peace treaties) and may not do (e.g., abridge the people’s free speech and religious liberty rights, or deprive a criminal defendant of the right to a jury trial).

Radical, Multicultural Morality. The federal curriculum, argues Quist, “views morality, modesty, human rights and the family as being mere constructs,” subject to reinvention by each culture.

Under the influence of a postmodern rejection of transcendent moral truths, an otherwise beneficial emphasis on “cultural pluralism” has been degraded into “radical multiculturalism.” The “radical” approach, as Quist calls it, elevates tolerance of diversity above natural law morality. For example, in Quist’s own state of Minnesota, the Department of Health’s *School Health Guide* includes homosexuality as an instance of diversity that should be affirmed as benign.²⁷ In a recent conference presentation, Quist identified numerous examples in which storybooks specifically recommended for fulfillment of the federal standards actively devalue objective morality and celebrate characters who pursue alternative, subjective value systems. A recurring theme is that homosexual “families” are normal and healthy.²⁸

Although Quist focuses on the curriculum studied by students, my own analysis of the curriculum that trains future teachers quickly reveals a corresponding postmodern rejection of objective morality. For example, a textbook prepared for future language-arts teachers offers the following advice: “Often, story characters are placed in situations that require them to make moral decisions. ... Regular experience with these types of stories can help young people to formulate their own concepts of right and wrong.”²⁹ Significantly, the author encourages children to formulate *their own* morality, rather than to discern *objective* distinctions between right and wrong; no criteria are provided for evaluating the merits of the child’s invented morality.

The teachers themselves, however, are to have particular moral outcomes in mind for their students. This can be seen in the way that another teacher-training text recommends a cross-disciplinary promotion of multicultural diversity: “Adding the book *The Color Purple* to a literature unit.”³⁰ This novel, published by Alice Walker in 1982, portrays the emotional struggles of an impoverished black girl named Celie, who is raped by her father and later suffers sexual abuse from her husband. She learns to find comfort by explicitly rejecting the God of Scripture (for being too masculine) and embracing both lesbianism and solitary masturbation. The book concludes with Celie’s acceptance of pantheism, which at least one literary critic finds far more satisfying than Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange*

Copeland (1970), in which the viewpoint character triumphed by turning from Christianity to the Black Muslim movement, rather than to pantheism.³¹

These examples are not isolated instances. When learning to design effective lesson plans, teachers-in-training are asked to consider favorably the following model for sex education among middle school children. Ten-year-old boys role play as the fathers of their ten-year-old female classmates, explaining to those girls the kinds of changes that their bodies will undergo as puberty commences. Class discussions include the topics of “anal sex, transvestites, incest, birth control methods, and the like.” Photographs of “external and internal sexual organs” may be passed around the room, and students also may be directed to “view themselves in front of a mirror.” This multifaceted lesson plan ultimately aims at fostering “healthy love relationships,” apparently as defined by a combination of students’ own preferences, the teacher’s admonitions concerning “sexual exploitation,” and advice received from representatives of Gay Alliance, who visit the class to answer students’ questions about homosexuality.³²

I discovered the preceding examples by briefly skimming the texts used by Elementary Education majors at Bethany Lutheran College—one of the least likely campuses for such literature. To find postmodern assaults on biblical and natural law morality embedded even in Bethany’s curriculum suggests that Quist’s data in *Fed Ed* and *America’s Schools* are not anomalous, but rather are linked to a far-reaching development in our nation’s educational system, from kindergarten through college. This is not to imply that Bethany’s own professors have compromised the Christian mission of the college. Rather, it is to acknowledge the special challenge faced by the college’s Elementary Education Department, which selects textbooks that must sufficiently conform to government standards for graduates to receive state licensure as teachers. A professor can, of course, use a textbook as a negative example rather than a positive example. Bethany professors are expected to address all topics—whether state mandated or not—from a Christian perspective, training their students to distinguish carefully between what is worthy and unworthy of their acceptance. When handling standards

that would compromise the Christian faith, one professor has told me he takes the following approach: “I ‘cover’ such standards by teaching against them.” As the next section indicates, some of those standards have begun to operate in favor of pagan theology.

