

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 42 MARCH 2002 NUMBER 1

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The JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY is published at Immanuel Lutheran College, 501 Grover Rd, Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701-7199, by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Subscriptions: \$10.50 per year, \$18.00 for two years, \$26.50 for three years (Foreign: \$14.50, \$26.00 and \$37.50), payable in advance. Issues are dated: March, June, September, and December.

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Lenten Meditations on Texts from Jeremiah

David Lau

"Moreover you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: "Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return? Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return. I listened and heard, But they do not speak aright. No man repented of his wickedness, Saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his own course, As the horse rushes into the battle. "Even the stork in the heavens Knows her appointed times; And the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow Observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the LORD. "How can you say, 'We are wise, And the law of the LORD is with us'? Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly

works falsehood. The wise men are ashamed, They are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD; So what wisdom do they have? Therefore I will give their wives to others, And their fields to those who will inherit them; Because from the least even to the greatest Everyone is given to covetousness; From the prophet even to the priest Everyone deals falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, Saying, ' Peace, peace!' When there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; In the time of their punishment They shall be cast down," says the LORD" (Jer. 8:4-12 NKJV).

The historic gospel reading for the Sunday before Ash Wednesday contains Jesus' words to His disciples: **"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished"** (Luke 18:31). For the next few weeks, particularly in our midweek Lenten services, we shall be going up to Jerusalem with Jesus to see how He fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures by His suffering, death, and resurrection. This season of the year affords a particular privilege to Christians and unbelievers too, for that matter, the privilege of hearing in detail the marvelous story of salvation which culminates in the cross on Calvary.

As we begin once more this sacred season of Lent, it is appropriate that we are made aware of the fearful consequences of rejecting this precious gospel. We can reject it not only by refusing to hear it altogether but also by resisting the Holy Spirit when He seeks through this gospel to bring forth fruit in our lives. In other words, we do actually resist the gospel when we reject any part of God's Word, when we fail to let God's admonitions affect us and guide us, when we refuse to repent of our sins, receive His forgiveness, and change our ways.

In our text the prophet Jeremiah speaks God's Word to us and tells us that **GOD THREATENS TERRIBLE JUDGMENT ON THOSE WHO REJECT HIS WORD**. This text is intended to sober up those people in our world who treat God's Word with levity and speak and act as though God were dead. God is not mocked. His Word and Sacraments are still the holy ground on which he comes down to us. Those who have no respect for His Word, those who take no heed even though God Himself is speaking to them, some day they will receive the judgment here threatened, unless they repent.

We pray that this terrible judgment will not strike any of us here; at the same time we know that because of our proud flesh we need these warnings. So let us examine this text in which **GOD THREATENS TERRIBLE JUDGMENT ON THOSE WHO REJECT HIS WORD**.

First of all, we ask: **HOW DOES GOD CHARACTERIZE THOSE THAT REJECT HIS WORD?** Our text gives us five answers, and we shall look at them one by one. **HOW DOES GOD CHARACTERIZE THOSE THAT REJECT HIS WORD?** First, He says they refuse to repent of their sins. **"Thus says the LORD: ' Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return? Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return.'**" When a man falls on the ice, does he not pick himself up again? When a man goes on the wrong road and ends up in a dead end, does he not turn around and come back? Why then is it that so many Christians fall into sin, run away from their heavenly Father like the prodigal son, and then refuse to return? Why is it that so many Christian leaders make grievous mistakes and even become guilty of false teaching but refuse to admit it when it is pointed out to them? **"They hold fast to deceit."** They stick to their wrongs and defend them to the end.

In our times this refusal to repent has sometimes taken a strange turn. It seems that there is an overflowing of repentance on the part of many church leaders. They say: We must all repent of our contributions to this sad affair. But this general call for repentance is generally meaningless. It would be as if King David had replied to Nathan's specific charge: **"You are the man"** by saying: "Oh, yes, we are all guilty in this terrible situation." Would that have been repentance? David said: **"I have sinned against the Lord."** I, David, have committed adultery and murder and have caused the heathen to blaspheme God's holy name. I, David, am guilty. When someone points out to us our sins, no matter who it is, then let us not be eager to defend ourselves, but rather eager to confess and correct our faults, wherever we have gone astray.

God says: **"I listened and heard, But they do not speak aright. No man repented of his wickedness, Saying, ' What have I done?' Everyone turned to his own course, As the horse rushes into the battle.** Dear friends, we do all go astray, we all fail. We should be thankful that God gives us an opportunity to repent, to get up again and go the right way. He does not hold our sins against us if we repent of them, as David did, and as Peter did. But if we refuse to repent, then we can only expect God's terrible judgment. God says to us: **" Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; In the time of their punishment They shall be cast down,' says the LORD."** Think of it. All God wants is a blush! All He wants is a broken and contrite heart. But there are so many who simply refuse to blush. They refuse to repent of their sins.

Secondly, God characterizes those who reject His Word as those who do not recognize that the time for repentance has come. He says: **‘Even the stork in the heavens Knows her appointed times; And the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow Observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the LORD.’** It is impossible to determine what birds are actually meant by the Hebrew terms used here. But the picture is plain. These migratory birds know when to return to their summer homes. They make their long flights by instinct. They know the time to return. But God’s people don’t know the time for repentance. They think they can put it off. They will repent later on after they have enjoyed their sins a little more. They say: “I know I’ve done wrong, but it’s done now, and I can neither admit it nor correct it. On my deathbed I’ll repent, and God will forgive me.”

Does God want us to tempt Him in that way? No, God’s Word is filled with the admonition: **‘Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your hearts’** (Ps. 95:7-8). If David had not immediately told Nathan, **‘I have sinned against the Lord,’** he might never have been able to. If Peter had not immediately gone out and wept bitterly after his Lord looked at him, it might have been too late. For Judas it was too late. He failed to heed the earnest warnings of his Master. Are we going to reject God’s Word by postponing our repentance? God forbid!

Thirdly, God characterizes the rejecters of His Word by accusing them of falsifying God’s Word. They seem to be wise, but they are not. **‘How can you say, ‘We are wise, And the law of the LORD is with us’? Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood. The wise men are ashamed, They are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD; So what wisdom do they have?’**

Those who sin and refuse to repent are not always obvious evildoers. Oh, no, many times these rejecters of God’s Word are considered wise and even orthodox. They claim: We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us. In other words, they defend their sins and their wrong position by falsifying the very Word of God. **‘By smooth words and flattering speech (they) deceive the hearts of the simple’** (Rom. 16:18). Dear friends, human wisdom dare not be the final judge of right and wrong; for human wisdom can manipulate God’s Word for its own purposes, especially when it is trying to defend its errors and sins. There is no doubt that many are deceived by this seeming wisdom. But God’s judgment stands: **‘They have rejected the Word of the Lord; so what wisdom do they have?’** The bare or naked Word of God still condemns them in spite of their elaborate explanations. The Word of God puts them to shame. The wisdom of God’s Word refutes their human wisdom. For apart from God’s Word, what wisdom is there?

Fourthly, God characterizes the rejecters of His Word as given to covetousness. **‘Because from the least even to the greatest Everyone is given to covetousness; From the prophet even to the priest Everyone deals falsely.’** Here God exposes the motives of these men who refuse to repent and who dare even to falsify God’s Word to cover up their sins. Their motive is covetousness, selfish ambition, the comforts of life, the security of a job, personal popularity, and so forth. We can scarcely believe the sordidness of the human heart, until we take a deep look at our own hearts and determine that often we do what we do because of covetousness. The apostle Paul calls it “belly service;” that is, obeying our lower or higher desires rather than God’s Word.

Church workers are not immune to this vice. The prophet and the priest are also given to covetousness. The prophet preaches what people like to hear in order to retain his high office. The priest goes along with the sin of the people without condemnation lest he lose his position. The sin of covetousness strikes the greatest as well as the least, the prophet as well as the priest. Dear friends, let us be on guard against rejecting God’s Word out of covetousness or selfishness.

Fifthly, God characterizes the rejecters of His Word as men who give false comfort to their troubled followers. **‘For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, Saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ When there is no peace.’** This is the activity of church politicians everywhere in this our day. They go around saying: All is well, all is well, so that the people won’t get alarmed and hold back on their contributions. The daughter is hurt, and they heal the wound slightly, that is, they make light of it. They cover it with a nice white bandage without ever cleaning out the dirt first. They preach the comfort of the gospel when the warnings of the law would be more in place.

Does God’s peace and His blessing rest on those who reject His Word and refuse to repent of their sins, on those who falsify His Word out of covetousness and selfish ambition? Then why do you say, Peace, peace, when there is no peace? Being evangelical does not mean being afraid to condemn sin and false teaching. If it does, our Lord Jesus Christ was not evangelical.

Dear friends, this five-fold characterization of those who reject God’s Word will give us many insights into what is going on in the churches of our day. May it also serve to subdue our old flesh, that it may submit to the new man of the Spirit, which the Holy Spirit has created in us through the gospel of our salvation. If we did not need to hear these things, God would not have preserved the words of Jeremiah for us, nor would He have told us: **‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,**

for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

For our warning we also ask a second question: HOW DOES GOD DESCRIBE THE JUDGMENT THAT WILL COME ON THOSE WHO REJECT HIS WORD? God answers: **“Therefore I will give their wives to others, And their fields to those who will inherit them.”** In other words, God' s spiritual blessings which He had showered on them in the past will be taken from them and given to others. The gracious God becomes their enemy. And so it has happened. The gospel went from the Jews to the Gentiles, from the Greeks to the Romans, from the Romans to the Germans, from the Germans to the Americans, and so it will continue. The Lutherans have a precious heritage, but now they are busy rejecting the Word that was so precious to Martin Luther.

Yes, they are rejecting it all over in our day, and they are not ashamed of their rejecting it. In fact they say they are discovering it anew. **“ Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; In the time of their punishment They shall be cast down,” says the LORD.**”The last day will right a lot of wrongs. The Antichrist is prosperous on earth, but consider his end as prophesied in Holy Scripture.

Now then, brothers and sisters, what are we going to do? Let us recognize our blindness and call out to Jesus: **“Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David”** (Matt. 20:31). He will heal us. We can be sure of that, for the prophet Isaiah has told us: **“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”** (Isa. 53:6). The iniquity of us all - on Him. This is our hope. So all our shame, our sins, our human wisdom, our covering up, our covetousness - let us get rid of it by giving it to our Lord Jesus Christ, who announces to our troubled and repentant hearts: **“Peace, peace be unto you, and there is peace.”** Amen!

