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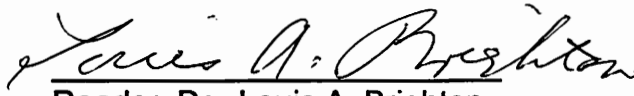
**A STUDY GROUP EXAMINES
A PARADOXICAL VISION OF THE END TIMES**

A Major Applied Project Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

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**To The Members Of St. Paul's Lutheran Congregation
California, Missouri**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to show how the use of paradox is a valid, essential tool for the expression of certain Christian truths in general, and for end-times teachings in particular. In light of the approaching millennium, Biblical end-times paradoxes will help counter prophets who seize this moment to tickle ears and generate fears. A congregational study group served as the means to test these assertions. Questionnaires filled out by this study group served as an evaluative tool. The findings reveal the correlation between the right use of paradox and a Gospel-centered view of the end-times.

**PART I. APOLEGETICAL, HISTORICAL, EXEGETICAL,
ETHICAL, AND SYSTEMATIC CONSIDERATIONS
PERTINENT TO A PARADOXICAL VISION
OF THE END TIMES**

CHAPTER I

“AN APOLOGETIC FOR A PARADOXICAL VISION OF THE END TIMES”

Father Jerzy Popieluszko, a Polish priest martyred by communists, once said, “a Christian must be a sign of contradiction in the world.”¹ Popieluszko might well have said we are to be a paradoxical people. A paradox refers to two assertions which apparently contradict each other but are true.

As people born again by the life-giving news of a paradox, namely, how God declares the “ungodly” “godly” (Rom 4:5), we are by our second birth, people blessed with paradoxical eyes. We have been given by the Spirit vision which walks not by sight but by faith (II Cor 5:7). In Augustinian fashion we say, “I believe in order to see.”

To the world, so much of what God grants us to see through faith seems unreasonable and even nonsensical. Yet it is all true. God’s Word contains a wisdom higher than man’s. As I Corinthians 1:25 says, “...the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

God’s wisdom, so often filled with paradoxes, bestows upon the believer an understanding of reality which sees blind spots missed by man due to sin (Rom 11:8-10). Living in a culture which is, as Robert H. Bork’s recent book aptly put it, Slouching Towards Gomorrah², we see a need to view reality in a

¹Gene Edward Veith, Jr., Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture (Wheaton, Illinois: Good News Publishers, 1994), p.231.

²Robert H. Bork, Slouching Towards Gomorrah (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996).

manner which avoids not only denial of major epistemological problems, but also hopelessness and euphoria. In order for that to happen, I believe we need a paradoxical vision of the end times.

A paradoxical vision of the end times is an essential vision for these gray and latter days, days in which we are witnessing “a world that could well be moving toward dissolution.”³ For without this vision, people will either become unduly optimistic—building sand castles, falsely thinking that human praxis can provide an exodus out of the wilderness created by original sin; or, they will become overly pessimistic, feeling like they are trapped in a cosmic squirrel cage. Both are consequence of failing to see the “yet, not yet” victory that the cosmic Redeemer-Lord of the universe (Col 1: 15-20) has secured as the timeless One Who entered time to be the death of death by His death (Heb 2:14).

³Robert Benne, The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 25. Robert Kolb, a Lutheran scholar known for not being given to extremes wrote in 1995, “Although we do not like to hear it, it is possible that North American society has gone too far to be salvaged; its exploitation of the poor and needy may cry to heaven for such a judgment as we cannot imagine.” See Concordia Journal (July, 1995), p. 336. Stanley Rothman, a third researcher, an agnostic sociologist/political scientist who for decades has studied the cultural landscape of the Western world, has arrived at some gloomy conclusions about our declining society. His diagnosis according to Peter Brimelow, a writer for *Forbes*, “This religious tradition (Protestant Christianity) may be self-destructing. Its very rationality is undercutting the religious basis of its values. And its very economic success has financed the rise of what Rothman calls ‘cultural strategic elites’—influential groups like his major media professionals and academics—who are divorced from the system and, his polls show, increasingly hostile to it.” *Forbes*, (July 17, 1995) 101-102.

Without a paradoxical vision of the end times, one is likely to conclude that history is no more than “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”⁴ For without a vision of the eternal I AM's *alpha* point of his incarnation (Jn 1:14), *iota* point of perfectly fulfilling the law for fallen humanity (Mt 5:17-18; II Cor 5:21), *lambda* point of being the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29), *sigma* point of the resurrection (I Cor 15:4), and *omega* point of returning at the end of history (Mt 25:31-46), history has absolutely no meaning. Without a paradoxical vision of “how the dear Gospel fared in the world,”⁵ history becomes reduced to a king-of-the-hill contest where, for the most part, one Machiavellian thug after another spends great energy in “chasing after the wind” (Ecc 2:17) to enslave the masses for a mere moment in time.⁶

The call for a paradoxical vision of the end times is a clarion call for the right proclamation of the Gospel and a correct hearing it.⁷ After all, the message

⁴John Bartlett, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations (London: Little, Brown, and Company, 1882, 1980), p.240. These words are from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, V, v, 17.

⁵One of Luther's definitions of history.

⁶Implicit in this introduction of paradox is that the right use of it is a complete gift of God, a *testimonium spiritus santi in cordibus*. It is not due to human achievement but human reivement, by grace through faith in the paradoxical work of God's holy Son, Jesus Christ.

⁷In New Testament nomenclature the end times encompasses the whole New Testament age beginning with the incarnation of our Lord, stretching to His second coming. The “eschaton days” according to Hebrews 1:2 were inaugurated when the Word became flesh, “but in these eschaton days (God) has spoken to us by His Son.” On Pentecost day the apostle Peter proclaimed that the eschaton had arrived. Citing the prophet Joel, Peter declared to his hearers that the last days were upon them: “No, this is what the was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the eschaton days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all

of the Gospel is both highly paradoxical and highly eschatological. It offers high paradox—as alluded to earlier—in that the message of the Gospel is the good news of how God, for the sake of the redemptive work of his Son, declares the ungodly—godly (Rom 4:5)!⁸ Furthermore, the Gospel bestows gifts lofty in eschatological character, in that the message of the Gospel prepares the believer in Christ to live as a new creature (II Cor 5:17) in the end times (I Cor 10:11), as well as preparing the Christian for the future life after death (Phil 1:21), for bodily resurrection (I Cor 15: 51-57), Judgment Day (Rom 8:1), and the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1-4).

As noted earlier, a paradoxical vision of the end times is especially necessary due to the nature of the times. For a paradoxical vision provides us with a theology of hope to help us cope without greasing a slope that otherwise might lead into utopianism or escapism. For example, the paradoxical vision sees the “yet, not yet” nature of Christ’s victory. It *knows* that “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37), and yet, it recognizes *at the same time* “that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).⁹ Such a vision keeps one from viewing reality either through solely

people” (Acts 2:16,17). About this passage, F.F. Bruce asserts, “The ‘last days’ began with Christ’s first advent and will end with His second advent; they are days which the age to come overlaps the present age.” F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p.68).

⁸While the subject of paradox will be treated substantially throughout this paper, another (Cf. footnote 2) good working theological definition of paradox is the following: “A paradox refers to two statements that apparently contradict each other but are ultimately true.” See Benne, The Paradoxical Vision, 64.

⁹All Biblical citations will be from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

rose-colored glasses or merely through thorn-clouded lenses. Only through the Gospel-born vision, which sees Christ's Good Friday-Easter Sunday-Means of Grace victory in the midst of the ongoing battles of life, do we have a correct view of the Divine drama being played out in history. It is this *cross-eyed, double-vision* view that enables us to see life from God's perspective in our "yet, not yet"—triumph—and—tragedy existence in a Kingdom where the best is yet to come.

It is this paradoxical view that enables us to contend with the escalation of the nuclear meltdown of the family, illegitimacy, and crime for we know that the Antichrist has long been here and yet is coming (I Jn 2:18). It is this paradoxical vision which equips us to see the end-time vision of Satan being both **loose and bound—at the same time—loose** by way of the infestation of the historical critical movement into theological seminaries¹⁰, the widespread acceptance of the theory of evolution these past five decades, the proliferation

¹⁰The Historical Critical method of Biblical interpretation, with its anti-miraculous bias, is the queen that rules the theological formulation of the vast majority of seminaries from mainstream denominations. This is tragic on several fronts. Not only does the HC method undermine confidence in God's Word but it works with the assumption that **we must find God by our determination of which texts of Scripture shall stand**. This assumption runs contrary to the gospel where God finds us in the Word. The eclectic dialectic of the HC practitioners makes man the normative factor of salvation and truth. It inverts the gospel into a law, it leads to relativistic formulations of ethics, antinomianism, a non paradoxical view on matters of theology that range from inspiration of Scripture to the theology of the two kingdoms. All of this just adds to the confusion of the times.

of the cults, the facing of "terrorist threats of unprecedented proportion,"¹¹ bound because he is still yet unable to deceive the nations as he did in Old Testament times (Rev 20:2). These and other end-time paradoxes help us to hear the voice of God even in midst of the loud, noisy crackling sounds that signal that our cultural foundations are crumbling. These and other end-times paradoxes we shall examine more thoroughly. We shall examine them more thoroughly so that we are not unduly alarmed over the massive problems of this fallen world.

Earlier, problems close to home were identified. A look around the world does not add to a person's confidence in human solutions to mankind's endless ills. Political powder kegs with short fuses—throughout the world—are vulnerable to the pyrotechnics of the first demagogue with a fanatical finger itching to exact political revenge. Be it the tinderbox of the Middle East, the shaky situation in Russia, the tense milieu in South Africa, the ongoing Cain and Abel Korean conflict, the perpetual Irish fratricide and self-hatred, the African genocide, the South American instabilities, or endless abortion holocausts, the whole world is writhing from the effects and defects of sin. Couple these factors with the jitters which arise whenever a new millennium approaches and one can expect a host of Armageddon announcements¹², feverish preoccupation with "the

¹¹This observation came from an ABC television *Nightline* interview (July 18, 1996) with William Cohen, a congressman from Maine. Cohen is an expert on matters dealing with terrorists.

¹²Roman Catholic scholar Peter Kreeft discusses the approaching of Armageddon in his recent book Ecumenical Jihad (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996) 12. Here is his grim assessment: "At Armageddon there will be no more uncertainty, no neutral corners. Armageddon is approaching...In America alone, the blood of thirty million unborn babies has been spilled into the thirst

signs,” radical fringe groups taking to bombs, bitter bombast, and bizarre behavior. It is a certainty when society falls apart, radicals come out of the woodwork. Stanley Rothman, in discussing the rise of the Third Reich after cultural collapse in Germany, said “Normally, Himmler would just have been an authoritarian schoolteacher.”¹³

Already there are a large numbers of Christian writers who have noticed these same international conflicts, cultural collapses, and painful prognoses.¹⁴ Unfortunately, many of these communicators, lacking a clear paradoxical vision, that is, a clear Gospel vision, only add to the problems. By offering theological placebos, the result of trying to weaken the “yet, not yet” tension of the Kingdom of God, they end up creating more tension. For example, when they hold out the false hope of a sneak, fictitious rapture, they unwittingly change the “yet, not

maw of Molech... A modern Rip Van Winkle falling asleep in 1955 and waking up in 1995 would simply not believe his ears when he heard the statistics of our decay.” 12.

¹³Brimelow, *Forbes*, 101.

¹⁴During a June day, 1996, while walking through a Christian bookstore I was struck with the abundance of recently written books on the subject of the end times. Characteristic of these books was a thorough lack of a paradoxical vision regarding the Kingdom of Christ, the binding of Satan, the AntiChrist, judgment day, death, and other eschatological subjects. More than concomitantly, there was a lack of gospel in these books, consequently also a lack of the power of God unto salvation, the Christian fuel for faith, the paradoxical gracious movement of God through the Person and work of Jesus Christ and His means of grace. A case in point was John Hagee’s book, Beginning of the End: the Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Coming Antichrist (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 1996. The book was Israel-centric rather than Christocentric from front to finish because the author was unable to grasp the paradox that Israel will at the same time not be saved and will be saved (Romans 9:6). This statement of Hagee’s, “The shot that killed Yitzhak Rabin launched Bible prophecy onto the fast track” (p.8) is a central thesis that he pulls out of the thin air, devoid of a shred of Biblical evidence.

yet” tenor of Revelation 2:10 from “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,” to read “Be thou faithful unto the *sneak rapture*, and I will give thee a crown of life.” This false hope is neither a theology to live by nor to die by. It certainly did not help the eighty to one hundred million Christians who were murdered and martyred by totalitarian communistic regimes the first half of the twentieth century.

Sorely needed today is a vision that heralds the “yet, not yet” end-times nature of the Kingdom of God. Without this vision, misguided men of the theological ancestry of Hal Lindsey will construct escape plans that will rupture when the promised sneak rapture does not occur, when the tribulations must be endured, and when their calendar calculations go awry. Without a paradoxical Gospel-centered vision, many millions will be led to the same law-centered dead end to which Hal Lindsey guided scores of millions during the seventies and early eighties.

Equally sad, by their sign-seeking, prediction-producing pontifications, prophets without a paradoxical vision end up endlessly tickling ears and generating fears, creating needless anxiety before they are proven wrong. They also cause widespread apathy among the gullible toward the things of Christ when their theological cries of “wolf” are unveiled as wrong. Added to these seductions is the fact that an unhealthy seeking of the end-times signs usually leads to an overlooking of the signs by which Jesus gives us strength during the end times: Word and Sacrament. It is these latter signs of Baptism, the Eucharist, Holy Absolution, and the proclamation of the Gospel which convey

rich resurrection realities which are given by the Lord of the church to sustain us in our passing pilgrimage toward our heavenly home. It is these signs which ready us to live as though Jesus died the day before yesterday, rose yesterday and is coming tomorrow.

A long time ago, an apt observer said that man by nature is like the drunk riding on the horse. He rides a few yards and falls into a ditch on the right. After a rude lesson on gravity, he gets back up and rides a little farther, only to fall next in the ditch on the left. Right. Left. Right. Left. All the way back home the poor dipsomaniac continues this left-right fall-guy routine. We never do find out if the poor chap made it home. Without a paradoxical vision, a Gospel centered-vision, man by nature is like the drunk on the horse, going from one extreme to the other, from one devilish ditch to another.

Elton Trueblood, a Christian apologist and philosopher, once spoke of the value of paradox in the formulation of religious truth. He knew as did Reinhold Niebuhr that "perplexities, too simply solved produce despair."¹⁵ He also realized that paradox was an analytical tool, and when rightly used allowed faith-creating theological tensions to help Christians cope with real-life tensions, present accurately the truth, and keep God's children from falling into the pit of disillusionment or falling off quixotic mountain tops. In speaking about the apt use of paradox by Blaise Pascal, the brilliant French thinker, Trueblood wrote about the value of paradox. He wrote:

¹⁵Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 233.

Almost as important as the idea of involvement is the idea of paradox, which has been a common theme in religious thought, but was particularly prominent in the brilliant notes which were left by Pascal when he died. The heart of the idea is that, because truth is never really simple, it is almost always necessary, when dealing with profound matters, to present at least two propositions rather than one. Often the two propositions are in sharp tension, but this is essential to the effort to represent adequately the complexity of the situation.¹⁶

A **paradoxical** vision for the end times is necessary because without a paradoxical view, we can easily end up accenting one revealed truth of Scripture at the expense of another. Paradox under the Gospel helps one to be Biblically balanced, to take into consideration all the Biblical data necessary to neither add to nor subtract from Scripture. According to Elton Trueblood, paradox "is essential to the effort to represent adequately the complexity of the situation."¹⁷ Whether the doctrines in question are eschatology, ecclesiology, or Christology, the Holy Spirit reveals the workings of God in a paradoxical pattern. In fact, that which is orthodox breathes deeply the air of paradox.

Not since St. Paul has there been a better theological teacher of paradox than Martin Luther. Luther provided a paradigm par excellence to show us how to use paradox in service for the Gospel and the edification of God's paradoxical people.¹⁸ The next part of our study, "Martin Luther: Poet of Paradox," begins

¹⁶Elton Trueblood, Philosophy of Reason, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), p. 25.

¹⁷Trueblood, p. 25.

¹⁸The American Luther scholar Donald Mackenzie wrote, "Not until Luther came, do we find anyone who can at all be classified with Augustine for the wealth and depth of his insight into the paradoxical subtlety of the nature of man and of the manifold wisdom of God's activity both in nature and redemption and,

with Luther, so that we might end with Scripture. Luther is our mentor so that we might, with his Gospel guidance, grasp the message of the Scriptures synthetically rather than atomistically, thereby finding comfort in life as a faith-filled odyssey rather than a frustrating theodicy, and discovering by the power of the Holy Spirit, in matters of faith, “believing is seeing” rather than “seeing is believing.”

From Luther, we go more directly into Holy Scripture. Thus, the third chapter of our study will explore some key paradoxes throughout the Holy Scriptures. This study will reveal that the paradoxical “imprint” that is stamped on numerous fundamental doctrines throughout the Old and New Testament Scriptures.¹⁹ These two chapters are designed to reveal the profluent paradoxical proclivities of Scripture, so that we may be encouraged to pay attention to the paradoxical paths of key eschatological matters, and to serve as a prelude to A Paradoxical Vision of the End times. In chapter four, I will set forth aspects of eschatological ethics, examining this question: “How does a

above all, for his power of self expression in memorable words. Is not that the reason why essentially his writings are never out of date?” Quote is from This Is Luther by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948) p.325.

¹⁹Steven L. Reagles, in his article *Preaching the Imprint of Paradox* talks about the “imprint” of paradox throughout Scripture. He begins his article with this thoughtful paragraph: “When during the sixteenth-century debate on free will Erasmus accused Luther of ‘transfixing paradoxes into dogmas’ (to use Roland Bainton’s words), Luther replied, ‘they are not my paradoxes...they are God’s paradoxes!’ Many of the truths of Scripture are paradoxical. In appearance they seem contradictory, display a tension between opposites, and baffle the brightest minds that seeks to plumb the mystery. The Trinity, two natures of Christ, virgin birth, and the resurrection, to name a few, are doctrines of the Christian faith which thwart dissection, while they beckon to the eye of faith.

Christian live in light of the paradoxical and eschatological elements of the Gospel?"

CHAPTER II

“ MARTIN LUTHER: POET OF PARADOX”

The use of paradox to set forth that which is orthodox was an instrument that Martin Luther enlisted throughout his career as a preacher, teacher, and writer. This instrument of communication, paradox, functioned as a tremendous tool for Martin Luther to propagate the Gospel in the sixteenth century. Moreover, it is no less of a hermeneutical mechanism to convey truth for interpreters of reality who stand on the threshold of the third millennium.

Through his writings, Luther reveals himself not only to be a marvelous teacher of the Gospel, but also a poet of paradox. Throughout this paper, I hope to demonstrate how the two go hand and hand. As with his use of reason, Luther placed paradox under Scripture to be used as a servant-tool to help him scale by faith otherwise insurmountable theological problems and to help him hurdle otherwise theological pitfalls.

In a similar vein, paradox for Luther became a device to help guard against all attempts to explain away the mysteries of God to men. For Luther, such egotistical efforts vitiated against the very nature of faith itself. Rationalistic proofs were just another visible effort to prove the existence of God. Luther held the Pauline pattern “we walk by faith and not by visible forms.”²⁰ Hence, paradox becomes a useful instrument to keep the Old Adam from the Babel building of theological constructs to justify the ways of God to man.

From Wittenberg to Heidelberg to Wartburg to Augsburg to the end of his life, Luther made abundant use of paradox. He saw that although the coin of truth was one, it often had a different imprint on each side. While Rome and the Reformed camps often overemphasized one truth at the expense of another truth, Luther sought via paradox to hold simultaneously both sides of a given truth, even when these strands *seemed* to contradict one another.

This chapter seeks to highlight Luther's use of paradox to express the deep dimensions of divine truth. In particular, I will show that Luther was a poet of paradox from the beginning of the Reformation to the end of his life. Above all, this chapter will seek to show that the very use of paradox for Luther flowed from the Gospel, because the very nature of the Gospel is profound paradox. Once again, the very fact that God "declares the ungodly—godly" (of Rom 4:5) seems a colossal contradiction of the highest order, yet it is the heart of the Gospel and the truth that unveils the nature of God. Added to this, the unfathomable truth that it took nothing less than the death of God Himself, Jesus Christ (the eternal God dies!) only adds more paradox to paradox as the heart of the Gospel!

It was F. Scott Fitzgerald who once said, 'the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.'²¹ Martin Luther's first-rate mind and photographic memory no doubt aided him in simultaneously holding two different

²⁰2 Cor. 5:7 (Free Translation).

sides of the same truth. While these superb natural gifts of mind from God assisted Luther in becoming a poet of paradox, above all, it was the Holy Spirit who revealed to him a plethora of paradoxical ideas that were the most powerful forces of the Reformation.²²

This last point, that paradox for Luther was a gift from God rather than a gain by man's brain, sets Luther apart from other famous poets of paradox. It was God's good grace rather than man's good head as the source of sound paradoxical expression.²³ Unlike the ancients, who saw paradox as a rhetorical device to solve the paradox with some rationalistic synthesis, Luther used paradox to confess the double-edged-sword truths of God's revealed mysteries.²⁴

A place where one can see the early Luther making vigorous use of paradox is Heidelberg. It is about a half year after Luther has posted his Ninety-five Theses on October 31, 1517 on the north door of the castle church at Wittenberg. The disputation Luther hoped would occur as a result of the Ninety-five Theses, where indulgences were smashed to pieces, was swallowed up by controversy. At the counsel of Johann von Staupitz, vicar of Luther's Augustinian order, Luther was advised not to debate controversial subjects that attacked the Fugger-fueled forgiveness of Tetzl and Leo X. Instead, Staupitz

²¹Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., In Search of Excellence, (New York: Warner Books, 1982), pp. 89ff.

²²Ewald M. Plass, ed. What Luther Says, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 665.

²³Siegbert W. Becker, The Foolishness of God, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982), p. 124.

enjoined Luther to prepare disputation theses that would treat subjects such as free will, sin, and grace.

With courage, clarity, and courtesy, Luther prepared and presented twenty-eight theological and twelve philosophical theses for his Heidelberg Disputation. Also, he formulated short Biblical proofs for the theological theses and an added explanation of the sixth thesis.²⁵ Right at the beginning, Luther signals his fellow monks to prepare to hear a presentation of his new evangelical theology in the form of paradoxes:

Distrusting completely our own wisdom, according to that counsel of the Holy Spirit, "Do not rely on your own insight" [Prov. 3:5], we humbly present to the judgment of all those who wish to be here these theological paradoxes, so that it may become clear whether they have been deduced well or poorly from St. Paul, the especially chosen vessel and instrument of Christ and also from St. Augustine, his most trustworthy interpreter.²⁶

Luther's promise to present paradoxes began to be fulfilled early in his disputation. The very first theological thesis he sets forth is wrapped in paradox. He asserts how God's good law leads to bad results. Although good tonic in itself, the law leads to toxic results in a fallen world. Wrote Luther, "The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way of righteousness, but rather hinders him."²⁷

²⁴Becker, p. 127.

