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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL of Concordia University for the Concordia University System

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Introduction to the *Concordia Theological Journal*, Vol. 6, Issue 1

The Concordia Theological Journal (CTJ) has been published for the past five years as the academic journal for the theology departments of Concordia University—Wisconsin (CUW) and, after the merger, Concordia University—Ann Arbor (CUAA). For this the sixth year of its publication, it has been expanded to showcase not just the academic work of CUW/CUAA but also of the entire Concordia University System (CUS). The reach of the journal has been extended in that it will not only be published in print but also is found online at our own webpage (www.cuaa.edu/ctj) and is listed on ATLASerials™ with the full-text of each article being available on ATLA-Serials Plus™. To maintain academic excellence, we are now using a system of double-blind peer review. We are colloquially terming this expansion of the authorship pool, the extension of the journal's reach, and the institution of double-blind peer review "CTJ 2.0" in order to emphasize the extent of the changes made to what has already been a strong history of journalistic excellence.

The purpose of CTJ is to provide space for interdisciplinary, academic conversation within the tradition of Confessional Lutheranism on pressing problems affecting the church and Christian higher education. To this end, while we want to focus on academic offerings from the universities' and colleges' theology departments, we are open to interdisciplinary work as well that would include faculty in other academic departments at CUS schools, such as biology, anthropology, English, etc. Please see our website for instructions on how to submit articles for consideration.

The articles in this issue investigate what it means to be authentically Lutheran in the rapidly changing world of the twenty-first century, particularly as it relates to faithful articulation of doctrine and practice in higher education and congregational life. The article by Scott Yakimow (CUAA) provides an analysis of the practice of the early church as witnessed in the New Testament and the Didache regarding how prophets and their prophecies were tested in order to suggest a possible pattern for determining when a new articulation of doctrine or practice is faithful to the faith as it has been received. Philip Brandt (Concordia University—Portland) draws upon the history of the development of the liturgical seasons in order to make a suggestion for re-situating the penitential aspect of the Advent season to the time after Christmas due to changes in our culture. Joel Oesch (Concordia University—Irvine) reflects on the nature of what it means to be human in the twenty-first century and makes a proposal for how an incarnate, em-

bodied life might be reconceived and reclaimed in what is termed the "Age of Excarnation"—an age where human identity has become disembodied and various technologies have come to dominate our lives. Finally, Joshua Hollman (Concordia College—New York) is also concerned with questions of identity, drawing upon Charles Taylor as well as Martin Luther in order to help educators teach Lutheran, Christian identity and the importance of "with-ness" in a twenty-first century key that resonates with contemporary students.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Scott Yakimow and Theodore J. Hopkins (CUAA)

Managing Editors of Concordia Theological Journal

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Editorial

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"Theology Is For Confession"

Nearly thirty years ago Gerhard Forde wrote his well-known treatise *Theology Is for Proclamation*.[1] For me, this book was a game-changer. I began to see theology not primarily as an academic enterprise that finds the truth at all costs, but as a discipline that is fundamentally oriented to the church and directed toward a specific end: God's eschatological announcement of the Gospel message in Jesus Christ, "Your sins are forgiven." This understanding of theology has continued to propel my own teaching at the university level, and Forde's distinction between explanation and proclamation remains a necessary distinction so that the gospel is not elided by a system. In Forde's own metaphor, the distinction helps to ensure the bridegroom is heard saying, "I love you," to his bride and not merely a lecture on the nature of love.

With some trepidation and a recognition of the continuing significance of Forde's work, I wish to put forward an alternative to broaden and enrich his proposal that theology is for proclamation. I believe it is more helpful to say that theology is for confession.[2] Before I describe what that means, let me explain why I think the adjustment is necessary: the church. Forde's notion of proclamation easily separates Christians from each other so that every Christian stands before God, yes, but all seem to stand in their own separate space, hearing their own personal proclamation. The preacher and the hearer are all that is necessary for the proclamation to take place, and a robust sense of Christian community falls to the wayside as unnecessary or unimportant.[3] The problem is exacerbated in an American context where individualism is assumed, and Americans can hardly see, let alone express, the social nature of faith, work, or even public life. Moreover, America is the land of novelty and utilitarian thinking, which has thrown away the old wine skins of history and tradition to embrace the new wine of the therapeutic.[4] In short, the idea that theology is solely for proclamation endangers the

[1] Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

[2] Paul Hinlicky has rightly placed confession as central to dogmatics. Hinlicky writes, "I will argue that public confession, not (supposedly) righteous political interventions in the mixed society of the common body, is the fruit by which theology is known, tested, and judged." Paul R. Hinlicky, *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics After Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 24.

[3] Steven Paulson, a student of Forde and himself a noted Lutheran theologian, shows just what this looks like. Paulson sums up his basic ecclesiology: "The Holy Spirit works anew all that is needed by bringing Christ to his sinners via the preaching office." Steven D. Paulson, "Do Lutherans Need a New Ecclesiology?" *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001): 217. Paulson's more recent book reiterates the same perspective. Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, Doing Theology series (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 237–40. For criticisms of Forde's ecclesiology, see Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 45–8.

[4] I mention therapy precisely because proclamation can easily be interpreted in a therapeutic

church by truncating it both in time and in space. The church is truncated spatially by placing the individual before God with little consideration of the corporate body. The church is truncated temporally by emphasizing the proclamation in the present in such a way that the individual is separated from the saints of old and the confession of faith in the past. Proclamation loses the church.

For these reasons, I suggest instead that theology is for confession. What does this mean? Theology as a discipline of the church is to "foster, advocate, and drive to" confession.[5] First, this means that theology drives to confession of sins and the good news of the absolution. That is, theology is not designed to simply provide eternal answers to theological questions but to open space for repentance and the proclamation of God's promises in Jesus. In this aspect of my suggestion, I am not intending to say anything other than what Forde has elucidated so well already. Second, this means that theology is to advocate and foster a robust confession of faith. Just as the divine service moves from proclamation in confession and absolution to the confession of the Creed, so too theology must cultivate a true, robust, and meaningful confession of the Christian faith. To use Forde's imagery of love with the bridegroom and the bride, theology's role is not only to make space for the bridegroom to proclaim his love but also to describe Christ the groom and narrate his story in such a way that the bride knows the groom, delights in speaking about the groom, and sees him as her whole world. In other words, the church learns to understand who Jesus is, confesses her faith in him boldly, confesses him in praise joyfully, and knows all reality in relation to him.

I believe that this notion that theology is to foster confession is more helpful than Forde's understanding of theology for proclamation for five reasons. First, as I use the term, confession includes the moment of an encounter with the Gospel that Forde intends with his emphasis upon proclamation. That is, it incorporates Forde's valid and important concerns even as it allows for a richer, multidimensional understanding of the purpose of theology. Second, whereas proclamation tends toward individualization, confessions of faith are social in character. Many Christians learn to confess the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds together in church community before they ever understand the depth and nature of these words. Third, confession not only connects Christians to one another in the present church community, but confession also directs Christians to see their words in unity with the church of the past. As Christians learn to speak the ancient words of confession, they learn from the fathers, the martyrs, and the church now at rest

framework. See Theodore J. Hopkins, "Theology in a Post-Christian Context: Two Stories, Two Tasks," *Concordia Theological Journal* 4, no. 2 (2017): 49–54.

[5] I'm using Forde's exact language here. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*, 1.

to confess Christ. A theology that cultivates confession will thus learn from history and use the good, true, and right dogma of the church for teaching and maturation in faith. Fourth, confession emphasizes a more positive role that theology can play in describing the reality that Christians live in every day. A theology that fosters confession would play a role related to the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification, shaping God's people to have the mind of Christ. Finally, confession is always done in the world today. Thus, a theology that fosters confession must seek to understand the world in which we live so that Christians can learn to confess the ancient faith in a new register for the contemporary world. My point is not merely that theology must be applied today, but it must take seriously the structures of reality, the data and evidence from the social sciences, psychology, and religious studies, among others.[6] Confession happens in the real world studied by these various disciplines, and theology must learn to understand this reality to speak God's truth for those living in it.

If this suggestion only steers one toward talking about God and away from doing the deed of proclaiming the gospel, then tear these pages out and throw them away (or delete the .pdf and empty the trash bin). Such is neither my desire nor intention. Pastors and all Christians must divide Law and Gospel in such a way that the good news of Jesus the Savior is spoken, I to you, the bridegroom to his bride. Only when the promise is given will sinners believe and respond in confession. Thus, if my suggestion has any merit, it will not be to curtail proclamation but to widen the eyes of the church so that Christians who are addressed by the bridegroom come and see their lives with others who also have been addressed by the same Lord. Christians would come to see themselves as the children of God who learn to confess the same crucified Christ in their words and praise the Triune God with their lips together with the whole church past and present, and to the world in which they dwell. Such a goal, however, will take more than a change in slogan.

Theodore J. Hopkins

Co-Managing Editor of CTJ

[6] Christine Helmer rightly argues that doctrine has a place outside of narrow ecclesiastical and academic theological circles. See Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), esp. 149–69.

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Articles

Testing the Spirits: The Early Church on Judging Prophecy and Prophets

Scott Yakimow

The task of discerning whether or not a teaching faithfully articulates Christian doctrine and practice is not new to the church but rather has been a feature of her corporate life since Pentecost. For the early church, judging prophets and their prophecies was one of the ways this was accomplished. Accepting a false prophet entailed accepting into the church's life both a false teacher—a wolf in sheep's clothing[1]—and a false teaching that could lead many astray. Jesus himself warned of the dangers of false prophets and gave a rule by which they might be identified when he said: "You will recognize them by their fruits."[2] This article will explore the various practical tests or general rules of practice the early church used to recognize the fruits of the prophets in order to determine true prophets from false ones by examining passages in the New Testament where this testing is in view along with the Didache to see how the testing continued into the first half of the 2nd century. By so doing, it will provide guidelines that could be applied analogously to contemporary teachings to determine if they are faithful articulations of Christian doctrine and practice. I begin by engaging in conversation with David Aune whose book, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*,[3] remains the standard work in the field in order to provide the necessary presuppositions to understand my argument. While Aune reads the church's *praxis* of judging the prophets against a background of political conflict within the Christian community, I read it against a background of pastoral concern for the life of the flock in the face of a cosmic battle between spiritual powers of good and evil where adopting errant teaching can have eternal significance. Given this background of spiritual conflict in the first century, I contend that theology, not politics, is the driving concern for the early church, and theological considerations that drive testing the prophets are not restricted to only what the prophet says or the propositions he explicitly teaches but also extend to how he acts and what behavior his prophecy recommends on behalf of the church; that is to

1 Cf. Matt. 7:15.
2 Matt. 7:16 (ESV).
3 David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

say, doctrine, the prophet's behavior, and the effect on the ecclesial life of the community were all in view for the early church's testing of the prophets. I will close by offering some reflections on how this *praxis* may be of relevance today in discerning faithful articulations of Christian doctrine and practice, particularly in its focus on testing the practical fruits of the teachings for the life of the church.

The texts I have chosen to treat are the principal passages discussed by Aune and focus upon the church's practice of judging the prophets and their prophecies. These include 1 Thess. 5; 1 Cor. 12-14; 1 John 4; and Did. 11. Matthew 7 is only used to frame the discussion, while Hermas *Mand*.xi, and the Acts of Thomas 79 are not treated here for the sake of space even though Aune discusses them. I will largely focus upon literary approaches on the assumption that the texts in the form we have them (or have best reconstructed them) were put together for a purpose, are expressive of a coherent worldview, and therefore can be legitimately read as literary wholes. While historical reconstructions will not be completely eschewed, their importance will be bracketed in favor of reading the texts as we now possess them.[4] By doing this, I find at least two things: 1) a large degree of agreement in details and the discrete claims made by Aune and others regarding the criteria the early church used to judge prophets and their prophecies; and 2) a different narratival framework[5] within which these common details and claims fit such that this framework that operates at the level of presuppositions entails a different set of implications for the life of the church. Though I will be discussing most of the same texts that Aune does and interacting with his readings from time to time, I do so only instrumentally as a way to highlight the picture I desire to draw through a reading of the primary texts which can

[4] I also do this because I consider the texts from the New Testament to be Scripture, and as such the inspired Word of God. However, my argument throughout the paper does not depend on this faith commitment; it does depend on an assumption of the literary integrity of the texts in question (including the non-biblical *Didache*), and this is why I state it here. It is also true that this assertion of literary coherence is itself very much in line with treating the texts as God's inspired Word. That said, in its methodology, this article is a work whose primary "home" is in the field of "religious studies" and not, in the first place, "theology" *per se* insofar as it takes the voice of an outsider and not an insider. Even so, my hope in offering it in a place like *Concordia Theological Journal* is that it will be amenable for use by theologians (such as myself) to make theological arguments that speak to and directly affect the life of the church as we point people to the Lord of the church. My closing reflections begin to do this and so initiate theological reflection on the conclusions found herein, but much more in this vein can and should be said.

[5] I use the phrase "narratival framework" to denote an ordering of causally-related concepts. In order to understand the framework, it is necessary to be able to situate each concept in terms of its logical location (e.g., ground, consequence, implication, etc) and its function in relation to the other concepts that are nested within that particular locus of thought. I use the term "narratival" as a descriptor in order to bring out the causal nature of the relations between the concepts and to emphasize the irreplaceability of any given concept for understanding the whole. Characterizing the plot needs to be able to take into account all the plot points.

be stated as follows: given that the early Christian community viewed themselves as players in a cosmic spiritual struggle and believed it necessary to be aligned with one side or the other (whether wittingly or unwittingly), they judged the veracity of the spirit motivating the prophets and their prophecies by comparing what they said to what they were taught, by evaluating the behavior of the prophet, and by looking to the fruits of the prophecy in the corporate life of the church.

Judging Prophets: *A Political Game or Taking Sides in a Cosmic Struggle?*

In his aforementioned book, David Aune sets up the problem of dealing with conflicting political and prophetic authorities by contrasting the means available to Greco-Roman prophets in mediating conflicting oracular utterances with those associated with inspired prophets such as those within the Jewish tradition. Unlike the Greco-Roman prophets where an utterance may be rejected due to a technical error (divinatory technique was improperly performed, signs were misread, etc), erroneous prophecies associated with inspired prophets are more difficult to discern because it has to do with spirits—entities that are almost by definition not open to direct observation. In the case of false inspired prophets, one is obligated to determine whether "the spirit speaking through the prophet is a lying spirit or an evil spirit, or the prophet himself is deceitful."[6] Because of this inherent difficulty of identifying the spirit behind the prophet, Aune argues that prophets are usually tested only when it is politically necessary for the leadership to do so because their authority has been challenged:

> The procedure of testing prophets is usually invoked only when strong conflict exists between particular prophetic spokesmen and other types of political or religious leadership. It will become apparent below that when the topics of testing or evaluating prophets and their messages arises in early Christian literature, a conflict between the authority of Christian leaders and the authority of prophets lurks in the background.[7]

It is against this background of political conflict that Aune proceeds to give an interpretation of texts dealing with testing the prophets.[8]

At the end of his discussion, Aune issues two sets of conclusions. First, he finds his supposition regarding the principally political nature of the conflict to be vindicated. He writes,

> In all the passages in early Christian literature where tests for unmasking false prophets are discussed (with the notable exception of Did. 11–12), the primary purpose of these criteria was to denounce a particu-

[6] Aune, *Prophecy*, 217.
[7] Ibid., 217.
[8] Particularly 1 Thess. 5; 1 Cor. 12–14; 1 John 4; and Did. 11–12, though Matt. 7, Hermas *Mand*. xi, and the Acts of Thomas 79 are also in view

> lar false prophet (or group of false prophets) whom the author regarded as particularly threatening. Conflict among various prophets or between prophets and other types of Christian leaders in which prophetic *legitimacy* is questioned is a way of solving the problem of conflicting authority as perceived in what appear to be conflicting norms and values.[9]

This indicates that the true problem for Aune is not the effects that true or false prophecy might have on the theology of the church *per se* (he describes this as an *apparent* conflict between norms and values) but rather of preserving political power for an entrenched leadership. Aune's second conclusion trades upon the first and necessarily presupposes political conflict either between prophets or, more likely, between prophets and established communal authority. He writes:

> Unlike false teachers, false prophets were particularly difficult to deal with since they appealed to the divine authority which stood behind their pronouncements. Two basic types of charges, often combined, were used to discredit prophets regarded as a threat: they were deceivers or they were possessed by evil spirits. The charge that false prophets were mediums through which evil spirits spoke accounted for the fact that both true and false prophets claimed inspiration for their utterances. Prophets who were illegitimate were shown to be such through their *behavior*, their *teaching*, and their *prophetic protocol*.[10]

Though Aune is likely correct in his estimation regarding the specific means by which prophets were judged (i.e., by their behavior, teaching, and observance of prophetic protocol—more on this later), the overall tenor of the picture he paints is dominated by the idea of competing human agents struggling for control over the early Christian community. When the established authority is challenged, the challengers had to be "dealt with" by means of "charges" whose intention was to "discredit" the prophets. That is, the narratival framework within which he situates his interpretations is one where theological statements are in service to political concerns in that the human desire to achieve political control necessitates theological statements regarding the supernatural / divine realm as a means to achieve that end. Theology is principally a political tool and only secondarily (or perhaps even incidentally) says something about divine realities. In the structure of Aune's thought, then, leaders of human communities laid down an irremediably vague methodology,[11] replete with theological warrants, which

[9] Aune, *Prophecy*, 229.

[10] Ibid., 229.

[11] The term "irremediable vagueness" was coined by Peter Ochs and is based upon the work of Charles Sanders Peirce in the field of logic. Cf. Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 180–1. I use it here to denote an important characteristic of narratival frameworks: they overflow with meaning. Because they are fundamentally stories, they are held together by a plot with various twists and turns that

they could then use to assert their own authority over prophets who would upset the *status quo*. The method propounded entailed charging disruptive prophets with being possessed by evil spirits or with being deceivers interested only in their bellies. If my reading of Aune is at all reflective of his thought, then the narratival framework he presupposes is one where political realities form a theology which is then intended to be used instrumentally to protect established authority and **not** one where theological statements regarding ultimate reality resonate in the political realm thereby issuing in a changed political reality. In a word, politics over theology.[12]

However, is that what is going on in *these* texts? Is the principal concern exemplified in the texts best read as that of safeguarding the political leadership of the community? Is this the correct presupposition to bring with respect to these particular texts? I do not think so. These texts are about determining the character of the spirit inspiring the prophet in order to see if the fruit of the act of prophecy will be beneficial to the church or bitter indeed. Rather than approaching the texts presupposing that theology is a tool used to strengthen the hand of political control, I contend that the texts are better read when understood as representing leaders who are concerned to get the theology right, not so that they can control the community, but so that they themselves, along with the community, might be aligned on the right side of a cosmic conflict between good and evil spirits, the spirit of truth and spirits of error, God and Satan together with his demons, where the consequences of an erroneous alignment have both temporal and eternal implications. This theological concern then resonates in the political sphere necessitating the labeling of some prophets (or teachers) as false prophets (or false teachers) and some prophecies (and teachings) as false prophecies (or false teachings). Because much was at stake theologically, much came to be at stake politically. False prophets were to be avoided and false teachings

occur simply because "that's how the story goes." How they can be applied is extraordinarily malleable because well-constructed stories speak to a wide range of human experience – and this is a strength, not a weakness. But precisely how they are applied in any given context is not clear until the actual event of their application; it cannot be predicted beforehand. In that way, applying narratival frameworks is a vague process, and irremediably so. This fits in well with Aune's construal because such a vague process could easily be manipulated by those in positions of power to maintain their control over the community.

[12] It should be noted that presuppositions are not something to be avoided (even if they could be). Rather, the question is which presuppositions best enable interpretation. Aune may be correct in his estimation that political conflict might be the best assumption to use in order to comprehend the situation and theological claims that the texts present. One cannot simply rule out beforehand (on the basis of divine inspiration for example) Aune's estimation that political conflict might be the best assumption to use in order to comprehend early Christian texts. Christian history has plenty of examples where Christian leaders have used the text for political purposes exactly as Aune understands them. Perhaps the most glaring instance of theology funding political realities would be the attitude of the medieval papacy embodied in the so-called "Donation of Constantine" (Cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. [revised], s.v. "Donation of Constantine") and the investiture controversy.

rejected, sometimes even without comment. Expulsion from the Christian community was a temporal, political consequence of divine realities expressed by means of theological statements, statements regarding the existence of cosmic conflict, lying spirits, deceitful prophets, etc. and the effects of such on life now and eternally. Within this narratival framework, the equation described in my reading of Aune is reversed where theology now takes primacy over politics in the worldview of the texts. In a word, theology over politics. If the existence of cosmic conflict is not understood to be the background of why prophets need to be judged, then the stakes of such judging will remain unclear. These presuppositions will be tested by seeing if they help to explain the texts in question.

Paul on Testing the Spirits

First Thessalonians

In what is perhaps his earliest letter, Paul is already stating his concern for testing prophecies. He writes in 1 Thess. 5:19–22: "Do not quench (σβέννυτε[13]) the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." While it is quite likely that this is a series of standardized instructions in an easily memorized form,[14] what Paul has to say here must be understood within the context of the entirety of his epistle. By placing it in this context, Paul's focus on the role of the Spirit in prophecy and his concern regarding the behavior of the prophets along with the practical fruits of prophecies come to the fore.

After greeting the Thessalonians, Paul describes how the gospel he preached came to them by emphasizing the role of the Spirit: "our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and [with] full conviction." (1:5) It should be noted that the "with" (translating "ἐν") in brackets is likely not original to the text.[15] If this is true, Paul coordinates the latter two phrases as part of a single concept—that of the gospel being proclaimed to the Thessalonians not in mere words but in

[13] Note that Paul uses the same term in Eph. 6:16 when referring to how the "shield of faith" is able to "extinguish" the "flaming darts" of the "evil one". In that context, it is a specifically spiritual struggle that Paul describes where it is entirely possible that the darts that must be confronted by a strong faith are those of the doubts raised by false teaching or even oracular utterances. If that is the case, then we have another context in which false teachings or false prophecies are forwarded by evil spirits, spirits whose utterances must be "extinguished" or "quenched."

