

47.3

CONCORDIA SEMINARY LIBRARY
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

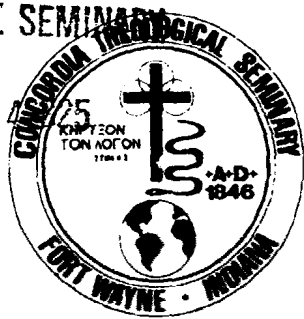
CTQ

Volume 47, Number 3

JULY 1983

Luther on the Church	Eugene F. Klug	193
Luther's Concept of the Resurrection in His Commentary on I Corinthians 15	David P. Scaer	209
The Influence of the Two Delitzsches on Biblical and Near Eastern Studies	Raymond F. Surburg	225
Theological Observer		241
Homiletical Studies		249
Book Reviews		285

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LIBRARY
FT. WAYNE, INDIANA



Theological Observer

PREMILLENNIALISM AND THE AUGUSTANA

A study in the "Theological Observer" section of the previous issue ("Post-millennialism and the Augustana," XLVII, pp. 158-162) argued that, contrary to the vagaries of some nominal Lutherans, postmillennialism is excluded by the Augsburg Confession as well as by the subsequent symbols of the Lutheran church. It is dispensational premillennialism, however, that is currently the most vocal form of popular American eschatology; and some have sought to reconcile also this school of chiliasm with Lutheranism on the ground that the sixteenth century confessions do not speak to the distinctive tenets which congealed into dispensationalism in the writings of J.N. Darby (1800-1882) in the nineteenth century. (The distinctions drawn in my previous study between post-millennialism, historic premillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism are assumed in the present case.) In the course of the last four and a half centuries, to be sure, most students of the Lutheran Confessions have understood the third sentence of Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession as a repudiation of all forms of millennialism. This interpretation was not only unanimous during the Age of Orthodoxy, but is maintained by such modern symbolists as Werner Elert. There are scholars, however, who have restricted the scope of the repudiation in question to a few rabble-rousers on the lunatic fringe of sixteenth-century Protestantism.

Even Edmund Schlink follows this line of thought (*Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J.A. Bouman [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961], p. 284, note 15):

This sentence has long experienced various interpretations. Does it reject every kind of chiliasm . . . , or only a coarse, carnal variety as promoted in word and deed by certain Anabaptists under the influence of Jewish ideas. . . ? Does this condemnation reject Rev. 20, or does it merely reject a brand of chiliasm which contradicts also the Apocalypse, by teaching that the pious will have a world kingdom *before* the resurrection of the dead? Even though the old Lutheran theology generally rejected every kind of chiliasm and understood the millennium (Rev. 20) not as an eschatological event but as a past epoch of church history, it must not be overlooked that the wording of A.C.XVII rejects only a definite perversion of the millennial idea. Plitt rightly observes that "it would be a mistake to turn the point of the last sentence of Article XVII against anything beyond what contemporary history suggested."

By italicizing the word "before" in his third sentence, Schlink is evidently closing the door to the postmillennialists while leaving some room in the house of Lutheranism for at least some "brand" of premillennialism. Two points in this quotation require comment.

For one thing, there can be no serious question of a rejection of Revelation 20 in Augustana XVII. The authors and signitors of the Lutheran Confessions did, to be sure, distinguish between the homolegomenous books of the New Testament and the antilegomena, including the Revelation to John (cf. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, tr. Fred Kramer, I [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971], First Topic, Section VI, pp. 168-195; Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950], pp. 330-338). In actuality, however, almost all of the confessors accepted the apostolicity, and hence the canonicity, of the Apocalypse without reservation. Consequently, Article I of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of

