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Editor's Note

This year marks the 150th anniversary of Concordia Publishing House. Since her founding, she has supported the church in a number of ways, most especially through the publication of materials used to proclaim God's word. The Editors now take this opportunity to thank Concordia Publishing House for her work, in general, and for supporting the publication of this issue in particular. May the Lord grant Concordia Publishing House increased blessing in service to him.

The Editors

Book Reviews

Additional book reviews are available online
at the following address: www.ctsfw.edu/ctq/reviews

Early Christian Readings of Genesis One: Patristic Exegesis and Literal Interpretation. By Craig D. Allert. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2018. 340 pages. Softcover. \$35.99.

For the last century or so, Christians have engaged in a debate concerning the proper response to various scientific theories about the origins of the universe and the nature of life itself. One point of ongoing contention is the length of the days mentioned in the first chapter of Genesis. One side seeks to mitigate the conflict between sacred scripture and modern scientific theories. The days of creation are understood to allow for extensive lengths of time compatible with current scientific theories. The other side finds these accommodations of Genesis one to modern scientific ideas to be an outright denial of the scriptural faith or at least a dangerous compromise worthy of censure.

For myself, I can say that I have heard arguments from both sides throughout my life. Few arguments are actually new and even fewer promise a way forward. While I reject exegetical attempts to bring scripture into agreement with current scientific theories, nevertheless the debate generally has seemed rather stagnant and unworthy of prolonged attention. Enter Craig Allert's new book, *Early Christian Readings of Genesis One*. Allert suggests a way forward by turning backwards. His new book considers the testimony of ancient Christian fathers as expressed in their readings of Genesis one.

Allert divides his book into two parts. The first part (chapters 1–3) deals with the use or misuse of patristic sources within the modern debate concerning the days of creation. The second part (chapters 4–8) explores the way patristic readers such as Basil of Caesarea, Ephrem the Syrian, and Augustine of Hippo interpreted Genesis one.

The first part, while well written and thoughtfully organized, primarily surrounds a negative purpose. Allert seeks to critique the irresponsible use of the church fathers in the debate concerning the literal interpretation of Genesis one. While the author claims that both sides have misused patristic sources, the weight of his critique clearly falls on fundamentalist evangelicals who use the fathers to support a literal interpretation of the creation account. Allert's critique of these fundamentalists bears a certain emotion that seems to come from personal experience. For instance, he begins his book recounting his own experience of being

“misunderstood” and having his “words used in unintended ways” (1). This emotion gives Allert’s critique a certain passion and vitality, but it also raises suspicion that his criticism may be overly harsh. Allert’s critique of Louis Lavellee, James Mook, Ken Ham, *Answers in Genesis*, and *Creation Ministries International* appears warranted and worthy of due consideration; however, because there is no corresponding critique of the opposing point of view, Allert’s criticism comes off as one-sided and unbalanced.

While the reader may be tempted to stop reading after the first chapters, I encourage him to keep going. The second part offers a thought-provoking and truly illuminating venture into various patristic readings of Genesis one. Part 2 is a positive look at how ancient Christians confessed the doctrine of creation and handled important scriptural texts. For Allert, the fathers do not hold the literal meaning of scripture to be incompatible with figurative meanings. Indeed, the use of “figurative” may be misleading; for the fathers, the letter of the text includes within itself a deeply theological meaning. Inspiration means that scriptural words bear the Spirit. The surface of the text—its letters, words, and grammar—is a window that is meant to open up to the eternal depths of the Spirit.

Thus, as the fathers read Genesis one, they saw certain textual indications that called them to deeper theological meaning. Allert does a masterful job allowing the spirituality of the fathers to manifest itself. I will limit myself to two examples. First is the meaning of “beginning” in Gen 1:1. Is this strictly a temporal beginning or is it a genealogical priority of being? Allert shows how important this question was for the fathers’ polemical purposes. The very fact that the stars do not appear until the fourth day challenges their priority in pagan thought and philosophical perspectives. Yet, even more fundamentally, the “beginning” is read with reference to Christ through the influence of John’s Gospel. The divine Word is the beginning (John 1:1); this verse is a hermeneutical claim calling the fathers to read Genesis one in a thoroughly Christological way.

