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The Centrality of the Gospel in Our Ministry

Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn

Introduction

In our Sunday morning family Bible class, we are just concluding a study of Dr. C.F.W. Walther's twenty-five theses on *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*. To briefly summarize the differences between these two essential teachings of Holy Scripture:

- The law shows us our sin, while the gospel shows us our Savior from sin.
- The law tells us what we are to do, while the gospel reveals to us what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.
- In the law we hear the tenfold summons, "*Thou shalt...*", while in the gospel there are no demands, but simply the comforting proclamation, "*Your sins are forgiven.*"
- The law condemns, while the gospel saves.

Walther's twenty-fifth and final thesis states: "**...The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.**"¹ Walther is simply reiterating the inspired words of the apostle Paul:

1 Corinthians 1:22-24, "***For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***"²

1 Corinthians 2:2, "***For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.***"

1 Corinthians 15:3,4, "***For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.***"

Dr. Martin Luther also reflected such divine words when he wrote, "**In my heart there reigns, and shall ever reign, this one article, namely, faith in my Lord Jesus Christ, which is the sole**

beginning, middle, and end of all spiritual and godly thoughts which I may have at any time, day or night.”³

In view of the Sacred Scriptures and the testimony of our faithful spiritual forefathers, may we, in a spirit of self-examination, ask ourselves today: ***‘Is the Gospel Central in Our Ministry?’***

First, What Is the Gospel?

“Gospel” is derived from an old English word that means “Good News.” A word we utilize in the official name of our congregation also means the same thing: “evangel.” The apostle Paul said, ***‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’***” (Rom. 1:16,17). The first gospel--or evangel--is recorded for us in Genesis 3:15. When God addressed the serpent, Adam and Eve were given the very first promise of the Savior, who by His sufferings and death would defeat the power of sin, death and the devil: ***‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.’***

When God gave His written law on Mount Sinai, He not only demanded obedience from His creatures, but He also threatened punishment for disobedience. Jesus took care of both things for us. As our representative represents us in Congress--sitting in our place--so Jesus represents the whole human race before His heavenly Father. By His perfect life, His holiness and His sinlessness, Jesus covers over all our disobedience. Remember--Christ is our substitute and representative. So when God now looks upon us, He sees Christ. When He sees us, He sees His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased. ***‘For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous’*** (Rom. 5:19).

But God is just. Payment had to be made for our sins. As judge, He simply could not overlook our iniquity, any more than an earthly judge can release a convicted murderer who is serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole because he has a change of heart. But again, Jesus Christ stepped into the picture. As our substitute, Christ endured the divine punishment in our place upon the cross. While Jesus hung there on Calvary--suffering the very pains and anguish of hell itself--it was as if you and I were hanging there and suffering. The Father then gave His stamp of approval upon everything His Son had accomplished by raising Him on the third day. By Christ’s physical resurrection from the dead, God declares to us that everything has been paid in full. ***‘For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him’*** (2 Cor. 5:21). He ***‘was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification’*** (Rom. 4:25).

Our Evangelical Lutheran Church’s own Formula of Concord states the nature of this gospel so succinctly when it confesses:

Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach and confess unanimously, ...that poor sinful man is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins, and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and adopted into sonship and heirship of eternal life, without any merit or worth of our own, also without any preceding, present, or any subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us for righteousness.

These treasures are offered us by the Holy Ghost in the promise of the holy Gospel; and faith alone is the only means by which we lay hold upon, accept, and apply, and appropriate them to ourselves. This faith is a gift of God...⁴

Second, How Is the Gospel Replaced as the Center of Our Ministry?

“The Gospel is evasive because it is totally spiritual and therefore contrary to the thinking of natural man.”⁵ The good news of Jesus Christ is foreign to our sinful human nature. Paul writes, ***‘But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned’*** (1 Cor. 2:14). The world we live in is hostile to the gospel: ***‘...The light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than***

light...” (John 3:19). And the devil, our old evil foe, *“walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8).

Since the gospel is so foreign to our natural man, it is very tempting to replace it with something else as the center of our proclamation and ministry. In our circles especially it is tempting to replace the gospel with another teaching of Holy Scripture--the doctrine of church fellowship.

Although our congregation was not, our synod was born in the midst of controversy. In the 1950s we witnessed the disintegration of the Synodical Conference, due to false doctrine in the Missouri Synod. In the midst of this turmoil we discovered that our former affiliations had also strayed from their Biblical position on church fellowship. Scripture teaches us that when a brother in the faith (or a sister church body) has been determined to be a false teacher after patient and evangelical admonition, we are to avoid him. The Bible verse that deals with this matter is Romans 16:17, *“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”*

Scripture is clear. But the Wisconsin Synod (WELS), to which many of us formerly belonged, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), to which some of us belonged, changed their official teaching in this matter. The new doctrine that developed due to the circumstances of the time was this: if a sister church body, after patient brotherly admonition, has been *“noted to cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which we have learned,”* we need not avoid it as Scripture commands. But we are to continue admonishing until our own human reason has determined it’s not doing any more good. In obedience to this same Word of God, then, in Romans 16:17, the Church of the Lutheran Confession was born. It was born in the midst of controversy. [Note: *It is entirely proper periodically (but not necessarily constantly and incessantly) to review for ourselves the reasons for our existence as a synod. After so many years--almost 40 years now--memories fade. We ask ourselves, and our children and grandchildren ask, if our reasons for avoiding fellowship with our former brethren are still valid. The answer is a resounding, “Yes!”*]

Because of the circumstances surrounding the birth of our synod, it can be very tempting to replace the gospel with the doctrine of church fellowship. If that would occur, church fellowship is all we would end up talking about and emphasizing. In the early 1960s Prof. Edmund Reim sounded the warning loudly and clearly:

We are gathered as a group that has taken matters of doctrine seriously, both with regard to the statement of such doctrine and the way in which it is to be translated into life. We have come through a crisis and arrived at a decision. At such times it is so natural to relax, to find a certain measure of satisfaction in having stood one’s ground, to engage in a process of building up one’s own self-esteem, usually at the expense of others who (in our estimation) did not meet the test so well [A footnote says here: ‘This does not imply, of course, that the issue itself is merely a matter of human judgment’]. For after all, haven’t we stood for the right doctrine? --Or we may sense the danger of such an attitude of complacency and, feeling the need of justifying ourselves before the world as well as before our own consciences, launch forth into an endless round of reviewing the issues, restating the arguments, re-refuting the counterarguments, reformulating our conclusions---all with the plea that we are contending for the doctrine!⁶

Unfortunately, however, we have not always paid attention to Prof. Reim’s sound words of advice. A son of our own congregation once observed:

The mark of a sect is that its existence centers around one particular doctrine or teaching. The Seventh Day Adventist (sic) defines a true Christian in terms of keeping the Old Testament Sabbath. The hard-shell Baptist defines a Christian in terms of not smoking and drinking. The Pentecostal or Evangelical defines a Christian in terms of a religious experience or new life-style. It is very easy for us to define a Christian in terms of church-fellowship. Early in my ministry a devout lady from the ALC remarked that whereas in the ALC she had heard nothing of confessional fellowship now she seems to hear nothing but fellowship. And she was right.⁷

Another writer has this to say about misplaced emphasis in our teaching and practice:

The modern church has become an elaborate, complex organization that bewilders many Christians with its complexity. There is a need to return to the simplicity that is to be found in Christ alone. In order to keep things in proper perspective let us consider the following diagram of a wheel.

The wheel represents the written Word of God, the Holy Bible. The hub represents the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. The spokes represent the various other teachings of the Bible (doctrines).

Liberalism breaks one spoke after another by accepting the higher critical method of Bible interpretation which questions or denies the various teachings of the Bible.

Conservatism [*a better word to use here would be 'Legalism'--SK*] often replaces the hub of the wheel with a spoke by emphasizing a particular doctrine of the Bible more than the Gospel itself.

Either way, the final result is the collapse of the wheel. A church or Christian that goes to one extreme or the other is no longer teaching the Word of God.⁸

Third, How Should the Gospel Be Reflected in the Ministry Activities of the Church?

Our commission from Christ--who is the only Head of the Church--is to share the Word of God so the Holy Spirit can work in human hearts. Law and gospel are to be proclaimed, with the gospel having the pre-eminence.

- ***“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word!”*** (2 Tim. 4:1,2).
- ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”*** (Matt. 28:19,20).
- ***“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”*** (Luke 24:46,47).
- ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”*** (Mark 16:15).

