Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal

Volume 4 | Issue 1 Article 15

4-15-2022

Grapho 2022

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Recommended Citation
Davis, Kendall (2022) "Grapho 2022," *Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 15.
Available at: https://scholar.csl.edu/grapho/vol4/iss1/15

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GRAPHO

CONCORDIA SEMINARY STUDENT JOURNAL

THE LIGHT FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

VOLUME 4 2022

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Submissions for review should be sent to cslstudentpublications@gmail.com. Manuscripts submitted for publication should conform to Chicago Manual of Style. Editorial decisions about submissions include peer review.

Grapho is published annually.

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GRAPHO

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Letter from the Chairman: Over Pne Hundred Years of Student Publications at Concordia Seminary — *7*
Kendall Davis

Essays

Tradition: Handing Down the Light to the Next Generation — ***13***
Kristen Einertson

A Disordered Estate: A Lutheran Approach to Institutional Evils — ***19***
Christian Dollar

Impassioned Wonder: Theosis and the Place of Reason in Gregory Nazianzen's Theological Orations — ***30***
Benjamin Vanderhyde

Arius as a Figure in Church History — ***41***
Kendall Davis

Light: Recovering an Ancient Perspective — ***52***
Hayden Lukas

Devotional Material

Christian Sexuality: A Five Session Small Group Study — ***64***
Christian Dollar

Greek and Hebrew Catechetical Devotions — ***77***
Jaron Melin

Poetry

Morning — ***85***
Cody MacMillin

Deep Roots are Not Touched by the Frost — ***86***
Aidan Moon

Kyrie Eleison — ***87***
Aidan Moon

Collaborative Essays

The Gospel for the Whole Person: Attending to Sin and Grace Throughout the Human Experience — ***91***
Charles Ridley

Making the Case for Preachers Who Read — ***97***
Ethan Stoppenhagen

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The Student Publications would also like to offer a special thanks to Concordia Seminary's staff from Creative Services and Publications for their help and guidance in bringing this project to fruition.

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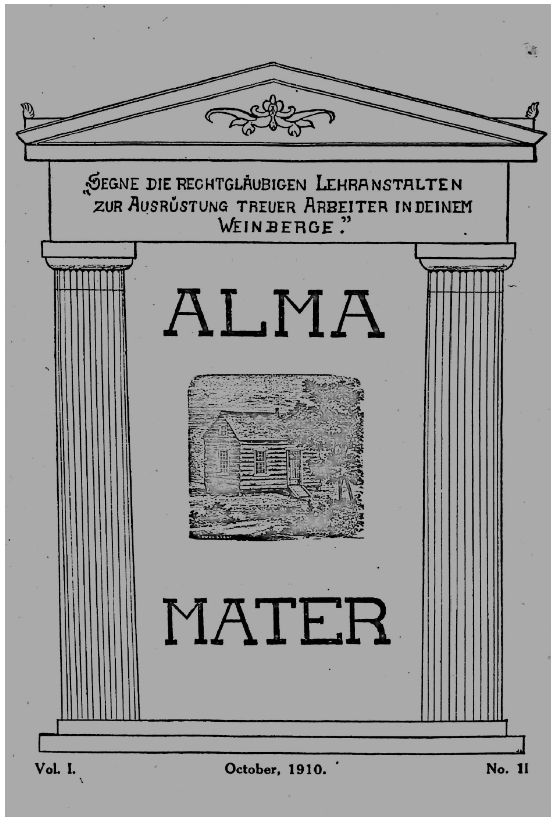
Letter from the Chairman

Letter from the Chairman: Over One Hundred Years of Student Publications at Concordia Seminary

For this year's issue of *Grapho* we are focusing on the theme, "The Light from Generation to Generation." Obviously, this echoes the motto of our seminary, "Ἄνωθεν τὸ φῶς" or "The light from above." But the student publications committee also felt that this theme captures well what we do here at this seminary: prepare men and women to teach present and future generations about *the* light, the Lord Jesus. In exegetical classes we learn how the writers of the Scriptures pointed their original hearers to this light. In historical classes we learn how Christians in the past taught and thought about the light. In systematics courses we learn how to speak this message about the light of the world for the world of today. In practical course we get into the nitty gritty of preaching and teaching and leading others to point them to this same light. As students at this institution, we are acutely aware that we owe a great debt to the pastors and other faithful Christians who have taught us the faith and we hope to pass on this very same faith to others in our future service to the church. We would like this issue to explore this central task more.



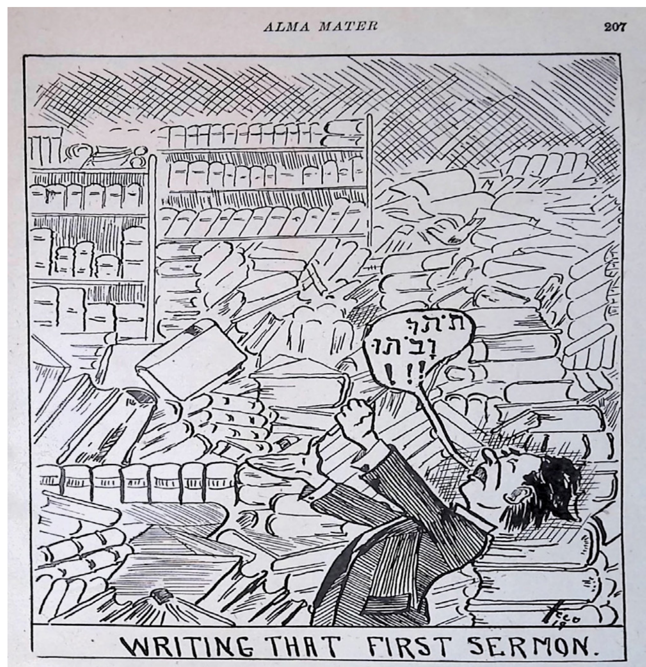
The cover of the inaugural issue of Alma Mater. The German text reads: "Bless orthodox institutions of learning for the equipping of faithful workers in your vineyard."

After this letter, you will see how some of our writers have contributed to this discussion, but first I would like to offer a brief picture of the long history of student publications at Concordia Seminary. My hope is that this glimpse into student publications from over one hundred years ago will help us gain some perspective on how the conversations in this journal might contribute to the task of passing on the light of Jesus Christ from generation to generation.

A quick look over at the official archives of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Concordia Historical Institute (CHI), reveals that there is a long and varied history of student publications at Concordia Seminary. These publications have taken a variety of forms and names over the

years. The earliest publication I am aware of calls itself *Alma Mater* and began in 1910. This publication ran continuously under various names until 1974. CHI has records of numerous other student publications, such as *The Vicar* (1943–1953), *The Quad* (1952–1968), *Spectrum* (1968–2000), *Concordia Seminary Student Journal* (1983–2007), and *Around the Tower* (2000–2007). There are records of numerous other publications as well. Some of these publications are in the style of an academic journal, like *Grapho*, others take an even more eclectic approach and feature sections on poetry, humor, sports, updates from other synodical colleges and the like. Some publications were published quite frequently, even weekly. Some are quite brief and functioned more like a newsletter. So even though the present publication was only started in 2018, *Grapho* is continuing a long tradition of the various student bodies of this institution, a tradition that goes back well over a hundred years.

I would like to offer a few brief observations from the earliest issues of *Alma Mater* since they offer us a window into student life from such a long time ago. When *Alma Mater* began in 1910, the current campus had not been built yet. The seminary made its home in a single building over on Jefferson Avenue. This student publication was started by students upon the approval of the faculty and was published monthly. Issues were distributed throughout synodical colleges as well as to subscribing alumni for fifty cents annually. While most articles and the like are in English, a significant number are also in German. Occasionally a piece written in Latin also appears. The inaugural issue has the following to say about the languages that would be accepted for submission, which gives a sense of the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the expected readership and contributors: "Any language spoken within the bounds of the Missouri Synod is acceptable. However, correspondents in Tamil, Portuguese, Slavonian, Polish, Lithuanian, and Estonian will be requested to furnish their own interpretation."[1]



A cartoon from the humor section of Alma Mater. The student quotes Genesis 1 in Hebrew, "formless and void."

One also finds a news section in each month's issue reporting news from synodical schools and colleges across the country. Many of these other institutions will be familiar to present readers such as Seward, St. Paul, and Ft. Wayne. However, present readers may also be surprised to find news bulletins from synodical colleges in Greensboro and Conover, North Carolina; Oakland, California;

Winfield, Kansas; and two different colleges in New Orleans.

One issue notes, in reference to Franz Pieper, the seminary president at the time, "At present he is preparing to issue a larger work on Dogmatical Theology."[2] The reference, of course, is to Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, a work that readers are certainly familiar with.

The humor section features jokes, cartoons, and other humorous stories. While many of the jokes do not quite land for contemporary readers as well as they may have for readers from a century ago, some are still very relevant: "What is the difference between some students and a mirror? A mirror reflects without talking; some students talk without reflecting."[3]

In discussing how the seminary's athletic programs got their start, it is reported that the first sport to gain official approval from the faculty was baseball. Prior to this the faculty were strongly opposed to athletics at the seminary. Other sports were not approved until later. Concordia Seminary successfully fielded a baseball team in the spring of 1910 and apparently was able to win games against Washington University and St. Louis University.[4] One imagines that the intervening century has unfortunately diminished this institution's chances of success against such universities again.

Although not everything in this publication is as light-hearted. One can also observe how current events affected the seminary. Later volumes reflect on the outbreak of World War I. One author forcefully asserts that this new European war is ultimately a result of God's judgment on the nations of Europe: "God has stricken them for their disobedience and unbelief. The just retribution which is overtaking them is so bloody in its nature, so appalling in its consequences as to baffle description—words cannot be found to give an adequate portrayal thereof." Yet he continues by pointing out that this situation also serves as a warning to those in the Missouri Synod to be faithful in continuing to proclaim the pure teaching of the Scriptures that has been entrusted to them by God: "Should we grow proud of our own wisdom and abilities to the detriment of God's Word, then God would afflict us with a divine visitation as surely as He is even now laying low the proud and arrogant nations of Europe."[5] Of course, it was not long before the United States also became involved in the Great War and it ceased to be such a distinctly European problem. Nevertheless, these reflections show how some students reflected on the theological significance of world events around them.

Several years later another author reflects on the end of the war in 1918 and the experience of celebrating the same Christmas when things were all of a sudden so different after years of war:

> Yet there is a change. We are changed. The events of five of the most momentous years in the history of mankind and of the last few days, which were the equivalent of another such five years, have not passed us by untouched. The peace which has descended from above with a God-given balm on the disrupted world is enriching our hearts, too, and the Christmas which we shall thus celebrate in color and sentiment, in force and depth of feeling, will differ from any which we have celebrated heretofore.[7]

While it may be difficult for us today to understand how it may have felt to live through a world war, the *Alma Mater*'s reflections on the pandemic caused by the Spanish flu remind us that even "unprecedented" times are not quite so unique as we might imagine. They report multiple waves of the flu striking St. Louis, church services cancelled for weeks on end, classes cancelled and students sent home, professors and students getting sick even resulting in the death of one student. Classes were cancelled from December 1st to January 7th and students went home, though it is reported that about forty students stayed behind. Apparently, they kept themselves busy working in the city even delivering mail for the post office. It is even reported that this remnant of seminarians got into the habit of gathering for their morning devotions as early as four or five in the morning, though no reason is given for such early rising.[7]

We thank God that he has been faithful to allow this institution to continue to form students for ministry. We hope that the essays, poems, and other pieces contained in this present issue will help you to think about both the debt we owe to the generations of faithful Christians who have come before us as well as the task we ourselves have been given to faithfully preach and teach this one true light for future generations to come.

Kendall Davis
Student Publications Chairman
Holy Week 2022

Endnotes

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Essays

Tradition: Handing Down the Light to the Next Generation

Kristen Einertson

Kristen Einertson is a PhD candidate in Rhetoric at the University of Minnesota who focuses on the rhetoric and public discourse surrounding Eastern European post-Soviet states. She graduated from Luther College in 2018 with degrees in communication studies, music, and philosophy. In 2018-2019 she lived in Rīga, Latvia, while completing her Fulbright. She and her husband, Christian, have one son, Theodore, and live in Saint Louis.

We certainly must commend Christian doctrine in every way, by preaching, reading, singing, etc., so that young and unlearned people may be formed by it"–Martin Luther[1]

When my husband and I found out that I was pregnant with our first child, we started discussing the ways we hoped to hand down the faith to our children one day. Initially, the things that our own parents had done when we were younger helped us to come up with a pretty familiar list of activities: getting them baptized soon after they arrived, going to church regularly, teaching them to pray before mealtimes and bedtime, reading Bible stories, and familiarizing them with the church's hymns. If there was one nearby—and we wanted to get a little crazy—maybe we would even send them to a Lutheran school! Since we were both products of the public school system, that seemed pretty out there—but we figured if it would help our children remain Christian, it might be worth a shot.

However, as my pregnancy progressed and we started to ask wise and experienced parents how they inculcated the Christian faith in their progeny, we discovered a profound difference between these families' experience of the faith and the way we grew up. Indeed, it seemed like they inhabited a whole other world of Christian living that had previously been unfamiliar to us. To these families raising their children in the Lutheran faith was an entirely different endeavor than just teaching them to memorize "Come, Lord Jesus" and singing "A Mighty Fortress" on Reformation Day. To them the faith was not a series of additional extracurricular activities, school preferences, or other add-ons that they were in the habit of either doing or not doing. Instead, they embedded teaching moments within whatever they already did with their children: simple things like eating, singing, and story-telling. Their teachings reflected the seasons and holidays of the church's year and mirrored the natural human experience. It was already a part of their lives. To put it simply, what we witnessed was not faith instruction as we had learned from our own parents and the churches of our youth; no, this was something wildly different. My husband and I immediately wanted to know more.

As we started to ask questions and observe these families more closely, we learned about St. Martin's Day songs,[2] Twelfth Night parties,[3] name day celebrations,[4] pancakes on Fat Tuesday,[5] waffles for the Annunciation,[6] and crepes on Candlemas.[7] We discovered the backgrounds and histories of St. Helena,[8] St. Lucia,[9] and St. Cecilia.[10] We noticed how in

Published by Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary, 2022

these families, even the youngest child could differentiate between feast days and fast days, glorias and litanies, epistles and apostles. The sort of teaching that these parents were doing taught their children how the faith applied to their everyday experiences and encounters. To them the faith was not a foreign object that was being forced upon their lives in an unnatural, uncomfortable way, nor was it the sort of thing reserved for Sunday mornings, dinner table devotions, or youth group. Instead, the Christian faith was the *only* way of life, one that easily matched up with the things that the children were already doing in the home and with their parents.

These parents were handing down the faith to their children in a way that was profoundly different from the ways we and many of our contemporaries had learned it—and it is not hard to see why they might want to do so. After all, it has been pretty obvious in recent years that the church needs to rethink the way it catechizes its members.[11] Surveys have shown that our own LCMS is simply failing to retain its young people, with perhaps only a third of our confirmands going on to remain active members of our churches and perhaps even more than that leaving the faith altogether.[12] Millennials' parents and grandparents told us that our peers who grew up in the faith would come back to church when they got married or had children. That sentiment is understandable, but it does not account for what happens when they do not get married and do not have children.[13] And the LCMS is not the only organization to have this problem. Newspaper headlines like "Church membership in the U.S. has fallen below the majority"[14] and polls reporting a widening gap between "older Americans and Millennials in their levels of religious affiliation and attendance" show that this is an issue common to the American church.[15] In short, the message has become plain and clear: the church where we have grown up has not done a good job of teaching the faith to its children and encouraging them in their faith as adults.

If the way young Christians in the last few decades have learned the faith was not effective, it might make sense to look for a new kind of teaching—yet these parents we met were doing the opposite. As the Preacher says, "there is nothing new under the sun," (Eccl 1:9) and the way of teaching the faith that we observed as we anticipated our child's arrival is not new, either. Living "liturgically," as some now call it,[16] that is, living in concert with the church year, has always been a custom of pious Christians. Although many of the church's historic holidays are no longer as familiar to us as they were to our forebears, these days once marked the pattern of the church's year for almost as long as there has been a church. That is how so many of the folk traditions associated with those days came about: as Christians celebrated these holy days and used them to instruct their children over the centuries, they invented and passed on customs that helped them hand down the

Grace Before Meal. Franz Defregger, 1875. Public domain.

faith to the next generation. Over time, these traditions and the seasons and patterns of the church year became common knowledge to much of Christendom, not just something special for people who paid particular attention in Bible class.

Indeed, not only the folk traditions but also the church's holidays themselves are the product of ordinary Christians finding ways to teach Christianity to the young and those new to the faith. To take the sanctoral calendar for example, ordinary people putting on humble commemorations of local martyrs and other exemplary members of their congregation is exactly how saints' days entered the Christian calendar to begin with. For example, St. Martin of Tours, famous in LCMS circles for lending his name to our own Martin Luther, was a prominent example of godliness in the church of France before and during his service as a bishop there. Immediately following his death, the churches of the area began commemorating their dearly departed bishop on the day of his heavenly birth. From there his feast spread throughout Europe and the whole Christian world: Christians from Italy to Germany found in the soldier-bishop an example of faith and Christian living that was worthy of annual remembrance. And so it is with many of the other saints' day on the Christian calendar. Most of them were not instituted by centralized authorities in places like Rome or Constantinople; they simply grew out of the pious remembrances of Christians in local communities who were trying to pass down the faith and virtues of these various saints to the next generation. We can even see this phenomenon in today's church, with Lutheran parishes continuing to add new saints to their own local liturgical calendars,[17] showing the families of those congregations that saints like Andrew and Cyril were not larger-than-life heroes of the olden days but the same type of broken sinners that we all know.

In time, though, the pious traditions and holidays that originated in the devotion of ordinary Christians came to be seen in some circles as too "medieval" or "Catholic." In the face of this accusation, it is important to note that handing down the faith by means of the church's calendar is endorsed by no less than the Lutheran Confessions. Throughout our Confessions it is clear that the reformers did not think that the annual commemorations of Christ and his saints were an aspect of medieval piety that merited rejection; rather, they were a helpful custom of the ancient church that ought to be preserved and used to teach the young and unlearned.[18] Thus, from the very start of the Lutheran church, Christians eagerly worked to follow the yearly cycle of feasts and festivals that celebrated both the events of our Lord's life and the lives of his followers.

The Feast of St. John. Jules Breton, 1875. Public domain.

Of course, when they utilized communal traditions and customs to hand down the light of faith to their children, our Reformation forebears were not only following the example of their immediate predecessors in the medieval church. Rather, they were living out a scriptural pattern. As far back as the Pentateuch, the people of Israel can be seen using the Old Testament

liturgical calendar and simple family activities of eating specific foods and telling specific stories on specific days as a means to teach the faith. God even commanded his people to teach their children with these sorts of customs! Take, for example, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When the Lord instituted it, He told his people that they would eat only unleavened bread for a week each year so that they could bring their children into the story of the Exodus. The Lord knew that children like to ask questions about these sorts of customs, so He commanded his people, "You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt'" (Exod 13:8). Yet just like any other custom, it was not for children alone; it was for everyone in Israel. Thus, the Lord says that this pious tradition "shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt" (Exod 13:9). Even in the age of Moses, long before our current liturgical calendar had taken shape, God's people knew that simple family customs were a way to keep His words on their hearts and in their mouths, an insight that our fathers in the faith maintained long after the Old Testament Paschal feast gave way to the New Testament celebration of the Resurrection.

By instructing our children in the faith using the aid and gift that the liturgical calendar is to us, we get to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors, Old and New Testament alike, teaching our progeny the same lessons that our forefathers in the faith taught theirs. As we live out the faith in this way, we get to joyfully remember Christ's annunciation, visitation, nativity, circumcision, epiphany, baptism, transfiguration, last supper, Passion, resurrection, and ascension with all the saints who have gone before us. We get to live the cycle of the church over and over again, experiencing the holy days as our Lord experienced them and remembering how He walked on this earth just as we do. And as we repeat the cycle with our children time and time again, year after year, decade after decade, we get to pass on the faith to the next generation, understanding just a bit more every single time how brilliant and wonderful the work is that our Savior did for us when He came down from heaven. In this way, we can ensure that the faith is something that is joyfully and fruitfully celebrated regularly and often in our churches, hearts, and homes.[19]

Moreover, when we celebrate the church's calendar and teach it to our children, we learn more about the men and women who faithfully followed our Lord and gave up their life for Him. In becoming more familiar with the days that grace the liturgical year, we can also become more familiar with the folks who knew our Lord better than anyone else.[20] People like the twelve apostles who were the primary witnesses of His work and the authors of the New Testament. Or the individuals who were a part of Jesus' family; the men and women who made up his bloodline, people like St. Abraham, St. Joseph, and St. Ruth. Or the ones who watched him grow up, St. Mary and St. Joseph. We can learn more about Jesus' friends and the ones he loved: Ss. Mary and Martha, St. Mary Magdalene, and St. Lazarus. We can learn from the early church fathers who were extremely influential to the church that raised us—St. Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Basil the Great, and St. John Chrysostom. Or we can learn more about those who have helped inform the Lutheran tradition: St. Wilhelm Löhe, St. Philip Melanchthon, and Ss. Lucas Cranach and Albrecht Dürer. I promise you, everywhere you look on the Christian calendar, you will find someone with whom you can identify, someone whose story you find interesting, or someone who challenges you to grow in your faith and trust more in our Lord.

The possibilities for instruction are endless, and we thank God for that.

By re-adopting this rich treasure into our daily Christian practices and meshing our Christian household life with the liturgical calendar and the traditions that flow from it, we can better understand, challenge, and grapple with the very faith that we wish to hand down to our children. By studying the Christian calendar and the seasons of the church's year with them, we can provide them with an education in not only theology but also church history, political history, spirituality, and prayer.[21] Further, our adherence to these feasts and holy days together as a family has the potential to be so powerful that in remembering our Lord's saints, we can preserve a public memory of the faith, collectively meditating upon the examples that most closely resemble Christ.[22]

Moreover, the fact of the matter is that every person and every family has traditions. Whether it is singing "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve or eating nachos on Superbowl Sunday, traditions are a natural and unavoidable part of human life. If that is the case, we must ask what sort of traditions we want to have, and if one of our fundamental goals as Christian parents is handing down the faith to our children, it only makes sense to preserve the sorts of traditions that have been tailored to that purpose and stood the test of time. An appropriate dose of humility will also probably make us admit that our ancestors likely knew a thing or two about how to make the faith more tangible for our children, how to weave it seamlessly through the pattern of their days and ensure that it is far more congruous with their worldly experiences than any well-intentioned church after-school program or VBS curriculum could ever be. Besides, if we are going to pattern our life after anything—and we will pattern our life after something—it might as well be after Jesus and His life.[23] And what a gift it is for us to be able to use the same sort of things that our Lord has found so meaningful and significant, the common and ordinary objects and events of life.[24]

Finally, perhaps the best part of engaging in this handing down of the faith is that after you do it for any period of time, you will realize that it is not just for the kids. If you open yourself up to a life of living liturgically, you will discover all sorts of things that you never learned in Sunday School, like how the new year actually begins with Advent or that Christmas trees can stay up until February 2nd.[25] You might discover that you look forward intently to St. Lawrence's Day and Ss. Peter and Paul because you like barbecue ribs[26] and fish.[27] Or perhaps you look forward to Michaelmas because you love blackberries![28] By opening your life up to the church and her traditions, you will likely learn more about the faith than you ever thought you could. You will discover how to prepare yourself and your families for the feast to come and a lifetime of celebration with our Lord.[29] You will find that your thoughts, your prayers, and your actions begin to be shaped by the church's calendar. You will realize that seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, hearing, making, and doing in accordance with our Lord and his work is purely delightful.[30] And in your feasting and fasting, baking and singing, your praying and storytelling, you will pass the days doing what matters: handing down the light of faith to the next generation until you and your families can join all the saints who have gone before us and who rest in the home of our Heavenly Father for all eternity.

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A Disordered Estate: A Lutheran Approach to Institutional Evils

Christian Dollar

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The question of institutional evils weighs heavily on the mind of the American Zeitgeist. Institutional racism, once happily relegated to history as a relic of Jim Crow, has reentered the public discussion on a national level in a way not seen since the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. The new virtue of "fair-trade" is lauded as the solution for an exploitive economic system, while "going green" promises absolution of a company's carbon footprint. The extent of government COVID-19 measures and the debate surrounding the inclusion of critical theories in public education dominate primetime and social media. These are all examples of how Americans are aware of institutional evils in a way they have rarely been before, and many Christians are looking to their churches for answers.

