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Sixteenth-Century Lutheran-Calvinist Conflict on the *Protevangeliu*m

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Since the second half of the sixteenth century Lutheranism has taken a dimmer view of Calvinism than Calvinism has taken of it, largely due to the different perspectives each has on the concept of “evangelical church.” In the Calvinist mind, there is one reformed (evangelical) church over against Rome, and within it one can find various “tendencies.” To classic Lutheranism, the Church of the Augsburg Confession teaches the Gospel in truth, while Calvinism does not. Hence, while confessional Lutheranism acknowledges that there are Christians among the Reformed, it nonetheless insists that the theological issues which set Calvinism apart from it cut to the very heart of the Christian faith and are divisive of fellowship.

This difference in perspective can be traced to the first half of the sixteenth century. Lutherans flatly refused to let “sacramentarians” sign the Augsburg Confession. At Marburg Luther had taken a hard line on the theological matters which impinged on the Gospel, and he saw all doctrine as related to the Gospel. Though Luther made one or two favorable remarks about Calvin, there is evidence that he eventually wondered whether the eloquent Frenchman harbored sacramentarian views — and therefore presumably would have been subject to all the standard strictures.¹

If data on Luther’s views on Calvin are in short supply, we do not lack places to turn for Calvin’s assessment of Luther. He expressed it on several occasions and thereby provided much of the paradigm for his spiritual heirs. “Luther, for him, was not an oracle but a pathfinder: a pioneer, in whose footsteps we follow and whose trail has to be pushed on further. We hurry on, still today, in the path he opened up.” Calvin taught that Protestants all stood beneath an overarching unity of thought (that consensus existed among the anti-Roman reformers “*in tota pietatis summa*”) and that this umbrella encompassed sufficient space for legitimate development. The sacraments made for an obvious area of divergence, but even there Calvin was convinced that he had maintained Luther’s fundamental concern. Thus, Calvin and his followers were amazed and miffed at the criticisms they drew from Lutherans

in the second half of the century, to say nothing of refusals of church fellowship.²

If there had been any place where Lutheranism may have taken a more relaxed view of Calvinism, it easily could have been the field of biblical exegesis. For neither Luther nor Calvin insisted that interpreters must agree with each other concerning every detail of a text. Both allowed a certain freedom in exegesis. But how much? Calvin said his Lutheran opponents were overly restrictive; they thought not.³

This paper contrasts classic Lutheranism's exegesis of a noteworthy Scripture passage with that of classic Calvinism. It will conclude that the two traditions indeed used divergent exegetical approaches, that the differences over which they clashed at the end of the century were essentially the same as those which already existed between Luther and Calvin, and that the differences had hermeneutical and doctrinal import. Thus, the conflict between the positions was basic and unavoidable. The passage in question is the *protevangelium*, Genesis 3:15:

- (15a) I will put enmity between you and the woman,
- (15b) and between your seed and her seed;
- (15c) he shall bruise your head,
- (15d) and you shall bruise his heel.⁴

The main issue which came to the fore in Lutheran-Calvinist debate was this: who or what was the "seed" of the woman?

I. The Conflict in Germ: Luther and Calvin

A. Luther

By the time Luther began lecturing on the *protevangelium* in 1536, he had already told his students that the curse upon the serpent "contains whatever is excellent in all Scripture." Yet, he noted, this text "was not expounded by anyone carefully and accurately, so far as I know." Even among the venerable ancient bishops, sound of doctrine and life, "there is no one who adequately expounded this passage." As for "more recent" interpreters, he criticized their Vulgate-inspired changes of the masculine pronoun *ipse* to the feminine *ipsa*, which set up Mariological understandings of the verse ("she will bruise your head"). He also complained about the