Pantheism. A series of twentieth-century court cases supposedly separated religion from public schools.³³ As noted above, the cultural influence that natural law and biblical morality once held over American classrooms is now largely missing. What has replaced it, however, is not the spiritual void of secularism, but rather the spiritual diversity of pantheism.³⁴ As Quist documents, the National Council of Social Studies recommends children’s literature books (for a cross-disciplinary approach to social studies) that advocate environmentalism in pantheistic terms. For example, *Aani and the Tree Huggers* romanticizes Indian villagers who pantheistically regard trees as their brothers and therefore wrap their bodies around the trees to protect them from developers. In *Give Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message*, preschool children are provided with a model of prayer offered to Mother Earth.³⁵ In Quist’s analysis, teachers, even if as unwitting agents of the curriculum designers, “are indoctrinating our youngest and most vulnerable citizens with pantheism, and most of the time the parents have no idea what is happening.”³⁶

As in the natural rights controversy, Quist identifies the United Nations as a key source of the pantheistic ideology. The U.N. has promoted pantheism at its Earth Summits and articulated it in its position documents and treaties. The U.N. Earth Charter (approved by UNESCO in 2000) advocates “sustainable development” based upon “the spiritual wisdom in all cultures,” and especially the “spirituality” of “indigenous people,” which is singled out for special government protection. The Earth Charter promotes a “kinship with all life” during the course of “life’s evolution,” with the understanding that “peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth [not “the earth,” but a personified “Earth”], and the larger whole of which we are part.”³⁷ Quist explains that the U.N.’s Biodiversity Treaty, which was narrowly defeated in the U.S. Senate in 1994, “in effect says that the monotheistic religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam

are destructive to environmental concerns because these religions treat God and nature as being separate. The religions of indigenous peoples, by contrast, are pictured as being environmentally friendly because they believe that God and Nature are one and the same.”³⁸ Though Quist does not identify specific historical ties between that treaty and the children’s literature sampled above, the ideological parallel invites curiosity. Once more, the language employed in certain U.N. documents closely corresponds with the language of subsequent U.S. policies.³⁹ Whether by coincidence or conscious planning, the fact remains: children’s curricula increasingly promote pantheistic environmentalism, rather than a biblical or natural-law stewardship of creation. As the next section reveals, Quist is concerned that secular alternatives to pantheism also can be problematic.

Neo-Marxism. Quist argues that just as some parts of the federal curriculum foster pantheistic theology, so also other parts promote a quasi-socialist political economy. Quist, a strong advocate of private property and a skeptic of centralized planning, warns that the federal curriculum’s civic lessons avoid terms such as “free market” and “free enterprise,” and instead use the more ambiguous term “market economy,” which can include free enterprise and socialism alike.⁴⁰ Quist does not, however, devote much space in his books to a critique of Marxism, since he acknowledges that neither “socialism, in the classical sense” nor “traditional communism” finds many supporters in our post-Cold War era. The neo-Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, by contrast, continues to challenge the foundations of American freedom.

Gramsci (1891–1937), an Italian political theorist, agreed with Marx that all human problems could be traced to the division between haves and have-nots, and that therefore an equalization of their power would bring lasting peace. Marx understood power in economic terms: the goal of communist revolutionaries was for the poor to claim for themselves the means of production owned by the rich. Quist explains that Gramsci understood the power struggle in terms of culture, not economics. Thus, Gramsci advocated “transformational education,” a recipe for changing the existing culture by training the children to be different than their parents.