Lutherans have often felt handicapped by their theology in the face of institutional evils. On one hand is the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Originally used to describe God's two-fold way of ruling his creation, it is too often flattened into an impenetrable barrier sanctifying the division of Church and State.[1] On the other hand stands vocation. Luther originally employed the doctrine of vocation to elevate the secular roles of life into holy orders.[2] Now, however, vocation is often used as a tool to limit the scope of a Christian's responsibility.[3] Even when the two doctrines are freed of these misunderstandings, both offer incomplete guidance for addressing institutional evils. What are one's vocational responsibilities to a child laborer half a world away when making a purchase from a subsidiary of an international conglomerate? How does a Christian leverage their role in the church to address predatory policing? It is not that the doctrines of the Two Kingdoms or vocation are irrelevant or unimportant to these questions, but their use is limited. Something more is needed. It is my argument that the doctrine of the Three Estates offers a theologically Lutheran framework in which to address institutional evils. This medieval doctrine, employed by Luther and preserved by the Church of the Reformation, has fallen into general disuse in American Lutheranism; however, the Three Estates provide an avenue for both speaking theologically and acting ethically in a world of institutional evils.[4]

Speaking Theologically about Institutions: The Three Estates

The word "institution" calls to mind a variety of images: an institution of higher education, the institution of the family, the institution of the Lord's Supper. These examples are hardly "institutions" in the same way. So, theologically speaking, what is an institution? Luther provides a starting point. "But the holy orders and true religious institutions

Illustration from a 13th century French text depicting those who pray, those who fight, and those who work. Public domain.

established by God are these three: the office of priest, the estate of marriage, the civil government."[5] This quote taken from the *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528) introduces both the Three Estates and its terminological ambiguity. Orders, institutions, offices, estates, and hierarchies are all used by Luther throughout his life to describe the three-fold structure God created and employs to organize all human life.[6] Although this three-fold structure is built into creation and does not change, history presents a myriad of patterns for manifesting church, government, and family.[7] For the sake of clarity, the term "estate" will be used to refer to one of the three aspects of God's ordering of creation—church (*ecclesia*), family (*oeconomia*), and government (*politia*). On the other hand, the word "institution" will refer to a concrete manifestation of one of these estates. For example, the *estate* of government may be filled in a particular instance by the *institution* of the St. Louis Board of Aldermen, while in a different time and place it may be filled by the *institution* of the Great Khan of the Golden Horde.

The First Estate: Ecclesia

As an order of creation, the estate of church has its source in the creation account. Commenting on God's prohibition to Adam in Genesis 2:17, Luther explains, "Here we have the establishment of the church before there was any government of the home and of the state… Moreover, the church is established without walls and without any pomp."[8] The church, when properly ordered, fulfills the estate's created responsibility of orienting man to God in faith through the word. In the context of God's prohibition to Adam, such an orientation is manifested as obedience. With the entry of sin, man's relationship to God has become broken and no longer adheres to the proper ordering of the estate.[9] The estate may now manifest in any number of deficient ways, and so does not refer exclusively to the *Christian* church. Instead, the estate of church may refer to any of man's innumerable ways of reaching out to God.[10] According to our terminology, the Christian church, heretical churches, and the Hindu temple are all institutions of the ecclesial estate because all are manifestations of man's relationship to the divine.[11] No man may be excluded from this estate as Luther explains in the Large Catechism: "There has never been a nation so wicked that it did not establish and maintain some sort of worship" (LC I, 17).[12] The estate of the Church, as all the others, is an inescapable part of creation, even if it remains broken.

The Second Estate: Oeconomia

According to Luther, God established the second estate in his creation of Eve. He comments on Genesis 2:18, "Now also the household is set up. For God makes a husband of lonely Adam and joins him to a wife, who was needed to bring about the increase of the human race."[13] The second estate is not limited simply to marriage and procreation. It includes "everything that goes inside the house," which in Luther's day included the majority of the economic structure.[14] Bonhoeffer describes this estate as "a participation by

man in the action of creation," and references as an example the report in Genesis 4:14-21 of the foundation of the first city, the creation of musical instruments and tools, and the propagation of mankind.[15] The vast majority of human activity is contained within this estate: the education of children, the development of culture, and the entirety of economic systems, including their attendant institutions such as businesses and banks.

The Third Estate: Politia

Compared to the breadth of the estate of marriage, the jurisdiction of the governmental estate is relatively narrow. It is concerned with the preservation of creation through the punishment of evil and the imposition of worldly justice.[16] Because of its role in combating sin, Risto Saarinen describes Luther's understanding of this estate as less a "created order" and more of an "emergency order."[17] Luther himself is explicit that civil government would be unnecessary without sin. However, he is less explicit regarding its source.[18] Nowhere in his Genesis commentary does he identify a moment of divine institution for the estate of government as he did for the other estates.[19] Despite this ambiguity of source and its "emergency" status, the government for Luther remains a divinely ordered estate imbued with the authority of God.

Institutional Evil

What then, theologically speaking, is an institutional evil? Using the definitions above, an institutional evil is an instance in which a particular concrete manifestation of an estate (i.e., an institution) does not pattern itself off the divine ordinance of its respective estate. There are two general ways in which this can happen. First, an institution may become disordered either by negligence or overreach to an extent that it threatens the proper functions of its co-estates. This is an inter-estate disordering and is rectified by the correct exercise of the other two estates' institutions. The second type of institutional evil is an internal disordering which threatens the function of the disordered estate. This intra-estate evil is corrected by "emergency vocations" that are only sanctioned by the need to preserve the correct functioning of the estate. Often these two types of institutional evils will occur in the same instance, and so a particular disordered institution may require both inter-estate intervention and intra-estate "emergency vocations." However, for the sake of clarity, we will address each type individually and on its own terms.

Inter-Estate Correction

Lutherans are rightly sensitive to the dangers of muddling important theological distinctions. The Two Kingdoms doctrine serves as a bulwark against the inappropriate mixing of the temporal authority of the secular order and the spiritual authority of the church. Yet Luther himself often called on his princes to correct abuses within the church. Essential to understanding Luther's rationale is a grasp of his dual appeal to the princes. On the one hand Luther appealed to the princes as fellow Christians to correct the negligence of the church from within the ecclesial estate. On the other hand, Luther appealed to the princes *qua* princes to exercise the authority of the governmental estate to correct the gross injustices of the institutional church. It is this second appeal that falls under the category of

intra-estate correction and to which we now turn.

Correction by the Politia

In the two years following the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses, it had become obvious that the ecclesial authorities were unwilling to take up the challenge of church reform. In the face of continuing clerical abuses, Luther called on the temporal authorities to rectify the situation in his 1520 appeal "To the Christian Nobility."[20] In this work Luther attacked three metaphorical walls behind which papal supporters were shielded from outside correction. Papal supporters argued as follows: (1) the "spiritual estate" is beyond the jurisdiction of the temporal authorities, (2) only the pope may interpret scripture, and (3) the pope alone may call a council.[21] For our discussion of inter-estate correction, only the first wall is relevant. The other two will be treated more fully in a subsequent section.

In his attack on the first wall, Luther overturns the papal teaching of the primacy of the spiritual estate. He does not, however, accomplish this by urging the primacy of either the government or home. Instead, Luther reunifies the three estates into an interconnected whole. The medieval interpretation of the Three Estates created a system of three distinct, siloed social orders to which an individual could belong.[22] The clergy belonged to the first estate—the "spiritual estate." The nobility belonged to the second estate—the estate of government. Finally, the peasantry was relegated to the estate of labor which corresponds to Luther's estate of marriage and the home. Within this tripartite division of society, the church positioned the spiritual estate above the rest and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of the temporal authorities. Luther attacked this atomized understanding of the estates that would exclude certain Christians from the spiritual estate as "pure invention."[23] It is absurd, Luther argues, to build walls between the estates because, if it were taken to its logical conclusion:

> Then tailors, cobblers, stonemasons, carpenters, cooks, innkeepers, farmers, and all the temporal craftsman should be prevented from providing pope, bishops, priests, and monks with shoes, clothes, house, meat and drink, as well as from paying them any tribute. But if these laymen are allowed to do their proper work without restriction, what then are the Romanist scribes doing with their own laws, which exempt them from the jurisdiction of the temporal Christian authority?[24]

If the home estate is permitted to service the spiritual estate, then the governmental estate must also be allowed to do so through its proper function. This is because what distinguishes the estates from each other does not come down to people. For Luther all people belong to each estate simultaneously.[25] The same individual who is the prince of the *politia* is also both a son of his father in the *oeconomia* and a congregant of his pastor in the *ecclesia*. Even the hermit monk who rejects family and political affairs cannot retreat into the church alone. At most, Luther says, the monk who abandons all else for the "spiritual" can only neglect his responsibilities in the other two estates.[26] On one hand, what distinguishes the estates is their function and not their occupants since each person lives in all three estates simultaneously. On the other hand, individuals are distinguished within particular estates by the offices he or she occupies within it, and so an individual is subject to the responsibilities and obligations of their role within an estate regardless of other offices they may occupy in another.[27] Thus, when an institution of the ecclesial estate by thievery or corruption impinges on the duty

of the governmental estate to preserve order and justice, "the temporal authority is under obligation to protect the innocent and prevent injustice."[28] No one is beyond the jurisdiction of the temporal authorities where the preservation of justice is concerned.

Luther applies this principle to the estate of the home. Commenting on the plight of children who are forcibly married off by their parents, Luther states that the authorities must "deprive the father of his devilish power, rescue the child from him, and restrict him to the proper use of his parental authority," because the prevention of such injustice falls within the governmental estate's responsibilities to "guard and uphold the right."[29] This duty to preserve justice may sanction the government estate to act even when the danger is not immediate. In a letter from 1524, Luther called on councilmen throughout Germany to establish public schools. In the letter Luther explicitly places the responsibility to educate children within the estate of marriage. However, when parents do not properly educate their children, the governmental estate suffers from a lack of qualified leaders. Luther complains to the councilmen: "Are we then to permit none but louts and boors to rule, when we can do better than that?"[30] It is the danger of an incompetent ruler impeding the smooth running of government that sanctions the governmental estate's establishment of schools.[31] This is not the temporal authorities entering into the estate of marriage as a kind of "emergency parent." The establishment of public schools is the temporal authorities acting within the protective function of the governmental estate. Luther explains to the councilmen that a city is not only protected by "mighty walls" and a "goodly supply of guns and armor," but that a city's best defense is a cohort of "able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens."[32]

Correction by the Church

Luther is a wealth of deep theological thought on the proper relationship between the governmental and ecclesial estates. However, because of the challenges he sought to correct, he speaks more powerfully and frequently about governmental corrections of the church than the reverse. To find a Lutheran theologian exploring the role the church may play in correcting governmental institutional evils through the lens of the Three Estates, one must spring forward 400 years to World War II. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has been sanctified in Lutheran hagiography for his resistance to the Nazi regime and his (albeit small) role in the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Less well known is his theological work, *Ethics*, which he prepared during his time as a double agent. In his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer intentionally follows in the footsteps of the reformer by applying Luther's pattern of inter-estate correction through the proper exercise of the other estates.[33]

The proper function of the church for both Bonhoeffer and Luther is that of proclamation. Where such proclamation takes place to sinful human beings, it takes the form of Law and Gospel. Where, however, such proclamation is directed not towards individual sinners but rather to institutions, the church's proclamation functions as a guiding law that informs the estates of their proper shape and function.[34] Sinful man is wont to view the accomplishments of the temporal estates as the sum total of a collective will, "concluding that it is owing to its own cleverness, reason, and strength that a community or dominion endures and thrives."[35] Luther teaches that those who occupy the institutions of home and government must recognize the divine power and purpose behind their role, even though the

estate demands that they "proceed as if there were no God and they had to rescue themselves and manage their own affairs."[36] It is only the proclamation of the church that informs these estates that they are, in fact, divinely ordered and established by God. They are not free to exceed their jurisdiction or neglect their duties.

Bonhoeffer explains that this proclamation by the Church cannot be aimed at a "Christianization" of the other estates into a theocracy of state or home. That itself would be to create an inter-estate disordering. Instead, the church calls on the government and home to act "in accordance with its own special task."[37] Thus, when the institutions that occupy the governmental estate no longer uphold justice, preserve order, or protect the innocent, it is the duty of the ecclesial estate to remind it of its divine obligations through its proclamation. Likewise, the church cannot remain silent when the governmental estate impinges on the jurisdiction of either the estate of the church or home, but it must seek to shepherd it into its proper sphere through its proclamation. Here Luther's treatise, *Temporal Authority*, stands as a venerable example of the church's proclamation to the governmental estate.[38] In addition, there are innumerable examples of the ecclesial estate's guidance to the proper ordering of the marriage estate including biblical examples such as Ephesians 5:21–6:9, the Small Catechism's Table of Duties, and modern sermon series about raising godly children. In each instance the ecclesial estate addresses the many disorders of the home and government by fulfilling its own divinely mandated responsibilities through its faithful proclamation.

Correction by the Oeconomia

There is a disappointing lack of theological reflection on the role the estate of marriage may play in the correction of government and church. This is all the more unfortunate given how, in our industrial and post-industrial context, the *oeconomia* has experienced an unprecedented expansion of influence. The cottage industries and peasant farmers that were the backbone of the medieval economy have been replaced by an international network of businesses that steer a global supply chain of resource extraction, labor, and consumers. It is hard to deny that the *oeconomia* now wields global influence, and many have sought to leverage this influence to correct institutional abuses. Boycotts such as the film industry's recent exodus from Georgia in the wake of a series of new laws is an example of this estate, within its proper sphere, pressuring the government to correct a perceived abuse. A similar pattern plays out in miniature again and again in congregations throughout the nation in which congregants, rightly or wrongly, withhold their contributions to punish a perceived erring pastor.

Although the *oeconomia* possesses a comparatively wider scope than its co-estates, in a capitalistic setting, its most powerful tool for inter-estate correction is the economy. Such was not always the case. During the West's eighteenth-century transition from a preindustrial to an industrial society, many European countries saw the development of what was then and still is described as the *fourth* estate: the independent press.[39] The ability of the independent press to shape public opinion and so influence the wheels of power outside the established political and ecclesial channels rightly earned it a place alongside of the princes and bishops; however, as simply another avenue of man's participation in creation, the press theologically falls under the *oeconomia*. Thus, the estate of the home, once barred from the

levers of power by the reality of medieval Europe, now made its influence felt powerfully through an independent press. Contemporary manifestations of the *oeconomia* correcting its partner estates through the independent press and investigative journalism are legendary. The Panama Papers, Wiki-Leaks, the Iran-Contra scandal, and the Boston Globe's work on the Roman Catholic Sex Scandal are all recent historical examples of the *oeconomia* addressing institutional evils of its partner estates. Unfortunately, much of the theological reflection stimulated by these revelations focused solely on the scandals themselves and not on the structures and methods that brought them to light. These scandals undoubtedly deserve every ounce of theological reflection offered, especially those that touch on institutional evils within the church, but this singular focus has left a rich well of theological possibilities untapped. What is the theological significance of exposing evil before the world? What transparency (if any) is owed by the *ecclesia* and the *politia* to the *oeconomia*? What shape might a theology of journalism take? Disappointingly, an investigation into these topics would greatly exceed the room allotted for this paper.

Intra-Estate Correction

We may now turn our attention to the challenge of institutional evils contained within a single estate. Unlike the previous examples, institutional disorders that do not impinge on the jurisdiction of the other estates are, to a certain degree, insulated from their correction. Should an institution of the ecclesial estate begin to execute murderers the governmental estate refuses to punish, then it has overstepped its own mandate. The ecclesial estate would have only created an inter-estate disordering without correcting the governmental estate's intra-estate disordering. Then is there no recourse for a disorder of an estate when its institutional authorities refuse to fulfill its obligations? Not at all. Luther provides a theologically responsible framework to address intra-estate disordering through what could be described as "emergency vocations."

Although the Three Estates are for Luther a divinely ordered pattern of creation, they are not immutable. In his 1529 treatise *On War Against the Turk*, Luther traces out the antitheses which threaten to destroy the estates:

> As I said, lies destroy the spiritual estate; murder, the temporal; disregard of marriage, the estate of matrimony. Now if you take out of the world *veram religionem*, *veram politiam*, *veram oeconomiam*, that is, true spiritual life, true temporal government, and true home life, what is left in the world but flesh, world, and devil?[40]

When an institution by its lies, murder, or disregard of marriage threatens the very existence of an estate, it triggers for Luther a special type of emergency. Luther employs numerous metaphors when he describes these emergency situations: a town fire; a mad dog; and,

17th century illustration of a fire in Tiverton, England in 1612. Public Domain.

for the Pope who undermines all three estates simultaneously, a werewolf (*Beerwolf*).[41] In each metaphor Luther explains that the normal vocational boundaries do not apply. Nature itself demands immediate action. "Would it not be unnatural if a fire broke out in a city, and everybody were to stand by and let it burn on and on and consume everything that could burn because nobody had the authority of the mayor?" Rather, it is the duty of each citizen to raise the alarm and do what he can to extinguish the blaze.[42] Because the Three Estates *are* the correct ordering of creation, their preservation is of paramount importance. Those who are equipped to do something may, in such emergencies, usurp the authority of the institutions of an estate by filling an "emergency vocation."

Emergency Vocations

We may now return to Luther's "To the Christian Nobility." After tearing down the papal claims of the superiority of the spiritual estate over the temporal estate, Luther called on the princes *qua* princes to exercise their duty to punish the secular injustices perpetrated by the clergy. Luther then secures the right of every Christian to interpret scripture by tearing down the second wall. However, it is Luther's attack on the third wall that is most relevant to our discussion of intra-estate disordering. Luther identified this third wall as the claim that the pope alone may call a council. By refusing to call a council to address papal abuses, the ecclesial authorities avoided reform. For Luther, this gridlock rose to the level of an emergency. Luther called on the princes to intervene; however, not in the same way he had before. In this second appeal Luther calls on the princes not as princes, but as fellow Christians who possess the Priesthood of all Believers. Drawing on the image of a town on fire, Luther explained that, when the spiritual authorities neglect their duty to call a church council and so leave abuses unchecked, it becomes the responsibility of "the first man who is able" to convene a council.[43] The Christian princes were the perfect individuals to accomplish this goal because they conveniently wielded enormous power and wealth.[44] They were not, however, to call a council in their role as a prince, but as baptized Christians.[45] Luther is even more explicit in his 1528 Saxon Visitation letter. In the letter Luther beseeches his elector, John the Steadfast, to reestablish episcopal oversight for the evangelical churches by appointing parish visitors. Again, Luther requests that Elector John appoint parish visitors not in his role as prince, but "out of Christian love (since he is not obligated to do so as a temporal sovereign) and by God's will for the benefit of the gospel and the welfare of the wretched Christians in his territory."[46] The Elector, as the Christian best equipped for the challenge, is to fill the office of "bishop," not on the basis of a regular call, but out of necessity. Here and in his appeal "To the Christian Nobility," Luther lays out a pattern for individuals to supersede both their vocations and the vocations of others during emergency situations.

The emergency sanctioning of vocational supersession and the allowance of "emergency vocations" may also be seen in Luther's treatment of crises within the governmental estate. Commenting on the German Peasant Revolt, Luther again calls to mind the image of a destructive fire and the emergency vocations thrust upon all those within the estate. "For if a man is in open rebellion, everyone is both his judge and his executioner; just as when a fire starts, the first man who can put it out is the best man to do the job."[47] This is not a sanctioning of vigilante justice. Such emergency vocations are only permissible in true

crisis that threaten the very estate. "For rebellion is not just simple murder; it is like a great fire, which attacks and devastates a whole land … and turns everything upside down, like the worst disaster."[48] In the same way that any Christian who is able to call a council in an emergency situation should do so regardless of their office within the ecclesial estate, Luther sanctions the supersession of normal vocational boundaries within the governmental estate when it is threatened.[49]

Finally, Luther provides a glimpse of what such "emergency vocations" may look like within the estate of marriage, albeit more implicitly and without the apocalyptic flavor he gives the previous examples. Luther describes the abusive father who forces his child into celibacy or otherwise denies the child the necessities of life as "no father at all."[50] While the temporal authorities are under obligations to correct such injustice, the child himself is able to supersede his vocational responsibilities towards his father within the home estate and treat his parents "as if they were not parents at all, or were dead."[51] In doing so the child takes on the responsibilities the parents had towards the child to care for himself and find a mate.[52] Luther does not root such drastic action in the freedom of the child to marry whomever they please. Instead, the child is only permitted to supersede their vocational responsibility because such parental actions undermine the entire estate of marriage.[53] The case of the abused child is a "micro-emergency" that sanctions vocational supersession.

The Necessity of the Three Estates

If an inter-estate evil is corrected by the proper functioning of institutions from the other two estates, and intra-estate evil is corrected by "emergency vocations" within the respective estate, what essential function does the doctrine of the Three Estates provide in correcting institutional evils? To put the question more simply, "What use is the doctrine of the Three Estates if institutional evils are ultimately corrected by vocations of one kind or another?" From the outset, it must be noted that the doctrine of the Three Estates is not designed to replace another doctrine. Without the doctrine of vocation, the Three Estates are as equally inept at addressing institutional evils as vocation is without the doctrine of the Three Estates. Rather, the Three Estates function as a doctrinal supplement. It provides a more wholistic theological view of the challenges institutional evils pose.

First, the Three Estates serves as a counterbalance to the powerful limiting force inherent in the doctrine of vocation. It has long been recognized that the doctrine of vocation often nurtures an atomistic understanding of one's responsibilities. According to this understanding, a Christian's responsibility extends only as far as their vocation. A Christian father is responsible for the wellbeing of his own children but not the children of his neighbor. Whether this limiting force is inherent in vocation, or if the doctrine is simply susceptible to this misreading, several theologians have recognized this weakness and have attempted to counteract this limiting impulse by supplementation. Gustaf Wingren suggests "The Sovereignty of Love" as a creative force that would open vocation to "fresh and unsuspected perspectives for life's activities."[54] Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, recommends a "free responsibility" to Christ that would equip one to distinguish between correct and incorrect extensions and restrictions of responsibility.[55] Unfortunately, such suggestions undercut what is perhaps the greatest ethical strength of vocation: its ability to direct the care

of neighbor into concrete relationships. Vocation conforms Christ's general command to "love one's neighbor" to the realities of one's life. To smear the edges of the doctrine to make it more widely applicable undermines this great strength. The Three Estates, however, provide a powerful expansive counterforce without diluting the focusing force of vocation. It simply opens a wider field in which this focusing force may operate. The Three Estates encompass the entirety of human life as well as each person individually. When paired with vocation, the doctrine of the Three Estates is able to orient an individual not only to his own vocation, but also to the entirety of human society.

Second, the estates frame and guide vocation and help clarify conflicting vocational responsibilities. The estates are the field in which an individual's vocations are operative, and so they establish a vocation's roles and limits. An individual must ensure the temporal wellbeing of his neighbor so long as he is operating within the governmental estate. However, once he begins to operate within the ecclesial estate, every action must be driven towards the proclamation of the word. The estates inform an individual which of their vocational responsibilities take precedence in a particular situation. This is all the more important in an emergency. How would one determine which of the myriad of potential "emergency vocations" a crisis requires? One must identify in which estate the emergency is occurring and employ an "emergency vocation" appropriate to that estate. An "emergency general" who preaches or an "emergency priest" who executes only further confuses the doctrine of vocation. The Three Estates provide clarity.

Finally, and perhaps most relevant to our contemporary challenges, the Three Estates provide a grammar for speaking theologically about moral evils that extend beyond the actions of a single individual. Once one fights through the ambiguous and varied terminology, Luther's treatment of the Three Estates provides a way to evaluate human structures beyond the humans that operate them. An estate is more than the sum of its parts. God established the three estates at creation, and they continue to possess a reality distinct from the institutions that fill it. In this way they are as equally creatures of God as man is. The estates certainly exist differently than man, but they nevertheless exist as creatures with particular characteristics. Likewise, as a manifestation of an estate, an institution possesses a "being" that is more than a legal fiction or an abstract way to describe the organization of individuals. They are the eco-systems of human life through which God orients, propagates, and protects his creation. Where their divine mandates are neglected or disordered, a true evil occurs. Christians must be able to respond appropriately to these evils, and the Three Estates provide a framework from which to operate.

Endnotes

1 Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 188.

2 Michael Richard Laffin, *The Promise of Martin Luther's Political Theology: Freeing Luther from the Modern Political Narrative* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 160.

3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 256-257.

4 Martin Luther, "Disputation on the Three Hierarchies," trans. Wilhelm Linss, *Lutheran Forum* 51, no. 2 (2017), 37.

5 LW 37:364

6 LW 13:369.

7 Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 324–25.