[14] Cf. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 2002), 122; and E.P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 184.

[15] Neither ℵ nor B (along with a fragment, an old Latin text and the Vulgate) contains the "ἐν". Arrayed against this evidence is an impressive assortment of texts that do, but it is easier to account for a scribe desiring to coordinate the three phrases and so adding in the "ἐν" than coming up with a rationale for scribal deletion.

power and in the Holy Spirit and great fullness of assurance *that comes from the presence of the Spirit*. In the next verse, Paul continues his crediting the Holy Spirit with a real, indeed, a determinative role in his preaching and its results in the community when he says: "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit." (1:6) Though receiving the Spirit-empowered word of the gospel brought affliction in imitation of Paul, his companions, and the Lord, it also brought with it joy precisely because the Spirit is active in it. Yet the affliction is real as well. Why? Because receiving the word that comes by the Holy Spirit entails a turning from idols (cf. 1:9–10), and doing so places one in a conflictual situation where the messengers of the Holy Spirit are "shamefully" treated (cf. 2:2). Paul should therefore be understood as encouraging the Thessalonians by assuring them, even in the midst of suffering, that the message they hold to is divinely authorized by the Holy Spirit and is itself the activity of that Spirit. The effect Paul envisions is twofold: first, that they would continue to serve the "living and true God" and continue to "expect his Son from heaven;" and second, that by so fortifying the Thessalonians in their faith and expectation, he would also tacitly commend himself to them as the proclaimer of the Spirit's message. Both of these effects have to do with the fruits of his work among them.

Paul makes this second claim explicit when he transitions from praising the Thessalonians to a defense of the divine nature of his own ministry and his own words. Not enough attention has been paid to understanding the nature of evaluating the prophets by means of Paul's defense of his own ministry. While Paul may not fit the mold of a mantic prophet but rather that of an apostle who teaches, the fact that he appeals to many of the same criteria for evaluating the prophets (such as those outlined by Aune) suggests that he sees his role as being close enough to that of a prophet to apply a similar standard.[16] Further, since in the end true teaching or true prophecy is understood as that authorized by and originating from God, the problem is the same in both cases—determining if God is the source of Paul's teaching.[17] Paul's defense, then, gives us insight into the standards by which he saw himself being evaluated and what types of arguments he would himself entertain in determining the authenticity of a prophet or teacher.

[16] Others have noted this as well. Cf. Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 130–73.

[17] The idea that the Word of God dwells on the lips of one engaging in Torah study was common in the world of Palestinian Judaism in Paul's day. A tradition regarding the great Torah knowledge of Akiva ben Yosef (50–135 AD) and his *Bayt Midrash* found in the *Bavli* details how his (apparently novel) *halakha* is understood as being delivered to Moses on Sinai, even when Moses himself did not know that it was. (*b.Menaḥ.29b*) For more on this phenomenon, see: Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE – 400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

With this in mind, the primary datum to which Paul appears to appeal is his behavior. He indicates his willingness to endure suffering for the sake of the message (2:2); he did not flatter nor did he appeal for money (2:5); he did not seek glory by making demands (2:6); he was gentle and sought to build them up (2:7-8); he worked hard to make sure that he would not financially burden them (2:9-10); and finally he dealt with them by meting out discipline as well as exhortation that they might "walk worthy of God" (2:11-12). In each of these cases, Paul is expecting that the witness he has provided by his behavior will resonate with the Thessalonians in a wholesome way so that they will recognize that his words were in fact God's words (2:13). This is important because he claims that it was the word of God that is active in the "believers" who became "imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus" thereby undergoing the same persecution from the Jews that they are undergoing. In this way, the behavior of the Thessalonians becomes a further testimony to the divine authentication and origination of Paul's message and ministry. In short, Paul points to his behavior as eliciting the "great fullness of assurance"—an assurance that comes by the Holy Spirit—in his message which has already changed the lives of those he is addressing making them imitators of Paul, imitators of the churches of God, and even imitators of Christ. The criterion of behavior should therefore be understood as logically circular but not viciously so.[18] Paul's good behavior testifies to the authenticity of his message and ministry which has already produced converts whose changed lives already predispose them to accepting his defense of the divine authentication and origin of his words.

After Paul makes his defense, he then goes into a description of the work of the other side of the situation—the role of Satan in his ministry. He says that Satan "hindered us" (2:18) from meeting with the Thessalonians. This caused Paul great concern to the point that he sent someone to check on them because he was afraid that "the tempter" might have made "empty" "our labor" (3:5). The perlocutionary effect of this history (told from Paul's perspective) is to increase Paul's stature in the eyes of the Thessalonians as one who is truly sent by God and a participant in God's action of overcoming of the forces of evil. More than that, the effect of Paul's ministry is so challenging to the spiritual powers opposing God that "the tempter" would try to make it "empty." When Timothy sends his encouraging report back to Paul, he says that the Thessalonians are "standing firm in the Lord" (3:8) presumably over against the efforts of "the tempter." By making this rhetor-

[18] Vicious circularity occurs when the arguments conclusions are found in the premises, and there is no way to interrupt this chain of reasoning. What I am describing here is more akin to the well-known "hermeneutic circle." Cf. Anthony Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 157–9.

ical move, Paul has firmly positioned himself as the spokesman of the Holy Spirit whose words are God's own words and whose ministry is beset by evil powers seeking to derail his ministry thereby emptying it of its fruits.

Chapter four begins with instructions on how the Thessalonians might live in such a way that they please God (4:1). After describing this life, Paul says, "For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore (τοιγαροῦν) whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you." (4:7–8) Paul connects as closely as possible (by means of the emphatic inferential conjunction "τοιγαροῦν") the God who calls His people to holiness with the rejection by disregarding such holiness not being an offence against a human being (or one could add, a human political structure) but against God Himself—perhaps more importantly in the context of this article, the God who gives His Holy Spirit. Paul raises the stakes considerably in this statement thereby shedding new light upon his defense of his own ministry. If his words or actions were shown to not be meeting the standard of holiness he lays out here, he would be betraying not a human authority but a divine authority. As he said earlier (2:4), pleasing human beings (or maintaining a human political community) is not what is at issue in Paul's rhetoric; rather, pleasing God is what is crucial.

The stakes are high for Paul in 1 Thessalonians. It is the dead who are "in Christ" that will rise up first to meet the Lord in the air to always (πάντοτε) be with him (4:16–17). He emphasizes the distinction between the sudden destruction that characterizes those who live in darkness as opposed to those who are "children of light, children of the day" (5:3–5). The reality of the impending return of the Lord is so dominant that it affects everything that Christians do so that they might always be prepared for the "day of the Lord," maintaining their position by means of the military imagery of the "breastplate of faith" and wearing "the hope of salvation" as a helmet (5:8). Those on the wrong side of the divide between light and darkness are threatened by wrath—something for which God has not destined "us" (5:9), presumably those who believe in Christ and have the Holy Spirit.[19] In this way, being "children of light" who have the Holy Spirit has implications now and eternally in that Jesus is: "[the one] who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him." (5:10)

It is into this context where spiritual realities predominate over earthly ones, where affliction can be endured with the joy of the Holy Spirit, that we finally find Paul's admonitions concerning prophesying in 5:19–22. For

[19] This distinction between light and darkness makes it hard to agree with Aune's claim that in 1 Thessalonians: "there is no indication that any other supernatural power than that of the Spirit of God was thought to be at work in prophets whose oracles the Thessalonians had come to despise." (Aune, *Prophecy*, 220) This distinction is certainly such an indication.

him, the Spirit should not be quenched because it is the same Spirit that authorizes and originates Paul's gospel as being the gospel of God (1:5; 2:9, 13), the words that the Spirit used to turn the Thessalonians from idols to the living God (1:9), the words by which the Gentiles might be saved (2:16). True prophecies are not to be despised because they are the speaking of this Spirit, but they need to be tested (δοκιμάζω), just as Paul considers himself to have been tested and approved by God, the tester of hearts (2:4). The means of that testing can be discerned by the standard Paul applies to himself—that of behavior that is in accordance with the character of the Spirit he proclaims and so is also fruitful in the lives of those he teaches, effecting in them a change of life in the same character as Paul's changed life. The good fruit of the prophet's activity[20] should be maintained while even all appearances of evil (παντὸς εἴδους πονηροῦ—5:22) are to be avoided, because to disregard the holiness that comes from God is not to disregard a humanly-contrived injunction but to disregard God. The consequences of "getting it wrong" in the context of the spiritual struggle Paul outlines (where Satan / "the tempter" is an active entity) are dire (5:3, 9), while those of having the Spirit are the joys of living together with Jesus, whether alive or dead (5:10).[21]

Nowhere in this reading are we compelled to think that Paul has any particular group of prophets in mind that he raises up for castigation, nor must we understand that Paul says what he says only to maintain his control over the community for the sake of such control. He has already left and has no financial stake nor any direct authority over the community. While it is certainly the case that the community's recognition of the divine character of Paul's words determines, for Paul, whether or not they are aligned with the Holy Spirit, it is first and foremost that Paul is convinced that what he says is in fact—with full assurance—the words of the Holy Spirit that he is so insistent upon it. Understanding that Paul conceives of a situation where the living God speaks to His people through His Holy Spirit by means of human words in the context of a spiritual conflict is crucial to see what is at stake in testing the prophets / prophecies. What's at stake is not the existence of a particular communal polity or the political career of the leaders but rather the existence of the community as the "children of light" in a beneficial relationship with God over against the darkness.

[20] I am taking this as a reference to the outcome of the prophetic testing earlier in the same verse. Cf. the discussion of the issues involved in: Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 126.

[21] Gordon Fee reads this passage in light of 2 Thessalonians 2. Through that lens, he also finds a doctrinal test operative in addition to a test of purpose similar to the test of behavior that I outline above. Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 158–62.

First Corinthians

A second important set of Pauline texts that deal with judging the prophets is found in 1 Corinthians. Unlike 1 Thessalonians where Paul treated few subjects all in the context of the impending "day of the Lord" which necessitated an analysis of the entire epistle, 1 Corinthians treats many different subjects in order to establish a regulated church life that expects to continue for some time. Of principal interest for understanding Paul's attitude towards "discerning the spirits" is 1 Cor. 12–14. Here, I adopt James Dunn's reading of these chapters where he sees three primary criteria for "discerning the spirits" being forwarded by Paul: 1) "the test of the gospel;" 2) "the test of love;" and 3) "the test of community benefit."[22]

Dunn finds the "test of the gospel" in 1 Cor. 12:1–3 where "ecstatic inspiration"[23] was likely in view due to Paul's comment, "You know that when you were pagans you were led astray (ἀπαγόμενοι) to mute idols, however you were led (ἤγεσθε)." (12:2). The passive "ἤγεσθε" indicating that they were "being led" combined with the compound participle "ἀπαγόμενοι" (based upon the same root) showing that they were those who were "led astray" strongly suggests that the powers associated with the "mute idols" were responsible for their leading. These powers were surely conceived of in spiritual terms as Paul makes clear in describing pagan sacrifices as being offered to "demons" (δαιμονίοις), a designation he uses for the spiritual powers associated with idols throughout 1 Cor. 10:19–22. So after making the connection to idols in 12:2, Paul then gives the short creed "Jesus is Lord" (Κύριος Ἰησοῦς)[24] as the test of the ecstatic utterance inspired by the Holy Spirit in contrast to an ecstatic utterance of "Jesus be cursed" (Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς) by what must be taken as the powers associated with the idols. It is difficult to think that Paul had anything else in mind but an evil spirit, a demonic power like those of the idols giving rise to an ecstatic utterance contrary to the gospel.

The second criterion, "the test of love," is to be found in 1 Cor. 13. Dunn contends that the placement of ch. 13 between 12 and 14 which treat of similar topics should not be a cause for puzzlement. Rather, "it was written in recognition that charismatic ministry and other important expressions of the Christian life and congregation could often be exercised in a selfish and uncaring manner."[25] Even more, love is lauded as something that is "a

[22] Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 594–8.
[23] Ibid., 595.
[24] That Paul sees this as a creedal statement confessing the heart of the gospel can be intimated from Rom. 10:9; 2 Cor. 4:5; and Col. 2:6 – passages that Dunn points out (ibid.).
[25] Ibid., 596.

mark of greater maturity" with "effects more enduring than any charism."[26] If Dunn is right, then it is interesting to connect Paul's instruction of love with the purpose he expressed earlier to impart a wisdom to the "mature" (τελείοις) in 2:6, a wisdom corresponding to the "more excellent way" (ὑπερβολὴν ὁδὸν) (12:31) by which he describes ch. 13. This comparison seems to be apropos given that ch. 2 is also a discussion of the role of the Spirit in revealing the "secret and hidden wisdom of God" (2:7). Since Paul connects the revelation of this wisdom directly to the operation of the Spirit in this chapter, it is not too difficult to imagine that he has in mind either inspired teaching (such as Paul himself gives) or even prophetic utterances. Such a "spiritual person" (πνευματικὸς) who gives the teaching, in contrast to the "natural person" (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος), is not to be judged (2:15). Yet this presupposes that such a one truly is a "spiritual person" and not a "natural person." This can be seen in the next verse where Paul cites Is. 40:13, "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" with the editorial comment that, in fact, "But we have the mind of Christ" (2:16). This presupposition thereby leaves open the discussion of chs. 12–14 where making precisely this distinction is in view. If these connections between ch.2 and ch. 13 (or chs. 12–14 more generally) are found to be persuasive, then it is possible to envision the discourse on love as the content of the wisdom mentioned in ch. 2 even as it is the proof of the true "spiritual person." That would further mean that the chapter on love describes a wisdom which finds its antithesis in the "wisdom of this age and of the rulers of this age who are being rendered powerless" (2:6). This is an earthly wisdom, a "σοφία ἀνθρώπων" (2:5; cf. 2:13), one that "fleshly" ("σαρκίνοις," 3:1), *but also one that has a source*—"the spirit of the world" (2:12). Therefore, Paul is contrasting the wisdom of God that comes through the Spirit of God and is exemplified in love with the human wisdom that comes through the spirit of the world and is exemplified in such things as jealousy and strife.[27]

With Dunn, I agree that ch. 13 outlines a particular criterion for "discerning the spirits," but this insight needs to be expanded. Given the larger context of Paul's letter outlined above, I suggest that Paul also has a negative side in view. That is, if prophets might be adjudged to be acting in accordance with the love that comes from the Holy Spirit, they might also be adjudged to be acting in accordance with the jealousy and the strife that comes from the spirit of the world. If this is the case, then we do not leave the context of cosmic struggle with this second criterion but are still in the midst of it.

[26] Ibid.

[27] That Paul is moving on to describe the effects of this human, fleshly wisdom in ch. 3 forms the connection between the two chapters. The jealousy and strife mentioned in 3:3 should be understood as products of this human wisdom.

Dunn's third criterion, "the test of community benefit," comes from ch. 14 and is, for him, the clearest of the three criteria. He seizes upon Paul's use of concepts relating to "building up" seven times in this chapter as a way to demonstrate the importance Paul places upon it.[28] Dunn says: "In all this the important point of principle which emerges is that the individual's prerogative (inspiration or status) is always subordinate to the good of the whole."[29] How this communal good should be conceived Dunn does not say outside of pointing to "the yardstick of God's love in Christ, love of neighbour."[30] While this is quite likely the case, it seems that the idea of "the good of the whole" should be conceived of not only horizontally between human beings but also vertically between God and humanity. The communal good, then, would be for the community to be in a relationship to God, receiving the gifts God gives through His Holy Spirit (which includes prophecies among others), essentially being not just the *people* of God, but the people *of God*. This relationship from which all the spiritual gifts flow is basic to the creation and preservation of the community and so must be conceived of as its most important "good." Being in relation to God by His Spirit through Christ then gives hope of resurrection from the dead and ultimately victory over death (ch. 15). Of course, not being in a relationship with God by His Spirit but rather being in one to a worldly spirit brings no such benefits and cannot be understood to be in any way a communal "good" that Paul would recognize. So for Paul, much would be at stake in building up the community in its relationship to God—even everlasting life.

Given this analysis, we finally come to the crucial phrase that I have been putting in quotation marks all along: "discerning the spirits" (ἄλλῳ διακρίσεις πνευμάτων – 12:10). While Aune is probably correct in saying that the Corinthians likely had not heard this phrase before and it is "the product of Paul's penchant for categorizing charismatic phenomena,"[31] his reading of the plural "spirits" as referring to oracular utterances of a prophet is unconvincing. We have seen that Paul has no problem with understanding that various spirits are at work in the world, from naming one Satan or "the tempter" to calling them outright "demons" to mentioning the "spirit of the cosmos." It would certainly not be foreign to Paul's thought if we see here a simple and direct reference to various spirits (the Holy one or others) that are at work in the world. Certainly, the plural form "spirits" points in this direction. Likewise, Thiselton's preference for Dunn's thesis that "Paul may

[28] The two words Dunn notes are the noun "οἰκοδομή" (14:3, 5, 12, 26) and the verb "οἰκοδομέω" (twice in 14:4 and in 14:7). He also points to their use in 1 Cor. 3:9; 8:1; 10:23 as well as in Rom. 14:19; 15:2; 2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; Gal. 2:18; 1 Thess. 5:11. Cf. Dunn, *Paul*, 597.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Aune, *Prophecy*, 221.

be using πνευμάτων (spirits) 'in the sense of πνευματικῶν' (spiritual gifts, or those things which pertain to the Spirit),"[32] seems unnecessary as well. A virtual substitution of one word for another resulting in what appears to be a spiritual gift of cataloging (a gift only a librarian could love) has less to commend it than reading it as "spirits" referring to animate (and animating) spiritual powers which flows well from Paul's conception of spirits outlined above.

There has been much discussion over the meaning of "discerning" (διακρίσεις) as well. Thiselton is most helpful in this connection when he says that: "the gifts of **discernment** or *discrimination* include (a) a *critical capacity to discern the genuine transcendent activity of the Spirit* from merely human attempts to replace it; and (b) a *pastoral discernment of the varied ways in which the Spirit of God is working*, in such a way as to distinguish various consequences and patterns."[33] While this twofold definition has much to commend it, the first part could be further sharpened by interrogating what "human attempts to replace it" might entail. As mentioned above, in 1 Corinthians "human wisdom" has an origin in the "spirit of the cosmos." Further, in Ephesians Paul directly attributes human misbehavior to spiritual powers when he describes their previous walk as idolaters as: "following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, *the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*" (Eph 2:2). So while there is certainly a distinction to be made between ecstatic prophetic utterances wherein what is said is, for all intents and purposes, the speech of an evil spirit and feigned prophetic utterances geared to benefit the "prophet," the work of an evil spirit cannot be completely separated from either. "Human attempts to replace" the "transcendent activity of the Spirit" are still actions of another spirit—either the direct speech of that spirit or that of a deceived (and deceiving) human being who is following a spirit that is not the Spirit of God. In short, when Paul writes "discerning the spirits," he is speaking of the twofold activity of arriving at the origin of an utterance as being from the Holy Spirit or from another spiritual power as well as determining what the consequences may be on the life of the community of such an utterance once it has been agreed that it is from the Spirit of God.[34]

[32] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 968. For an excellent discussion of the various translational options, see 965–70.

[33] Ibid., 967. Emphasis in original.

[34] Fee, in substantial agreement with Thiselton and the approach outlined here, also takes the course of joining together in the concept of "διακρίσεις" that of identifying the activity of the Holy Spirit in a prophetic utterance with judging the implications of the content of the prophecy. However, he goes on to agree with Aune in seeing the reference to "spirits" as referring "to the prophetic utterances that need to be 'differentiated' by the others in the community who also have the Spirit and can so discern what is truly of the Spirit." Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NITCNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 597, cf. also 596–7. But is determining which prophetic utterance "is truly of the Spirit" any different than discerning between

Summary: *Paul and Discerning the Spirits*

To summarize Paul's approach to discerning the spirits in prophecy, I propose the following four conclusions. First, the content of the prophecy must be consonant with the gospel as Paul preaches it. A spirit that does not teach God's salvific activity in Jesus contained in the short proto-creed "Jesus is Lord" cannot be the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead thereby vindicating his Lordship. Second, the behavior of the prophet must exhibit the activity of the Holy Spirit in the prophet's life.[35] Third (and connected to the second point), there is no discreet, propositional, disembodied method or procedure, rational or otherwise, by which this recognition of the Holy Spirit in the prophet's behavior may be made. Rather, it is expected that the community formed by the activity of the Spirit will *recognize* the activity of that same Spirit in another. The concept of recognition points to a narratival embodiment of a Spirit-filled mode of living that militates against linear, syllogistic reasoning; the church recognizes that the same Christ-centered plot is operative in the life and words of the prophet as it is throughout the Christian community. A breakdown in this recognition on either side of the equation (the prophet's or the community's) brings into question whether the prophet is really inspired by the Spirit or whether the community itself is still the charismatic community formed by the Spirit. Fourth and finally, the prophecy must build the community not only in the horizontal relationships among its members or even those outside the community, but also in its relationship with the God who called the community into being through His Spirit. Being correctly aligned with God, as opposed to possible alignments with other spirits, is of crucial importance for the community and its members as the hope of a resurrection to salvation, of living with Jesus eternally, is at stake.

First John: *Confessing the Truth in Word and Deed*

Perhaps more than any of the other texts we will examine, 1 John best exemplifies a worldview dominated by a conflict between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (4:6) which is the root conflict envisioned by the presupposition I outlined in my introduction. Given that there is less controversy about 1 John exhibiting a dualism between good and evil powers, my treatment of this aspect of the letter will be relatively brief.

Throughout this short epistle, one of the most dominant concepts is that

different spirits that may be at work? It seems to me that there is no distinction to be made here. If so, then nothing is gained by identifying the "spirits" with the prophetic utterances themselves; what is still really being spoken of is figuring out which spirit is active in the act of prophesying.