Concord uses Revelation 4:11 to confirm an article of faith (homologoumenous passages being cited first), using the phrase "Scripture testifies" (34). The "book of life" of Revelation 20:15 is thrice equated with Christ in Article XI of the Formula of Concord (Epitome, 7; SD, 13, 25; the manner in which the phrase is quoted, especially in the last citation, shows that the reference is to Rev. 20 as well as to the homologoumenous Phil. 4:3). This figurative understanding of one particular phrase is indicative of the symbolic interpretation which the confessors gave to Revelation 20 in general — in line with the view which, according to the admission of all, had predominated in the church since the time of Augustine. This symbolic interpretation, which sees the present New Testament era as the "millennium" of Revelation 20, arises, indeed, from the Johannine context itself, since, according to its own explicit claim, Revelation 20 is the record of a vision (vs. 1, 4, 11, 12) rather than a prediction in direct terms — even as John previously describes the Book of Revelation generally (1:2; the word *seemainoo* is used by John, like some Greek authors, to refer to prediction in a figurative manner; cf. John 12: 33; 18:32; 21:19). For the confessors, then, the point is obviously not the rejection of Revelation 20, but rather the rejection of an unscriptural interpretation of it.

All forms of premillennialism necessarily collide with confessional Lutheranism, therefore, when they make Revelation 20 the fountainhead of millennial doctrine. Indeed, the liberal-minded premillennialist George Eldon Ladd goes so far as to restrict the doctrinal base of the millennium almost exclusively to Revelation 20. He does, to be sure, see in Romans 11:26 an explicit assertion of a future conversion of the Jewish race (perhaps a nation) and in 1 Corinthians 15:23-26 a possible prediction of an interim Kingdom of God ("Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. Robert G. Clouse [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977], pp. 27-28, 38-39). Yet he acknowledges: "The strongest objection to millennialism is that this truth is found in only one passage of Scripture — Revelation 20 . . . It is a fact that most of the New Testament writings say nothing about a millennium" (*ibid.*, p. 38). Other premillennialists, especially dispensationalists, would find many more descriptions of the millennium, but Revelation 20 still supplies the basic framework of world history into which the exegete is supposed to fit these other references. Even the postmillennial pseudo-Lutheran Franz Delitzsch made Revelation 20 so central to the understanding of Scripture as to insist "that what the Apocalypse predicts under the definite form of the millennium is the substance of all prophecy, and that no interpretation of prophecy on sound principles is any longer possible from the standpoint of an orthodox antichiliasm" (*Isaiah*, tr. James Martin, 2 vols. in 1 [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, rep. 1975], II, p. 492). When Schlink, then, asks of Article XVII:3 of the Augsburg Confession, "Does this condemnation reject Rev. 20 . . .?" we may respond with a definite negative.

At the same time, however, we cannot affirm the alternative which Schlink offers when he asks of Augustana XVII:3, "or does it merely reject a brand of chiliasm which contradicts also the Apocalypse, by teaching that the pious will have a world kingdom *before* the resurrection of the dead?" If Schlink had phrased the question, "or does it reject chiliasm, which contradicts also the Apocalypse" (using a comma to make the relative clause non-restrictive, so as to modify "chiliasm" generally), then we should readily answer in the affirmative. According to Schlink, however, Augustana XVII:3 "rejects only a definite perversion of the millennial idea" and so can be used to exclude only a "brand of chiliasm" promulgated in "contemporary history," namely, "a course, carnal variety . . . promoted . . . by certain Anabaptists under the influence of Jewish ideas . . ." One may concede, indeed, that the immediate occasion of the

Seventeenth Article of the Augsburg Confession was the activity of men like Melchior Rink and the Augsburg Anabaptist Augustin Bader, who was executed at Stuttgart on March 30, 1530. Inspired by Jews residing in Worms, Bader had expected the millennium to begin on Easter of 1530. Yet the confessors clearly have no intention of restricting the scope of their condemnation of chiliasm to several sixteenth-century fanatics.

For one thing, the statement occurs among the twenty-one doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession, in which the goal was to enunciate the articles of faith in a general (although not completely comprehensive) manner by means of affirmations and condemnations. Thus, the conclusion to the doctrinal articles begins with these words in the Latin form: "This is just about the sum of the doctrine among us." The German form enlarges upon this assertion:

This is just about the sum of the doctrine that is preached and taught in our churches for proper Christian instruction and consolation of consciences — also improvement of believers. Certainly we should not wish to put our own souls and consciences in the gravest peril before God by misusing the divine name or word, nor should we wish to pass on or bequeath to our children and posterity any other teaching than that which agrees with the pure divine word and Christian truth.

