# Foreword

During Holy Week and especially on Good Friday, the Old Testament picture used to point to Christ's redemptive work is usually the Passover type. This is proper since Christ's great passion occurred in the context of the Passover celebration. The sermon on Hebrews 7:26–27, however, makes use of another Old Testament type, the Yom Kippur event, which points to the sacrificial death of Christ. This sermon was written by Prof. Erling Teigen of Bethany Lutheran College.

According to both Luther and Chemnitz, the Lord's Supper contains all the elements of a last will and testament. This concept is used in the sermon "The Last Supper: The Testament of Jesus" based on Psalm 111, which is often called the Lord's Supper psalm.

On April 3, 2008, Professor Juul Madson was taken home to be with his Savior. He taught the New Testament classes in the seminary beginning in 1970, and was a teacher to a whole generation of our pastors. He taught a number of courses in the college, showing his wide range of expertise; he assisted in the Mequon program; he was the chaplain of the college; he was president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod; and he served on the Doctrine Committee of the ELS for 38 years. We thank the Lord for all the blessings given His church through this faithful servant. The sermon given at his funeral is included in this *Quarterly*. This sermon, based on Luke 2:25-32, was preached by the Rev. John Petersen of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota.

At the 2007 General Pastoral Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Rev. Theodore Gullixson presented the essay *Practical Hermeneutics.* It is the contention of this paper that in order for us to strive against the unbelief of the unchristian world, to guard against the father of lies, and to edify the hearers of preaching and teaching we need to pay more attention to the study of hermeneutics. The Rev. Gullixson is the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin.

The Psalms are the prayer book and hymnal of the church. In his essay on Psalm 119, the Rev. Jesse Jacobsen gives an interesting overview of this psalm. The Rev. Jacobsen is the pastor of Concordia

Lutheran Church in Hood River, Oregon, and Bethany Lutheran Church in The Dalles, Oregon.

This is the fifteenth anniversary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), founded in 1993 in Oberwesel, Germany. The anniversary convention of the CELC was held in Kiev, Ukraine, June 3-5, 2008. A summary of this convention is included in this *Quarterly*.

Also included in this issue of the *Quarterly* is a review of the book *The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* by Michael Paul Middendorf. This book was reviewed by Prof. Michael Smith of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

# Contents

# Sermon on Hebrews 7:26-27

*by Erling T. Teigen*

**Text:** *For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.* (Hebrews 7:26-27; NKJV)

A putrid, bitter stench, from spilled blood, burned animal carcasses, hide and flesh, and all the other odors that went with that—even incense could barely cover it up. To "go to church" in the Old Testament times was to go to the tabernacle, while still in the wilderness, and then the temple in Jerusalem. And that would have been the flavor of it—a putrid, bitter stench—of spilled blood, of burned animals—hide, flesh, and innards. I don't know if I could have been one of those priests who officiated over that—but I wouldn't have had to worry, since they held their office as sons of the tribe of Levi.

Some of you, not so long ago in *Introduction to Christianity,* read the description of those bloody sacrifices in Leviticus 16, the institution of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement: Aaron was to take two goats, and offer one as a sin offering, and lay on the other the sins of the Israelites and send it out into the wilderness as a scapegoat. "He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat…. Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering… and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat." "So he shall make atonement… because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel."

It was a bloody business; the heart of their work was sacrifice. And it really was bloody; it was all about blood. But those bloody sacrifices were never finished. The priests had to make atonement for their own sins, and for the sins of the people—repeatedly. According to God's command through Moses, this Day of Atonement was to be an annual affair—forever. There were the daily and weekly sacrifices; but this sacrifice of atonement was a standing order, every year.

But in the sacrifice of the Great High Priest, the bloody sacrifices of the Day of Atonement DID come to an end. No longer were the sacrifices carried out by Aaron and his successors, the sons of Levi. But the sacrifice came to an end when on THE Day of atonement, the Son of God and David's Son made the once and for all sacrifice at Golgotha. That was the "place of the skull" reputed by tradition to be the place where Adam was buried.

That sacrifice was as bloody as any of the Old Testament sacrifices ever were. It was an agonizing torture for the victim, and the blood and sweat that poured out surely left as much of a stench and smell of death as did the sacrifices of old. There was a scapegoat—one being punished in the place of the people. But now, the goat of the sacrifice and the scapegoat were joined into one.

But where was the priest? Where was the one who sacrificed? Now the priest, the sacrificer, was joined into one with the sacrifice and the scapegoat. God's Son is the priest, and HE is the sacrifice that he offers, once and for all, which is the end of all bloody offerings for sin, makes him also the eternal priest, once and for all. And so we sing in the old Latin hymn, "Offered was He for greatest and for least, Himself the victim and Himself the priest."

He was the innocent lamb, guiltless and unblemished. Yet he became the sin offering for all time—for you. "God made HIM who knew no sin to be sin for us"; "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The great image we have of this bloody sacrifice in the Revelation of St. John speaks of those who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." And Isaiah writes it: "Though your sins be as scarlet, yet shall they be as white as snow."

He offered up himself and is the priest for all time—once and for all, for you. He stands as the one priest when through the ministry of his word, he distributes to us daily his word of forgiveness. He serves us through those he sends out in his apostolic ministry, when they speak his word of forgiveness, baptize us into his death and resurrection, and feed us with the body and blood he offered once and for all for the forgiveness of sins. But our ministers are no longer sacrificing priests; they serve under HIS promise, "Whosesoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven," and "He who hears you hears

me." They have only His once and for all sacrifice to give.

And so we confess in our Lutheran Confessions: "We teach that the sacrifice of Christ dying on the cross has been sufficient for the sins of the whole world, and that there is no need, besides, of other sacrifices, as though this were not sufficient for our sins. [We], accordingly, are justified not because of any other sacrifices, but because of this one sacrifice of Christ, if [we] believe that [we] have been redeemed by this sacrifice" (Ap XIII).

Thanks be to God, our great high priest, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

# Sermon on Psalm 111: The Lord's Supper

*by Gaylin R. Schmeling*

**Prayer:** We do not presume to come to this Your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Your table. But You are the Lord, who desires to have mercy; grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of Your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink His blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His body, and our souls washed through His most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us, throughout time and eternity. Amen.

**Text:** *Praise the Lord! I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, In the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. The works of the* Lord *are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, And His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the* Lord *is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant. He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people: He has commanded His covenant forever: holy and awesome is His name. The fear of the* Lord *is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever* (Psalm 111; NKJV).

Our text this evening is often called the "Lord's Supper psalm." At least since the time of St. Augustine, it has been read as anticipating in type the establishment of the Holy Supper in the New Testament. It points to the wonderful blessings of the Sacrament.

The psalm begins by praising the Lord for His glorious

works. He has established a remembrance of his marvelous deeds in creation and redemption (Psalm 111:4). In the Old Testament the remembrance took place in the Passover feast, and in the New Testament it is celebrated in the New Passover, the Eucharist. In this remembrance He gives food to those who fear Him (Psalm 111:5). In the Old Covenant He gave the Passover lamb as food for His people. We, however, do not merely eat the meat of an animal pointing to the Messiah. We eat the very flesh and blood of the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord. This is the true heavenly manna.

The psalm reads, "He has sent redemption to His people: He has commanded His covenant forever" (Psalm 111:9). The first covenant was sealed with the blood of goats and calves, but it was only temporary. It pointed to the new and eternal covenant established through the blood of Christ. The New Covenant or New Testament is not a contract between God and His people where each agrees to do his share. No, this is a unilateral agreement where God does all. It is a pure gift, God's inheritance for His people. This Maundy Thursday, then, we consider **The Lord's Supper, the Last Will and Testament of Christ.**

**I. First, we look at the testament.** We have every reason to shout "Hallelujah, praise the Lord" when we learn that we are remembered in Christ's Holy Thursday last will and testament. We will praise the Lord for His marvelous deeds. Think how privileged we would feel if we were adopted into the family of a multi-millionaire and declared his legal heir. Every earthly advantage would be ours.

We, however, have received an adoption infinitely greater. In Baptism we were adopted by the Almighty Himself, becoming the sons of God by faith, joint heirs with Christ, sharing in His divine glory (Romans 8:17). Now in the Lord's Supper His last will and testament is read and that magnificent inheritance is dispensed.

According to both Luther and Chemnitz, the Lord's Supper contains all the elements of a last will and testament (LW 36:179–180; LW 35:86–87; Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper,* p. 27). Before a man dies, he often prepares his will where he bequeaths his property to whomever he desires. Then, through his death, the will is made effective. This is what Jesus did on Maundy Thursday. Right

before His great passion where He accomplished salvation for all, He gave us His will and testament where we receive all the blessings of His redemptive work on the cross. Luther says, "Since God in the Scriptures again and again calls His promise a testament He means to announce thereby that He will die; and again, in calling it a promise He means to announce that He will live. And thus, by that one word He wants to make us understand that He would become man, die, and yet live eternally" (LW 36:179; Hebrews 9:15–28).

Because the Words of Institution are Christ's last will and testament, they must be interpreted literally. One cannot change the stipulations of a human will. If your departed uncle leaves you one-eighth of his stocks and bonds, you cannot say, "No, that really means one-half of his stocks." Likewise, Christ's words, "This is My body; This is the new testament in My blood," cannot be modified or changed to mean "This only represents or pictures My body and blood" (Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper,* p. 27).

Therefore, the testament is the true body and blood of Christ, given and shed for the remission of sins. We receive at the altar the very body born of the Virgin Mary, and from the cup pours the very blood that ran from His five sacred wounds. The Sacrament is a presentation of Christ's once and for all sacrifice on the cross in the midst of His people, where all the treasures of that sacrifice are made present for His own through His body and blood. Here His wonderful works are indeed remembered, and his blessings offered (Psalm 111:4).

This great testament, His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, is effected by the all-powerful Words of our Lord, the Words of Institution. St. Paul says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). Here St. Paul points out that the blessing with the words of consecration causes Christ's body and blood to be present in our midst.

**II. The last will and testament is Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Now we want to consider the heirs of this inheritance.** Who are the heirs? Our text says, "He has given food to those who fear Him." This heavenly food is offered to those who

fear the Lord, those who are adopted children of God through faith in Christ worked in Baptism (Galatians 3:26–27). The fact that this is an inheritance indicates that we have done nothing to deserve or earn the blessings of the Sacrament. It is entirely a gift.

One is to be a worthy guest at the Lord's table. How then may we properly prepare to receive the Sacrament? Paul says, "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat" (1 Corinthians 11:28). This examination includes the following: 1. Do we realize our miserable condition by nature? We were born in sin (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:1) and we continue to sin daily in our lives (1 John 1:10). If we do not see our sin, then we should read through the Ten Commandments and their explanation where we see how we daily sin in thought, word, and deed. 2. We should be truly sorry for our sins and confess them before God as we did this evening in the common confession (1 John 1:9). This sorrow isn't just a sorrow with the mouth, but a sorrow of the heart that we have broken the dear Savior's heart. It means that with the help of God the Holy Spirit we will strive to lead a more God-pleasing life. 3. Finally, true preparation includes the faith that Jesus has already forgiven all our sins on the cross and that He gives us that forgiveness in the Sacrament through His true body and blood. He who is a worthy guest is sorry for his sin and trusts in Jesus' forgiveness in this Supper.

Out of gratitude for this great inheritance, we will desire to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to the Lord which is our reasonable service (Romans 12:1). Drawn into the body of Christ, the church, by receiving His body in the Supper, the church offers itself, all that it is and all that it has, as a thank-offering to God on the basis of Christ's once and for all sacrifice on the cross. We who are His body will desire to live as His body. We desire to be what we are. We will glorify our Savior by our lifestyle and draw more and more to His saving Gospel. Through Christ, we will offer our lives as the hymn of praise, a high doxology unto the blessed Trinity (Hebrews 13:15).

**III. Finally, we want to look at the benefits of this inheritance.** The text says He has sent redemption to his people, He has commanded his covenant forever (Psalm 111:9). This inheritance offered to us this evening is worth more than a 100 million-dollar lottery ticket.

It is worth more than all the gold and silver in the world. We were redeemed, not with gold and silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death (1 Peter 1:18–19). Here we receive the vivifying flesh and blood of Christ, our ransom, the price of our redemption. Therefore, we need never wonder if our sins are forgiven.

A little boy had badly misbehaved and needed to be punished. To underscore the seriousness of the misdeed, his father sent him to bed without supper. Later that evening the bedroom door opened slightly. The offender shyly came out into the living room and quietly said, "Daddy, I have a question. What I've got to know," said the boy, "is Daddy, are we still friends?" "Still friends," Jesus tells us in his Holy Supper with his precious blood. More than friends, he assures us that we are the children of God, forgiven and restored with His blood. Christ gives us His body and blood permeated with divinity, so that we might be drawn into communion and union with the deity itself, participating in the divine nature as the sons of God with an eternal existence (2 Peter 1:4).

In illustrating this communion and union with Christ in the Sacrament, many of the Lutheran fathers used the example of the vine and the branches in John 15 which Jesus gave during the Last Supper. By receiving His body and blood we are engrafted into Him, drawing life from Him as branches from the vine. We are so united with Him that we can say, "It is not I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). When we remain in Him and He in us through a regular use of Word and Sacrament we will bear abundant fruit, for without Him we can do nothing.

Here is the food for the way. The Psalmist says, "He has given food to those who fear Him" (Psalm 111:5). When we are burdened by the problems and cares of day-to-day life, when there is sickness in our family, financial crisis in our home, and conflict with our friends; when it seems we can't make it another step further; we need not suffer alone, for the Lord says, "Come to My table all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Through the Sacrament He gives the strength to face all the difficulties of life and to do all things through Him (Matthew 11:28; John 6:55).

Finally, as we meet Jesus in the Supper, our thoughts are pointed heavenward to the final consummation of our redemption. He says, "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:18). The Sacrament is the messianic feast of the kingdom which will culminate in the feast of the Lamb once slain. Then as we eat at His table here we have a foretaste of the eternal banquet, and we are assured that we will feast forever in paradise with Him.

Receive the vivifying flesh and blood of Christ, our eternal inheritance, our ransom, the price of our redemption, the food for the way, a foretaste of heaven. The meal is prepared.

# Funeral Sermon for Juul B. Madson

*by John J. Petersen*

**Text:** *And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."* (Luke 2:25-32; NKJV)

Dear Clarice, family, and friends of Juul Benjamin Madson,

In His grace and mercy, the Lord heard and answered the many prayers offered up for your dear husband and father, and delivered Juul from his suffering and from this world to Himself in heaven last Thursday morning. And in doing so the words Simeon spoke in the temple were realized directly for Juul - "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace."

Juul's family requested that these words spoken by Simeon be considered for our comfort and edification today. They are very appropriate words for this occasion. As I pondered them in recent days it became apparent that there are some definite similarities between Juul and Simeon.

Luke writes, "And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." How old was Simeon when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple for the purification ceremony? We aren't told. We might assume that

Simeon had lived a long life and that he had been patiently and faithfully waiting many years for this day to come, when he would see his Savior face to face.

We do know how old Juul was when his time on earth ended: 87 years. That fact may be a bit of a surprise to some of us, since the Lord kept him so strong and vigorous and mentally alert as the years went by. And we know that those years were filled with many experiences and accomplishments. During those years he was a son and a brother, growing up in Bode, Iowa and in Princeton, Minnesota. Since 1946, for 62 of his years, Juul faithfully carried out the role of husband to you, Clarice. Through those years he was a loving father to the nine children the Lord gave to your marriage; and to his 23 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren he was a caring and attentive grandpa. And to many of us who are present today, he was a faithful pastor and professor and friend.

In considering the similarities between Juul and Simeon, we would note also this: that both were faithful servants of the Lord. Simeon's faithfulness is evident by the fact that he was present in the temple that day baby Jesus was brought there by Mary and Joseph. The Lord had spoken to him and he trusted what he'd been told, and through the years he waited for its fulfillment. There may have been other things Simeon did and intended to do in his life, but this was first and foremost: that he would wait upon what he'd been promised.

So also we would say that Juul was likewise a faithful servant of the Lord. His parishioners and his many students in the college and seminary would attest to that. Having said that, I believe that Juul would have modestly objected to our equating his faithfulness with Simeon's. I understand that frequently in the evening Juul led his family in singing the hymn entitled "The Sun Has Gone Down," and that he gave special and heartfelt attention to the third stanza:

*Forgive me, O Lord, My sins and transgressions in deed and in word!*
*Thou knowest my heart and my innermost thought,*
*The words I have spoken, the deeds I have wrought,*
*My errors and failings I deeply regret, Forgive and forget, forgive and forget!*

He was a humble Christian man who knew and confessed his sin and knew that his own faithfulness could never be the cause for his status as God's redeemed child and heir of eternal life. Rightly so, for God's Word clearly tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." He would insist that His only claim to worthiness is Jesus Christ, and that the only faithfulness he could claim was the faithful love of the Savior who lived a perfectly obedient life and died to pay for Juul's sins and our sins.

What other similarities can we note as we think about Simeon of old and Juul Madson? St. Luke says of Simeon, "This man was just and devout." As Simeon awaited that happy day when he would see and hold the world's Savior in his arms, he was counted as justified before God. By faith Simeon was counted, as all believers in Christ are counted, as just, or innocent before the holy God. This is so, not because Simeon was in himself a holy, sinless man. Rather by God's free grace he was declared "not guilty" for the sake of the innocent Savior who was promised and who had come.

What does the apostle Paul write? In Romans 3 he says, "For there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood through faith." For the sake of Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life for all and who was punished for all on the cross, God justifies us, proving it by the resurrection of His Son on Easter morning.

For 24 years Juul proclaimed this, the central teaching of God's word as a parish pastor. For 22 years he taught this precious doctrine as a professor at Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. For 38 years he served as a guardian of this saving truth as a member of our synod's doctrine committee. For 87 years he was covered in Christ's righteousness, having been brought to trust in it through baptism, being assured of it by hearing the Gospel and receiving the Savior's body and blood in Holy Communion. Knowing and confessing his failings, the life Juul lived in response to this good news was a devout life.

This leads to yet another obvious connection between Simeon and Juul Benjamin Madson: both could depart this world in peace. When Simeon took in his arms the promised Redeemer,

he sang this song: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." Now Simeon's great goal had been reached. He had seen the promise fulfilled in the baby he held. He knew every promise would be kept by God and he was consoled, trusting that when the Lord called him from this world, he would depart, not in fear or in doubt, but in the peace of full forgiveness and the certainty of life forever in heaven.

Juul's last days in the hospital must have been very difficult for him as he dealt with the results of the stroke he experienced on March 22nd. How could it be otherwise? But what a comfort it must have been to be surrounded by his loving family! What a great help to be attended by good physicians and nurses! What an encouragement to be visited by so many dear friends, all praying for his physical and spiritual well-being. But those things alone couldn't account for the calm repose he maintained through it all. He was departing this life with the peace which passes all human understanding.

That is so, because like Simeon in the temple, Juul had seen Jesus Christ. Both Simeon and Juul saw their Savior. Simeon face to face in the temple that day; Juul through the means of grace, throughout his life. And where Jesus Christ is seen by faith and held in the heart, there is sweet consolation, knowing every sin is washed away. Where Jesus is present with His Word, there is life, even as the body dies. For He promised, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though He may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." When Jesus spoke these words, He asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" By His consistent confession Juul answered, like Simeon earlier, and like Martha in these words, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Dear Clarice and family, today and in the days to come there will be sadness. Again, how could it be otherwise? But we have this consolation that like Simeon, Juul departed in peace. We have this comfort, knowing that all who die in peace with God enjoy forever what the psalmist described when he wrote, "I will both lay me down

in peace, and sleep; for You O Lord only make me dwell in safety."

So in peace we will wait for the day when we will depart this world, trusting that our dear Savior will call us home. In our sadness we rejoice already in the reunion to come at the throne of the Lamb who was slain for Juul and for Simeon, for you and for me. May God by His grace keep us all in that peace, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**Juul Benjamin Madson**
November 17, 1920 – April 3, 2008

Juul Benjamin Madson was born to Norman and Elsie Madson on November 17, 1920, in Bode, Iowa. He became one of God's children through Baptism at St. Olaf Lutheran Church. He later confirmed his faith publicly at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Princeton, Minnesota.

Following three years at Bethany Lutheran High School, Juul graduated from Bethany Lutheran College in 1940. After two years at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, he returned to Bethany Lutheran High School to teach German and coach the basketball team. He entered Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1943, and by 1946 he had entered the full-time teaching and preaching ministry at churches in Northwood and Somber, Iowa. He was married that year to Clarice Elaine Huso. Juul and Clarice were blessed by God with nine children: Linda Kathleen Browning (Daniel), Mark Daniel Madson (Sharon), Paul Michael Madson (Karen), David Huso Madson (Jan), Jonathan Noel Madson (Sharen), Timothy Juul Madson (Susan), Matthew Abel Madson, Joseph Benjamin Madson (Tiann), and Jennifer Laura Pederson (Brian).

In 1954 Juul and Clarice and family moved to Tacoma, Washington, where he served Lakewood Lutheran Church for seven years. In 1960 Juul was called to First American Lutheran Church in Mayville, North Dakota, where he served faithfully for seven years. In 1968 he accepted a call to English Lutheran Church in Cottonwood, Minnesota, while also serving as President of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In 1970 Juul accepted a call to teach at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota, where he was a professor of New Testament exegesis and various

other courses for a total of 22 years. During this time he also served on the synod's Doctrine Committee (38 years), was the chaplain of Bethany Lutheran College, and a member of the Catechism Revision Committee. He also completed graduate work at Mankato State University and at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

Juul was an ardent fan of the games of basketball and baseball, and he was an avid and accomplished reader, writer, golfer, and gardener. He loved his family and devoted endless hours pointing them to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His diplomacy, wisdom, thoughtfulness, and dedication to God, his church, family, and friends made him an example for all of us to follow.

