

Foreword

This year is the sesquicentennial of Norseland Lutheran Church, St. Peter, Minnesota. Norseland was one of the early congregations of the Norwegian Synod in the Minnesota area. The founding pastor was Laur. Larsen, who is at times considered to be the fourth father of the Norwegian Synod together with Preus, Ottesen, and Koren. One of its long-time pastors, the Rev. Thomas Johnsen, started congregations throughout southern Minnesota. The present pastor of the congregation is the Rev. Craig Ferkenstad, who is also the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The preacher for the festival anniversary service was the Rev. Norman Madson, a former pastor of the congregation. His sermon was based on Psalm 150 with the theme *Using the 150th Psalm to Help us Rightly Observe the 150th Anniversary of Your Congregation*.

The Rev. Bruce Wilmont Adams of Glengowrie, South Australia, has written an article entitled *A Reflection on St. John—Apostle and Evangelist*. This article reminds us that amid all the glitter and tinsel of the holidays the true meaning of Christmas is found in the holy incarnation and its Christological message.

The Rev. Phillip Lepak has prepared an exegetical study of 3 John entitled *Continue Walking in the Truth: A Resonance of John 14:6*. Here the reader will see that 3 John echoes the well-known words of our Savior in the Gospel of John, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” The Rev. Lepak is the pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Portage, Indiana.

The essay entitled *An Exegetical Survey of the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis* is a study of these important parts of our liturgy, all of which have their source in the Gospel of Luke. The essayist points out that all of these songs of Scripture reveal Christ as our Savior and center in Him as Luther emphasizes: *Die ganze Schrift treibt Christum* (the entire Scripture points to Christ). The essayist is the Rev. S. Piet Van Kampen, the pastor of English Lutheran Church in Cottonwood, Minnesota.

We need to be attuned to the way that we as a flock focus on the mission and vision that Christ has given us over against the world in which we live, and guide that vision by the proper application of God’s Word. To that extent we will use strategies that proclaim God’s Word faithfully. This is the point of the essay *Refocusing a Congregation on Its Mission* by the Rev. Edward Bryant, pastor of St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Lombard, Illinois.

This year marks a number of anniversaries in the life of the church. It is the 90th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). In 1918 a small group of pastors gathered at Lime Creek Lutheran Church in rural Lake Mills, Iowa, desiring to remain on the old paths of the inerrant Word and holy Sacraments. The outcome of this meeting was the founding of our ELS.

This year is the 450th anniversary of the death of Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558). Bugenhagen was born June 24, 1485, in Wollin, Pomerania. He translated the Bible into Low German (*Plattdeutsch*), the language of most northern Germans. He was responsible for organizing church life in much of northern Germany, Denmark, and Norway. He is best remembered as Luther's pastor. He was an example Lutheran pastor and *Seelsorger*.

This year many magazines and journals are commemorating the Wilhelm Löhe bicentennial. However, another important missiologist of the Lutheran Renewal should also be remembered this year. This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig Harms. His Hermannsburg mission house sent men to South Africa, America, India, and Australia.

This *Quarterly* contains a congratulatory letter on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the ordination of the Rev. Edward Bryant. This letter was sent by the Rev. Alex Ring of Lakewood Lutheran Church in Lakewood, Washington. The Rev. Bryant is pastor at St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Lombard, Illinois.

Also included in this issue are two book reviews. The book *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace* by Dr. David Scaer was reviewed by the Rev. Shawn Stafford, pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Bagley, Minnesota, and St. Paul Lutheran Church in Lengby, Minnesota. The book *Speaking the Truth in Love to Jehovah's Witnesses* by Dr. Roland Cap Ehlke was reviewed by the Rev. John Petersen, pastor of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota.

GRS

Contents

Sermon for the 150th Anniversary of Norseland Lutheran Church 299
Norman A. Madson

A Reflection on St. John – Apostle and Evangelist 304
Bruce W. Adams

Continue Walking in the Truth: A Resonance of John 14:6 311
Phillip K. Lepak

An Exegetical Survey of the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and 336
 the Nunc Dimittis
S. Piet Van Kampen

Refocusing a Congregation on Its Mission 353
Edward L. Bryant

The 90th Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod 383
Gaylin R. Schmeling

Luther’s Pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen: The 450th Anniversary 387
 of the Death of this Great Lutheran Pastor and Preacher, 1485–1558
Gaylin R. Schmeling

Ludwig Harms: The 200th Anniversary of the Birth of this 395
 Theologian and Missionary, 1808–1865
Gaylin R. Schmeling

Congratulatory Anniversary Letter 407
Alex K. Ring

Note and Book Reviews

David P. Scaer, *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace* 409
Shawn Stafford

Roland Cap Ehlke, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Jehovah’s Witnesses* . . . 414
John J. Petersen

Index to Volume 48 416



Norman Madson preaching at the Norseland anniversary

Sermon for the 150th Anniversary of Norseland Lutheran Church

Rural St. Peter, Minnesota – Sunday, June 22, 2008

by Norman A. Madson

Prayer: Dear Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, we praise and thank You on this anniversary day for having brought into existence 150 years ago this Christian congregation. We thank You for Your holy Word and blessed Sacraments which have initiated and sustained the faith of many down through these past 15 decades. And we pray, O Lord, that you will continue to bless and to guide the life of Norseland Lutheran Church for many, many years to come. We ask it all in your name, and for Your sake, O Christ of God. Amen!

Text: *Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.* (Psalm 150, NIV)

Fellow redeemed in Christ, dear anniversary worshippers: Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!

What a joyous occasion this is for Norseland Lutheran Church! And what a pleasure it is for me to be a part of this worship service this morning. It is always nice to return to a parish where one has served as pastor in former years, and it is doubly nice when it is for such a special event like we are observing here today. We can truthfully say with the psalmist, “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24).

This 150th Psalm, which I have chosen for my text today, is the closing psalm in the Book of Psalms, which was the hymnbook for the people of God in Old Testament times. It is a psalm in which the word “praise” occurs no less than 13 times in the six short verses.

One Bible commentator says this: “The first Psalm begins with the word ‘blessed,’ and stresses the truth that all are blessed who meditate upon

God's law and do it. And now the fruit of that blessedness is shown in the last psalm, which begins and ends with the word 'praise' " (Christopher Wordsworth).

And so, we have chosen as the theme for our message today this theme: **Using the 150th Psalm to help us rightly observe the 150th anniversary of your congregation!**

My homiletics professor at the seminary would have said: "Norman, that is way too many words for a sermon theme." He preferred short sermon themes, but did admit that there may be a few occasions where a lengthier theme would be allowable. And I am considering this occasion to be one of those times. The number of words in this theme is only two more than the number of times the word "praise" appears in the Psalm. We will find the answer to these three questions in this psalm:

I. Where should we praise God?

II. How should we go about praising him?

And most importantly,

III. For what should we be praising him?

I. Where should we praise God? The opening verse answers that: "Praise God in his sanctuary, praise him in his mighty heavens" (Psalm 150:1)! Though we are to praise our gracious God at all times and in all places, we should especially praise Him whenever we gather together with fellow believers around Word and Sacraments.

When that group of Norwegian Lutheran families met in the home of Johannes Odegard, less than two miles from here, on a Sunday back in June of 1858, it was for more than just to formally organize a congregation. That historic day was first of all marked by the preaching of God's Word by the Rev. Lauritz Larsen and the administering of the holy Sacraments.

And when church services were conducted in the cabins of members and in local school buildings for several years thereafter, it was for the purpose of praising God for allowing them to have the Word of God and the blessed Sacraments brought to them on a regular basis. With the psalmist of old those pioneer families could say, "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'" (Psalm 122:1). And they could say that even though the "house of the Lord" was for them in those days only a humble shack or a primitive schoolhouse.

In 1864 the old Boen school house was purchased from the school district. It became the sanctuary for those early pioneer worshippers in which they praised the God of their salvation. That old school house was eventually replaced by an actual church edifice in 1866, located right

across the road in your present cemetery, and that was added on to in 1884. Finally in 1911 this present building was constructed, which also has been added on to, and has been kept in good repair these 97 years.

Down through the 150-year history of this congregation, whether members of the congregation met in private homes or in used school buildings or in actual church structures, the Word that was preached and the Sacraments that have been administered have remained the all-important thing. For those are the things that have uplifted and sustained the souls that have gathered down through these 15 decades to praise God in His sanctuary. The psalmist declares, “For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised. . . Honor and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary” (Psalm 96:4a, 6).

II. But now the question arises, how are we to praise the Lord in His sanctuary? And the answer to that is found in verses 3-5: “Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet; praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with the tambourine and dancing; praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals” (Psalm 150:3–5).

Down through the history of the Old and New Testament church, and also of Norseland Lutheran Church, music has played an important role in expressing praise to God for His manifold blessings. The psalmist lists in our text the many stringed and wind and percussion instruments of that day which were used to praise and glorify God. Here at Norseland the organ, and piano, an occasional violin, and a trumpet or two at Easter time, an excellent male chorus for many years, always a choir of mixed voices, children’s choirs, and always good congregational singing have been used in sending forth praises to the Lord of the church. Martin Luther once remarked, “I place music next to theology, and give it the highest praise!”

The church father, St. Augustine, says that the various instruments mentioned in this psalm involves really our whole being – breath, fingers, whole hand, arms and legs, even our feet. This is bolstered by the words of the final verse: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6a)! Before this day of celebrating is over, I am sure that music of various kinds will have been an integral part of the day’s festivities.

III. But now to the third and most important question: for what shall we be praising the Lord on this day? For the answer to that we go back to verse 2: “Praise him for his acts of power!” And what are God’s acts of power? Oh, I suppose, we could cite His creation of this

world and of human kind. We could recount some of the great deliverances of His people in Bible times – the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, the great military victory given to Gideon and his 300 foot soldiers, the crashing down of the walls of Jericho, to mention just a few.

But those acts of our mighty God really fade into nothingness when placed along side His greatest act of all. And that was the sending of His one and only Son down to this sin-cursed earth to become our Redeemer and Savior. God's mightiest act, as far as you and I are concerned, is this: that He made His dear Son, Jesus Christ, "to be sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The pioneer members of this congregation, who for many years met in homes and schoolhouses, came on a Sunday to the worship services laden down with a load of sin, even as you and I who are gathered here today have come. Not a single one of us has the right to view ourselves, as we are by nature, other than how Isaiah has described us, when he says, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Among us "There is no one righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:10), for "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

I trust that all of us who worship here today recognize and confess that even our best efforts at keeping God's law have failed miserably. So what must we do to find rest for our souls? We must cling to the precious promises of the Gospel. And what are those promises? In the words of Scripture here are some of them. The Lord assures you and me through the prophet Isaiah, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). David tells us in the beautiful Psalm 103, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy... He has not dealt with us according to our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities... As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:8, 10, 12). And the apostle Paul sums it all up in these few words, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

What we ought to be praising our benevolent God the most for on this anniversary day is that for 150 years He has allowed this same unconditioned Gospel to sound forth from the various buildings that have served as the sanctuary for Norseland Lutheran Church. Time changes many things in the history of a congregation, but one thing that never changes is the Word of our God, and the work of His Son, Jesus Christ, on our behalf. And that is borne out so nicely in the scriptural theme you have

chosen for this anniversary – “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

In conclusion I will relate to you this little story, and I think it is a true story. In a Lutheran church, made up mostly of conservative and rather staid Germans and Scandinavians, a visitor was on hand one Sunday. The visitor was from a denomination in which it was not uncommon for members during a worship service to express verbally their agreement with what the preacher was saying. And so when he heard something he really liked that day, he would shout out “Amen, brother,” or “Praise the Lord!” A lady member of that congregation, after a few of these verbal outbursts, leaned over and whispered to the stranger, “Sir,” she said, “we don’t praise the Lord in this church!”

We know, of course, what she meant, even though the way she expressed it didn’t come out just right. During today’s message, in which the whole subject has been about praising the Lord, I did not hear from you the worshippers, nor did I expect to hear, the verbal expressions of “Amen, brother!” or “Praise the Lord!” And yet I have no doubt that in the hearts of all of us today we do praise the Lord for all that He has done for us individually and for this congregation collectively, and that these praises are sincere and that they come from the deepest recesses of our hearts. May God continue to bless Norseland Lutheran Church as it goes forward from this anniversary year! With N.F.S. Grundtvig we sang right before the sermon this morning the words:

Now we may gather with our King,
E’en in the lowliest dwelling;
Praises to Him we there may bring,
His wondrous mercy forth telling;
Jesus His grace to us accords,
Spirit and life are all His words,
His truth doth hallow the temple.
(ELH 211:4)

AMEN!

A Reflection on St. John – Apostle and Evangelist

by Bruce Wilmot Adams

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”
(John 1:14a)

Our Confession approves giving honor to the saints....The first is thanksgiving [for these great heroes of the faith]....The second honor is the strengthening of our faith [encouragement through their example]....The third honor is the imitation, first of their faith and then of their other virtues.¹

In the year A.D. 563, to the small island of Iona off Scotland’s western shore, there journeyed St. Columba in the company of twelve companions. They had taken the direct route from Derry in Ireland to the shores of this island, to bring the sweet message of the Gospel of the Incarnate Lord and Saviour to the people of Alban Dalriada, and on to the distant frontiers of what is now known as Scotland, England, Iceland, and Europe. For almost two centuries the ancient Celtic Church had held firmly to the faith and practices of the Apostles, despite the hostility of the Druids. Ian Finlay observes that “the preaching of Columba was simply the Word of God as taught by the evangelists and apostles.”²

Outside the beautifully restored Abbey of Iona stand two crosses, like two sentinels guarding a precious heritage. To the left of the entrance to the church is the symbolic cross of St. John, while to the right is the cross of St. Martin of Gaul, a Celtic missionary. Both of these saints have forged throughout the centuries inflexible bonds with a minority of confessional Lutherans, who still cherish their Celtic heritage of faith. To this day, a popular cross worn by many Lutherans is a Celtic cross, bespeaking a succession of faith and worship reaching back to Christ himself, expressed in St. John’s Gospel: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Dr. Martin Luther always bore a special attachment to St. John, and his inspired Gospel and writings. In his preface to the commentary of the Gospel he explains that, “we in the church, who possess, preach and confess God’s Word – must remain conversant with this evangelist.”³

What with all the excitement of the Advent preparations, with their pinnacle of joy and worship in the celebration of Christmas Eve and Morn,

it is understandable that the post-Christmas period is too often marked by a mood of lethargy, if not fatigue. On December 27, how many will pause to spare a thought for the feast-day of St. John, the apostle, theologian, and evangelist? Such is the subtlety of “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30), who knows how to short circuit the message of the evangel in the minds of modern believers. By disregarding St. John the Divine, who points with such clarity of language to the historic reality of the Incarnation, the Christian can be easily enticed to underrate the manifestation of the Christ in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16), with the cheer of Bacchus readily replacing the crib of Bethlehem, with its ruptured cadences of the cabaret and hard-rock submerging the carols of Christmastide.

In this year of grace, 2008, Lutheran Christians should pause a while on December 27, to praise God for the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2).

That the day of St. John should fall within the Christmas cycle is altogether apposite. Obviously a dogmatic purpose in the evangelist’s writing of the Gospel was to proclaim the factual revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Incarnation” (from the Latin term, meaning “becoming in flesh”) conveys the biblical truth which finds classic expression in the Gospel According to St. John: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). But what is the inspired apostle really saying?

St. John Boldly Confesses Both Christ’s Deity and Humanity

Encompassing two important English words – “the Word” – much unnecessary speculation has been negotiated and debated. Philosophers of the Platonic school, along with the higher critics, have seized upon these two words to suggest that St. John was presumably dependent upon the Greek philosophers for his understanding of the “Logos,” particularly the Stoic philosophers whom St. Paul encountered in Athens. It is argued that not the God of the Bible is referred to in St. John’s use of the word “Logos,” so inferring that the essential principle or rationality behind the universe is the directing force in its choice. Consequently, the question immediately arises as to whether the Apostle John was just another philosopher. Indeed not! Such a conclusion is entirely fatuous! When he commenced to pen his blessed Gospel with the ringing phrase, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1), the terminology of St. John’s Gospel was Hebrew, not Greek. The term is traceable to Genesis 1:1-3, not to the life-force of an Heraclitus. The Word is that God who speaks, acts, and actually reveals His person and will in the inspired and infallible Scriptures. Thus the psalmist could sing, “By

the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host” (Psalm 33:6).

Certainly both the Greeks and the Jews in the times of the apostolic and early church currently used “Logos” in their conversation, as we would currently use the word “verbalize.” The usage of a certain word may reflect acquaintance, but not dependability as to its origin and actual meaning. St. John would have nothing to do with the detached gods and principles of the pagan religions. Rather he took great pains, under the Spirit’s guidance, to draw from the rich Old Testament revelation found in Moses, the prophets, and wisdom literature, so using “Logos” of the God who involves himself in man’s creation, history, and struggles. The “Word” therefore is nothing less than the living and eternal God himself, who becomes flesh in Jesus Christ. The fathers of Nicea rightly confessed of Jesus Christ that he was “Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made” (Nicene Creed).

Ah, Lord, who has created all,
How weak art Thou, how poor and small,
That Thou dost choose Thine infant bed
Where ass and ox but lately fed!
(Martin Luther - ELH 123:9)

St. John Boldly Confesses Christ’s Incarnation In History

Professor Arnold J. Koelpin has reminded us in his timely article entitled, “Scripture, The Revelation of History’s Lord,” that “In the Incarnation he puts on the mantle of a creature and covers himself with our shameful wickedness. God’s Son enters our time and space as one of us, in a place called Bethlehem, at a time when Quirinius was governor of Syria, to redeem the time.”⁴

It is all too evident that secularized man in these post-modern times is desperate to side-step history, in the interest of hoping that biblical history will dissolve itself in mythology and legend. Charles Colson has referred to “the historical forgetfulness of modernity.”⁵ In this way many of our contemporaries hope to escape the fact of Christ, any sense of sin, as well as God’s rescue operation in the world in the Saviour’s birth, ministry, teaching and atoning death and resurrection. Such attempts to discredit the New Testament documents of their historical reliability invariably reflect the pervading agnosticism of the sceptics and critics themselves. Confessional Lutherans dare never surrender the authenticity

of the Scriptures which bear witness to the Word. In the apt words of Dr. Hermann Sasse: “But although God is hidden from our eyes, He does reveal Himself through His Word. He speaks to us human beings, and we can hear His Word. So God’s way of revealing Himself in this world is by way of His Word....He is the eternal Word who from the beginning is the content of every proclaimed and written Word of God.”⁷⁶ There can be no complicity or partnership with those snagged by modern indifference to the fact, revelation, and truth of Jesus Christ in time and history. Like St. John, Lutheran Christians need to recognize history as the focus of God’s revelation and that realm where the Creator and Saviour God operates as both Judge and Redeemer. It is a truism that those who persist in running away from history end up living for the moment, striving at the same time to project themselves into some future man-centred dream utopia which they interpret as reality.

In contrast, St. John points to that moment of time when the eternal Son of God becomes flesh and later initiates a public ministry which leads to the Cross of Calvary: “And as Moses was lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:15).

Evidence certainly points to Ephesus as being the centre of St. John’s ministry. The New Testament scholar Professor F.F. Bruce believes that “The dominant name from the apostolic age which dominates Asian, and especially Ephesian tradition, is that of John....Although he was in no sense a founder of the Ephesian church he soon came to enjoy in that church the kind of prestige that Peter and Paul enjoyed in Roman tradition.”⁷⁷ Herein lies the reason why St. John is so strong in his emphasis on the historic nature of the humanity and divinity of the incarnate Lord, included throughout his Gospel in the “I am” sayings of Christ, and in his first Epistle: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9).

Throughout Asia were heretics who denied Christ’s coming in the flesh in time and space. For these false teachers, everything material was evil. They consequently spread the lie that Christ’s humanity must be apparent and not real. They muttered in terms of a spiritual encounter, yet never meaning an encounter with the living God “sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3). The Aegean world revelled in theories which endeavoured to make irrelevant the historic fact of the Incarnation.

For the Apostle John and the apostolic church, there could be no compromise with such blatant falsehood. With a crushing rejoinder he

refuted such heresy:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1-4).

St. John Challenges Us to Boldly Confess the Incarnation of the Word and His Presence in the Eucharist

Confessional Lutherans living in the twenty-first century must do battle, as did St. John, with those siren voices of today who discard the historical events and accounts of the scriptural narratives. Gene Edward Veith observes, “Far from dying out, religion of the most supernatural kind is booming, from megachurches with membership in the thousands to the most esoteric New Age mysticism. Even those who are not ‘religious’ claim to be ‘spiritual.’”⁸ Under a cloak of learning Jesus is often portrayed as a “good guy” preaching a social gospel—His person reduced to a kindly religious “symbol” for post-moderns. To suit such a theory, the central emphasis of the Scriptures of the Word becoming flesh, born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus’ miracles and claims to deity (John 14:9-10), his atoning death and resurrection, are drained off and removed to some other realm of existential mysticism. It should come as no surprise that those churches which have succumbed to such fallacies, often market today an entertainment-style of worship, with an additional deep-rooted loss of nerve evidenced in a dread of facing their congregations with the Christ who claimed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Without the least ambiguity, the Apostle John sets forth in his Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation, the Incarnation of the Christ to our terra firma to redeem a sinful human race. He is the world’s only Saviour!

Within this context of the cross and resurrection of Christ, the Oxford scholar and apologist, Dr. Alister McGrath, underlines the thrust of the incarnation: “God is shown as one who is passionately committed to the well-being and salvation of his creation – so much so, that he is prepared to enter into our creation, and redeem it from within. The creator becomes the creature within his own creation, in order to recreate it.”⁹

All this has far-reaching implications for a lucid understanding of the real presence in the Eucharist, known among Lutherans as the Sacrament of the Altar. Dr. Hermann Sasse affirms, “Here the heavenly bread is no longer the person of Christ but His flesh. Whoever eats the flesh of Christ and drinks His blood is to be raised to eternal life.”¹⁰ President Gaylin Schmeling in an article entitled, “Our Incarnational Theology,” expounds the relationship between the Incarnation and the Lord’s Supper: “Because Christ’s body and blood are permeated with divinity, they are certainly life-giving as they are received in the Blessed Sacrament. Our Lord says, ‘Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him. . . . so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me’ (John 6:54-57).”¹¹

For faithful confessional Lutheran Christians holding fast the faith, the post-Christmas cycle will not numb, but sparkle with fresh meaning and unsurmountable joy as the fact and the person of the incarnate Lord of history speaks again through Word and Sacrament, so clearly proclaimed by St. John, Apostle and Evangelist. That eminent classical scholar of the twentieth century, the late Professor E.M. Blaiklock of Auckland University, New Zealand, testifies, “I discovered Christ as another friend wrote about him – for St. John’s Gospel has been one of the adventures of my life.”¹²

Such an adventure is always there for those for whom the Incarnation and Redemption of Jesus Christ, as proclaimed by St. John, Apostle and Evangelist, takes center place in Word and Sacrament this Advent and Christmastide.

A Collect for St. John’s Day –December 27

Merciful Lord, cast the bright beams of your light upon your Church that, being instructed in the doctrine of your blessed apostle and evangelist Saint John, we may come to the light of everlasting life; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.¹³

Endnotes

All Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, Concordia Publishing House Edition, St. Louis, USA., 2003.

¹ Theo.G. Tappert, trans. and ed. *The Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 229-230.

² Ian Finlay, *Columba* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1979), 114.

³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 22, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House 1957), 5.

⁴ Arnold J. Koelpin, "Scripture, The Revelation of History's Lord," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 39:1 (March 1999): 73.

⁵ Charles Colson, *Against The Night* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 173.

⁶ Hermann Sasse, *We Confess Jesus Christ*, Vol.1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 48.

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James & John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 121-122.

⁸ Gene Edward Veith, *One Incarnate Truth*, ed. Uwe Siemon-Netto (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 17.