Consequently, the condemnations attached to the various doctrinal articles are meant to embrace, not only such "brands" of heterodoxy as may be named, but also all who hold similar views. The German form of Article VIII, for example, ends with the *damnamus*, "Accordingly the Donatists and all others who hold contrary views are condemned," while the Latin text repudiates "the Donatists and others like them." Likewise, Article XVII:2 ("Our churches condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils" [Latin form]) clearly denounces all universalists, not just Anabaptists.

The following sentence, Article XVII:3, has an equally general scope. The German text, to be sure, speaks of "some Jewish teachings" (*etlich judisch Lehren*) and describes them as including the idea that the godly will "annihilate" (*vertilgen*) all the godless before the resurrection. The Latin form, however, sets the *damnamus* very broadly on "others" (*alios*) — that is, *besides* the Anabaptists, who are mentioned in the previous sentence — and uses "Jewish opinions" (*iudaicas opiniones*) generically to describe all assertions that "before the resurrection of the dead [1] the godly will take possession of the kingdom of the world, [2] the ungodly being everywhere suppressed" (*oppressis*). This terminology comprehends all brands of chiliasm since the phrase "resurrection of the dead" in Augustana XVII refers, not to a resurrection merely of the just (which occurs before the millennium, according to premillennialism), but to a resurrection of "all the dead" (XVII:1), both believers and unbelievers, "on the last day" (German) or "consummation of the world" (Latin). The German translation preserved in Nuremberg of a Latin text predating the official form of the Augustana includes a similarly comprehensive condemnation of chiliasm when it rejects "those who on the basis of Jewish thinking say . . . that before . . . the last judgment the godless will be everywhere suppressed by the saints and that they [i.e., the saints] will bring the temporal government [*das zeitlich Regiment*, i.e., of the world] under their control [*unter sich*]." Interestingly enough, this document repudiates more specifically the idea "that the promise of the conquest of the promised land must be understood literally," a point which is, of course, central also to modern dispensational premillennialism) — namely, that the predictions by the Old Testament prophets of an Israelite reoccupation of Palestine refer to a physical appropriation in a future millennium. (Orthodox Lutheran exegetes would argue, of course, that the

prophets were speaking in figures of the extension of the church through the proclamation of the gospel in the present New Testament era.)

Another proof that the *damnamus* of Augustana XVII:3 encompasses all brands of millennialism is the assumption of the confessors that the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession accord in an obvious manner with the theology of the great doctors of the western church. The conclusion to the doctrinal articles argues in this way: "Since this doctrine is grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures and is not contrary or opposed to that of the universal Christian church, or even of the Roman church (in so far as one may note this doctrine from the writings of the Fathers), we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above" (1, German form). Likewise, the introduction to Articles XXII-XXVIII, "Articles about Matters in Dispute," begins, "From the above it is manifest [*So nun*] that nothing is taught in our churches concerning articles of faith that is contrary to the Holy Scriptures or what is common to the Christian church" (1, German form). The reference to the "writings of the Fathers" would embrace, above all, St. Augustine, to whom appeal is made in Article XVIII (4) and several more times in the Augsburg Confession (XX:13, 26; XXVI:17; XXVII:2, 35). Now, modern millennialists claim such early authors as Tertullian, Lactantius, and even Irenaeus as fellow-chiliasts, but they admit that Augustine and the post-Augustinian church as a whole was amillennial prior to the Reformation (Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views*, third ed. [Chicago, Moody Press, 1980], pp. 95-96). According to Clouse, indeed, the Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned millennialism as superstition (*op. cit.*, p. 9).

