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Theological Observer

THE HISTORICITY OF JONAH

A recent issue of the *Lutheran Standard*, the official periodical of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, makes an assertion which, considering the source, is, in itself, common enough in modern liberalism: "Jonah is not history ..." ("Since You Asked," by Norma and Burton Everist, *Lutheran Standard*, September 1998, page 21). A layman or laywoman, in a query addressed to the *Lutheran Standard*, begins with these reasonable observations: "While teaching Sunday school I was surprised to read that Jonah was thought to be a parable. I see nothing in the text that suggests it couldn't be historical." The concerned correspondent then poses the obvious question: "How is it a parable?"

A. A Critical View of Jonah

In the response to this query the denial of the historicity of the Book of Jonah is, in itself, scarcely surprising. Both of the Everists, after all, are shown in a photograph above the column wearing clerical collars. The "Rev. Norma Cook Everist" is identified as a professor of church and ministry in Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque (Iowa), while the "Rev. Burton L. Everist is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church" in East Dubuque (Illinois). The responders, clearly, with the ELCA in general and all its periodicals, are working on the basis of a biblical criticism which, by definition, assumes the fallibility of Holy Scripture. This approach has been, of course, the road by which the ELCA arrived at the ordination of women to the pastoral office, which has become so common in the denomination that the majority of its laity have now accepted the practice (comparing the materials on the "order of creation" in *Book One of Genesis* [CTS, 1998] and the appendix ["The Ordination of Women"] in *Feminism and the Bible*, which is expected within the coming month).

The strange thing about the response is, in fact, the lack of any candid application of higher criticism to the Book of Jonah. It would at least show more intellectual integrity to acknowledge that the book was presumably propounded as history and was certainly so accepted by the ancient Jews. An impartial critic, after all, has no problem in granting an original understanding and, indeed, original intention which differs from his own view of reality. He will then, of course, proceed to state that the author of the Book of Jonah, writing in post-exilic times, has given expression to legendary tales of a pre-exilic prophet which, however, are largely erroneous. There could, to be sure, be some kernel of truth, such as a change from chauvinism to universalism in the preaching of the historical Jonah. The story, however, a critic would say, has clearly been subjected to manifold elaborations, including miracles

by land and by sea, in the course of its transmission through generation on generation in the oral tradition of Israel.

The critic may still, of course, approve the theme of a historical theologian even when his historical data has been tried and found wanting. Thus, many critics would, as do also the Everists, second the theme of Jonah as they see it (correctly to some degree), in contrasting divine love with self-centered chauvinism: "Nineveh is like the heathen nations Israel does not want God to love. God persists when Jonah – and we – are reluctant. The message is: 'Go speak to those you don't know and may not even like.' God's righteousness and mercy includes them too." The assertion here that Nineveh is "like" the nations which Israel wishes to deprive of divine love, as opposed to being in actuality the capital of such a nation, presumably rests on the critical assumption of a post-exilic date of the Book of Jonah. The "like" implies, in other words, the destruction of Nineveh long before the composition of the supposed memoirs of a pre-exilic prophet. In the formulation, moreover, of the "message" of Jonah, the assumption of unfamiliarity with those whom we dislike owes more to the naivete of the formulators than to the Book of Jonah. The prophet, in fact, already knew the Assyrians all too well before the beginning of the events recounted in his book. Contrary to the wishful thinking of modern liberals, an increase in the knowledge of others is no guarantee of a decrease in hating them. More knowledge of others may just as easily exacerbate the hatred. The accuracy, moreover, of the final sentence quoted above depends on the significance of the term "righteousness" therein (especially since even the more conservative predecessors of the ELCA rejected the doctrine of objective justification advocated by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States). The theme of Jonah, then, could be simplified as being the inclusion of the Gentiles too within the love of God (as the undersigned has stated in his *Prophetic Books of the Pre-Exilic Era*). The applications to Christians today would, indeed, include the responsibility of bearing witness also to those of differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds even when we dislike them.

To return, however, to the historicity of Jonah, the dismissal in itself, as previously stated, of the factual reliability of the book comes as no surprise. For the denial itself is completely consistent with the critical theology of the *Lutheran Standard* and the ELCA as a whole. The odd thing is the rationalization whereby the Book of Jonah is implicitly characterized as a parable. The *Lutheran Standard*, to be sure, never actually answers the original question, as quoted above, relating to the

Book of Jonah: "How is it a parable?" Several points, however, are introduced to make its portrayal as parable seem less extraordinary.