Second is Moses’ use of the cardinal number “one” in Genesis 1:5. While ordinal numbers—second, third, fourth, etc.—are used for the other days, the beginning of days is referred to as “day one.” This same cardinal number is used in reference to the day of resurrection (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). For patristic readers, this connection indicated that the mystery of salvation underlies Moses’ account. The first week of creation already points toward the holy week of our Lord’s passion. This relationship is the basis for the significance of the eighth day in patristic theology, that is, the Lord’s day that has no end.

Allert’s exposition demonstrates that the fathers refused to allow any barrier separating God from creation or time from eternity. Indeed, the fathers’ theology of time was the most thought-provoking aspect of Allert’s book. While they assume

the days of creation to be historical days, the fathers refuse to reduce their significance to such materialistic notions. Rather, within the historical days of creation, eternity is truly present manifesting itself to those with the eyes to see. The fathers are just as thoroughly incarnational with regard to time as they are with regard to space. The whole fullness of God is present in a single human being; so, too, the whole of eternity is present in day one, in the day of the Lord, in “the day the Lord has made” (Ps 118:24). Allert’s book calls us to join the fathers and “rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps 118:24).

James G. Bushur

***Luther’s Works: Companion Volume (Sixteenth-Century Biographies of Martin Luther)*. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018. 728 pages. Hardcover. \$54.99.**

This thick volume presents in English six biographies of Martin Luther from the sixteenth century, of varying length and disparate genres, and a brief preface authored by Luther himself for a catalog of his writings up to that time, published in 1533. Four of the biographical studies originated in the context of Luther’s death in 1546. The first is the meticulous report on the Reformer’s final weeks and of his deathbed experiences and confession of faith, recorded by Luther’s friend and colleague Justus Jonas and others. There follow the funeral sermon of Luther’s pastor, Johann Bugenhagen, and his colleague Philip Melancthon’s funeral oration. Next appears Melancthon’s careful biography of the Reformer, published a few months after Luther’s death as the preface for the second volume of his collected Latin writings; the preface covers Luther’s childhood through his development into a reformer, focusing especially on how God had raised up Luther to counter the “mania for idols” (77) of that age. These shorter works are followed by the unique hymnic biography consisting of sixty-four stanzas by Johann Walter, illuminatingly entitled *A New Spiritual Song about the Blessed, Precious, and Highly Gifted Man, Dr. Martin Luther, the Prophet and Apostle of Germany*, published in 1564. Finally, making up the vast majority of this large volume (101–612) are the seventeen biographical sermons of a former student of Luther’s, the Joachimsthal preacher Johann Mathesius, that deeply influenced subsequent Luther biography for at least the next two centuries. Mathesius preached these sermons between 1562 and 1564 and they were published shortly after his death, in 1566. Mathesius utilized countless published and manuscript sources as well as his own personal recollections to detail Luther’s upbringing and his career as a reformer and pastor, the leading figure of the Wittenberg Reformation. He celebrates Luther as a German

prophet, the “extraordinary man” that the Son of God used “to free us from the abominable kingdom and doctrine of the Antichrist and to rekindle the Gospel . . . and fan it into flame” (4).

Editor Christopher Brown’s extensive introduction (nearly eighty pages) to the volume analyzes each of these primary sources, and highly detailed annotations to the biographies make this book a treasure trove for the scholar. The annotations also provide the more casual reader with the historical background and bibliographical aids for understanding the many personalities, both allies and foes, who interacted with Luther during his influential life. Sometimes these annotations take up more than half the page and they can be a distraction from the narrative of these various biographies, but their inclusion makes the volume tremendously useful. For an account of Luther’s life and influence readers can always take up one or several of the many modern biographies available today, with quite a few of these published recently in the years leading up to the five-hundredth anniversary of the *Ninety-Five Theses* in 2017. But exploring these historic biographies, with the aid of the annotations, presents Luther as his contemporaries knew and valued him: not just an extraordinary and fascinating man but an instrument of God and even a prophet and apostle, sent to deliver the Church from the idolatry of the papacy and to renew the Gospel for the last days of human history.