2

“Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,” says the LORD. A voice was heard on the desolate heights, Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way; They have forgotten the LORD their God. “Return, you backsliding children, And I will heal your backslidings.” “Indeed we do come to You, For You are the LORD our God. Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, And from the multitude of mountains; Truly, in the LORD our God Is the salvation of Israel. For shame has devoured The labor of our fathers from our youth; Their flocks and their herds, Their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, And our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, We and our fathers, From our youth even to this day, And have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God” (Jer. 3:20-25 NKJV).

The Lenten season is a time of preparation for Good Friday and Easter. What is the best preparation for these festivals? The best preparation is to heed the voice of John the Baptist: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”** (Matt. 3:2).

We are prepared to receive the message of Good Friday and Easter when we are thoroughly repentant. Particularly in Lent we should realize that it was our sins that led Jesus to the cross and drove the nails into His hands and feet. As Jesus was led to the cross, He told the women of Jerusalem to weep not for Him but for themselves and their children. He wanted them to realize it was their sin that had brought this about - and that if they failed to repent of their sin, God' s judgment would surely fall on their city.

Jerusalem was not the only city to be warned thus. Jesus also pronounced His woes on the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum because they refused to repent of their sins even though the Son of God Himself spent much time with them and worked many miracles in their midst.

So repentance is absolutely essential for gaining any benefits from the Good Friday and Easter message. If we do not realize our own sinfulness, what do we care about a Savior from sin? All this talk about Jesus dying for our sins and rising again from the dead to give us forgiveness is meaningless to us unless we understand how sinful we are and how much we need forgiveness.

So on this Sunday in Lent we turn to the writings of Jeremiah, the great Old Testament prophet of repentance, and listen to him describe for us AN EXAMPLE OF GENUINE SINCERE REPENTANCE.

There was certainly much to repent of in Israel. Jeremiah says: **“ Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,” says the LORD.**”Israel was like an unfaithful wife, walking out on her husband and shamefully committing adultery with many other lovers. It' s a terrible thing when we see a man' s wife debase herself in this way and bring shame to her husband. But this is exactly the way Israel was treating her God. For this was a common picture God used to describe the relationship between Him and His people. God is the loving Husband, and Israel is His beloved bride. We are acquainted with this picture also from the New Testament. Paul writes: **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the**

church. ... Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22,25).

But even though God had been a faithful and loving Husband, the bride Israel was unfaithful. The Lord says through Jeremiah in another place: **“My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water”** (Jer. 2:13). Israel was unfaithful to God, her Bridegroom, and disgraced herself with all kinds of strange lovers much inferior to God, as broken cisterns are inferior to a fountain of living waters, spring waters.

Israel had much to repent of: chiefly their worship of the idols of Canaan, Baal and Asherah, god and goddess, who were worshiped on the high places with dancing and singing and drinking and sexual sins-yes, adultery in the name of religion. Jeremiah describes it this way: **“For they have perverted their way; They have forgotten the LORD their God.”** He speaks of their worship on the hills, their orgies on the mountains, their sinful religious celebrations. This false religion robbed the people of their money and strength, even of their sons and daughters, and gave them nothing of value in return. For this false religion was like a broken cistern that held no water, completely worthless. It's a strange thing how the devil can get people so wrapped up in a false religion that they will give their money, their possessions, almost everything they have to the service and support of an idol, while the worship of the true God always has to go begging.

But now we have spoken enough of the sins of Israel. What about our sins? Do we have much to repent of? As far as our nation is concerned, we certainly do. It seems the shameful religion of the Canaanites, with its heavy emphasis on sexual sins, is experiencing a revival in our land, even though it is not called a religion. Paul says it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done by men in secret, but now many of these sins are taking place in public under the bright light of day and even exhibited to the public in theaters and movie houses, made a big thing of, just like in the days of Jeremiah, as though it was perfectly healthy and wholesome and even religious.

To the extent that we support such entertainment we are also guilty. We are a part of our age, and there is no doubt that the loose morality of our times in these matters is rubbing off on us.

But we have much else to repent of, too. Do we always speak the truth? Do we get angry at one another and bear grudges? Do we give to the poor and help the needy? Does any evil talk ever come out of our mouths? Do we enjoy filthiness, foolish talking? Do we like to read about fornication and uncleanness? Do we allow ourselves to get drunk on alcohol instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit? Are we thankful to the Lord for His gifts? Do the wives among us submit to their husbands as to the Lord, and do we husbands love our wives as Christ loved the church? Finally, is the Lord our true love, our precious Bridegroom, our One and Only, or have we forsaken Him, or do we forsake Him at times for other interests, other loves, which although much inferior to Him we consider more worthy of our time and interest? We all have our pet sins, those sins that we have trouble overcoming, and we have much to repent of even if we have not bowed down to Baal as the Israelites did.

How did God react to the shameful sins of Israel, their forsaking Him and worshipping other gods? We might imagine that God in the fury of His wrath would destroy His idolatrous people in a moment. But no, God is merciful. Although He rebukes their sin in plain language and threatens drastic judgment, His aim is always to lead His people to repentance so that He can forgive them and does not have to punish them.

In our text we hear God calling to His people: **“Return, you backsliding children, And I will heal your backslidings.”** Repent, come back to Me, and I will forgive you all your sins. God's patience and mercy is truly amazing. In this same chapter a few verses before our text we hear God calling to His people: **“Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, That you have transgressed against the LORD your God, And have scattered your charms To alien deities under every green tree, And you have not obeyed My voice,' says the LORD”**(Jer. 3:12-13).

Also we are told in the New Testament: **“The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Pet. 3:9). That's why He sent His spokesmen like Jeremiah and John the Baptist and the apostle Paul too. We might not think of Paul so much as a preacher of repentance, but that was part of His calling, too. When he was permitted to speak in Athens on Mars' Hill, he said: **“God now commands all men everywhere to repent”** (Acts 17:30).

This obviously means us, too. We are a part of all men everywhere. God commands us to repent of our sins, to acknowledge our guilt, to admit that we have not obeyed His voice. At the same time as He says, **“Return, you backsliding children,”** He promises, **“I will heal your backslidings.”**

The message that our Lord Jesus wants spread throughout the world is repentance and forgiveness of sins. If we ask why or how God can be merciful to us sinners, the answer is revealed in Christ, on whom God laid our iniquity and who became a curse for us on the cross so that God might forgive us. God is merciful only in Christ. There is no other way of salvation than by faith in Him.

How did Israel respond to God' s call to repentance through Jeremiah? At first they were stubborn. They said: **‘I am innocent. I have not sinned’** (Jer. 2:35). But in our text Jeremiah describes a case of genuine repentance. He says: **‘A voice was heard on the desolate heights, Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel.’** On the same place where they had held their idolatrous and adulterous religious orgies, there now they weep because of their sins and they plead with their God to be merciful to them.

There is nothing unmanly about tears of repentance. Peter was a man, and his name means Rock. When Jesus looked at him that night after his threefold denial, he went out and wept bitterly because of his sin. So Israel wept because they had perverted their way and forgotten the Lord their God.

When God through Jeremiah called on them to repent and promised mercy to them, they replied: **"Indeed we do come to You, For You are the LORD our God. Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, And from the multitude of mountains; Truly, in the LORD our God Is the salvation of Israel. For shame has devoured The labor of our fathers from our youth; Their flocks and their herds, Their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, And our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, We and our fathers, From our youth even to this day, And have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God."**

Oh, our God loves to hear such confessions. He loves to see the return of His prodigal sons, confessing, **‘I have sinned, and am not worthy to be called Your son.’** He loves to hear them say, **‘O Lord, You are our only Savior and Help.’** For it is God' s way to comfort those that mourn, to fill the hungry with good things, and to give His kingdom to the poor in spirit. It is God' s delight to forgive repentant sinners and make merry over His returning prodigal children.

So how should we respond to God's call for repentance? How should we prepare for Good Friday and Easter, and Judgment Day? What better way than to repeat the confession of repentant Israel in all sincerity: **‘We have sinned. We have not obeyed. Indeed we do come to You. Truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.’** Amen!

Formalism - A Threat to Orthodoxy?

David J. Reim

In his introduction to the CLC directory, President Fleischer mentions four of the "many temptations and snares [which] confront the way of orthodoxy - Legalism, arrogance, formalism, exclusivism." Most of them are quite easily understood, but the third catches one' s attention and deserves more thought Formalism. One might ask, "Formalism - A threat to orthodoxy?" One might think that our traditional and conservative forms of worship and church organization are there to help protect our orthodoxy. Yes, in some cases we may even like to point to our forms as a proof of our orthodoxy. Is there a point at which these forms can become a threat to orthodoxy? The answer is a definite yes! Of course, it is not necessarily the forms themselves that threaten us, but our use of and attitudes toward those forms. God gives us many examples and warnings of the dangers of formalism. Formalism is deadly to our faith and life as God' s children. It is certainly also a threat to orthodoxy. In order to better understand how formalism is a threat to orthodoxy and to defend ourselves against it, we can benefit from a review of what Formalism is.

Formalism - A Deadly Hypocrisy!

The Apostle Paul warns about the perils that we face in these last days. These are not perils to our body and life but perils to our soul and eternal life with God.

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

Paul describes a most ungodly group of people living in these last days. Their hearts are full of every type of evil. We see this type of people all around us in the world. The entertainment industry parades such people and their ungodly lifestyles before our eyes as exhibits of a great way of life. Such influences are a great temptation and peril to our faith and life with God. Satan would use these temptations to rob us of our faith and kill our souls!

The last line of the above passage almost catches one by surprise. Those whose lives are filled with all this

ungodliness have a "form of godliness." Outwardly they have a form or appearance of godliness to disguise the wretched godlessness inside their hearts. This is FORMALISM-"having a FORM of godliness but denying its power." Formalism is a kind of hypocrisy. It is a way to cover up an evil heart and make it look godly. Yes, it can even soothe our conscience to make us think we are godly. That is what makes it such a dangerous threat.

Formalism is so appealing and tempting to man because it does not demand a change of heart. One can practice it with great zeal and diligence no matter what the condition of the heart may be. Formalism is an externalizing of God' s Word into a system of ceremonies and traditions that the most hardened unbeliever could follow and feel good about.

Types of Formalism

There are at least two types of Formalism which come in varying degrees. There is a more personal formalism in the life of the individual, which can vary from a weakness in a believer to outright unbelief. There is also a collective formalism of a group, where the religious system is designed to emphasize form and externals rather than a change of heart. One is inward, the other is outward. They seem to feed off each other and strengthen each other. Let' s take a closer look at each.

1. The first type of religious formalism is when worshipers simply go through the motions or forms of worship while their heart is not in it. Cain was the first to practice such formalism. He offered his sacrifices to God as he was taught by his parents. But it was only outward action without faith and love for God in his heart.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for this type of formalism when He said, "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ' These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me' " (Matt. 15:8). Such worship has a form or appearance of godliness. Those who worship look religious, but they deny it' s power.