Juul is survived by his wife Clarice (62 years of marriage), eight children, 23 grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by his sister Gudrun Moldstad, and his son Paul. Juul died in the presence of his family at Immanuel St. Joseph's Hospital in Mankato, Minnesota, on April 3, 2008. He now worships in heaven before the throne of his Savior!

Blessed be his memory.

# Practical Hermeneutics

*by Theodore G. Gullixson*

Centuries ago, the deacon Philip asked an important question of an Ethiopian, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man in the chariot answered, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" He was having difficulty applying the words of Isaiah 53 to the prophet or to some other man. Then Philip began to preach Christ **and** to teach hermeneutics (Acts 8:30-35). Even though Scripture is clear, the Ethiopian needed the hermeneutical key of Christ to open his understanding of Scripture and to begin his faith in Christ.[1]

Many people today need that same hermeneutical key—Christ. Believers today have perceived that a growing crisis exists within Christendom due to the voices of tolerance and inclusion that have virtually drowned out the voices of faith. These voices include the influence of post-modernism, which rejects absolute truth and promotes knowledge by experience, and a growing number of false voices—Christian (critical, experiential, evangelical), human-created (world religions), and secular (philosophy and science)—all of which clamor for the attention of our members and of people in our community. The result is an increasing number of Americans who are biblically illiterate and see the Bible as irrelevant to their lives. Speaking in 1966, Robert Preus shows that this crisis has been with us for a long time:

> In a sense the present crisis is more serious than that which faced the Church in the 1880's. First the debate today over the inspiration, authority and inerrancy of Scripture and the related subject of Biblical interpretation is not confined to the Lutheran Church in America. It is worldwide. No theologian or informed Christian can avoid it. Second the present controversy over the nature of Scripture and its interpretation strikes at once at every single doctrine of our faith, for every article of faith is based upon Scripture and drawn from it. Third, the debate concerning the Bible has become frightfully complicated making it exceedingly difficult for laymen or pastor or professor to cope with all the problems connected with Biblical authority, inerrancy, hermeneutics, etc. Philology, archaeology, philosophy, history, all have a bearing on the problems; and it

> is almost impossible for anyone to qualify himself in all these fields of learning. Yet we must cope with the problems.[2]

In order for us to cope with the unbelief of the unchristian world, to guard against the father of lies, and to edify the hearers of preaching and teaching, pastors need to pay more attention to the study of hermeneutics. One of the most important textbooks on hermeneutics and exegesis is in the library of most Lutheran pastors and congregations: the *Book of Concord*. Ralph Bohlmann's book, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions,* demonstrates that the writers of the Lutheran Confessions used sound hermeneutical principles in their exposition of Scripture and in their confession of its truths. A thorough understanding of our confessions will also teach the correct principles of interpretation because they are clearly stated by the confessors.

In addition, coping against modern errors means that pastors need to prepare the members in the pew to be fully equipped to deal with post-modern thought, to worship together in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, and not to be children who are tossed about with every wind of doctrine, by every trickery of men, or by cunning speech (Ephesians 4:12-14). Such a program of Bible education requires a working knowledge of hermeneutics.

## The use of the word "Hermeneutics"

Though the Reformation was a "hermeneutical revolution," the first use of the word *hermeutica* with regard to the interpretation of texts was made by Johann Dannhauer, a 17th-century Lutheran theologian from Strasbourg. He connected this new science with Aristotle's treatise Περὶ ἑρμενεῖας. Though they did not use the word "hermeneutics," the study, practice, and use of hermeneutical principles were developed by Luther and his followers, Melanchthon and Flacius.[3]

Flacius' book *Clavis scripturae sacrae* (1567) attempted to develop a specific hermeneutics which would serve as a key for understanding difficult passages in the Bible while relying of the principle of *sola Scriptura.* [4]

## An Important Practical Consideration

One primary presupposition and prerequisite for understanding Scripture is the thesis that the Holy Spirit is his own interpreter and that his work is required for anyone to understand the Bible. Only the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (SC III; ELH, p. 32), and he must guide the student of the Bible to the proper understanding and correct conclusions about what he has revealed. For he tells us, "no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). Jesus also states, "Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27).

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of truth…[who] will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Man's need for the Holy Spirit is expressed in the *Formula of Concord*: "But to be born anew, and to receive inwardly a new heart, mind, and spirit, is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. He opens the intellect and the heart to understand the Scriptures and to heed the Word." (FC, SD II:26; Tappert, p. 526). God's Word has divine power to convert sinful hearts, yet St. Paul says that the Word can be hidden: "But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:15-16). Paul declares that "the veil is taken away in Christ" (v. 14), which is accomplished only by faith, which is also the work of the Holy Spirit. The veil of death blinded Christ's disciples on Easter Sunday so that Jesus in the upper room had to open "their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45).[5] In that room Jesus was teaching the disciples to see the Old Testament in a new hermeneutical way so that they might recognize in it the fulfillment of the prophecies about his work of redemption and the Gospel message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.

The basic premise of this paper is that the study of hermeneutics is both practical and vital for knowing Scripture. The first part of the paper will speak to the practicality of hermeneutical studies, that is, why such studies are necessary, and the second part will look at some practical applications of the presuppositions,

principles, and rules of hermeneutics that are used in the study of Scripture.

# The Practicality of Hermeneutical Studies

## The Relationship of Hermeneutics to Exegesis

In some books on hermeneutics it is difficult to separate this discipline from exegesis. Dr. Preus states, "Hermeneutics deals with the method as well as the tools of exegesis."[6] While hermeneutics and exegesis are two separate disciplines, they must interact to produce understanding of a given biblical text.

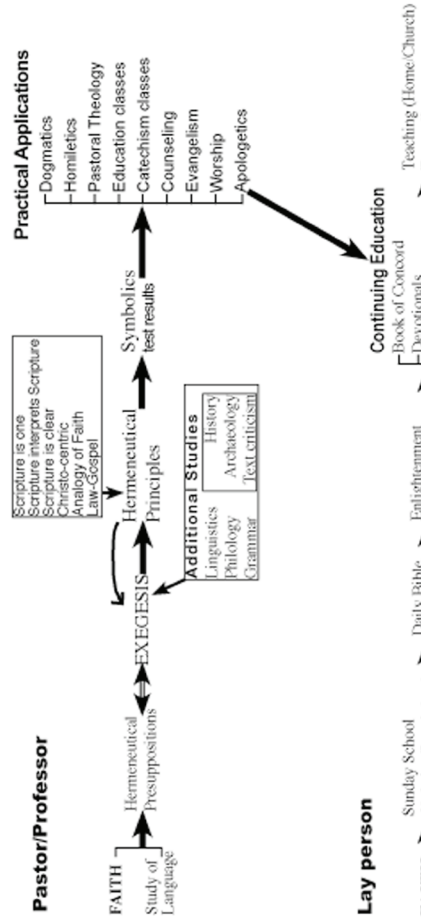
Perhaps it would help to explain the relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis by way of an analogy. Consider that you want a new automobile and someone sets on your lawn all the parts for you to assemble. The parts need to be identified (exegesis), but in order for them to be assembled most of us would need a manual (hermeneutics) to understand how the parts interact to make the car operate. To extend the analogy one step further, a shop class is needed to teach about systems and how the parts work together (presuppositions), so that with the help of the manual you will recognize the parts and assemble them correctly.

Bernard Ramm sees no need to distinguish between hermeneutics and exegesis: "It has been customary to specify hermeneutics as the theory of interpretation and exegesis as the application of the theory to the text."[7] He adds, however, that scholars developed the theory of hermeneutics from practical issues of exegesis. Since "hermeneutical principles are distilled from the activity of exegesis itself. Therefore any division between exegesis and hermeneutics is somewhat artificial."[8] Prof. James Voelz uses a functional distinction: "The **actual interpretation** of the Scriptures is called **exegesis**. The **study of the principles of interpretation**, the theory which stands behind the actual performance of exegesis, is **hermeneutics**…."[9]

Ramm's description suggests that a hermeneutical circle exists between hermeneutics and exegesis. That is, Scripture cannot be understood properly apart from the fundamental hermeneutical presuppositions, which in turn are derived from a careful exegesis

of Scripture. This logical circle is "resolved" in two ways: 1) people read/hear the plain words of Scripture and are lead by them to trust that the Bible is God's Word, and 2) past exegetical and dogmatic studies have provided the proper information for the hermeneutical study of the text. While it is not necessary to pin down the answer to "Which came first?" it is important to remember that hermeneutics stands above exegesis in the same way that a commanding general develops strategy for the soldiers under him to execute (tactics).

The use of biblical hermeneutics in exegesis is very practical because it influences every part of the ministry of the Word—preaching, catechesis, counseling, Bible classes, and teaching. The chart below attempts to display the interaction between the minister and laypeople with their practical results.



This chart makes two points. First, understanding a given text begins with faith and hermeneutics-exegesis and not with dogmatics, which is applied exegetical study. Second, because the Bible is clear, lay people can know the truth of the Scriptures and apply that knowledge in their lives as Christians. They also need to know the principles of biblical interpretation so that they can know what God revealed in His Word.

Pastors have often heard people say, "That is just your interpretation." Indeed, modern students and scholars of the Bible have arrived at different conclusions concerning a given text, but they do so within the framework of their own hermeneutical principles. That is, Calvin, Arminius, Knott, Wesley, Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, Kant, Bultmann, Barth, and a host of others approached Scripture with principles of interpretation at variance with those of the Lutheran Confessions. They imposed their own hermeneutical presuppositions and rules on Scripture, so it is no wonder that their studies produced different results in theology. Pieper states that "the entire Christian doctrine is revealed and set forth in Scripture passages so clear that the learned and unlearned alike can understand them; they do not stand in need of 'exegesis' for explanation."[10]

We should thank God the Holy Spirit for leading Luther and the other Lutheran confessional pastors and theologians to use and espouse a distinct set of hermeneutical presuppositions and principles drawn from Scripture itself as a guide to a correct understanding of Scripture.

These hermeneutical principles are specifically rejected by both Roman Catholic and Reformed theologians and discarded as useless by the exponents of higher-critical investigation. In the face of their relentless criticism of Scripture, confessional pastors must hold to them even more strongly lest they also lose the precious Gospel. The doctrine of justification by faith must ever remain the central teaching of Scripture, but without a proper hermeneutical understanding of Scripture, its readers will not hold the correct view about justification.

# The Science and Art of Hermeneutics

> In the holy Scriptures you can make no progress unless you have a guide to show you the way. ... The art of interpreting the Scriptures is the only one of which all men everywhere claim to be masters. ... The babbling old woman, the doting old man, and the wordy sophist, one and all take in hand the Scriptures, rend them in pieces and teach them before they have learned them
>
> *-St. Jerome, to Paulinus (Letter LIII), A.D. 394.*

If we are to appreciate the practical nature of hermeneutical studies for Scripture we need to understand the scope of hermeneutics. The discussion as to whether hermeneutics is a science (*scientia*) or an art (*ars interpretendi*) is an important corrective to any study of biblical hermeneutics. It certainly would be most practical if the presuppositions, principles, and rules of hermeneutics could be entered into a computer. Then the process from biblical exegesis to dogmatical theology would be a fairly simple matter.

Erasmus could call hermeneutics a science since he named theology "the mother of all sciences." But to Erasmus "science" held a different connotation as being equal to knowledge. The modern definition of science insists that the critical thinker is the measure of all things. Gerhard Meier defines **science** as: "methodologically ordered reflection, making use of all available means, which can be executed and tested under the same conditions by others."[11] Given this definition, hermeneutics can be classified as a science because others can test its results. However, Meier recognizes that since the Bible is God's Word, biblical hermeneutics is a science *sui generis* (in a category by itself).

This concept of hermeneutics as a science may not be so easily accepted, since this is the hermeneutical approach of several Reformed groups. Donald Bloesch states:

> Every text, it is supposed, can be harmonized not only with the whole of Scripture but also with the findings of secular history and natural science. The meaning of most texts is thought to be obvious even to an unbeliever. The end result of such a treatment of Scripture is a coherent, systematic theological system, presumably reflecting the very mind of God. This

> approach has been represented in Reformed circles by the so-called Princeton School of Theology associated with Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield.
>
> In this perspective, hermeneutics is considered a scientific discipline abiding by the rules that govern other disciplines of knowledge. Scripture, it is said, yields its meaning to a systematic, inductive analysis and does not necessarily presuppose a faith commitment to be understood. Some proponents of the old orthodoxy (such as Gordon Clark and Carl Henry) favor a metaphysical-deductive over an empirical-inductive approach, seeking to deduce the concrete meanings of Scripture from first principles given in Scripture.[12]

On the other hand, computers and hermeneutical principles cannot by themselves interpret Scripture. For hermeneutics is also an **art** (*ars*), that is, the interpreter requires the guiding of the Holy Spirit and faith to open the mysteries of God, to understand correctly their relationship to other passages and to other doctrines of Scripture, to balance properly divine wisdom with human ignorance, and to deal with the inherent paradoxes and tensions that exist in the Scriptures. Gerhard Meier states, "If hermeneutics is understood as the laws by which an utterance be understood, hermeneutics runs the risk of becoming a sterile application of rules, and the interpreter is tempted as a skilled theoretician to want to understand everything."[13]

Grammars and lexicons are not suited to capture the nuance of language. The human mind was created to communicate first with God and then with other humans. God gave man the cognitive tools to gain comprehension through various communication skills, whether written or spoken. However, *Ars interpretandi* does not mean that exegetes have the freedom to find their own meaning in the Bible, but it does mean that hermeneutics recognizes the fact that communication is more than words and grammar.

*Ars interpretandi* is not just a matter of getting behind the mind of the biblical author, or finding nuances of meaning which the rules of hermeneutics could not bring out. In his essay on J. P. Koehler, Peter Prange stated, "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)."[14] Faith in Christ is the essential hermeneutical key that opens up the Scriptures to be understood. Without true faith, one is practicing only *scientia interpretandi* with a sin-darkened understanding.

Do you taste the tension that exists between *scientia* and *ars*, between reason and intuition, between methodology and faith? Instead of resolving this tension, Ramm states, "Hermeneutics is both an art and a science. It is a science in that it can reduce interpretation within limits to a set of rules; is it an art in that not infrequently elements in the text escape easy treatment by rules."[15] More will discussed about biblical tensions and hermeneutics.

## Division into two fields (Prolegomena and Practical)

As Dr. Preus stated in the introduction, hermeneutics is such a large field of knowledge that it cannot be comprehended by the mind. In order for us to comprehend the scope of this discipline, this paper is dividing hermeneutics into two distinct areas labeled "Prolegomena" and "Practical." The first deals with presuppositions and the latter with hermeneutical tools, principles, and skills.

Under the "Prolegomena" category is included the discussion of the worldview, scope, and presuppositions of hermeneutics. This is the arena where the very critical discussion of the historical-grammatical hermeneutics versus the historical-critical viewpoint belong. This discussion is driven by the presuppositions that the exegete brings to biblical studies: the main presupposition being whether or not the Bible is directly inspired by God and therefore inerrant. Of course, the inerrancy presupposition must first be derived from the Spirit-led revelation of what Scripture says about itself—a true hermeneutical circle.

Only faith in a divine God who cannot and will not lie enables the interpreter of God's Word to take his Word literally, that is, to understand it to be clear and without error. Dr. Preus speaks about one who held to a different set of presuppositions:

> Bultmann is incapable of adhering to any of the hermeneutical

> principles of Lutheranism or historical Christianity, e.g., the divine origin of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, the unity of Scripture, the analogy of Scripture, the clarity of Scripture. But most remarkable is that Bultmann is no longer interested as an exegete in *finding the literal sense* of Scripture, the plain meaning intended by the writers. What John or Matthew or Paul *intended* to present as fact is erroneous myth. …What is this if it is not some sort of new allegorical method, a new esoteric, spiritualized exegesis?[16]

The category of "Practical Hermeneutics" deals with language, historical, archaeological, and linguistic studies that are brought to bear on a given text of Scripture. Included in this category are the hermeneutical principles (or rules) that guide the exegete in his studies. These principles, in turn, are divided into 1) general rules of interpretation of any text, and 2) special principles for the specific study of Scripture.

The general hermeneutical principles/rules apply to all studies of literature, ancient and modern, such as Aesop's *Fables*, Plato's *The Republic*, Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, the Constitution of the United States, and Scripture. General hermeneutical principles were employed to discover in 1440 that the *Donation of Constantine,* in which the Emperor Constantine purportedly gave the pope secular authority over Italy, was written long afterwards and a forgery from the eighth century.[17]

General rules are to assist in finding the meaning of the words and recognizing their grammatical form and syntax; they are to assist in understanding the purpose of the writing, and in comparing it with other similar writings. One general principle is that the original meaning of words (etymology) is of less importance than the word's *usus loquendi,* which is determined by the context.[18]

Each field of human endeavor uses specific words and thought constructions to develop a need for special rules of interpretation. The same is true with regard to the Bible because of its divine origin, its divinely-revealed teachings, and its special characteristics such as inerrancy, unity, Christocentricity—characteristics that are shared with no other book. Because of these special characteristics, a special biblical hermeneutical set of principles is necessary so that the Bible is not interpreted as just any other literary work.

The discipline of hermeneutics states that in general each literary work must interpret itself in whole or in part. Because we are dealing with God's truthful Word, "The rules of Biblical Hermeneutics are themselves contained in the Bible and are gotten at by careful exegetical study, just as the rules of the grammar of any language are derived from a careful study of the respective literature."[19]

Where did these biblical hermeneutical presuppositions and principles come from? It is important to know about Lutheran history to see how Lutherans were engaged in hermeneutical study.

## Lutheran Hermeneutic History

The Reformation arose from and benefited from the Renaissance revival of Greek and Hebrew studies, which required a study of how to interpret the ancient writings. The Reformation succeeded, in part, because of a hermeneutical revolution of the same type and scope as the hermeneutical exchanges between Jesus and his enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jewish interpreters living at the time of Jesus also had a long history of interpretation of Scripture. Richard Longenecker, in his book *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period,* states that, despite different exegetical methods, Jewish interpreters held to four basic points: the divine inspiration of Scripture, the Torah contained the entire truth of God, the necessity of dealing with both the plain meaning and the implied or deduced meanings of the text, and the purpose of all biblical interpretation was translating into life the instructions of God.[20]

Longenecker informs us that when quoting Scripture Jesus used literal and midrash exegesis, but his most characteristic use of Scripture is what he calls the "pesher-type" of interpretation, that is, the "this is that" fulfillment motif. He cites Jesus' sermon in Nazareth after reading Isaiah 61:1 where He says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:16-21).[21]

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 can also be viewed as Jesus' hermeneutical sermon on properly interpreting God's Law, that it is a matter of the heart and faith ("Blessed are the…") rather than outward actions. When the Pharisees objected

to Jesus eating with sinners at the dinner that Matthew gave, Jesus replied, "But go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). The Pharisees needed a different set of hermeneutical presuppositions in order to evaluate properly Jesus' actions. Jesus declared that he was acting on the basis of Scripture correctly interpreted. Jesus also answered both Satan's and the Pharisees' temptations with God's Word, using the principle that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. When the Pharisees tested Jesus about Deuteronomy 25:7 and whether it was lawful to divorce a wife "for just any reason," Jesus responded by quoting Genesis 2:24 to restate what God's original intention in marriage was, and added "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:3-6). Here Jesus was interpreting God's institution of marriage in Genesis 2 and expounding on the meaning of the words "and the two shall become one flesh."