Mathesius’s biographical sermons in particular reward the reader with insight into the character of the Reformation as a whole, from the perspective of a pastor living out its legacy under the difficult circumstances of Habsburg rule in Bohemia in the two decades following Luther’s death (1545–1565). While nearly all Luther biographies are at the same time analyses of (and judgments upon) Luther’s Reformation, modern biographers tend to read Luther and the Reformation through the lens of their own contemporary mores and theological frameworks. From Luther’s anti-papal and anti-Sacramentarian polemics to his harsh and sometimes disturbing attacks against the Jews and the Turks (i.e., Islamic society), Luther can be judged along psychoanalytical lines as displaying personality disorders (see Roland Bainton, who laments Luther had not died prior to his harshest polemics against the Jews in the 1540s; Erik Erikson; and more recently Mark Edwards and Lyndal Roper) or faulted even by highly sympathetic biographers (Heinz Schilling, Scott Hendrix) for not more gregariously engaging and winning over his political opponents and especially some of his own wayward disciples. Such analyses of Luther’s personal character stem largely from the modern biographer’s tendency, one could say goal, to explore Luther as a complex and flawed *man*, and the Reformation as an experience of humanity, a human phenomenon, even a human experiment. Reading these biographies of Luther’s contemporaries, but especially Mathesius’s on account of its length and the author’s

personal and pastoral interests in unveiling Luther's life and work so extensively, results in internalizing the very different but prevailing view of Luther's time that here was not just a man but an instrument of God, and Luther's Reformation the battleground between God and His archenemy, Satan. From his preface through each of his sermons on Luther's life—and even in those sermons devoted more specifically to Luther's views on fables (Seventh Sermon), the Augsburg Confession (Ninth Sermon), the University of Wittenberg (Sixteenth Sermon), and Luther's sayings and stories about mining (Seventeenth Sermon)—Mathesius continuously describes Luther as the instrument and apostle of God while his enemies and opponents, from the papal Antichrist to the Sacramentarians to wayward disciples like the fanatic Thomas Münzer and the antinomian Johann Agricola, all alike are but the tools of Satan to destroy and undermine God's own work through Luther and Luther's Reformation.

Each of these sixteenth-century biographies of Luther offers the Lutheran pastor and theologian today an opportunity to reflect on the story of the Reformer's life and work in the ways these were celebrated by Luther's contemporaries and the generation that followed. It is a very different experience than reading a modern biography, one that deserves to have an impact on preaching, as that event too is most profitably viewed as God at work through His instrument. As Karl Barth observed of Paul in the opening paragraphs of his commentary *The Epistle of the Romans*, "Fashioned of the same stuff as all other men, a stone differing in no way from other stones, yet in his relation to God—and in this only—he is unique. As an apostle—and only as an apostle—he stands in no organic relationship with human society as it exists in history: seen from the point of view of history, he can be regarded only as an exception, nay, rather, an impossibility." Luther's sixteenth-century biographers viewed his exceptionality as the divine intervention of God in human history. Preachers today will preach the Law and the Gospel with the authority of God's own word as they see their calling in the same light.

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***Luther and the Reformation of the Later Middle Ages.* By Leland Saak. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 410 pages. Hardcover. \$120.00.**

Did you know that there was a reformation before the Reformation? Well, there was and it was characterized by sharp criticism of corrupt clergy, efforts at returning the monastic orders to the ideal of their founders, new forms of lay piety, challenges

to papal leadership, and innovations in theology. Martin Luther became an Augustinian hermit and joined the fray. But the medieval reformation failed. Ironically, however, its failure became the catalyst for the Protestant Reformation—a fundamental restructuring of the western Church; and Luther was a part of that, too. This is the argument of Leland Saak's book.