Such formalism is also taking God' s name in vain by mechanically using God' s name in repetitious prayers, liturgies and singing while having no thought of Him, no genuine devotion.

2. The other type of formalism is a strict adherence to outward forms. It is a type of externalism, an undue emphasis placed upon external rules of morality or religion. The forms rather than the content become the center of focus and importance.

When Shalmaneser, king of Assyria scattered the northern tribes of Israel and replaced them with people from other cities he had conquered, these heathen people did not fear the Lord. "Therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them" (2 Kings 17:25). The people understood that this was because they were displeasing the god of that land. So, at their request, the king sent back one of the priests of Israel to teach them about the true God. The Samaritans, as they were called, were content simply to know and practice "the rituals of the God of the land." They learned how to offer sacrifices to God properly, which they did while they continued the worship of their own false gods. Knowing and practicing the forms of worship was good enough for them. While they had the forms of worship, they really knew nothing about the true worship of the God of heaven.

Human nature always thinks of religion as a simple matter of knowing and doing the right "rituals." Such formalism is really a form of idolatry. It is the same work-righteous belief that is shared by every other religion in the world, thinking that religion is about what we do for God or god. Mankind thinks that if we do the right things and have the right forms, then we are religious and godly.

All types of formalism have one thing in common. They have a "form of godliness," but they are all "denying its power." The power of the true Church of God is the gospel. The gospel is "the power of God to salvation" (Rom. 1:16). The gospel alone has the power to change hearts and lives, to make children of God out of children of the devil. Only the gospel has the power of God to cleanse our sin-filthy souls and present us to God as righteous and holy. For the Holy Spirit works with His almighty power through the gospel and gives us Christ and His righteousness. If we deny that power of God in the gospel, all we have left is empty and worthless form.

Formalism is as widespread and powerful today as ever. Many today have a "form" or outward appearance of "godliness." Some have many very beautiful and elaborate forms that look very religious and godly. Interestingly, it seems that where the content and power of the gospel is denied, the forms become more formal. When one' religion is based on forms, then one has to make the form more elaborate to seem worthy. Yet they deny its power. They deny the power of God unto salvation. They deny the power of God to take away sin. They are more interested in covering up sin than exposing and cleansing it. Formalism is all about appearing righteous, not being righteous.

Religious formalism is one of the great perils that we face today. It is a serious threat to the CLC. It is a very real and dangerous threat to each and every one of us, pastors and lay people alike. It is no surprise that it also threatens orthodoxy. Let us now consider how formalism is a specific threat to orthodoxy. Or, perhaps more to the point:

Formalism, a particular threat to the Orthodox!

Satan is always trying to attack all of God's children. He has a whole arsenal of weapons and uses the weapons that work the best for each individual or group. Formalism is one temptation in his arsenal that seems to be especially effective with the orthodox. Formalism presents a temptation to the orthodox in virtually every area of their religious life. We will consider how it threatens their worship, their teaching and their Christian life.

I - Formalism threatens the Worship of the Orthodox

The orthodox typically follow traditional forms of worship. These traditional forms are very meaningful and precious. They are based solidly on God's word and are therefore orthodox themselves. But they are the breeding ground for the first type of formalism, that is, going through the motions of worship without any devotion to God.

It has been said, "Hypocrites have no greater ally than tradition." Because traditions require no integrity of heart, they are easily substituted for true worship and obedience. Then it becomes very easy for people to honor God "with their lips but their heart is far from [Him]."

A. Tradition can breed heartless Worship.

When the people of Israel were living in captivity in Babylon they established a tradition. Every fifth and seventh month they wept and fasted in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem and in repentance for their sins which caused it. After they had returned to rebuild Jerusalem and had lived in the land for a while, the people sent representatives to inquire of the priests whether or not they should still continue this fast in those months. God responded to them by asking, "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me - for Me?" (Zech. 7:5). God pointed out that already for some time they had been simply following the tradition and were not fasting for God. There was no longer any true repentance or sorrow in their hearts. They were just going through the motions.

This same temptation of formalism threatens the orthodox today. When we continue in the same traditional forms of worship for many years, our worship can easily become empty and meaningless. How often haven't you zipped through the liturgy without any genuine worship? Even things as precious to us as the Lord's prayer can easily become a mechanical recitation. Our reciting the Lord's prayer in this way then becomes vain repetition rather than true praying. Those things that are the most familiar lend themselves most easily to formalism in our worship.

It is the same with our liturgy. When we use the same liturgy for years, we become so familiar with it that we can go through it in our sleep. Is such worship in any way pleasing to God? He may well ask us, "When you worship with 'page five and following' in the Lutheran Hymnal are you really doing it for Me - for Me?" We as pastors may even contribute to this meaningless worship by simply rattling through the liturgy, with little feeling or expression. It is almost as if we want to get through with that so we can get to the sermon which is "more important."

B. Formalism corrupts worship when we associate our Orthodoxy with certain forms.

In our introduction we said, "One might think that our traditional and conservative forms of worship and church organization are there to help protect our orthodoxy. Yes, in some cases we may even like to point to our forms as a proof of our orthodoxy. Is there a point at which these forms can become a threat to orthodoxy?" That, in fact, IS the point where formalism becomes a threat to true orthodoxy, when we associate orthodoxy with certain forms.

There seems to be a natural tendency to associate the two. How many times haven't you heard people talk about an experience in another church and comment on how different it was. When you ask them how it was different, they talk about the different forms of their worship. Those forms may not be wrong but since they are different from ours they are viewed as wrong. It is as if they could tell they were not orthodox because they didn't have the right forms of worship. On the other hand, some may attend a worship service in another church where the liturgy is very much the same as ours and they conclude that their church is the same as ours.

Tradition and forms do not prove or protect orthodoxy as such. Traditions are man-made customs. True orthodoxy is adherence to God's word. Even if the traditions themselves are orthodox, those traditions do not preserve orthodoxy. When we make such an association, then formalism is at the door ready to pounce and attack

us in several ways.

First, it can lead to the temptation to think that if we have the right form of worship then we are orthodox and are being faithful to God. Like the Samaritans we can begin to think that if we have the right rituals for worship then everything is ok. That leads to the type of heartless mechanical worship we discussed above.

Secondly, it can lead to a rigid insistence upon certain forms. Traditional forms of worship give the appearance of orthodoxy because they were established long ago by our orthodox forefathers. We know that God's Word does not change, so orthodoxy also cannot change. We may then make the logical conclusion that our traditions cannot change either. The temptation is great in our day of rapid change, to feel that we have to hold on to our forms and traditions in order to preserve and to prove our orthodoxy. There arises a fear that any change in our traditional forms is a straying from our orthodoxy. We may become suspicious of any brethren who want to introduce something new. We may even want to insist that we can not change certain forms.

That is already a weakening of true orthodoxy. But if our orthodoxy is measured or associated with our traditional forms then we are ripe for many other threats of formalism.

II - Formalism threatens the Teachings of the Orthodox

The teachings of Scripture are the heart and soul of the Church. The orthodox recognize this and treasure those teachings. So that is where Satan attacks. He uses the temptation of formalism to undermine and finally destroy the teachings so that they are no longer orthodox or true to God's word.

A. Formalism separates Form from Substance.

If we associate orthodox forms with orthodoxy, then we can begin to give the same value to them as to Scripture. We have always recognized the error of the Roman Catholic church in putting their traditions and the writings of the church fathers on the same level with scripture. But we face the same temptation. We would not ever say that our doctrinal writings are on the same level with Scripture, but when we have a writing that has been accepted as an official doctrinal statement of the CLC and is scripturally sound, then people begin reading and studying that human writing for instruction instead of God's word. It somehow seems easier to rely on the explanations of men than on the teachings of Scripture. So, we may look to Luther's Catechisms to study Scripture teaching. We study the Formula of Concord for our answers to certain questions. We study Walther's Law and Gospel, Pieper's Dogmatics or the CLC's Concerning Church Fellowship and Concerning Church and Ministry for a better understanding of various teachings. All of these writings are worth studying. They can help us sharpen our understanding of Scripture. However, here Satan plants the seed of formalism. Quite contrary to the intentions of the authors and our own intentions, we can begin, almost subconsciously, to rely on these writings of men more than or even instead of God's Word. This is another subtle beginning of formalism which separates form (the writings of men in this case) from substance (the Word of God).

Satan is looking for much more, however. In time,

B. Form supersedes substance.

Let us look at the example of the Priests and Pharisees of Jesus' day. They are a good example of how formalism supplants true teaching. The Scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus complaining, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." At least they were honest. They didn't try to claim that Jesus' disciples were transgressing the word of God. But they were transgressing the "Tradition of the Elders." To them that was as bad or even worse than transgressing scripture.

Alfred Edersheim gives us an interesting insight into this "tradition of the Elders" and its importance to the Jews. He describes how they were to perform this ceremonial washing before eating every "common" meal (a different, more complete washing which involved immersing the hands was used before eating sacrificial foods). This washing was called the Netilath Yadayim, literally, the lifting of the hands. Edersheim describes this washing:

It was the practice to draw water . . ., with what was called a natla, antila, or anteiaya, very often of glass, which must hold (at least) a quarter of a log--a measure equal to one and a half ' eggshells.' For no less quantity than this might be used for affusion. The water was poured on both hands, which must be free of anything covering them, such as gravel, mortar, etc., the hands were lifted up, so as to make the water run to the wrist, in order to ensure that the whole hand was washed, and that the water polluted by the hand did not again run down the fingers. Similarly, each hand was rubbed with the other (the fist), provided the hand that rubbed had been affused: otherwise, the rubbing might be done against the head, or

even against a wall. But there was one point on which special stress was laid. In the ' first affusion,' which was all that originally was required when the hands were Levitically ' defiled,' the water had to run down to the wrist. If the water remained short of the wrist, the hands were not clean . . .

If the hands were ' defiled,' two affusions were required: the first, or ' first waters' (mayim rishonim) to remove the defilement, and the ' second,' or ' after waters' (mayira sheniym or acharonim) to wash away the waters that had contracted the defilement of the hands. Accordingly, on the affusion of the first waters the hands were elevated, and the water made to run down at the wrist, while at the second waters the hands were depressed, so that the water might run off by the finger points and tips. By-and-by, it became the practice to have two affusions, whenever Terumah (prepared first-fruits) was to be eaten, and at last even when ordinary food (chullin) was partaken of.¹

Edersheim also says it became the practice to perform this washing not only before the meal but also after the meal and even in between courses. You see how tradition, in time, supersedes God' s Word. Traditions have a way of multiplying. None of this was required by God. The law of Moses did prescribe certain ceremonial washings for specific circumstances, especially for the priests before offering sacrifices or when one was defiled (cf. Lev. 12-15). But these were always only a picture of the need for spiritual cleansing from all sin. The Jews went way beyond the command of God in adding many rituals and rules about hand washing and making these human traditions necessary elements of their religion. John MacArthur gives some examples of how important this hand washing was to the devout Jews:

The value of ceremonial rinsing was held so high that one rabbi insisted that "whosoever has his abode in the land of Israel and eats his common food with rinsed hands may rest assured that he shall obtain eternal life." Another rabbi taught that it would be better to walk four miles out of the way to get water than to eat with unwashed hands. A certain rabbi who was imprisoned and given a small ration of water used it to wash his hands before eating rather than to drink, claiming he would rather die than transgress the tradition.²

The tradition of the elders went way beyond the word of God and added many legal requirements to what God' s word dictated. They established a superorthodoxy, which was not orthodox at all because it was not based on God' s word. Their "orthodoxy" was based on human traditions and denied the power of the gospel by making the rules of men necessary for life with God and salvation.