²⁵Martin Luther, Luther's Works, 55 vols., gen. Eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg/Fortress Press, 1955-1986), (Hereafter LW), 31: pp. 39-70.

²⁶LW 31:39.

²⁷Ibid.

In theses three and four, Luther shows what often is beautiful to man is ghastly to God; and, what often is held in low esteem by man is held in high regard by God. What Luther is doing is preparing the way for assertions relevant to the theology of the cross. Theses three and four read this way:

3. Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.
4. Although the works of God are always unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless really eternal merits.²⁸

Luther's paradoxical progression toward the cross culminates in a contrast between two different theologies: the theology of glory versus the theology of the cross. The theology of glory proposes to perceive the invisible things of God through the visible things of this life.²⁹ Such a theology Luther labels as bankrupt. It attacks faith and therefore grace. The person who looks to find God via an evidential or empirical theology, is in Luther's estimate not deserving to be called a theologian.³⁰ Vigorously Luther charges "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."³¹

As a whole, the twenty-eight theses of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation cut with a sharp paradoxical edge. Two more examples will further show this to be the case. First, on the subject of grace, Luther's "janusian-style"³² issues another paradox. Wrote Luther, "It is certain that a man must utterly despair of his own

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See explanation to thesis 19 of Heidelberg Disputation, LW 31:52.

³⁰ LW 31:40.

³¹ Ibid.

ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.”³³ While St. Paul is the prime tributary to Luther’s wellspring of paradoxes, here one sees the reformer drawing from our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount.³⁴

Second, thesis twenty-six of the Heidelberg Disputation reveals the paradoxical polarities of Law and Gospel. By means of these two handles, Law and Gospel, Luther gained a hermeneutical hold on what otherwise might be viewed as seemingly slippery contradictions.³⁵ The Law says one is saved by what we do (Mt 19:17) and the Gospel says we are saved by what Jesus has done (Gal 3:13; 26). Which one is it? Is Scripture giving two opposite answers to life’s major question? Do we have here polar positions unable to be reconciled? In thesis twenty-six, Luther’s good grasp of the Law-Gospel dialectic shows how God bridges the gap. Luther asserts, “The law says, ‘do this,’ and it is never done. Grace says ‘believe in this,’ and everything is already done.”³⁶

Before closing commentary on the Heidelberg Disputation, we must note one more striking paradox that Luther alluded to in his presentation to his fellow

³²Steven L. Reagles, Concordia Journal (September 1985) p. 177.

³³LW 31:40.

³⁴Matthew 5:3.

³⁵Reagles commentary is very useful here: “In confessional Lutheran theology there is paradox surrounding the doctrine of Law and Gospel. At the cross God shows his greatest hatred for sinful mankind by requiring the penalty of death. Yet paradoxically God displays His overwhelming love there, at the same time, by releasing man from the penalty of death and giving him life. The guilty go free while the Guiltless One is punished. Yet justice is perfectly served—a seeming contradiction. The Righteous One is “made sin” while the sinful ones are declared righteous.” p. 176.

³⁶LW 31:41.

Augustinians at their general meeting in Heidelberg. It is one of his most famous paradoxes. Profound. Comforting. Penetrating. Comprehensive. The words of this paradox sketch the picture of the ever-renewed struggle between sin and grace, the natural man and the new man in Christ, the old Adam and the new Adam in the believer. What is this paradox? It is “Simul justus et peccator sum.”

It is significant to note that even before October 31, 1517, Luther was already making good use of the tool of paradox. Ernest B. Koenker reminds us that the origin of this paradoxical assertion by Martin Luther appears as early as 1515-16.³⁷ In his exposition of Romans, Luther articulates the dialectic of the Christian in terms of the Christian being simultaneously both saint and sinner. Luther’s classic formulation in wider context is set forth in this manner, “simul justus et simul peccator, peccator scilicet re vera, sed justus ex fide promissionis et spe impletionis.”³⁸ Although Luther did not express in succinct fashion this paradox at Heidelberg, the fruits of his paradoxical formulation were displayed in the market place at Heidelberg.

The truth that the Christian is *at the same time* before God just (iustus) and notorious sinner (peccator) was an indissoluble reality of existence that

³⁷Heino O. Kadai, editor, Accents in Luther’s Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 100. Note also that Luther refers to the double nature of the a Christian as a “paradox.” See Plass, p. 235. Here Luther says, “These two divergent facts they [the opponents] cannot reconcile. Therefore understand this *paradox* (emphasis mine) thus: Christians are divided into two parts: an inner being, which is faith, and an outer being, which is the flesh.” This presents in the context of a fallen world this paradox: only a divided person is a whole person.

Luther could set forth only by way of paradox. It enabled Luther to see that every Christian is a living paradox. Luther did not try to dissolve this tension that the believer is *at the same time* unrighteous and righteous, unholy and holy, sinner and saint. Dr. Martin Scharlemann summarizes Luther's paradoxical posture embraced in the succinct formula "simul iustus et peccator":

As the Reformer discovered from his serious study of the Bible and from the anguish of his soul, this situation is sketched neither in terms of legal fiction nor of a pious hope—either of which would help solve the contradiction—but as a present and dependable fact. He found that as a person, in relationship to God, the ultimate dimension of life, he had to think of God's utter rejection of him and of His gracious acceptance of him as an indissoluble unity of existence.^{39 40}

As a living paradox, it made good Biblical sense to Luther that paradox permeate a Christian's whole way of looking at things. For example, Luther saw how the prayer life of a Christian is also paradoxical. In a sermon during the year 1519, on prayer and life, Luther links prayer and paradox. He wrote, "we

³⁸WA 56:165.

³⁹Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Paradox in Perspective," Concordia Theological Monthly (March, 1976) p. 352.

⁴⁰For an excellent article on paradox, see "The Paradox in Perspective," by Martin H. Scharlemann (Vol. XXXVIII, May 1957, The Concordia Theological Monthly). Scharlemann notes that in the old Latin "paradox" came to mean an apparent contradiction (p. 349). He points out how Bertrand Russell took a skeptical view toward paradox. Wrote Russell, "paradoxes arise from the attribution of significance to sentences that are in fact nonsensical" (p. 350). Scharlemann correctly counters Russell's witty objection, "The paradox, in point of fact, is not only a legitimate but also an essential tool for the expression of certain insights in Christian theology; for the dimension of God's revelation often cannot be expressed or described in anything except paradoxical formulations," p. 350.

pray after all because we are not worthy to pray.”⁴¹ To a mind captive to the Law this makes no sense whatsoever, another seeming contradiction. To the mind under the Gospel, by way of paradox, Luther saw how Christians become “worthy unworthies,” to borrow a phrase coined by Professor Francis Rossow.⁴²

The next paradox from Luther that I would like to examine comes a year later. It is a monumental paradox. In his 1520 tract, *The Freedom of the Christian*, Luther demonstrates how God’s justifying grace liberated the sinner who had been a slave of sin to become a slave of righteousness. Leaning upon the apostles Peter and Paul,⁴³ Luther saw how walking in freedom meant walking in service. In describing the liberty Christians, Luther put the essence of the matter in two apparently opposite propositions: “The Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”⁴⁴

In authoring this paradox, Luther assails legalism as well as assaults license. Sweaty realist that he was, Luther holds in tension the freedom that comes from justification before God and the responsibility we have as those

⁴¹LW 42: 89.

⁴²Francis Rossow and Gerhard Aho, ed., Lectionary Preaching Resources, Series C (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), p. 167.

⁴³1 Peter 2:16; 1 Corinthians 7:22.

⁴⁴LW 31:344. I have sat in on discussions with learned Lutheran scholars who opined that these two propositions by Luther on Christian freedom were not a true paradox. Luther, however, seems to accept them as a paradox. Immediately after setting forth these two propositions, he declares, “these two theses seem to contradict each other.” (ibid.) Luther by purposely penning this assertion twice in his introductory comments on Christian freedom, strongly suggests that he viewed the assertion “to be free the Christian must serve” as a

redeemed living in Christ's kingdom. For Luther, this axiom of freedom through slavery was another way of expressing the inextricable link between justification and sanctification. By this paradox, Luther avoids a synergistic solution to justification and an antinomian characterization of sanctification. It is another way of declaring that while God grants salvation free of works, nevertheless, we are expected to do good works.

Luther's penchant for paradox shows up continuously in his writings. Be it his 1521 Comfort When Facing Grave Temptations, when he asserts that the worse trial in life is no trial at all⁴⁵ or his use of paradox to show how the monks of his day had inveighed against the Gospel and inverted the meaning of the commandments.⁴⁶ Especially eloquent in paradox is some of Luther's commentary on the Magnificat. Here are two samples:

Even so, Christ was powerless on the cross; and yet there He performed His mightiest work and conquered sin, death, world, hell, devil, and all evil. Thus all the martyrs were strong and overcame.⁴⁷

"Who is like the Lord, our God, who is seated high, who looks far down upon the heavens and the earth?" For since He is the Most High, and yet there is nothing above Him, He cannot look above Him, nor yet to either side, for there is none like Him. He must needs, therefore, look within Him and beneath Him; and the farther one is beneath Him, the better does He see Him.⁴⁸

paradox. Martin Scharlemann also holds that these propositions form paradox (Vol. XXXVIII, May 1957, Concordia Theological Monthly).

⁴⁵LW 42:183.

⁴⁶LW 36: 133-230.

⁴⁷LW 21: 340.

⁴⁸LW 21: 299-300.

In 1525, the rapier wit of Erasmus' legalistic pen met the paradoxical power of Luther's Gospel-driven quill. Martin Luther's De Servo Arbitrio was quite likely a lot more than Erasmus bargained for when the humanist from Rotterdam drew first blood with his De Libero Arbitrio against the monk from Wittenberg. Vigorously, with polemics in one hand and paradoxes in the other, Luther admonishes Erasmus for his aversion to paradoxes. For Luther much of Erasmus' problem resides in his inability to distinguish between paradoxes and contradictions. Because Erasmus mistakes the latter for the former, he concludes that the Scriptures are an obscure book. With biting irony Luther asks the humanist who thinks the Holy Spirit speaks with forked tongue:

My dear Erasmus, let me too say in turn: If you think these paradoxes are inventions of men, what are you contending about? Why are you so roused?...If, therefore, God has willed that such things [paradoxes] should be openly spoken of and published abroad without regard to consequences, who are we to forbid it?⁴⁹

Here one sees clearly Luther's view on the propagation of paradoxes. Proclaim them. Publish them. Pronounce them. Furthermore, do not measure them by the judgment of finite, fallen man. In fact, paradoxes are crucial to the whole element of faith in that the hidden quality of them calls for trust not unbelief. What trust is needed if we can rationalistically explain the mysteries of faith? Taking aim at all theologians of glory who like Erasmus want to walk by sight rather than by faith, Luther strings together a series of paradoxes showing them as an instrument of faith as well as a way to confess the one true Christian faith. Luther continues:

Hence in order that there be room for faith, it is necessary that everything which is believed should be hidden. It cannot, however, be more deeply hidden than under an object, perception, or experience which is contrary to it. Thus when God makes alive he does it by killing, when he justifies he does it by making men guilty, when he exalts to heaven he does it by bringing down to hell, as Scripture says: "The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" [I Sam. 2:6].⁵⁰

Luther sees Erasmus' aversion to Scriptural paradoxes as a misguided attempt to not let God be God.⁵¹ Erasmus cannot hold simultaneously the hot tough tandem truths of Scripture that Luther picks up by faith with the tongs of paradox. While Erasmus recoils from the clearly revealed truth of God hardening hearts, unable to line it up with the love of God, Luther simultaneously lays hold of both the truth of God's love and the truth of God's unscrutable ways through this paradoxical assertion: "As far as God is concerned, therefore, he does nothing but harden by continual goodness and nothing but show mercy by continual punishment."⁵²

Luther never stopped using paradoxes to confess the faith. On one occasion, in making the point how God often enlists the devil to do his work, Luther used a paradox regarding the devil's prophet Mohammed. Sharply and succinctly Luther writes, "He [Mohammed] is God's rod and the devil's servant [Isa. 10:5]; there is no doubt about that."⁵³ What is so characteristic here is Luther's use of paradox to demonstrate how so often God accomplishes two

⁴⁹LW 33: 59.

⁵⁰LW 33: 62.

⁵¹LW 33: 206.

⁵²LW 33: 168.

things at once—simultaneously! Just as the message of the cross has at the same time two seemingly contradictory elements at work: the revelation of God’s love for all mankind, as well as His holy judgment upon the sin of the world, so often the actions of God frequently cut a path of opposites, a paradoxical path.

In his 1535 commentary on Galatians, Luther openly exclaims how the Law-Gospel paradox “knocks out the teeth of the law.”⁵⁴ In explaining his hermeneutic, Luther declares, “This is our theology; and when it is said that I am not only blind and deaf to the Law and free from it but completely dead to it, these are paradoxes strange to reason and absurd.”⁵⁵ Shortly after that assertion, Luther presents this paradox about death, “Death, you have nothing on me. For I have another death, one that kills you, my death. And the death that kills is stronger than the death that is killed.”⁵⁶

In a grand flare of the use of paradox, Luther confesses how God uses the Law, sin, and death to defeat the Law, sin, and death. His theology of opposites sparkles with this paradox:

Thus with the sweetest names Christ is called my Law, my sin, and my death, in opposition to the Law, sin, and death, even though in fact He is nothing but sheer liberty, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation. Therefore He became Law to the Law, sin to sin, and death to death, in order that He might redeem me from the curse of the Law, justify me, and make me alive. And so Christ is both: While He is the Law, He is liberty; While He is sin, He is righteousness; And while He is death, He is life. For by the very fact that He permitted the Law to accuse Him, sin to damn Him, and death to devour Him He abrogated the Law, damned sin,

⁵³LW 46: 170.

⁵⁴LW 26: 161.

⁵⁵LW 26: 161.

⁵⁶LW 26: 162.

destroyed death, and justified and saved me. Thus Christ is a poison against the Law, sin, and death, and simultaneously a remedy to regain liberty, righteousness, and eternal life.⁵⁷

During the last ten years of his life, Luther delivered his final set of lectures. These Lectures on Genesis show Luther as a lover of paradox to the end of his life. In the early portion of the eighth and last volume of his Genesis lectures, Luther's pen pours out one paradox after another. Twice he quotes the paradoxical prophetic word of I Samuel 2:6-7, "I kill and bring to life; I bring down to Sheol and raise up; I make poor and make rich."⁵⁸ Through the paradoxical spectacles of this Scripture, Luther sees how God uses sickness as a medicine to save us.⁵⁹

Through the vision of paradox, Luther sees the hidden God at work. Paradox becomes, for Luther, a way to cast down the senses in order for that sixth sense, faith, to arise and have only baptism and the sure word of God on which to stand.⁶⁰ With high homiletical skill, Luther takes the story of the Old Testament patriarch Joseph, and in particular the phrase, "I am Joseph," to show how God took this son of Jacob along the paradoxical path—from dungeons to diadems—in order to make a saint for all seasons. Luther describes the paradoxical pattern God uses as Potter to sculpture Joseph:

Besides, He is the kind of God who not only makes everything out of nothing but makes nothing out of everything, just as He reduced Joseph to nothing. And when it seemed that Joseph was ruined

⁵⁷LW 26: 163.

⁵⁸LW 8: 5-10. Here Luther offers a series of excellent paradoxes.

⁵⁹LW 8: 7-10.

⁶⁰LW 8: 8-9.

and lost, He makes everything out of him, that is, the greatest man in the world. But Joseph, on the other hand, divests himself of all rank and fame, descends from his royal throne to the lowliest men, his father and brothers, and says: "I am Joseph." Here he is again brought down to nothing and is that very Joseph who was cast into the pit, sold, and consigned to slavery. Once more he becomes the son of a shepherd and says: "I am your brother, the son of a shepherd, just as you are."⁶¹

Well into his lectures on Genesis, the last in his life, Luther makes a curious remark. He says, "No one can prevent God from doing things differently."⁶² Once more the vocabulary of faith and paradox are at work. The use of paradox in matters of faith is acknowledging, that from our point of view, God does things differently than what we would expect. Through the gift of faith, God grants us a paradoxical vision to see His unexpected works, ways, and wonders. Above all, Luther enables us to see the paradoxical path of that teaching which is the center of the Scripture: the Gospel.⁶³ At the end of his life, this poet of paradox, Martin Luther, declares, "Before the world Christ is killed, condemned, and descends into hell. But before God this is the salvation of the whole world from the beginning all the way to the end."⁶⁴ It is this paradox which will prepare us to continue to lay our foundation for a paradoxical vision of the of the end times.

⁶¹LW 8: 20.

⁶²LW 8: 207.

⁶³According to the Lutheran Symbols, the Gospel *is* the center of the Scriptures. For that reason the writers of the Symbols see everything in the Holy Scriptures as related to the Gospel in such a way that they can say, "Everything in the Word of God is written down for us, not for the purpose of thereby driving us to despair but in order that 'by steadfastness, by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Rom. 15:4)." Tappert, p. 618 (FC SD XI, 12).

⁶⁴LW 8: 29.

CHAPTER III

THE PARADOXICAL THREAD THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

From the opening verse of Sacred Scripture in Genesis to the end of the last chapter of the Apocalypse of John, the Holy Spirit cuts a paradoxical path through the words of the prophets and apostles. The first verse of Scripture reveals the God who stands outside of time speaking of a "beginning" (Gen 1:1). The second to last verse of the Bible, presents an apostle praying that Emmanuel who is already here (Mt 28:20) will come soon (Rev 22:20).

The paradoxical thread, like the redemptive thread, runs through the Scriptures from cover to cover. It is an ever-present, continuous non-stop thread which reminds us that God's hat-size is not our head-size;⁶⁵ God's thoughts are not our thoughts, His ways are not our ways;⁶⁶ and His judgments are unsearchable, unfathomable, and unscrutable.⁶⁷ For just as God is not bound to the natural rules that He created to run this universe,⁶⁸ neither is He bound to dealing with us in ways that are limited to our finiteness.

⁶⁵Job 38-42:6 is an outstanding section of Scripture to warn us against the dangers of trying to downsize God.

⁶⁶Isaiah 55: 8,9.

⁶⁷Romans 11:33-36.

⁶⁸Here examples from Scripture abound: 1) the parting of the Red Sea waters (Exodus 14: 21-31); 2) the causing of the sun to stand still (Joshua 10: 12-14); 3) Jonah being swallowed by a great fish (Jonah 1:17-2:10); 4) Jesus walking on water (Mark 6: 45-51); 5) Jesus rising from the dead (Luke 24:1-8; 13-49); 6) Jesus' ascension into the clouds (Acts 1: 9-11); 7) Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to St. Paul (Acts 9:1-6). These are just a handful of the

That there is a surprising amount of paradox in Scripture should come as no surprise to followers of Christ. Why? Because paradox always carries with it the aroma of mystery; and what are Christians but “stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Cor 4:1)? St. Paul, in describing the nature of faith to Timothy, put it this way, “holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (I Tim 3:9).

Through paradox, the eyes of faith see two worlds at work simultaneously. Whether the temporal or eternal, the seen or unseen, the kingdom of Caesar or the Kingdom of God, tension points exist that seem contradictory but in fact are not, for with God all things are possible (Gen 18:14; Mt 19:26). The paradox of this paradox is that it is the tension points of paradox that help us cope with the tension points of life (II Cor 4: 8-12).

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (II Cor 5:7). The thesis of this chapter is that the life of faith is a life whereby we constantly embrace paradoxes, seeing beyond what “looks” to be a contradiction to beholding deep truths that explain God’s mighty acts of creation, redemption, and sanctification. So that our faith might not rest upon human ingenuity, human powers of the mind, or human effort, but rather God’s power, God gives us paradoxes, the Gospel itself being the chief paradox. This paradox, Paul says, is of first importance (I Cor 15:3), for it is this paradox by which we are saved (I Cor 15:2).

examples which show that God is over rather than under the natural laws by which this universe is run.

As we begin a journey of examining a good number of paradoxes in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, two things must be kept in mind. First, the recognition of paradoxes is a gift from the Triune God through the work of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 2:10-16). Second, by the grace of God, we examine these paradoxes from the Old Testament and New Testament to sharpen up our skills in order to develop a paradoxical vision of the end times.

Old Testament Paradoxes

The very first verse of the Old Testament, Genesis 1:1, reverberates with paradoxical echoes: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The thought of juxtaposing the eternal God (Ps 90:1,2), whose reach is before and beyond time (II Pt 3:8), alongside "in the beginning" is the marriage of the Timeless One to the ones of time. In creation we have the intersection of time and eternity by way of a paradox from the God Who Himself is a paradox.

How intriguing it is, that the first time God's name is mentioned in Scripture, it comes to us in a plural form (Elohim), yet we know that God is one (Deut 6:4; I Cor 8:4). As Leupold rightly observes, the term *Elohim* allows for the fuller unfolding of the doctrine of Trinity. He writes, "Consequently, he who would claim that the term can have no connection with the truth of the Holy Trinity goes too far."⁶⁹ Martin Luther after examining the opening two verses of Genesis, especially noting the work of all three persons of the Trinity, does not

⁶⁹H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), p. 43.

hesitate to draw this paradoxical conclusion: "But we have clear testimony that Moses aimed to indicate the Trinity or the three persons in the one divine nature."⁷⁰

Later in the same chapter, Trinitarian echoes arise when God says, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness" (Gen 1:26). Once again there is paradoxical movement. Once again, the Spirit reveals that God is at the same time a God of unity, plurality, and mystery. Fuller revelation from Scripture, of course, reveals explicitly what is implicitly set forth in the first chapter of Genesis, namely the truth of God's one divine essence and three distinct persons (Mt 28:19).

Other paradoxical imprints can be seen in the inaugural chapter of Genesis. The fact that God creates (*bara*) everything out of nothing (Gen 1:1) so that things which are seen were made out of things that were not seen (Heb 11:3) has a distinct paradoxical ring. Not only does the *creatio ex nihilo* and epoch-making work of bringing into existence all things from nothing take on paradoxical dimensions, but the calling into existence light before the placement of the luminaries (1:3 cf., 1:14-18) appears totally nonsensical. Nevertheless, faith sees, what to our minds appears to be another pleasant contradiction. It beholds the powerful paradoxical work of the Creator.

Throughout this paper we have noted the paradoxical nature of the Gospel. Consequently, it follows that the Bible's first Gospel promise (*the Protevangelium*), Genesis 3:15 would exude paradox. And not only does it

⁷⁰Leupold, p.44.

exude paradox but it exults in paradox. In this first Gospel promise, God foretells the good news of how a Savior would gain victory through defeat! Even though the heel of the great Descendant of Eve would be badly bruised, nevertheless, victory over the devil-serpent would be obtained.