And so when we then apply the teachings and precepts of God’s Word to our everyday ministry as a congregation, and to our everyday lives as Christians, ***it should always be in light of the gospel.*** Here are just a few examples out of several we could give to illustrate this point: In marital counseling situations we should point out that the love husbands and wives are to have for one another is based on the love between Christ and the Church. When parents have problems with their children, they should deal with them as our heavenly Father deals with us in Christ. When we endeavor to encourage our members to greater giving, our Christian stewardship should not be motivated by the needs of the church so we can make our budget, but in response to Christ’s great love for us. And when it comes to specific applications of religious fellowship, we should remember that the Lord wants us to stay away from false teachers, and fellowship only with those who are agreed with us in all the teachings of Scripture, ***because false doctrine will eventually take from us the very gospel itself:***

Thus in heterodox churches, in order to defend false doctrine, God’s Word must continually be denied. It is rightly said: “It cost nine lies to maintain one lie.” Whoever allows himself such liberties with the Word of God, let him beware, lest the devil also make this clear Word doubtful for him in the hour of death: ***“The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.”*** 1 John 1:7⁹

Even our dealings with brothers and sisters in the faith who have become trapped in one sin or another should be motivated from the gospel. In Matthew 18, the steps which our Lord gives us to deal with a Christian brother or sister who has become trapped in sin are to be carried out in patient love. Being patient with a straying and weak brother or sister, however, should never be construed as being soft or permissive or condoning of sin. The Lord’s guidelines are given us so a straying and weak Christian may be ***rescued.*** ***“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that one sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not***

go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matt. 18:14).

This is where the strength of our spiritual forefathers lay. The gospel was at the center of what they taught and practiced. The Formula of Concord:

This article concerning justification by faith...is the chief article in the entire Christian doctrine, without which no poor conscience can have any firm consolation, or can truly know the riches of the grace of Christ, as Dr. Luther also has written: *If this only article remains pure on the battlefield, the Christian Church also remains pure, and in goodly harmony and without any sects; but if it does not remain pure, it is not possible that any error or fanatical spirit can be resisted.*¹⁰

Writing in connection with the 50th Anniversary of the Synodical Conference and the 75th Anniversary of the Missouri Synod, Prof. August Pieper of the Lutheran Seminary in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin had this to say about Dr. C.F.W. Walther, of whom we quoted earlier:

It is, therefore, his strong *emphasis on the objective character of God's act of justification* which is the distinctive feature of Walther's way of teaching. It permeates everything he said and wrote in his teaching, yes, gives it its specific stamp. For this writer, a Luther hour in which Walther explained the announcement of the Christmas angel in this sense remains unforgettable. He told about a spiritually troubled old woman who came to joyful faith when he explained this to her. In conclusion he added that the entire gospel can be summed up in the one word the Savior spoke to the paralyzed man, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven' (Mt 9:2). This, he said, is the *joyful* message with which the risen Lord sent His disciples into the world when he gave them the commission, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.' The gospel is God's absolution without conditions to every sinner who hears it. When Walther said this, it seemed as though the Spirit of God was moving through the large hall, and the eyes of many lighted up with joy.

Make no mistake. *The secret of Walther's power lay in his clear, popular, joyful, and convincing presentation of objective justification.* That was also Luther's power, Paul's power, the power of the gospel itself, the power of God which creates faith unto salvation. On this point the division occurs between true gospel and false gospel; pure doctrine and false doctrine.... Walther knew how to make his hearers sure of grace ... like Luther, he preached to every sinner--not merely to the believing--God's free, unconditional, complete grace and forgiveness in Christ.¹¹

J. P. Koehler, another faithful professor at the old Wauwatosa seminary, spoke of what occurs when the gospel is not our motivator:

There is present in the Christian a nature that takes its *impulses* for behavior from the law ... that is, from demanding, threatening, condemning. The Christian allows the *demanding* of the law to serve for obedience to God's will. He perceives the will of God as a foreign will burdening him; he does not of course dare to act contrary to it, but he does not act as if he stood in blessed confidence in God; the old *suspicion* remains. The Christian allows the *threatening* of the law to serve as impulse for obedience so that *selfishness* in the form of venality becomes his motive for acting. The Christian lets himself be driven by the law's condemnation, so that *fear* lies at the root of his behavior. He uses this manner not only when in this way he takes the law as the starting point for his obedience, but also when he *imposes* it on *others* for their obedience.

That is an absurdity, since the nature of the Christian's new life does not correspond to it. The new life would rather take the impulses for its behavior from the gospel. The new nature which the gospel brings forth is faith, love, hope.¹²

Conclusion

The following was written in 1988:

The current situation of American Lutheranism becomes terribly, indeed ultimately, serious if one asks a simple question: Where in American Christianity is the gospel being

proclaimed? The question need not be answered with complete pessimism, yet the present condition of American Christianity (and, let it be quickly added, America is by no means unique in this) hardly allows many answers of positive heartiness.¹³

May God in His grace always allow us to proclaim the Gospel in all its beauty, comfort, glory and purity here at St. Paul's, throughout the Church of the Lutheran Confession, and even beyond our circles. May the Good News of "*Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" always be at the heart and center of our teaching and practice. To this end help us, dear heavenly Father!

The Gospel shows the Father's grace,
Who sent His Son to save our race,
Proclaims how Jesus lived and died
That man might thus be justified.

It sets the Lamb before our eyes,
Who made th'atoning sacrifice,
And calls the souls with guilt opprest
To come and find eternal rest.

It brings the Savior's righteousness
Our souls to robe in royal dress;
From all our guilt it brings release
And gives the troubled conscience peace.

It is the pow'r of God to save
From sin and Satan and the grave;
It works the faith, which firmly clings
To all the treasures which it brings.

It bears to all the tidings glad
And bids their hearts no more be sad;
The heavy-laden souls it cheers
And banishes their guilty fears.

May we in faith its tidings learn
Nor thanklessly its blessings spurn;
May we in faith its truth confess
And praise the Lord our Righteousness! Amen.

Matthias Loy, 1863
Hymn 297, *The Lutheran Hymnal*

NOTES

¹ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law And Gospel*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928) 4.

² All Bible quotations are from the *Holy Bible: The New King James Version*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

³ Luther quoted by Walther, *Law And Gospel*, 408.

⁴ Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article III, Paragraphs 9,10; *Triglot Concordia*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921) 919.

⁵ Frederick M. Archer, *Working For The Lord...Like The Devil*, (Landis, North Carolina: Archer

Publishing, 1990) 91.

⁶ Edmund Reim, "Things to Guard against in Our Approach toward Re-alignment," (*Journal Of Theology*, Volume 2, Number 1, February 1962) 2.

⁷ John Schierenbeck, "How to Be both Confessional and Ecumenical," (CLC Southeastern Pastoral Conference paper, 1981) 6.

⁸ Archer, op. cit., 92,93.

⁹ Francis Pieper, *The Difference Between Orthodox And Heterodox Churches, And Supplement*, (Coos Bay, Oregon: St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 1981) 40.

¹⁰ Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Section, III, paragraph 6, *Triglott Concordia*, 917.

¹¹ August Pieper, from "Jubiläumsnachgedanken," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 1923. Reprinted in English as "Anniversary Reflections," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. 3, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) 252,253.

¹² J.P. Koehler, from "Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 1914 and 1915. Reprinted in English as "Legalism among Us," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. 2, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) 235.

¹³ Peter L. Berger, "American Lutheranism at a Crossroads," *Dialog*, (Volume 27, Number 2, St. Paul: Spring 1988) 90.

Christ's Subordination to His Father*

John K. Pfeiffer

* Presented to the CLC General Pastoral Conference, June 17-19, 1997.

† Unless marked by (†), all references are from the NASB.

Introduction

'Confessedly great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in flesh . . .' (1 Tim. 2:16[†]). So great is the mystery that one trembles at the thought of probing into it. However, our fears should not prevent us from examining that which has been revealed to us. To shrink back from such a task would be to rob ourselves of truth which has been given *"for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"* (Rom. 15:4). On the other hand, to go beyond the revelation of Scripture will bring nothing but disaster. Therefore, this study is undertaken with the prayer that the Lord will guide us as far as His Word leads and that He will stop us where His Word stops.

The Divine Nature

'God was manifest in the flesh.' Here revealed is the truth that the omnipotent, infinite God was revealed to the world in the weak, finite flesh of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we can declare that which is a mystery: in the person of Jesus of Nazareth we see the God of the universe. *'He who has seen me has seen the Father'* (John 14:9).

JESUS IS GOD! The Christian Church has proclaimed this truth since its beginning. Time and again this truth has been assaulted by the devil and his minions, for he knows that if this truth is destroyed, then he has gained the victory. If Jesus is not God, His life and death are of no value.

However, "one little word can fell him." The Word of God is more powerful than Satan. As often as he has tried to destroy the truth, so often the "sword of the Spirit" has overcome him .