How did things get to this state of hypocrisy and formalism in Israel? We find its beginning during the time of the Babylonian captivity. Israel' s captivity served its Godintended purpose. People were brought to repentance and returned to the Lord. There was a resurgence of orthodoxy and interest in God' s word. Ezra and other scribes began to assemble and copy the various books of Scripture that were written up to that time. As they studied the scriptures, they began to make comments on various passages that seemed unclear. The intent was to preserve the true meaning of the Scripture and to help people to understand it and apply it to their lives. In time, they accumulated more pages of these interpretations than they had of Scriptures. Gradually the distinction between Scripture and the traditions based on interpretations of Scripture became less clear. Before long, tradition was more familiar and more revered than God' s own Word. Then the depravityof human nature takes over and turns traditions into a system of works for salvation rather than trusting the gospel.

Here we see how formalism poses a particular threat to us and our orthodoxy. The orthodox are especially concerned about preserving God's word. They are battling error on every side. So they very zealously want to define every minute detail and application of God' s word. We in the CLC, for example, have felt the need to spell out to our people many applications of the fellowship principle. This is not necessarily bad, but that is exactly where Satan attacks us with the temptation of formalism. Such proclamations of the church can easily become the Talmud of the CLC, a set of church rules that must be followed by all members. That sort of thing appeals to our flesh and to the temptation to hypocrisy and formalism in us all. Rules are something we can mechanically follow and feel good about. Meanwhile the principles that require a heart of devoted love to our Savior and His word are overshadowed and even lost sight of. It becomes possible then for people to follow religiously all the rules of fellowship while not having any meaningful worship to God.

Once formalism gets a foot hold, it grows until it not only supersedes Scripture but actually contradicts Scripture.

C. Formalism leads to a Contradiction of Scripture.

This is the stage at which the "Orthodox" Jews were. When the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of disobeying the tradition of the elders, Jesus showed how their tradition of the elders not only added to God' s Word but actually demanded disobedience to God' s clear command. Jesus responded to the charge of the Pharisees by

asking, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother;' and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"- then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition" (Matt. 15:3-6).

John MacArthur describes how this tradition not only contradicted the Commandment of God, but was actually a hypocritical sham to cover up the greed in their hearts and make their disobedience to God appear righteous.

Sometime in the past, a tradition had developed that allowed a person to call all his possessions *korban*, thereby dedicating them to God. And because Scripture taught that a vow to God must not be violated (Num. 30:2), those possessions could not be used for anything but service to God. Therefore, if a man's father or mother asked for financial assistance, he could tell them, "Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God." The Greek text of the next phrase is more emphatic than the English suggests. "He is not to honor" might better be rendered, "He must not honor." The vow did not simply allow withholding help from "father or . . . mother" but actually forbade it.

Except for what may have been actually given to the Temple or synagogue, however, the *korban* possessions remained in the person's hands. And when he decided to use them for his own purposes, tradition permitted him to do so simply by saying *korban* over them again. In other words, the tradition was not designed to serve either God or the family but the selfish interests of the person making the hypocritical vow. To avoid giving up his possessions in order to support his parents, he could declare those possessions sacred and unusable; but as soon as he wanted to use them for himself he could just as easily reverse the vow. The covert purpose of that tradition was to invalidate "the word of God" by circumventing the fifth commandment.³ (Note, by our way of counting it is the fourth commandment.)

I'm sure the vow to dedicate one's possessions to the Lord began with a genuine desire to serve the Lord. But that is how traditions evolve over time. When man writes his explanation of any part of God's word, especially if it is found to be orthodox in itself, the temptation is to treat that like Scripture. Time is spent commenting on and applying what man has written. Further explanations and applications are added to the explanations and applications and we get farther and farther removed from the Scriptures themselves and can even contradict Scripture.

This writer has seen that very thing happen already with our official CLC doctrinal exposition, *Concerning Church and Ministry*. That document is a fine explanation of the scriptural teaching of the Church and Ministry. Now it has been looked to by some as Scripture doctrine, and it is studied rather than Scripture. Inferences and applications have then been drawn from that human writing which are anti-scriptural. And so the process continues. Human traditions are placed alongside Scripture and then it develops and goes against Scripture and orthodoxy is lost.

III- Formalism threatens the Christian Life of the Orthodox

You are all familiar with the period of "Dead Orthodoxy," also called "Orthodoxism," in the years after the Lutheran Reformation. That was an example of how deadly formalism can be to the orthodox. It is actually an example of how formalism can choke out faith. Where faith is gone the Christian life is also gone.

The reformers had a genuine love for the Word of God and a desire to preserve it. In time however, orthodoxy became the end and the goal rather than simply the means to remain close to God. Many succumbed to the temptation to externalize the word and turn it into something which humans can do, and Christianity became for many a matter of knowing the right answers. Orthodoxy and even Christianity itself was measured by being able to say April 1, 2002 things in the correct words. It even got to the point where they debated and argued about things that are not answered by God's Word. The result was, the Christian life suffered. They knew the truth but it didn't seem to have any real impact on their life. Faith became only intellectual and not a matter of the heart. Even perfect orthodoxy is made of no value by formalism if one knows the Scriptures but does not take them to heart or do them. It is like building one's house on the sand (cp. Matt. 7:26-27). Scriptural externals alone provide no more firm a foundation than building on the words of men.

Jesus warned against this formalism of dead orthodoxy in His letter to the church in Ephesus. He said to them,

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I

have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent. (Rev. 2:2-5)

I would suspect that every pastor among us has seen signs of this formalism in his congregation and perhaps in his own life.

The formalism of dead orthodoxy threatens orthodoxy in yet another way. The reaction to the dead orthodoxy of the 17th century was a rise in pietism. Pietism downplays orthodoxy and emphasizes the Christian life. In fact, orthodoxy is viewed as the problem; therefore there is a movement away from orthodoxy.

Catherine Winkworth, who translated many of our German hymns into English, showed her contempt for orthodoxy in some of the things she wrote. She saw the problems of the dead orthodoxy of Lutheranism. She wrote, "Religion suffered. . . . On the one hand was a rigid Lutheranism, which had petrified what had once been living convictions into dead dogmas, and which gave its whole attention to controversies about definitions of doctrines in which people had ceased to feel a genuine interest."⁴ But notice where she puts the blame. She writes: "It has happened to me that I have seen most of the evils that arise among those who make the written Word the sole Revelation of God to man, and regard the very letter of that as infallible."⁵ She wanted nothing to do with "doctrinal rigidity."

What a shame when man's abuse of orthodoxy causes God's Word to be blasphemed in this way. True orthodoxy suffers greatly. We may still see the results of that today in some people's negative reaction to the suggestion that we must agree on Scripture or even that there is definite scriptural truth.

Solutions

What does all this mean for us? How can we avoid succumbing to these temptations? Shall we throw out all our forms and traditions and use only the Bible? That is hardly the solution. There are many very valuable traditions and forms in the Lutheran Church. We would lose much if we got rid of them all. Besides, using only the forms of the Word of God does not guarantee we will be safe from formalism. There are a number of things we can do, however.

The passage from 2 Timothy 3, which we quoted at the beginning of this paper, also gives us a key to what is at the heart of formalism. Therefore it also gives us a hint at the only real solution. It said, "Men will be lovers of themselves, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Formalism is an attempt to appear righteous and godly without a heart of genuine love for God. It is to draw near to God with our mouths and honor Him with our lips while our heart is far from Him. Therefore we want our heart to be dedicated to God alone.

Remember there is only one thing that can keep our hearts dedicated to God--the gospel. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The only real solution is to keep the focus on the gospel. When we try to take the short cut of using the law to motivate and create change, then we are encouraging formalism which obeys the law without the devotion of the heart to God. But by the power of God in the gospel we can also do the following.

Worship in Spirit and in truth.

To keep formalism out of our worship, let us remember that when we go to church, we are entering into the presence of the holy God to worship Him. We want to offer Him our praise and thanks for His great love and mercy. Let us prepare ourselves for worship by remembering why we are there. Let's remember what God has done for us, and then pray that God will help us keep focused so that our worship may be pleasing to Him. Reading a psalm before the service can also help. Remembering also that we come to church to have God speak to us, feed us and strengthen us, and coming with the expectation of receiving what we need from God will help us to keep focused on the word of God and the sermon.

We don't have to throw "page 5 and following" out of our hymnals. It is a very well thought out and beautiful order of service. However, if we use it, we as pastors should do everything we can to help our people truly to worship with it. Provide explanations of parts that are not easily understood. Narrative services and bulletin inserts about the liturgy can be very helpful to our people. In conducting the liturgy, we will want to make every effort to make it meaningful and heartfelt. Don't just rattle off the words but give expression and feeling to it. Add explanations as you go. These can all help people to keep focused.

On the other hand there can be much benefit in using new and fresh orders of service. Some of the musical responses in the Hymnal supplement seem to offer a more joyous mood to the worship. With different liturgies we may avoid the tendency simply to recite the words, and be led to think about what we are saying. Thus new forms

of service can enhance our worship. (We will also want to be sensitive to the feelings of the congregation about change.)

Above all let us never forget that the heart of the gospel is the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus. The worship and sacrifice God desires most of all is a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:16-17). May we never seek to establish our own righteousness or try to cover our sins, but humbly confess all our sins and seek the righteousness of Christ through the forgiveness of sins. Let us come, ready to unload our burden of sin, eager to hear the words of absolution.

All these things can help us truly to worship our God in spirit and in truth and to go away truly blessed.

Make sure our orthodoxy is found only in the Word of God.

A very faithful and devout member once came to me expressing his discomfort with singing, "How Great Thou Art" in our service. Because it is used so much by the Reformed churches, he felt that singing it could make some associate us with the Reformed. I told him that I chose it because the words were so beautiful and they fit so well with the theme of the service. But I would not use it if he was not comfortable with it. He came back later and said he had been reading the words of the hymn again and they were truly beautiful. He said he wouldn't mind singing it. Then He said, "Sometimes I'm just too orthodox." May we never apologize for being orthodox. Let's just make sure that our orthodoxy is based solidly on God's Word and not on our traditions.