Concerning the New Testament writers, Longenecker says that they interpreted the Old Testament from a Christocentric perspective, in conformity with a Christian tradition, and along Christological lines. These are dominant themes, even though Paul certainly used other interpretive methods learned from his rabbinic teacher Gamaliel.[22] Dr. Preus disagrees with this assessment and refers to 2 Corinthians 10:1ff regarding the spiritual Rock that followed the Children of Israel: "There is no evidence that Paul has an old midrash in mind at all, or that he ever followed Jewish midrashim (which can first be traced only to a time later than Paul.) Paul is not implying that some rock followed the Israelites in the wilderness. Rather he is using an analogy: just as the Israelites drank water from that rock in the wilderness, they also drank spiritually from a spiritual rock which came after them, viz., Christ. The rock in the Old Testament is a type of Christ."[23]

In the 1500s in Germany, the new learning arising from the Renaissance provided Luther with an intellectual climate of challenging the hermeneutical principles used in the Roman Catholic Church. Nicholas of Lyra proposed hermeneutical views that were contradictory to the standard four-fold hermeneutical procedure of his day. Luther was influenced by his writings.[24] In Raymond

Surburg's judgment, the Lutheran Reformation would have been impossible without Luther's change in hermeneutics.[25]

Dr. Robert Preus describes the hermeneutical presuppositions which are both uniquely Lutheran and fundamental for proper study of Scripture: "The Lutheran emphasis upon the doctrinal unity of Scripture, the divine origin and authority of Scripture, the Christ-centeredness and saving aim of Scripture—all such emphases constitute a series of hermeneutical presuppositions of gigantic proportions, presuppositions which will totally determine the interpreter's attitude and approach to the sacred Scriptures."[26] He notes that these presuppositions were Luther's, those who followed him, and especially those who wrote the Lutheran Confessions.[27]

It should not surprise anyone that in 1518 Luther still reflected the mind of the late Middle Age scholastics, who thought that necessary doctrine must be based on Scripture, the church fathers, councils, canon law, and reason. The various controversies of the next two years brought Luther to realize that teaching must be based on clear words of Scripture alone.[28] In 1520 Luther wrote in his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* concerning ordination, "We ought to see that every article of faith of which we boast is certain, pure, and based on clear passages of Scripture. But we are unable to do that in the case of the sacrament under consideration."[29] Luther did employ allegory in his exegetical works, but as application of Scripture, not as an interpretation. He wrote much against the use of allegories: "Who has so weak a mind as not to be able to launch into allegories? I would not have a theologian devote himself to allegories until he has exhausted the legitimate and simple meaning of Scripture; otherwise his theology will bring him into danger, as Origen discovered."[30]

One practical example of Luther's exegesis at work is his discussion of Genesis 2:8 concerning what the Garden of Eden means and where it is:

> The distance between the rivers [in Eden] troubles Origen, for he has in mind a garden area of the size they are among us. Therefore he turns to allegory. Paradise he takes to be heaven; the trees he takes to be angels; the rivers he takes to be wisdom. Such twaddle is unworthy of theologians, though for a mirthful

> poet they might perhaps be appropriate. Origen does not take into consideration that Moses is writing a history and, what is more, one that deals with matters long since past.[31]

Luther's hermeneutical revolution came about because of his devotion to God's Word and his understanding from Scripture about Christ and justification by faith alone. Pelikan notes that Luther equated the term "Word of God" with "promise," that is, God's redemptive Word, which was accomplished in Christ.[32]

The first Lutheran to investigate the principles and rules of interpretation was Matthias Flacius. His book, *Clavis Scripturae sacrae* (1567), was written to open the seemingly closed doors of dark Scripture passages, stating that Christ, the Lamb who was slain, was the key (Revelations 5:12). Flacius listed fifty-one points to describe the reader's inability to understand a given text, among them the reader's inability to understand the text, the tendency to think contrary to God's revelation, and various linguistic issues. In another eight points Flacius set forth aids to overcome these difficulties, including Luther's list of prayer, mediation, and "experience" (*oratio, meditatio, tentatio*). Flacius then listed sixty points that are "rules for understanding that a person can gather from Scripture himself."[33]

Flacius' exegetical procedure is a careful one of three stages: 1) *grammatica intellectio,* the philological understanding of words and context; 2) *theologica tractatio*, the theological preparation to know the theological intention of the speaker; and 3) *cognitio practica*, the practical knowledge of the text for the Christian life.[34]

The successor to this important work came in 1610 from the pen of Johann Gerhard in his *De interpretatione Scripturae sacrae*, a synthesis of presuppositions of biblical interpretation. Hagglund states that Gerhard clearly articulated the epistemological foundations of interpretation and defined the phrase "enlightenment by the Holy Spirit." Using Aristotelian categories, Gerhard said, "Every act of perception presumes a reciprocal action between that which is to be comprehended and the understanding that comprehends it (*cognoscit*)."[35]

Two other hermeneutic works should be mentioned. Wolfgang Franz (1645-1628) wrote a 1,000-page book, *Tractatus theologicus*

*novus et perspicuous de interpretatione sacrarum scripturarum* (A New and Clear Theological Treatise Explaining How to Interpret Holy Scripture). The most important part of this book is a collection of examples with detailed interpretation of 152 Bible passages. The second hermeneutical text is that of Salomon Glassius (1593-1656), who wrote *Philologia sacra* (Biblical Philology) in 1646. Glassius emphasized the variations in style and literature in the Bible, discussing in detail the rhetorical figures in the Bible, especially in the prophetic writings. "A fundamental principle for his hermeneutics is that the elementary understanding of the text (*dignoscere*) is to be distinguished from the more intensive examination and interpretation (*eruere*) of the text. This is comparable to the modern distinction of the terms 'understanding' and 'interpretation.'"[36]

During the Age of Enlightenment, Emmanual Kant and the French philosophers destroyed the careful hermeneutics of Lutheran orthodoxy and started the critical line of investigation which continues to this day as the historical-critical method that is so destructive of biblical truth. Schleiermacher (with his "art of understanding"), Bultmann, and Barth tried to revive a new hermeneutic that seemed faithful to the Scriptures while not denying the critical investigations of others. However, they fell short of the truth because they did not believe the Bible to be God's own Word.[37]

Theologians writing during the Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy made important contributions to the study of hermeneutics. Translations and studies of their books could introduce important insights for our own study of Scripture. However, re-introducing their methodology may not prove as helpful because we are not dealing with the same questions they did.

## Another Hermeneutical Principle

In the next section of this paper, some of the main principles used in Lutheran hermeneutics will be examined for their practical use. The lists of main hermeneutical principles vary in number and type from author to author so that it is difficult to come up with a definitive list. Some are foundational (Scripture is God's Word, is inerrant, is clear, is Christological) and others are more practical

(division of Law and Gospel, analogy of faith, Christ the center of Scripture). This paper proposes that another practical concept be given greater consideration in hermeneutics and exegesis.

Students of Scripture have recognized that God's Word contains many human paradoxes. The word "paradox" means "a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true."[38] However, a study of dogmatics demonstrates that certain doctrines, such as universal grace-election, divine providence and human free will, conversion, and justification are not true paradoxes; they are humanly illogical and directly contradictory to each other. These doctrines are not contradictory with God nor are they self-contradictory in Scripture. However, our sin-limited minds cannot understand how these doctrines that are clearly taught in Scripture fit together; therefore we need to believe in, and live with, the biblical paradoxes/contradictions.

Dr. Preus discusses this subject under the unity of Scripture, or analogy of faith. "Some articles of faith, based upon solid *sedes*, seem *prima facie* to be at odds with other clearly derived articles of faith or clear biblical data."[39] Preus mentions that Christ's vicarious atonement seems in conflict with God's love for all sinners, hell seems opposed to God's universal love, particular election and predestination at variance with universal grace, and Law and Gospel seem to teach different ways of salvation. He adds, "More vexing for the exegete is the fact that there seems to be inconsistencies or conflicts within certain articles, or mysteries, of faith."[40] His examples are the personal union of Christ and the Trinity. "But no principle of unity or analogy can be used to mitigate the plain meaning of texts and *sedes* or to force biblical data in order to make one aspect or element of the doctrine compatible with another."[41]

John Johnson states that *analogia fidei* means "that doctrine must be deduced from those passages referring to the doctrine under question; clear passages must be put side by side even if there seems to be a contradiction involved; no one may abolish a clear statement of Scripture by saying that it contradicts another clear passage; apparent conflict between two such passages does not destroy the *analogia fidei*; faith accepts both statements since we are dealing with *analogia fidei*, not *analogia rationis*."[42]

This paper proposes that the issue of biblical paradoxes and tensions be elevated to a greater attention as a practical guide to interpreting the Bible. Consider the following:

> **The interpreter of Scripture should look for and expect to find paradoxes and tensions within the biblical texts**.

"Paradoxes" are those teachings that Scripture asserts are true even though those they cannot be logically set together, as said above. By "tensions" I refer to areas of application in exegesis and theology where clearly stated biblical truths encounter apparent difficulties in applying them to life situations.

Hermeneutical principles are to be drawn from Scripture or from their use in Scripture. St. Paul used the tension that exists in the believer when he states, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:21, 23-24). Paul reconciles the tension between wanting to go to heaven and wanting to serve Christ on earth by leaving the issue to God's will. Another example is Paul's discussion of his inner self in Romans 7: "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Rom 7:19). Luther's solves this by the paradoxical statement that believers are both saints and sinners at the same time. Jesus also used paradox in relating God's will to the unbelief of the people of Jerusalem: "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37). The paradox consists in this: if man can reject God's grace can he also accept it? The contradiction must stand that God wills the salvation of all, but man can reject it.

By now it should be apparent that this very principle itself creates its own theological tension. For we confess that the Bible is clear and contains no discrepancies or contradictions. Yet this new principle states that paradoxes and tensions exist. The problem is not due to God's Word, but to our limited understanding of God and his Word. God has spoken clearly, but unrepentant sinners may not

believe its clear statements, may not have the capacity to grasp the totality of God's truths, or may not be able to balance "competing truths" using the other hermeneutical tools/principles.

Every miracle of Jesus during His ministry on earth is a paradox, one that the Pharisees solved by stating, "For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God" (John 10:33). They could not deal with the paradox that Jesus proclaimed during holy week: "If David called him Lord, how is He his son?" (Luke 20:44). Jesus' person is a paradox we cannot resolve. When Jesus calmed the storms on the Sea of Galilee, our preaching cannot make Jesus so human that he had to rest before he had strength to calm the sea and, conversely, we cannot describe him as so divine so as to say that Jesus was not tired and only pretended to sleep to test the disciples.

While paradox deals with the meaning of Scripture, I have used the word "tensions" to deal with one's application of Scripture. Consider the tension between Christ's command to love one's enemies (which led the early Church to be pacifist) and the father's responsibility to protect his family. How does one apply the prohibition to "flee also youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22) and not to "sit in the seat of scorners" (Psalm 1:1) to the command "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15)? How does one "wait on the Lord" and also carry out one's vocation? How do we "abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22) and not feel guilty by turning on TV? How does one balance the tension between showing love to widows and the poor, and yet also follow the injunction that children of widows are to "repay their parents" (1 Timothy 5:4) and not burden the church? Tension also exists in applying the parables of Jesus, for the earthly example cannot match the realities of God's kingdom.

Looking for and dealing with these tensions will help the preacher apply these parables to modern day life, for it is easy to allegorize the parables or to overstate what Scripture actually says. By God's grace, Dr. Luther was able to avoid the doctrinal boxes that others tried to impose on Scripture.

As Luther studied Scripture, he also had to balance "competing claims" of what the Bible said. Jaroslav Pelikan describes how in the

Lord's Supper controversy Luther dealt with the competing claims of the Roman Catholic Church and Zwingli. Though neither Rome nor Geneva totally rejected the truths of Scripture, both fitted the scriptural evidence into tight logical boxes of their own making and refused to consider the biblical evidence or the biblical paradox.

Luther dealt with the false ideas of both transubstantiation and spiritualization of the Lord's Supper by believing the literal words of Christ, "This is My body." Pelikan notes, "Luther set his exegesis of 'This is My body' against the identification of 'body' and 'flesh.' Not the *flesh* of Christ in a cannibalistic sense…but the *body* of Christ was meant by the text 'This is My body.'"[43] Those who posited a "spiritual" presence to eliminate the "materialistic" exegesis of the text meant not Christ's true body but a sign of His body.[44]

The same biblical realism that characterized Luther's exegesis also extended to the person of Christ. Pelikan states that Luther "fairly reveled in the most material proofs of the reality of the incarnation—the swaddling clothes of the Holy Infant, His hunger and sleep, His perspiration, and the hair on His body. It has not always been easy for the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ to avoid idealism in its picture of Christ, but Luther's exegesis kept creature and Creator together in the paradox of the incarnation."[45] Pelikan continues:

> Yet it was part of Luther's genius as a Biblical theologian to hold emphases together without confusing them. This ability made itself evident also in his exegesis of "This is My body." For while he took the literal sense of the term "body" in this text to mean the body of Christ which suffered and died on the cross, he also recognized that the spiritual sense could mean the church. He would not concede that "My body" in the text could merely symbolize or represent the body of Christ, and that "My blood" could merely symbolize or represent the blood of Christ. But even in his vehement Confession of 1528 he remained aware of the symbolic nature of the Eucharist: "Thus also the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is intended to symbolize and represent something, namely, the unity of Christians in one spiritual body of Christ through one Spirit, one faith, one love, one cross, and the like."[46]

Luther had to balance competing ideas with regard to the forgiveness of sins offered in the Lord's Supper. A biblical paradox exists between predestination and sacramental forgiveness. Medieval thought so emphasized the sacraments as a means of forgiveness that it jeopardized divine freedom. That is, the priest at the altar commanded and the Son had to obey, come to the altar and grant forgiveness. Luther declared that forgiveness was an act of God's sovereign freedom, based on his will rather than on priestly action. Also, Roman Catholic grace had become a disposition of man that merited God's favor. Luther's exegesis of Romans made grace an attribute of God and defined grace as the favor of God.[47] Pelikan gives many other examples where Luther threaded his way between two competing ideas (biblical paradoxes and tensions between Roman Catholic and Reformed theologies).

In studying Scripture and relating scriptural truths to each other, exegetes all too often try to fit the biblical evidence into their own logical boxes instead of listening to all that Scripture says. For example, Baptist theology diligently quotes Ephesians 2:8-9—"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." One would suppose that Baptist theology would rejoice in the unconditional Gospel and sacramental theology. Instead, their theologians have imposed a false hermeneutic upon Scripture regarding the will of man and have denied that God works forgiveness through means. Therefore they demand that the will must "decide for Christ" (denying that this is semi-Pelagianism), and they declare that baptism is a work of obedience to Christ and therefore it cannot be a gift of faith. Their false hermeneutic causes them to twist Scripture regarding man's will and to re-interpret the passages which teach that "baptism doth now save us" (1 Peter 3:21) by uniting us in faith to the salvation Jesus won.

Ignoring the existence of scriptural paradoxes and tensions has lead to many controversies in the church militant during its long history. Flacius, the author of the first Lutheran book on hermeneutics, was trapped by ignoring this principle when he asserted, "human nature is inherently evil." Others tried to point out from Scripture that such a concept would lead to denying Christ's holiness, but the

box had been drawn and Flacius would not listen to what Scripture said. The authors of Article I in the *Formula of Concord* carefully stated their goal to "preserve this doctrine in such a way that we fall neither into Pelagian nor into Manichaean errors" (FC SD I:16; Tappert, p. 511). They supported the paradox between man's created nature and original sin with both clear Scripture and the analogy of faith by showing its relation to the three articles of the creed (FC SD I:34-45; Tappert, pp. 514-516).

The discussion regarding the Lord's Supper is an example of drawing boxes to exclude biblical or confessional evidence. The Confessions clearly state that Christ's words "This do" "[comprehend] the whole action or administration of this sacrament (namely, that in a Christian assembly we take bread and wine, consecrate it, distribute it, receive it, eat and drink it, and therewith proclaim the Lord's death), must be kept integrally and inviolately…" (FC, SD, VII:84; Tappert, p. 584). Failure to "take and eat" means that Christ's command is not carried out and there is no sacrament (FC, SD, VII:83; Tappert, p. 584). People who emphasized this view were accused of drawing a box around the "reception." On the other hand, others felt that the Lord's Supper had suffered from too pedestrian a viewpoint of Christ's Supper and that Scripture and the apostles (Luther and the Reformation as well) highly esteemed it and showed it by their liturgical actions (consuming the *reliquiae*). A recognition that a biblical tension exists between these two ideas might have led to a better appreciation for the concerns of each "box" drawn, rather than an overstatement or a denial of either one. A hermeneutical study of the clear words "This do" and "Do this in remembrance of Me" together with the tensions of applying them might have led to a better understanding of each position and concern, and a reduction of tension.

Applying this concept to the current discussion of the Office of the Public Ministry should be self-evident. There will always be a tension between the ministerial authority Christ instituted and how it is applied in the modern world. We need to recognize the both/and tension and ask God to bless His work among us.

Whether or not this concept of paradox and tension should become a hermeneutical principle requires further study. However,

the recognition of paradox/contradiction and tensions in Scripture will enrich our biblical studies as we learn to appreciate the truth of what St. Paul writes at the end of his paradoxical discussion of God's grace to Jew and Gentile: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33).

# The Practical Application of Hermeneutics

> But if it is not enough merely to state the opinion, but if what is stated must be confirmed, we do not wait for the testimony of men, but we establish the matter that is in question by the voice of the Lord, which is the surest of all demonstrations, or rather is the only demonstration…. — Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-211), *Stromata,* Book 7, chapter 16, *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, volume II

## Practical Hermeneutics in the Lutheran Confessions

While the holy Scriptures are clear, human beings need the study of hermeneutics to deal with problems of understanding that arise from divergent times, languages, and cultures in order to understand divine concepts that are opposed to the sin-laden heart and to respond to the worldviews and philosophical questions that constantly change with the passing centuries. Against such changes the *Formula of Concord* states, "We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated" (FC SD Rule and Norm: 3; Tappert, pp. 503-504).

Hermeneutics and exegesis are also necessary because of the false interpretations and heresies that continue to multiply in the 21st century. Melanchthon declares, "Our opponents twist many texts because they read their own opinions into them instead of deriving the meaning from the texts themselves. There is no problem in this text [1 Cor. 13:2] if we remove the interpretation that our opponents add to it on their own, for they understand neither what justification is nor how it happens" (*Apology* IV:224; Tappert, p. 138).

Just as modern scholarship quotes the dictates of past historical-critical authors as having more authority than Scripture, so the Reformers had to reject the "worthless authorities" used against them:

> They have on their side some theologians of great reputation, like Duns Scotus, Gabriel Biel, and the like in addition to patristic statements which the decrees quote in garbled form. Certainly, if we were to count authorities, they would be right: for there is a great crowd of worthless commentators on the *Sentences* who as though by a conspiracy defend the false notions we have been discussing about the merits of attrition and works and similar ideas. Lest anyone be moved by this large number of quotations, it must be kept in mind that no great authority attaches to the statements of later theologians who did not produce their own books but only compiled them from earlier ones and transferred these opinions from one book to another. In this they showed no judgment, but like petty public officials they quietly approved the errors of their superiors, without understanding them. Let us not hesitate, therefore, to oppose this statement of Peter [Acts 10:43], citing the consensus of the prophets, to the many legions of commentators on the Sentences. The testimony of the Holy Spirit was added to this statement of Peter, for the text says (Acts 10:44), "While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word"(Apology XII: 68-60; Tappert, p. 192).

The *Apology* furnishes many examples of its use of hermeneutical principles, citing what recent scholars have called the Analogy of Faith principle, the Christology principle, the clear-Scripture principle, and the Law-Gospel principle. The confessions use phrases such as "out of harmony with the Scriptures" *(Apology* XVI:9-11; Tappert, p. 224) and "there is not passage in Scripture about" (*Apology* XXI:8-9; Tappert, p. 230) to teach that Scripture alone decides all matters of doctrine.

## Confessional Lutheran Exegesis

One practical application of the exegetical and hermeneutical approach to Scripture is that those who subscribe to the *Book of Concord* must also subscribe to its exegetical conclusions. Dr.

Preus reports, "One oblique attack on the confessions claims that 'Lutherans are not bound by the exegesis of exegetical conclusions of our Confessions, but only to the doctrinal content.'"[48] Such a position is absurd, for "it implies that we are bound by the doctrine of our Symbols even if we are unconvinced that that doctrine is drawn from Scripture by proper exegesis. … To accept the doctrinal content of our Confessions is to accept the exegesis and all the exegetical conclusions of our Confessions."[49]

The *Formula of Concord* expressly states its adherence to the exegesis of the earlier confessions: "We therefore unanimously pledge our adherence to this Apology also, because in it the cited Augsburg Confession is clearly expounded and defended against errors and also because it is supported with clear and irrefutable testimonies from the Holy Scriptures" (FC, SD, Rule and Norm:6; Tappert, pp. 504-505).[50]

Sometimes the confessors' clear testimony rested on the understanding of one word, as in the Tractate:

> Here certain passages are quoted against us: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Again, "I will give you the keys" (Matt. 16:19). Again, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17), and certain other passages. … Nevertheless, we shall respond briefly by way of interpretation. In all these passages Peter is representative of the entire company of the apostles, as is apparent from the text itself, for Christ did not question Peter alone but asked, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). And what is here spoken in the singular number ("I will give you the keys" and "whatever you bind") is elsewhere given in the plural ("Whatever you bind"), etc. In John, too, it is written, "If you forgive the sins," (John 20:23). These words show that the keys were given equally to all the apostles and that all the apostles were sent out as equals" (*Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*: 22-23; Tappert, pp. 323-324).

This interpretation is vital in the argument against Peter being identified as the first "pope" and for understanding that the keys are not given to one man, but to all the apostles.

Because the discipline of hermeneutics works with sets of presuppositions and principles to govern the exegetical process, it is not easy to demonstrate the practical nature of hermeneutical

studies. This may be why few books have been written on "practical hermeneutics." Hermeneutics is practiced when the exegete or reader of Scripture uses the hermeneutical presuppositions and principles (either deliberately or unwittingly) to study the texts of Scripture.

The practice of hermeneutics can be best learned from reading the *Book of Concord*, especially the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* and the *Formula of Concord*, with the expressed purpose of studying how these writings deal with Scripture. We now examine the Lutheran Confessions' use of the chief hermeneutical principles.

## Scripture Alone

*Sola Scriptura* is a foundational concept for doing homiletics, theology and dogmatics, where it is placed under the category of *prolegomena*. "Scripture alone" is not technically a principle of hermeneutics since it is not a guide to interpretation. However, it is a rule that rejects the use of other sources to establish doctrine. For whenever people inject other sources—whether other books, logic, science, or human reason—those sources inevitably lead to a misinterpretation of the Bible.