8 LW 1:103.
9 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 208.
10 Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 122-123.
11 Perhaps an English word that more closely captures the scope of the estate of the church in the modern context would be religion. In medieval Europe, in which the doctrine of the Three Estates was developed, the Christian church was functionally synonymous with the estate of the church.
12 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., T*he Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 388, hereafter Kolb-Wengert.
13 LW 21:110.
14 LW 45:322.
15 Bonhoeffer divides *oeconomia* into two different estates—marriage and labor—and treats both as equal co-estates of church and government. For our purposes both estates of marriage and labor will be treated as the single estate of *oeconomia*, Ethics, 206.
16 LW 1:104.
17 Risto Saarinen, "Ethics in Luther's Theology: The Three Orders," in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity*, ed. Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen, vol. 57 (Norwell, MA: Springer, 2005), 197.
18 LW 1:104.
19 The first reference Luther makes to a concrete instance of civil government is the city Cain built (LW 1:294); however, the administration of the government was in some way given to Adam before the fall (LW 1:94) and possessed by him consciously even if not exercised (LW 1:246). In the Large Catechism Luther roots the authority of the government in "Fatherhood," although he does not explain when or how this derivation occurred (LC I, 141-150).
20 James M Estes, "Luther on the Role of Secular Authority in the Reformation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (2003), 199.
21 LW 44:126.
22 Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 3.
23 LW 44:127.
24 LW 44:131.
25 Estes, *"Luther on the Role of Secular Authority,"* 202.
26 Luther, "*Three Hierarchies,*" 40.
27 Lewis W. Spitz, "Luther's Ecclesiology and His Concept of the Prince as Notbischof," *Church History* 22, no. 2 (1953), 127.
28 LW 44:157.
29 LW 45:389.
30 LW 45:357.
31 LW 45:368.
32 LW 45:356.
33 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 196-197.
34 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 342.
35 LW 45:328.
36 LW 45:331.
37 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 342.
38 LW 45:75–129
39 Julianne Schultz, *Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability and the Media*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.
40 LW 46:182.
41 LW 44:137; LW 46:50; Luther, "Disputation on the Three Hierarchies," 41.
42 LW 44:137.
43 LW 44:137.
44 Robert Rosin argues that Luther called on the princes to fulfill the role of "emergency bishops" to the exclusion of those who did not possess temporal authority. Only the governmental authorities could fill the emergency vocation by virtue of their role as the "patrons of a kind of social family" "Bringing Forth Fruit: Luther on Social Welfare," in *A Cup of Cold Water: A Look at Biblical Charity*, ed. Robert Rosin and Charles P Arand, (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1996), 120. While it is true that Luther views the temporal authorities as *patres patriae* (LC 142), Luther does not single out the princes on this basis. Rather, Luther is motivated by practicality. Speaking about the need to call a council, Luther states, "No one can do this so well as the temporal authorities," implying that, in different circumstances, others may be better equipped. Additionally, Luther later encourages both the temporal authorities and the "ordinary people" to take up conciliar matters if the ecclesial authorities are unwilling, LW 44:137, 139.
45 LW 44:137.
46 Later in the letter Luther argues that the Elector may be obligated to force the compliance of those who resist the parish visitors. However, this is done to prevent "strife, rioting, and rebellion" and so is within the jurisdiction of the Elector's duties as prince and not as an "emergency bishop," LW 40:271–73.
47 LW 46:50.
48 LW 46:50.
49 Charles P. Arand sets forth a vision of how the institutions of the church may address intra-estate disordering within the governmental sphere in an analogous way to the princes acting as "emergency bishop." He suggests that when within the governmental estate "the established orders have simply broken down or are not-existent as in the case of large-scale disasters like typhoons, famines, and earthquakes or smaller scale crises where the infrastructure has broken down such as in the inner city," the church may step in as an "emergency prince." There are several historical examples of this happening. Perhaps most dramatic of them is Pope Leo's negotiations with Attila for the safety of the city of Rome. The Confessions do allow for the possibility of a single institution operating within multiple estates as long as the authorities are not confused and the Two Kingdoms are kept distinct (AC XVIII, 21–29). Arand's warning that "this work will more or less be a temporary measure" should be heeded if the emergency measures of Pope Leo do not eventually transform through time and tradition into the abuses the Reformation sought to correct, "Considering Biblical Charity within a Creedal Framework," in *A Cup of Cold Water*, 195.
50 LW 45:391.
51 LW 45:390.
52 It is difficult to consider this particular instance of vocational supersession an "emergency vocation," for it does not establish the child in vocational relationship to a neighbor except, perhaps, to a future spouse, LW 45:391–392.
53 LW 45:390–391.
54 Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 147.
55 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 252–58.

Impassioned Wonder: Theosis and the Place of Reason in Gregory Nazianzen's Theological Orations

Ben Vanderhyde

Reason, Revelation and Transcendence

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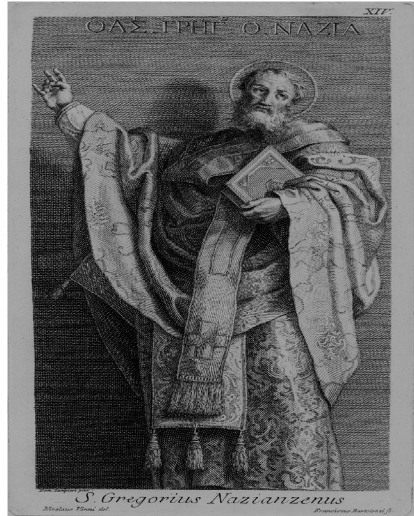
The theologian is situated between two realities: the revelation of God and the transcendence of God. It would seem that all of theology should be a matter of reckoning with these two extremities. Without transcendence, we have no God. Without revelation we have neither starting point, nor guide, nor aim; theology becomes pointless speculation. We must know God, and yet, not know him. He must remain far beyond any language to describe or any image to depict, and yet, we must describe him. Theology lives in the middle of these, neither putting God into a box nor holding God above, out of reach. It would seem to be yet another paradox to maintain, another tension to hold in the balances. Say what can be said, so much and no more. And yet, the relationship between what is revealed of God and what is transcendent of God is in no way simple. That is in part because revelation is itself shrouded in mystery. "He came to his own and his own did not receive him" (John 1:14, NKJV). The incarnation, the light shining in the darkness, is itself the greatest mystery of human history, not a simplification of what was once transcendent. Revelation and transcendence remain inextricably bound up together. It is with a view toward this dynamic between revelation and transcendence that Gregory of Nazianzus gave his famous *Five Theological Orations* in the year 379 as part of the orthodox Nicene resistance in Arian-dominated Constantinople. These are some of the most important theological lectures in the history of the church, so important, in fact, that they prompted subsequent generations of the church to canonize Gregory as the "Theologian," a title only ever given to one other father of the church, Saint John the Evangelist himself.

In the second of these orations, Gregory quotes Plato as having said, "To know God is hard, to describe him impossible."[1] He sees Plato indicating subtly his own ability to ascend to knowledge of the transcendent, though not without great difficulty. Gregory turns it around and says that, yes, to tell of God is impossible but *knowing* him is *even harder* (28.4).[2] In short, reason will not do as a starting point for the ascent. It was necessary for Gregory to suppress this Platonic overconfidence for comprehending the nature of God through philosophy, because the indiscriminate use of reason in the theological debates of this time had reached a fevered pitch in the Eunomians.

Gregory's primary objective in these orations was to refute this group of extreme

Arians who believed that the Son was unlike the Father and thus could not be consubstantial with him. Gregory pulls no punches in deriding their arguments:

> They delight in the "profane and vain babblings and contradictions of the Knowledge falsely so-called," [1 Tim 6:20] and in "strife of words" [1 Tim 6:4] .... I only wish they would display comparable energy in their actions: then they might be something more than mere verbal tricksters, grotesque and preposterous word-gamesters—their derisory antics invite derisive description. (27.1)



Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. By Francesco Bartolozzi after Domenichino. 19th century. Public domain.Public

Gregory has little sympathy for those who irreverently submit God to their sophistry. Their attempt to reach God apart from revelation is fated from the beginning.[3] But in the act of dismantling their arguments and exposing the absurdity of their conclusions, Gregory reveals his own earnest desire to know God. Gregory does not merely throw up his hands and despair of reason altogether in his appeal to Scripture and tradition. A properly functioning faculty of reasoning is, for him, intimately connected with his theology of the Trinity and not to be excluded. The Eunomians abuse reason and misuse it to the denigration of the Godhead. But in Gregory's view, faith, instead of cutting reasoning short, gives fullness to it.

This comes to expression in the doctrine of *theosis*, or deification, which features centrally in these orations. Gregory's rejection of the extreme Arian position comes to a head in rhetorical questions like, "If the Son is not God then how can he deify me?" *Theosis* indicates man's salvific participation in the divine nature (cf. 1 Pet 2:4), situating man's *telos* in God himself. "He became man that we might become God,"[4] as Athanasius put it. This essay seeks to demonstrate that *theosis* is a helpful lens through which to view the way of the theologian between what is known and what cannot be known, the way from revelation towards transcendence. In his *Theological Orations*, Gregory forges the path of the true philosopher-theologian, whose capacity for reason is grounded in the fact that he is created and restored into the image of the source of all reason.

In Gregory's trinitarian theology, a picture emerges of the relationship between God's revelation and transcendence. Gregory does not emphasize the revealed God to the exclusion of the transcendent God, taming him into a palatable God of the gospel. The revealed God and the transcendent God are not polar opposites in his mind.[5] Instead, the transcendent God is the one whom Gregory desires to know. He does not turn his back on the transcendent God in favor of the revealed God. The revealed God is the pinprick of light (28.17) which informs him and transforms him at the inception of his journey into the fulness of God's light. Like the refrain of the final chapter in C. S. Lewis' *The Last Battle,* the clarion call of *theosis* is a resounding "Further up and further in!"[6] Gregory can say, in solidarity with Paul,

> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:12–14)

Such an attitude, when applied to reason's pursuit of understanding, recognizes that striving will cease when, as Paul puts it, we no longer see in a mirror dimly but face to face and "know fully, even as [we] have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12). Acknowledging that reason has reached its limit, then, becomes acknowledgment of God's transcendence and the reality that we are not yet perfect. From this viewpoint, recognizing the limits of reason must not entail the abandonment of philosophy; rather, "it is the repentance of the human person before the face of the living God."[7]

What follows is not a systematic analysis of the *Theological Orations*. We intend, rather, to trace the outlines of Gregory's place for reason in theology. The first section is an exploration into the nuanced philosophical arguments Gregory had to engage in to defend Nicene theology. Significant for our purposes is the fact that Gregory does not relinquish reason to the heretics but enters into the philosophical, linguistical debates, in large part, to prove reason's inadequacy by itself for reaching knowledge of God by deflating the Eunomians' overconfidence in their sophisticated philosophy. The second section, the heart of this study, discusses the doctrine of *theosis* and shows how Gregory's view of the importance of reason in theology stems from it. *Theosis*, we maintain, is the linchpin in Gregory's understanding of reason, holding together both its limits and its striving for comprehending God. The final section shows Gregory's emphasis on the limits of reason in key rhetorical passages in the orations. It demonstrates how, for Gregory, reason's inability to pierce beyond a certain level is a matter of striving rather than laziness, a matter of piety rather than resignation. Although talk of *theosis* might sound strange or even alarming in our Western ears, we must engage Gregory's theology as it is and resist the urge to "domesticate" it.[8] This is not to say that we must adopt *theosis* into our own theological vocabulary, but coming to a better understanding of the way Gregory employs it will help us understand how the Theologian believes theologians should think about reason, revelation and transcendence.

Reason Is Incapable of Comprehending the Incomprehensible

Frederick Norris's distinction between the approaches of philosophic and rhetoric in the *Theological Orations* is a helpful framework in which to contrast Gregory's approach to reason with that of his opponents.[9] Norris observes that strict (Platonic) philosophy prefers logical syllogisms that proceed from premises to conclusions. The logic of syllogism pulls people along from one truth to the next. It forces them to give their consent to what must necessarily be true. For instance, (a) God is ingenerate (i.e., he has no origin); (b) the Son is generate (he originates from the Father); therefore (c) the Son is not God. Gregory calls this what it is, a word-game, but he also takes it in hand to demonstrate the fallacies of their argument.

In the *Theological Orations*, Gregory prefers not to develop his arguments on the basis of this strict, logical, deductive argumentation. Instead, he favors the less precise Aristotelian "enthymematic," inductive approach which Norris calls rhetorical philosophy.

The arguments from this approach are not necessarily able to be formally demonstrated through a logical chain of premises and conclusions. Rather, they appeal to the sensibilities of the audience. For instance, in his argument for the divinity of the Holy Spirit, Gregory asks: "Were the Spirit not to be worshipped, how could he deify me through baptism?" (31.28) He leaves it to his audience to confirm for themselves whether the Holy Spirit's deification is indeed an essential doctrine. Had Gregory, instead of asking a rhetorical question, stated this in the form of a logical syllogism, it might have followed something like this: (a) the Holy Spirit deifies me through baptism; (b) to deify me, he must be divine; therefore, (c) the Holy Spirit must be divine (and so he is to be worshipped). But this kind of cumbersome argumentation is exactly the kind of thing Gregory seeks to avoid throughout these orations, not least of all because these are orations and not treatises. Rhetoric, with its allowance for imprecision, is a much more suitable tool for asserting divine truth, shrouded, as it is, in mystery.

Despite this preference (which will come sharply into focus in the final section of our investigation), Gregory does not hesitate to enter into the philosophical debates spurred on by his opponents. He engages their syllogistic reasoning either in a negative way, to show the futility of reason for arriving at an understanding of God, or, in a positive way, to show the fallacies in his opponents' logic which lead them to their incorrect conclusions. For instance, in the second theological oration, he engages in this philosophical banter and proves, logically, that God is incorporeal, after which discussion he apologizes:

> Why have I made this digression, too labored, I dare say, for the general ear but in tune with the prevalent fashion in discussions, a fashion which despises noble simplicity and substitutes tortuous conundrums? I did it to make the tree known by its fruit. ... I wanted to make plain the point my sermon began with, which was this: the incomprehensibility of deity to the human mind and its totally unimaginable grandeur. (28.11)

The third oration is the densest of the theological orations, since Gregory challenges head-on many of the Eunomians' most tightly knit arguments. For example, as Gregory relates, they ask whether the Father begat voluntarily or involuntarily (29.6). They think this is an airtight dilemma for the Nicene theologian since he cannot both be God *and* do something involuntarily (be forced into it). On the other hand, if he begets voluntarily, then the Son, they say, is the son of his Father's *will*. Gregory shows the absurdity of this argument by applying it to human begetting. If we say that the human father's begetting was voluntary (to say otherwise would be absurd), then, says Gregory, "a few syllables have lost you your father—you are evidently a son of his will, not of your father" (29.6). Whether or not Gregory's rejoinder is completely airtight (though it seems to be), he has achieved his rhetorical objective of persuading his audience that the case of the Eunomians is not airtight.

One of the more famous Eunomian syllogisms which Gregory dismantles comes later in the third oration. At the heart of the radical Arian claim that the Son is subordinate to the Father was the claim that being unbegotten is essential to God's nature. We have already introduced the syllogism above which asserts that because the Son is begotten, he cannot be God. "Begottenness" is completely unlike "unbegottenness," rendering absurd the language of the Nicene Creed (*homoousios,* same substance). But, as this is a war of words, Gregory argues that the Eunomians fail to properly use language. They

treat "unbegottenness" and "God" as if they were identical when they, in fact, cannot be substituted for one another perfectly. God is a "relative" term while "unbegotten" is an absolute term.

> God and [unbegottenness] are not identical. If they were identical, the [Unbegotten] would have to be somebody's [Unbegotten], since God is somebody's God, seeing that logical equivalents can be used interchangeably. But what is it the [Unbegotten] *of*? God is somebody's—he is God *of* all. So how can "God" and [unbegotten] be identical? (29.12)

Gregory is not just splitting hairs here. Rigorously trained as he was in philosophy and rhetoric, Gregory simply refuses to cede the realm of reason to the heretics. Their philosophically nuanced demotion and dissolution of the Trinity meet their match in Gregory's formidable, equally nuanced rejoinder.

Be that as it may, Gregory does not think that this sort of argumentation is either appropriate or adequate for describing God in his essence. Questions like "How does the Father beget?" ought to have "the tribute of our reverent silence" (29.8). But the arguments must be answered, and Gregory is not afraid to get his hands dirty if only to prove both the ineptitude of the Eunomians at such rationalizing and the ineptitude of such rationalizing for conceiving of the transcendent God. Their arguments are futile, they "overthrow the faith," they "empty the mystery" (31.23). So much for reason's inability to ascend to knowledge of God. Now we proceed to Gregory's positive view of reason, founded in the theology of *theosis*.

Gregory the Theologian. Fresco from Kariye Camii, Istanbul. Copyrighted use.

Theosis: Revelation as the Foundation for Proper Reasoning

At the heart of Gregory's defense of Nicene orthodoxy against the radical Arians lies the doctrine of *theosis*. The denial of the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit struck at the heart of Gregory's soteriology, since the ability of both the Son and the Spirit to deify is contingent on their being equal with God. Thus, "if he has the same rank as I have, how can he make me God, how can he link me with deity?" (31.4) Scholars hold differing opinions with regard to how literal Gregory's language was. Was he, perhaps, merely exaggerating for rhetorical effect?[10] Was *theosis* just a metaphor?[11] McGuckin argues convincingly that Gregory's appropriation of *theosis* was a bold use of language.[12] This is a good place to start. *Theosis* is indeed a bold use of language. It elevates the *telos* of man to the level of the transcendent God. In the words of Athanasius, "He became man that we might become God."[13] In this respect, the salvation of man aims toward an end that is actually beyond our comprehension, just as God is incomprehensible in his essence. The imprecision of this bold theological phraseology fits right in with Gregory the rhetorician, who preferred to assert the orthodox faith and persuade his audience to faith, as opposed to arguing his audience into assent through syllogistic reasoning.

Before wrestling with the significant implications of what seems to be a blatant confusing of the creature and the creator, it is helpful to recognize that language of *theosis* has a sturdy basis in Scripture. The theological language of *theosis* grows out of the descriptions in Scripture of God's salvation of man. Psalm 82 is one famous example of such bold-sounding language: "I said 'You are gods, sons of the Most High all of you'" (Ps 82:6). Considering the implications of the relationship between a human father and his son, that Christians are God's children (Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26; Gal 4:7) or will become so (John 1:2) is itself a bold assertion. To what degree do the children share in the nature of the father? The Scripture passage which most strongly evinces *theosis* language appears to answer this question quite literally: "that you may become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:3–4). These and other Scriptural allusions supply the basis for subsequent expressions of salvation in terms of *theosis*.[14] Scholars are quick to observe the kinship between the Christian language of *theosis* and the Greek conception of *apotheosis*.[15] The teaching might easily conform to suspicions of a corruptive "Hellenization" of Christianity. That deification language was a deliberate appropriation of Greek thought[16] is possible, (probable, in the case of Gregory) just as the entire divine revelation occurs within a human context of culture and language. Gregory must have known about *apotheosis*, steeped as he was in the Greek tradition, but his career displays a strong desire to assert the superiority of the Christian religion to Greek religion and philosophy[17] even as he affirmed the helpfulness of the Greeks' achievements for Christians.[18]

Understanding Theosis

Now, the problem with this bold theological language is that it seems to blur the lines between creator and creature.[19] The question here is whether humanity ceases to be human as a result, whether deification is a process of becoming more divine and *less* human. This, of course, depends on another question: What does it mean to be human? If human nature is static, self-contained, able to be defined independently from its source, then *theosis* does indeed threaten to nullify human nature by making it into something new. However, since the early church, commentators on Genesis have seen human nature as inherently dynamic. Irenaeus says that Adam and Eve were in an infant state at creation with the implication that they would mature over time by means of divine nourishment.[20] Martin Luther, in solidarity with the scholastic tradition, recognized that "we were created for a better life in the future than this physical life would have been, even if our nature had remained unimpaired."[21] In view of such testimony, human nature need not be identified as static in its essence. This does not mean that humanity was not "good" (Gen 1:31) in its own right at creation, but the good of humanity was a changeable good in comparison with the changeless good of God. Again, if humanity lacked nothing outside of itself for being what it was created to be, then God's presence in the primordial garden and his conversation with the first man are difficult to explain. Man's relationship with God continues to be essential to what it means to be human. In short, growth into God by transformative participation in the life of God (i.e., *theosis*) is intrinsic to what it means to be fully human. The fall, then, can be understood as an "interruption" of the created process of *theosis*,[22] and redemption, a restoration of human nature to its "truly natural state:"[23] orientation towards God, worship of God, contemplation of God.

Theosis as the Source and Aim of Reason

As a lens, therefore, through which to view the divine *oikonomia*—creation, redemption, restoration—*theosis* locates the *telos* of humanity in God. In the theological orations, Gregory recognizes God as the source, aim and fulfilment of human reasoning. He is the source in that we are created in his image (Gen 1:26–27). The human mind and reason are his next of kin, Gregory says (28.17). He is the aim because reason leads man to look for the one who made all things according to reason and implanted reason in all things (28.16). He is the fulfillment because we will know him fully: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).

In this framework of *theosis*, humanity's *telos* is the life of the unknowable, transcendent God whose revelation in the incarnation forms the basis for man's ascent to God, Christ, the Logos, serving as the ladder for this ascent. Thus, for Gregory, any theology that contradicts the revelation of Scripture or dilutes God's transcendence overthrows salvation. Since his own *telos* is situated in the incomprehensible God, Gregory does not tolerate the Eunomians' emptying of God's mystery (27.2; 31.23). God's essence necessarily eludes all description and simply cannot be subjected to philosophical argumentation. Any attempt to conceive of God apart from revelation inevitably falls short. Just as God cannot be contained by any physical space, neither can he be contained by human thought or human language (28.10). Yet as he tears into the Eunomians for submitting God to their games of logic, Gregory does not denigrate but rather elevates what he sees as the proper struggle to comprehend and know God:

> Not that the deity resents our knowledge: resentment is a far cry from the divine nature, serene as it is, uniquely and properly "good," especially resentment of its most prized creation. What can mean more to the Word than thinking beings, since their very existence is an act of supreme goodness? It is not that he treasures his own fullness of glory, keeping his majesty costly by inaccessibility. (28.11)

The soul is oriented to seek after God. As McGuckin puts it, the human soul is, for Gregory, "ascentive and naturally restless in its quest for the God it relentlessly desires, because its desire can have no limit."[24] Gregory never disparages this struggle to know the unknowable God. Rather, this pursuit for comprehension of God is rooted for him in what it means to be human.

Recognizing Reason's Limits as Repentance

Gregory sees growth in the knowledge of God as inextricably bound to purification of the flesh: the character of the theologian "should be undimmed, making for a perception of light by light" (28.1). As Plato's classic maxim goes, "like knows like." We have already hinted at the relationship between illumination and purification above. Just as the Christian is never perfectly free from the passions of the flesh, there is always more which his reason cannot comprehend. As long as his sanctification is incomplete, his knowledge is too. This cuts both ways. Thus, on the basis of the Eunomian claim to "know all and teach all" (27.2), Gregory perceives their impiety and unrepentance. He asserts:

> [Theology] is not for all people, but only for those who have been tested and have found a sound footing in

> study, and, more importantly, have undergone, or at the very least are undergoing, purification of body and soul. For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun's brightness. (27.3)

The Spirit's deifying work through baptism and the life of the church comes sharply into focus here.[25] While Jesus reveals God and accomplishes man's deification "by the power of his incarnate manhood" (30.14), we still cannot know God without the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Holy Spirit brings to fulfillment in the Church what Christ makes potential in his incarnate work. Beeley puts it well:

> The Spirit's epistemic priority in bringing the new life of Christ into the Church is fundamental to Gregory's doctrine as a whole, for it makes the theologian's experience of the divine life a necessary part of the Trinitarian confession. It is only by the Spirit, who purifies and illuminates the theologian, that God can be understood, interpreted, and heard.[26]

Thus Gregory's objection to the Eunomians on the basis of *theosis* proves fundamental. If the Son and Spirit are not God, how can they impart knowledge of God, and how can they make us into God's image? We have shown how their philosophy sought to demote Son and Spirit. For Gregory, knowledge of God is bound together with the theologian's purification into the image of God.

The Limitations of Reason

Experiencing the *Five Theological Orations* (even as a reader), one cannot help but notice the importance, for Gregory, of reason reaching its limit. In contrast to the neat syllogistic reasoning of the Eunomians, Gregory speaks passionately of matters beyond his understanding, not only in the area of theology but also in science and the natural world. "All truth, all philosophy, to be sure, is obscure, hard to trace out" (28.21), he posits. But the limits of reason are more than a cautionary tale against philosophical optimism; they are essential to a theologian's sanctification. Gregory applies his most striking powers of rhetoric at precisely those moments when he seeks to assert the limits of reason for understanding divine truth.