One little Word:

– *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the*

Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1,14).

- *“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” (Acts 20:28).*
- *“Whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever” (Rom. 9:5).*
- *“Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit. 2:13).*
- *“And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is true God and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20).*

The Human Nature

“God was manifest in the flesh.” As true as is the divine nature, so true is the human nature of Christ.

- *“And the Word became flesh...” (John 1:14).*
- *“Whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh...” (Rom. 9:5).*
- *“But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...” (Gal. 4:4).*
- *“There is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).*
- *“By this we know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (1 John 4:2).*
- *“Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb. 2:14f.).*

In every sense He was human: in body, soul, and spirit. This truth, also, has been repeatedly attacked by Satan. If he can persuade men to deny the reality of the flesh of Christ, then they will also deny the reality of the vicarious atonement. A fleshless Christ would have had nothing to offer to God on behalf of mankind.

“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

The Uniting of the Two Natures

“God was manifest in the flesh.” The mystery is not that there is a God nor that there is a man, but that God was manifest in the flesh. How can this be? We content ourselves with the simple statement of faith: *“Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).* As for biological or metaphysical explanations of the uniting of the two natures, we are left in the dark. God has not bothered to explain that which the human mind cannot possibly understand. The fact that the two natures were united in one person is revealed to us, as is seen in the passages quoted above. The intimacy of this union has been revealed, also.

“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” (Acts 20:28). Blood is a part of the fleshly existence ... a part of the human nature. Yet, Paul identifies the blood of Christ as being the blood of God. This could happen only through the intimate communication of attributes. Likewise, divine attributes are attributed to the human nature.

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory, as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

John beheld divine glory in that flesh. Even if this refers only to that which he beheld on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt . 17), it still shows that the divine attributes were communicated to the human nature.

Indeed, Colossians 1:19 declares that “... *it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross...*” The reference to blood indicates that “Him” refers to the incarnate Son of God. The verses that follow verify this.

As for the meaning of “the fulness,” in 2:9, Paul uses the same expression, adding τῆς θεότητος, “the Godhead.” We consider 1:19 to be referring to the same “fulness.”

In Romans 1:3, Paul writes, “*concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David, according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead ...*” It was not someone else who “was born.” It was “His Son.” It was not someone else “who was declared to be the Son of God.” It was this one “who was born. . . according to the flesh.” Thus, Jesus of Nazareth, the one person, was at one and the same time fully divine and fully human.

The Humiliation

The single passage which gives us the most instruction in the matter of the humbling of the God-man is that found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:5-11). Since this passage has been misunderstood by some, leading them to some false conclusions about the nature of Christ’s humiliation, an examination of this passage is in order.

In chapter 2 Paul is urging the Philippians to focus their attention in an outward direction, away from themselves and toward their brethren. This includes a humbling of oneself... a willingness to recognize others as being more important than oneself. In so doing they would be open to the thoughts and needs of others. Thus they could work toward a real unity. . . an inner unity, wherein they think alike. -- Having so urged them, he directs their attention to the supreme example.

Verse 5

τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
this think in yourself which also in Christ Jesus

τοῦτο refers back to the previous thoughts on selflessness.

φρονεῖτε - Whereas νοῦς is the mind, the faculty of perception and understanding, φρήν refers to the processes of the mind (*thinking*). φρονέω would then refer to the processing of the mind (*I think*). What follows reveals the kind of thinking that filled the mind of the Son of God as He became flesh.

Verse 6

ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάχων οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ,
who in form of God subsisting not seizing he considered the to be equal to God,

μορφῇ - *form; outward appearance* - This word is used three times in the NT. Other than the two usages in this section, μορφῇ is used only in Mark 16:12, where it describes Christ’s post-resurrection appearance to the two disciples on the road as being in “another form.”

The word μορφῇ refers to some kind of *form* whether an actual visible, physical *form* or something more abstract. (Cf. appendix #1 for a more complete word study.) Yet the *form* must contain the essential attributes of that which it represents. If it has the *form* of the thing, it is the same as the thing; verily, it **is** the thing.

The expression μορφῇ θεοῦ is found only in this place. Since we cannot find parallel passages to help us understand this expression, we must proceed on the basis of the immediate context. One thing that can be said is that this does not refer to physical, visible appearance, since God is a spirit.

The context contains the contrasting expression, μορφῇ δούλου. Our idea of what constitutes a “God” is limited, but we surely know what a slave is. In itself, μορφῇ δούλου does not refer to the

external nature of a human being, since it could also refer to an angel. The “*form of a slave*” then must refer to that which makes a slave a slave ... the essence of a slave. A slave is one who is bound to subordinate his own will to the will of his master. It is as Paul urged the Christian slaves, that they should be “*us slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart*” (Eph. 6:6).

The *form of God* must be the opposite of the *form of a slave*. If the *form of slave* is the essence of servitude ... the subjection of one’s own will to that of the master, the *form of God* must refer to the absolute dominance of one’s own will. Even so the context emphasizes this (cf. later notes on κενώω).

ὑπάρχων is variously translated: *begin below or under* (i.e. *begin quietly* - cf. Strong); *make a beginning; come forth, be there; be; subsist*.

The present participle indicates an ongoing condition, one which came from the past (relative to the main verb), continues in the present, and extends into the future. It is durative and linear. — Thus, what is being described was true prior to the activity referred to in the context and is true during and after that activity. — At the time that *He did not regard equality with God a thing to be snatched ...* at that time He was subsisting in the form of God.

ἄρπαγμός comes from the root: ἀρπάζω - *seize, carry off by force, snatch*. This is found in such passages as the following:

John 6:15 - *they were about to seize Him* (to make Him king).

John 10:12 - *the wolf snatches them* (sheep).

Matthew 13:19 - *the evil one snatches that sown in his heart*.

Jude 23 - *snatch others from the fire*.

Acts 8:39 - *the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip*.

The verb refers to a sudden reaching out and grasping of something which is not in one’s own possession. Whether or not the subject has a right to seize the object is not addressed by the verb.

ἄρπαγμός is a hapax legomenon. The context and the root form help us to understand the meaning. The meaning of the verb is given above. The suffix -μός stresses the action, rather than the object, which is usually indicated by the suffix -μα. BAG (Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich) declares that ἄρπαγμός is equal to ἀρπαγμά, although the NT contains no examples. The author recites two examples within Christian literature and admits that there are none outside. However, as an hermeneutical principle, the simplest and most obvious meaning should be the first choice, unless the context militates against it. The usages of the verb in the NT indicate that the word itself does not reveal the right of the subject to seize the object. If he has no such right, then a word like *robbery* would be fitting. If he has the right, then a word like *seizure, grasping, snatching* might be chosen. Thus, Jesus did not regard being equal with God as something outside of Himself that He had to actively seize and secure for Himself. Rather, being in the form of God, He was already equal with God; yea, He **was** God before the incarnation.

ἡγήσατο - ἡγέομαι - Thayer: *to lead, go before; be a leader, rule, command, have authority over; consider, think, deem, account*. — BAG: *lead, guide* (only in present ptc.); *think, consider, regard, look upon, deem*.

The aorist indicative is punctiliar. At the specific *time* that the Son of God considered the incarnation, He did not regard possessing the state of being equal with God as seizure, for it was His already.

τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is the direct object of the verb ἡγήσατο. It defines the thing that *He did not regard*. It is the **being** equal that He did not regard as robbery or seizure. The wording demonstrates that it is not equality as such that is under consideration, but the exercise of that equality, : “the being equal.”

Verse 7

ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὐρέθει· ὡς ἄνθρωπος

but Himself He emptied form of slave taking in likeness of men becoming; and in appearance

being found as man

ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν - The Son of God emptied Himself. The question is, “Of what did He empty Himself?” Is it not enough to say “He emptied himself” or “He emptied His *self*”? This is similar to the expression, “let him deny himself,” **ἀπαρνησάσθω ἐαυτὸν** (Matt. 16:24).

The context (Philippians 2) tells us that *self* is not of greatest importance. In lowliness of mind, we are to esteem others as being better than *ourselves* (**ἐαυτῶν** - v. 3). Each one of us is not to look upon the things of *himself* (**τὰ ἐαυτῶν** - v. 1), but also upon the things of others. Christ, the supreme example of *selflessness*, emptied **ἐαυτὸν**. He then humbled **ἐαυτὸν** even to the point of dying on the cross. He did not exalt **ἐαυτὸν**; rather, God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name.

In emptying Himself, Jesus made *self* of no importance. Rather, He put Himself in the frame of mind wherein He would accept the Father as His GOD, the One whose will would be supreme in His life. Thus, He submitted His will to that of the Father. It was after He had completed the work of reconciliation that God exalted Him, placing His will above all others, so that every one will bow to Him and every tongue will call Him “Lord” (v. 11).