Gramsci called for an education that would de-construct the present culture (thus dismantling any of its claims to absolute truth), redefine the teacher as “friendly guide” rather than an expert (compare the slogan heard today, “a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage”), emphasize group projects (thus promoting “mass consciousness,” said Gramsci), and merge college preparatory training with vocational training (to counteract the social inequalities perpetuated by the two-track model).⁴¹

Quist suggests that Gramsci’s neo-Marxism has influenced the formation of the federal curriculum, both directly (President Clinton reportedly admired Gramsci⁴²) and indirectly. As noted earlier, the CCE’s civics lessons dismiss the natural law foundation of American government as being quaintly old-fashioned, which would fit Gramsci’s model of deconstructing cultural authorities to make room for alternatives. In a chapter entitled “Integrated Math,” Quist claims that the federal curriculum’s emphasis on group projects in math “are not intended to improve academic performance. They are about changing the child’s view of what it means to be a person.”⁴³ Though never a fan of group work during my own student days, it would seem to me an overstatement to claim that any group activity necessarily represents a Gramscian agenda. My own cursory reading of the *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, however, uncovered some examples that suggest, once again, that Quist’s investigation might be on to something: recent trends in education serve not a pedagogically effective agenda, but a politically narrow one.

For example, researcher Eric Gutstein taught a mathematics class designed to develop “sociopolitical consciousness,” a “sense of agency,” and “positive social/cultural identities” among his mostly Mexican-American grade school students. These objectives were integrated with more traditional mathematics-related aims, which is to say that the latter were diluted by the former. Gutstein used a life-situation-based textbook that “let me [Gutstein] develop projects with a focus more on the social justice aspects and less on the mathematical ones.”(One of his assignments asked students to write a letter to the Educational Testing Service raising questions about the relationship between family income and SAT scores.)

Gutstein argues that “all practice (including teaching) is inherently political.”⁴⁴ Quist, by contrast, “rejects the view that political themes should be taught in math and science.”⁴⁵

Quist’s suggestion that such subjects should be taught *apolitically* resonates with the dichotomy he sees between the politically biased “transformational education” of yesteryear’s Gramsci and today’s federal curriculum, on the one hand, and Quist’s own preference for “traditional” or “academic” education, on the other. I question, however, whether there might be more continuity here than Quist admits. Social engineering is not a new objective of educators, nor is it limited only to the political left. Abraham Lincoln knew as well as Gramsci that “The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next.”⁴⁶ Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, advocated a curriculum for women’s schools that would specially prepare students to become the wives and mothers upon whom the new republic would depend.⁴⁷ And Yale’s professors, when seeking to preserve the time-honored ideal of a liberal arts education in 1828, argued that sound education does not merely convey knowledge; it more importantly molds people’s character.⁴⁸ Thus, I do not think the federal curriculum is flawed simply for serving a social agenda. I am not ashamed to admit my own agenda, as a history professor desiring to offer a comprehensive perspective, when I assign students to read both the Mayflower Compact and the autobiography of colonial slave Olaudah Equiano, or both the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy and the speeches of civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., in contrast to contemporary textbooks that promote a more constrained notion of “diversity” by excluding the classic works of white Americans.

On closer inspection, Quist is really faulting the new standards for two deeper reasons. First, the federal curriculum seeks to remove American culture from its natural law moorings; that is to say, it serves a social agenda that is inconsistent with the nation’s own social past (hence “radical” and “transformational”). Second, it does so under government auspices but without the informed consent of those who are thereby governed in a nation whose constitution is founded upon the principle of popular sovereignty. If these objectives

are denoted by the term “transformational education,” then Quist rightfully sounds the alarm.

What Next?

Quist concludes Part I of *America’s Schools* with three calls to action for those who, with him, believe that the new federal curriculum must be either reformed or discarded. First, inform others. Second, organize a national network of organizations, such as EdWatch, his publisher. Third, contact elected officials to urge policy reform. (Grass-roots organizations have had some success in Minnesota at reversing the recent trends in social studies standards.⁴⁹) Part II of *America’s Schools* offers useful frameworks applicable to all three of these objectives, namely, criteria by which to distinguish the good from the bad in current curriculum standards and to guide the formation of new standards.