[35] Lockwood's observation is on point here: "Another characteristic of false prophecy is a loss of self-control, resulting in disorderly worship." Gregory Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 433.

of "abiding" (μένω). A full study of the way John uses the word is beyond the scope of this investigation, but a number of instances are directly relevant. The first instance is programmatic for the remaining uses. In 2:5b-6, John writes: "By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." For John, the concept he is about to develop regarding "abiding" is purposive. One does not merely abide in such a way that one's life is unchanged. Rather, the consequence claiming to "abide in him" (i.e., Jesus) is that one needs to do what he did—to refrain from sin and engage in christic behavior, walking as Jesus walked.

For those whose behavior is negative, a different sort of abiding is described. The one who does not love abides in death (3:14). All murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them (3:15). God's love does not abide in the one who closes his heart to the brother in need (3:17).[36] Even more, "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." (3:8). So continuing to sin means that the sinner is "from the devil," which is really bad news for the sinner given that the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil—works which could at least conceivably include those who participate with the devil and so are "from" him.

Most of ch. 3 plays off the antithesis between those who are of God and those who are of the devil. In the middle of this discussion, John states a general rule to discriminate between who is who, or perhaps more accurately stated, who is of whom, by looking at their behavior when he writes: "By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother." (3:10) So for John the one who does not practice righteousness or does not love her brother is not "from" God; more than this, such a person is a child of the devil.

It must be emphasized that the performative purpose of this rhetoric is not to damn the reader but to point him toward the importance of his behavior—his fruits—being appropriate to the one in whom he abides and to form him into such a person. This leads us to three very important "reciprocal" (my term) statements. The first is 3:24a where John writes: "Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him." This is reciprocal in the sense that not only is the abiding in God of the keeper of the com-

[36] Though the word "abide" does not appear in 2:15, the idea is quite similar—that God's love is not in the one who loves the world in that a worldly outlook, which includes the desire of the flesh and of the eyes along with pride in possessions, is not from the Father and is passing away. This is opposed to one who keeps God's commandments who abides forever (2:15–17).

mandments (which are defined previously as believing in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another), but also that God is said to abide in him thereby signifying a type of mutuality within the relationship. This reciprocity could also be seen as intentionally highlighting the importance of the condition stated, i.e. the keeping of these two commandments. The second and third instances of such "reciprocal" markers are found in 4:15–16 where John essentially repeats the twofold content of the commandments to be kept—confessing that Jesus is the Son of God and abiding in love—as being determinative of when one abides in God and God abides in him. If this is the case, then 4:15–16 is a restatement of the claim made in 3:24 and further commentary upon it.

If these two sets of reciprocal statements regarding the abiding of God are seen as modifying each other and both have their epistemological basis in the activity of the Spirit, then the intervening material of 4:1–6 should also be seen as commentary upon the twofold commandment left by God (to believe in the name of Jesus and love one another) and originated in the human mind by the work of the Holy Spirit. Add to this the previous insights regarding how continuing to practice sin and not loving the neighbor earns the label "children of the devil" or being described as those "from the devil," and the spiritual struggle of different spirits at least attempting to abide in a human host[37] is not just implicitly but explicitly indicated. So the test of prophets indicated in 4:2 is really understood as a test of spirits in the sense of spiritual powers. The Spirit that confesses Jesus Christ came in the flesh is from God, and the spirit that does not is the spirit of the antichrist (4:2–3). It is a spiritual struggle—one between the "the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (4:6)—but the ones who are "from God" will listen to "us" (and so the Spirit of truth) while those who are "from the world" will listen to the world (and so the spirit of error).

In summary, John envisions a situation wherein the believer abides in God in an intimate, reciprocal relationship, the knowledge of which is mediated by the work of the Holy Spirit. The actual accomplishment of this abiding is conceived of circularly. While an individual's abiding in God (and vice-versa) is explicitly predicated upon belief in the name of Jesus and the practice of loving the neighbor which entails an absence of sin, such an absence of sin and so the confession of Jesus and practice of righteousness is possible because of the existence of this abiding relationship. In parallel to this "abiding" in God, the existence of the possibility of a lesser "abiding" (only improperly so-called) with an evil spirit is posited in a similarly

[37] I say "at least attempting to abide" because nowhere does John give the indication that the spirit of error or the spirit of the antichrist is actually powerful enough or on an equal plane with God so that it could actually "abide" in a human host or that the human could "abide" in it. Demonic possession is not to be equated with the divine abiding.

circular manner. One who continues in sin and not loving the neighbor is "from" the devil and is a child of the devil, yet this is because they do not abide in God; if they did, it would be impossible for them to continue in sin. Therefore, in discerning whether or not a prophet is speaking from the Spirit of truth or the spirit of error, the outcome is already given. That is, if one agrees with what the Spirit of truth is already known to have said—that one should believe in Jesus and practice love of neighbor—then that one is of the Holy Spirit and will be recognized as such.[38] Note that this "test" (δοκιμάζω) is not a procedure *per se*. Rather, it is principally a matter of an expected recognition of an already given reality, where the Spirit that is in the believer will almost automatically recognize the Spirit that is in the prophet as the same Spirit, or they will "naturally" (for lack of a better term) not see their Spirit reflected and so can attribute the prophetic utterance to the spirit of error. So it is appropriate to speak of a twofold criterion being established (belief / confession of Jesus and love of neighbor) which is similar to Paul's first two criteria above.[39] Only the Pauline criterion regarding the up-building of the community does not find explicit affirmation, though it is implicit throughout given that the purpose of the letter was to do just that.

Finally, John also sees much at stake in getting the identification of the spirits right. For if a person finds herself in agreement with the wrong spirit, it is because she is already "from the world" and is "from the devil" and is a "child of the devil."[40] John, more directly than Paul, is clear about what is at stake in a wrong alignment in the vertical realm—whether that person will be identified with those things that the Son of God came to destroy (3.8), that God has overcome (4.4), and that are passing away (2:17) with the

[38] What keeps this logic from being viciously circular is that it presupposes the existence of actual willing entities—God working through His Spirit as well as the spirit of error—whose exercise of will influences (in the case of the evil spirit) or determines (in the case of the Spirit of truth) the alignment of the human subject.

[39] While Smalley is correct to note the doctrinal test John offers, he fails to recognize the importance of behavior in testing the prophets in 1 John. Even so, the logic of John's argument drives him to connect doctrine with ethics when he writes: "However, John does not make an idol of tradition by itself, or of correct belief on its own. First, as always in this document, doctrine and ethics are closely related; so that teaching about non-worldly faith (4:1–6) is followed by instruction concerning practical love (4:7–5:4). Second, the tone of the present section is consistently (if not always directly) hortatory. John's readers are encouraged here, above all, to reject "worldliness," and so to live as true children of God; and they are exhorted to do this by discerning where the truth lies (vv 1–3), and by making it their own (vv 4–6)." Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1989), 232.

[40] I find myself in agreement with David Hill when he writes with regard to false prophets: "It is necessary to be in a communion of trust and love with those whom Christ chose as his witnesses in order to enter into communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ (1.3). The false prophets have separated themselves from the former and therefore cannot participate in the latter: they have gone out into the world because they did not abide in orthodox doctrine (cf. 2 John 9) which the apostolic tradition, witnessed to by the Spirit, alone conserved." David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 152.

result that she is abiding in death (3:14); or if she will be identified with God Himself and abide in Him unto eternal life.[41]

The Didache: *Wandering Prophets*

The Didache is important to this discussion because it is a witness to the early church's practice of judging the prophets in the early 2nd century and is very practical in its outlook. It is unlike the previous three texts we have examined in a number of ways, only two of which I mention here. First, there is a change of genre from the Pauline texts that are epistles written to particular churches and the Johannine epistle which appears to be written by a well-known church leader for general circulation among churches who know him to a document that appears to be a church order mixed together with a paranetic section derived from an already existing document. Second, the Pauline and Johannine texts exhibited strong coherence of thought where the thoughts and personalities of the authors come to the fore. The hand of the didachist, however, has not left as much of an imprint on the materials he has used and is, at times, almost invisible.[42] The Didache has the tone of a person transcribing the customs of a group of congregations in a particular region. In consequence of the genre of the Didache as a mixed church order and its lack of a strong authorial presence, reading it as a tightly argued document where verbal correspondences are crucial to understanding the whole (as I read the previous texts) becomes a much more speculative affair. Therefore, I will be largely treating the Didache piecemeal, rarely looking to the flow of the whole document since the existences of such a flow is open to serious dispute.

In 11:1–2, the didachist opens his section on the reception given to itinerant churchmen with the general category of "teacher" which he then subdivides into that of apostle and prophet. These two categories have some overlap because an apostle whose behavior does not accord with what is expected of him can be called a "false prophet." Teachers and prophets also

[41] Though Aune agrees here that "the term 'spirits' refers to one spirit of error (1 John 4:6), who speaks through many 'false prophets' (1 John 4:1)," (Aune, *Prophecy*, 224) he still reads the text as primarily dealing with political conflict within the community: "The position which we take… is that the polemic in 1 John 4:1–3, 6 is leveled against those prophets *who lend support to the deviant form of teaching opposed by the Elder through prophetic utterances*… In a word, these prophets too appear to have a basic antistructural and antimaterial stance which expresses itself in the ideology of a corresponding Christology." (ibid., 225; emphasis in original) Further, like Smalley, Aune does not take into account the larger context of the epistle and the relation of the twofold commandment to 4:1-6 when he writes: "The sole test which the Elder proposes is doctrinal, and though 1 John does deal with Christian behavior to a considerable extent, no specific criterion of behavior is proposed as a test for discriminating true from false prophets." (ibid.)

[42] This is not to say that neither Paul nor John used previously existing materials. Both did. But the manner in which they adopted them shows that they were fully integrated into their epistles and serve a specific argument that the author was developing. Not so with the didachist.

appear to exercise distinctive yet overlapping roles in the congregation in later chapters (13:1–2), even as bishops and deacons are said to do the ministry of prophets and teachers (15:1–2). This suggests that understanding "teacher" as a general office or position in 11:1–2 is not appropriate. Instead, it is likely that the reference to teachers in 11:1–2 should not be understood as referring to a particular defined role but rather a general reference to the activity of teaching itself as it is exercised by itinerants—something that apostles and prophets do.[43] Therefore, it is appropriate to think of some overlap between the prophet and the "teacher" (διδάσκαλος) in that both "teach" (διδάσκω), even though the redactor later makes a distinction between the two roles in the church.

A second consequence of this observation is that according to 11:1–2, it can be assumed that if a prophet were teaching but not "in the spirit," then he would be subject to a testing of his teaching by a comparison of its content with the two ways material[44] of 1–6 and, interestingly, the liturgical practices of 7–10. If the prophet's teaching (not "in the spirit") undermines or dissolves (καταλυσαι) "all the things said above," then he is not to be heard. On the other hand, if what he says gives or adds (προστίθειναι) "righteousness and knowledge of the Lord"[45] then he is to be welcomed. What is important to note here is that the didachist raises the possibility of new information being imparted that does not "dismantle" (καταλυσαι) what is previously held but rather serves to "benefit" or "increases" (προστίθειναι) the community in its Christian praxis and knowledge. Novelty is not necessarily a bar to the community receiving a teaching; rather, it should be evaluated on the effect—the fruits—of the new teaching upon what has been taught before (so as not to undermine or dissolve it) and the possibility of future benefits for up-building the Christian life of the community.[46]

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[43] This supposition is supported by the difference in words used. In 11:1-2, "the teacher" is a participle of the verb "to teach" (διδάσκω) placing emphasis upon the activity of teaching, while in 13:2 and 15:1-2 (where an office is in view) we find the nominal form "teacher" (διδάσκαλος) focusing attention on the person. Sandt and Flusser agree with this view indicating that "διδάσκαλος" is likely a "*terminus technicus* designating a distinct class of teachers." Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 342.

[44] A genre that compares the path of darkness to the path of light. For more on the two ways material in the Didache, see: *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Didache."

45 Niederwimmer is likely correct when he observes that these two terms should be taken as a hendiadys describing a single concept modified by the genitive "of the Lord." Cf. Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 171–2.

[46] With a brief introductory formula for the next section (11:3), the didachist begins a discussion of how to evaluate two different classes of itinerants—apostles and prophets. Beginning with the apostles, the didachist is first concerned with the length of his stay. One day is best, two is acceptable, but three draws condemnation as a "false prophet." Similarly, an apostle as a radical itinerant can only ask for enough bread until he finds his next night's lodging, and if he

Turning to prophets in 11:7ff, the didachist urges care upon the reader. A prophet "speaking in the spirit" is not to be tested or discerned (διακρίνω) because "this sin will not be forgiven," the sin apparently being putting the Holy Spirit to the test. It should be noted that the phrase begins with a present participle (λαλοῦντα) which, in this context, likely indicates an action that is occurring in the time of the main verb thereby suggesting the translation: "You will not test or judge every prophet *while* (they are) speaking in the spirit." If this is the case, then the idea would be that *at the time of their prophesying*, they are not to be tested or discerned. This seems to fit the context because prophets are to be judged both by their conduct (11:8–11) and even by the content of what they say while "in the spirit" (11:12). But for present purposes, what is important to note is that this injunction is explicitly inspired by concern over the safety (if this sin is not forgivable, then much is at stake for she who sins in this way) of the one who might choose to test or discern the spirit speaking through the prophet.[47] If it is indeed the active voice of the Holy Spirit, then it is not the prophet who has been offended but the Spirit Himself, the consequences of which are serious—the withholding of forgiveness and so, assumedly, salvation.

In 11:8, the didachist outlines the way by which a prophet or a false prophet might be "known" by focusing upon his conduct or manner of life (τρόπος), specifically if he has the "conduct of the Lord." This indicates that it is really the conduct of Jesus himself that the prophet is to emulate,

asks for money, he is again condemned as a "false prophet" (ψευδοπροφήτης). Niederwimmer may be correct when he says that the word "false prophet" is used instead of "false apostle" simply because the latter is more obscure (ibid., 176). Niederwimmer surveys Greek literature for the word "ψευδοαπόστολος" and finds it attested originally in what he considers an "ad hoc construction by Paul" in 2 Cor. 11:13. He then goes on to indicate that it does not appear again until Hegesippus, Justin, and Tertullian (cf. Niederwimmer for references) and points to Rev. 2:2 as an example of where the word could have been used but was not. (Cf. also Sandt and Flusser, Didache, 343). Yet in light of the connection between behavior and the label of "ψευδοπροφήτης" in 11:7–12 where a "false prophet" is exactly what is in mind, it may be enlightening to entertain the suggestion that the didachist does mean "false prophet" and not "false apostle." The consequence of this line of thought would be to pronounce a judgment against the spirit the community finds at work within the life of the apostle—a spirit that issues in behavior that does not up-build the community but rather serves to tear it down by taking advantage of hospitality freely given. Such a spirit could not be the Spirit of God which, as we have seen in other early Christian literature and will be seen in the tests regarding prophets in the Didache, issues forth in behavior consonant with the character of God as seen in Jesus. Yet even if the didachist is simply seizing upon a word which he does not really mean, the fact that he thought the word "ψευδοπροφήτης" adequate to describe a false apostle indicates the closeness of the two roles in his mind. This suggests that what applies to prophets also applies to teaching more generally, so the contemporary church would have some support in applying the practice found in the Didache to contemporary teachers, even if they do not exhibit prophetic characteristics *per se*.

[47] Sandt and Flusser agree with this point in that they see prophecy as "a gift of divine origin and, therefore, principally beyond man's examination… Evaluation of a prophecy would involve a judgment on the spirit at work in the prophet and might be a sin against the spirit." Sandt & Flusser, *Didache*, 344–5.

and suggests that the cases mentioned in 11:9–12 are just that—a casuistic application of this general principle. Further, given that the two ways material of chs. 1–6 is likely seen as an authoritative interpretation of the manner of life embodied by Jesus, it would be against this material that the conduct of the prophet is to be compared. This would fit with the words that opened ch. 11 where the teaching that an itinerant brings must support both the two ways material and the liturgical injunctions that have been outlined in the first ten chapters. It would be an odd thing if the didachist understood the "conduct of the Lord" to be something radically different than what he had already outlined or restricted it to the cases he subsequently marshals.

A second case is cited as a means to identify a false prophet as one who *teaches* "the truth" (no mention is made of speaking "in the spirit") but does not do it. It is not enough to just say what is true; one's life must also reflect that truth. Hypocrisy in this matter labeled one as a false prophet. Additionally, this indicates that prophets were not only given to oracular utterances but also to what can be described as "teaching" (διδάσκω), something I noted with regard to 11:1–2. The truth value of what they said was likely evaluated on the same premises in 11:1–2—i.e., its agreement with what the didachist said in chs. 1–10. Once the teaching is established as "true," the behavior of the prophet must match or he is a "false prophet." As with the case of the apostle cited above, it may be possible to see this as a judgment against the spirit of the prophet. Further, a necessary connection between behavior and the presence of the Holy Spirit must be presupposed for a judgment based upon the behavior of a prophet to falsify his prophetic activity as a whole, including his ecstatic utterances.

In sum, we see the continuation of a pattern that started with Paul. The test of the truth of a teaching, including teaching given by a prophet, is whether or not it agrees with what is taught by the community. Doctrinal agreement is an important element.[48] A second test is behavioral where the conduct of a prophet is to be the "conduct of the Lord." The criterion of communal up-building is active in the Didache as well in that many of the tests focus on the abuse of the hospitality of the community. It is not difficult to imagine a situation where a naïve but well-meaning member of the community may entertain a "prophet" who is only interested in food or money over the objections of other members of the community leading to arguments and schism that tear down the community.[49] On the other hand, new teachings are to be welcomed if they do not "dissolve" what has come before and if they function to "increase" Christian behavior in the community. Even strange or idiosyncratic behavior done "for the worldly mystery

[48] It is of note that the Didache appears to add liturgical agreement to this test as well.

[49] Sandt and Flusser also emphasize the effects on communal hospitality. Cf. Sandt and Flusser, *Didache*, 340-2.

of the church" (11:11) is accepted as long as that behavior is not urged upon the community.

Conclusions and Reflections

In the course of this study, we have observed that the early Christian community applied specific criteria (though not necessarily propositionally rationalistic criteria) to the prophets in order to adjudicate the true prophet from the false. Running throughout the texts we have studied, we see a similarity of concerns. First, there was a concern for doctrine. The teaching of the prophet was to be weighed to see if it harmonized with what the community had believed and taught. Doctrine matters in judging the prophets and their prophecies for the early church, but it was not the sole criterion for accepting the prophet or his utterance. This category of testing is well-known and non-controversial.

Second, the behavior of the individual prophet was of great importance in determining whether or not he spoke from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. This serves to add another layer beyond the doctrinal test in that it demonstrates an overall concern for the "fruits" of the prophet, which includes but goes beyond doctrinal accuracy. This second criterion is hardly one that can be fully encapsulated in a series of rules. It depends upon the concept of "recognition" rather than that of logical coherence as with the doctrinal test. Recognizing the behavior of a true prophet was more a matter of seeing if the prophet conducted himself in ways that resonated with the community as being honest and forthright, according to the spirit of the community which is, assumedly, the Holy Spirit. This is essentially like determining whether the narrative of the prophet's life fits into the story of what the Holy Spirit is doing or would do in those situations such that the prophet's story is consonant with the Spirit's story. So here, recognition and discernment say much the same thing.

The third concern is ecclesial in that the effect of the prophet's ministry in up-building the community was ascertained. If the prophet's words led to an increase in Christian life and faith for the church, then the prophet is accepted. Again, as with an evaluation of behavior, this is a highly contingent criterion and not easily discerned. It takes time for the fruits of prophetic practice to come to full bloom. But it is also here that the concern for the practical effects on the Christian community is of great importance. Does what the prophet says build up the body of Christ in its love for God and neighbor or not? Perhaps here *in nuce* is Augustine's dictum that: "Whoever, therefore, thinks he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and our neighbor does not

understand it at all."[50] Judging the fruitfulness of a prophet is not confined solely to his propositional statements nor to the exemplary character of his life but also to the effects his words and actions have on the community.[51] This is part and parcel of determining whether he should be accepted or rejected for the early church.

Among the implications of adopting this set of interpretive presuppositions for the life of the contemporary Christian community are the following. First, it enables an understanding of the life of the Christian community being conducted in the presence of a living God who is actively engaged in the life of His community. Acknowledging the living presence of the Spirit in the teaching and preaching of contemporary teachers and preachers in a manner analogous to the ancient prophets is entirely appropriate. One's teaching and preaching aligns oneself with the activity of the Spirit behind that teaching and preaching, and this has great implications for the recipient community.

Second, understanding that not only the Spirit of God but other spirits may be active in teaching and preaching is a salutary caution to both the contemporary Christian community and to any particular teacher or preacher. It encourages self-reflection on the part of the teachers of the Christian community and also enables the possibility of communal repentance for having followed the guidance of a wrong spirit in the past.[52] The importance of this observation can then be carried over to the political life of the community where a similar set of criteria can be applied to determine the authorization and origination of a particular teaching or teacher.

Third, *how* one says something and *why* it is said are crucially important questions; not only *what* is said. Teaching and preaching is not a matter of simply saying propositionally true things in a vacuum; it is a matter of saying the right thing at the right time and in the right way. It is not enough to simply state what is true in the abstract; a biblical view of truth will also

[50] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), 30 [*De.Doc.* 1:XXXVI:40].

[51] Seeing these effects entails the formation of a peculiarly Christian "mind." N.T. Wright well characterizes Paul's goal in forming such a person: "...the development of a Christian 'mind', not simply in the sense of a calculating-machine that deduces norms from first principles, but in the sense of developing the freedom to think wisely and carefully about particular vocational and innovatory tasks, is at the heart of Paul's vision of Christian character... [it is] about teaching people to think as day-dwellers in a still darkened world." N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 2:1124.