In one place, Gregory makes a strong case for the incomprehensibility of God based on our inability to comprehend even what lies at our feet (28.29). In a lengthy but compelling stretch of oratory (28.21–31), Gregory takes his audience through various mysteries of our earthly existence: anthropology, zoology, cosmology, astronomy, meteorology. His relentless questioning effectively presses science and philosophy to their limits. Regarding humanity:

> What was the first stage in the process of molding and bringing us together in nature's workshop? What is the final stage of formative development? What is the urge to get and provide food? What is the instinct which brings us to the first springs and materials of life? What makes food nourishment for the body and speech for the soul? What is nature's spell, binding parents and children together? What goes to make stable variations of appearance, when an infinitely large number of special factors is involved? How does it come about that the same living thing is both mortal and immortal? Changing its state, it dies; giving birth makes it immortal. Now it goes away, now it comes back in again, channeled like a constant, flowing river. (28.23)

So it proceeds in each area of the sciences. Whether science might at that time or at some time in the future have an answer to any of these questions is beside the point. The point is, as he makes clear in this oration, observation of patterns and characteristics (i.e. science) is one thing, but knowledge of things in their essence and cause is quite another (28.29). We should note that Gregory had a high level of education including familiarity with such scientific works as Aristotle's *The History of Animals* and *The Generation of Animals*.[27] Hence his observations of the limits of reason were not based on ignorance but, in fact, on knowledge and the experience of reasoning reaching its limit.

The revelation of Scripture is the only true grounds for human knowledge about God. The evidence for Gregory's high view of Scripture is overwhelming: in just these five orations alone, he makes over five hundred Scriptural allusions.[28] Here too, the human mind reaches its limit in comprehending the divine revelation. In fact, Gregory says, "theology is fuller, and so harder, with more counter-arguments, tougher solutions, than other philosophy" (28.21). He identifies with Solomon, Paul and David, who all sought to understand the wisdom of God.

> Paul tries to get there—I do not mean to God's nature (that he knew to be quite impossible) but only to God's judgments. Paul found no way through, no stopping-place in his climb, since intellectual curiosity has no clear limit and there is always some truth left to dawn on us. The marvel of it all—I share his feelings as he closes his argument with impassioned wonder at the sort of things he calls "the wealth and depth of God" [Rom 11:33] in acknowledgment of the incomprehensibility of God's judgments. (28.21)

Recognizing the limits of our understanding in theological matters was of utmost importance in Gregory's debates with the Eunomians. On the basis of Scripture and its descriptions of Christ's subordination to the Father, they asserted that the two could not consist of the same nature (30.14). In response, Gregory pounds home the divinity and humanity of Jesus, juxtaposing human aspects of his life with divine aspects, maintaining the paradox boldly and unapologetically in a particularly beautiful bit of oratory:

> He whom presently you scorn was once transcendent, over even you. He who is presently human was incomposite. He remained what he was; what he was not, he assumed. No "because" is required for his existence in the beginning, for what could account for the existence of God? But later he came into being because of something, namely your salvation, yours, who insult him and despise his Godhead for that very reason, because he took on your thick corporeality. Through the medium of the mind he had dealings with the flesh, being made that God on earth, which is Man: Man and God blended. They became a single whole, the stronger side predominating, in order that I might be made God to the same extent that he was made man. He was begotten—yet he was already begotten—of a woman. And yet she was a virgin. That it was from a woman makes it human, that she was a virgin makes it divine. On earth he has no father, but in heaven no mother. All this is part of his Godhead. He was carried in the womb, but acknowledged by a prophet as yet unborn himself, who leaped for joy at the presence of the Word for whose sake he had been created. He was wrapped in swaddling bands, but at the Resurrection he unloosed the swaddling bands of the grave. He was laid in a manger, but was extolled by angels, disclosed by a star and adored by Magi. Why do you take offense at what you see, instead of attending to its spiritual significance? (29.19)

It is not theological laziness or the neglect of science that prompts these flights of apophatic theology, in which language is shown to fall short of capturing the essence of truth. It is

philosophy and theology operating at full capacity. It is the recognition of mind-blowing truth breaking into reality both in creation and in the incarnation.

Theosis, as a lens through which to view the divine *oikonomia*, places the *telos* of man beyond the comprehension of man, in the life of God. Just as man cannot comprehend God, he cannot comprehend his own destiny. The degree to which he cannot comprehend God is the same degree to which he cannot reflect the divine image. As one who is connected to the deifying power of the incarnation in the deifying power of the Holy Spirit through the baptismal life of the church, the theologian strives to understand God and his unsearchable judgments and ways because he is being made more perfectly into the image from which his reason and understanding sprung. The more he strives to understand, the more his understanding brushes up against the incomprehensibility of God, the more he discovers what is opposed to God in himself. "God reveals himself to our limited understanding while ever remaining transcendent so as to create a dynamic of growth that moves us through yearning and wonder to ever greater degrees of purification and illumination."[29] Thus reason's place, for the theologian, lies in striving to know God (based on the revelation of Scripture and not apart from it) and in discovering the limitations of reason through such striving. The result is a theology that is at once bold and repentant, seeking to know the unknowable God and relying on him entirely.

Conclusion

The revelation of the transcendent God is far more true and far more reasonable than the theologian can ever understand. Nevertheless, Christ and the Scriptures that testify to him bring the unknowable God into the world to be known by the world, restoring man's likeness to God and enabling him to know God. In his *Five Theological Orations*, Gregory sees Christ as the cleft in the rock through which he catches only the slightest glimpse of God (28.3). As such, the opponents' claim "to know all and teach all" (27.2) is an emptying of the mystery in Gregory's view, an overthrowing of the faith. Gregory's defense of the incomprehensibility of God calls theologians of every time and place to approach the revelation of God not as the end of the mystery—as if we knew everything we needed to know—but as the starting place on an upward journey into the image and knowledge of God. How often does church feel like a place in which everything is known, and, consequently, where nothing matters? Perhaps Norris is on to something when he suggests that poetry, art and oration might be far more compelling and useful for today than the post-Enlightenment theological treatises of logic and pure philosophy.[30] Gregory's orations call us to wonder at the mystery we are engulfed in, which the image of the invisible God has pulled us up into by his appearance and enduring presence. Gregory calls us to expect revelation to be the sort of thing that leaves us with eyes shining, because that is exactly what it does.

Endnotes

1 See Plato *Timaeus*, 28c.

2 Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham trans., *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius,* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).

3 One hears echoes of this in Luther's Genesis commentary: "But those who want to reach God apart from these coverings exert themselves to ascend to heaven

without ladders (that is, without the Word)," LW 1:14.

4 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione,* 54.

5 Gerhard Forde approaches transcendence and revelation from this perspective, concluding that God "above you" is always a God of wrath, whereas God revealed is a God of the gospel in "Naming the One Who is Above Us," in *Speaking the Christian God*, Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 119. Luther applied this distinction pastorally for those who saw chaos and injustice in creation and could logically conclude that there is no God or that God is evil, *The Bondage of the Will,* trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2000), 315–16.

6 C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 198–211.

7 Andrew Louth, "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions,* Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 43.

8 Michael Christensen reflects on this tendency among modern theologians, "The Problem, Promise, and Process of *Theosis"* in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 29.

9 Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 17–39.

10 Vladimir Kharlamov makes this argument in "Rhetorical Application of *Theosis* in Greek Patristic Theology," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 126.

11 Norman Russell makes this argument in T*he Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 213–214; 222–225.

12 McGuckin points to *Orat*. 11.5 and *Orat*. 14.23 as instances of this.

13 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 54.

14 Jordan Cooper gives an ample overview of the relevant Scriptural bases for deification in *Christification: A Lutheran Approach to Theosis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 48–72.

15 McGuckin explains *apotheosis* as "humans, especially heroes, great sages, and latterly emperors, being advanced to the rank of deity," "Strategic Adaptation," 95.

16 McGuckin, "Strategic Adaptation," 95.

17 Beeley, *On the Trinity and Knowledge of God*, 4.

18 Frederick Norris, "Gregory Contemplating the Beautiful: Knowing Human Misery and Divine Mystery through and Being Persuaded by Images," in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, Joestein Børtnes and Tomas Hägg eds. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), 19.

19 Christensen recognizes this to be the enduring problem behind *theosis*, providing a brief survey of the psychological, philosophical, and theological implications of "creatures becoming gods," "The Problem, Promise, and Process of *Theosis,*" 28.

20 *Adversus Haereses* 4.38.1.

21 LW 1:56.

22 Beeley, *On the Trinity and Knowledge of God*, 119.

23 Andrew Louth, "The Place of *Theosis*," 39.

24 J. A. McGuckin, "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians," in Partakers of the Divine Nature, 103.

25 Not to be forgotten is the fact that Gregory is the first church father to make the bold assertion that the Holy Spirit is God, consubstantial with the Father, a thing the formers of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 380–381 were not willing to do.

26 Beeley, *On The Trinity and Knowledge of God*, 180.

27 Norris, *Faith Gives Fulness to Reasoning*, 124.

28 We are indebted to Frederick William and Lionel Wickam for chasing all of these down. *On God and Christ*.

29 Beeley, *On The Trinity and Knowledge of God,* 111.

Arius as a Figure in Church History

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Church history, much like any other kind of history, is an exercise in meaning-making and identity creation. As Anglican theologian, Rowan Williams, writes regarding Church history, "We begin with a sense of identity that is in some way fragile or questionable, and we embark on the enterprise of history to make it clearer and more secure. In the process, of course, definitions may change a good deal, but the aim is to emerge with some fuller sense of who we are."[1] This is quite obviously true when we tell stories about the heroes of the faith: Irenaeus, Martin Luther, C. F. W. Walther, and so on, but it is no less true when we tell stories about the villains of the faith, that is, heretics. The church's identity and doctrine have been shaped in no small part due to her reaction to heretics. This is why heretics make up a significant part of the way Christians retell their own history, whether at an academic or popular level. Therefore, anyone who participates in retelling the story of the church does well to pay attention even to how they tell the story of heretics to ensure that the telling of these stories serves the church.

No figure is reckoned to be *the* quintessential and paradigmatic arch-heretic quite like Arius of Alexandria. Athanasius himself expresses it this way: "But this one heresy, called the Arian...has now emerged as forerunner of the Antichrist."[2] Later historians and theologians, such as John Henry Newman writing in the early nineteenth century, have followed Athanasius' lead and have portrayed "Arianism" as the pinnacle and recapitulation of all the heresies that have come before it.[3] Thus, we see that the story of Arius possesses a symbolic value in church historiography. Arius is not just one heretic among many. He stands for something more significant. He represents the pinnacle of the heretical enterprise itself.

However, the church no longer finds herself in open conflict with those who espouse the theology of Arius, Jehovah's Witnesses notwithstanding (more on them below). The church does not need to understand Arianism so that it can do what Athanasius did. She is in a different situation. Instead, church historians seek to understand the Arian error because the church rightly wants to guard herself against this heresy and its attendant errors cropping up again. This is why church historians often unwittingly find themselves "projecting on to...[Arianism] whatever theological or ecclesiological tenets currently represent the opposition to a Christian mainstream in which the scholar and interpreter claims to stand."[4] In other words, theologians of all stripes often find that these ancient heretics have an uncanny similarity to their own opponents. Now, regardless of whether these theologians are correct in their assessments, it certainly makes for a compelling argument

Published by Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary, 2022

against their opponents. After all, who wants to side with a modern-day Arius? This is another way in which Arius (and other heretics) possess symbolic value for church historians.

This is part of the reason why one finds such a proliferation of different approaches to Arius among church historians. An accurate portrait of Arius as a figure and theologian is notoriously difficult to reconstruct, not merely because the sources are scant and not always trustworthy, but also because, for church historians, this question is not merely an arcane historical question about a long-dead Egyptian presbyter. This question also has symbolic value for the church today as she seeks to remain faithful.

Arius of Alexandria. 1493. Public domain.

Therefore, this essay does not seek to give another reconstruction of the historical figure of Arius and his theology, although certain points will be made in this regard. Rather, this essay is interested in discussing Arius as a figure in church historiography. To do this, I will discuss in-depth how Arius has been treated in recent historiography and will offer suggestions for how Arius might be approached in a genuinely ecclesial or church-centered historiography as a case study. This essay will seek to show that church historiography is rightly interested in the symbolic significance of Arius and other heretics as theological figures and that, because of this, the church of the present day is best served when she pursues a portrait of Arius and other heretics that is simultaneously *accurate* and *sympathetic*. To be accurate means to present a portrait that is in line with what can be known on the basis of the evidence available; it is to present a reasonable construction based on the available data. To be sympathetic does not mean to make heretics appear likeable or attractive. Rather, it means to treat such figures fairly, to recognize that almost nobody wants to be a heretic. Even heretics believe they are preserving the truth and are typically motivated by that pursuit even if they end up in heresy.

Church Historiography

But what exactly does this essay mean by "church historiography"? Let this definition suffice, "church historiography" refers not merely to history written by those who are Christians nor to history about the church, but to history written in and for the church, that is, history written within the interpretive community of the church and in the service of the church. It does not attempt to be purely neutral or objective. It is an intentionally and unapologetically ideological historiography or, better yet, a theological historiography. This is in many ways at odds with modern western historiography, which prizes neutrality and objectivity. However, church historiography is unbothered by this because the church cannot be neutral when it comes to the telling of her own story.[5]

To be sure, church historiography is not the only way to approach the history of the church. For example, biblical scholar Bart Ehrman exemplifies a rather different approach.

Ehrman presents a picture of early Christianity that consists of a diverse group of perspectives and traditions which are only later consolidated into what we call orthodoxy: "Virtually all forms of modern Christianity...go back to *one* form of Christianity that emerged as victorious from the conflicts of the second and third centuries. This one form of Christianity decided what was the 'correct' Christian perspective... and... what forms of Christianity would be marginalized, set aside, destroyed."[6] Likewise, some would also tell the story of the Arian controversy in these terms, that it is not a story of the truth of the faith triumphing over heresy, but about power factions and politics. Orthodoxy is written by the victors, they would say.

One certainly could dispute the accuracy of Ehrman's approach, but the primary problem for church historiography is not the potential inaccuracy of Ehrman's narrative, but that it proceeds from assumptions that are at odds with the assumptions of church historiography. Now, this is not to say that the assumptions of church historiography are merely arbitrary or are just as good as any other historiographical perspective. This approach to historiography does not consign us to relativism. There are arguments to be had and maybe even minds to be changed. Some people really are right, and others really are wrong. However, we cannot have these arguments from outside of our perspectives, and we should not attempt to do so. Church historiography understands this and proceeds accordingly.

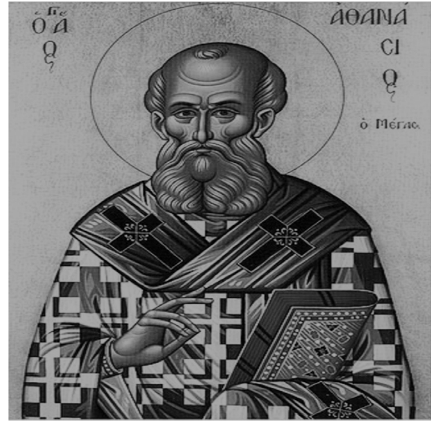
A church historiographer studies the heretics not merely as marginalized theology or as the history of ideas, but as instances of opposition to the truth of the faith with present relevance to the church today who seeks to guard and protect this truth. Church historiographers will seek to be accurate in their assessment even of heretics because they serve the "God of truth"(Isa 65:16). The truth of God has no part in falsehood. To mingle the truth of God with falsehood merely because it is convenient or helps paint the portrait one would like is to forget that the Lord of the church is himself truth (John 14:6) and that the Devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). Church historiographers will seek to be sympathetic in their assessment even of heretics for two reasons: 1) Since unsympathetic portraits tend to present oversimplified portraits driven by the historian's own agenda, they are quite likely to be inaccurate. Sympathy is helpful in the pursuit of accuracy since it encourages nuance and complexity. Sympathy is not a guarantee of accuracy. There certainly are a number of sympathetic portraits of Arius that are also inaccurate. 2) Sympathetic portraits are more conducive to the critical reflection necessary for the church to avoid the errors of heretics in the future. This will be explored further below.

Methodological Problems in the Study of Arius

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to give a brief account of the methodological problems inherent in any reconstruction of Arius. These issues are what make it difficult for church historians to give an *accurate* picture of Arius.

Our only certain and complete texts from Arius himself are three short letters written to Alexander of Alexandria, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and Constantine.[7] We possess potential fragments from Arius' work, the *Thalia*, in two quotations from Athanasius' *Orations Against the Arians*. However, it is difficult to determine whether Athanasius is

quoting Arius exactly, paraphrasing Arius, or something else. In any case, the fragments are removed from their original context, which makes it hard to judge how these statements fit into the larger framework of Arius' theology. As Williams points out, "We can never be sure that the theological *priorities* ascribed to Arius by his opponents were his own, even if his *statements* are transmitted correctly."[8] It may well be that Athanasius is picking the most objectionable parts of the *Thalia*, not necessarily the most *representative*. Of course, this does not mean that Athanasius is being reckless or irresponsible. Historian Charles Kannengiesser is right to point out that we should not judge Athanasius for merely adhering to the standard practices of his own time and polemical context.[9] In ancient rhetoric and polemics, exact quotations and polite decorum were not expected the way modern people are accustomed to.



Icon of Athanasius of Alexandria. Public domain.

These difficulties with primary sources lead to further methodological issues. For example, there is little agreement about how trustworthy Athanasius and others are in their treatment of Arius. Williams is quite critical of the reliability of some of the Athanasian quotations[10] while Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh tend to receive Athanasius' statements far less critically in their study of Arius.[11] The result is twofold: not only can historians not agree on what constitutes the core historical data, but they also cannot agree on how to interpret the data. The data requires a great deal of judgement calls and critical evaluations. And while this is indeed true for any historical figure, it is especially true for Arius because, as Kannengiesser writes, "*We reach the essential Arius through Athanasius*, and in no other way."[12] Our best source for Arius' own thought is a hostile source. Until a copy of Arius' *Thalia* and some of Arius' sermons are discovered in a long-forgotten corner of the Egyptian desert, Athanasius remains our best source for Arius' theology.

Finally, a further difficulty is the complex relationships between various theologians in the Arian controversy. For our purposes, the primary issue is that "Arianism" is in large part a rhetorical invention of Athanasius.[13] The "Arians" were, in reality, a rather diverse group of Anti-Nicenes. It was unlikely many of these figures were influenced by Arius or even agreed with him on much. Of course, this inevitably complicates the matter for church historians, who must distinguish between Arius as the figure who began a theological conflict in Alexandria and the later Arianism which Athanasius and others fought against.

Portraits of Arius

But how have actual historians overcome these difficulties and reconstructed Arius and his theology? To be sure, there may be as many reconstructions of Arius as there are historians doing the reconstructing. Therefore, this section will give a selective survey of patterns among important attempts to understand Arius as a theological figure in the history of the church.

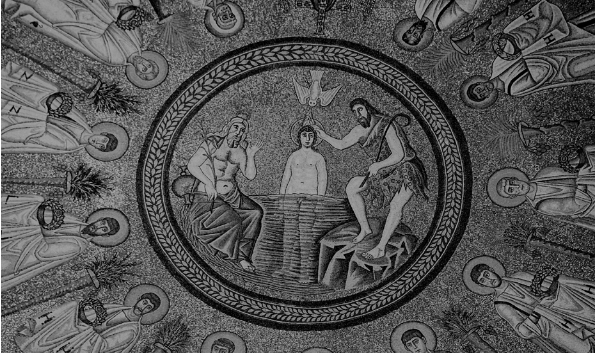
Many scholars spend a great deal of attention determining Arius' influences and where he fits within the theological divisions of his day. There is a particular focus on whether Arius was more influenced by the more allegorically-minded Alexandrian school or the more literally-minded Antiochene school. How Arius could have been influenced by Alexandria is quite clear considering this is where he served as a presbyter. The potential connection with Antioch is not quite so obvious. In Arius' letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, he calls Eusebius a "fellow-Lucianite," referring to Lucian of Antioch.[14] Many have concluded from this that Arius studied in Antioch under Lucian, but it is far from certain that this is what Arius means.[15] Even still, Newman is adamant that Arius is more influenced by Antioch than Alexandria.[16]

While such a question may sound like another in a long line of arcane fights among patristics scholars, Williams' analysis of Newman's reconstruction shows that even a dispute like this is still relevant for how Arius functions as a symbolic figure in church historiography:

> In the appendix to the fourth edition [of Newman's work], Newman made still more of the Antiochene devotion to the "literal and critical interpretation of Scripture," the invariable connection between "heterodoxy and biblical criticism," and the implicit denial of any real doctrine of inspiration of those rejecting allegory. The Alexandrian church is held up, in contrast, as the very exemplar of traditional and revealed religion.... In true Alexandrian (or at least Origenian) style, Newman regards certain exegetical options as moral and spiritual in character and effect. Antioch's exegetical preference is no mere alternative within the spectrum of possible techniques: it is a spiritual deficiency.... *The Arians of the Fourth Century* is, in large part, a tract in defence of what the early Oxford Movement thought of as spiritual religion and spiritual authority.[17]

If Williams is right, then Newman is keen to connect Arius with Antioch because he sees parallels between Antioch and his own theological enemies and between Alexandria and his own Oxford Movement. The implicit move being that, while his enemies are of the spirit of Arius, he is of the spirit of Athanasius and Nicaea, making the correct choice between the two sides quite obvious. Newman's polemic about the past then becomes a polemic about his present. All this is possible because of how highly symbolic Arius is.

Another common feature of the historiography is to emphasize Arius as a cold and exacting logician. Arius' downfall becomes his own philosophical presuppositions. He cared more about his philosophy than his theology, so say several historians.[18] Davis speaks of Arius' "rigorous use of syllogistic reasoning."[19] Likewise, Kelly speaks of Arius' "ruthless dialectic" as well as the Arians' "dry rationalism" and "their methodical, literalistic interpretation of Scripture."[20] While there may be some truth in these characterizations, one also detects that they may share some influence from the polemic of Athanasius and others. As Young points out, "Being led astray by philosophy was an all-too present motif in Christian polemic."[21] Thus Athanasius' characterization of Arius as overly philosophical may reflect the rhetorical environment more than a distinctive feature of the theology of Arius. Historians who rely too heavily on this polemical trope may fail to take into account the evidence that we have and instead offer a simpler and more easily digestible portrait of Arius. This is one reason why church historiography does well to pursue a sympathetic portrait of Arius. Unsympathetic portraits are typically oversimplifications. People are usually complex,



Mosaic from Arian baptistry in Ravenna, Italy. © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro. CC BY-SA 4.0.

even heretics. Unsympathetic portraits will be both inaccurate and misleading. Their reliance on oversimplification will fail to reveal the true issue.

Yet another strain in the historiography has sought to do just that: present a sympathetic portrait of Arius. It is rare to find Arius championed as a hero, but many historians seem keen to reverse the demonization that has been done to Arius over the centuries. Some are subtle, such as Young who states, "Arius was not in himself the 'archetypal heretic,' nor even much of an enquirer; rather, he was a reactionary, a rather literal-minded conservative who appealed to scripture and tradition on the basis of his faith."[22] Wiles is equally measured in his final assessment of Arius, "All this is not to say that after all Arius was right, nor is it to accuse Athanasius of illogicality or unspirituality.... It is to suggest that the difference between the two sides is not as absolute or as clear-cut as has traditionally been assumed. Arius was seriously inhibited by the rigidity of the philosophical framework within which he was operating."[23]

Perhaps the two most significant studies of Arius that seek to take the sympathetic track are Gregg and Groh's *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* and Williams' *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*. Gregg and Groh argue that Arius is not the cold and hyper-rationalistic philosopher-turned-theologian of much traditional historiography. Rather, they argue that Arius' core concern was not philosophy, but soteriology: "Early Arianism is most intelligible when viewed as a scheme of salvation. Soteriological concerns dominate the texts and inform every major aspect of the controversy. At the center of the Arian soteriology was a redeemer, obedient to his Creator's will, whose life of virtue modeled perfect creaturehood and hence the path of salvation for all Christians."[24] In other words, Christ as the perfect creature provides a model of growth for human creatures to follow.