(1.) The *Lutheran Standard* mentions, in the first place, the variety of literary genres in the Bible: "Scripture comes to us in many forms, including poetry, history, prophecy, laws, allegories, and parables." This observation is true enough, but it is essential to add that history and law are much more basic genres in the biblical repertory than allegories and parables. No passage, indeed, may properly be regarded as allegory or parable without good reason. Such a *modus operandi* is simply a corollary of the basic semantic principle of biblical exegesis, that the one intended sense (*sensus literalis unus*) of any word of Holy Scripture, in any one place and grammatical relation, must be equated with the common meaning (*sensus literae*) of the word unless the context or the analogy of faith requires the acceptance of a different meaning.

(2.) The Everists, to be sure, ascribe an anomalous nature to the Book of Jonah: "Jonah is in a collection of prophetic books. But it is unlike the others, which describe the message that the prophets proclaimed in extensive detail. The message of Jonah is in the story about Jonah." We may observe, however, that the only reason behind Jonah's place among the twelve minor prophets is its brevity. When we think more broadly of the whole category of the *N^ebhî'îm*, or Prophets, as the second category of the tripartite Hebrew canon, Jonah is by no means unique. For there are, in the first place, the Former Prophets, which comprise the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The Latter Prophets, too, comprehend sizable sections of historical narrative in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Even, indeed, outside the *N^ebhî'îm*, or Prophets in the technical sense, every book also of the Pentateuch and the Writings (including Daniel and such historical books as Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) received a place in the TaNaK purely on the basis of its authorship by Moses, the Prophet Primarius of Israel, or by one of the prophets who succeeded him.

(3.) The Everists, thirdly, treat "Jonah" as the figure of a people rather than as an individual man: "'Jonah' means dove – a pet name for Israel." Now the word *yônâh* occurs thirty-two times in the Old Testament – twenty-one times in the singular absolute, once in the singular construct, thrice with the first singular suffix (*yônâthî*), seven times in the plural absolute, and once in the plural construct (Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, page 401b). In half (sixteen) of these cases the reference is to a dove pure and simple, either an individual (Genesis 8: 8-12) or any of the species, namely in Leviticus (12:6; 1:14; 5:7; 5:11; 12:8; 14:22; 14:30; 15:14; and 15:29), Numbers (6:10),

and 2 Kings (6:25). In the superscription, moreover, to Psalm 56 the only use of the singular construct occurs in the name of the melody to which the psalm was to be sung. The remaining instances of *yōnāh* eventuate in similes and metaphors of various kinds. The wings of doves give birth to the analogies found in Psalms 55 (7 MT, 6 EV) and 68 (14 MT, 13 EV), Isaiah 60:8, Hosea 11:11, Jeremiah 48:28 (referring to fleeing Moabites), and Ezekiel 7:16. The mournful sound of doves gives rise to the similes employed in Nahum 2:8 and Isaiah 38:14 and 59:11. The eyes of doves produces the metaphors found in chapters 1:15 and 4:1 in the Song of Songs. Hosea 7:11, to be sure, compares Ephraim to a dove but, more specifically, to "a silly dove" by reason of letting itself to be snared (*ibid.*). There appears, in fact, to be nowhere outside the Song of Songs that the word *yōnāh* is used as a term of affection. For only there does the Beloved One call His Bride "My Dove" in chapters 2:14, 5:2, and 6:9 (the only three occurrences of *yōnāthī* in the Bible). The use of *yōnāthī*, however, in the lyric poetry of the Canticle provides no grounds on which the *yōnāh* of the Book of Jonah can be interpreted as a "pet name" of Israel. The words, quite to the contrary, which begin the Book of Jonah identify its author in a manner analogous to the initial verse of all the other Latter Prophets. The formula *dᵉbhar-YHWH 'el-Yōnāh* ("the word of the LORD to Jonah") is especially similar to the superscriptions of the books of Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah among the minor prophets and Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the major prophets. The inaugural clause, indeed, specifies the Jonah of the book as "the son of Amittai" (Jonah 1:1). There is, therefore, no doubt of his identification with a historical figure of special prominence in Israel in the reign of King Jeroboam II. For, according to 2 Kings 14, Jeroboam "restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-Hepher" (verse 25).