As simple as that may sound, however, this is not a simple book. It demands a lot of the reader, for Saak not only describes the work of obscure medieval theologians, he also describes the Reformer's early theology on the basis of obscure sources from the Reformer's own pen. So, for example, in Chapter 5, Saak offers a brief survey of medieval Augustinians who taught unconditional predestination. They include Alfonsus Vargas, Johannes Zachariae, and (Luther's contemporary) Konrad Treger—all of them brand new to me and, very likely, unknown to Luther. Among the more challenging sources for Luther's thinking that Saak depends on are Luther's marginal notes on several works of Augustine (from the beginning of Luther's theological studies at Erfurt), similar notes on Lombard's *Sentences* (1509/10), and a Christmas Sermon to the Wittenberg Augustinians (1514).

Even more challenging than the sources is the author's method. For example, in order to understand Luther's statement, "all Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light" from his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* (1517), Saak spends about seventy pages reflecting on Luther's awareness and use of scholastic thinkers in order to show that:

Fundamental structures of Luther's ways of thought of his mature theology were already present in his earliest theological development. Such structures were derived from an Aristotelian philosophy of the *via moderna* conditioned by the Augustinian theological tradition as Brother Martin knew it. (196)

As I said, this is not an easy book.

Readers of this journal, however, might find some parts of the work more accessible than the treatment of the "fundamental structures" of Luther's thought. Saak, for example, has a very interesting chapter on what it meant to call Luther "an Augustinian," (Ch. 2). Elsewhere (Ch. 3), Saak discusses Luther's Reformation breakthrough and argues against Martin Brecht and Heiko Oberman on behalf of an early date for Luther's realization that "the righteousness of God" in Romans 1:17 is the righteousness by which God declares us righteous for the sake of Christ and not the righteousness of good works that He demands from us. This involves a close rereading of Luther's own description of his experience as well as examining several other texts, but Saak is careful and persuasive. If nothing else, he shows how hard it is to be dogmatic about dating Luther's tower experience.

An early date for Luther's theological breakthrough is essential to the first thesis of the book—that Luther discovered passive righteousness, developed his exegetical principles, and began his opposition to the papacy while still being a faithful, obedient Augustinian hermit. Three additional themes follow: (1) to study the early Luther, we need to know late medieval Augustinianism, for Luther really was an Augustinian until at least 1520 (he quit wearing his habit only in 1524); (2) early Luther was a full participant in late medieval reformation; and (3) just as late medieval reform failed so did the 16th century Reformation. Instead, it produced the modern world.

Obviously, this is an ambitious work. It will be of most interest to those who want to make Luther's connection to scholastic theology and to medieval Augustinianism as precise as possible. For the general reader of Luther and his theology its focus on late medieval scholasticism and the Augustinian Order is probably too narrow. It certainly belongs in theology libraries. For pastors' libraries, probably not.

Cameron MacKenzie

***Surviving the Storms: Memoirs of David P. Scaer.* By David Scaer, edited by Robert E. Smith. N.p.: Luther Academy, 2018. 448 pages. Hardcover. \$40. Also available in softcover, PDF, and Kindle.**

Memoirs differ from autobiographies in that the former tends to focus less on the self and more on other persons. Readers looking for something like Augustine's *Confessions* (i.e., an introspective account) will have to look elsewhere. Scaer's memoirs are, to a great degree, about the people whom he knew, whom he studied with, whom he taught, and whom he worked with as colleagues at Springfield, Fort Wayne, and in the Missouri Synod. It also informs the reader about Scaer's theological development and insights, which are original to him, and worthy of study in their own right.

The basic structure of this book is chronological, which is normal. Unusual for this genre, the author has supplied one or more "excurses" after eight out of the twelve chapters. For those who want to read the book as an autobiography, the editor supplies an alternate table of contents (page x), but no reader should skip the excurses entirely.