In contrast, Williams argues that Gregg and Groh have gone too far in attributing an "exemplarist doctrine of salvation" to Arius. Rather, Williams argues that Arius would likely affirm that the Son is unchanging, but he possesses this immutability by the grace and will of the Father and *not* by nature. Thus, the Son is *in theory* changeable even if he is not so in fact. Thus, for Arius, "it may well be that he was as uneasy with the rhetoric of exaltation and apotheosis as were his critics."[25] Athanasius, however, presses Arius precisely on these points about the changeability of the Son, not because Arius was actually teaching a form of Adoptionism, which he was accused of, but because Athanasius believes "that Arius' solution...leads him inexorably toward the position he most wants to avoid—in this instance, the Christological doctrines associated with Paul of Samosata,"[26] that is, Adoptionism. Even if one did not agree with Williams on these points, one should see that his study of Arius represents one of the most careful and comprehensive accounts of Arius and his theology in recent decades. He is intentional about not making Arius out to be a hero or a martyr at the

hands of power-hungry bishops[27] and is just as willing to criticize Arius as he is to defend him against the oversimplifications of modern scholarship. The portrait that emerges is of a complex and sympathetic figure, both theologically and philosophically:

> Isolation" is a word that recurs in discussing Arius, both in his career and in his thinking; and we constantly find a paradoxical mixture of the reactionary and the radical in this. In Alexandria he represented not only a conservative theology, but also a conservative understanding of his presbyteral role *vis-à-vis* the bishop.... … In philosophy, he is ahead of his time: he recognizes the mythological and materialist elements in a loosely Middle Platonist account of God's relation to the world and the world's participation in God, and presses the logic of God's transcendence and ineffability to a consistent conclusion.... In many ways—and here is a still stranger paradox—his apophaticism foreshadows the concerns of *Nicene* theology later in the fourth century, the insights of the Cappadocians, or even Augustine. If he had his problems with the Lucianists, he would have found the "neo-Arians" of later decades still less sympathetic.[28]

This is an Arius that is clearly a product of his particular time and context and whose theological thinking is robust even though it is heretical. He is not merely the quintessential arch-heretic and chief enemy of the church. He is not reduced to an abstraction of a particular idea about the Trinity or Christology. However, this does not mean that Arius has no further relevance for the church's telling of her own story. Williams explores modern parallels for the Arian controversy in the German Church Struggle (*Kirchenkampf*) where German churches struggled to respond to the Nazi regime in the 1930s and 40s.[29] The general contours of Williams' historiographical approach identified here should be the model for church historiography of Arius and other heretics, namely with respect to his concern to produce an *accurate* and *sympathetic* portrait that nevertheless serves a larger symbolic function for the church's reflection on her teaching and life.

Church Historiography and Arius

Church historiography will care about Arius' theology not merely as an instance of fourth century religious thought or as an instance of social and political dynamics in the late Roman Empire, although it is certainly both of these. Rather, church historiography cares about Arius' theology precisely as a heresy. The church has regarded and continues to regard Arius and his teachings as heretical and has an interest in avoiding them. Thus, for church historiography, one of the purposes of the study of Arius is to help the church understand Arius' errors so that she can avoid them. When she does this, she will inevitably and rightly make generalizations from the particular situation of the fourth century in order to identify significant similarities with the present.

However, at this point, some would object that generalizing heresies from their particulars is both unproductive and irresponsible. They would argue that looking for modern-day Arians is not only a waste of time but also destructive. This objection should be taken seriously. After all, while Jehovah's Witnesses certainly have much in common with Arius, namely their denial of the divinity of Jesus,[30] one imagines that they would be befuddled by his Middle Platonism and Origenistic exegesis. Perhaps it is inaccurate to regard Jehovah's Witnesses as modern-day Arians. After all, Arius and Jehovah's Witnesses do not quite believe the same things. Or maybe the differences between Jehovah's Witnesses and Arius are not substantial enough to prevent church historiographers from rightly using the

label. In any case, it is a fair question.

Pete Enns is a progressive biblical scholar and one who finds such generalizations to be "utterly ridiculous and irresponsible."[31] Enns is routinely accused of being a Marcionite for his position on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. In his own words, Enns believes that "the New Testament does not share the tribal, insider-outsider, rhetoric of a *significant portion* of the Old Testament." However, Enns believes that to be a Marcionite "means adhering to the teachings of the 2nd-century heretic Marcion, who saw in the Bible two different Gods: the wrathful God of the Old Testament and the happy gracious God of the New."[32] Enns does not adhere to the precise teaching of Marcion on this point. Therefore, in his estimation, calling him a Marcionite is simply incorrect.

Regardless of whether or not we think Enns fits the label of "Marcionite," his frustration is understandable. In his own experience, "the name-calling is simply a way of shutting down discussion, no different from similar debate moves like, 'That sounds like something Hitler would say,' or 'That sounds just like the snake in the Garden of Eden'.... It is a sub-Christian, point-scoring, debate tactic that does nothing but perpetuates tribal thinking, animosity, and misunderstanding."[33] Enns is right to reject superficial name-calling as a debate tactic. When such strategies are used to end conversations, they are unhelpful. Thus, to be clear, when I advocate for church historiography to treat Arius and other heretics symbolically, I am not advocating for the kind of rhetorical tactics Enns derides here. In fact, I would hope that a sympathetic and nuanced reading of heretics would result in an equally nuanced and sympathetic reading of modern theologians (even if they are modern heretics!).

I do believe that Enns is too quick to reject the possibility of someone rightly being called a heretic in the vein of Marcion. The church is right to seek parallels between ancient heretics and modern teachers. Enns' claim that one has to believe exactly the same things as a heretic to be guilty of his error sets a rather high bar for any would-be false teacher. After all, the intervening centuries mean that our situation is theologically, philosophically, and socially quite different from Marcion's. Thus, it will be functionally impossible for anyone to take an *identical* position as him. Unsurprisingly, Enns admits that he has never actually met anyone whom he believes actually qualifies as a Marcionite.[34] However, Enns has made a historiographical error. He is not allowing for the legitimacy of historical generalizations. If historian John Lewis Gaddis is right that "without generalization historians would have nothing whatever to say,"[35] then Enns' objection artificially prevents what is a standard historical move. Inevitably, to do history is to generalize. To be sure, any generalizations are "limited, not universal, generalizations."[36] They do not apply to any and all situations. However, these generalizations will have applicability outside of their immediate context. As Gaddis writes, "My generalization about Stalin might thus provide some basis for making comparisons to other dictatorships, or to democracies, or to still other forms of government."[37]

Thus, church historiography is right to treat Arius and "Arianism" as generalizable or as this essay has discussed, symbolic, that is, it is possible and justifiable to identify figures, teachings, and so on in our contemporary context as somehow "Arian." To say that a modern person is an "Arian" is not necessarily to say that they believe all the same things as Arius.

After all, even most "Arians" in the ancient world did not believe the exact same things as Arius. It is to say that where it counts, modern figures are making a fundamentally similar error as Arius. We should be careful not to make such generalizations hastily or to use them to shut down conversations and ignore points of genuine difference. However, the practice is not totally objectionable. The church does well to avoid the errors of previous eras, even if such errors do not look *exactly* the same. For example, I think that Enns is in error regardless of whether or not his error qualifies as Marcionism. I think the church does well to avoid his error just as she avoided Marcionism. Perhaps, if we would like to be more precise, we might say that Enns is making a *similar* error to Marcion or that groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses are making *similar* errors to Arius. In any case, this is what responsible church historians mean when they describe a modern person as a Marcionite or an Arian.

However, treating Arius as a symbolic figure does not mean that we are free to craft our portrait of him however we like. In fact, any attempt at responsible generalization is reliant upon a portrait that is true to life. After all, if portraits are not true to life, it is typically because they have been fashioned more by whims and proclivities than reality. This is why church historiography ought to be concerned with *accuracy*. Arius is a real historical figure. He was a real person not unlike any of the rest of us. The controversy he started was in response to his actual ideas, whatever they were. Thus, for church historiography, we serve the interests of the church best when we are as historically accurate as we can be given the limitations. The church is not served well when our portrait of Arius is molded and shaped to fit our opponents irrespective of what Arius actually thought and taught. That is to put the cart before the horse. After all, one's opponents can both be wrong and also not be Arians.

Accordingly, it is in the interests of church historiography to provide a *sympathetic* portrait of Arius and other heretics. To be sympathetic does not mean providing an attractive portrait. We have no interest in inspiring future generations of Arians. Rather, it means recognizing that no one, not even Arius, became a heretic on purpose. Arius thought he was defending the truth from error. We can recognize this while still affirming that Arius was indeed a heretic. Furthermore, demonizing Arius can have the unintended effect of making his error seem not only wrong~~,~~ but also inconceivable. It can seem that only an exceptionally foolish or wicked person could fall for such an error. Most people do not consider themselves exceptionally foolish or wicked. Thus, most people do not believe that they should be concerned about falling into such an error. Now, a sympathetic portrait of Arius will not shy away from pointing out foolishness and wickedness in Arius. The point is not to turn Arius into a misunderstood martyr. We have no interest in rehabilitating Arius. Arius is a heretic. There is no getting around that fact for church historiography. Rather, a sympathetic portrait seeks to make clear the fact we are not necessarily immune to the errors of Arius. We too must be on our guard from falling into the same kind of errors. One observes this same strategy used in many of the best spiritual writers.[38] Sin is not typically obviously evil to us. Rather, sin ~~so~~ often looks to be good. This is one of the factors that makes sin so destructive and impossible to avoid. Accordingly, heresy and error are also pernicious. Heretics generally do not think that they are heretics. They will identify more with Athanasius than Arius. Arius himself thought he was defending the truth of scripture from the errors of Alexander and Athanasius. While Athanasius could point to Arius' condemnation at Nicaea, Arius could

point to Athanasius' condemnation at other councils. Things are not so simple when one is in the middle of them. Therefore, a sympathetic portrait is more helpful than a demonizing portrait, since it encourages the tough critical reflection that is required for the church to avoid these errors. We avoid false teaching through critical self-examination, guided by the Holy Spirit. Responsible church historiography can help us do this.

Now, at this point, some may object that Athanasius certainly did not give a sympathetic portrait of Arius. Athanasius portrays Arius in the worst possible light, as a blasphemer of the holy truth of God. Surely, they might say, church historiography should follow the lead of such a foundational figure as Athanasius. However, church historiography is not necessarily committed to the historical judgments of the fathers or their tactics. Just because Athanasius portrays Arius rather unsympathetically does not mean that we must do likewise. We must recognize that Athanasius was in a different rhetorical situation. He needed to convince a church who found Arius' teaching rather appealing that it was actually a horrible error. He was writing at a time when Arius was not widely considered to be a heretic. This is not true of our situation. If anything, in our situation, people are more likely to demonize Arius than canonize him. Of course, if we found ourselves in the opposite situation, it may then be useful to dust off some of Athanasius' rhetoric. Church historiography is done in the service of the church; therefore, it must be sensitive and responsive to the situation that the church finds herself in. To be clear, this essay has not advocated for sympathetic portraits of figures like Arius because the Church has some kind of universal obligation to be nice to heretics. There is none. The argument has been that sympathetic portraits serve the church of the present-day well.

This essay has left many questions unanswered. What exactly is the most accurate way to understand Arius based on the historical data available to us? How do we best generalize the error of Arius, and where do we find parallels in our own day? These are important questions to answer, especially since Arius remains a persistent character in the telling of the doctrinal history of the church, even at the popular level. The inclusion of Arius in such settings acknowledges that an understanding of him is still important for Christians today. This essay has sought to address why this might be so and how church historians ought to present Arius and other heretics to the church today. We must remember that church history is not just a recounting of names and dates in the church's past. Church history is an activity of meaning-making and identity creation. Heretics and other false teachers serve key roles in this process which can easily be made less effective through inaccuracy and demonization. Instead, the church is best served when the stories she tells about heretics and other false teachers are both accurate and sympathetic. If this is true of Arius, then it is also likely true of other heretics and false teachers throughout the ages.

Endnotes

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Light: Recovering an Ancient Perspective

Hayden Lukas

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As John the Baptist bore witness to the Light of the World, so too must the Church today. But there are many ways to talk about light. How should we speak about light when bearing witness to Christ? On which understanding of light should we draw? Light can refer to daylight or the light in a room—the physical phenomenon we perceive through sight. But light can also refer to objects that produce light, such as a floor lamp; we "turn on the lights." We are familiar with scientific descriptions of light, such as its speed or its wavelength. Light can also refer to mental activities, as when we use the words enlighten or elucidate. As a father to a young reader, it seems I read Dr. Seuss' Oh the Thinks You Can Think! almost daily: "Think of Light! Think of Bright! Think of Stars in the Night!"[1] Christians have much to draw on when speaking of the Light of the World. But what exactly is light? I will sketch two competing answers to these questions, the Platonic and the physicalist. I will argue from this sketch that the Christian account of light is closer to the Platonic perspective than the physicalist. As such, Christians should return to a more ancient perspective of light because it offers a more compelling account of light and its role in God's creation.

"True Light": Two Competing Views

Martin Luther was concerned with the meaning of the word "light" in his 1535 Lectures on Genesis. The opening chapters of Luther's lectures are mostly warnings against toying with the clear words of Scripture. Luther complains that other commentators interpret the light at the beginning of creation through a variety of allegories or metaphors. He disapproves of light interpreted as some angelic force or some linguistic stand-in for knowledge. Luther says we should not "by force read meanings into words."[2] For Luther, the creation account in Genesis is as simple as "calling a post a post." It was written by Moses for the common man to understand quite literally. When God creates light, we should take it to mean simply, as Luther says, "true light."[3] This is a worthy consideration. But "true light" is not as neutral a term as we might think. Light has had different meanings in different cultures and times. The meaning of "true light" for the common man in an ancient context is different from what it would be for the common man today.

For today's common man, light is a physical phenomenon. For example, the Encyclopedia Britannica categorizes its article on "Light" in its section about "Physics," which is a subsection of its "Science" category. Light is identified as "electromagnetic radiation."[4] Such an identification is unproblematic to the contemporary consciousness. It is the kind of explanation every student in the US public school system is first exposed to in

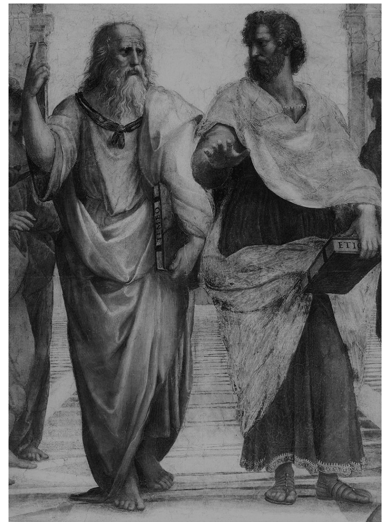
third, fourth, or fifth grade. According to this view, light is understood as a wave that travels through space at a constant speed (the speed of light). Its variable wavelength appears to us as different colors, but "light" specifically represents only the visible subset of a more general phenomenon, electromagnetic radiation. Light's visibility is only based on the human eye's capabilities, but "sight" is a much broader phenomenon that exists in many living things. Light can also be understood as a subatomic particle, a photon. But this development has only found its expression in the past on hundred years—it is a much newer concept.

Richard Feynman—who employs a specialist's knowledge of light using the language of physics—describes it thusly: "Light, with which we see, is only one small part of a vast spectrum of [electromagnetic radiation], the various parts of this spectrum being distinguished by different values of a certain quantity which varies. This variable quantity could be called the 'wavelength.' As it varies in the visible spectrum, the light apparently changes color from red to violet."[5] Simply put, light is a wave that radiates from a source and hits the human eyes, creating sight when interpreted by the brain. This is very intuitive for the common man today.

The contemporary view is the exact reverse of the ancients' understanding of light. For the ancients, light is not something we see, exactly, but rather the thing by which we see other things. Inasmuch as Feynman offers a sophisticated view of today's common man, the same can be assumed for Plato who, as we will see, offers a rather standard position from the ancient world. While it is not likely that every ancient person had a copy of Cratylus or Timaeus on his nightstand, Plato's theory of light at least is substantially representative of the ancient world as a whole.

As explained in Timaeus, Plato believes every man has an interior store of fire, which is gathered in a pure form into the eyes, so that they can be shot out as a stream of vision:

> The pure fire which is within us [was] made to flow through the eyes in a stream smooth and dense, compressing the whole eye, and especially the centre part, so that it kept out everything of a coarser nature, and allowed to pass only this pure element. When the light of day surrounds the stream of vision, then like falls upon like, and they coalesce, and one body is formed by natural affinity in the line of vision. [...] The whole stream of vision...diffuses the motions of what it touches or what touches it over the whole body, until they reach the soul, causing that perception which we call sight. [6]



Detail of The School of Athens. Raphael. 1511. Public domain.

For Plato, light was shot out from the eyes and information was captured outside of the body as it struck the light of day. Then this information was transmitted to the soul, causing perception. This was a popular theory of sight in the ancient world.

Notably, this is the Christian view of sight, too. Here, Christian is a reference to the view of Christ, himself. Christ adopts such a view when he says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23). Christ utilizes an ancient theory of light.

The ancient worldview saw the eye as a lamp—something that produced light rather than merely receiving it.[7] That is to say, the eye was viewed as an active participant in the illumination of the world rather than as a passive recipient of illumination as it is today. In this sense, the ancient view of sight is exactly opposite to the present view. Christ's view of light coming from the eyes does not have a developed physical theory like Plato's does (Christ makes no reference to how the lamp shines). However, Christ's statement still exhibits the same structure: light comes from the eyes, and that light diffuses itself throughout the whole body to the soul.

When confronted with Christ's ancient view of sight, the Christian has a few options. First, they can assume that Christ is playing a kind of game. Christ, being all-knowing, knows light is really electromagnetic radiation and that the eye actually produces nothing when it sees something. Christ is just acclimating himself to a particular time and place and using the language of the historical period. That is, if Christ were around today he would make reference to the Encyclopedia Britannica or quote Richard Feynman when trying to make a point about light. Christ knows better than the ancients. Here, "knows better" roughly means "believes what the common man of today believes."

Second, the Christian can adopt the view that Christ does not believe in the truths of modern science. In this view, either Christ is not omniscient or contemporary science is incorrect. Christ does not speak utilizing contemporary science, so he must not believe it to be true. Therefore, either the physical content of what he said is true (i.e., the eye is physically a lamp for the body, approximating the description of Plato in Timaeus, and which contemporary science has contested), or Christ is simply wrong, and the eye is not a lamp to the body. After all, Christ grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). In his day, this meant he believed that the eye is a lamp like everyone else believed. If he grew up today, he would not believe the eye is a lamp, just like everyone else. Christ is a product of his human contextual education and knows nothing more and nothing less. Christ also says, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" (John 3:8). Nowadays, we know where the wind goes. We have weather stations across the world tracking the direction of the wind at all times, and these can tell us where the wind came from and where it is going. The same principle applies: Christ is simply mistaken that wind is unpredictable or contemporary weather forecasters are mistaken in how they understand the wind.

Of course, Christians should assume Christ is speaking the truth. We might qualify the word truth by saying it is a "different kind" of truth than the contemporary physicalist view. It could even be allowed that the physicalist or scientific view of light represents a "lower-order" way of speaking than Christ's view of light. But I do not want to rely too heavily on such a qualification. While this might be acceptable in some logical schema, such

a qualification dulls the shock that Christ offers a picture of light totally different from our own. We should give ourselves no quarter when Christ offers us the truth. We ought to conform ourselves to him, whatever form the truth takes. Whether this truth is rightly called "physical" or "literal" will be explored below.

Christ is correct, but to argue for this is difficult as he does not offer a systematic theory of light, but only speaks about light when an explanation is occasioned. As such, I will give a general account of an ancient view of sight through reference to Plato and Christ together. Plato's account more closely corresponds to Christ's than a modern physicalist one, so an examination of Plato's work will show how the logic of an ancient account of light is made. While this examination may not tell us exactly how Christ understood "light," it will give us an ability to understand how one kind of ancient view is possible, and how this view may bring us closer to Christ's own understanding of light than our own.

Light: Intelligible and Intelligibility

Luther asks us to understand light as "true light," but we have seen this concept is unclear. In the context of the passage Luther brings it up (commenting on Genesis 1:3), it is reasonable to think that "true light" for Luther is a physical light as we experience it every day. But what is such an experience? Of what is it composed? For the common man today, we place light within the category of "Physics," but our everyday experience is far removed from the scientific study of the structure of nature expressed in mathematical terms. And what of the common man in the ancient world? To understand the Platonic view of light, we must pause here because even the meaning of the word physical is not a simple thing to grasp. What exactly does it mean to be physical? For the ancients, this question was answered in the classical distinction between matter and form. It would be helpful to contextualize matter and form in their ancient philosophical usage before examining their relationship. What follows is a brief overview of matter and form. As this is not strictly the focus of this essay, I have chosen to generalize and simplify the views of a very diverse Platonic tradition, and much of what is explained below likely would fit an Aristotelian's understanding, too. I will borrow the language of Hans-Georg Gadamer by referring to this as the "Platonic-Aristotelian" tradition.

The distinction between matter and form arose out of a desire to solve a problem: How can the mind know what something is? Put another way, what is it that the mind knows? The contemporary philosopher would place these questions within the domain of epistemology or the philosophy of mind. But for the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, the significance of knowledge about the world (i.e., what the mind knows) is actually framed as a metaphysical problem.

Many Philosophy 101 classes are misled into taking this distinction as an epistemological problem, and many class sessions follow the unfortunate course of interpreting Plato either through contemporary physicalism or 16th and 17th century debates about epistemology. Plato is not heard as Plato in such a setting. Rather, he is heard as an idiosyncratic and often incoherent Enlightenment philosopher. Platonism is from the ancient world, not the Enlightenment world. This must always be kept in mind.

It matters whether the distinction between matter and form is taken as a metaphysical problem rather than an epistemological problem because this changes how the questions surrounding matter and form are understood. On the Platonic view, "matter" and "form" are not simply some distinctions that help the mind analyze the world—something in the realm of epistemology. Rather, "matter" and "form" are metaphysical categories. That is, the distinction between the two applies generally to all things; their usage is universal in scope—not only applying to the mind but to all of reality. Put simply: for the Platonist, matter and form are both foundational parts of the structure of the world.

The problem Platonism is trying to solve is how the material world can be grasped at all by the mind. After all, my mind is not the chair sitting in the corner of my room. But my mind can know this chair. How is that possible? The Platonist answers: the matter which makes up that chair has assumed a certain form so that the mind can grasp it. Matter has taken on a form which makes the matter intelligible to the mind.

The basic relationship between matter and form: matter is that in which form assumes a body, and form is that which grants matter intelligibility. Matter cannot be known without identifying some form in it, and form cannot be encountered apart from some matter revealing it (although the Platonic tradition does not always agree on this latter point). The certain thing for the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition is that form is what makes matter intelligible. In fact, form could simply be taken as intelligibility. In many respects, form only refers to those concepts or ideas by which we understand reality; when we call a ball "round" or "blue" that is how we come to know anything about the ball. The intelligible qualities of things (their formal characteristics) that the mind grasps onto through language or thought reveal the identity of matter. To speak of "matter" and "form," then, is simply to understand that there is a process by which the mind comes to understand matter, namely through matter's intelligible qualities. These intelligible qualities are simply matter's formal characteristics—certain patterns according to which matter operates.

Matter being united with form always involves some arrangement that puts two unlike things together. That is to say, to know one thing, I must know it through something else. Matter is not form, although it bears its image, and to become acquainted with matter, I must know its form. To understand anything, I have to understand it through something that it is not.[8] For example, a tree is not the shapes (of letters) I see on the page as I read the word "tree." A tree is also not "green" or "leafy" or "tall" or "woody." It is no vocable, no sound, no arrangement of letters. It is not an idea or observation. It is not a thing that is "in" my mind, and it is not the sensation of touching or seeing something I would call "woody" or "leafy" or "tall," yet these things are the only way I come to know a tree: words, sensations, and encounters through some means or medium. I meet a thing by that which it is not.

The modern temptation is to treat this incongruency as a source for skepticism. In the skeptical view, thoughts, sensations, observations, and ideas—that is, the mind's encounter with the world through the world's formal characteristics—are (at best) interpretations of or (at worst) illusions about reality. While the sensations, observations, thoughts, and ideas through which we encounter reality may have some meaning in themselves, they do not get at matter in itself.

This is unproblematic for the Platonist, for the Platonist agrees with this line of reasoning. In fact, this explains why the Platonist attributes "true reality" to form rather than to matter. Forms reveal the truth about the world because they are the only thing that can be recognized as truth. If we attributed "true reality" to matter rather than form, then we would never be able to know the truth because matter is entirely unintelligible. By attributing true reality to form rather than matter, the Platonist is giving an account of the structure of the world: Truth is a quality of the world because the world has a structure based on form.

This account of "true reality" is quite different from the common view of "true reality" today. Generally speaking, true reality is revealed by the forms for the ancient world and revealed by matter for the contemporary world. That being said, in the Platonist view scientific or physicalist accounts of reality are not ever really describing reality materially. A "material description" of the world is impossible using Platonist terminology. In fact, the difference between a Platonic-Aristotelean account of the universe and a physicalist account of the universe is not that the physicalist account can account for modern scientific descriptions of the universe while the Platonic cannot. Rather, it is that the Platonic tradition tries to account for the process by which scientific knowledge is grasped by the mind from the outset, whereas the physicalist tradition largely leaves this an open question. Contemporary physicalist accounts generally do not seek to provide an answer beyond "the human brain has adapted to make descriptions of reality." Platonists, rather, assume a matrix in which the tools of the mind—sensations, words, ideas, concepts, and so on—are coterminous with the structure of the actual world. A critique of either position is not possible here, but it is worthwhile understanding the radically different perspectives.