(4.) Of most significance, however, is the comparison which the *Lutheran Standard* draws between the Book of Jonah and the story of Nathan in 2 Samuel 12: "Jonah is not history but is like the story Nathan told David about the wealthy man who takes his neighbor's only sheep (2 Samuel 12: 1-15). Here is an allegorical parable catching David in his sin of adultery and murder. But by itself it would appear to be factual."

(a.) The description, in the first place, of the story in 2 Samuel 12 as "an allegorical parable" is somewhat mystifying. For the phrase would seem to be either (i.) a tautology or (ii.) a self-contradiction. The choice would depend upon whether one had in mind the use of "parable"

customary in the study of literature in general or the more specific usage usually employed in the realm of biblical exegesis.

(i.) For, on the one hand, some literary scholars use the term "parable" to designate a species within the more general category of allegory. In this schema parables are defined as "briefer, less systematic allegories" which are exemplified by the "parable of the cave" in *The Republic* of Plato (Lillian Herlands Hornstein, G. D. Percy, Calvin S. Brown, et alii, eds., *The Reader's Companion to World Literature* [New York: The New American Library, 1956], pages 15-16). In such a scheme, however, the story of Nathan would correctly be called a "parable" pure and simple (without the tautological modification of "allegorical").

(ii.) Exegetes of the Bible, on the other hand, ordinarily distinguish between parables and allegories as differing species of figurative discourse. The parable, in this schema, is said to "constitute a type of figurative speech involving a comparison which is distinguishable from the simple metaphor on the one hand and allegory on the other ..." (Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976], page 119). Thus, allegory is often described as an extended metaphor and parable as an extended simile (E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968 (originally published in 1898)], pages 748-749). Exegetes have come to restrict the application of "parable" to "an illustration by which one set of circumstances is likened to another" explicitly (Bullinger, page 751). More specifically, indeed, "the images employed are drawn from nature and everyday life" (Soulen, page 119). In the parable the "events must be possible" in ordinary terms, "or likely to have happened" (Bullinger, page 752). Thus, unless otherwise defined, a parable, in biblical exegesis, is an express comparison in which some more profound truth is depicted in terms of ordinary life known to the audience.

In a parable, then, the likeness concerned is explicitly stated (using particles or words equivalent to "like" or "as" in English), while in an allegory the likeness is stated by substitution or implication. In this schema, then, the story of Nathan would be an allegory, rather than a parable. Still, however, there remain many points of similarity between the specific allegory found in 2 Samuel 12 and all of the parables which are recounted in Holy Scripture, whether in the Old Testament or, much more frequently, in the New Testament and especially in the public ministry of Jesus Christ Himself (in accordance with previous prophecy). It may, therefore, prove instructive to examine the similarity which the *Lutheran Standard* asserts between the story of Nathan and the

Book of Jonah and then cites as a reason to call the story of Jonah a parable.

A prime example of actual parable in the Old Testament is found in verses 15-20 of Job 6 (as is indicated in *The Poetical Books of the Bible*, third edition [CTS, 1998], page 190). There the patriarch compares the three friends who were visiting him (Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite) with the waters of a wady in the Arabian Desert (verse 15, translating anew):

> My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook,
> As a stream of brooks that pass away.

Job thus states his comparison explicitly both by means of the *khᵉmō* which precedes *nachal* ("a brook") and by means of the *ka* (*kaph* pointed with *pathach*) which is prefixed to *ʾᵃphīq-nᵉchālīm* ("a stream of brooks").

(b.) There is, in fact, very little similarity between the Book of Jonah and the story of Nathan in 2 Samuel 12. More specifically, indeed, there is no such likeness at all which relates to the distinctive nature of either parables or allegories. The differences, on the contrary, which separate Jonah from both parable and the story of Nathan are many and various:

(i.) The story of Nathan comprises three and a half verses. A parable, too, as already noted, is by nature quite brief and simple (Hornstein, Percy, and Brown, pages 15-16). Thus, the parable in Job 6 consumes but six verses *in toto* (verses 15-20). The Book of Jonah, on the other hand, includes a full forty-eight verses.

