

How Are ὕψι and σώζω Used in the Bible?
From What Are We Saved?

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Affected the Life of Young Norwegian
Pastors Realized Through the Experiences,
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Wednesday of the Third Sunday of Easter

Pentecost Sermon

Book Reviews

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF..... Timothy A. Hartwig
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Nicholas D. Proksch,
Timothy R. Schmeling

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 64, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2024)

TERMS ARE IMPORTANT, BUT GROUPS OF PEOPLE can fall into the habit of using them with a superficial understanding of their meaning. The church has many terms that it uses frequently that may not be well understood. Pastor Thompson in the first article of this volume explores the word “save.” He looks at it from the perspective of the Old Testament Hebrew and the New Testament Greek so that one can grow in understanding what it means to be saved.

In the merger mania of the 19th and 20th centuries, salvation was at stake. The true teachings of scripture alone and salvation by grace alone through Jesus Christ alone were being laid aside by Lutherans for the supposedly high goal of unionism. Some were not willing to give up the Truth and took a stand for it. Pastor Justin Peterson was one. The second article of this volume by Pastor Faugstad presents the life and experiences of Pastor Peterson.

The third article of the volume presents an exegesis of Revelation 20:1–6. Pastor Gullixson sets before us the correct understanding of the 1000-year reign of Christ and his saints.

Also included in this issue are three recent sermons and two book reviews.

—TAH

How Are **ישע** and **σωζω** Used in the Bible? From What Are We Saved?

Noah R. Thompson
River Heights Lutheran Church
East Grand Forks, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 64, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2024)

Many of our greatest and most treasured Lutheran hymns contain either the word save or salvation. “Salvation unto us is come, By God’s free grace and favor” (ELH 227:1). Maybe those words sounded in your mind when you read the sentence above. Or, “By Grace I’m saved, grace free and boundless; My soul, believe and doubt it not” (ELH 226:1) echoed instead. If you were to ask many of our children and catechumens what Jesus has done for us, I am sure that many would reply that he died to save us. The second volume of Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics* is titled “The Saving Grace of God” and goes on to discuss salvation for 557 pages.¹

There is no shortage of literature and hymns concerning salvation. The goal of this paper is to look at how verb **ישע** in the Hebrew and **σωζω** in the Greek are used in the Old and New Testament. It is difficult to look at the verb alone. So, often the corresponding nouns **ישועה** and **σωτηρία** will be investigated. How did God have these words used in the various sections of Scripture? How did the prophets use these words, and the psalmists? What use did Moses make of **ישע** in the Pentateuch and the narrative sections of the Old Testament? How did our Savior use **σωζω**? How was it used by Paul and other writers in the New Testament church? And, very importantly, what is it that God saves his people from in these various sections of Scripture? This paper

¹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. II (Concordia Publishing House, 1951).

will be an investigation into these questions and a study of the Greek and Hebrew words “to save” with their corresponding noun “salvation.”

The Use of **יָשַׁע** in the Old Testament

Definition

The definition of **יָשַׁע** does not have unanimous agreement among scholars in recent times. While Vine’s *Complete Expository Dictionary* holds to the BDAG definition stating, “Essentially the word means ‘to remove or seek to remove someone from a burden, oppression, or danger,’”² other theological dictionaries contend that **יָשַׁע** has nothing to do with the Arabic verb *wasia* which means “be spacious” or “give room to,” and that this is an error in conflating the Proto-Semitic root for **יָשַׁע**, *ys*, with the Arabic *ws*.³ In support of this argument, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states,

The conception of salvation as “spaciousness,” liberation from restricting, oppressive experiences both physical and spiritual, occurs frequently in the OT (e.g., Ps. 4:2[1]; 18:17-20[16-19]; 25:17; 31:9[8]; 118:5;5; Est. 4:14); this meaning, however, is expressed not by *hōsia** but by *hirhib*, “give room to,” *merhab*, “liberating space,” and the like. No trace of the “spaciousness” hypothesis is attested before Schuldens, and in practice, apart from brief etymological sections, it has played a minor role in comprehensive discussions of the meaning of *hōsia*, *yesua*, etc.⁴

Instead, they argue general root for **יָשַׁע** (*ys*) “implies bringing help to people in the midst of their trouble rather than in rescuing them from it.”⁵ While this may seem to be semantically trivial, there are theological implications to whether **יָשַׁע** means to bring help to one in need instead of removing one from their troubles.⁶

² W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, eds., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 214. Hereafter *EDBW*.

³ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Green (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 6:442. Hereafter *TDOT*.

⁴ *TDOT* 6:442–3.

⁵ Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 2:556. Hereafter *NIDOTTE*.

⁶ While it is outside of the scope of this paper as to whether **יָשַׁע** means to remove from trouble or to bring help to those in trouble, the author found the argument that God brings salvation to those in trouble to be more compelling. The fact that God will

While the root ys occurs 354 time in the Old Testament,⁷ and is at the root of a number of proper names including Elisha, Joshua, and Isaiah, among many others, it is used in the verb form 205 times. The verb only occurs in the causative and passive stems, *hiphil* and *niphal*.⁸

Acting Agent

Throughout the Old Testament ישׁ is almost exclusively used as a theological term. The acting agent, whether it be the immediate agent or acting through intermediaries that he has sent on his behalf, is Yahweh. God is the subject or acting agent and his chosen people are the objects: the recipients of his saving acts.

ישׁ is the most common term when it comes to soteriological acts in religious contexts, and one of the rarer verbs to be used in everyday language.⁹ Instead, in everyday language verbs such as *azar* (“help”), *hissil* (“rescue”), *nissabôn* (“victory”), are much more likely to be used. Almost exclusively, ישׁ is a special word that is reserved for cases when God works, sometimes through direct miraculous means and sometime through indirect or non-miraculous intermediary means, to bring help to his people.

In contexts that involve a non-Israelite speaking, or the help that is expected from foreign and false gods to non-Israelites, the use of ישׁ seems to be deliberately avoided. Examples of ישׁ being used exclusively for Yahweh and his saving power in distinction to the sort of salvation the enemies of God’s people can look for are found in 1 Samuel 4. When the faith of Israel’s elders in the power of God is expressed, ישׁ is used. When the Philistines call out to their god נצל “be delivered” is used. Other examples of the use of ישׁ being avoided when the speaker is a non-Israelite are found in Exodus 2:19 and 2 Kings 19:11. In both these cases נצל is again used to describe the deliverance or salvation they expect. These examples reinforce the point that ישׁ is reserved for the work of God as he brings help to his people who are in trouble.

The Use of ישׁ in the Old Testament

Now that a working definition has been established and understanding that Yahweh is almost exclusively the acting agent in the use of ישׁ , this paper will look at how ישׁ is used in different sections of

often allow us to remain in our trials but will nevertheless save us and does not abandon us is commonly found in Scripture and is evident in our own lives.

⁷ TDOT 6:446.

⁸ EDBW 214.

⁹ TDOT 6:445.

the Old Testament. And, what God saves his people from will also be investigated.

Narrative Prose Texts

The *locus classicus* of **ישע** being used in the narrative prose¹⁰ is found in Israel's victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea, **וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם**, **אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל--מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם; וַיִּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל**, "And Yahweh saved Israel on that day from the hand of Egypt" (Ex 14:30a). Exodus 14 serves as the template of a pattern that reoccurs in the narrative prose: God's people are in trouble, they call out for deliverance, and God answers the call of distress with his **ישע**.¹¹

While the destruction of the Egyptian army serves as the premier example of the way God saves his people from situations in which they cannot save themselves, the theme of **ישע** continues throughout the narrative prose. One of the primary means is found in connection with Israel's military success over her enemies. Gideon knows God will save (**ישע**) Israel from the hands of the Midianites when he finds the fleece wet and the ground dry in Judges 6. The proof that this is God's salvation is further exemplified in Judges when the number of men is reduced to 300. God declares that he is the one who will save (**ישע**) Israel in Judges 7:7. Other examples of Israel's military victories that are divinely directed with Yahweh as the saving agent are found with Samuel (1 Sam 7:8), Saul and Samuel (1 Sam 11:13), and David (1 Sam 19:5) to name a few examples among many.

At other points God is the implied subject when he sends leaders to his people who will act as saviors. These leaders act as saviors who were raised up by God such as the case in Judges 2:16; **וַיִּקַּם יְהוָה, שְׂפָטִים; וַיִּוִּשְׁעוּם, מִיַּד שִׁסְיָהֶם**, "And the Lord raised up judges, who saved them from the hand of these raiders." Another example of this occur with Samuel's anointing of Saul who would save God's people from the Philistines in 1 Samuel 9:16. There are also cases of God giving victory to those he has chosen to deliver his people, such Samson in Judges 15:18 (**הִתְשׁוּעָה**).

In investigating the use of **ישע** in the narrative texts, we find God saving his people from their earthly enemies. This is not surprising considering the narrative texts serve as the history of God's people. It is the history of God fulfilling his covenant to Abraham by delivering them and leading them to the promised land. One of the main factors

¹⁰ TDOT 6:450.

¹¹ NIDOTTE 2:556.

by which God fulfills his promise is by giving them victory over various armies and nations that would threaten the fulfillment of his covenant.

Prophetic Literature

The root *ys* is prominent throughout the Prophets, being used one hundred times.¹² As is the case in the narrative texts, Yahweh remains the only proper subject of **שׁע**.¹³ As pointed out above, **שׁע** is avoided when idols are addressed. The only time when **שׁע** is used in reference to another subject besides Yahweh is to show that other gods cannot save. This is found in Jeremiah 14:9 which explains that mankind is unable to save in the manner that only God can.

While the use of **שׁע** is fairly unidimensional in its use in the narrative texts, and while the subject (Yahweh) and object (God's people) remain consistent, the situations to which God brings his salvation is more nuanced in prophetic literature. The verb **שׁע** and the noun **ישׁועה** (salvation) are associated not only with single events, but also universal conditions in the prophetic texts.

Calls for Yahweh to save his people from a foreign enemy continues to be a use of **שׁע** in the prophetic texts. Hezekiah prays for Yahweh to save when facing the Assyrian army in Isaiah 37:20. In Jeremiah 15:20, Yahweh promises to save Jeremiah from his opponents. But also in prophetic literature, God brings his saving power to the individual, saving him from earthly woes including from sickness, as is the case in Isaiah 38:20. Also connected to individual moments of beings saved is God's promise to save the remnant in Zephaniah 3:17.

However, **שׁע** is also used in a broader sense that has implications of eschatological salvation in various places in the prophets.¹⁴ Often, this use involves the restoration of a united Israel under a future Davidic king (e.g., Jer 23:6, Ezek 34:22, and Zech 9:9). Many of these uses imply a universal condition instead of a one-time event. There are also times when **שׁע** extends beyond the Israelite nation, although it is through Israel being a light for the gentiles that Yahweh's salvation comes to them (Isa 49:6).

In prophetic literature, a connection is often made with **שׁע** and expressions of trust, or faith (**בְּטַחֹן**). The *locus classicus* of this connection between **שׁע** and trust is found in Isaiah 30:15.¹⁵ **בְּשׁוֹבֵי וְנַחַת**

¹² NIDOTTE 2:558

¹³ TDOT 6:455

¹⁴ NIDOTTE 2:558.

¹⁵ TDOT 6:458.

תְּשׁוּעָתְךָ בְּהַשְׁקֵט וּבְבִטְחָה תִּהְיֶה גְבוּרַתְךָם, “In returning and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”

Connections are also made with *ישועה* and *צדקה* (“righteousness”) in prophetic literature. Isaiah 51:8 states, *וְצִדְקָתִי לְעוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה, וְיִשׁוּעָתִי לְדוֹר דּוֹרִים*, “my righteousness will be forever, and my salvation to all generations” (cf. Isa 45:8; 46:13; 51:6). Botterweck and Ringren write that this “illustrates the application of forensic terminology to the saving relationship between God and his people. Much what has been written on *sedāqa* and thus be applied to *ysua*, e.g., ‘this righteousness can even be invoked as a basis for the forgiveness of sins.’”¹⁶

The use of *ישע* and *ישועה* in prophetic literature expands beyond Yahweh saving his people from their physical enemies. The saving work of God extends to the promise of salvation for other nations. Also, the saving nature of God extends to an everlasting righteousness. While somewhat indirect, God saving his people from their unrighteousness or sin is implied.

The Psalms

The psalter contains nearly 40 percent of the root *ys* with 136 occurrences.¹⁷ Nearly half of the psalms contain one or more occurrences of *ys*. Most commonly *ישע* is found in the imperative form with a first person suffix. It cuts across all the Psalter’s literary types (e.g., laments, thanksgiving, praise, remembrance). As is the case in the prophetic texts and narrative texts, Yahweh remains the subject unless his help is being contrasted to the futility of human aid such as in Psalm 60:11 or the insufficiency of military might such as in Psalm 33:16.

In the Psalms there are some frequent associations that come with *ישע* or *ישועה*. One association comes with expressions of confidence and faith. Psalm 37:40 describes how God saves those who *חסה* (“trust”) in him for refuge. This is also the case in Psalm 17:7. Psalm 78 tells how Yahweh in his anger rose up against Israel because they did not *אמן* (“believe”) or *בטח* (“trust”) in his salvation (78:21–22).

However, while emphasis is put on the faith of Israel or the individual as to whether Yahweh will save, the psalms also show that God saves because he is the one who is faithful and good. This is demonstrated with the psalms’ association of *ys* with the *חסד* (“loyalty or goodness”) of Yahweh. This connection is made in Psalm 36:5–6; 6:4; and 17:7, among many others. Indeed, the close association of *חסד*

¹⁶ TDOT 6:459.

¹⁷ NIDOTTE 2:559.

with $\gamma\psi$ make it as though God's intention to save his people is a legal obligation.¹⁸ There is also correlation between the certainty that God will answer the prayer for salvation and the poverty and helplessness of the one calling out in Psalm 72:4 and 34:6.

With the many uses of $\gamma\psi$ in the Psalms, there are a plethora of situations and needs in which Yahweh saves. There are the times of communal calls for Yahweh to save and give God's people victory over her enemies (e.g., 60:5; 20:9). There are also communal thanks that God saves the poor from their distress (18:27). The Psalms naturally take on a personal salvation connotation as well. David prays for God to save him from all who pursue him in Psalm 7:2. Yahweh saves David from his enemy's false accusation (7:10). Psalm 54 has David asking God to save his life from the foreigners who have risen against him. In Psalm 51:14, David asks the "God of my salvation" to deliver him from the guilt of his sin. Finally, Psalm 68:20 has the God of deliverances (*מושעה*) being the one from whom escape from death is found. In the Psalms, perhaps more so than anywhere in the Old Testament, we find the fullest expression of what Yahweh saves from: death, sin, strife, despair, by providing peace, security, health, forgiveness, joy, life, and victory, which God grants from his heavenly sphere.¹⁹

Old Testament Conclusion

The overall theme to be gleaned from the Old Testament usage of $\gamma\psi$ is clear: God and God alone is the one who saves. Not surprisingly, the nature of the saving acts of God in dealing with his chosen people to whom he had promised the land of Israel, deals largely with God saving his people from earthly dangers. This is clearly seen in the narrative prose as God again and again saves his people from foreign nations and armies. But as seen in prophetic literature and the Psalms, the use of $\gamma\psi$ goes far beyond earthly enemies. There as we see a more personal use of $\gamma\psi$. It extends to eschatological and soteriological uses. God bring help to his people in their sickness, from false accusations, the sorrows of this life, and even from the guilt of sin and death.

Perhaps the most important thing to note in in the Old Testament, is how $\gamma\psi$ and *ושעה* are used nearly without exception in matters that belong to Yahweh and him alone. As this paper moves on to the use of the of the Greek verb $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$, "to save" (by far the most common translation of $\gamma\psi$ in the Septuagint), it gives a sense of wonder to the

¹⁸ TDOT 6:460.

¹⁹ TDOT 6:463.

words of the angel of the Lord when he appears to Joseph in a dream in Matthew 1:21. The angel tells Joseph the name he is to give to the Son, who is not his own and in the womb of his betrothed, is **יְשׁוּעָה**.

The Use of **σώζω** in the New Testament

Definition and Acting Agent

While the definition of **יְשׁוּעָה** in the Old Testament is a little harder to define, the definition of **σώζω** is more straight forward. The *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* defines **σώζω** as rescue, save, preserve, or help.²⁰ Louw-Nida gives the definition for **σώζω** as “to rescue from danger and to restore to a former state of safety and well-being—‘to deliver, to rescue, to make safe, deliverance.’”²¹ In either case, the common translation of **σώζω** “to save” serves well enough, although “to heal” is also acceptable in certain situations.

The verb **σώζω** occurs 106 times in the New Testament. As we will see below, it is fairly evenly distributed through the New Testament, with the exception of the writings of John. The acting agent or initiator of saving is often God. But his saving work is often done through indirect means. Jesus is often the direct acting agent (Mt 1:21) in the Gospels, but God works through other means such as Paul (1 Cor 9:22), another Christian (Jas 5:20), a person’s spouse (1 Cor 7:16), the church (Jude 23), the word (Jas 1:21), the prayer of faith (Jas 5:15), and baptism (1 Pet 3:21).²²

The recipients who are being saved vary nearly as much as the acting agent that God works through. Those who are saved, asking to be saved, or God desires to save, include individuals (Mt 14:30), Jesus himself (Jn 12:27), the Jews (Jn 5:34), Israel (Rom 9:27), all people (1 Tim 2:4), and the world (Jn 3:16-17).

*The Use of **σώζω** in the New Testament*

In the Synoptic Gospels

There are two primary uses of **σώζω** in the Synoptic Gospels: Jesus’ physical healings and spiritual saving. In accounts of Jesus healing, **σώζω** is used sixteen times and **διασώζω** is used twice. In these healings, **σώζω**

²⁰ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 3:319. Hereafter *NIDNTT*.

²¹ J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:240. Hereafter *GELNT*.

²² *NIDNTT* 3:319.

never refers to a single part of the body but always to the entire person.²³ While these saving acts of Jesus bring about a physical healing, there is often a spiritual aspect to the physical healing. The faith of the person being given a physical healing/saving is an important factor. Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; and 18:42 all include the phrase ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε, “Your (the) faith has saved you”—that adds up to seven of the eighteen times that Jesus heals an individual. Jesus’ choice of words leaves room for the view that the saving power of Jesus connected with faith goes beyond the physical life. The fact that the faith of the individual and the saving power of Jesus goes beyond physical healing is demonstrated in Luke 7. Jesus uses this same phrase ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε when he tells the sinful woman who anoints his feet that her sins are forgiven.

In the psalm and prophecy of Zechariah at the birth of his son John in Luke 1, σωτηρία are used three times. As Zechariah prophesies the salvation his child will proclaim, he uses terms of the Old Testament. He blesses God that he has raised up a κέρασ σωτηρίας, “horn of salvation” (v. 69). God has given his people “salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all those who hate us” (v. 71). And says he has given “knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins” (v. 77). *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology* explains this benediction alongside the words of the angel in Matthew 1:21 in this way: “Whereas in the OT cleansing from sin was a precondition of physical salvation from one’s enemies, this psalm suggest it is in the precondition of light and peace, which are now understood primary in terms of a personal relationship with God in Christ.”²⁴

Through the core of Synoptic Gospels, σῶζω and σωτηρία are very much in the background, underscoring Jesus words and actions.²⁵ Jesus speaks eschatologically when replying to Peter’s confession and tells his disciples, “whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life on account me, this person will save it” (Lk 9:24). This account is recorded in corresponding texts of Matthew 16 and Mark 8 with the same eschatological use of σῶζω. The eschatological emphasis of σῶζω is found when the disciples, shocked at learning the difficulty of entering the kingdom of heaven when Jesus compares it to a camel entering

²³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 7:990. Hereafter *TDNT*.

²⁴ *NIDNTT* 3:212.

²⁵ *TDNT* 7:991.

through the eye of a needle, ask *τίς δύναται σωθῆναι* “who can be saved?” (Mk 10:26). To this Jesus responds that all things are possible with God.

While salvation often alludes to eschatology in the Synoptic Gospel, Jesus’ interaction with Zacchaeus in Luke 19 shows that salvation is something the believer has in the present. Jesus tells Zacchaeus, *Σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ ἐγένετο*, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

In the Synoptics, *σωτηρία* primarily denotes a future event, but it is also a present event—that which was lost is found.²⁶ The saving act is impossible for man and only possible with God (Mk 10:26–27). It is done through Jesus who saves his people from their sins (Mt 1:21). This results in crossing over from death to life as one loses his life for the sake of Christ, and he in turn saves the sinner’s life (Lk 9:24).

In Acts

In Acts, *σῶζω* and *σωτηρία* occur 19 times. *Σωτηρία* is of central importance to the proclamation of the early New Testament church. In many places, the early church shows that the content of *σωτηρία* is found in the forgiveness of sin (Acts 3:19, 26; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 22:16; 26:18). This message of salvation was addressed first to the Jews (Acts 13:26) and then to the gentiles (Acts 16:17). While *σῶζω* is used in the theological sense throughout Acts, it is also used for physical safety in Acts 27 when Paul and the sailors hope to be saved from the storm.

Acts makes clear that *σωτηρία* is found in no one else besides Christ. Peter tells the council in Jerusalem in Acts 4:12, *καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἄλλῳ οὐδενὶ ἢ σωτηρία, οὐδὲ γὰρ ὄνομα ἔστιν ἕτερον ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν τὸ δεδομένον ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἐν ᾧ δεῖ σωθῆναι ἡμᾶς*, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that is given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts makes clear that *σωτηρία* is received through faith in Christ (Acts 15:10, 16:31). This saving faith in Christ is alone what saves in opposition to those who suppose they can be saved by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38) or circumcision (Acts 15:1).

Acts shows that *σωτηρία* is something to be obtained in the present (Acts 2:40, 22:16). It is given to those who *πιστεύω* “believe” that in Christ their sins have been forgiven (Acts 10:43). The primary emphasis of what we are saved from in Acts is our sin, with the implication that this new relationship with God will also result in being saved on the last day.

²⁶ TDNT 7:992.

In Pauline Literature

In the letters to the Church

In the epistles to the various churches Paul uses *σῶζω* and *σωτηρία* in an intentionally limited sense—confining it to the relation between God and man. When Paul refers to other dangers from which he asks God for help he uses *ῥύομαι* (rescue/deliver) (2 Thess 3:2 and 2 Tim 3:11),²⁷ perhaps keeping in mind the way the Old Testament reserved *ἡσ* for specific actions of Yahweh, Paul seeks to reserve *σῶζω* specifically for the work of God. While the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation and justification are not completely separated from Paul's use of *σῶζω*, Paul primarily uses *σωτηρία* as a future eschatological term.²⁸ An example of this differentiation is found in Romans 5:9: πολλῶ οὖν μᾶλλον δικαιωθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ σωθησόμεθα δι' αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς, "Since therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved through him from the wrath." That wrath is the final judgment of God.

While Paul primarily uses *σῶζω* and *σωτηρία* in looking toward the end of all things, the status of being saved is the reality in which the Christian now lives (e.g., Rom 8:24 and Eph 2:8). The result of living in this saved state results in a change in the believer's life: 2 Thessalonians 2:13, ὅτι εἴλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἀπαρχὴν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας, "because God has chosen you as first fruits for salvation by the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in truth." Paul goes on to encourage them in this salvation to stand firm and be strengthened in every good work and word. Paul notes that salvation is a present reality given to men when he quotes from Isaiah 49:8: "now is the day of salvation." In 2 Corinthians 6:2, "[t]he very fact that we have already been saved makes the expectation of final eschatological salvation the greater reality."²⁹ In Philippians 2:12f., Paul encourages believers to work out their salvation in fear and trembling as it is a reality they live in, with the reminder that it is God who works within them.

In his letters to various churches, what the believer is saved from has both temporal and eschatological implications. Those who are saved by faith are contrasted with those who are perishing in the here and now (1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 2:15). And, in the eschatological salvation we are saved from the coming wrath of God (Rom 5:9; 1 Cor 3:15; 5:5;

²⁷ TDNT 7:992.

²⁸ TDNT 7:992.

²⁹ NIDNTT 3:214.

1 Thess 5:9). The fact that we are saved from the coming wrath of God implies that we are also saved from what induces God's righteous wrath against humanity, namely, our sin.

In the Pastoral Letters

The Pastoral Letters contain a series of verses containing *σώζω* and *σωτηρία*. They also show how salvation is mediated to us. In his first letter to Timothy Paul states his apostleship is by the "command of God our Savior" (*θεοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν*) and then lays down in verse 15 that the purpose of Jesus entering into the world was to save sinners (*ἁμαρτωλοὺς σώσαι*). Paul's first letter to Timothy also reveals that it is God's desire to save all men, and this is done when they come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).

Paul lays out salvation as a present experience. 2 Timothy 1:9 states that we have been saved and called with a holy calling which was given to us before the world began, and 2 Timothy 3:14 shows that it is the holy writings (*ιερά γράμματα*) that make us wise unto salvation. Titus 3:5 says that we have been saved, not with deeds done in righteousness, but because of God's own mercy through the washing of regeneration (*διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας*). This demonstrates that God's salvation is mediated through baptism as well as the calling of the word.

Paul, as is typical in his letter to the churches, also refers to the saving work of God and salvation in the final eschatological salvation. One difficult passage involving *σώζω* is found in 1 Timothy 2:15 where Paul states that the woman will be saved through childbirth. Some say this is most likely a reference to the virgin birth since it is juxtaposed to Eve in verse 13. Paul, at the end of his second letter to Timothy, is confident that God will rescue him from every evil deed and save him for his kingdom (2 Tim 4:16.)

Again, the main thrust of what we are saved from is sin in the Pastoral Letters. Whether it be the reference of the fall of Eve in 1 Timothy 2:13–15 or Paul's statement that Jesus entered into the world to save sinners in 1 Timothy 1:15.

In Hebrews

The author to the Hebrews, in a way similar to Paul, limits the words *σώζω* and *σωτηρία* for the work of God. In Hebrews Christ is the ultimate focus of salvation. Christ is the originator (*ἀρχηγός*), the source (*αἰτία*), and the intermediary (*μεσίτης*) of salvation (Heb 2:10; 5:9; 7:25).³⁰

³⁰ *NIDNTT* 3:214.

Hebrews does have a strong focus on the coming salvation, which is thought to be close (10:25). But, as is shown in 7:25, it is something the Christian has in the present, and it is eternally valid (5:9). Because Jesus lives forever, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him as he makes intercession for them (7:24).

While Paul prefers *ῥύομαι* when he refers to how God rescues the Christian from death, Hebrews in 5:7 and 11:7 uses *σῶζω* and *σωτηρία* to say that God saves from physical death.³¹ Alongside being saved from death, part of *σωτηρία* is the work that the Christian is called to do (Heb 6:9). Hebrews also uses *σωτηρία* eschatologically in Hebrews 2:3 in that we have been saved from a *ἔνδικον μισθαποδοσίαν*, “just punishment” that are due to us because of our *παράβασις*, “transgressions”.

In Peter's Epistles

In 1 Peter the disciple uses *σωτηρία* to express the coming final salvation. It is, however, something that the Christians lives in now. 1 Peter 1:5 tells us that God is protecting us through faith for a salvation to be revealed in the last time. *Σωτηρία* is confirmed as the salvation of your souls (*ψυχῶν*) in 1 Peter 1:8. Peter shows that our salvation is connected to avoiding things that would seek to separate us from our salvation such as malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. Instead, we are to seek spiritual milk so that by it we *αὐξηθήτε εἰς σωτηρίαν*, “grow up to into salvation” (2 Pet 2:2). In 2 Peter 3:15, Peter tells his readers to regard God's patience as salvation.

Similar to Paul, Peter distinguishes *ἐλυτρώθητε*, “redeemed,” from *σῶζω* in 1 Peter 1:18. In fact, *σῶζω* is only used two times in Peter's epistles. The first instance is in 1 Peter 3:21: *νῦν σῶζει βάπτισμα*, “now baptism saves you,” implying that while we await the coming eschatological salvation, salvation is something we have in the present through the connection to Christ's resurrection given to us in baptism. The second use is in 1 Peter 4:18 when Peter quotes from Proverbs 11:31.

In James and Jude

James only uses *σῶζω* in reference to deliverance from the Last Judgment with the exception of 5:15 where it says the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick. James 5:20 connects being saved to the knowledge of the *ἀλήθεια*, “truth,” from which some wander (v. 19). When that sinner is brought back, the brother who has brought him back will *σώσει ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκ θανάτου*, “save his soul from death”. In

³¹ TDNT 7:996.