Very helpful to the reader is the glossary of Lutheran acronyms and terms (371–374) and a complete index of persons (375–385). The back pages (387–427) are a wonderfully complete bibliography of works by David P. Scaer, compiled by the editor Robert E. Smith.

These memoirs serve as a study of two things: the author and the seminary which he served for nearly his entire career. The corporate history of the Missouri Synod's Concordia Theological Seminary, titled *Prairie School of the Prophets* (CPH, 1989), was written by Erich H. Heintzen and completed by Lorman M. Petersen. Scaer's memoirs extends details of that history from 1966 to the present day. Only time will tell for sure whether these memoirs of Scaer are more important for their insights into the seminary or their author. I think the latter.

One of the challenges in writing histories of significant theologians is that we often do not know the thinking or events that led them to forging a new path. Scaer does us a favor in outlining his thinking when it began to head in new directions. He writes "Soon after beginning to teach dogmatics [in 1966], I saw that even such a fundamental doctrine as biblical inspiration could not be taught in isolation, but had to be seen as a derivative of the authority of the apostles derived from Jesus. This injected an historical component into how the Scriptures took form. All this was expressed in my *Apostolic Scriptures*"(43).

When Scaer began his work as seminary professor in Springfield in 1966, Rudolf Bultmann was still a "super-star" in American religious academies. In *Excurses III, "Working with the Gospels,"* Scaer rightly credits Bultmann's theological method with being the "ultimate theological cause for the St. Louis faculty walkout and formation of Seminex in 1974" (77). In his struggles to overcome the Bultmannian threat to Lutheran theology, Scaer realized that "History precedes God's speaking to us in our history, and so the incarnation is the necessary prelude to inspiration" (81), and "Typically dogmatics goes from the divine, with the assumption that the Scriptures are inspired, then to the historical, i.e., if God says it, it must be so. This is true, but this leaves unaddressed the historical context in which that authoritative word of God was spoken" (81).

Scaer continues to explain that the historical context in which that word of God was spoken is provided in the Gospels: "[T]he Gospels are recognized as the source of what is known about [Jesus] and what should be believed, and they take precedence in church life and theology over all other books, including the Old Testament and the Epistles, all of which, like the Gospels, claim divine origin and authority. So while the term *Christology* is reserved for a particular section in the dogmatic sequence, the term should primarily be used of the Gospels. They are Christologies in the primary sense" (79).

Here is my assessment of Scaer's accomplishment in theology: his was a new way of doing orthodox, biblical Lutheran theology. It grounded the authority of the New Testament in the fact that its books were authored by apostles of Jesus—an insight certainly found in Luther, but often forgotten. It preferred the acts of Jesus over the Acts of the Apostles. It preferred the "red letter" discourses of Jesus over

the discourses of the apostles. It preferred the thought-patterns and language of Jesus to traditional dogmatic categories. It was a thoroughly Gospel-historical way of doing dogmatic theology. It also resolved the problems in dogmatic theology noted by Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, and Ernst Troeltsch, and put Lutheran dogma on a firmer foundation than it had been for several centuries.

This just scratches the surface of the theological insights that the reader will encounter in these memoirs. It is mandatory reading for anyone who wonders what happened at Fort Wayne in the 1980s and 1990s and for anyone who cares about preserving orthodox, biblical Lutheran theology into the 21st century.

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***Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) and the Conceptualization of Theologia at the Threshold of the “Age of Orthodoxy.” The Making of a Theologian.* By Glenn K. Fluegge. Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2018. 258 pages. Hardcover. \$40.00.**

The Lutheran concept of theology as a “practical habit” has been extremely important from the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy up to the present. In *Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) and the Conceptualization of Theologia at the Threshold of the “Age of Orthodoxy,”* Glenn Fluegge of Concordia University, Irvine, explores the origins of this understanding of theology within Lutheranism. The book represents a modified version of his doctoral dissertation.