allegories by which even Augustine and Gregory had explained the passage.⁵

To Luther, the comfort of Genesis 3:15 first consisted in that God did not proclaim the same punishment on Adam and Eve as He had on the serpent. Rather, He established a conflict between them and their great enemy. "Moreover, the main point of the comfort is this: Although this enemy fights with cunning and treacheries, the seed will be born who will crush the head of the serpent." Luther maintained that Adam and Eve viewed this text as a Messianic promise pointing to a Man by whom the devil's head would be crushed, his tyranny broken. This Messianic figure would be God, as Luther went on to emphasize against the Mariolatrous Vulgate rendering. He remarked, "They say that by giving birth to Christ, Mary has destroyed all the power of Satan. If this is true, does not the same honor belong to all other women who preceded Mary in the same line?" Luther wanted nothing to take the "glory of our redemption and deliverance" away from Christ.⁶

So he was adamant about the Seed's identity. He paraphrased the curse on the devil: "You have corrupted the flesh through sin and have made it subject to death, but from that very flesh I shall bring forth a Man who will crush and prostrate you and all your powers." Yet, he observed, the curse remained vague enough that its very form vexed the devil: due to it "he suspects all mothers of giving birth to this Seed, although only one woman was to be the mother of this blessed Seed." Eve had thought her first-born son was the God-Man who would crush the devil's head.⁷

Luther also noted that God referred to the Seed of the *woman*. Countless women gave birth in Old Testament times, but "their seed could not in truth be called the Seed of the woman, but rather the seed of a man. But what is born from Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit and is the true Seed of Mary. ...This meaning Isaiah is the first to point out when he says that a virgin will give birth." Thus, the *protevangelium* implied that the Messiah would be conceived without the involvement of a man.⁸ The most striking aspect of Luther's exposition is his insistence that the woman's Seed could be none other than the Christ.

Luther's position on Genesis 3:15 should further be clarified along two lines. First, he has been misunderstood as contra-

dicting himself when he admits that “seed” could refer to “all individuals in general.” In so speaking, however, Luther was merely observing how God mocked the devil by promising a “Seed” who, as far as could be known from the promise, might be born to any woman. The reformer pronounced this expression “an amazing instance of synecdoche.” He repeated that “God wanted to make all women suspect to Satan.” As Luther explained the promise, all women would come under demonic suspicion, not because each of them or each of their offspring was somehow messianic, but rather because any woman could perhaps be the one who would bear the one Seed, the Christ. Similarly, God wanted His people “to expect this salvation from all who gave birth, until the real one came.” The word “Seed” pointed to only one person, the Messiah, and Luther held that the first recipients of the first gospel understood it in just this way.⁹

Secondly, Luther occasionally and in passing depicted Christians attacked by Satan with phraseology from Genesis 3:15. As far as I have been able to determine, he did not directly call Christians the woman’s seed, even when he did predicate of them the kind of enmity with the devil and his seed which the *protevangeliu*m attributed to the Seed of the woman (and, after all, to the woman herself as well). For example, after quoting Genesis 3:15 in his sermons on John, he went on to say, “This is the very enmity Christ is speaking about here [in the sermon text] when He says that His Christians will be excommunicated and put to death.” Moreover, Luther did not cast Christians themselves in the role of defeating the devil; Christ did that as the Seed who “has crushed and still crushes the serpent’s head, although we must run the risk that he, in turn, will bite us in the heel.”¹⁰ When Luther spoke of Christians as subject to the same hatred as the woman’s Seed, he did so to underscore the sufferings which they had to endure in this life. And he made such suggestions not when the *protevangeliu*m formed the chief subject at hand, but rather when it came up incidentally in other discussions. In these cases, the reformer was trying not to interpret the text but to apply it.

In his major expositions of the verse, as in most of his passing references to it, Luther clearly identified the Seed as Christ alone. Even the few exceptional statements just noted contain nothing which directly conflicts with this identifica-

tion. It is significant that, in the Lutheran-Calvinist conflict between Hunnius and Pareus later in the sixteenth century, both sides took Luther's words in his lectures on chapter 3 of Genesis as representative of his position—as, in fact, they were.