[52] Instances of such repentance could include many churches' support for slavery in the United States, eliminating theological disagreement through violent means like in the Inquisition, seeking political expansion through the Crusades, etc. All of these things could be seen as an instance of following a spirit other than the Spirit of God. For more along these lines, see: Theodore J Hopkins and Mark A Koschmann, "Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities: Congregations and Race in America," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 24, no. 2 (May 2016): 247–63.

encompass what should be said here and now, at this point in time, in order to build up the life of the community. Defending truth is never an abstract exercise; it is always fully embodied. The holistic practice of the early church bears witness to this in determining the "fruit" of a prophet.

Finally, the reading offered emphasizes upon the importance of the doctrine of the Christian community as ultimately being a reflection of and a response to the living Lord of the community and so a matter of critical importance for the community. Rather than encouraging the Christian community to be unreflective regarding its statements of belief, knowing that such teaching is a means by which the community aligns itself with the Spirit of God or other spirits is a goad for the community to achieve greater depth in its theological reflection as well as greater faithfulness to the Christian tradition in the spirit (pun intended) of Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*. Anti-intellectualism has no part in the heritage of Christianity. Viewing judging prophets and prophecies primarily through a political lens where the goal is to place one's allies in positions of influence or unseat others for political goals degrades the entire process and becomes an exercise of the will-to-power where those who currently are in charge are able to lord it over those who are not. Recognizing, instead, that different spiritual powers are at work the truth of which is displayed not just in what is said but by whom and how and for what purpose should help to free the church from its allegiance to purely political concerns of power in favor of upbuilding the entire community in its life of faith in service to God and neighbor.

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"Can We Talk About Advent"

Phillip Brandt

Abstract

Those who are awake to the meaning and celebration of liturgical seasons have long bemoaned the eclipse of Advent by secular Christmas. But this is not just an aesthetic problem of Christmas carols preemptively shouldering aside rich Advent hymnody and practices. Advent, as a season of penitence, does necessary and healthful things to the worshiper. Can we identify that a hunger for penitence manifests in culture and use its own grasping for meaning, penitence, and reflection to achieve Advent goals in other times and seasons? Rather than fighting against culture, can we let culture do some of the heavy lifting for us? I believe so.

Introduction

Late this fall, on the Sunday which falls closest to the feast of St. Andrew for those following the Roman Calendar or the day after the feast of St. Philip (Nov. 15) for those following Eastern rite, liturgically oriented Christians will enter the season of Advent. In the West, we will set up our wreaths, diligently light an increasing number of candles, and perhaps gather for a special midweek service. In the parish I attend this midweek service will be preceded by a simple meal of soup and bread which has roots in ancient Advent practices of fasting. But, incongruously, we almost always have dessert too. Traditions vary across the ethnic and liturgical spectra of Christendom. In the East the Orthodox tradition has rather strict rules of fasting in this season, which for them continues until Jan. 6. But even in more relaxed traditions, in some way, many Christians will at least observe it. If nothing else, the first Sunday of Advent will mark the beginning of another year in the liturgical cycle of readings.

I have no quarrel with this and indeed cherish much of what passes for Advent these days. I assert, however, that what passes for Advent in most of our parishes would be unrecognizable as a penitential season to the generations of Christians who observed the season prior to the modern period. Again, let me reiterate, I am not seeking to change what currently passes for Advent; I am in fact appreciative of what it is attempting to do. I do wonder, however, how it affects the folks within our congregations. Being a Lutheran, I need to ask that question. Law and Gospel are not actually determined by the content of the words and actions we speak and perform as much as

they are by the effect which the words and actions have on the hearer. This has only sharpened for me over the past decade as I have left called parish ministry to enter the ranks of the academy. I am no longer the one immersed in sermon preparation and hymn selection every week. When I was, the liturgical calendar was a very real part of my life, profoundly shaping me. Now, I am the one experiencing that hard work on the part of the pastor and musicians of the parish I attend. In my work-a-day world, I am far more influenced by other calendars, primarily academic. December is not a period of fasting, penitential vows, and an emphasis on prayer but of final exams and the end of the term. Both have a certain apocalyptic tenor, but they are very different.

When I look at my own experience and speak to my fellow parishioners, I find that Advent is simply not a penitential season. It is a season of feasting, parties, decorating trees, and preparing for a grand party on the 25th of the month. The Advent which Gregory I (590-604) codified was an occasion for rigorous and healthy penitential practices of fasting, self-denial, penitential vows, and the earnest amendment of a sinful life. The culture in which we swim has shouldered this Advent aside. Christmas has started sometime shortly after Labor Day, if the merchants have their say. By the time the Thanksgiving holiday has rolled around, any pretense to fasting and self-denial is effectively crushed by a round of holiday parties, the excesses of consumerism, and the incessant pressure to make sure the house and table are Christmas-ready.

Even those who argue against this are really making an aesthetic argument more than they do a pastoral argument for penitential practices. Liturgical grumps crabbily insist that carols must wait and the crèche needs to be infant-less until the actual Feast of the Nativity. They argue that it is not Christmas yet, and we need to pay attention to that. At best their congregations may indulge them as eccentrics. Mostly they are politely ignored.

Those grumps are right. I have been one, holding the line on Christmas carols in worship until the actual Christmas season. I probably am still a little grumpy about this. I have been known to quiz cashiers in December about when the 12 days of Christmas fall on the calendar. They never get it right. I insist on saying Merry Christmas to them until Jan. 6. My children roll their eyes and my wife finds some magazine so engrossing in the next aisle that no one would casually connect us as married while I do this. I miss the Christmas that started on Christmas day but even as I make these arguments I realize that I am not actually arguing for a penitential season. I am arguing for an aesthetically defined season. As I consider the lives of my parishioners and the students whom I currently teach, I note the absence of

the Advent which was intended by the fathers: a period of penitential practices. I grieve that loss too and fear for the people who live without it. They need it as well. This is why I want to talk about Advent. I am not trying to restore an aesthetic season which waited until Dec. 24 to erect the Christmas tree. I really do not care when the tree is set up. I am arguing that in the 21st century, people need a time to repent. Advent, even if we keep the Christmas carols at bay for the first 24 days of December, simply cannot be that season in our current cultural situation.

In this article I propose to take a brief look at Advent, its origins, and its purpose. But this is not simply an historical exercise. I intend to propose that we need to reconsider this season and how we embody the Advent proclamation of Law and Gospel in our cultural context. Advent is not an artifact which we need to preserve. It was founded as an ecclesial action which conveyed a particular message and worked a particular work for the congregant. I would distill Advent's original message/effect, particularly its penitential emphasis and practices, and ask whether Advent and Christmas as more recently formulated actually accomplish what we want or even need them to accomplish. And then I would propose a reconsideration of just how we might accomplish that essential Advent and Christmas task. My proposal is that we consider the two or three weeks immediately after the Christmas holiday as an intentionally and liturgically observed penitential period.

A Pastoral History of Advent

Advent is a relatively late addition to our liturgical calendars but is still ancient. The Advent we know, a period of four Sundays prior to the feast of the Nativity, took shape in the pontificate of Gregory I in the late sixth century.1 That, however, is only the modern shape of the season. Gregory did not create the season but was giving shape to existing practices which were observed before he came to office. There are several antecedents which indicate that precursors to Advent existed. We know that the early church was observing a winter Pascha of sorts. Earlier in the 5th century Leo I (the Great) chided Sicilian bishops for practices surrounding baptisms in this season. He thought that their celebrations were eclipsing the more important Spring Pascha when Baptisms were traditionally held.2 Unfortunately, there is just not sufficient data, and it conflicts a great deal, to say too much about this proto-advent season. That of course has not inhibited liturgical and patristic scholars from making speculation.

As with Easter, the winter Pascha—the celebration of the Incarnation—was preceded by a period of penitential reflection, self-denial, catechetical

[1] Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 158.
[2] Nathan Mitchell, "The Winter Pascha," *Worship* 67, no. 6 (1993): 535.

preparation, and fasting. Our scanty references to this period of winter fasting suggest that it was initially understood and articulated as a period of preparation for Catechumens who were to be baptized. It might be assumed that this period of fasting was designed for a small part of the community, but there is evidence that this period of fasting may pre-date the practice of baptism at Epiphany and may have been generally practiced. This question of a pre-Epiphany fast is made much more complex by the uneven introduction of Dec. 25 as the Festival of the Nativity. Prior to the elevation of this Christmas date, the penitential period seems to have been leading to the celebration of Epiphany on Jan. 6. The introduction of another festival, Christmas, less than two weeks earlier, in the middle of the fast, and at which Baptisms also seem to have been conducted, have significantly muddied our understanding of these early observances of an Advent-like season. 3

A second origin to the season may also be discerned. It appears to have been a season of Marian piety. In several communities, special emphasis was given to the annunciations in this period, culminating in the annunciations to Mary and Joseph. While the Annunciation narrative remains in the western rite on the Sunday prior to Christmas, this was more prevalent in the Eastern dioceses of the Church.[4]

A third observed rationale for the season falls under the title of "Fast of the Tenth Month" (December). This may have roots which predate Christianity itself as a received tradition from Roman culture in which inhabitants of Italy fasted in each season of the year, the winter fast falling in the tenth month.[5] This was rooted in the agricultural rhythms of the Italian peninsula. It has been argued that the early Christians in Rome "baptized" this period of fasting.[6]

This penitential season, adapted to circumstance and calendar, became Advent. It never had the same severity and austerity as the Lententide. Should one sing "Alleluias" in Advent? The answer is much less settled than it is in the case of the Lenten proscription of "Alleluias". It appears that this penitential period prior the Nativity/Incarnation/Epiphany was often conceived of as a parallel (imitation?) of Lent, but one without same intensity. It also did not have the same unanimous shape as Lent. In some places beginning as early as Nov. 11, even in some places extending to as early as the Conception of John the Baptist on Sept. 24.[7] In Milan, within the Ambrosian

[3] Bradshaw, *Origins*, 160–3.
[4] Ibid., 158–9.
[5] Thomas Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo, 1986), 148.
[6] J. Neil Alexander, *Waiting for the Coming: The Liturgical Meaning of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany* (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1993), 14–7.
[7] Ibid., 14.

Rite, it is still a period of six weeks, not four.[8]

An Important Aside on Ancient Penitence and Fasting

This paper is interested in the practices which marked this period. What did observing Advent entail for the Christians of the late antique and early medieval periods? The modern congregant is often unaware of the extent to which both Lent and Advent reflected the culture which obtained at the point of their establishment. The early church walked a very rigorous and sometimes excessively penitential road which is alien to a modern western outlook. Advent was not as severe as Lent in many places because it only added one day of fasting to the weekly calendar. Christians were expected to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays every week of the year except the festivals. In Advent, they also were expected to fast on Mondays.[9]

This seems excessive to moderns. But these ancient practices were rooted in a particular way of looking at the world. In the ancient and medieval world, persecution and plague were frequently seen as visitations of divine justice and occasions for very visible acts of repentance.[10] A visitor to Rome today will likely visit the Castel Sant' Angelo. It was originally Hadrian's (died 138) tomb but by the Medieval period had been converted to a fortress. It derives its name from an event which is said to have happened in 590, in the days of Pope Gregory I. A plague was ravaging the area, and Gregory heard that a pagan shrine had recently been rejuvenated and was even attracting Christians. Assuming that the plague was punishment for this sin, Gregory destroyed the shrine and several others. Upon his return at the head of a penitential procession, he was said to see Michael the Archangel atop the tomb, cleaning and sheathing his bloodied sword. An angel has adorned the top of the Hadrian's mausoleum for many of the years since then.[11] We have no idea if this story is true—likely it is a medieval fable—but what matters is that it was perceived as factual in the medieval context. This "made sense" in the medieval world.

I bring this story up because it introduces us to the different world in which the early and medieval church lived and in which it formulated its penitential seasons. Gregory, of course, is the same Gregory who decreed the Advent season of four weeks prior to Dec. 25. These people took very seriously Jesus' opening words of his ministry: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." They fasted twice a week in non-penitential seasons.

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8 Bradshaw, *Origins*, 164.
9 Alexander, *Waiting*, 13.
10 Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity,* Vol I, 2d ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 429–30.
11 https://hefenfelth.wordpress.com/2012/05/19/st-michael-the-plague-and-castel-sant-angelo/ (accessed 10/15/2018).

They went on pilgrimages. They took vows of self-denial and engaged in penitential actions. The Medieval Church developed an entire system of penitential actions against which Luther's efforts at reform were initially directed.[12]

For many of these early centuries of the Church, these penitential seasons of Advent and Lent served to give space to penitence but then also to contain and restrict the penitential impulse. The Christians often saw that they were subject to forces and events which were completely beyond their control but which God manipulated to bring about repentance. As late as the Reformation period, the great Black Death of the 14th century and later evoked massive penitential processions between cities.13 People would abuse their bodies and fast excessively. Even a young friar name Martin Luther would fast so much that it seems to have affected his health later in life. Advent and Lent were the spaces in the year when people fasted rigorously, made special vows, and practiced all sorts of self-denial.

Lent and Advent may well have been introduced not so much to encourage these acts of repentance but to contain them. Egeria, the late 4th century pilgrim to the Holy Land, noted the prescribed cessation of fasting in the Eastertide, and she noted her and the people's eagerness for the resumption of their regular fasting.14 They did not chaff under the fast but at the feast. The people were given seasons in which they were encouraged to repent so that room could be made for the rejoicing of Christmas and Easter. Had this not been done people would have simply continued to repent all the time, and the great festivals would have been somber affairs and not the bright and joyous festivals which they were intended to be. If it is a struggle to see this, consider the life of an early and medieval church hero. Simeon the Stylite was evicted from his monastic community because his penitential practices were too severe. That is how he eventually ended up on top of a pillar praying for 37 years, an act of radical self-denial.15 The ancients did not need to be encouraged to these penitential actions. They needed to be encouraged to moderate them. Simeon resisted the effort to moderate. The 20th Canon of the council of Nicea mandates that there be no kneeling for prayer on Sundays and in the days of Pentecost (Easter).16 It was a time to

[12] Scott Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2015), 37.
[13] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 2010), 553–4.
[14] Egeria, *Egeria's Travels,* trans. John Wilkinson (Oxford: Aris and Phillips Press, 2006), 159–61.
[15] MacCulloch, *Christianity,* 207–9. (Cf. plate #3, after p. 206)
[16] Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol XIV, The Seven Ecumenical Councils,* ed. Henry R. Percival (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004) 43. It should also be said that the ancient practice of kneeling at prayer needs to be seen in a polemical light as well. Kneeling differentiated the Christian from the pagan.

celebrate the resurrection and proclaim ownership of divinely granted status before God as the redeemed children of God. That meant the proper posture was standing at prayer. They did not have to encourage kneeling; they had to encourage the non-penitential posture of standing. This is why the Sundays in Lent are "in" Lent. The people had been repenting so hard for the other six days that Sunday was supposed to be a relaxation of repentance.

A Comparison to the World of Today

Consider how different our situation is. A Lenten Sunday is likely the only time most of our people will ever even think about—let alone engage in—any penitential action. Even that might simply be limited to noting that an observant liturgical planner has omitted the hymn of praise and "Alleluias" from the service. Rather than our seasons of Advent and Lent giving voice to a powerful cultural impulse to repentant action, we are often in the role of having to teach repentance and encourage it. Our people have not been excessively repentant. On the contrary, they have been altogether too indulgent of passions, desires, and vices. They come to church—if they come at all—blithely unaware of the gravity of their sin and certainly not connecting their modern problems (aching back, tanking retirement account, or marital troubles, for example) to their need to repent and get right with God. They may come lonely, afraid, and hopeless, but they do not perceive that fasting, penitential vows, self-denial, and other tradition acts of penitence associated with Advent are the proper course of action. These troubling parts of their lives are perceived as the results of poor choices or circumstances—maybe genetics or financial forces—beyond our control. They come perhaps with an aggrieved sense of entitlement; certainly they come needy, happy for help, but not gripped by a penitential impulse which can be expressed liturgically and which the liturgy and worship of the Church needs to channel and constrain.

We are left, however, with seasons which are originally designed to meet that very different antique situation. I believe they can adapt. Lent, because Easter is not the gift-giving orgy that is secular Christmas, is not under the same pressure. The Christian has space to observe in Lent within our culture. Fasting, prayer, and gifts to the poor can find room, albeit cramped, in that season to be done meaningfully. No one is cramming "Alleluia" laden hymns or "I'm dreaming of a green Easter" into their ears through the speakers in Kohl's.

Advent, on the other hand, is a completely different story. We are all aware of this. December can hardly be a time when we think about fasting, self-denial, and other penitential practices. Black Friday and Cyber Monday have kicked off a spending frenzy which is whipped into a fever pitch by

merchants. I have great sympathy for the merchants. My mother worked in a small gift store for some years which was owned by her good friend. For eleven months of the year they made no profit. The entire profit for the year was the Christmas season. If I were a merchant, I would undoubtedly be trying to maximize that as well.

While it is understandable, this commercial Christmas has had an effect on both the Advent and the subsequent Christmas seasons. By the time Christmas arrives on Dec. 25, most people are sick of it. The Christmas trees, having adorned the living rooms since the day after Thanksgiving, are tinder dry and will be left on the curb for the local Boy Scout troop to gather and recycle on Dec. 26. Simply for reasons of fire prevention this is a good thing. The decorations are quickly boxed up and only a stray loose end of wrapping paper drifting across the play room floor might give any indication that Christmas has come and gone. December was for amassing the pile of toys and baubles which now lie in the corner. The liturgically minded know that the feast of Christmas has really just begun on December 25. Our neighbors and fellow congregants, however, have displaced Advent with another sort of Christmas and are no longer ready for the festival when it finally arrives. Penitential Advent, having been muscled aside by the loud and prematurely celebrated Christmas, is not part of their December at all. At most we can expect that Christmas day will serve as the culmination and crescendo of a pre-Christmas season.

Should we grieve that? Aesthetically the commercialized Christmas is gauche, and spiritually the whole gift-giving emphasis of secular Christmas has largely been hi-jacked by a self-serving ethos which is difficult to fit into the observance of the Incarnation of Christ. That is a loss, but an adroit preacher and the careful worship planner can steer clear of the aesthetic train wrecks and even reclaim the spiritual depth in many of the practices of Christmas as it is observed in the weeks prior to Christmas. In fact, as I preach in various congregations in my area, I find that we are already doing that. Emphases on loneliness, community, and the spiritual significance of gift-giving abound. They are importations of Christmas into the Advent time-slot. I think we need to do more of this. But in order to that, Advent will need to make room for a Christmas which begins much earlier. We will have to embrace the Christmas of December 1-24 and find another time for the Advent emphases on practices of penitence.

A Pastoral Proposal for Reform

What, then, to do about Advent, and especially its practices penitence, fasting, and simplicity? Here is where I believe we need to recognize the power of culture and stop working against it. The culture is pushing

Christmas before Dec. 25 and that is displacing the language of self-denial, reform, and simplicity. The richness and celebratory character of Christmas is overwhelming the penitential themes of old Advent. I do not believe we can stop this and we ought not to try to stop this. What is more I think we are already navigating this well. We have picked upon congruent themes already present in our Advent readings which allow us to import some of the incarnational joy of Christmas. Themes of hope, communal fellowship, and light, which would have been alien to an early church observer of Advent, have regularly found their way into the worship life of parishes on Sunday. We need to preach these themes of Incarnation, Christ, and his hope-giving presence in this world right now. If we wait until the 12 days of the festival (Dec. 25-Jan 6), we have missed the moment at which our people are really ready to hear that. The iron is no longer hot.

In fact, it may be wise to import Christmas hymnody and themes into the Sundays of December prior to the Festival. *Of the Father's Love Begotten; Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising; Once in David's Royal City; Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light;* and *Joy to the World* will largely be unsung if we leave them to the 12 days of Christmas. What is more, their themes and messages can fit beautifully into pastoral care for people who are rendered lost, lonely, and disoriented by the commercial Christmas observances which surround us.

But what of Advent's original works of penitence? My proposal does not mean jettisoning the Advent emphasis on penitence, but I do think we need to relocate it out of the Advent season. I say that because the culture continues to recognize the necessity of these penitential acts and has even provided us with an alternative season of penitence associated with Christmas. This season, however, begins in the days immediately after the Feast of Christmas, not before it.

Consider the actions of penitence. When we repent, we consider our life and its need for reform. We make a vow, a promise to do better, and take steps before God to amend our sinful life. What is this frank acknowledgement of my problem and a promise to better myself but another language for speaking of a New Year's Resolution? That resolution, spiritually understood, is a penitential vow. In addition to penitential vows, penitence often involved fasting and self-denial. In my house, because of billing cycles, the first days of the New Year bring me the grim news of my sins of excess as credit card bills begin to show up in my mailbox. Enforced fasting ensues as fiscal constraints limit our consumption—or one could call this self-denial. If you are like me, the most dreadful part of the post-Christmas penitential season is the day I screw up enough courage to mount the bathroom scale

and take grim stock of the damage done by too much feasting, my lack of self-control, and insufficient exercise. Now the piper must be paid in gnawing hunger, sweat, and tears.

This is all the language of repentance, but it is couched differently from the liturgical language of repentance, and therefore I think we miss it. We need to seize this time of penitential action and make it into a season of penitence—effectively relocating the Advent penitential action to the days after Christmas. Another way to think of this is to say that these actions—which people are doing anyway—need to be taken before God and not simply in service to the self.