As with much of the methodology of scholastic orthodoxy, the notion of theology as a “practical habit” draws on Aristotelian philosophy. In Aristotle’s thought, a *habitus* (habit) is an aptitude for action possessed by a human being. This aptitude can have moral and epistemological dimensions. One must have a certain aptitude to develop virtue through right practice (i.e., the basis of Aristotle’s virtue ethics). One also needs an intellectual aptitude to engage in a course of study on an academic subject.

The medieval church used Aristotle’s concept of habits as a way of conceptualizing how human beings exercised faith, hope, and love. God’s grace was understood as creating faith, hope, and love in the soul as capacities that developed by correct behavior. Luther rejected this notion not only because it lacked biblical support, but because “*habitus*” quite literally means “to have” or “to possess.” In Luther’s conception of the life of faith, grace can never be seen as a possession. As the Reformer famously wrote at the end of his life, we are “beggars

all.” Nevertheless, Luther’s, and later Lutheran, rejection of the notion of faith as a kind of habit created difficulties for discussion of theology as a discipline.

Gerhard’s impetus to further develop the concept of theology as a “practical habit” was occasioned by the fallout from the “Hofmann Controversy.” The Helmstedt professor Daniel Hofmann insisted that everything taught by philosophy was the wisdom of the flesh and therefore opposed to theology. Jakob Martini of Wittenberg affirmed that theology and philosophy were harmonious and should be seen as simply different modes of the same divine truth. This debate spilled over into an argument about the nature of theology as a discipline. Hofmann insisted that theology grew out of the piety of the individual theologian. If this were not the case, and theology was primarily academic discipline, it could be engaged in by anyone with basic intellectual capacities. By implication, unbelievers could be just as good theologians as people with genuine faith. Hofmann found this conclusion to be unacceptable. Countering this, Martini and others insisted that theology was a real form of propositional knowledge about God. Thus, it was a genuine academic discipline that utilized the same intellectual tools as other disciplines. Many Lutherans drew the conclusion during this debate that the practice of doing theology presupposed the existence of a certain intellectual aptitude (habit).

Gerhard wanted to affirm that theology was a genuine academic discipline, while not cutting theology off from faith and piety. Moreover, he wanted to affirm that the goal of theology is essentially practical (i.e., engaging in word and sacrament ministry). Hence, he developed the concept of theology as a “practical habit.” Following Aristotelian concepts of cognition, Gerhard asserted that there was a passive and active intellect. When a human being perceives an object of cognition, the passive intellect filters out all the accidental qualities and the active intellect identifies its formal reality. Nevertheless, when one reads Scripture the primary objects of perception (i.e., the doctrines of the faith) are not part of the natural order and therefore cannot be comprehended by the active intellect when left to its own powers. Rather, God must illuminate the human mind and give a “habit” to identify the supernatural object of cognition, namely, the truths of the faith.

At certain points, Fluegge seems to suggest that Gerhard was nervous about making grace a kind of possession for reasons similar to Luther’s. Hence Gerhard describes the *habitus* of theology as not being an intellectual capacity in the normal sense. The practice of theology is a kind of intellectual event that occurred when the Word of God was read, heard, or contemplated. Gerhard envisioned this encounter with the Word of God as occurring through Luther’s threefold practice of prayer, meditation, and suffering/temptation. As Fluegge shows, the value of this theory is that it was able to incorporate both the faith and academic dimensions of the practice of theology.

Overall, Fluegge does an excellent job describing and analyzing Gerhard's work. Some of the terminology might be a little challenging for those without a background in the period. Nonetheless, for those more advanced students of scholastic orthodoxy, Fluegge's work is essential and is therefore highly recommended.