Jude, σώζω is also used to speak of rescue from the Last Judgment. The Christian is to have mercy on those who doubt and save others by snatching them out of the fire, σώζετε ἐκ πυρός ἀρπάζοντες (Jude 23). In James and Jude σώζω and Σωτηρία are connected to being saved from the final judgment (being saved from sin is not mentioned).

In Johannine Literature

Σωτηρία is used only once in the gospel of John. It is used in Jesus' statement to the Samaritan woman in John 4:22 ἡ σωτηρία ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐστίν, "The salvation is from the Jews." John uses σώζω only six times in his Gospel. "Doubtless this is connected with the fact that in John 'eternal life' is the determinative concept of the statements about salvation."³² John has an eschatological use of σώζω in John 3:17 when Jesus tells Nicodemus that he was sent to the world so that the world would be saved through him, in opposition to him being sent to κρίνει, "judge," the world. John also uses σώζω in terms of being saved from physical danger. This is the case when the disciples speak about Lazarus getting well because he is sleeping (Jn 11:12) and when Jesus asks if he should ask God to save him from this hour in John 12:27. The theological emphasis in the Gospel of John is not expressed in σώζω or σωτηρία.³³

In Revelation, σώζω is not found. Σωτηρία is used in three places (7:10; 12:10; 19:1). In each of these, σωτηρία is something that belongs to God and is of him. It is his (7:10) because he has thrown down the accuser (12:10), and the great crowd of heaven cries out Ἀλληλουϊά, "Hallelujah," because salvation belongs to our God (19:10). In each of these, σωτηρία has the familiar Old Testament nuance of victory.³⁴

Application and Conclusion

The astounding consistency of the Old Testament in attributing **יְשׁוּעַ** only to Yahweh and his works is to be noted. It is not surprising to find that the Old Testament often refers to Yahweh saving his people from their earthly enemies, especially in the narrative texts. With the Psalms and Prophets, we find a more personal saving. God indeed saves his people, but the more personal interaction of God's saving is found there. God saves the one who calls on him. He saves him from his earthly problems, whether it be his enemies or accusers, but also, he saves the individual from death and sin. We also find that the saving

³² *NIDNTT* 3:216.

³³ *TDNT* 7:996.

³⁴ *TDNT* 7:998.

work of Yahweh goes beyond the nation of Israel to other foreigners who would turn to him for help. We also find $\psi\omega$ being referred to in an eschatological sense as a one-time future action. While $\psi\omega$ is very scarcely used in terms of the problem that sin has separated God's people from him, it is still found there. But perhaps the greatest take away from the Old Testament use of $\psi\omega$ is found in the name given to Jesus, $\psi\omega\iota$. And the first use of $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ is found in the same verse. He is given the name Jesus because he will save God's people from their sins.

In terms of application, we should apply the conclusion that Luther's comes to in his 1525 treatise *How Christians Should Regard Moses* realizing the books of the Old Testament were written to the Old Testament Israelites. While there is still much we can learn from them today, they were not written to the New Testament Church. "Therefore tell this to Moses: Leave Moses and his people together; they have had their day and do not pertain to me. I listen to that word which applies to me. We have the gospel."³⁵ While Luther was speaking more in terms of the law, we can apply the same premise: what kind of salvation does the Christian look for from God? The saving the New Testament Christian expects may not mirror the saving acts of God in the Old Testament. In particular, the physical saving from the hands of earthly enemies that is prevalent in the narrative texts of the Old Testament is not promised to the New Testament Christian. When it comes to what salvation is and from what God saves us, the Christian looks to what is confirmed in the New Testament.

In the New Testament we see the variety of uses for $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$. We do not need to be overly dogmatic in application of what God saves us from, i.e. that he only saves us from the final judgment, or that he only saves us from our sin. In the New Testament the saving work of God is comprehensive. Jesus saves from sin in the first use of $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ in the New Testament. Jesus saves people from their bodily illness to confirm his divine authority in the Synoptic Gospels. The early preaching of the church preaches saving from sin as the primary use of $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$. However, the predominant use of $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ and $\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho\iota\alpha$ is eschatological in the New Testament, especially in the letters of the New Testament. We are saved from the judgement of a righteous God and the eternal damnation we deserve on the last day. It may be well to note that Paul, alongside the author of Hebrews, intentionally reserves $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ and $\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho\iota\alpha$ in this way.

³⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955-), 36:171.

When they speak of how we are saved from sin, they prefer verbs such as redeem. It may be a subtle reminder that when we think of the way God has dealt with the sin that separates us from him, we are to keep in mind that it came at a great cost.

Regardless, it seems a beautiful bookend to Scripture to see how John, who only uses *σωτηρία* once in his other writings, uses *σωτηρία* three times in Revelation. It echoes the Old Testament use of *ושעה*, as once again we find the salvation of our God as victory over our greatest enemies—sin, death and the devil. [\[LSQ\]](#)

A Brief History of How the Merger of 1917 Affected the Life of Young Norwegian Pastors Realized Through the Experiences, Perspectives, and Writings of Justin A. Petersen

Abraham P. Faugstad

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CICERO ONCE SAID, “HISTORY IS LIFE’S TEACHER” (*Historia magistra vitae est*). In a culture in which history is devalued and often besmirched, perhaps there is no better occasion to reflect on the past. Most have heard the old adages such as “history repeats itself,” and “history is who we are and why we are here.” It is written in Job 8:8, “For inquire, please, of the former age, and consider the things discovered by their fathers.” Moses writes, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you” (Deut 32:7).¹ The author of the Hebrews declares, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7, ESV). While children may remember their parents’ character and unique personalities, they often do not know what happened in their parents’ early lives and the battles they faced, and the grandchildren seldom have knowledge of these things without the help of written records. Dates slip the mind, facts turn into mysteries, and family folklore is soon forgotten. The same applies for the history of the synod. History can help influence and teach each generation, but all too often the history of our forefathers is lost through the shuffle of the years.

The history of Rev. Justin A. Petersen is a heretofore untold history. While the history of any pastor in the ELS is of value, the history of

¹ All Scripture references will be from the NKJV unless otherwise specified.

Rev. Petersen took place at a critical point in synod history, the post-merger “reorganization.” Efforts have been made to provide a backdrop for the difficulties the thirteen pastors who began the little Norwegian Synod² experienced, but there has been little to no work considering the effects of the merger on young Norwegian pastors who gradually made their way into the “Little Norwegian Synod.” A review of one of these pastors offers a unique perspective, shedding light on the trials, burdens, motivations, and mindsets of those who decided to leave the merger church body.

As descendants of the old Norwegian Synod, it is imperative that the torch is not extinguished. There is a considerable amount of ELS history that remains untold, and to much chagrin, will remain untold. The harvest is ripe, but the harvesters are few. While all history has value, the history of the ELS is invaluable because of the synod’s purpose and reason for existence.

[The ELS] finds its sole justification for existence as a separate synod in the confident assurance, based on clear passages of Scripture, that it still owns the blessed heritage of the Reformation, the Gospel message of pure grace, to be acknowledged with thanksgiving, professed with sincerity, believed with confidence, preached with zeal and faithfulness, and delivered to succeeding generations without spot or blemish, the Gospel of a Christ Who is able to save to the uttermost and of a hope that maketh not ashamed.³

To remember the history of the synod does not mean that the synod in and of itself should be canonized. The synod should never become an idol, “Not the hosts of the Lord, but the Lord of hosts will we worship.”⁴ May the pastors and members of the ELS continue in this fervent and tenacious desire for the Word of Truth.

Thesis

As one studies the history of the ELS, it becomes apparent that the election controversy was the central cause for the existence of the synod.

² The name taken for the continuation of the old synod of 1853, which organized in 1918 was “The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church.” In 1957 the name was changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). This minority group was often referred to as the “little Norwegian Synod,” which eventually became a term of endearment.

³ Sigurd C. Ylvisaker, *Grace for Grace* (Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), 211.

⁴ Justin A. Petersen, “Address in Commemoration of the Saxon Immigration,” *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1938, 57.

In spite of the monumental impact of the election controversy which flavors most historical discussions, the life and writings of Justin A. Petersen demonstrate that there were other contributing reasons for the existence of the ELS besides the doctrine of election such as Christian education and Secret Societies. In addition, his writings help sharpen the unique flavor of the ELS.

Significance

There are numerous writings on the Election controversy, the merger of 1917, and the plight of the little Norwegian Synod. However, there has never been something written which details the transition and perspectives of those early Lutheran pastors who would later join the “little” synod. The untold story of these young pastors is one worthy of note. These young men would shape the growth, expansion, and survival of the ELS for years to come. The lack of scholarship from the perspective of these young pastors and of Justin A. Petersen is what drives the need for this research paper. The vast amount of histories primarily focus on the doctrine of election as the impetus for the formation of the ELS. Besides the ELS history, *Grace for Grace*, which for example mentions secret societies only in passing as one of the other doctrinal concerns,⁵ the other prominent ELS histories chiefly focus on the doctrine of election as the impetus for the existence of the ELS and omit many of the other doctrinal reasons (*Faith of our Fathers*, *A City Set on a Hill*, *Built on a Rock*, and *Proclaim His Wonders*). While the significance of the election controversy cannot be overemphasized, it is not the sole motivation for the existence of the reorganized synod. By examining the life and writings of Justin A. Petersen a more complete understanding can be had of the other doctrinal controversies and practices which contributed to the founding of the reorganized synod of 1918.

PERSONAL LIFE

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

⁵ Lillegard, *Grace for Grace*, 200.

Personal History

Justin Axel Petersen was born into a first-generation Norwegian immigrant family. His father, Julius Petersen, was born in Bergen, Norway. Julius was a tailor by trade and, after serving in an apprenticeship in Norway, he immigrated to America and worked for three years until he earned enough money to send for his future wife, Mary Gaasrud, a native of Oslo, Norway. Julius and Mary settled in Escanaba, Michigan, where Justin was born on January 2, 1891. Justin was the fourth child in a family of thirteen, three of whom went to their heavenly home prior to adulthood. He was baptized into the Christian faith in Escanaba, at the United Norwegian Lutheran Church.⁶ His father was one of the charter members and served as the *klokker* of the congregation.⁷ After a few years, Julius moved his family to Manistique, Michigan, where he set up his own tailoring business. There in Manistique, Justin was confirmed by Rev. L. O. Oien at the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Manistique, Michigan.⁸

The children of Julius and Mary pursued many different vocations: Agnes and Laura were housewives, Elizabeth and Margaret were nurses, Borhgild was a secretary, Leonard worked for the railroad, Herbert was a newspaper man (Detroit Times), Walter was a dentist, and Reuben, a jack of all trades.⁹ None of these paths were for Justin. His youngest daughter, Esther Faugstad tells, "Justin was the intellectual type and not at all interested in tailoring or other vocations."¹⁰ Justin graduated

⁶ The Church was founded in 1888 as the Norwegian-Danish Lutheran Church. It was organized by twenty-three members and the Rev. G. A. Sovde. When the congregation was first organized it was in fellowship with the Norwegian-Danish Conference, but in 1890 the Conference would merge with the Norwegian Augustana Synod and the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood into the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. Walter R. Nursey, *The Iron Port of the World: A History of its Growth, with a Description of its Industries, Resources, Commercial Position, Climate, and Topography* (Lew. A. Gates, of "The Calumey," 1890), 36.

⁷ The *klokker* assisted with the prayers of the congregation and would lead the congregational singing. For more information on the office of *klokker*, see J. Magnus Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutheranism Up to 1872* (Macmillan, 1926), 80–86. Olaf Morgan Norlie and T. O. Tolo, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter I Amerika: 1843–1916* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1918), 872.

⁸ From 1888 to 1908 the congregation was not a member of the Norwegian Lutheran Church body, but it was served by its pastors. However, in 1908 it became an official member of the Norwegian Synod. Julius served as treasurer. Norlie and Tolo, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter*, 888.

⁹ Esther Faugstad, "To the family of Justin Axel Petersen (1891–1954) and Nettie Christine Knutson (1888–1963)" (unpublished manuscript, 2004), 3.

¹⁰ Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 3.

high school as the valedictorian of his class in Manistique. The superintendent of the school identified Justin as a very bright young man and arranged for his admission into the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor with the idea of him getting into medical school. To his dismay, Justin announced that he would not be able to attend the University of Michigan, explaining that he had already made arrangements to go to Luther College in Decorah, Iowa because he wanted to become a pastor. The superintendent responded by saying, “What a waste.”¹¹ While Justin may have disappointed the high school superintendent, he honored his father who hoped that one of his sons would become a pastor.¹²

Education

One of the early challenges of the Norwegian Synod was securing a theological education for potential pastors. In the beginning, an agreement with the Missouri Synod allowed the Norwegian students to be trained at Concordia College and its seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. The Norwegian Synod also supported a Norwegian faculty position to serve at the St. Louis Seminary, in order to help the Norwegian students and teach a few German courses as well. Peter Laur. Larsen was the first to serve in this position.¹³ However, the plans for a Norwegian Synod school of its own was hastened with the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861 and the ensuing uncertainty in St. Louis. As a result, in June 1861 the synod chose Decorah as its location for its new school.¹⁴ While students were indeed instructed those first few years, ground would not be broken for a new school building until 1863.¹⁵ Luther College in Decorah became one of the hallmarks of the Norwegian Synod. Luther College was a liberal arts college which maintained a classical curriculum, requiring all students to take both Greek and Latin until 1932. Wilfred Bunge explains,

Classical because it focused on the languages, literature, and history of Ancient ‘Classical’ Rome and Greece. The greatest emphasis was on mastery of the Latin language—Larsen called the school a “Latin School.” Students studied Latin six years and Greek four.

¹¹ Rev. John Petersen, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad, January 8, 2020.

¹² Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 3.

¹³ Larsen assumed his professorship on October 14, 1859.

¹⁴ However, since there were no proper accommodations in Decorah, the school opened that September in a vacant parsonage at Halfway Creek, Wisconsin.

¹⁵ Wilfred F. Bunge, “*Toward Community in a New Land*,” (unpublished manuscript, 2011). <https://www.luther.edu/about/history/essays/>

Additional subjects included German, Norwegian, English, and Hebrew languages; substantial attention to mathematics, history, music, and Christianity (catechism); logic; and geography, natural history, penmanship, and Bible history the first two years only.¹⁶

Professor Larsen, who became a professor at Luther after St. Louis, believed that the study of the languages and Ancient Rome and Greece was the best way for students, “to develop their intellectual powers.”¹⁷

Justin enrolled at Luther College in 1909 and graduated in 1913. In Justin’s funeral sermon, Norman Madson, a former classmate, life-long friend, and fellow pastor, describes some of their early history together:

Like so many a young boy away from home for the first time, Justin was a desperately homesick lad the first month at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He had, in fact, made up his mind that he would return home and give up the thought of entering the ministry. The president of the school, knowing that I had been just as desperately afflicted with that same trouble in my freshman year, asked me to spend part of my afternoons up in his room helping him with his Latin and Greek, and telling him of how I had overcome my home-sickness. He appreciated the help given him in the classics all right. But when I began telling him of my siege of home-sickness and how at last I had become reconciled to school life there, he turned a deaf ear. His case was entirely different, he claimed. Having learned to know something about his home life, and how his father and mother had at last found a way to send at least one of their boys to college, hoping, perhaps, that he would enter the ministry, I realized what it would mean to them to have their hopes suddenly dashed to pieces by his returning home. So I decided to resort to heroic methods in curing him of his home-sickness. After pleading with him at some length one afternoon to no avail, I suddenly turned on him and said: “Do you know what’s troubling you, Justin? It isn’t home-sickness but pure selfishness. How your father and mother will feel when you return home, doesn’t at all concern you. Just so you can get back to your old pals. Your father and mother may not utter a word by way of reproof, but knowing something about the hopes and desires of God-fearing parents, know there will be tears shed in silence.” That turned the trick. He decided then and there

¹⁶ Wilfred Bunge, *The Classical Curriculum* (unpublished manuscript, 2011). <https://www.luther.edu/about/history/essays/>

¹⁷ Bunge, *The Classical Curriculum*.

that he was not going to cause his parents that sorrow. And that resolve he, by the grace of God, was given the strength to keep. And by the end of that fall term you couldn't have driven him away from school with a baseball bat.¹⁸

Norman's counsel to the young freshman, would benefit Justin and many others in years to come (Pro 19:20).

In his junior and senior years, Justin was a member of the *College Chips* staff, which was Luther College's student newspaper. In 1912, he won first place in the Annual English Oratorical Contest.¹⁹ This contest was one of the opportunities students had to train in public speaking. The first contest was held on February 22, 1902, and "proved a decided success."²⁰ The Luther College Club, of southern Wisconsin, offered \$25.00 as first prize for the best oration delivered in Norwegian or English. This created such an interest that other prizes were presented at the same contest, "Rev. Wiese gave \$5, which was to be awarded as first prize to the one whom the audience should judge to be the best."²¹ Justin's practice in oratory would undoubtedly benefit him in his future vocation.

In fall 1876, the Norwegian Synod started its own seminary in a rented building in Madison, Wisconsin. After twelve years, the synod decided to change locations from Madison to the Twin Cities in 1888. They secured a new building in the Minneapolis suburb of Robbinsdale in 1889, but after only six years in that location, the building burned down in 1895. The seminary continued temporarily in a former hotel in Robbinsdale until it was moved to a permanent location in the Hamline section of St. Paul, Minnesota.²² Not only did the seminary endure difficult circumstances and changes, but these hardships were inconsequential compared to the theological controversy concerning predestination that had been raging in the Norwegian Synod since the 1880s. It was at this time, when Luther Seminary was located in Hamline, that Justin enrolled in 1913.

The faculty at Luther Seminary included H. G. Stub who was the seminary president, Johannes Ylvisaker, Olaf Brandt, and Elling

¹⁸ Norman Arthur Madson Sr., *Morning Bells at Our Saviour's: Sermons for Every Sunday of the Church Year, Based on Gospel Texts for the Day, and Several Sermons for Special Occasions*, ed. Norman A. Madson (Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2008), 397–8.

¹⁹ Olaf Morgan Norlie, *Luther College through Sixty Years 1861–1921* (Augsburg Pub. House, 1922), 327.

²⁰ Norlie, *Luther College through Sixty Years*, 327.

²¹ Norlie, *Luther College through Sixty Years*, 328.

²² Mark Granquist, *A History of Luther Seminary* (Fortress Press, 2019), 53–55.

Hove. Stub served as the professor of systematic theology and the Old Testament; Ylvisaker was the New Testament Professor; and Hove was a professor of historical and systematic theology.²³ It is interesting to note, that Stub and Ylvisaker, colleagues of F. A. Schmidt in Madison, were both strong supporters of Walther and leaders of the Missourian group in the Norwegian Synod.²⁴ Surprising, Stub was later in favor of the merger in 1917. Ylvisaker is believed to have been against it. While Justin alludes to private conversations with faculty about the controversies in the Norwegian Synod, he does not mention specific professors.

Luther Seminary began with a practical degree in theology, which consisted of men who were older and without a formal educational background. Two years later, however, in 1878 a theoretical program to the seminary was added, which included a “more rigorous course of study, including the classical biblical languages.”²⁵ Justin graduated from Luther Seminary in 1916 with a theoretical degree (C.T.).

Family

At Luther College Justin made dear friendships which would last him the rest of his life. However, of those friendships, he was likely most thankful for his friendship with Carl Knutson from Belview, Minnesota. At the end of one school year, Carl invited Justin to go home with him to work on the farm for the summer. There on the Knutson farm, in the Minnesota River Valley of Swedes Forest Township, Redwood County, outside of Belview, Minnesota, Justin met Carl’s sister, Nettie Knutson. Esther, Justin’s and Nettie’s youngest daughter, tells that Justin “not only fell in love with her, but recognized qualities in her which would enhance his ministry.”²⁶ Nettie had the perfect credentials for a pastor’s wife: a strong Christian, beautiful, and Norwegian!

Nettie Christine Knutson, the second daughter of Kristen and Karen (Hanson) Knutson, was born August 2, 1888, in Belview, Minnesota. She was baptized into the Christian faith at Rock Dell Lutheran Church where she was also confirmed. After attending elementary school in the one-room schoolhouse of Swedes Forest, she graduated secondary schooling from the Lutheran Normal School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The Lutheran Normal School in Sioux Falls was the normal school of the Norwegian Synod, which was established

²³ Grandquist, *A History of Luther Seminary*, 55; *The Lutheran Herald*, (24 Aug 1916): 804.

²⁴ Grandquist, *A History of Luther Seminary*, 54.

²⁵ Grandquist, *A History of Luther Seminary*, 53.

²⁶ Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 3.

to train teachers for the parochial schools.²⁷ Afterwards, Nettie attended the Lutheran Ladies' Seminary located in Red Wing, Minnesota.²⁸ The Red Wing Seminary, which included a junior college department, was run by the Norwegian Synod, not to be confused with the Red Wing Seminary of the Hauge Synod.²⁹ With this educational background, Nettie taught in elementary schools for a number of years, including her former elementary school in Swedes Forest, located across from the Knutson Farm.³⁰

Not only had Nettie received a supreme education, but she was also gifted in music which benefitted her future husband in the parish where she served as an organist and accompanist.³¹ Shortly after graduating from Luther Seminary, Justin and Nettie were united in holy matrimony. It was a beautiful day on August 23, 1916, at Rock Dell Lutheran Church. The wedding was officiated by Rev. Mommsen,³² who was reported to have delivered an "impressive sermon" by The Belview Independent. Nettie's maid of honor was Miss Anna Knutson and Justin's best man was Richard T. Wanberg, a classmate from Luther College. Nettie's brother, Carl sang the tenor solo, "His Blessed Face." The Belview Independent reported about the local bride, "Her many friends are the ones who understand and appreciate true Christian character and genuine womanliness." The Independent also comments on Nettie's husband, "While Rev. Peterson is not a local man, this community has already learned to know him as a sincere and able man who will be a powerful factor in the calling of advancing the Christian faith." The

²⁷ In 1919, Church leaders merged the Lutheran Normal School and Augustana College in Canton under the name Augustana College and Normal School, but in 1926, "and Normal School," was dropped. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 113; <https://www.lostcolleges.com/canton-normal-school>.

²⁸ "It is necessary to clarify the term *seminary* in the title of the new institution. In nineteenth-century America, the term *seminary* was not limited to a school providing theological education for the ministry. Rather, seminary could refer to any number of different kinds of education beyond the primary schools; there were even quite a number of 'ladies seminaries.'" Mark Grandquist, *Luther Seminary*, 60–61.

²⁹ Nelson, *the Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans*, 113.

³⁰ Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 3.

³¹ Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 3.

³² Max Frederich Mommsen was ordained in 1909 in the Norwegian Synod. He brought the Rock Dell Lutheran church, Belview, Minnesota over from the N.L.C.A to the reorganized synod in 1922. He served the Belview parish from 1912–1928. Rasmus Malmin, Olaf Morgan Norlie, and O. A. Tingelstad, *Who's Who Among Pastors in All the Norwegian Lutheran Synods of America, 1843–1927*, 3rd ed. (Augsburg Pub. House, 1928), 388.

groom's actions reflect this comment, for the day after the wedding they left for Decorah, Iowa where they "began their work at once."

The living arrangements for their first few months of their marriage would not have been a dream situation for any bride. Justin's first assignment was to Big Canoe Lutheran Church, where he served Rev. Seehuus' congregations during his leave of absence.³³ While there, they lived with the pastor's family which included two grandmothers.³⁴ After less than a year in Decorah, Iowa, they headed to Rembrandt (Linn Grove), Iowa. The family quadrupled in size during their time in Rembrandt, where their first four children were born: Justin C., Joseph, Camilla, and Paul. The last three children were born when Justin served in Scarville, Iowa: Esther (Borghild), Wilhelm, and Esther. Esther Borghild died in infancy at only three months old after coming down with whooping cough, followed by pneumonia. Unfortunately, at this time there was no antibiotic available to remedy this illness. Justin and Nettie named their youngest child Esther E. after the late Esther Borghild. Esther E. noted that she does not remember Justin speaking of the loss of their fifth child, but remembers her mother writing a story about how hard it was for a mother to lose her child and how one feels to go through such a loss.³⁵ The loss of a child is one of the greatest hardships a parent can know, but undoubtedly, Justin and Nettie were strengthened by their Christian faith and comforted in the promise of the resurrection and hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ (Jn 11:25; Rev 24:4).

The Petersen family faced difficulties in many areas of their life. They grieved the loss of a child not once, but twice. The first was with their daughter, Ester Borghild. The second was the news that their son Paul, who was serving in Europe during WWII, was Missing in Action. After almost a month of Paul being missing, in a letter to Nels Faugstad, a deployed member of his congregation and future son-in-law, Justin writes,

By now you have heard of the report that we received from the secretary of war regarding our Paul, news that may prove sad, very sad, indeed. The telegram reached us August 3, stating that Paul had been reported missing over Germany since July 19. (We had a letter from him written the 18th, the day before he went down).

A few days later we received a letter from the Adjutant General, confirming the telegram, and advising us not to consider the case

³³ *Lutheran Herald* (August 31, 1916): 831.

³⁴ See Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 4.

³⁵ Esther Faugstad, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad, January 19, 2019.

closed, as many of those earlier reported missing in action in the air later are found to be prisoners of war. Camilla³⁶ has heard that about 80% later turn up safe, but that percentage seems incredibly high to me.

This must have been one of Paul's last or very last, mission, as he some time back wrote that he had just about completed his quota and that we could look for him home, God willing, in the early fall.

So the report is not comforting, [but] we have by no means abandoned hope. And even though worst should come to worst, that will be for the best too. Even though our gallant Paul should be physically dead, yet we know that he lives, really lives.

We have had so many comforting letters from him, in which he humbly, confidently confesses his faith in His Savior. Once he wrote: "Don't worry about me. If I go down, I shall, by the grace of God go down as God and you would have me go down, trusting solely in my Saviors merits. And if it be his will that I should go down, well that should be our will too."

The triune God was and is with our Paul; He is and will also be with us. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."³⁷

However, not long after this letter they received the joyous report that Paul had survived.³⁸ The fighter plane went down in France, but they were able to escape France into Switzerland, which was neutral, with the help of brave men in the French Underground.

The Petersen family also underwent much religious strife. They left the synod into which they were baptized and reared, because they saw the compromises that the Norwegian Synod had made with the merger of 1917. These were not easy times to be leaving a well-established synod. Not only did Justin face the struggles of being a pastor in a fledgling synod, but the hardships would increase with the stock market crash of 1929 and the "depression years" which followed. As a pastor in rural Iowa, the majority of his members were farmers and profits were

³⁶ Justin's daughter and future wife of Nels Faugstad.

³⁷ Justin Petersen to Nels Faugstad, *August 18, 1944*, Letter, from Family Collection.

³⁸ At this time, Prof. Rudolf Honsey was a vicar under Justin in Scarville, Iowa. He was there around lunchtime when they received the Western Union telegram that Paul Petersen was listed as Missing in Action in Europe. Prof. Honsey would often relate how sad and frightened Justin and Nettie were. Professor Honsey was also there almost two months later the day the telegram came with the news that Paul and the bomber crew emerged in Grenoble, France, as that city was being liberated by the American army. It made an impression on him for the rest of his life.

sparse. Esther Faugstad recounts that Justin did not receive his pay for many months. However, they did not forget their pastor, they supplied his family with “many farm products: meat, eggs, and other food.”³⁹ The local grocer would give them store credit, which enabled Nettie to purchase flour, sugar, and other necessities until funds were available to pay the bills. Justin always tended to a large garden and Nettie canned all she could. He also fed and milked the cows and would sell the extra milk and cream to the townspeople.⁴⁰

Justin also dealt with his own personal struggles. He was bipolar and would face bouts of deep depression. Although he sought treatment, there were very few medications and tools available during those years to help deal with Bipolar disorder. Justin relied on the promises of God to get him through the most difficult times. One of Justin’s doctors once said that if Justin did not have such a strong faith, he would have likely not survived it. Justin’s illness eventually caused his early retirement. He resigned from Scarville after twenty-four years and moved to Mankato. Once Justin’s health improved, he managed the Lutheran Synod Book Company at Bethany College.

Despite the hardships Justin faced in his own life, he was a good husband, loving father, loyal friend, and faithful pastor. Esther Faugstad says her father was a “faithful servant of the Word, kind, and always cared for people.”⁴¹ She writes, “He loved people and was loved by those who knew him. One of his favorite sayings was ‘Accept people for what they are, not what you wish they were.’ He was punctual and followed a strict routine. He needed much rest and was not afraid to ask for a bed to lie down on when he was not close to home. He could be firm and a strict disciplinarian but even in rebuke, he had a kind way about him which endeared him to people.”⁴² The Petersen family had healthy relationships with their father, and deeply cared for him. He had a “good sense of humor” and was a great story teller. Esther Faugstad commented that when he would go to parties he would go around the room shaking hands and greeting everyone, and before he left, he would repeat the handshake as he said goodbye.⁴³

He was a pastor who called frequently on his “flock.” I went with him often and treasure our special “talks.” There was the story of

³⁹ Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 5.