Of course such a course of action will necessitate rethinking what we are doing. I wonder, though, if it is not high time for that and if the re-thinking will be limited to the way we talk about New Year's resolutions. Our modern discussion of repentance is perhaps not rooted as much in Scripture as we imagine it to be. We tend to see penitence solely as some abasement before the divine, a mental activity, a re-orientation of my inner self and not my embodied life. New Year's resolutions seem to be too self-help or therapeutic for our theologically motivated ideas about repentance. But is that really so? Yes, dieting and fiscal restraint have a self-serving component to them both. But so did the massive penitential processions of the 14th century and Gregory's destruction of the shrines in Rome. They wanted the plague to stop. The Quartodeciman observance of Easter in the first centuries of the Church's life included specific times of fasting which coincided with the Jewish Passover feasting. While the Jewish competition feasted, Christians fasted in order to set ourselves apart.17 This seems to have been fasting as a sort of inter-religious polemical statement. In their extreme mortification the desert fathers sought something for themselves in relationship with God. Simeon the Stylite sat on his platform at the top of a pole for over 30 years because he understood this as a way to be closer to God. But we should not ever forget that the ascetics of the first centuries of the Church were also immensely popular. One did not become a superstar through Instagram in ancient world. One did something dramatic like sitting on a pole for decades. Simeon had to move to increasingly higher pillars because the crowds of pilgrims kept him from his austerities. He was consulted by emperors and bishops.18 By the end of his life, a double wall had to be constructed around his pillar to keep the crowds out. Can we exclude this popularity as part of what kept him upon that pillar? The presence of a self-beneficial effect to our repenting is not the problem. The absence of any divine dimension to our New Year's resolution is the problem to which we will need to preach

[17] Bradshaw, *Origins*, 42.

[18] Williston Walker, Richard A. Norris, et al., *The History of the Christian Church,* 4th ed. (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1985), 155–6. Cf. MacCulloch, 235.

and plan.

We should not shy away from dieting as penitence and we should have a care for the physical health of our parishioners. This gives us an opportunity to speak to a gnostic protestant culture which disconnects the body from the spirit and subsequently from God. Can we observe this season with a "Biggest Loser" contest in the congregation? Can we understand that dieting and bodily care are churchly, holy things to do and not ancillary "social" activities which exist apart from worship? Can we suggest that God is cheering us on to better health? Could we offer a support group for people who are struggling to control their finances and get out from under credit card debt? Could that be seen as a spiritual thing and not simply a worldly concern? Should we make New Year resolutions into holy, liturgically recognized vows taken before God? Can the community of faithful Christians hold individuals accountable for those vows? Would we find them easier to keep that way? Obesity has been likened to a modern plague.19 In the face of outbreaks of bubonic plague medieval flagellants walked between cities and beat themselves raw. Can we have a volksmarch and call it is a similarly penitential and holy thing?

For this we may need new hymnody, and this suggestion is made with some trepidation. The lyricist will need to delve deeply into the theology of the physical world and creation. Modern American Protestantism is only recently discovering that it is in many respects gnostic in its thought, imagining salvation as an escape from the physical to an ethereal heaven of harps, halos, wings, and clouds but nothing real. Most of us were nurtured in a theology based in an unbiblical physical and spiritual dichotomy. It would be too easy for this to be facile and superficial, or worse, merely therapeutic, turning the Church into some sort of spiritual weight watchers organization. This hymnody and song will need to take careful consideration of what it means that God came into the physical world to redeem the physical world because he loves this physical world which he has made. Salvation is not an escape from this world but the redemption of this very broken world, even the corner of it I call my home, my life, and my body. Can we gather up the angst of the man or woman who failed again in the dieting goals, succumbing to the pleasures of food? Is there music to articulate the fear of losing your house or being unable to provide for your children because you are so close to insolvency? Can we focus on the Psalmists vows and his promises to fulfill those vows in the presence of God's people? Can we sing songs of encouragement and bring praise to God when vows are kept? Can we bring all this into our churches once more?

[19] Cal Shipley, *Obesity – the Modern Plague.* https://www.calshipleymd.com/obesity-modern-plague/. Downloaded 9/5/2018.

Here is why I believe the penitential season which follows the Festival of the Incarnation may be necessary. Christ has come into this world, taken up human flesh, to redeem this world and all its sinful humanity. Salvation is not an escape from world of senses and the material. Christian salvation is God restoring us to right relationship with him and his creation. We need to re-connect the vow to do better in this body and life with God.

Anticipating some Responses

I am not suggesting that we jettison the liturgical season of Advent. Keep singing the Advent Hymns and light the Advent wreath. What I suggest is that we remove from Advent the burden of needing to be a penitential season which lives in tension with Christmas. Christmas has already intruded; make peace with that. Our culture is not allowing the penitential practices of historic Advent to happen. Advent originally became a penitential season of preparation as an adaptation to culture in the first centuries of the Church's existence. Can it adapt culturally to this age? I think so. I think it needs to.

Likewise, I think it is worth singing the Christmas hymns after the day of Christmas, but this too might work into this proposal. I have been in Target and heard them playing "Greensleeves," and, shockingly, with a vocalist actually singing the words of "What Child is This." But they always stop after one verse. The Christmas preacher and music planner will want to go onto that subsequent verse with its nail and spear which pierce him through. Christmas is about the Incarnation, after all. That incarnational emphasis of Christmas has always had a dark or penitential side to it. The feasts of Stephen (Dec. 26), Holy Innocents (Dec. 28), and even St. John (Dec. 27) afford occasions for reflection on the incarnation which might be very penitential. The Incarnation would be the impetus for the penitential season which follows. Christ's presence in the daily life we live provides motivation and strength to this repentance.

I would also say that I am not displacing the following season of Epiphany, but I am somewhat reimagining its purpose, particularly in the first weeks, within the life of the parish. Epiphany's lectionary contains material which is congenial to this penitential emphasis. Jesus is found in the waters of John's baptism for repentance in that Sunday which follows the Epiphany. What is he, the sinless Son of God, doing there? John baptizes for repentance and even himself asks the question in Matthew's account. Jesus tells John and us that this fulfills all righteousness. He has taken the sins of the whole world to himself. He must repent of them because we have failed to repent of them adequately. That presence of Christ both spurs us to repent more fully and allows us to cast our own vows, fasting, and other penitential actions into a far more spiritually healthy light. We are not earning points

with God; we are simply being found with our Lord. Jesus' early ministry—which occupies the subsequent Sundays after the Epiphany—finds Jesus frequently exhorting people to repent for the kingdom is here.

There are concerns which are raised by this proposal.

First of all, we need to note the modern conception of repentance and how that also differs from the repentance to which the Holy Spirit continues to call people. We will have to be aware that some will hear this word repent and have in mind something utterly different from the repentance for which Jesus calls. This would seemingly manifest in a therapeutic understanding of my repentance in which my problems are not sins before God but simply unhealthy practices, thoughts, or attitudes. They are not sins which render me unholy and in need to God's gracious forgiveness.

Second, we will need to pay attention to how this will alter the way we celebrate Christmas and Epiphany. There are cherished and important traditions for any worshipping community involved here. As I note above, incarnational themes found in Christmas and penitential themes found in Epiphany are already giving us opportunity to step into a penitential mode. But we will need to have a care to remember the cherished elements of those seasons. This penitence needs its place, but it cannot occupy the whole space.

Third, I would not like us to repent of Christmas. Too often New Year's Resolutions manifest a sort of puritanical forswearing of all fun after a season of too much fun. But festivals need to be times of excess and joy. Don't repent of that. Repent of the life which knows only indulgence and nothing else. That life is not satisfied with Christmas joy, but always wants more and more. Or it finds that Christmas joy commercially observed was empty or shallow.

Fourth, the Church has already attempted to deal with this liturgically. I just don't think it has worked very well. The liturgical reforms of Vatican II—especially the adoption of a three year lectionary—has created a quasi-penitential season at the end of the church year, the three weeks in November which precede the Last Sunday of the Church Year/Feast of Christ the King. The eschatological focus here is alive and well, but the Christmas anticipation, Thanksgiving celebration, and cultural biases against penitence undermine its ability to inculcate the sort of penitential action this paper envisions. Rather, I think this ought to be seen as another preparatory or undergirding element of the post-Christmas penitential season. The eschaton needs to be lurking in the background and sometimes the foreground of penitence. This will not go on forever. There is an end, an accounting of things.

Conclusion

Any such proposal as this needs finally to ask whether what it proposes is better than what exists at the moment. I come to yet another Thanksgiving/Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season as I compose these words. Here is what I am expecting to happen. The pressure to celebrate will increase over the coming weeks as expectations rise for the Thanksgiving Day feast. We will be consumed by where, when, and with whom we will observe this secularly originated holiday. We will finally decide on which family members will be present, the menu, and where exactly the feasting will take place. The questions of who will bring dessert, who will bring the cranberries, and who will supply the yams will be settled. The yams will need to be without marshmallows at my house; that is non-negotiable. This is a liturgical event with clearly defined rules and expectations. The with-marshmallow crowd will be excommunicated with all the fervor of a 19th century inter-denominational dialogue between German and Swedish Lutherans.

After the Thanksgiving feasting is done and the families have returned to their respective domiciles, we will engage in the preparation for Christmas. My family eschews the Black Friday crush and madness. Critical questions are when shall we erect the tree and decorate it? When will we complete the holiday shopping for gifts to be distributed at Christmas? When will we brave the ladder and weather to string the lights on the gutters of my home, cursing my earlier sloth during beautiful fall days? Yes, Advent will make its appearance. We will attend a midweek service preceded by a meal of soup and bread. But it will not be a penitential affair, a simple meal which allows me to divert resources to the poor in almsgiving. A friendly competition has arisen in my parish of late. A score of crockpots will show up with soups of increasing complexity and subtler flavors as the Wednesdays of December progress. We have become soup snobs. There will be dessert too. While a soup supper may have origins in fasting, any such ideas have been blunted. It is about fellowship and community. I am not complaining, merely observing.

The preacher—a very good one in my parish—on Sundays and Wednesdays will direct our attention to the promised Messiah. He will likely point to themes of darkness and light. There is much darkness to note and great need for the Light of the World. The candles will be lit during a family oriented litany of prayer and readings. We will sing "O, Come, O, Come, Emmanuel" every week as another candle on the wreath is lit. Will he wait until Christmas to proclaim that Light? I would not. On the Sunday prior to the festival, all the pretense of waiting will be pushed aside as the Sunday School presents their Christmas program. In the Narthex the Angel Tree

program will make us all feel good about the growing mountain of gifts for the children of prisoners in the local penitentiary. While the readings will direct our attention to the fact that we are anticipating Christ, there will be little or no manifestation of this in practices. I forgo nothing in this season to mark the absence of Christ in my life. I will attend the staff party on 19th and join my fellow congregants in decorating the Church for Christmas several weeks prior to the actual day. After the last lights are strung and the tree is finished, we will eat cookies. My Lutheran university will present their Christmas concert in the first week of December, and my son's band will play their concert the same weekend, creating an odd confluence of beautiful and somewhat out-of-tune carols in my hearing.

The Christmas season will culminate in the night of our Lord's birth with one of the best attended services of the year. In fact, we will repeat it later that night so we can fit them all in. The next morning a much smaller gathering of folk will observe the feast in a morning service. The following Sunday will see the smallest attendance of the year as many take advantage of school and office closures to visit distant relatives. So dramatic is the attendance downturn, our usual two service Sunday morning schedule will reduce to one. Everyone is apparently "churched out" after extra Advent and Christmas Eve/Day services. The festivities have played out for them.

As I note above, I really do not have a problem with any of this. In fact, I would say that the wise preacher will note the attendance patterns and the relative importance of Incarnational preaching for people and begin importing Christmas themes into those weeks prior to Christmas. His people have ears to hear that message. Preach when they are there, not when the church is empty.

But there will be little or no penitence in this time. We could scowl at the folks eating their Christmas treats or forbid the desserts at Advent soup suppers. We could turn the Angel Tree donation into an act of self-denial, giving gifts to others at the expense or in place of gifts to the people we love. I seriously doubt if this will have much traction in the lives of the folks we serve. They will buy the gift for the prisoner's child and two more for their own son or grand-son because it feels so good.

We simply ask where the real themes of the original Advent shall go. They have no home in the weeks prior to the Feast day itself. Dialed into celebration by Thanksgiving and surrounded by the festivities of cultural and religious Christmas, the fasting penitent will not find a supportive community, either outside or inside the Church. But how this changes in the days which follow the Feast of our Lord's Incarnation. The people who come that next Sunday are the stalwarts. They are ready for such a message. The week

leading up to the change of the calendar is filled with retrospective, and often sorrowful retrospective considerations of the past year, famous people who have died, tragedies revisited, and measurements of progress or regress. It is a season for vows to do better. It is a time to consider life's excesses and their bitter effects upon our lives. People are ready to amend their lives.

The Church would be remiss if it did not acknowledge this opportunity. We have too long pretended that Christ's call to "repent and believe that the Kingdom is here" can be truncated simply to "believe." Oddly, our otherwise very secular world understands the need to repent as did the ancients. They are already doing it. They are not, however, engaged in the rich Christian tradition of repentance. They are trying to lose 20 pounds so they will fit in that dress or suit that hangs in their closet. We will not grab that fasting/dieting and make it into a spiritual thing but we will insist on a 12 day celebration for weary celebrants who are exhausted by the pre-party. We are out of step with the world. It is time to make like the ancients who gathered up a strong cultural impetus to repent and channeled it into the Church and brought the repentance before God. We really need to talk about Advent.

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"Embodied Living in the Age of Excarnation"

Joel Oesch

In 2013, a tourist was strolling down the beautiful St. Kilda's pier in Melbourne, Australia, enjoying the evening air and the pleasant sound of locals in friendly conversation. The woman decided to check her smartphone as she walked, slowly absorbing herself in her Facebook feed. She was so engrossed with the tiny screen in her hand that she accidentally stepped off the pier and plunged into the water. While unable to swim, she fortunately knew how to float on her back until the local authorities arrived, who fished her out of the water to her great embarrassment. Yes, this is true. Yes, similar events to this have happened all over the world. And yes, it gets worse. When the woman was finally rescued, the authorities noticed that she was clutching the destroyed-by-water smartphone for dear life. Even the prospect of drowning was not enough for this woman to release the very thing that nearly killed her.[1]

The point of this story is not to employ heavy-handed virtue-signaling as a declaration of moral superiority over those who enjoy their devices. These days, obsessed technophiles make for easy targets and piling on accomplishes little. The point is to illustrate the all-engrossing magnetism of social media, affecting vast portions of human life. Whether biologically, sociologically, or psychologically, these devices, in coordination with the applications they run, fundamentally transform the human person. Recent neurological research tells us that the Internet, and more broadly speaking, the digital screen, physiologically modifies the way a person's brain functions. Nicholas Carr presses home the argument that the brain—even the adult brain—is considerably more plastic than once believed. Neural patterns are restructured in ways that better interpret the shallow, disjointed, image-based world that the Internet provides.[2]

Sociologically speaking, the utterly astonishing power of the smartphone has forever altered the way local communities function, how goods and information are exchanged in the marketplace, and how people form social bonds with each other in communities both local and global.[3] This power extends to once-novel technologies, such as online social media and virtu-

[1] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25426263 (accessed Sept. 27, 2018).
[2] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 17–35.
[3] William H. Davidow, *Overconnected* (Harrison, NY: Delphinium, 2011).

al reality. When taken together, the transformative effects of these social technologies are substantial, particularly as their use generates a withdrawal from traditional forms of community. Economist Edward Castronova suggests that the gravitational pull of the virtual life will "create a change in social climate that makes global warming look like a tempest in a teacup."[4]

Perhaps the most substantial change is located at the level of human identity. The Digital Age, along with its retinue of devices, is primed to be the foremost shaper of human identity in the Western world, outpacing the more traditional influences of family, religion, political persuasion, or ethnicity. Technologies not only shape the way we think about the world around us, but, in an inward turn, these tools have taught us to think about ourselves—about human nature—in largely unfamiliar ways. The "tool as teacher" designation may be too benign. Perhaps we should start calling digital tools our *masters*. One visit to a baseball game, a restaurant, or train station will show you who is in charge of whom. As the famous saying goes, "We shape our tools, and thereafter, our tools shape us."[5]

The young woman on the pier reminds us how blurry the distinctions between the virtual and real have become. Clay Shirky, author of *Cognitive Surplus*, argues that a user's digital world no longer remains distinct from the real life they inhabit. He explains,

> The old view of online as a separate space, cyberspace, apart from the-real world, was an accident of history. Back when the online population was tiny, most of the people you knew in your daily life weren't part of that population. Now that computers and increasingly computerlike phones have been broadly adopted, the whole notion of cyberspace is fading. Our social media tools aren't an alternative to real life, they are part of it.[6]

MIT Sociologist Sherry Turkle, sharing Shirky's sentiment, notes the ease by which Internet users fluidly move between various virtual and embodied identities by baldly stating, "We are all cyborgs now."[7]

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[4] Edward Castronova, *Exodus to the Virtual World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), xiv–xv.

[5] Mistakenly attributed to sociologist Marshall McLuhan, this phrase was actually penned by his friend, Father John Culkin, a professor at Fordham University. The quote surfaced in 'A Schoolman's Guide to Marshall McLuhan' in *The Saturday Review* (March 18, 1967), 70. It has been modified and used in a variety of contexts since then, though it is no stretch to think that the central idea behind the quote is McLuhan's.

[6] Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 37.

[7] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (New York: Basic, 2011), 152. Turkle's full quote: "Within a decade, what had seemed alien was close to becoming everyone's way of life, as compact smartphones replaced the cyborgs' more elaborate accoutrements. This is the experience of living full-time on the Net, newly free in some ways, newly yoked in others. We are all cyborgs now."

The central reason why Christians should be paying attention to this tidal change is that ours is an Age of Excarnation. Roman Catholic philosopher, Charles Taylor, describes excarnation in this way: Excarnation is "the steady disembodying of spiritual life, so that it is less and less carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms, and lies more and more in the head."[8] As Christian intellectualism potentially leaves the body behind, so the profound nature of the Incarnation and our collective witness as the living Body of Christ slowly recedes from our theological imagination, leaving us with a feeble form of Gnosticism. Excarnation directly threatens human embodiment and undercuts the uniquely incarnational claims of Christianity.

Moment by moment, the West is experiencing a transformation. Embodied expressions of culture, art, music, vocation, and community have now given way to digitally mediated living. It is just a matter of time before the cultural takeover of digital technologies is complete, invading our very bodies in pursuit of more knowledge, longer lifespan, and enhanced emotional capacities. I admit that I am rather pessimistic that our society will place clear boundaries on the human body as we proceed further into the present century. The distinction between man and technology will continue to blur, and so Christians, like the Apostle Paul, are going to have to "build tents in Corinth," living in a culture that largely despises scriptural declarations of human identity. Culture, in both its religious and non-religious forms, may lose the ability to articulate a holistic response to the question, "What makes humans, human?" because it lacks any solid footing with which to place the body as an essential component of human life.

The nature of technology, as it transforms our understanding of personal biology, sociology, and psychology, raises the timeless question, "Who am I?" Whether through circumstance or curiosity, self-reflective people are often drawn to consider the ontological nature of one's existence and its necessary partner questions, "Why am I here?" and "To what end shall I live?" The purpose of this piece is to bring theology into the discussion as a conversation partner, drawing out the vitality of human embodiment vis-à-vis a culture that turns increasingly toward disembodied forms of identity. To be clear from the outset, my use of the term embodiment moving forward specifically refers to the God-given gift of human physicality, one's actual enfleshed body—not simply a reference to materiality in the broad sense.

For the first third of this article, I will briefly outline several historical metaphors for human identity. I will note various images that Western thought has used as guiding principles in its pursuit to understand human

[8] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2007), 771. While I use Taylor's term to aid in my thesis, excarnation is one small portion of his project in *The Secular Age*. My comments here should not be seen as an analysis of his incredibly complex and important work.

distinctiveness. In that examination, I will, within each system, consider the nature of human flourishing that results from such a starting point. The second third will turn its gaze to contemporary models with particular attention given to the world of secular Transhumanism and its key doctrines. In the final third, I will offer a Christian corrective that will bind human identity to the great good of embodiment without resorting to the extreme position of neo-Luddism. This corrective will consist of a creedal Trinitarian framework for thinking about the human person built on the pillars of vocation, embodiment, and the church-community. This structure is not intended to be exhaustive but can serve as a pedagogical rallying point for identifying some essential features of human identity, useful for laity and professional theologians alike.

Ultimately, this is a discussion about human *telos*. It is reflection on the nature of our purpose, what we love, and how we pursue our deepest ends.[9] And because we are complicated beings, the answers to these questions are often equally complex and require some balance. In our Lutheran expression of the Christian life, both the monastic *and* the scholastic, contemplation *and* disputation—heart, hands, *and* head—make for a healthy, holistic theology.[10] Such theology rightly returns us to the profound importance of the body as it relates to our ultimate ends. In what follows, I hope to challenge the cultural turn toward disembodied views of human identity, to resurrect—to make alive again—a view of the person which includes our corporeal nature as an essential feature of our creatureliness, of our human-ness.

HOMO SAPIENS

Humans are imaginative, conceptual creatures. They are also flesh, bone, and sinew—experiencing the natural world through sense organs. When taken together, it seems natural that people take their experience of the world and braid it together with a broader, transcendent narrative.[11] Such a narrative, then, becomes a stable platform by which one can reflect on the fundamental nature of their own existence. Who am I? *Why* am I? If narrative is indeed an appropriate facilitator for answering such questions, which I believe it is, we are left with the conclusion that language operates as a me-

[9] James K. A. Smith, *You are What you Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016). Smith uses Augustine as an entry into discussions about *telos*. He moves away from a view of discipleship that is restricted to simply thinking the right things about God and toward a view that encourages a proper ordering of the heart's desire for God through habituation and worship. "To be human is to be on the move, pursuing something, *after* something. We are like existential sharks: we have to move to live. We are not just static containers for ideas; we are dynamic creatures directed toward some *end* [author's emphasis]" (8).

[10] Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 9–13.

[11] Michael Zeigler, *Christian Hope Among Rivals* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017). Zeigler traces the power of narrative or "life-organizing" stories as a tool to both understand evil and to ground the believer's hope in an eschatology that ultimately overcomes such evil.

diating force: It provides us with certain imaginative tools to articulate more richly the human experience. Metaphor is one such tool—and a powerful one, indeed. By employing metaphors to the human condition, a person can draw together useful ways to communicate with one another, to learn from one another, and to build lasting communities under a common *mythos*.[12]

Some of the most effective ways for describing human nature and identity come in these picturesque packages. As years become decades and decades become centuries, philosophers identify particular anthropologies that have staying power, often because the models mirror discoveries about human nature in biology or sociology. Briefly, I would like to examine a few of these in full recognition that I cannot systematically treat any of them with the justice they deserve. I am simply attempting to trace the contours of human thinking on the subject, taking note of how these metaphors connect, and how they separate from one another.