Quoting 2 Timothy 3:15, Carl Lawrenz wrote, "Scripture and Scripture alone can make us wise unto salvation, and it makes us wise through faith in Jesus."[51] Melanchthon argued for proof from Scripture and against obscuring Christ with regard to the intercession of saints:

> Even though they [our opponents] distinguish between mediators of intercession and mediators of redemption, they obviously make the saints mediators of redemption. They do not even have proof from Scripture for calling them mediators of intercession. To put it mildly, even this obscured the work of Christ and transfers to the saints the trust we should have in Christ's mercy. Men suppose that Christ is more severe and the saints more approachable. (Apology XXI: 14-15; Tappert, pp. 230-231)

The "Scripture alone" principle declares that the Bible is the only source for divine truth. Dr. Preus states, "Just as God is the only

source of all theology, his Word, Holy Scripture, is the only source of our knowledge of theology. Just as God is judge over everything that is taught in his name, his Word, Holy Scripture, is the only norm and judge available to the church whereby teachers and teachings can be judged."[52]

This *sola Scriptura* principle demands that the rules of grammar be derived from Scripture itself, as Dr. Pieper stated, "[N]o grammatical rule may be used in the exposition of Holy Writ in its original text which is not abstracted from Scripture itself. If anyone wants to introduce into Scripture interpretation a grammatical rule that is not adopted from Scripture itself, he is introducing a false rationalistic principle into Scripture interpretation."[53] The Scriptures are a light in themselves. Dr. Pieper applied this concept to the study of Greek: "Interesting and important for apologetics as it is, e.g., to compare the New Testament Greek with the earlier Greek of Homer and with the contemporary Greek of Philo and Josephus and the monuments, etc. in the last analysis the linguistic usage of the New Testament alone decides the matter."[54]

This paper cannot do justice to the millions of words that have been written about the Scripture alone principle, both in support and in opposition. Any hermeneutic that allows material outside of the Bible to influence the interpretation of Scripture texts violates this understanding about God's Word.

## The Clarity of Scripture Principle

The psalmist teaches the clarity of God's Word with these well-known words, "Your word is a lamb to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:120). Solomon states the same concept: "My son, if you receive my words…then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:5-6). Because Scripture is clear, Jesus often quoted Scripture with little further explanation, a practice also followed extensively in the Lutheran Confessions.

However, if Scripture is clear, what did St. Peter mean when he referred to the writings of Paul, "…in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to

their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16)? The problem is not with the non-clarity of St. Paul, but with those who twist his words, that is, deliberately misinterpret the Scriptures. Paul's words are clear in Romans 9 regarding God's mercy on Israel and on the Gentiles, but what he writes is beyond our ability to grasp the whole picture of God's will and mercy.

Melanchthon also addressed the issue of twisting Scripture: "It ought not to disturb devout minds if our opponents twist Paul's sentences, for nothing can be said so simply that some quibbler cannot pervert it. We know that what we have said is what Paul really and truly means; we know that this position of ours brings devout consciences a firm consolation without which no one can stand before the judgment of God" (*Apology* XII:84; Tappert, p. 194). On another topic he notes, "We are not justified before God either by reason or by the law. These things are so clear and evident that we are astonished to see how furiously our opponents deny them" (*Apology* IV:298; Tappert p. 153).

Modern theological studies of the Bible, both higher-critical and post-modern, do nothing but further twist Scripture to their own destruction. They make the Bible a dark book in which only the skilled historian is able to find a kernel of meaning applicable to the modern world.

Concerning the difficult passages of Scripture, Gerhard Maier states, "Protestant Scholasticism [i.e., 1700s Lutheran orthodoxy] had three answers: 1) everything necessary for salvation is clear, as Quenstedt stated; 2) difficult passages were to be explained by the clear passages ('secundum analogiam fidei'—'according to the analogy of faith'); and 3) the attempt to explain the sense of obscure passages hermeneutically."[55] However, Maier warns, "We should exercise caution at this point. All too quickly our explanations become ecclesiastical rationalism or verge on speculation."[56]

The clarity of Scripture means that a scribal caste is not needed to interpret it. Gerhard Maier declares, "The Christian community itself requires no special class of people 'in the know' who alone are competent to open up Scripture's meaning to the rest."[57] He points to Deut. 30:11-14 and Rom. 10:6ff where Scripture says, "the word is very near you." Micah 6:8 presupposes that God's

message is generally understandable and unambiguous. When Jesus asks, "Have you not read…?" it shows that He was convinced of the clarity of Scripture.[58] Referring to Romans 3:23 and 8:7-8, Melanchthon adds, "These words are so clear that they do not need an acute understanding but only attentive listening" (Apology IV: 32-33; Tappert, p. 111).

Whether it is justification by faith, offerings and masses for the dead (AP XXIV:94), Law and Gospel (AP IV:185-186), or owning property (XVI:9-11), the *Apology* sets against the opponents' arguments "the clearest and surest passages of Scripture" (*Apology* XXIV; Tappert, p. 257).

With regard to Christ's words of institution, the *Formula of Concord* demands that they be read in the intended sense (*sensus literalis*): "We are therefore bound to interpret and explain these words of the eternal, truthful, and almighty Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Creator, and Redeemer, not as flowery, figurative, or metaphorical expressions, as they appear to our reason, but we must accept them in simple faith and due obedience in their strict and clear sense, just as they read" (FC SD VII:45; Tappert, p. 577). The example of Abraham teaches that he believed God's clear command and promise.

The clarity principle also means that clear passages need no interpretation. Thus, when the enthusiasts interpreted the words of institution by referring to John 6, Luther called this "pretending to listen to Scripture," stating, "To demand that clear and certain passages be explained by drawing in other passages amounts to an iniquitous deriding of the truth and the injection of fog into the light." F. Pieper discusses the hermeneutical rule "Scripture interpreting Scripture," noting that "clear passages must explain other clear passages, but not by unclear and dark passages."[59]

The clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture is both a presupposition and a hermeneutic principle which affects all other principles and interpretations of the Bible simply because without the understanding of this biblical characteristic all other interpretation of Scripture is suspect.

Pastors often hear the comment that all church bodies differ only in their own interpretation of Scripture. Such comments

come from people who do not believe in the clarity of Scripture. Dr. Francis Pieper noted, "The Roman Catholic Church does not stand on Scripture, but on the papal interpretation of Scripture. The Reformed Churches, as far as they differ from the Lutheran Church, do not stand on Scripture, but on Zwingli's, Calvin's, etc., interpretation of Scripture. The Lutheran Church, however, does not stand on an interpretation of Scripture, but on Scripture itself. This is not a mere assertion. It can be proved by induction in the face of universal contradiction."[60]

## The Unity of Scripture Principle: Typology

St. Paul declares, "There is one body and one Spirit…one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). From this passage we can also deduce that the Bible has one message, since it was inspired by the Holy Spirit and it teaches about the one faith in Christ Jesus. This unity principle means that the Bible cannot contradict itself. The Lutheran Confessions acted on this principle when they cited passages from both testaments to prove what doctrines they confessed. Another application of the unity principle is seen in how the Old Testament uses types to teach about the antitypes in the New Testament.

A type is a person, thing, office, institution, or event in the Old Testament that is intended by the Holy Spirit to prefigure some corresponding person, thing, office, etc., in the New Testament. Typological study is an important tool for finding Christ in the Old Testament because it applies the Christological principle and the unity principle of interpretation. Finding types in the Old Testament is a part of the God-intended meaning of the Old Testament, as St. Paul states, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). St. Paul applies the type of Israel to the antitype of baptism and Christian faith and life in 1 Corinthians 10:1-10.

Prof. George Lillegard notes three rules for analyzing types: 1) types are determined by Scripture itself, either explicitly or implicitly; 2) the interpreter must first ascertain the literal sense of the text and then note the resemblance between type and anti-

type; and 3) do not multiply points of comparison, remembering that types are always inferior to their anti-type.[61] Another basic principle of typology is that "only 'historical facts' (persons, events, and institutions) are material for typological interpretation. These were divinely ordained to be seen as *representative of that which was to come*."[62]

Just because two texts bear some resemblance to each other it does not mean that a type exists. On the other hand, it is not necessary for Scripture to state expressly that something is a type in order to identify types in the Old Testament.[63]

Some Reformed hermeneutic books have denied that a typological interpretation exists unless it was clearly intended by the author. They claim that it violates hermeneutic principles to read a fulfillment or typology from the New Testament back into the Old Testament text unless this meaning was intended by the author. Walter Kaiser declared, "It is a mark of eisegesis, not exegesis, to borrow freight that appears chronologically later in the text and to transport it back and unload it on an earlier passage simply because both or all the passages share the same canon."[64]

This attitude may be reasonable when applied to other ancient books; however, when applied to Holy Scripture such a position violates the hermeneutical unity principle. The Holy Spirit inspired the Old Testament authors to write down more than they knew, as St. Peter states, "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Peter 1:10-11). The prophets had to search their own writings to learn more about Christ and his work and coming. Christ himself illustrated the use of the Christological and unity principles as He spoke to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

The unity principle also means that the Old Testament is the book about Christ, since He is the content and center of Scripture. Christ is the essential unity of Scripture. This unity principle is

upheld when the church maintains the validity of rectilinear, or direct, Messianic prophecy and a typological interpretation of Scripture.[65] Pres. Schmeling notes, "Typological exegesis then is based on the conviction that God the Father determined that certain persons and events in the history of Israel would prefigure what He would accomplish in the fullness of time in the person of His only begotten Son."[66]

The *Apology* demonstrates how the Reformation Lutherans understood the typological interpretation of Scripture in regard to Old Testament worship:

> The Old Testament had pictures or shadows of what was to come; thus this depicted Christ and the whole worship of the New Testament. The burning of the lamb symbolized the death of Christ. The drink offering symbolizes the sprinkling, that is, the sanctifying of believers throughout the world with the blood of that lamb, by the proclamation of the Gospel, as Peter says (1 Pet. 1:2); "Sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood." The offering of flour symbolizes faith, prayer, and thanksgiving in the heart. Therefore, as we discern the shadow in the Old Testament, so in the New we should look for what it represents and not for another symbol that seems to be a sacrifice. (*Apology* XXIV:36-37; Tappert, p. 257)

Note how Melanchthon carefully dealt with clear Scriptures and rejected the analogies of the Roman Catholic theologians who wanted to "apply the term 'sacrifice' only to the ceremony" and who insisted that "as there was a daily sacrifice in the Old Testament, so the Mass ought to be the daily sacrifice of the New Testament" (*Apology* XXIV:34-35; Tappert, p. 256).

The Roman Confutation argued that Hebrews 8:5 required that their priests offer sacrifices for sins. However, the *Apology* states, "Though the main proofs for our position are in the Epistle to the Hebrews, our opponents twist passages from this very epistle against us—like this one, which says that 'every high priest is appointed to offer sacrifices for sins.' The Scripture itself adds immediately that Christ is the high priest. The preceding words talk about the Levitical priesthood and say that it was a picture of Christ's priesthood. The Levitical sacrifices for sin did not merit the forgiveness of sins in the

sight of God" (*Apology* XXIV:53; Tappert, p. 259).

Roman Catholic scholars often spoke of the *sensus plenior*, or "fuller meaning" that exists in the Bible.[67] Raymond Brown noted, "The *sensus plenior* is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a Biblical text."[68] This "fuller meaning" concept was used to justify the spiritual, mystical, allegorical, and typological interpretations which Luther rejected. Though the recognition of types might seem to be a *sensus plenior* approach, in reality typology is the God-inspired and God-intended ***literal*** interpretation of the texts.

Therefore, Pres. Schmeling carefully states, "We can be certain that the bronze serpent points to the cross (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14) but we cannot be as certain that Samson, who accomplished more in his death than his life, is a picture of Christ's passion even though this type was used throughout the history of the church. Samson prefigured Christ in his birth announced by an angel, in his life purpose to destroy the enemy, and in his death where he gave his life to save others."[69]

Although Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is not directly described as a type of Christ in Scripture, the many parallels between that event and the crucifixion of Christ must be divinely intended. At any rate, to preach a sermon on this text and talk only about Abraham's obedience would be a disservice to God's revelation and to one's hearers. That approach would also violate Luther's Christological principle of finding Christ in the Old Testament.

Dunnett lists some examples which should not be identified as types: 1) Jacob's deceitful reception of the blessing is not a type of our receiving God's blessings; 2) neither the brass nor the shape of the serpent on the pole are types of Christ, but the act of lifting it up is the significant type, as Jesus taught Nicodemus; and 3) both Israel and Jesus were brought out of Egypt, but there are many differences between the two events to prevent it from being a type.[70]

## The Analogy of Faith Principle

The hermeneutical principle of the analogy of faith has been an important tool in the interpretation of Scripture. John Johnson

states, "The association of clear passages with the 'rule of faith' is found in Chemnitz (*Examen*, VIII,1) and in Gerhard (*Loc. Theo.* I,25,532) who clearly referred Rom. 12:6 to the *articulii fidei*."[71]

The "analogy of faith" is of great practical importance for biblical interpretation when it is defined correctly and used properly. Bengt Hagglund defines the analogy of faith as, "The fundamental principle is rather that the summary of Scripture used to guide its interpretation—for instance, in the rule of faith or a similar conception of its content—in fact constitutes the inner nexus of the text; it is not something that is read into it from the outside. That is comparable with the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) of the early church fathers, who presupposed such a rule of faith as a summary of Scripture."[72]

This principle is said to be derived from Romans 12:6: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith" (εἴτε προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως). An interesting feature of the entire sentence from verse 6 through 8 is that there is no main verb. The word ἀναλογία is a hapax legomenon so that its meaning must be supplied by the context and the lexicon, which gives the meaning as "proportion." On this verse, Luther states, "For the Greek ἀναλογία is taken by some to mean 'proportion,' 'comparison,' 'rule,', or 'similiarity'…. And thus an 'analogy' is an assimilation, not one that is active and derived from the intellect, but one that is passive, or rather neutral, in which one thing resembles another in its characteristics and becomes like it."[73] In his comments on Romans 12:6, Luther seems to take πίστεως as a subjective genitive, the faith we believe. However, John Johnson states the prevailing view, "the word 'faith' is understood in the objective sense, the *fides quae creditur.*"[74]

> Faith in this passage is understood to mean not faith (trust) which clings to the promise of God proclaimed in the Gospel; it is *Glaubensbekenntnis*. In other words, exegesis…must be in harmony with the faith confessed by the Church. This means that Scripture must not be interpreted against itself. For Luther it is another way of saying *Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*.[75]

While this principle has been correctly used for many

centuries, a correct understanding of the word ἀναλογία is necessary to know its proper use. In his 2006 Reformation Lecture on J. P. Koehler, Peter Prange stated that Koehler "first of all demonstrated that Romans 12:6 'furnished no rule of interpretation.' 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 the fellow members."[76] Koehler was reacting against the misuse of this principle by the supporters of F. A. Schmidt in the election controversy and, to a certain extent, an overuse by the defenders of the true doctrine. Prange reports, "While the Ohio and Iowa men conceded that the *intuitu fidei* concept is nowhere stated in Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions, they could 'prove' the correctness of their doctrine of election by means of the entire Scripture. 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."[77] This position was a clear misuse of the "analogy of faith" principle, as the *Apology*, defined it: "Besides, examples ought to be interpreted according to the rule, that is, according to sure and clear passages of Scripture, not against the rule or the passages. It is a sure thing that our observances do not merit the forgiveness of sins or justification" (*Apology* XXVII:60; Tappert, p. 279). In this citation, "rule" is the "analogy of faith" principle defined by "sure and clear passages of Scripture."

The *Apology* contains many examples of how this "rule" was applied, especially in Article IV on justification. Melanchthon wrote, "Let no one think that we are teaching anything new in this regard when the Church Fathers have so clearly handed down the doctrine that we need mercy even in our good works" (Apology IV:325; Tappert, p. 157).[78]

Melanchthon used the analogy of faith principle to make another "rule" when interpreting Scripture passages that speak of the works of believers. Notice how he supports his statements with clear Scripture:

> These passages and all others like them where works are praised in the Scriptures must be taken to mean not only outward works but also the faith of the heart, since the Scriptures do not speak of hypocrisy but of righteousness in the heart and of its fruits.

> Whenever the law and works are mentioned, we must know that Christ, the mediator, should not be excluded. He is the end of the law (Rom 10:4), and he himself says, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). By this rule, as we have said earlier, all passages on works can be interpreted. Therefore, when eternal life is granted to works, it is granted to the justified. None can do good works except the justified, who are led by the Spirit of Christ; nor can good works please God without the mediator Christ and faith, according to Heb. 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (*Apology* IV:371-372; Tappert, p. 164)

The Lutherans felt confident that they had correctly interpreted Scripture by the analogy of faith because it was based on clear Scripture and it did not deny the doctrine of justification by faith. Johnson discusses Luther's similar use of this principle: "Luther demonstrates the use of *analogia fidei* when he says that he does not care if 'you bring a thousand places of Scripture for the righteousness of works against the righteousness of faith and cry out that the Scripture is against me. I have the author and Lord of Scripture with me; I would rather stand on his side than believe you.' The Bible is the place where Christ preaches his Gospel of justification and life. Take Christ from the Scriptures, says Luther, and what more will you find in them?"[79]

The *Formula of Concord* also used the phrase "the pattern of sound words" (FC SD I:50; Tappert, p. 517) and "a summary formula and pattern" to identify this interpretive analogy of faith principle (FC SD Rule and Norm:1; Tappert, p. 501).

The Confessions use the "analogy of faith" with another meaning to posit a consensus of faithful interpreters of Scripture. The authors did not mean to set up another source or standard of truth but to demonstrate that the true Church has always taught the same doctrines. *Apology* IV states, "We know that what we have said agrees with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, with the holy Fathers Ambrose, Augustine, and many others, and with the whole church of Christ, which certainly confesses that Christ is the propitiator and the justifier" (*Apology* IV:389; Tappert, p. 166).

Second, Melanchthon uses the analogy of faith principle as the consensus of Old Testament prophets:

> Our opponents cry out that they are the church and follow the consensus of the church. But here Peter cites the consensus of the church in support of our position: "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name," etc. Surely the consensus of the prophets should be interpreted as the consensus of the universal church. Neither to the pope nor to the church do we grant the authority to issue decrees contrary to this consensus of the prophets. (Apology XII:66; Tappert, p. 191)

The *Formula of Concord* uses the *Augsburg Confession* as an "analogy of faith": "For that reason necessity requires that such controverted articles be explained on the basis of God's Word and of approved writings in such a way that anybody with Christian intelligence can see which opinion in the controverted issues agrees with the Word of God and the Christian Augsburg Confession…" (FC SD Rule and Norm: 10; Tappert, p. 503). They could use other creeds or even church fathers in this way because those creeds are built on the *norma normans*, the clear words of Scripture.

Maier noted a third use of the analogy principle: "Flacius wishes to contain the subjectivity of the interpreter by means of the *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith)."[80] In this view, the analogy of faith acts in a similar way as a "proof" in mathematics. By using the analogy of faith the interpreter of Scripture tests his exegetical conclusions against the Lutheran Confessions and the church fathers. If there is a disagreement between his conclusions and theirs, the exegete should restudy the text and/or demonstrate where the church fathers had departed from Scripture. Luther added a caveat to the use of this analogy principle: "In this manner, says Luther, Scripture is its own light. Scripture need not be illuminated by the doctrines of men or the church; if it did need such illumination the procedure would say that the Holy Spirit must learn from theologians how he should have spoken."[81] Prof. Johnson also notes:

> In the *Apology*, in a discussion of repentance and remission of sins, reference is made to the adversaries (Romanists who *vociferantur se esse ecclesiam*) and the *consensus ecclesiae*. Against this consensus one passage, Acts 10:43 is cited as the *consensus prophetarum*. The fathers, the Church, and the *Sententiae* must give way to this agreement of the holy prophets;

> "for the Gospel, which proclaims the forgiveness of sins through the blessed Seed has from the beginning of the world been the greatest consolation and treasure." And the *scripta apostolorum* testify they believe the same thing. (XII, 70-72)[82]

Johnson states that " 'Analogy' might therefore be called a principle of harmonization."[83] Hagglund describes the process Flacius used for such a harmonization of clear Scripture: "Flacius pointed to the fact that for unitary literary analysis the interpreter must first create a synthesis, or conception, of its content in order to understand the individual details of the text. To be able to comprehend a map that shows only part of the territory, it is necessary to have a conception of the larger map into which it fits."[84]

John Gerhard offers five steps for the proper use of the *analogia fidei*: 1) Search the intended *sensus literalis* appropriate to the text; 2) Do not depart from the plain, literal sense of the text, especially in articles of faith, unless Scripture elsewhere compels departure from the literal sense; 3) Nothing is dogma unless based on clear Scripture; 4) The rule of faith is consistent in all its parts and cannot contradict itself; 5) Never depart from the rule of faith where passages are not clear because of context, reference, or grammar.[85] Rule number four could be misunderstood to mean what F. A. Schmidt and the anti-Missourians advocated, that human reason must remove contradictions in Scripture. However we should understand it to mean that the "rule of faith" may contain divine paradoxes but it is not self-contradictory. Dr. Preus makes the same point: "The analogy of Scripture…means that Scripture is analogous with itself (*scriptura scripturam interpretatur*). It is not an analogy of Scripture with science (*scientia*), or philosophy (Thomas Aquinus), or mathematics (Descartes), or reason (Ritzschl), or an existentialist anthropology (Bultmann), or the 'Gospel' (Schlink), or historical coherence, facts, and reality (Troeltsch, historical-critical method)."[86]

To what areas of biblical study can the practical application of the analogy of faith principle apply when we consider our proclamation of God's Word? The members of the congregations we serve could use help to understand Scripture in three major areas: 1) faith and Christian works, 2) the basis

for Christ's judgment, and 3) eschatology.

Because of the "law-religion" that still resides in the human heart beset with original sin, the reader of Scripture can easily gain an incorrect understanding of the many passages where St. Paul instructs believers in Christian living. The reader of Scripture needs to understand that Christ's Sermon on the Mount, 1 Corinthians 13, John 15, and many other "third use of the law" passages cannot be kept apart from true faith in Jesus. The *Apology* declares that this analogy needs to be understood by all Bible students: "These will be easy for good men to evaluate if they remember, whenever a passage on love of works is quoted, that the law cannot be kept without Christ, and that we are not justified by the law but by the Gospel, the promise of grace offered in Christ" (*Apology* IV: 38; Tappert, p. 166).