B. Calvin

When Calvin reached the *protevangelium* in his Genesis commentary, he declared, "I regard this simply to mean that there should always be the hostile strife between the human race and serpents, which is now apparent...man abhors them." Calvin saw this as the meaning of 15b, and he also detected the idea in 15c. "They shall be troublesome to each other," he summarized. Yet humans retained the upper hand in this struggle since they could inflict the more serious injury.¹¹

But Genesis 3:15 described more than strife between two species of physical creatures. "We must now make a transition from the serpent to the author of this mischief himself; and that not only in the way of comparison, for there truly is a literal *anagogy*...[est enim vere literalis anagoge]." God's final object was to punish the true culprit, the devil. Calvin further noted that this curse-saying would have brought but small consolation to people if it involved serpents but not Satan. Thus, "God here chiefly assails Satan under the name of the serpent" so that people would be wary of Satan and struggle against him with confidence.

Satan loomed as the enemy of all men. Genesis 3:15 showed that enmity between the devil and humans would reach beyond the first generation. Calvin took the expression concerning the woman's seed to mean that hatred would extend "as widely, indeed, as the human race shall be propagated." God singled out the woman for mention because she succumbed to deception first.¹² Like Luther, Calvin criticized Rome's feminine rendering of the pronoun in the next clause, calling it a token of the "ignorance, dullness, and carelessness" which prevailed under the papacy, even among scholars. Continuing with his own exegesis, Calvin said:

There is, indeed, no ambiguity in the *words* here used by Moses; but I do not agree with others respecting their *meaning*; for other interpreters take the seed for

Christ, without controversy; as if it were said that some one would arise from the seed of the woman who should wound the serpent's head. Gladly would I give my suffrage in support of their opinion, but that I regard the word *seed* as too violently distorted by them; for who will concede that a *collective* noun is to be understood of one man *only*?

Calvin saw "the woman's seed" as a general reference to Eve's offspring, adding that his explanation reflected the perpetual nature of the conflict described in verse 15.

But there remained one more phase in his exposition. Since "experience teaches that not all the sons of Adam by far arise as conquerors of the devil, we must necessarily come to one head, that we may find to whom the victory belongs," Christ. Hence, St. Paul could rightly direct his readers to Christ by writing about the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). In the Messiah "the human race, which Satan was endeavoring to oppress, would at length be victorious." Calvin concluded that the church would especially share in the power of its Head to overcome the devil (Romans 16:20).¹³

In sum, Calvin identified the woman's seed, in the several parts of his interpretation, as (1.) all men (as against snakes), (2.) all men (as against the devil), and (3.) Christ as the Champion of all men (and, by extension from Christ, the church). He arrived at Christ because "experience teaches" that all do not conquer Satan; yet, inasmuch as the passage did promise victory over the devil, there had to be "one Head" in whom the race would conquer. Having introduced the "headship" concept, which comes not from Genesis 3:15 but from New Testament passages on Christ and His church, Calvin went on to say that Christ shared with His people the power to overcome the devil.

Luther, as indicated earlier, at times spoke of Christians as subject to the enmity which the Seed of the woman should expect from the devil and his seed. Luther's focus in such contexts, however, was on the sufferings of Christians, not on their victory. In these incidental statements he offered no theological rationale, such as "headship," to include Christians among the woman's seed, as Calvin did. At any rate, Luther's great thrust remained that there was but one Seed of the woman. In this emphasis he differed from Calvin.

The contrast between Calvin's view and Luther's, as set forth in their respective commentaries, becomes most apparent when one considers intentionality. Luther thought God intended in Genesis 3:15 to predict the coming of one person, the Seed. Calvin could say that God wanted to predict victory, but the details of the report were sketchy. It stood to reason that God Himself would have to intervene; hence, the verse had an indirect Messianic character. But Calvin arrived at this Messianic significance in part because of a lesson learned from the experience of generations who failed in the struggle with Satan. Calvin gave no indication that Adam and Eve, who lacked such experience as they stood naked before God, could have come to the Messianic meaning.