⁴⁰ Esther Faugstad, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad.

⁴¹ Esther Faugstad, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad.

⁴² Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 3.

⁴³ Esther Faugstad, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad.

an elderly man living near Center Church; Grandpa called on him, gave him instruction and baptized him. Since he did not appear to have relatives in the area, he brought groceries to him on a weekly basis. I will never forget the picture of him standing at the cemetery the day of Dad's funeral. His gray hair and beard were blowing in the cold February wind. He held his hat in his hand in respect, and the tears streamed unashamedly down his cheeks. We had lost our father, husband and grandfather, but he had lost his dearest friend!⁴⁴

Justin was also a strong supporter of Christian education. While he was at Scarville Lutheran Church, he started a Christian day school. He sent his children to Bethany High School and the Bethany Junior College in Mankato, Minnesota. Three of his sons became pastors: Joseph, Paul, and Wilhelm. His oldest son, Justin C. worked for many years at Bethany Lutheran College on the custodial staff. Camilla became a nurse and Esther was a Christian day school teacher. Justin's Christian faith can be seen in his fruits (Mt 7:20). Justin himself writes about the blessing the parsonage offers while raising children, "What an opportunity the parsonage, almost above all other homes, affords for the implanting of Christian ideas and ideals concerning family life, mating, marriage, education, [and] culture! What an opportunity to engender love and loyalty towards their church in the hearts of our children by instructing them informally in the history and doctrinal position of our Synod! Such an atmosphere will contribute much towards molding our children's choice of life-calling."⁴⁵ Justin not only spoke to this effect, but lived it, as seen in the lives of his progeny.

THE GREAT FJORD OF 1917

It would be a disservice to any biography, especially of an ELS pastor during the early 1900s, to neglect an examination of the election controversy in America, specifically among Norwegians, and the merger which followed in 1917. The importance of the election controversy among Norwegians Lutherans in America cannot be overstated. The election controversy among Lutherans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is arguably the most important period of time in American Lutheranism. The battle over the doctrine of election swept through all of the Midwestern Lutherans, severing long-standing unity between synods, motivating doctrinal compromise, and resulting in the

⁴⁴ Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 4.

⁴⁵ Justin Petersen, "The Parsonage," *Clergy Bulletin* 8, no. 3 (1948), 19–27.

propagation of numerous synods. This controversy passed through many synods, but undoubtedly wreaked the most havoc in the Norwegian Synod. John Brenner comments, “No Lutheran synod in America suffered more as a result of the Election Controversy than did the Norwegian Synod.”⁴⁶ Justin A. Petersen entered into the public ministry in the Norwegian Synod one year prior to the 1917 merger. Yet even Justin would not live to see the lasting effects of the controversy before his death in 1954.

The doctrine of election, or predestination, requires the examination of several other important teachings in Scripture: universal redemption, objective justification, grace alone, and conversion. Universal redemption means that Christ has paid in full for the sins of every sinner. St. Paul writes, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:5–6) and St. John writes, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 Jn 2:2). Scripture clearly teaches that on the cross of Calvary the sacrifice was complete for all people of all time. Objective or universal justification⁴⁷ implies that on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice and His perfect obedience to the Law in our place (Rom 5:18–19), God, who is appeased and sees the world differently, does not count or reckon sin, but declares the whole world righteous and innocent. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Cor 5:19; Rom 4:5, 5:18). Grace alone, one of the three *solas* of the Reformation, means that all that pertains to the Christian’s salvation, comes as a gift from God. Scripture plainly teaches grace alone, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:23–24) and “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph 2:8–9; 2 Tim 1:9; Phil 2:13).

The doctrine of election “declares that God has chosen certain individuals to salvation; that this choosing took place in eternity on the basis of God’s grace in Christ; and that through the Word and Sacraments these individuals shall be brought to faith in Christ, justified, sanctified, and glorified. In this doctrine God lays a solid foundation for

⁴⁶ John Brenner, *The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century*, (Northwestern, 2017), 137.

⁴⁷ Objective and universal justification are often used synonymously. However, objective justification stresses justification “outside” of man whereas universal justification emphasizes for all people.

the Christian's hope in Christ."⁴⁸ The Solid Declaration states, "God's eternal election not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect but is also a cause of our salvation and whatever pertains to it, on the basis of the gracious will and good pleasure of God in Christ Jesus. As this cause, it creates, effects, aids, and promotes our salvation."⁴⁹ Theodore Aaberg poses a series of important questions:

Does not the Christian then have a new worry, namely, whether or not he is one of the elect? No, for the very fact that he has come to faith in Christ is a sure sign that he is one of the elect, faith being a result of one's election and the means by which God has determined to bestow salvation in Christ upon the elect. Will not the Christian be tempted to cast Christ aside, and to put his confidence in his election? No, for it is unto faith in Christ that he has been elected. Will not the Christian, through the doctrine of election, become carnally secure, indifferent to the Gospel, and careless in his Christian life? That Christians fall into these sins is only too true, but it is not because of the doctrine of election for the Christian is elected to salvation 'through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth' (II. Thess. 2:13).⁵⁰

The doctrine of election is a comfort for Christians. It is not meant for us to brood over or make our own deductions and conclusions, but to simply cling to God's Word of promise. Issues arise only when man attempts to go beyond Scripture to understand and explain God's clear and perfect Word.

The last and final teaching which needs to be understood is conversion, which is man's turning from unbelief to faith in Christ. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in Baptism and the Word. This is clearly presented in Scripture, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26); "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5; Eph 2:4-5; Jn 1:12-13; Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 12:3). A man's faith is God's work and not his own.

⁴⁸ Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Board of Publications ELS, 1968), 13.

⁴⁹ FC SD XI.8, in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Fortress, 2000), 642.

⁵⁰ Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 14; Eph 1:3-7, 11, 2 Thess 2:13, Rom 8:28-30, Acts 13:48.

Man is by nature dead—a dead man cannot do anything! Yet, God in His mercy, makes us alive and puts a new heart of faith in us.

When one studies the teaching in Scripture of universal redemption, objective justification, grace alone, conversion, and election—they all seem to be so clear. Yet, the understanding of these articles of faith has been the cause of many controversies and divisions in the church. Justin briefly explains the development of this controversy:

But the doctrine of Conversion naturally led our fathers to a consideration of the doctrine of Election or Predestination. In close connection with the doctrine of Conversion, the question arises of itself, How is it that some come to faith, or are converted, and finally saved, while others do not come to faith, remain unconverted, and eventually are lost? Why was Saul hardened while David was reclaimed? Why Peter a saint, while Judas a suicide?

Now when these two classes are viewed separately, the answer is plain. Those that are lost are lost solely and only because of their unbelief, stubbornly persisted in to the very end. Those that are saved, on the other hand, are saved solely and only because of the unmerited mercy of God.

But when these two classes are compared in the light of God's universal grace and universal depravity, then the crux comes. How come? is asked. The one isn't a whit better than the other in himself, you say. No, because Scripture says so. "For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Rom. 3:22–23. But then there must be a dissimilar will in God towards sinners. He must favor one above the other. This is a solution, it is true, but a solution which denies universal grace. No, Scripture emphatically asserts that "God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." I Tim. 2:4. Well, then, there must be a difference in men then (natural man), a certain something that distinguishes the one from the other, that makes him more pleasing in God's eyes,—his attitude, his better conduct in some way, his cessation of willful, persistent resistance to the Gospel, call it what you will, but there clearly must be something in the one which moves God to choose him to eternal life in preference to the other. True, this explanation, too, succeeds in solving the mystery, but unfortunately it flies in the face of the truth, God's holy Word: "God hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own

purpose, and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." II Tim. 1:9.

Viewing the two classes, the saved and the lost, Scripture indeed does give us an answer, but not one with which man's reason is satisfied. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." Hosea 13:9. Its answer is: There is an "election of grace" and leaves it with that, **warning us not to attempt with our puny minds to penetrate further into the hidden mysteries of God.**

Missouri took this warning to heart, placed her finger upon her lips, and said: "We are not God's counselors, and since it has not pleased Him to solve this mystery for us in this life, we will humbly leave it to eternity's dawn, when this and every other problem that perplexed us here will be clearly answered. In the meantime we exclaim with the apostle Paul, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

Having taken reason captive under the Word of God, Missouri realized full well that any man-made solution to this mystery would militate either against universal grace on the one hand, or grace alone on the other—and at the same time deal the Word alone its death-blow. To do so would be to steal from God—terrible thought!—some of the glory that belongs to Him alone for the sinner's salvation, thus striking a discordant note in the myriad-voiced anthem of the saved saints here and yonder, "Glory to God alone!" To do so would be to rob sinners of complete comfort in terrors of conscience, forcing them to attempt to stand with one foot on the eternal rock of God's grace, and with the other foot on the quicksands of *something* in themselves.

No wonder our Confessions state: "Not for a thousand worlds would experienced consciences have their salvation depend upon themselves." Apology of Augsburg Confession.

No, it was by no means just a meaningless quarrel between stubborn theologians. This matter struck at the very heart of our Christian faith and hope.⁵¹

The Bible lays out to whom credit should be given in belief, and to whom it should be given in unbelief. Yet, for sinful man, this can be a

⁵¹ Justin A. Petersen, "Address in Commemoration of the Saxon Immigration," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1938, 52–3. Emphasis original.

hard truth. Many have tried to answer or explain this phenomenon by going beyond Scripture. Yet, in so doing, they have erred.

John Calvin answered the question of why some believed but not others by teaching that since God has elected some to salvation, then he must have also elected others to damnation. To Calvin, the teaching of double predestination answered the mystery according to human reason. The followers of Luther's own friend and ally, Philip Melancthon, fell into the temptation of trying to answer this mystery as well. Some Philippists taught that one came to faith because he did not resist the Word of God. However, all resist the Word by nature and cannot contribute toward their conversion. This false teaching is called synergism, "a term which means to work together with another to accomplish something that could not be done by one or the other alone."⁵² Lutherans have always denied each of these false teachings because they are contrary to the Word of God; Calvinism denies universal redemption and synergism denies man's complete depravity and so rejects salvation by grace alone. Instead of trying to answer this mystery, Lutherans have let God's Word stand—God wants all people to be saved—at the same time has elected some to salvation. Salvation is by grace alone, at the same time not all who hear the Gospel come to faith. This can be a hard teaching, but a Christian must be content to know and believe what God says in his Word and not go beyond it. The Apostle writes, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?'" (Rom 11:33–34).

The election controversy which tore through the Norwegian Synod had a peculiar beginning. It all began when Professor Friedrich August Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod took issue with Dr. C. F. W. Walther's essay on the doctrine of election. Schmidt was originally from the Missouri Synod and a student of Walther. As a student in St. Louis, Schmidt learned Norwegian so that he could serve as a proofreader for the Norwegian Lutheran paper, *Kirketidende*. Later, while Schmidt was serving a parish in Baltimore, Maryland, he was visited by the Norwegian Synod's leader Herman Amberg Preus. He was surprised at Schmidt's ability to speak Norwegian.⁵³ Not long after, Schmidt was called by the Norwegian Synod to be a professor at Luther College in 1861 when the school began. In 1872, Schmidt was called by the Synod

⁵² Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 16.

⁵³ Brenner, *Election Controversy*, 74.

to serve as the theological professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where he was Walther's colleague. Schmidt served there until 1876, when the Norwegian Synod established its own seminary in Madison, Wisconsin where he also served on the faculty. Professor Schmidt even presented an essay on "Justification" at the first Synodical Conference convention in 1872 and was on Walther's side when Professor Ole Asperheim of the Norwegian Synod expressed concern over Missouri's weaknesses and imperfections.⁵⁴

Yet, attitudes changed in 1879. Church historians have suggested that the impetus for Schmidt's transformation was from not receiving the call to serve as the Missouri's English professor of theology in 1878, which he seems to have sought.⁵⁵ In January of 1879, Schmidt brought his objections to Walther's 1877 essay to Walther himself. Though Walther and Schmidt had agreed to keep silent on the issue publicly, the parley came to a screeching halt when Schmidt publicly charged Dr. Walther with false doctrine, accusing him of being a crypto-Calvinist and criticizing him for rejecting the teaching of election *intuitu fidei*.⁵⁶ This controversy quickly became a raging fire. Brenner explains,

In 1879, Schmidt challenged Walther's teaching on election and soon had about one-third of the Norwegian Synod's pastors and congregations on his side. Part of the appeal in Schmidt's teaching came from the nearly universal use of Pontoppidan's catechism among Norwegian Lutherans. Question 548 of Pontoppidan's exposition of Luther's Small Catechism taught election *intuitu fidei*. "What is election? God has appointed all those to eternal life who He from eternity has foreseen would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ and remain constant in this faith unto the end."⁵⁷

In an attempt to hinder the flames of the controversy from growing and destroying the Synodical Conference, the Norwegian Synod withdrew from the conference while trying to settle the debate. In part, due to the fact that the Synodical Conference was led in German, it would be much easier for the Norwegians to discuss matters in their native tongue.

⁵⁴ *Grace for Grace*, 70.

⁵⁵ Brenner, *Election Controversy*, 75.

⁵⁶ Schmidt began publishing a new theological journal, *Altes und Neues* (Old and New), in 1880 to present his concerns. This journal began to "fan the flames of controversy into a raging fire" (Brenner, *Election Controversy*, 83).

⁵⁷ Brenner, *Election Controversy*, 145.

In Walther's essay, he sought to teach that the doctrine of election gives all glory to God. Walther held to the Scriptural teaching that men are elected unto salvation completely by God's grace alone apart from their works, faith, or non-resistance of the spirit. Schmidt's opposition to Walther's essay, eventually brought to light the true misunderstanding and false teaching that Schmidt held. Professor Schmidt states, "I believe and teach now as before, that it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God's Word and our Lutheran Confession, that 'salvation *in a certain sense* does not depend on God alone."⁵⁸ Schmidt taught that God elected some *in view of the faith* that they would someday possess. Thus, Schmidt taught that man's faith was at least in part the basis for which God elects us to salvation. Schmidt was teaching a synergistic doctrine of election which Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions clearly reject and condemn. Unfortunately, Schmidt attempted to rationalize the age old question—why some and not others.

The leaders of the Norwegian Synod (Koren, Preus, and Ottesen) agreed with Walther against the false teachings of Professor Schmidt. Unfortunately, this clash led about one-third of the Norwegian Synod's pastors and congregations to leave the Synod and form the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood in 1887, which then merged with the Norwegian Augustana Synod and the Norwegian-Danish Conference in 1890 forming the United Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁵⁹ The Norwegian Synod continued with its doctrinal purity, but in the beginning of the twentieth century there was a strong sentiment for union among the Norwegians to form one church body in America. This push for one Norwegian church body resulted in willingness to compromise and sacrifice doctrinal clarity. There were many factors involved driving toward union among the Norwegian church bodies: particularly significant was Norway's independence from Sweden in 1905 (ethnic pride), in addition weariness of fighting over doctrine (especially among the laity), the production of a joint hymnal in English, and the ecumenical spirit of the times which valued outward unity despite doctrinal differences—all contributed toward this push for union.

Free conferences, meetings, pamphlets, and articles spanned the course of almost two decades evaluating the doctrinal disputes between the synods. Although the members of the synods were in fellowship only a few years before, the committee members of the Norwegian

⁵⁸ *Grace for Grace*, 172.

⁵⁹ Historians have commented that the only commonality between the synods was their hostility towards the Norwegian Synod.

Synod “had never suspected that there was such great doctrinal difference between the United Church and their own.”⁶⁰ The Norwegian Synod was as ardent a defender of the doctrine of Election as they were in the 1880s, but eventually gave way to the union spirit of the times. This lapse, on the basis of two merger documents, the Madison Agreement (*Opgjør*) and the Austin Agreement, allowed both forms of election to stand: man is elected entirely by the work of God, regardless of his works, faith, or something inside of him, while at the same time man in a certain sense, plays a part in his election. At first, there was a substantial minority led by C. K. Preus opposed to this document. However, the minority eventually agreed to enter the merger.

One struggle for pastors was that these documents appeared to confess the teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions but at the same time permitted and taught false doctrine. They went hand in hand—there were tares among the wheat. Many of the pastors, including Justin Petersen, were told not to worry about these potential differences because they would be settled in the new merger body. So in 1917 the last convention of the old Norwegian Synod took place. The Norwegian Synod, United Church, and the Hauge Synod joined hands, forming the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NLCA), which was the largest Norwegian Lutheran church body in America, “the three church bodies adjourned their meetings and marched in jubilant procession to the auditorium where the Union exercises were held. This marked the end of the old Norwegian Synod.”⁶¹

PUBLIC MINISTRY

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (Rom 16:17).

Out with the New and Into the Old

Justin A. Petersen was ordained in 1916. He was a product of Luther Seminary, attending from 1913 to 1916. For the first eight years of his ministry he served in the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (1916–24). At first, Justin was in favor of the union with the hope, along with many other pastors, “the Synod would really act as a leaven in the new Church-body, thus furthering the cause of

⁶⁰ *Grace for Grace*, 100.

⁶¹ *Grace for Grace*, 110.

confessional Lutheranism.”⁶² However, these hopes soon faded as the conditions of the compromising merger body came to fruition. Instead of the synod encouraging a zeal for confessional Lutheranism, it became more and more tainted. This was evident by the actions of the churches and conversations among the clergy. This was an extremely difficult time. Justin was trained under both merger and non-merger professors at Luther Seminary. He had relatives and friends in the merger church. He was a young pastor with a wife and four children. However, in time Justin recognized that the apparent differences in the new church body were not simply alternate ways of expressing the same teaching, but an entirely different Gospel which was really no Gospel at all (Gal 1:7). Due to his doctrinal convictions, he left the merger church body. After encouraging his congregation to leave the NLCA with no success, he left the merger church and joined the little Norwegian Synod. He was called in 1925 to the Scarville/Center Parish in Scarville, Iowa where he would faithfully serve for twenty-four years before retiring from the ministry.

Justin penned many useful writings, but one of the most helpful for gathering insight on his perspective at the time on the merger was an article written in the *Lutheran Sentinel* one year after joining the little Norwegian Synod, titled—“A Statement and a Testimonial.”⁶³ In *A Statement and a Testimonial*, Justin makes a clear outline of why he left the merger body in regards to his experiences and perspectives. Justin believed that one should not flippantly leave one synod and join another without “urgent grounds. Nor should this step be taken without a clear-cut statement of the thereto contributing causes. If for no other reason, it should be done out of fairness to both the old and the new brethren in faith.”⁶⁴

Justin notes that the union struggle began when he was a student at Luther College (1909–13). Although surprising, he comments, “seldom was it mentioned by our professors—yet we inferred that a serious struggle was being waged.” In 1913 Justin entered Luther Seminary when the debate was at its peak; but even there, he states that it was mentioned even less. Justin does say however, “Only when we sought their [professors] counsel in private did we receive the desired enlightenment.” There was certainly diversity in opinions at Luther Seminary at the time, which seems to have led to almost universal silence in

⁶² Justin Petersen, “A Statement and a Testimonial,” *Evangelisk Lutherski Tidende and Lutheran Sentinel* 9, no. 18 (May 5, 1926): 275.

⁶³ Petersen, “A Statement,” 273–81.

⁶⁴ Petersen, “A Statement,” 273.

the classrooms.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, it was not just the debates that were quieted, but also the theology revolving around the doctrine of election, Justin notes: “Not even in our study of Dogmatics, which comes close to the center of theology, was the doctrine of Conversion and Election treated; for our three years’ course in Dogmatics did not cover quite one-half of the field comprising this important branch of theological study.”⁶⁶ It may not be at all surprising that the majority of pastors were older who left the merger body in 1917 since the younger pastors were instructed during this time of silence regarding the doctrine of election. If pastors had not been trained in the doctrine of election and the other important articles of faith surrounding it, they may not have realized the gravity of what was at stake in the merger. Perhaps a contributing factor, the average age of the original thirteen pastors forming the Little Norwegian Synod was near fifty, with the exception of George O. Lillegard.⁶⁷

As mentioned previously, Justin entered the merger with the hopes and assurance of others that the synod would act as a leaven in the new church-body, thus advancing confessional Lutheranism. With these things in mind, Justin favored the merger, but as he noted in the article, “Here, too, the wish was the father of the thought.”⁶⁸ Justin records both the outward and inward conditions which began to alter his previous convictions. Externally in the churches, “The seeming low ebb of spirituality, together with the deplorable unchristian conduct of some of those who were diligent users of the Means of Grace, filled our heart with misgiving despair.”⁶⁹ Even worse was his internal battle,

But my doctrinal plight was still worse; and had I but been clear here, then all other perplexing problems would to a great extent have been solved. Nor was it on what many choose to call hair-splitting niceties that I was unclear: No, my unclearness concerned **the very heart of our Christian faith**, namely, a lost sinner’s justification before the holy God in heaven. And here I was to point and direct others into the narrow way of salvation, the way that I myself saw but as in a haze.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Often in the midst of controversy, conversions are halted in the classroom.

⁶⁶ Petersen, “A Statement,” 274.

⁶⁷ The average age of men entering the “little” Norwegian Synod who have no previous connection (son or cousin of clergy) in the first ten years was on average above fifty years old.

⁶⁸ Petersen, “A Statement,” 275.

⁶⁹ Petersen, “A Statement,” 275.

⁷⁰ Petersen, “A Statement,” 275. Emphasis original.

The illustration of doctrine as a body is often used. When one article of faith is awry—one member of the body, it can cause doubt for all doctrine—bringing harm to the whole body. Justin shows that the doctrinal confusion in the merger body was not a mere “hair-splitting nicety,” but concerning the very heart of the Gospel—Justification.⁷¹

Justin states that on account of this doctrinal haze, “Sermon preparation was often a drudgery, and many a time we ascended the pulpit steps with feet of lead.”⁷² But this did not last.

Then it was that I by the grace of God was led to the library of a Lutheran pastor of the old school, the sainted Rev. Otto C. Ottesen.⁷³ This library contained almost every book and brochure penned by the hand of America’s Luther, the pious and learned Dr. Walther, long since gone to his reward of grace. What a revelation this teacher’s work were to me! How they cleared up many mists! Dr. Walther’s writings are as a crystal spring compared to many muddy theological sloughs we have been in. His **Gesetz und Evangelium**⁷⁴ especially was a spiritual sun to my cloudy mind and heart. How simply and clearly this Doctor explains the way of salvation, guarding most carefully on the one side against all the imposing mountains of work-righteousness, be they moral or spiritual, and on the other side against the bottomless mire of spiritual despair. With what conviction he speaks!⁷⁵

Although the Norwegians had not been trained in St. Louis since 1876, Walther’s teachings affected the lives of Lutherans throughout American history as seen in Justin. He notes that it was through Walther’s clear writings, along with Dr. F. Pieper’s dogmatics, he learned what true Lutheranism is. There was a common opinion among many Lutherans and other churches in America at this time that the Missouri synod was spiritually cold and often referred to as “dead orthodoxy.” However,

⁷¹ Justification is often depicted as the heart of all doctrine. If one incorrectly teaches this, all is lost and one may as well go back to Rome. In 1930 Justin wrote a synod convention essay on the Fourth Article of the Augsburg Confession—Justification. For Justin and all Lutherans, Justification by faith alone is the central doctrine of Scripture.

⁷² Petersen, “A Statement,” 275–276.

⁷³ Otto Ottesen was the son of Jakob A. Ottesen. Rev. Otto Ottesen served as pastor at Little Sioux Valley where Justin served before entering the little Norwegian Synod.

⁷⁴ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*.

⁷⁵ Petersen, “A Statement,” 276. Emphasis original.

Justin says that to his joy, he found its main publication, the *Lutheran Witness*, to be “pulsated with strong, spiritual life of the right kind.”⁷⁶

As Justin began to see with clarity, he understood why Lutherans must never compromise, never extend the hand of fellowship to those who are only Lutheran by name, the importance of Christian schools, the necessity of guarding against the mixing of church and state, and why one must contend against secret societies. Justin highlights these five points which ring throughout many of his other writings. Some of these may come as more of a surprise than others. Undoubtedly, to this day the ELS teaches and preaches the importance of never compromising doctrinally or extending the hand of fellowship to those who do not share the same faith or confession (Jn 8:31–32, 1 Cor 1:10, Eph 2:19–20, Mt 7:15–20, Rom 16:17). However, the other three that Justin mention are perhaps more surprising to modern intellects: Christian education, church and state, and secret societies.

The issues within the merger body became more and more pronounced. Even worse, nothing was being done to hinder or refute the false teachings or poor practices in the synod. Justin was both eye and ear witness to many of these problems.⁷⁷ He acknowledged that many would deem his criticisms of a few individuals to not warrant him to hold the entire church-body accountable, since the only fair criterion is the doctrinal position of the Church. Justin thoughtfully responds,

In all fairness we with joy admit that many in the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America take just the opposite, and therefore correct, stand in some of these matters mentioned above, and I have also heard them lodge public protests against such practices. In other instances these statements have been left unchallenged, and therefore unchanged, even after we have been assured that corrections would be made before the same forum. The following facts also remain: The **whole** Church-body **has** practiced and **is** practicing unionism... Little manifest discipline is being exercised against the violators of principles ever held sacred by the conservative, confessional Lutheran Church. Do not these facts make the whole Church-body responsible and co-guilty?⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Petersen, “A Statement,” 277.

⁷⁷ Doctrinal purity belittled, lack of support for infant baptism, unionism practiced, disapproval of Christian day-schools, and negative remarks on the old synod.

⁷⁸ Petersen, “A Statement,” 278. Emphasis original.

The men who left the merger did not leave for personal or vain reasons, but because of a conviction and courage to stand on Scripture. As many today view groups like the ELS as schismatic or overly “strict” for being unwilling to compromise, Justin and the like did not do so out of pleasure or pride, but because they were duty-bound to confess the truth. Jesus says that “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:31–32). Not only are Christians able to know the truth, but they are to guard against false teachers, “watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (Rom 16:17). While it was noble for many to hope that the Norwegian Synod could act as a leaven to the new merger church body and change its course, it serves as an important reminder that God does not call for Christians to attempt to steer an erring church body into the right, but to know the truth, confess it, and avoid false teachers. For indeed, “A little leaven, leavens the whole lump” (Gal 5:9).⁷⁹

Justin writes, “To have remained longer would have been hypocrisy. Then followed my resignation from my kind congregation at Little Sioux Valley.”⁸⁰ As soon as his health permitted he began a study of the doctrine of election and conversion, and outlined a feeling which many had concerning the documents of the merger—

I read and reread “Opgjør.” How this document puzzled me! One minute it seemed to reject all false doctrine, and then again it made statements that were not in harmony with “the form of sound words.” 2 Tim. 1. 13. Here Rev. Thoen’s treatise helped me to an understanding of this historic document. I am now convinced that “Opgjør” is a compromise. The doctrine of man’s mind is placed side by side with the doctrine of God’s word. The truth is indeed confessed there, but so is error... I believe that true Lutheranism was placed on the altar of unionism.⁸¹

Justin relates a progression which many went through. Regardless of the positive truths, the Opgjør was a compromise of true doctrine. Pastor J. E. Thoen, a member of the minority, states that they did not join the union because the Opgjør allows for man’s self-determination

⁷⁹ The merger body became the ALC, eventually forming into the ELCA as it is today.

⁸⁰ Petersen, “A Statement,” 278.

⁸¹ Petersen, “A Statement,” 278–279.

in his conversion, “It permits the teaching and defense of man’s cooperation in his own conversion, the doctrine that we must not rely on God alone in our hope of salvation. This doctrine we reject with our whole heart and will resist unto the last! ... The assurance of salvation, the steadfast confidence of remission of sins, is irretrievably lost, if we no longer can rely on God alone.”⁸²

For Justin to leave his church body in which he was baptized, confirmed, and ordained was no easy thing. Yet, he found solace by, “making Luther’s comfort my own, in that he thanked God that he was not baptized to the pope, nor to the Catholic Church, nor to any Council, nor to any congregation, but solely to Christ.”⁸³ In early 1924, Justin left the merger Church-body, having his name struck from the clergy roster. It is worthwhile to note one of Justin’s last remarks in “A Statement and a Testimonial,” concerning his new synod:

But what have you found after soon a year’s membership? Much that is discouraging. Our archenemy is most active in our midst, and his tireless efforts are bearing fruit. I have found all the sins and shortcomings common to flesh and blood. We fear that not a few bear the Synod name, aye, perhaps even carnally boast of it, but who show shamefully little of the true Synod spirit. But, thank God! We have also found many true brothers and sisters in faith, who believe the same and strive to practice the same. Nor is one brother from the same pulpit or press tearing down what another brother is building up. But above all, we have the **truth**, and when we have that, have we not in reality **everything**? True, the Synod is small, and in the eyes of many a sorry spectacle, “but there are those who love her.”⁸⁴

Parish Work

Decorah, IA

After graduating from Luther Seminary and being united in holy matrimony on August 23, 1916, Justin Petersen began his first

⁸² J. E. Thoen, quoted in Craig Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders: A Pictorial History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2017), 16.