Current teachers, students training to be teachers, and parents—including home school parents—would be wise to read the chapters of Part II. People who do not agree with Quist fully will still benefit from his careful discernment between “transformational” and “academic” models of education. Specific chapters address history and geography, civics and government, language arts, and math and science. The learning objectives that Quist outlines may serve as benchmarks for selecting textbooks, adding supplementary material to compensate for deficient textbooks, revising existing state standards for each discipline, or developing alternatives to public schooling.

As Quist notes, “private school teachers are not trained to identify those truths that are missing from the educational materials,” and “it is the unusual private school teacher who has the time and background to supplement the textbooks being used.”⁵⁰ Unfortunately, many of the textbooks marketed at private schools and home schools conform to the same federal standards of the public schools that parents seek to avoid by having their students taught at home or in a private school.⁵¹ Reading Part II of *America’s Schools* can prepare parents and teachers to recognize the dangers of America’s dominant curricula. The task of avoiding curricular pitfalls once they are recognized may, however, prove nearly impossible. For

example, a former Lutheran elementary schoolteacher has confided to me that he resigned from his call when he realized that his efforts to teach around and against the published curricula were as futile as they were exhausting.

Quist's books deserve careful reading by parents, teachers, and taxpayers who are funding the federal curriculum, if for no other reason than prudent caution. Quist has adopted the challenge of identifying the nature, the causes, and the likely results of recent educational trends while the process is still underway. He therefore lacks the luxury that historians like myself have when we read the archived correspondence of participants in political debates from long ago. For Quist's topic, not all of the secrets are out yet, but he has pieced together presently available information into a much-needed report of what is happening and what likely will happen if those who share his preference for traditional education do not act soon.

By indicating that the federal curriculum emerged from a myriad of factions forming opportunistic alliances, not a unified group of planners, *America's Schools* offers a more carefully nuanced account than *Fed Ed*, though both books leave some questions unanswered. Which policy makers had the greatest sway in the creation of the federal curriculum? Were their original goals realized, or do even they feel compromised by political forces beyond their control? And have local teachers absorbed the changes unawares, or did they recognize—and perhaps actively support—the curricular innovations? I look forward to the day when more information will become available concerning the behind-the-scenes maneuvering that has resulted in what Quist terms a “radical transformation” of American education. Much light could be shed by a series of case-study histories focusing, for example, on the recent Profile of Learning debates in Minnesota, employing personal interviews of legislators, teachers, and parents throughout the full political spectrum. Meanwhile, Quist's research can be appreciated as the starting point of a discussion that deserves to be continued.

Readers who feel tempted to dismiss Quist's books as radical, right-wing alarmism should at least test his claims by visiting their local elementary school.⁵² Are math students studying math, or being

trained as social activists—and if so, for the full diversity of the political spectrum, or only for a narrow segment of it? Are children’s stories promoting natural law morality—as Aesop’s fables once did—or postmodern subjectivism that invites every second-grader to make up his or her own set of rules? Are civics lessons teaching the government’s role of protecting its citizens’ inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property, or promoting social entitlements according to a special interest group’s latest menu of options? Are public schools serving society as religiously neutral institutions, or indoctrinating students in pantheism? My own inquiries concerning schools in my district reveal a mixed picture: we may simultaneously thank God for his Fourth Petition blessing of “good government,” including some aspects of public schooling, while also becoming concerned about the same troubling patterns identified by Quist.

Of course, the more important question is not whether schools are in fact teaching the sort of “transformational” curricula that Quist describes, but whether Quist is wise in urging that they should be prevented from doing so. Some of the issues involved fall beyond the scope of a clear Scriptural mandate and are better addressed in the political arena than in the church. Other trends—such as the advocacy of pantheism and the denial of natural law morality—pose dangers to both church and state, and properly may be addressed within each of these “kingdoms” by employing their respective God-given tools of Scripture and human reason. Leaders in both kingdoms would be wise to heed Solomon’s advice: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Pr 22:6) History abounds with examples of the misfortunes that befall a society which fails to do so. Lutheran Schools of America, as it works toward the goal of establishing 100 new Lutheran elementary schools by 2055, has a special opportunity to make a difference for both kingdoms. Insights gleaned from Quist’s research may provide helpful guidance in accomplishing that work.