Of course, this cannot be taken out of its context. The emptying of self was in direct relationship with the preceding. **Ἄλλά** sets this verse in an adversative relationship with what comes before. The clause that immediately precedes this says that Jesus did not regard the exercise of equality with God as something outside of Himself ... something that He must seize in order to make it His own. He did not regard it so, because He was already subsisting in the form of God.

It is in connection with this exercise of equality that Jesus emptied Himself. Since it was not a form of seizure for Jesus to exercise equality with God, He could well have insisted upon His right to continue that exercise. By emptying Himself, however, Jesus ceased to insist on His rights. Rather, He did what is revealed in the following.

μορφὴν δούλου λαβών - λαβών, being an aorist participle, expresses coincidental activity in this context. When He emptied Himself, He took upon Himself the form of a slave.

μορφὴν δούλου - Cf. notes re: **μορφῇ θεοῦ** above.

ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος - ὁμοίωμα - *likeness, becoming in likeness of men*. This phrase narrows the previous expression (**μορφῇ θεοῦ**). While angels also are servants of God, Jesus was not in the form of an angel, but rather in the likeness of men.

“For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like (ὁμοιωθῆναι) His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:16,17).

The only exception to this is that Jesus did not have sin (Heb. 4:15).

However, sin is not part of the essence of man. Rather, it is an *accidens*, which Adam and Eve introduced to the human nature in the Garden of Eden.

σχῆματι εὐρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος - σχήματι - Th.: *comprising everything in a person which strikes the senses, the figure, bearing, discourse, manner of life, etc. - outward appearance, form, shape*. — What the eyes saw, what the ears heard, what the hands touched ... everything that men sensed in the physical person of Jesus told them that He was a man.

Verse 8

ἐταπεινώσεν ἐαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ.
He humbled Himself becoming obedient until death, death even of a cross

Did the actions of verse 7 precede those of verse 8? The temporal sequence of events is not made known here. One might think that all happened simultaneously. However, it can be said that merely being human does not mean that Jesus was lowly. Even now the exalted Christ possesses the human nature. Although it is filled with the fulness of the Godhead, it is nevertheless truly human (Col.

2:9). This verse leaves no doubt regarding the condition of Jesus Christ while He was here on earth. *He humbled Himself* (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν) Rather than living in an exalted, divine state (τὸ εἶναι ἰσα θεῶ), He lowered Himself to live in the state of man, yet without the sin.

γενόμενος ὑπήκοος - This phrase is descriptive of the action of humbling. *‘He humbled Himself, becoming obedient.’*

How contrary to all thinking that **God** should **obey**. Supremacy of the will is implicit in the word “god.” How can it be that one who is “in the form of God” should have to obey anyone? *‘Great is the mystery of godliness.’* That which would seem impossible has happened.

Conclusion of 5-8

He — **had no grasping attitude toward being equal with God,**
being in the form of God
— **emptied Himself,**
taking the form of a slave,
and becoming like men
— **humbled Himself,**
becoming obedient until death on the cross.

Everything in bold print was true of Jesus Christ during His state of humiliation. God lowered Himself to live as a slave of God. Truly, the Father did become the God of the Son, because the Son of God made Himself into a slave of God.

Consider Christ at the lowest point of His humiliation, when He cried out, *‘My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?’* (Matt. 27:46) He did have One who was “His God.” The impossible was possible. Yet, Jesus remained God! Philippians 2 does not say that He ceased to be in the form of God nor that He ceased to be equal with God. What did stop during His humiliation was “the being equal.” He ceased His ongoing exercise of equality. In order for this to take place, He had to empty Himself of all that is implied by the word ‘self’... of all focus on personal rights or needs or desires.

Subordination

It should be clear from the exegesis and commentary of Philippians 2 that Jesus did indeed subordinate Himself to the Father during His state of humiliation. Jesus was the עֶבֶר יְהוָה, the “Servant of Jehovah” spoken of by Isaiah: *‘Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights...’* (42:1). This is the Servant, who was *‘high and lifted up, and greatly exalted’* (52:13), and at the same time was *‘despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief’* (53:3). He was stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, bruised, chastened, oppressed, and cut off from the land of the living. Indeed, it was Jehovah Himself who *‘was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief’* (53:10). All of this took place so that *‘by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities’* (53:11).

In all things, Jesus submitted to the will of the Father. At the beginning of His ministry He was baptized in order to *‘fulfil all righteousness’* (Matt. 3:15). -- In the wilderness, He learned in a painful way what it means that *‘man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’* (Matt. 4:4) -- In Cana, He refused to turn water into wine until the designated time (cf. John 2:4). -- At the well of Samaria, He told His disciples, *‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work’* (John 4:34). -- At the Pool of Bethesda, He told the Jews, *‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself (οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ οὐδὲν), unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner ... I can do nothing an My own initiative (οὐ δύναμαι ἐγὼ ποιεῖν ἄπ’ ἑμαυτοῦ οὐδέν). As I hear I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me’* (John 5:19,30). -- And to the people of Capernaum, Jesus said, *‘I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will*

of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day” (John 6:38). -- At the Feast of Dedication, He told the people, “. . . *the works that I do in My Father’s name, these bear witness of Me*” (John 10:25). His works were done in connection with--on the basis of--His Father’s identity and authority.

Finally, and perhaps most dramatically, are Christ’s enigmatic words in Gethsemene: *“Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done”* (Luke 22:12). These words are recorded not so that we will have doubts about the will of Christ, but so that we will know that Christ submitted completely to the Father ... that His will was to do His Father’s will. Jesus was obedient unto death. That much is clear; that much we need to know and need to teach.

When we say that the Son subordinated His will to the will of His Father, we are not saying that the Son had a different will nor a contrary will. A slave may be in perfect agreement with his master. However, the slave’s obedience to his master is not based on his personal agreement with the will of his master, but rather on the superior authority of his master. Even so, we believe that Christ’s will was in perfect agreement with the will of the Father, but His obedience was not based on this agreement; rather it was based on the superior authority of His Father at the time of the humiliation. And the Father’s authority was superior, because the Son emptied Himself, took on the form of a slave, made Himself like men, and humbled Himself. Even so it had to be, if there was to be salvation for mankind.

The Purpose of Subordination

The law was the expression of God’s holy will for mankind. It was given so that sinners might become fully aware of their sinfulness (Rom. 7), so that the wickedness of the unregenerate might be curbed by their fear of punishment (Rom. 13), and so that the regenerate might have a written account of the will of God to use in directing their gospel-generated love (Ps. 119:9f.).

It is because man has set his will against the will of God (Rom. 8:7f.), willingly violating His law, that God in love deemed it necessary to provide the way of salvation. This way of salvation does not ignore the revealed will of God, but rather provides the only manner in which the demands of the law can be fulfilled: vicarious atonement. One would be chosen who is sufficient to stand in the place of all men and satisfy all the demands of the law: demands for righteousness and for punishment. His substitutionary works then would be acceptable to God on behalf of all flesh.

So it is that the voluntary subordination of the Son to the Father took place so that the righteousness of the Righteous One would cover the unrighteousness of the unrighteous ones (mankind). He was *“born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons”* (Gal.4:4f.).

Although it never happened, if Christ had exerted His own will without consideration of the will of the Father, His righteousness would not be acceptable in terms of vicarious obedience. After all, man, for whom He served as a substitute, is not free to exert his own will independently of the will of God. God’s will is always supreme and man is always subordinate. In order for the work of the Savior to be a true substitute for man’s work, the Savior had to be in the same position as man: born under the law ... born subject to the will of God.

Christ also died subject to the will of God. In Gethsemene He declared the subjection of His will in the matter of His sufferings and death. He took the cup which the Father had given Him to drink. He satisfied the law’s demand that there be a curse upon those who sin. Our sin became His sin; our curse became His curse. *“For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them’ ... 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’”* (Gal. 3:10,13).

Thanks be unto the Son of God, whose love for wretched sinners was so great that He was willing to lay aside the exercise of His equality with God and to submit Himself to the will of the Father, so that He could obtain a righteousness that God would credit to our account and so that He could pay the price for our unrighteousness, setting us free from the curse of eternal death. *“God was*

in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not counting their trespasses against them ... He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:19,21).

The Exercise of Power

It has been said that Philippians 2 teaches that the humiliation of the Son of God included the fact that, even though He was true God, He denied to Himself all use of His divine powers. According to this belief, in all His miracles He called upon the power of His Father. In short, He emptied Himself of any and every use of His powers. His miracles were performed as man would perform them ... as the disciples performed them.