This analogy principle is especially important in understanding the Old Testament. Where God demands from the children of Israel faithful obedience to his commands, faith in the promised Messiah must be added. Worship apart from faith resulted in God saying, "'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?'… 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle, I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats'" (Isaiah 1:11). The analogy of faith should also be used wherever God says, "Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them" (Isaiah 2:10), meaning that the "righteous" are those declared righteous by faith in the Messiah.

An examination of the passages about God's judgment on the Last Day seems to teach salvation by works. Indeed, so plain are these words that salvation by works is the inescapable interpretation. Jesus said, "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). Jesus said to those standing on His right hand, "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me'" (Matthew 25:40). Consider the passage quoted in the *Athanasian Creed*: "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the

resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29). And in Revelation, Jesus says, "And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to His work" (Revelation 22:12). These are clear passages, yet they contradict the equally clear statement of St. Paul, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20).

Perhaps the rule of paradox advocated above could be invoked to say that we must let this contradiction stand. But then we would have to teach faith **and** love as the requirements for heaven. However, such an interpretation would deny the Christological principle and the chief doctrine—justification by faith alone.[87]

The analogy of faith principle regarding justification by faith alone decrees that on the basis of the many clear statements of Scripture these passages cannot teach salvation by works. The issue can be resolved in two ways: 1) In the context of the great judgment parable Jesus says, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). The word "inherit" is a Gospel-word that has nothing to do with meriting salvation by works. 2) The passages are similar to James 2:17-18, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." On Judgment Day Jesus will show "our faith by our works," that is, as evidence of the faith hidden in the heart. When Christian people are clearly instructed on this subject and apply the correct analogy of faith, then people will be able to confess the *Athanasian Creed* with understanding.

Regarding eschatology, the analogy of faith principle being "clear Scripture must interpret less clear Scriptures," parishioners need to be instructed that Matthew 24 and 25 are the clearest presentations of what will happen on the Last Day and are the standard by which Daniel, Ezekiel, 2 Thessalonians, Revelation, and all other passages about the Last Day are to be interpreted. That is not to say that Jesus' words in Matthew 24 and 25 are easily applied since eschatological passages are necessarily vague as to how they will be fulfilled. However, false ideas about the "rapture" or the "millennial earthly kingdom" must be judged by and rejected on the

basis of Matthew 24 and 25.

## The Christological Principle

Scripture is one unit because it has one divine author and one central message. Martin Luther placed Christ at the center of all Scripture. Dr. Preus states, "Like a red thread the promises concerning Christ run through the entire Old Testament Scriptures, giving them a Christological unity with the New Testament, and proclaiming one way of salvation from the Fall of our first parents to the end of time (AP XXIV, 55, 57; IV, 57; XII 71 Cf German text)."[88] Prof. Johnson summarized Luther's Christological interpretation in six points:

> 1) All of Scripture must be understood in the light of Christ. 2) The Scripture reveals a theology of the cross since "all good things are hidden in and under the cross." 3) The O.T. is "the cradle in which Christ is laid." 4) The N.T. is a public proclamation regarding Christ. 5) Christ is the Master of Scripture. 6) Christ is the center of Scripture, *der Sprechende und der Geweissagte*. Such a principle is soundly Biblical. Luther could even say that he finds "nothing in Scripture except Jesus Christ and him crucified."[89]

This Christological principle was not invented by Luther or Lutheran scholars. They found the principle as one that Jesus himself used after his resurrection. On the road to Emmaus Jesus "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Later that day Jesus did the same to the disciples in the upper room (Luke 24:45). At other times Jesus identified many Scriptures that pointed to him. He told the Pharisees that the Scriptures "are these which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

With respect to Luther's commentary on the Exodus, Pelikan writes:

> Therefore the Word of God in the Old Testament was not only the Exodus as such but the anticipation by the Exodus of God's ultimate redemptive deed in Jesus Christ. For this reason Luther so often equated the Old Testament term "Word of God"

> with "promise"; for when God spoke His redemptive Word to Israel, the redemption which this Word wrought and brought was the redemption ultimately accomplished in Christ. By this profound insight Luther was able to go beyond the "Messianic prophecies" of the Old Testament to a recognition of the Word of God in the Old Testament even in those passages where the Messiah was not mentioned. It must be added, of course, that Luther found the Messiah mentioned in many passages where very few modern students of the Old Testament would find Him. In short, as the "Word of God" in the cosmic sense was the eternal Christ, and as the "Word of God" in the Old Testament was finally the anticipated Christ, so the "Word of God" in the New Testament was essentially the historical Christ.[90]

Dr. Preus comments on this principle: "Luther's principle of *solus Christus* springs from his exegetical studies which conclude that the entire Scripture is christocentric in its content. 'The Scriptures from beginning to end reveal no one besides the Messiah, the Son of God, who should come and through His sacrifice carry and take away the sins of the world.' Such a statement makes the christocentricity of Scripture a hermeneutical principle for Luther."[91] This Christological principle is proclaimed in Scripture when St. John wrote, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). Because Scripture is a unit, this verse is applicable to the whole Bible.

## The Law-Gospel Principle

The *Formula of Concord* states, "The distinction between Law and Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly. We must therefore observe this distinction with particular diligence lest we confuse the two doctrines and change the Gospel into law" (FC SD V:I; Tappert, p. 558). Ralph Bohlmann discussed the question whether the *Formula of Concord* was raising the Law-Gospel distinction as a principle to interpret all of Scripture. He noted that Edmund Schlink and many others promoted the idea that "the Gospel is the basic norm in the Scripture and that Scripture is

normative only for the sake of the Gospel."[92] This position was later labeled "Gospel-reductionism."

Bohlmann answers his own question in two ways. First, "If the Law-Gospel distinction and the doctrine of justification by grace were hermeneutical principles of general applicability, or even the dominant hermeneutical principles, it is difficult to understand why the confessions bring nonsoteriological questions to the Scriptures without the explicit help of such soteriological hermeneutical principles."[93] He cites examples where the *Apology* deals with the passages themselves by "careful grammatical exegesis" rather than imposing the Law-Gospel principle on it. However, secondly, the Law-Gospel distinction and justification by faith are rightly used as hermeneutical principles in the passages where Scripture speaks about Law and Gospel and the relationship between faith and works.[94]

The *Apology* accuses its opponents of abolishing the Gospel promise and quoting the Law: "The rule I have just stated interprets all the passages they quote on law and works. For we concede that in some places the Scripture presents law, while in others it presents the Gospel, the free promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake. But by their denial that faith justifies and by their doctrine that because of our love and works we receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation, our opponents abolish this free promise" (*Apology* IV:185-186; Tappert, p. 132.)

Consider one example of how the *Apology* uses this distinction to understand Scripture:

> Other statements about works are also quoted against us. Luke 6:37, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Isa. 58:7,9, "Share your bread with the hungry. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer." Dan. 4:27, "Redeem your sins by showing mercy." Matt. 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And again (v. 7), "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." But these passages would say nothing against us if our opponents did not read something false into them. They contain two elements. One is the proclamation of the law or of penitence, which condemns wrongdoers and commands that they do right. The other is a promise that is added. They do not add that sins are forgiven without faith or that these works are themselves a propitiation."

(Apology IV: 256; Tappert, p. 144)

This presentation demonstrates both the importance that the Confessors placed upon proper hermeneutical principles and the usefulness that the *Book of Concord* has for teaching hermeneutics.

# A Hermeneutical Example

## A Study of Genesis 4:7

Reference was made earlier to the idea that Luther put more emphasis on the subject than on the meaning of a single word. Luther wrote, "Therefore in every exposition the subject should be given consideration first; that is, it must be determined what is under consideration. After this has been done, the next step is that the words should be adapted to the matter if the character of the language so permits, not the matter to the words."[95]

What Luther was treating was God's message to Cain after his sacrifice was not accepted. The traditional translation of the verse is, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door." Luther's exegesis deals with the real subject of the passage—repentance and faith, and so he adopts the theological meaning of the word as the *literal* sense.

> But the matter which cannot escape notice, inasmuch as it is the basic issue, is this: that nothing is pleasing to God unless it is done in faith. This is in agreement with that well-known general statement of Paul (Rom. 14:23): "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." And Solomon declares (Prov. 15:8): "The sacrifice of the wicked God loathes." The second basic issue is that sin is something so enormous that it cannot be blotted out by sacrifices and other works but only through God's mercy, which must be accepted by faith.

> The entire meaning hinges on the verb שְׂאֵת, from נשׂא, "to lift up." Moreover, here we have a clear example of how great a difference there is between the knowledge of a word and the knowledge of the matter. If you apply the word "lift up" to a concrete object, it means "to raise up" or "to raise high," as in

> Is. 6:1: "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." This is something far different from what we have in Ps. 32:1: "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven." And yet in both passages the verb is the same.
>
> Therefore the sense is: "If you did well, or if you were good, that is, if you believed, you would have a gracious God and there would be a true lifting-up, that is, forgiveness of sins. But because I see that God had no regard for you, it assuredly follows that you are not good and are not freed from your sin; but your sin remains."[96]

A similar procedure should be used concerning the word "repent" as it is used in the Bible. In order to determine its proper meaning, it is necessary to determine the subject matter, whether "repent" is used of man or of God, whether or not "repent" is used in connection with "believe" and "remission," and whether "repent" refers to conversion or the Christian life.

However, this procedure should never empty a given word of its basic meaning or inject a new meaning by the will of the exegete. In the reference above, Luther's exegesis dealt with the word's semantic range, that is, as the word was used elsewhere in Scripture. The subject (*res*) may not induce a word to go outside of its semantic range or use.

## The Conclusion

Scholars have noted that Luther did not possess the great bulk of external evidence, especially the literature of the church fathers before A.D. 200; he possessed only the evidence of the New Testament documents themselves.[97] The fact that we have access to a great deal more material does not put us at an advantage over Luther's understanding of Scripture. Julian Anderson states, "Luther's principles, however, like those of the earliest disciples, were unerringly correct. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were nothing more nor less than the voice of Christ, absolutely authoritative. And as such these Scriptures were self-authenticating."[98]

What Luther did possess was a thorough knowledge of God's Word, from which he drew hermeneutical principles that continue

to guide our understanding of Scripture.[99] Therefore, our study of biblical hermeneutics is both necessary and practical. It is necessary because pastors need to have at hand the best tools that are available to assist them in understanding the great truths God has revealed. Hermeneutics is practical because its presuppositions and principles help us remain true to God's revelation so we can declare his praises to the world. Dr. Preus states, "We must never forget that the only reason for any discussion of Scripture or hermeneutics is that the Christ of Scripture might be made more real to poor sinners. And when this happens, when we meet Christ in the Scriptures and learn to trust and love Him, the Bible ceases to be something to speculate about and criticize and dissect, it becomes God's Word of comfort and truth to us."[100]

Exact grammatical study of the text, along with the other historical-grammatical disciplines, is the *scientia* of hermeneutical study. Since each word of Scripture is revealed by the Holy Spirit, the science of inductive study is an important tool for getting meaning from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greeks texts of the Bible. Unfortunately, this paper did not have space to enter into the extensive discussion regarding grammar, philology, context, linguistics, and many other practical aspects of Bible interpretation.

True understanding of God's holy Word requires more than *scientia*; it also requires the *ars interpretendi* in which the interpreter of Scripture is moved by the working of the Holy Spirit to believe its teachings, to cling to the Christological center of Scripture and of salvation, and to comprehend the scope of scriptural doctrine.

Exegetical and hermeneutical studies are not an end in and of themselves. These studies are the means by which the work of Christ's ministry of the Word is carried out. Apart from God's Word there is no legitimate work for a minister to do. The fruit of faithful Bible study will show itself in a pastor's sermons, teaching, counseling, and pastoral care. Such a pastor will then be able to articulate the results of his study so that hearers are fed with the Gospel, children are nurtured with the pure milk of the Word, and the mature believers are instructed and comforted with the Word of truth. This paper will have achieved its purpose if it leads each reader to a more detailed study of Scripture, a more conscious use of

hermeneutical principles and presuppositions, and a more diligent ministry of teaching God's clear revelation.

The work of the Public Ministry is "applied hermeneutics." When pastors and teachers know the Scriptures—which begins with hermeneutics (prolegomena and practical), they can be more faithful and effective in their vocational activities of homiletics, counseling, care of troubled souls, shut-in and hospital visits, Christian education in the congregation, worship, etc.

A specific area of pastoral care where the practical application of hermeneutics needs more attention is the adult instruction class. The general population in our country possesses little, no, or false knowledge of the Bible. For them, the Bible may seem to be a contradictory book about an angry Old Testament god and a gracious New Testament god, or a hopeless jumble of competing truths, or an ancient book of fantasy stories. Instruction classes should require daily Bible readings during the weeks of instruction with time for questions in class. While instruction materials present the various characteristics of Scripture, more material needs to be presented to teach students to identify both Law and Gospel in Scripture, to find Christ as the center of Scripture, and to understand the analogy of faith in relation to issues of justification and sanctification. Prospects need to be provided a hermeneutical framework to guide them in the study of God's Word.

In conclusion, I wish to make explicit what has been implicit throughout this paper. Our doctrinal confession, our ministry of the Word, our preaching ministry, our care for souls has no other basis than the clear Word of God, rightly interpreted and divided. Doctrinal issues cannot be resolved apart from a clear understanding of the source of all truth—the Holy Scripture. Citations from Church Fathers, from past dogmatics books, and even from the Lutheran Confessions can be a hindrance where the hermeneutical/exegetical study of Scripture is not the starting point. Conversely, an exegetical study of Scripture is not complete without testing its results by means of the analogy of faith of the Church, that is, the Lutheran Confessions, past dogmatics works, and the Church Fathers.

God has blessed us with his Word and with faith to believe it. Let us heed the advice of St. Paul to Timothy: "You must continue

in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

To God alone the glory.

γέγραπται·
οὐκ ἐπ᾽ ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος,
ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι ἐκπορευομένῳ διὰ στόματος θεοῦ.
(Matthew 4:4)

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# Endnotes

[1] Don Closson lists three reasons why people have difficulty understanding the text and why the study of hermeneutics is important: "First, we are separated from the historical events written about by thousands of years of history. Second, we live in a dramatically different culture, and third, the biblical texts were written in foreign languages" (*Hermeneutics*, Probe Ministries, http://www.probe.org/docs/hermen.html, p. 1). A fourth reason comes to mind: the Bible proclaims divine truths that could not enter the minds of men without God's revelation. These truths challenge our worldview with a theology of the cross. Biblical hermeneutics with its presuppositions, principles, and analytical tools assists readers to grasp the meaning of a passage and to relate various passages to each other so that they can proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world in darkness.

[2] Robert Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," *Doctrine is Life*: *The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Scripture,* ed. Klemet Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), p. 132.

[3] "Task of Hermeneutics in Ancient Philosophy," p. 211, *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* (8), 1994, 211-320. The author also states, "The Catholic counter-reformation's response to Luther was that it had no difficulty with his scriptural principle of *sola scriptura*, since its own authority also derived from the Bible. The only problem resided in the interpretation of ambiguous passages. Despite Luther's acclaimed principle, the Catholic Church contended that it was far from certain that the Bible is always clear and consistently serves as its *sui ipsius interpres* (i.e., its own interpreter). Indeed, the striking divergences among the protestants themselves on very important matters of Biblical interpretation confirmed this suspicion. Thus, the catholics concluded that it was necessary to rely on tradition and the authority of the magisterium to establish the correct interpretation of ambiguous texts. And, it was precisely in the Lutheran response to this catholic counter-reaction that one can pin-point the emergence of a hermeneutics in the protestant tradition. The first to offer such a hermeneutics were followers of Luther, Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), in this treatises on rhetoric of 1519 and 11531, and Matthias Flacious Illyricus (1520-1575)…" (p. 212).

[4] "Task of Hermeneutics in Ancient Philosophy," p. 212. The author I am citing here also discussed Plato's use of the word ἑρμενεῖα with the meaning that the interpreter discovers the meaning of divinations or oracles without determining its truth, something philosophy must attend to ("Task of Hermeneutics in Ancient Philosophy," p. 219). The discipline of biblical hermeneutics does not seek to interpret hidden oracles; it works with the clear and inerrant Word of God.

[5] James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), p. 226.

[6] Robert Preus, "How is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the

Old and New Testaments?" in *Doctrine is Life*: *The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Scripture,* ed. Klemet Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), p. 215.

[7] Bernard L. Ramm, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics: Bernard L. Ramm and Others* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 9.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Voelz, p. 13 (emphasis added).

[10] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* Vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 359.

[11] Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books [Good News Publishers], 1994), p. 40.

[12] Donald G. Bloesch, *A Christological Hermeneutic: Crisis and Conflict in Hermeneutics* (http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=0).

[13] Maier, p. 17.

[14] Peter Prange, "John Philipp Koehler and the Exegetical Task: The Science and Evangelical Art of Biblical Hermeneutics," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 47:1 (March 2007), p. 53.

[15] Ramm, "Biblical Interpretation," p. 8.

[16] "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," *Doctrine is Life*: *The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Scripture,* ed. Klemet Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), p. 165.

[17] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 633-634.

[18] Fredrick S. Wenger, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Original Notes* (Springfield: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1967), pp. 2-3.

[19] Wenger, p. 1.

[20] Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 19-20.

[21] Longenecker, p. 70.

[22] Longenecker, p. 206.

[23] Preus, p. 168.

[24] Raymond Surburg, "The Presuppositions of the Historical-Grammatical Method as Employed by Historic Lutheranism," *The Springfielder* 38:4 (October 1974), p. 3.

[25] Surburg, p. 3.

[26] Preus, p. 133.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Richard P. Bucher, *The Ecumenical Luther: The Development and Use of His Doctrinal Hermeneutic* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2003), p. 34.

[29] Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philiadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 238.

[30] Ibid., pp. 241-242.

[31] Luther goes on to state that the Flood destroyed Paradise so that it is

foolish to try to locate it on earth. He insists that "we speak of a historical Paradise which once was and no longer exists" (*Luther's Works,* Volume 1, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958], p. 90).

[32] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Luther's Works: Companion Volume* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 59.

[33] Bengt Hagglund, "Pre-Kantian Hermeneutics in Lutheran Orthodoxy," *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. XX:3 (Autumn 2006), pp. 318-336.

[34] Maier, p. 337.

[35] Hagglund, p. 322.

[36] Hagglund, p. 325.

[37] Walther M. Dunnett's (*The Interpretation of Holy Scripture* [New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984], pp. 85-86) evaluation of the "New Hermeneutic" of the modern era is: 1) It is more concerned with the creative understanding of the text and less about how one understands it correctly; 2) There is a one-sided use of the New Testament, with attention on the use of language categories (poems, hymns, parables, etc.) and less to the theological parts; 3) A one-sided view of language as functioning on the basis of conventions, instead of communication that contains meaning, that describes and informs; and 4) Finally, the "new hermeneutic" gives the impression of being overly-subjective. "It changes theology into anthrolology."

[38] *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1984), p. 853.

[39] Preus, p. 258.

[40] Preus, pp. 259-260.

[41] Ibid. (See also: "The exegetically determined meaning of one verse may appear to conflict with the meaning of another verse dealing with the same subject matter or article of faith. The meaning of a verse may appear to conflict with extrabiblical evidence from history or sound reason or experience. Or even more serious, the clear teaching of Scripture on one article of faith or subject may appear to conflict with the clear teaching of Scripture on another article of faith or subject. How can such conflicts be harmonized without denying the plain meaning of God's Word in this or that verse or section of Scripture? The answer is that the conflict can not be harmonized, if harmonization or solution of the difficulty involves any departure at all from the intended meaning of a single Bible text. In every case the meaning of the given text must stand, whatever the consequences [SC, VII,22,30,45] [Preus, p. 228]).

[42] John F. Johnson, "Analogia Fidei as Hermeneutical Principle," *The Springfielder* XXXVI:4 (March 1973), p. 253.

[43] Pelikan, pp. 147-148.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., pp. 148-149.

[46] Ibid., pp. 154-155.

[47] Ibid., pp. 158-159.

[48] Robert Preus, "How is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the

Old and New Testaments?" in *Doctrine is Life*, ed. Klemet Preus, pp. 185-186.

[49] Ibid. Dr. Preus quotes Edmund Schlink regarding the Lutheran Confessions: "Confessions in their proper sense will never be taken seriously until they are taken seriously as exposition of the Scriptures, to be specific, as the church's exposition of the Scriptures… Confessions are primarily expositions of Scripture…." Again, "Resting on Scripture as a whole, the Confessions aim to summarize the multiplicity of statements from Scripture in doctrinal articles directed against the errors of their day and designed for the protection of the correct proclamation them and for all time to come" ("The Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord" in *Doctrine is Life*, Klement Preus, ed., p. 216.

[50] In defending their decision to include the earlier Lutheran Confessions in the *Book of Concord*, the authors of the *Formula of Concord* state, "No one can blame us if we derive our expositions and decisions in the controverted articles from these writings, for just as we base our position on the Word of God as the eternal truth, so we introduce and cite these writings as a witness to the truth and as exhibiting the unanimous and correct understanding of our predecessors, who remained steadfastly in the pure doctrine" (FC, SD, Rule and Norm: 13; Tappert, pp. 506).

[51]Carl Lawrenz, "The Clarity of Scripture," *This Steadfast Word*, Carl Lawrenz, ed., (n.p.: Lutheran Free Conference Publications, 1965), pp. 123-124.

[52] Preus, "The Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord," in *Doctrine is Life*, ed. Klemet Preus, p. 224.

[53] Kenneth Miller, "Biblical Interpretation," *This Steadfast Word*, Carl Lawrenz, ed., p. 127.