⁹ Alister McGrath, *Making Sense of the Cross* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 52.

¹⁰ Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 78.

¹¹ Gaylin Schmeling, "Our Incarnational Theology," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 37:2 (December 1997): 5-6.

¹² E.M. Blaiklock, *Still a Christian* (London, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980), 37.

¹³ *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 100.

Continue Walking in the Truth: A Resonance of John 14:6

by Phillip K. Lepak

Introduction

“With simple words, profound!” describes the Apostle John. Who can forget the first words of his gospel? But who from Adam can fully understand them? Does John not merely follow in the way of his Master, revealing matters beyond words with words? Such is the good preaching of our Lord, who said, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by me.” Could anyone more simply state that Christ alone is our salvation, in whom we live and move and have our being, in whom we grow and learn and know and live? How sweetly and clearly those simple words continue to ring within the one whom Jesus loved! John

was waiting in mysterious silence, with a reserved force, for his proper time, which did not come till Peter and Paul had finished their mission. Then, after their departure, he revealed the hidden depths of his genius in his marvelous writings, which represent the last and crowning work of the apostolic church. John has never been fully fathomed, but it has been felt throughout all periods of church history that he has best understood and portrayed the Master.¹

We have never met John, but we recognize his inkwell and clearly hear above his scratching quill the sweet Word of our Savior. John has never met us, yet he has no greater joy than to see his children continuing to walk in the truth. And how he now experiences that greatest joy! With the white-robed multitude gathered around the throne of the Lamb, he joyfully sings, not in cryptic vision, but before God’s shining countenance.

“Continue to walk in the truth.” It breaks forth from John’s eternity into this day, the Light of God daily bathing the narrow Way in His truth; His Word is truth. Continue--live--every remaining moment in your Life in this Way, bathed in Truth. How Jesus’ words resound, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life”! How appropriate for us spiritual children of John to take up in our conference the third epistle of the apostle whom

Jesus loved. How good it is for us humbly to learn to speak it simply and plainly so to God's dear children!

Translation

¹The Presbyter,

to Gaius, the beloved one, whom I love in the truth,

²Beloved, concerning all things, I pray for you to be well and to be in good health, even as your soul is going on a good way.

³For I rejoiced greatly when our brothers came and bore witness to your truth, even as you are walking in the Truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than this: that I hear that my own children are walking in the Truth.

⁵Beloved, you are faithfully working at what you do for the brothers – and strangers at that, ⁶who testified to your love before the church, whom you would do well to send on in a manner worthy of God. ⁷For they went out on behalf of the Name, taking nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸Therefore we ought to help such ones, that we may be co-workers in the Truth.

⁹I did write to the church, but Diotrephes, who would like to make himself first, does not listen to us. ¹⁰Therefore, if I come, I will recount the things that he is doing: he talks nonsense about us with malicious words (and not content with them), he does not listen to the brothers and he hinders those who want to, even expelling them from the church.

¹¹Beloved, do not mimic the evil one, but the good One. The one who does good is from God. The one who does evil has not recognized God. ¹²Demetrius is approved by all, even by the Truth itself. Likewise, we do so testify, and you know that our testimony is true.

¹³I have many things to write to you about, but I would rather not write you with pen and ink. ¹⁴Instead, I hope to see you soon, and then we can speak face to face.

¹⁵Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet our friends by name.

Exegesis

Text and Translation

1 Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ, ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.

1 The Presbyter, to Gaius, the beloved one, whom I love in the truth,

Commentary

The first verse is in the form of a standard, Oriental, Κοινή inner address or salutation. The author is identified by the nominative; the recipient demarcated by the dative. The epexegetical substantival adjective and relative clause are enhancements to the letter's tone, not elaborations on the recipient's title or merit. The author identifies himself with the term, "presbyter." Obtained by way of the comparative form of πρέσβυς, the Κοινή adjectival usage implies a comparison by relative age and experience, hence it is commonly rendered with "elder."² Typical of such comparatives, the substantive is used as *titulis*. Thus John simultaneously identifies himself as one older and more experienced than his recipient and as one speaking in an authoritative capacity to the letter's recipient. Certainly John is both, yet, relative to John's apostleship, the title is humble and hardly condescending.³

John greets a certain Gaius with immediate encouragement, "Gaius, the beloved one." John thereby decreases himself immediately, that his Lord might be preeminent in his letter. The substantival verbal adjective, ὁ ἀγαπητός, is a term of familial endearment, often from parent to child. The juxtaposition with the relative clause, however, elucidates an important fortification of ἀγάπη in Johannine literature. John intends to draw together in that one word the love of Christ for sinners, the love of God the Father for His Son, the love of the Father for His sons by faith and the love of fellow Christians for one another.⁴ While ἀγαπητός immediately follows the writer's appellation, and thus is momentarily assumed to indicate John's paternal love, ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ immediately voids the assumption and leaves the object, the reader, to ponder the subject of the verbal adjective. John thereby points faithful Gaius to Jesus, who truly loves both writer and reader.

In this technique lies the genius of John's style. He first projects potential, true, and already grand conclusions in broad, simple language, only to then, by a simple shift of emphasis, supersede them with an even grander, Christological conclusion.

Herein is a brilliant homiletical pattern: simple, everyday, insightful truths, which are in themselves already greatly instructive and should be preached, can further serve to express the Truth by a mere shift of emphasis.

In the relative clause, ἐν is spherical and the anarthrous ἀληθεία is abstract.⁵ The prepositional phrase offers up potential ("in relation to truth" begs the answer to Pilate's question, "What is the truth?") in order to draw the reader into contemplating the relationship between ἀγάπη and

ἀλήθεια. The translator is urged to consider this potential. Since the English idiom “in truth” would convey “really and truly,” rather than “in relation to truth,” and since “truth” in English is by default abstract, the insertion of the article is to be preferred in order to retain more of the meaning of the prepositional phrase.⁶

Text and Translation

2 Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὕχομαί σε εὐοδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν, καθὼς εὐοδοῦται σου ἡ ψυχὴ.

2 Beloved, concerning all things, I pray for you to be well and to be in good health, even as your soul is going on a good way.

Commentary

The vocative is so very personal. “Beloved,” the apostle writes. It is a second, even more personal address to Gaius. Herein is a lesson for our preaching. Love is personal. Gospel preaching applies grace with the vocative, in a word both imparting and inviting response.

The apostle speaks to his friend in Christ to encourage him. “Diotrephes hated Gaius because of what Gaius had been doing.”⁷ Gaius is not beloved by Diotrephes. But how that must pale in comparison to the love of Christ and the love shown him by his elder Apostle. The position of the prepositional phrase is significant, serving to establish emphatically the scope of πάντων, thereby invoking a contrast between John’s motives and the motives of Diotrephes.⁸

Εὕχομαι is used in two basic and related senses: praying and wishing. Both invoke the volition of the subject, and hence the verb is deponent. Both senses admit three patterns each.

Typically the patterns used with the first sense admit:

- the simple accusative, *e.g.*, “I pray for rain.” The subject is the intended recipient of the object in this case.
- the accusative with the infinitive, *e.g.*, “I pray for you to win.” The object is the intended recipient of the action of the infinitive in this case.
- with the infinitive alone, *e.g.*, “I pray to win.” Here the subject is the intended recipient of the action of the infinitive.

The latter sense also admits three patterns:

- the nominative then the infinitive, *e.g.*, “I wish to win.”
- the accusative then the infinitive, *e.g.*, “I wish you to win.”
- the optative, *e.g.*, “O, that I would win.”

The former patterns of the first sense and the first pattern of the second sense appear to be most closely related, while the final two uses of the second sense most likely arise by analogy with θέλω.

The second patterns are of note in this verse which has both the object and infinitive.⁹ Both patterns are alike in expressing the wish of the subject, but the first admits a certain spiritual element. Praying, certainly in the usage of the apostles, implies petitioning the Lord. The intention is discerned in the adverbial subordinate clause.

If the the apostle wishes Gaius well “concerning all things,” why does he then add καθὼς εὐοδοῦται σου ἡ ψυχὴ? One would expect that spiritual well-being is the foremost part of πάντων, no matter what the exact meaning of the verb, but the apostle separates it *post facto*. In this way the determination of the meaning of the verb is possible. If the meaning were “wish” and πᾶς were idiomatically confined to things related to temporal well-being, the subordinate clause emphasizes nothing, but this would contradict the intensive nature of the subordinating conjunction, καθὼς. Hence, the meaning of the verb is “to pray.”¹⁰

Here again John leads with a simple phrase full of potential and then intensifies it by an unexpected shift of emphasis. “Concerning all things, I pray for you to be well.” Surely he wishes Gaius well in everything, spiritual and eternal. That is the standard prayer of one Christian for another in the Church militant. John singles out and intensifies the spiritual dimension, καθὼς εὐοδοῦσαι σου ἡ ψυχὴ – “even as your soul is doing well.” How encouraging for Gaius to receive such a high evaluation from his elder! John addresses Gaius’ soul. Gaius is to reflect on John’s evaluation of his soul’s progress, not his earthly progress. Yet there is more to this spiritual evaluation.

The double use of εὐοδόω is also instructive. The first use is idiomatic, but John re-emphasizes the verb used in stock well-wishing, thus exposing its etymological roots – “going on a good road.”¹¹ In the next verse, the intensifying subordinate clause parallels; there the verb is περιπατέω, “to walk.” John prays for Gaius to go on a good way, even as his soul is going on the good Way.¹² Following, walking in the Way, is the sanctified life of the Christian.

Text and Translation

3 ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς σὺ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατεῖς.

3 For I rejoiced greatly when our brothers came and bore witness to your truth, even as you are walking in the Truth.

Commentary

The particle γάρ indicates a progression of reasoning that leads either to or from the conclusion.¹³ In this case, the conclusion is stated in verse 1, “even as your soul is going on a good way.” This is evident in the aorist tense of the ἐχάρην. Clearly the report that led John to the conclusion that Gaius’ soul is “going on the good Way” preceded. John rejoiced at the report of Gaius’ brothers, who had clearly shared every good thing with their teacher. And in this letter, John passes that joy to Gaius, sharing with him every good thing.

The brothers are certainly brothers in the faith; there is no indicator of kinship. Clearly they reported to John after traveling from afar. Clearly they heard Gaius’ personal proclamation and confession, and it was the truth, not some adulterated version thereof, but the rather the Word of God.¹⁴ The genitive pronoun often precedes and is in no way emphatic.¹⁵

Was Gaius a preacher or a teacher? Were the brothers missionaries or laymen? Some of these questions are not sufficiently answered by the text, and there exist manifold conjectures regarding these brothers and their relationships to John and Gaius. The exact explanation, however, is not necessary to the understanding of the text. Our attention ought to remain on John’s twin foci, ἀλήθεια and on ἀγάπη, for these produce the brotherhood into which John, Gaius, the brothers mentioned (and we) are bound.

The subordinate clause is expegetical, amplifying the meaning of the genitive personal pronoun.¹⁶ Gaius held the truth in his heart as his own possession, and it even expressed itself in his actions. Diotrephes may have known the truth, but he had not been expressing it in his actions.

Text and Translation

4 μειζοτέραν τούτων οὐχ ἔχω χαράν, ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα.¹⁷

4 I have no greater joy than this: that I hear that my own children are walking in the Truth.¹⁸

Commentary

Μειζότεραν is an interesting form of the adjective μέγα. The comparative form from earlier Greek is the irregular μείζων. As BAGD notes, another form developed “beside it, because of the gradual disappearance of feeling for its comparative sense.” Μειζότερος is that second form, more like the form of a normal comparative adjective.¹⁹

Μειζότεραν is followed by the ablative genitive of comparison, but the genitive demonstrative pronoun is plural. The number is an indicator that τούτων refers to the brothers’ testimonies, not to the summary of the report given in the final clause.²⁰ The ἵνα clause, however, after a demonstrative pronoun can take the place of an explanatory infinitive.²¹ Such is the case here. The ἵνα clause explains the demonstrative. This explanation offers a singular, durative concept: I hear, *i.e.*, the hearing of these reports. For this reason, it is simplest to bring the number of the demonstrative and the number of the explanation into agreement to smooth the English by substituting a singular for τούτων.

Is οὐχ μειζότεραν hyperbolic? Does John truly have no greater joy than to hear the testimony of his children that they are walking in the Truth? If so, what is this highest possible joy that one can have, that John has?

Consider Hebrews 12:1f. Τοιγαροῦν καὶ ἡμεῖς τοσοῦτον ἔχοντες περικείμενον ἡμῖν νέφος μαρτύρων, ὄγκον ἀποθέμενοι πάντα καὶ τὴν εὐπερίστατον ἀμαρτίαν, δι’ ὑπομονῆς τρέχωμεν τὸν προκείμενον ἡμῖν ἀγῶνα ἀφορῶντες εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν, ὃς ἀντὶ τῆς προκειμένης αὐτῷ χαρᾶς ὑπέμεινε σταυρὸν αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας ἐν δεξιᾷ τε τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ κεκάθικεν. ἀναλογίσασθε γὰρ τὸν τοιαύτην ὑπομενηκότα ὑπὸ τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀντιλογίαν, ἵνα μὴ κάμητε ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ἐκλυόμενοι. – “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (NIV). What is the joy set before our Lord that would motivate Him to endure the cross? It

is not, as some would suggest, the prospect of completing the redemptive work and sitting down at the right hand of God.²² It is rather the joy of hearing those so redeemed repenting on earth and commencing to confess the truth in eternal communion with the triune God as a result.²³ The race marked out for us is not that of accomplishing or obtaining redemption.

John is not overemphasizing the point for effect. He shares the same joy that encouraged the Son of Man to endure even the cross. This joy is not solely an earthly joy, but one that we share with the Savior even, and especially, in eternity. It is truly, therefore, the greatest of joys. It is enjoyed even in the face of the terrible tribulation of the cross. John points Gaius to this joy as he struggles with Diotrephes.

This joy is also experienced by the Father and expressed in John's emphatic term of endearment, τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα.²⁴ This is the joy of God "tenderly inviting us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him with all boldness and confidence as dear children ask their dear father." Even in this context, this joy is found in the midst of sadness, as every father knows.

Finally, this joy is the work of that greatest Counselor and Teacher, the Holy Spirit. It is the joy of hearing the faithful echo of His words of eternal life, not in sound only but in the actions of the life faithfully lived in the truth.

Text and Translation

5 Ἀγαπητέ, πιστὸν ποιεῖς ὃ ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους,

5 Beloved, you are faithfully working at what you do for the brothers – and strangers at that,

Commentary

The present indicative, ποιεῖς, is used as an epistolary present progressive. John is aware of Gaius' faithful deeds.²⁵ "The writer uses the present tense to describe Gaius' faithful service, by which he, John, would show that such kindly service was a customary practice with his friend."²⁶ With the future indicative, ποιήσεις, in verse 6, he encourages Gaius to extend his present behavior both in extent and into the future.²⁷ Πιστόν is an adverbial accusative, modifying ποιεῖς.

The verb of the relative clause is ἐργάσῃ, which is clearly rooted in ἔργον. Ποιεῖς alone is syntactically, but not semantically, focal. Ἐργάζομαι

is clearly the semantic focus and indicates (with ποιέω) an agent of numerable event highlighting the exertion.²⁸ Clearly ποιέω and ἐργάζομαι are very nearly synonymous; it is therefore acceptable to smooth the English translation by exchanging the semantic focus with the main verb. It should also be noted that John has in mind distinct occurrences of Gaius' good efforts, indicating that he must have received regular reports about Gaius, possibly from Demetrius or another in Gaius' congregation.

The aorist subjunctive with the particle ἐάν expresses the anticipation of action relative to the tense, but as Lenski notes, the aorist is constative.²⁹ In other words, "The 'constative' aorist just treats the act as a single whole entirely irrespective of the parts or time involved."³⁰ Thus the dependent clause is speaking to all that Gaius has and is doing, *i.e.*, his effort *in toto*. English expresses the anticipation and the constative aspect, albeit weakly, with a simple present in the relative clause.

John has in mind that the act of a Christian faithfully doing anything is a truly good work, no matter how seemingly insignificant the deed. This is evident in the use of the relative pronoun instead of the demonstrative. In fact, the relative pronoun in conjunction with the particle ἐάν very nearly makes for a general statement, *i.e.*, ὅ approaches "whatever" and ἐάν approaches "whenever."³¹

Τοῦτο is another instance of the adverbial accusative. It can be rendered with "and that." The effect is to intensify the meaning of the verb in relation to ζένους relative to its meaning in relation to ἀδελφούς. Stott notes that the brothers and the strangers were in fact one and the same, consistent with his theory of itinerant missionaries, and that the intensification serves to further focus attention on Gaius' brotherly hospitality.³² Some translators prefer to substitute "even" for "and that" in order to preserve the word order, but this approach obscures the identification of the brothers with the strangers.

Text and Translation

6 οἱ ἐμαρτύρησάν σου τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας, οὓς καλῶς ποιήσεις προπέμψας ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ·

6 who testified to your love before the church, whom you would do well to send on in a manner worthy of God.

Commentary

The brothers of verse 5 are fellow believers. They were known to

John when they went to Gaius, but they were strangers to Gaius at the time. Gaius acquitted himself well, showing them proper Christian hospitality.³³ These same brothers then reported back to John and the congregation, giving a good report about Gaius in person.³⁴ They testified that Gaius possessed love; in other words, Gaius was a believer, and his faith had been demonstrated in the sacrifice of love for the mission and those sent on that mission. Now these same brothers have returned to Gaius, possibly with this third epistle of John in hand. Verse 8 further identifies the brothers as “co-workers in the truth.”

Προπέμψας is complementary to and coincident with ποιήσεις and can be translated as though it were the infinitive.³⁵

There is pastoral advice in the adverbs of verse 6. Often encouragement need not come in the form of an imperative. John encourages Gaius by pointing him to the mission. With *καλῶς*, John expresses every confidence that Gaius will choose rightly and know what to do to further the Word in his congregation. Ἀξίως is encouragement to attend to the details and to get the job done right. The work should not be thought of as for missionaries only, but for the Lord who sent them. The full force of ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ is seen in Colossians 1:10f and First Thessalonians 2:10-13. John urges Gaius to do the Commandments. In so doing, he will be doing his work in ἀγάπη and not for the missionaries or for himself. In this way Gaius will not be tempted by personality conflict or adversity to turn from his noble work. This is an inoculation against the attitude and evil works of Diotrophes.

Text and Translation

7 ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐξῆλθον μηδὲν λαμβάνοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἔθνικῶν.

7 For they went out on behalf of the Name, receiving nothing from the pagans.³⁶

Commentary

Were these brother co-workers laymen or called missionaries? The answer to this question is given to a fair degree of confidence in the text. Clearly ὑπὲρ ... τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐξῆλθον – “they went out on behalf of the Name.” The participial phrase also indicates that they were not working among the heathen for their daily bread, but instead were receiving their sustenance from individual believers like Gaius, congregations, and larger

groups of believers. This arrangement is certainly consistent with that which was afforded called workers by the early church and is, in modern Lutheran circles, most like the call of some itinerant foreign missionaries.

These men went out on behalf of the Name. John refers the reader to the sense employed in Genesis 4:26, Matthew 18:20, Matthew 28:19, and First John 3:23.³⁷ Τὸ ὄνομα clearly refers to the Name of the Lord, which is inseparable from His essence.³⁸ Thus the 2001 *Explanation of the Small Catechism* rightly states, “The *name* of God means God Himself, as He has made Himself known to us through His Word and works.”³⁹ Furthermore, “God’s name is so precious because it reveals our salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ who kept the law for us.”⁴⁰

Gaius and the missionaries were carrying out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. Perhaps the allusion to the Name in conjunction with ἐξῆλθον was meant to bring to mind Jesus’ words in the Commission and especially the end of verse 20: καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος – “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Faithful Gaius needed the promise of his Savior to be constant in Diotrephes’ storm of strife.

Text and Translation

8 ἡμεῖς οὖν ὀφείλομεν ὑπολαμβάνειν τοὺς τοιούτους, ἵνα συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.

8 Therefore we ought to help such ones, in order that we may be co-workers in the Truth.

Commentary

The conclusion to which John has led is stated in verse 8 with the postpositive οὖν. This particle is noteworthy because it is so infrequently used by the Apostle. The pronoun is plural, indicating that John is stating a principle to be followed by all believers (in contrast to the pagans), especially those involved in the work of the missionaries. Ὑπολαμβάνω, ἀντιλαμβάνω, συμβάλλομαι, παρίσταμαι, ἀντέχομαι, ἐπαρκέω and βοηθέω are synonymous in New Testament usage; they mean “to help” or “to assist in supplying what may be needed.”⁴¹

The final clause carries the connotation of a privilege or reward more than a result clause would. Since it is the common desire of John and Gaius to carry out the work of the Lord, the principle expressed in the main clause carries with it the privilege of being co-workers in the truth, evangelists,

preachers of the good news of salvation. While being a co-worker does not necessarily mean working in the same way in the same location, it does mean carrying out the work locally and supporting it abroad. While a call may rightly limit a pastor's field, it certainly does not diminish the evangelical desire that all the world should receive the Good News.

John qualifies the work with τῆ ἀληθείᾳ, a dative of advantage.⁴² The UBS translators opine “that ‘the truth’ (in the sense of ‘God’s truthfulness,’ cf. 1Jo 1:8) functions here as a personified quality of God, with which the traveling preachers are working together.”⁴³ Thus the verse resonates with John 14:6.

Text and Translation

9 Ἐγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· ἀλλ' ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς.

9 I did write to the church, but Diotrophes, who would like to make himself first, does not listen to us.⁴⁴

Commentary

To this point, John has expended his words on aligning his readers with the Truth and encouraging Gaius in his work. Now comes the reason for the effort. A man named Diotrophes had taken to promoting himself and his agenda in Gaius' congregation.

The attributive participle, φιλοπρωτεύων, is clearly used in its rawest sense. Diotrophes wants to become head over even the Apostle. He has ignored previous correspondence with Gaius' congregation, as is evidenced by the epistolary aorist.⁴⁵ Furthermore, he does not ἐπιδέχεται. The verb, ἐπιδέχομαι, is used in two semantic domains, welcoming and obeying. The beginning of verse 10, especially ἐὰν ἔλθω – “if I come,” seems to rule out the former. The latter sense denotes paying attention leading to obeying, and overlaps considerably with ἀκούω, precisely the word used in verse 4. Diotrophes is doing precisely the opposite (οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται) of that which gives John (and the Lord) his greatest joy.

Diotrophes is not just rebelling against human beings, namely the called missionaries, Gaius and John.⁴⁶ Their words have been true to God's Word, so Diotrophes is sinning against God and God's appointed workers. How this must have saddened and sorely displeased John!

Text and Translation

10 διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ λόγοις μονητροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ μὴ ἀρκοῦμενος ἐπὶ τούτοις οὔτε αὐτὸς ἐπιδέχεται τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοὺς βουλομένους κωλύει καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐκβάλλει.

10 Therefore, if I come, I will recount the things that he is doing: he talks nonsense about us with malicious words (and not content with them), he does not listen to the brothers and he hinders those who want to, even expelling them from the church.⁴⁷

Commentary

Διὰ τοῦτο is much more commonly used by John than οὖν. The future more vivid conditional clearly expresses John's intent. He certainly desires to come. And though other factors may prevent him, he would not be deterred by Diotrophes. In fact, John is speaking as the overseer of Diotrophes. He intends to come and deal pointedly with the things that Diotrophes has been and is continuing to do. Note that John does not speak about these deeds as putative. In fact, the third item in the procession of evil deeds is a thoroughly public affair. The deeds are a matter of public knowledge in the congregation. The matter must be before the congregation for John to speak so about Diotrophes' words and deeds, so John's visit would be tantamount to the final statement of excommunication.