(ii.) The story of Nathan consists solely in narrative. The parable in Job 6 is the same, since, by virtue again of its brevity and pointedness, a parable allows little if any addition to the main simile. The most elaboration to be found in a parable is a brief quotation here and there. The Book of Jonah, on the other hand, incorporates, not only a considerable quantity of dialogue (in chapters 1, 3, and 4), but also a governmental decree (3: 7-9) and, above all, a complete psalm (2: 3-10 MT [2-9 EV]).

(iii.) The story of Nathan makes no mention of God, nor does the parable in Job. Such absence of divine reference is, indeed, characteristic of the parable, since its purpose, again, is the depiction of more profound truths in more earthly terms. The Book of Jonah, on the other hand, refers to the One True God from beginning to end and frequently by means of the Divine Name, which is to say YHWH. The tetragrammeton is, of course, traditionally rendered "the LORD" (written with four capital letters) in English versions of the Bible. The book, indeed, not also quotes Jonah and others addressing the One True God

at length, but also quotes God Himself speaking directly and extensively to the Prophet Jonah.

(iv.) The story of Nathan is explicitly introduced as spoken by Nathan to David in the specific setting of his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah: "And the LORD sent Nathan unto David; and He came unto him and said unto him ..." (2 Samuel 12:1a). The rationale, too, of the story is expressly stated in the immediately preceding context of the Book of Samuel: "the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Samuel 11:27b). Job 6, likewise, clearly introduces the parable of verses 15-20 as spoken by the patriarch Job (6:1) in the setting of Job's first response to Eliphaz the Temanite (chapters 6-7) within the first cycle of speeches (chapters 4-14) in the course of his dialogue with the three friends who, according to Job 2:11, had come to visit him in his affliction (*The Poetical Books of the Bible*, pages 58-59). The same specificity in terms of literary and historical contexts obtains in the case of all the other parables in the Bible, including all the parables of our Lord. There is, on the other hand, no introduction of the narrative of Jonah in any preceding context or any otherwise specified setting.

(v.) The story of Nathan contains no name of any kind, but only such generic designations as "two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor" (2 Samuel 12:1). Nor does verse 4 specify the traveler's name who came to visit the rich man. The parable in Job 6 likewise speaks of seasonal streams in general, and our Lord names no names in any of His stories which are rightly considered parables. The Book of Jonah, on the other hand, is replete with names of individual people and places, including the names of the prophet Jonah and his father Amittai and the Divine Name already mentioned (*passim*). The references to Nineveh are legion, including mention of the specific king then ruling there (3: 6-7). The references to Joppa and Tarshish are cited below.

(vi.) The story of Nathan begins with a construct chain of two nouns, *sh'nēy-'anāshīm*, which is, literally, "a twosome of men" (2 Samuel 12:1). All the parables in the Bible, including the one in Job 6, begin, by definition, with the word or particle meaning "like" or "as" in the Hebrew or Greek of the original texts. The Book of Jonah, on the other hand, commences, rather unusually, with a verb and, indeed, with a strong *waw* and breviate form, which others may call a *waw*-consecutive with (shortened or apocopated) imperfect, *wayh̆ī d'bar-YHWH 'el-Yōnāh*, which is, literally, "and there came to be the word of the LORD to Jonah" (Jonah 1:1). A historical narrative can, to be sure, begin as easily as a figurative discourse with a noun, but the specific initiation of Jonah is scarcely appropriate to a parable.

The initial clause of Jonah exemplifies, in the first place, a special subgroup of the many sentences in the Hebrew Bible in which a circumstantial clause precedes the main clause. To use the terminology of Waltke and O'Connor, a "circumstantial clause introduced by *wyhy* may be followed by a *wayyqtl* form" (Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990], page 553). T. O. Lambdin, although employing differing terminology, still describes the basic usage clearly (Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971], page 123):

> Within a narrative sequence temporal modifiers are very frequently placed before the clause they modify and are introduced by *waw-onversive* + a form of the verb *hāyâh*. In the past tense narrative this is uniformly . . . *wayhī* . . . and in the future (or habitual/durative) narrative it is . . . *wᵉhāyâh*. The temporal clause is then followed by the expected sequential form of the main narrative.

Instances of this phenomenon appear in the midst of historical books in such passages as Genesis 22:20, Judges 17:1, and 1 Samuel 9:1 (Waltke and O'Connor, pages 553-554).