I thank Bethany Lutheran College professors Robert Hanna and Jennifer Wosmek, attorney Scott MacPherson (my brother), and my wife Marie for their critical feedback on previous drafts of this review essay.

Endnotes

¹ Goals 2000 Act (1994) www.ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/index.html.

² The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (H.R. 6), frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=103_cong_bills&docid=f:h6enr.txt.pdf, p. 381.

³ School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994), frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=103_cong_bills&docid=f:h2884enr.txt.pdf.

⁴ UNESCO, World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and Framework for Action (1990), www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/world_conference_jomtien.shtml.

⁵ A directory of sixteen curriculum-standards organizations is provided in Allen Quist, *Inside the New Federal Curriculum* (St. Paul, MN: Maple River Education Coalition, 2003), 28–30.

⁶ Quist, *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom* (Chaska, MN: EdWatch, 2005), 68–69, quoting from “A Report of the United States to the International Consultative Forum on Education for All,” Jan. 2000, www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/usa/contents.html.

⁷ No Child Left Behind Act (2002), www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html.

⁸ Quist, *America's Schools*, 64 (quotation of Paige), 65–66 (Dakar and NCLB comparison). For the original report, see Rod Paige, “Statement of Secretary Paige at the UNESCO Round Table of Ministers on Quality Education,” 3 Oct. 2003, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2003/10/10032003.html.

⁹ Quist, *America's Schools*, 89–90.

¹⁰ Quist, *America's Schools*, 69, quoting from “A Report of the United States to the International Consultative Forum on Education for All,” Jan. 2000, www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/usa/contents.html.

¹¹ The Declaration of Independence (1776), para. 2, states that governments are legitimate based on the “consent of the governed.” President Abraham Lincoln similarly emphasized the importance of “government of the people, by the people, and for the people” in his Gettysburg Address (1863). Quist laments that “the entire federal curriculum is a violation of this principle” (*America's Schools*, 116).

¹² See esp. Quist, *Fed-Ed*, chap. 9, and *America's Schools*, Appendix F.

¹³ Declaration of Independence, para. 2.

¹⁴ U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), art. 24 (paid vacation), art. 26 (education), art. 19 (speech), art. 18 (religion), Preamble (“inalienable”), art. 29 (limited to U.N. purposes), www.un.org/Overview/rights.html. See also Quist, *America's Schools*, 92–93; *Fed Ed*, chap. 9.

¹⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Cuba (1992), art. 53; trans., www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm. See also Quist's discussions in *Fed-Ed*, 57, and *America's*

Schools, 208.

¹⁶ See, for example, Joseph Kraft, “Missing the Boat on Castro,” *World Affairs* 143, no. 1 (1980), 68–70; S.S., “Cuban Refugee Crisis: Quick Test for New Law,” *American Bar Association Journal* 66, no. 7 (1980): 826–27; Human Rights Watch, “Cuba,” *World Report 2002*, www.hrw.org/wr2k2/americas5.html.

¹⁷ Margaret Galey, “Congress and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” panel presentation sponsored by the International Relations Committee of the League of Women Voters, 14 Oct. 1998, www.dwatch.com/lwvdc/lwv9811b.htm; *Flores v. Southern Peru Copper Corp.*, 343 F.3d 140 (2d Cir. 2003), *caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data2/circs/2nd/029008pv2.pdf*. The *Flores* precedent has been cited favorably in other recent federal cases. “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is merely a resolution of the United Nations [as are other, similar, international agreements, which the U.S. likewise has never ratified]; none is binding on the United States or on this court,” *Feng Hsin Chen v. John Ashcroft and Luis Garcia*, U.S. Ct. of Appeals (10th Cir. 2004), <http://www.kscourts.org/ca10/cases/2004/01/03-2078.htm>. “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is aspirational, not binding, and is not recognized as law in the United States,” *Bertand Sacks v. Office of Foreign Assets Control*, U.S. Dist. Ct., W. Dist. of Wash. at Seattle (2004), 7, www.scn.org/ccpi/ofac/JudgeRobartDecision22Oct04.pdf. Curiously, the CCE reproduces the U.N. Declaration without mentioning that it is a United Nations document, rather than a U.S. document; its placement between Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and Martin Luther King’s Birmingham jail letter gives the false impression that the U.N. document is quintessentially American. See Center for Civic Education (CCE), *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*, 7th printing (Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 2000), 247–49.