The confessors, moreover, accept the three ecumenical creeds as the most eminent enunciations of the Christian faith outside of Scripture and, indeed, as normative because of their fidelity to Scripture (e.g., AC I:1, "We unanimously hold and teach in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea"; III:6; FC-Ep. Rule and Norm 3, with respect to "the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, we pledge ourselves to them, and we hereby reject all heresies and doctrines which have been introduced into the church of God contrary to them"). And it is clear that the Augsburg Confession understands the phrases, "when He shall come to judge the quick and the dead," "the resurrection of the body," and "the resurrection of the dead," in the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds as all referring to a simultaneous second coming of Christ, bodily resurrection of all the dead, and final judgment of all people in history. Article XVII itself makes this statement: "It is also taught among us that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the last day for judgment and will raise up all the dead, to give eternal life and everlasting joy to believers and the elect but to condemn ungodly men and the devil to hell and eternal punishment" (cf. III:6, "as stated in the Apostolic Creed"). Postmillennialism, to be sure, makes the same connection, but the equation of second coming with final judgment is, as noted previously, contrary to the distinctive essence of premillennialism. The Athanasian Creed itself, indeed, clearly makes these events simultaneous when we confess, "He sitteth at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead; at whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give an account of their own works; and they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire." This same equation of second coming and final judgment occurs in the Apology when Article XVII is succinctly restated. The comprehensive scope of the Augustana's antichiliasm receives confirmation, finally, from the way in which the authors of the Roman Confutation accepted Article XVII "without exception" (Apol. XVII).

In conclusion, one may aptly note that the language of Augustana XVII:3 is quite similar to phraseology used by the Blessed Dr. Luther in a sermon preached some nine years subsequent to the presentation of the Augsburg Confession. Characteristically he described "the chiliasts" — clearly referring not just to a few contemporary sectarians but to millennialists of all ages, including Tertullian — as having "played the fool with the idea that before judgment day the Christians alone will possess the earth . . ." And on this occasion, as on various others, the Reformer pointed out the real *raison d'être* of millennialism (WA 47, 561):

And what moved them to harbor this idea is this, that the ungodly are so fortunate in the world, possess kingdoms and worldly authority, wisdom, and power, while the Christians are of no account in comparison with them. So they thought: Surely, all the ungodly will be rooted out so that the pious may live in peace.

In other words, the theology of glory is the true text of chiliasm; Revelation 20 is merely the pretext.

Douglas McC. Lindsay Judisch

DOES THE STATE OF ISRAEL REALLY DESERVE SPECIAL RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATION?

Recent Israeli military action in Lebanon provides an opportunity for evangelicals to reevaluate their religious commitment to Israel. American foreign policy is strongly influenced by the size and organization of ethnic groups represented in our country. This is simply a fact of political life. Current support for the modern state of Israel goes beyond these dimensions. Not only does Israel claim support from American Jews as either coreligionists or sharers of a common heritage, but it benefits from the even greater numerical support of a majority of evangelical Protestants. Evangelical support for Israel, as a matter of belief, recognizes the Israeli government's claim to the Biblical Caanan, today's Palestine, as a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Israel's right to existence is based by her evangelical supporters not on natural law, applicable to all other nations, but on a specially revealed divine mandate given to Abraham and authenticated by the prophets. A high view of inspiration and inerrancy only serves to intensify this belief. Unlike the support given by ethnic groups to their home countries, Protestant support for Israel is purely a matter of religious conviction, as Protestants do not think of themselves as ethnic, cultural, or religious Jews. Although orthodox Israelis, but certainly not all Israelis, are in agreement with evangelical Protestants in recognizing the special divine character of the Old Testament, the two groups are irreconcilably divided over the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. Jews flatly deny that He has come in the person of Jesus. In spite of this fact, both groups are committed to furthering the causes of the state of Israel. So strong is American Jewish and evangelical Protestant support for Israel that any suggestion of making Israel a secular state for both Jews and Arabs is hardly a live option.

Protestants supporting Israel for religious reasons are most frequently those who are most vocal in calling for a separation between church and state. They remain absolutely opposed to American diplomatic recognition of the Vatican. Any proposal to exchange ambassadors with the pope would bring immediate cries of violating the Constitution. These Protestants do not allow for Roman Catholics what they demand for themselves. They cannot understand that the Vatican's claim to political power is no less mandated by revelation for Roman Catholics than Israel's claim to Palestine is for themselves. The religious problems connected with the special support accorded Israel are more serious than merely that of applying American constitutional principles even-handedly.