Ὑπομνήσω indicates that John will call forth from Diotrophes' memory the recollection of the evil words and deeds. Since John will do this verbally, the verb is better rendered with "recount" rather than "recall." This is to be a confrontation. It is a serious mistake when pastors fail to confront under circumstances such as those mentioned in the verse. Not only does personal, face-to-face confrontation remove any possible hearsay from the debate, but it also puts the troublemaker before the Lord's called servant, in this case an Apostle. Diotrophes would be aware in his conscience at that moment that he was making his arguments before the omniscient God. He would have to consider the contrast that John was making in the letter between τὰ ἔργα ... ποιεῖ and ποιεῖς ... ἐργάση. That contrast segues into the statement of principle in verse 11.

Then John constructs a progression. Its form is obscured by a parenthetical καὶ μὴ ἀρκοῦμενος ἐπὶ τούτοις; the conjunction and negative particle must be factored out when resolving the construction. He wants to use ποιέω to continue the comparison of good and evil deeds begun in

verse 5 and to emphatically state that Diotrephes' behavior is an ongoing problem. The first item follows ποιεῖ, hence the complementary participle. The other members of the list are verbs in the indicative present.

The charges against Diotrephes are serious and obvious. First, what he says is nonsense, φλυαρέω; this in and of itself would be reason for a confrontation. Diotrophes is speaking untruths – whether little or big, he is lying about Gaius and John and others. The words λόγοις μωμητοῖς tell us much more about the content of those lies. Diotrephes was smearing John and Gaius as the plural pronoun shows, using words that were not merely annoying but thoroughly wicked. The substantive of ποιηρός is a title of Satan. Diotrephes' intentions were evil. Secondly, John recounts Diotrephes' refusal of brotherly admonishment. He would not listen to or obey the biblical admonishment of his godly brothers. Surely this is the hallmark of the unrepentant sinner. Finally, John points out the dangerous effect of Diotrephes' unrepentance: he is participating with the evil one in keeping people away from the Word of God, even arrogantly trying to separate people from Christ's flock by throwing them out of the congregation. The καί is intensive, extending the last element of the list, κωλύει.

Jesus speaks about just the sort of behavior that Diotrephes is exhibiting and the proper response to it in Luke 17:1f: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him” (NIV).

The struggle is between one who wants to control the destiny of the congregation and mold it to his will and one who wishes to follow meekly the true Shepherd and to be molded into His image. Diotrephes views it as a classic power struggle. John and Gaius view it as a clash between the Truth and the father of lies. How can Gaius survive the evil determinations of Diotrephes? Certainly not by following in Diotrephes' way and seeking to wrest power from him. Such approaches nearly always lead to a succession of ever-worsening tyrants. John does not reply with ideas about how to undercut Diotrephes, but rather he encourages Gaius and the congregation to look to the invincible Truth, the one who really does own the congregation. No falsehood can overcome the Truth. The Savior is patient, but He will deal with Diotrephes, seeking at the same time to bring him back to the flock and to strengthen all involved through the ordeal by sanctifying them.

Text and Translation

11 Ἀγαπητέ, μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν· ὁ κακοποιῶν οὐχ ἐώρακεν τὸν θεόν.

11 Beloved, do not mimic the evil one, but the good One. The one who does good is from God. The one who does evil has not recognized God.⁴⁸

Commentary

Once more John addresses Gaius sympathetically with the vocative, and then gives him a principle: “do not mimic the evil one, but the good One.” “If οὐ denies the fact, μὴ denies the idea.”⁴⁹ The construction directs Gaius not even to think like Diotrephes is thinking. The whole method that Diotrephes is using to solve problems in the congregation is from the evil one, relying on coercion, machinations, and slander instead of Gospel preaching, the sanctifying work of the Spirit and the Truth.

The articles are significant. The substantive, τὸ κακόν, could be identified with either Satan or Diotrephes. Since the sentence is a statement of general principle, it does not refer to Diotrephes but rather the one whom he and all such are following, the devil. Τὸ ἀγαθόν clearly can only refer to Christ Himself. In other words, we are following either Satan or Christ. As sheep we are following someone. The will is bound to someone, and that bondage works itself out in the deeds of the slave. Either he is a slave of the devil and does what the devil wants as κακοποιῶν, or he is δοῦλος Χριστοῦ, and follows in the footsteps of his Savior as ἀγαθοποιῶν. There is no middle ground. Repentance is a volteface.

The impetus for the change of heart from evil to good is always generated by the working of the Truth in the heart. The Holy Spirit teaches the Gospel, and that Gospel is true, and it is the power of God unto salvation. Thus those who do good are truly ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ.⁵⁰ Gaius undoubtedly had fellow believers who were doing good for him.⁵¹ He could take heart that God was hearing his pleas and sending help in the form of believing friends. He was also to find encouragement in the fact that his meekness and inability to solve the problem with Diotrephes was not at all an indication of failure or weakness.

The final sentence deals again with the proper understanding of those who would be first before God: “The one who does evil has not recognized God.” The semantic domain of ὁράω includes not merely the act of sensing visual information, but also the act of interpreting that

information in light of pre-existing knowledge. Τὸ κακοποιῶν is not Satan, but is a collective noun expressing the group or classification of those who do evil. Satan has seen God, before his great fall. Evil-doers may have seen him and lapsed into unbelief.⁵² But neither Satan nor the unbeliever has recognized the truth about God. In fact, they refuse to recognize what their eyes and conscience tell them. They have not recognized God, and it continues to have a lasting effect in their lives, namely they are doing evil, and they cannot do even a single good deed before God.⁵³ This is the significance of the perfect tense.

Text and Translation

12 Δημητρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας· καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθῆς ἐστίν.

12 Demetrius is approved by all, even by the truth itself. Likewise we do so testify, and you know that our testimony is true.⁵⁴

Commentary

Abruptly a new character appears. He is obviously known to both Gaius and John. Perhaps he is one of the missionaries or a fellow member in Gaius' congregation, whom Diotrophes is attempting to pit against Gaius. His exact situation is not known. What is known, however, is that this man is an ἀγαθοποιῶν. The testimonies of all, presumably the brothers who know him, including the Apostle, agree that Demetrius is a follower of the Lord in doing good works. The effect of the plural agent is not to represent mere consensus, but unanimity of testimony. Given that the testimony is positive and forceful, it is a strong endorsement or approval in the passive. Even αὐτὴ ἡ ἀλήθεια, the Truth Himself, testifies in this regard. Μαρτυρέω does not admit an impersonal subject. This is a statement that only the Apostle could make; no man can see the heart of another, so the Lord must have revealed this to John in the process of writing this letter.

The καὶ ... δέ construction with the same verb as the previous sentence continues the same thought and is best represented with "likewise." The unanimity of testimony is further underscored by the singular ἡ μαρτυρία. The truth proceeds forth from the Truth through the ἀγαθοποιῶν. Only perverse falsehood can proceed forth from the father of lies through the κακοποιῶν.

Text and Translation

13 πολλὰ εἶχον γράψαι σοι ἄλλ' οὐ θέλω διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου σοι γράφειν·

13 I have many things to write to you about, but I would rather not write you with pen and ink.⁵⁵

Commentary

Clearly *πολλά* expresses the fact that Gaius' relationship to John extends far beyond the confines of the conflict with Diotrephes. While John is the overseer of Gaius, he is also his friend, brother, and fellow follower of the truth. What these “many things” are, we do not know, but John wants to express them in a personal meeting rather than with ink and pen. The use of *θέλω* indicates desire but not necessarily the ability to fulfill that desire at the time of writing. The face-to-face meeting between John and Gaius may never have been possible.

It is helpful to add the word “about” to clarify the intent of *γράψαι* in the first clause. John does not have in mind a specific, detailed list of items, but rather whole concepts and thoughts that he wishes to impart. It is also helpful (though not necessary) to transpose *μέλανος καὶ καλάμου* to match the English idiom.

Text and Translation

14 ἐλπίζω δὲ εὐθέως σε ἰδεῖν, καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν.

14 Instead, I hope to see you soon, and then we can speak face to face.⁵⁶

Commentary

Clearly John intends to make a personal visitation upon Gaius' congregation to deal with Diotrephes but also to discuss “many things” with Gaius.

There are at least two connotations associated with *στόμα πρὸς στόμα* – “face to face.”⁵⁷ Here the meaning is clearly “to engage in brotherly dialog.” Third John is so filled with kind words of brotherly encouragement for Gaius that it could hardly be otherwise. This will be an event for Gaius to anticipate with joy. If the phrase, however, had been

used with reference to Diotrephes, it would have the other connotation, *i.e.*, personal confrontation, and perhaps this is intimated.⁵⁸

Text and Translation

15 εἰρήνη σοι. ἀσπάζονται σε οἱ φίλοι. ἀσπάζου τοὺς φίλους κατ' ὄνομα.

15 Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet our friends by name.^{59, 60}

Commentary

If there were any question about John's attitude toward Gaius, it is put to rest by John's chosen complimentary closing, εἰρήνη σοι – "Peace to you." Were these not the very words of Christ and God's angels to fearful believers? If there is now peace between God and mankind, then there need not be any worry about the seeming lack of peace in this Church Militant. Troubles with fellow members caught in sin will always be present and unpleasant, yet the reason that Gaius and Demetrius and John and the missionaries and indeed the Christian Church soldier on is that we follow Christ and hear His Commission and receive strength by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

Οἱ φίλοι (from φιλέω) begs genitive personal pronouns. The question posed by their lack is, "To whom does each set of friends belong?" Is John sending along greetings to Gaius from Gaius' friends who are part of John's congregation, or are John's friends sending greetings, or do Gaius and John possess mutual friends who are sending greetings to Gaius? The same possibilities must also be considered for the last sentence. The lack of the explicit pronoun in both sentences is in itself the answer. John does not have in mind a specific list of friends, rather the φίλοι on both ends of the correspondence are bound together by the Truth in love and all alike greet one another. For this reason, John adds to the last sentence κατ' ὄνομα, since he himself would like to add a personalization to the mutual greetings of the two groups; without it, the last two sentences would be inter-congregational encouragements.

Conclusion

Continue walking in the Truth, dear brothers. Turmoil and strife, both in the mind and in the congregation, are but the clouds of dust from

dying Adam. They are passing, blown away by the working of the Spirit of Truth. Only let us speak the truth in love, and let us contend when necessary to ensure its free course. Encourage those who are doing good, every Gaius and Demetrius – all the more as you see the Day approaching. And do not be afraid to confront face to face those who have erred and will not recognize the Truth. No lie of the evil one can stand up against the Truth. Though there may be turmoil and hardship as a result, consider the soul's cost. The One who is the Way and the Truth and the Life says, "Peace." At the cost of His precious life, εἰρήνη σοι. Though we often cannot see how it must happen, it shall come to pass. This is our faith, only help us, Lord, in our unbelief. Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless.⁶¹ Now go on your good way. Amen.

Bibliography

- Aland, K. et al. *Das Neue Testament: Griechisch und Deutsch*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 1986.
- Bauer, Walter, et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BAGD)*. 4th revised and augmented ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Beck, William F. *The Holy Bible: An American Translation*. New Haven, Missouri: Leader Publishing Company, 1976.
- Conrad, Carl W. "Use of Comparative in 3 John 4". <http://www.ibiblio.org/bgreek/test-archives/html4/1997-06/19282.html>.
- Degner, H. W., ed. *The Exegetical Lectures of Dr. George Stöckhardt*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1980.
- Eusebius of Caesarea. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Translated by Arthur C. McGiffert. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- Haas, C. et al. *A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John*. London: United Bible Society, 1972.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/Council_Of_Rome.
- http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/The_Epistle_Of_John. Irenaeus of Lyon. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Translated by A. Cleveland Coxe. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- Jerome. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Translated by W. H. Fremantle et al. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- Kretzmann Popular Commentary. "The Third Epistle General of John."
- Lenski, R. C. H. *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*. Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. Ed. 2nd printing. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (LN)*. 2nd ed. 2 vol. New York: United Bible Society, 1989.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Epistles of John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978.
- Papias. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts and

James Donaldson. Translated by A. Cleveland Coxe. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994).

Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950.

Polycarp. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Translated by A. Cleveland Coxe. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.

Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church*. 8 vol. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006.

Stott, J. R. W. *The Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary*. Photolithoprinted Eerdmans Ed. Tyndale: 1964.

Werre, Luke. "The Third Epistle of the Apostle John: Exegesis and Commentary." Thiensville, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1998.

Endnotes

¹ Schaff, 240f.

² Cf. Homer, LXX, Ep. Arist., Philo, Josephus.

³ Far too much has been made of St. Jerome's "*opinio a plerisque tradita*," which is based on Eusebius' retailing of vague reports about a Papias' quotation in Irenaeus' quotation of Polycarp's quotation, "If, then, any one who had attended on the elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings, – what Andrew or Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord's disciples: which things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say" (Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus – On Famous Men*, 18; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3, 39; Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses*, 33, 4; Papias, fragments, 1). Erasmus, Grotius, Credner, Bretschneider, Reuss, et al., contend vainly thereby that "the presbyter John" is the author and not the Apostle John. The moderns among them use this argument to leverage a non-apostolic origin for the Gospel of John.

⁴ Only in Johannine literature is ἀγάπη so fortified. Elsewhere in the Scriptures, it often can be convincingly demonstrated to be synonymous with other members of the semantic domain, especially φιλία. Certain contemporary literature attempts to extend Johannine usage with predictably confusing effects.

⁵ Q.v. "in connection with what is truth" (Lenski, 577).

⁶ Conscientious Bible translations can generally be divided into two camps: those that tend to preserve word meanings as closely as possible and those that tend to preserve phrase meanings. So long as the host language tends to be molded by the translation, word meaning preservation is probably the more stable approach. Context will preserve the full meaning even against the natural drift in the host language. Phrase meaning preservation is less stable in this regard but does produce a translation that is more easily apprehended by native speakers of the host language in the short term. Thus the latter produces a much more "readable" translation. The King James Version and its derivatives are word preservation translations. The NIV is an example of a phrase preservation translation. For those who are using their translation efforts for short term purposes, e.g., teaching the meaning of the text in contemporary language, I prefer the phrase preservation approach. For those attempting to preserve the meaning of the text, especially against intergenerational linguistic drift, the word preservation approach seems more appropriate. Note that Luther follows the same line of reasoning, translating with "in der Wahrheit." Strangely, Beck chose not to follow Luther.

⁷ Lenski, 577.

⁸ The Piscator Bible (1650) variant προπάντων is unique and simply too late to be considered in any way reflective of the original text. The translation would be "above all," like that of Kretzmann, q.v., but it is doubtful that Kretzmann is referring to this variant.

⁹ Lenski asserts that "Περὶ πάντων fits only the first infinitive [to wish]", but this assertion is unsupportable (578). Cf. BAGD, περὶ, 1.e.

¹⁰ Lenski arrives at this conclusion. Stöckhardt does not. Kretzmann translates *περὶ πάντων* with “above all things,” effectively replacing *περὶ* with *ὑπέρ*. When used with verbs of petitioning, e.g., to ask, to pray, etc., *περὶ* with the genitive introduces the person or thing in whose interest the petition is made (*BAGD*, 644).

However, the accusative pronoun quickly eliminates this possible meaning.

¹¹ This reemphasis matches somewhat the contemporary English idiom, e.g., “The two boys were to cooperate, really co-operate.”

¹² In general the meaning of a particular use of a word in a sentence cannot be ascertained by naïve etymological appeal. History and context conspire to limit and mold the meaning. However, an author might sometimes choose to revert the meaning of a word to its etymological roots for effect. This method is one among many employed by the Apostle John to shape the meaning of his simplified vocabulary for his purposes. Care must be taken to recognize when an author is fortifying the meaning of a particular word, and care must be exercised to avoid applying the same meaning to the word outside of the purview of that author.

¹³ A number of Greek manuscripts (33, 81, 623, 2464, 2495; 81 is the earliest dating to the sixth century), Latin codices and, most notably, the Codex Sinaiticus omit this particle (*q.v.* facsimile). The omission of the particle has little effect in this instance, since typically the sentence following usually explains the sentence preceding in a paragraph anyway. The omission in Sinaiticus appears to have been rejected by subsequent copyists.

¹⁴ Cf. 2Jo 9, 10.

¹⁵ Lenski, 580.

¹⁶ Robertson, 968.

¹⁷ The variant reading, replacing *χαράν* with *χάριον*, would mean, “favor from God,” but the variant is found only in the Codex Vaticanus (IV) and two eleventh-century codices, which may have been influenced by the Vulgate translation, which itself depended on Vaticanus. Clearly this variant can be safely ignored.

¹⁸ It is interesting that Luther chose to render *περιπατέω* with *leben*.

¹⁹ Lenski and Robertson call *μειζοτέρων* a double-comparative rather than a second, distinct form and note that Blass does not explain it but calls it vulgar. Lenski cites Bauer in *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, “such comparatives were formed in the Koine when the feeling for the comparative force of the usual forms was fading and needed re-inforcement” (Lenski, 581). Robertson cites Moulton (Robertson, 227; 664). This is perhaps the source of Charles Stevens’ suggestion that “there is a ‘double comparative’ sense to this word.” (Stevens in Conrad, §1). Common usage bears out the assertion of *BAGD* that the form is merely an alternate form.

²⁰ Robertson notes that often in such cases the neuter singular or plural is employed (704). This accounts neatly for the locus of variants centered on *τούτων*. The variants differ by gender and number.

²¹ Robertson, 699; *BAGD*, *ἴνα*, II.b.e.

²² The Zondervan *New International Version Study Bible* equates “joy set before Him” with “His accomplishing our eternal redemption and His glorification at the Father’s ‘right hand.’”

²³ Consider Luk 15:7f; Joh 3:29.

²⁴ John chooses the rarer personal pronoun over the reflexive (Robertson, 685).

²⁵ Cf. Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2; 1Pe 4:9; 1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:8.

²⁶ Stöckhardt, 89.

²⁷ Lenski, 582.

²⁸ LN 90K fn 10, 90.45, 90.47; Lenski, 582.

²⁹ Lenski, 582.

³⁰ Robertson, 832.

³¹ Haas, 151.

³² Luther translates with *zumal*. While this word very closely captures τοῦτο, it has been replaced by the use of *sogar* in more modern translations.

³³ See *Didache* 11:2, 4.

³⁴ N.B. ἐνώπιον phrase instead of the dative.

³⁵ Robertson, 861; 1121.

³⁶ Codex Athous Laurae (VIII) and several later manuscripts add αὐτοῦ as a gloss. The unnamed Wolfenbüttel codex (VI), the Byzantine texts and the Vulgate read ἔθνων, nations, in place of ἔθνικῶν. The majority of the ancient codices have the text used.

³⁷ Conversely, in Luke 21:17, Jesus said, καὶ ἔσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου – “And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.” Clearly πάντων refers to the world. The world, however, tolerates quite nicely those who speak and talk about nearly any god other than the one, true God. Τὸ ὄνομα clearly means more than a mere appellation.

³⁸ AC I, 3; 1Ki 8:27; Psa 90:2, 4; Pieper, 428.

³⁹ Q 161.

⁴⁰ Q 35.

⁴¹ LN 35.1 fn 1.

⁴² Lenski, 584.

⁴³ Haas, 153.

⁴⁴ There are a considerable number of strong variant texts for this verse. The variants center on the object of ἔγραψα. The earliest codices have the text presented. Other codices omit τι. Because of the English idiom and context, these variants have the same translation. A number of later manuscripts, however, replace τι with ἄν. Marshall opines that τι indicates “a letter of modest size,” whereas ἄν would remove that implication. He also believes that this variation “was motivated by the desire to avoid the suggestions that the elder’s letter had been lost or that its authority had not been accepted” (88).

⁴⁵ Robertson, 846. Lenski makes a fine argument for understanding τι to be Second John (548 ff.).

⁴⁶ Q.v. v. 10.

⁴⁷ Codex Ephraemi (V) has εἰς before ἡμᾶς and ἐπιδεχομένους in place of βουλομένους. This would imply that Diotrophes had spoken his nonsense to the apostle and brothers and that he was actively trying to turn individuals from following the apostolic teachings. The variant is unlikely, and the assessment of Diotrophes’ unrepentance would stand in any case. Codex Sinaiticus lacks ἐκ τῆς

ἐκκλησίας. The effect of this variant would make both κωλύει and ἐκβάλλει actions in the list rather than ἐκβάλλει intensifying κωλύει. Either way, the implication is clear: Diotrephes was eliminating those who would contend with him on the basis of the Scriptures.

⁴⁸ Codex Regius has δέ before κακοποιῶν. Clearly this variant arose because of the inherent contrast between the sentences.

⁴⁹ Robertson, 1167.

⁵⁰ Genitive of origin.

⁵¹ *Q.v.* v. 15.

⁵² *Q.v.* Gal 5:4.

⁵³ *Q.v.* Heb 11:6.

⁵⁴ Codex Alexandrianus (V) and Bodmer XVII (VII) often agree. Here both have ἐκκλησίας in place of ἀληθεία. Codex Ephraemi (V) has ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἀληθεία. This is clearly an inadvertent contextual substitution. All of the other major codices have the text as presented. The locus of variations surrounding οἶδας arises in the Byzantine texts and is laid to rest by the sheer weight of the uncorrelated testimonies of the codices.

⁵⁵ Instead of the aorist infinitive used by the uncorrelated, ancient codices, the correlated Byzantine texts have the present infinitive and vice versa for the infinitive at the end of the verse. This is likely a transposition error. Codex Alexandrianus (V) has οὐκ ἐβουλήθην in place of οὐ θελω. This could be the result of the scribe drawing βουλουμένους from verse 10.

⁵⁶ Codex Sinaiticus (IV), the Wolfenbüttel Codex, Codex Athos Laurae, and the majority of the Byzantine texts have ἰδεῖν σε instead of σε ἰδεῖν. This order should perhaps be preferred, but does not impact the meaning.

⁵⁷ See Robertson, p. 625, for an interesting discussion of the implications of John's use of πρὸς here and elsewhere.

⁵⁸ *Cf.* v. 10.

⁵⁹ There are sundry texts that have ἀδελφοί / ἀδελφούς in place of φίλοι / φίλους. This is an understandable substitution or gloss.

⁶⁰ Codex Regius and a few manuscripts have Ἀμήν appended.

⁶¹ Psa 10:12 (NIV).

An Exegetical Survey of the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis

by S. Piet Van Kampen

Introduction

Luke's gospel, in itself, is rather unique. It is the longest of the four gospels. It is the only gospel based on the eyewitness accounts of others, since Luke was not an eyewitness to the life of Jesus Christ. And while the other gospels quote psalms and prophecies of the Old Testament as they fill in the messianic details of the life of Jesus, they do not have any original poetry or songs of their own. Luke's gospel does. In fact, Luke's book includes three major canticles, early on, and with short space between: the Magnificat (1:46-55), the Benedictus (1:67-79), and the Nunc Dimittis (2:29-32).

While many have undertaken to study these three songs of praise separately, few have taken a look at the three of them together. What are their points of commonality? Where do they differ from each other? This essay seeks to be an aid in drawing connections between these three canticles, so that the reader may develop a heightened sense of the meaning of each canticle along with a greater understanding and appreciation for some of the central themes of Luke's gospel.