⁸³ Petersen, “A Statement,” 279.

⁸⁴ Petersen, “A Statement,” 280. Emphasis original.

assignment to Big Canoe Lutheran church, Decorah, Iowa.⁸⁵ Big Canoe was organized in 1852 under Pastor N. O. Brandt from Rock Valley, Wisconsin. From 1853 until 1856, Pastor Ulrik V. Koren served Big Canoe along with the entire area of northeastern Iowa.⁸⁶ Other notable pastors serving the Big Canoe congregation were F. A. Schmidt⁸⁷ and H. A. Stub. Big Canoe was a large congregation in the Norwegian Synod⁸⁸ and since 1894 shared its pastor with a sister congregation, Highland Lutheran Church. Justin was ordained at Big Canoe on August 31, 1916. During this time Justin served Rev. Seehuus' congregations during his leave of absence.⁸⁹ Justin served his first year of the ministry in the last year of the Norwegian Synod, which joined with two other Norwegian church-bodies to form the NLCA, the merger church body, in 1917.

Linn Grove, Iowa

After a short stay in Decorah, Iowa, Justin headed with his wife to Little Sioux Valley Lutheran Church of Buena Vista County, Iowa. Little Sioux was established in 1868 under Rev. N. Amlundand. The congregation was also served by Otto Ottesen, to whose library Justin attributes providing materials from Walther which cleared the murky waters of doctrine for him. The church began with no permanent structure, like many others, but erected a permanent church building in 1887.⁹⁰ By 1914, Little Sioux was recorded to have had 300 baptized souls.⁹¹ The church was located three miles northwest of Rembrandt, with a Linn Grove address. Prior to Justin's arrival in 1917, the members of the Saviour's English Lutheran Church of Rembrandt⁹² were accepted as

⁸⁵ This would not have been a vicarage. At this point in the history of the Norwegian Synod Seminary, it was only three years of classes without a vicarage. The practice of vicarages in seminary is a relatively new invention.

⁸⁶ Olaf M. Norlie and T. O. Tolo, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter I Amerika: 1843–1916* (Augsburg Pub. House, 1918), 327.

⁸⁷ Schmidt only served for a brief time (1964–65), likely as a vacancy pastor between N. E. Jensen and H. A. Stub, while still serving as a professor at Luther College.

⁸⁸ 1,028 souls 1867; 650 souls 1914. Norlie, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter I Amerika*, 327.

⁸⁹ *Lutheran Herald* (August 31, 1916): 831.

⁹⁰ Sioux Rapids Press (IA) reports that on May 26, 1887, "The consecration services commenced at 10:30 a.m. Rev. V. Koren, of Decorah, Iowa, one of the pioneers of that church, delivered an able sermon after the consecration services proper."

⁹¹ Norlie, *Norsk lutherske menigheter I Amerika*, 382.

⁹² The Little Sioux Valley Lutheran Church was a Norwegian Synod Church, but the Saviour's English Lutheran Church was a member of the United Norwegian

members of Little Sioux Valley in 1914.⁹³ The services were conducted every Sunday at both churches changing every other Sunday from morning to evening services. The preacher would preach in Norwegian at the Little Sioux Valley Lutheran Church and in English at the pulpit in Rembrandt.

The Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune (Iowa) reports that Justin was installed on May 20, 1917 with Rev. H. Solum of Story City performing the installation. Justin began his duties immediately; it was an active time for the church and him. The Pilot-Tribune tells of the new parsonage for the Little Sioux Valley Church,

The contract for the new parsonage to be built by the Little Sioux Valley church has been let to George Branvoid and the plumbing to Edwall & Rystad. The house is to cost approximately \$5,300, and it will make a fine home for the popular pastor, Rev J. A. Petersen and family.

Since locating here, Rev. Mr. Petersen has won a strong place in the esteem of the people of his congregation and of the community generally and the work is progressing nicely in all departments.⁹⁴

Justin enjoyed his time at the Little Sioux Valley Lutheran Church.⁹⁵ Even after leaving the church to enter the reorganized synod, he

Lutheran Church in America. These two churches preceded the official merger at the national level in 1917.

⁹³ The Little Sioux and English Lutheran built a church large enough to house both congregations in Rembrandt proper, in 1952. The country church was dismantled in 1955 because it was no longer needed. A memorial stands at the former Little Sioux Valley Church site. "History of the Little Sioux Valley Norwegian Lutheran Church," Buena Vista County, IA, last updated 09/01/2017, iagenweb.org/buenavista/Churches/CountryChurches/BarnesTownship/LittleSiouxValley.

⁹⁴ N.A. "History of Rembrandt, Iowa," N.P., (May 29, 2018), 12.

⁹⁵ A note from Justin Petersen in the local newspaper after Pentecost Sunday, "It was gratifying to face a well filled church at Rembrandt Pentecost afternoon. We hope to have many such audiences during the summer months. Make it a point to attend every service, and take your friends with you. We need you, and you need us. The confirmation services in the country the preceding Sunday was also well attended in spite of the threatening weather. What should hinder us from having such an audience every Sunday in the country? The roads, you may say, for then we can't use the car. If you allow this excuse to keep you from attending divine services, then your automobile is a curse to your soul. Or the horses are tired, you may say, well, this excuse is better than the first one; but this excuse also loses its strength when we remember that Christ always walked. And "the disciple is not above His Master." The believer agrees with David when he says: "I was glad when they said unto me. Let us go into the house of the Lord." No there is nothing to prevent us from having a well-filled church every

remained close friends with members from the congregation who would often visit their family in Scarville. The church duties kept him occupied. In a letter to Norman A. Madson he mentions that he only had time for a brief note because he was preparing for yet another funeral service, which was the fourth in the last two months.⁹⁶ Concurrent with World War I and the building of a new parsonage was an awful epidemic of influenza which ravaged the area claiming many lives. The deaths rose to such a number between 1917 and 1918, that they delayed the dedication of the new parsonage by one year.⁹⁷ Besides church duties, Justin and Nettie added four more to the Petersen family. At this same time, the problems within the NLCA were beginning to surface for Justin.

As Justin's time in the ministry progressed, he witnessed, heard, and saw alarming things within this new merger church-body. He was not alone in his concern over this. Justin's close friend from Luther College and fellow pastor in the NLCA, Norman Madson, served a parish about fifty miles east of Rembrandt in Bode, Iowa. The two of them remained in close communication during their early years of the ministry and shared a mutual concern for the doctrinal plight in the new merger church-body. As these concerns developed into sincere convictions, Madson would follow Justin's lead into the reorganized synod of 1918.⁹⁸ In February of 1923, Justin writes to the "Bishop of East,"⁹⁹

Norman, this book [Steffen's Doctor Carl F. W. Walther] is a bugle-call for men of a like mind to join the ranks of *Confessional Lutheranism*, and I don't think we will feel contented until we have heeded the call.

If we could only hope, or dared hope that the tendency of our own church body were in this direction, then the outlook would not be quite so dark. But does not everything rather point in the

Sunday but ourselves. Let each one be in his pew, and then we will have Pentecost every Sunday." Justin Petersen, Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune, (May 28, 1920).

⁹⁶ The Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune reports that one of the funerals Justin officiated was for Carl A. Haraldson who was killed in WWI while removing German mines in France. "History of Rembrandt," 15.

⁹⁷ Rolf Mosbo and Eloise Obman, *Building with Faith for the Future: 125 Years Our Savior's Lutheran Congregation*, 10.

⁹⁸ Kyle Madson, "The Life and Service of Reverend Dean Norman Arthur Madson Sr.: A Brief History," M.Div. thesis, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2008.

⁹⁹ Justin often referred to Norman A. Madson as the "Bishop of Bode" or the "Bishop of the East" in his letters. It is apparent in much of their correspondence that they were close friends from college. When writing regarding more official topics, Justin would often preface that the letter was no joke or banter, but a serious matter.

opposite (one t, not 2 tt's) [sic] direction? Here my mind is not quite clear, and my conscience not at ease. Come over, and help me out!¹⁰⁰

In this same letter, Justin mentions that he recently received in the mail Walther's "*Gesetz und Evangelium*," Stockhardt's "Passions—Predigten," and Steffen's "Doctor Carl F. W. Walther." He told Madson regarding Steffen's book, "And I'll never quite forgive you for not nagging at me relentlessly to procure this gem, for then I would have ordered it, read it and enjoyed it weeks, nay months ago."¹⁰¹ The two young pastors exchanged much correspondence through letters and in person as some letters allude to, but many of the letters have not been preserved.

When Justin realized that the merger of 1917 was a compromise, he took his concerns to the congregation. However, they were not willing to follow their young pastor. It was not easy for congregations to break away from the established church. Nor was it easy for Justin, for there were many faithful members in the church.¹⁰² At the end of 1923 Justin A. Petersen tendered his resignation from the congregations in Linn Grove, Iowa, which was accepted early the following year in 1924.¹⁰³ Justin did not immediately begin work in the Little Norwegian Synod. It was not until May of 1925 that he was installed at the Scarville and Center Lutheran churches.

Interim

There is not much documentation on this short period of time for the Petersen family. The children would have been too young to remember it and there is sparse mention of it by Justin in any of his later writings. The only letter preserved from this period was written by Justin to Norman Madson from St. Paul, Minnesota, which is where they would have likely been living. Justin tells that he had been working at the Golden Rule for five weeks. He mentions that it was strenuous work, but was thankful for the opportunity because "work is very scarce... If I can't find work down town, I can study Pieper and Walther at the St. Paul Concordia, *og det er meget bedre* [and it is much better]."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Justin Petersen to Norman A. Madson, *February 7, 1923*, Letter, from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives. Emphasis original.

¹⁰¹ He goes on to say, "Its arrival almost broke up our home, for (both) Mrs. and self wanted to read it both at the same time." Petersen to Madson, *February 7, 1923*.

¹⁰² Esther Faugstad, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad, January 19, 2019.

¹⁰³ "History of Rembrandt," 22.

¹⁰⁴ Justin Petersen to Norman A. Madson, *December 20, 1924*, Letter, from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives.

Scarville, Iowa

Justin Petersen's first call into the little Norwegian Synod was to the Scarville and Center Lutheran churches. He served at these congregations for the rest of his pastoral ministry. As all newly established organizations, the fledgling synod required much work from its pastors not only within their congregations, but also for the synod at large. While many pastors limit their shepherding to their congregation, this was not the case for the pastors at the beginning in the little Norwegian Synod. Besides the necessity, Justin was also willing and eager to help in whatever ways he could. This zeal is evident by his activity in multiple areas of the synod: Board of Home Missions, Christian Day School Board, Board of Regents, Circuit Visitor, as well as various writings for the Lutheran Sentinel, pastoral conference, and synod convention.

Justin's activity within the synod did not impede with efforts to proclaim the comforting Word of the Gospel to his congregations. He also did not limit the teaching of the Word to the pulpit. Justin's decision to leave the merger body and enter the reorganized synod was prompted, not only by his doctrinal conviction, but also by the lack of spiritual fruit within the merger body. Despite the size of this merger church-body, Christian institutions were fewer than in the Norwegian Synod. Justin held Christian education in high regard and considered it to be of vital importance. In a 1926 convention essay, he writes, "As Lutherans, therefore, we must ever insist upon the thorough word-feeding of our children, whom we are to bring up, not for the kingdom of this world, but for the kingdom of heaven. When we cease to do this, we are no longer true Lutherans, no matter how much we may boast of that name."¹⁰⁵ The Norwegians, especially the laity, did not always have as high an opinion of Christian education as their fellow German Lutherans did. This was evident in the merger church-body. However, this was not the case for Justin and many others in the reorganized synod. Justin was an ardent advocate of Christian education, which can be seen in his efforts at Scarville where he helped establish a Christian day school in 1927. Justin's enthusiasm and thankfulness for the newly founded school can be seen in his note on the Scarville School in the Jubilee Souvenir, "With what fear and trembling we approached the parents and other members of the congregation, and solicited both children and gifts for the school! Who was it that warmed and opened the hearts for this important and blessed cause? Surely, not our eloquence;

¹⁰⁵ Justin A. Petersen, "The Christian Day School," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1926, 66.

for our tongue was well-nigh tied. There is but one answer: "This is the Lord's doing."¹⁰⁶ God surely blessed the Scarville School, which continues to this day.

Christ's command to "feed my lambs" was heeded by Justin, whether that came by the Christian day school or confirmation. His daughter, Esther, tells that Justin always made sure that his confirmands were in class. If parents were unable to bring their children to confirmation class, he would pick them up for class and bring them home afterwards. He was gentle and kind, but he was always in control of the classroom.¹⁰⁷ He not only cared for the spiritual well-being of the youth, but also showed great concern and care for the sick and the elderly. He would regularly visit shut-ins at home and in the hospitals. A doctor once expressed his appreciation for his visits; while many pastors seemed to rile up the patients, Justin had a calming effect on the patients. If someone had gone through a stroke and was seemingly comatose, he would still visit them, reading Scripture and singing hymns.¹⁰⁸

Justin had his own personal struggles, which he often called his old "mind trouble." In today's world, he would have likely been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. It was not uncommon for Justin to go in and out of bouts of deep depression. The times of depression could last for months, but would eventually shift into a manic stage. Despite these troubles, Justin learned to manage things remarkably well with the help of his faithful wife. When his "mind troubles" would come, it was difficult, and at times almost impossible for him to do any writing, especially sermon writing. In a few letters to close pastors, Justin mentions his thankfulness for health or a hope that the clouds would soon be lifted. Due to the difficulty of writing during his depressive stages, he was extremely prolific during his manic stages. He would write sermons months in advance in order to be prepared for the days when writing a sermon was nigh impossible. In one letter, Justin apologizes to Norman Madson for his long silence, but explains his reason, "For the past two months I have been struggling with my old mind trouble, and it has

¹⁰⁶ Justin A. Petersen, "The Scarville School," in *Jubilee Souvenir: 1853-1928*, (N.P., 1928), 20.

¹⁰⁷ Esther Faugstad, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad, January 19, 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Faugstad, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad, December 1, 2020. During one of Daniel Faugstad's shut-in visits to a woman in the Lake Mills parish, she expressed how personable and comforting Pastor Petersen was. The woman said that she thought he was so foolish to be talking to her "aged and seemingly comatose parent," but later realized the importance and necessity of his care. Despite unresponsiveness, many still hear and understand despite showing no sign of it.

only been with the greatest effort that I have been able, in a fashion, to do the most necessary things. Even the writing of a simple letter means hours of work and worry. I could, of course, have written you about my condition before, but I have hesitated to do so, hoping that each week would dispel the clouds.”¹⁰⁹

Esther Faugstad mentions that while the family and close friends knew of his struggles, the majority of people were unaware of Justin’s “mind trouble.” She says that most would not have been able to tell.¹¹⁰ By God’s grace, Justin was able to serve his congregations and synod in the midst of these troubles. Despite this, as is the case with many pastors, he felt as though he was unworthy of his call as a pastor. This was no doubt magnified by his manic depression. He was concerned that he was not serving his churches the way that he should. Justin expresses his feelings to a dear friend and fellow minister, “I need not tell you why I have to ‘beg off,’ I am struggling so hard to carry on here, and the struggle is getting so long drawn out, and my courage is at the point of exhaustion. If I were only certain that I was doing the right thing by trying to hold on.”¹¹¹ The inner turmoil and struggles that Justin faced pulses throughout many of his letters to dear brothers in the ministry. Encouragement in the battle is always needed. Pastors, the ones who dispense the healing balm of the Gospel, are not immune to their own spiritual battles and need both the Law and the Gospel as much as any sin sick sinner. What a blessing it was for Justin to have brothers to build him up in his faith (1 Thess 5:11).

Interim II

During these bouts of depression, Justin is said to have offered his resignation to the congregation, but each time he did the congregation would tell him that they would not consider his resignation, and eventually he would come out of his depression. However, in the spring of 1942 it was to such a degree that Justin had to say farewell to his dear congregations in Scarville, Iowa. Shortly after his move from Scarville to Mankato, Justin wrote to Norman Madson,

Of the many difficult decisions I have been forced to make during the days of my pilgrimage, none has been more difficult than this

¹⁰⁹ Justin Petersen to Norman A. Madson, *February 8, 1927*, Letter, from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives.

¹¹⁰ Esther Faugstad, interviewed by Abraham Faugstad, January 19, 2019.

¹¹¹ Justin Petersen to H. M. Tjernagel, November 13, 1935, Letter, from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives. Emphasis original.

one. But the Father of mercies and God of all comfort who has brought His light into my darkness so many a time, will also do the same this time, in His good time, and in His good way. With that assurance, I must try to be content, though the flesh is so weak and so impatient.¹¹²

Justin's sabbatical appears not to have lasted very long because before long a vacancy pastor was needed at Central Lutheran Church, in Duluth, Minnesota.¹¹³ Perhaps they thought the familiar waters of Lake Superior would do the Michigan boy some good.

The hills and water of Duluth seem to have been just what the doctor ordered. A certain pep can be observed in Justin's correspondence with others. One of note, was with Nels Faugstad, a member of Scarville Lutheran Church and future son-in-law, who was serving in WWII,

I think of you often, Nels, think gratefully and proudly of you, and if you should get a letter from me every time I thought of you, you'd soon start wondering, "well, just what is the matter with that man anyway?!" [Justin goes on with some niceties and then to his home in Duluth] Our Central Lutheran Church here is located somewhat in the center of the city. With all these steep streets, one gets a lot of wholesome exercise daily. At first my leg muscles ached every evening, but now I'm pretty well broken in. I do most of my calling on foot. For the longer calls I take the bus. My Ford rests in the garage. What a relief it is not to worry about snow drifts and mud holes as I have been accustomed to the last 26 years!¹¹⁴

Besides preaching, calling on members, and teaching adult instruction, Justin was also writing an essay for the 1943 synod convention on *Sola Scriptura*.¹¹⁵ If there was any indication that Justin's health was improving, it would be by the ink spent by his pen.

Scarville, Iowa II

After Justin's resignation from the congregations in Scarville, Iowa they were in the process of calling a new pastor. To theirs and Justin's

¹¹² Justin Petersen to Norman Madson, *June 29, 1942*, Letter, from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives.

¹¹³ N. A. Madson, "The President's Annual Report," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1943, 14.

¹¹⁴ Justin Petersen to Nels Faugstad, *January 25, 1943*, Letter, Family Collection.

¹¹⁵ In the essay, Justin references his room in Duluth, MN. Besides the reference in the paper and a couple letters, there was no documentation on his retreat to Duluth.

disappointment, they were unable to procure one. After several unsuccessful calls to pastors throughout the synod, the congregations of Scarville called their long time pastor once more. Justin left Scarville in May, 1942, and returned to serve the congregation again by June of 1943. He served Scarville for the remainder of his ministry until his early retirement in June of 1949 on account of his old “mind trouble.” He served the Scarville congregations of the little Norwegian Synod for twenty-four years.

Bethany Book Store

After resigning from the Scarville, Iowa congregations, Justin and Nettie moved to Mankato, Minnesota. After some recuperating and improvement in his health, Justin took over the management of the Lutheran Synod Book Company, which was also connected with the Bethany Lutheran College Book Store, and turned it into a prosperous business.¹¹⁶ George Lillegard writes, “Our Lutheran Synod Book Co. has also been built up into a paying business, since Rev. J. A. Petersen took charge in 1949... and fulfills an important duty for the Norwegian Synod.”¹¹⁷ Besides his work at the Book Store, Justin served on the Synod’s Board for Publications and also continued to write in the *Clergy Bulletin*, *Sentinel*, and for General Pastoral Conference.

Synod Work

“All hands on deck,” seemed to be the call for all the pastors and members of the fledgling Synod. The supply was low and the demand was high, but the Lord blessed the efforts of the Little Norwegian Synod. The men leaving the merger had strong convictions not only for doctrine, but also for the implications of that saving faith. One of the reasons for leaving the merger body was their lack of support for Christian education. Justin and many others entering the reorganized Synod were strong advocates of Christian education whether that be at the Christian day school level or higher education. When the Synod received the opportunity to obtain Bethany Lutheran College as an educational institution for the synod in 1927, Justin was in favor from the start. He promoted Bethany in his congregations by encouraging them to send financial support and their children to the synod school.

¹¹⁶ Faugstad, *Justin and Nettie*, 7. For a brief history on the Lutheran Synod Book Co., see Erling T. Teigen, “The Lutheran Synod Book Company,” *Oak Leaves* 14, no. 4 (February 2011): 1–2.

¹¹⁷ George Lillegard, *Faith of Our Fathers* (Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1953), 169.

Justin showed his dedication to Christian education by sending all of his children to Bethany High School and Bethany Junior College.

Justin served the synod in different capacities throughout his life. It is hard to gauge the involvement of pastors, but by letters and other records he seems to have remained active in the synod that he held so dear. Some of the positions that Justin held throughout the years are listed here: Christian Day School Board (1925–1929); Board of Home Missions (1927–1939); Jubilee Committee (1938–1943); Board of Regents (1940–1946); Circuit Visitor (1940–1949); and Board of Publications (1951–1954).

THE WRITINGS OF JUSTIN A. PETERSEN

This paper has so far reviewed the life and events of Rev. Justin A. Petersen. Upon examination, one cannot help but admire a man who endured some of the starkest times in American history, living through World War I and World War II, a man who endured the loss of a child, a man who survived the Depression years, a man who stood by his convictions for the sake of his soul, despite the material loss, all the while facing his own spiritual and mental turmoil. However, the life and writings of Justin offer more than just cause for admiration. As one studies the history of the ELS, it becomes apparent that the election controversy was a pivotal cause for the existence of the synod. In spite of the monumental impact of the election controversy which flavors most historical discussions, Justin's writings demonstrate that there were other contributing reasons for the existence of the ELS besides the doctrine of election and reveal how some of these early attitudes continue to impact the direction of the ELS today.

As twenty-first century Christians, it is easy to forget all the various battles of the early forefathers. Although stressed, the election controversy was not the only religious controversy in the eighteenth and nineteenth century! Religious freedom in the United States was a beacon of hope and dreams for many different religions, denominations, and sects—not just the Lutherans. America was a pool of ideas, beliefs, and practices. The Norwegian Lutheran immigrants were walking in new territory—a religious battlefield not dictated by the state church. History sheds light on past events in such a way that right and wrong, truth and falsehood, yes and no, are easily recognized. However, those who faced these challenges did not have this same advantage and therefore needed to “test the spirits” (1 Jn 4:1). One of the earliest published

works of Justin witnesses to one of these unknown spirits—secret societies.

Secret societies (lodges, Masons, etc.) have not entirely disappeared from the public eye, but they are not what they once were. While the members are seldom recognized, the buildings remain intact and the Shriners make their occasional appearance in the fun little go-karts in local town parades, but otherwise remain quite hidden. The organizations ran under the radar of most, but participation in these groups was a battle for the clergy. Many failed to grasp the theological implications of involvement with these groups and therefore membership amongst Lutherans was rising. In a published sermon from 1924, Justin very thoughtfully addresses many of the issues and concerns of secret societies. He does not use the extreme examples of what was being done by some members of the lodge, but examines the primary sources which were held in high regard by the secret societies. All too often, advocates for a cause paint a straw-man argument against their opponents, which often leads to mistrust and lack of acknowledgement. Christians have the duty not to bear false witness, even against false teachers. Justin's approach not only shows his breadth of knowledge and investigation on the subject, but also his evangelical spirit while maintaining scriptural truth.

Many proponents of the lodges argued that the lodge was not a religious institution and only confessed God as the creator. Justin responds by showing the problem is that "The lodge religion doesn't go far enough. It confesses only a part of the truth revealed in the Bible. And a half-truth is more dangerous than a whole lie. There is not a word said in the lodge confession of faith about God the Son, the Savior of the world, and God the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier of all true children of God."¹¹⁸ It gets worse,

Christ is not only left out, but He is deliberately struck out... I say this does not surprise us; but there is something that does surprise us beyond comprehension, and that is how a Christian, called to whom Christ by profession is the power of God, and the wisdom of God, how a Christian can worship at such an altar, where the bloodstains of the crucified Lamb have been washed away! O my friend, how can you consistently worship Christ as your only hope of salvation on Sunday morning... and then on Monday or Tuesday evening enter the lodge room, where Scripture is read, prayers

¹¹⁸ Justin Petersen, *Secret Societies* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1924), 17.

spoken, odes sung, but where the blessed name of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ dare not pass your lips? I say, how can you?¹¹⁹

Eventually, the merger church body would accept lodge members. This was another sign to those in the reorganized synod that the mast of the merger ship was not true. Justin writes, “For the Lutheran Church cannot remain half-lodge and half-Christian. God grant in His grace that no other flag shall ever fly over our ship of church than the ensign of the cross of Christ!”¹²⁰

Scripture teaches Christians to remain and abide in the Word of truth. The Christian must be armed with spiritual armor to combat the arrows and attacks of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. This preparation is done by the study of God’s Word, which is sharper than any two edged sword (Heb 4:12). In Justin’s first convention essay on Christian education he highlights the concern Christians should have for this preparation:

We hear much in our keenly sensitive materialistic age about a balanced food-diet for our children. But can we call this a balanced soul-diet for Christ’s lambs: Several hours of the week devoted to stocking your child’s mind with interesting knowledge concerning the geography of this world, and then on top of all this hurriedly crowd in a skimp half-hour at Sunday school for instruction in the geography of the land that lies above the skies? Several hours a week to the study of language, in order that our children might learn to master their mother-tongue—and perhaps other tongues—and then just a few minutes a week in learning to speak the language of grace, the *only* tongue that shall be spoken in heaven? As much time as possible, often years and years, to the study of the book of man’s mind, but as little time as possible to the study of the *Book* of books, the *only* revelation of the mind of God to our salvation? Can we as Christians call this a balanced diet for our children?¹²¹

Justin knew the sinful heart. He had a way of bringing to light the obvious vices of men. Parents are rightfully concerned about the future of their children, but all too often their concern is not for what is most important, “Friends, we may be certain, that the schools that rank

¹¹⁹ Petersen, *Secret Societies*, 21–22.

¹²⁰ Petersen, *Secret Societies*, 29.

¹²¹ Justin A. Petersen, “The Christian Day-School,” *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1926, 64. Emphasis original.

highest in the standards of the world, have no accreditation in heaven.”¹²² The early leaders of the synod heeded Christ’s command to “feed my lambs,” because that command is to Christians. Justin acknowledges the right of the government to educate its citizens so that they may not all be an illiterate bunch, but only to Christ’s disciples, those who love Christ, has he given the command to feed His lambs,

but never has God commanded the State or any other institution to teach His lambs. On the contrary, His word abounds with clear commands and precious promises to His individual Christians, especially parents then, and to the gathering of His Christians into congregations. “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” Deut. 6:6-7. “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Matt. 28:20. “And, ye fathers... bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Eph. 6:4. And our text, “Feed my lambs.”¹²³

The efforts of the early pastors in the synod had lasting effects through the founding of educational arms for the synod, which allowed for children to be inculcated with the Word. To the world, the church had a small room in a basement, but in that cold basement was given the peace that the world can not give (Jn 14:27).

The old Norwegian Synod had always promoted the establishing and supporting of congregational schools. However, Rev. Christian Anderson tells that after the merger was finalized, the advocates of Christians schools were hushed and “all except three of the schools of the old Norwegian Synod were discontinued.”¹²⁴ In fact, those three schools which survived continued in the reorganized synod and not the merger church body. For Justin, this indicated the poor spiritual health of the merger body. The disparagement of Christian education proved to be a sure sign to many that the merger body had strayed from the path of the old Norwegian Synod. Christian education was another motive for the reorganized synod. The early founders of the ELS believed that Christian education was vital for the tending of God’s dear children.

¹²² Petersen, “The Christian Day-School,” 65.

¹²³ Petersen, “The Christian Day-School,” 65.

¹²⁴ Christian Anderson, “Elementary Christian Education,” in *Grace for Grace*, 81.

As twenty-first century Lutherans who lay claim to the old Norwegian Synod, it is imperative that the history of its continuation in the reorganized synod is not forgotten. While broad statements like the “election controversy” may help explain why the ELS exists, it is not a complete summary. Present-day pastors and members of the ELS may be surprised at some of the different concerns and motivations of the early founders of the ELS like secret societies and Christian education. Just these two examples from Justin’s writings help provide a fuller understanding of the other doctrinal controversies and practices that led to the founding and continuation of the old Norwegian Synod besides the doctrine of election.