However, of which of the disciples do we read that the power to perform miracles came from within themselves? *But Jesus said, ‘Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone forth from Me (δύναμιν ἐξεληλυθυῖαν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ)’ (Luke 8:46).* The woman with the issue of blood had come up behind Him and touched the hem of His garment. When she did this, He felt a ‘power drain.’ The power went out of (ἐκ) and away from (ἀπο) Him. It was a power that Jesus had within Himself.

Likewise, none of the disciples ever manifested forth their own glory in the performance of miracles. But we read of Jesus, *‘This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory (ἐθανέρωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ), and His disciples believed in Him” (John 2:11).* The glory spoken of can be only that which John referred to earlier: *“... we beheld His glory (τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ), glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14).*

In healing the two blind men, Jesus asked them, *“Do you believe that I am able (δύναμαι) to do this?” They said to Him., ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘Be it done to you according to your faith.’ And their eyes were opened ...” (Matt. 9:28f.).* As a result of their faith in His power, they were healed.

Does this exertion of innate, divine power on the part of Christ somehow interrupt the humiliation? Not at all. We all have power to some degree or another, but as Christians we exercise our powers only in accord with the will of God. Even so, Jesus exercised His powers only according to the will of God. When He manifested forth His glory it was only at the pre-designated time and because the Father willed it to be so.

The same holds true on the Mount of Transfiguration. *‘He was transfigured before them; and His face shown like the sun, and His garments became as white as light” (Matt. 17:2).* Peter comments on this occurrence: *“... we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased” (2 Pet. 1:16f.).* It did not interrupt His humiliation when **His** majesty was revealed on the mountain, because it happened not as an exercise of His own will, but rather as an exercise of the will of the Father: *‘He received honor and glory from the Father.’*

What of the time when the leper said, *‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean’?* Jesus then replied, *‘I am willing; be cleansed” (Matt. 8:2f.).* Is this not an exercise of His will in the performance of a miracle? Certainly it is, but not independently from the will of the Father. Jesus never performed miracles **unwillingly.**

This also is my understanding of the statement in the Formula of Concord (Trig., 1023, 25): *“In virtue of this he also wrought all his miracles, and manifested this his divine majesty, according to his pleasure, when and as he willed, and therefore not first after his resurrection and ascension only, but also in His state of humiliation ...”*

The section which contains this statement is explaining how the man, Jesus Christ, was able to do many of the miraculous things that He did. It is not comparing the will of the Son to that of the Father. Therefore this statement ought not to be understood as referring to an exercise of His will apart from His Father, but in submission to Him.

Acts 10:38, also, is quoted in this context: *‘God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit*

and with power and He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him.”⁺ It should be noted that the name “Jesus of Nazareth” is used. This name identifies His human origins. Truly, Jesus the man was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the human nature; by the working of the Spirit the power of His divine nature was poured out on the human nature.

At all times during His humiliation, the Son of God remained in subjection to the Father. Even in the exercise of power, He remained in subjection. This is shown during the temptation in the wilderness. When Jesus was confronted with the temptation to ease His hunger by the use of His divine power, He replied, *‘It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’* (Matt. 4:4). God’s word to Jesus was that He should not exercise His power for personal advantage.

This is evident throughout His life. He never used His power to make things easier for Himself in carrying out the work of redemption. He did not use His power to resist the temptations of the devil, but was *‘tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin’* (Heb. 4:15). Verily, *‘He Himself suffered being tempted’* (Heb. 2:18⁺). Neither did He use His divine power to help bear the agonies on Calvary. He suffered the full penalty for the sins of the world. His obedience and suffering was not a sham; it was not an imitation of that which we owed to God. It was in every way the same. He did it as a man. Thus, His work is acceptable as a substitute for what we should have done. Every use of divine attributes was for the sake of others: to alleviate the sufferings of others and to make it evident to others that He was the promised Messiah (John. 5:36).

The Exaltation

9. διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα,
Wherefore also God Him super-exalted and freely gave to Him the name the one above every name,
10. ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων,
so that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend of heavenly ones and of earthly ones and of ones under the earth
11. καὶ πάντα γλῶσσαι ἐξομολογήσεται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς.
and every tongue should openly confess that Lord is Jesus Christ unto glory of God Father

What professing Christian would question the exaltation of Jesus Christ? *‘When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high’* (Heb. 1:3). However, some do question the degree to which He was exalted. As was stated before, Christ was always in the form of God and always possessed equality with God. What He laid aside was *τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ ‘the being equal with God’*: the exercise of equality. With His exaltation, He cast off the form of a slave, reverted back to His former glorification, and once again began to exercise that which was His all along.

One major difference was that He now possessed a human nature. Observing the various, supernatural things that Christ did with His body (appearing & disappearing; passing through solid walls; ascending into heaven), one comes to the conclusion that the exercise of equality with God also applied to His human nature. Indeed, *‘in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily’* (Col. 2:9⁺). Thus, Scripture calls His body “glorious” (Phil. 3:21).

Still, as a human being, Jesus was a creature of God. Is it for this reason that, after His resurrection, He said to Mary, *‘Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God’* (John 20:17). In so far as He was flesh and blood, the Father is “His God.” Does this, then, make Him something less than the Father, even if it be only according to His human nature? By no means. “All the fulness of the Godhead” dwells in Him. The word “all” leaves nothing that is not put in Him

‘bodily.’ Power, majesty, authority ... all the attributes of the Godhead are found in Christ Jesus, the God-man.

Subordination has to do with the exercise of authority. The risen Jesus declared to His disciples: *“All authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth ...”* (Matt .28:18). ‘Heaven and earth’ embrace the totality of that which exists: the abode of God and the abode of man. Within these abodes, Jesus Christ possesses “all authority.” “All” leaves nothing that is not under His authority, except the other Persons of the Godhead, who share in “all authority.”

‘Hence also the human nature, after the resurrection from the dead, has its exaltation above all creatures in heaven and on earth; which is nothing else than that He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, and yet did not lay aside His human nature, but retains it to eternity, and is put in the full possession and use of the divine majesty according to His assumed human nature’ (Trig. 1023, 26).

The Trinity

One of the greatest mysteries of all is the nature of the Holy Trinity. We know the bare facts: three Persons, one God. As for the relationship of these three and the inner workings of the Trinity, we know precious little. However, this ‘little’ is almost more than our minds can handle.

We *understand* that the three Persons are always working together. There is a unity of purpose and effort. Yet, we also realize that there is something unique in the incarnation of the Son. The Father and the Spirit did not become flesh, nor did they die on the cross. Therefore, as baffling as it may be, we must maintain the singularity of the work of the Redeemer. The mystery must remain a mystery.

Also beyond our mental grasp is the thought that, while the Son of God was in the flesh here on earth, He was also in the circle of the Trinity in heaven. *“No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man, who is in heaven”* (John 3:13). However difficult this may be, it can help us to understand Christ, when He said, *“The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner”* (John 5:19). And again: *“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear I judge ...”* (John 5:30).

In discussing the subordination of the Son to the Father, however, we need to isolate those statements made about the incarnate Son of God, Jesus in the flesh. These need to be considered in the unique context of the humiliation. As for the mystery of *“the Son of man who is in heaven,”* this we leave for disclosure in hereafter.

Conclusion

Prior to the incarnation, the Son exercised the same authority as of the Father. During the state of humiliation, the incarnate Son subjected His will to that of the Father. After His exaltation, the glorified God-man exercises the same authority as of the Father.

The reason for the subordination during the state of humiliation was so that the Son of God could do for man what man did not do for himself: subject himself to the law of God and thus become righteous before God. It was done also so that the Son of God could endure for man the punishment that man had brought upon Himself.

In our closing song of praise, we gladly attribute equal dominion to the Father and the Son. *“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing ... To Him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and glory and dominion forever and ever”* (Rev. 5:12f.).

Appendix 1: additional exegetical notes on Philippians 2

5. φρονέω - BAG: *think, form (hold) an opinion, judge; set one’s mind on, be intent on; have thoughts, be minded (disposed.); Th.: have understanding, be wise, feel, think; direct one’s mind to a thing.*

φρήν - BAG: *thinking, understanding*; Th.: *midriff, diaphragm; mind, faculty of perceiving*; Zod.: *regarded as the seat or intellectual and spiritual activity*.

6. **μόρφωσις** - The suffix **-σις** denotes action: *the activity of forming: formulation, embodiment*.

Romans 2:20 - *form of knowledge*

2 Timothy 3:5 - *form of godliness*

Thus, the *form of knowledge*, while being abstract, is the embodiment of the essential attributes of knowledge. The law was the external embodiment of that which is internal, that which is within the mind of God.