[54] Pieper, Vol. I, p. 365.

[55] Maier, p. 183.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Pieper, Vol. I, pp. 363-364.

[60] Pieper, Vol. I, p. 367.

[61] George Lillegard, "Biblical Hermeneutics: Principles of Bible Interpretation Based on Works of Hermeneutics," http://www.wlsessays.net/authors/L/lindex.html, n.p.

[62] Walter Dunnett, *The Interpretation of Holy Scripture* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), p. 51.

[63] Lillegard, n.p.

[64] Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward and Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 82.

[65] Gaylin Schmeling, "The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 36:1, p 30.

[66] Schmeling, p. 32.

[67] LaSor gives several examples where he thinks that a *sensus plenior* interpretation is helpful. In Genesis 3:15 the literal sense is "clear" that God

speaks of hostility between human beings and serpents where humans will be hurt and serpents killed. "There must be a deeper meaning," he says, and he refers to Christ's victory over Satan. He rejects the idea that "the seed of the woman" is a type of Christ, since it refers to the human race. However, LaSor must have forgotten St. Paul's own inspired commentary that the word "Seed" is singular, not a collective noun, and that it refers only to Christ (Galatians 3:16). LaSor does not see rectilinear prophesy in Isaiah 9, 11, 53, or Micah 5:2, so he resorts to finding a "fuller meaning" in Jesus. In so doing, he goes against the God-intended meaning of these Messianic prophecies (William Sanford LaSor, "Interpretation of Prophecy," Ramm, Bernard, and others. *Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987], pp. 109-115.)

[68] Ibid., p. 106.

[69] Schmeling, p. 35.

[70] Dunnett, p. 54.

[71] Johnson, p. 250.

[72] Hagglund, p. 320.

[73] Martin Luther, "Lectures on Romans," *Luther's Works* Vol. 25 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 446.

[74] Johnson, p. 252.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Prange, p. 42.

[77] Prange, p. 40.

[78] "Scripture often stresses the same thing. Ps. 143:2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for no man living is righteousness, even to all the saints and servants of God, if God does not forgive but judges and condemns their hearts.' When David elsewhere boasts of his righteousness, he is speaking of his cause against the persecutors of God's Word, not of his personal purity. He prays for the defense of God's cause and his glory, as in Ps. 7:8, 'Judge men, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me.' Similarly, in Ps. 130:3 he says that no one can stand the judgment of God if he observes our sins, 'If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?' Job 9:28, 'I feared all my works'; vv. 30-31, 'If I wash myself with snow, and cleanse my hands with lye, yet thou wilt plunge me into a pit" (*Apology* IV:326; Tappert, pp. 157-158; seven more passages are cited to show that works and merits cannot save anyone).

[79] Johnson, p. 255.

[80] Maier, p. 338.

[81] Johnson, p. 254.

[82] Johnson, p. 259, endnote #23. "Texts, as is well known, have their own history of interpretation and effect."

"In this form *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith) and *interpretatio fidei* (interpretation of faith) report back to us from earlier discussion." The author gives three concerns about its use by those who use the historical-critical methodology: 1) what weight is to be given to various interpreters. The author

says that in modern times most weight is given to post-Enlightenment voices, avoiding patristic voices, though the wheat must be separated from the chaff. 2) Dogmatics embodies stability and continuity. "Its natural disadvantage is its natural attachment to tradition. Yet it can warn exegesis, which is sometimes too interpretively fleet-footed for its own good." 3) Confessions furnish "a concentrated history of interpretation and effect. Where they hinder observation of the text they are damaging" (Maier, pp. 398-90).

[83] Johnson, p. 251.

[84] Hagglund, p. 320.

[85] Preus, "The Unity of Scripture" in *Doctrine is Life*: *The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Scripture*, ed. Klemet Preus, pp. 257-258.

[86] Ibid, p. 258.

[87] In the connection of the last times, a Roman Catholic author makes the following comments about Gal 3:10-13 where he has "proved" that Paul says nothing about salvation by faith alone. "The presumption that is foisted on the text by these Protestant apologists, is that since no one can perfectly keep the law, all are condemned who believe any kind of law is necessary for salvation. The logical step for them is next to say that since no one can perfectly keep the law, one needs alien righteousness of Christ to be imputed to one's account. It is purely a forensic scheme, where Christ's perfect righteousness is laid to one's account that will perfectly satisfy God's justice. God will not see one's own righteousness, but only Christ's righteousness. The problem is that nowhere in Galatians 3:10-14, or actually nowhere else in the book of Galatians (or actually anywhere in the Bible) is it stated that on judgment day, one person's basis for going to heaven is an alien righteousness laid to one's account. There is no scene that says that those who go to hell go there because of this lack of an alien righteousness. In fact, in every judgment scene, this separation is based on faithfulness or lack of faithfulness (Rom. 2:4-13; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:10-17; Rom. 14:10-12; John 5:28-29; Mt. 25:31-46; Mt. 16:24-27; Rev. 20:10-13; 22:10-14)" (http://matt1618.freeyellow.com/gal3.htm).

[88] Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," ed. Klemet Preus, p. 136.

[89] Johnson, p. 255.

[90] Pelikan, pp. 59-60. Pelikan may have shown his true feelings with the "few modern students" comment. This essayist is aware that Pelikan's theological judgments are not confessional.

[91] Preus, "Luther: Word, Doctrine and Confession," ed. Klemet Preus, p. 279.

[92] Ralph Bohlmann, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 111.

[93] Ibid., p. 114.

[94] Ibid., p. 118.

[95] Luther, *Luther's Works,* Vol. 1, p. 263.

[96] Luther, *Luther's Works,* Vol. 1, p. 265.

[97] Julian Anderson, "Scripture and Tradition in Relation to the Church,"

*This Steadfast Word,* ed. Carl Lawrenz, (n.p.: Lutheran Free Conference Publications, 1965), p. 157.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Luther as an expositor was a virtuoso. Pelikan writes, "Where conservative commentators are often timid, Luther is bold and creative. Where critical commentators are often irresponsible, Luther knows himself to be the servant of the Word of God, not its master. Where scholarly commentators sometimes seem interested in every detail of the text except its theological meaning, Luther manages to find theological meaning in the most unpromising parts of the Bible. Where Roman Catholic allegorical commentators often practice an exegetical alchemy that sets out to turn lead into gold but ends up turning gold into lead, Luther labors to discover the literal and historical sense of the text. Where Protestant commentators often become so preoccupied with the literal sense that they cannot tell prose from poetry, Luther's eye is always sensitive to the spectrum of meanings in both the Old and the New Testament" (Pelikan, p. 255).

[100] Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," ed. Klemet Preus, p. 177.

# Overview, Themes, and Vocabulary in Psalm 119

*by Jesse M. Jacobsen*

Psalm 119 is unique among the Psalms. It is the most rigorous alphabetic acrostic in the Bible, and follows other conventions of Hebrew poetry just as strictly. To learn from it, one should read it, pray, meditate upon its contents, and repeat these things several times. The psalm itself exemplifies this pattern for the use of God's Word. A collection of Hebrew nouns used synonymously define the theme of the psalm. Half of these traditionally recognized theme-words seem to lean toward a legal understanding of God's Word, while the other half are neutral on the Law-Gospel continuum. If other theme-words can be shown which imply the revelation of God's mercy in Christ, then it will be clear that the psalmist's perspective of God's Word embraces the entire revealed will of God, explicitly including both Law and Gospel, and that the psalmist's apprehension of these things occurs only in the promised Messiah, Jesus.

גַּל־עֵינַי וְאַבִּיטָה נִפְלָאוֹת מִתּוֹרָתֶךָ

(v. 18)

## 1 Sourdough

One of the things I enjoy is sourdough. With sourdough starter, one can make all sorts of things. I began with bread, moved on to pancakes, and recently even made sourdough waffles. Sourdough starter is a living thing, and requires frequent attention. It's not like dry yeast, which happily sits in storage for a long time. Sourdough starter needs to be fed and replenished, and kept in conditions that allow it to thrive. If it's not, then it will die, or become infected with foreign bacteria or mold. When that happens, you can only throw it away and start again from square one. On the other hand, if you can keep your starter alive, it can be shared with other people. Sharing

your starter does not diminish your own supply. In fact, if you don't share it or use it yourself, then you will have to throw away some of it at least once each week. So sharing your starter with other people makes a lot of sense.

Another reason I like sourdough is the many parallels it offers to eternal Truth. For our purpose today, sourdough starter represents Christian doctrine, the very word of faith we have received (John 17:8, 1 Co 2:12, Gal 1:9), which we confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts (Rom 10:8-10). It must be kept unalloyed, or it becomes worthless. It gives life, as long as it is not dead itself (James 2:26). If our doctrine becomes dead or mixed with foreign doctrines, then it is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill, and we must return to square one: repentance, even conversion. The doctrine of Jesus Christ is not diminished when we share it with others. In fact, if we do not share it or put it into practice ourselves, then we are poor stewards, for we throw away its potential.

For our purposes, the most important attribute of sourdough starter, as it illustrates the doctrine of God's Word, is that it is precious. I gladly do my best to keep my starter alive and well, because if I don't, there won't be any sourdough pancakes or bread. Jesus said, "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31). So Christians gladly do their best to abide in his Word. This is not a static or passive proposition. It often takes enormous effort and decisive action, but *always* requires unflagging diligence. Those who assume that they already abide in Jesus' Word without the care required have fallen into carnal security. We need to do our best to keep pure the precious doctrine of the living Word, because it is our life, and the life of the Church.

The doctrine of Christ is divine wisdom, and more valuable than anything else. "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its value, Nor is it found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me'; And the sea says, 'It is not with me.' It cannot be purchased for gold, Nor can silver be weighed for its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, In precious onyx or sapphire" (Job 28:12–16). There is exactly one place where salutary, divine wisdom has been provided for us: in the Word of God, the holy Scriptures.

Our most precious treasure is the Word of God, and its doctrine: Jesus Christ crucified for our justification. The formal and material principles of our faith are like sourdough starter for every Christian. Accordingly, Psalm 119 is a psalm for every Christian. It expresses our love, our longing, and our deep appreciation for the most precious thing we have on earth.

# 2 Composition

## 2.1 Alphabetic Acrostic

The most obvious characteristic of Psalm 119, in Hebrew anyway, is its acrostic arrangement. The Psalm is written in something like stanzas of eight verses, where each verse in a stanza begins with the same letter of the alphabet. There is a stanza for every letter from א to ת. This is the only psalm with that particular acrostic arrangement, though other variations are found in Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145. Psalms 25, 34, 37, and 145 appear less rigidly acrostic than Psalms 111, 112, and 119. This poetic form can be employed to varying degrees, or in various kinds, as we also see by the appearance of acrostic passages within certain other poetic sections of the Bible, including Psalms 9 and 10. Psalm 37 shows that the psalmist may even ignore word prefixes (like ב, מִן, and ו) when choosing a word to fit the acrostic pattern (vss. 10 and 39).
Psalm 119 is in a class by itself in terms of its acrostic composition. While other acrostic psalms may omit a letter here and there, this one is rigidly acrostic. It uses the appropriate letter at the very beginning of each word, including any word prefix, at the start of every verse throughout every stanza.

## 2.2 Meter

Since I am not qualified as an expert in Hebrew poetry, and since the field seems to be obscured by conflicting opinions and great expanses of time, I can't say anything authoritative about poetic meter. However, nature abhors a vacuum, so I'll provide a suggestion. If you have the opportunity to read Psalm 119 in Hebrew, and are interested in poetic meter, pay attention to the *atnah* and the

*silluq*. These are "heavy disjunctive accents," so that their words are always in pause. That means their accented syllables have long vowels.[1] Since they also divide each verse according to content, *atnah* and *silluq* provide convenient and regular subdivisions, a rough kind of poetic meter.

A sensible approach to the meter of Hebrew poetry, mentioned in the 1915 *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, recognizes that the ancient Hebrew perception of meter was far removed from that of recent centuries in Western languages. As a poetic device, meter may have been used only subconsciously at that time, without known rules. In my admittedly inexpert experience, the art of Hebrew poetry seems more concerned with the arrangement of fact (i.e. parallelism) than with obeying intricate rules of form. This is not entirely, but partly the reverse of what I have (inexpertly) noticed in certain classic English poetry. In that case, the content-oriented *atnah* and *silluq* is an appropriate indicator of the ebb and flow that the psalmist had in mind.

In other words: forget about poetic meter as we know it, and pay attention to the way each verse is divided into mutually-reinforced thought patterns.

## 2.3 Themes

It is easy to be distracted into questions about vocabulary used in Psalm 119 for the law or the Word of God. It is quite possible to do a mathematical word study of how many occurrences may be found of various words, and to find significance in how their meanings overlap or differ. We shall touch upon that later. But we want to know the overall theme of the psalm, and such efforts can miss the point. It's better to discern the theme first, and pull out the microscope later.[2]

The main theme of Psalm 119 can be understood in several ways, but I do not mean contrary understandings. These are different perspectives on the same thing. In Luther's class notes for teaching the Psalms (ca. 1514), he writes about a spiritual meaning for ideas like obedience and righteousness, which is found only when one interprets the psalm in its "prophetic" or literal sense. The spiritual

meaning can only be found in the light of the Gospel. It may help to hear a little of what he means by this. “The prophet looks with spiritual eyes at the law of Moses and sees hidden and enclosed in it the law of faith, the gospel of grace, and the invisible things promised, like the kernel under the shell, or the treasure under the ground....”[3] It is evident that Luther’s understanding of the theology of the cross was busily maturing at this time.

If we are uncomfortable that some of the key concepts seem legalistic (like obedience and righteousness), we might attempt escape from the psalmist’s use of law-terms by simply saying that *law* does not always mean the condemning, deadly commandments of God. It’s true that תּוֹרָה (law) has a wider meaning in the OT, but that does not fully deliver us from the psalmist’s certainty that he obeys and keeps God’s righteous decrees, as in v. 60: “I made haste, and did not delay To keep Your commandments.” As for the wider meaning, it is certain that the concept of God’s law is used in a very broad sense throughout the psalm, even when synonyms are used like מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ (your judgments) in v. 102. It’s reasonable to say that the intended meaning is often the Word of God. In fact, I would suggest something even more general: the revealed will of God, including both Law and Gospel.

Today, we might try putting the theme in terms of Law and Gospel by granting that Psalm 119 uses Law (narrow sense) expressions, intending them as such, but not because it is teaching a pharisaic or legalistic soteriology. Rather, the context provided by the entire psalm is the Gospel in its broadest sense, as used in the Apology: “the sum of the preaching of the gospel is this, namely, to convict of sin, and to offer for Christ’s sake the remission of sins and righteousness, and the Holy Ghost, and eternal life, and that as regenerate men we should do good works. Thus Christ comprises the sum of the gospel when He says in Luke 24, 47: That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in My name among all nations.”[4]

Therefore, when the psalmist expresses love for God’s law, it is not surprising, for every Christian *does* love God’s law. When he expresses remorse for sin, it is still not surprising, for every Christian (in the world) *does* sin. When he expresses confidence

in keeping or obeying the law, it is still not surprising, because as Christians, we both *have kept* the law, and *do* keep the law. The seeming contradiction between all of these things is no mystery when we understand the full *simul iustus et peccator* context and the proper relationship between justification and sanctification.

In a word, the psalm is about Christ. As the Christian lives under the cross, Christ makes himself found in his Word. Therefore, the Christian cherishes all aspects of that Word above everything else in the world.

Yet this understanding is elusive, and only comes through the theology of the cross and the proper distinction between law and gospel. It is no wonder, then, that some interpreters of Psalm 119 miss the point. It doesn't read like prose, but relies absolutely upon the larger theological context of the Bible. That context is an assumption of the psalmist and a prerequisite for understanding the psalm. The study of this psalm, as with other sections of holy Scripture, is an exercise of Lutheran theology.

You may recall the saying, *Oratio, meditatio, tentatio faciunt theologum.* It's a true statement. It also happens to be Luther's statement. A pithy summary of this psalm could be given in those three words: *oratio, meditatio, tentatio.* It turns out that Luther made that connection himself in the preface to the Wittenberg edition of his own works, published in 1539.[5] Since Luther's description is too lengthy to include, here is Franz Pieper's description of *oratio, meditatio, tentatio*:

> The *Oratio* is the humble and earnest prayer that God would give us by His Holy Spirit the right understanding of the Scripture and not let us plunge into it with our reason. For "although the grammatical sense of Scripture is clear, yet the Holy Ghost must open up for us the living and salutary understanding of the Scriptures," and the "beginning" of all theology is to despair of all one's own wisdom, unconditionally to subject one's own opinion to the Word of God, and to be willing to derive all knowledge in spiritual things from the Word of God.
>
> But this no man is able to do according to his own natural disposition. Therefore one must persist with the *Oratio*, and so much the more in proportion as learning and natural gifts are the greater. "Competent knowledge and rich gifts are a grand

endowment." But it should never be forgotten, the greater the knowledge and gifts, the greater the danger that one becomes self-confident, also in theology!

The *Meditatio*, that is the constant study of the Scripture, "the delving deep into God's Word," "to occupy one's self with God's Word in every way," according to Luther: "not in the heart alone, but also externally work on and apply the oral speech and the lettered words in the Book," as one rubs aromatic herbs that they may give forth their own precious scent, adds Walther.

That the *Tentatio* also belongs to "theological methodology" is established, for instance, by 2 Cor. 1:3ff. When Luther says: "As soon as the Word of God blooms forth through you, the devil will visit you, and make a real doctor of you, and by his affliction will teach you to seek and love God's Word," Walther adds, that is indeed a "strange promotion to the doctorate." But God observes this method: "hence no student of theology should grieve if God sends him all manner of temptation." He is intent on holding fast to this "methodology," although He is well aware that many smile over it as insufficient for our times.

The *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* of which Luther speaks, however, are to be found only in the regenerate. And so Walther further insists most emphatically that only one who has first become a true Christian can become a theologian. He writes: "No unbeliever, no natural man, no slave of sin, no non-Christian, no hypocrite, but only a believer, a regenerate and sanctified person, in short, only a true Christian can be a true theologian; as the Christian presupposes the man, so the theologian presupposes the Christian, and as faith includes knowledge, so theology includes faith."[6]

The psalmist is engaging in Christian theology from א to ת, and teaching us by example how to be Lutheran theologians. This example is perfect; nothing is missing. The single theme that permeates the entire psalm is in the form of a prayer. The psalmist is asking that God would continually grant the greatest blessing he can give: his pure, salutary Word. The Word includes both commandments and mercy, righteous judgments and comfort. The Christian theologian delights in all of this and strives day-in and day-out to grow in the understanding of God's Word. No confirmation, installation, ordination, or graduation can satisfy a theologian's hunger for a deeper understanding of that Word. No

call, job assignment, work ethic, or mission can preclude a Christian theologian's desire to be faithful to the gospel in both word and deed. No earthly circumstances, needs, sorrows, or joys can obviate the Christian theologian's overwhelming love for the purity of divine truth, and his need to seek it daily with all his heart. Even his friendships and family ties do not bind the Christian theologian as tightly as one word of holy Scripture.

This psalm also shows us how the Christian must contend with his own flaws and with the enemies of the gospel at the same time. But they do not detract from his desire for God's Word; on the contrary, they increase it, along with the intensity of his prayer. In this way, the Holy Spirit makes a Christian theologian from a pile of clay.

## 3 Use

I hope you've had a chance to read through the whole psalm at least once in preparation for this conference. Ideally, you would have read it at least three times — in English, of course, unless you are linguistically gifted beyond the lot of mortals. However, I have come to understand the way pastoral conferences work, so this hope may be unfulfilled. If I can impress anything upon you regarding Psalm 119, let it be this: a full reading of the psalm is required to establish the context for exegesis of any part. The more full readings you can undertake, the better. It takes some time to read, if you really want to pay attention — about 20 to 25 minutes is reasonable. It requires some mental discipline during that time, to keep yourself on track. I would not advise doing this late in the evening. Save it for when you're fresh. There is a lot of repetition, which may have made it sound poetic to Hebrew ears, but makes it a little dull to English ears.

Beside the kind of exegetical attention we might want to give this psalm, it's also perfect for simple devotional meditation and prayer. When parts of the Church stopped using the canonical hours with their frequent rotation of the psalms, we lost something. Don't misunderstand me; I'm not suggesting that we all revive the canonical hours again.[7] However, we should use the psalms as the

frequent prayer- and song-book that God intended. Part of Luther's theological acumen and pastoral spirit must have come from his long, frequent devotional exposure to the psalms as a monk and afterward. Maybe the rest of our ministerium is already on par with Luther, but we all know that I've got my work cut out for me. Thankfully, *oratio* and *meditatio* are provided here in abundance.

Repetitive reading of some things, including Psalm 119, can become dry. We need ways to overcome the reluctance of our own flesh, increase our stamina, and improve our focus. Because of this, I should mention an underrated alternative to reading the psalm, for those who have any musical interest. Psalm 119 may be chanted. Our *Hymnary* includes the stanzas א, ב, ל, מ, and נ.[8] The *Christian Worship* hymnal uses excerpts from three stanzas, using two refrains between them. One refrain is v. 105, and the other is Peter's confession in John 6:68. The stanzas used are א, ה, and מ.[9] Those whose sense of personal piety allows or demands it might also use the more challenging settings provided in the Lutheran *Brotherhood Prayer Book*, which contains the entire psalm.[10] Learning to chant from the Gregorian notation provided there may not be easy, but is certainly rewarding. One commentator wrote that Psalm 119 was probably not sung in Hebrew. I don't know if that's true. Either way, it sings well in English, and good singing enhances its devotional nature. So, who wants to try it first?