Justin’s writings not only shed light on other concerns that were on the hearts and minds of early pastors in the reorganized synod, but they also show how an early pastor like Justin impacted the ethos of the ELS today. His influence on the synod has been carried on through his writings, his days in the congregation, as well as by the rearing of his children, three of whom became pastors in the ELS who would continue with a similar character. He was not a man who only zeroed in on doctrinal purity, but also a man who valued things such as church history and family devotional life.¹²⁵ The following examples demonstrate some of the attitudes and principles that have contributed to what some have called the particular “flavor” of the ELS, with its emphasis on the gospel.

One of the most well-known writings of Rev. Justin Petersen was his convention essay on Christian burial.¹²⁶ The essay was made into a pamphlet that was widely distributed throughout the synod. It was also reprinted in *Concordia Theological Monthly* in 1934 and translated into Spanish for the Concordia Seminary in Argentina in 1999. In this essay Justin defines Christian burial and explains its purpose, who it is for, and clarifies the emphasis for every funeral sermon. Here is a brief excerpt from his discussion on the funeral sermon:

The funeral sermon affords the Church through its official spokesman, the pastor, an outstanding opportunity to testify of the issues of life and death, and the most should be made of such golden opportunities. Many people attend funerals who rarely, if ever, go to Church at other times. If ever they are serious, if ever

¹²⁵ See several installments of Justin’s in the *Sentinel* on Athanasius and the Family Altar.

¹²⁶ Justin A. Petersen, “Christian Burial,” *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1933, 17–28.

the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of death, is impressed upon them, if ever men are brought to realize that their “hearts are muffled drums beating funeral marches to the grave,” it is now. It is hard for unbelief and skepticism to look death in the face. Their bold front often breaks down over the coffin and at the grave.

If ever, therefore, the issues of life and death should be proclaimed clearly, convincingly, and fearlessly, if ever we should preach as “dying men to dying men,” it is at a funeral. To the casket before us we can point as concrete, indisputable evidence of the awful truth that “the wages of sin is death,” but at the same time we can over the mortal remains of a child of God joyfully, aye, boastfully, point to the glorious hope of life eternal as the “gift of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord.” Sin and grace should be stressed in every sermon, and certainly should resound clearly in every funeral sermon. It should be emphasized that the deceased was, and confessed himself to be a poor sinner, whose only comfort and hope against his sins was the grace of God in Christ Jesus.¹²⁷

The men who left the NLCA were not imbibed with dead orthodoxy. They had a zeal to proclaim the Law and Gospel in its fullness! Justin’s essay on Christian burial is just one of many examples where men of this generation offer true pastoral wisdom. He was a man who cared for the souls of men and sought to offer them the comfort of the Gospel—the Good News that Christ has paid man’s debt of sin, which is freely given to man in the means of grace. This emphasis on the importance of proclaiming the comfort of the Gospel in its fullness at each funeral is still taught at the ELS seminary and preached in its pulpits.

Justin had an eternal spirit of gratefulness for the Gospel. He was thankful for the reorganized synod for leaving the merger church body, but also for the help of theologians like C. F. W. Walther and Francis Pieper. This ode of appreciation can be seen in several personal letters, but perhaps most explicitly in his 1938 convention essay, “Address In Commemoration of the Saxon Immigration.” This essay describes in brief, the important help the Missouri Synod gave to the Norwegian Synod. Towards the end of the essay Justin explains the ways that the Norwegian Lutherans could best repay their debt to the Missouri Synod.

2. The bearing of fruits meet for the purity of the doctrine of grace. God expects, and rightly, more of us than He does of others less

¹²⁷ Petersen, “Christian Burial,” 26.

avored. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Who should be more humble, more zealous, more fruitful than just we? In the strength of this same grace, we should constantly strive to become ever worthier sons and daughters of the true Reformation church. But is not the danger actual and ever-present to make an idol even out of purity of doctrine and the outward forms of worship, priding ourselves in the possession of the same while we fail to bear the fruits thereof in our hearts and lives? Our own Luther even in his day saw this danger and bitterly deplored the oft meager fruits of faith.

So while we deplore and decry the ever louder-growing slogan "Deeds, not Creeds," let us beware lest it with us does not become creeds without deeds—thus becoming barren fig trees in the garden of God's grace....

4. A humble, sympathetic understanding of the position and problems of our brethren. We shall be quick to praise, and slow to find fault. We shall not act like little dogs that constantly bark and rant at every shadow. We shall look for the bright and not the shady side. Our very position as members of the Synodical Conference and especially of the Norwegian Synod makes it so easy to develop the holier-than-thou attitude. We should shun suspicion and carping criticism as the devil himself and ever be mindful also in Synodical relations of the eighth commandment which admonishes us to excuse our neighbor, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

5. This does not mean, of course, that we never must criticize, admonish and, if needs be, even rebuke. Such spirit is not evidence of true love. We must not regard the Missouri Synod as an aggregation of saints perfected in themselves—though her doctrine, and our doctrine, is perfect—for wherever you have the human equation, there you have sinners with depraved and deceitful hearts, the fountain-head of all evil, ready to flow over at any time. No, in this sad sense the perfect Church is not here; the perfect Church is yonder.

We must not, therefore, canonize the Missouri Synod, and "make flesh our arm." That would be making an idol out of her—a spirit far alien to the true Missourian. Not the hosts of the Lord, but the Lord of hosts will we worship.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Petersen, "Address in Commemoration of the Saxon Immigration," 56–57.

The great debt of appreciation does not mean blind-eye worship, but humility and brotherly love. In a letter to Norman Madson, who was heavily involved with the Synodical Conference and the issues of unionism that were going on between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, Justin wrote to encourage him to remember this debt to the Missouri Synod and its theologians like Walther.¹²⁹ At the same time, Justin expressed the need to proclaim the truth confidently. Perhaps aware of Madson's sometimes abrupt demeanor, he urged him to do to all in gentleness and care.

Justin was aware of the schismatic tendencies that could naturally develop in a synod such as the ELS. As a church body that had already left the merger church body, it would not be surprising for more breaks to occur. A General Pastoral Conference essay on "The Gospel Ministry and Human Relations," addresses some of the concerns he has,

Before we proceed any further on the intersynodical path, we believe it would be well to remind ourselves of Walther's burning, and honest, zeal for one truly united Lutheran Church in this country. This goal, we too, should never lose sight of, though often sorely tempted to do so, due to the many steadily accumulating aggravations and violations of doctrinal purity and practice—within our Synodical Conference even.

Whereas we should never cease—which God forbid!—earnestly to strive "for the faith once delivered unto the saints," we should at the same time strive to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Eph. 4, 3.

Isn't there such a thing as going so far in our justified aversion to union at any price, that we are in danger of developing a union-at-no-price attitude? There is such a thing as "having zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Rom. 10, 2.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Justin writing to Norman Madson in the Spring of 1940,

We know too, that unionism is intoxicating, and under the influence of this "ruse" people think, say, and do things they would not do otherwise. Now as sinners ourselves who live by the grace of God alone, we wouldn't forthwith disown a son or even daughter, who came home intoxicated, would we, could we? Here too.

"Yes, but we have been patient, and long suffering." I know—but love, grateful love, will continue on and on, though the time may and perhaps must come—God forbid!—when we must say: Our greater love for our Savior God and His truth will not permit us to negotiate or plead longer (*April 4, 1940*, Letter, from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives).

¹³⁰ Justin Petersen, "The Gospel Ministry and Human Relations," *Clergy Bulletin* 14, no. 7 (1955): 69.

Justin was not advocating for unionism, but that the Gospel might dictate our behavior in human relations. This heart-felt yearning for unity among Orthodox Lutherans can still be seen in the ELS today through its involvement in the founding and support of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), which was established in 1993.

The best way to learn who the early men of the synod were, specifically, Rev. Justin Petersen, is to read what they were writing about. However, some observations can be made. In all of his writings, there is a clear and pastoral tone. He was not afraid to call sin a sin, but went about it with humility and care. His writings are filled with Scripture, as well as citations from the Book of Concord, Luther, Walther, and various theologians. On a visit to his son who had recently moved to a new congregation, he asked for his copy of the *Book of Concord*. The son confessed that he had not unpacked it, and Justin reprimanded him quite strongly, "You will never be a Lutheran preacher, if you do not study the Confessions."¹³¹ He was not an island to himself, but one who treasured the wealth of material and works of many theologians gone by. His writings do not reflect a schismatic personality, but one that guarded against any denigration or perversion of the Gospel. He fought to preserve this truth through his words and work. The doctrine of election was indeed a primary concern for the early men of the synod, but that was not the limit of their concern as seen in the writings of Justin Petersen.

CONCLUSION

Justin A. Petersen passed away suddenly from a stroke on February 18, 1954 at the early age of 63 years, one month, and 16 days. He was buried at the Scarville Lutheran cemetery. Inscribed on his tombstone are the words, "A Christian Lutheran Pastor—By the Grace of God."¹³² A fitting epitaph for the life of the Lord's faithful servant. He lived in one of the most tumultuous times in American history—both socially and religiously. Justin relied on the strength and mercy of his good and gracious Lord. He was a man who knew he was a poor sinner in need of a greater Savior. May the lives of our forefathers serve as a reminder of the great cloud of witnesses before us who have

¹³¹ Joseph Petersen, "Fundamental Principles of Lutheran Homiletics," *General Pastors Conference* (ELS Synod Archives, July 13, 1994), 3.

¹³² Wilhelm Petersen, *Oak Leaves* vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 12.

persevered in the faith until their end, holding fast to the faithful Word of Truth.

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth’s sake.” May these words ever be expressive of the deepest sentiments of our heart! For then we will ever in true humility confess our own unworthiness, give God alone all the glory, magnify His mercy, and treasure His truth. Then, but only then, can we be certain that our word in His Church will be pleasing unto Him and profitable unto us and others. God grant it for His mercies’ sake! Amen.¹³³ LSQ

¹³³ Justin Petersen, “Festival Sermon Delivered at the Western Koshkonong Lutheran Church, 1928,” *Lutheran Sentinel* 11, no. 42 (October 17, 1928): 665.

Our Millennial Life: Exegesis of Revelation 20:1–6

Theodore G. Gullixson
Pastor emeritus

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The King shall come when morning dawns
And light and beauty brings.
Hail, Christ the Lord! Your people pray:
Come quickly, King of Kings (ELH 101:5).

AS A STUDENT AT BETHANY LUTHERAN College, I saw a film on television, *A Thief in the Night* by Russell Doughten. The film featured the theme song by Larry Norman, “I Wish We’d All Been Ready,” in which he sings, “There’s no time to change your mind, the Son has come and you’ve been left behind.” Hal Lindsey’s 1970 book *The Late Great Planet Earth* captured the imagination of many. In 1973, he wrote another book, *There’s A New World Coming: A Prophetic Odyssey*. J. Dwight Pentecost popularized this genre in *Things to Come* in 1958 and John Walvord wrote *The Millennial Kingdom* in 1959. Another pamphlet was titled “88 Reasons why Jesus will return in 1988.” In 1988 he wrote 89 Reasons...” From 1995 to 2007, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins co-authored a 16-book series *Left Behind*, which also generated four movies.¹ Even Concordia

¹ “Left Behind tells an apocalyptic story about the ending of Earth (set in the contemporary era) over a period of seven years. The true believers in Jesus Christ have been raptured (taken instantly to heaven), leaving non-believers behind on Earth, now a shattered and chaotic world. As people scramble for answers, an obscure Romanian politician named Nicolae Jetty Carpathia rises to become secretary-general of the United Nations, promising to restore peace and stability to all nations. What most of

Publishing House printed their *Revelation* commentary by Louis Brighton in 1999.

This publishing of books was leading up to the year AD 2000 with the expectation that Jesus would return—soon. Unlike the year AD 1000, Christian excitement fizzled. Indeed, the greater fear was the “apocalypse” of every computer crashing because of a dating glitch. Twenty years later, the culture pays very little attention to Jesus’ return on the Last Day. The attention of Christians should not waver, since, “now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Rom 13:11)², and because we live in a culture in which the ruler of this world is growing stronger.

Our society has replaced the post-millennial idea of Christ reigning on earth for 1,000 years (predicting world-wide peace and prosperity) with the socialistic ideal of everyone being equal and happy on earth. Both dreams need to be refuted. An exegesis of Revelation 20 can help pastors instruct the confused, warn the misguided, and give hope to those facing persecution.

Unfortunately, the devil has filled the world with confusing ideas about St. John’s *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Those who claim to have a literal interpretation of Revelation 20 end up adding details that fit their millennial viewpoints. For Hal Lindsey, “The real issue at stake is whether or not God ever promised such an earthly Kingdom, and if he did, will He keep His promise literally.”³

the world does not realize is that Carpathia is actually the Antichrist foretold in the Bible. Coming to grips with the truth and becoming born-again Christians, airline pilot Rayford Steele, his daughter Chloe, their pastor Bruce Barnes, and young journalist Cameron ‘Buck’ Williams begin their quest as the Tribulation Force to help save the lost and prepare for the coming Tribulation, in which God will rain down judgment on the world for seven years” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left_Behind).

² All Biblical quotations from NKJV unless otherwise noted.

³ Hal Lindsey, *There’s A New World Coming: A Prophetic Odyssey* (Vision House Pbl., 1973), 267. Elsewhere he writes, “There are more prophesies in the Bible about this Kingdom and its significance to the believing Jew than any other theme of prophecy. The heart of the Old Testament prophetic message is the coming of the Messiah to set up an earthly kingdom over which He would rule from the throne of David. The only important detail which the Book of Revelation adds concerning this promised messianic Kingdom is its duration—one thousand years. ... I believe the apostles and early Christians unanimously expected Jesus to set up a literal Kingdom of God... I am convinced that the most important issue at stake is that of consistency in Bible interpretation. For instance, in Chapter 20 of Revelation there is absolutely no basis for saying that the narrative should be taken non-literally. There is no way it could have been written more forcefully as objective, historical fact rather than subjective allegory” (Lindsey, *New World*, 167–9. Emphasis original).

By contrast, some liberal commentators consider Revelation to be a mere letter that gives opportunity for St. John to fight gnosticism and correct certain elements in Paul's theology. For example, R.H. Charles (*International Critical Commentary*) concluded that Revelation 20:4–22:21 is so confusing that John must have died and “a faithful but unintelligent disciple” tried to finish it, because the confusion makes it “impossible for us to accept the text as it stands.”⁴

Revelation 20 should not be studied in isolation from the rest of the book. Chapters seven to nineteen provide a helpful context for a proper understanding of chapter 20. This chapter stands at the end of many visions that describe the war between Christ and Satan, which is also a war between the Christ's Church and the agents of Satan. The visions of chapters 7–19 retell the story revealed in earlier chapters from a different perspective. The visions of the seven seals (ch. 6–8) and the seven trumpets (ch. 8–9) deal with the many plagues that will come upon the earth because of the world's unbelief in Jesus. In chapter ten, St. John eats the little book and is commanded to prophesy further. St. John then sees the two witnesses of God who go forth and are killed by the opposition that the devil mounts against them (ch. 11).

The battle between Satan and Christ is again told in chapters 12–19. The woman (the Church) gives birth to a Son (Jesus). The dragon (Satan) tries to kill the Son, but is powerless against Him (ch. 12). With Satan “bound,” he must work through agents: 1) the beast from the sea, whose wounded head was healed and who spoke blasphemies; and 2) the beast of the earth, who exercised authority and demanded that everyone wear his mark and number (ch. 13). Next, St. John is shown those in heaven who refused to worship the beast and he hears the angel preaching the Gospel and declaring that Babylon is fallen, while the remaining drink of God's wrath. While the saints sing praise to God (ch. 15), the angels pour bowls of wrath on the world (ch. 16). In chapter 17, St. John introduces the harlot named “Babylon,” who deceives the nations. The destruction of Satan's agents—the two beasts and the harlot—is told in chapters 18 and 19.

In chapter 20, St. John is given four visions. The first vision (vv. 1–3) speaks about the binding of Satan for 1,000 years. Verses four to six describe what happened to those who escaped the power of Satan. The third vision tells about the short time that Satan is set free to make war on the believers (vv. 7–10). The fourth vision describes Satan's descent

⁴ Gerhard A. Krodel, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Revelation* (Augsburg Publ. Co., 1990), 327.

into the lake of fire and the resurrection on the Last Day (the rest of the chapter). Chapters 21 and 22 picture the glories of heaven that await those who worshiped the Lamb and did not receive the mark of the beast—ending with Jesus declaring, “I am coming soon.”⁵

Many interpretations of chapters six to twenty exist. Philip Hughes lists three overall interpretations of Revelation:

The **preterits** have wished to assign the fulfillment of the book’s prophecies, for the most part, to the earliest age of ecclesiastical history. The **historicists** maintain that the Patmos visions portray the development of the church and its affairs in a sequence of periods that stretch successively from the beginning to the end of its history. The **futurists**, as the name indicates, hold that the focus of Revelation is neither on the pastors nor the present but on events that have yet to take place.⁶

There is also the **idealist** approach where Revelation is neither past nor present, but symbols dealing with the struggle of good over evil.⁷

Hughes then lists three main schools of interpretation:

[T]he **premillennialists** hold that prior to his reigning for a thousand years on earth Christ’s second advent will take place, the **post-millennialists** hold that Christ’s return will be after the millennium which they envisage as a golden age of church prevalence and gospel fruitfulness throughout the world, and the **amillennialists** hold that the thousand years signify the duration of the present gospel era extending between the two comings of Christ, treating the number

⁵ Gregory Beale finds a “chiastic structure in chapters 17–22, exhibiting a rough synchronous parallelism, further suggesting that 20:1ff does not chronologically follow chapter 19:11–24:

A. Judgment of the harlot (17:1–19:6)

B. The divine Judge (19:11–16)

C. Judgment of the beast and the false prophet (19:17–21; cf. Ezek 39)

D. Satan imprisoned for 1,000 years (20: 1–3)

D* The saints reign. judge for 1,000 years (20:4–6)

C* The judgment of Gog and Magog (20:7–10; cf. Ezek 38–39)

B* The divine Judge (20:11–15)

A* Vindication of the bride (21:1–22:5; cf. 19:7–9)” (G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1999), 983).

⁶ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1990), 9. Emphasis added.

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eschatology>.

one thousand, in line with other numbers of the book, as symbolical in significance.⁸

Finally, Lutheran theologians have distinguished three types of millennialists: coarse, moderate, and subtle. In coarse chiliasm, heretics taught a millennium of carnal delights. Modern chiliasm teaches a visible reign of Christ and a two-fold resurrection. The subtle chiliasm assumes an age of ideal peace and prosperity for the Church.⁹

It is not possible, nor profitable, to refute every contention of the millennialists. This study of Revelation 20 affords an opportunity to look at world history in a few verses so that we might be comforted in times of persecution, warned in times of ease and prosperity, encouraged when we are discouraged, and given hope when the world seems to be losing hope.

Hermeneutical interpretation is both a science and an art. On the science side, the interpreter can use the tools of historical-critical studies, isagogics, philology, and linguistics to understand the meaning of words and their relationship to the whole book and to the rest of Scripture. Science can aid the exegete to understand the *what* of St. John's book. The art of interpretation requires faith. Faith helps understand the *meaning* of his inspired words. Faith is bound to another

⁸ Hughes, *Revelation*, 9. Emphasis added. Gawrisch lists ten points of Biblical teaching on the end times, refuting millennialism: "1. God has not revealed to anyone when the last day will come. 2. The ever-present signs of the end serve as a warning to us to be prepared for it at all times. 3. As the end approaches, conditions in nature, in society and in the church will become increasingly worse, not better. 4. The destruction of the present world by fire will coincide with Christ's return, not follow it by a thousand years. 5. Christ's return in glory will be universally visible, not secret. 6. Believers and unbelievers will be raised from the dead in one simultaneous, universal resurrection, not in two or more resurrections at various times. 7. The final judgment will take place at Christ's return, not a thousand years later. 8. Christ's kingdom is spiritual and heavenly, not political and temporal. 9. At death unbelievers enter at once into hell and believers into heaven, not into some intermediate state. 10. The punishment of the damned in hell and the joys of the saints in heaven will never end" (Wilbert R. Gawrisch, *Eschatological Prophecies and Current Misinterpretations* [Reprint from Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1974], 31. <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/handle/123456789/1747>).

⁹ Theodore Graebner, *War in the Light of Prophecy, "Was It Forefold?"—A Reply to Modern Chiliasm* (Concordia Publ. House, 1941), 66. Theodore Graebner wrote *Prophecy and the War* in 1918 to refute chiliast claims about World War I. He revised that book in 1941 because of millennial schemes printed in such magazines as *Our Hope*, *Destiny*, *Revelation*, *The Sunday-school Times*, and *The Prophecy Monthly*. He attempts to "show that World War II as little as its predecessor of twenty-five years ago has any specific relation to the prophecies whose fulfillment is so confidently asserted by most Fundamentalists of today" (Graebner, *War*, iv–v).

principle: Scripture interprets Scripture. This principle is especially needed with Revelation 20, since some commentators want to interject Ezekiel 38–39 (Gog and Magog) or Daniel 7 (the reign of the Son of Man’s everlasting kingdom) into this section.¹⁰

Another important hermeneutical principle of interpretation is that less clear (and figurative) passages should be understood by clearer (and more plain) passages in Scripture. In this case, the book of Revelation is to be interpreted by Jesus’ clearer discussion of Judgment Day in Matthew 24 and 25 and John 5.

The presuppositions that a person brings to this study will govern the interpretations of John’s book. We hold that the book of Revelation is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), that God cannot lie (Jn 17:17), and that the Bible does not have contradictions. We also need to be aware of the special hermeneutical rules and principles that deal with poetic, prophetic, and apocalyptic literature. A word is to be understood in a literal sense unless something shows that it was used figuratively. A figurative use must be founded on the literal use of a word. A figurative use still serves to proclaim truth.

When dealing with the Last Day, the Holy Spirit used figurative language to instruct us. First, because the events of Judgment Day will be unlike anything humans have experienced—Christ’s glory and either exceedingly great joy or unending deep bitterness. Second, because God wants all believers to be ready for that Day since He has not revealed when the end will come. Third, because believers could be overcome with fear if God had spoken literally or directly. Some of the figurative language of Revelation is frightening enough, even as the book’s purpose is to comfort God’s people amid the trials of this world.

One key to interpreting Revelation occurs in the first verse of the book. Concerning “the things which must shortly take place,” St. John wrote, “And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John” (καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ,) (Rev 1:1). Thayer gives this main verb ἐσήμανεν the meaning “to give a sign, signify, indicate; to make known.”¹¹ Many commentators and Bible translations use the meaning “to make known” and say nothing about the symbolism of Revelation from this word. Lenski states that the verbs δειξαε and ἐσήμανεν have the same basic meaning as ἀποκαλυψις—to

¹⁰ See Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Popular Commentary (Concordia Publ. House, 2009), 976–83.

¹¹ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Zondervan, 1962), s.v. σημαίνω.

reveal or show.¹² Though a paraphrase, the EHV makes the “signified” of the NKJV above more explicit: “Christ expressed this revelation by means of symbols sent through his angel to his servant John” (Rev 1:1).

Many of the nouns and verbs in chapter 20 are used as symbols. The literal/real meaning is derived from the symbolic language. St. John helps by explaining the symbol of the seven lamp stands, stating that they are the seven churches in Asia Minor. Hughes states, “[A]nd so the seer must do his best to communicate what he has seen to others by means of analogical approximations and images which suggest and point beyond themselves to realities that far exceed all that can be said.”¹³ He reminds us that clarity will come to us only when we see the reality in the glory to come.¹⁴ Therefore, apocalyptic literature can be deliberately vague and its interpretation cannot always be assured due to our ignorance.

Exegesis first deals with the language and words that St. John wrote and secondly considers what meaning those words convey to people 2,000 years later. Exegesis is the source material for Dogmatics, Systematics, and Homiletics; but it is not independent of those disciplines.

Based on Scripture, we confess:

Our churches also teach that at the consummating of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will raise up all the dead. 2) To the godly and elect he will give eternal life and endless joy, 3) but ungodly men and devils he will condemn to be tormented without end. 4) Our churches condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils, 5) They also condemn others who are not spreading Jewish opinions to the effect that before the resurrection of the dead the godly will take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being suppressed everywhere.¹⁵

¹² R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Augsburg Publ. House, 1989), 28.

¹³ Hughes, *Revelation*, 8.

¹⁴ Hughes, *Revelation*, 10.

¹⁵ CA XVII:1-5 [Latin]. All quotes from the Book of Concord are taken from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert, Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, and Arthur C. Piepkorn (Fortress Press, 1959).

Revelation 20:1

Wisely fight, for time is fleeting;
 The hours of grace are fast retreating;
 Short, short is this our earthly way.
 When the trump the death is waking
 And sinners all with fear are quaking,
 With joy the saints will greet their Day.
 Bless God, our triumph's sure,
 Though long we did endure Scorn and trail.
 Thou, Son of God, To Thine abode
 Wilt lead the way Thyself hast trod (ELH 518:3).

Text and Translation

Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελόν καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ.

And I saw an angel descending from heaven having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

Vocabulary

καταβαίνοντα—to descend, go down, come down [Pres. Active Part.-Masc. Acc. Sing.]

ἔχοντα—to have, to hold; hold fast, keep; have in readiness. [Pres. Active Part.-Fem. Acc. Sing.]

κλεῖν—a key [noun: Fem. Acc. Sing.]

ἀβύσσου—bottomless, unbounded. [Adjective: Masc. Gen. Sing.]

ἄλυσιν—a chain, bond. (2 Tim 1:16-handcuff). [Noun: Fem. Acc. sing.]

μεγάλην—large, great, important, strong, excellent. [Adjective: Fem. Acc. Sing.]

Commentary

The first words (Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελόν) indicate that St. John sees a special vision. Louis Brighton states that this is a new vision, different from those of chapter 19, which does not follow that chapter in the sequence of time since John's formula words (μετά ταῦτα) are missing. The events of chapter 20 cannot be placed after the second coming of Christ.¹⁶

¹⁶ Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (Concordia Publ. House, 1999), 546–7.

Does καὶ indicate a historical sequence so that this verse records events after the marriage feast of the bride and Lamb and Christ's second coming in chapter 19? Or is καὶ a "visionary sequence" marking a literary transition? Gregory Beale states that the καὶ-s of chapter 20 indicate an historical sequence, but not this first one.¹⁷ Chapter 20 is therefore understood as a "recapitulation" of visions written earlier in Revelation; the millennialists do not. Their understanding forces them to speak of two physical resurrections and an earthly reign of Christ after the events of chapter 19.

John literally saw what he described in verse one. Just as the angel is a spiritual being who is seen, we should expect the other five nouns in this verse to refer to the spiritual realm.¹⁸ Even the word "descending" should not be understood too literally. This is what John saw.

Siegbert Becker states that the angel that John saw is Christ Himself. He asserts that everything that is said about this angel fits Jesus better than a created angel.¹⁹ Most other commentators (Luther Poellot, *The Pulpit Commentary*, R.H. Charles, Henry Alford, Albert Barnes, R. Lenski, and Philip Hughes) state that John saw a literal angel. Lenski comments that if the angel is Christ, this would be the only place in Revelation where Christ appears as an angel.²⁰

The present participles καταβαίνοντα and ἔχοντα are descriptive in respect to ἄγγελόν. The first states where the angel came from: ἐκ refers to source, with a genitive of place. The angel is a messenger whom God commissioned to bind Satan and who is given power to accomplish this task. The second (ἔχοντα) describes the equipment the angel is given by Christ, who said, "I also hold the keys of death and hell" (Rev 1:18, EHV). The special hermeneutical rule applies here: Both the "key" and the "chain" are intended as symbols, since a literal interpretation of the spirit-being, Satan, being bound by physical chains would be nonsensical.

τὴν κλεῖν (key) is always used in a figurative sense in the New Testament.²¹ "Key" is a symbol of power/authority to open or close the gates of hell. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus holds the "keys of death and

¹⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 975.

¹⁸ J. Marcellus Kik, *Revelation Twenty: An Exposition* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., 1955), 16.

¹⁹ Siegbert W. Becker, *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song* (Northwestern Publ. House, 1985), 296–7. See Gawrisch, *Prophecies*, 47.

²⁰ Lenski, *Revelation*, 567.