Obviously the main connection between these three songs from Luke 1 and 2 is Christ. When one sees the context, structure, and content of what is said here in the Magnificat, Benedictus, and Nunc Dimittis, he or she can only come away with the understanding that Jesus is at the center of it all. And as far as that goes, these three songs make great sermons. For, as Luther tells it, "What else is the gospel but a sermon about Christ, declaring that he is a Savior, light, and glory of all the world; such a sermon fills the heart with joy, and it marvels joyfully at such grace and consolation."¹

The Magnificat

Right after receiving the announcement from Gabriel that she was going to be the mother of the Christ, Mary went to visit her elderly cousin

Elizabeth, who was pregnant at the time with John the Baptist. As soon as Mary greeted her, Elizabeth's baby leaped within her womb, and filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth exclaimed:

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” (1:42-45, NIV)

In direct response to these words of blessing to her, Mary responds with her own Spirit-inspired words:

Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶ Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν κύριον,
⁴⁷ καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτηρὶ μου,
⁴⁸ ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ.
 ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί,
⁴⁹ ὅτι ἐποίησέν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός.
 καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,
⁵⁰ καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς
 τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν.
⁵¹ Ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ,
 διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους διανοοῖα καρδίας αὐτῶν·
⁵² καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων
 καὶ ὕψωσεν ταπεινοὺς,
⁵³ πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν
 καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξάπέστειλεν κενούς.
⁵⁴ ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ,
 μνησθῆναι ἐλέους,
⁵⁵ καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν,
 τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

Translation:

⁴⁶ My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit is overjoyed in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ because he has looked with care on the humble state of his servant-girl.
 For behold, from now on all generations will consider me blessed,
⁴⁹ because the Mighty One has done great things to me.

And holy is his name,

⁵⁰ and his mercy for generations and generations is for those who fear him.

⁵¹ He has done a mighty deed with his arm, scattering the arrogant in the thoughts of their hearts;

⁵² He has taken down kings from their thrones and has lifted up the humble,

⁵³ he has satisfied the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty.

⁵⁴ He has come to help Israel his dear servant, to remember mercy,

⁵⁵ just as he declared to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

When reading the Magnificat, the song practically screams, “Psalm!” Everything from the structure of the canticle to much of the content and imagery has roots in Old Testament poetry and songs of praise. The clearest comparison to make is between the Magnificat and Hannah’s song of praise in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Notice the similarities in terms of content and structure. Like Hannah, Mary speaks of the Lord’s help in the horn of salvation. Also, like Hannah, Mary marks that help in terms of reversals: the full become hungry and the hungry become full (1 Sa 2:5), humbling and exalting (2:7), etc.

The structural connection to Hebrew poetry in the song of Mary includes the use of parallelism as poetic device. Verses 46 and 47 are synonymous, essentially stating the same thing, but in a slightly different way: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit is overjoyed in God my Savior.” Verse 51 is a synthetic parallelism, where an idea is stated in the first half, then fleshed out more fully in the second half: “He has done a mighty deed with his arm, scattering the arrogant in the thoughts of their hearts.” A pair of antithetic parallels pops up in verses 52 and 53, where the second half of the verse states the opposite of the first half. Here is verse 52 as an example: “He has taken down kings from their thrones/ and has lifted up the humble.”

The Magnificat divides itself easily into two strophes: verses 46-49 and verses 50-55. In the first strophe (1:46-49) Mary declares the reasons for her praise and for her blessedness, as expressed by the two ὄτι clauses in verses 48 and 49. In the second strophe she gives praise for what Arthur A. Just, Jr. calls “The Great Reversal.”²²

Mary begins by declaring her praises to God. In verse 46 she states that her soul “magnifies (μεγαλύνει) the Lord.” Μεγαλύνει is actually the Septuagint equivalent of the Hebrew word לָבַח (to make

great). Origen makes the point that we cannot make God great ourselves, because, “The Lord can undergo neither increase nor loss. He is what he is.”⁵³ God is already self-magnifying. Where we can make God great is in the perceptions of other people. So Mary by her words about God brings him great glory and honor and praise, increasing him in our eyes.

This magnification and glorification of God comes from Mary’s soul (ἡ ψυχὴ), as also in verse 47 her spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα) is overjoyed, rejoicing in God her Savior. The synonymous parallelism here helps in our understanding. In the past some have distinguished between “soul” and “spirit,” but they are both referring to the nature of Mary’s praise. It is an inward praise and joy that flows from deep inside her.

Why? The ὅτι purpose clause in verse 48 gives an explanation: “because he has looked with care on the humble state (ταπεινώσειν) of his servant-girl.” That phrase, “humble state,” is important because it “announces the major theme of the Magnificat, and one of the major themes of the gospel, the Great Reversal.”⁵⁴ The paper will address that theme in depth later.

Mary takes the personal and applies it to the whole world in the second strophe (vv. 50-55). For a Gentile physician, Luke knows a surprising amount about poetry in general, and Hebrew poetry in particular. In these five verses Luke employs two chiasms, one within the other: an ABCC¹B¹A¹ chiasmic structure from verses 50 to 54, with an ABBA chiasm in C and C¹ (verses 52 and 53). The following illustration will serve to demonstrate.

A⁵⁰ and his mercy for generations and generations is for those who fear him.

B⁵¹ He has done a mighty deed with his arm,

scattering the arrogant in the thoughts of their hearts;

C⁵² He has taken down kings from their thrones (A)
and has lifted up the humble,

(B)

C^{1 53} he has satisfied the hungry with good things

(B)

and the rich he has sent away empty.

(A)

B^{1 54} He has come to help Israel his dear servant,

A¹ to remember mercy,

⁵⁵ just as he told to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

In the chiasmic forms we find the heart of Mary's song: the great reversal that was alluded to earlier. At the heart of the two chiasms is the heart of the reversal. Looking at the reversal itself, Mary states it in a couple of different ways. First, in verse 52 she says that God "has taken down kings from their thrones and has lifted up the humble." One only needs to look at Israel's history to see how God has taken down mighty kings from their thrones throughout the centuries—kings who thought they did not need the Lord. The truly mighty, though, in God's sight, are the humble, "who know how to say with the apostle, 'We can do all things in him who strengthens us, the Lord Jesus Christ' [Phil. 4:13]."⁵

In verse 53, Mary praises God by saying, "he has satisfied the hungry (πεινῶντας) with good things and the rich (πλουτοῦντας) he has sent away empty." It does not matter if the hunger is physical or spiritual, the Lord Jesus is there to satisfy it.

When he sits down with tax collectors and sinners, with the five thousand, with the Twelve at the Last Supper, with the Emmaus disciples after the resurrection, the presence of God at table with the hungry fills them with good things. Jesus, the humble child in the womb of this humble servant, shows God's hospitality to the world by coming to those who expect it least and bringing them salvation.⁶

Of course, pertaining to salvation, the spiritual hunger is the most important need. Jesus himself in the Beatitudes promises to fill it for us. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."⁷ Augustine rightly identifies the rich and the hungry by quoting Luke 18:10, "Two men went up to the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector."⁸

Moving out to the "B" level of the chiasm, Mary reveals in verse 51 that this Great Reversal takes a "mighty deed" (κράτος) done with the Lord's "arm" (βραχίονι). Mary is following the pattern of Psalm 118:15 and many other passages of Scripture where God's almighty power is personified in some way. Ironically, in this case, that almighty power is revealed in the sending of the humble Christ-child. The mighty deed is done when, in verse 54, "he has come to help (ἀντελάβετο) Israel his dear servant." The visitation Mary speaks of is like a doctor making a house call on his patients, whom he cares for deeply. Jesus comes and takes Israel under his own protection.⁹

Framing this reversal at both ends of the chiasm is God's mercy (ἔλεος). The Lord's mercy is the motive behind this Great Reversal for

the hungry and the humble. In verse 50 Mary speaks of his mercy being for generations and generations of those who fear him. God's mercy is universal. In verse 54 the Lord helps his servant Israel by carrying out salvation to remember (μνησθῆναι) his mercy. Verse 55 explains that the mercy God shows is mercy that was declared (ἐλάλησεν) "to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever."

Benedictus

Soon the time came for Elizabeth to have her baby. The relatives all wanted to name him after his father, Zechariah, but mother and father both remembered the name God wanted him to have: John. So Zechariah writes it down on a clay tablet, that his name is John, because God took away his speech as chastisement for his unbelief. When he wrote that name, though, his mouth was opened.¹⁰ According to Luke, this is what Zechariah said by inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

Luke 1:68-79

- ⁶⁸ Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ,
ὅτι ἐπεσκέψατο καὶ ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ,
⁶⁹ καὶ ἤγειρεν κέρασ σωτηρίας ἡμῖν
ἐν οἴκῳ Δαυὶδ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ,
⁷⁰ καθὼς ἐλάλησεν διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ' αἰῶνος προφητῶν
αὐτοῦ,
⁷¹ σωτηρίαν ἐξ ἐχθρῶν ἡμῶν καὶ ἐκ χειρὸς πάντων τῶν μισούντων
ἡμᾶς,
⁷² ποιῆσαι ἔλεος μετὰ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν
καὶ μνησθῆναι διαθήκης ἁγίας αὐτοῦ,
⁷³ ὄρκον ὃν ὤμοσεν πρὸς Ἀβραάμ τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν,
τοῦ δοῦναι ἡμῖν ⁷⁴ ἀφόβως ἐκ χειρὸς ἐχθρῶν ῥυσθέντας
λατρεύειν αὐτῷ ⁷⁵ ἐν ὀσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ
πάσαις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἡμῶν.
⁷⁶ Καὶ σὺ δέ, παιδίον, προφήτης ὑψίστου κληθήσῃ
προπορεύσῃ γὰρ ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἐτοιμάσαι ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ,
⁷⁷ τοῦ δοῦναι γινῶσιν σωτηρίας τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ
ἐν ἀφέσει ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν,
⁷⁸ διὰ σπλάγχνα ἐλέους θεοῦ ἡμῶν,
ἐν οἷς ἐπισκέπεται ἡμᾶς ἀνατολὴ ἐξ ὕψους,
⁷⁹ ἐπιφᾶναι τοῖς ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου καθημένους,
τοῦ κατευθῆναι τοὺς πόδας ἡμῶν εἰς ὁδὸν εἰρήνης.

Translation:

⁶⁸ Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
 because he has visited and made redemption for his people,
⁶⁹ and he has raised up a horn of salvation for us
 in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouths of his holy prophets from the
 beginning,
⁷¹ deliverance from our enemies and from the hands of everyone
 who hates us,
⁷² to do mercy with our fathers and to remember his holy
 covenant,
⁷³ the oath which he swore to Abraham our father,
 that he would permit us ⁷⁴ without fear, rescued from the hand of
 our enemies,
 to serve him ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness in his presence all
 our days.
⁷⁶ And also you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
 for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
⁷⁷ by granting knowledge of salvation to his people
 in the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ on account of the merciful guts of our God,
 by which the dawn from on high shall visit us,
⁷⁹ to enlighten those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death,
 to guide our feet into the way of peace.

While the Magnificat reads more like a psalm, the Benedictus, the song of Zechariah, reads more like an Old Testament prophecy. Of the three songs it is the most replete with references to the Old Testament, especially to the Psalms; to the prophets Isaiah, Micah, and Malachi; and to the salvation prophecies of Genesis and Exodus. Structurally the song is divided into two strophes, both of which are chiasmic.

Zechariah begins in verse 68 saying, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and made redemption for his people.” Literally, to “be spoken of well” in Greek, εὐλογητός, is the LXX equivalent to בָּרוּךְ in Hebrew, as in this parallel passage from Psalm 41:13 (40:14 in LXX):

εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα
 να γένοιτο γένοιτο. LXX
 Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to
 everlasting. Amen and Amen. (NIV)

In Mark 14:61 the “Blessed One” referred to is God himself. As in the Magnificat we find a verb for “visitation” (ἐπεσκέψατο). Again, we are speaking of God’s visitation to man for the purpose of bringing help. And that help comes in the form of redemption (λύτρωσις), strictly emphasizing the setting free from the bonds of slavery. Figuratively the noun can refer to deliverance, freedom, or liberation. Ἀπολύτρωσις is the form of the word that strictly refers to the buying back of someone.

In this song the central theme of salvation is connected to the notion of freedom: freedom from our enemies in verse 71, freedom from fear and freedom to serve the Lord in verses 74 and 75. Another primary salvation concept in this song is the “horn of salvation” (κέρας σωτηρίας) in verse 69. Horns—whether you are talking about weapons, shielding made from horns, horns as musical instruments, or horns on raging bulls—are symbols of power. Our salvation is a powerful salvation, brought about by the Lord our God in sending his Son.

The chiasmic structures in this canticle deal with two different subjects: verses 68 to 75 connect the present salvation with past promises of salvation; the chiasm from verse 76 to verse 79 highlights the role that John would fulfill when he grew up. Here is the first chiasm:

⁶⁸ Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,

because he has visited and made redemption for his people,

⁶⁹ and he has raised up a horn of salvation for us

A

in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouths of his holy prophets from the beginning, B

⁷¹ deliverance from our enemies and from the hands of everyone who hates us, C

⁷² to do mercy with our fathers

C¹

and to remember his holy covenant,

B¹

⁷³ the oath which he swore to Abraham our father,

that he would permit us ⁷⁴ without fear, rescued from the hand of our enemies, A¹

to serve him ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our

days.

As you can see, God’s mercy (ἐλέους) is at or near the heart of both chiasmic structures. In verse 72 God puts mercy into practice for our fathers through the deliverance from our enemies and from the hand of everyone who hates us. Right away the reader often assumes that Zechariah is talking about the deliverance that Jesus won for us from the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. Yet Zechariah is not specific about who those enemies are. Though our spiritual enemies need to be our primary concern when we read this, it applies to all enemies—enemies of the gospel, people who hate Christians because of who they are and what they believe. One day, though, the hatred will stop; they will all be gone.

Moving outward from the center in the first chiasm, God spoke this merciful deliverance “through the mouths of his holy prophets from the beginning” (in verse 70) and was carried out “to remember his holy covenant” (verse 72b). Zechariah reminds his listeners that the redemption of mercy, carried out for the fathers, was promised to the fathers from the beginning through prophets and by the covenant sworn to Abraham and upheld in the house of David (verses 73 and 69). Finally, by setting them free from the hand of their enemies, his people could serve him without fear (verses 68 and 69, along with 74 and 75).

One of the goals behind our salvation is to return us to the image of God—holy, righteous, without blemish or defect. When that happens, we can serve God *in his presence*. Right now that is something that sinful people cannot do. We would die if we saw God in his naked glory. So Jesus comes into our presence as one of us, so that one day we can serve him in his holy presence without the fear that Isaiah had when he faced the throne of the Almighty.¹¹

Here is the second chiasm:

⁷⁶ And also you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

A

⁷⁷ by granting knowledge of salvation to his people

B

in the forgiveness of their sins,

C

⁷⁸ on account of the guts of mercy of our God,

D

by which the dawn from on high shall visit us,

C¹

⁷⁹ to enlighten those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death,
 B¹
 to guide our feet into the way of peace.
 A¹

The second chiasm is far less complex than Zechariah's first. At the heart of the chiasm again is God's mercy in verse 78, but this time it is the "guts of mercy" (σπλάγχνα ἐλέους) of God. In Greek culture and society, the seat of a person's feelings lay in their bowels, not in their hearts. Perhaps it had something to do with the way emotions affect a person's digestion. Who knows? Suffice it to say, taking "mercy" as a genitive of description and looking for the best dynamic equivalent for "guts," "merciful heart" would be an acceptable translation.

The two "C" levels connect that merciful heart to the forgiveness of sin in verse 77b, along with the reason for our visit from "the dawn" in verse 78b, the dawn being an image of the Christ—the sunrise as a picture of Christmas. In the "B" levels Zechariah moves us out to knowledge. Forgiveness through the visitation of the dawn from on high is the "knowledge of salvation" in verse 77. That knowledge—knowledge that is thorough and complete when it comes to God's mercy in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins—will "enlighten those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death" (verse 79). Finally, out in the "A"s, John's purpose is shown: to go ahead of the Lord to "prepare the way" for him (verse 76). While he is doing that work of preparation on our hearts he is also guiding our feet "into the way of peace" (verse 79).

Nunc Dimittis

Simeon was waiting for what every righteous and devout man was waiting for: "the consolation of Israel."¹² Only now he was waiting with eyes wide open because the Holy Spirit had promised him that he would get to see what he had been waiting for all this time. Simeon would get to see the Lord's Christ. That day in the temple courts when he picked up that forty-day old baby in his arms; the amazement! He knew that what he had been waiting for was finally here! That amazement found voice in the words he spoke to this baby who was God in the hearing of his earthly parents:

Luke 2:29-32

²⁹ νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου, δέσποτα,
κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ·

³⁰ ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου,

³¹ ὃ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν,

³² φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἔθνῶν

καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ.

Translation:

²⁹ Now, set free your servant, Master,
according to your word, in peace;

³⁰ because my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all the peoples,

³² a light for the revelation to the gentiles
and for glory of your people Israel.

The time is “now” (νῦν). “Now” governs the whole canticle. *Now* you set your servant free. Salvation “is ‘now’ in this tiny child that Simeon holds in his arms.”¹³ It is *now* for all people, whether Jew or Gentile.

Most translations render ἀπολύεις as “dismiss” or “let depart.” Yet the verb ἀπολύω chiefly means to “set free.” It can mean “divorce,” as it does in Matthew 19:3, 7, 8, 9. It is also used in the context of releasing prisoners, as in Matthew 27. “Set free” or “dismiss” makes the most sense, though, because of the context. “Set free” best illustrates the relationship between this servant (δοῦλος) and his Master (δέσποτα). From what is Simeon being set free? It could be his time of grace and service to God. More than likely it is the prison of his sin-and-death-ridden flesh, as Origen thinks.¹⁴ Even with all the fear that death brings, when the soul finally embraces Christ by the Spirit’s power and work, the disciple of Christ quietly prays for the day when he or she will be set free from sin and death for all eternity. Only in Christ can one find death to be a threshold crossed in true peace (ἐν εἰρήνῃ), as Simeon now was able. “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”¹⁵

Simeon bases his request on the sure word of God. He says, “Now, set free your servant, Master, according to your word” (κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου). Luke plainly says that the Spirit revealed to him that he would not die before seeing Christ.¹⁶ Yet, on further consideration, the whole Christian’s life is lived “according to your word,” trusting the promises that the Lord has given us in Jesus Christ. Mary, when Gabriel announced his good news to her, replied, “Let it happen for me according to your word.”¹⁷

Simeon is ready for this life to be over because, as he says in verse

30, “My eyes have seen your salvation.” Visible “salvation” (σωτήριον) means only one thing: the baby cradled in his arms was the Savior. By his words, Simeon does us a valuable service, reassuring us even further that Jesus is the Christ. “He explains what salvation is. It is not some mere active force... What then is salvation?... The Son, who is from God, is our God. He himself is also the Savior of the human race.”¹⁸ Jesus himself said, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.”¹⁹

In verse 31 Simeon tells us that this salvation was “prepared in the presence of all people” (ἡτοιμάσας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν). κατὰ πρόσωπον literally means “face to face.” In 2 Corinthians 10:7 the phrase refers to what is “right in front of the face.” The Lord’s salvation, in its planning and in its execution, has been painfully obvious. From Genesis 3:15 to Malachi 3:1 the Lord has given us prophecy after prophecy about how the salvation would come about. Even when Jesus died, the Roman centurion figured it out: “Surely this man was the Son of God!”²⁰ This salvation has been prepared before the face of all people because it is meant for all people. God “wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.”²¹ Salvation is universal and objective. It does not matter if you are a three-year old or just arrived at the ripe age of ninety-two. Salvation is meant for everyone.

Race does not matter in the kingdom of God. Jesus, our salvation, is a “light for revelation to the Gentiles” (φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν), as Simeon states in verse 32. The prophet Isaiah records the Lord’s words to his Suffering Servant, the Christ: “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.”²² Jesus is not just a “light” (φῶς), but a light with a purpose: “for revelation (ἀποκάλυψιν) to the Gentiles.” Simeon sees Jesus as salvation revealed, meant for all the nations.

Jesus is also a “light” (φῶς) for “the glory (δόξαν) of... Israel.” According to Isaiah 46:13 salvation brings splendor to Israel. Cyril of Alexandria refers to the remnant of Israel, those faithful who were saved through Christ. The first fruits of that group, according to St. Cyril, were the twelve disciples. Their brightness “lightens the whole world.”²³

Prophetic Canticles

All three of these songs have an inherently prophetic character. In verse 48 of Mary’s Magnificat, she points ahead to centuries of recognition of the fact that she was blessed, all because of the coming Christ-child. At the same time speaking of things past, present, and future, verses 52-53

of the Magnificat speak of kings taken down and humble people lifted up, hungry people filled and the rich sent away empty. Even before the Savior was born, Zechariah in the Benedictus spoke of salvation as if it were already completed. Simeon points ahead to the Christ as the light of the world, enlightening Gentiles and glorifying Israel.

One major textual component that all three hymns of praise share is the use of the aorist indicative. In non-poetic writing, with reference to time the aorist indicates action already taken, already completed, not invading on present time. However, these three songs were not sung by Greeks, but by people who spoke a Semitic language (more than likely Aramaic). There is no concept of an aorist in the language itself. However, the aorist, in terms of prophecy, comes closest to the perfect tense of Hebrew or Aramaic.²⁴ For this reason, translators tend to render the aorist tense verbs in these songs as though they were Semitic language perfect tense verbs. This prophetic aorist in Greek works like the prophetic perfect in Hebrew. The usage of that aorist tense and the completed action implied in all three songs reminds us that God's promises and prophecies are as good as being done already, even if they have not happened yet.

Canticles of Promises Kept

These three songs are also hymns celebrating God's fulfilled promises in the coming of Jesus Christ. Many of these promises were made long ago, to the fathers and forefathers, going all the way back to the patriarchs. Mary points to the fact that the Lord, God her Savior, accomplishes all the wonderful blessings in order to "remember mercy, just as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever."²⁵ Zechariah speaks of the God of Israel showing mercy "as he spoke through the mouths of the holy prophets from the beginning... to our fathers and remembering his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to Abraham and to our fathers."²⁶ Simeon infers promises kept to Israel when he speaks of baby Jesus as the light "for glory to your people Israel."²⁷

Each of these songs personally praises God for promises kept to the original singers. Mary tells of how the mighty Lord has done great things for her.²⁸ Zechariah, in a shift of focus, turns to his own newborn son and prophesies, "And also you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High."²⁹ Simeon's song is all about the special word that he had received from God concerning himself through the Spirit.

Canticles of God's Salvation

Five blind men are out in the African savannah, when they come across something they cannot figure out. One felt a big, round, floppy thing in his hands from which air was coming out the end. Another felt wiry hairs, as from a wire brush. Another felt what seemed like a giant tree trunk, and so on. Put the images together, and what emerges? It is an elephant. Similarly, taken together, these three hymns provide a good look at what salvation really is in Christ. Salvation is both personal and universal, according to Mary and Simeon. Salvation in Christ Jesus involves a great reversal—the proud scattered, the humble lifted up, etc.—in the lives of many people. Zechariah sees salvation as deliverance from enemies, connected to the forgiveness of sins. Simeon's eyes laid hold of the light of the Gentiles. All these different images of salvation are wrapped together in peace and mercy, recorded in all three songs.

Canticles for Worship

Let there be here a distinction between theory and practice. The canticles express various aspects of worship theory, i.e., how and why we worship. Mary proclaims her deep, heartfelt worship of the Lord, of being overjoyed at God her Savior. Why? God is great. “The Mighty One has done great things to me.” For Zechariah, our lives as saved people involve constant worship—meaning the idea of service to God. In fact, it comes across in the Benedictus clearly that we are saved to serve. Simeon's song to the young infant Christ, where he expresses his desire for God to let him go into eternal life, reminds us that worship is the expression of one who is heavenly minded. Again, all these “hows” and “whys” are wrapped together and identified with God's mercy as revealed in Christ.

In practice, these three songs have been in use nearly as long as the church has stood. Today, we still find the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis in the ELH Vespers service. It is fitting when one considers the appropriateness of the subject matter at the end of the day: considering the Lord's blessings in the Magnificat, praying Simeon's song as our prayer for dismissal, not from worship, but from this life into the next. The Benedictus on the other hand is reserved for early risers in the Matins service. The Nunc Dimittis especially finds an appropriate home following the Lord's Supper in any service where the sacrament is celebrated. The Sacrament of the Altar is the closest we get to seeing (though we touch and taste) our Savior and his redemption won for us by His body and blood. If people truly understand the sacrament, they also understand that, in their

own way, they have taken the humble baby Jesus in their arms and looked him in the eye and seen the powerful salvation that Jesus is.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this analytical and synthetic study of these important songs has at least stirred the mind and the heart by more clearly revealing Jesus as our Christ and Savior. My prayer is that ultimately, this essay has reinforced the notion that Luther put forth: *Die ganze Schrift treibt Christum*—The entire Scripture points to Christ.