Remember that everything written by men, however good and orthodox it may be, is still only the word of men and part of our human tradition. The orthodox writings of men are valuable in helping us to understand the Scripture. We can definitely benefit from the insights of others. But they should never take the place of God's word. Rather they should lead us into the Scriptures even more to "see if these things are so."

True orthodoxy is created and preserved only and alone by the Word of God. May we always say with the Psalmist, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. . . . How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way" (Ps. 119:97,103-104).

And may we always pray, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way. Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You" (Ps. 119:33-38). For it is God Himself who will preserve us from formalism and keep us in the true faith unto the end.

NOTES

¹ *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, 10ff.

² *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Matthew 8-15, 453.

³ MacArthur, 454-455.

⁴ Catherine Winkworth. *Christian Singers of Germany* ([London]: Macmillan & Co., [1869]), 105. Printed in the *ISC Hymnworks*.

⁵ Margaret J. Shaen, *Memorials of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 330. Printed in the *ISC Hymnworks*.

The Method of Applying Water in Baptism

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While at Chennai in the summer of 2001, I visited with two seminary students from the union Lutheran seminary, Gurukul. One of these men was preparing a paper on baptism in order to deliver a presentation with discussion in class. The professor had indicated that there would be a lively discussion because there was not

agreement on what the student would present: the Lutheran Position. The lively discussion would be expected due to non-Lutheran students in attendance. But was the position so clear or united, even among Lutherans? We huddled in my hotel room discussing the Scriptures.

We have met this issue of the method of applying water in baptism over and over again. A sizeable majority of the men trained and in training to be pastors in the BELC were not Lutheran in back-ground or brought up with the truth on baptism. Even in the CLCI the questions arise perennially among the men in training. Such is the influence of the Reformed and Pentecostal/Charismatic false teaching.

There is the temptation to go to the catacombs and point to the engravings of sea shells and say, "There is the evidence that the water was poured." Equally tempting is recourse to the Didache, which says that all three methods of applying the water are acceptable. In the end of course it is Scripture which must rule, no matter how splendid the courtiers standing beside the throne. They are still beside the throne with Scripture ruling.

NOT βάπτω , BUT βαπτίζω

If the word used in Scripture for baptism were βάπτω or ἐμβάπτω in the Great Commission and elsewhere, baptizing would be purely by immersion. But that is not the case. βάπτω does mean "dip," as we see by its use in Scripture.

βάπτω

Luke 16:24 ". . . send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water. . ."

John 13:26 ". . . I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it. So when he had dipped the morsel. . ."

Rev. 19:13 "He is clad in a robe dipped in blood. . ."

ἐμβάπτω

Matt. 26:23 ". . . He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me. . ."

Mark 14:20 "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread in the same dish with me."

John 13:26 ". . . I shall give this morsel when I have dipped . . ."

The Greek Word in Context

We look at βαπτίζω as it is used in Scripture. This is the rule: words change meaning and are used differently in different writings. In secular literature back then the word παραβάτης meant mostly a warrior beside the charioteer, or a certain kind of foot-soldier. It has a different meaning in Scripture. James 2:9 ". . . and are convicted by the law as transgressors." In our literature, based on Scripture, it means only "transgressor." Or consider the word χάρις, used earlier it meant "that which brought joy and pleasure." Its meaning in Scripture is overwhelmingly "grace." So with the words of Scripture, we consider them in context, that is, how they are used in Scripture.

We find that in India there has been some purposeful mistranslation of βαπτίζω and its derivatives as "Immerse." This is a case of reading into Scripture instead of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. A far more honest translation would have been to use the English cognate "baptize." While some ask the question, "What's in a word?" this mistranslation can lead people astray. Since the etymology of a word may not account for a changed usage, we ask in this study "How is the word used in its setting in Scripture?" Scripture is a rule unto itself: inspired, infallible, self-explaining.

Pertinent Words

(KJV from Young's Analytical Concordance)

βάπτισμα	<i>baptism</i> (22 times)
βαπτισμός	<i>baptism</i> in Heb. 6:2, <i>washing</i> in Mark 7:4,8; Heb. 9:10
βαπτιστής	<i>Baptist</i> (14 times)
βαπτίζω	<i>baptize</i> (74 times), <i>Baptist</i> (one time), <i>be baptized</i> [mid. pass.] (two times), <i>wash</i> (two times)
βάπτω	<i>dip</i> (three times)
ἐμβάπτω	<i>dip</i> (three times)
νίπτω	<i>wash</i> (17 times)

λούω	wash (six times)
ἀπολούω	wash (two times)
λουτρόν	washing (two times) Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5
ῥαντίζω	sprinkle (four times) Hebrews

Pouring

The idea of “pouring” is far more consonant with βαπτίζω than “immerse,” or any of the other renderings.

John 1:33 “. . . He, on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” Here the idea of descending, alighting upon, coming down from above, is used in the same sentence with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It seems far more sensible to look at that which came upon Jesus as that which comes upon us.

The example though that seems so conclusive is Acts 1:5 (and its attendant explaining passages) “John **baptized with water**, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 2:17 Peter explains the Pentecost happening quoting Joel, “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will **pour out my Spirit** upon all flesh. . .” John the baptizer had also previously stated, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier . . . he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt. 3:11). The Spirit was poured out upon and fire was upon the heads. It was not a case of being immersed in the Spirit or of fire. And now go backwards from that “pouring” understanding and with common sense note that usage for John’s baptism in Acts 1:5 and Matt. 3:11. We take the word in its understandable contextual usage. The idea of the Spirit being ἐκχέω poured out is also found elsewhere, for example: in Isa. 32:15: “until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high. . .”

Luke 12:49-50 “I came to cast fire upon the earth: and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with: and how I am constrained until it is accomplished.” Does it sound right to quote John, “I have an immersion to be immersed in”? That seems farfetched. As fire comes down upon, so persecution would fall upon, be poured out upon Jesus. Our Lord asked James and John, “Are you able to drink the cup I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” The persecution and judgment fell upon Him. He was not immersed in it. Isa. 53:5 “upon him was the chastisement that made us whole. . .”

Acts 10:45 “And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out (ἐκκέχεται, perf. pass. of ἐκχύνω) even on the Gentiles.” When describing this later Peter said, “As I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell (ἐπέπεσεν, aor. of ἐπιπίπτω) on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’ ” (Acts 11:15-16). ἐκχύνω means the same as ἐκχέω of Acts 2:17. Here we have “baptized” explained with the words “poured out” and “fell upon.”

Washing

In Scripture βαπτίζω is used in the sense of “washing.”

Luke 11:38 “The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.” The word translated “wash” is βαπτίζω.

The passages that have so much to say on this subject are Mark 7:2-4. “They saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed, ἀνίπτοι. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash, νίπωνται, their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify, βαπτίσωνται themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing, βαπτισμὸς, of cups and pots and vessels of bronze. . .).” Back in Luke 11, as well as here, νίπτω and βαπτίζω are interchangeable for washing hands or utensils. In Mark 7, even if one does not accept the manuscript for κλίνων, “beds” or “tables,” it is still stretching it to say that the χαλκίων “vessels of bronze” had to be immersed. Some have maintained that βαπτίζω means the whole body is immersed and that it corresponds with λούω. But here it is used with νίπτω and hands.

Acts 22:16 “Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins. . .” Here “wash” is ἀπόλουω and that sounds fine. But forcing a word as some do would mean saying it really means “drowning” or “immersing.”

In the two passages where λουτρόν is used in the New Testament, the reference is to baptism. “. . . that he might sanctify her, having cleansed (καθαρίσα) her by the washing (τῷ λουτρῷ) of water with the word” (Eph. 5:26). “He saved us . . . by the washing (λουτροῦ) of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). There are those who say that λούω means to wash the whole body, whereas νίπτω means to wash a part. In a

variety of passages this seems true. λούω is clearly used this way in Heb. 10:22: “. . . our bodies washed (λελουμένοι) with pure water.” But in Acts 16:33 the jailer “washed (ἔλουσεν) their wounds.” This was a part of the body. And in Luke 11:38, in the washing before eating, βαπτίζω can' t mean the whole body. The argument from the “immersion people” locks βαπτίζω in with λούω, the washing of the whole body, thus immersion. That will not work with βαπτίζω' s use in Scripture.

Sprinkling

In the freedom that Scripture gives us in the method of applying water, sprinkling is a viable method.

Ezek. 36:25 “I will sprinkle -יִסְפַּרְסֶנּוּ in the Septuagint (LXX) ῥαντίζω is used-clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses.” In the Old Testament there was the sprinkling of blood, Lev. 4:6,16:15, which cleansed. It is not hard to use that method to convey the cleansing of baptism. And have you ever wondered about the question of the Pharisees?

John 1:25 “They asked him, ' Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' ” Where in the Old Testament would the Pharisees get the idea of a baptismal cleansing? Ezekiel 36:25 perhaps?

Heb. 9:19 “. . . he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled (ῥαντίζω) both the book itself and all the people.” This is one of several passages in Hebrews which refer to ῥαντίζω.

In Hebrews 9:10 we have reference to “various ablutions” (βαπτισμοῖς), and in 6:2 to “ablutions” (βαπτισμῶν). These could refer to the βάπτισμα of Eph. 4:5, John' s baptism, the Jewish ceremonial according to the Law and tradition, including their conversion practice, and back to what was referenced in Hebrews 9:19.

Immersion

This method, which is held to by some in such an ironclad manner, finds little backing in Scripture.

Rom. 6:3-4 “. . . baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death . . . buried therefore with him by baptism into death . . .” is not pointing out a method for applying water. It tells us that baptism ties us to his sacrificial death. In verse four “we were buried” συνετάφημεν speaks of being in the earth with him. He was our substitute.

In Col. 2:11-15 we again meet the expression “buried with him in baptism” (v. 12). Look at the context. Circumcision in Old Testament times initiated one into the covenant relationship. Now baptism does that and lashes us to him. The method of applying water is not presented.

1 Cor. 10:1-2 has reference to “baptized into Moses.” If there is immersion in water in this historic all reference, it has to do with Egyptians being drowned and not our old flesh. There was a relationship with Moses in connection with water, yes. And there is a relationship with Christ through the water and the Word. It is as Peter says, by means of water, 1 Pet. 3:21, and so baptism is used.