Man as creature between gods and nature

For the ancient era, man was largely seen as a creature caught in a complex relationship between the gods and the natural world. In the case of pagan religions, the individual must master a balance between the Scylla of the gods, who send blessings in their benevolence as well as curses in their anger, and the Charybdis of the natural world, where thorns and thistles disrupt crops and wild animals encroach from the borderlands. Maintaining this balance required attention to deities both general and local, offering proper sacrifices and performing the necessary cultic rituals to invoke primordial powers that even the gods were required to obey.[13] Only then could one turn his efforts towards taming the ground and the livestock.[14] Noteworthy events were interpreted in this lens: bumper crops were the result of proper devotion to the deities, prompting their favor. Floods and pestilence

[12] Paul Ricoeur is a central figure in discussions about human identity and language. Ricoeur argued that one could only encounter the self through language, and therefore, a person's self-understanding was essentially an act of interpretation grounded in story and metaphor. See Ricoeur's, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny (London: Routledge, 2003) and *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

[13] The relationship between pagan gods and the natural world itself is a complex one. A key feature of pagan religiosity is the belief that a "primordial realm" of "darkness, water, spirit, earth, [and] sky" predates the emergence of deities and act as the fundamental conditions by which all being rely, human or divine. Gods, therefore, themselves were subjected to many humanlike aspirations: finding food and drink, sexual intercourse, dealing with fate, and so on. For a brief overview of the pagan worldview, see Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1972), 21–59, and Henri Frankfort, H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, and Thorkild Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy* (Harmandsworth, GB: Penguin, 1949), 11–36.

[14] Many ancient pagan religions believed that work itself was humanity's ultimate purpose. For example, in Sumerian and Akkadian accounts, humans were created to do the work of the gods, to take on the gods' burdens which they themselves had tired of performing. See John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 214–15.

could be signs of their displeasure. To be sure, the result was "interpreted as an outside power which infus[ed] itself into a man's doings."[15]

The ancient Greeks, too, believed that man was neither divine nor animal, though features of each would reveal themselves in a person's constitution. From the bottom, the appetitive desires of sex, food, and comfort were largely identified as animalistic. They were the lower instincts that, though necessary, could overpower a man and make him a slave to base desire. From the top, the Greeks understood the life of mindful rationality and the practice of virtue to be the goal of human activity. The contemplative life reflects the divine.[16]

Contrast these positions with biblical anthropology. Whereas the pagan divine-man relationship is born in tension and discord, the biblical witness takes great pains to describe the creation of man as originally good, being uniquely made in God's own image. Human beings are given the divine mandate to be both priests and stewards; to offer to God their bodies as living sacrifices and to exercise dominion over the whole of God's creation.[17] Whereas the Greeks emphasize the rational life of the mind and relegate the body as a secondary consideration, Judeo-Christian thought takes care to acknowledge the profound role of embodiment as the context for procreation, cultivation, and holy living. For the Christian, the physical is the centerpiece of the Christian creed. Indeed, a physical *body.* As Paul remarks in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."[18]

Man as evolved animal

As the Church's authority withered over time in academic and scientific disciplines, so too, its explanatory power waned with the rise of the European Enlightenment. A second powerful metaphor offered a counter-narrative to the Christian claims of humanity's special or dignified status in the natural world. The metaphor identified man as the latest product of the evolutionary chain and nothing more. Darwin's work, in large part, cemented humanity's status as animal, a product of purely natural processes.[19] Lost is the "porous man," where external cosmic forces—both good and evil—pen-

[15] Frankfort, Frankfort, Wilson, and Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy*, 219.

[16] Plato's tripartite division of the soul is laid bare in *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. The former outlines the three components as reason, spiritedness, and appetite. The latter describes the faculty of reason as a charioteer guiding the two lesser portions of the soul toward truth and goodness. See Plato's *Republic* (419a–445e), and *Phaedrus* (246a–254e).

[17] Gilbert Meilander, *Faith and Faithfulness* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1991), 38.

[18] 1 Cor 15:17 (New International Version).

[19] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (New York: D. Appleton, 1898), 1–209. This portion of the text explores the commonality in physical and mental traits between humans and other animals such as monkeys and dogs. Later on, Darwin concludes that "man is descended from some less highly organized form" (620).

etrate the person and give broader meaning to his situation in life.[20]

Darwin's discoveries in the natural world leaked steadily into the realms of religion, philosophy and ethics. Nietzsche, as an unflinching torch bearer of Darwinian theory, drew upon the naturalist to construct his own philosophy of will and power. If the strong are fit enough to survive and reproduce, then they also have the ability to mold the world in their favor, using other creatures—indeed, even other men and women—as instruments for their own achievement. Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity, in large part, stemmed from his desire to strip away Christian virtue from the might-makes-right natural order of things. Faith, hope, and charity were despised by Nietzsche as anathema, preventing humanity from unlocking its full potential.[21]

The "Man as Evolved Animal" model continues to enjoy longevity in contemporary ethical discussions. Princeton philosopher Peter Singer, for one, presses home a view of nature that makes almost no distinction in moral status between a human infant and a chicken.[22] And why should he, if he labels anything that favors human dignity over-and-against other animals as evidence of speciesism?

Man as Machine

The third and final metaphor I wish to invoke is Man as Machine. This will have particular value for the later conversation on Transhumanism, but for the present, let me offer a simple summary. Man as Machine first emerged from the writings of Julian Offray de la Mettrie (1709-1751) and was built on the back of strict materialism. De la Mettrie's work noted the similarities of animal and human functioning, effectively dismissing man's elevated status and reducing the soul to pure physical processes. This metaphor folds in nicely with the man as evolved animal, for the strictly materialist de la Mettrie argues, "Man is not moulded from a more precious clay; nature has only used one and the same dough, merely changing the yeast."[23] Humanity is simply a complicated automaton that mechanically and predictably responds to stimuli like a machine that uses inputs to manufacture outputs.[24]

[20] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35–41.

[21] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Geneology of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Deithe (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2017), 3–36. Nietzsche rejected the biblical moral framework as a "slave morality." Essentially, slave morality was created in response to the values created by those in power; it esteems behaviors which those in power ignore or despise (e.g., humility, altruism, care for the poor). See also, Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1974), 351–71.

[22] Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 181–91.

[23] Julian Offray de la Mettrie, *Machine Man and Other Writings*, trans. Ann Thomson (New York: Cambridge University, 1996), 20.

[24] The first century Greek poet, Lucretius, offered similar views centuries before de la Mettrie.

The metaphor is certainly useful in the natural sciences. It prompts the scientist to probe in the structures of matter and locate the relationship between the discrete pieces and the whole. After all, altering one tiny spark plug makes the difference between a pleasant Sunday drive and sitting in a parking lot with an angry expression on your face. The stakes are considerably higher if one ignores the magnificent machinery of the human genome.

. . .

Each metaphor sends humanity toward a particular fate; it indicates a *telos* or ultimate end to which a person strives. If man is a being caught between divine forces from above and unruly nature below, then the flourishing life is one that avoids the wrath of the gods and finds a certain harmony with the natural world. The pagan, then, would harness what power was available to him through spells, shamans, and sacrifice to minimize the curses and maximize the blessings for one's family, crops, and social relations.

If man is only an evolved animal, then ultimate flourishing is to adapt, survive, and spread one's genes. Strength and vigor become the operating virtues, and human communities are either reduced to arenas by which strong individuals subdue the weak or serve as entities of power unto themselves to rule other groups.

And, finally, if man is a machine as de la Mettrie suggests, then flourishing can be equated with optimum efficiency, where all the parts that make up a person's body and mind operate seamlessly without deferring to outside or transcendent sources of meaning.

These metaphors make claims about the human person—who the person *is*—and they suggest particular forms of flourishing. Yet each of the above models lacks the incarnational impulse of human nature—by that I mean an inherent bodily dignity given to man and woman by God as gift and as essential to a person's human-ness.

Models and frameworks only work insofar as they explain fixed targets, in this case, human nature. What happens if *that* given is called into question, as in the case of the rising Transhumanist movement?

Expounding on the ideas of Epicurus, Lucretius held to an atomistic view of nature where the world acts in accordance with physical laws apart from divine influence. See his *On the Nature of Things*, particularly Books 1–2.

HOMO TECHNOLOGICUS?

Imagine, for a moment, that you go to your eye doctor. After twenty minutes of assorted tests, she tells you what you already know. You need stronger lenses. Then, much to your surprise, she tells you about some recent innovations in ophthalmology. She says, "Our office is a part of a beta program that can surgically remove one of your eyes, replacing it with a robotic replica that is absolutely identical in look and feel. This new eye will give you perfect vision at a hundred yards." Before you can catalogue any objections, she continues, "The procedure is only two hours long, financially covered by government subsidies, and pain-free." Your potential objection list just shrank by three right there. Would you consider the surgery?

Let's play out the thought experiment. If you were, in theory, okay with a robotic eye, would you value a potential upgrade that would provide perfect vision at a thousand yards? Would you order a version of the eye that would allow you to have zoom capabilities, see with night vision, and/or have x-ray toggles? Would it make a difference if you were the only person in the world with access to this type of enhancement?

I have used this thought experiment in parish and university contexts for some time now. While a few adventurous souls would say yes to the entire package, most have deep reservations about the proposed surgery in at least one if not all of its permutations. The hesitation usually manifests itself in two distinct forms. The first objection is individual in nature and requires the theological assumption that man is sinful by nature. If a person is given a power that exceeds normal human abilities, resisting the temptation to abuse such power may also prove to be super-human. Remarkable eyesight with zoom or night-vision, for example, would inevitably lead to seeing things that should not be seen. Privacy would be violated, and the beneficiary of the surgery is transformed over time into a voyeur *par excellence*. The self-aware person, then, declines precisely because he knows he is human—and as such, he is predictably fallible and susceptible to evil actions.

The second objection has broader-based, communal concerns. Many participants in the thought experiment question to what degree human enhancement (as opposed to therapeutic uses of technology) leads to a devaluation of humanity. In other words, if I add a robotic eye or two, will this make me less human? What about adding a robotic arm, as well? This is a version of the sorites paradox. Rather than asking how many grains of sand are required to make a heap, we are asking how many robotic modifications are required before a person is something other than human.

Both concerns are quite profound and useful to our time here because

they speak to this fundamental anxiety about what it means to be human in a technologically advanced society. Ironically, the resistance to such a surgery implies a certain discomfort with the belief that a person can actually be thought of *as a machine*. To put this another way, it appears that an individual is a machine right up until we allow actual machines to penetrate one's body with increasing regularity. Then, we find ourselves disoriented in the human-but-not-quite-human terrain of the "uncanny valley" and are left with the intuition that our nature can and should remain appropriately distanced from the strict determinism implied in the Man as Machine metaphor.

Presently, the term "machine" has an anachronistic quality to it. Perhaps the more suitable metaphor is a slight augmentation of Man as Machine to Man as Computer, the flesh-and-bones hardware facilitating the software of the mind. For anyone who has ever bought a new computer online, the available customization options are nearly endless. Processors, graphics cards, power supplies, memory—all powerful tools to help a user run the type of programs they need to be successful. This is the story of Transhumanism, a story when man takes hold of his evolutionary destiny and crafts for himself a world of unlimited freedom and possibility. It is a tale that has but one use for the body: to protect the program of the mind, the *person's true identity*.

Transhumanism is a constellation of beliefs that reject any static view of human nature. Rather, it suggests that humans can and should modify their physical and mental processes with any and all technology at their disposal.[25] Practically speaking, this can take a variety of forms: surgically placed microchip security implants, mind-machine interfaces for amputees, and yes, eye, ear, and limb enhancements. An overwhelmingly secular movement, Transhumanism simply carries evolutionary theory to its endgame. Humanity, for the first time in its history, can bring about favorable "mutations" through applied technology, alterations that carry a person past therapeutic technologies into the realm of super-human enhancement. Some thinkers, including Yuval Noah Harari, believe that this species-wide transformation will be so total, so beneficial, that the term *Homo sapiens* will fail to communicate the "god-like control" that humans have over "their own biological substratum."[26] Harari's *Homo deus* designation may be a bit hyperbolic, but *Homo technologicus* just might hit the nail on the head: the technologically-reliant person situated in the digitally-mediated life.

The transhumanist movement has three central struts: super-longevity, super-intelligence, and super-wellbeing. Super-longevity is the scientif-

[25] Max More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," in *The Transhumanist Reader*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Chickchester: Wiley, 2013), 3–17.
[26] Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 43–49.

ic pursuit to reverse the aging process. Aubrey de Gray, a noted leader in this field, bemoans the fatalism that is present in current discussions about death. His work at SENS Research Foundation and AgeX Therapeutics focuses on regenerative medicine, therapies that halt or reverse normal cellular decay, prompting widespread optimism for a future where death is chosen, not inevitable.[27]

Super-intelligence is the second super. Oxford philosopher and transhumanist thinker, Nick Bostrom, lays out three forms of super-intelligence, two of which are useful for my purposes: "speed" superintelligence and "quality" superintelligence. The former refers to any system that can do what a human intellect can do, only "multiple orders of magnitude" faster. The latter identifies systems that are as fast as the human mind but "vastly qualitatively smarter."[28] In either case, the age is approaching when computer speeds (or the speed of human thinking augmented directly by digital technologies) will create new rules on what is humanly possible.

If the above targets are largely fulfilled, neural procedures in the future could dramatically increase abilities such as calculation, memory, comprehension, and/or creativity. Imagine, if you will, the ability to receive knowledge uploads where you can perfectly and completely recall the entire contents of the Library of Congress or Wikipedia. In the broad sense, one can accurately refer to an age of super-intelligence when computers exceed human abilities across a variety of fields (general intelligence). More than brute force calculation in which computers are already far superior, true artificial super-intelligence will be able to master the nuances of speech, art, music, and philosophy at alarming rates, ever-improving by recursive self-learning.

The final super is super-wellbeing. If a person is technologically enhanced to live two hundred years and has the brain power of a thousand geniuses yet is unhappy, what's ultimately the point? Super-wellbeing seeks to modify your affective brain states. Philosopher David Pearce argues that humans have the moral obligation to remove all forms of anxiety, depression, fear, and unhappiness through advanced gene therapies. His paper, "The Hedonistic Imperative," suggests that manufactured eternal bliss—first through drugs, then through gene therapies—is not only possible, but the most preferable of post-human futures.[29] He styles himself a leader in the Abolitionist Project, a movement designed to phase out involuntary suffering in sentient beings.

[27] Aubrey de Grey, *Ending Aging* (New York: St. Martins, 2007).
[28] Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 52–61.
[29] https://www.hedweb.com (accessed Sept 27, 2018).

You will undoubtedly note the religious tenor of the three supers. In fact, there are some, though few, Christians who argue that Christianity is at its very core a transhumanist movement. It does, after all, seek to impart unlimited life to its adherents. Christians experience a form of super-intelligence when all things are made clear at the end of time. In addition, one of the enduring images of Christian eschatology is a world without tears, anxiety, or fear, strikingly akin to the transhumanist value of super-wellbeing. Yet Lutherans, as well as other Christian denominations, should be quick to make two distinctions here. First, transhumanist *telos* cannot escape the immanent; there is no ultimate, transcendent ends to which it can aspire. The movement merely offers the means. Why should we be transhumanist? The surprisingly limited (and ultimately, unsatisfying) answer is: To be *better*. Second, eschatology is not fundamentally an "adding on" of abilities at the end of time, but rather it is the restoration of man's original being—free, good, and in properly ordered relationships with God, neighbor, and nature.

I suspect that Transhumanism's popularity will wax brightly as people: 1) regularly witness the remarkable magic of technological advances that have real impact on their day-to-day living, and 2) increasingly rely on digital technologies for their physical and mental maintenance. The Digital Age has fueled the utopian dreams of many transhumanists as the widespread availability of information has led to stunning degrees of social change. Yet central to my thesis, the digital life necessarily causes embodiment to fall into eclipse. Humans have exchanged real worlds for virtual ones, incarnation for excarnation.

This eclipse can happen in two distinct ways. On the one hand, tamer versions of transhumanist thought believe that the human body is a necessary, yet flawed, piece of hardware. This is the view of futurists Max More and Natasha Vita-More. Technology is used to overcome specific bodily limitations, such as the size of human brains or the lack of wings.[30] On the other hand, the most famous of all transhumanists, Google's Ray Kurzweil, has far grander visions of future human existence. He is convinced that the pace of technological advance in the near future will be so remarkable that a "singularity" will take place. In this new age, men and women will be able to live indefinitely by uploading their consciousness into computer substrates or exist in ethereal digital clouds.[31]

Neither view treats the human body in way I have been promoting by my particular employment of the term "embodiment": as an essential, God-gift-

[30] Max More, "A Letter to Mother Nature" in *The Transhumanist Reader*, 449–50.

[31] Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near* (New York: Penguin, 2005). The "technological singularity" is a term used to describe ultra-rapid, exponential technological progress fueled by ever-increasing computer processing speeds.

ed component of human identity. This is an important point. It is here that Man as Machine models begin to fail. What's left is a view of man that essentially regards human identity as *software*, as *mind*. The person is never wholly immaterial, per se, since consciousness may in the future run from silicon-based platforms. But he loses his incarnational character; the human body no longer has a proper role to play in terms of identity.

When the body is lost for the promise of a transhumanist utopia, the person inevitably loses other goods. Procreation becomes a hassle and no longer represents a central human expression of hope for the future. Courage and sacrifice no longer serve as virtues, becoming nostalgic afterthoughts of a bliss-saturated generation unaccustomed to the uncomfortable idea of death. Since the object of all transhumanist technologies is to empower the individual with abilities far beyond current levels, deep and unsettling questions linger about the individual's responsibility to the whole. What happens to embodied community in an age of gods?

The Age of Excarnation is upon us. It is an age in which we choose data over people, screen over skin-and-bones, and connectivity over community. For a generation of young people, the concept of community has taken an utterly strange turn. Many believe that online social networks serve as an adequate medium for participating in all affairs of communal life. Paradoxically, but also predictably, researchers are finding this generation to be lonelier than ever.[32] Young men and women exercise ever-increasing controls on their friendship groups yet find that online discussions quickly turn into shouting matches and *ad hominem* attacks. Whereas "third places" like bars and bowling alleys traditionally used to facilitate full spectrum communication and community bonding, now one receives a text message and an emoji.[33] Even sexuality is no longer assumed to be an embodied experience. In fact, the term "digisexual" has emerged as a description of those whose only sexual experiences come mediated by digital or virtual environments.[34]

Earlier, I quoted Charles Taylor from his work, *A Secular Age*. His comment on excarnation articulated a movement within faith communities—a movement away from embodied, physical expressions of religious faith in favor of private contemplation and individualistic spirituality. I would venture to add two small phrases to expand the quote's reach, to read: Excarna-

[32] See the Cigna's U.S. Loneliness Index (2018). https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf (Accessed Sept 25, 2018). It should be noted that social media use is but one of many related factors to the increase in loneliness among young people.

[33] For more on the decline of third places and corresponding decline in social capital, see Robert Putnam's classic, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[34] For a unique (and somewhat alarming) look at the future of human sexuality, I suggest David Levy's *Love+Sex+Robots* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

tion is, "the steady disembodying of spiritual [and communal] life, so that it is less and less carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms, and lies more and more in the head [and in the device.]" My expansion of the definition allows us to consider the deep influence of digital media on the person regardless if they are participants in traditional faith communities or not.

Ultimately, this term can and must be set in opposition to incarnation. Whereas incarnation is image made flesh, excarnation seeks the reverse: flesh made image. Man become software. Excarnation is the reducing of the rich complexity of human life, identity, and experience to quantifiable data; it is the intentional 'captioning' of the human person. An obvious example of excarnation is pornography, where the profound depths of embodied human sexuality are cast aside for superficial images designed to reduce the subject to an easy-to-discard sex object. To use a lighter example, boys' high school sports are changing dramatically. With the rise of popular video games, such as the Madden franchise, fewer and fewer boys are trying out for the team. Boys feel like they "know" football because they can play a video game with expertise, leaving behind the experiential knowledge that only comes with the embodied participation on the field.[35] An irreducibly physical activity like tackle football has been reduced to something a 16-year old boy can play while drinking a Coke on the family couch.

The Age of Excarnation presents a deep, utterly gnostic challenge to theological anthropology. If parishes ignore this threat or remain blind to its subtle effects, they risk becoming a church-community that no longer visits the hurt, binds the broken, shelters the homeless, and reconciles the imprisoned. Instead, they remain distant from their obligations to the physical neighborhoods to which they belong, choosing instead to inhabit virtual (i.e., online) worlds with virtual (i.e., not *real*) acts of love and pastoral care. Can the Church counter this tidal shift toward excarnate living?

HOMO CHRISTIANUS

In his wildly popular book, *Homo Deus*, Yuval Harari claims that man's only unique distinction among other animals is that man can "cooperate in very flexible ways with countless numbers of strangers."[36] Is this the last surviving tale of human identity? If true, this surely is music to the ears of Mark Zuckerberg and other tech giants, since by pinning human identity to cooperation, they can justify massive data grabs that produce greater levels

[35] Leonard Sax, *Boys Adrift* (New York: Basic, 2016), 86–87. Video games might offer an alternative way to preserve a boy's perceived masculinity when they shun the demanding physical activity of the school sport. A boy can still "participate" in the football or basketball culture, even learn basic terminology or nuanced techniques in theory. Sax's research, however, highlights the great gap between *Wissenshaft* (knowledge about something) and *Kenntnis* (knowledge through direct experience).

[36] Harari, *Homo Deus*, 133.

of connectivity and near-unlimited cash flow. And yet, this approach leaves substantial gaps. Harari's statement, like de la Mettrie's *Man a Machine*, fails to produce any resource by which one can claim intrinsic dignity for the human body, strong or weak. What's left is a fragile accord between individuals for the sake of survival, akin to one member of a community pleading with another, "If you don't hurt me, I won't hurt you."