Bibliography

- Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by K. Elliger & W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990.
- Friberg, B. & T. *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (electronic edition). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000.
- Just, Arthur A., ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament III, Luke*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Just, Arthur A., Jr. *Luke 1:1-9:50*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*, vol. 52. Edited by Hans J. Hillerbrand. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974.
- LXX Septuaginta*. Edited by Alfred Rahlfs. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935.
- Newman, Barclay M, Jr. *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993.
- Novum Testamentum Graece*. Nestle-Aland, 27th rev. ed. Edited by Barbara & Kurt Aland, et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993.
- St. Ambrose of Milan. *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*. Translated by Theodosia Tomkinson. Etna, California: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998.
- St. Cyril of Alexandria. *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. United States: Studion Publishers, Inc., 1983.

Endnotes

- ¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Volume 52, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 104.
- ² Arthur A. Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 79.
- ³ Arthur A. Just, Jr., ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament III, Luke* (hereafter, *ACCS III*) (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 24.
- ⁴ Just, 79.
- ⁵ The Venerable Bede, *ACCS III*, 26.
- ⁶ Just, 86.
- ⁷ NIV Matthew 5:6.
- ⁸ Augustine, *ACCS III*, 26.
- ⁹ The Venerable Bede, *ACCS III*, 27.
- ¹⁰ Read Luke 1:57-67.
- ¹¹ Isaiah 6.
- ¹² Luke 2:25 (NIV).
- ¹³ Just, 116.
- ¹⁴ Origen, *ACCS III*, 48. Not just Origen, but also St. Ambrose of Milan: "Behold, the just man, as if enclosed in the prison of the body, wishing to be set free, so that he can begin to be with Christ" (St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson [Etna, California: Center for Traditionalist Studies, 1998]).
- ¹⁵ Philippians 1:23 (NIV).
- ¹⁶ Luke 2:26 (NIV).
- ¹⁷ Luke 1:38.
- ¹⁸ Basil the Great, *ACCS III*, p. 49. Sorry, *Star Wars* fans. "The Force" is nothing in comparison to Jesus.
- ¹⁹ Luke 10:23 (NIV).
- ²⁰ Mark 15:39 (NIV).
- ²¹ 1 Timothy 2:4 (NIV).
- ²² Isaiah 42:6 (NIV; italics added).
- ²³ Cyril of Alexandria, *ACCS III*, 50.
- ²⁴ Hebrew, for example, has only two tenses: perfect and imperfect; either an action is done, or it is not done yet.
- ²⁵ Verses 54-55.
- ²⁶ Verses 70, 72-73.
- ²⁷ 2:32.
- ²⁸ 1:49.
- ²⁹ 1:76.

Refocusing a Congregation on Its Mission

by Edward L. Bryant

The program committee for the conference assigned the topic “Refocusing a Congregation on Its Mission.” In asking me to deliver the paper it referenced similar efforts with which I have been involved over the years. It is on that basis that I make this presentation to the conference. This is not a scholarly sociological study in which different plans are followed and subjected to a system of measurement to determine which shows more success. It is reflection based upon experience and referenced to scriptural principles and to some key understandings to which I have come over the years.

Here is a brief preview of our discussion.

- 1) **What is the mission of a congregation?**
- 2) **What are scriptural examples of churches that lost their focus on their mission or that refocused their vision?**
- 3) **How do we determine the current focus of a congregation and whether it needs to be changed?**
- 4) **How does Christ refocus congregations on their mission?**
- 5) **How can the contemporary church adapt the way we bring the Word to the contemporary Christian congregation in such special cases?**
- 6) **Conclusion: How do these things all work together to serve our Christ-centered ministry?**

1) What is the mission of a congregation?

The term “mission” is used once in the NIV New Testament, and not at all in the KJV. The case where it is used in the NIV is in Acts 12:25 where it is used of Paul and Barnabas and their “mission” to bring financial help to the beleaguered believers in Jerusalem. The Greek there is *διακονία* and can be translated “ministry” (KJV) or “service.” When we think of it that way, all Christians individually and collectively are called upon to perform various services according to their station.

When we use the term “mission” in the vernacular, we are drawing from modern management theory and then applying it to the church. According to modern management theory, the mission of an organization is its purpose, its reason for being.¹ Peter Drucker, an influential 20th-

century management theorist, maintained that understanding and clearly stating the mission of an organization contributed greatly to its success. The mission statement could state the purpose of an organization as it is, or as it is desired to be.

There are a number of well-known accounts of the effect of mission statements. Consider the significance of The Coca-Cola Company describing itself as a company that “refreshes people” instead of “manufacturing carbonated beverages.”²² How much of the milk or water you drink comes from The Coca-Cola Company? Another example is Xerox. When its mission statement says that it is a company that intends “to help people find better ways to do great work,”²³ it gives insight into the fact that it doesn’t just make copy machines.

Should we use terminology borrowed from modern management theory to talk about the purpose and work of Christ’s church? Obviously, we ARE doing just that, or this topic wouldn’t have been assigned. It is a practice, however, that should be carried out with some caution. As used in management theory, the term implies that the mission of an organization is not only discovered or revealed, but molded. In fact, the ability to change the mission of an organization is valuable in an environment where continued profitability depends upon the ability to adapt. That is how Smith-Corona, the typewriter manufacturer, was able to become one of the larger manufacturers of small arms during World War II.

It is just such an attitude that has changed the mission of some church bodies so as to make them social service agencies or political pressure groups. We want none of that.

On the other hand there are a couple of other aspects of the terms “mission” and “mission statement” that can be useful. In the first place there is the process of writing a mission statement. The process of writing a mission statement is not just to craft a classy slogan; it is to examine the purpose of the organization so carefully that nothing is taken for granted. Those involved in the process go beyond presumption to a real examination of the purpose of the organization.

In the second place, there is the clarity of purpose that is communicated by the mission statement. A well-written mission statement states the purpose of an organization in a way that is difficult to misunderstand or dismiss, and it serves as a measure of whether the activity of the organization is actually devoted to its purpose.

Can the terminology of “mission” be sanctified and applied to our work as Christian congregations? The answer is, “Yes, but carefully.”

- a) What is the mission of all congregations?

Rather than *devise* our mission and our mission statements as businesses and other organizations do, in Christian congregations we *discover* our mission and express our mission statements accordingly. Of course we discover our mission in the Scriptures where Christ the Lord of the church speaks to us, and as pastors we have the responsibility to see to it that God's Word guides us in an activity that can have broad ramifications.

Without using the terminology, the Scriptures do lay out the purpose, the "mission" for which Christ himself gathers believers together. In the following references we see a variation on the constant theme of the use of Word and Sacrament and the body of Christ zealous to do good works.

Make Disciples through Baptism and the Gospel Matthew 28:19-20 ^{19c}"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Feed the Flock on the Word Acts 20:28 ²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Exercise Church Discipline According to Christ's Word Matthew 18:15-20 ^{15c}"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. ^{18c}"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ^{19c}Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Preach the Gospel and Administer the Sacraments Acts 2:42 ⁴²And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Maintain Unity through the Word 1 Corinthians 1:10 ¹⁰Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together

in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Send out Missionaries Acts 13:2-3 ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Build Up Christians through the Word Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Remain Faithful to the Confession of Christ’s Word Galatians

3:1-3 ¹You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

²I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?

³Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Glorify Christ Ephesians 1:11-12 ¹¹In him we were also

chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Gather Together around the Word To Uphold the Gospel and To Encourage One Another in Faith and Love Hebrews

10:22-25 ²²[L]et us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,

for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,

but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Serve in Purity of Life Titus 2:11-14 ¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹²It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-

controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us

to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Work Together in Good Works 2 Corinthians 8:7 ⁷But just as

you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

From these we can put together a general statement of the mission of a congregation, namely that the mission of a Christian congregation is to gather together in unity around the means of grace to be built up in faith and good works and to work together to spread the good news. This could be amplified significantly (in which case it would be an expression of our mission, but not a mission statement) or it could be condensed to something like, “Serving Christ in faith and one another in love,” or “To know Christ and to make Christ known.”

- b) What is the mission of a congregation in particular circumstances?

While our mission is given to us by our Lord, the particular circumstances of a congregation may serve to focus on one or another aspect of the mission Christ has given us. One way this is done is by understanding the relationship between our *mission* and our *vision*. While the mission of a congregation will not change, a vision statement serves to address the immediate challenges we face in carrying out our mission. It is a statement of what we intend, by God’s grace, to *do* about our mission. We may intend to open a school or build a new sanctuary in order to “know Christ and make Christ known.” We may agree together to break out of our groups of friends and relatives before and after services in order to make visitors feel welcome. We may agree to study the liturgy together to better understand how it helps us to know Christ.

- c) What is the significance of the role of Law and Gospel in the mission of a congregation, especially when we believe a refocusing is called for?

Because a mission and vision statement is an expression of what we should be and do it is inherently an expression of the Law. The reason we may want to refocus the congregation on its mission and vision is not to motivate the people, but for the sake of clarity as God’s people desire to do his will. It may also be for reproof or for correction because a congregation has lost its focus on its mission.

- 2) What are scriptural examples of congregations that lost their focus on their mission?**

a) What do we see in Acts?

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is very instructive in that we see the church constant in its mission, but with its vision frequently undergoing revision. Jesus had told the apostles, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). He also laid out the general plan of the mission campaign: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

So it was that the church in general and the apostles in particular were faithful to the mission Christ had set before them. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

When circumstances and personalities began to distract the church from its mission a refocusing occurred, at least once in a very shocking way. Remember in Acts 4 we hear that the church held property in common. Unfortunately, for Ananias and Sapphira the focus shifted from service in Christ to a search for personal fame. When they met their deaths, “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events” (Acts 5:11).

In the next chapter of Acts we hear specifically that the time and effort of the disciples was shifting away from preaching and teaching to other things. The apostles decided to address the issue: “So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them’” (Acts 6:2-3). The refocusing of their vision permitted the twelve to be occupied more fully in the word: “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

While the church was faithful to its mission, its vision changed appropriately over time from reaching out to their fellow Jews to reaching out to the whole world. The church of Acts 6 was centered in Jerusalem and on the Jews. Even the “Grecian widows” mentioned were probably Hellenistic Jews. Things begin to change in chapter 8 where we learn, “On that day [the day of Stephen’s martyrdom] a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered

throughout Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). We get a hint of further change when the Lord instructs Ananias to go to Saul; when Ananias hesitates, Jesus tells him, ““Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel”” (Acts 9:15).

Soon after this, Peter is visited by the vision of the unclean animals and by Cornelius, causing Peter to declare, “...I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34-35). Peter was called upon to explain his offensive fellowship with Gentiles before the church in Jerusalem. He told them what had happened, and “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life’” (Acts 11:18).

Eventually, in chapter 13, we find that the church selects Paul and Barnabas specifically to bring the gospel to the Gentile regions, going first to the Jews in the synagogues and then to the Gentiles. “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3).

If I may editorialize here a little bit, allow me to point out how difficult it was for the early church to speak to those who were “other.” Likewise I frequently hear young people who have come through our institutions express dismay at not being prepared to engage people outside the pale of midwestern quasi-Christianity. We also have a hard time speaking, witnessing to, and engaging those on “the outside” of our comfortable little world.

So we see a great change in the vision of the church in the way it will carry out the mission of “teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42). It goes from meeting in the temple courts in Jerusalem preaching to Jews to engaging with Gentiles in the capitals of their own culture and civilization.

b) What do the epistles to the churches show?

The epistles of Paul to the churches provide additional examples of congregations who adjusted their mission and vision. For the sake of time we will consider only Corinth and the churches of Galatia and Thessalonica, and then only in broad strokes.

i) Corinth

The church in Corinth had so many problems that saying that it had need of “refocusing on its mission” could only be an understatement.

Contention, licentiousness, rebellion, and disbelief afflicted the church. Luther said of them, “Things got so wild and disorderly that everyone wanted to be the expert and do the teaching and make what he pleased of the gospel, the Sacrament, and faith. Meanwhile they let the main thing drop—namely, that Christ is our salvation, righteousness, and redemption—as if they had long since outgrown it” (LW 35:381).⁴

Between the two epistles, however, much improved. Christian discipline was begun, to be completed when the excommunicated person was reinstated. Many of the people became reconciled to one another and to Paul. Finally the Gospel, the Sacrament, and faith came to be better appreciated. It can be instructive to us to consider this in terms of a refocusing on the mission and vision that Christ set before them through His apostle.

ii) Galatia

In the Galatian churches seemingly sincere Christians had come from Judea and were teaching that the way to Christianity was only through Judaism and the observance of circumcision and other ceremonial laws. This really raises the question of the mission of the church. Is it to proclaim the full and free salvation of Christ, or is it to establish a code of behavior? By mingling the Law and the Gospel, the people had lost sight of the unconditional Gospel and were focusing upon the outward adherence to the Mosaic Law.

iii) Thessalonica

The church in Thessalonica was suffering persecution. Think of all the temptations to lose sight of the mission of the church! Nevertheless, the church remained steadfast in the faith. That still didn't stop Paul from writing to reassure them that Christ would rescue, reward, perfect, resurrect, and sanctify all who trust in God's grace. Particularly it appears that he corrected a misunderstanding of the resurrection under which they were suffering, assuring them that those who had died before Christ's return were not lost to them, but would be reunited with them on the Last Day.

c) What do the letters show that were written to the churches in the Revelation of St. John?

Of particular interest in the matter of refocusing a congregation is the group of letters addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2-3. In the letters that the Lord of the Church directed to these congregations Christ addressed ways in which these churches had lost their focus, and even when not, he lent encouragement and direction. Surely every pastor in reading these letters has asked himself if the reproof

or the encouragement or the direction that Jesus brings applies to his own congregation.

i) Ephesus

Jesus said, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (Revelation 2:4-5).

How easy it is for our attention to drift from our call to faithfully proclaim God’s Word and to administer the Sacraments! Ephesus was a major congregation and was prospering by human measure. What had distracted the church from its first love, which would presumably be Christ and his Gospel? What would John have felt as he wrote this, having had (it is thought) a very strong connection with Ephesus prior to his exile? To lose our first love is enough to endanger our lampstand, that is, to endanger our mission of being the light of the world.

ii) Smyrna

Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Jesus leveled no criticism at the church at Smyrna and had praise for the church at Philadelphia. Nevertheless he offered encouragement and direction to the church at Smyrna in the famous words just quoted. This reminds us that when we are focused on our mission and are diligent to be faithful in Word and Sacrament, we are still to resist the siren’s songs that would lead us into more “practical” or “popular” directions.

iii) Pergamum

Jesus said, “Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Revelation 2:14-16).

Balaam told the pagan women how to lead the Israelite men into sexual immorality and worship of their idols. The Nicolaitans were an heretical sect that justified compromising with the pagan world and engaging in pagan practices in the name of religious liberty; they hoped to avoid the condemnation that came from the pagan world when the Christians refused to take part in the immoral pagan practices. We could say that in Pergamum the spirit of compromise had diverted many from

their focus on the truth.

iv) Thyatira

Jesus said, “Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. . . . Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come” (Revelation 2:20, 24-25).

Our Lord found fault with the church in Thyatira for its toleration of a woman who is epithetically called Jezebel. It appears that there was immorality within the congregation that was promoted by some and tolerated by others, possibly in the name of being more spiritual and initiated people. Yet there were some who were not tolerant, and who opposed the iniquity. Jesus tells them to “hold on.”

v) Sardis

Jesus said, “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you’” (Revelation 3:1-3).

In his letter to Timothy, Paul warns that in the latter days there will be those “having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them” (2 Timothy 3:5). We also remember the words of James: “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17). There are those who have the appearance of spiritual life in their congregation, but who are really dead. The “nominal Christian” of today, appearing around the church and the Word only to be “hatched, matched and dispatched,” might be a good example of what Jesus is talking about. Recently we acknowledged a number of people at St. Timothy to have “excluded themselves from the Christian congregation.” It was pointed out to me that in a nearby church this would never have been done, they would have remained members, just “inactive,” yet with every expectation of Christian burial, or communion when they turned up in ten years at a relative’s first communion. Surely the indifferent and the complacent, the Christians in name only, will be most sorrowful when Jesus returns “like a thief” and finds no faith in them.

Jesus goes on to acknowledge that there are some who have not

“soiled their clothes,” and will remain in the book of life.

vi) Philadelphia

Jesus said, “I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).

As with the faithful members of the church at Thyatira, when Jesus praises the church in Philadelphia for having endured patiently He tells them to “hold on.” As with the church at Smyrna, the concern is not that the church should refocus on its mission, but that it doesn’t change. When things are not going well in the church by outward appearances it may be that we have lost our way. It may also be that it is a time of sowing rather than reaping, so that we are really called to hold on to the truth and the precious gospel that we have.

vii) Laodicea

Jesus said, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:15-17).

In the ruins of Laodicea you can still see the city fountain. Because it was fed by the hot springs of Hierapolis which were piped across from the opposite side of the Lycos River, the fountain in the heart of the city gushed forth lukewarm water. You can still see the pipes plugged with carbonates that precipitated as the water cooled. The city was very wealthy – so much so that they rejected “federal aid” from Rome when an earthquake nearly destroyed the city.

Jesus used these characteristics of the city to convey the spiritual poverty and complacency of the Christians at Laodicea. They did not hate their sin and desire the riches of Christ’s righteousness. They did not acknowledge their blindness and desire the salve of God’s Word that would heal their blindness. The horrors of sin and the riches of God’s grace were not to them the terror and the joy that they should have been. So also today, churches grow dull to the reality of the cosmic battle in which we are engaged.

3) How do we determine the current focus of a congregation and whether it needs to be changed?

We can see from the foregoing examples that even though the church has one mission, this mission is carried out according to a vision more attuned to the time and place in which we serve. In addition, we can

see that congregations may lose focus as they face different challenges, deceptions, and temptations.

So what shall we do? Are we to consider whether our congregation has lost its focus? Paul gave us one example. He left the elders of Ephesus a stiff charge when he summoned them to Miletus on his way to Jerusalem. He said,

Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. (Acts 20:25-31)

As shepherds of the church of God, we have an obligation to be sure that we are preaching the whole counsel of God to our people and to preach the message of sin and grace relevantly, pointing out *our* sin and *our* forgiveness as a congregation. It would be nice if we could be sure that just because we are, well, *us*, that we could be sure that we are guiding and leading and focusing upon the true mission that Christ has given to his church. However, we too are but dust; we too need to evaluate our work continually according to the unchanging Word of the Lord of the Church, our true Shepherd.

We do well to examine our congregation and the spiritual climate in which we live and work so that we can determine if we are focused on our mission and have a vision to carry it out.

- a) What can we learn from the reputation of a congregation in the community?

It isn't a matter of whether the church is liked, after all, because we surely do not want to be like the Nicolaitans, but we can get an idea of what we are actually doing as a congregation when we hear a consistent assessment of our church. I was aware of one church, for example, that had a terrible reputation in the community. As one knowledgeable member of the community put it, "I'm sure they love Jesus, but they don't seem to

like anybody else.” It seems the members of the church were so concerned about neighbors using the basketball hoops and the jungle gym that they ran everybody off. Is that our main mission as Christians, to keep the neighbors off the playground?

b) What can we learn from regular visitation with our members?

As most of us know, there is no substitute for being in the homes of our members. Maybe even more important is being with them at the social occasions that they don't think of as a “pastoral visit.” It is amazing what pastors can learn about the real spiritual condition of their people from unguarded comments. Don't be surprised at the confused state of our teens who will say that fornication is wrong, but that it's OK to have sex with your boy/girl friend; or that God created the earth and the world, but that *homo erectus* is an ancestor of *homo sapiens*. Don't be surprised if a leader in your women's group is surprised that we are opposed to women pastors or homosexual marriage. Don't be surprised because, after all, they are often more likely than we to be influenced by the consensus of the major opinion molders. The church and Christ's Word may for them be just one source of their values and opinions, especially when we don't address such issues in our teaching and preaching.

c) What can we learn from the local newspapers, schools, churches, and other indicators of the spiritual climate in which our people live and work?

It is not uncommon for pastors to have family and friends that are deeply involved in the church. Do we have any idea of the spiritual climate in which the other people live? We may make fun of evolution without realizing the profound intellectual appeal that the local science teacher has in dealing with our teenagers. It is important that as a congregation we preach God's Word faithfully, not only as it pertains to the issues with which we grew up, but also as it pertains to the Jezebels and the Nicolaitans of our own day.

In addition to regular visitation, it may also be helpful to stay abreast of local current events. It is often there that we can begin to gage the spiritual climate in which our people are living.

d) What can we learn from a dispassionate reflection upon our congregation?

Sometimes it is good to take a two- or three-week vacation and come back with as much cancelled as possible. Throw away all the to-do lists before you leave, and when you get back, try to look at the congregation as

you did when you first arrived. Try to throw out assumptions and previous conclusions. It may be that the members have grown according to our strengths and failed to grow where we ourselves are weak as a shepherd.

- e) What can we learn from a visit by our circuit visitor?

A circuit visitor or consultant may provide insight, possibly because people will tell him things they won't tell you. He may also have had more or different experiences. I remember Ron Heins came to Bethany-Port Orchard from the parish management office of the WELS while we were planning to move and rebuild. Our planning horizon was the completion of the new building. He recommended that we get to work planning how we were going to make use of the new sanctuary as part of the mission and vision of the congregation. It helped to keep our focus on Word and Sacrament rather than on bricks and mortar.

- f) What can we learn from prayer requests?

Another thing often done in connection with an every-member visit is the collection of prayer requests. What people put on prayer requests, especially if anonymous, is often at a deeper level of communication than what we talk about over coffee. This can help us measure the actual focus of our congregation as well.

- g) What can we learn from mission statements, constitutions, annual plans and other documents?

Because our people love our Lord, sometimes the process of writing a mission or vision statement will be sufficiently self-revelatory for our people to see where their focus has shifted from what it should be. Because we do (or should!) turn to the Word as a guide for our mission and vision the process may help the leadership of the congregation particularly refocus and lead the congregation accordingly.

4) How does Christ refocus congregations on their mission?

- a) How does Jesus refocus the congregations of Revelation in Asia Minor?
 b) How is the Word of Christ delivered to the congregations of Revelation?

The short answer is that he sent them a letter. This is significant, because it means that Jesus continues to rule and govern his church through his holy Word. We see this in the following examples. In the example of the Colossians, we see that it was the intent of Christ through His apostle

to have the letter read throughout the other churches as well.

- “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours...” (1 Corinthians 1:1-2).
- “Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...” (Galatians 1:1-3).
- “Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you...” (1 Thessalonians 1:1).
- “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands...” (Revelation 1:19-2:1).
- “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.... After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea” (Colossians 1:1-2; 4:16).

It would seem that a number of factors worked together to make this a very effective means to reach all the members of the congregations with the entire message that Christ and his apostle wanted them to hear. I may place more emphasis on these factors than they deserve, but consider the following circumstances that made the communication of the complete message to all the members of a congregation easier, in a sense, even than now in an age of communication.

- The existence of persecution made complacency and indifference to the message less of an issue.
- The regular worship would include practically every member of the congregation each week.
- The worship practices, which may have included the reading of

one or more complete letters during an individual service, as well as the repeated reading of a complete letter or book of the Bible, over time permitted a more thorough exposure to the message of God's Word.

- The more didactic style of preaching, as well as much longer time devoted to preaching, enabled a more thorough instillation of the Word of God in the people.
- The relative paucity of communication of any kind made it easier to learn and digest the communication that was received.
- The people were trained to learn by listening. Even the existence of structures such as the *odea* tell us that gathering groups to pass on information orally was common.