II. The Conflict Joined: Hunnius versus Pareus

In 1593 Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603) published a polemical work called *Calvinus Judaizans* ("Calvin the Judaizer"), in which he criticized Calvin for having assumed weak positions in his exegetical writings on prooftexts commonly cited to support the doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Calvin's explanations of the passages so weakened the Biblical basis for these two crucial Christian teachings, Hunnius contended, that they came uncomfortably close to expositions which one might expect from people who were not Christians at all, like Jews or Arians. Hunnius carefully indicated that he did not accuse Calvin of completely rejecting Christianity, but he urgently contended that Calvin opened the window and prepared the way for the basic convictions of Arianism, for example, to enter the picture.¹⁴

Calvinist Old Testament scholar David Pareus (1548-1622) quickly replied to Hunnius in an occasional piece. Later, in 1609, he set forth an interpretation of Genesis 3:15 in his *Commentary on Genesis*.¹⁵ Pareus affirmed that the passage "undoubtedly contains the first Gospel concerning the overthrow of the Satanic kingdom. . . through Christ the Mediator." However, he continued, the brevity and obscurity of its figurative speech have rendered it a difficult verse, not only among those who are hostile to the Gospel (e.g., Jews), but also among Christians.¹⁶

Hunnius in turn attacked Pareus in a 1594 book aptly called *Antipareus* and again in 1599 with *Antipareus Alter*. Though much longer than *Calvinus Judaizans*, this new two-part

assault had the same basic arrangement as the earlier work. It dealt with Pareus' (and Calvin's) expositions of passages on the Trinity and the deity of Christ. As in *Calvinus Judaizans*, Hunnius cited Calvin often, and now he added lengthy quotations from Pareus as well. In the preface to *Antipareus* Hunnius complained about the manner in which his Calvinist opponents, while inveighing against the Arians, had in their own way compromised the teaching that Jesus is God. They always seemed to say that the plain sense of Messianic prophecy did not pertain to Christ, or not to Him alone. The exposition of Genesis 3:15 provided Hunnius his first detailed example. If Calvin had not totally overthrown the passage, he had weakened it as a *sedes doctrinae* by taking "seed" as collective. Further, Hunnius accused Pareus of missing the point when he defended Calvin against charges of Judaizing by attempting to show that Calvin did not Judaize either in his life or in his faith. Pareus had noted that Calvin in fact criticized the Jews. But Hunnius insisted that the issue at hand was Calvin's exposition of prophecy, which stood out as more Jewish than Christian by way of its concessions.¹⁷

Hunnius' criticism of Calvin's exegesis had a twofold thrust. The Lutheran scored Calvin for saying the simple sense of the text denoted a battle between men and snakes, and he further objected to Calvin's reading of "seed" as collective. His two-pronged attack set the stage for the ensuing debate, which can be summarized under these two headings:

A. Men and Snakes

Hunnius began his chapter in *Calvinus Judaizans* on texts concerned with the deity of Christ with Genesis 3:15, "the first promise of the Gospel of them all." Originally spoken by the preincarnate Christ Himself in Eden, subsequently expounded more fully by the prophets, these words served the church of all ages ("omnium seculorum & aetatum ecclesia") as a brief reminder of the Messiah's human nature and of His suffering to carry out His redemptive work. Hunnius said, "By this Gospel our first parents and their pious and faithful posterity sustained themselves and by faith in that sweetest promise the fallen were saved."¹⁸

It would amount to a concession to the devil himself, Hunnius continued, if one would think God only aimed his curse at Adam and Eve or at the natural serpent. Moreover,

“if the Gospel promise concerning the coming Messiah is not set forth by the dominical discourse, it further follows that neither the first people nor the fathers of the *primaeval* world had any clear Gospel; that would be inharmonious with everything a Christian...understands.”¹⁹ Hunnius quoted Calvin’s Genesis commentary and observed that it depicted verse 15 as a reference to the natural serpent and to hatred between men and serpents. He warned that such a view opened a crack to the Jews, who said the passage meant only that and no more.²⁰

For his part, Pareus insisted that the literal sense of Genesis 3:15 involved no obscurity. It indicated there would be a “perpetual variance” between the serpent and Eve and also between their respective offspring, serpents and men. Men would win this fight because God has arranged matters so serpents cannot reach any higher than to attack their feet. Pareus thought that “we neither ought to repudiate this literal sense, nor are we able to do so,” especially since God directed other curses against the serpent, and humans have in fact experienced enmity with snakes.