The Platonic view of light, as we have seen, falls closer to Christ's understanding of light than that of the physicalist. The approach contemporary Christians decide to take, whether physicalist or Platonic, will affect how they understand light. Platonists understand "true light" related more directly to form than matter, because form is simply the intelligible quality (or complex of qualities) of a material thing. This is simply what physical light means for the Platonic understanding: form and matter together. "True light" is material, but it is grasped by its formal characteristics, its intelligible qualities embodied in matter.

That being said, given an ecumenical spirit, the Platonist and physicalist may be able to come to an understanding on such a description of light. It is not hard to see that material objects are grasped by their formal (and largely measurable!) qualities. But light occupies a unique position in the relationship between form and matter for Platonism that may break any ecumenical possibilities with physicalism.

Although light itself is intelligible (it is form embodied in matter) it can also be understood as pure intelligibility; pure meaning or pure information. Light and Intelligibility may even be thought of as coextensive. When darkness comes, the nature of the world is hidden, but when there is light, the truth is open for all who have eyes to see. Light fills the important role in the ancient imagination as that which makes all things intelligible. This is the meaning set forth in Plato's allegory of The Cave. While illusions about reality are portrayed as shadows, the truest things are revealed by the light of the Sun, which produces light to illuminate all truth. The light from the Sun makes all the forms outside the cave

intelligible.

For those unfamiliar with the allegory of The Cave, the crucial thing to grasp (for the purposes of this essay) is that the Sun (which is not a star among many, but the one and only source of life and light) is interpreted as a causal agent for Plato. As Plato has it, "[the Good (represented by the Sun)] is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual."[9] The Sun authors all of existence because it makes all things intelligible; it is "the source of reason and truth." Light is equivalent to reason and truth; they are contiguous without medium. We could not understand anything if light did not make all of existence available for the mind, illuminating the world around us to sight.

As we saw above in Timaeus, we are able to see not simply because the eyes have a stream of fire, but because the eyes' fire meets the fire coming from the Sun's light. "When the light of day surrounds the stream of vision, then like falls upon like, and they coalesce, and one body is formed by natural affinity in the line of vision. […] The whole stream of vision…diffuses the motions of what it touches or what touches it over the whole body, until they reach the soul, causing that perception which we call sight."[10] It is the fire of our eyes meeting the fire of the Sun in material objects that creates our ability to see the intelligible qualities (or form) of the material world. The Sun enables forms to become available for thought, and in this sense, causes our ability to see the world for what it truly is.

Both Plato and Christ note the importance of the Sun in this respect. For Plato says, "when night comes on and the external and kindred fire departs, then the stream of vision is cut off; for going forth to an unlike element it is changed and extinguished, being no longer of one nature with the surrounding atmosphere which is now deprived of fire: and so the eye no longer sees,"[11] Christ also says, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him" (John 11:9-10).

I am not making the banal point that both Christ and Plato knew the definition of the word night. They both have a subtle understanding of sight. Vision is no longer possible when the external light that illuminates all of reality departs. Light is literally that which imparts truth. When the Sun goes down, the truth is able to be hidden, because the light of the external world is no longer available to humans. For Plato, this means the stream of vision is "cut off," whereas for Christ, this means "the light is no longer in him." For both thinkers, illumination radiating from a higher source is necessary for the mind to know anything true about the world.

Christ The Light

The preceding account provides a description of an ancient view of sight. Christ's description of light shares substantial characteristics with this account: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23). Whether the Platonic understanding of light is what

Detail of Disputation of the Holy Sacrament. Raphael. 1510. Public domain.

Luther meant by "true light" I will not take a guess here. But I will also not assume Luther meant *electromagnetic radiation* when he spoke of "true light." But there is a True Light that appears in the Scriptures, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

If we seek to interpret biblical passages that describe Christ as light itself, or as a light-bearer or bringer, the Platonic understanding is much more compelling than a contemporary physicalist view. For the Christian, the ancient view should prove satisfying for both reason and affect. For if we understand the "light of Christ" from an ancient perspective, (notably, closer to Christ's own perspective) Christ is the One through which all of reality becomes intelligible. He is the source of meaning in all being, built into the very structure of reality—comparable to the Sun in Plato's Cave. But if we view light in a physicalist understanding, Christ's status as light is more contentious. It is hard to see how Christ is literally *electromagnetic radiation.*

This term "literal" exposes the difference between the two views I have outlined when defining the term "light." For the physicalist, "literal" means a physical phenomenon that can be strictly identified as a kind of electromagnetic radiation. But for the Platonist, "literal" has a broader meaning. Literal light is any phenomenon that confers intelligibility, mental or non-mental. This phenomenon can be a physical light or some insight that gives the mind a deeper understanding. This may seem like unnecessary hair-splitting on a definition of "literal," but it shows the difference between the two worldviews. In Platonism, literal light is not only a certain kind of electromagnetic radiation, but a range of phenomena that take the same form—the conferring of intelligibility or "bringing to light"—whether this is mental or non-mental.

Literalness is not necessarily important or valuable. It just seems to be one of the things that physicalism desires in its explanation of phenomena. Literal interpretations of texts are understood as "scientifically valid or true" in many cases today. For example, in discussions about Creation or the Flood, "literal" is often taken to mean "scientifically valid or true." I defend many elements of such "literal" interpretations, but such an understanding of "literal" cannot be taken as a sufficient understanding when applied to light, or likely any phenomena in the Scriptures.

A Platonic literalness is more compelling when trying to understand the employment of the word "light" in passages such as John 1:5, which tells us that the Light of Christ "shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." For the physicalist, this statement would be taken to be a metaphor because (the life borne by) Christ is not literally

a light shining in darkness. The physicalist could argue that biblical descriptions of Christ as light are metaphors for either electromagnetic radiation or for normal experiences of "true light." But this will prove challenging without recourse to phenomenology, which is roughly what I have employed in parts of this essay that identify light as a certain kind of pattern or form identifiable in nature and in the mind. Even if no recourse is made to phenomenology and an attempt is made to speak in terms of neuroscience or some other area in the physical sciences, the problem remains as to how such a program can be considered consistent with Christ's self-professed ancient understanding of light which is flatly the opposite of the current scientific understanding. If such an argument could be made, it would likely take a similar shape to that of the Platonic tradition. Such an argument would be welcome.

But if the Platonic description of reality is largely correct in the way I have presented it, then Christ being a "light" is a literal truth which is built into the structure of reality. This truth should prove valuable in interpreting statements about Christ as the Light, such as in the Prologue to John's Gospel. Light is literally the thing by which information comes to be known—it is how facts about the world "come to light." For the Platonic mind, we saw that light is only able to grant information if "like interacts with like," which is a reference to the capacity of the human mind to grasp forms in the material world. But this is not an arbitrary happening—it is something built into reality at the level of metaphysical analysis.

"Light" is a literal description of how information is transmitted. It may be that *electromagnetic radiation* is not even what is meant by *light*. Perhaps an encyclopedia article about "Light" does not belong in the category of physics, but in the category of religion. Of course, light is a physical phenomenon. The Christian and the Platonist do not doubt this. But it means more than something strictly *material*. Christ is *literally* the light—that thing by which the intelligible qualities of the whole world become known.

Said otherwise, Christ is the meaning of the world. He is the thing by which all the disparate beings in the world are illuminated, and their meanings made intelligible. Apart from this light, we literally live in darkness because the true light has not shone on us.

A physicalist understanding does not offer the benefit of this literalness. Light would only be a metaphor, not a literal description of who Christ is. As noted above, the Platonic ideal is that we come to know something through what it is not—a phenomena, a sensation, a word, an experience. Physicalist metaphors instead show us what Christ is not by something he is not. Light literally is a particle received by the eye and interpreted by the brain. Christ literally is not. Light literally is electromagnetic radiation. Christ literally is not. The same is true for experiences of light. Sunlight is warm on the skin. Christ is literally not warm on the skin.

Preachers need to be especially careful about such metaphors because such metaphors end up conferring no real information about Christ. Statements about Christ as the "light of the world" end up having very specious meanings, if not altogether arbitrary ones, when taken metaphorically. Christ's majesty and glory are diminished when our language about him cannot rise above suggestive metaphors. We should seek to be

forthcoming in our descriptions of his work and his role in the actual world.

As such, we should not assume Christ "knows better" than the ancients. That is, Christ does not believe everything the common man of today believes about the world; we should not assume Christ shares with contemporary man an incomplete and unsatisfactory picture of reality. Instead, we should allow ourselves no quarter and seek to conform our own thinking to his. This conformity includes understanding that his identity fits into the structure of reality in a deeply intelligible way. After all, the Scriptures testify that Christ is the Light of the World. In saying this, they mean Christ is that which gives the world its ability to be understood at all.

In writing this essay, I have not tried to convince the preacher that he should educate his congregation on Plato's *Timaeus*. Such education may occasionally delight or interest the listener from the pulpit, but Platonism should not be undertaken as a programmatic education. Rather, in writing this essay, I am asking the preacher to open the imagination of his audience to the possibility that there is a logical structure to the world, and that in this structure Christ plays the central role. Christ's centrality to all creation is proclaimed more clearly when he is understood as he who makes all things intelligible. He is the Light of the World, not one light among many. Within a Platonic framework, Christ fills this role literally. But in the common physicalist framework, he fills this role only arbitrarily and metaphorically.

It is a marvel that the light of the world, Jesus Christ, truly man and truly God, came to enlighten the whole world. It is certainly to Christ's glory that we understand him truly as that which makes all reality intelligible, meaningful, and true. This is not an arbitrary phenomena but fits into the structure by which all reality comes to be known. When the Scriptures speak of light, they are not asking the reader to understand it as particles or waves or *electromagnetic radiation*. Rather, they are asking us to see the process at work by which truth is revealed—Christ manifesting himself through Word and Sacrament to us, who, having been delivered from the domain of darkness, now share our inheritance with the saints in light.

Endnotes

1 Dr. Seuss, *Oh, the Thinks You Can Think,* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2003).

2 LW 1:19.

3 LW 1:19.

4 Glen Stark, "Light," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 1, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/science/light.

5 Richard Feynman, Robert Leighton, and Matthew Sands, *The Feynman Lectures on Physics* Vol. 1 (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1963), 26.1.

6 Plato, *Timaeus* 45b-c. trans. Benjamin Jowett. 4th edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

7 For a summary of how Christ's understanding of the eye fits into the ancient picture, see Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew* 1:1-11:1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 355-357. Also, compare John 11:9-10 with Plato, *Timaeus*, 45b-d.

8 See a contemporary account of this in Walker Percy, *Symbol and Existence: A Study in Meaning,* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2019), 234-237.

9 Plato, *Republic* 517c, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

10 Plato, *Timaeus* 45b-c, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

11 Plato, Timaeus 45c, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

Devotional Material

Christian Sexuality: Five Session Small-Group Study

Christian Dollar

Christian sexual ethics have always set the Church apart from the world. The division between Church and world goes deeper than its incongruence with its early Greco-Roman context of sexual slavery and pervasive homosexuality. Jesus' teaching on sexuality was shocking to his Jewish context as well. Jesus' radical commitment to the integrity of marriage left his disciples questioning the feasibility of the institution, all the more since the teaching contradicted the pattern of divorce instituted by scripture (Matt 19:1-10). Behind Jesus' vision of human sexuality stood God's original design for marriage rooted in the creation of sexed bodies designed for relationships.

The radicalness of Christian sexual ethics has endured because its creational foundation remains. God's good design still informs Christian sexuality despite the corruption of sexuality by sin. As our American culture continues its drive for libertine sexuality, the Church in the West has been forced to defend its sexual ethics in ways it has not needed to for centuries. Much of this defense has taken an antagonistic posture. The Church has defined its sexual ethics over and against promiscuity, homosexuality, divorce, and other perversions of human sexuality. Now, there is extensive biblical warrant for an antagonistic posture. Much of Paul's instructions on sexual ethics consist of injunctions against pagan sexual practices (1 Cor 6:12-19; Col 3:5-11; Eph 5:1-20; Gal 5:16-21), and the Church has appropriately defined her sexual ethics against modern-day equivalents.

Need for an Alternative

Unfortunately, something is lost when the Church primarily addresses sexuality from an antagonistic posture. Christian sexuality loses its independence. For many Christians, sexuality is defined primarily by *what it is not* rather than by *what it is*. This apophatic sexuality leaves the Christian grasping for substance, for a goal. When the Church does not provide a vision of godly sexuality except in the most generic of senses, where is the Christian to look? The average Christian is just as numb to sexual stimulation as the contemporary heathen. No, in our sexually saturated context, it is unreasonable to expect Christians to revert to Victorian prudes. A "negative sexuality" cannot suffice. The Christian needs a wholistic Christian sexuality, not an "un-pagan sexuality." Hints of this "negative sexuality" can be seen in the organization of LCMS online resources. Under the tab "Social Issues" are eleven sub-options ranging from "Child Abuse" to "Religious Liberty." The three sub-options of note to us are "Life," "Marriage," and "Sexuality."[1] Now, one should not put much weight on the theological significance of webpage design, but this subdivision of Sexuality from Marriage and Marriage from Life issues is indicative of a Christian sexuality that defines itself against discrete antitheses.[2] It is not the Church that would separate Sexuality from Marriage or Life issues from Sexuality. It is the world that attempts to divide what God has brought together.

Overview

The following Bible study is designed to be a small step towards a wholistic treatment of Christian sexuality. For the theologians and pastors who spend years studying the things of God, the underlying theological connections between marriage, procreation, and Life issues are obvious. This is not necessarily the case for the typical congregant. This Bible study aims to tie together the usually disparate themes of Christian sexuality into a cohesive structure not defined by sinful practices. The goal of the study is to provide at the lay level a theoretical yet practical basis for understanding sexuality and thereby measuring sexual practices. This focus on the "positive" side of sexuality will inevitably frustrate those seeking guidance for the particular sexual challenges of today, but there are many wonderful resources already available to that end. This study seeks to do something different.

Summary

1: The Body; **2:** The Sexes; **3:** Companionship; **4:** Erotic Expression; **5:** Procreation.

Section one establishes human beings as embodied creatures whose bodies must be understood as theologically significant. This lesson sets the groundwork for those that follow by counteracting the prevailing American understanding that the body is something used and possessed instead of something gifted as our very being. Above all, it seeks to establish in the mind of the student the goodness of the body.

Section two introduces the integrity of the sexes. Here the equality and distinction of the sexes are affirmed and explored. The irreducibility of our embodied nature as either male or female is compared with societal expectations of the sexes and the role of stereotypes. This is likely to be the lesson in which students, especially those sensitive to sexism, will be most "on guard," and so a tactful, open-ended approach is used. Because the goal of this lesson is the establishment of the integrity of the sexes, more difficult passages such as Ephesians 5 are addressed in the following, lessons specific to marriage.

Section three signals a shift from the sexuality of the individual to sexuality in community. The marriage relationship will dominate the following three lessons. Section three will focus on the relational aspect of marriage through the lens of companionship. In it the interdependence and mutuality of husband and wife are highlighted as part of the original intention of God. Additionally, singleness is addressed, and students are invited to reflect on the space afforded within the Church to the unmarried.

Section four introduces the students to the goodness of what is typically understood by sexuality: erotic expression. This topic is rarely addressed within Church groups and may make students uncomfortable. Therefore, a lighthearted though respectful tone is taken throughout this lesson. Keeping in line with the study's focus on the positive aspects of sexuality, sinful sexual practices are addressed in general. Instead, most of the study is spent exploring the goodness, pleasure, and healing functions of Christian sexuality.

Section five brings the study to a close with its topic of procreation. This section is not a lesson on parenting. Instead, the focus of this lesson is on the relationship between marriage and procreation. Procreation is held up as a good thing that is the natural overflow

of Christian sexuality. The majority of the lesson is spent comparing contemporary thoughts and feelings about procreation to biblical examples.

Lesson Structure

This study is designed to be used in a small group setting with a heavy emphasis on discussion questions. Because it is likely that many small group leaders will not have a seminary-level theological education, a short introduction to each Bible passage is provided, along with discussion questions. Additionally, because this is designed to be used in the informal setting of a small-group, discussion-based study, each subsection functions as an independent node. Besides the introduction and closing thought, the subsections can be rearranged to better fit whatever direction the discussion takes. Finally, there are two "floating" subsections that do not have a standard place across lessons. These floating subsections address tangential issues that may or may not be relevant to a particular class. The outline includes suggested points at which to address them should the leader choose to do so.

Introduction: A short introductory paragraph is used to help orient students to the topic. Each introduction includes a question or set of questions to be answered by the study.

Main Verse: This is a single verse taken from the Genesis creation account. It is used as the entry point into the principle of Christian sexuality under consideration. There is not a lengthy exposition attached to this verse; rather, it serves as a landmark from which the helping verses can be located. All other subsections revolve around this verse. In addition, there is a short explanatory paragraph of this verse that brings out one relevant facet of Christian sexuality.

Helping Verses: Along with the main verse, each lesson includes three "helping verses." These helping verses range from a single verse to an entire chapter, and each introduces a distinct aspect of Christian sexuality not yet addressed by either the Main Verse or other Helping Verses. Instead of explanations of the helping verses, there are discussion questions attached. Some discussion questions are open-ended, while others invite students to participate in short "activities," such as counting the occurrences of a particular word in a passage.

Well, I Heard…!: The *Well, I Heard!* section is a floating subsection designed to address common beliefs in the Church about the lesson's topic. This section is structured as a statement put to the small-group leader by one of the students. Often this statement will be related to a misunderstood or misconstrued Bible verse, although it may also stem from a folk-belief likely present in a congregation. The benefit of this subsection is that it gives voice to viewpoints students may hold but be hesitant to make known. In this way, scruples may be addressed in the open without the embarrassment of "believing the wrong thing." Often there will be discussion questions suggested for further exploration at the end of the explanation.

What About….?: The *What About?* section is the second floating subsection. Whereas the *Well, I Heard!* section addresses theologically based questions, the *What About?* section addresses difficult societal issues. In this section popular beliefs and attitudes

stemming from outside of the Church are addressed. Each question is structured to ask about *a person rather than a topic*. This structure helps to remove potentially contentious political issues from the abstract and to bring them into the interpersonal realm. The response to each *What About?* section outlines both a theological structure for understanding the question and a Christian response to the issue.

Closing Thought: The Closing Thought is the final takeaway from the lesson that answers the questions posed by the introduction.

Session One: Created as a Body

Introduction: Why do we have a body? Odds are most of us have not given that question much thought. A body is just what you are born with. Is there some deep meaning behind us having 10 fingers instead of 12? Does it matter if we are tall or short? Having a body is just part of being a person! Yet God could have made us without physical bodies like He did the angels. Imagine what life would be like if you did not have to eat, sleep, or ever get mud on your shoes. That does not sound too bad, does it? But if God did not make us as physical bodies, we would not be able to hug our pets, taste a homecooked meal, or get cozy in bed. Who would want to miss out on those things? So why did God make us *as bodies*? The short answer is, "Because it is Good!"

Main Verse: Genesis 1:31—"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

Here God looks over everything He had created in the 6 previous days and sees just how good everything is. But none of it is "very good" until God makes humans to take care of it. God created the world as a finely-tuned machine, a machine that needs human bodies in the world to take care of the world!

(*Suggested: Well, I Heard…*!)

Helping Verses

Psalm 139:13-18 ("Knit me together in my mother's womb…")

How should God's intimate concern for our bodies inform how we think about our own? What about those parts of our bodies that we don't normally think about?

(*Suggested: What About…*?)

Luke 1:26-32 ("You will conceive and bear a son, and you shall call Him Jesus…")

The Perfect God became a physical man, lived a sinless life in the body, and was raised with a glorious body. God effected our salvation through the body of Jesus. (Incarnate literally means "into-flesh") What possibilities does having hands, feet, and a body provide in service to our neighbor that would not be possible otherwise?

1 Cor 15:35-49 ("But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised…'")

As Christians, we are not looking forward to an eternity as a disembodied spirit floating in the clouds. We are expecting an eternity in the physical body on a new earth. How does this picture of a "physical salvation" compare with how life after death is usually depicted?

Closing Thought: God did not make us with Bodies; He made us as Bodies, and He will remake us as new Bodies. This is very good!

Well, I Heard…!

Well, I heard that it is better to be in Heaven and live as a *spirit* than it is to live life in the *body* here on Earth?

In 2 Cor 5:8 Paul says, "Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." It certainly sounds like Paul would agree that living as a spirit would be better than living as a body, and who could blame him? He just recounted all the bodily suffering he had experienced up to this point: affliction, perplexity, persecution, being struck down (2 Cor 4:7-9). But just one verse later Paul explains why all of this happened: "So that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our *bodies*." Paul is willing to both suffer bodily hardships and even to die (be away from the body) so that he can be with the Lord! As Christians we are looking forward to the day when the Lord returns, raises the dead, and gives us new bodies so that we can live here on earth with the Lord! This is exactly what Paul told the Corinthians when he said, "Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." (2 Cor 4:14)

What About….?

What about Birth Defects?

Scripture is clear, God created all of creation "very good," but Scripture also tells us that we live in a fallen world. When sin entered in, it corrupted the good things God had made. Our bodies are subject to death and brokenness because of sin, but that does not mean that the brokenness of our body is outside of God's power or plan. When the disciples saw a man who had been born blind, they asked him whose fault it was that the man was born blind. Jesus corrected them by saying, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." (John 9:1-3). Even the brokenness of our bodies is used by God to display His grace.

Session Two: Celebrating Our Differences: The Sexes

Introduction: God made human beings as bodies, but not all bodies are the same. Some are tall. Some are short. Some are skinny. Some are… not. For as many differences as there are

from one body to the next, all seem minor when compared to one special kind of difference: male and female. So, what does it mean that some*body* is female, and some other body is male? Is there a real difference between the two? Do the differences matter? *Should the differences matter*? As we continue to look at what it means to be in the body, we have to look at what it means to be female and male.

Main Verse: Gen 1:27—"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Too often discussions about male and female begin with the differences between the two, and too often these differences are simply stereotypes. When Scripture first speaks about male and female, it begins with the "Image of God." Fundamentally being male or female is not rooted in who does the dishes, but in being a representative of God to the world. The specifics of how one represents God will change depending on the person (you or me), role (Mother or Police Officer), and, yes, even sex (male or female).

Helping Verses

Gen 2:5-7, 20-22 ("Then the Lord God formed the man of the dust … took one of his ribs")

In Gen 1:27 we see how God created both man and woman in the Image of God. Here we see the special, intimate, and distinct ways God creates the man and woman. In what ways do we in the Church tend to highlight either the differences or similarities between the sexes and so lose sight of the other?

Gal 3:26-28 ("For you are all one in Christ Jesus.")

Paul is here saying that nationality, freedom, or sex does not keep someone from being a Child of God. In that respect, Paul is saying much the same thing as Genesis 1:27. How do stereotypes creep into the way we treat and think about the sexes?

(*Suggested: Well, I Heard…*!)

Prov 31:10-31 ("Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come…")

A Proverbs 31 woman has become a common theme in the Church. Notice the combination of characteristics and actions contained in a single person. Record the actions and attributes of the excellent wife into either a "Feminine" group or a "Masculine" group. Where did you put verse 30?

(*Suggested: What About…*?)

Closing Thought: God made us male and female, not better or worse. God made the sexes for distinction, not division.

Well, I Heard…!

Well, I heard that the Bible tells women they have to wear veils.

In 1 Cor 11:2-16, Paul not only tells women to wear veils when they pray but also to have long hair! Additionally, men have to keep their hair short and not wear a hat when they pray! Is there something holy about women's hats and evil about men's hats? Hardly. Instead, Paul explains in v. 3 that this program is rooted in the proper ordering of things: "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." What does this mean? Well, it doesn't mean that women are less than men; after all, Christ is not less God than God. It simply means that our behavior should reflect the way God made us. In the culture of Paul's day, head coverings were a way to indicate to everyone that the wearer was a woman. It was a simple way to agree with the fact that God made her the way He did.[3] *What are some ways we can affirm our own creation as male and female in our cultural context*?

What About….?

What about people who are transgender?

Transgenderism is a hot topic today, but it is hardly a single movement. There are those who say gender should not matter at all, while others say gender is the most important thing. Add on top of that the political fights, and we end up with a very confusing situation. One group of people who the Church cannot lose sight of in the confusion are those struggling with painful questions about their gender identity. Pain, confusion, and distress in all their forms have their roots in the brokenness of creation caused by sin, and God has tasked the Church to bring the healing of the Gospel to a hurting world. The Church's role to those struggling with questions of gender identity is one of care and accompaniment by affirming who God has made them to be and their place within the family of God,[4] "so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (2 Cor 1:4).

Session Three: Marriage: Complementary Companionship

Introduction: This lesson signals a turn for our series. Until this point, we have been focusing on what it means to be an individual in a body. The second part of our series will look at what it means to have a relationship while in the body. For Christians, the bodily relationship par-excellence is Marriage. In the joining together of wife and husband, a unique and sacred relationship is formed, but what should this relationship look like?