At the end of the saddest chapter of the Bible, just after the plunging of the world into sin by Adam and Eve, another paradox stands out. God must keep Adam and Eve from eating the tree of life so that they will die in order that they might live (3:22-24). Had they eaten from that tree which had power to impart imperishable physical life, they would have had to endure more thorns, more thistles, endless entropy, a prolonged death. It was mercy which moved God to take away the tree of life so that our first parents might be free to die and free to be with Christ in heaven, which is far better (Phil 1:21).

Noah saw the paradoxical hand of the Lord when God used water to destroy an evil world, yet used that same water to save the remnant of eight (Gen 7; cf. I Pt 3:21). Hence, this world-wide deluge was both a life-taking and life-giving flood. Hundreds of years later God would repeat this Law-Gospel water event of paradoxical proportions when the Red Sea became both an instrument of death and life at the same time (Ex 14: 21-31).

Without a doubt, Abraham saw the paradoxical ways of the Lord when he and Sarah were given a child despite Sarah's dead womb. From a dead womb, Sarah gave birth to their child (Gen 18:11-13), Isaac. Moreover, God's paradoxical command to Abraham later to kill his only son Isaac seemed to contradict everything that God had earlier promised to Abraham (Gen 15: 3,4).

Still, Abraham used paradox to contend with paradox, believing that even if his son, Isaac, died, yet he would live (Heb 11:19).

I have picked out only a few examples of paradoxical movement in the book of Genesis to illustrate the use of this tool by the Holy Spirit. These examples could be multiplied many times over as one culls paradoxes from the Bible of our Lord. Due to the scope of this paper, selectivity will be necessary. Nevertheless, there are several key paradoxes that deserve special attention as they relate to the central message of Scripture, the coming of a Savior in the fullness of time to make atonement for the sin of the world.

A key part of the redemptive plan of God was to create a Kingdom whereby He would go “about the matter of re-establishing His rule over and among men by His offer of grace.”⁷¹ The choice of the nation to be the vessel and vehicle from which the Savior of the world would come is a prelude to the New Testament paradox, “and the last shall be first” (Mt 19:30). God would take a nation of slaves to be the nation from which would come the One who would set hearts free (Jn 8:36). Out of sheer grace, God would pick the lowliest and least of all peoples, a nation of slaves,⁷² to be the first and foremost of peoples, a nation from whom the Magna Charta of Christian liberty would arise (Gal 5:1).

⁷¹Martin H. Scharlemann, “Kingdom and Church,” Concordia Journal (March, 1976) p. 48.

⁷²“For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all the people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people: for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you...” (Dt. 7: 6-8a).

God's paradoxical ways in creating His kingdom can be seen throughout the Pentateuch. From the bush that burns but does not burn up (Ex 3;4-22), to a mysterious Person who is both an angel and Lord (Num 22:21-35), the path of paradox and the revelation of God's omniscience is striking. God reveals Himself in such a way that both reveals and conceals, so that faith might be created and sustained.

Exodus 33 is a chapter of Scripture that reveals God's hiddenness. On the one hand it is said that: "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex 33:11). On the other hand, in the same chapter when Moses asks God to see His face so that His people will have added assurance for their journey ahead, God says, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Ex 33:20). Through this paradox we see that "there is a sense in which Israel both sees and does not see the face of God...so God remains hidden even in the midst of his revelation."⁷³

One of the outstanding paradoxes in the Old Testament, a paradox which prepares us for a Mount Everest paradox in the New Testament,⁷⁴ comes from a Psalm that "is quoted more often in the New Testament than in any other."⁷⁵ Psalm 110 verse one reads, "The Lord (Yahweh) says in reference to my Lord

⁷³Jay G. Williams, Ten Words of Freedom, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 101.

⁷⁴In Matthew 22:41-45 Jesus refers to Psalm 110:1 as a proof text to show that the promised Messiah would be both David's son and David's Lord, both human and divine.

⁷⁵H. C. Leupold, Exposition of The Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 770.

(Adonai): 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"⁷⁶ Here is inter-Trinitarian dialogue taking place with the Father speaking to the Messiah Priest-King (110:4) and the Spirit listening and recording. Here we see the paradoxical nature of God, one of unity of essence and plurality of Persons.

The zenith of paradox in the Old Testament issues forth from the prophetic writings of Isaiah. Isaiah soars on the wings of paradox! Beginning with his prophecy of the Virgin Birth and Immanuel's incarnation—the absolute paradox! (7:14), the Messianic announcement that the Wonder-Child would be the "The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father" (9:6), and climaxing with the Suffering Servant's substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of all (53:4-6), paradox scales the apex of Messianic mountain tops in the Old Testament.

If we miss these paradoxes regarding the person and work of the promised Messiah, we will miss the very heart of the Gospel which is the central message of the Old and New Testaments! Isaiah contributes greatly to the grand paradox of the Old Testament! What is that paradox? It is this: the coming Messiah was to be a conquering King (II Sam. 7: 12-16) as well as the Suffering Servant who would be the great Yom Kippur sacrifice for the sin of the world (Isaiah 53). Mysteriously, paradoxically, divinely, the Messianic God-Man, born of the virgin, would establish an everlasting kingdom (II Sam 7:13) through the paradoxical pattern of death and resurrection (Is 53:8-11).

Unfortunately, so staggering was the prediction of this paradoxical path, that the God-Man Messiah would suffer for the sins of the world, die, and rise

⁷⁶Leupold's translation, p. 775.

from the dead, that few would believe it. In the opening verse of the Suffering Servant chapter, Isaiah predicted by way of a rhetorical question the fact that few would believe this mountain top Messianic paradox. "Who hath believed our report?" (Is 53:1), is the lead into this chapter, a chapter which has puzzled so many people in the past. You recall it was this chapter that was an enigma to the treasurer from Ethiopia until he heard the good news of Jesus from Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:27-39). Moreover, it is this chapter that is quoted more by New Testament writers than any other Old Testament section.⁷⁷ It is a branch that bears rich Gospel fruit.

The tragedy of Old Testament kingdom seekers was that only a remnant received, by faith, the paradox of the King who would conquer through suffering, death, and resurrection. Even though the Old Testament sublimely set forth how Messiah would be both a Victorious King and Suffering Servant, the latter half of this divine equation, this Gospel-paradox, often suffered subtraction because of the attraction of a vision of a worldly kingdom.

Paradox in the Old Testament was to remind people that the Kingdom of God would come in a wholly different way than natural man could imagine. Many people within Israel fell into the trap of taking one-half of the Messianic formula—that Messiah would be a Victorious King—and failed to temper it with the latent truth contained in the protoevangelium (Gen 3:15); namely, that

⁷⁷The following are New Testament references to this profoundly paradoxical chapter: Mt 8:17; 1 Pt 2:24; 1Pt 2: 5-6; Acts 8: 32-33; Rv 5:6,12; 13:8; I Pt 2:22; Rv 14:5; I Jn 3:5; Ro 5:19; Ro 4:25; Ep 5:2, 25; Ph 2:7-9; Mk 15:28; Lk 22:37; Heb. 9:28; Gal. 4:27.

Messiah would be fighting a spiritual battle, defeating the devil by being defeated! His heel would be bruised, indeed! Nevertheless, Messiah would crush the head of the old evil foe.

New Testament Paradoxes

It *appeared* to be an absolute contradiction to the Pharisees and religious teachers of the law. Jesus of Nazareth had just declared a paralyzed man forgiven (Lk 5:20). After bestowing upon this man the ultimate gift of forgiveness of sins, Jesus grants him the penultimate gift of healing (Lk 5:25-26). That this Man, Jesus of Nazareth, should do what God alone does, amazed everyone present! Luke the evangelist records, "Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen strange things (paradoxa) today!"⁷⁸ This is the one time in the New Testament where the Greek word for paradox is used.⁷⁹

Gerhard Kittel in his Theological Dictionary of the New Testament indicates that the word was quite common in secular Greek.⁸⁰ He adds, "In the

⁷⁸The BECK translation catches the paradoxical reaction of the people which Luke communicates through his use of the Greek word *paradoxa*. Beck renders the verse in this manner: "All were amazed and praised God. Fearfully they declared, "You wouldn't believe what we've seen today!"

⁷⁹Pseudepigrapha works III Maccabees 6:33 and The Wisdom of Solomon 5:2 also use the word *paradoxa* in a sense similar to that in Luke's Gospel.

⁸⁰Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Edited and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Vol. II. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. 255.

NT it occurs only in Lk 5:26, where it is designed to emphasise [*sic*] the unusual aspect of what was seen in Jesus: *eidov paradoxa semeron*.”⁸¹

Although this is the sole instance in the New Testament where the Greek word for paradox is used, paradox in the New Testament comes forth in a profuse and profound manner.⁸² The New Testament use of paradox is not just to present the unusual but rather to convey vital, in-depth truths about the mystery of the Kingdom of God.⁸³ Consequently, it is of little surprise to see how the parables of our Lord contained paradoxes.

Within a number of parables of our Lord, one sees paradoxes which revealed “mysteries of the kingdom” (Mt 13:11). In fact, one witnesses our Lord unveiling a double paradox in the parable known as “The Laborers in the Vineyard” (Mt 20:1-16). When Jesus concludes this parable with the paradox, “So the last shall be first, and the first last” (Mt 20:16), Jesus is using a double-entendre, teasing His hearers into thinking differently and deeply about the

⁸¹Kittel, p. 255.

⁸²It should be noted that *paradoxos* (Lk 5:26) and paradox as used in this paper are not linguistic equivalents. While both terms have within them an aspect that stresses the “unusual,” *paradox* as used in this paper has an expanded definition entailing the notion of two statements that on the surface seem to contradict each other but ultimately are true.

⁸³Kurt Marquart in his book, THE CHURCH and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance, (Waverly, Iowa: Published by The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), p. 16, has a fine summary on the relationship of the “Kingdom” and the “Church.” He writes, “In our day, by contrast, it has become fashionable to argue that ‘kingdom’ and ‘church’ are quite different entities. The confusion seems to arise from an indiscriminate lumping together of God’s power, grace, and glory.... It is enough here to point out that if it is true that the church is the People or Israel of God, then it must be true that she is His kingdom, for He is the King of Israel (Is. 44:6; Zeph. 3:15.

Kingdom that comes with grace upon grace. And at the same time, our Lord is revealing that the Kingdom of God, like the message of the cross, brings both a word of grace and a word of judgment. It brings grace to those who receive the good news that Christ the King brings; it brings judgment to those who insist on being inveterate bookkeepers. Robert Capon catches the powerful message of the Kingdom of God, revealed by parable and paradox, when he writes, "...the kingdom of heaven is for everybody; hell is reserved only for the idiots who insist on keeping nonexistent records in their heads."⁸⁴

Paradoxes are a superb tool to reveal significant facts about the Kingdom of God because God's Kingdom is itself paradoxical to the core. In what sense is it paradoxical? The Kingdom of God is paradoxical in its presence, the Person who embodies it, its purpose, its pedagogy, its people, its parousia today and its parousia tomorrow. This chapter will briefly examine the first six of these paradoxical aspects of the Kingdom to provide a basis for the seventh aspect, a paradoxical vision of the end times.⁸⁵

First, the Kingdom of God is paradoxical in its presence among us in the here and now. In the Gospel of Mark, we read how "Jesus came into Galilee

Compare Ex. 15:18; I Sam. 12:12; etc.). Specifically of course the church, as the New Israel, is the kingdom of 'great David's greater Son'."

⁸⁴Robert Farrar Capon, The Parables of Judgment, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 56.

⁸⁵The parousia of today is a reference to how Jesus *comes* to us today through Word and Sacrament. It is this parousia that prepares us for His second *coming*, the parousia of tomorrow. This latter parousia is the subject of the next chapter. Parousia is the New Testament Greek for "coming," often referred as a short-hand term for Christ's second coming. My point in developing these

preaching the gospel of the kingdom, And saying, The time is fulfilled, And the kingdom of God is at hand:" (Mk 1:14). These striking words in Mark find support throughout the New Testament, a document which thoroughly affirms "that the Kingdom of God has in a real sense become present fact, here and now."⁸⁶ John Bright aptly describes how the Kingdom of God is a rich reality, a power already at work in the world:

The future tense of the Old Testament ("behold the days are coming," and the like) has now become an emphatic present: "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). The final act of the drama has even now begun, the messianic age has dawned; he who is greater than Solomon, greater than Jonah (Luke 11: 31-32), nay greater than the temple and law (Matt. 12: 6-8), is here. The Servant is even now on the scene (Luke 4:17-21), and his works may be seen of all (Matt. 11:2-6). This is the day which all the past desired to see, but did not (Luke 10: 23-24). No need any more to look wildly about for signs of the Kingdom's imminent coming: it is right here "among you" (Luke 17:21).⁸⁷ In the person and work of Jesus the Kingdom of God has intruded into the world.⁸⁸

The paradox of the Kingdom of God's presence is part of what is known as the "yet, not yet" tension of the Kingdom. Indeed, it is among us now in the person of Christ our Lord. Nevertheless, believers in Christ also pray that it will yet come, saying, "Thy kingdom come" (Mt 6:10). Here we see quite squarely the paradox; namely, that the Kingdom is at one and the same time realized yet unrealized. Similarly, when we pray "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in

categories is to stress the importance of Christ's eschatological coming today through His divinely ordained means of grace.

⁸⁶John Bright, The Kingdom of God, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 216.

⁸⁷Bright here discusses by way of footnote the debate between whether the reading in Luke 17:21 should "among you" or "within you." Scholars are divided on this matter. Bright prefers "among you."

heaven” (Mt. 6:10), we pray paradoxically as people who are under God’s gracious rule yet who have not fully arrived. A close inspection of the Lord’s Prayer is a study in both paradox and the “yet, not yet” reality of the Kingdom of God. Every petition echoes the paradoxical tension of the “yet, not yet.”

Second, the Kingdom of God is paradoxical in the Person who embodies it, Jesus Christ. Because the Kingdom of God comes among us (Mk 1:15) and dwells within us (Gal. 2:20), in the Person of Jesus Christ, the understanding of the paradoxical nature of His Person is essential. A discussion of this matter quickly leads to what Kierkegaard regarded as the great paradox, the incarnation!⁸⁹

The paradox of the incarnation itself, as well as the paradoxes that result from it, stretch across the New Testament. How the infinite God became finite without denying Himself is a profound mystery. The Apostle Paul writes, “Deep is the mystery of our faith! He appeared in flesh...” (I Tim 3:16a, [Beck]).

As one examines the paradox of the incarnation, one sees how paradox begets paradox. How is it that He who sustains and holds the whole universe together (Col 1:17) becomes a dependent baby lying in a manger (Lk 2:17)? How is it that the Great I Am (Ex 3:2-14), who is the “same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:7), who is the “wisdom of God” (I Cor 1:24) and the one “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom” (Col 2:3), *grows* in wisdom (Luke 1:40)? How is it that the Bread of life (Jn 6:35) endures hunger (Mt. 4:2), that

⁸⁹Bright, p. 216.

the source of all waters (Heb. 1:2) experiences thirst (Jn 19:28), that the perfect Son of God (Heb 4:15) learns obedience (Heb 5:8), that the eternal God dies on a cross (Lk 23:46), that the God who cannot die comes back to life (Lk. 24:6), that the one who saved others could not save Himself (Mk. 15:31), that God forsakes God in hell and God prays to God from hell (Mt. 27:46)?

When dealing in paradoxes, we notice that God gives us paradoxes to answer paradoxical questions. For example, Job once asked, "How can he be clean *that is* born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). In other words, "how can God bring a clean thing from an unclean?" Through the miracle of the Incarnation, by way of the Virgin Birth, we see the paradoxical answer to this paradoxical question!

The Gospel is replete with paradoxes because the embodiment of the Gospel, Jesus Christ, lived a life replete with paradoxes from His incarnation to His death and resurrection. Even now, as risen Savior, the paradox of His Person remains as true God and true man. The post-Ascension Word remains, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9). Even now, although He suffers no more atonement pain, He still intimately identifies with the pain of His redeemed (Acts 9:4; Mt 25:40).

Third, the purpose of Christ's coming into the world is paradoxical from beginning to end. He came into the world to be the death of death by death (Heb 2:14). He came into the world so that the blind might see and those who see may turn blind (Jn 9:39). He came into the world to give people a yoke so

⁸⁹Martin H. Scharlemann, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh*, Concordia Theological Monthly, (March, 1961), p.133.

that their burdens might be light (Mt 11:28-30). He, the sinless One, comes into the world to take upon Himself our sin so that we, the sinful ones, might receive His sinlessness (II Cor 5:21). At the heart of this happy exchange is deep mystery and profound paradox.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, asserting that the message of a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (I Cor 1:23), he was summarizing the reaction of unbelief regarding divine paradoxes. For Jews who grew up learning that cursed is he who died on a tree (Dt 21:23), the message of the cross was especially jarring. That the core paradoxical idea embedded in the Gospel entailed Messiah becoming a curse to take away the curse of sin (Is 53) was a scandal of highest proportions. For Greeks, whose gods were given to caprice, the sober, yet staggering idea that Creator would die for the creature was paradoxical nonsense. However, to those who believed this good news, this was God's power, God's wisdom, God's paradoxical way of saving fallen man (I Cor 1:24).

Fourth, the pedagogical nature of the Kingdom of God is paradoxical. Here my remarks are aimed largely at the content of the teachings of the Kingdom rather than the style. Nonetheless, our Lord engages in paradoxical style as well as paradoxical substance. Especially noteworthy is the manner in which Jesus paradoxically puts forth the Law to pave the way for the paradoxical Gospel. For example, when Jesus talks about religious leaders of His day straining gnats and swallowing camels (Mt 23:24), taking specks of dust out of

the eyes of others while ignoring the big planks in their own eyes (Mt 7:4), mourning when they should have been rejoicing, and rejoicing when they should have been mourning (Mt 11:17), he is using paradoxical word pictures. It is part of His surgery of the soul, to put people to death through the Law so that He can raise them through the Gospel. And here His methodology is instructive, using paradoxical pictures in life to inculcate Kingdom paradoxes.

The Kingdom truths that come from the lips of our Lord are themselves loaded with paradoxes. One of His best known paradoxes is "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Mt 10:39). Through this paradox, Jesus seeks to pave the way for the scandal of the cross. Thus, what one has pedagogically and paradoxically, is the use of a paradox to serve the Paradox, the Gospel.

As we have demonstrated throughout the paper, paradoxes often come as a result of the tension between texts. A good example are two seemingly contradictory teachings of our Lord from the very same Gospel. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says "blessed are the peacemakers" (5:9). Yet five chapters later, Jesus declares that He did not come to earth to bring peace but a sword (Mt 10:34). What looks on the surface to be an apparent contradiction, is a divine paradox. The truth this paradox conveys is that Jesus both unites and divides. When the Gospel is embraced by grace through faith royal reconciliation results. When the Gospel is rejected divisions only deepen.

Through paradox our Lord either directly, or through His apostles, gives us pedagogical opportunity to see reality from God's point of view. Often the

paradoxes stop us in their tracks to retool our thinking. One such paradox is from Luke 8:18: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."

One of the highly instructive and highly comforting paradoxes in the New Testament is a resurrection paradox, where He who is the resurrection and the life declares that "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (Jn 11:24-25). Other comforting paradoxes the Spirit gives us for our education and edification, and for our perspective and perseverance are: "when I am weak, I am strong" (II Cor 12; 10); "whom the Lord loves He chastens" (Heb 12:6); "blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3); "blessed are those who mourn" (Mt 5:4); "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5).⁹⁰

In the Scriptures you will find verses which give birth to paradoxes. Matthew 6:33 serves as a good point in case. Here Jesus enjoins us "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Apply this word of God to the subject of happiness. What is

⁹⁰The last three references are from the Beatitudes, from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Just as in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus adds one paradox after another. In the Beatitudes Jesus talks about that "blessed" hunger (5:6), that "blessed" thirst (5:6), and that "blessed" persecution (5:11). There is even more paradox in the Sermon on the Mount. On the one hand Jesus says, "Let your light so shine" (5:16) and then a little later he says, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men" (6:1). Here He who is greater than Solomon is using paradox to drive home the point, To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven: (Ecc 3:1). Another Sermon on the Mount paradox is where commands us not to judge (7:1) and 15 verses later commands

the paradox? You gain happiness by not seeking it. Rather, if you seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, happiness will come as a blessed offshoot of God's gift of heaven's happiness—joy (Gal 5:22). This brings to mind the paradox about heaven that C.S. Lewis puts forth in this manner: "Aim at heaven and you get earth 'thrown in;' aim at earth and you get neither."⁹¹ So it is with the pursuit of happiness.

Fifth, the Kingdom of God is paradoxical in the people who are part of it. On the one hand, the people of the Kingdom of God are saints.⁹² On the other hand and at the same time, God's people are sinners (I Jn 1:8-10). The paradox that we are at the same time sinner and saint is to warn and comfort. It warns us against any illusions of omnipotence (Jn 15:5c) while at the same time it assures us that we are "more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom 8:37).⁹³ This view is a glorious tension that helps us cope with the tensions of

Kingdom makers to judge (7:15). Once again, under opposites Christ brings to us the blessed Biblical balance.

⁹¹C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1943), p.104.

⁹²To see how strong this emphasis is, namely, that the believer in Christ is a saint, look at the majestic NT epistle of Ephesians. Nine times in six chapters the apostle Paul underscores the "sainthood" status of the Christian, a status made possible by God's gracious election (Eph 1:3-14). The nine references are: 1:1, 1:15, 1:18, 2:19, 3:8, 3:18, 4:12, 5:3, 6:18.

⁹³Most instructive to understanding the sinner-saint tension is the Pauline explanation of it in Romans 7 and 8. Paul's autobiographical sketch of the fallout of sin, as he points out how believers keep on sinning even after conversion is most practical. He reminds us that sin is a condition, not just something we do. Despite this "poor miserable sinner status" that yet remains, the apostle Paul sets forth an amazing truth, to wit, even now we are glorified (Rom 8:30). The use of the aorist tense of the word "glorified" stresses its been a done deal! To be sure, the full fruits of this glorification await us (I Cor 15: 43); nevertheless, we are simultaneously glorified yet not glorified. Once again, from

life. It also accounts for a present reality of original sin as well as the reality of Christ's victory over sin. In brief, it is another expression of the "yet, not yet" nature of the Kingdom.

As paradoxical people, peculiar people, pilgrim people, God's people move through life to the beat of a different drum than people who live life 'under the sun.' The Apostle Paul describes that earthly journey this way, "As unknown, yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (II Cor 6: 9,10). This is the life of the "yet, not yet" people of God.

Scores of other paradoxes shape the actions of God's paradoxical people. When the apostle Paul warns the elect "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor 10:13), one is confronted with an unfathomable mystery. The elect fall? Never! Nonetheless, the elect must be warned.

Luther said doctrine was like a golden ring. It is all connected. It all hangs together. And if it indeed it is a gold ring, than paradox must be the rim of that ring, providing Spirit-designed parameters to keep us from exaggerating one truth at the expense of another.