Likewise, the *form of godliness* is the embodiment of the essential attributes of godliness. The evil men had the *form of godliness* ... in an external sense they possessed the embodiment of that which is internal. They had the outward trappings of godliness, but by denying the power thereof they failed to possess the internal reality of godliness.

In both of these passages the word **μόρφωσις** is used, which refers to the *formulation* of something ... *the giving of form* to something. They do not refer to the actual thing, but only to the formulation of that thing.

μορφώω - The verb **μορφώω**, meaning *to form, shape*, refers to something taking form. In Galatians 4:19 (*'I am in labor until Christ is formed in you'*), we have an allusion to the formation of a fetus in the womb. This is the actual forming of a human being. The fetus possesses all the characteristics of a human being. It is in the **μορφή** of a human being, i.e. it is a human being. This takes place at the moment of conception, at which time the embryo possesses everything that a full grown human possesses, albeit not in the same condition of development. -- Likewise, when a man comes to faith, *Christ is formed* in his heart.

ὑπάρξων - BAG: *exist, be present, be at one's disposal*; Th.: *begin below, make a beginning; come forth, be there; be*; Str. *-begin under (quietly). i. e., come into existence (be present or at hand)*. -- *subsist*.

7. **σχήματα** - BAG: *bearing, manner, comportment, outward appearance, form, shape* -- Th.: *comprising everything in a person which strikes the senses, the figure, bearing, discourse, manner of life, etc.*

Appendix 2: concerning 1 Corinthians 15:27

"He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected (preferably: will subject Himself) to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all."

Will the Son of God become subordinate to the Father at the end of time? If this were true, what then is the relationship of the Father and the Son before this subordination? Are we to imagine that Christ now exercises equality with the Father, but at sometime in the future He will become subordinate? This is a doubtful interpretation.

As I "see through the glass darkly," my understanding at this point is this: Jesus Christ, in His role as Redeemer and Mediator of the world, is actively involved in subduing all the enemies of Himself and of His Church. When death itself is finally eliminated, Jesus will lay all things at the feet of His Father, including His role. In this sense He will subject Himself to the Father. Henceforth, the role of Redeemer/Mediator will no longer be needed and God will be all in all.

NATHANAEL BARTHOLOMEW

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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Bartholomew is mentioned by that particular name only four times in Scripture (Matt. 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:14, Acts 1:13). Each time it is in connection with a simple listing of the apostles. If one were limited to these four passages the information on Bartholomew would be scant indeed. But it was common in those days for men to be known by more than one name (see John 6:71). In particular, a name would often be used which expressed the familial relationship of an individual. The name Bartholomew is patronymic, meaning literally "son of Talmi" (see 2 Sam. 13:37). There was a sect among the Jews known as the Tholmaens who gave much attention to the study of ancient Scripture. Bartholomew could have been familiar with that particular school and been known as one who studied the Scriptures as carefully as they did.

Bartholomew is most often identified as Nathanael. This identification is made because of the fact that in the synoptic gospels Bartholomew is always listed alongside Philip. It would seem as though these two were fairly constant companions. When John 1:45 lists Philip and Nathanael together, it is probably *Nathanael Bartholomew* (Nathanael son of Tolmai). It would not be unusual for John to refer to this apostle by his first name.

When one takes into account the fact that Nathanael and Bartholomew are one and the same, the door is opened for the Scriptures to speak in more passages. Nathanael was one of those who saw the risen and glorified Savior (John 21:2). The verses which stand out, however, are those which record Nathanael's encounter with Jesus in John 1:43-51.

JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH NATHANAEL WAS THE CONVERSATION HE HAS WITH HIS CHURCH THROUGHOUT HISTORY

It was Philip who first sought out Nathanael and made it known to him that the Son of God was at hand. Nathanael's first response was skepticism. Here was a man who was to be one of the Lord's disciples and he responded, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael's surprise seems evident even though it is likely that he was aware of the sayings that Jesus would be a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23). Nazareth had a very poor reputation and most Jews were embarrassed by the thought of their Messiah coming from such a despised city. Certainly there was confusion among the church leaders regarding Jesus' place of origin. Later on, they even rejected Jesus for this very reason. "But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? However, we know where this man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where he is from" (John 7:26-27). The Jewish church was very skeptical of their Savior -- skeptical because they had already lost sight of the true purpose of Christ's coming into the world. Had they forgotten the message of Genesis 3:15? Had they forgotten the prophecies of Moses and of David concerning the coming Messiah? During the 400 years between the writing of Malachi and the events recorded in Luke 2 the Jews had taken to following many different religious leaders such as Jesus Sirach (the author of the apocryphal book *Ecclesiasticus*). Teachers such as these who interpreted the law with such proficiency had interpreted away the very purpose of the law which was to be a tutor up until Christ came (Gal. 3:24). Their system of laws had gone far beyond what God had originally put into place. Their religion had become one of work righteousness instead of faith in the promised Savior. Since the Jews ultimately ended up glorifying themselves with their laws, they were naturally very skeptical about any religious leader who might show them up or "come with a different gospel," so to speak. A king of the Jews from Nazareth was a terrible blow to their pride. A king of the Jews who proclaimed that the law was no longer in effect was a terrible blow to their whole religion.

God surely can use the sins of human beings to accomplish his purposes in working out the history of His Church. When Herod died Archelaus became ruler after a worse fashion than his father

before him. So Joseph was driven to the town of Nazareth, even being warned in a dream to flee to Galilee. As is seen in the verses of John 1:47ff., Nathanael's initial question soon turned into a profession of sincere faith. Yet in the mind of sinful man skepticism often reigns supreme. People ask today, "Can anything good come out of the Bible?" The Bible is such an outdated book in many people's minds that churches are replacing it with "more interesting" reading. The focus is taken away from Christ and the cross and placed on man and his accomplishments. Emphasis is placed on how one feels about his beliefs rather than on the object of those beliefs. *Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? This is the question about which all church history turns.*

When Jesus meets Nathanael He offers this striking sentence "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" (John 1:47). What a statement for Jesus to make after Nathanael had just asked if anything good could come out of Nazareth! It is seen how Jesus was the master at bringing the words of law or gospel at just the proper time. (Isn't it true that the history of proper preaching in the church is based on rightly dividing law and gospel?) Nathanael's previous question was not uttered in rank unbelief after the manner of the Jewish leaders. He was indeed waiting expectantly for the coming Messiah, praying the prayer of Isaiah 64:1, "Oh, that you would rend the heavens! That you would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence." It was Philip who came to him with the wonderful news "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (Legend has it that Nathanael was praying for the coming Messiah while he was under the fig tree prior to his meeting with Jesus. While this is a possibility, Scripture itself remains silent on this point.) Jesus came not with a statement of law as He would have with a skeptical Jew, but with the pure sound of the gospel. He announced Nathanael to be an Israelite in whom there was no deceit, not that he had no sin, but that he believed in God's promise that a Savior from all sin would one day be sent to the world. He well knew the prophecies of Isaiah, Micah, Malachi, and others who spoke of the coming Messiah. Through faith which latched on to the proclamation of the gospel in the Old Testament, Nathanael was declared righteous before the holy God.

It is only the preaching of the gospel which can lead people to answer correctly Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" This is what the church is all about. It is about preaching law so people can recognize their sins and repent. It is about preaching the gospel so that it can be seen just how much God has done for the human race. *Jesus' conversation with Nathanael was the conversation He has with His Church throughout history.* He announces to her that she is without spot or blemish because she is His holy bride. The hymn writer pens, "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord; She is His new creation By water and the Word. From heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought her, And for her life He died." In studying church history notice how Jesus comes to His believers in love, even though they may be weak in their faith. He says to them all, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

NATHANAEL'S CONFESSION IS THE CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH

Nathanael answered history's greatest question. He said, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49). There is no one truth that has been attacked more often in the course of history than the deity of Christ. If man could prove that Jesus was just like everyone else, then every religion would be just as good as the next one. If it could be proved that Jesus was just a man, then all this talk about sin would be meaningless. Shortly after Christ's time there were the Gnostics who failed to recognize Jesus as God. Those who died in that belief will suffer the beginning of eternal torment on the Last Day. If Jesus were not God, then our sins would not be forgiven, as the words of Psalm 49 stand clear, "No man can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (NASB).