¹⁸ CCE, *We the People*, 207; also quoted and discussed in Quist, *America’s Schools*, 90–91; and, Quist, *Inside the New Federal Curriculum*, 6–7

¹⁹ CCE, *We the People*, 100; quoted by Quist, *America’s Schools*, 94.

²⁰ CCE, *We the People*, 90.

²¹ Christopher Collier and James Lincoln Collier, *Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitution of 1787* (New York: Ballantine, 1986), 339.

²² The Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom (drafted, 1779; adopted, 1786), religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/vaact.html.

²³ Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 316–18. For a clear statement of the natural law philosophy commonly accepted during the era of the American Revolution, see William Blackstone, *Commentary on the Laws of England* (1st American ed., 1771), Introduction, Section 2, www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/blackstone/blacksto.htm.

²⁴ Rakove, *Original Meanings*, 330.

²⁵ Jack N. Rakove, *Declaring Rights: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 19–21, 23–26; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological*

Origins of the American Revolution, enl. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 184–89; Edmond S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763–1789*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chap. 5.

²⁶ CCE, *We the People*, 100–1. See also Quist, chap. 10.

²⁷ Quist, *America's Schools*, 38–39, referring to *Minnesota School Health Guide* (1998), chap. 12, www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/mch/schoolhealth/guide/chapter12.html.

²⁸ Allen Quist, “Dealing with Constructivism and Pantheism in School Textbooks,” presented at the Confessional Christian Worldview Seminar, Trego, WI, 30 June 2005. The proceedings of this conference are presently in press, under the editorship of Curtis A. Jahn, at Northwestern Publishing House. Cf. *America's Schools*, chaps. 6–8.

²⁹ Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson, *Essentials of Children's Literature*, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2005), 5.

³⁰ Sharon Vaughn, Candace S. Bos, and Jeanne Shay Schumm, *Teaching Exceptional, Diverse, and At-Risk Students in the General Education Classrooms*, 3d ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2003), 279.

³¹ Stacie Lynn Hankinson, “From Monotheism to Pantheism: Liberation from Patriarchy in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 320–28. See also Linda Abbandonato, “‘A View from Elsewhere’: Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in *The Color Purple*,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 106, no. 5 (Oct. 1991): 1106–1115.

³² John D. McNeil, *Curriculum: The Teacher's Initiative*, 3d ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 73–74.

³³ The Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment's religion clause should be interpreted according to Jefferson's concept of a “wall of separation between church and State” (*Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 16 [1947]). Consequently, public school teachers may not lead their students in prayer, no matter how vague the reference to God is (*Engel v. Vitale* 370 U.S. 421 [1962]). Nor may daily Bible readings or a recitation of the Lord's Prayer be conducted in public schools (*School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* 374 U.S. 203 [1963]). A state government may not prohibit the teaching of evolution in public schools if motivated by a concern for citizens who for religious reasons reject the theory of evolution (*Eppeerson v. Arkansas* 393 U.S. 97 [1968]). A governmental action may support religion only if the purpose and primary effect of the governmental action are thoroughly secular, and the resulting secondary support for religion is not characterized by “excessive entanglement” between church and state (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 [1969]). A state government cannot require public school science classes to teach creation science along side the theory of evolution, since creation science apparently is religiously motivated, even if its scientific formulations contain no specific references to God (*Edwards v. Aguillard* 482 U.S. 578 [1987]). The texts of these rulings may be

found online: supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/cases/name.htm.