More remarkable, however, is the occurrence of this construction at the very beginning of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 and 2 Samuel), Ezekiel, Ruth, Esther, and Nehemiah. These cases, to be sure, involving *wayᵉhī* may be distinguished to some degree, as they are by Waltke and O'Connor, from those in which strong *waw* with verbs other than *hyh* begins the books of Leviticus and Numbers (Waltke and O'Connor, page 554; although introducing here the terms "strong *waw*" and "weak *waw*" advocated in *Classical Hebrew and the English Language*, fourth edition [CTS, 1998], pages 75-83). Such a distinction, indeed, applies as much or more to the weak *waw* which inaugurates the books of Exodus, Kings, and Ezra. For, admittedly, the circumstantial clause beginning with *wayhī* or *wayᵉhī* constitutes a distinct idiom which possesses more independence than the others beginning with *waw*. At the same time, however, we can by no means simply lay aside the very essence of *waw* as a conjunction.

Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, therefore, quite rightly emphasizes the basic conception which underlies all these cases of biblical books beginning with *waw* of any kind: "The fact that whole books begin with the imperfect *consecutive* ..., and others with *waw copulative* ..., is taken as a sign of their close connection with the historical books now or originally preceding them" (Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius, Emil Friedrich

Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, second edition [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910, with additions and corrections], page 133, footnote 1, where "books" is capitalized). C. F. Keil, in turn, correctly applies this principle to the Book of Jonah in particular when he describes *way'hȳ* as "the standing formula with which historical events were linked on to one another, inasmuch as every occurrence follows another in chronological sequence; so that the *Vav* (and) simply attaches to a series of events, which are assumed as well known ...." (Carl Friedrich Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, translated by James Martin, in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, by C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, (reprinted) 1975]), X:I, page 389). The initiation, then, of a book with *way'hȳ* is a mark of historical intention. The only cases of its use among the so-called Latter Prophets are in Ezekiel and Jonah; and Ezekiel, like Jonah, begins with historical narrative. The Prophet Jonah, then, is following the example of his prophetic predecessors who wrote Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and Samuel in employing this grammatical usage to indicate his historical intention. Jonah was, in turn, followed in the use of the same introduction by his prophetic successors who wrote the books of Ezekiel, Esther, and Nehemiah.

(vii.) The story of Nathan recounts developments which could easily take place in ordinary life. The parable in Job 6 speaks of the wadies of the desert in which the waters come and go every year. For it is, again, the goal of the parable to express more profound truths in terms of ordinary life known to the audience. The Book of Jonah, on the other hand, records very singular events which include, indeed, miracles unique even to Holy Scripture. Modernists have, after all, particularly used the quantity of miracle in the book as being indicative of its legendary rather than historical character. Eiselen, for example, cites a specific number of offending wonders: "Here are twelve miracles in a book of forty-eight verses" (*The Prophetic Books of the Old Testament*, pages 454-455). Thus, it is the very things which motivate the modernists to deny the historical reliability of the book which also make it quite impossible to call it parabolic.

(viii.) The meaning of the story of Nathan is immediately and dramatically clarified at some length in the succeeding context of 2 Samuel 12 (verses 7-9, AV):

[7.] Then Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, 'I anointed thee king over Israel and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. [8.] And I gave thee thy master's house and thy master's wives into thy bosom and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto

thee such and such things. [9.] Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and hast taken his wife to be thy wife and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.'"

The Lord reiterates the case against David in the following verse: "thou hast despised Me and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" (verse 10). It is, therefore, misleading of the Everists to say of the parable of Nathan that "by itself it would appear to be factual." For the parable was never intended to be spoken without the explanation which immediately followed.

Job likewise applies the parable in Job 6 to his three visitors in the words both preceding and following. For he begins with the basic accusation: "my brethren have dealt deceitfully" (verse 15). He then amplifies the accusation in the verses which follow the parable, beginning with the explanatory conjunction (*kī*, verse 21, revising the Authorized Version):

For now ye live not,
Ye see calamity and are afraid.

The Book of Jonah, on the other hand, receives no preceding or succeeding application by way of parabolic clarification. Its usage, instead, in subsequent scriptures consistently assumes its historicity.