Through the ages the Church has wrestled to keep this teaching pure. Christianity stands or falls upon the deity of Jesus Christ. In the days of the apostles there was the well-known heretic, Cerinthus. The Jews also rejected Christ's deity by their repeated attempts to make Him an earthly king. Later on there was the Arian controversy, out of which our Nicene Creed was born, a creed which states in no uncertain terms that Jesus is God. "I believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ...God of

God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God...Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made.” Any number of early Christian creeds were written to reflect this most important truth. Even as Nathanael confessed Christ as God, so also do our own Lutheran confessions, which are very much a part of the history of the Christian church. “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord” (SC, III, iii). “We believe, teach, and confess that the Son of God ... [is] essential, Perfect God ...” (FC -TD, VIII, vi). In our day there are any number of churches which deny the deity of Christ, the most notable being perhaps the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The words of Jesus ring out loudly, “I am the Way the Truth and the Life.” Consider all the Roman Catholic teachings fought against by Luther and those who followed after him. Ultimately any form of works righteousness denies the deity of Christ, because if man is able to save himself the true God would surely not have had to die. It is upon a true confession of Jesus Christ that the Church is built. ***So also are the events of church history wrapped up in the same confession as that of Nathanael.*** Peter told the Sanhedrin, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Church history involves the story of this confession of faith.

JESUS’ PROMISE TO NATHANAEL IS ALSO HIS PROMISE TO THE CHURCH

Such confession would not be possible without the truths and promises of the gospel. The heart of man is by nature sinful and against God. It is only by hearing about the great love the Savior has had for the world that such a heart can be warmed and brought to will and to do according to His good pleasure. It is through the gospel that God has blessed the history of the church. Nathanael was once impressed that Jesus knew he had spent some time under a fig tree. Jesus had revelations much greater than this, however. Listen to the promise made to Nathanael: “Most assuredly I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:51). Nathanael was to see the glory of God in Christ in a very special way. He was one of the twelve whom Jesus appointed specially to help Him in His work. He was present in the upper room and partook of the first Lord’s Supper. He saw Jesus crucified, dead, and buried. He saw Him risen and glorified on Easter Sunday. He saw all the Old Testament promises of God fulfilled in Christ. He saw how God worked in history to accomplish His will, namely the salvation of souls.

The same promise is there for us. From the time of the apostles to the present day we have seen the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. ***We have seen how God cannot and will not allow the flame of His gospel to die out.*** The early churches founded by Paul preached Christ and Him crucified. The likes of Herod, Nero, and Diocletian were powerless against God’s word. We have numerous confessions and liturgies developed by our forefathers which emphasize God in Christ. The history of the church is summarized in the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come.”

* * *

Little is known about Nathanael Bartholomew’s life aside from his apostleship and this encounter with Jesus. The martyrdom of Bartholomew is recorded in the writings of the church fathers, but the way in which he was martyred is most likely speculation. Secular history records that he preached the gospel in India. “Pantaenus ... went as far as India, where he appears to have found that Matthew’s gospel had arrived before him and was in the hands of some there who had come to know Christ. Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them and had left behind Matthew’s account in the actual Aramaic characters, and it was preserved till the time of Pantaenus’s mission” (Eus. V, 10). If this is true, then Nathanael was involved in the spread of the gospel to foreign lands. He was involved in the history of the church. When the Last Day comes and church history has run its course, no one will have any excuse (Rom. 1:20-21), for their sound has gone out to all the earth (Rom. 10:18).

BOOK REVIEWS

God's Providence, by Mark Lenz. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.

This is one in a series of 25 paperbacks intended to present all the doctrines of the Bible in simple language. These little books are entitled "People's BIBLE Teachings" and serve as companion volumes to the "People's Bible" series on individual books of the Bible.

This book on God's providence covers the various topics that are usually discussed by dogmatics textbooks under this theme. Several times the author must say: "This does not satisfy our human logic" (as on p. 89). For example, what is meant by God's concurrence with evil? The Bible tells us that "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The context shows that by "we" the Bible here means all human beings on earth. Therefore it is correct to say that the bank robber could not do what he did without God's giving him the strength to do so. Yet at the same time God is not responsible for the bank robbery. So our author rightly concludes: "When we speak of God concurring in evil, we mean that the evil can only happen as God goes along with the act. God is, however, never responsible for the evil" (74).

This is typical of how in the doctrine of providence we must avoid going to extremes. Perhaps one extreme many of us are tempted to adopt is the fatalistic viewpoint of the person who says: "When your number's up, it's up" (p. 91). God certainly has determined the exact length of our lives here on this earth. Yet this does not give us the right to be reckless with our lives or avoid using the means God has given us to preserve our lives. We need to remember Jesus' words to Satan when Satan tempted Him to jump from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus rightly said: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Matt. 4:7). We are guilty of tempting God when we fail to use the means God has provided (such as food, medicine, safety precautions, etc.) and dare God to take care of us without such means. In the spiritual life the same thing is true of God's means of grace: the Gospel in Word and sacraments. We need to make use of what God has given us to sustain our spiritual life as well as what He has given us to sustain our physical life.

All in all, this book does a good job of summarizing what God's Word teaches us about God's providence. For every aspect of this doctrine the evidence from Scripture is presented copiously. A Scripture index in back lists all of the passages quoted and where they can be found in this book. The examples drawn from present-day life are generally helpful.

When I first read the introduction and the first chapters, it struck me that the supposed reader of this volume is presented as one who has led a soft and sheltered life. He was baptized as an infant, attended Lutheran grade school and high school. One of his biggest problems is not being able to get to Grandma's house at Thanksgiving time because of a storm. The reader eats three good meals every day. He gets tired from shoveling snow. He discovers a few gray hairs on his head. He goes out walking on a beautiful spring day. Indeed his problems seem rather trite compared with the disease and the sense of being forsaken by God experienced by Job, the hunger of Elijah in time of famine, the dangers faced by David as he fled from King Saul, or the persecutions endured by ordinary followers of Christ in the early church. The point no doubt is that God watches over us in the humdrum activities of everyday life as well as in the perilous situations described in Scripture. Nevertheless, I think that there are very few Christians today who have as uneventful or as simple a life as the alleged reader of this book. In the later chapters of this book the problems confronting the alleged reader become more complex and indicate a more difficult life.

The other books available in this series so far include: *Christian Freedom* by William E. Fischer, *Church Fellowship* by John F. Brug (referred to briefly in the *Journal of Theology* of December 1996), *Church -- Mission -- Ministry* by Armin Schuetze, *Law and Gospel* by Leroy A. Dobberstein, and *Angels and Demons* by John D. Schuetze. Each of these little books contains from 130 to 180 pages or so, and is priced at \$8.99.

A Burning and a Shining Light, by Paul G. Koch. Legacy of Words, 117 Vermont St., La Crosse, IN 46348. 189 pages, \$9.95 plus \$1.50 for transportation.

The title of this book comes from Jesus' description of John the Baptist, recorded in John 5:35.

This book discusses all that the Bible says concerning John the Baptist. It also includes chapters with such titles as "John in the Worship of Churches Today" (including several pages of hymns referring to John the Baptist), "John the Baptist in Drama," "John the Baptist in Poetry," "John the Baptist in Music," and "John the Baptist in Art" (including 16 full -page art reproductions).

In connection with John's baptism of Jesus Pastor Koch refers to the Matthew account ("Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness") and says: "By baptizing Jesus, John would be doing God's will and would be furthering Jesus' mission to fulfill all righteousness. Although Jesus is the sinless Son of God, He presents Himself along with sinful human beings for baptism. Not that He needed the forgiveness which is offered, given, and certified by baptism, but by receiving the washing ordained for His brethren He put Himself in the same class as sinful human beings to keep the whole will and law of God in their stead" (42).

On the question of whether John the Baptist in prison doubted whether Jesus was the promised Savior (Matt. 11: 2-6), Pastor Koch is of the firm opinion that "the Forerunner ... would not yield to doubt because he was suffering imprisonment for Christ" (66). "John sent his disciples to Jesus to give them the assurance that He is the promised Messiah" (67).

Acts 19:5 seems to be telling us that twelve men who had already been baptized with John's baptism were then baptized with Christian baptism. This may seem to indicate that there was something lacking in John's baptism, that it was not a means of grace like Christian baptism. But Pastor Koch suggests the solution of Martin Chemnitz and others: to take verse 5 as a continuation of the previous verse's quotation of the words of the apostle Paul, namely: "When they heard this (John's invitation to believe in Jesus), they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (64).

The last half of the book presents a variety of references to John the Baptist in literature and art. A clear distinction is made between these references and what is recorded in Holy Scripture. Pastor Koch accepts the Bible "as the inerrant Word of God" and he rightly confesses that divine inspiration of the Bible "includes references to secular subjects such as geographical and historical matters" (155).

In summary this book examines all the Bible references to John the Baptist and then adds all kinds of interesting tidbits from other sources for our information.

Our older pastors will remember that Paul G. Koch was a member of the Church of the Lutheran Confession for a short time in the early sixties. Since that time he has served for many years as a pastor and officer in the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation (LCR).

Jesus the Messiah, by Robert H. Stein. InterVarsity Press, 1996. 290 pages.