²¹ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1964–76), 3:744.

the grave.” In 9:1, a key was given to a “star fallen from heaven,” that is, Satan, who opened the bottomless pit (v. 2). Here an angel “from heaven” shuts the abyss.²² The genitive of possession, τῆς ἀβύσσου, identifies which key the angel holds; being distinguished from “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” that Jesus gave to His Church (Mt 16:19). There is no need for St. John to refer to a lock, since he is using symbols to describe reality.²³ “Satan cannot open what is shut with the angel’s key from heaven (cf. Is 22:22; Mt 16:19; Rev 3:7).”²⁴

The word ἀβύσσου was originally an adjective to γη, meaning “unfathomably deep.”²⁵ Alford declares that this abyss is temporary and is separate from the “lake of fire” into which Satan is to be thrown (Rev 20:10).²⁶ Lenski declares that ἀβύσσου describes hell’s awful depth and darkness, whereas the “lake of fire” suggests its length and breadth.²⁷ The context indicates that verses one and two describe an earlier binding and that verse 10 points to a final judgment. In Jesus’ parable of the Rich man and Lazarus, Jesus mentions the “great gulf” that exists between heaven and hell, which may be a part of this abyss. (Lk 16:26). Here, “the abyss’ seems to be the temporary abode of the demons until the End, in contrast to ‘the lake of fire.’”²⁸

St. John also saw “a great chain” (ἄλυσιν μεγάλην). It needs to be great or strong because Satan still is a powerful agent of evil.²⁹ The chain symbolizes the power to restrain Satan effectively³⁰ and to render him helpless.³¹ Brighton states that the chain is a metaphor for God’s power.³² St. John sees the chain ἐπὶ “upon his hand.” Charles says that ἐπὶ is hard to explain and he makes it equivalent to ἐν. But Lenski pictures the

²² Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 547.

²³ Luther Poellot, *Revelation* (Concordia Publ. House, 1962), 257.

²⁴ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Popular Commentary, 373.

²⁵ “In the NT 1, ἀβύσσοσ is thought of as a ‘prison for spirits’ (Rev 9:1; 20:1,3; cf. Pray. Man. 3). A well-like abyss forms the entrance, from which when it is opened there ascends the smoke of hell-fire (Rev 9:1). Its inmates until their release in the tribulation before the end are Antichrist (Rev 11:7; 17:8), the prince of the underworld (Rev 9:11), demons (Lk 8:31) and scorpion centaurs (Rev 9:3ff). The fact that God has power and control over the world of hostile spirits is clearly expressed in this idea of a spirit prison” (Kittle, *Dictionary*, 1:9–10).

²⁶ Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament* (Moody Press, 1958), 4:730.

²⁷ Lenski, *Revelation*, 568.

²⁸ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 550.

²⁹ Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament* (Kregel Publ., 1962), 1709.

³⁰ Poellot, *Revelation*, 257.

³¹ Lenski, *Revelation*, 568.

³² Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 548.

chain “upon” the angel’s arm with its two ends hanging down.³³ Jude 6 informs us that the evil angels were “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” The adjective *μεγάλην* can also mean “long.” That is, a chain that allows Satan some latitude of influence, but no more than that.

All six nouns of verse one (angel, heaven, key, abyss, chain, hand) refer to spiritual realities. Joh uses four referents from earth (key, abyss, chain, and hand) as aids to help us understand the spiritual truths we can only imagine.

In verse two, St. John tells us what the angel did with the key and chain at the beginning of the thousand years.

Revelation 20:2

Text and Translation

καὶ ἐκράτηκεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὅς ἐστιν Διάβολος καὶ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη,

And he seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him one thousand years.

Vocabulary

ἐκράτηκεν—to be powerful, rule; get, obtain; take hold of, restrain, seize. [1 Aor. Active Ind.-3rd Sing. of κράτω.]

δράκοντα—a dragon (great serpent). [noun: Masc. Acc. Sing.]

ὄφις—a snake, serpent. [Noun: Masc. Nom. Sing.]

ἀρχαῖος—original, primeval, old, ancient. [Adjective: Masc. Nom. Sing.]

Διάβολος—prone to slander. Subst.-caluminator, slanderer. [Adjective: Masc. Nom. Sing.]

Σατανᾶς—adversary. [Noun: Masc. Nom. Sing.]

ἔδησεν—to bind, tie, fasten (with acc. of person). [1 Aor. Active Ind.-3rd Sing. of δεῶ]

Commentary

God sent the angel to “seize the dragon” and bind him with the chain in his hand. As powerful as Satan is (Eph 6:12), he is bound without the hint of a struggle. For Satan must submit to God.³⁴

³³ Lenski, *Revelation*, 568.

³⁴ Poellot, *Revelation*, 257. Describing the chaining of Satan: “Up to his imprisonment in the abyss, the devil could deceive and mislead people for the purpose of

The dragon is a picture of a destroyer, like a dreadful sea-monster that inspires fear and terror. In the Old Testament, both the Egyptian Pharaoh (Ezk 29:3) and King Nebuchadrezzar (Jer 51:34) are identified as dragons because of their violent opposition to God's people.³⁵ St. John wrote a vivid description of this dragon: "Behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads" (Rev 12:3). The numbers "7" and "10" properly belong to God in Scripture. But here the numbers represent Satan's pretension to be like God and his claims to royalty and dominion over the world.³⁶ Consider Satan's third temptation of Jesus, "All these things (kingdoms of the world) I will give you if You will fall down and worship me" (Mt 4:9).

The description "ancient serpent" reminds us of Satan's cunning temptation of Adam and Eve to rebel against God's word. Indeed, the serpent is to be feared more than the dragon.³⁷ St. Paul warned the Corinthians about his cunning: "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached ... you may well put up with it" (2 Cor 11:3-4).

The Textus Receptus reads "ancient serpent" in the accusative case in order to avoid the incongruity of a nominative case connected with the accusative δράκοντα. However, in the book of Revelation, St. John characteristically employs the nominative case for a title or proper name that stands in apposition to a noun in an oblique case.³⁸ The dragon and serpent are further identified by Διάβολος καὶ Σατανᾶς, preceded by a relative pronoun with ὁ ὄφις as the antecedent. Διάβολος means "false accuser, slanderer." Jesus stated: "When he speaks a lie, he speaks from

destroying them and any relationship they might have with God. This deception began in the Garden of Eden when the dragon, the ancient serpent (Rev 12:9), lied to and thus deceived Adam and Eve (Gen 3). Ever since then he has been known as the liar and the father of lies (John 8:33; cf. 1 John 3:8). Before Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, Satan could even accuse and bad-mouth God's saints before God's heavenly throne (Job 1:6-11; Zech 3:1-5). But at Christ's victory he was thrown out of heaven (Rev 12:7-12). Never again would Satan be able to accuse God's saints in his holy presence. Satan's exile from heaven was a direct result of Christ's saving ministry and death (cf. Luke 10:17-19; John 12:31-32), which exile was authorized and carried out at his ascension (Rev 12:5, 7-9ff)" (Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 553).

³⁵ See Poellot, *Revelation*, 257 and Kik, *Revelation*, 22.

³⁶ Lenski, *Revelation*, 364.

³⁷ Kik, *Revelation*, 24.

³⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971), 764; Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 542.

his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (Jn 8:44). The name Σατανᾶς is a transliteration into Greek of the Aramaic “Satana,” which originally meant “one lying in ambush for.”³⁹ In this verse, the meaning is “adversary” in referring to Satan’s implacable opposition to God, the truth, Christ, and the Church.

The four names given to the adversary are the principle feature of verse two. These four names individually appear elsewhere in Scripture, but first appeared together in Revelation 12:7–9. After the woman flees to the wilderness, “war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon ... but they did not prevail. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan.” These four names do not describe all of the devil’s criminal aliases, for in Revelation 9:11 he is also called “Abaddon” (destruction), in Isaiah 14:12, “Lucifer” (burning one), and in Luke 11:15, “Beelzebub” (ruler of the demons). The four names describe the many forms of evil associated with the ancient foe.⁴⁰

Revelation chapters 9, 12, 13, 16 and 17 present descriptions of the dragon, the two beasts, and the harlot—all of whom fought against Christ and His Church. Because he was chained, Satan worked through these agents to do all kinds of evil in the world. Concerning the beast of the sea (representing governmental powers), St. John wrote: “it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them” (Rev 13:7). A second beast came out of the earth (representing all evil religions), who was given power so that “he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs he was granted to do.” This beast made everyone wear a mark “that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast” (Rev 13:14, 17). These beasts symbolize all the forces that Satan uses in his attempt to destroy the Church of Christ (the woman’s seed of 12:13–18).

The phrase “and he bound him one thousand years” marks the beginning of troubles for Satan—and for many a commentator. Those who look to past history for a literal 1,000-year fulfillment will find no such time. Hengstenberg claimed that Satan’s binding began on Christmas Eve A.D. 800 when the Pope crowned Charlemagne the Great as Emperor. Others seek this time in the future when they think Jesus will reign over an earthly kingdom. Some, like Barnes, see it as a literal 1,000-year period. Others use Psalm 90:4, where a day equals 1,000 years, to extend the time to 360,000 years! Bullinger declares

³⁹ Lenski, *Revelation*, 377.

⁴⁰ Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, 1709.

that the above phrase is an elipsis, where the omitted words need to be supplied, namely, “and kept him bound.”⁴¹

Mounce states that millennial ideas stem from Jewish ideas, where a messianic kingdom would last on earth forever, referring to Isaiah 11:10–16, Isaiah 65:20–25, and Daniel 7:14, 27. He adds that we should not be surprised that St. John, a Jew, would use the 1,000 years literally.⁴² Lenski explains why millennial views are so persistent: “[I]t simply cannot be possible that the Christian Church must remain under the cross until the last day; it must reach a golden age on earth when it shines in triumph.”⁴³

Becker, Poellot, Hughes, *The Pulpit Commentary*, and Lenski all declare that the 1,000 years represents a long, but finite period of time. In Scripture, “ten” is used symbolically to symbolize ‘completeness.’ Ten-cubed gives the idea of the highest completeness. Charles remarks that nowhere else in earlier or contemporary literature is the 1,000 years assigned to the Messianic kingdom.⁴⁴

“Satan’s exile from heaven was a direct result of Christ’s saving ministry and death (cf. Lk 10:17–19); Jn 12:31–32), which exile was authorized and carried out at his ascension (Rev. 12:5, 7–9).”⁴⁵ During this time of Satan’s binding, the Church will be able to proclaim Christ to the world.

Verses one and two help us understand what we confess in the Large Catechism: “[A]nd [Christ] finally ascended into heaven and assumed dominion at the right hand of the Father. The devil and all powers, therefore, must be subject to him and lie beneath his feet until finally, at the last day, he will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, sin, etc.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, 1968), 20.

⁴² Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1977), 357.

⁴³ Lenski, *Revelation*, 572. “Others are said to believe that the millennium began with the reign of Constantine the Great, who became Roman Emperor A.D. 306. Others hold that it began at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Again, according to missionary Fjelstedt, the Jews in the East expected the millennium to begin in 1810 ... The Western Jews looked for the 1,000 years to begin in 1466. Whiston placed the date in 1776, Jurieu in 1785, Bengel in 1836, Miller in 1843, Sander in 1847, Schmucker in 1848, and others variously in 1866, 1879–87, 1888, etc. Some set 1914 as the year that the millennium was to begin, only to find that it brought World War I” (Poellot, *Revelation*, 255–6).

⁴⁴ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC (T&T Clarke, 1979), 2:141.

⁴⁵ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 553.

⁴⁶ LC II II:30.

Revelation 20:3

And now we fight the battle, But then shall wear the crown
 Of full and everlasting And passion-less renown;
 And now we watch and struggle, And now we live in hope,
 And Zion in her anguish With Babylon must cope (ELH 534:4).

Text and Translation

καὶ ἔβαλλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσου καὶ ἔκλεισεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄρχι τελεσθῆ τὸ χίλια ἔτη μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον.

And he cast him into the bottomless pit and shut it and placed a seal above it in order that he no longer should deceive the gentiles until the thousand years were completed. After these things it is necessary that he be released for a short time.

Vocabulary

ἔκλεισεν—to shut, shut up. [1 Aor. Active Ind. 3rd Sing. of κλειω]
 ἐσφράγισεν—to set a seal upon, to seal. [1 Aor. Active Ind. 3rd Sing. of σφράγιζω]

ἐπάνω—above, beyond, more than. [Adverb]

πλανήσῃ—to cause to stray, lead astray; lead into error, deceive. [1 Aor. Active Subj. 3rd Sing. of πλαναω].

τελεσθῆ—to bring to a close, finish, end; Pass.-passed, finished, fulfilled, completed. [1 Aor. Pass. Subj. 3rd Sing. of τελεω]

λυθῆναι—to loose, unbind, set free, release from bonds. [1 Aor. Passive Infinitive of λυω]

Commentary

Verses two and three contain a series of aorist verbs connected with a καὶ. Mussies demonstrated that much of Revelation has its roots in Hebrew grammar. The construction in verses 2 and 3 is like a string of waw-consecutives. The Aorist tenses describe steps in a continuous process; in this case, in the past.⁴⁷

The five aorist verbs relate the overthrow of Satan at the beginning of the thousand years. The angel overpowered the dragon, bound him with the chain, cast him into the abyss, and shut and sealed the abyss so

⁴⁷ G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism* (E.J. Brill, 1971), 329.

that he could not escape. These five verbs state from a different perspective what happened to Satan when Jesus cried from the cross, "It is finished!" Jesus was born "that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:8), to judge the devil (Jn 16:11), and to "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). St. Paul wrote about this overthrow: "having disarmed principalities and powers, [with Jesus' descent into hell] He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Col 2:15).

Becker maintains at length that *ἔθνη* should not be translated "nations" because some millennialists see in these words "the complete political subjugation of the nations of the world to Christ as the millennial king." With the translation "gentiles," St. John then refers to the post-ascension work of the apostles to proclaim Christ to the world.⁴⁸

The Gentile peoples were under Satan's deceiving power during the time of the Old Testament. He led them into all types of idolatry, empty philosophies, and mystery religions. At first, the Children of Israel was given the true knowledge of God's Word and promise. But after Christ came, the Gentiles were to become aware of Jesus' light of truth through the preaching of the Gospel.⁴⁹ Almost two millennia later, we see how effectively Satan has been bound from the fact that few religions (aside from the Hindus) worship many gods, whereas most pagan nations before Jesus came worshipped a pantheon of gods.

When the seventy disciples returned from their missionary trips, Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven" (Lk 10:17). Jesus is the stronger man who has overcome Satan and divided his spoils (Lk 11:21-2). The bottomless pit is closed and sealed as a prison (Rev 20:7). The emphasis here is not on Satan's suffering, but on the restrictions that God imposed on him.⁵⁰

The purpose clause, beginning with *ἵνα*, "in order that he no longer should deceive the gentiles," informs us about why Satan was bound. It also tells us the extent of the binding and sealing of the abyss. That is, not an absolute binding of Satan's power, but limiting the devil with regards to his deceptions. Poellot notes that *πλανήση* is not passive (nations never *being deceived*), but active (Satan not deceiving the nations).⁵¹

Since the "roaring lion" continues to walk about so strongly in the world today, one might wonder when this chaining took/will take place. One Seventh-Day Adventist preacher declared that this binding meant

⁴⁸ Becker, *Revelation*, 299.

⁴⁹ Hughes, *Revelation*, 210.

⁵⁰ Poellot, *Revelation*, 258.

⁵¹ Poellot, *Revelation*, 259.

that all people will be removed from the earth for 1,000 years. Hal Lindsey imagines a period of universal righteousness and peace, which would not be possible if Satan remained free.⁵² Lutheran Gerhard Krodel describes this binding as a preliminary punishment and the total liberation of the earth from sin, idolatry, and the devil.⁵³

Sigbert Becker warns readers not to paint a picture of Satan thrown into the abyss, chained and sealed “as something that leaves no more freedom of movement than a straitjacket” (p. 297). That picture would put us into an unscriptural paradox, since St. Paul repeatedly warned Christians to put on the armor of God to fight Satan. The chain sets limits to Satan’s power to deceive the Gentiles so that the Gospel may be proclaimed.

Satan is still busy, but his activities are curtailed. He cannot prevent the Gospel from being proclaimed. St. John wrote that “he should deceive the gentiles no more,” that is, personally and directly. Satan must work through others.⁵⁴ Satan’s work is effectively stopped wherever the Gospel is preached in the world. Those whom his agents (the dragon and two beasts) have deceived do not believe in Jesus because they have rejected God’s Word.⁵⁵

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Satan’s binding by means of the Gospel will continue “until the thousand years come to an end.”⁵⁷ Then Satan will be released for a “short time.” The phrase *μετα ταυτα* (after this) could refer back to the word “years.” It would then mean the short time comes after the thousand years. St. John elsewhere in Revelation uses this phrase to refer to preceding events—the binding and imprisonment of Satan. Then

⁵² Lindsey, *New World*, 272.

⁵³ Krodel, *Revelation*, 326.

⁵⁴ Poellot, *Revelation*, 259; Lenski, *Revelation*, 575.

⁵⁵ Lenski, *Revelation*, 576.

⁵⁶ Becker, *Revelation*, 297.

⁵⁷ “The use of the subjunctive *τελεσθη*, which is the mood of indefiniteness, the timeless nature of the aorist, the undetermined length of the thousand years and the fact that the four visions cover the time from the first Advent to the final judgment strongly suggest that the short time comes toward the end of the thousand years” (Gawrisch, *Prophecies*, 50).

this would mean that the short time Satan is released is included in the closing period of the thousand years. However, Becker states that it is not necessary to determine which is meant, since Jesus prophesied a time of “great distress” and that He would “cut short” this time lest no believers are left on the earth (Mt 24:21–25).⁵⁸

Satan was seized and bound in order to allow the Gospel to be preached. During the “little time,” the work of the Gospel will come to an end,⁵⁹ when the “preaching of the gospel becomes muted and false teachers and false Christs multiply as the devil’s instruments to lead the nations astray.”⁶⁰ St. John declares that “it is necessary (δεῖ) that he be loosed.” Alford identifies this δεῖ as the necessity of prophecy. Grundmann notes in Kittel, “Not a blind belief in destiny, but faith in God’s eternal plans formulates this δεῖ. The δεῖ denotes that God is in Himself committed to these plans. It thus expresses a necessity which lies in the very nature of God and which issues in the execution of His plans in the eschatological event.”⁶¹

Poellot notes, “The devil will not be released in order to harm the church but only to gather all his servants and agencies together for their combined and final overthrow and everlasting damnation (Rev. 20:9–10).”⁶²

God was not forced to release Satan. The necessity is part of God’s plan, even though we do not know His purpose. The construction of λυθῆναι αὐτὸν is not unusual in Greek, but Mussies cites it as a Semeticism where the subject is attached to the end, just like in a Hebrew verb.⁶³

With Satan’s short release, using Gog and Magog, “wild and rude people shall assault the stronghold of Christians.”⁶⁴

From past history with Jesus’ defeat of Satan and his being chained, St. John turns to what for him was the future and for us is the ongoing present: the reign for the thousand years.

⁵⁸ Becker, *Revelation*, 302–3.

⁵⁹ Lenski, *Revelation*, 577.

⁶⁰ Becker, *Revelation*, 302.

⁶¹ Kittel, *Dictionary*, 2:23.

⁶² Poellot, *Revelation*, 260.

⁶³ Mussies, *Morphology*, 329.

⁶⁴ George Stoeckhardt, *Exegetical Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, trans. H.W. Degner (Graphic Publ. Co., 1964), 83.

Revelation 20:4

We wait for Thee, 'mid toil and pain, In weariness and sighing;
But glad that Thou our guilt hast borne, And cancelled it by dying.

Hence, cheerfully May we with Thee
Take up our cross and bear it, Till we relief inherit (ELH 536:2).

Text and Translation

Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς, καὶ κρίνα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τοῦ πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίον Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ οἵτινες οὐ προσεκύνησαν τὸ θηρίον οὐδὲ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔλαβον τὸ χάραγμα ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτῶν καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη.

And I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them, and (I saw) the souls of those who had been beheaded for the sake of the witness about Jesus and for the sake of the Word of God, and those who did not worship the beast nor his image and who did not receive the mark upon the forehead and upon their head; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Vocabulary

θρόνους—throne, seat (Metonymy-kingly power) [Noun-Masc. Acc. Pl.]

ἐκάθισαν—to make to sit down; set, appoint. [1 Aor. Active Ind.-3rd Pl.]

ἐδόθη—to give, bestow; grant; supply. [1 Aor. Pass. Ind.-3rd Sing. of δίδωμι.]

ψυχὰς—breath, life; soul. [Noun-Fem. Acc. Pl.]

πεπελεκισμένων—to cut off with an axe (πέλεκυς=axe or two-edged sword). [Perf. Pass. Part.-Masc. Gen. Pl.]

προσεκύνησαν—to kiss the hand to one, do homage, worship. [1 Aor. Active Ind.-3rd Pl.]

μαρτυρίον—testimony, witness. [Noun-Neut. Acc. Sing.]

θηρίον—little beast, little animal, wild beast. [Noun-Neut. Acc. Sing.]

εἰκόνα—image, figure, likeness. [Noun-Fem. Acc. Sing.]

χάραγμα—stamp, imprinted mark; sculpture. [Noun-Neut. Acc. Sing.]

μέτωπον—the forehead (space between the eyes). [Noun-Neut. Acc. Sing.]

ἔζησαν—to live, become alive, come back to life. [Aor. Active Ind.-3rd Pl.]

ἐβασίλευσαν—to be a king, reign; control. [1 Aor. Active Ind.-3rd Pl.]

Commentary

St. John sees (εἶδον) a second vision in this chapter that describes what happens during the thousand-year reign of the saints. John sees people ruling, some being beheaded and not worshiping the beast, the rest remaining dead, and many people given a part in the first resurrection. Here St. John gives us a short version of Church history by presenting spiritual events, rather than diplomatic, economic, or social history.

This verse does not speak about *Christ* reigning alone on earth for 1,000 years, but about the *saints* who sat on thrones ruling with Christ. Indeed, Christ reigns forever (Rev 11:15), but not while residing in this world (Jn 18:36).⁶⁵

First, St. John states that he saw thrones (plural), but not how many he saw nor where they were placed. Thrones are the symbol for rule, power, and dominion. One who is “sitting on a throne” is exercising such rule.⁶⁶

Commentators have many answers as to who is sitting on these thrones. Poellot refers to all the saints who by the Office of the Keys judge the world: “Every member of the church is a king.”⁶⁷ Others mention the Apostles, as Jesus promised in Matthew 19:28; or to the saints that St. Paul refers to: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor 6:2).⁶⁸ The phrase “they lived and reigned” indicates who are sitting on the thrones, namely, the beheaded souls who live in heaven.⁶⁹

Those who sit on thrones “will judge the world.” Luke 22:29–30, Romans 5:17, and 1 Corinthians 6:2 speak about saints judging or ruling the world. Since Christ’s kingdom of grace is not of this earth, their judging and ruling is not worldly, but spiritual. Whenever the Law and Gospel are preached, God’s judgment and grace are proclaimed.

⁶⁵ Becker, *Revelation*, 306.

⁶⁶ Lenski, *Revelation*, 578.

⁶⁷ Poellot, *Revelation*, 260–1.

⁶⁸ Alford, *New Testament*, 4:731.

⁶⁹ Becker, *Revelation*, 305, 307; Lenski, *Revelation*, 579.

Where men loved darkness, condemnation falls; where God grants the light of faith, mercy is given.

Both nouns “thrones” and “souls” are direct objects of “I saw.” What is not clear is whether St. John saw one group of people on thrones—the beheaded ones who did not worship the beast (as Krodel, Charles, Becker, and Poellot say), or two groups—the beheaded ones and those who did not worship the beast (as in Lenski and Hughes), or three groups—the beheaded ones, those who didn’t worship the beast, and those who didn’t have the beast’s mark.⁷⁰ Charles states that *καὶ οἵτινες* further defines the martyrs,⁷¹ while Lenski writes that the two groups are required because of the addition of *καὶ*. It is noted that *ψυχὰς* is in the accusative case while *οἵτινες* is in the nominative case. Brighton says, “It is likely that this one group represents all martyrs and all those who refuse to worship the beast and to bear his mark.”⁷²

This conclusion is reinforced with the word *μαρτυρίον*, which means “witness.” They “witnessed about Jesus” (an objective genitive),⁷³ that is, they confessed Jesus as the Messiah and proclaimed what Jesus did to save sinners from eternal death. Therefore, the “souls” in verse 4 speak about all believers who are witnesses, judges, and rulers with Christ, some of whom were martyrs.⁷⁴

The believers of St. John’s time suffered under the persecution of Domitian. Many people were killed for their faith in Christ.⁷⁵ The Church used the name *μαρτυρίον* (witness) for those who had been beheaded and killed—martyr. St. John wanted to reassure his readers that the martyrs had not died in vain, even though Satan seemed victorious.

In Revelation 13:16, the second beast places his mark “666” on the foreheads or hands to identify those who follow Satan. “But the followers of Christ do not have such a mark, for they are identified as saints of God in Christ. God has sealed them on their foreheads (7:3;

⁷⁰ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 556.

⁷¹ Charles, *Revelation*, 183.

⁷² Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 556.

⁷³ Becker, *Revelation*, 307.

⁷⁴ Gawrisch notes, “To this day the testimony of faithful witnesses of the past, men like Luther and Chemnitz, Gerhard and Quenstedt, Walther and Hoenecke, the Piepers, Schaller, Meyer and the many other orthodox teachers of the church continue to bear fruit and to extend Christ’s royal reign of grace in the hearts of men” (*Gawrisch, Prophecies*, 45).

⁷⁵ “Paul was beheaded, James the brother of John was killed with a sword, Matthias was stoned and beheaded, Peter was crucified, Stephen was stoned, James the Just was thrown from the Temple” (Poellot, *Revelation*, 262).

cf. 9:4) with the seal of the name of the Lamb and the name of God the Father (19:19–21).⁷⁶

Those who refuse to worship the beast, or his image, or to receive their mark, are the believers. In chapter 13, St. John describes the second beast (anti-Christian religions) as one who required all people to make an image of the first beast from the sea and worship it. This beast also caused those who refused to be killed. No one could buy or sell unless they had the mark (666) on their foreheads. Those who obeyed this beast receive eternal death. Those who lost their lives for Jesus' sake will find it in heaven. Therefore Scripture warns believers to “mark and avoid” false teachers (Rom 16:17) and not to “be unequally yoked with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14).

Based on the text, inductive reasoning could conclude that only those who had been martyred for the faith are mentioned in verse 4. Deductive reasoning would consider that the saints on earth truly “reign with Christ” as they judge through law and gospel and as they proclaim Christ (witness), as “all things work together for [their] good,” and as God answers their prayers.

Some commentators have problems with St. John seeing “souls.” They wish to insert a resurrection of believers here, so they declare that the first resurrection is a bodily one, perfect and complete.⁷⁷ Kik maintains that there are few places in the New Testament where ψυχὰς can be translated ‘souls,’ stating that John saw “lives” of those who lived and ruled.⁷⁸ Hal Lindsey requires that a bodily resurrection occur first because John could not see souls. Nor is this a synecdoche, as Bullinger states: where a part—ψυχὰς—is meant for the whole: body and soul.⁷⁹ The text clearly indicates that those who had died were the souls St. John saw. If John could see angels in this vision, he could also see souls.⁸⁰

This verse, along with Revelation 7:9, gave great comfort to those who lost loved ones to persecution. The wicked foe had not won. These departed souls lived and reigned with Christ, as He promised: “Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn 11:26).

The misunderstanding over ψυχὰς extends to ἔζησαν (“they lived”). Alford, the King James Version, and other millennialists insist on “lived again” to speak of a bodily resurrection of believers prior to the general

⁷⁶ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Popular Commentary, 380.

⁷⁷ Alford, *New Testament*, 4:732.

⁷⁸ Kik, *Revelation*, 50–2.

⁷⁹ Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 640.

⁸⁰ Becker, *Revelation*, 308.

resurrection of the dead. If true, St. John should have used ἀνέζησαν.⁸¹ Others translate “come to life” (NIV). This is wrong, first, because believers never die (Jn 11:26) and second, because it is an aorist like ἐβασίλευσαν—the two verbs picture souls without interruption living and reigning with Christ.⁸²

The two verbs, “lived and reigned” are constative aorists that state facts not linked to time.⁸³ The souls who are brought to faith in Jesus are given life. Though they may die on earth, they continue to live and reign with Christ in heaven. Stoeckhardt writes, “The expression ‘to reign with Christ,’ from chapter 22:5 appears to mean to celebrate triumph for ever and ever.”⁸⁴

The verb ἐζησαν occurs in both verse 4 and 5. One hermeneutical rule states that the two words/verbs used close together cannot have different meanings. Alford and others declare that if the first refers to a spiritual resurrection and the second to a physical one “then there is an end of all significance in language.”⁸⁵ Brighton’s answer is that we are dealing with two literary units: verses 1–10 and 11–15. In the first unit, John does not mention a second resurrection (as he does in verse 13).

[By writing] the first resurrection, John indicates that there is a second universal physical resurrection. Since Scripture nowhere speaks of two physical resurrections, ἐζησαν in verse 4 refers to a spiritual resurrection. Jesus Himself speaks this way in John 5: “The hour is coming ... when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” (v. 25) and “the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth”(v. 28–29).⁸⁶

⁸¹ Becker, *Revelation*, 308.