Some even go back to Naaman' s example. In 2 Kings 5:10 the command in v. 10 (LXX) uses λούσαι, while the carrying out of the command by Naaman in v. 14 uses ἐβαπτίσαιτο. This is translated as “dip” and the argument is then carried forward to the New Testament use of βαπτίζω. That is really going well beyond reason. Why not, with this disconnected reference, then also enjoin a sevenfold application of water and of the Jordan?

How much water was used in the New Testament baptisms? At times it goes beyond normal reading to suggest that there was always enough water on hand for immersion. Acts 16:33 has the jailer and his family baptized at once at night. Acts 10:27 tells of many people gathered at Cornelius' home. In verse 47 Peter declared, “Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people...?” Just think with common sense what this says. Does he ask “forbid going to water” or “forbid water being brought?” We have no problem with the fact that one can be baptized by immersion, but with the assertion that it is commanded that baptism must be by immersion.

Anointing

Psalm 23:5 mentions “thou anointest my head with oil.” The applying of oil by pouring can also remind us of God' s anointing resting upon us. And this has to be our prayer, that God' s Holy Spirit rests upon us, that He imparts to us the proper understanding of Scripture. We have surely received the Spirit from God (1 Cor. 2:12). It requires much twisting of Scripture to get from a word or passage what it simply does not say. The clear Word tells us that water must be used, but not to use that water in one of the three common methods to the exclusion of the other two.

Missionary Efforts of the Christian Church to Western Border Lands of the Roman Empire. AD 590-1066

Philip D. Matzke

Introduction:

How should we approach Church History, as a series of facts for the interest of those who enjoy that type of thing or as a tool to teach us about "His-Story" so that we can also learn and apply the examples of the past to the future? It has been observed that "the chief concern of Church History is not to trace the formation of doctrine, but rather to observe the operation of the gospel, how by interplay of many forces God creates new spheres for its development, gathers His people from all peoples, languages, and tongues, and guards and keeps them through His gospel until the great day of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹

The spread of Christianity in the British Isles prior to AD 500 is for the most part sketchy. We do have in existence some original writings from men such as St. Patrick, but primarily the sources exist in the form of composite histories from the Catholic Church. The problem with using these sources as the only means of information is that the Catholic Church tended to make the histories of the famous missionaries into a catalog for their admission to sainthood. As a result, we have, intermingled into a common history, stories of fantastic proportion along with what are hopefully factual events. As one wades through these stories, we do find a record of how Christianity was brought into the border lands of what was at one time the Roman Empire. In England we find only a few examples of Christianity during the Roman period. Ireland, it is assumed, had a few Christians who made some inroads during this period of silence. Scotland it seems was resistant to Christianity prior to AD 500. The countries of the Germanic tribes had exposure early because of their acceptance of Arianism. While it could be questioned whether this was even a true Christianity (Arian doctrine seems to resemble some of the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses today) still, the Germanic Arians were exposed to some Christian teachings and may have even had some of the Scriptures among them, where they could learn of "the power of God to salvation" (Rom. 1:16). It is the intent of this article to examine the various border countries of the west in an attempt to trace the path of the gospel, roughly from the period after the Romans withdrew their legions from Britain, until the time of the Norman Invasion of 1066 when Rome finally drew the whole church into her fold.

Europe under the Goths and the Franks:

The Edict of Toleration in AD 313 officially ended the persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire. From 324 on, Christians were given favored status in the political and social arenas. By the end of the fourth century, it was dangerous to be a pagan in the Roman Empire. This shift in religious emphasis created a reverse in the type of mission efforts that went on in the areas closely associated to Rome. Rome, being the center of Christianity due to political maneuvering, began to persecute not only paganism, but also false teachers in the Christian churches. They were put under discipline and subject to the same penalties as those charged with paganism. After the Council of Nicea (325), Christianity began to gain strength throughout Roman Empire. With the exception of Julian the Apostate, the emperors were favorable to Christianity and in 381, Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. The Church, because of its many untrained members and the years of persecution, began a sort of counter-persecution. With the Church in control, she now became the aggressor. The many councils that were held condemned false teachings and made adherence to them punishable by death. The result was the rapid scattering (cp. Acts 8:1) of false-teaching Christians, who took their messages to the unconverted Goths and Franks. The most "successful" of these messages was the teaching of Arianism, which influenced Ulfilas (311-383) to become Christian. In the East, Nestorianism was the Christianity of choice.

England:

From the Goths and the Franks, Christianity spread to England (a derivative of "Angle" or "Engle," as the blond haired and fair skinned people were first described as "angels" by the people of Italy c. 580.) There is very little archeological evidence which would tell us the time when Christianity entered England. It can be assumed from the accounts of martyrs² that Christianity soon entered England through the soldiers of the Roman Legions

that were stationed there.

The Roman legions entered England around AD 43 and with them came many changes. The soldiers, that is, those who had any religious inclinations at all, brought their own gods with them. Inscriptions to the many of the Roman gods have been found, as well as a number of altars dedicated to the goddess Minerva. The Celtic language of the Britons was soon lost, except in reference to some geographic features, and Latin became the common language of England.

Although there is little evidence of Christianity during the first 250 years of Roman occupation, we do find documents which show that in AD 314 bishops from London and York attended a church council in Gaul. From then on, there is a good deal of evidence which shows that Christianity was not merely a presence in London and York, but it was an important influential force in the lives of people in large areas of England. Although the Roman legions withdrew from England altogether in 407, the Christian presence remained in spite of many civil wars among the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes.

The year 490 begins the period of settlement of the Teutons (Anglo-Saxons) from Denmark, Northwest Germany, and the Netherlands. During this time Latin virtually disappeared as the language of the people to be replaced by "Angle-ish" or "English," as the Angles were the most numerous. Early writers produced works such as *Beowulf* and *Ruined Burgh* (a poem describing a ruined Roman city.) The religion of these Anglo-Saxons was a superstitious religion based on the many mythical creatures from the forests and hills. Thor and Woden (from which we have "Thursday" and "Wednesday" respectively) were their chief gods. They also revered mythical creatures such as giants, fairies, witches, goblins, elves, pixies, etc. It seems unusual to find that in spite of all these superstitions the people were not particularly religious, or faithful to their beliefs. The priests had no real hold on the people except through their threats of harm through charms or other superstitions. By the time Christianity entered again in strength,³ the people embraced it readily. The tragedy of this period is that the Celts, who had converted to Christianity under the Romans, did not offer the message of salvation to their conquerors, the Anglo-Saxons.

Christianity at first re-entered England through the missionary zeal of a man by the name of Gregory. Gregory was a deacon in Rome. The story goes that Gregory was in the marketplace and saw three boys who were being sold as slaves. Intrigued by their white skin, fair faces and fine hair, he asked who they were. Someone said that they were Angles from heathen lands.

He commented that they would be better off called "Angels" because of their fair looks, and should be rescued from paganism to become joint heirs with the angels in heaven. He was not granted permission to go to the Angles by the Pope. Later, Gregory became Pope. He remembered the encounter in the market-place and commissioned Augustine (not the famed Augustine of Hippo) and 40 missionaries to the land of the Angles. They arrived on the shores of Kent in 597. The people of Kent had been in contact with the mainland, and in fact the wife of Ethelbert, king of Kent, was already a Christian. She was the daughter of the Frankish King who ruled in Paris. Several in the court were Christian and had been worshipping in an old Roman church outside the city of Canterbury. Ethelbert had not yet been converted but invited the missionaries to speak to him. As Augustine preached to the king, using also a silver cross and a painted picture of Christ, Ethelbert became more interested and invited the missionaries into Canterbury to teach and preach. Some time later, Ethelbert himself became a Christian and was baptized. Soon after this, Augustine was named by Pope Gregory to be Archbishop of the English. Christianity spread in all of the region where Ethelbert had influence, which was far beyond the boundaries of Kent.

When Ethelbert died, the missionary efforts slowed considerably. Resistance became more apparent in the kingdoms to the south and center of Briton. However, in Northumbria, thirty years after the arrival of Augustine, the newly crowned king Edwin married a Kentish princess and she took with her a priest named Paulinus for the purpose of spreading Christianity in the north. Paulinus, and his company preached to the court for a considerable time without success. Finally, king Edwin and all his nobles were converted and deserted the old gods. They were baptized and soon built a church of wood and then later of stone which later was named York Minster.

The spread of Christianity was halted for a time in Northumbria, and it seemed as though all would be lost when Edwin was killed in AD 633 by the "Christian" king of the Welsh in alliance with the pagan king of Mercia, Penda (this was a battle between "native" Britons and Anglo-Saxons). Paulinus, along with the queen and her children, fled to Kent. Northumbria became a killing ground by the forces of Cadwallon and Penda. This reign of terror was short-lived. By the next year Oswald, whose pagan father had earlier been defeated by Edwin before he became a Christian, and who had embraced Christianity whole-heartedly, fought and defeated Cadwallon and his army toward the end of AD 634. Having brought peace to all of Northumbria, he sent word to Iona that he was in need of missionaries to teach and preach among his people. Oswald donated land and money for the work of the Church in Northumbria. Although his reign was short-lived (he was killed in battle at the age of 38 in AD 642) his brother and cousin continued the work that he had begun and firmly planted Christianity in Northumbria.

Ireland and Scotland:

Ireland has a history different than that of any other “Christian” nation. Unlike all the other nations of the Holy Roman Empire (H.R.E.), Ireland was brought to Christianity outside the pale of the H.R.E. It was only after many years (644) that Ireland became associated with Roman Catholicism, and interestingly, was the only one of the British Isles that remained Catholic. And it wasn't until the Norman invasions by William I (1066) that the H.R.E. entered Ireland in full force to stay.

Very little is recorded of the early history of Ireland. It is known that the religion during the Roman occupation was primarily Druidism, although Christianity seems to have made inroads from the Celts of Briton. In the earliest recorded history of the area, Ireland was the little island known as the Sacred Island. Later on, with the introduction of monasteries the Sacred Island designation took on a new meaning especially at Iona (more on this later). Rome, under the Caesars, had very little influence on Ireland (or “Hibernia,” as it was commonly called; it was also called “Scotland” or “Scotia” until the eleventh century). Tacitus records that Agricola considered the idea of invading Ireland in order to remove notions of freedom from the Britons, but the idea never came to fruition, probably because of the many civil wars that were plaguing Rome. As a result of this isolation from Rome and the authority of the Roman church, when Christianity finally did enter Ireland it was not consistently Romanized (or Catholic) Christianity but rather a Christianity which, in many respects, mingled aspects of the Roman Church, paganism, and teachings which resemble modern Protestantism. This resulted in having a rule and norm which aligned more closely to the Scriptures than to Catholic tradition or to the authority of the central Church government.