Sixth, the Kingdom of God is paradoxical in the nature of its "parousia" today. The danger of scores of books that treat the subject of Christ's second

another angle the NT Scriptures present the "yet, not yet" tension of those in the Church Militant.

coming (parousia) is that they say less than little about the nature of His coming today. Such silence is not golden, nor does it embolden one for Christ's second coming.

Just as Jesus entered time and space by way of the incarnation, He comes to us paradoxically today. Through simple acts awesome deeds are performed. Through the simple acts of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Holy Absolution, and the preaching of the Gospel, God's paradoxical people participate in His coming to us today. Through these Gospel acts, the acts of the apostles, the acts of our Lord, the acts of God, God continues to pour out His grace to enable us to see His face and run the good race. Through these grand Gospel-deeds Jesus paradoxically gives us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

A good example is the paradoxical and parousia nature of baptism. In his epistle to the Romans, St. Paul sublimely spelled this out for us. Here he talks about the life-giving death of Baptism whereby we "were baptized into Jesus Christ into his death...buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3b,4). Paul enunciates the implications of this real baptism into the real death of Christ when he writes, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (I Cor 12:13). The apostle wants Christians to know, that throughout life, even until death, even until the last day, this "washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tt 3:5) is in force to help us participate in the daily death of repentance.

Similarly, the Lord's Supper manifests a real paradoxical character. Its paradoxical and parousia nature consists in the fact that in this holy meal is offered not merely bread and wine but also—at the same time—the body and blood of the Risen Savior who fills the whole universe according to His divine and human nature (Col 2:9). While the Church of Rome sought to erase the first part of this paradox, the churches of Geneva, Zurich, and their descendants attempted to eradicate the latter. The Lutheran Church, however, has with utmost earnestness embraced the paradox put forth by St. Paul, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (I Cor 10:16).

When the profound paradoxical nature of the Lord's Supper is not overlooked, we see a breathtaking connection between the parousia of Christ's coming in the Lord's Supper among us now and His parousia at the end of time. However when this meal is reduced to no more than a sacred pantomime, a spiritual exercise to remember what Jesus did for us, then we miss the profound paradox at work. Herman Sasse explains this double parousia connection:

Much rather the hope of the Lord's return and the coming Kingdom is so powerfully alive in this celebration because the Lord's Supper, as the celebration of Christ's real presence, already includes a fulfillment of that expectation. Whoever partakes of it already now sits at the table of the Lord, whose guest he will be one day in the kingdom of God. The same Lord, whose coming in glory one implores in the Eucharistic prayer is already present in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus the prayer “Come, Lord Jesus” retains its eschatological meaning, but at the same time it carries the meaning expressed in an early liturgical prayer, ...: “Be

present, be present, Jesus good priest, among us, as also you will be in the midst of your disciples.”⁹⁴

There is one more paradoxical aspect regarding the Lord's Supper that I would like to note. It has to do with the ancient practice of the Church called “close” or “closed” communion. This is a policy where communion fellowship is limited to those where there is a common confession of the Gospel. By common confession of the Gospel, I do not mean a Gospel reductionist view nor some minimalist Gospel, but rather one where all aspects of the Gospel, from the person and work of Jesus Christ, to the scandal of particularity, to the means of grace doctrine and the eschewing of all legalism or lawlessness is part of the true Gospel understanding. When this is the case, it might serve the pastor well to present the doctrine of closed communion in paradoxical form, demonstrating how closed communion ought to be practiced and applied wherever individuals are not open to the Gospel. In other words, to practice open communion is to tolerate movements closed to the Gospel. Often people who advocate open communion have no idea that they are supporting the embracing of theologies which trim the sails of the Gospel. My point in raising this issue is to show how paradox can be a useful tool to help instruct people to see that closed communion is a doctrine given to us by God for the sake of the Gospel.

The paradoxical, parousia-nature of Holy Absolution, another means of grace, deserves attention as well. The paradoxical nature of this means of grace

⁹⁴Herman Sasse, We Confess The Sacraments, vol. 2. Translated by Norman Nagel. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), p.92.

by which Christ imparts forgiveness (Jn 20:23), bestows upon us His Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22), and grants peace (Jn 20:21) is not unlike the Virgin Birth. Like the Virgin Birth, God brings forth a clean thing from an unclean thing in Holy Absolution. He uses sinful people to forgive sins and to be a means by which the Holy Spirit comes! He gives dying people the most awesome authority and life-giving message in the universe! For in Holy Absolution there is every bit as much power as when God said, "Let there be light!" That dying, sinful men should impart a life-giving sinlessness, whereby Christ through the Gospel tabernacles among people is certainly a double paradox to adore!

The paradoxical path and parousia-nature of the preaching and teaching of the Gospel itself, has been discussed repeatedly throughout this chapter. It is through the paradoxical message of the Gospel that the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus, keeps us in faith in Jesus, and bestows upon us all that our dear Savior merited for us through His suffering, death, and resurrection. Luther eloquently summarizes the paradoxical and parousia work of the Spirit when he declares how the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." Through the Cornerstone of Christ, by way of the touchstones of Word and Sacrament, the Spirit produces *living stones* (I Pt 2:5, another paradox!)

Through Word and Sacrament Christ continues to come to us. Through these lifelines of love He paradoxically comes so we might be ready for His second coming. By these means He grants to us a rich supply of His Holy Spirit, the Spirit who grants to us a paradoxical vision of the end times.

Having examined the paradoxical nature of the coming of Christ and of the Kingdom of Christ, I now specifically wish to construct from Scripture a paradoxical vision of eschatological matters. Such a view, I believe, will help Christians have the highest of hopes without falling prey to an undue optimism regarding solutions to the world's problems coming from within history. Kurt Marquart describes this end-times hope in a manner that sets the tone for our next chapter:

As the church presses onward and upwards towards the goal (Phil. 3:12-14), she does so as a pilgrim, intent on what lies ahead, not as a tourist, absorbed in the here and now. Her solidarity is not with Adam's fallen race and its "cultures," on the old plan (I Cor. 15:22ff.; II Cor. 5:16-17) but with the New Adam and Head of the new humanity. This new humanity, the church, has her own unique identity and history, transcending this world "cultures," which, rather, she re-shapes (Rom. 12:2)...God's children and servants "take pleasure" in Zion's very "stones, and favor the dust thereof"—all on account of God's Temple which was but a shadow of things to come; "but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:17).⁹⁵

⁹⁵Marquart, p. 219.

CHAPTER IV

A PARADOXICAL VISION OF THE END TIMES

In the previous chapters, the case for an end-times view of reality which is paradoxical in scope and Gospel-centered in nature has been made. Chapter one aimed at providing an apologetic for the need of a paradoxical, eschatological vision, as God's saints head toward and into the third millennium, Lord permitting. The second chapter tapped into the paradoxical thinking of the *sola Scriptura* sixteenth century "poet of paradox," Martin Luther. I began with Luther to end with Scripture, the final authority in all matters of faith. Widespread reading of Luther the past four years has helped me to see how the Reformer made abundant use of paradox for the sake of the Gospel, and how it enabled him to present a paradoxical vision of reality "in, with, and under" the Gospel. More than admirably, Luther served as my mentor, training my eye to pay closer attention to the Spirit's use of paradox in Scripture.

Under Luther's tutelage, I began to discover paradoxes in places I had never noticed before. I then began to see a paradoxical thread running from Genesis chapter one right on through the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation chapter twenty-two. In addition, I began to see that paradox is part of the heartbeat of the Kingdom of God. Wherever the Gospel goes, there is the movement of paradox. Moreover, this movement is also part of the

eschatological steps of the New Testament, for eschatological hope is born of the Gospel.⁹⁶

This chapter will attempt to apply the Gospel-paradox vision to end-times matters. I call it a “Gospel-paradox” vision not only because the Gospel itself is highly paradoxical, but because a paradoxical vision of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be true to the Scriptures, must be Gospel-centered. It must continually ask how every eschatological doctrine relates to the glorious good news of how God for the sake of His beloved Son declares the ungodly godly (Rom 4:5). For only when this Gospel-centered doctrine, this paradoxical vision is in tact, do other eschatological teachings fall into place.

Because the field of eschatology has a breadth, length, height, and depth the length of the Scriptures—and beyond, I had to narrow which eschatological themes I selected in formulating a paradoxical vision of the end times. Yet even with a modest approach, I believe one can get at the heart of eschatological issues that call for a paradoxical vision of the end times. In this chapter I plan to survey these eschatological issues:

1. The Paradox of the present millennium
2. The Paradox of the binding of Satan
3. The Paradox of the Antichrist
4. The Paradox of Israel
5. The Paradox of life after death

⁹⁶Gustav Wingren, Luther on Vocation, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Evansville, Indiana: Ballast Press), p. 38. Here Wingren wrote, “The concept of justification also has an eschatological meaning. The forgiveness of sins, as justification, implies that it is only through the forgiveness of sins that man can stand in the judgment—that is, the final judgment. Thus, the forgiveness of sins is the same as eternal life. Since it is faith which receives the forgiveness of sins, faith is seen to have an eschatological dimension.”

6. The Paradox of hell
7. The Paradox of Judgment Day

The Paradox of the Present Millennium

“If you join at eleven o’clock a conversation which began at eight you will often not see the real bearing of what it said. Remarks which seem to you very ordinary will produce laughter or irritation and you will not see why—the reason of course being that the earlier stages of the conversation have given them a special point.”⁹⁷ So writes C.S. Lewis about the importance of the *earlier* portion of a vital conversation.

It is the “earlier” stages of the New Testament that enable one to see clearly the nature of the Kingdom of God and its relationship to the millennium.⁹⁸ It is my contention that a right understanding of what the New Testament sets forth in the first twenty-six books of its corpus regarding the Kingdom of God will unlock the meaning of what John refers to as the “1,000 years” (Rev 20:4-8).⁹⁹ The historic hermeneutic of the Holy Christian Church has been to allow the

⁹⁷C.S. Lewis’ commentary on the value of reading old books in order to understand the new. See introduction to St. Athanasius on the Incarnation (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1953), p. 4.

⁹⁸*Millennium* is a term derived from two Latin words: 1) *mille*, “a thousand,” and 2) *annus*, “a year.” When the term is used in theological discussions, it usually goes back to Revelation 20. Here Scripture talks about a 1,000 year reign. The debate within the church is whether the 1,000 year reference is figurative language describing the Kingdom of God at work now in time; or, whether the 1,000 year reference is to be taken literalistically referring to a 1,000 year visible rule here on earth. Lutherans hold to the former view, the view reflected in the Creeds, the view espoused by St. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and most of the early Church fathers.

clearer portions of the New Testament to interpret the less clear, to allow the literal to interpret the figurative, to allow the first twenty-six books of the New Testament to interpret Revelation rather than Revelation interpreting the first twenty-six books. To do otherwise, is to fall into the trap of putting the cart before the horse, to follow a Jehovah's Witnesses-like hermeneutic as our guide in interpreting Revelation 20, and to subordinate the "yet, not yet"—"I believe so that I see" nature of the Kingdom of God to a "heaven on earth"—to a "I see so that I believe" Kingdom of God.

Historically, those who hold to a visible 1,000 year rule of Christ here on earth have followed the hermeneutic of allowing the less clear teachings of Scripture (figurative language) to interpret the clear portions of Scripture (literal assertions). As a consequence, the clear and numerous teachings about the paradoxical "yet, not yet" nature of the Kingdom of God marking the whole of the New Testament era right up to the second coming of Christ have been ignored. Whether we examine the 1970, 15 million plus seller of Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth, or the 1996 Beginning of the End (The Assassination of Yitzak Rabin and the Coming AntiChrist by John Hagee, what is striking about these books by men who represent a literalistic interpretation of the 1,000-year rule of Christ (Rev 20:6) is the *complete silence* about the "yet, not yet" nature of

⁹⁹Six times in this section, Revelation 20:2-7, John refers to this kingdom which will last "a thousand years." This is the only section in Scripture where the 1,000 year reference, or what is referred to the millennium is made.

the Kingdom of Christ! Not a jot or tittle about the end-times Kingdom of God at work now in time and space is noted by these premillennialistic advocates!¹⁰⁰

Equally noticeable by omission on the part of premillennialistic or postmillennialistic¹⁰¹ proponents is the New Testament understanding of the end times as beginning with Christ's incarnation and the times of the apostles (Heb 1:2, Acts 2:16-21; cf. Joel 2:28-32; Heb 9:26; I Cor 10:11; I Pt 1:20; I Jn 2:18). Tragically, when one fails to see clearly that the end times are already upon us, that the Kingdom of God "has come and is even now in the world; (*and*) it is also yet to come,"¹⁰² one is ill-equipped to allow the end-time reality of the "yet, not yet" rule of Christ to shed light on the meaning of the 1,000-year rule of Christ (Rev 20: 4,6). Without this light, that the gracious rule of Christ is already at work, the emphasis on a "1,000-year rule" by Christ will be on the "1,000" rather than on the "rule" and the paradoxical vision presented regarding the millennium will be missed.

The lamentable result of ignoring "the yet, not yet" rule of Christ in the interpretation of the "1,000-year rule" of Christ of which St. John speaks is several-fold. One, it ignores the heart of the Gospel message that justification brings, namely, a *simul justus et peccator*—"yet, not yet" eschatological Kingdom has arrived—as the key hermeneutical tool to disclose the meaning of the

¹⁰⁰*Premillennialism* is the view that Christ's second advent will occur before ("pre") the "millennium," after which will come a 1,000 year visible reign here on earth.

¹⁰¹*Postmillennialism* is the view that Christ's second advent will occur after ("post") the "millennium," understood as a golden age on earth where society has been reconstructed but not necessarily lasting 1,000 years.

millennium.¹⁰³ Two, the failure to use the paradoxical Gospel vision of victorious martyrs, of people who own everything yet nothing, who are at the same time offscouring and yet priests of God misses the main motif of Revelation: Continue as priests and kings of God (Rev 1:6—the yet) to be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life (Rev 2:10—the not yet)! Three, by missing the Kingdom of God “yet, not yet” tension, false hopes¹⁰⁴ replace comforting realities.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Bright, p. 237.

¹⁰³Fascinating in the Revelation 20:4-6 pericope is how the aorist tense for “rule” is used in verse 4, while the future tense is used in verse six, strongly suggesting the “yet, not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God!

¹⁰⁴Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism. (A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1989), p. 43. This document succinctly identifies the false hope premillennial camps offer: “The views of pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture offer the Christian the false hope of exemption from the intensified persecution toward the end. Moreover, they offer a second chance of conversion for those are left after the rapture. The focus of the Scripture’s hope is not an earthly kingdom lasting 1000 years but eternity with Christ.” p. 43.

¹⁰⁵Here we see the difference between Fundamentalism and true evangelical theology. Fundamentalism began as a good movement and good word back around 1912. At that time a very distinguished group of Bible students produced a series of booklets on what they called The Fundamentals. These booklets were designed to uphold the doctrines of verbal inspiration, the vicarious atonement of Christ, the bodily resurrection, the virgin birth, and the millennium. Much of what The Fundamentals put forth was salutary. While Confessional Lutherans see the whole life of the Christian as a constant call back to the fundamentals, we are not fundamentalists. The key difference between Evangelical Lutherans and Fundamentalists is this: Lutherans see the vital importance of viewing every doctrine in light of the Gospel. Consequently, we give high priority to the Gospel acts of Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion in a way that Fundamentalists do not. These mighty Gospel acts are key components in the comfort of God’s saints in the “yet” part of the “not yet” paradox. Fundamentalism, which is much more Law-driven, will accent more of what we must do to get ready for Christ’s second coming while Lutherans emphasize what God does through the Gospel to ready us.

The Paradox of the Binding of Satan

Part of the fallout of rejecting the paradoxical Gospel vision of the “yet, not yet” Kingdom of God as the core content of Revelation 20:4-8, is the failure to grasp the paradoxical binding of the devil. The New Testament teaches that the devil is bound and yet—at the same time—he is not bound. A Gospel vision of the end times recognizes this paradox. It sees how as the embodiment of the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ, came into the world not only to blind the prince of darkness but to bind him (Mt 12:29).¹⁰⁶

Here again we allow the non-figurative parts of the New Testament to shed light on the figurative parts. When we do, we see that the binding of Satan took place during Christ’s earthly life through His mighty redemptive deeds. Explicitly the New Testament tells us that Satan “was cast out, judged and defeated at Christ’s first advent (Jn 12:31, 16:11; I Jn 3:8; Luke 10:18; Heb 2:14).”¹⁰⁷ Through Christ’s decisive victory Satan lost his clout and place as the prosecuting attorney of men before God (I Jn 2:1; Rev 12:10), for the propitiation price had been paid in full (I Jn 2:2; Jn 19:30; Rev 12:11). The CTCR document of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism, summarizes well how the Gospel victory by Christ has declawed this roaring lion: “This ‘binding’ of Satan is parallel to Rev.

¹⁰⁶The paradox, that Jesus came into the world to blind the prince of darkness consists in the fact that it was blind rage that drove the devil to have Christ crucified and end up in his (the devil’s) own undoing. Second, the word used in the Gospels for the “binding” of Satan [*deo*] (Mt 12:29; Mk 3:27) is the root word used in Revelation 20:2 for the “binding” of Satan for a thousand years.

12:7-13 where he is cast out of heaven and no longer allowed to accuse the saints as He did in Old Testament times (Zechariah 3; Job 1-2).¹⁰⁸

Revelation 20 gives us another insight into what the binding of Satan involves. What was hinted at in Revelation 12:9 is made explicit in Revelation 20; namely, that the devil has been bound so that "he should deceive the nations no more." If the rest of Scripture is permitted to shed light on this binding, and the 1,000 years is rightly understood as the New Testament age, the binding of the devil for a 1,000 years (Rev 20:7) makes superb Biblical sense.

Compared to Old Testament times, the devil's ability to deceive the nations has received a substantial blow. At one time, during the age of Noah, the Gospel-remnant saved had been reduced to a mere eight souls (I Pt 3:21). Considering that the world's population at that time may have been far larger than what it is today, due to the longevity of the age span of the Old Testament patriarchs (Gen 5), the New Testament binding of Satan squares very well with devil's massive disinformation powers in the old eon.

Before the coming of Christ into the flesh, His victory over the temptation of the devil, His casting out demons, His death, His descent into hell body and soul to proclaim victory over the devil,¹⁰⁹ His resurrection, and His ascension, and His coronation, salvation had been largely limited to believing Jews. While

¹⁰⁷CTCR Document: The End Times, p. 40.

¹⁰⁸CTCR Document, p. 40.

¹⁰⁹See I Pt 3:18-21 the *sedes doctrina* for Christ's descent into hell. In brief, the apostle Peter reveals how Jesus, alive from the dead, both body and soul, as true God and true man, in glory not humiliation, descended into hell to

the church today is a shrinking minority in our ever expanding pluralistic world, nevertheless, the New Testament binding of Satan has allowed the Gospel to go out to the nations in a manner unlike anything in the Old Testament era.

Even though the devil is truly bound, thanks to Christ's decisive victory, he is not bound in every sense. The old evil foe still "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pt 5:7). The fact that the devil's great-in-number filthy crew of fallen cohorts (Eph 6:12; Rev 12:4) also wages war in his behalf makes the Christian ever a man of war and a man of peace. The members of God's "yet, not yet" Kingdom know that although D-Day has occurred, the mopping up operations before V-Day are in full force involving some fierce fighting, major battles, and no few Armageddons. If we get too close to the devil's means of disgrace and too far away from God's means of grace, the devil or one of his henchmen can put on the big hurt. William Hendriksen has worded it well, "...within the sphere in which Satan is permitted to exert his influence for evil he rages most furiously. A dog securely bound with a long and heavy chain can do great damage within the circle of his imprisonment. Outside that circle, however, the animal can do no damage and can hurt no-one."¹¹⁰

declare his victory over the devil, a victory that would put the devil into a real bind!

¹¹⁰William Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1940), p. 190.

The Paradox of the Antichrist

With the help of Herman Sasse, we can formulate this paradox in ten words: "The Antichrist is always coming, and he is already here."¹¹¹ In light of the "yet, not yet" tension of the Kingdom, such a formulation does not surprise one. The "yet, not yet" nature of the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of the Antichrist will end only on Judgment Day when the Lord Jesus "shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (II Thess 2:8) this "son of perdition" (II Thess 2:3).¹¹²

"Remarkably," writes John Stephenson, "the term Antichrist itself is absent from the crucial Thessalonians passage, appearing only in the Johannine letters. Here Antichrist is both a plural and a singular phenomenon, already present and yet to come (I Jn 2:18)."¹¹³ With these fundamental facts, we see that this doctrine in its application, by its very nature, must be elastic rather than plastic. It must cover every expression of the Antichrist everywhere throughout the whole

¹¹¹Sasse vol. 3, p. 111.

¹¹²II Thess 2:7 gives the impression that Antichrist appears in the form of "the man of lawlessness" while I John 2:18 gives the impression Antichrist will be in the form of many men who are called Antichrists. Throughout history many guesses have been ventured as to the identity of the Antichrist. During WW I Kaiser Wilhelm was a candidate. During WW II Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin all took their turns as candidates. President John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, and Ronald Wilson Reagan (Reagan because each of his three names had six letters, ergo, Mr. 666). Church history should teach us prophetic reserve. Biblical prophecy regarding the Antichrist should enjoin us to pay close attention to the fact that Antichrist takes his seat in the "temple of God," that is, in the church (II Thess 2:4). Sasse's comment is helpful, "The fulfillment could also be thought of in this way, that the collective person will find his final expression in an individual person." See "Last Things: Church and Antichrist," We Confess the Church, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 112.

New Testament age. Hence, the doctrine of the Antichrist is a theological shoe which fits all sizes, wherever the Gospel is replaced by some substitute Gospel, wherever egotistical people flatter themselves into thinking that they can scale their way to heaven through works.

In our Lutheran Confessions, Philip Melancthon identified “the kingdom of Mohammed” with its salvation by works and denial “that men are freely justified before God by faith for Christ’s sake,” as having the marks of the Antichrist.¹¹⁴ And while Melancthon spotted the finger prints of the Antichrist in Mohammad’s written ramblings of salvation by the Law, Luther saw the finger prints and footprints of the Antichrist in the papacy.¹¹⁵ For Luther, whether it was a pope who taught salvation by indulgences, Zwingli’s war against the Gospel-nature of the Lord’s Supper, the work-righteous Turk, or whoever substituted the Gospel with some humanistic manifesto, all were in league with the kingdom of Antichrist.¹¹⁶

It is important that two distinctions be made here. One, the Lutheran Confessors were not judging faith in the heart (*fides qua*) but rather the faith

¹¹³Stephenson, p. 79.

¹¹⁴Tappert, p. 217.