⁸² Becker, *Revelation*, 309.

⁸³ Bullinger calls this phrase an hendiadys—two verbs are used where one is meant. Thus, “they lived, and yes reigned, too.” Gawrisch wrote that ἐζησαν και ἐβασίλευσαν are constative aorists. “The action is viewed as a whole, irrespective of the time.”

⁸⁴ Stoeckhardt, *Revelation*, 82.

⁸⁵ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 560n66.

⁸⁶ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 561. “Many of the earliest church fathers were millenarians. Toward the middle of the second century Justin Martyr said that properly instructed Christians were assured of a resurrection of the dead to be followed by a thousand years in Jerusalem (*Dial.* 80). Irenaeus, in the last of the same century, believed in an earthly millennium during which the saints and martyrs would be rewarded (*Adv. Haer.* v. 32). Unfortunately, many chiliasts allowed their imaginations to run riot and read into the thousand year period all manner of materialistic and sensuous extremes. Papias records as the words of Jesus an extravagant portrayal of the fertility of the earth in which each grape would yield twenty-five measures of wine and

Revelation 20:5

Preserve, O Lord, Thy Zion, Bought dearly with Thy blood;
Protect what Thou hast chosen Against the foe's dread brood.

Be Thou her great Defender When dangers gather round;
E'en though the earth be crumbling, Safe will Thy Church be found
(ELH 533:3).

Text and Translation

οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄρχι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη.

The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were fulfilled. This is the first resurrection.

Vocabulary

λοιποὶ—pl.—the remaining, rest [Adjective: Masc. Nom. Pl.]

ἄρχι—even to, until, to the time that. [Conjunction]

τελεσθῆ—to perform, execute, complete, fulfill. [1 Aor. Passive Subj-3rd Sing.]

ἀνάστασις—raising up, rising; rising from dead, resurrection. [Noun: Fem. Nom. Sing.]

Commentary

Verse 4 speaks about those who were martyred and who “lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Verse 5 speaks of the “rest of the dead,” those who never lived at all because “they were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Barnes describes this second group as “the pious

every grain of wheat 10,000 pounds of flour. Eusebius records that the heretic Cerinthus taught an earthly kingdom of sensual pleasure ... to follow the resurrection (*Hist. Eccl.* iii.38). He also refers to Nepos, an Egyptian bishop who “supposed that there would be a certain millennium of sensual luxury on this earth” (*Hist. Eccl.* vii.24). These extremes led later scholars to condemn the materialistic chiliasm which had taken root in the church. In the third century Origen rebuked those who looked forward to bodily pleasure and luxury in the millennium (*De Princ.* ii.11.2-3). It was Augustin, however, who about the beginning of the fifth century made the first serious effort to interpret Revelation 20 in a non-millennial fashion. He held that the thousand year period was to be taken as the interval between the first advent and the final conflict. The binding of Satan during this period was accomplished by Christ during his earthly ministry. The first resurrection was the spiritual birth of believers (*De Civ. Dei* xx.7ff)” (Mounce, *Revelation*, 358. See also “A History of Christian Views” in Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 536–9).

dead,” being distinct from the martyrs, who would not be raised until after the millennium.⁸⁷ This is reading into the text what John has not written. Similarly, the KJV “lived not again” and the NIV “come to life” reflect a misunderstanding of the word ἀρχι. Commentators see this sentence as a contrast to the preceding verse with “the beheaded ones.” However, the one group lived and reigned with Christ, while the other group never lived.

This conjunction “until” does not imply that the dead will live again after the thousand years end. It only states what happens during the thousand years without saying anything about events after that time.⁸⁸ These dead never lived and do not participate in the reign with Christ. Their future is the resurrection of condemnation.⁸⁹

The major question in this verse is: what is meant by the “first resurrection”? The relative pronoun αὐτη does not refer to the preceding sentence because the “rest of the dead” did not live at all (being unbelievers). It could be a predicate that refers to verse 6.⁹⁰ Αὐτη is best taken as the subject that refers back to the martyred souls of verse 4, those who live and reign with Jesus both on earth and in heaven.

Alford declares that for 300 years the church understood “thousand years” in the literal sense.⁹¹ He writes:

As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain ψυχὰι ἐζήσαν at the first, and the rest of the νεκρῶν οὐκ ἐζήσαν only at the end of a specified period after that first,—if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean a *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means a *literal* rising from the grave; then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing. If the first resurrection is

⁸⁷ Barnes, *Barnes' Notes*, 1712.

⁸⁸ Becker, *Revelation*, 310.

⁸⁹ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 567–8.

⁹⁰ Alford, *New Testament*, 4:732.

⁹¹ Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Victorinus take the words literally to refer to an actual reign of Christ on earth with the glorified martyrs (Charles, *Revelation*, 185). However, Gawrisch states: “A careful reading of the Apostolic Fathers—the writings of Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Papias, Ignatius, Barnabas, and the anonymous Shepherd of Hermes and the Didache—reveals that the church of that period was not predominantly chiliastic” (Gawrisch, *Prophecies*, 7).

spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain; but if the second is literal, then so is the first.⁹²

Hughes agrees with Alford about both terms being literal resurrections. However, he states that the first resurrection is Christ's resurrection from the tomb. Due to his union with Christ (Eph 2:5f), the believer also shares in Christ's resurrection.⁹³ Krodel refers to the first resurrection as a bodily one which cannot refer to a spiritual immortal life.⁹⁴ Stoeckhardt: "The context shows that this resurrection [eternal life in heaven] concerns believers, only believers that have passed on."⁹⁵

In contrast, Becker declares that with the first resurrection a spiritual one is meant "when those who are spiritually dead listen to the voice of the Son of God as it comes to them in the preaching of the gospel."⁹⁶ Poellot agrees with this, stating that the first resurrection "occurs whenever the Holy Ghost brings a chosen person to saving faith in Jesus Christ."⁹⁷ And so we confess: "Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit."⁹⁸

In addressing the issue discussed by Alford, Lenski declares that the first resurrection is neither physical nor spiritual, for:

As the first transfers the soul to its throne in heaven, so the second transfers the soul's body. ... The New Testament does *not* use *anastasis* in the sense of a spiritual resurrection! ... *To the person who was dead in sin nothing that he had before returns.* ... The *anastasis* which John terms the first applies, as John says, to *souls*. He is not using the word in its literal sense but in a symbolical sense even as all these visions are full of both symbolical terms and symbolical aggregates. The implied second *anastasis* is necessarily the same, namely symbolical.⁹⁹

⁹² Alford, *New Testament*, 4:732. Emphasis original.

⁹³ Hughes, *Revelation*, 214.

⁹⁴ Krodel, *Revelation*, 335.

⁹⁵ Stoeckhardt, *Revelation*, 83.

⁹⁶ Becker, *Revelation*, 312.

⁹⁷ Poellot, *Revelation*, 264.

⁹⁸ LC II III:53.

⁹⁹ Lenski, *Revelation*, 586–8. Emphasis original.

Brighton recognizes that ἀνάστασις “is the common noun for ‘resurrection’ in the NT,” referencing a physical resurrection. He refers to the verb ἀνίστημι, where in Ephesians 5:14 St. Paul speaks of a spiritual resurrection [και ἀνάστα εκ των νεκρων] from unbelief. He concludes, “[T]hough elsewhere in the NT the noun most often is used for *physical* resurrection, ἀνάστασις in Rev. 20:5–6 may refer to the *present, spiritual* resurrection of Christians still on earth, in analogy with the use of ἀνίστημι the verb in Eph. 5:14.”¹⁰⁰

St. John uses the term “first resurrection” to describe a spiritual life as distinct from spiritual death. By the word “first,” he implies a second resurrection—the one whereby the soul and body will be reunited. Both of these resurrections are described by Jesus in John 5, “Most assuredly, I say to you the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” [ζήσουσιν] (v. 25). And later, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth” (vv. 28–9).

In John 5:25, Jesus identifies “will live” with rising from spiritual death by hearing the Word. This resurrection “now is” because the Son’s voice will soon go into the world through the preaching of the apostles. Verses 28–29 describe the time when all the physically dead will hear the voice of Christ and come forth with reunited bodies and souls. Millennialists therefore add to Scripture when they use Revelation 20 to describe two physical resurrections—one of martyrs before the 1,000 years and a general one at the end.

Revelation 20:6

He comes to judge the nations, A terror to His foes,
A Light of consolations And blessed hope to those
Who love the Lord’s appearing.
O glorious Son, now come,
Send forth Thy beams so cheering,
And guide us safely home! (ELH 94:10).

Text and Translation

μαρκάριος και ἅγιος μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεῦτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ’ ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ και τοῦ Χριστοῦ, και βασιλεύσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.

¹⁰⁰ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 565. Emphasis original.

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; upon them the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with Him the thousand years.

Vocabulary

μακάριος—blessed, happy (with the reason why one is blessed expressed by a participle taking the place of the subject). [Adjective: Masc. Nom. Sing.]

μέρος—a part due or assigned; lot, destiny, one part of a whole. [Adjective: Neut. Nom. Sing.]

ἐξουσίαν—power; power or choice; authority, rule. [Noun: Fem. Acc. Sing.]

ἔσονται—to be. [Pres. Active Future-3rd Pl.]

ἱερεῖς—priest. [Noun: Masc. Acc. Pl.]

βασιλεύουσιν—to be a king, reign; control. [Fut. Active Ind.-3rd Pl.]

Commentary

This verse contains the fifth beatitude of Revelation. One purpose of writing Revelation was to encourage believers to be faithful until death so that God will give them the crown of life (Rev 2:10). This beatitude also encourages those who have been raised to spiritual life (the first resurrection) to continue in the true faith because Satan has been chained. Only those who are holy (subjective justification) can truly be called “blessed.” For through the grace of God in Word and Sacraments they become fellow-heirs with Christ. St. John here points to the assured bliss of those who have been killed for their faith.¹⁰¹

The blessed are also called “holy.” Barnes declares that no one will be honored “who has not an established character for holiness.”¹⁰² This is mixing law and gospel. Holiness is not what the believer establishes, but what God gives—the garments of salvation, the robe of righteousness (Is 61:10), the white robes of those who “made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). Holiness is the blessing of the vicarious atonement given through the justification by faith, where God declares believers in Christ to be saints, children of God, and heirs of eternal life (Rom 8:17).

The paradox of the passage above is, if “we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” St. John has spoken about martyrs and beheadings, which seem contrary to the blessings, holiness, and glory

¹⁰¹ Becker, *Revelation*, 313.

¹⁰² Barnes, *Barnes' Notes*, 1712.

of living as children of God. We live in a world where Satan's agents have deceived millions of people and where God seems hidden during adversity.

The paradox is strengthened by the phrase "they shall be priests of God and of Christ." The 24 elders sang, "And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev 5:10). This verse alludes to God's words to Israel: "and keep My covenant ... then you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex 19:6). New Testament priests offer sacrifices of praise to God. With the word "reign," many are tempted to dream about an earthly millennial kingdom. But "the manifestation of their kingship and their priesthood was to come only after suffering and death."¹⁰³ How do the "holy ones" reign with Christ the thousand years? Instead of political power, believers have the spiritual "power" that comes from proclaiming the Gospel and from prayer where believers can move "mountains" (Mt 17:20).¹⁰⁴

St. Paul further describes the paradox of the Christian's life on earth: "by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as

¹⁰³ Becker, *Revelation*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Luther's comment on the Fifth Petition describes why Christians need to pray, "But deliver us from evil. Amen." "Therefore we sum it all up by saying, 'Dear Father, help us to get rid of all this misfortune.' Nevertheless, this petition includes all the evil that may befall us under the devil's kingdom: poverty, shame, death, and, in short, all the tragic misery and heartache of which there is so incalculably much on earth. Since the devil is not only a liar but also a murderer, he incessantly seeks our life and vents his anger by causing accidents and injury to our bodies. He breaks many a man's neck and drives others to insanity; some he drowns, and many he hounds to suicide or other dreadful catastrophes. Therefore there is nothing for us to do on earth but to pray constantly against this arch-enemy. For if God did not support us, we would not be safe from him for a single hour" (LC III:112-6). "Then comes the devil, who baits and badgers us on all sides, but especially exerts himself where the conscience and spiritual matters are at stake. His purpose is to make us scorn and despise both the Word and the works of God, to tear us away from faith, hope, and love, to draw us into unbelief, false security, and stubbornness, or, on the contrary, to drive us into despair, atheism, blasphemy, and countless other abominable sins. These are snares and nets; indeed, they are the real 'flaming darts' which are venomously shot into our hearts, not by flesh and blood but by the devil. ... As long as we remain in this vile life in which we are attacked, hunted, and hurried on all sides, we are constrained to cry out and pray every hour that God may not allow us to become faint and weary and to fall back into sin, shame, and unbelief. Otherwise it is impossible to overcome even the least temptation" (LC III:104-5).

poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:8–10).

St. John resolves this paradox in chapters 21 and 22 by pointing to the second resurrection and the glorious life that the saints will have with God. St. Paul answers the paradox this way: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). Meanwhile, as royal priests; we pray, worship, witness, help others, and encourage—we suffer, resist Satan, endure trials, and wait.

Revelation 20:7–10

Let us also die with Jesus, His death from the second death,
From our soul’s destruction frees us, Quickens us with life’s glad breath.

Let us mortify, while living, Flesh and blood and die to sin;
And the grave that shuts us in Shall but prove the gate to heaven.
Jesus, here I die to Thee, There to live eternally (ELH 236:3).

Text

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Commentary

In verses 7 to 10, St. John’s vision shifts to the time when Satan will be released for a “short time.” The bottomless pit of verse 4 (τῆς ἀβύσσου) where he had been chained is here called a “prison” (τῆς φυλακῆς). He is released, free to bring his deceptions directly to the world. Γῶγ και Μαῶγ, first described in Ezekiel 38:2 to represent all the forces arrayed against the children of Israel, are used here to symbolize every evil force to be arrayed against the Christian Church. “This the great battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16) which judgment day brings to a halt.”¹⁰⁵ They are gathered (συναγαγεῖν), that is, unified to fight against “the saints and

¹⁰⁵ Gawrisch, *Prophecies*, 47.

the beloved city.” Before they can fight a single battle, fire comes down from heaven and devours them.

Satan also receives his punishment for his opposition to God—to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone forever (v. 10). He will be joined with the other rebellious angels who were “reserved in everlasting chains ... for judgment” (Jude 6) and with those who were his agents—the two beasts, the harlot, and the false prophet. Sadly, those who followed these agents on the wide road will also end up in everlasting torment: “cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 25:30).

So we confess: “[A]nd [Jesus] finally ascended into heaven and assumed dominion at the right hand of the Father. The devil and all powers, therefore, must be subject to him and lie beneath his feet until finally, at the last day, he will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, sin, etc.”¹⁰⁶

Revelation 20:11–15

Text

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Commentary

The fourth vision (vv. 11–15) shows everyone appearing before the “great white throne” (θρόνον μέγαν λευκόν) for judgment. Those both “small and great” (in size, honor, and power) stand before God’s throne. The books were opened, including the Book of Life. All the dead were judged “according to his works.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ LC II II:30.

¹⁰⁷ “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and

Almost every Bible reference to the judgment on the Last Day speaks about works as the basis for being sheep on the right or goats on the left hand. David wrote, “For You render to each one according to his work” (Ps 62:12, see also Jer 17:10). Jesus states, “then He shall reward every man according to his works” (Mt 16:27) In, Matthew 24, the king commends those who gave food, visited the sick, etc. In John 5, Jesus declares, “and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn 5:29). See also Mark 9:41, 1 Corinthians 3:14, and Revelation 3:21 for the promise of reward to those who “abound in the work of the Lord.”

Since salvation by works contradicts the plain words of Scripture (“by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight” [Rom 3:20]), the teaching that believers are judged by their works on Judgment Day must have a different intent. St. James helps us: “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas 2:17). Since faith is invisible to everyone except God, the deeds done from faith in and love of Jesus become the evidence of faith that all will see on Judgment Day. On the basis of that evidenced-based faith in Christ, believers will enter eternal bliss and unbelievers will suffer with Satan.

Conclusion

A book is opened then to all,
 A record truly telling
 What each hath done, both great and small,
 When he on earth was dwelling;
 And ev’ry heart be clearly seen,
 And all be known as they have been
 In thoughts and words and actions.

O Jesus, who my debt did pay
 And for my sin was smitten;
 Within the Book of Live, O may
 My name be also written!
 I will not doubt; I trust in Thee,
 From Satan Thou hast made me free
 And from all condemnation (ELH 538:3, 5).

before His angels” (Rev 3:5).

The twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation of Jesus Christ describes world history from the death and resurrection of Jesus, through the 1,000 reign of Jesus with His saints, to the return of Christ on the Last Day. The birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is the central event and the high point of all human history. The intervening years (the 1,000 years) are anticlimactic. The thousand years is symbolic of a definite length of time in which Satan is bound and the Gospel is preached until “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26), for God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).

Louis Brighton mentions that Tyconius and Augustine interpreted the thousand years as “a metaphor that symbolizes the completed era between Christ’s first advent and his second coming at the end of this present world.”¹⁰⁸ While Satan and his agents can cause the Church much suffering, the gates of hell cannot overcome Christ’s Church.¹⁰⁹

Our millennial life is a world where cults abound, where unchristian religions are spreading (Mt 24:11), where the anti-Christ Pope appears as an angel of light sitting in the temple of God (2 Thess 2:4), where people turn away from the truth because “the love of many will grow cold” (Mt 24:12), and where lawlessness abounds. It is not wrong for us to conclude that Satan is loosed and the End is not far away. Almost five hundred years ago, the Augsburg Confession stated, “[I]n these last times of which the Scriptures prophesy, the world is growing worse and men are becoming weaker and more infirm.”¹¹⁰ God wants us to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation or fall prey to Satan’s delusions.

On the Last Day, Jesus will return in glory in a manner that all living people will see Him. Then with a shout, He will raise up all the dead. His angels will gather all people before His throne, divide them into two groups as He judges them. Jesus will say to the greater number on His left, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41). To those elect on His right hand, Jesus will say, “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt 25:34).

God wants His children to be always ready, with their oil lamps of faith burning as they wait for the Lord’s blessed return—just as others before them have stood watchful. “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but

¹⁰⁸ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 568.

¹⁰⁹ Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 569.

¹¹⁰ CA XXIII:14 [German].

they shall be priests of God and of Christ” (v. 6). May God grant this to us all and to all the sheep who hear His voice.

Jesus says, “Ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ.” We pray: “Αμήν, ἔρχου, κύριε Ἰησοῦ.”

Lord, write my name, I pray Thee, Now in the Book of Life,
And with all true believers Take me where joys are rife.

There let me bloom and flourish, Thy perfect freedom prove,
And tell, as I adore Thee, How faithful was Thy love (ELH 535:5). LSQ

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Luke C. Ulrich
Mount Olive Lutheran Church
Mankato, Minnesota

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Text: *Whoever belongs to God listens to what God says. (John 8:47, EHV)*

Listening to What God Says

IF YOU HAVE A JOB BUT YOU DON'T LISTEN TO THE directions your boss gives, you will get fired. If you are an athlete on a team, but you don't listen to your coach or follow his gameplan, you will get benched or dropped from the team, no matter how talented an athlete you are. If you refuse to listen to the instructions and rules of your parents, teachers, police officers, or government officials, you will be removed from your family, class, community—you will face punishment—being grounded, stuck in detention, or even thrown into jail!

To be a part of an organization, team, family, class, or community, it is necessary to listen to those who are in charge. If you don't, you won't be part of that group. You will miss out! And the same thing goes for those who want to belong to God! Wouldn't it be important to listen to what God says? To listen to His direction, His gameplan, His instructions?

But it's not easy to listen to God! Satan works hard to get you to ignore God. He'd rather you "Follow your heart!" That's a temptation we have all faced and are aware of. But what if your sinful, selfish heart tells you do to things that are harmful and wrong? Or to do things that fly in the face of what God says and what God wants? If you are "following your heart" in such a way, aren't you putting yourself before God? In

fact, making yourself out to be your own God? Listening to yourself, while not listening to God?

Satan also tempts you to belittle God in your heart—to look around and see that things are not the way you expect them to be. We face challenging difficult times and situations in our lives. So then, we are tempted to think, “God must be failing! Or maybe He’s not worth listening to! Why follow some weak God who makes humiliating, dumb decisions?”

Wasn’t this what the Jewish leaders in our Gospel lesson were doing? Jesus was speaking nothing but the truth to them. He was affirming Himself to be the Messiah, the long-awaited offspring of Abraham, the one who came with the power of God! Yet, Jesus wasn’t living up to their expectations. He wasn’t bowing to their wants and desires! So they dishonored, mocked, and insulted Him. They saw Jesus as weak and worthless, needing to be disposed of by a cross. They made themselves deaf to what God’s Word had to say about God’s plan of Salvation and what the coming Savior would look like and do. They were letting their own ideas about the Messiah come before God’s design and plan.

Aren’t you and I guilty of this too? When God—or when Jesus—doesn’t live up to our own ideas of what He should do or how He should function, how easy is it for us to dishonor Him, or mock and insult Him, as we doubt and question Him? We use this as an excuse to not listen to Him—to write Him off—to act as if our own ideas and wants are better than His!

What a contrast we see between that kind of attitude and mentality and Abraham in our Old Testament lesson [Gen. 22:1–14]. Was Abraham willing to listen to God? That was a situation where God’s instructions were not at all what Abraham expected or wanted! If Abraham would have “followed his heart,” he would have likely ran with Isaac in the opposite direction! But Abraham denies himself. He denies his own wants, his own ideas and desires. He doesn’t question God or accuse God of being foolish. He listens. He clings to every word that God had given him! Not just this command to sacrifice Isaac, but also God’s promises, given to him earlier, that he would be the father of nations and that the promised seed of the Messiah would come through Isaac’s line!

Listening to these words of God, Abraham marches up that mountain, builds the altar, binds Isaac and puts him on the altar as the sacrifice! Every step of the way he was listening to God; fully ready and willing to comply with what God had told him to do—even when

God's expectations and requests would have been so incredibly difficult for him to bear!

Doesn't God want the same from you and me? Even when it comes to the challenging, difficult things He says to us? And He certainly does have challenging things to say to us! As Jesus said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt. 10:37-38, EHV). Or, "I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44, EHV). What does God say about our love of money and wealth? He says things that our world doesn't want to hear when it comes to sexual relations, marriage, and divorce—things that challenge us too! He says that worrying is wrong and shows a lack of trust. He tells us that all people are our neighbors, who we should willingly help. He condemns our holding grudges or seeking revenge. He desires us to be liberal in kindness, forgiveness, and generosity. He wants us to love and be zealous for His Word and Sacraments and to gather together around them regularly. He wants us to share that Word with those around us. He wants us to put the best construction on others. And the list could go on and on. There are many things that God says that are hard and challenging for us to listen to!

Jesus said, "Whoever belongs to God listens to what God says." So, how have you done with that? Have you listened to God? Or have you listened to and followed after someone or something else? We want to belong to God. And we understand that it is important to listen to what God says. Even when it challenges us; or when those things point out our shortcomings and sinfulness; or when it points out that we are guilty—that we have failed to listen to God and that we should not belong to Him!

Don't we have to admit that if God was an earthly boss, or coach, or parent, teacher, or government official—we would have been fired, benched, grounded, imprisoned, long ago? Dear friends, when we realize this as being true, do not turn away from God in despair, but continue to Listen to what God Says—and in particular, listen to God's Word of forgiveness!

God understands and acknowledges that all people since Adam and Eve fell into sin, are going to be falling short. He knows we lack the perfection that He intended us to have. He knows that our hearts are full of sin and rebelliousness. He knows that if it were left up to us, we

could never belong to Him. For this very reason, God wants us to listen to what His Gospel says!

God tells us that His plan of salvation crushes Satan's work. God tells us that His Son, Jesus, was perfect in every way! "Who of you can convict me of any sin?" (Jn. 8:46, EHV). Jesus asked. No one! He was righteous and perfect in every way—as our heavenly Father is perfect—and listen to this: That perfection of Christ now belongs to you as you stand before God! It is shared with all who listen to Jesus with faith!

We should have been the ones bound and put on the altar of sacrifice because of the debt of our sins, but Christ appeared among us, as our substitute—He was the lamb that Isaac was asking about—He was that ram caught in the thicket, that God Himself provided—to be the offering for us, so that we would not die, but live! The knife should have fallen upon you and me, but God called out: "Wait! No hand will be laid upon you!" God provides a substitute sacrifice for you in Jesus! As our Epistle lesson [Heb. 9:11–15] said, "He (Jesus) entered once into the Most Holy Place and obtained eternal redemption... by his own blood... A death took place as payment for the trespasses committed under the first covenant"—that is, we deserve punishment because we didn't listen to God's Law or follow it (Heb. 9:12, 15, EHV). But upon the cross, Jesus pays for our sins in full. And as you and I see the miserable, humiliating weakness of Good Friday, we don't scoff at it or doubt. Instead, like Abraham, we rejoice to see that day—and we know that on the cross Jesus declares that our sins are "Finished." What a glorious word you and I get to listen to from our God, as He dies upon the cross!

We also get to listen to an equally glorious word echo out of the tomb on Easter morning! "He is not here! He is risen!" All who listen to that with faith have a promise from God that they will also rise from their graves to eternal life! We listen to this! We hold onto this word and message of the Gospel, and because of it, Jesus declares that we will "certainly never see death"—because we are listening to the words of eternal life (Jn. 8:51, EHV)!

Is there anything better that you could ever listen to? We don't deserve anything from God—we should be eternally separated from Him. But you now get to listen to Jesus declare the words of Absolution over you, "Your sins are forgiven!" You listen as He says, "You are baptized into my death and resurrection—you are now a child a God!" You listen as He says, "Eat and drink! My Body and Blood—for you—for the forgiveness of your sins!"

These are words that we do not scoff at, mock, or doubt. Instead, we rejoice as we listen to them! These words remove the sin and guilt of our not listening, and they open the gates of heaven to us!

As we are closing out the Lenten season—and as Holy Week is approaching, this is a time when the church has traditionally dedicated itself to listening to these precious Words of our Savior. To have a trusting faith—like that of Abraham—that willingly listens especially as difficult things are approaching. After all, difficult things are approaching in the end of this season. As we see the foolishness of the cross, or the stumbling block of Christ's suffering, we do not let these seemingly, weak and humiliating things cause us to doubt or reject God. Instead, cling to what God tells you! This is His plan for your Salvation! Listen to His Word that proclaims you to be forgiven! And have confidence and assurance because of that, you are counted among those who belong to God! Amen. LSQ

Wednesday of the Third Sunday of Easter

*Timothy A. Hartwig
Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Mankato, Minnesota*

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IN JESUS, THE CHRIST, THE GOOD SHEPHERD, DEAR fellow redeemed:

God's grace, mercy, and peace are yours through Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Is there a difference between a boss and a leader? Now, you might respond, "No, they're really synonyms, they mean the same thing." But I want to suggest this morning that there is a subtle difference between a boss and a leader. A boss tells us what to do. "Go here. Do that." A leader motivates us to move in a certain direction. So, there is a difference between a boss and a leader. Now, I don't want to push this too far because you may have a boss who is a leader.

How do you view your pastor? Is he a boss or is he a leader? Maybe a better question to ask would be, "How does God want His pastors, His shepherds to be—bosses or leaders?" Well, Peter, in our text, provides us with God's direction for pastors and how they are to function. We read in 1 Peter 5:1–4, "Therefore, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and as one who also shares in the glory that is about to be revealed, I appeal to the elders among you: Shepherd God's flock that is among you, serving as overseers, not grudgingly but willingly, as God desires, not because you are greedy for money but because you are eager to do it. Do not lord it over those entrusted to your care, but be examples for the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive an unfading crown of glory" (EHV).

We could say that God caused these words to be written specifically for pastors. That would be true, but there's some general application for us all: how pastors are to function and how we are to view them. So, bosses or leaders?

Obviously here, in verse three, Peter tells pastors that they're not to lord it over. They're not to simply bark orders and expect the flock of God to obey them. Now, that doesn't mean that they have no authority. There's a very important word in our text where it speaks of overseeing, watching over something, guarding something, protecting it, looking out for its good. We can definitely see how shepherding would tie into that. A shepherd watches over the flock. He guards it. He protects it. He works for its good. He leads it to green pastures. So, shepherds have authority, but it's how they use their authority that's important.

I would suggest that that's the subtle difference between a boss and a leader. God wants His pastors to use their authority to serve the sheep. I think that's a good thing. I think it's good that God has given someone authority over me to watch out for me. Because I'm a sheep. I tend to love to wander where I shouldn't go. I get myself caught up in things that I can't get out of. I make decisions, at times, that are just as dumb as we consider sheep. It's a good thing that God has placed someone over me with authority to keep watch, to keep me safe, and to protect me.