One problem connected with Israel's claim to Palestine is determining who are the descendents of Abraham to whom the promise was first given. It is not that clear that modern Israel constitutes all of Abraham's heirs. Many others, now unaware of their Abrahamic lineage, might make a claim to the land. Besides the Jews who claim descent from Abraham through Isaac, Arabs claim a prior descent from him through Ishmael, his first son. After Sarah's death, Abraham had other children through Keturah. Even if the inheritance is narrowed down to Jacob, Isaac's second son (Genesis 25:6), whose God-given name "Israel" is the current national designation, the matter of identifying his descendants through his twelve sons becomes hardly less thorny. Between the eighth and the sixth centuries before Christ, all twelve tribes were carried into captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians. Only a small portion ever returned to Palestine with others maintaining their identity in many different places. Others lost this identity through intermarrying with Gentiles. Such intermarriage could hardly disqualify any progeny from a share in the Palestine inheritance. Obed, King David's grandfather, was himself only half-Jewish. Again in the first century, the Jews who became the first Christians gradually lost their ethnic identity. This loss of Jewish identity could hardly be a cause of disinheritance. On the contrary, one might argue that the claim of such Christian Jews to Palestine has become stronger, as they were Abraham's descendants not only by blood but by faith, which both Jesus and Paul consider the most important. (Today Christians cannot be Israeli citizens!) Abraham lived about four thousand years ago and through these four millenia his descendants have been literally scattered to the world's four corners. All tracing their origins from the Middle East may have Abraham's blood running through their veins. What a disastrous thought for any committed anti-Semite!

There is also the issue of Biblical interpretation. From its very beginning, the Christian Church has recognized itself as the true Israel and the legitimate successor to the Old Testament promises. John the Baptist said that God could find descendants among the

stones for Abraham (Matt. 3:9). Jesus said the Jews who did not believe in Him were not Abraham's descendants because they did not share Abraham's faith (John 8:39, 40). The Gentiles are to take the place of the Jews at the final banquet (Matt. 8:12-13). The parable of the vineyard teaches that God's kingdom is to be taken away from the Jews because of their failure to recognize Jesus as God's Son. Descendants of the Old Testament Jews no longer have an exclusive claim to be God's people (Matt. 21:23-41). Peter took Israel's special designations as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people, and God's own people and transferred them to the church (I Peter 2:9,10). The prophecies about Israel find their living fulfillment in the church today and not in any modern state.

At the heart of the problem lies the recognition of Jesus as the Christ. Essential to the New Testament understanding of Jesus is that He is the fulfillment of all of God's gracious promises in the Old Testament. The church is God's true Israel, but only through faith in Him. Luke records the explicit claims of Jesus that all the Scriptures, including the promises to Abraham's progeny, center in Him (24:27,44). Jesus is to be recognized as the ultimate King, Prophet, Priest, and Temple. Likewise, He is the ultimate "promised land" to which the Old Testament saints looked for rest. The pre-occupation of many Protestants with Israel's real estate claims to Palestine denotes a failure to recognize that the proclamation of Christ is not only the major goal of the Old Testament revelation but its all-embracing goal. Through Him the church becomes God's new Israel, Abraham's true sons. This is not to say Jews have no advantage over Gentiles. They do. Jews brought up on the Old Testament know the Messianic portrait even before recognizing its realization in Jesus. This fact makes their continued rejection of Him all the more tragic. The Jewish advantage is proximity to the Old Testament description of the Messiah and not divinely mandated property rights. Christians detract from the glory of Jesus by seeing in the state of Israel the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Reading the Old Testament as a land contract is of no ultimate significance and detracts from the role of Jesus as the consummation of God's saving revelation. Such religious concern for land deeds is already a stumbling block to the Jews, since they will look to themselves and not Jesus as the total fulfillment of God's promises.

Americans are said to be virtually missionary-minded in their foreign policy as they have shown concern for the peace and prosperity of downtrodden peoples in other lands. European Jewry suffered unimaginably at the hands of the Nazis. The Estonians, the Lithuanians, the Latvians, the Ukrainians, and the Cambodians have likewise suffered at the hands of genocidal dictators in our times. The Israelis themselves are now seen by many as the perpetrators of such sufferings. Christians cannot overlook such suffering. No nation has the right to claim for itself a consideration which others cannot equally share.

David P. Scaer