B. A Biblical View of Jonah

The actual case, in fact, is quite the contrary of the depiction of Jonah in the *Lutheran Standard*. The prophet's narrative is, in actuality, fully historical both in its intention and in its execution. The historicity of the Book of Jonah clearly follows from the ensuing points:

(1.) The narrative itself, firstly, provides no evidence of any non-historical intention. The teacher who "was surprised to read that Jonah was a parable" stated the actual case quite correctly: "I see nothing in the text that suggests it couldn't be historical." For the burden of proof, in any objective exegesis, clearly rests with those who wish to dispute the historical intention of a narrative rather than with those who are assuming it.

(2.) The book contains, secondly, a variety of historical and geographical references. The Prophet Jonah himself, as previously noted, is identified more specifically in 2 Kings 14:23, and he records the actions of the specific king who was then reigning in Nineveh in a

reduced and harassed Assyria (3: 6-9). The geographical references include, not only Nineveh itself (*passim*), but also the cities of Joppa in Palestine (1:3) and Tarshish in Spain (1:3 and 4:2).

The Book of Jonah presumably came into existence sometime between 783 and 745 B.C., a temporary period of Assyrian troubles which would have made Nineveh more susceptible of repentance; its composition, more specifically, probably took place late in 763 B.C. or shortly thereafter. For 783 B.C. saw the death of Adad-Nirari III (whose mother Sammuramat ruled as regent from 810 to 805 B.C. and was likely the original of the legendary Semiramis), during whose reign there was an approach to monotheism, albeit still paganism. In 745 B.C., on the other hand, a general seized the throne who proclaimed himself Tiglath-Pileser III and founded the Sargonid dynasty. With his accession Assyria firmly retrenched itself in its old evil ways. Between, however, 783 and 745 B.C. intervened a period of weak kings, internal dissension, and external pressure, especially by the Urartu to the north. The prospects of Assyria appeared ominous, and the sense of crisis in the populace reached a melting point in the reign of Assurdan III (771-754 B.C.). A plague in 765 B.C. and a total eclipse of the sun on June 15 in the year 763 reduced the populace to a state of consternation which would have provided a climax to the preparation of Nineveh, in this period, to respond rightly to the preaching of Jonah; another plague struck the country in 759 B.C. The eclipse of 763 was evidently widely regarded as "a sign of celestial wrath. Assur, the home of Assyria's most ancient traditions, revolted and was joined by other cities.... For six years civil war raged, while pestilence devastated the land" (H. R. Hall, *The Ancient History of the Near East*, pages 461-462). Jonah by no means employs, as the critics assume the designation "the king of Nineveh" as the formal title of the monarch of Assyria (3:6), but as a reflection of the reality of his reduced domain in this period of royal impotence.

(3.) The ancient Jews, thirdly, uniformly understood the narrative as historical (Tobit 14:4 and Josephus, *Antiquities*, IX: 10: 2), as did the church of the New Testament during the course of nineteen centuries. Thus, Tobit gives this final charge to Tobias: "My son, take your sons; behold, I have grown old and am about to depart this life. Go to Media, my son, for I fully believe what Jonah the prophet said about Nineveh, that it will be overthrown" (verse 4a, *The Apocrypha of the Old Testament: Revised Standard Version*). The reference is clearly to the preaching of the Prophet Jonah in verse 4 of Jonah 3: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (4b). This prophecy goes unfulfilled, of course, in the Book of Jonah itself by virtue of the repentance of Nineveh at the time, but the author of the Book of Tobit represents his hero as assuming that

the subsequent apostasy of Nineveh would ultimately bring the threatened destruction on the city.

(4.) The testimony, above all, of Jesus Christ is clearly expressed and should be decisive for anyone who believes in His divinity and, consequently, His infallibility even according to His assumed human nature. The Gospel of Matthew affords two separate instances of His witness to the historicity of Jonah (in chapters 12 [verses 39-41] and 16:4), and the Gospel of Luke provides a parallel (11: 29-32). Moderates may wish to vitiate the evidence by arguing that Christ could be using fictional characters and events as illustrations just as easily in the verses cited as when He Himself is telling parables, or when we ourselves use illustrations drawn from modern novels or even cartoons. The specific nature, however, of the references which our Lord makes to the Book of Jonah make such a scenario quite impossible.