Robert H. Stein is a professor at Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. This study of the life of Christ has been praised by many as a good up-to-date textbook for a college or university course on the life and teachings of our Savior. It certainly is better than anything that the members of the Jesus Seminar would or could produce. Professor Stein believes and teaches that Jesus is the promised Messiah, that He did miracles, that He was crucified, that He truly died, that He actually rose from the dead, and that He "shall return in visible bodily form just as he ascended" (276).

Part One contains three chapters, one on the role of presuppositions in studying the life of Jesus, one on the sources for studying the life of Jesus, and one on the chronology. The second chapter on the sources I found particularly interesting and helpful. Pagan authors that referred to Christ are listed, as well as Jewish authors and non-Biblical sources such as the apocryphal Gospels. Professor Stein's conclusion is that "anyone wanting to learn about Jesus has to go to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. ... The amount of material (from other sources) is small" (50).

Part Two, the major part of the book, covers the life of Christ from His conception to His resurrection and beyond. In some controversial areas of study Professor Stein lists several different interpretations and the evidence supporting them and then gives his own opinions. For example, in his discussion of the ethical teachings of Jesus, he lists six different interpretations: the "Catholic" interpretation; the "utopian" interpretation; the "Lutheran" interpretation; the "liberal" interpretation; the "interim ethic" interpretation; and the "existentialist" interpretation. He describes the "Lutheran"

interpretation as this, that ‘the teachings of Jesus... are simply impossible to fulfill. Any serious attempt to keep them can lead only to guilt and despair. But this is their purpose, for in our despair we are driven to seek God’s grace’ (136 -137). In his criticism of this interpretation Professor Stein says: ‘It loses sight of the fact that these ethical teachings, which supposedly are meant to drive us to grace, are directed at those who have already experienced the grace of God and are already followers of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount, for example, is directed to those who were already disciples’ (138). I think our answer to this must be that according to our Lutheran confessions the law has at least three functions: the ‘mirror’ use to show us our sin (the most important function of all), but then also the ‘curb’ use to check the worst excesses of sins, and the ‘standard’ use to show grateful Christians how they can express their love for God. We must remember also that even Christians, who do good works out of love for their Savior, need the law in its ‘mirror’ use to show them that their keeping of God’s commandments is far from perfect. As our Lutheran confessions repeatedly remind us, “*Lex semper accusat*”; that is, the law always condemns.

In his discussion of the Lord’s Supper Professor Stein again lists the various interpretations, including the Lutheran interpretation. He rejects the Lutheran interpretation in this case, saying: “There is no need to insist on a literal interpretation of his (Jesus’) words here” (207).

In trying to harmonize the various gospel accounts, Professor Stein sometimes writes as though one of the gospel writers may have been mistaken in some of the details. In other words, although he does not regard the four Gospels as late products of the early church (like many Bible scholars of today), he still does not seem to regard every Word of Scripture as necessarily the inspired and inerrant Word of God. For example, in connection with Jesus’ cleansing of the temple he says that Mark put the cleansing of the temple on Monday so that the reader would see the connection between the cursing of the fig tree and Jesus’ judgment on the Jews. But is it not rather true that Mark put the cleansing of the temple on Monday because that is when it took place? Of course we understand that the evangelists sometimes departed from the chronological order, and wrote about things in the order that they themselves chose for their own purposes. Yet at the same time we believe that the Holy Spirit gave them the exact words they used, so that there would not be any errors in details anywhere in the four Gospels. If Mark says Jesus cleansed the temple on Monday, that is when He did it. The other evangelists never say specifically that Jesus cleansed the temple on any other day of the week. They do not contradict Mark’s Gospel on this point.

Professor Stein’s interpretations are usually solidly based, although sometimes he is too timid when it seems he could be more dogmatic. Nevertheless, we cannot agree with all of his conclusions and certainly we cannot agree with the conclusions of others that he presents.

Luther’s Family Devotions, gathered by George Link, tr. by Joel Baseley. Mark V Publications, 2000 North York, Dearborn, MI 48128, 1996. 688 pages, \$22 plus \$3, shipping and handling.

George Link served 52 years (1851-1903) in the pastoral ministry of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. In 1877 he published a German book of devotions taken from the writings of Martin Luther. This book has now been translated into English by Joel Baseley, a pastor of the Missouri Synod.

The daily devotions follow the pattern of the church year, beginning with the Sunday of the first week in Advent, and concluding with the Saturday after the 27th Sunday after Trinity. Each devotion includes a Bible verse, Luther’s comments, and a hymn verse. The source of Luther’s comments is also indicated. An appendix contains a Scriptural index and a topical index.

The very first devotion stresses the fact that we sinners cannot begin to go to God. He must come to us first. Our salvation is by grace alone. Typical Luther, and altogether worthwhile reading!

Sermons of Martin Luther, The House Postils, 3 volumes, ed. by Eugene F. A. Klug. Baker Books, 1996.

Besides the sermons of Luther contained in the 55 volumes of *Luther's Works* and the Lenker collection called *Sermons of Martin Luther* (8 volumes reprinted by Baker in 1983), we now have three more volumes of Luther's sermons in English. These sermons of Luther's "Hauspostille" or "House Sermons" cover all the Sundays and festivals of the church year. Most of these sermons were delivered by Luther in his home between 1531 and 1535. They were taken down by George Roerer, an expert note-taker. It seems they were preached at home by Luther, because he felt it was his duty to preach to his family, household, and friends later in the day on Sundays and festivals, even though other preachers had conducted church services earlier in the day. Sometimes, in fact, Luther was too weak or sick to participate in the services in the main church. The texts that Luther expounded were the historic gospel lessons, the same texts on which Luther's Church Postil sermons (the Lenker collection) were based.

Six translators, most of them retired from the pastoral or teaching ministry, are responsible for the present English translation. The editor, Eugene F. A. Klug, is one of the translators.

- David Lau

The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism, by Harry Sturz.
Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984.

In our study of manuscript questions on reliability of the different families I admit, right off the bat, my weaknesses. This is a book to carry us further into our study of its 305 pages. There is no question that this book is a scholar's work. The appendices beginning on page 135 attest to that.

To me, uppermost in our concerns should be the two lengthy readings in John 8 and Mark 16 where the Byzantine family and the 'earlier' manuscripts diverge. Would God have allowed those two lengthy readings to be treated as Scripture for so very long a time had they not been? This is a variation on the argument of 'providential preservation.' Though of shorter length, the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5:7-8) was inserted and has been used as a proof text for the Trinity for over 400 years.

There is no question that the Byzantine family has unjustly taken it on the chin since the 1880s in the Westcott/Hort attack. But we also have on the other side those advocating (such as Burgon in the last century and Pickering in this) that the Byzantine should be primary. If Sturz is correct in his studies, which are in depth and rather current, then the Byzantine should be ranked along with the other manuscripts, as having equal weight. I, like John Alden, am speaking for another, though I am rather convinced myself. Sturz' view, "differs from the WH contention that the Byzantine text should not be used because it is secondary and it differs with the Burgon-Hills view, which would use only the Byzantine text because it is primary" (47). May his conclusion on pages 129-131 whet your appetite to chew more on the points in his book.

The King James Version Debate - A Plea for Realism, by D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994.

While browsing in a bookstore for books to take overseas to our brethren in Nigeria and India, this volume caught my eye. I remembered Carson for his writings on exegetical fallacies. I do not regret buying this book.

Concise

It appealed to me since it was only 123 pages. It appealed to me doubly so when I read in the introduction, "This slender volume is not an exhaustive treatise ... this book aims at being minimally technical. It is designed for students, pastors, and laymen who have no personal knowledge of the primary literature ..." (10). His fourteen theses are clear and scholarly in presentation. In an appendix he critiques in nineteen pages the Pickering position.

Cogent

He at least should cause the TR defenders to pause for reflection in his reasonable presentation. That it was originally written in 1977 and now is in its twelfth printing in 1994 testifies to its enduring value.

Courteous

As he begins his fourteen theses he states, "In what follows I shall not argue that the vociferous defenders of the TR are knaves and fools" (43). He does not question the intention of the "vociferous" to adhere to truth. He simply points up logical fallacies.

Correct

Whether he is correct or not, you may decide for yourself. As for me I am inclined to be an "eclectic."

An Aside

His quotation of the following poem I found so appropriate to us, what with recent incidents within our synod (77):

Zeal is that pure and heavenly flame
The fire of love supplies;
While that which often bears the name
Is self in a disguise.

True zeal is merciful and mild,
Can pity and forbear:
The false is headstrong, fierce and wild,
And breathes revenge and war.

While zeal for truth the Christian warms,
He knows the worth of peace;
But self contends for names and forms,
Its party to increase.

John Newton (1725-1807)

- David Koenig