I suggest that if one gets human identity wrong, then the resulting model of human flourishing risks minimizing or ignoring the crucial role of the body.[37] Solid theological anthropology must include a space for the person's physical constitution. Therefore, I believe that the Church's first and most pressing step is to lay out a straightforward case for human identity that incorporates enfleshed living and properly accounts for the necessity of physical communities of grace. This approach need not be Luddite in any way, as the Lutheran articulation of freedom allows us to engage culture in all of its forms.

I suggest a model that binds human identity directly to the life of the Trinity. Human distinctness is borne out of the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying purposes of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, respectively. What does that look like, exactly?

Telos (Vocation)

From the instant of his creation, man has been given purpose. In the broad sense, Adam and Eve are created to bring glory to God, to participate in the life of God made immediate to them in the Garden. God the Father bestows man and woman with the gift of *telos*, a reason for being that reflects his very own nature.[38] In the narrow sense, man and woman exist to work the ground, to exercise care *for* and dominion *over* the animals, and to be fruitful and multiply. God's design for humanity is brought to fullness in Revelation 21–22, where the Tree of Life, crops, and rivers again move and produce in harmony, and all of humankind is caught up in the glorious praise of God in song, worship, and community.

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[37] This dynamic works in the reverse, to an extent. A healthy understanding of our collective past can help us better understand our individual identities in the present. Charles Taylor notes this by saying, "Our past is sedimented in our present, and we are doomed to misidentify ourselves, as long as we can't do justice to where we come from." (Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 29).

[38] The *telos* of humanity reverberates in discussions of philosophy and theology, from Aristotle's treatment of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*), to Aquinas' teleological emphasis in the fifth of his Five Forms, to Luther's "new obedience" borne out of faith and directed toward neighbor. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1095a15–1102a); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911-1925), Ia, q. 2, art 3; and Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 245–50.

Christian engagement with the world operates between these two idyllic states, doing the works that the Father prepared in advance for the Body of Christ to do. The Christian *telos* is to make disciples, to baptize, and teach the present and coming kingdom of God, while at the same time, praising God by serving in the kingdom of the left in the everyday matters of vocation *and* avocation. To be without vocation is to be without purpose. It should serve as no surprise, then, that unemployment affects a person so profoundly, for the loss of a job strips away a crucial feature of one's very humanity. Vocations not tied to employment are just as central to our identity; they enliven us with reasons for being, for doing.

Notice how this wing of theological anthropology opens the door for those in the technology industry. Christians do not have to take a Luddite stand here, but instead they can encourage the faithful research and implementation of digital and robotic technologies with a heart of discernment to love one's neighbor. This is not too dissimilar from the vocation of soldier, who must from time to time wield his or her weapon against the enemy. The discipline and training it takes to do such difficult tasks is necessary for a peaceful society, just as the same is necessary for those who wield other dangerous things, like the Internet. The Church can, in these instances, offer goodness and beauty to a fallen world by shining brightly into the far reaches of culture.

Embodiment (Incarnation)

In his remarkable text, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stresses the importance of bodily presence in Christian communities, stating:

> The believer feels no shame, as though he were still living too much in the flesh, when he yearns for the physical presence of other Christians. Man was created a body, the Son of God appeared on earth in the body, he was raised in the body, in the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in the body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected fellowship of God's spiritual-physical creatures.[39]

For Bonhoeffer and for us, the incarnate life of the Christian is experienced in multiple ways. Not only is the human life understood solely through the context of one's physical existence, but the character of history can be understood solely through Jesus, and seen through the lens of his real body broken and real blood shed to impart real forgiveness. The second person of the Trinity is God's complete endorsement of physical embodiment.[40]

[39] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 19–20.

[40] Discussions about "the body" and how it may be referenced accurately are not without complexity, particularly in light of recent discussions on sex and gender. For a relatively brief introduction into some of these issues, see Caroline Bynum, "Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective" in *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn

As Lutherans, we confess the following realities in this light:

- One, *we are embodied* creatures. God, in his goodness and wisdom, formed man from the dirt of the ground and woman from the flesh of Adam. The organic material is unapologetically used by God as a designation of 1) man's origin in Genesis 2, and 2) his temporal destiny, made clear in God's tragic pronouncement in the very next chapter, declaring to Adam "for dust you are, and to dust you will return."[41] In his wisdom, God chose for man a material body, an "inactive clod" that God forms into a "most beautiful creature which has a share of immortality."[42]
- Two, *we follow the Incarnation*. Jesus represents God's great Yes to humanity, and by extension, his Yes to the created order. In order to accomplish the reconciliation promised to man, God in Jesus descends and becomes flesh, to live among us. The blood he sheds on the cross is actual blood; the flesh that is broken for us at Calvary is actual flesh. Because Jesus dies, we can follow him to the cross. Because he rises, we can endure the experience of death to rise yet again.
- Three, *we are sacramental*. The embodied character of the Gospel shines through Baptism and Holy Communion, the means of grace, by which God offers his very self in the material elements of water, bread, and wine. The sacraments are neither disembodied nor theoretical; by God's command they require physical means. Christians encounter the real and living God first at the font, then as a member of God's own body at the table.
- Finally, *we are eschatological beings*. The hope of the Christian is not the dying, then subsequent ascension of the soul for eternal bliss in heaven. Rather, the hope is in the physical resurrection of the dead as Jesus himself experienced. Our physical selves are neither annihilated nor left behind. The Christian seeks to take part in the new heavens and new earth with the fully redeemed same-but-not-quite-the-same bodies that were gifted to us at life's beginning.

Hunt (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999), 241–80.

41 Genesis 3:19b (NIV).

42 *LW* 1:84.

Church-Community

All of the aforementioned arguments about embodiment are incomplete without the community. We experience community in our creatureliness, as Eve's introduction to Adam was borne out of God's declaration that "it is not good for the man to be alone."[43] Luther adds that Adam, while "beautiful" and "provided for," nevertheless lacks the "gift of the increase and the blessing—because he is alone."[44] Our experience of the embodied life is necessarily communal, as we bear our creaturely limitations to live lives of service and consolation to the brethren. Even more than that, our bodies bear unique witness in and amongst the communities we live in, as the apostle Paul reminds the church at Corinth, "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you."[45]

Our sacramental identity is overwhelmingly communal in nature, for we neither baptize ourselves nor commune ourselves in isolation. Rather, the absolving word of God from pulpit, font, or table is always spoken upon us externally, communicating God's Word to us in the confidence of God's promises. "[The Christian] needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure."[46]

It is here in community that we find the abiding and sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit animates the Church with passion and vigor, first demonstrated at Pentecost, to the good of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The very same Spirit fills the Body of Christ today. In the Large Catechism, Luther sums up the community of saints in this way:

> I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet it is united in love without sect of schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought into it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the beginning point for entering it.[47]

[43] Gen 2:18 (NIV).
[44] *LW* 1:116.
[45] 2 Cor 4:10–12 (NIV).
[46] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 23.
[47] LC II, 51–52. From Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Con-*

Here one ought to notice that the Christian *telos* is never far from the experience of community, as the Christian man's presence among other Christians is described as partnership in a common task and is authenticated by the ongoing invitation to hear God's word. Yet also present in Luther's statement is an implicit understanding that the church-community is not bound in a single historical context; it is the collection of believers under the headship of Christ, only to be brought together in the end times. This is not insignificant, as the Christian Church will have to grapple with digital communities within her flock and discern whether an authentic communication of God's Word can be proclaimed (and heard) in such virtual spaces.

Conclusion

What is lost if there are two of the above, but not all three? Vocation and embodiment without community leaves the Christian without the full word of grace, isolated from his opportunity to hear *and* proclaim the great hope that exists for the Christian. Embodiment and community without vocation leads to the deep depression of being disconnected from God's purposes on earth. It is the actor in search of a story in which to play a part. Vocation and community without embodiment leads to gnostic forms of Christianity, where the physical is reviled, creation is ignored or despised, and the fundamental good of being gifted with flesh-and-blood bodies is cast aside for utopian visions of perfect thinking, perfect religiosity, *perfect folly*.

As the Age of Excarnation continues to hypnotize us with shiny new toys and grand promises of pixel-induced bliss, the Christian confession can offer a narrative on human identity that actually addresses the whole person. Our neighbors are not simply minds. They are much more than complicated computers that produce outputs.

Human beings require the features of vocation, embodiment, and community grounded in the mutual love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With these non-negotiables set in stone, the Christian can boldly interact with the world of technology and Transhumanism with discerning hearts and clear eyes. Every topic, every conversation, every new innovation is open to the gaze of the free Christian, knowing that such matters do not put his justification at risk. Yet in this exploration, the Christian need not fret when hopes of a technologically-driven utopia never come to pass; Christian hope was never placed in the hands of men in the first place.

In this day of miracle and wonder, a Christian need not cry, "Crucify!" at each new technological advance, for he has a vocation to perform, a body to enjoy, and a church-community to participate in. His efforts can be more fruitfully directed by boldly identifying what it means to be human,

fessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000).

especially in light of the over-promising, under-delivering (and ultimately, de-humanizing) promises of Transhumanism. Christian eschatology, after all, offers *all* good things to those whose identity is found in the risen Christ—a new heaven, a new earth, and a redeemed body. And that is truly super.

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"Christian Identity in a Secular Age: Charles Taylor and Martin Luther on the Authenticity of the Self in Society"

Joshua Hollmann

"Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood."[1] So begins arguably the greatest midlife crisis of all time: Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Dante journeys to hell and back to find his identity. Dante remains nameless throughout much of his quest. He is only nominally identified at the end of purgatory. In the dialectic and radiating pull of love he is named by another: Beatrice, his muse and meditator.[2] The nameless Dante represents every person. The named Dante represents the need for human community. "Identity" derives from the Latin for sameness.[3] Dante is the same as us, in need of identity in community. The humanities tie together (human+ties) the universal search for finding one's self and one's place in the cosmos.[4] Yet Dante's world often seems far removed from our own. I teach Dante to students today who often have a difficult time comprehending why Dante begins his masterwork with "in the journey of *our* life." It is his life, not mine, they respond. My life is mine alone.

We meet Don Draper in *medias res* in season one of the television series *Mad Men*.[5] He is lost in an enigma: an expressive individual making his way through the turbulent 1960s, a self-made advertising guru.[6] Seven seasons

[1] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto I, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno, Italian Text and Translation*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 2–3.

[2] Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, Canto XXX, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio, Italian Text and Translation*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 330–1.

[3] For an etymological and epistemological overview of identity, see Marcel Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person, the Notion of Self" in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans, and Peter Redman (London: Sage, 2000), 325–45.

[4] I am thankful to Rev. Dr. John Nunes, President of Concordia College-New York, for this observation.

[5] On Don Draper's search for identity in *Mad Men*, see Ada S. Jaarsma, "An Existential Look at *Mad Men*: Don Draper Advertising, and the Promise of Happiness" in *Mad Men and Philosophy: Nothing Is as It Seems*, ed. Rod Carveth and James B. South (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), 95–109, and John Elia, "Don Draper, on How to Make Oneself" in *Mad Men and Philosophy*, 168–85. For an in-depth overview of the series, see Matt Zoller Seitz, *Mad Men Carousel: The Complete Critical Companion* (New York: Abrams, 2015).

[6] The title of season 1, episode 1 is "Smoke gets in your eyes," a televised take on smoke and mirrors, illusions and delusions, mass-produced *personas* (masks) and the nakedness of materialism.

unfold Don Draper's search for who he really is. Identity no longer articulates human sameness. Instead Don Draper's identity remains perpetually enigmatic and extremely personal. He pitches: "what you call love was invented by guys like me to sell nylons."[7] The series ends with Don Draper finding himself through the material sameness of Coca Cola, the commercial: "I'd like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love; I'd like to buy the world a coke and keep it company. It's the real thing."[8]

I teach theology through encountering Dante and Don Draper. Both frame conceptualizations of human identity or understanding ourselves and our place in the world: Dante and Beatrice as the Platonic ideal of the beautiful and the corporate desire of higher-ordered love, and Don Draper as commodity of consumption and lower level materialism. The former eventually sees God as mirror, the latter sees self as marketing, from *imago Dei* to Instagram. Dante and Don Draper explicate extreme cases of identity crises. Yet their searches for self arise from the same Western intellectual ethos: Don Draper actually reads Dante's *Divine Comedy* in season six of *Mad Men*. To put it in terms of contemporary Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, Dante and Don Draper search for self in relation to moral visions of the good.[9] The frameworks for this search have shifted: from transcendent and enchanted to disenchanted and imminent. Yet, the search for finding one's self and one's place in the world continues. What we identify as good has evolved from without to within, yet there remains even in the callous Don Draper an endearing desire for fullness and for what Taylor calls "human flourishing."[10] Indeed for Taylor, "A secular age is one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable."[11] While our materialistic, secular age obscures transcendent human flourishing, the impulse to find meaning beyond the here and now endures.

Secularism literally means pertaining to a generation or age.[12] Secularism is focused on the temporal. Taylor's grand project in *A Secular Age* is to understand secularism in direct relation to the past. Temporal limitations on

[7] *Mad Men*, season 1, episode 1, written by Matthew Weiner.

[8] *Mad Men*, season 7, episode 14, "Person to Person." For background and credits on the commercial, see Seitz, *Mad Men Carousel*, 418.

[9] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), x.

[10] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard, 2007), 17. For a succinct synopsis of several of the significant ideas of *A Secular Age*, see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Observe Don Draper's repeated attempts to find himself throughout the seven seasons of *Madmen*. In season 7, episode 12, Don Draper is compared to Herman Melville's Great White Whale, who, in *Moby Dick*, has the last word (or the last splash). Swimmingly, Don Draper has the last word (or the last ad) in *Madmen*.

[11] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 19.

[12] The English word secularism is derived from the Latin *saecularis*: worldly, secular, pertaining to a generation or age. In the Medieval West, when applied to clergy, the word denoted priests working in the world.

contextualizing secularism are constructs of negation and deconstructions of past moral visions and affirmations of ordinary life that nonetheless still stubbornly stand in many and various ways. According to Taylor, secularism does not arise from theories of negation: simply subtract God, etc., but rather secularism develops with the fullness of the linger and languor of religion and spirituality and parallels the making of the modern identity.[13] There remains in the contemporary identity a search for fullness and human flourishing. Pascal writes of this fullness when he expresses, "the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing." This same search for fullness is evident in Augustine's restlessness, and the ordinary wonder of Montaigne's humanness. We encounter it in Dante's love for Beatrice (self and God). The quest for extensiveness beyond the here and now appears in Malcolm X's reading of Spinoza's ethics and the struggle to break the bonds of human defacement. All of these pursuits orbit the expanding secular and motley spiritual universe that is the Western intellectual ethos. The timeless, eclectic human journey toward self-knowledge and expression remains, as we continue to find our place and purpose in the outer and inner spaces of human existence.[14]

In light of this continuing search for human flourishing, the vast majority of my students are also keenly attuned to aspirations of the good life and deciphering one's relations to the internal and external world. I have found the writings of Charles Taylor, notably *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self*, very helpful in articulating what it means to be human in the present through the conceptualization of the authenticity of the self in society. We will concentrate on Taylor's central concepts in *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self* in order to gain greater insight into articulations of Christian-Lutheran identity in our North American cultural ethos of the authenticity of the self. First, the essay will present Taylor's account of identity in a secular age. Second, having established how our secular age affects the ageless search for what it means to be human, we will consider Taylor's understanding of identity as inclusive of the affirmation of the ordinary life and how this relates to the Lutheran teaching of vocation in both the private and public spheres. Third, we will compare Taylor and Martin Luther on identity and vocation and what this means for the contemporary quest to discover one's self and one's place in our secular age of authenticity. Finally, in response to Taylor and Luther's focus on agape and vocation, we will revisit

[13] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 5, 22, 25–7.

[14] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 5. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995), 127. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3. Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003); see especially Montaigne's final essay and masterpiece, "On Experience," 1207–69. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 183–84.

Dante and Don Draper's search for finding one's self by observing how the search for authenticity leads to the discovery of human flourishing as experienced in love radiating out to others. While for Socrates the unexamined life is not worth living, for Christians, the unrelated life is not worth living. In the Christian experience, we relate in love to Father (creator), Son (redeemer), and Holy Spirit (sanctifier), and we relate in love to all of our neighbors. This essay is particularly aimed at Christian educators and those striving to teach their students to find themselves in relation with and for God in order that they may live authentic lives of passion and service in relation with and for others. As Christians, our lives in Christ by the Spirit are lived with and for others. Our witness is our with-ness. In this actively shared life we authentically reveal God's love for creation, and the sameness and dignity of all humanity.

I. Identity in our Secular Age

The Reformation of the sixteenth century marks the point of departure for Taylor's *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self. A Secular Age* begins with the question: "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God, in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?"[15] His sprawling book charts the emergence of the secular in dialogue with the sacred. Taylor's foils are subtraction or negative theories of secularization.[16] Taylor understands the Christian faith and practice as incarnate, where the Christian church is the place in which human beings, in all of their different and disparate itineraries, come together. Indeed, the story of how we arrived at a secular age is inextricably bound up with an account of where we are. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor charts the course of the idea of the individual in early modernity to the present age of authenticity or the age of finding one's self. As in *A Secular Age*, where the secular cannot be examined without the sacred, so too the complexity of the concept of the self is properly approached in light of earlier pictures of human identity, what Taylor titles: "inescapable frameworks," which lead in *A Secular Age* to our contemporary "immanent frame." These contemporary frameworks cannot escape past imprints of human identity, nor can our age of immanence reduce past inclusions of transcendence.[17] Just as *A Secular Age* begins in the era of the European Reformations, *Sources of the Self* commences with Luther's personal stand. Taylor writes, "To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the

[15] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 772.
[16] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26–7, 427, on religion and secularization.
[17] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, title of chapter 1. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, title of chapter 15.

horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand."[18] From the ancient age up to the early modern and Enlightenment, Western thinkers perceived the world within and without through differing perspectives on one shared horizon of being and meaning.[19] One orients and originates one's self in relation and reaction to set forms of meaning. Thus, Taylor notes, "For someone in Luther's age, the issue of the basic moral frame orienting one's actions could *only* be put in universal terms. Nothing else made sense."[20] Now, however, such a universal frame makes no sense to my secular students in our secular age.

According to Taylor, the current state of finding one's self and one's place in society is an enigma: discernable in the past, yet distorted today. Taylor has different ways of describing this present puzzle of identity formation: fragility and fragmentation, a pluralist world, in which many forms of belief and unbelief jostle and hence embrittle each other.[21] There arises the corollary desire for grasping our lives in a narrative,[22] the vexing relation of language to the vision of others,[23] and "a common picture of the self, as (at least potentially and ideally) drawing its purposes, goals, and life-plans out of itself, seeking 'relationships' only insofar as they are 'fulfilling', is largely based on ignoring our embedding in webs of interlocution."[24] For Taylor, "fragmentation arises when people come to see themselves more and more atomistically, otherwise put, as less and less bound to their fellow citizens in common projects and allegiances."[25] Taylor also observes that the search for identity cannot be disentangled from the web of the good. Even in our "loss of horizon" and disenchantment, selfhood and the good and selfhood and morality turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes (much like notions of secularism and religion and spirituality).[26] For Taylor, our orientation in relation to the good requires frameworks, which still include higher dimensions of meaning.[27] He also refers to this as "the aspiration to full-

[18] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 27.

19 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 2. Perhaps, this perspective is best expressed by the epitaph on Kant's grave: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more frequently and persistently one's meditation deals with them: *the starry sky above me and the moral law within me*" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002], 203). According to Murdoch, these two sources of wonder were perceived from the ancients through the enlightenment on the same horizon of philosophical possibility (in "metaphysical circularity," Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 57).

[20] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 28.

[21] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 531.

[22] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 47.

[23] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 37.

[24] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 38–9.

[25] Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, *CBC Massey Lectures* (Toronto: Anansi, 1991), 112–3.

[26] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 19.

[27] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 42.

ness" which can be met by building something into one's life, some pattern of higher action, or be met by connecting one's life up with some greater reality or story.[28] In *A Secular Age*, Taylor puts this in terms of the ordinary contemporary aspiration to live a fully satisfying life.[29] In other words, this may be seen in the incessant drive to override the fragility of fragmentation and experience coherent lives of fulfillment. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor defines the modern identity in relation to the good and the search for fulfillment through three major frameworks: the inner self or inwardness, the affirmation of the ordinary life, and the voice of nature, which implies the expressivist notion of nature as inner moral source.[30]

II. Christian Identity, Vocation, and the Affirmation of the Ordinary Life in the Private and Public Spheres

In relation to the importance of the Reformation as starting point for Taylor's *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self*, as well as to Luther's revolutionary understanding of the self in society as corporately lived out in God-given vocations, we shall here focus on Taylor's second framework, the affirmation of ordinary life in the private and public spheres. Taylor observes that the affirmation of ordinary life finds its origins in Judeo-Christian spirituality, and the particular impetus it receives in the modern era comes, first of all, from the Reformation.[31] Taylor observes that before Luther the Christian was a passenger in the ecclesial ship in its journey to God. "But for Protestantism, there can be no passengers. This is because there is no ship in the Catholic sense, no common movement carrying humans to salvation. Each believer rows her or her own boat."[32] One rowed one's boat in the temporal currents of ordinary life: "The repudiation of monasticism was a reaffirmation of lay life as a central locus for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Luther marks their break in his own life by ceasing to be such a monk and by marrying a former nun."[33] Taylor's ideas on the ordinary life are related to two twentieth century German philosophers: Jürgen Habermas and Martin Heidegger. Habermas chronicled the origins of the public square or what we might term, the public sphere of life.[34] This overarchingly concerns the collective intersections of individuals, and public space and institutions. Heidegger favors ontic isolation or what we might call the private sphere wherein one differentiates and develops individual authenticity.[35] The

[28] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 43.
[29] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 7.
[30] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, x, i.e., the outline of the book.
[31] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 215.
[32] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 217.
[33] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 218.
[34] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).
[35] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein and Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh

private sphere covers the interior life and includes the family and personal relationships.