(a.) In all these passages, in the first place, the word *sēmeion* ("sign") occurs. In Matthew 16 Jesus states the case without elaboration: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there will be no sign given unto it except the sign of Jonah the prophet" (verse 4, revising the Authorized Version in this quotation and all those which follow in the interests of consistency). In Luke 11 He defines "the sign of Jonah the prophet" as the sign which Jonah constituted as a prophet. The genitives, in other words, in the phrase *to sēmeion Iōnā tou prophētou* are genitives of apposition: "This is an evil generation. It seeketh a sign, and there will be no sign given unto it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be unto this generation" (verses 29-30). The *usus loquendi*, however, of *sēmeion* is an entity or action of an historical nature, even if not (as is often the case) miraculous (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, fourth edition [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952], pages 755-756). Objective exegesis requires us to remain with the common meaning of a word unless the context or analogy of faith compels us to accept a different meaning.

(b.) In Matthew 12, secondly, our Lord assumes the participation of the Ninevites to whom Jonah preached in the resurrection of the dead connected with His second coming: "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah" (verse 41). Luke 11:32 records the same logion in precisely the same words. Jesus, then, and His evangelists regard the Ninevites who repented in chapters 3 and 4 of the Book of Jonah as being equally as real as the Jews whom He is then addressing and, indeed, as real as the final judgment. Although, to be

sure, the majority of Nineveh soon returned its old ways, there were Ninevites who remained faithful to the True God unto death; and these historical penitents we ourselves, if we continue in repentance, shall see by the grace of God in the kingdom of glory.

(c.) In Matthew 12, again, our Lord makes the experience of Jonah a sign of His own burial before His resurrection: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there will be no sign given unto it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (verses 39-40). In verse 40 Jesus is drawing His words from the Book of Jonah itself. Jonah 2:1 in the Massoretic Text describes first the preparation of a "great fish" (*dāg gādhōl*) and then Jonah's sojourn "in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (1:17 in the English Version).

Our Lord, then, treats the events recorded in chapters 1 and 2 of the Book of Jonah as being equally as historical as His own death and resurrection. He asserts, in effect, "As surely as Jonah spent three days in the fish before returning to preach repentance, so surely shall I spend three days in the grave before returning to preach repentance." Modern scholars may decry as simplistic the question often posed by pious laymen, "If I cannot believe that Jonah was swallowed by a fish, how can I believe that Christ arose from the dead?" The fact is, however, that Christ Himself ties the two events together so inextricably in terms of historicity that the question seems quite reasonable.

(d.) In the end, fourthly, our Lord compares His very existence to the existence of Jonah. For in both Matthew 12 and Luke 11 He concludes His logion on Jonah in precisely the same words: *kai idou pleion Iōnā hōde*, "and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (verses 41 and 32 respectively). Jesus is saying nothing if He is claiming to be greater than someone who never existed, and He is saying very little if He is claiming to be greater than someone who merely said the words quoted in verse 25 of 2 Kings 14. The premise of Christ is clearly that Jonah was, indeed, a very notable prophet by virtue of the experiences which He has just mentioned, which is to say the miraculous preservation of Jonah in a fish and the repentance of Nineveh in response to his preaching (Matthew 12 [39-40] and Luke 11 [29-30]).

It is this specific Jonah, as described in the Book of Jonah, than whom the Divine Prophet is still greater. In the end, therefore, our Lord ties together His very existence so inextricably with the depiction of Jonah in the prophet's own book that, logically speaking, one can only deny the historicity of the Book of Jonah by also denying the historicity of

Christ. Or, at the least, one is required by the logic of the case to deny the identity of the historical Jesus as the Self-Existing One who was and is and is to be.

Douglas McC.L. Judisch

Two Significant Archival Collections

It is with great joy, particularly in light of the first article in this issue, that we note the recent announcement by Concordia Historical Institute that the papers of two of the most important pastors and theologians of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod have been arranged and described. Of further note is that both served as president of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne.

The Wilhelm Sihler Collection consists chiefly of materials created and collected by Sihler and especially features his correspondence and sermons. The correspondence is filed in chronological order. Further, it has, for the most part, been transcribed into a typewritten format, which aids the researcher in reading them with ease. The letters remain in their original German. The sermons are arranged according to the books of the Bible (he seems to have preached on more than two-thirds of the books of Scripture), though occasional sermons are included at the end of this section.

Under the heading "Various Writings" are a number of folders containing manuscripts Sihler labeled "Gedankenspäne und Gedankenkeime" (shavings of thoughts and seeds of thoughts). Most of these manuscripts have been transcribed. Finally, there is a handwritten diary of Wilhelm Sihler and a number of photos.