¹¹⁵“To the extent that the papacy continues to claim as official dogma the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent which expressly anathematizes, for instance, the doctrine ‘that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this trust alone by which we are justified,’ the judgment of the Lutheran confessional writings that the papacy is the Antichrist holds. At the same time, of course, we must recognize the possibility, under God’s guidance, that contemporary discussions and statements (e.g., 1983 U.S. Lutheran—Roman dialogue statement on ‘Justification by Faith’) could lead to a revision of the Roman Catholic position regarding Tridentine dogma.” p. 25, The End Times, (1989 CTCR report), p. 25.

which is confessed (*fides quae*). And any doctrine offered and confessed by any religious prophet which attempted to water down, sabotage, or replace the Gospel—especially when offered within the Church (2 Thess 2:4), involved the work of the Antichrist.

Two, no one person and no one institution exhausts the mystery of the Antichrist. While the Antichrist is not Satan himself, he does operate “by the activity of Satan” (2 Thess 2:9). Because of that, Antichrist under the power of the devil, no doubt can take on many disguises masquerading as an angel of light (II Cor 11:14). What pseudo-Christ-masks and theological arsenic admixtures Antichrist will enlist in the future to deceive the masses remains to be seen. Herman Sasse writes:

The Lutheran Church teaches nothing in its Confessions as to how God may let the prophecy of the Antichrist come to fulfillment in the hidden future, that is, what form the Antichrist may take in the final terrors of the end time.¹¹⁷

No additives to the Gospel! That must be our abiding concern if we wish to counter the soul-destroying attacks of the Antichrist. The term Antichrist carries with it the notion of one who tries to substitute Christ (Greek *anti* means “in place of”) and one who opposes Christ (II Thess 2:4a). In so far as this is done, Antichrist is as work stealing comfort from God's saints and glory from Christ.

¹¹⁶Stephenson, p. 81.

¹¹⁷Sasse, (Vol. 3) p. 119.

A paradoxical vision of the Antichrist will help identify the many movements that seek to qualify the radical grace of God through the Person of His Son and through the means of grace. A paradoxical vision will not make the myopic mistake of looking for the Antichrist in some sole end-times political leader. Furthermore, a paradoxical vision will not overlook the fact that the *peccator* portion of our human nature is only too happy to make ourselves the center of the universe. Aware of temptations within as well as without, aware of the wider the collective character of the Antichrist, especially as it operates *within* the temple of God, the Christian seeks to "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly!" (Col. 3:16). Knowing that Antichrist is always coming and is already here, always seeking to destroy the paradox of justification by grace, is a call to constant readiness in the "yet, not yet" Kingdom of God!

The Paradox of Israel

The paradox in the Bible regarding Israel is important to grasp and hold in tension if one desires to avoid all kinds of theological wild-goose chases. Without a paradoxical vision of the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), one can easily slip into a theology of salvation by race rather than salvation by grace. How often over the years good Christian friends of mine from the premillennial camp have spoken to me about "God's chosen people the Jews."¹¹⁸ In speaking in

¹¹⁸Luther in his Lectures on Genesis (LW, Vol. 7) p. 15, reminds us that Israel of the flesh was really an admixture of a number of nations, as is every nation for that matter. Writes Luther, "For the whole people of Israel is descended from Leah and Rachel, and this was not the line of Abraham. The

this manner, their view of God's chosen race was one of the flesh rather faith. Rather than faith in Messiah serving as the criterion for being a member of the chosen race, it was biological bloodline which determined if you were part of the chosen race.

Before proceeding further, I should spell out the paradox. The paradox regarding Israel is this: all of Israel will be saved and all of Israel will not be saved. St. Paul presents this paradox in Romans chapters 11 and 9. On the one hand, he writes, "All Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). On the other hand, he also writes "Only a remnant of them will be saved" (Rom 9:27).

This paradox greatly grieved the Apostle Paul. As a result, he wrote, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:2-3). Luther's comment to this kind of thinking is paradoxical, "It seems incredible that a man would desire to be damned in order that the damned might be saved."¹¹⁹

The paradox that all of Israel will be saved and all of Israel will not be saved is to show us that there is an Israel within an Israel. Paradoxically, it is a remnant larger than the physical fabric of Israel itself. Just as Christ is greater

tribe of Judah is descended from Tamar. Finally David himself is descended from Moab. Therefore, their pride, because of which they despise the Gentiles and hate them most bitterly, is decidedly reprehensible, since, of course, they are blood relations because of this mother Tamar and because of other women we have mentioned previously. Through them Gentile and Jewish blood was mixed."

than the body of Christ so is this remnant of Israel greater in number than Israel itself. It is greater in number for Messiah's vineyard includes within it, large grafted/adopted (Rom 11:13-26) branches. These living branches, to use the prophetic words of the Messiah, will come from "the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 8:11).

The paradox of Israel is given to us by God to teach us that God's Israel is a spiritual Israel. Unless this vision is seen clearly, we are constantly vulnerable to every Hal Lindsey that comes along with an Israel-centered view of the end times. Over twenty-five years ago, Lindsey's Late Great Planet Earth told people "don't expect to be around much longer"¹²⁰ because the rapture is about to occur and the Russian forces of Gog are about to descend upon the nation of Israel. With maps, arrows, and diagrams he drew up a wild Israel-centered scenario. With a recklessness devoid of the paradoxical vision of which St. Paul spoke, he predicted how the Roman Confederacy would attack Israel from the west, the Russians would assail Israel from the North, and the 2,000,000 man Chinese army would swarm into Israel from the East.¹²¹

Not only was Hal Lindsey's Israel-centered view proven dead wrong over time, but he also diverted millions of Christians from seeing the real Israel of God (Gal 6:16; I Pt 2:9). The real Israel of God according to the Bible is a creation by God through the Red Sea event of Baptism. Through the

¹¹⁹John Stott, Romans: God's Good News for the World, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 264. Stott quotes LW, Vol. 25 *Luther's Lectures on Romans*, p. 380.

¹²⁰Lindsey, p. 117.

paradoxical-Gospel event of Baptism, we all become children of God by faith in Jesus the Messiah (Gal 3:26-27). This awesome act creates a fundamental Jewish-Gentile solidarity in God's New Israel, the Church (Gal. 3:28). Added to this good news is that via the grace of God in Baptism, when we "put on Messiah" (3:27), we simultaneously become part of Abraham's seed (3:29); that is, the New Israel!

Years ago, like many Christians, I became enamored by the Hal Lindsey Israel-centered theology. It took nearly a half of a decade to work out of my system his Israel-centered, walk-by-sight, Antichrist-hostility toward the Gospel as it comes to us in the holy sacraments. A brother in the faith wrote to me in 1996 how he too took a long time to rid his world-view of the theological virus with which Lindsey had infected him. He wrote:

About six years ago, God changed my understanding of eschatology from a view which focused on the nation of Israel as central to end-time events to one which sees Christ and the promise of His return as central. This change came as I read Luther and learned from him that all doctrine is rightly understood when Christ is at its center, and that any doctrinal interpretation which causes people to look hopefully, to any source other than Christ is a false interpretation. When I realized this, I stopped looking for a temple to be built in Jerusalem and for other such events relating to the nation of Israel, and now look instead for the return of the Savior Jesus Christ.¹²²

The Paradox of Life after Death

Years ago when I was first serving as a pastor in the Office of the Holy Ministry, I recall a rather irritated member of the congregation speaking to me

¹²¹Lindsey, pp. 119-135.

after a church service. He took issue with an assertion I made in the sermon. "Pastor," he said, "You had it all wrong in the sermon today. When we die, we don't go to heaven. That does not take place until Judgment Day when we are raised from the dead."

I felt sorry for this saint. For years he had been living, believing, and laboring under false belief—thinking that at the point of death a Christian dies, his body rots, and that's it until the parousia. The problem here is a lack of a fuller Gospel vision, a lack of paradoxical vision that sees a most comforting dimension at death for the Christian. This paradox was expressed to Martha by Jesus at the death of her brother Lazarus. It is a paradox which issues from paradox *Condescendit nobis Deus, ut nos consurgamus*. What is that paradox? It is this: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall live" (Jn 11:25).

The Lutheran Agenda articulates this paradox in a beautiful fashion when it speaks of the Christians who have died as ones who "abide in joy as to their souls and in hope as to their bodies."¹²³ Is there a Biblical basis for Christians to teach that the moment Christians die, their spirit or soul goes to heaven, that their personal identity remains intact between death and the bodily resurrection? In other words, is there an intermediate state between death and the bodily resurrection?

¹²²John Doe, personal letter, August, 1996.

¹²³The Lutheran Agenda, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, no date given) p. 98.

So clear is the New Testament witness to the reality of the intermediate state that one is amazed when Christians question the “yet, not yet” dimensions of “even though we die, yet shall we live,” dominical word of our Lord. It was this word that Jesus spoke unambiguously to the repentant thief on the cross on Good Friday (Lk 23:43). That the soul does not die with the body Jesus confirms when He Himself cries out in victory “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46). Stephen following the example of our Lord, also expressed the highest of hopes of eternal life immediately upon death, exclaiming, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).¹²⁴

Throughout the Bible as a whole, we see the holy writers speaking of the departed faithful as existing in a conscious state (Rev 6:9-11; Rev. 7:9-10, 14-15), a blessed state (Ps. 73:24-26), paradise (Lk 23:43)! In Philippians 1:23 St. Paul speaks of death for the Christian as the means for the Christian to actually be “with Christ” in heaven which is “far better”. The story of the believing beggar who dies and yet goes to heaven (Lk 16:23) resounds with a loud echo and Amen to the aforementioned!

One of the reasons Christians have cited as a basis for by-passing the Biblical teaching that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord,” (II Cor 5:8) is a one-sided emphasis upon Biblical passages that set forth what is known as “soul sleep.” For example, St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “But I

¹²⁴The force of the aorist middle imperative is one of utmost urgency, “receive my spirit now!”

would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are *asleep* that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (I Thess 4:13).

No doubt about it, Scripture does speak of those who die in Jesus as “sleeping.” However, a paradoxical vision scours all of Scripture before rendering a judgment. It uses Scripture to interpret Scripture so that full picture of any given Biblical metaphor may be tempered, enriched, and balanced.¹²⁵

Luther gives us the right picture of “soul sleep” in his lectures on Genesis. Speaking about the deaths of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, Luther describes how the believer who has died is asleep and yet awake.¹²⁶ Writing in his typical colorful manner, the Reformer describes the paradox of being asleep yet awake:

Nevertheless, there is a difference between the sleep or rest of this life and that of the future life. For toward night a person who has become exhausted by his daily labor in this life enters into his chamber of peace, as it were, to sleep there; and during this night he enjoys rest and has no knowledge whatever of any evil caused either by fire or murder. But the soul does not sleep in the same manner. It is awake. It experiences visions and the discourses of the angels and of God. Therefore the sleep in the future life is deeper than it is in this life. Nevertheless, the soul lives before God... Nevertheless, God preserves the waking soul. Thus God is able to awaken Elijah, Moses, etc., and so to control them that they live. But how? We do not know.¹²⁷

¹²⁵Here the paradoxical handles of Scripture, Law and Gospel, are helpful. The Law declares that sin is the cause of temporal death, the separation of body and soul. The Gospel is the good news that by grace through faith in Jesus believers yet live even though they die. Our person-hood lives. Our identity remains. When the Christian dies, he goes to be with the Savior in heaven. “*Today, thou will be with me in paradise*” (Lk 23:43) are words for all Christians to firmly believe. See also Acts 7:59.

¹²⁶As an aside, unbelievers, according to Scripture are the people who are awake yet asleep (Eph 5:14).

¹²⁷LW, 4:313.

The Paradox of Hell

At the end of his Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Heinrich Schmid discusses matters pertaining to eternal damnation and eternal life. After quoting a number of Lutheran Church fathers on these two eschatological subjects, he concludes his lengthy dogmatic text with a most memorable anecdote. He wrote about one of the ancients, who was asked what books he used in his daily study of God's Word. He responded that he studied every day a book with three pages, one red, one black, and one white. On the red page, he read of our Lord's suffering and death. On the black page, he read about the torments of the lost. On the white page, he studied the joys of those in the Church above. From this study, he derived more comfort and profit, than if he were to ponder all the books of the philosophers.¹²⁸

It is that black page, the study of the torments of the lost, that we hear so very little today. Hell is a subject which seems to have just disappeared. Martin Marty has observed that "hell disappeared and no one noticed."¹²⁹ One hears little about it from today's "power of positive thinking pulpits." Consequently, when there is such a vacuum, false views arise to fill the void.

One such false view today is annihilationism. Annihilationism is the view that those who end up in hell through unbelief will pass out of existence upon death. Throughout the ages groups as far ranging as the Jehovah's Witnesses

¹²⁸Heinrich Schmid, The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1875), p. 663.

¹²⁹Larry Dixon, The Other Side of the Good News, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1992), p.15.

to the Anabaptists to even conservative Biblical scholars as Clark Pinnock and John Stott have advanced annihilationism. Francis Pieper writes, "The objections raised in all ages to the endlessness of the infernal punishment are understandable; for the thought of a never-ending agony of rational beings, fully realizing their distressing plight, is so appalling that it exceeds comprehension."¹³⁰

False ideas of the last things are direct reflections of not wanting to live within paradoxical tensions. The paradoxical tension regarding the eternal damnation of the unbelievers is that hell is the place where the dead can never die. Already now in time unbelievers are already in a state of damnation, of which physical death will not end (John 3:18, 36; Rom 1:18). Believers in Christ who have undergone the first resurrection, faith in Christ, "on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev 20:6). The second death, St. John defines later in this same chapter as the eternal torment of "the lake of fire" (20:10; 14).

Another false doctrine that is gaining wider acceptance is universalism, the doctrine that God will wipe out all sin and save all mankind regardless whether a person believes the Gospel or not. T.S. Eliot said if we rid the doctrine of the final judgment in favor of universalism, we convert God into a

¹³⁰Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics. Vol. 3. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 545.

Santa Claus who declares, "everybody shall have toys and be glad."¹³¹ Eliot by this observation is reminding us that universalism destroys the Law-Gospel paradox by turning the Gospel into an *ex opera operato* enterprise.

The paradox that universalists overlook is one that is a result of the rejection of central doctrine of Scripture, the justification of the sinner by grace through faith in Christ apart from the works of the Law (Rom 3:28). The paradox as it applies to those who end up in hell is this: those who end up in hell are forgiven sinners! God has declared the whole world forgiven! (II Cor. 5:19). Here is the justification that precedes faith. Those who believe the good news that they are forgiven will be saved. Those who reject the reality that they are forgiven will be lost (John 3:36). Just as "hell contains no atheists, because the damned actually experience God as the righteous Judge,"¹³² neither does it contain any unforgiven sinners.

There is a third paradox about hell. This paradox comes from C. S. Lewis. Professor Francis Rossow amplifies it: "The doors of hell are, first of all, locked from the inside—only afterwards locked also from the outside. To people unable to say to God, 'Thy will be done,' God ultimately and reluctantly replies, 'Thy will be done'—and, of course, that's the hell of it."¹³³

¹³¹Dixon, p. 166.

¹³²Pieper, p. 546.

¹³³Francis Rossow, *Giving Christian Doctrine a New Translation: Selected Examples from the Novels of C.S. Lewis*. Concordia Journal, July 1995, p.287.

The Paradox of Judgment Day

The Athanasian Creed, one of the great ecumenical creeds, concludes with these sobering words, "And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire." These words seem to run at variance with the paradoxical, central doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus apart from the works of the laws (Rom 3:28). And yet the same apostle who eloquently wrote about salvation by grace (Eph 2:8,9), also wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor 5:10).

Through the paradoxical Law-Gospel lenses of Scripture, a paradox regarding our works as the norm for judgment on Judgment Day is unmistakable. Scripture teaches that on Judgment Day Christians will be judged according to their works; **and**, they will *not* be judged according to their works. A very enlightening section of Scripture which presents this paradox is the account of Judgment Day given to us by Matthew in his Gospel (Matt. 25:31-46)

In this account, Jesus addresses his disciples on the Mount of Olives, shortly before his suffering, death, and resurrection. He tells them that one day He will visibly return in glory to judge all the nations (25:32). Noteworthy is the fact that there is not the slightest hint of a sneak rapture, but on the contrary, a scenario where "every eye will see Him" (Rev. 1:7). When He comes, all His holy angels will be with Him. On that day, humanity will be divided into two

camps, goats and sheep, unbelievers and believers, the damned and the redeemed.

To the sheep Jesus as King speaks words of salvation by grace, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34). Ephesians 1:3-14 gives expanded commentary on these words revealing how God, in love, in Christ, before the foundation of the world chose us. Moreover, this election was a Trinitarian election where God the Father authored our salvation, Jesus served as an agent of it, and the Holy Spirit administers it (Eph 1:3-14).

Remember, paradox always scans the whole of Scripture before pronouncement, utilizing the Scripture interprets Scripture hermeneutic. Here in Matthew's account of Judgment Day we see words of Gospel coming before words of Judgment with regards to God's elect, the sheep, the believers in Christ. God's gracious indicative precedes His Gospel-empowered imperative.

What does Jesus say to His sheep on Judgment Day? Are they subjected to a judgment by the King of kings? Yes, indeed! But it is a joyful judgment. They are judged solely according to the works they have done in helping the hungry and thirsty brethren, in ministering to fellow Christians who were strangers, naked, and in prison. And remember! They are doing the good works that the Holy Spirit through the Gospel works through them (Phil 1:6). To put it another way, God is judging them and rewarding them for the good works that God Himself works through them. Talk about grace upon grace!

Observe how the believers in Christ are being *judged* according to their works but *not saved* by them. Colossal difference! Mark Twain said there is a world of difference between the lightning bug and lightning. Equally true, there is a world of difference between being *judged* by one's good works versus being *saved* by them. The former is Scriptural and the latter is heresy.

Thus, we see the Christian will be judged according to their works—their good works—the good works Jesus has worked in them—which really are the works of Christ Himself—the Gospel! Now, that is good news! But there is more good news yet. Notice that in this account in Matthew, that not one single sin is mentioned or brought up against the account of the sheep, the believer in Christ! Why? Paul tells us, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus!” (Rom 8:1). For the believer, those on Christ's right hand, their evil works will not even be brought up on Judgment Day. Their sins have been cast into the depths of the sea (Mi 7:19).

This then is the picture. Believers in Christ will be judged only on the basis of the good works that God Himself works in them. Second, we will not be judged on the basis of our evil works in any shape or form. The unbeliever, however, who lives by the Law will die by the Law—eternally (Mt 25:46a; Gal 3:10). “Ye gave me no meat—law; ye gave me no drink—law; ye did not clothe me—law; ye did not visit me—law; ye did not minister unto me—law!” (Mt. 25:43-44). Because unbelievers reject the paradox of the Gospel (Rom 4:5), they do not receive the blessed results of this life-saving paradox on Judgment Day.

A close examination of this Judgment Day text is a reminder to the Christian that there is no room for sloth nor synergism when it comes to the matter of works. Although we are not justified by works, a justified man works (Eph 2:8-10). This powerful pericope helps us to accent the human response to God's goodness without reducing the "allness" of God's activity in human salvation.¹³⁴

The paradox on Judgment Day, namely, that we will be judged and that on Judgment Day we will not be judged, enables the Christian to see one more glorious facet of the Gospel. As a result of the Gospel, we will be judged in mercy not wrath. We will be judged yes, but condemned no. Consequently, the Christian hope is not confidence that we will escape Judgment Day, but have confidence for it (I Jn 4:17). Using two Greek terms, we can put the matter like this: Because of Christ we have *parresian* (*boldness*) for the *parousia* (*coming*)!

¹³⁴Francis Rossow, *Book Review, Concordia Journal*, April 1994, p. 208. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* (p.115) gives us crisp commentary with his paradoxical insight on the relationship of faith and works: "The Bible really seems to clinch the matter when it puts the two things together into one amazing sentence. The first half is, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling'—which looks as if everything depended on us and our good actions: but the second half goes on, 'For it is God who worketh in you'—which looks as if God did everything and we nothing. I am afraid that is the sort of thing we come up against in Christianity. I am puzzled, but I am not surprised."

CHAPTER V

ESCHATOLOGICAL ETHICS

The question is this, “HOW DO WE LIVE IN LIGHT OF THIS PARADOXICAL VISION OF THE END TIMES?” How do we live life on planet earth in light of the reality that “The kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:21), and in view of the words of our Lord, “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36)? How do we live in a world that is not our final home (Phil. 3:20) and yet recognize the vital role the Christian has as an instrument of God in preserving it until the day of Christ’s return (Mt. 5:13)?

There are not easy answers to any of these questions. Nevertheless, a paradoxical mindset, born of the Gospel, simultaneously lives in two kingdoms, works toward positive social and political change in society yet always with an awareness of the reality of sin, that the days of this world are numbered, and Christians live life under a cross. As a result of the *simul justus et peccator* paradox, undue optimism about history is not a trait of the disciple of Christ who has his theological wits about him.

What is a mark of the Christian who lives life in the end times paradoxically is the willingness to engage in some vigorous thinking. After all, are we not also commanded to love our Lord with all our “mind” as well as our

heart, soul, and strength? (Mt. 22:37). An anti-intellectualism is not in step with the impulses the Gospel produces.¹³⁵

The Apostle Peter, writing to an eschatological community of believers in Asia Minor around A.D. 63, gave this exhortation, "Therefore, roll up the sleeves of your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (I Pt 1:13). The phrase, "roll up the sleeves" is translated in the KJV as "gird up the loins." It is a phrase rich in meaning. Paul Deterding writes:

...girding up one's loins at any time meant that one was making himself ready for action or for a hasty departure, since the long garment was worn loose and ungirded about the house. Thus, this is an apt description of the kind of preparation necessary for the unexpected parousia...¹³⁶

The injunction to roll up the sleeves of our mind, get ready for hard work, implicitly enjoins us to constantly be ready for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. And as we do this, we do this as a community of hope, people with a victorious calling as members of the "yet, not yet" kingdom of God. As Francis Pieper reminded people in his day, we need to remind people of our day, "that here on earth Christians, like Christ Himself, are woefully underrated."¹³⁷

As paradoxical people, people who ever confess, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mk 9:24), we know first hand the nature of the joyful

¹³⁵Even here, the Christian sees a paradox where reason is both God's gift and the devil's whore. It is the latter when it goes on a theodicy odyssey. It is the former when it submits to God's revelation through the apostles and prophets.

¹³⁶Paul Deterding, *Eschatological and Eucharistic Motifs in Luke 12:35-40*, Concordia Journal, May 1979, p. 89.

¹³⁷Pieper, (Vol. 3) p. 555.

struggle in which we participate, daily dying in baptism so that we might live for Him who lives in us (Gal 2:20). For us, the Spirit's ethical summons "to be who we are," God's saints, is one where we realize that even though we make it our aim to please Christ in every way, nevertheless, everything we do has on it the finger prints of sin.