However, Pareus said the word “He” later in the verse denoted a single seed and formed a clue that the straightforward sense would not exhaust the passage’s meaning. To recognize only the simple sense, he went on, would in effect have been to have taken a stand with the Jews: dwelling on the serpent as the enemy and ignoring man’s more serious plight. “Therefore a mystical sense must be reached and seen, by which God promises men victory over the devil himself.”²¹

Like Calvin, then, Pareus began with a “literal” interpretation which said that Genesis 3:15 predicted a conflict between people and snakes. He moved on rather quickly, however, to a Messianic exposition of the “mystical sense,” impelled not only by the need to have a champion of mankind who could successfully do battle with the devil (as Calvin said), but also by two reasons which reflected Hunnius’ concerns: (1.) the necessity of avoiding a Jewish (a non-Messianic, even non-Satanic) interpretation, and (2.) grammar, namely, that the word “He” referred to an individual.

In *Antipareus Alter*, Hunnius was not satisfied, however, with this kind of exegesis. He continued to complain that

Calvin reduced the struggle of Genesis 3:15 to humans versus snakes, and he criticized Pareus' willingness to defend Calvin's "impious gloss."²²

B. The Number of "Seed"

Here lay the heart of the conflict. In *Calvinus Judaizans*, Hunnius drew particular attention to "how audaciously" Calvin claimed that the word "seed" should not be interpreted individually, and thus that he could not join with those who saw in it a direct prophecy of Christ. "Listen, apostle Paul," Hunnius wrote sarcastically, "after so many years one has been found in the midst of the assembly of the Christian Church who might drive a note of absurdity against your exposition, in which you most clearly explain the collective noun 'seed' concerning the one man Jesus Christ." Then Hunnius quoted Galatians 3:16, the Pauline text which he had in mind: "Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring. It does not say, 'and to offsprings [*seminibus*],' referring to many; but to one, 'and to your offspring [*semine*],' which is Christ."²³

Hunnus said that Calvin was wasting effort when he finally arrived at his analogical interpretation of the *protevangelium*. By that time he had blunted the passage and overturned the *fundamentum* of the evangelical promise. And regardless of Calvin's exposition, which included mere people among the seed, Hunnius maintained that it was the work of the Son of God alone to grind the devil's head (1 John 3:8). Hunnius therefore complained that Calvin had distorted Romans 16:20 when he claimed that the power to crush the devil had been granted to believers. Besides, Hunnius added, if Calvin thought the whole church possessed such power, why did he object so strenuously to the Vulgate rendering of verse 15? After all, Mary was "an exceedingly noble member of the church." Should not she have been able to crush the devil?²⁴

In his analysis Pareus fastened on 15b as an indicator that hostility between the woman and the serpent would not come to an end with Eve's death; it would instead be passed along to her offspring. Frequently, he asserted, the Hebrews used the term "seed" collectively, as in God's promises to Abraham to be his God and that of his seed, or to give the land to his seed, or to multiply his seed. In other places the word referred to an individual, as in Genesis 4:25, 22:18, 15:3, and 21:13. In the case

at hand, Pareus continued, the “seed of the serpent” constituted a collective name for all families of devils. It also meant reprobate people, whose leader is the devil (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8,10). Against this group God opposed “the seed of the woman, that is, the posterity of Eve, as many as are not of the seed of the serpent that is, the entire church of elect men in the world.” Pareus maintained that here “the seed of the serpent [is taken] collectively; I do not know whether any reason permits the seed of the woman to be taken individually.” Furthermore, God said enmity against Satan would be transferred from the woman to her seed; and indeed we know it did reach all Eve’s pious sons, the elect of the Old and New Testaments.²⁵

Pareus’ last argument is formally invalid, for Genesis 3:15 did not say that the seed *alone* would hate the devil. Otherwise, it is noteworthy that Pareus reasoned chiefly from the context: If the serpent’s seed was collective, the seed of the woman should also be collective. So while he differed with Calvin on the precise nature of the collectivity (Calvin said it was the human race while Pareus said it was the elect²⁶), Pareus insisted that the “seed” in 15b was collective, not individual.