Main Verse: Gen 2:18—"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"

Did you catch it? This is the only time in the creation account where God says

something is "not good." Man is in paradise and creation is in perfect harmony. What could possibly not be good about that? One simple fact: he is alone. God created human beings for a relationship with Himself and with others, and relationships require someone different. God does not make a clone of Adam, but a new creature who is different yet familiar. Woman is for man a helper "fit for him." Both are designed by God to be compatible. With the entrance of sin, that compatibility is obscured, but God's original design still shines through.

Helping Verses

Eph 5:22-32—("Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord…")

Here Paul gives us the perfect paradigm of Marriage: Christ and the Church. Christ's relationship to the Church is not one of disembodied emotion, but one of embodied action. Identify the action words Paul uses to instruct Husbands and Wives and write down 3 embodied actions that would fit under that category.

(*Suggested: Well, I Heard*…!)

Gen 2:22-23; 3:11-12 ("Bone of my bone… She gave me fruit of the tree…")

It is sad to see how quickly sin transforms the joys of Marriage into accusations and blame. Based on Ephesians 5:22-32, how should Adam have reacted to God's question?

(*Suggested: What About*…?)

Matt 19:7-12—("Made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven…")

Jesus here speaks of those who "make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Likewise, Paul says that those who can remain unmarried have received a "gift from God" (1 Cor 7:7). Often the Church spends much of its time with couples and family ministries and forgets the special gifts of its single members. In what ways can the Church better recognize and celebrate its single members?

Closing Thought: God made human beings for relationships, and the greatest human relationship is Marriage. In it Husband and Wife are able to reflect the love of Christ to each other and to the world.

Well, I Heard…*!*

Well, I heard that Paul said it was better for Christians not to get married!

If you want good, godly marriage advice, you can do no better than 1 Cor 7, so why does Paul end his advice on marriage by saying that it is better to not marry at all (v.38)? He explains that he wants them to be "free from anxieties (v. 23)." Relationships are a lot of hard work, and Marriage especially so! Paul traveled extensively, and he inevitably saw

the stress placed on Marriages that being a Christian in a hostile world caused. His advice? "I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment … I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is." (v. 25-26). *Read through 1 Cor 7:25-40. What is Paul's concern for married people? What is his concern for unmarried people? What is Paul's ultimate goal for both married and unmarried people?*

What About….?

What about people who are divorced?

Divorce is a painful reality in our world and one that is far too common. Just like our bodies and our sexes, God designed marriage in a specific way. Marriage is to be the lifelong union of a man and woman. In this respect, divorce is less like the dissolution of a legal contract and more like an amputation. Remember the words of Adam (Gen 2:22-23) and Paul (Eph 5:25-30). Jesus informs us that God is intimately involved in Marriage: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:1-10). God is the force that brings a marriage together! Notice how different this is from modern conceptions of Marriages based on "chemistry" and "compatibility." *What would a marriage that had God as its foundation look like? What specific actions would Husbands and Wives do in such a relationship?*

Session Four: Marriage: Love In The Body

Introduction: The lifelong companionship of Marriage gets a lot of attention in the Church. The physical expression of that companionship – Sex – is often swept under the rug. Many times when it is addressed in the Church, it is followed by a series of "Thou Shalt Not…!" It is not that those "Thou Shalt Not's" are wrong, but they are only one half of the story. Sex, like our bodies and our gender, is a gift of God. If it is a gift, how are we to appropriately enjoy it?

Main Verse: Gen 2:24—"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Sex was part of God's plan right from the beginning. It is hardwired into the goodness of our bodies and is the ultimate expression of oneness with another. However, just like every other part of our lives, Sex and our desires have been warped and twisted because of sin. Whereas much of the world throughout history dives headfirst into whatever direction passion might direct them, Christians have consistently sought to live their sexual lives in accord with God's original good design.

(*Suggested: Well, I Heard…*!)

Helping Verses

Song 7:1-13—("How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights…")

Did you ever expect to read a love song in the Bible that talks about thighs, bellies, breasts, and… noses? The Song of Solomon certainly does not sound like something you would hear on the radio today, but it is unmistakably a love song! Read through v. 1-9 and try to discover the most used word ("Your"18x [ESV]). What does that tell you about the focus of the Husband and Wife (v. 10)?

1 Cor 7:2-8—("Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband…")

Sexuality is not just something corrupted by sin. Paul says that godly sexuality is actually a tool to overcome sinful sexuality![5] What does this view add to the Church's conversation about sexuality?

(*Suggested: What About*…?)

Prov 5:15-23—("Drink water from your own cistern…")

With the entrance of sin, our bodies and sexuality have two sides: the original good design of God and our current corrupted reality. We have to live with the tension between the two. How does the father's advice to his son apply to our modern context? (Timeless advice!)

Closing Thought: Our sexuality is a blessing from God, but one that is broken and easily led astray. God designed sexuality for Marriage, and in it our sexuality can find healing.

Well, I Heard…*!*

Well, I heard that sex is not something that you are supposed to talk about in Church except to warn people what not to do!

If that's the case, someone should have told God! It is true that sex has often been treated in the Church as something taboo – something polite company does not talk about – but the Bible is full of stories about sex, both good and bad. In fact, an entire book of the Bible, the Song of Songs, deals extensively with the godly desire between Wife and Husband. It is true many of the Bible passages about "good" Sex do not talk *only* about Sex (they also talk about having children and the marriage relationship), but that is because Sex was *never supposed to happen in isolation*. Although we are addressing Companionship, Sex, and Procreation in different lessons, for the Christian they always go together. You cannot separate Sex from Companionship any more than you can separate Sex from the Body! *What are the dangers of not talking about the positive aspects of Sex in the Church? What are the potential benefits of a wholistic framework of Christian Sexuality?*

What About….?

What about people who are homosexual?

Scripture is clear that sexual expression is reserved for Marriage. Looking back at God's original, uncorrupted design, Jesus himself tells us that marriage is between a male

and a female (Matt 19:4-6). It is helpful to think of homosexuality in terms of any other sexual activity outside of marriage such as adultery, pornography, and pre-marital sex. The temptations of these broken expressions of sexuality are real for everyone, including Christians. It is up to the Church to come alongside and support those who are struggling to live sexually pure lives, whatever their particular struggle is.[6] It is always important to approach our brothers and sisters with humility, remembering both Paul's rebuke and comfort in 1 Cor 6:11, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Session Five: Marriage: Procreation

Introduction: Our bodies and sexes point us to our relational nature, manifested most powerfully in the companionship and love of Marriage, but what does the Marriage relationship itself point us towards? The relationship between Man and Wife is oriented towards procreation. This does not mean that a Marriage without children is any less of a Marriage; after all, a male body is no less of a male body if he remains unmarried! What this means is that God built Marriage not only for the joy of the couple but also for the expansion of that joy into the lives of children and the continuation of humanity.

Main Verse: Gen 1:28—"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

The first thing God ever said to humanity was both a blessing and a command, "Be fruitful and multiply!" God had created everything good, and here He invites us to continue and expand that goodness. Through pro*creation* we participate with God in His continuing *creation*.[7]

Helping Verses

Mal 2:13-16—("And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring…")

This verse touches on many of the topics in our series, but here in the last book of the OT God reiterates the same purpose of marriage He established in Genesis. How does God's motivation for establishing marriage compare with modern reasons for getting married?

(*Suggested: What About…*?)

Psalm 127—("Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord…")

The Bible was written in an agricultural context where children were a financial advantage since they could help work and defend the land. In our context children are often viewed as a financial liability. How might we celebrate children in our own context like the Psalmist did for his?

Gen 4:1—("I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord…")

Why talk about the birth of Cain? Sure, this is the first recorded birth in the Bible, but is not Cain a bad guy for killing his brother? That's the point! Even in the most difficult situation (kicked out of the Garden) and for every person (both "good guys" and "bad guys") the birth of a child is a blessing from God. What are the yardsticks used to measure the coming of a new child (Planned/Unplanned, Financial Costs, Preparation of Parents)? What does Eve's focus tell us of how she views the coming of her new child?

(*Suggested: Well, I heard*…!)

Closing Thought: Children are the expansion of the companionship and love of Marriage beyond the couple.

Well, I Heard…*!*

Well, I heard that Christians are not allowed to use contraception!

Contraception is one of the most debated topics in the Church. This is likely because Christians throughout history have recognized that Marriage is designed for children, *but not only for children*. Although marriages are normally expected to be fruitful, there are circumstances in which love for one's spouse may warrant the use of contraceptives, such as health and other special concerns. Without a Biblical prohibition of the practice, we cannot reject contraceptives entirely. We must, however, be discerning in its use. For example, abortifacient contraceptives (those that destroy or otherwise impair a fertilized egg from reaching maturity) are a clear breaking of the 5th Commandment and should be rejected. We must also be cognizant of the reasons why contraceptives are being used. As with every other good gift of God, sin can twist even the marriage relationship towards inward-facing selfishness. Is the decision to use contraception based on a desire to focus on the upbringing of existing children, or does it stem from an unwillingness to give up the freedom of a childless marriage? The decision to use contraception in a Christian marriage should not be made lightly, even if their use has become ubiquitous in society. A pastor can be a helpful guide when making these decisions.[8]

What About…?

What about those who are infertile?

Certainly nothing is outside of God's control, even situations of infertility. In fact, in 1 Samuel 1:6, the Bible explicitly states that "the Lord had closed Hannah's womb." Although that story ends in the joy of a child, that is not always the case for us. Often our prayers seem to go unanswered, even when we, like Hannah, "have been pouring out [our] soul before the Lord." In these situations, we can look to the comfort God always attaches to His *No's*: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor 12:9) As the Family of God, we should be a conduit of grace to those struggling with infertility, making sure that they are never alone in their struggle. With so much talk about youth ministries in the Church, it can feel like there is no place for the childless couple. What can be done in your context to be more inclusive of those without children?

Endnotes

1 “Social Issues,” Social Issues—The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, accessed December 2, 2021, https://www.lcms.org/social-issues.
2 I say this not to denigrate the godly work that has been done and continues to be done to counter the malevolent sexual forces in our society. The content of these resources is thoughtful and edifying, and thankfully there is extensive overlap between the sub-options.
3 Gregory J Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), 378-379.
4 Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria in Christian Perspective* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2014), 9.
5 Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective*, (St. Louis: TheLutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1981), 20.
6 God’s Gift of Sexuality Task Force, “PDF” (St. Louis, October 2013), 19.
7 A Task Force on Life Issues, *The Child as a Gift of God* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2016), 4.
8 Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Human Sexuality*, 19-20.

Greek and Hebrew Catechetical Devotions

Jaron Melin

Jaron Melin is a fourth-year concluding MDiv-student from Wichita, KS. He earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in mathematics at Wichita State University. He will be continuing his education in the STM program in the next academic year focusing on systematic theology.

The Greek and Hebrew catechetical devotions are intended for all students of the Greek and Hebrew Bibles who wish to embed their practice of reading the Bible from the original languages within a devotional format. Not only will they practice reading the Bible in the original languages, but they will also recite the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer in the biblical languages. It is fitting and proper to review the ABCs of the Christian faith as one engages with the Scriptures. The grammar of faith as expressed in the Catechism is an indispensable guide for navigating the theology of the Scriptures, which informs our interpretive decisions. To recite the Catechism in the biblical languages helps to further take God's Word to heart so that interpreting the Scriptures in their original languages may be more than just a cognitive exercise but truly an exercise of faith and worship. As we read the Scriptures and become immersed in them, we can find our anchor in the Catechism which guides our reading. Now, we may ask, "Why have the Catechism in the biblical languages? Why not keep them in English?" The aspect of immersion is key. As we read the Bible in its original languages, we are engaging in the worlds in which those languages were spoken. Rather than imposing our English version of the Catechism into the Greek or Hebrew world of the Bible, we can engage the text on its own cultural terms while still keeping the transcultural truth of the Catechism. We can interact with the Greek and Hebrew worlds of the Bible in a respectful way while still being firmly grounded in the Christian faith which has been given to us. The Greek and Hebrew languages as well as the Catechism have been instrumental for passing on the Gospel of Jesus Christ from generation to generation, and these catechetical devotions are intended to keep doing that.

For the Hebrew, we make use of the Westminster Codex Leningrad,[1] the multilingual version of Luther's Small Catechism by Johannes Clajus,[2] and Franz Delitzsch's Hebrew translation of the New Testament.[3] For the Greek, we make use of Brenton's Septuagint,[4] Philip Schaff's Creeds of Christendom,[5] and the Textus Receptus.[6] All these sources are in the public domain, and no restrictions are given on the use of these devotions.

Many great thanks are given to Dr. Gerhard Bode for making the work of Johannes Clajus known. This project would not have been possible without this wonderful resource. Thanks are also given to Dr. Mart Thompson for showing us how to do daily devotions using the Catechism.

Concerning the formatting, the section-titles can be read aloud during the devotion as desired, the rubrics (the italicized text) give additional instruction as desired, and certain

portions of the text are in bold if one wishes to use these devotions in a group-setting. The leader of the devotion speaks the non-bold text, and the people speak the bold text in response.

Endnotes

1 Christopher V. Kimball, Westminster Leningrad Codex (CrossWire Bible Society: Sword Module Version 1.9, 2013), https://www.crosswire.org/sword/modules/ModInfo.jsp?modName=WLC .

2 Johannes Clajus, Johannes Hardeck, and Abdias Praetorius, 1608. Catechesis D. Martini Lutheri Minor Germanice, Latine, Graece [et] Ebraice. (Wittenberg, Germany. Witebergae: Selfisch, 1608; Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek, 2014), http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/a-361b-8f-helmst-2s/start.htm .

3 Franz Delitzsch, The Hebrew New Testament (The Xiphos Developer Team: Sword Module Version 1.0, 2011), http://www.kirjasilta.net/ha-berit/index.html .

4 Brenton, Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, μετάφραση των εβδομήκοντα: The Greek Septuagint with Apocrypha. (eBible.org: Sword Module Version 1.4, 2020), https://ebible.org/details.php?id=grcbrent .

5 Philip Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical notes: Volume II The History of Creeds (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), 64, https://ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/creeds2/cache/creeds2.pdf or https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iv.i.i.i.html .

6 Adam Boyd, Η Καινή Διαθήκη: The Greek Textus Receptus New Testament with manuscript annotations by Adam Boyd (eBible.org: Sword Module Version 10.0, 2021), https://ebible.org/details.php?id= grctr .

HEBREW DEVOTIONAL CATECHISM

קְרָאֵנוּ בְּשֵׁם־יהוה

Mt. 28:19b בְּשֵׁם־הָאָב וְהַבֵּן וְהָרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ׃ אָמֵן׃

עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים

Ex. 2:2-17 אָנֹכִי יהוה אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

א לֹא יִהְיֶה־לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים׃ ס

ב לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יהוה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַשָּׁוְא׃ ס

ג זָכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ׃ פ

ד כַּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמֶּךָ׃ ס

ה לֹא תִרְצָח׃ ס

ו לֹא תִנְאָף׃ ס

ז לֹא תִגְנֹב׃ ס

ח לֹא־תַעֲנֶה בְרֵעֲךָ עֵד שָׁקֶר׃ ס

ט לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ׃ ס

י לֹא־תַחְמֹד אֵשֶׁת רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וַאֲמָתוֹ וְשׁוֹרוֹ וַחֲמֹרוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ׃ פ

הַמִּקְרָא

Read from the Hebrew Bible, the Psalms, the Catechism, or some devotion.

הָאֱמוּנַת הַמְּשִׁיִּים

אֲנִי מַאֲמִין בֵּאלֹהִים הָאָב שַׁדַּי הַבּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ׃ פ
וּבְיֵשׁוּעַ מָשִׁיחַ בְּנוֹ יְחִיד אֲדֹנֵינוּ׃ אֲשֶׁר הוֹרָה מֵרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְנוֹלַד מִמִּרְיָם
הָעַלְמָה׃ וְסָבַל תַּחַת פּוֹנְטִיוֹס פִּילַטוֹשׁ נִתְלָה מֵת וְנִקְבַּר וְיָרַד אֶל־שְׁאֹל
וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי קָם מֵאֶת־הַמֵּתִים׃ וְעָלָה אֶל־שָׁמַיִם וְיוֹשֵׁב לִימִין אֵל
הָאָב שַׁדָּי׃ וּמִשָּׁם יָבוֹא׃ לִשְׁפֹּט אֶת־חַיִּים וְאֶת־מֵתִים׃ פ
אֲנִי מַאֲמִין בְּרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ׃ אֶת־קָדוֹשׁ קְהַל הַכְּלוֹ הַחֶבְרַת הַקְּדוֹשִׁים׃
אֶת־סְלִיחַת חֲטָאִים אֶת־תְּקוּמַת הַבָּשָׂר׃ וְאֶת־חַיֵּי עוֹלָמִים אָמֵן׃ פ

נִתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יהוה

Each person prays for the day. End every prayer by saying:

יהוה בֶּאֱמֻנָתְךָ שְׁמַע תְּפִלּוֹתֵינוּ׃ — *Ps. 143:1 (MT)*

אֲדֹנִי רַחֵם־נָא׃ הַמָּשִׁיחַ רַחֵם־נָא׃ אֲדֹנִי רַחֵם־נָא׃ אָמֵן׃ — *Mt. 17:15*

תְּפִלַּת הַמָּשִׁחַ

Mt. 6:9-13

אָבִינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם׃

א יִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֶךָ׃ ס

ב תָּבֹא מַלְכוּתֶךָ׃ ס

ג יֵעָשֶׂה רְצוֹנְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם גַּם בָּאָרֶץ׃ פ

ד אֶת־לֶחֶם חֻקֵּנוּ תֵּן־לָנוּ הַיּוֹם׃ ס

ה וּמְחַל־לָנוּ עַל־חֹבוֹתֵינוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר מָחַלְנוּ גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ לְחַיָּבֵינוּ׃ ס

ו וְאַל־תְּבִיאֵנוּ לִידֵי נִסָּיוֹן׃ ס

ז כִּי אִם־תְּחַלְּצֵנוּ מִן־הָרָע׃ פ

כִּי לְךָ הַמַּמְלָכָה וְהַגְּבוּרָה וְהַתִּפְאֶרֶת לְעוֹלְמֵי עוֹלָמִים אָמֵן׃ פ

הַבְּרָכָה

הוֹדוּ לַיהוה כִּי־טוֹב **כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ׃** — *Ps. 136:1 (MT)*

אֱלֹהִים יְחָנֵּנוּ וִיבָרְכֵנוּ יָאֵר פָּנָיו אִתָּנוּ׃ **אָמֵן׃** — *Ps. 67:2 (MT)*

GREEK DEVOTIONAL CATECHISM

Ἐπικαλοῦμεθα τὸ ὄνομά Κυρίου

Εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος. **Ἀμήν.** *Mt. 28:19b*

Οἱ Δέκα Λόγοι

Ἐγώ εἰμι Κύριος ὁ Θεός σου. *Ex. 2:2-17*

α Οὐκ ἔσονταί σοι θεοὶ ἕτεροι.
β Οὐ λήψῃ τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ σου ἐπὶ ματαίῳ·
γ Μνήσθητι τὴν ἡμέραν τῶν σαββάτων ἁγιάζειν αὐτήν.
δ Τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου, καὶ τὴν μητέρα σου.
ε Οὐ μοιχεύσεις.
ζ Οὐ κλέψεις.
η Οὐ φονεύσεις.
θ Οὐ ψευδομαρτυρήσεις κατὰ τοῦ πλησίον σου μαρτυρίαν ψευδῆ.
ι Οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ πλησίον σου·
κ Οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ πλησίον σου, οὔτε τὸν παῖ-δα αὐτοῦ, οὔτε τὴν παιδίσκην αὐτοῦ, οὔτε τοῦ βοὸς αὐτοῦ, οὔτε τοῦ ὑποζυγίου αὐτοῦ, οὔτε ὅσα τῷ πλησίον σου ἐστί.

Ἡ Ἀνάγνωσις

Read from the Greek Bible, the Psalms, the Catechism, or some devotion.

Σύμβολον τῶν Ἀποστόλων

Πιστεύω εἰς Θεὸν πατέρα, Παντοκράτορα, Ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς.

Καὶ εἰς Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, Υἱὸν Αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν, τὸν συλληφθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος ἁγίου, γεννηθέντα ἐκ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου, παθόντα ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, σταυρωθέντα, θανόντα, καὶ ταφέντα, κατελθόντα εἰς τὰ κατώτατα, τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστάντα ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανούς, καθεζόμενον ἐν δεξιᾷ Θεοῦ Πατρὸς παντοδυνάμου, ἐκεῖθεν ἐρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς.

Πιστεύω εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, ἁγίαν καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ἁγίων κοινωνίαν, ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν, ζωὴν αἰώνιον. Ἀμήν.

Εὐχόμεθα πρὸς τὸν Κύριον.

Each person prays for the day. End every prayer by saying:

*Κύριε, ἐν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ σου· **εἰσάκουσον τῆς προσευχῆς ἡμῶν.*** *Ps. 142:1 (LXX)*

Κύριε, **ἐλέησον.** Χριστέ, **ἐλέησον.** Κύριε, **ἐλέησον. Ἀμήν.** *Mt. 17:15*

Ἡ Εὐχὴ Κυριακῇ

Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. *Mt. 6:9-13*

α **Ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου.**

β **Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου.**

γ **Γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.**

δ **Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον.**

ε **Καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφίεμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν.**

ζ **Καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν,**

η **Ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.**

Ὅτι σοῦ ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεία καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν.

Ἡ Εὐλογία

Ἐξομολογεῖσθε τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὅτι ἀγαθός, **ὅτι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ.**

Ps. 135:1 (LXX)

Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ἡμῶν. **Ἀμήν.** *2 Co. 13:14*

Poetry

Morning

By Cody MacMillin

Cody MacMillin is a second-year M.Div student at Concordia Seminary. He received his bachelor's degree from Texas A&M University in 2020 with a major in English and has a special interest in rhetorical studies.

She raises the old hands
of a grandfather's clock
to reach their tallest pose,
swan-diving to slumber.
She cradles coos and cries
of children still restless,
waiting for the whisper
of mother to meet them.
She slinks past the hurting,
the hurried and harrowed,
heartbroken, hungover,
before their fretful rise.

She is the end of dreams
but never the nightmares,
exposing thick darkness
while imposing shadows.
She is the global fruit
of great toil and spins,
searching for order and
rhythm as they were set,
spoken by that great Voice.

She brings the Psalmist joy
and Moses fresh manna,
a pillar of cloud and
her own troubles, worries;
the fish of Galilee,
weighing down Peter's nets,
pulling the naked man
to share His company.

A rattling cry
A rooster's crow.
A risen King whose light is shone,
Morning.

Deep Roots Are Not Touched by the Frost

By Aidan Moon

Aidan Moon is a vicar currently serving Zion Lutheran Church in Bismarck, ND. He grew up on cattle ranches in Colorado, Montana, and New Mexico, and is a graduate of Concordia University Nebraska. He will continue his education as a fourth-year concluding MDiv student next year.

Deep roots are not touched by the frost
I've sometimes pulled from mine
But they are holding me steady
A twisting web of God's design

I long for something strong
For roots digging deep in soil
For heritage, adoption, life
There's more than one I can hold

At first by blood, then water
Bound, ancestors and brothers
A part of a family
That holds to one another

The ones who are my kindred
And those who with me are buried
God will raise from darkness
Will care for, tend, and carry

The rebel heart, reforming,
I came by it honestly
my heritage, my birthright
To act courageously

A passion for a Gospel
Unable to be tamed
Love for the one who healed
The blind, the sick, and the lame

These books and clothes, mementos
Photographs and memories
I won't release my hold
That family love is a tree

At times my heart it aches
As I think of those I've lost
But you're holding me steady
Deep roots are not touched by the frost

Kyrie Eleison

By Aidan Moon

Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison
Towering stone and spreading branches
Darker steps, creation dances
Light is clouded for a time
Melancholy on the mind!
Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison
Pensive stares cannot dissuade us
From the hand of God who made us
Darker though the heavens grow
Spirit wind through burdens blows
Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison
Rippling light as fountains fill
Wearing waters cleanse the filth
Clouds of doom but restoration
All at once, a new creation
Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison
The light reflective, bells in toll
As saintly voices call the roll
The promise stands, the maker made it
Foundation of a reign, he laid it!
Alleluia!
Alleluia!

Collaborative Essays

Collaborative Essays

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In the spirit of fellowship, the student journals of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne have decided to use their publications as an opportunity for conversation and edification between our two student bodies. As students may have seen, we have begun to distribute each other's journals on our campuses and now in this issue we share a collaborative project we have been working on.

This year marks the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament into his vernacular tongue. But the project of translation did not end there. Every Sunday a faithful Lutheran preacher must also translate the Word of God to his hearers. He must rightly divide the Word of Truth and lay it before his congregation in such a way that it communicates God's Word to hearers situated in a particular time and place. Preaching must coherently and compellingly present the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ in a contemporary context.