As we travel on this paradoxical path as sinner-saints, in the "yet, not yet" Kingdom of God—girding, watching; praying, worshipping; obeying, witnessing; rejoicing, wondering; sorrowing, working; sowing, watering; and continuously repenting—we do it as recipients of the extravagant love of God which "makes us righteous before him, not by our works but by our faith in Christ."¹³⁸ We realize there is a dual justification, that we are justified by grace and that we are justified by works. Before God, St. Paul tells us that we are justified by grace (Rom 3:24); and, before man, St. James tells us that we are justified by works (Ja 2:24,25). Such a tension keeps us from boasting as well as coasting. It also sounds forth the truth that while good works are necessary they are not necessary for salvation.

Robert Benne, in his outstanding book, A Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century, describes how this paradoxical tension plays out with regard to eschatological ethics. Using Luther's famous paradox that we are "free lords of all, subject to none, dutiful servants of all subject to all" Benne explains the relationship between who we are and how then shall we live. He writes:

Starting from this moment of contrition, our souls are lifted up by God's extravagant love. In Christ, God stoops to gather us up for communion with him, in spite of our sin. We are made "free lords of all, subject to none," by God's mercy. The human response to this is one of grateful joy and renewed faith in the promises of God. With regard to our relation to God, we are truly liberated from all that binds our souls. We are freed by his grace for reconciliation with him. Nothing or no one can take this from us.

At the same time that we are free lords of all, subject to none, we are, paradoxically, "dutiful servants of all, subject to all." The love that we have received from God in Christ moves us toward our neighbor. Our incurved wills are warmed by the Spirit so that they spontaneously move outward toward others. 'Love grasps the hand that need holds out.' This love, however, does not just float freely into an amorphous world. It flows from individual Christians through their various callings in the world. God gives each of us locations to exercise our Christian discipleship. We are family members, workers, citizens, and members of religious communities. Love of neighbor motivates us to perform and transform our responsibilities in the world into authentic Christian callings. Christian love, both corporate and individual, becomes a leavening influence in a fallen world...As we stretch our roles we risk a backlash from the world. If we take love and justice seriously in our callings, Luther says, we will not need to seek the cross; it will find us.¹³⁹

Eschatological living, which is a life under the cross, led by the grace of God, is life that now moves in concert with the rule of God, using one's vocation in life as a vehicle and vessel for God to channel His end-times blessings. It sees the Ten Commandments not as rules by which we earn heaven but rather as freedom's footsteps for those who have received the Spirit of God through the gift of forgiveness. Having been moved by the Spirit to "accept the fact that [we] are accepted," as Paul

¹³⁸Benne, p. 65.

¹³⁹Benne, p. 67.

Tillich puts it,¹⁴⁰ we work while it is day before the night comes (Jn 9:4) when the full light of God's revelation shall appear (Rev 22:5).

As we live from the Gospel and by the Ten Commandments, living a life whereby the victorious past and future of Kingdom have intersected in our lives, the Christian church becomes a sign to the world (II Cor. 3:3). As member of the body of Christ, we who are little signs of a far greater sign, we are not to seek nor provide empirical proofs and eschatological parousia calculations as our drawing card or affirming address. For to seek these signs would be a bad sign (Mt 12:39; 24:36).

The signs we are to seek in the end times as paradoxical people are paradoxical signs. Through these signs the hidden God is revealed and concealed, revealed sufficiently so that faith is created, sustained, and ever able to grow, and concealed sufficiently so that the life of God's Kingdom people must be a life of faith (II Cor. 5:7). What are these end-times signs? Here again, Martin Luther, poet of paradox, is our mentor. He writes:

To us in the New Testament, Baptism and the Eucharist have been given as the visible signs of grace, so that we might firmly believe that our sins have been forgiven through Christ's suffering and that we have been redeemed by His death. Thus the church has never been deprived to such an extent of outward signs that it became impossible to know where God could surely be found.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰Benne, p. 66.

¹⁴¹LW 1:248.

With these signs, the Word and Sacraments and the Keys, God's end times New Israel, the church, is empowered "to exhibit before the world the glory of the God who called it to be his people (I Pt 2:9-10; cf. Is 49:6)."¹⁴² And even though we daily sin much, these signs assure us that our "mission is no forlorn hope doomed to defeat, but a victorious calling."¹⁴³ As members of the "yet, not yet" Kingdom of God, Christians are optimists but not utopians. The extreme tension between what is and what out to be is overruled by the "yet, not yet" nature of the Kingdom, which reminds us that the Kingdom of God moves onward to its final triumph. He who has been given full authority to run the universe, one by one, is putting "all enemies under his feet" (I Cor 15:26).

It is only a twinkling of an eye in light of eternity before we shall see the full dimensions of this paradoxical vision of the end times. Until then a paradoxical vision of the end times "leads toward vigorous but non-utopian efforts to improve our historical lot."¹⁴⁴ And as we travel this paradoxical path, the words of the apostle Peter describe well the "yet, not yet" outlook we carry in our hearts: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (I Pt 1:8-9).

¹⁴²Bright, p. 227.

¹⁴³Bright, p. 233.

¹⁴⁴Benne, p. 226.

**PART II. FOUR STUDIES ON A PARADOXICAL
VISION OF THE END TIMES**

PART II. FOUR STUDIES ON A PARADOXICAL VISION OF THE END TIMES

In Part I of this MAP, the theological foundation for “A Paradoxical Vision of the End Times” as well as the need for such a foundation was set forth. Martin Luther, as one who made substantial use of paradoxes, provided an excellent example of the right use of paradox in the service of the Gospel. It was Luther’s productive mining of paradoxes from Holy Scripture which alerted this writer to the abundant presence of paradoxes in Scripture. This, in turn, moved me to search for paradoxes pertinent to end-times matters. Surprisingly not, end-times paradoxes surfaced. Most prominent among these end-times matters was the “yet, not yet” tension of the Kingdom of God. This tension gives the child of God abundant heavenly hope yet without undue earthly optimism. It accentuates our dual kingdom citizenship, underscores our sinner yet saint existence, and punctuates the need to hold at the same time two seemingly opposite teachings in order to express vital eschatological truths.

Now, in Part II, the written handouts for the four October 1996 Bible studies will be presented. The theological foundation, of course, was put to the reader’s eye in Part I. The four studies of Part II were formulated to explain to a largely Lutheran audience the role of paradox in Christian theology in general and the role of paradox in end times matters in particular. The two non-Lutherans who attended these studies came from Christian backgrounds which adhere to the three great Ecumenical Creeds. One seminar member who

attended was a devout Roman Catholic Christian. The other attendee was a conservative Episcopalian pastor.

Also, the studies were written to help Christians see some often overlooked aspects of Christ's victory for us and how the fruits of His victory are distributed to us even now in these end times via the means of grace. Similarly, a Biblical paradoxical vision does not fall prey to an unhealthy seeking of eye-popping, eyebrow raising empirical signs, but views the signs of Word and Sacrament as the magnificent Messianic marks of the Kingdom of God. It is these signs, the signs of Word and Sacrament, which provide the benchmarks for a theology that gives God glory and His saints certainty and comfort.

The four studies presented were used with a study group comprised of all Lutheran laity except for the two aforementioned saints. These evening studies were held at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, California, Missouri, during the month of October, 1996. The feedback from this group, its size, and description will receive fuller treatment in Part III.

But next, the notes given to the students participating in the study group session will be presented. The notes will be just as they were handed out to the study group with the exception of not being on colored paper. During the four sessions, a different colored-paper was used for each session, primarily for organizational purposes and variety. The other minor change is the page numbers for the sake of continuity with this MAP.

These studies were amplified with material from Part I plus other apt illustrations. For example, in attempting to explain the paradox that a Christian

is at the same time sinner and saint, during the second session I juggled simultaneously two colorful play-doh balls. This prop helped the saints to see the organic connection involved in the doctrine of the justification of the sinner before God.

These four studies brought comfort to the members of the study group. May they also edify all who read them. To God be the glory!

A Paradoxical Vision Of The End Times

Notes for Students: 10-3-96 Class

A Key Definition: "A paradox refers to two statements that *apparently* [italics added] contradict each other but are ultimately true." -- Robert Benne

A Key Quote: "The heart of the idea is that, because truth is never really simple, it is almost always necessary, when dealing with profound matters, to present at least two propositions rather than one. Often the two propositions are in sharp tension, but this is essential to the effort to represent adequately the complexity of the situation." -- Elton Trueblood.

About Luther: "Not until Luther came, do we find anyone who can at all be classified with Augustine for the wealth and depth of his insight into the paradoxical subtlety of the nature of man and of all the manifold wisdom of God's activity both in nature and redemption, and above all, for his power of self expression in memorable words. Is not that the reason why essentially his writings are never out of date?" -- Donald Mackenzie

Paradoxes from Luther: 1. The Christian is at the same time sinner and saint. 2. "The Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." 3. God uses sickness as medicine to save us. 4. "Even so, Christ was powerless on the cross; and yet there He performed His mightiest work and conquered sin, death, world, devil, and all evil. Thus all the martyrs were strong and overcame." 5. "Thus when God makes alive he does it by killing, when he justifies he does it by bringing down to hell, as Scripture says: 'The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.'" (1 Sam. 2:6). 6. "He (Mohammed) is God's rod and the devil's servant [Isaiah 10:5]; there is no doubt about that." 7. "Who is like the Lord, our God, who is seated high, who looks far down upon the heavens and the earth? For since He is the Most High, and yet there is nothing above Him, He cannot look above Him, nor yet to either side, for there is none like Him. He must needs, therefore, look within Him and beneath Him; and the farther one is beneath Him, the better does he see Him."

Glossary: 1. Eschatology. Derived from the Greek Word *eschaton*, "end," eschatology is the study of the doctrines pertaining to the end times. *Eschatological* means "pertaining to the end." 2. Rapture. This refers to the event described in I Thess. 4:4-17 when believers will be "raptured" or "caught up" (Latin: *rapiemur*) in the clouds to meet Christ in the air. A 19th century end-time notion which asserts believers will be secretly "snatched" out of this world prior to the great tribulation runs counter to Scripture (see Mt. 24:36-44; 25:32).

QUESTIONS

1. What does the end-times paradox spelled out by J.I. Packer; namely, that Christians are to live “packed up and ready to go, and packed up and ready to wait,” tell us about the nature of paradoxes?
2. What is the triple paradox of the gospel? Examine Romans 4:5; Acts 20:28 (NAS); and II Corinthians 5:21.
3. Identify the paradox in John 11:25,26.
4. What is the paradox of the message of the cross? See Galatians 2:20; I John 2:1-2 NAS.
5. What do paradoxes teach us about God’s ways of dealing with us? Isaiah 55:8,9. Proverbs 14:12; I Corinthians 1:25-31.
6. Are Christians optimists or pessimists? Compare Matthew 5:4 with Philippians 4:4. How does a paradoxical approach, with Scripture as our interpreter to reality, answer this question?
7. How are Christian parents to raise their children? Are they to give them roots to grow? Wings to fly? How would a paradoxical approach answer this question?
8. What is the relationship of paradox and faith?

BIBLE PASSAGES

(RSV) Romans 4:5 -- And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.

(NAS) Acts 20:28 -- Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

(RSV) 2 Corinthians 5:21 -- For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(RSV) Galatians 2:20 -- I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

(NAS) 1 John 2:1 -- My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

(RSV) Isaiah 55:8 -- For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord; 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

(RSV) Proverbs 14:12 -- There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

(RSV) 1 Corinthians 1:25 -- For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; 27 but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; 31 therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord."

(RSV) Matthew 5:4 -- Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

(RSV) Philippians 4:4 -- Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

(RSV) 1 Corinthians 2:14 -- The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

(RSV) Romans 7:18 -- For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, 23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

(RSV) Romans 8:1 -- There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

(RSV) 1 Peter 2:16 -- Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God.

(RSV) John 1:7 -- He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. 9 The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.

A Paradoxical Vision Of The End Times

Notes for Students: 10-10-96 Class

EXERCISES

"In the beginning God *created* the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). With a mighty paradox Scripture begins. God **creates** everything out of _____.

When God says, "Let ***us*** make man in ***our*** image" (Genesis 1:26), we again have the aroma of mystery. The mystery arises when we recall the *Shema*, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is ***one*** Lord." Allowing Scripture to be its own interpreter, the paradoxical mindset lets both propositions stand. Its conclusion? There is a ***unity***, a _____, and ***mystery*** in the doctrine of the Trinity.

The first Gospel passage in the Bible is known as the *Protevangelium*, Genesis 3:15. From the AAT translation we read, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your descendants and her Descendant. He will *crush* your head, and you will *bruise* His heel." In this first Gospel promise, God foretells the good news of how a Savior from Adam and Eve's line would gain victory through _____.

Noah saw the paradoxical hand of the Lord at work when God used water to destroy an evil world, yet used that same water to _____ the remnant of eight (Genesis 7; cf. 1 Peter 3:21).

Hundreds of years later God would repeat this Law-Gospel water event of paradoxical proportions when the Red Sea became both an instrument of _____ and life at the same time (Exodus 14:21-31).

Abraham saw this same mysterious movement in his life. From a _____ womb God brings about a _____ (Genesis 18: 11-13). Moreover, God's paradoxical command to Abraham later to kill to kill his only son Isaac seemed to contradict everything that God had earlier promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:3-4). Abraham used _____ to contend with paradox (Hebrews 11:19).

Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals Himself in such a way that both reveals and conceals, so that faith might be created and sustained. In Exodus 33:11 we see how God spoke to Moses "face to face" yet in the same chapter says, "you cannot see my _____ ; for man shall not see me and live" (v.20). Again, the point is this: God remains _____ even in the midst of revelation.

[**Answers** to above questions (but not in order): hidden, nothing, face, plurality, paradox, life, defeat, save, death, dead.]

The apex of paradox in the Old Testament arises from the prophetic book known as the fifth Gospel, Isaiah. Isaiah soars on the wings of paradox! Beginning with his prophecy of the Virgin Birth (Isaiah 7:14); who this child is (Isaiah 9:6); and what he will do (Isaiah 52:13-53:11) major Messianic Mountain tops appear. When this mountain range is seen as the back drop of II Samuel 7:12-16, you see a long list of paradoxes.

Based on the previous passages, complete the paradoxes:

The eternal God _____.

Creature gives birth to the _____.

God _____ to conquer.

The Suffering Servant is a _____ healer.

Messiah is a _____ Servant and a _____ King.

[Answers (not in order): stoops, suffering, Creator, wounded, dies, conquering.]

Question:

“Why is the most paradoxical chapter in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53), the most quoted chapter in the New Testament?”

Quote From Dissertation:

“As one examines the paradox of the incarnation, one sees how paradox begets paradox. How is it that He who sustains and holds the whole universe together (Col. 1:17) becomes a dependent baby lying in a manger (Lk. 2:17)? How is it that the Great I Am (Ex. 3:2-14), who is the “same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:7), who is the “wisdom of God” (I Cor. 1:24) and the one “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom” (Col. 2:3), *grows* in wisdom (Lk. 1:40)? How is it that the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:35) endures hunger (Mt. 4:2), that the source of all waters (Heb. 1:2) experiences thirst (Jn. 19:28), that the perfect Son of God *learns* obedience (Heb. 5:8), that the eternal God dies on a cross (Lk. 23:46), that the God who cannot die comes back to life (Lk. 24:6), that the one who saved others could not save Himself (Mk. 15:31), that God forsakes God in hell and God prays to God from hell (Mt. 27:46).”

-- Peter M. Kurowski

Glossary:

1. Protevangelium. Term for the first Gospel promise of the Bible. Genesis 3:16 is recognized by students of the Bible as the first (“prot”) Gospel (“evangelium”) prediction in Holy Scripture of a coming Savior.

2. Shema is Hebrew for the word “listen or hear.” It has reference to the great prayer in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.”

The Kingdom of God—Paradoxical to the core!

1. In its presence
 - A. Mark 1:14
 - B. Matthew 6:10; Revelation 22:20
 - C. "Yet, not yet"

2. In its person
 - A. The incarnation: The Absolute Paradox!
 - B. How can God bring a clean thing from an unclean thing?
 - C. Colossians 2:9
 - D. Quote from previous page

3. In its purpose
 - A. Hebrews 2:14
 - B. John 9:39; Matthew 11:28-30
 - C. "Cursed is He Who dies on a tree!" (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13)

4. In its pedagogy
 - A. Matthew 10:39
 - B. Matthew 5:9 and Matthew 10:34
 - C. II Corinthians 12:10

5. In its participants
 - A. Sinners yet saints (I John 1:7-10)
 - B. Sorrowful-rejoicing; poor yet rich; having nothing, yet possessing everything (II Corinthians 6:9-10)
 - C. Noble-scum (I Peter 2:9; I Corinthians 4:13)
 - D. Elect must be warned (I Corinthians 10:13)

6. In its *parousia* (coming)
 - A. Baptism-the daily death which gives life (Romans 6:3-5)
 - B. Lord's Supper-bread and wine yet body and blood (I Corinthians 10:16)
 - C. Holy Absolution through unholy people (John 20:21-23)

CONCLUSION:

A paradoxical thread runs through the Scriptures of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The movement, message, Man, and means by which the Kingdom of God comes is paradoxical to the core.

BIBLE PASSAGES

(NKJ) Isaiah 7:14 -- "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

(NKJ) Isaiah 9:6 -- For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

(NKJ) Isaiah 52:13 -- Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. 14 Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men; 15 So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.

(NKJ) Isaiah 53:1 -- Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, *There is* no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, *He* was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked -- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

(NKJ) 2 Samuel 7:12 -- "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with

the blows of the sons of men. 15 "But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." ' ' "

(NKJ) Mark 1:14 -- Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

(NKJ) Matthew 6:10 -- Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven.

(NKJ) Revelation 22:20 -- He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(NKJ) Colossians 2:9 -- For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

(NKJ) Hebrews 2:14 -- Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

(NKJ) John 9:39 -- And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."

(NKJ) Matthew 11:28 -- "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

(NKJ) Deuteronomy 21:23 -- "his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged *is* accursed of God.

(NKJ) Galatians 3:13 -- Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree"),

(NKJ) Matthew 10:39 -- "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

(NKJ) Matthew 5:9 -- Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

(NKJ) Matthew 10:34 -- " Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

(NKJ) 2 Corinthians 12:10 -- Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

(NKJ) 1 John 1:7 -- But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

(NKJ) 2 Corinthians 6:9 -- as unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and *yet* not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things.

(NKJ) 1 Peter 2:9 -- But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

(NKJ) 1 Corinthians 4:13 -- being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

(NKJ) 1 Corinthians 10:13 -- No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

(NKJ) Romans 6:3 -- Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection,

(NKJ) 1 Corinthians 10:16 -- The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

(NKJ) John 20:21 -- So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."

A Paradoxical Vision Of The End Times

Notes for Students: 10-17-96 Class

- * The opening chart will be examined at the end of class
- * Tonight we begin with two "End Times" paradoxes

Premillennial View

NT Age; Jesus in Heaven; His Humanity Bound by Time and Space	Sneak Rapture	Seven Year Trib- ulation	Second Coming	1,000 Year Rule; <i>Earthly</i> Rule	Satan Loosed	Christ's Third Coming	Judgment Day	Heaven or Hell	Eternity
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Postmillennial View

NT Age; Jesus in Heaven; His Humanity Bound by Time and Space	(1,000 Glorious Years) <i>Earthly</i> Rule	Satan Loosed	Second Coming	Judgment Day	Heaven or Hell	Eternity
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Amillennial View (Lutheran Accent)

NT Age; Millennium; <i>Gospel</i> rule; Jesus fills universe Col. 2:9; Binding of Satan	Little Season Satan Loosed Rev. 20:3	Second Coming	Judgment Day	Heaven or Hell	Eternity (New Heaven, New Earth)
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KISS method: *"KEEP IT SIMPLE, SAINTS"*

Amillennial View is the:

1. Historic view of the Church (Augustinian View)
2. Takes with utmost earnestness Jesus words, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36)
3. Only view which allows for the second coming to take place at any moment
4. The view which centers most on the person and work of Jesus Christ—
Messiah centered not Israel centered
5. Uses the non figurative passages of the Bible to interpret the figurative
(opposite of Premillennial view)
6. Lives with the New Testament tension of the "yet not yet" nature of the
Kingdom of God, the binding of Satan, the AntiChrist is always coming, etc.

Paradox: Satan Now Chained Yet Satan Not Chained

Revelation 20: 1-3 -- And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great **chain** in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and **bound** him a *thousand* years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be **loosed** a *little* season.

What is the good news announced to the church in the midst of increasing persecution (cf. 2:10; 13:10; 14:12), reminding them that the risen, reigning Christ is in full control?

Revelation states Satan is _____ for _____ years in a bottomless pit?

Important principle of Biblical interpretation: Allow the non-figurative portions of Scripture to interpret the figurative. Now the key question: "When did the binding of the devil take place?"

John 12:31; 16:11

I John 3:8

Luke 10:18

Hebrews 2:14

Matthew 12:24-29; Mark 3:22-27

Note: The same word for the "**binding**" of Satan in Revelation 20:2 (*deo* in the Greek)

occurs only in Matthew 12:29 and Mark 3:27.

What does this binding include? That the devil should no longer be able to _____ the nations nor that he should no longer be able to _____ the saints (Revelation 12:7-13). After Christ rose from the dead he commissioned the Gospel to be brought to _____ nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

YET AT THE SAME TIME SATAN IS NOT CHAINED -- Read I Peter 5:8

"Within the sphere in which Satan is permitted to exert his influence for evil he rages most furiously. A dog securely bound with a long and heavy chain can do great damage within the circle of his imprisonment. Outside that circle, however, the animal can do no damage and can hurt no-one." -- *William Hendriksen*

"Compared to Old Testament times, the devil's ability to deceive the nations has received a substantial blow. At one time, during the age of Noah, the Gospel remnant had been reduced to a mere eight souls (I Peter 3:21). Considering that the world's population at that time may have been far larger than what it is today, due to the longevity of the age span of the Old Testament patriarchs (Genesis 5), the New Testament binding of Satan squares very well with the devil's massive disinformation powers in the old eon." -- *Peter M. Kurowski*

VITAL QUESTION: "WHAT ARE THE 'END TIMES' ACCORDING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT?"

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." (Hebrews 1:1-2 NIV)

"Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:26 NIV)

"Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come." (I Corinthians 10:11 RSV)

Peter's Sermon at Pentecost

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place... 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 "And in the last days it shall be," God declares, "that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.'" (Acts 2:1, 14-17 RSV)

"He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of times for your sake." (I Peter 1:20 RSV)

"Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour." (I John 2:18 RSV)

The End Is Mostly Over

The greatest eschatological event in history is not in the future but in the past. Since Christ has won a decisive victory over Satan, sin, and death in the past, future eschatological events must be seen as the completion of a redemptive process which has already begun. What will happen on the last day, in other words, will be but a culmination of what has been happening in these last days.
 -- Anthony A. Hoekema

Baptism: A Great End Times Gift!

In Baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings—victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts. In short, the blessings of Baptism are so boundless that if timid nature considers them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true.-- Martin Luther (The Large Catechism)

The “Yet-Not Yet” Rule and the “1000-Year School”

(The Paradox of the Millennium)

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

Key in on two words. First, zero in on the word “*reigned*.” It is a “Kingdom” word. In fact, in the Lord’s prayer the same root word in the Greek (*Baseilia*) is used when we pray “Thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). Second, what did Jesus say about the “*kingdom*?” He stated to the people of his day it had come (Mark 1:15). It had come via his person and work. Last week we established that the kingdom (rule) of God had come and yet it is also coming (Revelation 22:20).