Pareus disagreed with Calvin again when he came to 15c, for he thought that the word “He” was a definite reference to Christ. There would be no final victory, Pareus said, until the action of 15c took place, namely, that Christ Himself would come and defeat the devil. He observed that there was an *athnach* under the word *zar’ah*, just before 15c, and concluded that God placed it there so readers would not confuse this portion with what preceded it.²⁷ But then he added, surprisingly, that “‘He’ should certainly be read as the seed; or ‘He’ as Christ.” Was Pareus now recognizing that the “Seed” of 15b denoted Christ alone? Not really; a few lines later he clarified his thought by stating that the “He” of 15c denoted “the Seed of the woman, that is, a certain one from among this seed, as if he goes forth from the midst for battle, an athlete and hero more robust and strong than the devil, certainly Christ.”²⁸ Thus, while Pareus favored a distinction between 15b and 15c and maintained that “the woman’s seed” in 15b remained collective while “He” in 15c was singular, he tacitly admitted this much overlap between the two expressions: “He” was the Seed (singular) in that He was the great champion from among the seed (collective).

In his commentary Pareus listed reasons why, in 15c, “the Seed of the woman is not to be understood collectively as before, but individually. . .concerning Christ”:

1. The word “He” was used instead of a repetition of the noun “his seed.” Thus, God separated this portion of the verse from what preceded it. Pareus conceded the weakness of this argument by itself, but he urged that it be considered together with the others.

2. The Septuagint rendered “He” with the word *autos*.

3. Opposed to the Seed in 15c stood not another seed, as in 15b, but the serpent himself, an individual.

4. The word *conterere* or, more generally, the idea of the fight and the mode of victory suggested a single entity.

5. It took divine strength to crush Satan’s reign (Zechariah 3:2, Romans 16:20). But the one prophesied would be both the Seed of the woman and God.

6. God sometimes spoke individually of Christ as “seed” (Galatians 3:16,²⁹ 1 Chronicles 17:11 [in which the seed was Christ; Solomon was not involved]; see also Isaiah 9:6).

7. Genesis 3:15 attributed to this seed the proper office of the Christ, namely, to break the power of Satan (Psalm 68:19, Psalm 110:6). David, Joshua, and Samson were only types; Christ was victor over Satan directly.

8. The New Testament showed the fulfillment of this promise in Christ alone (1 John 3:8, John 14:30, Luke 10:18, John 12:31, 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 20:2).

Pareus claimed that he personally held to “the received interpretation” of the individual Seed of the woman. To his mind, the pronoun “He” designated this individual seed; on this point, he disagreed with Calvin. Yet he maintained that Calvin’s adversaries had maliciously twisted the Frenchman’s opinion and that Calvin’s interpretation was not new, since it had the support of old authorities.³⁰ Furthermore, Pareus said Calvin did not overturn the foundation of the promise, for its certainty rested not in the subject (presumably “He” in the last part of the verse) but in the predicate (“will crush your head”). The Jews cannot deny this point, Pareus averred, for no one but Christ could do that work. So Calvin did lead to Christ, he concluded, albeit by a somewhat different approach

than others used. Moreover, Pareus pointed to a difference between the collective interpretation which Calvin adopted and that of the Jews. "Calvin so refers to the human race that he nevertheless teaches that necessarily it would have to come to one head, which is Christ." And he was preceded in his view by Chrysostom, Eucherius, Procopius, and Augustine. No one is without error. If Calvin had made a mistake here, he was in good company.³¹