The first records of Christianity are found from the three and four hundreds. Apparently Pelagius, though a Briton, had as an important ally one by the name of Caelestius who was Hibernian. It is also recorded that two bishops came from Hibernia, one of them named Mansuetus was an ordained bishop in Toul in AD 350, and the other, called Palladius, was supposedly a native Briton sent to Hibernia as a bishop in 431. No doubt Christianity came early to Ireland due to the extensive trading and the selling of slaves between Ireland and Briton in the late 200s and early 300s. It is known that Patrick, a Hibernian native, was born around AD 396 and was a slave already as a child in Briton. He was taught Christianity from his father. But it appears that Druidism still held sway in Ireland for some time after Palladius for we find no further record except that Palladius in discouragement gave up the mission field and settled in Northern Briton among the Picts.

While Rome failed through its servant Palladius, Patrick on the other hand did see some success and is known as the one who Christianized Ireland. It is unknown whether Palladius and Patrick knew each other. Much of the tradition from Rome seems to confuse the two people. They were contemporaries, but it is unknown whether their work was even done in the same area.

Patrick wrote only briefly about himself. He was the son of a deacon and the grandson of a priest (possibly Druid, although Patrick does not specify). There are two separate dates for his death, both March 17, either c. 465 or 493.⁴ His ministry is said to have spanned 60 years. He writes that his early childhood was spent as a slave in Briton, where he served six years as a shepherd. The teachings of his childhood were often on his mind (probably from his father who was a deacon). He eventually escaped and was again enslaved either in France or Briton. How he made it out of slavery is unknown. It is recounted by Patrick that shortly after he was free, he had a dream or vision in which a man named Victoricius gave him letters and begged him to come to Ireland as a missionary. The remainder of his life was spent in that mission. The rough dates of his activity are given from c. 440 - 493, although again this is conjecture. One of the reasons for the date of 440 is that the monastery in Armagh, which he supposedly founded, was founded in AD 445 and receives the credit for being the center of his missionary activities. He writes of having baptized thousands and exclaims “I am greatly indebted to God, who has bestowed his grace so largely upon me, that multitudes were born again to God through me. The Irish, who never had the knowledge of God and worshiped only idols and unclean things, have lately become the people of the Lord, and are called sons of God.”⁵

Patrick's work was only the beginning of the recorded missionary work in Ireland. Although Patrick died in 493, his work continued, due to the many monasteries and nunneries that he established for the training of boys, girls, young men and young women for the work of the church. Often, since Patrick focused his missionary efforts on the kings and nobles, these in turn would send their children to be educated in the monasteries. One of these educational centers brings us the account of Bridget, who became the founder of the abbey in Kildare. As a young girl she was known throughout the area for her charity toward the poor and needy, possibly due to her own humble birth in 454. Apparently her charity toward others actually became a fault, as she would even go so far as to give away things that were not hers to give. But through her words and actions many of the poor heathen were told of

the God of salvation and were baptized. Her story is, no doubt, one of the many positive results of the monasteries of Patrick. These monasteries kept the church going for the next great missionary of Ireland and Scotland: Columba.

It was Columba who established the most famous monastery located on the island of Iona in Northwestern Scotland. This small island, only three miles by 1.5 miles, became the center of missionary activities which sent missionaries throughout Scotland, Northumbria, and Scandinavia, as well as to the Germanic people on Europe's mainland.

Columba was born in 521 to a royal family. Through this circumstance he was well educated and was taught both communication skills and politics. Apparently he led somewhat of a wild life until his forties, when he decided to "be a pilgrim for Christ."⁶ Maybe it was his past which motivated him in his work, for he became the most important figure to the spread of Christianity not only in Ireland but around the whole of northern Europe. He established monasteries in the Inner Hebridian islands off the west coast of Scotland with Iona being the hub of his efforts, training missionaries, priests and laymen for the work of the church. The reputation of Iona was so widespread that many kings, nobles, and church leaders chose to be buried on this island dedicated to the success of Christianity in a still very pagan world. Unfortunately, many legends were embellished by the church to make Columba seem more than a man. He is said to have performed miracles, conversed with angels, prophesied, and won battles against druids and kings alike. In spite of these accounts, his zeal for the spread of the gospel can certainly be an example to the whole church.

When we consider the hardships and constant threat of danger that these early Christians had to endure we do not want to extend ourselves to the point that Bridget did in giving away those things that we need to sustain ourselves and our families, but neither do we want to make our concerns for our own welfare the most important issue as we say, "here am I send me." One author quoted a poem about a "problem child" who drove her family mad with her giving, and then commented: "There is a problem here. On the one hand, it can be argued that if our family members do not choose to make sacrifices for God we have no right to make that choice for them. ... On the other hand, I far more frequently hear Christians argue that their sacred duty to keep everything nice for their spouses and children prevents them, not only from going as missionaries to distant shores, but also from volunteering even quite moderate amounts of their time and money for worthy causes down the block (not that all unattached Christians are blameless in this regard). You will note that St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, told them that marriage, while instituted of God and a sign of the union between Christ and His Church, was not without its dangers to the spiritual life of the Christian. But the danger he saw had nothing to do with sex. He was concerned instead that the married are tempted to overvalue security, to feel that they cannot afford, for their families' sakes, to take chances. And since he expected Christians to be facing persecution soon, he saw this as a matter of urgency. So, as I said, there is a problem here. I have no final answer to give, but I commend it to your consideration."⁷

Germany:

From Ireland and Scotland, the gospel message was spread once again among the Germanic peoples: the Saxons, Franks and the Frisians. The work among the Franks and Frisians was focused mainly in the courts of the kings. It was the opinion of the missionaries that if the support of the monarchies could be achieved, then the gospel would have free reign to be preached in all the land. It was this philosophy which guided the missionaries which came from the now Romanized monasteries of Scotland, England, and Ireland.⁸

Work among the Frisians (the area of coast land which is on the south of the North Sea) and the Franks (to the south) had been interrupted centuries ago by the constant fighting of the "barbarians." Christianity had been in this area in the 400s due to the conversions among the Burgundians, Goths, and Visigoths to Arianism. While these tribes were mainly found in the western parts of Europe, their influence spread also to the eastern parts where Rome had not conquered. Willibrord, in 692, was the man who was sent among the Frisians. He had been educated in Ripon (location unknown) and in Lindisfarne, a famous monastery which was later sacked by the Vikings. He was a staunch supporter of Rome and had papal authorization to be a missionary. When he arrived in Frisia, he found a sort of feudal system already in place in this area. He used it to his advantage by pleading for protection from the "Mayor of the Palace" who was at that time Pepin. There were other kings hostile to Christianity, but with the protection of the Mayor of the Palace Christianity was given free reign. Willibrord erected many churches and monasteries.

It is often said that Willibrord and Boniface were the "apostles to the Germans." However, one of the notable things that we read in the histories is that when Boniface came to the areas of Bavaria and Thuringia (718) he found the area already having churches. Here he was not well received because they did not want to embrace the rule of Rome. He then spent three years with Willibrord in Friesland. From 723 on, his work seemed to take on

the form of organizing the independent churches so that they would conform to the authority of Rome. He died a martyr in AD 754 or 755.

There is one other important thing to take note of. It seems as though there was at times a great push to establish a form of the church, without worrying about the hearts of the people. When Christianity was brought to the Franks earlier under Clovis in the late 400s, we find that it had little effect on the lives of the people. Edman exclaims: "Baptism seems to have made little or no change in the life of Clovis and his contemporaries. To him the alliance with the Church was a means to the end of political and military power. [But] The Franks were as pagan as ever, only they adhered to some Christian formalities, such as the sign of the Cross, and were buried by the Church. France received the Church, but not Christ; the sacraments, but not salvation; the bishops, but not the Bible; the monks, but not the Mediator between God and men. It had the form of Christianity, but not the power thereof; and that difference altered the course of history to be followed by the Franks and their kingdom."⁹ This was the Christianity that Boniface also encountered. In a sermon which he preached to Christian converts on the renunciation of the devil in Baptism he shows them the very things that their ancestor Christians had also done: "But what are the works of the devil? They are pride, idolatry, envy, murder, calumny, lying, perjury, hatred, fornication, adultery, every kind of lewdness, theft, false witness, robbery, gluttony, drunkenness, slander, fight, malice, philters, incantations, lots, belief in witches and werewolves, abortion, disobedience to the Master, amulets. These . . . you have forsworn by your baptism, . . . I admonish you, my dearest brethren, to remember what you have promised Almighty God."¹⁰ This trend continued wherever the Roman Church was found: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mark 7:6).

This became ever more evident under Charlemagne, who, disgusted with the rejection of Christianity by many tribes of Saxons, took the philosophy that they should "convert or die." Thus the groundwork was laid and approved by Rome that mass conversions by force were much easier and showed faster results than the work of preaching the gospel. The "converts" offered lip service, but it wasn't until three and four generations later that we find true Christianity in some areas because it was not earlier in the hearts of the people.

Scandinavia: the Danes and the Vikings:

The Danes and Vikings were the last tribes in Europe to hear the gospel. There is no evidence that the gospel had been preached earlier in the Scandinavian countries. It had been almost 800 years earlier that the gospel first came to Rome, when it finally reached this wilderness and the very savage peoples who lived there. The first missionary to Denmark was Willibrord in the 700s but his visit was brief. He is said to have returned home to Frisia with 30 Danes for training in the Christian faith. But, as so often happens when war is more common, Christianity doesn't seem very important. When Charlemagne began his forced conversions of the Saxons, Godfred and his Danes considered the Christian God to be the enemy God and thus resisted Christianity. Conquest in the name of Christianity was a major stumbling block to those who did not want to be conquered. Charlemagne's armies were repelled by the Vikings. It wasn't until an alliance and a request for aid that was sent to Charlemagne by a rival Viking leader, Harald Klak, that he and his Vikings were baptized. Ansgar was appointed to be Harald's chaplain. Ansgar seems to have had a strong desire for mission work, but his efforts seemed largely in vain. He is said to have founded a few churches and had some success, but when he died (865), Scandinavia was still a pagan country for another century.