In recent years a long line of Bible students have overlooked the “yet, not yet” nature of the rule of Christ. The Kingdom is here. It is coming. A paradoxical vision holds on to both at the same time. Men like C.H. Dodd emphasized the former, while men like Hal Lindsey emphasized the latter.

John in Revelation 20:4 speaks of beheaded martyrs who actuality _____ with Christ in heaven. Remember this was written to comfort those whose loved ones had been beheaded, burnt at the stake, crucified, and martyred. They were comforted with the good news that the _____ of their loved ones were *reigning* in heaven.

A hermeneutical help: As is true generally with apocalyptic literature, numbers are symbolical, representing concepts (e.g., Revelation 5:6). The number 1,000 represents completeness (10 to the 3rd power). It indicates the complete time period for the church to carry out its worldwide mission, not a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth." (CTCR of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod)

If you take the "1,000 years" literally, then you must take other such passages in Revelation literally, like Revelation 5:6. Suppose you did that. If you did, Jesus would have _____ horns and _____ eyes.

The picture of the beheaded "souls" in heaven—victorious martyrs, shows nicely the New Testament "yet, not yet" rule of Christ. These believers who have gone on to heaven are ruling, yet they do not yet have their glorified bodies. They are part of the rule of Christ in the church above; we are part of God's gracious rule here on earth.

"For the kingdom (*rule*) of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Italics mine.

Revelation 20:5-6 -- "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 5 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and *shall reign with him a thousand years.*" (Dual emphasis mine)

Once again we see a reference to a **thousand years**. The word *millennium* comes from this chapter in a second-hand fashion. It is a combination of two Latin words, *mille*, "a thousand," and *annus*, "a year." Over the years this Latin word *millennium* has been used to teach a 1,000-year, visible kingdom of God here on earth. It is also called "**chiliasm**" from the Greek word *chilia*, "a thousand."

Key Questions:

Is this 1,000-year rule of Christ something only in the future as the *millennialists* teach? Or is the historic Christian view; namely, that the 1,000-year rule is a spiritual rule where King Jesus rules in grace human hearts during the NT-End-Times era the correct view?

Biblical Data supporting the second view:

- the binding of Satan
- the “yet, not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God
- beheaded souls now reigning
- Christ stating His kingdom is not of this world

Another Piece of Biblical Evidence:

“In Rev. 20:4-6 John mentions the ‘first resurrection.’ Again, the rest of Scripture helps us to define this phrase. The reference is no doubt to conversion, that is, being raised with Christ in baptism (cf. Rom. 6:2-5,11; Col. 2:12-13; John 5:24; 11:25-26; I John 3:14; 5:12; Rev. 3:1; Eph. 2:1-6). Those who share in this “resurrection” are no longer under the power of eternal death (20:6, 14-15). Rather, they are ‘priests of God and of Christ’ (20:6; cf. 1:6; 5:10). All Christians ‘who had not worshiped the beast or its image’ already reign with Christ, a rule which does not end at temporal death nor will it ever end (20:4; cf. 5:10;22:5; Rom. 5:17; Eph. 2:6). CTCR

The millennium reflects the “yet, not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God. It is not simply futuristic. Proponents of the millennium overlook this aspect of the paradox.

Born once, die twice. Born twice, die once. Because we are people who participate in the “first resurrection,” that is, conversion, the second death (eternal death cf. 20:14) has no power over us. The good news of our Amillennial approach is that it recognizes that the devil is indeed bound, that victorious martyrs are now reigning in heaven above, and that the second death cannot harm us for we are part of that glorious first resurrection.

Examine chart for an overview.

BIBLE PASSAGES

(NKJ) John 12:31 -- "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."

(NKJ) John 16:11 -- "...of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

(NKJ) 1 John 3:8 -- He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

(NKJ) Luke 10:18 -- And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

(NKJ) Hebrews 2:14 -- Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

(NKJ) Matthew 12:24 -- Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, "This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." 25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges. 28 "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

(NKJ) Mark 3:22 -- And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons." 23 So He called them to *Himself* and said to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 "And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 "And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. 27 "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house."

(NKJ) Revelation 12:7 -- And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, 8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. 9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. 10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. 11 "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. 12 "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." 13 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *Child*.

(NKJ) 1 Peter 5:8 -- Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

(NKJ) Revelation 5:8 -- Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

A Paradoxical Vision Of The End Times

Notes for Students: 10-24-96 Class

The Paradox of the Antichrist

"The Antichrist is always coming, and he is already here." -- *Herman Sasse*

- Note the "yet, not yet" tension
- Why should we not be surprised?

Biblical evidence:

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, *even now* are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time...Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." (1 John 2:18,22) *Italics mine*

The major section in the New Testament which deals with the Antichrist is 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12. Upon reading it, what are we able to determine about the antichrist?

The Antichrist is called the _____ of sin (2:3) and the son of _____ (2:3). He _____ himself all that is called God (2:4). He sits as God _____ the temple of God (2:4). Although not Satan, the Antichrist is according to the _____ of Satan (2:9). In Paul's day, he was _____ at work (2:7). Jesus at his coming will _____ with the brightness of his coming (2:8). Antichrist mimics Christ's power with all power, _____ and lying _____ (2:9).

In our Lutheran Confessions, Philip Melancthon identified "the kingdom of Mohammed" as the Antichrist.

For Luther, whether it was a pope who taught indulgences, some "Lutheran" who tampered with the Gospel, Zwingli's war against the Gospel nature of the Lord's Supper, the work-righteous Turk, or whoever substituted the Gospel with some humanistic manifesto, all were in league with the kingdom of Antichrist? Note: "*anti*" in "Antichrist" means "*in place of.*"

No one person and no one institution exhausts the mystery of the antichrist.

- It has a collective character
- Anyone or anything within the church that seeks to qualify the radical grace of God
- Needed is prophetic reserve
- A Paradoxical vision of Antichrist does not make the mistake of identifying some sole, end-times political leader as *the* Antichrist

- Antichrist seeks to destroy sinner-saint paradox
- Needed also is humility and the recognition how we, too, have at times allowed Antichrist elements to slip into our confession
- Antichrist seeks to destroy the sinner-saint reality

“To the extent that the papacy continues to claim as official dogma the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent which expressly anathematizes, for instance, the doctrine ‘that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake or that it is this trust alone by which we are justified,’ the judgment of the Lutheran confessional writings that the papacy is the Antichrist holds.” -- CTCR (1989)

“‘Antichrist’ is not any one individual, but any constellation of beliefs and religious practices which assumes that Jesus failed to completely established His Kingdom.” --*Martin Noland, Affirm, 1995.*

The Paradox of Israel

All of Israel will be saved; all of Israel will not be saved.

“And so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26 NIV)

“For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” (Romans 9:6 NIV)

“Isaiah cries out concerning Israel ‘Though the number of Israelites be as the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved.’” (Romans 9:27 NIV)

Without a paradoxical vision of the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16), one can easily slip into a theology of salvation by race rather than by grace. Through the paradoxical, Gospel event of **Baptism**, we all become children of God by faith in Jesus the Messiah (Galatians 3:26-27). This awesome act creates a fundamental Jewish-Gentile solidarity in God’s New Israel, the Church (Galatians 3:28). Added to this good news is that via the grace of God in Baptism, when we “put on Messiah” (Galatians 3:27), we simultaneously become part of Abraham’s seed (3:29); that is, the New Israel.

Galatians 3:26-29

For you **all** are sons of God through faith in Messiah Jesus. 27 For as many of you who were **baptized** into Messiah have put on Messiah. 28 *Therefore*, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Jesus. 29 And if you are Messiah’s, then you are **Abraham’s seed**, and **heirs** according to the promise. (Free Translation)

I Peter 2:9

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (NKJB)

The Paradox of Life after Death

The believer in Christ upon death is both dead and alive, both asleep and awake.

Alive, though dead

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" John 11:25-26

Asleep, yet awake

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which **are asleep**, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." I Thessalonians 4:13

"And when they opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?' 11 And white robes were given unto every one of them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." Revelation 6:9-11

"Throughout the Bible as a whole, we see the holy writers speaking of the departed faithful as existing in a conscious state (Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 7:9-11, 14-15), a blessed state (Psalm 73:24-26), paradise (Luke 23:43)! In Philippians 1:23, St. Paul speaks of death for the Christian as the means for the Christian to actually be "with Christ" in heaven which is "far better." The story of the believing beggar who dies and yet goes to heaven resounds with a loud echo and 'Amen' to the aforementioned!" -- *Peter M. Kurowski*

Prayer From The Lutheran Agenda

“Almighty God, who by the death of Thy Son Jesus Christ hast destroyed death, by His rest in the tomb hast sanctified the graves of Thy saints, and by His glorious resurrection hast brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, *so that all who die in Him abide in joy as to their souls and in hope as to their bodies*, receive we beseech Thee, our unfeigned thanks for that victory over death and the grave which He hath obtained for us and for all who sleep in Him;...”

The Paradox of Hell

Hell is the place where the dead do not die.

“One of the ancients, who was asked about what books he used in his daily studies, answered that he studied every day a book with three pages, one red, one black, one white; that on the red page he read of our Lord's passion, on the black, the torments of the lost, on the white, the joys of the glorified; and that from this study he derived more profit, than if he were to ponder all the books of the philosophers.” -- *Heinrich Schmid*

It is the second page, the study regarding the torments of the lost, that we hear so little of today. Martin Marty has observed that “hell disappeared and no one noticed.” The result of this vacuum? False views.

One such false view is annihilationism. Annihilationism is the view that those who end up in hell through unbelief will pass out of existence upon death.

“In both ‘body and soul’ unbelievers will suffer eternal separation and condemnation in hell (Matt. 18:8; 25:46; Mark 9:43; John 3:36; 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 13; Rev. 14:11). Indescribable torment will be experienced consciously, the degree determined by the nature of the sins to be punished” (Matt. 11:20-24; 23:15; Luke 12:47-48). CTCR

Annihilationism rejects this paradox: hell is the place where the dead can never die.

Another major false view is universalism. Universalism is the view that God will wipe out all sin and save all mankind regardless of whether or not a person believes in the Gospel.

Universalism overlooks this paradox: those who end up in hell are forgiven sinners (2 Corinthians 5:19; Revelation 20:10, 15; John 3:18, 36).

The doctrine of hell is given so that people don't end up in hell. It is the strongest word of Law possible to pave the way for the Gospel.

"The doors of hell are, first of all, locked from the inside—only afterwards locked also from the outside." — *C.S. Lewis*

"One thing is sure, hell contains no atheists, because the damned actually experience God as the righteous Judge." — *Francis Pieper*

To remove the doctrine of hell is to remove the need for a Law-Gospel paradox. To remove a Law-Gospel paradox is to remove the need for faith in the Messiah. To remove the need for faith in the Messiah is to remove the need for love God.

The Paradox of Judgment Day

We will be judged yet we will not be judged.

Read Matthew 25:31-46 to see the movement of this paradox.

Questions:

When Jesus returns, will it be by way of a sneak rapture or a spectacular public, world-wide return? (vv.31-32)

Those who have *inherited* the Kingdom, on what basis will they be judged? (vv.35-40)

1. good works
2. bad works
3. good works that God has moved them to do (Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-13)

Those who have not *inherited* the Kingdom, on what basis will they be judged? (vv. 41-45).

1. good works
2. sins of commission
3. sins of omission

Believers in Christ will be judged only on the _____ works that God Himself _____ in them. Grace upon grace upon grace. Second, believers in Christ will not be judged on the basis of their _____ works. Why? Because there is "now no _____ to them which are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:1). On Judgment Day, those who reject the _____ of the Gospel (Romans 4:5) will not receive the blessed results of this Divine declaration; namely, the ungodly are declared godly. A close examination of this Judgment Day text is a reminder that although the Christian is not justified by _____, a justified man _____.

Answers: (but not in order) works, paradox, good, works, works, condemnation.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (I Corinthians 5:10)

The believer: judged—yes; condemned—no.

The unbeliever: judged—yes; condemned—yes.

**PART III. REPORT ON THE FORMING OF THE STUDY GROUP,
THE FEEDBACK FROM THE MEMBERS IN THE STUDY GROUP
AND THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE WRITER UPON
PRESENTING FOUR STUDIES ON
A PARADOXICAL VISION OF THE END TIMES,
WHICH WAS HELD AT ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH,
CALIFORNIA, MISSOURI,
OCTOBER 3, 10, 17, 24, 1996**

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TESTING THE THESIS

This writer has observed that there is a significant correlation between a Christian's right use of paradox and a Gospel-centered view of the end times. What is this correlation? How does it play out theologically? How does understanding that God comes to one in Christ, "under the forms of opposites," enlighten one's understanding of cardinal, end-times teachings?

Properly understood, a truly evangelical eschatology, by way of paradox, enhances a Christian's understanding of the "yet, not yet" tension of the Kingdom of God, of the "yet, not yet" binding of Satan, and of the "yet, not yet" movement of the Antichrist. Moreover, a Gospel-centered paradoxical vision does not fall prey to an unhealthy seeking of prognosticator-signs, for it views the signs of Word and Sacrament as the supreme signs of the Kingdom of God.

Wrongly understood, an Israel-centric eschatology obscures the New Testament theology regarding the New Israel, the Church; it overlooks

significant aspects of Christ's victory and how the fruits of the victory come to believers via the lifelines of God's love, the means of grace. Furthermore, a view that looks for the establishment of a worldly Messianic kingdom here on earth generally fails to recognize the pernicious, paradoxical path of the Antichrist. Equally sad, such a view develops triumphalistic tendencies of a kingdom of God here on earth, with an ever growing itch to walk by sight rather than by faith.

Why is this so? Why does the lack of a Gospel-centered, paradoxical vision lead to a confused ecclesiology, truncated Christology, and skewed eschatology? What are some of the consequences of lacking a paradoxical vision of Christ's second coming?

This writer wrestled personally with these questions under the conviction that a paradoxical vision of the Biblical teachings of the last things enables a Christian to hold in tension dual aspects of given end-times teachings, thereby helping one to avoid half truths, and consequently full lies. Paradoxically, a more complicated view of truth marked by paradoxes will lead to a simpler view on eschatological matters in the end.

In testing these eschatological assertions, a study group was formed, and four sessions on the subject, **A Paradoxical Vision Of The End Times**, were conducted at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 207 North Owen, California, Missouri, on the dates of October 3d, 10th, 17th, and 24th of the year 1996. The outlines and study sheets used were presented in Part II of this Major Applied Project.

This MAP, then, has two prime pedagogical purposes. One, it was designed to be a heavy-duty Bible study for members of our congregation in the context of a study group. Two, it was a study of the use of paradox in service of the Gospel, with special attention given to end times teachings.

The aim of Part III of this MAP is to describe the formation of the study group, a profile of its participants, the manner in which the teaching material was presented, the educational goals of each session, and the feedback received from those who filled out questionnaires after each session. Coequal with this aim is this writer's goal to formulate conclusions regarding the results of this MAP.

The Formation of the Study Group

Participants principally were invited from the congregation of St. Paul's Lutheran Church by way of bulletin inserts two weeks prior to the beginning of the October study group sessions. Some individual contacts to attend these four sessions came from me, especially encouraging our congregational leaders to come. They were informed that even if they did not wish to volunteer as an evaluator of this MAP effort, they would still likely enjoy these studies.

One concern I had in sending out the written request for members of the congregation to attend this class was the nomenclature of my topic. At first glance, it sounds intimidating, **A Paradoxical View Of End Times**. Hence, the written invitation made an effort to allay fears that this Bible study might be merely an exercise in esoteric matters of the head rather than matters of vital importance.

Important to this writer were the prayers of the saints that this project might result in their good and God's glory. *Ora et labora* are ever the footsteps of faith. Moreover, if St. Paul constantly beckoned the saints of his day to pray for him in proclaiming the Gospel, we have in this example a *sine qua non* also for us.

The rest of the details involved in the forming of this study group are spelled out in the **"INVITATION TO A SPECIAL OCTOBER BIBLE STUDY."** On the following page is a reduced-in-size, print-wise, copy of the congregational invite. The saints were informed by way of our newsletter to return the insert to the church office as they had opportunity.

INVITATION TO A SPECIAL OCTOBER BIBLE STUDY

A special evening Bible study will be held at St. Paul's Lutheran Church on the first four Thursdays of October. The topic will be: "*A Paradoxical Vision of the End Times.*" During these four evening studies, which will run from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Pastor Kurowski will offer a foundational study of key paradoxes in Holy Scripture. Particular attention will be given to the use of paradox as it relates to having a Gospel-centered view of the *End Times*.

Don't be frightened by that word *paradox*. It is a good word. It is a good word describing those *seemingly* contradictory teachings of the Bible. Upon close inspection these *seeming* contradictions to our minds are really rich insights into the mind of God. Paradoxes help us to see the way God looks at things. They help us to get a grip on life because they are God's way of getting His gracious grip on us.

This unique Bible study is designed to help church leaders and church members to approach life with a realistic, yet optimistic view on life. Biblical balance is the aim. Whether on matters of life in general or on end-times matters in particular, God's paradoxes enable us to make our way through this life to the life to come with joy, hope, and courage.

Pastor Kurowski will present these four Bible studies as part of the fruit of his labor for completion of his Doctorate degree. Participants will be helping him complete his Major Applied Project for his Doctor of Ministry degree from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. They will provide vital feedback to evaluate his effort to impart comforting truths from our great Gospel heritage by way of paradoxes.

Each of the four sessions will last 90 minutes. A ten-minute break in between each session will allow for stretching time and sweet-tooth time. Beverages will also be provided.

Two requests will be made of all participants, *while the third is optional*: 1. Pray that the Holy Spirit will make these sessions a blessing to you; 2. Commit yourself, as far as it is possible, to attend all four sessions; and, 3. Agree to fill out a written questionnaire about the studies upon their completion.

Your help in this project will be very much appreciated. In this effort I pray that God will be glorified and you will be edified, all in the name of Him who for us was crucified, Jesus Christ!

Yes, I will pray for the Spirit's blessing upon me via these studies _____.

Yes, I will be attending these four sessions _____.

Yes, I will fill out a short questionnaire for each session _____.

Name _____

A Profile Of the Group's Participants

An average of 45 people per session attended the four October study group sessions. Of this number, 17 agreed to fill out questionnaires. Those who filled out questionnaires completed their tasks with diligence, thoughtfulness, and faithfulness. On two occasions a saint agreeing to fill out a questionnaire was unable to attend. Hence, for sessions two and three we received one less questionnaire.

Those who took part in the study session were a diverse group age-wise, ranging from a gentleman in his 20's to a lady in her upper 80's. Age representation among those filling out questionnaires came from saints in their 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's, and 80's. Characteristic of those participating in the evaluation was a love for Bible study.

Five of St. Paul's six elders were able to participate in evaluating the material for these presentations. Three male adult Bible study leaders (one an elder) also took part in the feedback process. Those evaluating the four October sessions, as a group, are people engaged in carrying out the work of their vocations with the highest of standards.

Three of those who evaluated the presentations are gentlemen who have read widely of the premillennial view. They came to the study with good honest questions over matters such as the rapture, the Antichrist, and the nature of the millennium.

One saint was a wholesome skeptic of my thesis, in particular, because of a wariness toward the word "paradox." His good humor, mixed with grace, made

his skepticism a welcome guest. His probing questions made me dig deeper, think harder, and pray more.

One of the participants who filled out the questionnaire was new to the Lutheran faith. Both she and her husband have shown high enthusiasm and great appreciation for our rich Gospel heritage.

As these thumbnail sketches indicate, the participants in this study were neither sycophants nor surly. Rather, they were individuals whose lives were marked by faith that expresses itself through love (Gal 5:6) as well as imitators of the early Bereans who every day carefully examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11).

Two groups of people who participated in a hospitality aspect of the study sessions were our Ladies Aid and Evening Guild Society members. They provided a dessert and drink at each session for attendees to enjoy during the ten-minute break. Their hospitality, as always, was magnificent.

The Manner In Which The Material Was Presented

Each session was held on a Thursday evening during the month of October, 1996. All sessions began at 7:00 p.m. and ended at 8:30 p.m. However, a number of saints stayed after each evening presentation to discuss the material set forth earlier that evening. These amiable post-class discussions allowed for further questions by the study group members, dialogue, and amplifications of the content by the teacher.

Each session was begun by introducing the topic for the evening and by stating the goals for each respective session. The subsection of the MAP shows how I **began** the various sessions. Note the educational **goals** for each session. The **opening prayers** intertwine with these goals. As a rule, I stayed close to the material handed out to the study group participants once the introduction was completed. The fourth session had a very short introduction due to the fact that there were five end-times paradoxes to discuss that evening.

Introduction to the October 3, 1996, Session

Lecture Notes

The Goal of This Session: To begin to understand how the Holy Scriptures use paradox to convey vital divine truths. This will be accomplished, in part, by a look at "Martin Luther, Poet of Paradox."

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for revealing to us the gospel-saving paradox, how for the sake of Your beloved Son Who atoned for the sins of the world, You declare the "ungodly" "godly." We thank you that Your Holy Spirit has moved us to believe this good news. Tonight, we pray that the same Spirit Who called us by the powerful, paradoxical gospel will increase the vision of the eyes of our faith so that we might through Your paradoxes see reality as You do. Especially we ask that Your Holy Spirit will help us lay a foundation tonight so that later this month we might gain a greater paradoxical vision of the end times in order that we would be equipped for every good work. We ask this in the name of Him Who is the hope of history, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Oscar Wilde once said, "In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants...and the other is getting it."

Juvenal, the Roman satirist once remarked, "The wise man in peace, prepares for war."

C.S. Lewis was fond of saying, "Give up yourself and you will find your real self."

All three of these opening statements, from Wilde, Juvenal, and Lewis are examples of *paradoxes*.

I have observed that there is a significant correlation between a Christian's right use of Biblical paradoxes and a correct, comforting, Christ-centered view of the end times.

The question is this: "How does understanding that God comes to one in Christ, '*under the form of opposites,*' enlighten one's understanding of the end times?"

I have also observed that there is a significant correlation between a Christian's right use of paradox and a Biblically balanced view of the End Times, not to mention a balanced view of life. A paradoxical view of the end times will have us ready, to use the words of J.I. Packer, to live "packed up and ready to go, and packed up and ready to wait."

But before I get too far along, an examination of the meaning of the word "paradox" is in order...

(At this point, see handout sheets for session one in Part II to gain insight into the progression of the rest of the lecture for October 3, 1996).

Introduction to the October 10, 1996, Session

Lecture Notes

The Goal of This Session: To see how from the opening verse of Holy Scripture to the end of the last chapter of the last chapter of the Apocalypse of John, the Holy Spirit cuts a paradoxical path through the words of the prophets and the apostles.