³⁴ The endorsement of pantheism in public schools may also be connected to a growing trend to replace mid-twentieth-century secularism with polytheism, in which multiple religious beliefs are to be equally tolerated. See Alvin J. Schmidt, "Polytheism: The New Face of American Civil Religion," *The Anonymous God: The Church Confronts Civil Religion and American Society*, ed. David L. Adams and Ken Schurb (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 193–217.

³⁵ Quist, *America's Schools*, 53–54. See also Quist, *Fed Ed*, 68–73.

³⁶ Quist, *America's Schools*, 55.

³⁷ UNESCO, Earth Charter (2000), www.earthcharter.org/files/charter/charter.pdf; also reprinted in Quist, *America's Schools*, appendix D (quoting pp. 188–89, 192, 193, 195) and discussed in chap. 7.

³⁸ Quist, *America's Schools*, 47.

³⁹ Quist, *America's Schools*, 49–50.

⁴⁰ Quist, *America's Schools*, 114.

⁴¹ Quist, *America's Schools*, chap. 4. For a recent analysis of Gramsci's educational program, see Carmel Borg, Joseph Buttigieg, and Peter Mayo, eds., *Gramsci and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

⁴² Quist, *America's Schools*, 29. Quist cites Tal Brooke, *One World* (Berkeley, CA: End Run Publishing, 2000), 109. No entry for "Gramsci" is provided in the index to Bill Clinton's recent autobiography, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), but the linkage between Clinton and Gramsci to which Quist alludes is suggested also by William F. Jasper, "The Clinton Administration's Terrorist Connections," *New American* 12, no. 24 (25 Nov. 1996): 4, www.thenewamerican.com/tna/1996/vo12no24/vo12no24_clinton.htm; William Norman Grigg, "Toward the Total State," *New American* 15, no. 14 (5 July 1999): 4–6, www.thenewamerican.com/tna/1999/07-05-99/vo15no14_total.htm; John Fonte, "Why There Is a Culture War: Gramsci and Tocqueville in America," *Policy Review* 104 (Dec. 2000–Jan. 2001), www.policyreview.org/dec00/Fonte.html; and, Charles Hill, "The Europeanization of the United States," *Hoover Digest* 2 (2001), www.hooverdigest.org/012/hill.html.

⁴³ Quist, *America's Schools*, 23.

⁴⁴ Eric Gutstein, "Teaching and Learning Mathematics for Social Justice in an Urban Latino School," *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 34.1 (2003): 37–73, quoting 44 (objectives), 65 (social justice), and 49 (political).

⁴⁵ Quist, *America's Schools*, 151.

⁴⁶ www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/abrahamlin133687.html.

⁴⁷ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 210–21.

⁴⁸ *Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College, by a Committee of the Corporation, and the Academical Faculty* (1828), www.yale.edu/yale300/collecti

blesandpublications/specialdocuments/Historical_Documents/1828_curriculum.pdf#search='yale%20report%201828'.

⁴⁹ Quist, *America's Schools*, 91.

⁵⁰ Quist, *America's Schools*, 101.

⁵¹ Quist, *America's Schools*, chap. 15. Standardized tests, required also of private school students, conform to the federal standards. Quist, *Fed Ed*, chap. 6.

⁵² It is worth noting that the American homeschooling movement originated among liberals, not conservatives, and continues to include families from a broad political spectrum, including many families who have chosen homeschooling for pedagogical, not ideological, reasons. See Esther de Waal and Tinie Theron, "Homeschooling as an Alternative Form of Educational Provision in South Africa and the USA," *Evaluation and Research in Education* 17, nos. 2–3 (2003): 144–56; and, Michael H. Romanowski, "Revisiting Common Myths about Homeschooling," *The Clearing House*, Jan./Feb. 2006, 125–29.