We have asked a student from each of our seminaries to offer some words on how preachers today can engage in this task intentionally and creatively. We envision this pair of essays as being like a micro-conference in print, the beginning of a conversation on how to preach the Gospel of Jesus faithfully and compellingly to a world in need of it. We hope that students will continue the conversation begun here among themselves and well into the future. Certainly as future preachers of the message of salvation we cannot learn enough from each other about how to preach this message to the world around us.

The essay from CSL fourth-year student Charles Ridley discusses how we can present the *content* of the gospel in our contemporary context. His essay draws on the research of missiologist Jayson Georges to lay out a program for preaching the one gospel under three different cultural frameworks: guilt/innocence, honor/shame and fear/power cultures. In this way our preaching can speak to the whole experience of the human person. CTSFW fourth-year Ethan Stoppenhagen explores how preachers can attend to the *style* of their preaching by immersing themselves in their literary tradition. He argues that the gospel is best presented when situated within the vast literary tradition that the present age stands heir to. We thank both writers for their contributions and hope you will benefit from these essays as we have.

The Gospel for the Whole Person: Attending to Sin and Grace Throughout the Human Experience

By Charles Ridley

Chuck Ridley is a concluding MDiv student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He plans to continue his studies under reduced residency status in the STM program while serving in the parish.

Preaching is the means by which the Holy Spirit speaks to God's people through the preacher who stands in the stead of Jesus, the Lord of the Church. Through a sermon that is faithful to God's revealed will and written Word, the Spirit convicts the world concerning sin and proclaims the gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation which is found in Christ alone. The basic task placed before us in preaching is not only to be faithful to scripture, but also to make a coherent and compelling presentation of the gospel. Most of those reading this will be familiar with the basic Law/Gospel dynamic of preaching and the move we typically make in applying it: you have broken the law and are therefore guilty, but Jesus took your place in bearing the punishment for your transgression, so you are forgiven and declared innocent before God. But is this the only faithful, coherent, and compelling way to apply law and gospel in preaching? Or is there more going on in the lives of hearers that could be addressed by the gospel? Is this account as coherent and compelling as it could be to those who experience more than just feelings of guilt and innocence in their lives? What does the gospel have to say to our other experiences, such as fear and shame?

Drawing on the work of Eugene Nida, Jayson Georges identifies three different types of cultures in our world, categorized based on how each type handles "transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes."[1] The types are named according to their responses to sin and the solution to those responses. Our familiar, individualistic, Western culture-type responds to breaking the law with guilt, as noted above. This guilt is primarily experienced internally or as a status before an institution, not so much a relational status with the community. The punishment that coincides with such guilt is imposed individually. The solution to this guilt is presented in judicial terms, using words like "pardon," "substitution," and "justification"—terms that identify a restoration (or declaration) of innocence. So, the basic gospel narrative depicted above clearly aligns well with this cultural "framework." But the other two types of culture do not think and speak primarily in these terms. Many

"Shame" by Joe Gatling CC BY 2.0.

cultures in the world are more collectivistic than our individualistic Western culture; their morals are primarily determined communally, and they respond to transgressions against those moral standards primarily with shame rather than guilt. This shame is more about identity than action (who I am rather than what I do); it separates an individual from their community, and it is solved by honor that comes through reconciliation and restoration of the broken relationship. Then there are still other types of cultures which tend to focus more on the spiritual world and experience life more in terms of battle with those spiritual forces. This type of culture primarily experiences fear in the face of the unknown, especially of forces that would harm them for living in "disharmony with the spiritual"[2] and seeks power to contend with the unseen forces of the world. These three types of culture are conveniently referred to as guilt-innocence, shame-honor, and fear-power.

But it is critical to recognize that each of these cultural frameworks expresses an aspect of the total human experience. As such, there are components of each paradigm in every specific human culture. That is, every culture on earth manifests its own blend of these three paradigms.[3] We should not treat any culture or any person as a pure expression of only one of these paradigms. Instead, these categories serve to help us see, understand, and respond to different aspects of the total human experience in a faithful and effective way. It may be helpful to think of these cultural types as different melodic lines that come together to form a harmony. The gospel can "sing" according to any one of the types, but when they are all combined over the course of a preacher's career, his hearers get the full experience of the glorious gospel of Christ. The importance for all preachers of the gospel to recognize and engage with these different cultural frameworks thus becomes clear. By addressing these different paradigms, preachers are expressing a fuller picture of reality, from the human experience of sin and their attempts to deal with it on their own to the gospel of God's grace in Christ to provide the real solution to sin and its consequences. Preachers thereby provide a more coherent and compelling account of the gospel to all people, addressing their actions and their identity.

Note that these are not purely sociological concepts but reflect biblical ideas. As Georges notes, "Adam and Eve's original sin introduced guilt, shame, and fear to the world. But God restores innocence, honor, and power to those who trust Him through the atoning life and death of Jesus Christ."[4] Major themes in scripture, which we regularly use in preaching, express this diversity. Readers will undoubtedly be most familiar with the judicial language of scripture, especially prevalent in the Pauline epistles, which often expresses the guilt-innocence paradigm. But consider the prevalent themes of feast and ritual purity which are woven throughout the Old and New Testaments. These themes express hospitality, inclusion, and acceptability, experiences that are more closely aligned with the shame-honor paradigm than with guilt-innocence. One's purity and acceptability may be linked with their guilt or innocence regarding keeping of the law, but one's purity or defilement impacts more than just oneself. It is a communal status. It may accompany guilt, but it does not have to, and it stands as its own status. Likewise, the fear-power paradigm can be seen in themes such as warfare and captivity. Israel battles its enemies and ends up in bondage. While their defeat may be a result of their guilt from not keeping God's law, they nonetheless experience these aspects of life which are not themselves an expression of innocence or guilt, since being in a

battle or in captivity is not always directly related to the judicial process of determining one's guilty status. One may be attacked or imprisoned despite being innocent of having broken any laws. Furthermore, as we see with Israel, forgiveness addresses their guilt, but it does not directly set them free from captivity. Israel needs the power of God to rescue them from bondage. These different cultural frameworks simply focus on individual facets of the whole gospel of Christ. The gospel can, then, be preached faithfully in terms of shame and honor or fear and power, in addition to guilt and innocence.

We are familiar with guilt-innocence culture and often speak exclusively in the language of that framework because that is how we have been taught to read scripture and how to preach. But, aligning with the language of scripture, our language still often wanders into expressing our sin problems in terms that would more appropriately be categorized under other frameworks. These expressions are not coherently and compellingly addressed through a proclamation of innocence, but ought to be addressed with their proper solution. One familiar example, though unlikely to have been taught to most readers in terms of these paradigms, is the explanation to the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us [from] [...] *great shame* and vice, and that [...] we may finally *prevail and gain the victory*."[5] Here, Luther himself expresses the gospel in terms of shame-honor and fear-power. Luther did not have to do some special study to determine categories of cultural thinking. He simply expressed the range of human experience and how God addresses the various results of sin. Thus, gospel proclamation limited to the guilt-innocence paradigm may leave people feeling that God has not addressed all their needs and they may wander into idolatry seeking solutions to the problems caused by their sin which are not experienced as guilt, but rather as shame or fear.[6]

Furthermore, some recognize that Americans experience more elements of the shame-honor paradigm than is typically realized or acknowledged.[7] Georges' work is again helpful here. The source of these cultural frameworks is seen in how each type of culture meets the basic needs of its members. In a chart comparing how the three frameworks meet "human needs," a task which reflects how "cultures embody their subsurface values," Georges shows us that in an honor-shame culture sickness is considered to be best treated by "a traditional natural remedy" rather than "a doctor's prescription," a person's misdeeds affect their "public reputation" rather than their "internal conscience," people desire "status and face" over equality and fairness, and people tend to feel "inferior" after misdeeds rather than "remorseful."[8] Consider the push for "organic" foods and "natural" remedies, the ubiquity of social media, and a general sense that we have to do enough to be enough. All of these express aspects of a culture that deals in honor and shame. For instance, a mom of two toddlers may choose to buy "organic" produce because the other moms in the neighborhood do this (communal expectation), and she would experience some degree of shame if she did not follow suit—she would be made to feel inadequate as a mother. She is not guilty before an institution but shamed by a community. Likewise, an ill-advised post on social media may seek to obtain "face" or status with a community (i.e., "friends" or "followers"), but can just as easily attract degrading shame in the form of mockery and cyber-bullying. This is not inherently a legal issue, but a communal issue related to reputation and identity. Of course, there can be aspects of guilt and innocence in the manifestations of these phenomena, such

as legal ramifications of cyber-bullying and any physical harm that may result, or the mother trying to avoid feelings of guilt for transgressing God's command to care for creation. But these aspects of guilt can coexist with the aspects of shame.

I hope the importance of attending to cultural frameworks other than guilt-innocence is now evident. But let me be clear that I am not suggesting we abandon the guilt-innocence framework. I am arguing for a fuller, more robust presentation of the gospel, not a mere chasing after the winds of change. I am arguing that we express the full harmony of the gospel in our preaching. Guilt-innocence is expressed in scripture and must be proclaimed when it is encountered in the text and, at the same time, shame-honor and fear-power are also expressed in scripture and must be proclaimed when *they* are encountered in the text. Our hearers experience sin and its results in a variety of ways, not just as guilt. So, through awareness of these different paradigms of sin and grace and intentional engagement with them in our preaching, we are better able to proclaim the full gospel to all people to address their whole lives. To try to make one framework fit into another—to attempt to turn shame or fear into guilt—not only does a disservice to the text, but also does disservice to (dare I say dishonors?) our hearers. It not only does not address the problems they are experiencing, but it heaps another burden on top of the one already being experienced. In other words, if we ignore these biblical and cultural distinctions and try to preach the gospel as pardon for transgression when the text conveys honor to resolve shame, our proclamation will not be as strongly coherent and persuasive that it would be if we were to recognize and proclaim the gospel through the lens of honor. The point is that we are called to proclaim God's truth in its fullness, and as we do so faithfully, we anticipate that God's Word will reach more people in a more complete way.

Seeing the need to expand our range of proclamation to be faithful to scripture and to connect with people who experience sin as shame and fear as well as guilt, how do we address these different frameworks in our preaching? What does this look like? An easy first step might be to simply read Georges' book, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures*, as a primer to enhance awareness of the subject. It is short and straightforward, yet full of helpful information that might easily be overlooked otherwise. Other books on the subject are available and provide more depth that could help us in evaluating our own reading of scripture and our application of it to preaching.[9]

As we become more familiar with these frameworks and their expressions in scripture and in the lives of those around us (including ourselves), we can begin to intentionally incorporate the relevant language in our sermons. Sin and grace can be expressed not only in terms of guilt and innocence, but also in terms of alienation and restoration, of bondage and power. But this is not a case of simply translating one framework into another. It is not as if guilt-innocence is the "right" framework and we are merely accommodating other frameworks up to a certain point. No, this is a recognition of the variety of human experiences of sin and grace. For instance, addiction is a consequence of our sinful condition, but on its face, addiction to tobacco does not make one guilty of breaking some law,[10] but rather binds the one addicted and requires power, not pardon, to overcome it. Similarly, feeling like an outsider among one's classmates or coworkers is not a matter of guilt, but of shame, which is not rectified by an acquittal, but with reconciliation

and inclusion. Our Lord is superabundant in his mercy and grace and has addressed every problem our sin causes. He pardons our guilt, restores our dignity, reconciles us to the Father, and he gives us power to withstand the assaults of the devil along with authority to forgive and retain sins. Once we are aware of these different paradigms and start to see them in scripture, I think it will become clear that addressing these facets of the gospel is not an optional "upgrade" to our preaching and teaching, but it is necessary to be faithful to the biblical witness.

Such expansion of our preaching could manifest itself in the following ways. Our understanding and expression of the shame-honor dominant culture of ancient Israel and the surrounding nations is enhanced, and our hearers may be able to better relate to and appreciate the accounts of this in scripture. Themes such as uncleanness and adoption become more coherent and compelling within a paradigm that is communal rather than individualistic, since they are relational in nature. Preaching can highlight the dignity that is conveyed through the act of adoption, which not only proclaims gospel to those who struggle with their identity and worth but can also elevate the importance of human adoption that expresses God's love to those who have experienced the shame of losing their family. Our adoption into God's family does not address any guilt we may have but brings honor to resolve our shame. Our preaching ought to reflect this. Vocation also becomes critical since social roles are central to the dynamics of honor and shame. The fourth commandment is the prime example, emphasizing the need to honor those in authority. Attending to the dynamics of honor and shame can help expand preaching on this aspect of the Christian life, beyond outward obedience. For instance, a preacher may be able to admonish adults to care for their aging parents in a more compelling way by expressing it in terms of shame-honor rather than in terms of avoiding guilt of breaking a law. It is easy to write a check, send aging parents into a nursing home, and consider one's duty done. But does this bring honor to parents, or shame? Christ has not just paid our debt for sin and left us as free individuals but has incorporated us into his body.

Exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, woodcut for "Die Bibel in Bildern," 1860. Public domain.

Likewise, bringing in a greater expression and understanding of the fear-power framework can help inculcate a deeper sense of the reality of spiritual warfare in the life of

Christians. Consider the use of the word "Lord." This fits within the fear-power paradigm, yet we tend to throw it around as nothing more than an honorary title. Christ provides pardon as mediator, but as Lord, he brings protection and authority. The working of Satan in this world is no mere analogy or allegory but is taken seriously in the fear-power paradigm and preaching that intentionally attends to this reality drives us back to the one who can rescue us, to Christ who has already triumphed over him. Proclaiming Christ as Lord portrays his power and assuages fear more so than guilt. The full harmony of the gospel can be heard as we intentionally incorporate the other melodies it plays.

I want to emphasize that this is no simple task. The gospel cannot be picked apart, nor are there different "gospels." The different aspects get intertwined, as I have already noted. However, I advocate a greater understanding and application of these different paradigms simply because I recognize the value of pursuing the expansion of our preaching to intentionally address these different expressions of sin and grace. Having tried this a couple of times, my humble perspective is that this is no easy task. Falling back into familiar ways is easy and it takes time and effort to reorient our thoughts and speech. Misaligning the aspect of gospel proclamation with the aspect of law in our sermons is easy to do. But who said preaching was supposed to be easy? If nothing else, in addition to being faithful to the texts we are preaching, applying ourselves as preachers to this "3D Gospel" might exemplify and embody for our hearers the fullness of Christ's saving work for us.

Endnotes

1 Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures,* (Timē Press, 2016), 10.

2 Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 26.

3 Georges, *The 3D Gospel,* 16.

4 Georges, *The 3D Gospel,* 49.

5 Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 358. Emphasis mine.

6 Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 9-10. Georges tells the story of a Central Asian woman who came to faith through the proclamation of the gospel in guilt-innocence terms, but subsequently faced problems in life that reflected the other two paradigms. The contention is that the guilt-innocence paradigm could not coherently and compellingly address these problems for the woman, and she was pushed by others into injustice and idolatrous actions to deal with those problems. One might argue that she is nonetheless accountable for her actions and therefore guilty, but this misses the point that the woman has not been taught to call upon the Lord (Rom. 10:14) in situations in which she is not deemed guilty. It is from the mishandling of the experiences of shame and fear, resulting from a lack of teaching, that she becomes guilty.

7 Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 22, 118-20. Cf. Georges, 3D Gospel, 15. While working for a different purpose, Ryan P. Brown also works off the premise that America has deep roots in the shame-honor paradigm, *Honor Bound: How a Cultural Ideal Has Shaped the American Psyche,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

8 Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 30-1.

9 See E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2012); Juliet November, *Honor/Shame Cultures: A Beginner's Guideo Cross-Cultural Missions* (self-pub., 2017); Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016).

10 One might argue that such an addiction breaks the fifth commandment because of its direct harm to self and indirect harm to neighbor, but this would have to be a labored argument and misses the point that the addiction is a form of bondage out of which one is not freed by a declaration of innocence, but by deliverance from the captivity and power over the oppressive force.

Making the Case for Preachers Who Read

Ethan Stoppenhagen

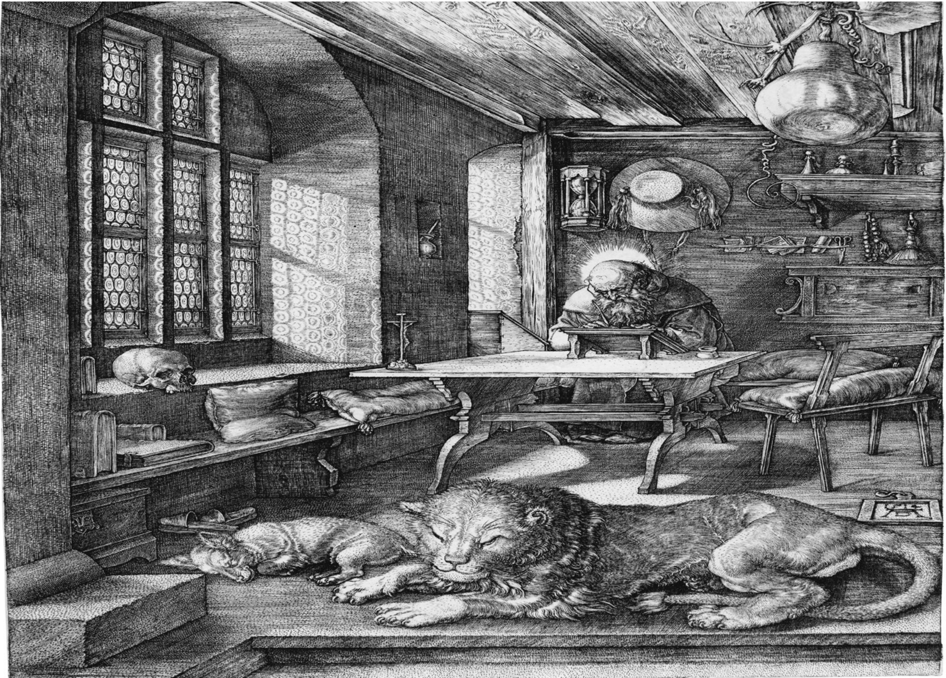
Ethan Stoppenhagen is a fourth-year student at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Raised on a farm near Ossian, Indiana, he studied Classics and German at Valparaiso University and was a Christ College Scholar. He and his wife, Lauren, look forward to serving Christ's Church wherever the Lord calls them.

I once heard a story about a new pastor in the early 1990s who was settling into his first call in Pembroke, Ontario. A man walked into his study and silently began perusing the shelves. The pastor noticed him, but carried on with his business. The stranger spent several minutes pulling books off the shelves, flipping pages, nodding and murmuring, and setting some books apart by laying them on their spines. Occasionally he'd hold up a book with a quizzical look on his face. "Required for class," the pastor shrugged, and the man would scoff and shove it back on the shelf. Finally, the stranger came to a shelf with a few copies of the recently founded journal First Things. "You're a subscriber?" he asked. The pastor nodded. The man smiled, walked over to the desk, stuck out his hand, and finally introduced himself. "I'm Richard Neuhaus. I've come to invite you and your wife to lunch next Sunday, but now that I see what you read, we're going to have a nice lunch." And he walked out the door.

What a pastor reads will usually reveal his theological convictions. That's why we're quick to check out a classmate's library whenever we get the chance. Of course, not all of us will have Richard John Neuhaus critiquing our shelves, but we generally know what makes for good Lutheran reading. If your friend's library is filled with the leading thinkers of Lutheran Orthodoxy, all the volumes of that Concordia Heritage Series, a set of Luther's Works, the writings of Hermann Sasse, and a handful of Concordia Commentaries, you can probably be sure that he's a "solid guy." On the other hand, if his library looks eerily similar to your small-town Christian bookstore, then you should probably be a little more suspicious.

But reading does more than inform one's theological convictions. It shapes how one thinks and speaks, as well. This is especially apparent in preaching. If a pastor's sermons are scripturally sound yet lacking any sense of form or style, then you can rest assured that he's still digging deep into his Lutheran dogmatics texts. But if his preaching is theologically insubstantial and sounds more like a reading of his Twitter feed from the past week, then he might not be reading much at all.

For the preaching task, continuous and deep study of the Scriptures (in their original languages), the Lutheran Confessions, and the writings of orthodox theologians are a given necessity. But a pastor's reading certainly shouldn't be limited to these texts. His deep study of theology should be matched by a wide reading of good literature. For as much as preaching is a unique form of communication, it does have place within the literary tradition. Preachers stand alongside poets, authors, and essayists as stewards of the word—albeit a livelier and more active Word. As such, the gifts of writers—a love of language, the power



Jerome in His Study. Albrecht Dürer. 1514. Public domain.

of observation, a sense of drama, an aptitude for metaphor and simile, the rhythm of a well-constructed sentence, and the overarching desire to pursue and convey truth—ought to be developed and engaged by pastors for the sake of the Gospel proclamation.

The writers of Sacred Scripture possessed these literary gifts, as did the great preachers of the Church through the centuries. ("The Bible is more than literature, but it certainly isn't less than literature," one of our theologians has said.) However, our presuppositions about these texts being primarily theological have hindered us from seeing their literary richness. For the modern reader, such treasures are often unlocked only after encountering them in other written works and being guided to recognize them. The study of grammatical and rhetorical devices in classical texts, as well as the conversation that seeks to understand their ends, can enlighten our minds as we continue to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the biblical text.

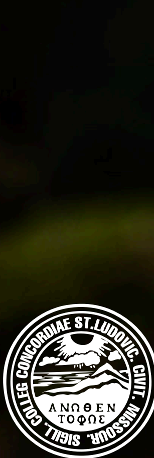
Most seminarians are often encouraged to read non-theological texts for the sake of sermon illustrations. Novels, magazines, and newspapers thus become sources for aphorisms, anecdotes, and pop culture references that help connect the reader to the biblical text. These are indeed valuable resources to have in one's homiletical arsenal. But even more than building a bank of illustrations and examples, reading improves grammar and expands vocabulary. At a very basic level, one's sermon writing can be improved simply by reading an article or book and taking notice of new words and how the author uses them in a sentence. As one reads more regularly, rhetorical devices like repetition, assonance, and hyperbole become more noticeable, and one (often unwittingly) begins to incorporate them into their own writing.

When a preacher's writing improves, his sermons become more coherent and engaging. He doesn't feel the need to distract with useless repetition, confuse with theological cliches, or bore the listener with endless anecdotes to "make things relevant." Instead, a pastor's own desire to write his sermons logically and beautifully draws the reader more deeply into the text on which he is preaching. Indeed, preaching done well should not only convey the theological truths of a biblical text, but also reveal the dramatic and poetic character that the scriptures inherently possess. It ought to provoke questions in the hearer's mind, pique his curiosity, and reveal the dynamic character of God's Word. The hearers then come to see the Bible not as a dusty old storybook, rule manual, or theological textbook, but as the living and active Word that it is.

Beyond learning to write well, a preacher should read to understand their cultural milieu and the state of mankind in general. Writers and poets, artists and musicians tend to have their finger on the pulse of humanity. They're intimately aware of the undercurrents of society and the desires of the masses, and they are often the ones bold enough to offer a critique. In this way, the creative vocations parallel the preaching task, as both seek to understand the human condition, find something lacking, and offer the truth (sometimes to a hostile and unreceptive audience). They see the sin, temptation, and corruption of earthly life and desire to offer hope and comfort in the midst of despair.

This pursuit of truth is certainly shared by both the preaching and writing tasks. This isn't always obvious, given the less-than-wholesome lives many writers and artists live in comparison to pastors. For example, many authors of the Beat Generation, a twentieth century American literary movement, appeared to be some of the most faithless, down-and-out, debauched people of their era. Nonetheless, many of them argued that the truth they were pursuing—their "Beat"—was ultimately the Beatific Vision. (Sometimes the further people are pressed into the margins, the closer they are brought to the truth.) When it comes to truth, however, preaching rise above the work of other writers. While preachers and writers both seek truth in some capacity, the preacher ultimately lays claim to possess the Word of Truth which he has been given him to proclaim. His is truly the highest creative task as he preaches the Word through whom the world was created. Nonetheless, in order to deepen his understanding of mankind and his culture, the preacher ought to recognize what he holds in common with writers and can learn from them.

How then does a preacher begin the journey into reading good literature? With small steps and a traveling partner or two. The paths of literature are innumerable, and it's easy to accidentally head down the wrong one. The essential first step is finding someone well-versed in the tradition who is willing to get to know you, curate a reading list for you, and then discuss the texts with you. This could be a mentor, a classmate, a fellow pastor, or even a congregation member once you're in the parish. It should be someone who is willing to read, meet regularly, and ask questions of both you and the text. It's not an easy task to read texts deeply, to analyze carefully, and interpret charitably. But the desire to learn and a dose of intellectual humility will go a long way to strengthen your mind and enhance your proclamation of the Truth.



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