## 4 Translation and Variation

Translating this psalm is a large task. Since the content is so homogenized, any stanza of it is certain to be quite similar to the rest. In fact, every verse is similar enough to the rest that merely reading it in translation requires special effort to pay attention. However, if the reader does pay attention, variations eventually emerge between verses and between stanzas. Translating the psalm is not needed for detecting many of these variations. So unless there is a special reason for re-translating the whole thing, I would recommend using that precious time to study it all in translation instead. If the need arises, one may consult dictionaries, grammars, or even exegetical commentaries. But the meat of the psalm is already provided by the Holy Spirit, right in your English versions.[11]

The variations between stanzas and verses is worthy of attention. The resources I used identify theme variations in several different ways. None is identical to any other.

- Kretzmann[12] and Leupold[13] both state a theme for each stanza.
- Brug[14] also writes a theme for each stanza, but in this case, it's just a phrase. He also divides the psalm into five major parts, each with its own emphasis, as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| א – ה | Guidance from the Word |
| ו – כ | Suffering of the psalmist |
| ל – נ | The value and purity of the Word |
| ס – צ | Indignation against the enemies of the Word |
| ק – ת | Commitment of the psalmist to obedience |

These parts are evident when reading through the psalm, even when they haven't been pointed out. The progression through these parts sometimes even seems climactic.

- Luther's notes[15] don't follow an overt pattern of themes, but in the course of his text, he will most likely note variations.[16]
- An unexpected source provides an intriguing collection of theme variations. The *Brotherhood Prayer Book*[17] divides Psalm 119 into four parts, but also provides a Psalm-prayer for each stanza of the psalm. The prayers are in collect form, clearly reflecting the content of their stanzas. The four parts are each set to be sung to a different psalm-tone meant to amplify the words in that part of the psalm. When the psalms are chanted as a psalmody, an antiphon is sung before and after the singing of the psalm. The setting of the antiphon complements the psalm-tone, and its words provide a summary — often drawn directly from the psalm itself. Since Psalm 119 is divided into four parts, each with its own psalm-tone, there are also four antiphons, each a brief summary that leads us into its respective part. We must keep in mind that

these theme variations — antiphons and prayers — were not written for exegetical or academic purposes. Instead, they have been prepared for worship, even for the Divine Service. Yet in a way, this distinction makes them more useful for our understanding of Psalm 119. *Lex orandi, lex credendi.*

| | |
|---|---|
| א – ו | Deal bountifully with thy servant: that I may live, and keep thy word. (v. 17) |
| ז – ל | O Lord, quicken me: according to Thy mercy. (probably from v. 88) |
| מ – פ | Uphold me according unto Thy Word: that I may live. (v. 116) |
| ת – צ | Let my soul live: and it shall praise thee. (v. 176) |

While on the subject of translating the psalm, I should mention that the isagogical questions of authorship and date are inconclusive. The content and certain vocabulary shared with Chronicles may suggest an exilic or post-exilic date, but there is no certainty in this.

## 5 The Revealed Will of God Includes ...

Rather than performing a mechanical translation of some verses, I will focus on certain patterns and passages that show the reason for my approach to Psalm 119. My approach is this. The overall theme is centered upon the revealed will of God. There may be better terms to express this, but these are the essentials that I'd like to convey:

1. It is given by God himself in written form.
2. It centers upon and actually confers Christ, with all his benefits, to those who have and keep it.

I could use the term *word* instead, and it would suffice. However, using the term *revealed will of God* shows the breadth of the Word better than *word*, while also implicitly distinguishing it from God's hidden counsels. It's not a secret word, but something

anyone may read or hear. Indeed, God has revealed it. He intends us to receive it. It is his revealed *will*, which includes both his antecedent will (1 Timothy 2:4, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.") and his consequent will (John 8:24, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.").

It is part of God's antecedent will that we should be conformed to his standard of perfection, the law (1 Peter 1:15 "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct"). Therefore, the law plays key roles in the way that will (our salvation) is carried out. It is indispensable, but that's a dry way to put it. "The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver" (Psalm 119:72), or, "every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (v. 160).

Psalm 119 contains what I will call theme-words. Together, they can cover a lot of semantic territory, but a key, recurring meaning among them is *law*. How is the word *law* meant in this psalm? In Hebrew, the word we might anticipate is the word תּוֹרָה (direction, instruction, doctrine – *law*), but there are others. The commentators I have consulted agree that the eight (or so) words used similarly throughout the psalm are essentially used as synonyms. One of them is דָּבָר (*word*), so that might swing our interpretation of תּוֹרָה away from the decalogue and toward the pentateuch, or even the entire Scripture. But what of the other six? They are חֹק (something prescribed – *statute*; always plural), מִצְוָה (*command[ment]*; plural), עֵדוּת (warning sign, reminder – *testimony*), אִמְרָה (word, opinion – *word, promise*), תִּשְׁפָּט (decision by arbitration – *judgment*), and פִּקּוּדִים (directions, orders – *precept*; plural). Four of these six have implications of law or judgment, though the poetic context allows for much more breadth of meaning.[18]

Of these eight words, five have definite law implications on the law-gospel scale, while the other three are neutral. One of the five, תּוֹרָה, could even be considered neutral, since its law-oriented meaning is such a small part of its broad semantic territory. The only reason the law-oriented meaning seems possible is its close proximity to the four law-oriented words. Sometimes in this psalm, that context might imply such a meaning for תּוֹרָה, but in general

it is not necessarily so. That would mean we have four of each: four law-oriented, and four neutral.

| BHS | Found at | LXX | NKJ |
|---|---|---|---|
| חֻקֶּיךָ | 33 (ה), 64 (ת), 80 (י) | δικαιώματα | [your] statutes |
| מִצְוֹתֶיךָ | 35 (ה), 60 (ת), 73 (י) | ἐντολάς | commandments |
| מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ | 39 (ה), 62 (ת), 75 (י) | κρίματα | judgments |
| מִשְׁפְּטֵי צִדְקֶךָ | 40 (ה), 63 (ת), 78 (י) | ἐντολάς | precepts |
| דְּבָרֶיךָ | 57 (ה), 74 (י) | νόμον/λόγους | words |
| תּוֹרָתֶךָ | 34 (ה), 61 (ת), 77 (י) | νόμος | law |
| אִמְרָתֶךָ | 38 (ה), 58 (ת), 76 (י) | λογίον | word |
| עֵדוֹתֶיךָ | 36 (ה), 59 (ת), 79 (י) | μαρτυρία | testimonies |

*Table 1: The eight "standard" theme-words used throughout Psalm 119.*

Table 1 shows where these words are found in stanzas ה, ת, and י, and how they are translated. The four law-oriented words are grouped together first. I have chosen these stanzas because

two commentaries claim that they contain all of the eight words in question. It seems that commentaries are sometimes mistaken.[19]

Between these stanzas, the NKJ is consistent in its translation of the Hebrew words, but the LXX is not entirely so. דָּבָר is once translated with *νόμον*, in verse 57. This shows that *νόμος* in the LXX can easily remain in our grouping of neutral words on the law-gospel spectrum. It comes as no surprise that it is also the LXX translation for תּוֹרָה, because not only is the meaning similar, but the semantic usage is similar.

If we grant that the eight theme-words are used synonymously, then the table above is enough to show that the psalmist has the whole Word of God in mind, not just the literal commandments of God. But we have only found theme-words that have law implications or that are neutral. Any words with gospel implications are conspicuously absent. Is this simply indicative that the Hebrew conception of God's Word leans toward the legal side? If that is so, then the development of legalism among the Pharisees would not be surprising. Indeed, such a conception easily mirrors the *opinio legis* found beneath every culture of fallen man.

A better question would be: where is Christ found in the psalmist's conception of God's Word? Despite his own teaching, Jesus is considered by some of our contemporaries to be a law-giver. He certainly taught law, and more pointedly than most. But his more important work is the fulfillment of the law: not just God's commandments, but his promises too, God's entire *doctrine*. With that in mind, it's not so hard to find Christ in the eight theme-words mentioned above. Yet the question remains, are there other, even more gospel-oriented theme-words?

The pattern used where the eight theme-words are found seems straightforward. They appear in Hebrew as nouns, sometimes in construct. Since they often come at the end of the verse, they are often in pausal form, but not always. מִשְׁפָּט is often found joined with צַדִּיק, as in v. 62. Usually — maybe always — the theme-word is something attributed to God: *your* commandments, *your* word, etc. This is the sort of construction I might expect to find for the majority of theme-words.

In most verses, only one of the theme-words appears, but

there are exceptions. Verses 16, 48, 168, and 172 are examples. The fact that one of our established theme-words appears in nearly every verse might deter us from looking for more, but the fact that some verses (like 37 in ה) do not contain any of them[20] should arouse some curiosity, at least. It is quite possible that we will find verses containing more than one potential theme-word, where the "other" word has gospel implications.

If we do find such verses, the question will arise, why have other commentators overlooked overtly gospel-oriented theme-words? There are several reasons I can think of. One is that this psalm's rigid acrostic structure could distract a commentator from the possibility of finding more than about eight theme-words. Perhaps the commentator is not open to words that only appear sporadically, since these eight appear so regularly. Another reason could be that the commentator himself is allowing for the general use of words that can have legal implications, but not of words that have implications of mercy. In other words, the *opinio legis* could be at work. It is even possible that a commentator discounts the possibility on the grounds that that such an interpretation would be a form of eisegesis, reading Christ *into* the Old Testament. It should go without saying that this is not a Lutheran position. Jesus is already there, waiting to be found. Reading Psalm 119 in a fairly literal translation, such as the NKJ, is sufficient to identify many possible theme-words that have gospel implications. Perhaps an even more mechanical translation, like the NASB, would reveal still more, but for our purposes, we need only find a general pattern. Already in stanzas ה, ח, and י, we have found the nouns in Table 2 which fit the pattern of our theme-words, and have gospel implications.

| **BHS** | **Found at** | **LXX** | **NKJ** |
|---|---|---|---|
| דְּרָכֶךָ | 37 (ה), | ὁδῶ | your way |
| חַסְדֶּךָ | 64 (ח), 76 (י) | ἐλέους | your mercy, merciful kindness |
| רַחֲמֶיךָ | 77 (י) | οἰκτιρμοί | your tender mercies |

*Table 2: Theme-words from* ה, ח *and* י *having gospel implications.*

It could be said that דֶּרֶךְ (way) is not explicitly gospel-oriented. In the dictionary that seems to be the case, but in the wider context of all Scripture, it has a strong gospel implication, particularly when used in the singular or associated with God. John 14:6 may be the prime example, where Jesus himself does both at once: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the *way*, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" The New Testament uses the same word as the LXX, ὅδος. Besides verse 37, I have found דֶּרֶךְ as a possible theme-word in verses 3 and 30, with a close synonym (אֹרַח) in verse 15.

Meanwhile, חֶסֶד (mercy, faithful love) is clearly an attribute of God that He reveals in His Word, found also in places like Isaiah 55:3, where the sure mercies of David[21] (חַסְדֵי דָוִד הַנֶּאֱמָנִים) are equated with God's forever-new testament (בְּרִית עוֹלָם). Besides 64 and 76, other verses I find where חֶסֶד could be considered a theme-word are 41, 124, 149, and 159.

רַחֲמִים (compassions, tender mercies) is another attribute of God which He reveals in His Word. Besides verse 77, it also appears in 156. This word is translated in the LXX with οἰκτιρμοί, a word mostly found in the plural due to the influence of רַחֲמִים, according to Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich.[22] The New Testament usage is exemplified by Romans 12:1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the *mercies* of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." The mercies of God are the very basis of Paul's appeal. This passage shows that רַחֲמִים qualifies as a theme-word for Psalm 119, despite only appearing twice. Even so, another verse from Romans shows beyond doubt that this is a universal characteristic of God, found in His Word: Romans 9:15, "For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will *have compassion* on whomever I will *have compassion*.'"[23]

Finally, it seems that in verses 123, 166, and 174, the word יְשׁוּעָה is also used as a theme-word. This is the same word that was imported as a name into Greek as Ἰησοῦς, but into English as *Joshua*. The Greek name was also imported into English as *Jesus*. In Psalm 119, the LXX translates it with σωτηρία. In the New Testament,

we see it used directly in connection with the gospel (Ephesians 1:13: "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your *salvation*; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise") and the Word (Acts 13:26: "Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this *salvation* has been sent."). All three uses in Psalm 119 affirm that it belongs to God. In all three cases, it is something that the future holds, and for which the psalmist confidently and eagerly waits. One may ask why he waits for this thing. The answer is simple, and explains why this can be one of our theme-words: the psalmist has received the promise in God's Word. יְשׁוּעָה is both the content of the Word and the fulfillment of God's gracious will, as it was promised of old.

| BHS | Found at | LXX | NKJ |
|---|---|---|---|
| דָּרְכֶּךָ | 3 (א), 30 (ד), 37 (ה), | ὁδός | way |
| אֹרַח | 15 (ב) | ὁδός | way |
| חַסְדֶּךָ | 41 (ו), 64 (ח), 76 (י), 124 (ע), 149 (ק), 159 (ר) | ἔλεος | mercy, merciful kindness |
| רַחֲמֶיךָ | 77 (ע), 156 (ר) | οἰκτιρμοί | tender mercies |
| לִישׁוּעָתְךָ | 123 (ע), 166 (ש), 174 (ת) | σωτηρίον | salvation |

*Table 3: Extra theme-words found in Psalm 119 having gospel implications.*

Table 3 is a listing of our extra theme-words, where they are found, and how they are translated. Such a brief glance at a few extra theme-words in the vocabulary of Psalm 119 may have left you with more questions than answers, but that's not such a bad thing. You know where the answers may be found.

## 6 Enjoy the Sourdough

Every time I read through Psalm 119, I am surprised at how engaging it is. Though sometimes my own faults make me less receptive, I always sense that the waters are deeper than I could ever reach. This is not discouraging, because these are safe waters, teeming with truth, righteousness, and faithful love. The longer you tarry, the deeper you swim, the more rewarding is your visit. Yet Psalm 119 is merely the current leading us out to the deep ocean of God's Word.

This becomes more certain every time I study this psalm: we have been blessed beyond measure to have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Jesus Christ. We apprehend all of this ultimately through one medium: God's Word. That Word sometimes comes to us visibly,[24] but the Word it remains, a cup containing life that Jesus secured for us by drinking the cup containing death.

God's Word has been called by many things. Some of these names come from a particular precious teaching found in the Word, as with "judgments," "commandments," "tender mercies," and "salvation." Though they mean something more specific, such names can be used for the entire revelation of the divine will by a sort of metonymy. Psalm 119 does this throughout, while also using more general names like "doctrine," "words," and "testimonies."

It is important to keep in mind that the psalmist's devotion embraces the *entire* revealed will of God: both law and gospel, not only in a general way, but even specifically. This is possible because the psalmist is a believer in Jesus Christ, and a new creation. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). These things cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit.

May God bless our persistence in prayer, our faithfulness in

meditation, and our steadfastness in affliction.

לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַכָּבוֹד

# Endnotes

[1] Page H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1992).

[2] Lest you think that I'm shirking the statistics, you should know that the Concordia Self-Study Commentary finds eight synonyms in Psalm 119 for the Word of God, the same as the number of verses in each stanza. However, Leupold's findings are a little more interesting. He finds ten: "law, word, saying, commandment, statute, ordinance, precept, testimony, way, and path" [See Leupold, 822]. Yet even Leupold hesitates to include מִשְׁפָּט (a foible that the present author does not possess).That brings the total number to eleven. Like the Concordia Self-Study Commentary, Brug also sticks to eight words.

[3] Martin Luther, First Lectures on the Psalms, in *First Lectures on the Psalms II: Psalms 76–126*, *Luther's Works* vol. 11, tr. Herbert J.A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976).

[4] Phillip Melanchthon, *Apology of the Augsburg Confession,* in F. Bente, editor, *Concordia Triglotta: Die Symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988), XII, 29–30.

[5] Martin Luther, Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings, in *Career of the Reformer IV*, *Luther's Works,* vol. 34 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960).

[6] Franz Pieper, "Dr. C.F.W. Walther As Theologian." <http://www. lutherantheology.comwatwat00contents.html>, September 2005. From the *Orthodox Lutheran Theologian* Vol. 1 Num. 2, February 1953, page 24f.; *Lehre und Wehre*, 1888, pp. 97-101.

[7] Though you may, of course. It's an adiaphoron, and can serve the Gospel well. I won't even call you catholic, unless you'd like me to.

[8] Dennis W. Marzolf, Harry K. Bartels, and Mark E. DeGarmeaux, editors, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: Morningstar Publishers, 1996).

[9] *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993).

[10] Benjamin T.G. Mayes and Michael N. Frese, editors, *The Brotherhood Prayer Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Our Savior Lutheran Church, 2004).

[11] This perspective may be surprising from someone who came through the WELS pre-seminary program, which emphasized exegesis in the original languages. I would still recommend that for anyone who has the gifts required, but some have other gifts. Some of our faithful pastors may not have the tools for detailed work in Hebrew, but that doesn't really hamper their exegetical studies — at least of this psalm. Even in translation, one cannot exhaust the treasures that the Holy Spirit has buried here.

[12] Paul E. Kretzmann, *Old Testament Vol. II, Popular Commentary of the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), pp. 183ff.

[13] D. D. Leupold, H.C., *Exposition of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959).

[14] John F. Brug, *Psalms 73–150,* The People's Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001).

[15] Martin Luther, First Lectures on the Psalms, in *First Lectures on the Psalms II: Psalms 76–126*, *Luther's Works* vol. 11, tr. Herbert J.A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976).

[16] This commentary is more worthwhile than the others, but I have yet to read through it all.

[17] Benjamin T.G. Mayes and Michael N. Frese, editors, *The Brotherhood Prayer Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Our Savior Lutheran Church, 2004).

[18] Leupold notes the same words, but also includes two more, bringing the total to ten. The extra words he notes are *way* and *path*.

[19] The word forms I have chosen to include in this table (and the others) are generally the same as the BHS for the Hebrew, but the Greek forms vary. Where the various references agree, I included the same form used in the LXX, but where the referenced forms differ significantly, I used a general form (nominative singular or plural) or a combination. This is only intended to give you an overview of these occurrences. Please consult the text in question for more details.

[20] For Leupold, v. 37 does contain a theme-word, but only because he expanded his list to ten.

[21] Objective, meaning "mercies shown to David."

[22] Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957).

[23] This verse is a quotation from Exodus 33:19, "Then He said, 'I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' " In Romans 9:15, the OT quotation is taken from the LXX. There, οἰκτίρω is used for the verb רָחַם, but the verb translated ἐλεῶ is חָנַן.

[24] Phillip Melanchthon, *Apology of the Augsburg Confession,* in F. Bente, editor, *Concordia Triglotta: Die Symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988).

# The Fifteenth Anniversary Convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

*by Gaylin R. Schmeling*

This year is the fifteenth anniversary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), founded in 1993 in Oberwesel, Germany. In this anniversary year, the convention of the CELC was held in Kiev, Ukraine, June 3–5, 2008. "Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom" was the theme for this anniversary celebration. The CELC was established as the spiritual heir of the Synodical Conference. The purpose of the CELC has been to preserve the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in our midst and to proclaim the message of salvation in Christ throughout the world. The CELC has done this through mutual encouragement and strengthening of the member churches. All the participants were filled with gratitude and thankfulness to the Lord that He has preserved His Word in its truth and purity in our midst and we pray that He will continue to be with us through Word and Sacrament in the future.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many people advocated an international organization of confessional Lutherans and did much to bring it to fruition. However, three names stand out as individuals who worked to promote this organization and make it a reality: Pres. Gerhard Wilde of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (ELFK, Evangelical Lutheran Free Church), Pres. George Orvick of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Pres. Wilde emphasized again and again the need for such a fellowship for lonely Lutherans throughout the world. He had experienced that loneliness in his own country during Soviet times and later when his church body struggled to maintain its confessional stand. Pres. Orvick expended considerable effort throughout his presidency to make contact with confessional Lutherans in the United States and around the globe who were in need of a new confessional home. Prof. Gawrisch worked tirelessly for this organization. He put in

more time and effort than anyone else to organize, promote, and establish such an international synodical conference.
The names of the church bodies, the year of their entrance into the CELC, and their approximate sizes are listed below:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Bulgarian Lutheran Church (1999) | 210 |
| 2. Christ the King Lutheran Church (Nigeria, 1993) | 5,400 |
| 3. Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (Mexico, 1993) | 440 |
| 4. Confessional Lutheran Church in Latvia (2002) | 690 |
| 5. Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church (2002) | 160 |
| 6. Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Finland, 1993) | 35 |
| 7. Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Puerto Rico, 1993) | 230 |
| 8. Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (Germany, 1993) | 1,600 |
| 9. Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA, 1993) | 21,000 |
| 10. Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia (1993) | 100 |
| 11. Gereja Lutheran – Indonesia (2005) | 700 |
| 12. Lutheran Church of Cameroon (1993) | 1,500 |
| 13. Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Malawi (1993) | 30,000 |
| 14. Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Zambia (1993) | 11,600 |
| 15. Lutheran Church of Portugal (2008) | 25 |
| 16. Lutheran Confessional Church (Sweden and Norway, 1993) | 280 |
| 17. Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church–Japan (1993) | 450 |
| 18. Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (1996) | 1,400 |
| 19. Soglasiye (Concord) Evangelical Lutheran Church (Russia, 1996) | 100 |
| 20. Ukrainian Lutheran Church (2002) | 3,000 |
| 21. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (1993) | 415,000 |

The theme of the convention was "Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!" This topic was discussed in five essays presented by men from the various church bodies that make up the CELC. The first essayist was the Rev. Yuriy Fizer of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC). He is a pastor in Kiev. In the essay "Holy Scripture: The Source of Our Outreach Message," he pointed out that the inspired, inerrant Scriptures are the only source of faith and doctrine. The Holy Scripture is the fountain of our Gospel message. The Rev. Glenn Obenberger, the vice-president of the ELS, was the reactor to this essay.