Luther revolutionized the life of the individual in both the public and private spheres. According to Luther, one did not have to become a priest to be closer to God. One could fully serve God at home in ordinary family life. And, for Luther, the public realm made extraordinary room to include shared space for the exercise of freedom of conscience as grounded in and guided by the liberty of God's Word. Luther's famous paradox of purpose on how to find fulfillment inwardly and outwardly in God and in others can shed some light here. "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[36] For Luther, this freedom is meant to be experienced in one's relation to God and neighbor. The reform of Christianity and society revolved from the concentric spheres of Christ and faith: from the believer to the church to society. According to Luther in *The Freedom of a Christian*, passively, the soul is married to Christ. Christ and the soul become one flesh, the most perfect of all marriages.[37] Luther writes, "Christ is full of grace, life and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's."[38] Luther continues to explain that just as Christ and the believer are one, so too the believer and his neighbor are one. Thus, the believer is in communion with God and in communion with others in the common modalities of life. Therein the good things of God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should "put on" his or her neighbor.[39] Luther concludes that a Christian lives not in him or herself, but in Christ and in his or her neighbor; otherwise, one is not a Christian.[40]

This Lutheran affirmation of ordinary life coincides with the scientific revolution and the advancement of science for the betterment of all. Taylor writes that in early modernity "Science is not a higher activity which ordinary life should subserve; on the contrary, science should benefit ordinary life."[41] Taylor connects this scientific benefit with the Christian calling for the overall betterment of society, "With the affirmation of ordinary life,

(Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), especially 107–22.

[36] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 344. Hereafter, all references to the American Edition of Luther's works will be abbreviated LW. For the critical edition of Luther's works, see the *Weimarer Ausgabe*: WA 7, 49.

[37] LW 31, 351. WA 7, 54.

[38] LW 31, 351. WA 7, 54–5.

[39] LW 31, 371. WA 7, 69.

[40] LW 31, 371. WA 7, 69.

[41] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 213.

agape is integrated in a new way into an ethic of everyday existence. My work in my calling ought to be for the general good."[42] Taylor, citing Joseph Hall, observes that for the Puritans, "God loveth adverbs; and cares not how good, but how well."[43] Christians are to live for God and for others in ordinary ways done extraordinarily well. This impetus for excellence eventually morphs into what Taylor calls in *A Secular Age*, "the age of mobilization" and "designates a process whereby people are persuaded, pushed, dragooned or bullied into new forms of society, church, association."[44] Taylor goes on, "whatever political, social, ecclesial structures to which we aspire now have to be mobilized into existence."[45] For example, to take the cosmos and cosmology, there was a shift from the enchanted world to a cosmos conceived in conformity with post-Newtonian science, in which there is absolutely no question of higher meanings being expressed in the universe around us. The commodification of time and demarcation of the metaphysical correlates with the rise of the self-reasoning and self-existing person as promoted by the enlightenment and eventually develops into what Taylor titles "the buffered self," the interiorization of individual identity.[46]

III. Finding our Place in Society: Charles Taylor and Martin Luther on Christian Identity and Vocation in an Age of Authenticity

All of this leads to today, where, according to Taylor, we find ourselves in an age of authenticity. "It appears," reasons Taylor, "that something has happened in the last half-century, perhaps even less, which has profoundly altered the conditions of belief in our societies."[47] The meta-projects of the age of mobilization: nationalism, Marxism, idealism, etc., have fragmented and no longer compel mass adherence. A life well lived is now a life well experienced. Taylor goes on, "This is a culture informed by an ethic of authenticity. I have to discover my route to wholeness and spiritual depth. The focus is on the individual, and on his/her experience. Spirituality must speak to this experience. The basic mode of spiritual life is thus the quest. . . It is a quest which can't start with a priori exclusions or inescapable starting points, which could pre-empt this experience."[48] Thus, in teaching students theology today, instructors would be wise to begin with the experiences of their students. Articulating identity includes the experiences of finding

[42] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 258.
[43] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 224. Joseph Hall quoted in: Charles H. George, and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of English Reformation, 1570-1640* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 139.
[44] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 445.
[45] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 445.
[46] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37–41.
[47] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473. On living well in an age of authenticity, as well as sources of the making of our age of authenticity, see also: Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
[48] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 507–8.

identity. For Christians, identity is centered in the self-giving love of God and found in Christ who finds us by the Spirit where we are. Thus, Christians affirm the search for finding ourselves in relation to human flourishing. For Luther, human flourishing means living in service for others. In this age of authenticity, Taylor holds out hope for societal transformation through Christians participating in the love (*agape*) of God, "which is by definition a love which goes way beyond any possible mutuality, a self-giving love not bounded by some measure of fairness" but open to limitless self-giving.[49] This self-giving love of God overpowers the separation anxiety of sin that stalks contemporary searches for the self. For Christians, the authenticity of the self is experienced in the affirmation of living ordinary lives for others extraordinarily well.

This perspective of divinely imparted transformation coordinates with Luther's concentration on the personal faith of the Christian believer as lived out in his or her baptismal and societal calling, and the infinite possibilities this opens for transforming self and society. When I teach Luther's theology, I often incorporate Martin Luther King Jr.'s (named by his father after Martin Luther) sermon, "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life" (1960), which echoes Martin Luther's sermon "On the Three Kinds of the Good Life" (1521). Luther's sermon proclaims the good life as radiating out to others from the center of justification by faith in Christ. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon puts Luther's dictum of passive and active righteousness or being free from all, subject to none and being a servant of all, subject to all, in contemporary and vocational terms. For Martin Luther King, Jr., "There are three dimensions of any complete life . . . length, breadth and height. Now the length of life . . . is not its duration . . . it is the push of a life forward to achieve its inner power and ambitions. The breadth of life is the outreach, the outward concern for the welfare of others, and the height of life is the upward reach for God."[50] Proclaiming Luther's understanding of vocation as a full or complete three-dimensional life, Martin Luther King, Jr. preaches, "When you discover your life's worth (*All right*), set out to do it so well that the living, the dead, or the unborn (*Oh Lord*) couldn't do it better (*Praise the Lord, Yes, Amen*). And no matter what it is, never consider it insignificant because if it is for the upbuilding of humanity (*Yes*) it has cosmic significance."[51] Thus, Martin Luther King, Jr. presses

[49] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 430.

[50] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," sermon delivered at Friendship Baptist Church, Pasadena, California, 28 February 1960, in *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project, Volume VI: Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948–March 1963*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Susan Englander, Troy Jackson, and Gerald L. Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 397. The text is taken from an audio recording of the service.

[51] King, "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," 398.

on: "And so if it falls your lot to be a street sweeper (*That's it, Well*), sweep streets like Rafael painted pictures. Sweep streets like Michelangelo carved marble (*Amen, Well*). Sweep streets like Beethoven composed music (*Oh yeah, Have mercy*). Sweep streets (*Amen*) like Shakespeare wrote poetry."[52] Here, we behold a beautiful affirmation of the ordinary life. Here, too, as in Luther's "Sermon on The Two Kinds of Righteousness" (1519), most of the focus is given to the active realm or actively living out the faith in one's particular duty in life. For Luther and Martin Luther King, Jr., vocation includes the struggle for God's justice in the face of human injustice. Today, as Taylor shows, belief in God is no longer axiomatic. Social justice may or may not include divine justice. There are alternatives to belief.[53] Revealed faith is still an option, but contested. Instead of rowing our own boats, more and more humanity willingly embarks as passengers on tech-driven devices floating along the non-linear, shallow ocean of what the French philosopher Luc Ferry titles the shift "from science to technology, the disappearance of ends and the triumph of means."[54]

Amidst the aimlessness, Luther is still read and taught. Martin Luther King, Jr. still inspires action for the welfare of others. This leads us back to teaching Luther's theology on the self in society for students striving to be themselves in the twenty-first century. From the start, the living Lutheran tradition has accentuated and actualized the concordance of scholarship and Christ-centered vocations of grace, contemplation and action.[55] My students and I explore the convergences of faith and reason, theology and the humanities and professional studies. Following Aristotle's lead, we are dedicated to the pursuit of academic excellence in the spirit of discovery and the desire to know and delight in the findings of reason and the grounding of faith.[56] As a professor of theology, I seek to inspire students, who come from various backgrounds and contexts, to live lives with meaning and purpose. In other words, this means teaching Luther on the self and society in experiential ways to students living in an age of authenticity. Furthermore, this requires patience and open space for students to search for their identities in relation to God's identity. And in our increasingly politically polarized world, this

[52] King, "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," 398.
[53] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.
[54] Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living*, trans. Theo Cuffe (New York: Harper, 2011), 211.
[55] In the Catholic medieval theological tradition (from which the Lutheran church and confessional movement arises), contemplation is coupled with action as faith is expressed in the charity of the Christian life. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* IIaIIæ, qs. 179–82. Christian identity includes matters of the heart and forming habits of virtue and service.
[56] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I (A), 1 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1552. Compare Luther's explanation to the first article of the Apostles' Creed in *The Small Catechism* in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 354–5.

search especially includes Martin Luther King, Jr. on vocation, justice, and the struggle to live meaningful lives for the welfare of the marginalized. As Taylor rightly notes, Luther's crisis was not one of meaning (the meaning of life was all too unquestionable to an Augustinian monk and to his whole age). "The existential predicament in which one fears condemnation is quite different from the one where one fears, above all, meaninglessness," which, as Paul Tillich explores in *The Courage To Be*, "perhaps defines our age."[57] Even so, the path to discovering meaning in our age of authenticity traverses the affirmation of the ordinary and finding fulfillment in quotidian occupations. This journey of identity is defined by determining what is good and fulfilling, the horizon within which we are capable of taking a stand for what is just and right.

How, then, does Luther's understanding of the freedom of the self in society elucidate Taylor's ideas of the authentic-secular self? Luther's transcendent-imminent concept of the self as expounded in *The Freedom of a Christian* and experienced in vocation comply and clarify Taylor's formularies of the buffered self, the imminent frame and the social imaginary. *A Secular Age* details the development of modern social imaginaries from their origins in the Reformation: how we see ourselves in relation to others and how our contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain. According to Taylor, the imminent frames how the self becomes articulated in our age of authenticity. According to Luther, the freedom of the believer coincides with freedom for our neighbors in the emerging public sphere. Both Luther and Taylor seek to understand how one finds his or her place in society. In framing together the ideas of self and society in Luther and Taylor, we see the abiding influence of the Reformation's focus on personal faith and interpersonal vocation as extended today in the search for personal fulfillment in our interconnected and secular age.

IV. Conclusion: Christian Identity as With-Ness

In summation of Taylor and Luther's focus on agape and vocation, we conclude by revisiting Dante and Don Draper's search for finding one's self and one's place in the world. The recurring ideas of Dante and Don Draper on self and society reappear in the thought of two contemporary Canadian thinkers and psychologists: Jordan Peterson and Steven Pinker. Peterson has penned the popular *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, where he maps meaning from pagan and Abrahamic religions.[58] The integrated self, according to Peterson, charts rules for abating the dark wood of chaos, and, like

[57] Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952). See, especially, the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, 46–51. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 18.

[58] Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2018). For a fuller theoretical and in-depth background study of the briefer twelve rules, see Jordan B. Peterson, *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

Dante, traverses from hell and back. *In Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, Pinker elucidates and expands Immanuel Kant's famous dictum of the enlightenment project: "Dare to know!" (*Sapere aude!*)[59] Pinker projects: look how far we have developed. Pinker purports: stay the course contra the obfuscation of unenlightened human nature. Pinker propounds: behold, there appears no limit to human advancement. Perhaps, the success of the enigmatic persona of ingenuity that characterizes Don Draper transmits the broadcast of the future.

Taylor guides us to see that the Western quest for human flourishing moves between these two moral visions of life in relation to the good (be it immaterial or material, inner or outer): an antidote to chaos and the advancement of human reason. Adding to this polarity, we also consider Raymond Klibansky who argued for continuity in the Western intellectual tradition through Plato's dialectic of the one and the many in *Parmenides*, and the human attempt to square the circle of self and society, immanence and transcendence, reality and ideas.[60] Klibansky was a Jewish scholar forced to flee Hitler's Germany. His research on continuity in the Western philosophical tradition was in part a response to the Nazi attack on Western civilization and a war ravaged world in chaos. In a world threatened with the chaos of nuclear annihilation, Klibansky's call to the stability of intellectual continuity still matters. Klibansky's Platonic points verge with Taylor's chronological continuity of western thought from the sacred to the secular and provide insight on how the ideas of the past still matter in the contemporary clash of chaos and progress. The present search for finding one's self and one's place in the world cannot be separated from past conceptions of what it means to human.

Christians articulate the lived tension between chaos and progress in terms of nature and grace. Identity is baptismally given and realized in the day-to-day struggle of living out what it means to be baptized. Followers of Christ live *in medias res*, in continuity in, with, and under Christ their fulfillment, yet they live in creative struggle on this side of paradise where they walk by faith and not by sight, knowing now in an enigma but then

[59] Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment" (1784) in *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*, edited by Paul Hyland (London: Routledge, 2003), 54. Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (New York: Viking, 2018). Pinker advocates against "Enlightenolatry" and posits how the enlightenment proceeds to progress all aspects of human flourishing (Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, 14). For a classic but eccentric critique of the enlightenment, see Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 2016), especially on Kant, 81–119.

[60] Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition During the Middle Ages, with a New Preface and Four Supplementary Chapters, and Plato's Parmenides in the Middle Ages and The Renaissance with a New Introductory Preface* (München: Kraus International Publications, 1981). Klibansky charts the Platonic tradition as a whole during the Middle Ages through three main currents: the Arabic, the Byzantine, and the Latin.

fully as they will be fully known.[61] In this journey of faith, witness proliferates in with-ness: Christians walk by faith together with fellow searchers for human flourishing from before and with seekers here and now. Somehow, someway, even my secular students, who initially judge Augustine to be preachy, connect with his mystical vision at Ostia with Monica his mother. Augustine, like Dante, is named by another in the pull of love and thereby experiences the feeling of wholeness followed by the rude return to reality "where a sentence has both a beginning and an ending."[62] Taylor teaches us that acknowledging and articulating identity in relation to the good is complicated and requires two large tomes (*A Secular Age and Sources of the Self*) comprised of many sentences to only begin to understand the self in relation to our secular age as a cohesive whole. For Taylor the sources of the self steer the affirmation of ordinary life: rightly navigating our vocations from Dante and the love of God to Don Draper and all the ambivalence that authenticity allows. *In medias res*, in between Christ who rose and Christ who will come again, the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel to fulfillment in the way of Christ. While Taylor reminds us that we cannot go back to the past, neither, as his endeavors exhibit, should we forget previous searches for human identity. Even though we search for identity and fulfillment in an immanent frame, cross pressures still push us in and out: to the interior memory, which connects past in the present, and to the persistence of transcendent traditions of future hope. Here Taylor constructively offers: "The fading contact of many with the traditional languages of faith seems to presage a declining future. But the very intensity of the search for adequate forms of spiritual life that this loss occasions may be full of promise."[63] He goes on, "We could say that this is a world in which the fate of belief depends much more than before on powerful intuitions of individuals, radiating out to others."[64] Luther teaches that the sameness of individual- Christ-imputed-identity invokes the inherent impulse to live radiating outside of ourselves: in and for God, and in the putting on of our neighbors for the wellbeing of the other.[65] Dante radiating out to Beatrice. Augustine radiating out to Monica. Beatrice and Monica radiating out of God. Ordinary Christians radiating out to others in the extraordinary love of the Holy Spirit. Transforming my life into *our* life. "The heart has its reasons," Pascal pondered in early modernity, "of which reason knows nothing." My students still feel it in a thousand things, just as Pascal affected: the infinite pulse radiating whatever is good and commendable, noble and true, praiseworthy

[61] 2 Corinthians 5:7. 1 Corinthians 13:12.
[62] Augustine, *Confessions*, 171, (Book IX).
[63] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 533.
[64] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 531.
[65] LW 31, 371. WA 7, 69.

and lovely.[66]

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[66] Pascal, *Pensées*, 127: "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing: we feel this in countless ways." "Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point; on le sait en mille choses." Pascal, *Pensées,* ed. Marc Escola (Paris: Flammarion, 2015), 144. Philippians 4:8.

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Book Review

Review of DeJonge, Michael P. *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 281 pp.

Review by Theodore J. Hopkins

Dietrich Bonhoeffer cites and refers to no one more than Luther, yet Bonhoeffer's own relationship to the Lutheran tradition remains a relative lacuna in Bonhoeffer studies. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to fill the void, and Michael DeJonge's new monograph is a significant contribution to this arena. In fact, DeJonge's book is a tour de force in Bonhoeffer scholarship, showing how Lutheran theological frameworks permeate Bonhoeffer's thought. Picking up where his previous monograph left off—*Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (OUP, 2012)—DeJonge argues that "Bonhoeffer's thinking was Lutheran and should be interpreted as such" (6). The point is not that Bonhoeffer was a "slavish" adherent of Lutheranism who tried to simply repeat what Luther or the tradition said. Instead, DeJonge's contention is that Bonhoeffer self-consciously understood himself and developed his thought in relationship to Luther and in contrast to other confessional traditions (7). DeJonge seeks to show that a Lutheran theological framework is hermeneutically fruitful for reading Bonhoeffer. What makes DeJonge's book so impressive is that he addresses the most challenging aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology for his thesis, those insights that most Bonhoeffer scholars have found to be least Lutheran, such as Bonhoeffer's criticisms of the *genus majestaticum* and two-sphere thinking, his statements on peace, and his resistance to governmental authority. Through close readings of primary texts and in conversation with key Bonhoeffer scholars, DeJonge demonstrates that even Bonhoeffer's criticisms of the Lutheran tradition are from within. In other words, Bonhoeffer addresses what he considers to be problematic formulations in the Lutheran tradition to drive Lutheran theology to correspond more closely with Luther's own central insights.

The first two chapters on Christology highlight the center of Bonhoeffer's theology, and show its fundamental Lutheran character. The most exciting research is in the rest of the book where DeJonge takes on Bonhoeffer's understanding of the two kingdoms, his pacifism, and his resistance to

governmental authority. In all three of these areas, DeJonge runs against the grain of Bonhoeffer scholarship. Whereas Bonhoeffer is usually portrayed as rejecting two kingdoms and pulling from other traditions for his peace ethic and for resisting authority, DeJonge shows that Bonhoeffer remained a deeply Lutheran thinker in all of these areas, even though he also challenged the tradition. The chapters on resistance are particularly interesting in this regard. Following Reinhold Niebuhr's reading of Luther and the Lutheran tradition, most normally understand Bonhoeffer to reject Lutheran quietism because it "lacks resources for resistance" (186). DeJonge, however, shows that Bonhoeffer's theology of resistance used resources that arise from the Lutheran Confessions themselves. DeJonge's point is not to defend the Lutheran tradition, but he does show that Lutheranism is more complex than mere obedience to authority. Bonhoeffer not only recognized this complexity, but he also deployed important elements of the logic in his own arguments (189–90). For example, Bonhoeffer made use of the logic developed in Article X of the Formula of Concord during the 1930s. For Bonhoeffer, Germany was in *status confessionis*[1] where the church and the gospel were at stake (205). For this reason, Bonhoeffer primarily answers the situation in Germany not with good ethics or right action but with confession. "And given the nature of the threats against the gospel, the confessing in question would need to clarify the nature of the gospel against false teaching while reasserting the roles and modes of governing proper to the state and the church according to two kingdoms thinking" (210). Even when Bonhoeffer's thought moves from a focus on the church's confession to the responsible action of individuals in 1939, Bonhoeffer's "thinking about active resistance to political power finds some precedence in Luther himself" (259). DeJonge consistently shows Bonhoeffer to be a Lutheran thinker, who struggled with confessing the truth and proclaiming God's law and God's gospel in a Lutheran key.

DeJonge's entire book is filled with key insights into reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer and understanding the central thrusts of his argumentation. As a Lutheran dogmatic theologian myself, I found DeJonge's ability to formulate accurate Lutheran theology surprising and impressive. In my reading of secondary literature in Bonhoeffer studies, many scholars do not understand how to think like a Lutheran, mistakenly attributing Lutheran thinking to Bonhoeffer's genius or simply not understanding his argument. DeJonge, however, has learned to think from within the Lutheran tradition himself. In fact, in one moment in particular, DeJonge shows himself to be a creative participant in Lutheran systematic theology. Discussing Bonhoeffer's criticism of the *genus majestaticum*—which Bonhoeffer says gives into Re-

1 DeJonge rightly notes that this is not the Formula's technical language, but it is the language Bonhoeffer uses (205).

formed thinking that focuses on the natures more than the person by trying to answering the question of how Christ can be present as both God and man (72–74)—DeJonge notes that the genus majestaticum can be read differently from this sort of "how" thinking. DeJonge suggests, "There is also a way of reading the majestic genus not as a reversion to illegitimate 'how' thinking but as a form of legitimate 'how' thinking within 'who' thinking. Such 'how' thinking could perhaps be characterized as a descriptive ontology of the present person of Christ, precisely what Bonhoeffer names as the task of christology" (74). Although these types of statements are fairly rare since DeJonge's point is to understand Bonhoeffer and show Bonhoeffer's creative engagement within the Lutheran tradition, DeJonge is no mere repeater of Bonhoeffer himself. He is engaging within the Lutheran tradition creatively with and against Bonhoeffer, and his insights are worth considering.

All in all, any aspiring Bonhoeffer scholar must read this book. DeJonge's study is one of those rare birds that opens up possibilities and avenues for further thought and research. In each chapter, I found myself reconsidering aspects of Bonhoeffer's thought in light of DeJonge's insights. Even if one has been long convinced of Bonhoeffer's fundamental Lutheranism, DeJonge's hermeneutical framework will open doors to understanding and reading Bonhoeffer anew. For anyone interested in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology, I cannot recommend this book enough!