The Robert D. Preus Papers have also been completed and are now available for research. This is a rich and varied collection, which is organized under five headings or series: Profile, Research, Correspondence, Seminary, Removal from Office. Each of the series has its own subseries. While a complete listing and details are available at CHI's website, an outline here may serve to encourage researchers to further in-depth study: 1) Profile: Subject Files, Clippings, Audio/Video, Student Days and Sermons; 2) Research: Subject Files, Writings by Preus, and Writings by Others; 3) Corresondence: General and Secretary; 4) Seminary: Teaching, St. Louis, and Fort Wayne; 5) Removal from Office: Indiana District Commission on Adjudication, Documents/Writings, and Biography.

The opening of these materials for examination and research truly reflects the character of Robert Preus. As president of Concordia

Theological Seminary he was always prepared to greet students and to discuss theology with them. As a first-year seminarian the undersigned responded with some incredulity at Dr. Preus's invitation to "visit me in my office whenever the door is open and we'll talk about theology." Skepticism quickly turned to conviction as Dr. Preus fulfilled his promise. Now, as was the case in his personal career, his papers beckon with the same proposal: come and read and talk about theology. The Preus papers will allow this great teacher to continue to guide confessional Lutheranism into the future.

Both of the collections, along with many others, are available for research at the Institute. A number of finding aids, including those for the collections featured in this piece, may be consulted on the CHI web site at http://chi.lcms.org.

In many ways CHI remains something of an undiscovered jewel in our Synod. It is officially the Department of Archives and History for the Synod. More than a mere storehouse, however, CHI strives to present the living history of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod—the stories and activities, as well as the theological matter of our church. We commend CHI for its ongoing work in preserving and making accessible our heritage as members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and look forward to the completion of other collections in the near future.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

Books Received

Barker, Margaret. *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith.* Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996. xvii + 166 Pages. Paper. $20.00.

Barnard, Leslie W. *Thomas Secker: An Eighteenth Century Primate.* Lewes, Sussex: The Book Guild, 1998. 234 Pages. Cloth.

Baum, Gregory. *The Church for Others: Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany.* Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, England: William B. Eerdmans, 1996. xvii + 156 Pages. Paper, $15.00.

Braaten, Carl E.; and Jenson, Robert W., editors. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998. ix + 182 Pages. Paper. $21.00

Bray, Gerald, editor. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Volume VI, Romans.* Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1998. xxvii + 404 Pages. Cloth.

Charlesworth, James H., editor. *Caves of Enlightenment: Proceedings of the American Schools of Oriental Research Dead Sea Scrolls Symposium (1947-1997).* North Richland Hills, Texas: Bibal Press, 1998. xviii + 139 Pages. Paper. $14.95.

Dahan, Gilbert. *The Christian Polemic Against the Jews in the Middle Ages.* Translated by Jody Gladding. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998. xii + 130 Pages. Paper. $8.00.

Eckardt, Burnell F., Jr. *Every Day Will I Bless Thee: Meditations for the Daily Office.* Sussex, Wisconsin: Concordia Catechetical Academy, 1998. xiv + 514 Pages. Cloth.

Ellison, Robert H. *The Victorian Pulpit: Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth-Century Britain.* London: Associated University Presses, 1998. 178 Pages. Cloth. $34.50.

Floysvik, Ingvar. *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms.* St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Academic Press, 1997. 206 Pages.

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Harris, W. Hall III. *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7-11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1998. xvii + 221 Pages. Paper. $19.99.

Henry, Carl F. H. *God, Revelation and Authority.* 6 volumes. 2nd edition. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1999. Paper.

Horvath, S.J., Tibor. *Jesus Christ as Ultimate Reality and Meaning: A Contribution to the Hermeneutics of Councillar Theology.* URAM Monographs, volume 2. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1994. 60 Pages. Paper.

Loughlin, Gerard. *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xv + 266 Pages. Cloth.

McDowell, Josh; and Hostetler, Bob. *The New Tolerance.* Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1998. ix +233 Pages. Paper.

McIntosch, Mark, A. *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar.* Studies in Spirituality and Theology, volume 3. Notre Dame, Indiana/London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996. xi + 200 Pages. Cloth. $29.00.