The second essay, delivered by the Rev. Egil Edvardsen of the Lutheran Confessional Church (Sweden and Norway), was entitled "Justification: The Theme of Our Outreach Message." This essay proclaimed that the central article of the faith is justification.

We are declared righteous by nothing we do or accomplish but on the basis of Christ's redemptive work alone. The confessional Lutheran church must continue to highlight forensic justification. Justification is the center of our Gospel proclamation. The reaction was given by the Rev. John Moldstad, the president of the ELS.

The Rev. Igor Logvinov of Soglasiye (Concord) Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia presented the next essay, "The Holy Spirit: Enabler of Our Outreach Message." Here the assembly was reminded of the important work of God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. He comes to us through the means of grace to work faith in our hearts, strengthen our faith and preserve us in that faith unto our end. The reactor to this essay was Prof. Forrest Bivens of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

The fourth essay was presented by the Rev. Takeshi Nidaira of the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church–Japan. The essay was entitled "Christology: The Focus of Our Outreach Message." The essayist emphasized that the doctrine of justification is based on Christology. Christ had to be both true God and true man to be our Savior. He had to be true man so that he could take our place under the law and suffer in our stead. He had to be true God so that his holy life and holy death would have infinite value for all people. This message is indeed meant for all. The reaction was delivered by the Rev. Artur Villares of the Lutheran Church of Portugal.

The final essay was "Eschatology: The Urgency of Our Outreach Message." This essay was written by the Rev. Segundo Gutierrez of the Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church and was read and translated by the Rev. David Haeuser of the same synod. The essayist noted the urgency of our mission outreach considering the hour of death and the coming judgment. All around us the souls of men are dying and their only hope is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Rev. Daniel Koelpin (WELS) was the reactor to the essay.

In addition to the essays at the conference, there was discussion of a dispute resolution policy, global theological education, and the work of the Theological Commission. Although the CELC has been spared from disharmony among its members, a dispute resolution policy was adopted by the convention, prayerfully that it never be needed.

The convention adopted a proposal for the establishment of the Theological Education—Transfer and Augmentation Commission (THETA Commission). The THETA Commission's purpose is to share resources among our CELC seminaries and help those institutions to further develop their faculties. The commission is made up of the following men: Prof. Kenneth Cherney (WELS), Prof. Salimo Hachibamba (Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Zambia), Prof. David Haeuser (Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church), Prof. John Vogt (ULC), and Dr. John Lawrenz (Asia Lutheran Seminary, Hong Kong).

In order that the essays presented at the triennial meetings might become available to a wider audience than just the participants at the conventions, the Theological Commission has been given the assignment to edit the essays of the previous conventions into booklet form. The commission produced and presented to the convention Article IV, "The Person and Work of Christ" in the series of booklets entitled *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*. Article I is a study of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, Article II of the doctrine of Justification, and Article III of the Work of the Holy Spirit. In addition, the outgoing members of the Theological Commission, Dr. Gottfried Herrmann (ELFK) and Prof. Salimo Hachibamba (Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Zambia), were thanked for their years of service. The new members of the Theological Commission are the Rev. Batson Beard Liwonde (Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Malawi) and the Rev. Andreas Drechsler (ELFK).

A highlight of this anniversary convention was the acceptance into membership of the *Igreja Luterana de Portugal* (ILP, Lutheran Church of Portugal), which is now the twenty-first member of the CELC. The Lutheran Church of Portugal is a church body which is making a strong confessional stand in this predominantly Roman Catholic country. The ILP has two congregations and several preaching stations served by the Rev. Artur Villares. This church body has been in contact with the WELS for a number of years. At its 2007 convention, the WELS declared fellowship with the ILP. The Doctrine Committee of the ELS has reviewed the doctrinal statement of the ILP and found it to be in agreement with the Holy

Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. At its 2008 convention, the ELS officially declared fellowship with the ILP.

The election of officers took place at the convention. The present officers of the CELC are: the Rev. Steven Peterson (ELS), president; the Rev. Daniel Koelpin (WELS), vice-president; the Rev. Thomas Nass (WELS), secretary; and Dr. William Kessel (ELS) and the Rev. Wayne Mueller (WELS), planning committee.

On Wednesday afternoon, June 4, 2008, the convention had the opportunity to tour a few of the major sites in the city of Kiev. The tour included St. Sophia Cathedral, the Golden Gate of Kiev, St. Volodymyr's Cathedral, St. Michael's Church, St. Andrew's Church, and the beautiful St. Andrew's Street area.

At the opening service of the convention the Rev. V'yacheslav Horpynchuk (ULC) preached using the text Revelation 21:1–4. The closing service was conducted by the Rev. Richard Warnke (WELS) with the Rev. Forrest Bivens (WELS) preaching on Acts 10:36–43 with the theme "Celebrating Our Fellowship: Centered in the Greatest Message of All." The Rev. Steven Petersen preached for the anniversary observance. The sermon was based on Colossians 1:3–6 with the theme "Celebrating our Fellowship: Congratulations! Keep Moving!"

The anniversary convention was hosted by the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. The ULC is made up of 25 congregations and 11 mission stations all over Ukraine. More than 2500 souls worship the Lord in the ULC and they are being served by 22 national pastors. The church also conducts a radio and a prison ministry. The official periodical of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church is *Stiah* (*The Banner*). The Ukrainian Lutheran Theological Seminary of Holy Wisdom (Saint Sophia) trains national pastors. The courses are taught by Rector John Vogt and by several adjunct faculty members from the ULC's clergy roster. Because this church body serves in eastern Europe where the Byzantine Rite is common, it uses a purified form of this rite (the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom), while confessional Lutherans in western Europe and the USA use a purified form of the Western Rite (the Hadrianum Mass). The Rev. V'yacheslav Horpynchuk is the bishop of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, a position similar to our synod president.

The CELC is the third largest worldwide Lutheran fellowship following the larger Lutheran World Federation and the International Lutheran Council. It was organized in 1993 and has approximately 450,000 members in 21 church bodies. The conference accepts the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments (the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God) as sole authority for doctrine, faith, and life. The conference also accepts the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, not in so far as, but because they are a correct exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God. The CELC continues to strengthen each of its member churches through mutual encouragement and consultation. We praise and thank our Triune God who has permitted us to establish this confessional organization on the firm foundation of Jesus and His Word.

For more information about the CELC, visit the website: <www.celc.info>.

# Book Review: The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7

*by Michael K. Smith*

Middendorf, Michael Paul. *The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7*. St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997. 303 pages. $22.99.

Scholars have long debated the issue of Paul's use of the "I" in the seventh chapter of his letter to the Romans. To whom is Paul referring by using this first person pronoun? What is the purpose of his use of the "I" in this chapter? How does the understanding of Paul's use of the "I" affect the interpretation of the message he conveys in his entire epistle?

Michael Paul Middendorf delves into these questions and more in *The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7*.[1] In his introduction, Middendorf references the manifold efforts that have sought to understand Romans 7: "More ink…has been spilled over this passage of Romans than any other" (9).[2] In contrast to simply adding to such verbiage, Middendorf states that his purpose is "to answer the questions surrounding the identity, the spiritual condition, and the purpose of the 'I' in Romans 7 by utilizing a modern linguistic approach" (10). In the course of outlining his approach chapter by chapter, Middendorf emphasizes the importance of the work of Werner Kümmel, whose 1929 study[3] was a landmark in the Romans 7 debate (11). Kümmel's work therefore receives copious attention in Middendorf's book.

In his first chapter, Middendorf provides a succinct summary of "Contemporary Interpretations of the 'I' in Romans 7:7-25" (15). He divides this portion of Romans into two sections in which the "I" is featured: 7:7-11 and 7:14-25.[4] For each section, Middendorf relates the support for and objections to various possibilities for the general identification of the "I." Regarding 7:7-11, these possibilities include Paul, Adam, Israel, a transpersonal understanding, and

combinations of these.[5] In contradistinction to Kümmel (19), he comes to the conclusion that the "most natural way to understand" (15) the "I" in 7:7-11 is that it refers to Paul himself. Middendorf analyzes well each possibility, bringing to bear issues such as the Greek Paul uses (especially the verb tenses), comparisons of biblical imagery and motifs, and the manner in which Paul normally characterizes the Jewish people. While some of his argumentation is brief, his intention is simply to provide an initial overview of how other scholars have approached this issue. He presents his evidence clearly, not displaying any bias toward a predetermined outcome.

Regarding 7:14-25, Middendorf examines the proposed understandings of the "I," which vary slightly from those offered for 7:7-11. Various scholars have proposed that the "I" in 7:14-25 is: 1) Paul prior to his conversion, 2) a description of Paul's Christian experience, 3) to be understood transpersonally, or 4) a combination of these. The inquiries regarding this section focus on "whether the first person singular is being used by Paul to portray a Christian or a non-Christian" (29). Although admitting that Paul nowhere else in his writings depicts the Christian life in such a way (38), Middendorf leans heavily toward the understanding of the "I" in this section to be Paul describing his own experience as a Christian (36-37). A strength of this chapter, which is demonstrated throughout the book, is Middendorf's caution not to allow "theological presuppositions to determine the solution," but he relies on "the words of Paul himself" (51). He does an admirable job of letting the text, and thus Paul, speak.

In Chapter Two, Middendorf focuses the reader's attention on Paul's words as he provides an exegetical analysis of Romans 7. He places this exegesis in its due context, briefly analyzing the remainder of Romans. His analysis in this chapter is in the realm of *semantics*, which "describes the relationship between the form of signs and their content (meaning). Here the question is addressed: How should/must what is said be understood? What is that which is meant?" (52)[6] Middendorf's emphasis on placing his exegesis of Romans 7 in its proper context is appreciated greatly. He captures well the "flow" of Romans as he examines it by sections: chapters 1-4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9-16. The centrality of Paul's theme of God's

righteousness through faith is seen more distinctly with his treatment of these chapters. For example, in his exegesis of chapter 5 he states, "Two observations emerge: 1) For Paul it is a matter of reigning (βασιλεύω). Either sin will reign, the end of which is death, or grace will rule through righteousness in Christ whose end is eternal life. 2) The major contrast in this chapter is between the 'then' and the 'now' of the Christian" (57).

Middendorf's exegetical treatment of chapter 7 is crisp and thoughtful. While scholars debate what precisely Paul states therein concerning the Law, Middendorf is satisfied to begin his analysis by stating that "Romans 7 focuses our attention upon the Law and its function(s), possibly both before and also within the Christian life" (62). In the course of his exegesis he does not draw much attention to the issue of identifying the "I," since he will discuss that issue in detail in Chapters Three and Four. Middendorf demonstrates his expertise in the Greek language, deftly explaining various Greek terms, syntax, and nuances. One important observation he makes is that the specific verses under closest examination, 7:7-25, are treated by most other scholars as an excursus (71). Middendorf shows conclusively that "verses 7-25 flow from the preceding context" (71-72), and thus are not to be regarded as a Pauline tangent. The importance of considering the context again comes to the fore as Middendorf works his way through vss. 14-25, showing that understanding certain verses *out* of context, such as v. 14, might lead to varying and conflicting interpretations. Overall, Middendorf makes it clear that Paul is writing about a Christian in chapter 7.

Also helpful in the overall understanding of Romans 7 was Middendorf's emphasis on the crucial connection between it and the first few verses of chapter 8. Here he notes that ἄρα νῦν with which chapter 8 begins indicates "that what follows is a *direct conclusion* based upon that which immediately precedes. Together they signal that there is an *intimate connection* between Chapter 7 and the initial verses of Chapter 8" (120-121). This connection is vital because Paul's emphasis in chapter 8 is on the presence of the Holy Spirit, bolstering the idea that the "I" refers to a Christian in chapter 7, since the Spirit is the one who "provides the intercession we so badly need" (129).

Middendorf's exegetical treatment of Romans 9-16 is quite brief, but such brevity is not an impediment to his overall argument. He aptly stresses that Paul uses the first person singular three times in chapters 9-11 to refer to himself, which supports his conclusions about the "I" in chapter 7. He also points out that the matter of the struggle of the Christian life takes center stage at various places in chapters 9-16, which would seem to parallel his ideas concerning chapter 7.

"Paul's Use of the First Person Singular: The Referent Question" is the title of Middendorf's third chapter. In order to avoid confusion, he begins his detailed analysis of this matter by making a key distinction; namely, that the understanding of two aspects of this investigation is paramount: the matter of the referent itself (the identity of the "I"), and the *pragmatic* nature of Paul's use of the "I." This field of pragmatics "seeks to determine the impact which an author aims to have upon his readers by using a particular expression. . . . [T]his involves asking how Paul intends his statements of and about the 'I' to function" (133-134).[7]

Again Middendorf structures his analysis by examining the commonly-regarded referents for Romans 7:7-11 followed by those for 7:14-25. In 7:7-11 scholars have proposed the following as the referent for the "I": 1) the people of Israel, 2) Adam and in him all mankind, 3) a rhetorical expression of man in general under the Law, and 4) Paul's personal experience. As he did in chapter one, Middendorf places forth the arguments favoring the particular identification, followed by a detailed evaluation of same. He wrote particularly impressively in his evaluation of the "rhetorical expression" possibility, especially since this was Kümmel's opinion (144). After looking at Paul's other epistles, Middendorf concludes that "when Paul uses the emphatic first person singular pronoun. . . . he always has a specific referent in mind. In addition, unless he indicates otherwise in the context, and usually unmistakably so, the referent is himself" (153). Middendorf rightfully believes that the referent of the "I" in 7:7-11 is Paul, and that he is describing his own experience: "…Paul is looking back from his Christian perspective and describing what was in reality happening prior to his conversion" (164).

Middendorf's consideration of the referent in Romans 7:14-25 is briefer, because he makes the valid assumption that there is only a slight probability of a change of referents from 7:7-11 to this section. He summarizes what has vexed scholars concerning 7:14-25 instead: "The disputed issue which has always surrounded verses 14-25 is not so much whether the referent of the 'I' is Paul or not. Instead, the unresolved question regards 'when.' When could what the 'I' says be true of Paul?" (172). According to Middendorf, the choices are simple: Paul is describing himself either prior to his conversion or after his conversion. He displays no qualms about expressing with which option he sides, leaning on Paul's use of the present tense to substantiate his belief that Paul describes himself after his conversion in this section. In the remainder of the chapter, Middendorf briefly justifies his opinion by examining what Paul says elsewhere about his life as a Christian, focusing especially on the evidence that "after his conversion Paul continues to describe himself as an Israelite or Jew…" (176), and that Paul also describes his struggles against his own flesh after his conversion. Since he will examine this issue in more detail in Chapter Four, Middendorf concludes this chapter by stating that nothing precludes understanding the "I" in 7:14-25 to refer to a post-conversion Paul.

Middendorf begins Chapter Four by constructing a useful side-by-side comparison of the "will" vs. the "action" that Paul describes in Romans 7:14-25 (the disparity between which he had described in Chapter Two). In order to prove that Paul describes a Christian in these verses, Middendorf chooses to examine what Paul states in the entirety of Romans, in his other letters, and in Acts. He correctly concludes that, especially considering the attitude toward God's Law of the unbeliever in Romans and of the "I" in Romans 7, "the statements made by the 'I' in Romans 7:14-25 cannot be equated with the picture Paul paints of unbelievers throughout Romans" (194). Middendorf reaches the same valid conclusion when he compares what Paul says about the unbeliever in his other letters and in Acts: Paul nowhere describes the unbeliever as having such internal struggles concerning God and his Law.

One of the primary issues Middendorf considers in the remainder of Chapter Four, as he strives to support his conclusion

that the "I" in 7:14-25 is post-conversion Paul, is what role the Law plays in the life of a Christian. He focuses on Paul's description of the ongoing role of God's Law in the Christian's life, not as that which motivates the Christian but that which condemns the Christian because of his sin. The Christian, therefore, struggles with the "now" and the "not yet," since he will never keep the Law perfectly in this life and will continue to struggle in his mind between what he wants to do and what he ends up doing as he awaits final deliverance. Middendorf concludes that "the 'I' in Romans 7:14-25 can only be representing the Spirit-renewed mind or will of a believer who strives, in accordance with God's Law, to refrain from evil and to do good" (224).

Naturally, there is more to understanding the "I" in Romans 7 than identifying it. What is Paul's purpose in using this style of inspired writing? In Chapter Five, Middendorf examines "Paul's Pragmatic Purpose in Romans 7." This is one facet of his investigation of Paul's use of the "I" in which Middendorf especially shines, since understanding the "I" statements relies on a proper perception of their *context*. Quite helpful toward the outset of this chapter is Middendorf's listing of all of Paul's references to himself as recorded in Scripture. He lists these references in fifteen categories according to "Paul's intended function or purpose" (231), but then condenses these purposes to two: "1) to *inform* and 2) to *exhort/command*, that is, to elicit some type of action or response" (234).

Middendorf first seeks to ascertain the purpose of Paul's use of the "I" in 7:7-11. He states at the outset that Paul's purpose falls into the general category "to inform:" "to use his own example in order *to inform* his addressees in an indirect manner *about the interrelationship between the Law, sin, and death*" (237). Middendorf copiously documents support for at least the idea that Paul is using himself as an example in this section. Paul strives to attain the result that "every sinner would realize what the Law's command in fact accomplishes in him and how this affects his standing before God…" (241). Paul desires his readers to consider their standing before God according to the Law.

Paul's purpose in 7:14-25 naturally flows from that of 7:7-11. That is, according to Middendorf, if Paul's purpose in 7:7-11

is to convince the sinner to consider his standing before God, and because the Law produces death in him, what *good* can the Law attain in the life of a Christian, or what positive role does the Law play in the life of the Christian? Some of Paul's readers had been under the mistaken impression that they could attain righteousness in God's sight through keeping the Law. Since this was not the case, basing one's relationship with God on the Law was not what a Christian was to do. Middendorf shows that Paul also encourages his readers by his self-description in this section, since reading of Paul's struggles will help the Christian avoid complacency in trying to fulfill the Law, and will help the Christian understand that "the conflict present in verses 14-25 is no cause for complete and total despair" (248). He summarizes the reasons why Paul uses the "I" in 7:14-25.

> First, it is a natural continuation of the first person singular which he employed in reference to himself in verses 7-11. . . . Second, and as a direct result, the first person singular serves to maintain the *coram Deo* level of Paul's discussion about the Law. . . . Paul is *not* speaking of his own *public conduct* before others, but picturing his current standing *before God* on the basis of his performance of the Law. . . .
> A third aspect is related. The first person singular enables Paul to make his point unmistakably clear. (249)

Middendorf closes Chapter Five with a brief excursus on how what Paul writes in Galatians confirms what he writes in Romans. One important note he makes is that Paul does not make use of the "I" more in Galatians because he was addressing more specific situations in that letter than was the case in Romans.

The "Conclusion" Middendorf makes is as pointed as the preceding parts of his work. Regarding the purpose of Paul's use of the "I" he states, ". . . *Paul uses Romans 7 to exclude the possibility of anyone attempting either to become righteous or to maintain a righteous standing before God by observing the Law's commands"* (259-260; emphasis in original). The reason why Paul uses himself as the exemplar of this truth is for vividness. Middendorf brings his analysis to a close by reemphasizing Paul's purpose in Romans 7 in light of the primary message of Romans: "In Romans 7 Paul

decisively proves that his and our righteous standing before God cannot be either earned or maintained by obedience to the Law's command. . . . Rather, our righteousness must be and, in fact, has already been accomplished solely by God's action in Jesus Christ" (264).

The final portion of Middendorf's book is an appendix surveying how the "I" in Romans was interpreted prior to 1900. This survey was useful in seeing additional trends of interpretation of this difficult section throughout history.

## Conclusion

Michael Paul Middendorf has produced a marvelous gem in the multi-faceted world of Pauline scholarship. I must admit that I began reading his work with a bias: I somewhat expected Middendorf simply to substantiate what other Lutheran commentators have written concerning this subject. Rather, Middendorf displayed exemplary scholarship and thorough research in addressing the "I" in Romans 7. His meticulous manner was appreciated not only in his summaries of conclusions offered by other scholars, but even more so in his attention to detail in arriving at his own conclusions. Middendorf allowed Paul's own words to speak for themselves, which is paramount in any biblical exegesis. Thus, his conclusions were fair and in keeping with the truth of God's entire Word.

# Endnotes

[1] His monograph is a modification of his 1990 doctoral dissertation.

[2] Quoting John A.T. Robinson's *Wrestling With Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), p. 82.

[3] *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus*.

[4] In vss. 12-13 "Paul draws a number of extremely significant conclusions regarding the Law…" (p. 28).

[5] Middendorf discusses the specifics of the identification of the referent of the "I" in Chapter Three. In Chapter One he summarizes current scholarship more globally.

[6] Cited from Wolfgang Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1984), 19.

[7] Middendorf examines this latter aspect in Chapter Five.

# Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

# 2008 Reformation Lectures

**Mankato, MN**

**Dates: October 30-31, 2008**

## Title: *The Freedom of the Will in the Three Reformations*

## Lecture One: The Lutheran Reformation

**Dr. Cameron MacKenzie** *(Ft. Wayne, IN - LC-MS)*

## Lecture Two: The Radical Reformation

**Prof. James Korthals** *(Mequon, WI - WELS)*

## Lecture Three: The Catholic Reformation

**Dr. John Maxfield** *(St. Francis, MN - LC-MS)*