Jack D. Kilcrease
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***Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition.* By Hans Boersma. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018. 512 pages. Hardcover. \$55.00.**

Hans Boersma, best known for his advocacy of Christian Platonism as the necessary fundament for a Christian ontology, has in *Seeing God* given us a *tour de force* on the topic of the beatific vision as the *telos* of human existence as that has been articulated by major figures in the history of the church. As such, this book is a paradigm of historical theology which introduces significant theological issues through the study of various voices who have struggled to do justice to the mysteries of the Christian faith.

The beatific vision as the *telos* of man has been a constant in Christian theology from the beginning, although in contemporary thought it has suffered some neglect. Boersma's discussions of his chosen representatives for the beatific vision are consistently excellent and enlightening and evince a thorough reading and engagement with the primary source materials and relevant secondary literature. There is much here to learn and much to think about. The breadth of his chosen representatives is remarkable, and for most readers his discussions will be a primer on figures unknown, yet worthy of knowing.

True to Boersma's advocacy of the Platonic tradition as a necessary philosophical background for an ontology of participation (Boersma's "sacramentalism"), the first chapter outlines both strengths and weaknesses in Plato and Plotinus as conceptual aids in thinking about the beatific vision. Both regarded vision of the divine as possible, however fleeting and imperfect, already in this life, an aspect which Boersma finds (rightly enough) as a positive. Yet, he is aware that both depreciate the body, an aspect which Boersma finds (rightly enough) problematic: "One of the challenges facing Christian theologians would be how to give expression to their faith in the beatific vision without gainsaying either the incarnation or the bodily resurrection" (75). Among the theological issues always in play is the significance of the body for thinking of the eschatological fullness of seeing God, and concomitant with that problem the necessity of maintaining the distinction between

God and the creature. Interesting, too, is the question of whether the beatific vision is a purely mental/intellectual state or whether the vision of God is through our physical, albeit transfigured, eyes. Finally, the question of what exactly is seen in the beatific vision remains central in all representatives. Is it the essence of God; is it the incarnate Christ; is it the Trinity? With such questions in play Boersma provides wholly engaging discussions of the following: Gregory of Nyssa; Augustine; Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas; Symeon the New Theologian and John of the Cross; Bonaventure and Nicholas of Cusa; Dante; John Calvin; John Donne; Puritan and Dutch Reformed thinkers (Isaac Ambrose, John Owen, Richard Baxter, Thomas Watson, Abraham Kuyper); Jonathan Edwards. Finally, in a concluding chapter Boersma offers his own reflections on how best to think of the beatific vision.

Strangely absent from the discussion is any mention or engagement with Luther and the Lutheran tradition. Luther is mentioned only once, in a footnote, to the effect that instead of a beatific vision Luther proposed a beatific hearing (27, n 24). Later, in another footnote, Boersma refers to a comment by Herman Bavinck that various Lutheran scholastics taught that the final vision of God would be with our physical eyes (mentioned are Quenstedt, Hollaz, Hülsemann, Lucas Maius, Johann Wolfgang Jäger)(423, n 100).¹ In fact, the beatific vision was given considerable discussion in the Lutheran tradition, as the extended treatment by Johann Gerhard attests. Nonetheless, as one from Dutch Reformed background, Boersma may be excused for this lapse. For Lutheran readers his discussion of Puritan and Dutch Reformed thinkers no doubt fills a void in our own knowledge.

This book is worth reading, and I highly recommend it. As I noted, it is superbly researched, and one can only deeply respect Boersma's compendious mastery of the sources. At the same time, some comments seem appropriate. Boersma notes that Aquinas thinks the object of the beatific vision is the essence of God (*οὐσία*). He never speaks of the beatific vision as a vision of Christ (414–417). Here “essence” refers to the deity of God as such.² As Boersma rightly notes, the Eastern tradition and most Protestants avoid such a conclusion as a threat to divine transcendence. According to his essence, God is incomprehensible, unknowable, and invisible. Boersma shares this reserve, insisting that the object of the beatific vision must be Christ himself. One can only concur with Boersma in this. But elsewhere, and throughout the book, Boersma uses the term “essence” in a wholly different, and inexact, sense. He frequently pairs “essence” with the “character” of God: “If we see

¹ That Boersma refers to Bavinck for this information indicates his choice to neglect the Lutheran heritage. One might mention that Maius and Jäger are hardly major figures in the Lutheran pantheon. In fact, Maius (1522-1598) converted to Calvinism!