Scandinavia was converted through the missionary kings; but the religion of the Scandinavians made the conversion to Christianity much easier because of the similarity between the accounts of Christianity and those of Scandinavian mythology. According to Scandinavian mythology, there was an "unknown God" of which the people were always interested to hear. Their theology centered upon eternal life. When a man died, if he had been brave, he went to Walhall in a state of joyous fighting and feasting. If on the other hand a man had been cowardly, he would go to Niflheim where he would be alone and surrounded by things disgusting and degrading. This was not the end though. It was taught that there was a final judgement in which all people would have to stand before the "unknown God," the "All-Father." Here they would not be judged by their bravery or cowardice, but rather by their goodness or wickedness. After the judgment, the All-Father was to create a new heaven and a new earth where the good would live for ever. The example of goodness was seen in the god Baldur, who watched the world from the rainbows and was the center of all the gods of Walhall. Isn't it interesting that they have stories which are similar to the Scriptures, as if they once had the truth but it became corrupted.¹¹ The Scandinavians had no priests or organized religious observances. Thus there was no competition with the established religion because the people were no longer interested in praying to the old gods and there was no priest class to oppose the good news. The chief battle was with the moral degradation to which the people had stooped. Stealing, killing, torture, drunkenness, and destruction were not only commonplace, but were what many did for a living. They were, however, fiercely

dedicated to king, family, and friend, and would gladly sacrifice their own lives in loyalty to them. When the kings converted, the people followed willingly and gladly, even though their lifestyles often did not change.¹²

Early Christianity in Scandinavia seems also to be politically motivated to an extent. The kings of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, when they embraced Christianity, embraced it enthusiastically . . . and put to death those who would not submit to the Christian faith. This is not to say that there were not true Christians among those who merely paid lip service. Yet the thought remains that the widespread “Christianizing” of these continents is largely due to the compelling argument of the sword rather than the conviction brought by the Word.

During the 900s, Christianity swept through the countries of Scandinavia, imposed by the various kings: Hakon the Good of Norway (934), Harald Bluetooth of Denmark (965), Olof Skotkunung, king of Sweden (995), Olaf Trygvesson of Norway (995). Leif Erickson in AD 1000 took Christianity to Greenland and possibly to North America. The last significant event in this period took place in AD 1066 when the Normans conquered England with papal approval and support. This meant that Rome finally dominated the last of the independent churches. This event also ended the age of the Vikings.

Concluding Remarks:

It may seem incredible to us that, with all the false teachings, the ascetic lifestyles, the wars, and the conversions by the sword, there were any true Christians among the converts. When we compare the lives of these people with what Paul says: “we are in the world but not of the world” we easily get the impression that the monasteries were havens for sin, and the gospel which came out of them was without effect. While we cannot often observe a great effect on the nations as a whole, still we can be confident of what God says in Isaiah 55:11, “So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth: it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

Finally we see in the latter years of this missionary period an attempt to employ the sword as the instrument of conversion. But while a sword may compel a confession of the lips, this does not in itself make a person a Christian. The threat of the sword may move people to undergo Baptism, but Baptism without faith does not make a person a Christian. It is faith which accepts the gospel Word in Baptism that makes one a Christian.

Now as we look ahead to the Crusades, which began around AD 1095, we see this trust in the sword continuing. It will also be seen in the conversion of the central and south American Indians, in clear distinction from the true mission work which was carried on in the earlier part of the period between AD 400 and 1000. It would seem that the further a people are removed from the days when God' s powerful grace is manifested before their eyes, the more they tend to trust the wisdom and might of man to accomplish God' s work. So it was in the days of Adam, Noah, and Joshua, and so this trend continues through the early Christian church, Martin Luther, and The Great Awakening of the 19th Century. Christendom today appears to be in a low in many respects, yet God has not left the world without shows of His power and grace. We have seen natural devastations unlike anything that the world has experienced in a long time. They can well teach us not to trust in horses or chariots, in human minds or might. Will we also teach our children where true joy and security is found? The further one goes away from those significant times, the more one forgets. Maybe that is what happened between AD 400 and 1000: the people forgot and the result was the “Christianity” of the Crusades. What will be the result of our Christianity?

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NOTES

¹ Reim, E., Synopsis of Prof. John Ph. Koehler' *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*.

² Fox' s Book of Martyrs, Chapter 2 relates: "Alban, from whom St. Alban' s, in Hertfordshire, received its name, was the first British martyr. Great Britain had received the gospel of Christ from Lucius, the first Christian king, but did not suffer from the rage of persecution for many years after. He was originally a pagan, but converted by a Christian ecclesiastic, named Amphibalus, whom he sheltered on account of his religion. The enemies of Amphibalus, having intelligence of the place where he was secreted, came to the house of Alban; in order to facilitate his escape, when the soldiers came, he offered himself up as the person they were seeking for. The deceit being detected, the governor ordered him to be scourged, and then he was sentenced to be beheaded, June 22, AD 287.

"The venerable Bede assures us, that, upon this occasion, the executioner suddenly became a convert to Christianity, and entreated permission to die for Alban, or with him. Obtaining the latter request, they were beheaded by a soldier, who voluntarily undertook the task of executioner. This happened on the twenty-second of June, AD 287, at Verulam, now St. Alban' s, in Hertfordshire, where a magnificent church was erected to his memory about the time of Constantine the Great. The edifice, being destroyed in the Saxon wars, was rebuilt by Offa, king of Mercia, and a monastery erected adjoining to it, some remains of which are still visible, and the church is a noble Gothic structure."

³ Civil wars kept Christianity at bay for some time, although it was not completely gone, contrary to what Bishop Browne wrote of the period: "All was lost. A day' s preaching had converted hundreds. A day' s defeat swept the whole thing away. Christianity in the North was gone" (Browne, G. F., *Augustine and his Companions*, 2nd edit., Edinburgh, 1873). It wasn' t until AD 634, when Oswald defeated the supposed Christian Cadwallon (who later hunted Anglo-Saxon Christians and had them put to death), that Christianity again was brought to Northumbria at the invitation of Oswald. Iona sent their man, Aidan, who became the revered evangelist to Saxon England. He reached England in the summer of 635 and was instrumental in the reconversion of almost all of England. England from then on would remain a Christian country (Addison, J. T., *The Medieval Missionary*, pp. 26-29).

⁴ Most historians hold to the later date for his death. Christian History magazine, 60, Vol. XVII, No. 4:15 states: "According to the Irish annals, Patrick died in 493, when he would have been in his seventies. But we do not know for sure when, where, or how he died."

⁵ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, IV: 46.

⁶ *Christian History*, 60:28.

⁷ James Kiefer. <http://www.oremus.org/liturgy/etc/ktf/mO2/ho1.html> Subject: more on Druids.

⁸ The Council of Whitby in AD 644 brought the churches of Ireland, Scotland, and England under the direct supervision and teachings of Rome. This ended the independence of the monasteries, and the missionaries were now called to Rome to be consecrated as bishops before they were sent as missionaries. Even this was not fully carried out for several reasons (mainly the many civil wars and Viking invasions). It wasn' t until the Norman invasions (which by the way were sanctioned by the papacy) that all church life was brought under strict Roman authority.

⁹ Edman, V. Raymond, *The Light in Dark Ages*, 80.

¹⁰ Schaff IV: 96.

¹¹ There are many tribes and nations that have stories which are similar to Bible stories. On almost every continent stories of the native people have similar accounts of Creation by a creator God, a Flood, and a child or youthful Savior. Even Celtic tradition tells of a child-savior. King Arthur is said to be an example of the child-savior.

¹² Schaff, IV: 107-110.

BOOK REVIEW

James I. Packer: *Truth & Power - The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life*, hard cover, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 1996, 251 pages.

Knowing God (reviewed in the September 1998 *Journal of Theology*) is no doubt the best-known book written by James Packer, the Anglican British teacher and scholar, now living in British Columbia in Canada. But he has written many others in his long career. In this book concerning Scripture, Packer stresses the importance of maintaining the doctrine of the Bible' s inerrancy.

In the first chapter ("God' s Freedom Trail") Packer points out the important connection between the doctrine of inerrancy and biblical authority. With emphasis on such passages as 2 Peter 1:21, 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, and 2 Timothy 3:15-17 Packer warns his readers: "Once you give up the New Testament view of biblical inspiration, there is no limit on how far you will go in rejecting or relativizing biblical assertions. ... Protestantism' s current confusion is largely due to the way its teachers have fanned out at this point, producing as many different sub-biblical theologies as there have been thinkers to devise them" (48).

The second chapter ("Formed, Deformed, Reformed") is a study of how various church groups (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, etc.) and various individual Christians (Augustine, Luther, Wesley, etc.) have understood biblical inerrancy and authority. Packer closes with this plea: "If the church is ever again going to live happily and fruitfully with the Bible, ... it must ...once more embrace the whole Bible as the written word of God and interpret it on the basis that it neither misinforms nor misleads" (94-95).

In the third chapter ("A Long War") Packer presents the battle for the Bible' s inerrancy from a personal perspective. Among evangelicals Packer has taken a leading role in asserting biblical inerrancy. In fact he helped to form the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI), which functioned between 1977 and 1987. In his view the war for the Bible' s inerrancy was absolutely necessary because so many theologians were influenced by Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, who did not even come close to asserting the inerrancy of Scripture even though they spent their lifetimes studying the words of the Bible.

The fourth chapter ("Give Me Understanding") shows the relationship between biblical inerrancy and biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics. Here Packer points out how easy it is for us to understand and interpret the Bible in the light of our denominational background. "Reaction, like tradition, can become a blinkering force, keeping us from seeing" what the Bible is actually saying (145).

The fifth chapter ("Mouthpiece for God") deals with biblical inerrancy and biblical preaching (homiletics). In this chapter Packer explains how he himself prepares to preach God' s Word in the world. "Every preacher should speak in a way that makes plain, first that his message is from God who speaks it in Scripture, second that he himself comes from the presence of God to deliver it, and third that it matters to him that his hearers follow the path of life by receiving it rather than miss that path by rejecting it. This is my aim when I preach" (177).

The sixth and last chapter ("Life and Health and Peace") covers the devotional reading of the Bible by ordinary Christians. Packer reminds us that "whatever the Bible teaches has divine authority, and we are to bow to that authority at every point" (193). How strange it is that there have never been more English translations of the Bible than now, never more helps available to understand the Bible, and yet there is such appalling ignorance of what the Bible actually says! "Western Christianity has become superficial and shallow; we do not give ourselves time to soak ourselves in Scripture!" (235).

Confessional Lutherans who accept the verdict of the *Formula of Concord* (1577) and the *Brief Statement* (1932) concerning the Bible will find themselves agreeing with almost everything that Packer says in this book. The main flaw in Packer' s presentation, and it is not a minor flaw, is that he makes little or no distinction between what God says as law and what God says as gospel. True as it is that we need to accept both law and gospel as inerrant revelation from God, the gospel must be presented as God' s final word that swallows up God' s law and thus gives abiding comfort to sinners like ourselves. The gospel is not altogether missing from Packer' s book. But it is not presented in contrast to the law. Since Packer' s theological niche is Calvinistic Puritanism, we should not be surprised.

Out of gratitude to God, who has given His Church scholars willing to accept the Bible as God' s inerrant Word, we conclude this review by printing a short statement produced by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978 (124-125):

- 1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God' s witness of Himself.**
- 2. Holy Scripture, being God' s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God' s instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God' s command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God' s pledge, in all that it promises.**
- 3. The Holy Spirit, its divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens**

our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God' s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God' s saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible' s own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

- *David Lau*