5) How can the contemporary church adapt the way we bring the Word to the contemporary Christian congregation in such special cases?

This is a key element of this presentation. If we want to communicate crucial information to everyone in our congregation, how would we do so? Putting it another way, if we want to communicate God's Word regarding the mission and vision of the congregation in its completeness to everyone in the congregation with a proper balance of Law and Gospel, how would we do it? Let's look at some of the challenges.

a) What characterizes the contemporary congregation?

The sainted pastor Adolf Loeber explained to me once how he was able to minister to a flock of 800-1000 souls as a solo pastor in Detroit during the early 20th century. I had asked him how he took care of all the counseling, discipline, meetings, etc. He told me that all of his members lived within an area within which he could easily walk. Member attendance was 90% or greater, and on his weekly walk to the sick he would knock on the doors of those who hadn't attended and he would find out if they were sick or off visiting relatives, etc. Just his expression of concern was an important element in encouraging regular attendance. On the same rounds he would perhaps "splain a few things" to the drunk or the otherwise erring member. There were no mixed marriages.

Of course, by the time he explained all this to me, this had changed, and perhaps his retrospectoscope had rose-colored lenses. Nevertheless the contrast with today is instructive.

- i) Irregular in attendance

To have more than 40% of one's flock in church each Sunday is considered unusual, as is more than 60% over the space of a few weeks. Imagine Paul's letters to the Corinthians or John's to the Ephesians reaching less than half of the intended audience.

ii) Difficult to communicate with thoroughly

With only twenty minutes per week, the thorough development of many matters is difficult. With so little time it is difficult to deal with anything in a context complete enough to allow the proper division of Law and Gospel. If we develop a matter of scriptural teaching over a number of weeks, the likelihood is that some at least will get only pieces of it.

iii) Communication overload

Sending a letter to people's homes with an extensive discourse on an important matter will often result in the important matter being swept along in the flood of information, largely unread and unconsidered. One of my members compared taking just the most important and relevant information from the flood that invades our consciousness through all the media to "trying to take a sip from a fire hose."

iv) Mixed marriages

In many of our churches dealing with our members as families is complicated by the fact that they are mixed households, with one member churched and others not, or one in our church, others in another.

v) Competing authority

We also have to face the fact that "thus saith the Lord" has been consciously or unconsciously reduced to "the pastor's opinion is..." or "the synod says...." Instead we have the competing authorities of personal feelings and social and sociological consensus.

vi) Sanctified

vii) In need of the gospel.

viii) Guided by the law.

Nevertheless, God's people are sanctified. As Christians they do have a new nature, they do seek to do right, and they do want to hear their Shepherd's voice. While they need the clear warnings of the Law to navigate the murk of our relativist culture, they especially need the constant light and comfort of the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit creates and builds up their faith. We do too. Our people are also eager to do the Lord's work and are eager to be guided in their life by God's Law, for they truly trust him as their Lord and guide. It is a tribute to the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word that so many do attend upon God's Word and count everything rubbish compared to the surpassing joy of knowing him.

The remaining portion of this presentation will suggest some

possible means by which God's Word can be brought to the whole congregation so as to refocus on the mission Christ has given his church in the particular circumstances in which the congregation is placed.

- b) How is the Word regarding the mission and vision of the congregation brought in its completeness to everyone in the congregation with a proper balance of Law and Gospel?

You may be surprised that whatever the name you may give it, we are speaking of the "congregational campaign." Such a congregational campaign is nothing more or less than a series of activities designed and undertaken to teach thoroughly a particular biblical concept to every member of a congregation amidst a balanced message of Law and Gospel. This is not to displace the divine service, nor are we looking for some unscriptural style to contain biblical substance. It is no different from the early church gathering at Jerusalem to discuss the absorption of Gentiles into the church, or congregations holding special forums to address the crisis in the Synodical Conference.

- i) What is the object of the campaign?

I am aware of congregations who made it a point to have a "campaign" every year. They not only enjoyed the congregational banquet at the end, in which they met in good spirits and Christian fellowship, they believed that a year could hardly go by without matters arising of which God's people should be aware. That may be. In any case, it is a pastoral responsibility to teach the whole counsel of God through preaching and teaching, and there are certainly matters that arise that call for particular consideration in the light of God's Word.

I mentioned ways in which a pastor might gauge the focus of his people on the mission and vision that Christ sets before us. A faithful pastor is always inclined to ...

- (1) LISTEN,
- (2) Observe,
- (3) Visit,
- (4) Receive a visit or consultation from a visitation pastor,
- (5) Prayer requests tell us what may be on the hearts of our people,
- (6) Observe our frustrations – matters which we sense but which have not yet risen to the level of conscious consideration may become clearer with prayerful review of Scripture,
- (7) Possibly make use of a retreat of some sort (another result

of the communication age), and

- (8) Ponder Scripture as the standard for all.
- ii) In order to teach faithfully, we may recognize a matter that God’s people are especially to be taught in the present instance, the matter in which they have lost focus on the mission or vision of the church, or in which we believe their focus should be clarified.
 - (1) Stewardship of time, talent, and treasure
 - (2) Removing the great cloud of disapproval by a thorough teaching of the division of Law and Gospel, with emphasis upon the Gospel
 - (3) The importance, ways, and means of personal evangelism
 - (4) The roles God has given us as men and women. This particularly begs for a thorough treatment and understanding.
 - (5) The importance of church attendance and the study of God’s Word personally and in the congregation
 - (6) The meaning of the liturgy
 - (7) The biblical doctrine of vocation
 - (8) Biblical wisdom regarding marriage and family
 - (9) The teaching of Scripture about the importance of the predominance of the Gospel
 - (10) The teaching of Scripture regarding a particular issue about which many have been led astray
 - (11) The application of Scripture to opportunities which have presented themselves to the congregation (strategic planning)
 - (12) A capital plan, such as constructing a building
- iii) Engage the Leadership with the entire message of the Word.

We may begin by gathering the leaders of the congregation in a regular or annual planning session. We may review an existing mission statement or write one anew. It is not unusual to examine our vision statement as the ways and means of carrying out the mission change from time to time. If there is going to be a

Example: A congregation’s leaders recognize that as a group their focus is more on the Law than the Gospel, so church has become a burden, rather than a joy. As a result, all they “share” in lieu of the Gospel is a condemnatory attitude toward those outside the church.

The leaders decide to look at the mission of the congregation and learn that “Sharing the Joy” of the Gospel is in stark contrast to “expressing disapproval” toward people not like us.

special emphasis or “campaign” it is a good thing to gather or appoint a steering committee for this purpose. This may be a separate committee of congregational leaders, or it may eventually grow into the “campaign committee” that eventually involves everyone possible in the congregation. As you look at the possible list of activities, you can easily see that a large number of people will be involved.

An important element at this time is a commitment from the congregation leaders. If it is a financial campaign, there will be an expectation of financial support from the leaders before the campaign progresses. By the same token, if it is a matter of congregational focus, the leadership will make a commitment of some sort to address it personally. For example, in one congregation of which I am aware, the men agreed to set the example of regular attendance for their families. In another case, the men confessed their sin of constant criticism and intended, with God’s help, to be less judgmental of their brothers and sisters in the faith.

Example: The leadership commits to personally underwriting the cost of a campaign to reemphasize the Gospel and the joy that we have in Christ. In addition the campaign will explain how we go about “Sharing the Joy” of the Gospel.

- (1) Mission Statement
 - (2) Vision Statement
 - (3) Commitment
 - (4) Steering Committee
- iv) Engage the entire congregation with the entire message of the Word.

Beginning with the leadership, the effort is made through various events and activities in which teaching occur to focus every member on the Word of God.

- (1) Remember, the purpose of the campaign is to teach thoroughly a particular biblical concept to every member of a congregation amidst a balanced message of Law and Gospel.
- (2) There are enough activities that everyone in the congregation will have a role in the campaign, which will last about 14 weeks.

An overall plan is needed that will involve every member in giving attention to the Word. It should be planned out well in advance. If, for example, the “campaign” were to run for 14 weeks, August through November, the meetings of the leadership will begin the previous spring, and the plan will be drawn up well before August.

It is extremely helpful to have a consultant available before the

process begins. You may have a circuit visitor who has been through it, or do it yourself, but experience has shown that effectiveness increases when someone is able to devote substantial time to planning and execution. I have been blessed with two memorable consultants over the years, with expenses ranging from about \$2500 for advice on meeting the pastoral needs of a larger congregation to \$16,000 for a major capital campaign. Fees, like everything else, have gone up and capital consultants will often charge \$50,000 or more.

While we tend to think of consultants as instruments of the church growth movement, I must say that in both of the aforementioned cases the consultants were extremely important in keeping our efforts Word-based and Word-focused. A consultant is important as a tutor, a mentor, a guide, and a disciplinarian – and he goes away afterwards.

Any major effort to communicate with the congregation as a whole will assemble any number of “features,” each of which serves a particular purpose in advancing the message. Everything receives *at least* three conspicuous announcements, usually in church, by mail, over the phone, and by email.

(3) Kickoff Sunday

This is a Sunday chosen for usual high attendance (e.g. not Labor Day weekend) with special mention in the bulletin, during the service (depending on the theme), and with announcements after the service. The theme and logo are revealed for the first time outside the committee. There may be a banner as well other visuals to emphasize the beginning of the effort.

(4) Every member visit to introduce the campaign and to elicit prayer requests

The purpose of the every member visit is to articulate the particular message of the Scriptures. It is not to “raise money” or “encourage action.” In general the visit will focus on the redeeming love of Christ for us and that he expresses this love through his Word within the Christian congregation. It will also collect information, particularly prayer requests, matters for which the individual or family desire prayers. These prayer requests may be used by the pastor and/or elders in regular prayers for the people or compiled and used in a “prayer vigil.”

Example: During the every member visit, volunteers express a simple Gospel message, dwell upon the hope that it brings, and assure the family of Christ’s redeeming love. That love is also expressed in the willingness of God’s people to intercede for one another.

Often it is helpful to leave a memento of some kind behind, such

as suggested prayers, a copy of Luther's little letter on prayer, a "Where to Go in the Bible When..." card, etc.

(5) Special Campaign Newsletter – 3-5 issues

This isn't your regular newsletter. It is special to the campaign, has a different look and feel, and is, if possible, of a much higher professional finish and appearance. It (1) reports on what has happened, (2) announces what is coming in the campaign, (3) teaches the biblical message, and (4) informs the people.

(6) Prayer Vigil

For 24 hours the church is open, with the prayer requests compiled and available. Each hour or half-hour a different person acts as host to greet people. God's people willingly intercede for one another and for the church, and the prayer of the righteous "avails much." The people also learn what is meaningful and important to their fellow Christians and according to God's Word.

(7) Special sermon series

(8) Special Bible Class series

With an extra effort to encourage attendance, special sermons and Bible classes are a way in which we directly teach the scriptural truth upon which we need to focus or refocus as a congregation. Relevant material may be included in the bulletin and is surely included in handouts for the Bible class. Bible classes may be the same days as the sermons or offset on the calendars to reach the most, most fully.

This is also the time to be thorough. Because we will have our audience more fully than at other times, we can be sure that Law and Gospel are properly divided.

(9) "Story Time" after services makes connection with individuals

Don't call these testimonials. These are personal stories from members, often leaders, of the congregation that illustrate the particular point at hand. They are an example that underscores the importance of the message regarding re-focusing.

(10) Campaign Brochure is summary of all-congregation instruction.

(a) A complete expression of what you want to teach

(b) Presented to everyone in the congregation once by mail and then in a personal and meaningful way at

Example: In an effort focusing on "Sharing the Joy" of the Gospel, a member told how she was "shipped off to Grandma's" each summer and "dropped off at VBS" to get her out of the house. It was at the VBS in the Lutheran church where she first heard the Gospel. It was that Word that gave her hope and joy until she was old enough to seek out baptism on her own.

the all-church banquet

The campaign booklet makes the complete case for what we are doing, as well as providing an historical perspective for the congregation and the particular efforts. The booklet must be complete, well-written, graphically effective, and professional-looking, so that if it were the only piece of information someone received, s/he would have the whole story.

(11) All-church banquet and children's party

The all-church banquet is intended for everyone of confirmation age and above. Everything is done to make it possible for everyone to attend. For babysitting, request help from a local congregation to host the children at the church for a pizza party and child care activity. The banquet should be off-site and not require any preparation or cleanup on the part of the members. It is at no cost to those who attend. It may be paid for as part of the capital budget or by special gifts. One congregation I know has it as part of their regular budget and it has become a traditional high point in their year.

At the banquet, every method of communication appropriate to the message is utilized, including skits, singing, multi-media, and of course the campaign booklet. Appropriate entertainment is often an important part of the event, which is typically upbeat in every way possible.

(12) A commitment to action will take into account each person's gifts and vocation.

The purpose of the commitment is for each person individually to address the mission of the congregation. The commitment is obvious in a financial campaign, because it tells us whether we can go ahead and "build the tower" or not. Typically the commitment cards are distributed with the campaign booklet at the banquet and picked up personally by volunteers.

When we talk about refocusing a congregation on its mission, people may commit to an idea and an action. E.g., "Believing that it is the mission of a Christian congregation to preach the Gospel in its truth and purity, so that the Gospel predominates, I commit to evaluating my own words and actions to that end and..." -OR- "Firmly believing that it is the mission of every congregation to faithfully preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, and that this is best accomplished in a new and more accessible facility, I commit to a gift of"

(13) Concluding Celebration

There is a concluding celebration in church just as there was a kickoff. It will certainly reflect what has been learned. If it is a financial campaign there will be an announcement of the results. Often such campaigns end the Sunday before Thanksgiving for obvious reasons. In any case, the purpose is to give glory to God for all that he does and has

done in bringing us his gifts.

(14) Following up

Having gone through such a major effort together, what has been learned becomes a matter of common experience and shared history. It can serve as a reminder. (Imagine in Laodicea: “Hey, Simon, remember that letter we got about being neither cold nor hot? Let’s take a stand here.”) Like all Christian instruction, the important thing is that we sow the seed. The increase is something we leave in the Lord’s hands. Even after a major capital campaign, the most important thing that the objects of that campaign will have heard is that the Lord is gracious.

6) Conclusion

Although a number of strategies have been discussed in this brief time, the main point I want to pass along is that each pastor comes to know his flock and the wolves that surround it. We need to be attuned to the way that we as a flock focus on the mission and vision that Christ has given us over against the world in which we live, and guide that vision by the proper application of God’s Word. To the extent that we have presented strategies, they are strategies to proclaim that Word faithfully.

Appendix Sample Campaign Time-Line

<h1 style="margin: 0;">August 2003</h1> <h2 style="margin: 0;">SHARING THE JOY</h2>		Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
3		4	5	6	7	8	9	2
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Leadership Recruitment</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">8:30 PM Meet to establish Mission</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">8:30 PM Confirm Mission; Plan Objectives</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Campaign Training</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-top: 2px;">Introduce Campaign</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Leadership Recruitment</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Sheeping Committee Recruited</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Saint Mary, Mother of Our Lord</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Leadership Recruitment</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Leadership Recruitment</div>

September 2003

SHARING THE JOY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																	
7 Holy Cross Day	8 6:00 PM Recruitment Calls for Home Visitors 8:00 PM Bible Study Host/Caller Training	9 Prayer Vigil Captains Formulated by Year	10 Char & Prec ID Advance Print Bible Study Invitations	11 Visit Ministers Commissioned for the Year Bible Class Card	12 Mail Bible Study Invitations	13 10:30 AM Steering Comm 11:00 AM Fall Comm 12:00 PM Prayer Vigil Ops 1:00 PM Banquet Comm CHECKUP MEETING																																																	
14 Labor Day	15 Recruit Promo & Materials Captains	16 Recruitment	17 Recruitment	18 7:00 PM Bible Study Capts 7:45 PM Home Visits Captains Pronouncements Capts	19 Print Bible Studies	20 HOME VISITS																																																	
21 BANNER UP BIBLE STUDY 1 PRAYER VIGIL SIGNUPS	22 CAMPAIN BROCHURE TO PRINTER Dessert Potluck & Bible Study 1	23 6:30 PM Home Visits Training 8:30 PM Home Visits Training Autumn begins	24 BIBLE STUDY/INVITE FOLLOW-UP CALLS	25	26	27																																																	
28 12:00 PM Steering Comm 1:00 PM Prayer Vigil Hour BIBLE STUDY 2 CHECKUP MTG	29 Dessert Potluck & Bible Study 2 Saint Michael and All Angels	30	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <th colspan="7">Aug 2003</th> </tr> <tr> <td>S</td><td>M</td><td>T</td><td>W</td><td>T</td><td>F</td><td>S</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td><td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>31</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td> </tr> </table>				Aug 2003							S	M	T	W	T	F	S	1	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31						
Aug 2003																																																							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S																																																	
1	4	5	6	7	8	9																																																	
10	11	12	13	14	15	16																																																	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23																																																	
24	25	26	27	28	29	30																																																	
31																																																							

November 2003

SHARING THE JOY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2 2 Leader Stories SHARING THE VISION SUNDAY 3	3 Advance Gifts Dinner NEWSLETTER 3 MAILED	4 Election Day	5 7:00 PM. Info for Comm Visits	6	7	8 Banquet Table Hosts Calls
9 Comm. Visits Explained in Church	10	11 Veterans Day	12	13	14	15 ALL CHURCH BANQUET
16 <i>both days</i>	17	18	19 COMMITMENT VISITS	20	21	22
23 CELEBRATION SUNDAY Feast of Christ the King	24	25 COMMITMENT VISITS	26	27 Thanksgiving	28	29
30 First Sunday of Advent Saint Andrew, Apostle						

12

13

14

Endnotes

¹ “Drucker Self-Assessment Tool,” <http://www.leadertoleader.org/knowledgecenter/sat/mission.html> (accessed September 4, 2007).

² Mission statement of The Coca-Cola Company, <http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/ourcompany/index.html> (accessed September 4, 2007).

³ Mission statement of Xerox Corporation, <http://www.xerox.com/go/xrx/template/019d.jsp?view=Factbook&id=XAG> (accessed September 7, 2007).

⁴ As quoted in Hoerber, R. G. (1997, c1986). *Concordia Self-Study Bible*. “Lutheran edition of the NIV study Bible” --Foreword. (electronic ed.) (1 Co 1:1). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.



Lime Creek Lutheran Church

The 90th Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

by Gaylin R. Schmeling

This year is the 90th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). In 1918 several pastors gathered at Lime Creek Lutheran Church in rural Lake Mills, Iowa. Though standing solidly on Scripture's foundation, they represented a theological minority among the Norwegian-American Lutherans. Their spiritual heritage, however, was not unique to either Norway or America. The pastors and laymen met to reorganize on the same foundation upon which the "old" Norwegian Synod was built. They were encouraged by the words of Jeremiah: "Stand in the way and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls" (6:16). The reorganized synod has remained on the old paths in all its teaching where one can find rest for the soul—true rest found in Jesus our Savior. Our souls are never at rest until we are at rest in Him.

At the time of the Lime Creek meeting it was sarcastically said on the streets of one of the towns in northern Iowa, "That little synod is nothing but a plucked chicken." The man who said it was obviously in favor of the merger. But a sensible down-to-earth Norwegian farmer is reported to have responded, "Yes, but if the chicken is healthy the feathers will grow back" (*Den Norske Synode er bare en ribbet høne. – Ja, men naar høne blir frisk og bra igjen så skal fjæerne vokse tilbake*).¹ With the Lord's help the feathers did start to grow. The synod became a haven for many who knew that the merger was wrong. Small groups in the Midwest and other parts of the land called for help and the synod answered the call. After the synod's later break in fellowship with the Missouri Synod, it became a refuge for many in Missouri who wanted to remain faithful to the truths of Scripture. By 1967 the synod had grown to 83 congregations with 15,000 members. Today the ELS has 131 congregations with 20,000 members and an active home and world missions program. Outside the Midwest the greatest geographical expansion has been in Florida and along the West Coast. Today the ELS remains a haven and refuge for all those seeking true orthodox Lutheranism.

Our synod is continually striving to proclaim the gracious message of justification by faith alone in Christ as the Savior. We are declared righteous by nothing we do or accomplish, but alone on the basis of Christ's

redemptive work which is counted as ours through faith in the Savior. He accomplished salvation for all on the cross and announced it to all by His resurrection declaring the whole world righteous. This wonderful treasure is offered to us in the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, and is received by faith alone in Him as the Savior, which faith is worked, strengthened, and preserved through these same means of grace.

This comforting truth is revealed to us in God's inerrant Word. It is our purpose as a synod to pay close attention to the doctrine of that Word and continue in it (1 Timothy 4:16). We make our stand on the inspired, inerrant Scriptures, the only source of faith, doctrine, and life, and we subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions because they are a correct exposition of the doctrines of the Scriptures. On this 90th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, this continues to be our great heritage.

Endnotes

¹ An anecdote from President Emeritus George M. Orvick.



Johannes Bugenhagen, Pomeranus. D.

Luther's Pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen: The 450th Anniversary of the Death of this Great Lutheran Pastor and Preacher 1485–1558

by Gaylin R. Schmeling

Luther was once asked to explain briefly how one should preach. He responded, “First you must learn to go up to the pulpit. Second, you must know that you should stay there for a time. Third, you must learn to get down again.”¹ Bugenhagen was excellent at the first two points, but he often forgot the third. His long-windedness became something of a joke in Wittenberg. The story is told of a man who came home from church on Sunday expecting to find a hot meal waiting for him. When his wife put a half-cooked dinner before him, he became angry and asked for an explanation. “Well,” his wife replied rather flustered, “I thought Dr. Pommer² was going to preach today.”³

All joking aside, Bugenhagen was widely respected as a preacher and pastor. This year marks the 450th anniversary of his death. Bugenhagen was the pastor of the *Stadtkirche* (city church) in Wittenberg and Luther's spiritual advisor. He earned a place in history by the composition of important liturgies and church orders for northern Germany and Scandinavia. He was the man who put the principles of Luther's theology into the practical form of congregation life.

Johannes Bugenhagen, born June 24, 1485, in Wollin, Pomerania, was two years Luther's junior. He studied at the University of Greifswald and in 1504 became rector of the school in Treptow on the Rega. His ordination took place in 1509. In 1517, he was called as lecturer on the Bible and the Fathers at the cloister school in Belbuck. In the same year his prince, Duke Bogislav X of Pomerania, commissioned him to write a history of his native land.

While at Belbuck he voiced his first criticisms of the conditions in the Medieval Church. After reading Luther's book, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), he immediately wrote to Luther and

declared himself to be on the side of the Reformation. He moved to Wittenberg in 1521 and in 1523 became the pastor of the *Stadtkirche*. His election as pastor was a momentous one for it established the principal of congregational election of pastors among Lutheran churches.⁴ He reorganized the worship service, cleansing it of the Roman abuses and of Karlstadt's fanaticism. He was active in the reestablishment of church schools.

Of all the Lutheran reformers, Bugenhagen was the first to marry. October 13, 1522, he was married in the presence of Luther and his other co-workers at the university. Walpurga was the name of his bride, having been born on Walpurgis Day, or May 1, 1500.⁵ Not much can be said about her with certainty. Occasionally she has been called the sister of Georg Rörer, one of the editors of Luther's *Hauspostille* and husband of Bugenhagen's sister.⁶ What we can say with certainty is that the Bugenhagens enjoyed a long and blessed married life.

Walpurga customarily accompanied her husband during his long journeys in Northern Germany in service of the Reformation. This seems to be a peculiarity of the Bugenhagens. Most of the other wives of the Reformation remained in Wittenberg when their men traveled abroad.