² A classic text is 1 Jn 3:2: “When he shall appear we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is (*καθώς ἔστιν*).” Thomas takes the “is” as strictly ontological, the being of God.

the character or οὐσία of God in Christ . . . ” (417). But we do not see the οὐσία of God in Christ, not if by οὐσία the οὐσία of Thomas Aquinas is meant. A better term for “character” would be “nature” or φύσις. It is, perhaps, a mere linguistic point; but the inexactitude of Boersma’s employment of “essence” tends at times to befuddle his comments.

In my judgment, Boersma’s own reflections largely come out on the right side of things. He insists that the beatific vision must be that of the incarnate Christ. Although not vigorously, he demurs from the common opinion (Augustine) that we will see God only mentally or intellectually. We will see God with our physical eyes. This is an important point, for apart from this claim it is impossible to assert that Christ is the object of the beatific vision. Interestingly, it is the Puritan thinkers (John Owen, Thomas Watson) and the Orthodox Gregory Palamas who most decidedly insist on the beatific vision through transfigured physical eyes. Despite the wealth of discussion, it remains for me quite strange that the role of the earthly Jesus, the Christian liturgy, the Eucharist, and the church seem with extreme rarity to play a role in thinking about the beatific vision. Equally strange is the absence of any role the forgiveness of sins plays, although the purity of virtue is common. Had Boersma paid attention to the Lutheran tradition, these aspects might have risen to the level of mention.³

William C. Weinrich

***The Saving Truth: Doctrine for Lay People.* By Kurt E. Marquart, edited by Ken Schurb and Robert Paul. Truth, Salvatory and Churchly. N.p.: Luther Academy, 2016. 196 pages. Hardcover. \$34.99.**

Few men have had as much influence on the theology of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as Kurt Marquart. It is difficult for those who knew him to comprehend that so many years have passed since his passing in September, 2006. More vested clergy may have been in attendance for his funeral than for any other similar occasion. A room in the seminary library has been dedicated to his memory with an appropriate painting on the wall projecting the dignity in which he carried himself.

He served on the synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations longer than anyone else. To assure that his theology will continue to have an impact,

³ See, for example, the short, but dense, discussion of “Eternal Life” (*Creation and Redemption*, 575-579): “[The beatific vision], however, is not a mystical ascent to God’s eternal majesty, but a vision of God’s glory in the man Jesus Christ our brother.”

Luther Academy, which has already published two volumes of his writings in its Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics series, has inaugurated another series, Truth, Salvatory and Churchly, to make his unpublished writings available to future generations. The subtitle of the first volume, *Doctrine for Lay People*, may be misleading, simply because in the lecture hall or in front of a group of laity, Marquart was encyclopedic in knowledge and easy to understand. If there was anyone who might be described as a Leonardo DaVinci in what he knew about theology and science, it was Marquart. Whatever the circumstances, he was engaging as no one else was. Topics covered in the first volume of the series are the scriptures, incarnation, justification and sanctification, law, gospel and the means of grace, baptism, the Lord Supper and an apologetic defense of Christianity.

Marquart wrote the way he spoke and so this is as easy a read as it is profound. For those who knew him, these essays will make him alive. Others will be in for treat in getting to know him. Of the nine chapters, chapter 2, “The Living God” was written by Robert D. Preus, though it might be discovered, in boxes of papers Marquart left behind, that Marquart also addressed this topic. As we await the second volume and third volumes with essays specifically addressed to pastors and scholars, we can enjoy visiting with him in the first volume.

David P. Scaer

Reviews Published Online at: www.ctsfw.edu/ctq/reviews

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