Peter also reveals some good things about shepherds and their attitude toward the sheep when he says that they are to keep watch "not grudgingly but willingly, as God desires." What would motivate a pastor to willingly watch over the sheep? I think there's a couple of things, but I think that one of the main things is that he loves his sheep; That he has a deep care for them. That care for those sheep motivates him to look out for them. I think it's a good thing that God has placed, in my case, two men over me who love me and care for me and have my best interest at heart.

Then Peter also reveals "not greedy"; So not doing it for money, but because they're eager to do it. We have to pay pastors. We want them to dedicate their lives to serving us, to watching over us. We have to support them financially. But God says that they're not to do it because of their financial reward. That's tough. Because I think at times we all have days that we only get out of bed and go and do what's expected of us because we want to eat in the evening. We don't always love our job. But here God is giving pastors specific direction to not do it for the money, but to do it eagerly out of love for the sheep.

So the fact that God has placed pastors over you is a good thing. He has given specific direction for how they are to function. Specifically, out of love for you.

Now, at the end of our text, it speaks of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, returning and these elders, these pastors, receiving a crown of unfading glory—that there will be a reward. That is a strong reminder for pastors that they're underneath this Chief Shepherd, Jesus and that they serve His flock. It was purchased with His blood. Their task is always to direct people to the reward that Jesus has won.

Your pastor's chief role is to connect you with the Good Shepherd who loves you. Loves you so much that He laid down His life for your sins. God has sent pastors into your life so that they can tell you that your sins are forgiven and that you don't just have a dead shepherd. We have one who died and rose again, demonstrating His power and victory over sin, death, and the devil, our three greatest enemies. Jesus has sent pastors into your life so that you can know that God loves you. That despite the bad decisions that you make, despite where you wander, where you get caught up, He is always desiring to bring you back, to keep you close and in His love. God has given you pastors because He loves you.

So pray for your pastors. They have a tough job. They're sinful, too. They need to be reminded of God's love for them at times. That's something that we don't think about. Remind your pastors that God loves them, too. Pray for them. Encourage them. Walk with them, because they're the leaders that God has sent you to get you to heaven.

May God bless us all and keep us together under His shepherds so that finally we see our Chief Shepherd face to face. To Him be the glory, now and forever. Amen. [LSQ](#)

Pentecost Sermon

Benjamin E. Wiechmann
Peace Lutheran Church
North Mankato, Minnesota

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Text: *“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also are going to testify, because you have been with me from the beginning. ... I did not tell you these things from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going away to him who sent me, and not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Yet because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth: It is good for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.” (John 15:26–27; 16:4b–11, EHV)*

Christ Has Not Left us Alone

HERE IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH WE EMPHASIZE preaching Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins—it’s in every one of our sermons. We talk, too, about the glory of God the Father, the work of His hand—His perfect will and providence in our life. But our God is not made up of just God the Father and God the Son, the Bible proclaims that our God is Triune. But we don’t preach about the Holy Spirit very often. And partly because of this, we’re tempted to think about the Holy Spirit as a third-wheel. Like

He's playing a supporting role in the makeup of our God. But Scripture is clear—the Holy Spirit is God, “the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father.” He is equally powerful, equally divine. But, the role He plays, His work, is indeed different. It's special and unique and today, the Day of Pentecost, is the day where our focus is on that work. Fifty days after Easter, the Holy Spirit is sent to God's people to comfort them, counsel them, and give them strength. And that work remains the same today in us, still *Christ Has Not Left us Alone*.

Our text is from the night in which Jesus is betrayed. Throughout the meal that Jesus is sharing with His disciples, He's giving them His farewell address, nailing home the points that He wants them to carry with them, comforting them in advance because He knows what is about to happen, and giving them some insight into what that is. He tells them He's going away but that this, which causes them sadness in the short term, will be a good thing for them in the end because when He goes to the Father, He will send the “Counselor,” the one will testify about Jesus.

And this step is important, it's crucial, in fact, for the disciples. Because remember, they've been following Jesus for three years but there's still so much for them to learn and understand. At this point still, they were thinking of an earthly kingdom, an earthly Messiah—they still don't understand that the victory Jesus will win will be through His death and resurrection. So this Counselor is essential, they need the Holy Spirit to reveal to them, to teach them the reality of what Jesus' resurrection truly means. These men are about to go from followers to leaders; the Apostles who are sent out to carry the Good News to the world and to do that they're going to need help, divine help. That's what Jesus promises here.

Instead of followers, they're very shortly going to become leaders. After Jesus' death these men would carry the Good News to the world and to do that they need help; there's no way they could accomplish this on their own. So that's what Jesus promises here. “If I do go, I will send the Counselor to you. He will testify about me and he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment.”

There are two ways this promise is fulfilled. The first is what we read to begin our service in the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came in power, with rushing wind and tongues of fire. He blessed the disciples, the believers there, with huge spiritual gifts that were used to spread the Word and worked through them to bring a huge number of people to faith.

And again, because of our emphasis on God the Father and God the Son, we're tempted to think this is the Holy Spirit's grand entrance—the big reveal, this is where His work starts. But the Holy Spirit, too, has always been with His people, from the very beginning. Genesis 1:2 tells us that even before the creation of the world, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. The Holy Spirit worked strength and power in judges and prophets and kings—men like Joshua, Samson, and David.

But it *is* here at Pentecost, that the power of the Holy Spirit is present in such a visible, tangible way. It's here, after Jesus ascends and the work of the ministry is left up to normal, regular human beings, that His power is so visible in so many. The rush of the wind, the tongues of fire, the supernatural ability to speak in different languages, all proof that Christ has not left His people alone.

Without that gift, without the work of the Holy Spirit, the Christian Church would not exist. You would not be sitting here, this building would not exist. Because without God, these men would have failed miserably. Where before they were cowering in the upper room, terrified of their enemies, now they are about to go out into the world with boldness and zeal, fearlessly proclaiming Jesus as the Savior. This is a change that was worked in them by the Holy Spirit, the Counselor.

Without the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, the Christian Church falls apart. The world is always one generation away from losing the Gospel, from losing the truth. It takes one generation of parents who do not teach their children, who do not point them to Christ, and the church is lost. But God the Holy Spirit continues to work, continues to teach and strengthen and comfort and counsel. It's just that He does this work in a less dramatic way.

When I was in about first grade we had a fire in the backyard. I don't know what we were burning but little bits of ash and embers were floating up and falling back down on the ground. I didn't think much of it so I sat there watching it, and I remember thinking it was beautiful. The next moment my dad had grabbed me and was rubbing my head with his shirt trying to put out my hair which had been started on fire by one of those floating embers. This was not a sign of the Holy Spirit. It was either a sign of naïveté or stupidity—I'm not sure which.

We have never heard a sound from heaven like a mighty rushing wind tear through Peace Lutheran Church. I've never known any of you to have any sudden supernatural language skills that would be useful for proclaiming the Gospel to all nations. And yet, nonetheless, in this

place, among you the Holy Spirit is just as much at work as He has ever been.

One of the biggest annoyances I have is how quickly I get bored with beauty or with something amazing. Fireworks are a good example. Usually you go to, at most, one big fireworks show a year. And those first ones are incredible; the lights and the sounds are so impressive. But how boring would it be if it was just the same single fire work shot up into the air twenty-five times? It has to grow, it has to continue to get more and more impressive up to the grand finale to keep our interest. Scenic lookouts are another. How long can you look out over a cliff at beautiful view before you get back in the car and keep looking for another?

How many times can you watch a miracle happen before it becomes so ordinary that it's boring? How many times can you experience one yourself before it becomes so commonplace that you forget about it? Remember that our natural state is spiritual death. That's how we're born. Ephesians 2:1, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." And there is no way for us to breathe spiritual life back into ourselves, there's no way to make our dead hearts alive. That spiritual death is so complete, that we don't even recognize it without the help of the Holy Spirit. "He will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment." Just teaching us that we're sinful, that we need help, that too is work that is done by our God.

And yet, we know that as we sit here now, that we are alive in Christ. We know that right now all that Jesus won by living perfectly, by claiming victory over sin, death, and the devil, all of that is applied to us, is given to us. As we sit here now we know that we have unity with God the Father. We know that our sins are no longer counted against us, that since we have new life in Christ that life will never be taken from us. We will live forever and get to share in the glory of our Triune God.

Our dead hearts are made alive through the *miraculous* work of the Holy Spirit. That miracle happened in you. And we got to watch that miracle happen here this morning with Josie. She who was dead in her trespasses and sin has been made alive in Christ and a child of God. You saw it happen! The Holy Spirit worked right here in front of us. We get to experience the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in ourselves every single week. As we confess our sins, the Counselor, the comforter works in our hearts through the Word of God to remind us of what Jesus did for us, to apply the comfort of forgiveness to us personally. As you come to the altar to receive the miracle of Christ's Body and Blood, the Holy

Spirit is working within you to strengthen your faith, to wipe away your sin, and to bring you closer to your God.

Each time we are in His Word, here in church or at home with our bible, the Holy Spirit is working. He uses that Word to shape you and mold you. To give you the strength you need to say no to temptation, to give you the zeal and the power to fulfill the vocation God has given you, to serve and love the people He has put into your life. That work of the Holy Spirit is called sanctification. And it's a miracle. It's not something that can happen naturally, it is supernatural work that is done by God in us through His means of grace.

Jesus went away, just as we talked about last week. He ascended into heaven, but that was good! Because He fulfilled His promise. He sent the Counselor, the Holy Spirit who was with the disciples and is with us still today. He has not left us alone. It is through the power of the Spirit that His Word (which we are blessed to share) works. That it convicts the world of sin, that it points people to the righteousness that has been won by Jesus and is ours through faith, and that it points people to the big picture—that Jesus is going to return in power to judge the living and dead. We don't live just for here and now, but our treasure has been stored up for us in heaven with our God.

This day of Pentecost is a reminder that our God is Triune—one God in three Persons—and that the Holy Spirit is just as much at work in us and in His church as He has ever been. Amen. LSQ

Book Reviews

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Book Review: The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism

Daniel G. Hummel. *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023. 382 +xvii pages. Price: \$29.99.

Even though dispensationalism runs contrary to confessional Lutheran theology, it does not require much detective work to discover it in our pews. Many of us have likely been asked by parishioners when the rapture will occur, have noticed some members carrying the *Scofield Reference Bible* to Bible study, or have had the latest book from a popular dispensationalist author thrust into our hands by

an enthusiastic parishioner. For Lutheran pastors who are curious about the history of dispensationalism or want to better engage members or prospective members who (perhaps unknowingly) have imbibed dispensationalist theology, Daniel G. Hummel's *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism* is a helpful tool as it narrates the movement's historical trajectory.

Helpfully, Hummel distinguishes between scholastic dispensationalism and popular dispensationalism. While the former is found primarily within an academic context, the latter is digested primarily through non-technical, easily accessible books and presentations intended for a general audience (such as the *Left Behind* novels). The constant conflict within dispensationalism

is found between these two camps, and it originates in the tradition's nineteenth century roots.

Dispensationalism began as a novel version of premillennialism. Unlike "historic" premillennialism, this new system divided salvation history into a series of separate epochs, or "dispensations." Each dispensation is marked by humanity's failure to obey God and God's faithfulness to His covenant. As Hummel writes, "Whether it is the dispensation of innocence in the Garden of Eden, or the dispensation of law as delivered to Moses, God does not cast away disobedient humanity but resolves to work through sin for redemptive purposes" (10). Currently, after Christ's first advent, we are in the final dispensation. Dispensationalism holds that "the close of this dispensation will be heralded by the imminent rapture, a sudden taking up into heaven of all true Christians to meet Jesus in the air" (9).

While the rapture is the most prominent aspect of dispensationalist theology, Hummel notes that the system is not strictly eschatological. Dispensationalism also is an ecclesiological theory, as "dispensationalism divides humanity into three distinct groups: Israel, the church, and the nations" (10). Dispensationalism holds that God maintains an eternal covenant with ethnic

Israel, which is distinct from the church. Since Israel rejected Jesus, the church has the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel to the nations. Eventually, towards the very end of time, Israel will repent and return to God. Therefore, God possesses "two chosen peoples" (10). Dispensationalism's belief in an imminent rapture and a dualistic understanding of Israel and church distinguished it from historic premillennialism.

This new premillennialism began with the ministry of John Nelson Darby, who served as a curate in the Church of Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century. Disgusted with the spiritual state of the Anglican establishment, Darby began the Brethren movement, which "adopted a premillennial eschatology that looked for the ruin of the church as a precursor to the second coming" (22). Darby took a futurist approach to many biblical prophecies, expecting their rapid fulfilment. Additionally, blaming the Laodicean spirituality of the Anglican Church on an unholy marriage between the church and politics, Darby believed that Christians had no divinely ordained role in politics. He differentiated between the "kingdom of God," which was the church, and the "kingdom of heaven," which was "the prophesied reign of peace on earth that would only come in the future

through Israel” (23). Hummel writes that “Darby drew new lines of separation inside of traditional biblical categories. He separated ancient Israel from the church—the patriarchs and prophets were not proto-Christians, nor was the church the new Israel” (23).

Darby’s theology did not remain sequestered within the English dissenting tradition. Brethren teachers popularized his theology in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Rarely did the popularizers use Darby’s name, which “was strategic, as they presented their arguments as emerging directly from Scripture and not from ‘the reasonings and speculations of men’” (29). This helped bury Darby’s association with dispensationalism in the larger public’s mind. The system seemingly was the product of a “plain,” “common sense” reading of Scripture.

In the late nineteenth century, dispensationalism grew in popularity, particularly in the Great Lakes region, and quickly became divorced from its Brethren origins. While Brethren dispensationalists encouraged adherents to leave their denominations and join them, American dispensationalists felt no obligation to leave their churches. Americans created a distinctive version of dispensationalism which diverged from Darby and his Brethren followers.

As a result, dispensationalism found a home in many denominations, including amongst the Lutherans.

Hummel points to Lutheran pastor Joseph A. Seiss as a prime example of dispensationalism’s early penetration into Lutheran circles. Seiss served as the pastor of Philadelphia’s St. John Lutheran Church and was one of the founders of the General Council. Inspired by William Miller’s Adventist movement in the 1840s, Seiss was impressed with the importance of Christ’s Second Coming. Following what he believed to be a more literal interpretation of biblical prophecy, Seiss shifted from postmillennialism to premillennialism and emphasized the end times in his preaching. In Seiss’ mind, the violence of the Civil War pointed towards Christ’s imminent return (likely between 1864 and 1872). He identified the final antichrist as Louis Napoleon, the emperor of France. However, he later retreated from such precise claims, instead finding refuge in notion that the rapture could occur at any moment (63). While Seiss’s premillennialism evolved over the course of his career, his strident dispensationalism illustrates how the theology could find a home even in theological traditions whose confessions

explicitly disavowed it—including Lutheranism.

Even as dispensationalism spread throughout American Christianity, it particularly blossomed within evangelicalism revivalism. Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899) preached a distilled version of the system which was far removed from Darby’s Brethren theology. Instead of preaching an intricate dispensational system or emphasizing the dualistic distinction between the church and Israel, Moody blended dispensationalism with other popular theological movements, such as the Higher Life movement, and made its focal point a basic gospel plea. In Hummel’s analysis, “far from the careful and complex theology of Darby, Moody’s premillennialism was simple: Jesus could come at any moment, and you don’t want to be left behind” (89).

Partially due to Moody’s influence, dispensationalism gradually became identical with the larger evangelical culture. It created its own institutions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dispensationalists hosted Bible conferences which taught laypeople how to exposit the Scriptures within a dispensationalist framework. Conference attendees would then bring their newfound knowledge and methods back to their local

congregations. Additionally, Bible institutes, such as the Moody Bible Institute and BIOLA, served as pipelines which produced dispensationalist pastors. Mission agencies sponsored missionaries who preached the gospel with a dispensationalist tinge. A pervasive print culture supported these institutions, as books such as the *Scofield Reference Bible* convinced many that a dispensational reading of Scripture was nothing more than the natural result of a plain, literal reading of the sacred text. These institutions constituted a “premillennial complex” which gave dispensationalism structures through which the system could be perpetuated and developed.

Another reason dispensationalism became nearly synonymous with American evangelicalism and fundamentalism was its theological elasticity. Aside from eschatology and ecclesiology, the system took few doctrinal stances. Dispensationalism was largely agnostic on doctrines which traditionally divided Protestant denominations, such as infant baptism or the correct form of church government. Therefore, pastors and laity could take various facets of the system and mold them to fit their tradition. Especially in the wake of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of the 1920s, when many evangelicals and fundamentalists were more

concerned about creating alliances to defend a “Christian” culture than theological orthodoxy, dispensationalism began a bridge that spanned the denominational divide (168).

According to Hummel, dispensationalism’s popularization ultimately led to its downfall as a coherent theological system. While some scholastic dispensationalists, such as Lewis Sperry Chafer and Charles Ryrie, sought to provide boundaries and precision to dispensationalism, their efforts were undermined by “pop dispensationalism,” particularly in the form of Hal Lindsey’s 1970 runaway bestseller *Late Great Planet Earth*. Whereas scholastic dispensationalists hesitated to set dates for prophetic events or to identify explicit fulfilments of prophecy in contemporary events, Lindsey lacked their conservatism. He identified the 1967 Six Days War as a prophetic fulcrum point, as Israel gained control over much of Jerusalem and other biblically significant locations. With the expansion of the state of Israel, Lindsey expected that end times prophecies would be fulfilled quickly, leading to the catastrophic battle of Armageddon and, of course, the rapture. Lindsey found unprecedented success in the way he connected dispensationalism, biblical prophecy, and current

events, and it created a genre which attracted many imitators.

Hummel argues that, ironically, Lindsey’s popularity spurred dispensationalism’s downfall. Academic theologians’ attempt to craft dispensationalism into a coherent system was undercut by the popularizers, who were not interested in that project. According to Hummel, “popularizers in Lindsey’s wake were more or less independent of oversight” (240). While some of the pop dispensationalists attended institutions like BIOLA or Dallas Theological Seminary or referenced works by Chafer or Ryrie, the majority did not. Instead, the popularizers were more interested in perpetuating their own personal brand rather than constructing a sound theological system.

Dispensationalism’s popularization also caused by a backlash amongst non-dispensationalists. Hummel charts that opposition within some confessional denominations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but opposition within evangelicalism spiked in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The author identifies three key sources of opposition: Christian Reconstructionists, “Lordship salvation” proponents, and historical premillennialists. Christian Reconstructionists, favoring postmillennialism, believed that

the Old Testament civil laws were still in effect and applicable to the United States. They critiqued dispensationalism for denigrating God's Law, not seeking to build the kingdom of God on earth due to the impending rapture. John MacArthur, a prominent California megachurch pastor, accused dispensationalists of being antinomian, because many believed it necessary to accept Jesus as "Savior" but not "Lord." In his mind, dispensationalists were guilty of "easy-believism" (310). MacArthur's criticisms brought him in line with New Calvinists, who had similar concerns about dispensationalist evangelicals. Finally, some dispensationalist scholars also reacted against the perceived excesses of pop dispensationalism. These dispensationalists, self-identified as "progressive dispensationalists," rejected the traditional dispensationalist tendency to identify sharp breaks between the dispensations. Instead, "progressives asserted a fundamental continuity, or progression, from one dispensation to the next" (314). According to Hummel, "on a variety of fronts, progressives nuanced, softened, or erased category distinctions that had animated dispensational thought for more than half a century" (314). These controversies (and more) severely weakened dispensationalism's sustainability

as a respectable, coherent theological system within American evangelicalism.

In this book, Hummel convincingly distinguishes between scholastic and popular dispensationalism and shows how the movement's popularization led to its academic downfall. This is helpful for us as we try to better understand dispensationalism with it rears its head in our parishes. We should not read Charles Ryrie's *Dispensationalism* and expect that to match with what our parishioners are, perhaps unknowingly, digesting.

However, I wonder if Hummel goes too far in identifying the "fall" of dispensationalism. If we restrict his judgment to scholastic dispensationalism, then he is likely correct. Dispensationalism seems to lack energy within academic theology. Nevertheless, the popular version is alive and well, as Hummel admits. Hummel even connects dispensationalist ideas with dystopian novels such as *Hunger Games*, quasi-secular conspiracy theories such as QAnon, and the apocalyptic tone prevalent within American conservative politics. If that's the case—and I think it is—can we really talk about the fall of dispensationalism? No.

Regardless, Hummel crafts an engaging narrative which reveals the history of a theological

movement which has significantly shaped American Christianity. No matter our ministry context, it is impossible to avoid engaging with dispensationalism at some level. On that basis, this book is a useful resource for any confessional Lutheran pastor seeking to better understanding our religious landscape.

– Adam S. Brasich
West Jordan, Utah

LSQ

Book Review: Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout

Ken Schurb, ed. *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout*. Concordia Historical Institute Monograph Series. Concordia Publishing House, 2023. 291 + xi pages. \$19.99.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the student and faculty walkout at Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, one of the formative events in twentieth century American Lutheranism which reverberated outside the confines of the Missouri Synod. While hardly an event worthy of celebration, the walkout demands reflection. Ken Schurb's edited volume, *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout*, helps Lutheran pastors and interested laity

to consider the event, the ideas which led to the walkout, and the Missouri Synod's post-1974 direction.

In this book, Schurb collects eleven essays from Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors and scholars which focus on different doctrines related to the Missouri Synod's doctrinal drift. Each essay shares an identical format, as the authors detail the doctrine's historical background, how the doctrine was contested within the twentieth century Missouri Synod, what the Scriptures and Confessions say about the teaching, how the doctrine played into the Seminex controversy, and the difference made by the Missouri Synod's stand.

Regrettably, the book lacks a preface or introduction that unifies the essays and states a thesis. LCMS President Matthew Harrison provides a historical introduction, but no new ground is broken there. However, after reading the essays, a thesis becomes evident: In the years leading to the 1974 walkout, a clear divergence from Scriptural, confessional Lutheranism emerged within the LCMS; therefore, the conflict, though painful, was necessary. Therefore, in a sense, this collection of essays is apologetic, defending Missouri Synod confessionalists from accusations of having stirred up a needless and damaging controversy.

While all of the essays provide insight into the theological development occurring within the Missouri Synod in the aftermath of World War II, several go beyond the normal narrative concerning the walkout. First of these is Roy S. Askins'

essay concerning the Mission Staff Walkout. Askins notes that “the 1970s saw not only a ‘battle for the Bible’ but also a full-fledged war for the heart and soul of LCMS missions, both foreign and domestic” (125). He highlights a little-known episode within the Missouri Synod’s Board of Missions which he dubs “Missionex.”

In 1965, the Missouri Synod adopted the “Mission Affirmations,” which, from a confessionalist perspective, were theologically problematic. Askins argues that the missions board “moved justification from its central place in theology and put missiology there instead” by declaring that all elements of church life, including worship and fellowship, have a “missionary dimension” (129). By declaring missions to be central to everything a church body does, the Missions Board promoted a liberal, ecumenical approach to cooperating with erring church bodies. While correctly recognizing that daughter churches were not subservient to the LCMS, they loosened the relationship to the point where they could not warn “a daughter church against or hindering it from entering into fellowship with a heterodox church body” (130). This, in turn, treated Lutheranism as “chiefly a confessional movement within the total body of Christ rather than a denomination emphasizing institutional barriers of separation” (130). While correct in a sense, Askins argues that “treating the Lutheran Church as merely one confessing movement among others reduces any concern for pure doctrine to theological nit-picking” (130). Additionally, the Mission

Affirmations “never once mention the means of grace as the tools by which Christ builds and sustains his church” (131). Therefore, the Missions Affirmations moved the Missouri Synod away from distinctively Lutheran theology and the synod’s historic position on church fellowship.

When conservatives won crucial synodical elections in 1973, the Missions Board, alongside Concordia Seminary, was under fire. Once confessionalists maintained a majority on the board, they decided not to renew the contract of James Meyer, the board’s secretary for South Asia. While many board members and world missionaries protested, the conservatives were unmoved. As a result, twelve out of seventeen Missions Board members resigned over the course of 1974. Some of these resigned board members began an independent missionary agency, “Partners in Mission,” which attached itself to Seminex’s Evangelical Lutherans in Mission.

Roy Askins’ essay narrates a little known but illuminating episode within Seminex. The doctrinal drift noted within Concordia Seminary was not limited to that institution. It was found throughout the LCMS, including its bureaucratic agencies. While Askins does not draw this implication, Askins’ essay alters the typical narrative of Seminex by demonstrating that the controversy was not simply one more student protest in an era in which they were commonplace or a “battle for the Bible.” The liberalizing tendencies at the center of the 1974 walkout had

their roots in theological developments within the LCMS earlier in the twentieth century, and their impact was not restricted to the doctrine of Scripture.

Cameron A. MacKenzie's essay on church fellowship also deserves particular notice, especially from ELS/WELS readers. MacKenzie admits that "at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Missouri Synod sounded like the Wisconsin Synod" in connecting church fellowship with unity in doctrine and practice. However, that position gradually became questioned. In 1967, several years after the ELS and WELS broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod, the LCMS adopted a document entitled *Theology of Fellowship*, which stated that Romans 16:17–18 could only be applied against those who "either by false teaching or separatistic, schismatic, factious activities attack the Gospel and the faith of Christians" (156). MacKenzie notes that "one could come away from these conclusions thinking that the Synod had no *biblical* basis for refusing church fellowship with erring *Christian* churches" (156, emphasis original). The same document encouraged LCMS pastors and members to "join in fervent prayer" with fellow Christians, even if they belonged to different denominations. Importantly, "nowhere ... did the document advocate using faithfulness to the Scriptures as a rule for church fellowship" (157). MacKenzie writes, "By maintaining that the Gospel can and does coexist with error in various churches, and by rejecting the application of Scripture passages

traditionally used to refuse fellowship with such erring churches, *Theology of Fellowship* demonstrated a significant departure from the previous Missouri Synod emphasis on unity in doctrine and practice as the criterion for church fellowship" (158).

That the Missouri Synod shifted its position on church fellowship is no surprise to any ELS or WELS pastor. However, the importance of this essay is that MacKenzie not only acknowledges the change but also that the confessional victory in Seminex did not reverse the Missouri Synod's shift on fellowship: "Did [the LCMS] reaffirm its original position regarding church fellowship, that it depended on unity in doctrine and practice? It did, but it restricted church fellowship to altar and pulpit fellowship, not prayer" (165). After Seminex, the Missouri Synod became stricter in its fellowship practices with other church bodies, but it did not return to its earlier stance. The confessionalist victory within the Missouri Synod had its limits.

John T. Pless's essay, "After the Walkout: Publications by the Faculty of Seminex," provides an interesting gaze down the road not taken within the Missouri Synod. Pless reviews publications from Seminex faculty after the 1974 walkout to describe their theological trajectories and, by extension, what might have been taught within Concordia Seminary and the Missouri Synod had Seminex never happened. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many former faculty members trended in a radically liberal direction. Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., whose homiletics still remains influential

within confessional Lutheran circles, endorsed the ordination of women pastors. Ralph Klein, who taught Old Testament at Concordia Seminary, became “a champion of the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the public ministry of the church” (250). So did Edward H. Schroeder. Other professors continued to publish higher criticism of the Scriptures, which led them to question historic Christian doctrines. Based on his research, Pless concludes that the “post-Walkout writings [of the Concordia Seminary professors who participated in the walkout] reflect their theological commitments with greater clarity. ... These writings by Seminex professors make it clear that their theological convictions and teachings had indeed changed from those traditionally embraced by the Missouri Synod” (257).

These three articles, along with the rest, convincingly argue that the 1974 walkout and Seminex mattered. Professors, seminarians, pastors, and synodical bureaucrats drifted from the Missouri Synod’s historic, confessional Lutheran teachings. Therefore, the controversy was necessary, despite the pain and division it caused. This is a needful reminder, especially for younger Lutherans (including this reviewer) who were not alive during

the controversy and may wonder to what degree the controversy was justified. The story also warns us that doctrinal drift can occur in once-orthodox Lutheran church bodies, so continued vigilance is required.

Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout is a crucial reconsideration of the Seminex controversy which ought to inspire further reflection on this important chapter in North American Lutheran history—and there is room for further reflection. Seminex, the 1974 Concordia Seminary walkout, their broader context within American religious history, and their aftermath within the synods of the old Synodical Conference have still been largely unconsidered outside partisan theological analysis such as that found in Schurb’s volume. Nevertheless, *Rediscovering the Issues* serves as a corrective to a myopic understanding Seminex, dissuading us from understanding it strictly through the lens of biblical inerrancy. Other doctrines were at stake, too. Unfortunately, the controversy was necessary.

– Adam S. Brasich
West Jordan, Utah