For example, she spent the summer and fall of 1528 with him in Braunschweig. At the beginning of October she followed him to Hamburg. From the end of 1530 until the spring of 1532 she stayed with him in Lübeck, and she spent almost two full years, 1537–1539, at his side in Copenhagen. In this way, she participated directly in the vocational activity of her husband, was near him conjugally and collegially, and supported him in his responsibilities as a representative of the Reformation, which were particularly necessary in regions outside of Wittenberg.⁷

The couple continually traveled together and even became close friends of Christian III (1536–1559) and the royal family of Denmark. *Frau* Bugenhagen was right at her husband's side, supporting and assisting him throughout his life—an ideal for all Lutheran pastor's wives.

When Luther married in 1525 following the lead of Bugenhagen, it was Bugenhagen who performed the ceremony and publicly defended the marriage of clergy. Luther is usually considered to be the founder of the Lutheran parsonage, but Bugenhagen certainly assisted in this establishment. Together with the Luthers, the Bugenhagens provided an example of the Lutheran parsonage to the generations that followed them.

It is uncertain how many children the Bugenhagen couple had. One

of their sons, Johannes, became superintendent in Wittenberg and provost of Kemberg. A daughter, Sarah, married George Cracow, chancellor under Elector August, who died as a result of the overthrow of crypto-Calvinism in Electoral Saxony in 1575.⁸

Bugenhagen translated the Bible into *Plattdeutsch* (Low German), the language of most of northern Germany, including Pomerania. This translation was as important to the Low German people living around the Baltic as Luther's High German translation was to the rest of Germany. Bugenhagen's Low German translation, with many woodcuts printed at Barth in 1588, enjoyed wide circulation. In 1524 he wrote a Gospel harmony of the Passion history,⁹ which was in the German hymnal of the Wisconsin Synod.¹⁰ The following is an example of Bugenhagen's Low German translation:

Vnde also se ethen / in der Nacht do he vorraden wart / nam de Here Jesus dat Brot / danckede / brack idt / gaff idt den Jüngern / vnde sprack: Nemet / ethet / dat is myn Lyff / dat vör juw gegeben wert / Sölckes doet tho myner Gedechtenisse. Desgelyken nam he ock den kelck / na dem Auentethende / danckede / gaff en den / vnde sprack: Drincket alle daruth / Disse Kelck is dat nye Testament in mynem Blode / dat vör juw vnde vör vele / vorgaten wert / thor Vorgeuinge der Sünde. Sölckes doet / so vaken also gy idt drincken / tho myner Gedechtenisse.¹¹

Und indem sie aßen in der Nacht, da er verraten ward, nahm der Herr Jesus das Brot, dankete, brachs, und gabs seinen Jüngern und sprach: Nehmet, esset, das ist mein Leib, der für euch gegeben wird; solches thut zu meinem Gedächtnis. Desselbigengleichen nahm er auch den Kelch nach dem Abendmahl, dankete, gab ihnen den und sprach: Trinket alle daraus; dieser Kelch ist das neue Testament in meinem Blut, das für euch und für viele vergossen wird zur Vergebung der Sünden. Solches thut, so oft ihrs trinket, zu meinem Gedächtnis.¹²

And as they were eating in the night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, "Take eat, this is My body which is given for you, this do in remembrance of

Me.” In the same manner He took also the cup after the evening meal, gave thanks, gave it to them, and said, “Drink from it all of you, this cup is the New Testament in My blood which for you and for many is shed for the forgiveness of sins. This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me.”

A considerable amount of writing was done by Bugenhagen in addition to his work as pastor and professor in Wittenberg. He wrote a number of commentaries on books of the Bible; his commentary on the Psalms was probably the most well known. One of his most important productions, *Von dem Christenloven und rechten guden Werken*, was an excellent explanation of the principle points of Lutheran doctrine. When Zwinglian ideas began to circulate in northern Germany, he was the first of the Wittenberg theologians to write against the Swiss with his treatise on the Lord’s Supper entitled *Ein Sendbrieff widder den neuen Irrthumb bei dem Sacrament des Leybs und Bluts unseres Herrn Jesu Christi* in 1525.¹³ This became known as the Eucharistic Controversy. Here he defended the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Supper.

This native of Pomerania is best remembered as the foremost organizer of the Lutheran Church. He wrote church orders (*Kirchenordnungen*), liturgies, and general organizational instructions for most of the churches in northern Germany. He organized the Lutheran Church in Braunschweig (1528), Hamburg (1529), Lübeck (1531), Pomerania (1534), Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1543), and Hildesheim (1544).

When Christian III desired to formalize the reformation of the church of Denmark and Norway in 1537, he too called on Bugenhagen. Bugenhagen was absent from Wittenberg for nearly two years during which time he reorganized the University of Copenhagen and much of the educational system in Denmark. The first Lutheran coronation service was conducted by Bugenhagen. This coronation of Christian III and his Queen, Dorothea, took place on August 12, 1537 in *Vor Fruer* (Our Lady) Church in Copenhagen.¹⁴ He consecrated seven bishops for Denmark and Norway even though he was not a bishop, and established a new church order for the Scandinavian churches. This is the reason that the Danish–Norwegian Order of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is often called the “Bugenhagen Order.”¹⁵

The relationship between Luther and Bugenhagen was very close. Not only were the two men close friends, Bugenhagen was also Luther’s pastor. When Luther was plagued by melancholy and other burdens, it was

Bugenhagen who comforted him with the life-giving Word. He continually pointed Luther to the full forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ the Savior. It was to Bugenhagen that Luther made his regular private confessions, being his *Beichtiger* (father confessor).¹⁶ At Luther's funeral on February 22, 1546, Bugenhagen preached one of the sermons.

Bugenhagen was a true *Seelsorger* (curate of souls). He had a love for God's Word and a love for souls. He showed pastoral concern for the souls in his care at the *Stadtkirche*. For example, when an epidemic arose in Wittenberg in 1527 and many fled for safety, he stood by his people, caring for them and providing for their spiritual needs. As a physician of souls he made a proper use of Law and Gospel. To be sure, he used the strong medicine of the Law to point out sin and error, but his primary purpose was always to dispense the sweet balm of the Gospel—the joy of salvation. One is saved by nothing that he does or accomplishes but alone through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross which is brought to an individual in the means of grace and received by faith alone in the Savior.

Bugenhagen's life after the Reformer's death in 1546 was a life of hardship, a life under the shadow of the cross. During the Smalcald War he remained with his congregation in Wittenberg when many fled for their lives. At this time he was associated with the Philippists, those that supported the views of Philipp Melanchthon. He submitted to the Leipzig Interim but by 1550 he defended strict Lutheranism with his commentary on Jonah in which he protested against the Roman error. Shortly before his retirement in 1557 he warned all pastors against compromise. In April of 1558 he was confined to his bed, his body weak, but his mind still vigorous, spending his time in prayer and in friendly conversation about the future life. He was called from this vale of tears on April 20, 1558, and was buried under the altar of the city church in Wittenberg. He was the practical reformer with a pastor's heart, a true *Seelsorger*.

Bibliography

- Bugenhagen, Johannes. *Historia des Lydendes unde Upstandige unses Heren Jesu Christi: uth den veer Euangelisten: Niederdeutsche Passionsharmonie: Faksimiledruck nach der Barther Ausgabe von 1586*. Berlin und Altenburg: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 1985.
- Evang-Lutherisches Gesangbuch für Kirche, Schule und Haus*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House.
- Hendel, Kurt K. "Johannes Bugenhagen, Organizer of the Lutheran Reformation." *Lutheran Quarterly*. 18, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 43–75.
- Lausten, Martin S. *A Church History of Denmark*. Trans by Frederick H. Cryer. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002.
- Mager, Inge. "Three Women Watch their Husbands' Backs: Walpurga Bugenhagen, Anna Rhegius and [Anna] Margarethe Corvin," *Lutheran Quarterly*. 18, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 28–42.
- Ruccius, Walter M. *John Bugenhagen Pommeranus: A Biographical Sketch*. Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1925.
- Steinmetz, David C. *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*. Second edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Tillmanns, Walter G. *The World and Men Around Luther*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959.
- Vogt, K. A. T. *Johannes Bugenhagen Pomeranus: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften*. Elberfeld: R. L. Friederichs, 1867.

Endnotes

¹ LW 54:393.

² Dr. Pommer is Bugenhagen's nickname.

³ David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 58; WATR 3, no. 2898, LW 54:179; WATR 4, no. 4956.

⁴ Kurt K. Hendel, "Johannes Bugenhagen, Organizer of the Lutheran Reformation," *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 1 (spring 2004): 51.

⁵ Walter M. Ruccius, *John Bugenhagen Pommeranus: A Biographical Sketch* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1925), 27.

⁶ Inge Mager, "Three Women Watch their Husbands' Backs: Walpurga Bugenhagen, Anna Rhegius and [Anna] Margarethe Corvin," *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 1 (spring 2004): 29.

⁷ Mager, 30–31.

⁸ Mager, 32.

⁹ The harmony of the Passion history is read in our Lenten services.

¹⁰ *Evang-Lutherisches Gesangbuch für Kirche, Schule und Haus* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House).

¹¹ Johannes Bugenhagen, *Historia Des lydendes unde upstandige / unses Heren Jesu Christi:/ uth den veer Euangelisten*, 59-62.

Gesangbuch, 541.

¹³ K. A. T. Vogt, *Johannes Bugenhagen Pomeranus: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften* (Elberfeld: R. L. Friederichs, 1867), 77 n1.

¹⁴ Martin S. Lausten, *A Church History of Denmark*, tr. By Frederick H. Cryer (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 110–111.

¹⁵ This is similar to "The Divine Service: Rite One" in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (p. 41).

¹⁶ Bugenhagen is portrayed as the *Beichtiger* in the altar painting (*Flügelaltar*) in the *Stadtkirche* in Wittenberg. Here Bugenhagen gives absolution with a key in each hand, one loosing the sins of a repentant sinner, and the other binding the sin of an unrepentant sinner.



L. Grouss.

Ludwig Harms: The 200th Anniversary of the Birth of this Theologian and Missionary 1808–1865

by Gaylin R. Schmeling

This year many magazines and journals are commemorating the Wilhelm Löhe bicentennial. Löhe was an important leader in the Lutheran Renewal (*Erweckungsbewegung*) of the 19th century who is especially remembered for his work in liturgics and missiology. His Neuendettelsau mission house sent many of the early pastors of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) to this country; he is considered to be the founder of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana; and he was the spiritual father of the Iowa Synod. However, another important missiologist of the Lutheran Renewal should also be remembered this year. This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig Harms. His Hermannsburg mission house sent men to Africa, America, and Australia.

Early Life of Harms

Harms was born on May 5, 1808, at Walsrode in Hanover. Hanover was, at that time, a kingdom in northern Germany.¹ His father, Hartwig Christian Harms, was a Lutheran pastor whose family had lived for generations in Hanover while his mother, Dorothee Friederika nee Heinze, originated from Saxon-Altenburg. Ludwig was baptized shortly after he was born with the full and proper name of George Ludwig Detlef Theodor Harms. In 1817, on the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, when Claus Harms produced his 95 Theses against Rationalism and the Prussian Union,² Ludwig's father became the pastor of Hermannsburg in the *Lüneburger Heide* (Lüneburg heath). His entire life would center around Hermannsburg and this area of Germany. Hermannsburg and the *Lüneburger Heide* were not on the highways of the world. It was a very secluded and rural part of the country.

Although he was born in a Lutheran parsonage, throughout his youth he did not consider himself to be a believer. He attended the gymnasium in Celle and in 1827 he entered the University of Göttingen. His parents assumed that he was studying for the public ministry, but his uncertainty about his faith

and his rationalist teachers caused him to strongly question this idea. Toward the end of his studies in 1830 his faith was renewed while meditating on John 17:3—“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” These words were imprinted on his life as the words, “The just shall live by faith,” were imprinted upon Luther. He realized that Christ alone can give peace to the soul. His rationalistic views were discarded and justification by faith alone became the sole foundation of his life. He did not immediately comprehend the full implications of orthodox Lutheranism, but as he studied Luther and the Confessions he was gradually freed from unionistic, Pietistic and Reformed tendencies, though he seems never to have rid himself completely of confused ideas on marriage, the Sabbath, and the descent into hell. Also, he tended to be legalistic, at times mixing Law and Gospel.³

Following his graduation from the University, he worked as a tutor as was common for young theological students before they received their first parish call. The same was the case with C.F.W. Walther. In 1841 he received a call to New York from Rev. Friedrich Wynecken, who had visited Germany for the sake of confessional Lutheranism in America. After seriously considering this call, the sickness and needs of his father led him to return it.⁴ Thus, in 1844, he became an assistant to his father as pastor in Hermannsburg and in 1849 he became his successor. Soon he gained renown in the entire area as a powerful preacher of the Gospel.

Harms as Preacher and Theologian

Sunday was an interesting day in Hermannsburg when Harms was pastor in the *Lüneburger Heide*. The following is a description of a normal Sunday: In order to claim a pew on Sunday morning, one had to take his seat by 9:30am for the church service beginning at 10:30am. Harms began the service by chanting the prayer of the day. After the second lesson for the day (usually the Gospel) Baptisms normally occurred. Harms had a high regard for the Sacrament of Regeneration. Next came his sermon where he gave a rich exposition of the text. The sermon was followed by the administration of the Lord's Supper. Communion was celebrated every Sunday at Hermannsburg. When the 3½ hour service was complete, the people were dismissed.

There was an hour break for a meal, after which the congregation assembled for the afternoon service. Harms read a chapter from the New Testament, commenting on it verse by verse. He catechized walking up and down the aisles, questioning both children and adults. The congregation was transformed into a vast Bible class. This service, including hymn

singing, was about 3 hours in length. At 7 in the evening, those who lived closer to Hermannsburg assembled in the parish hall where Harms preached to them in low German (*Plattdeutsch*) after which he updated the people concerning missionary work in various locations. The people from the *Lüneburger Heide* loved to hear him preach in their native tongue. He would say to them, “My children, let me speak to you in low German—that’s the best.” The people looked upon the preaching in low German as the dessert after the main course. Harms had the rule that everyone was to be home by 10:00 in the evening.⁵

His preaching always centered in justification. One is declared righteous by nothing he does or accomplishes but alone on the basis of Christ’s redemptive work which is received by faith in the Savior, worked through the means of grace. At the same time, he emphasized sanctification as the natural fruit of justification. When one trusts that he has been declared innocent through Christ’s work, he will desire to show his love for the Savior by following in the Savior’s loving footsteps. Harms exhorted his people to begin each day with devotions including prayer, singing, and reading God’s Word, closing the day with prayer, either standing or kneeling, as Luther advised, but never sitting, which Harms considered irreverent. God’s blessing should be asked at every meal and thanks should be given when it is finished. He never took a glass of water or ate an apple without giving thanks.⁶

In Harms’ day, as in our own, there were complaints about the length of divine services. Harms wrote concerning long church services:

Church lasts too long for them—especially for the young. Most of them would rather have a jug [beer stein] than be in church. Even the elderly prove through this that they do not want to be in heaven. If they are not able to endure four hours in church, how will they be able to endure heaven where there is church for all eternity?⁷

Harms obviously emphasized the importance of regularly gathering around the means of grace.

Harms was a prolific writer. He produced both an *Epistelpostille* and an *Evangelienpostille*. Here he provided written sermons on the historic Gospels and Epistles of the church year for the personal use of his members. Because he saw a need for more in-depth catechism instruction he also produced *Katechismuspredigten* for the edification of his people. In addition he was the editor of the *Missionsblatt* which gave information concerning the far-flung Hermannsburg missions.

Harms and the Lord's Supper

Regenerational Baptism was clearly taught by Harms as noted above. He also had a high regard for the Lord's Supper. In his sermons he continually pointed out the great blessings of the Supper and encouraged his people to regularly partake of the Sacrament.

First there are earthly elements in the Lord's Supper, namely the bread and the wine. To these earthly elements comes the almighty Word of the Lord: "This is My body, this is My blood." Thus, the heavenly gift, namely, the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, is united with the earthly elements. And so the elements become a Sacrament that unites us personally with Jesus Christ our Savior so that I can joyfully and blessedly sing, "The Lord is abiding with me and He considers me His worthy dwelling. I have Christ's flesh and blood. Concerning this, rejoice my heart and mind!" Indeed, the Lord Himself says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me and I in him." Thus, through the Lord's Supper it is a literally true and not merely a beautiful empty saying that Jesus is my bridegroom and I am His bride; that we are so bound into one that I must be where He is and that in eternity we can never be separated from one another. Our name Christian itself contains this complete truth. As a wife gives up her name and takes in exchange the name of her husband so it is totally in order that after I, through the Lord's Supper, am married to Christ I am called a Christian since He is called Christ. "Hasten, according to the custom of a fiancée, to the Bridegroom," as the hymn says. So it is with us. Oh what wonderful love it is that the Lord shows in this precious Sacrament, unparalleled by everything on earth that calls itself love. Indeed, the highest, purest, truest love on earth is the love of a mother. A mother carried her child under her heart and she bears it on her heart and feeds it with the milk of her breast. But what the mother's love itself cannot do, that the love of Christ does: Christ feeds us with His flesh and satisfies us with His blood and through the same gives us as our own all that He is and has. Now Christ is my life and death is my gain. Christ is the vine and I am a branch of the vine. Christ is the body and I am a member of the body. Therefore when things occur properly in our precious Lutheran church, Sunday after Sunday the Table of the Lord is prepared for all who hunger and thirst for His flesh and blood. Sunday after Sunday His blessed Communion guests come to the Altar of the Lord and receive the heavenly food and heavenly drink. One

cannot think of a Lutheran Sunday service without the Lord's Supper. One's heart bleeds when he comes to a congregation in which one celebrates Sunday without the Lord's Supper. Now, unfortunately, there are more than enough of such congregations in Lutheran lands.⁸

Harms as Missionary

Ludwig Harms is probably best remembered for his organization of the Hermannsburg Mission Society. When he came to understand clearly the central article of the faith, he was filled with a burning zeal for missions. He wanted all to know the joy of salvation. At first, he was associated with the northern German Union Mission Society, headquartered at Hamburg. However, he soon separated from this organization because he desired a purely Lutheran organization. Since there was no such organization to be found, he established his own mission society in Hermannsburg in 1849. Many thought this organization would be a complete failure. If a mission society could not survive in a major city like Hamburg, how could it survive in a backwoods town like Hermannsburg? Yet the Lord blessed the work of the Hermannsburg mission.

On October 12, 1849, Harms opened a mission seminary on farm land that he had bought in the Hermannsburg vicinity. His brother Theodor agreed to act as the superintendent of the school. Above the door of the seminary, a cross was fashioned, and on it was written *in hoc vinces* (In this [sign] you will conquer).⁹ It was the cross of Christ and Him crucified that was the center of all proclamation.

Harms had certain general ideas about the concept of missions. He believed that his men should go as a group, possibly groups of twelve, as was the case with the Irish and Anglo-Saxon missionaries sent from Britain to Germany over a thousand years earlier. They were to establish a settlement in the pagan land which was self-sufficient and from there reach out to the community.

After establishing a first settlement, most of them were to go on to new places not far away and start work there. A new group would come and replace the first one and learn the language, then follow the former ones and again establish new settlements. In this way, a wider region would soon be covered by a network of mission settlements which would be the points where congregations would collect and start to flourish. He hoped that in this way a whole country would be Christianized and be in a position to resist the bad influence of European

traders and politics.¹⁰

Missions in Africa

When the training of the first group of young men was finished in 1853, Harms hoped to send them as missionaries to the Galla tribes in Ethiopia. He had heard about these heathen tribes and believed that they had many of the same characteristics as the Germanic tribes of northern Europe. Boat passage was not able to be found for these missionaries. Still Harms was not deterred. The mission society paid for the construction of their own sailing vessel, christened “The Candace,” named after Candace, the Queen of Ethiopia, for whom the Ethiopian eunuch worked (Acts 8:26–40). This eunuch was the beginning of Christian mission work among the African people.

The Candace set sail for Zanzibar but the Muslims in the area blocked the door to mission work among the Gallas. This was a great disappointment to Harms. However, his dreams were realized by the Herrmansburg mission 75 years later when its first missionaries arrived at Lalo Aira in the western part of Ethiopia in 1928.¹¹

Because they were hindered in their hopes of doing mission work in Ethiopia, the boat turned south and landed at Durban, Natal, South Africa. After consulting with Pastor W. Posselt of the Berlin Missionary Society, stationed outside of Port Natal, they decided to concentrate their work on the Zulu people near Natal rather than on the Galla tribes. Here they had contact with H.P. Schreuder, a Norwegian missionary who received permission to work in the area.¹² In 1854 a tract of land was obtained and the first mission station was founded with the name, “New Hermansburg.” This was the beginning of the Hermansburg Mission in Southern Africa. They were soon able to establish a string of mission stations throughout Zululand. During the time of the Boer War these missions suffered considerably. Yet, from these missions a major African Lutheran church was established, which still exists today.¹³

Remember that Löhe hoped to establish colonies, like Frankenmuth, Michigan, to further mission work among Native Americans. Harms had much the same idea in South Africa where missionary farmers were sent.¹⁴ These people together with other German immigrants eventually established a German church in South Africa, which today is known as the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA).¹⁵

Africa was Ludwig Harms’ first love, yet his vision was wide enough to include other continents. When waiting for admission into the ministry, he himself considered going to India as a missionary. The Leipzig

Mission, a sister Lutheran society with which he had contacts as well as disputes, had its main field there. Therefore the Hermannsburg mission soon branched out into India. In 1864, Pastor August Mylius was commissioned as a missionary to India. Lutheran mission work to India began already in 1706 when the King of Denmark sent Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) and Heinrich Plütschau (1677–1746) to Tranquebar (Tarangambadi), India. The work in India was done in the Telegu language. Originally they intended to begin work in the Guntur area, but eventually the mission settled north of Midras. Later, the Ohio Synod of North America worked together with the mission society in India. The Hermannsburg Society continued to do mission work in India until the first World War, when the mission was completely taken over by the Ohio Synod, which is a part of the ELCA today.¹⁶

Missions in Australia

Many confessional Lutherans fled to Australia as a result of the Prussian Union. Harms had contact with a number of these individuals. Because of the needs of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the Hermannsburg Mission Society began working in Australia. The work centered in the Hermannsburg Station which was established on the Finke River close to Alice Springs in 1877.¹⁷ In addition, Hermannsburg provided a number of German speaking pastors for the German Lutheran congregations in Australia. Closely connected to this work was the attempt to work among the Maori in New Zealand in 1876. The work in New Zealand would later be suspended because of doctrinal differences when the last missionaries sent from Hermannsburg severed their relationship with the Mission in 1892.¹⁸

Assistance in America

Another urgent call came from America. Thousands of German people emigrated to America in the 19th century. In fact, more people in America are of German background than any other one nationality. These German emigrants were in desperate need of Lutheran pastors. They were being deluded by itinerant Methodists and Baptists who posed as Lutherans but were really wolves in sheep's clothing. While the primary purpose of the Hermannsburg was spreading the Gospel to the heathen, Harms came to see that there was a need for work among these German Americans who were sheep without a shepherd. The men who came from Hermannsburg served in the Missouri Synod, the Buffalo Synod, the Wisconsin Synod,

and the Ohio Synod.

In the first 30 years of its existence, the Wisconsin Synod had various connections with the Hermannsburg missions. It was a relationship that outlasted its connection with the other German mission societies. During these years the Wisconsin Synod received 17 men from Hermannsburg. But most importantly, its main early leader, Johannes Bading, was a Hermannsburg man. He, together with Adolph Hoenecke, led the church body on the path to orthodox Lutheranism.¹⁹

Theodor Harms

Theodor Harms (1819–1885) was Ludwig’s younger brother and a loyal supporter of the same. When the Hermannsburg mission was founded, Theodor Harms became the teacher at the mission’s seminary. Following the death of his brother, he was appointed as his brother’s successor and headed the mission society. In 1878, when the state church in Hanover moved away from its scriptural foundations, he organized a free church in Hanover where he hoped that the Word of God could be taught in its truth and purity and the Sacraments rightly administered.