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you that even though we are sinners, we are also saints—through Your Son Jesus Christ. By Your Holy Spirit, help us to see the paradoxical thread which runs through the Scriptures from cover to cover. Grant us eyes of faith so that we might see that You are the God Who creates everything from nothing and brings about victory by death and defeat in order for us to grasp that salvation is entirely your gift through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

From the opening verse of Sacred Scriptures in Genesis to the end of the last chapter of the Apocalypse on John, the Holy Spirit cuts a paradoxical path through the words of the prophets and apostles. This paradoxical path, like the redemptive thread of Christ's work, gives Scripture a powerful cohesiveness. It also reminds us that God's hat-size is not our head-size; that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, His ways are not our ways.

That there is a surprising amount of paradox in Scripture should come to no surprise to the follower of Christ. Why? Because Scripture always carries with it the aroma of *mystery*; and what are Christians but “stewards of the *mysteries* of God”? (I Corinthians 4:1). St. Paul in describing the nature of faith to Timothy chose to put it this way, “holding the *mystery* of the faith with a clear conscience” (I Timothy 3:9).

Through paradoxical revelations, the eyes of faith see two worlds at work simultaneously. Whether the temporal or eternal, the seen or unseen, the kingdom of Caesar or the Kingdom of God, *tension* points exist that *seem* contradictory but in fact are not, for with God all things are possible (Genesis 18:14; Matthew 19:26).

Biblical paradoxes beckon us to take with utmost seriousness the creedal formulation, “I believe in God the Father **Almighty**.” They invite us to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5b, RSV). They beseech us to trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own insight (Proverbs 3:5). In short, the life of faith is a life of paradoxes, seeing beyond what *looks* to be a contradiction to beholding deep truths that set forth God’s mighty acts of creation, redemption, and sanctification.

So that our faith might not rest upon human ingenuity, human powers of the mind, human effort, but rather God’s power, God gives us paradoxes. the chief paradox is the gospel. This paradox the apostle says is “of first importance” (I Corinthians 15:3, RSV), for it is the paradox by which we are saved (I Corinthians 15:2).

As we begin a journey this evening, a journey whereby we examine paradoxes in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, several things must be kept in mind. First, the recognition of paradoxes is a gift from the Triune God through the work of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:10-16). Two, although we hope to note a good number of paradoxes in a short amount of time, we are just beginning to wade into the Baptismal waters of this subject. Three, we do this to serve as a prelude to and a warm-up for developing **A Paradoxical Vision of the End Times**.

(At this point, see handout sheets for session two in Part II to gain insight into the progression of the rest of the lecture for October 10, 1996).

Introduction to the October 17, 1996, Session

Lecture Notes

The Goal of This Session: To examine two “End Times” paradoxes, namely, the binding of Satan and the “yet, not yet” nature of the millennium.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for bestowing upon us Your grace, making us members of Your Kingdom. Help us to live as vigilant, yet victorious members of this Kingdom, rejoicing that we are members of Your Kingdom and yet praying “Thy Kingdom Come.” Grant us eyes of faith to see that though the devil is bound, still he is a roaring lion able to devour those who drift from the means of grace. Help us to live a life of robust repentance anchored in Your Word of law and gospel, rooted in Your Word and Sacrament, and founded upon Jesus Christ, the King of kings, Lord of lords. In His name, we ask for the Spirit’s benediction. Amen.

Marion Langkop, one of our study group members, was kind enough to give me a copy of her Consumer Update from the University of Missouri System, Lincoln University, dated October 1996. You will never guess what the lead article was all about. You guessed it. **Paradox!**

Under an article titled, “A Look In the Crystal Ball,” Dr. Jerry Apps was quoted regarding changes that our future likely holds. One of these changes he suggests is the need to recognize “Increased Paradox.” The article defined paradox this way: “Paradox is something we need to become much more comfortable with. Paradox is a statement that is seemingly self-contradictory or absurd, but in reality expresses a possible truth.”

Quoting futurist Peter Senge, Consumer Update listed these examples of paradox:

- Today’s problems come from yesterday’s “solutions.”
- The harder you push, the harder the system pushes back.
- Behavior grows better before it grows worse.
- The easy way out usually leads back in.
- The cure can be worse than the disease.
- Faster is slower.
- Small changes produce big results

It is helpful to see how paradox is also an important tool in the secular world. It is a way to describe reality as well as help one view rightly the changes of the future.

Tonight we want to look at two “End Times” paradoxes. We begin this examination by turning to a chapter in the Bible that is pivotal in the discussion of “End Times” matters—Revelation 20. It is a chapter which is parallel to Revelation 12:1-14:20, a chunk of Scripture, which like Revelation begins with the devil’s defeat and ends with Judgment Day.

As we approach the powerful picture language of Revelation 20, we must keep in mind the purpose of this last book of the Bible. It was written to assure, steady, and comfort persecuted Christians in Asia Minor as well as cross-suffering Christians of every era (1:3) that they were “kings and priests unto God” (1:6) who would overcome all things through the risen, Ascended Savior (2:10).

(At this point, see handout sheet for session three in Part II to gain insight into the progression of the rest of the lecture for October 17, 1996).

Introduction to the October 24, 1996, Session

Lecture Notes

The Goal of This Session: To examine five End Times paradoxes, namely, the Antichrist is coming, and he is always here; all of Israel will be saved, yet all of Israel will not be saved; when the Christian dies they are asleep yet awake; hell is the place where the dead do not die; and, we will be judged on Judgment Day yet we will not be judged on Judgment Day.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for the privilege of prayer; being able to call upon You boldly yet humbly as people who own everything yet nothing; as people who are simultaneously weak and strong, sinners and saints. Help us to realize we are worthy to pray because we are unworthy—worthy only because the Lamb was worthy to open the 7 seals and the way to heaven. In His name, we ask You to pour out Your Holy Spirit so that we might see that we are by Your grace, part of the New Israel, a paradoxical people, a peculiar people, a people with present help and heavenly hope. As Your “yet, not yet” saints, keep our eyes on Him Who became poor so that we might become rich, David’s Son and David’s Lord, Jesus Christ, our righteousness. Amen.

Last week we examined two End Times paradoxes. First, we saw how Satan is both bound yet not bound, a pussy cat yet a roaring lion. To those under the curse of the Law, he is a fierce roaring lion. To those under the grace of God through Jesus Christ, the devil “can harm us none, He’s judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him,” to quote Luther.

Second, we examined the paradox of the millennium itself. We saw how the Kingdom of God has come and yet it is also coming. Victorious martyrs now reign in heaven. Even in the context of a fallen world, we are now "*glorified*" (Romans 8:30, *aorist* tense).

C.S. Lewis reminds us that temptations often come to us in two's. We can easily go to one extreme or the other. Paradoxes help us to avoid extremes, to avoid negating one truth at the expense of another, to avoid riding a pendulum too far.

Tonight, we wish to examine our final five end times paradoxes...

(At this point, see handout sheets for session four in Part II to gain insight into the progression of the rest of the lecture for October 24, 1996).

As a rule, after the introductions, I stayed close to the material handed out to the study group participants. Only on the doctrine of the Antichrist did we depart significantly from the handout sheets, as there was no shortage of questions on this eschatological issue. For a number of saints, the "yet, not yet" nature of the Antichrist seemed new to them. It helped earlier to have set the foundation by explaining the "yet, not yet" nature of Christ's Kingdom, and then contrasting it with the diabolical "yet, not yet" nature of the antichrist's kingdom.

As the reader no doubt detected, a large number of the Bible passages for the four sessions were printed out ahead of time for the participants. By doing this, much time was saved, much confusion was spared. For the most part, the New King James Version was used.

As group leader, I guided the studies. To add a degree of variety in the handout sheets, several different methods were used in conveying the content of the presentations. Questions, quotations, questionnaires, glossary helps, short summaries, fill-in-the-blank activities, examination of a chart I put together, as well as the lecture method were all used to instruct. The participants responded

very well to all these methods of inculcating the doctrine and data, but they especially liked the group fill-in-the-blank exercises.

During study sessions two through four, I used a rather corny but effective prop. On the top corners of my blackboard, I hung two decoy ducks to represent a “pair of ducks;” that is, a “par-a-dox.” This low level picture--pun served as an object lesson for the saints to see how paradox helps us to maintain Biblical balance and Evangelical evenness. For example, I wrote beneath one duck “all of Israel will be saved,” while under the opposite duck I wrote in chalk “all of Israel will not be saved.” Both end times truths must be taught and held in tact simultaneously lest one ends us with universalism on the one hand or salvation by race on the other. On several occasions, when a study group participant was pushing one truth too far at the expense of another, straining the paradox if you will, I went to the decoy ducks to show the need to hold both seemingly contradictory teachings together at the same time. This was a non-threatening way to affirm what the participant was stating, yet also, at the same time, affirming the antithetical dogmatic truth to maintain the paradox. The verbal feedback for this teaching technique came in the form of a lot of smiles. It was a good paradox prop, the pun notwithstanding.

Were the desired outcomes of these four study group sessions reached? Were the pedagogical goals reached? Did the Bible study participants catch **A Paradoxical Vision of the End Times?**

Feedback from the participants via the questionnaires along with personal comments signal that in general, the vision was caught, the pedagogical goals

reached, and desired outcomes achieved. Of those who filled out questionnaires, 75 percent indicated how in sessions one, two, and four they were helped “a lot.” The rest in these same three sessions stated they were helped “some.” Of the four sessions, session three deviated from the general pattern. Here 69 percent indicated they were helped a lot, while 25 percent indicated “some,” and one saint verbally told me that session three helped her “a little.”

All the feedback forms, except one, were unsigned. The one gentleman who signed his questionnaires gave me the opportunity to respond to him personally regarding the excellent questions he raised. His responses were of sterling character reflecting his Synodical training at one of our teacher colleges.

How The Feedback Procedure Worked

At the end of each session, an evaluation and feedback form was given to the study group participants. This was done to monitor progress, make necessary adaptations or clarifications along the way, to measure the consistency of the respective lectures, and encourage the saints to synthesize answers to crucial issues discussed in each session.

To a large degree, the responses to the questionnaire-questions were brief, clear, and theologically on target. But before I analyze these answers, I will present the data from the opening question of each of the four questionnaires, to provide an overview of the general response. The opening question for each of the four sessions was as follows:

This study group has increased my understanding of Biblical paradoxes:

1. A lot 2. Some 3. A little 4. Not at all. A simple chart gives the reader a snapshot of these results.

An Overview

	1. A lot	2. Some	3. A little	4. Not at all	Total
Session One	13	4			17
Session Two	12	3*			15*
Session Three	11	4	1		16
Session Four	13	4			17

* In session two, one saint simply responded to this question, "I understand more than last week." This did not fit any of the four categories.

Session One: Questions And Responses

October 3, 1996

Session One of this study has increased my understanding of Biblical paradoxes:

- | | | | |
|----------|---------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. A lot | 2. Some | 3. A little | 4. Not at all |
| 13 | 4 | | |

Did this presentation help you see the paradoxical nature of the Gospel pertaining to the person and work of Christ?

All 17 participants wrote "yes", one saint adding the words "very, very much."

What is the paradox involved in a Christian's death?

All answered correctly, "even though we die, yet shall we live"

What paradox discussed tonight was most helpful to you?"

We are at the same time sinner and saint (five)

The paradox of the cross—that God dies (four)

Law-Gospel itself (two)

Good Friday paradox—cross manifests both God's wrath and love (one)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

One comment/question from one of the participants which this question evoked: "The sinner-saint paradox was the one which gave me most comfort, although I have to wonder at what point we can lose our sainthood?"

What question about the end times would you like to see addressed in the third or fourth session?

One question by one participant: "Will there be a final war which we will recognize as Armageddon?"

A second question: "What are the events leading to the Apocalypse?"

Conclusion: Most rewarding to me regarding this first session was that all the participants responding indicated this presentation helped them see the paradoxical nature of the Gospel. Also, the fact that a number of the saints indicated that this presentation "comforted" them was satisfying.

Session Two: Questions And Responses

October 10, 1996

Session two of this study has increased my understanding of Biblical paradoxes:

- | | | | |
|----------|---------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. A lot | 2. Some | 3. A little | 4. Not at all |
| 12 | 3* | | |

*One saint responded to this question not by choosing a particular category but simply writing "I understand more than last week."

Was there any paradox in the Old Testament that stood out in your mind?

Here were some of the responses: "The Red Sea saved the Israelites but killed the Egyptians." "Abraham using paradox to contend with paradox in the story of his offering up Isaac." "The Isaiah 7:14 prophecy of the incarnation—cornerstone of Christianity." "The paradox of the Trinity itself and the creation of the universe out of nothing." "The Red Sea being a Death and Life instrument." "Isaiah 53—that the sinless would die for all the sinners."

What New Testament paradox caught your eye or ear more than any other?

Various responses: "Matthew 10:39—He who finds his life will lose it." "Christ's yoke is easy, His burden light." "The Real Presence of the Lord Supper." "Cursed is He who dies on a tree, yet He is our redeemer." "The eternal God must die to save us." "The Lord's Supper, a paradoxical meal." "The very person of Christ, true God and true man." "Living in the present, yet having the gift of eternal life within us." "The Lord's Supper." "The incarnation, how God brings forth a clean thing from an unclean thing." "God died (Christ) and saved us by rising from the dead."

What paradox discussed tonight was most helpful to you?

Various responses: "Isaiah 53." "How we live, die, yet live." "We are sinner-saint." "How Lord knew everything, yet as a child had to learn; really all the paradoxes of His birth." "Being saved by someone who was cursed." "The Lord's Supper—my questions were answered." "Baptism—the daily death which gives life (Romans 6:3-5)."

Conclusion: While a good number of saints answered the questions sporadically, the answers given were exciting, evangelical, and excellent.

Session Three: Questions and Responses

October 17, 1996

Session three of this study has increased my understanding of Biblical paradoxes:

- | | | | |
|----------|---------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. A lot | 2. Some | 3. A little | 4. Not at all |
| 11 | 4 | 1 | |

According to Scripture, is the devil bound or not bound? All but one of the saints answered correctly. The devil is both bound and not bound. The one participant of the 16 who answered incorrectly also stated that the presentation left her with more questions than answers. She also indicated that overall, this particular presentation helped her "a little." Overall, the questionnaire sheets indicated that the participants understood that the millennium, Christ's 1000 year rule—is now, and that it is the victory of Christ over the devil via Good Friday, Easter, and the Ascension which ushers in the end times.

Is Christ's 1,000-year rule (the millennium) a thing of the:

1. present
2. future
3. both
4. none of the above

This question was designed to see if the participants caught the "yet, not yet" flavor of the millennium. All but one of the participants answered "both," the answer which signifies the paradox of the millennium as an age which has both present as well as future aspects to it. The one saint who answered differently, responded "present." While this response did not fully catch the dual aspect of the New Testament teaching on the Kingdom of God, it did avoid the more serious error of premillennialism, which fails to appreciate that we are **now** "more than conquerors through Christ who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Have the End Times begun? If so, when did they begin? The 13 saints who answered this question all affirmed that we are living in the end times, the New Testament age. A thought provoking response: one saint pointed to the first Gospel promise, Genesis 3:15, as being part of the end times. In other words, it was the beginning of the end for Satan already in the Garden. This proleptic view of the End Times was elaborated to me after the 10-17-96 class. The actual written response was as follows: "At the first when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's direction, then Jesus took over the power of death and the end times are closer."

What is the danger in not rightly recognizing the 1,000-year rule of Christ?

The answers varied on this question. One participant indicated it is a hermeneutic problem when one looks at this matter literalistically, when one fails to discern that the **1,000-year** portion of this Messianic rule is figurative, standing for a set period of time. Several other saints pointed out how failure to recognize that we are in and under Christ's 1,000-year rule could lead to failure to "not realize that Christ could return at any time." Another participant indicated that a view of a worldly kingdom leads to "false hope or deferred hope."

Conclusion: The saints weathered this presentation quite well considering the weighty material which was covered. They grasped the first two end-times paradoxes in good fashion. The one saint who indicated in her questionnaire that she was helped only "a little" by this presentation, also wrote that this presentation "left me with more questions than answers, probably because I never studied Revelation much." Nevertheless, this participant answered the basic questionnaire questions regarding the millennium in fine form. Looking back, I believe that I may have tried to pack too much material into a ninety minute presentation. The responses to this presentation both pleased me and humbled me at the same time.

Session Four: Questions and Responses

October 24, 1996

Session four of this study has increased my understanding of Biblical paradoxes:

- | | | | |
|----------|---------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. A lot | 2. Some | 3. A little | 4. Not at all |
| 13 | 4 | | |

Are we to seek signs? If so, what signs? This question confused half of the participants. Two responded to the first question "no." Their responses indicated they had in mind the words of our Lord to the scribes and Pharisees, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 12:39). Six individuals did not render an answer. Those who did answer "yes" indicated that signs we should seek are gospel signs: baptism, the Lord's Supper, Holy Absolution, the taught and proclaimed Gospel. One participant wrote, "We are not to seek miraculous signs to conform our faith, but recognize the signs of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Holy Absolution for the forgiveness of sins."

What paradox discussed tonight was most helpful to you? Here there was a wide range of answers: that when we die we are asleep yet awake; the paradox of hell, the place where the dead do not die (2 responses); the paradox of life after death (2 responses); sinner-saint paradox (2 responses) on Judgment Day we will be judged yet not judged (3 responses); the “yet not yet” nature of the Antichrist (5 responses). Regarding the doctrine of the Antichrist one participant wrote, “it cleared up questions that I have had.” Another wrote, it “helped to answer questions I’ve had for a long time.”

One gentleman filling out his answer to this question wrote how the paradox of life after death brought him great comfort. He wrote: “(the) Paradox of Life after Death, since I have experienced the deaths of so many loved ones, it gives the comfort to accept the loss of loved ones.”

Is there a paradox in life that is most helpful to you? Here the participants either did not answer the question since it mirrored closely the previous question or they echoed their previous answer. One response, however, is worth recording. It is a hallmark of Lutheranism and true evangelical theology. One of the participants wrote that the sinner-saint paradox was the most helpful of paradoxes for his life “since we are very aware of our sinful state, it is very comforting to know we are also saints and need to hear it often.”

Conclusion: Once again the participants gave evidence that they understood the end-times paradoxes which were set forth. The fact that a number of the participants wrote that they were comforted by these paradoxes gave pleasure to me. “Comfort, comfort ye my people” is the double imperative of God in Isaiah chapter 40, verse one. By His grace, these studies served as an instrument to bring glad tidings by way of Biblical paradoxes to God’s saints here at St. Paul’s California. May they also bring joy, comfort, and hope to the readers of this MAP.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This MAP project sought to introduce to the members of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church of California, Missouri, **A Paradoxical Vision of the End Times**. Yet more than that, this MAP project aimed at introducing the participants to the paradoxical movement of the Holy Spirit throughout the

Scriptures in general. Most helpful in the service of this endeavor were the works of Martin Luther, whom I have coined as "The Poet of Paradox."

It was the continuous reading of Martin Luther throughout my Doctor of Ministry classes which generated a deep interest in the use of paradox in theological formulation. When several of St. Paul's members requested that I instruct the saints on matters pertaining to the end times, I began to formulate a number of end-times teachings in paradoxes. Soon it became apparent to me that so much of the confusion among Christians regarding end-times matters often had to do with the over-extension of one truth of a paradox at the expense of the opposite truth native to the paradox.

Something else happened along the way as I prepared the material for this MAP. I began to notice how paradoxical thinking was impacting my teaching, counseling, and preaching. Regarding preaching, sermons began to take on titles such as "Four Worms Go Fishing," "The Schism Which Heals," "Dying to Live," and "The Doubt That Faith Produces."¹⁴⁵ Regarding counseling, I found myself, to use the words of Will Rogers, being better able "to ride loose in the saddle." Why? Viewing matters paradoxically, I began to recognize certain tensions in which I, as a pastor, must live with rather than trying to resolve, thereby not sacrificing one truth of a paradox as the expense of the other.

¹⁴⁵The "doubt" which faith produces is spoken of in I John 4:1, where the Apostle John speaks of "testing the spirits." It is good for faith to doubt that which is evil, contrary to Scripture, contrary to truth. Hence, there is positive

If one has ever seen the movie *The Karate Kid*, one may recall the scene where at the ocean the mentor of the young student, the elderly Miyagi sends his young apprentice Daniel out into the tumultuous surf. “Learn balance! Learn balance!” he energetically exhorts.

Again and again, as young Daniel struggles against the crashing waves, he is knocked off his feet to the right, then to the left. At last, he turns to see his mentor in the distance, beautifully balanced atop a single post. From this position, Daniel’s mentor executes the delicate movements of the crane-like technique, demonstrating amazing balance as he adroitly shifts his weight from one foot to the other.

Paradox—in, with, and under Scripture—is an interpretative movement necessary for the Christian to maintain evangelical equilibrium in matters of theology in general and end-times matters in particular. It is a most useful tool in serving to give us the Biblical balance we need in order to avoid the extremes of a given position, extremes our sinful nature is so readily prone to taking. Above all, the servant-under-Scripture use of paradox enables the Christian to adore the faith-building, comfort-giving mysteries of the Gospel rather than abandoning them for man-made explanations which vitiate against faith itself.

These remarks lead to my observation regarding this MAP. Did these study group sessions lead to the Biblical balance we sought? Was I pleased

doubt and negative doubt, good doubt and bad doubt, God-given doubt and devilish doubt.

with the result or not pleased? Perhaps you have anticipated my paradoxical response. I was both pleased and displeased *at the same time*.

In the end, **all** the study group participants gave written and verbal indication that they held balanced, evangelical views regarding the end-times matters which were discussed. Equally exciting were the numerous written and verbal comments indicating how these four sessions brought “comfort” to them. Even though the questionnaire response sheets indicate that not all the participants learned “a lot” each session, I do believe all the participants learned “a lot” by the end of the four sessions.

While verbal indicators and the questionnaires revealed a good resolve regarding both the affective and cognitive results of this experiment, still, there were areas open for improvement. In particular, I think I would recommend spreading this material over one more session. Session three, for example, contained the material which was heavily taxing. Also, one more session to cover this material would have allowed me more time to explain in-depth how the premillennial and postmillennial positions miss the paradoxical mark and thus take on a more anthropocentric rather than Christocentric tone. Even so, the participants gave good indication of grasping the main points of the presentation.

As careful readers of this MAP know, Dionysius Exiguus' miscalculations of the Christian era, mean that we have reached the third millennium before reaching the year 2001. Even this has a paradoxical ring! Nevertheless, the tens of thousands of entries on today's internet tell us that millions of people are

approaching the "next" millennium with a frenzied fear. **A Paradoxical Vision of the End Times**, one rooted in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the ageless antidote for such frenzy, such fear, such fatalism. I believe the testimony of those who participated in the four studies for this MAP affirm the truth that our paradoxical Gospel casts out end-times fear, replacing it with end-times comfort, hope, and joy.

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