Final Years of Ludwig Harms

Ludwig Harms served the congregation in Hermannsburg faithfully for 20 years. Later in his career he was often afflicted by attacks of rheumatism and a number of other physical infirmities. Eventually he had to be wheeled to church in a cart, yet he continued to preach to his people every Sunday. In fact, the only Sunday he was not able to preach to them was the Sunday before his death. He left this life on November 14, 1865 at the age of 57 years. His life’s work centered in the Bible passage which meant so much to him: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). He was indeed a great theologian and missionary.

Bibliography

Books

- Fritz, John. *The Preacher's Manual: A Study in Homiletics with the Addition of a Brief History of Preaching, Sermon Materials, Texts for Various Occasions, and Pericopic Systems*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941.
- Harms, Hartwig. *Concerned for the Unreached: Life and Work of Louis Harms, Founder of the Hermannsburg Mission*. Hermannsburg, Germany: Ev.-luth. Missionswerk in Neidersachsen, 1999.
- Harms, Ludwig. *Katechismuspredigten*. Hermannsburg, Germany: Druck und Verlag der Missionshausdruckerei, 1886.
- Harms, Ludwig. *Predigten über die Evangelien des Kirchenjahrs*. Hermannsburg, Germany: Druck und Verlag der Missionshandlung, 1909.
- Harding, Nick. *Hanover and the British Empire, 1700–1837*. Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007.
- Herrmann, Gottfried. *Lutherische Freikirche in Sachsen: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer lutherischen Bekenntniskirche*. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1985.
- Ireland, Mary E., tr. *Life and Work of Pastor Louis Harms*. Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1900.
- Krueger, Ottomar. "Unto the Uttermost Part of the Earth: The life of Pastor Louis Harms." *Men and Missions*. Edited by L. Fuerbringer. St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1930.
- Leske, Everard, ed. *Hermannsburg: A Vision and a Mission*. Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977.
- Schuh, H. J. *The Life of Louis Harms*. Columbus, Ohio: The Book

Concern, 1926.

Periodicals

Grünhagen, Andrea. "Tat im Zeichen des Kreuzes: Quellen und Ursachen der Entstehung der Hannoverschen ev.-luth. Freikirche." *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche*. 27, no. 3 (August 2003): 123–142.

Harms, Ludwig. "Von heiligen Abendmahl." *Lutherische Beiträge*. 13, no. 3 (2008): 166–175.

Liefeld, David. "Free Men, Not Slaves! The Church Government Crisis in the Hermannsburg Mission to South Africa." *Logia*, 17, no. 1 (Epiphany, 2008): 21–36.

Lindemann, Daron. "In This Sign You Shall Conquer: The Story of Louis Harms, the Hermannsburg Mission Society, and their Contribution to the Wisconsin Synod." *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, 20, no. 1 (April 2002): 20–49.

Rakowski, Torben. "Ludwig Harms' diakonisches Wirken" *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche*. 31, no. 4 (December 2007): 195–247.

Wangelin, William R. "South Africa's Felsisa: A History" *LOGIA*, 17, no. 1 (Epiphany 2008): 61–67.

Endnotes

¹ Remember that the royal house of England was connected to the royal family of Hanover. George I of England was also the King of Hanover. This continued until Victoria became queen in 1837, when one of her uncles, Ernst August, was designated King of Hanover. Because German law did not recognize female succession, Victoria could not be monarch in Hanover (Nick Harding, *Hanover and the British Empire, 1700–1837* [Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007], p. 278).

² The 95 Theses of Claus Harms are often considered to be the beginning of the Lutheran Renewal. This movement centered in a renewed interest in the inerrant Word and the Lutheran Confessions in contradistinction to rationalism and unionism. It was marked by a renewed interest in the study of Luther and the 17th-century dogmatists. Even though Claus and Ludwig shared a surname, they were in no way related.

³ Gottfried Herrmann, *Lutherische Freikirche in Sachsen: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer lutherischen Bekenntniskirche* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1985), 320.

⁴ Ottomar Krueger, “Unto the Uttermost Part of the Earth: The life of Pastor Louis Harms,” *Men and Missions*, Feuerbringer, L. ed. (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1930), 26.

⁵ John Fritz, *The Preacher’s Manual: A Study in Homiletics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 150; c.f. also, Mary Ireland, tr., *Life and Work of Pastor Louis Harms* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1900), 49.

⁶ Ireland, 48.

⁷ *Die Kirche dauert ihnen zu lang, besonders das junge Volk, das meistens den Krug lieber hat als die Kirche, aber auch die alten Leute, die dadurch beweisen, dass sie nicht in den Himmel wollen. Denn können sie nichtmal vier Stunden in der Kirche aushalten, wie können sie im Himmel aushalten, wo die ganze Ewigkeit lang Kirche ist.*

De Kerk duert jüm to lang, besonnens dat junge Volk, de moistsens den Krog leewer hewwt as de Kerken, awer ok de olen Lüd, de dadörch bewist, dat se nich in Himmel willt. Denn künnt se nichmal veer Stunden inne Kerk utholen, wo können se ’t in Himmel utholen, wo de heele Ewigkeit Kerk is”, Harm, L.: Honnig, hg. v. Th. Harms, Hermannsburg, 1981 (Nachdruck der Ausgaben von 1877 und 1878), S. 161. [Andrea Grünhagen, “Tat im Zeichen des Kreuzes: Quellen und Ursachen der Entstehung der Hannoverschen ev.-luth. Freikirche.” *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche*. Vol. 27, No. 3 (August 2003): 127.]

⁸ Ludwig Harms, “Von heiligen Abendmahl,” *Lutherische Beiträge*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2008): 168–169.

⁹ The Latin here is shorthand for the important phrase from the time of Constantine: *In hoc signo vinces*.

¹⁰ Hartwig Harms, *Concerned for the Unreached: Life and Work of Louis Harms Founder of the Hermannsburg Mission* (Hermannsburg, Germany: Ev.-luth. Missionswerk in Neidersachsen, 1999), 31.

¹¹ Hartwig Harms, vi.

¹² This is the Schreuder mission with which C.U. Faye and Hans Theiste of the Norwegian Synod were connected. The mission was founded by the Norwegian missionary and bishop Hans Paludan Smith Schreuder (1817–1882), who was born in Sogndal, Norway, and graduated from the University of Christiania (Oslo) in 1841. He also contributed to the establishment of the Lutheran Church in Madagascar.

¹³ Ireland, 81.

¹⁴ Here he intended to follow the methods of the Celtic missionaries as noted above.

¹⁵ For more information regarding FELSISA, see William R. Wangelin, “South Africa’s Felsisa: A History,” *LOGIA*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Epiphany, 2008): 61–67.

¹⁶ H. J. Schuh, *The Life of Louis Harms* (Columbus, Ohio: The Book Concern, 1926), 99–101.

¹⁷ Everard Leske, ed. *Hermannsburg: A Vision and a Mission* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), 13.

¹⁸ Harms, 72.

¹⁹ Daron J. Lindemann, “In This Sign You Shall Conquer: The Story of Louis Harms, the Hermannsburg Mission Society, and their Contribution to the Wisconsin Synod,” *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (April, 2002): 20.

Congratulatory Anniversary Letter

(thirty-fifth anniversary of ordination of Rev. Edward Bryant)

by Alexander K. Ring

25 April 2008

St. Mark, Evangelist

Dear Ed, Debbie, and members of St. Timothy Ev. Lutheran Church;

John would have prevented [Jesus], saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"

But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. (St. Matthew 3:14–15)

It is often a difficult thing for a pastor to celebrate an anniversary. Not because it is a reminder you are getting older, or because you must once again hear a bunch of stories that begin "I remember when..." but because the celebration of the anniversary of your ordination seems so self-serving. There is a service, with a sermon and prayers that prominently feature your name. There is a dinner, given in your honor, gifts given to you, congratulations spoken to you, and letters like this one, written to you. And in the midst of all this, many pastors find themselves speaking those words from St. Luke 17, "I am an unworthy servant; I have only done my duty." There is that part of us that wishes to play John, and prevent this.

But Jesus would have you "let it be so now," and consent. It is fitting for a congregation to celebrate the anniversary of their pastor's ordination, for despite how often your name comes up this day, it is really not about you, it is about Jesus. St. Timothy congratulates you, they pat you on the back and thank you for your faithful service, and it is good and right they do this. But in doing so, they are really giving thanks to their Lord for His gift. For it is Jesus who sends pastors, Jesus who blesses their work, and Jesus who forgives them when they fail. Thus to celebrate an anniversary of an ordination is in the end to celebrate the work of Jesus and how He continues to bring all righteousness to His people.

So sit back, Ed, and consent. Permit it to be so now and enjoy the gratitude that comes even to unworthy servants who have only done their duty, for while the people of St. Timothy are grateful to you for your faithful work, they are even more grateful to their Lord for sending faithful

servants to them and to His whole Church.

Your Unworthy Brother in Christ,

Rev. Alexander Ring

Book Review: Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace

by Shawn Stafford

Scaer, David P. *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics Volume VIII. Edited by John Stephenson. St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 2008. 238 pages. \$25.95.

David P. Scaer's *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace* is the latest installment in the thirteen-volume (when completed) Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics series. This dogmatics resource is based upon the outline and thought pattern of the Lutheran Confessions. The series endeavors to be strictly and consciously confessional in its presentation of doctrine and its assessment and analysis of modern theological trends throughout the Christian Church. This series is not intended to take the place of Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* as the standard seminary dogmatics text, but rather to supplement it with the wealth of confessional research from recent decades and by addressing contemporary theological issues.

A professor of systematics and exegesis at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Scaer is a prolific writer and speaker. In the Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics series, Scaer previously produced *Christology* (vol. IV) in 1989 and *Baptism* (vol. XI) in 1999.

We might ask, "Do we need another work on this topic? What could such a work offer that we don't already have?" First, it has been over fifty years since Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* first appeared in English, making its language somewhat dated. Second, issues regarding law and gospel have arisen within Lutheranism since Pieper's time that have not been addressed in a scholarly dogmatic format.

Like Martin Chemnitz in his *Loci Theologici*, Scaer begins his work by defining the terms "law" and "gospel" as they are used in Scripture and in Lutheran theology. But far from being a dry theoretical book with no bearing on practice in the parish, Scaer's work offers practical advice for preaching law and gospel. He also gives a description of a sermon that would lead most preachers to examine thoroughly what it is we do for fifteen minutes each Sunday morning.

Law and gospel is the framework according to which a sermon should be constructed and preached. The sermon is not simply a publicly offered speech providing religious information or a

lecture on Christian doctrine, though in some cases it may be just that and no more. Rather the sermon addresses the hearer so that he finds himself in the sermon as one condemned by God (law), but who in the next moment hears that he has been redeemed by that same God in Christ (gospel) (60).

Scaer points out how it is not enough to simply use the words “law” and “gospel” or explain their function in a sermon. Talking “about” law and gospel is not the same as preaching them.

Law and gospel are proclaimed not when these words are recited in a sermon but when the narrative of Christ’s death and resurrection is read and provides the content of the church’s preaching. That and nothing else is the gospel which Paul proclaimed (1Cor. 15:1-5)! Even if the preacher can detail the differences between the law and the gospel, he may not be able to preach them. A sermon correctly denoting the differences between the law and the gospel may be devoid of both (12-13).

Scaer offers these words of comfort to preachers who botch their sermons when it comes to law and gospel and to the congregants subjected to such preaching:

Wherever the gospels are read and the traditional liturgy, especially with the creeds, remains in place in the church, there Jesus is proclaiming Himself as the gospel. Since no guarantee can be given that every preacher will proclaim the law and the gospel, as Luther conceded, it is vital for the church that the liturgy remains in place, the Scriptures are read, and doctrinally sound hymns are sung (12).

Anecdotal evidence was offered by Pres. Wilhelm Petersen at Bethany Seminary that this is similar to what Norman Madson, Sr. told his students.

In words that bring to mind the title of John R. W. Stott’s *Preaching: Between Two Worlds*, Scaer writes,

Preaching extends the historical events of Israel and Christ’s life and their interpretation by the prophets into the lives of His people whom God desires to save. It addresses the unbeliever and believer in the same way, since the believer remains a sinner for as long as He lives (SD VI. 7-8). *The believer is caught*

in the despair brought on by his own sins, but then he hears God's promises and by faith he possesses everything Christ by His death has won for him. What happened as a one-time historical act and was written in the Scriptures by the prophets and apostles is now proclaimed by preachers for the salvation of their hearers (60; emphasis mine).

One of the most difficult areas regarding law and gospel for Lutherans is the third use of the law: whether there is such a use and whether and how it is to be preached. For Lutherans, this controversy regarding the third use of the law goes back to the Antinomians of Luther's time who contended that the law had no place in the life of the believer. Scaer begins his discussion of the third use by making the observation, "Though with God the law is one and unchangeable, it is heard in different ways according to the circumstances of those who hear it" (SD VI.16) (63). What changes to make it the third use? "After he is converted by the gospel he sees the law as a positive factor in his life (third use). He sees the law as God first gave it to Adam. In its three uses, the law remains the same. What changes is man's understanding of himself, others, and his relationship to God" (63).

In keeping with a common catechism understanding of the third use Scaer states, "The third use is positive in outlining the good works which Christians are already doing" (SD VI.5) (63). As an example of the third use of the law he points to the positive directives found in Luther's explanations to the ten commands: "We should fear and love God, that we..." Keeping in mind the gospel as the power and motivation behind a Christian's works, he describes Luther's explanations as "the scaffolding on which the law is hung, and then it is lived out in the life of the Christian" (69). Scaer also shows how the Lutheran and Reformed views of the third use of the law differ: "Missing from the Reformed view is the idea, essential to the Lutheran position, that Christian faith spontaneously does good works" (Ep VI. 2) (64).

A unique aspect of Scaer's approach to the third use of the law, in keeping with his emphasis that "All theology is Christology," is his connection of the third use to Christ's active obedience. Like the 2001 ELS Explanation to Luther's Catechism, which concludes the discussion of each commandment with Jesus' active obedience of each, Scaer says, "In Luther's hand the law (commandments) become...Christological descriptions, first of Jesus and then of believers" (68).

Scaer finds in the third use "the unity of the law and the gospel" (69). What is meant by this unusual, un-Lutheran sounding statement?

“The third use of the law treats of man in that rare moment, which exists in faith rather than in real time, when he is without sin and sees the law as promise fulfilled by God rather than as a demand” (69). Only in Christ is the demand of the law met, and only as we are clothed in Christ by faith can the law no longer accuse us. This will occur fully only in heaven. The question has been raised within our fellowship of whether one could preach in a sermon law-gospel- third use, or whether the third use should be preached. Scaer writes, “In Christ the tension of the law and the gospel is resolved, and resolved also is the problem of how the law (third use) can be God’s last word to man” (69).

Among the issues discussed under the section on the Means of Grace are the distinctions between preaching and the administration of the sacraments and the wider audience for preaching. Scaer states, “The preached Word is for believers and unbelievers, but the sacraments are intended only for believers and are administered only in the community of faith” (20), and “Preaching is intended for all, baptism for believers, and the Lord’s Supper for the baptized” (140). Perhaps the phrase “baptism for believers” could be in reference to the examination and confession of the Apostles’ Creed as part of the baptismal rite. What is missing is an explicit statement of the fact that faith is created through the Holy Spirit’s working through the Word in Baptism.

Rather than pit the Word against the Sacrament in a sort of hierarchy where the Lord’s Supper ranks above preaching, Scaer emphasizes the necessity of the Word in preparation for and explanation of the Sacrament: “Sacraments are not autonomous rites to be administered apart from the proclamation of the gospel” (41). He further explains:

The sacraments are the gospel in a distilled or concentrated form and are intended for those who have already by convicted by the law. The word is prior to the sacraments and provides them with their salvific character and efficacy. The Word proclaims Christ, baptism places the believer into His death, and the Lord’s Supper offers to communicants what Christ sacrificed for them. *The Word invites individuals to repent, believe, and be baptized, and to receive the Lord’s Supper.* Where the law is not preached, the gospel cannot be understood properly and the sacraments are not received properly (41; emphasis mine).

One the most interesting and valuable contributions of Scaer’s work is his discussion of 20th-century issues regarding law and gospel. Among them are Barth’s inversion of law and gospel to gospel-law stemming from his denial of natural revelation, and Elert’s denial of the

third use. Of special interest is Scaer's description of the LC-MS' crisis in the early 1970s at St. Louis seminary which centered on the "role law and gospel played in theology" (93). Gospel reductionists argued that justification was the only necessary doctrine, and the controversy centered on the question of whether the governing principle in theology was the Scriptures or law and gospel (94). Scaer follows Fagerberg in stating that the Lutheran Confessions "did not make the gospel the norm of the biblical interpretation and yet both doctrines were central to understanding the Bible" (94-95). Over against gospel-reductionism and denials of inerrancy, Scaer writes, "The gospel requires that the biblical history be affirmed, and that this is applicable for the history of Israel as it is for the history of Jesus. The gospel derives its life from the *incarnatus est* and the *crucifixus est*" (99).

While not an easy read, Scaer's *Law and Gospel and Means of Grace* is a valuable tool in wrestling with difficult issues that have practical impact on our preaching and teaching.

Book Review: Speaking the Truth in Love to Jehovah's Witnesses

by John J. Petersen

Ehlke, Roland Cap. *Speaking the Truth in Love to Jehovah's Witnesses*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2008. 229 pages. \$15.99.

In college I had a speech professor who was very interested in the various forms of persuasion used by individuals, advertisers and organizations. Curious about the persuasion tactics of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the professor invited two of them into his home one late afternoon. After a couple of hours, tired and thoroughly bored, he wondered how this annoyance might be ended. He recalled having heard something about the Witnesses being against the use of alcohol and tobacco. "So," he recounted with a proud grin, "I lit up a cigarette and invited them to join me in a cocktail; and before long they were heading out the door."

Obviously there are much better alternatives when it comes to dealing with such visitors who appear on our doorsteps. Dr. Roland Cap Ehlke has provided us with one. In fact, biblically speaking, his approach is unarguably the best for Christians who seek to take advantage of an opportunity to share the hope that is in us: *Speaking The Truth In Love To Jehovah's Witnesses*.

Professor Ehlke arranges his book into three main sections. Part one offers an informative analysis of why the Jehovah's Witnesses are more than just a unique sect within Christianity, but are in fact a cult. Like other groups which fall into that category, the Watchtower Society rejects the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation of Christ. In the same section, he describes its founding and early history, as well as the terminology used and the mechanisms by which its leadership controls the members and their worship lives.

The second main part of the book takes up in detail the Society's most harmful errors, namely, its doctrines of God, Scripture, Christology, and Eschatology. The centerpiece of this doctrinal examination comprises chapters six and seven. There the author presents a clear summary of historic Christianity's teaching regarding the two natures in Christ, juxtaposed with the Watchtower's exegesis of key passages by which His full divinity is denied.

The book's third section provides a helpful directive to Christians desiring to do more than shut the door on or otherwise "get rid of"

visitors from the Watchtower Society. In addition to reviewing Scripture's teaching of salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus, in this portion of the book Ehlke shows how that comforting doctrine is corrupted by the Witnesses' insistence on salvation by works. The reader will also find in this section compelling accounts of those who have left the Society. Here, especially, good advice is given on how to best make a clear confession to those caught up in the harsh legalism of the Jehovah's Witness system.

The sections following the conclusion of *Speaking The Truth In Love To Jehovah's Witnesses* would alone make the book well worth its cost. There the reader will find questions for study and discussion which serve to summarize and recall the main points of each chapter. In fact, the book's readable style, along with the discussion questions, make it very usable for a small group Bible class. The appendix presents a clear description of the 4th-century Arian controversy, the errors of which are still prominent in Watchtower doctrine, and still answered in the Nicene Creed. In addition to the bibliography, and the subject and Scripture index, the vocabulary section is very useful in describing what Jehovah's Witnesses mean by their peculiar use of words which are otherwise familiar to Christians.

Near the beginning of the book, Dr. Ehlke cites an interesting quotation from 1938's "The Chaos of the Cult," where Jan Karel Van Baalen referred to cults as "the unpaid bills of the church." Doctrinal ignorance and confusion have developed among the liberal churches which have downplayed or even denied Scripture and what it teaches concerning faith and morality. A vacuum is created in which the cults thrive with their forceful message and insistence on proper moral behavior. Nevertheless, we realize that individuals who've grown up in more conservative churches are not immune to the deceptive allure of the cults. In such cases, the vacuum is created by a lack of Bible knowledge and an unfamiliarity with the foundational doctrines of historic Christianity.

How necessary it is for the church to maintain full working knowledge of the original languages of the Bible in order to answer and refute the mistranslations and false exegesis which is so central to the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses and other cults. How important it is for catechism students to know the two natures in Christ, and why it is necessary for our Savior to be true man and true God. Roland Cap Ehlke's book makes a very positive contribution to that crucial and ongoing task.

Lutheran Synod Quarterly Index

2008

	Volume	Number	Page
Articles			
The 90th Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod <i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	48	4	383
After the Storm: Paul Gerhardt and a Pastoral Theology of the Cross <i>Alex K. Ring</i>	48	1	107
Continue Walking in the Truth: A Resonance of John 14:6 <i>Phillip K. Lepak</i>	48	4	311
An Exegetical Survey of the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis <i>S. Piet Van Kampen</i>	48	4	336
Ludwig Harms: The 200th Anniversary of the Birth of this Theologian and Missionary, 1808–1865 <i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	48	4	395
Luther's Pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen: The 450th Anniversary of the Death of this Great Lutheran Pastor and Preacher, 1485–1558 <i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	48	4	387
Overview, Themes, and Vocabulary in Psalm 119 <i>Jesse M. Jacobsen</i>	48	2 & 3	256
Practical Hermeneutics <i>Theodore G. Gullixson</i>	48	2 & 3	199
A Reflection on St. John - Apostle and Evangelist <i>Bruce W. Adams</i>	48	4	304
Refocusing a Congregation on Its Mission <i>Edward L. Bryant</i>	48	4	353
Book Reviews			
David P. Scaer, Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace <i>Shawn Stafford</i>	48	4	409
Michael Paul Middendorf, The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7 <i>Michael K. Smith</i>	48	2 & 3	284

LSQ Vol. 48 No. 4			417
Roland Cap Ehlke, Speaking the Truth in Love to Jehovah's Witnesses <i>John J. Petersen</i>	48	4	414
	Volume	Number	Page
Reformation Lectures			
The Life and Work of Paul Gerhardt: 400th Anniversary	48	1	7
Lecture One: Paul Gerhardt: Pastor and Theologian <i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>			
Lecture Two: Paul Gerhardt: Poet and Hymnwriter <i>Carlos R. Messerli</i>	48	1	70
Reactions to the 2007 Reformation Lectures <i>Jerome T. Gernander</i> <i>Thomas L. Rank</i>	48	1	97
Sermons			
Funeral Sermon for Juul B. Madson <i>John J. Petersen</i>	48	2 & 3	193
Funeral Sermon on Psalm 71:9 <i>Paul Gerhardt</i>	48	1	156
Funeral Sermon on Psalm 86:11 <i>Paul Gerhardt</i>	48	1	138
Sermon for the 150th Anniversary of Norseland Lutheran Church <i>Norman A. Madson</i>	48	4	299
Sermon on Hebrews 7:26–27 <i>Erling T. Teigen</i>	48	2 & 3	184
Sermon on Psalm 111: The Lord's Supper <i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	48	2 & 3	187
Notes			
2008 Reformation Lectures	48	2 & 3	293
Anna of Prussia <i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	48	1	177
Congratulatory Anniversary Letter <i>Alex K. Ring</i>	48	4	407
The Fifteenth Anniversary Convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference <i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	48	2 & 3	278
Gerhardt and the Berlin Christmas Service of 1659	48	1	175
Index to Volume 48	48	4	416