Pareus cited the work of some of the expositors, ancient and recent, who had taken the woman's seed as collective. Chrysostom and Procopius both used Luke 10:19 as a parallel passage to Genesis 3:15, though in different ways: Chrysostom to allude to the victory promised in Genesis 3 without giving any details on how the victory would be won; Procopius to urge divine discipline upon Christians so they would live as the seed of the woman.³²

Among more recent exegetes, Pareus named Brenz and Marbach and even quoted Luther's Genesis 3 lectures: "The seed of the woman sounds in general concerning all individuals and nevertheless concerning only one individual."³³ In reality, of course, Luther's words did not support the collective interpretation, as was shown above. When he referred to all individuals, he was affirming that there was only one Seed, but the devil had no advance knowledge from Genesis 3:15 about when and where He would appear. Interestingly, Pareus made no appeal to the exceptional statements of Luther which we examined earlier. A work like *On the Councils and the Church*, in which one of these assertions occurred, was hardly obscure. The point is that, even in these exceptional statements, Luther did not directly designate Christians as the "seed."

Pareus was convinced he had to do precisely that, on the basis of 15b. He also, in a way similar to Calvin's, wanted to draw Christians in with Christ as part of the "He" of 15c: "Because it is said concerning the head, it pertains by participation to the whole body." Pareus argued from analogy. Satan bit Christ on the heel, but since Christ was the Head, His death pertained to the whole body. So Christians suffer and die with Him, and by virtue of His victory they would daily fight sin, death, and Satan, and win. "Therefore under this Seed, which is Christ, all the faithful are also contained." Pareus listed several reasons for this view: (1) The head and

the members are all from one (Hebrews 2:11); (2.) Christ has seed (Isaiah 53:10); (3.) Satan bites the heel not only of Christ but also of all the faithful; (4.) victory over Satan is distributed from the head to all the members according to Romans 16:20.³⁴

Hunnius began his lengthy treatment of Genesis 3:15 in *Antipareus Alter* with general arguments for his interpretation. If the *protevangelium* were not about the overthrow of Satan's kingdom, the great seducer would have gone unpunished. If it had not included a promise of the Messiah, Adam and Eve would have been left in terrors of conscience with no promise; they needed the consolation which could come only from the Gospel, not from the Law or from the ability to step on snakes. Given the enormity of the redemptive task, the "Seed" who would accomplish it could only be Christ, even if the fruit of His work pertained to great numbers of people.³⁵

Hunnius called attention to Pareus' two basic reasons for his collective interpretation of "seed." First, Pareus said it was a collective noun which could be used of individuals, but in Genesis 3:15 it was set in opposition to the (collective) seed of the serpent. Second, Pareus noted that enmity against Satan pertains to all men; thus, he went on, the promise of victory pertained to all.³⁶

In response to the first reason, Hunnius pointed out that even Pareus could cite instances of an individual use of "seed" (e.g., Genesis 4:25, Genesis 21:13). He added that it appeared to be a rule in the Scriptures that wherever "seed" clearly meant the Messiah it should be taken individually instead of collectively. He cited Genesis 22:18 (the promise contained there, he said, was repeated in Genesis 26 and 28), 2 Samuel 7:12-14, Galatians 3:16, 19, and Hebrews 2:16. Later in his treatment Hunnius defended the application of Galatians 3:16 to Genesis 3:15 at some length. The same Seed which had been the subject of the promise in the garden became the subject of the promise to Abraham. Both prophecies referred to great blessings which only God can provide. Against Pareus' initial suggestion that Galatians 3:16 did not deny that the seed was collective, Hunnius rhetorically asked why Paul should concede the collective meaning just when he was opposing the one to the many. And Paul was not talking about external blessings when he urged the unity of the Seed; rather, he was dealing with the promises of redemption, which was solely God's work.³⁷

Against the idea that the “seed” of the serpent encompassed a group and therefore that the woman’s seed should also have been collective, Hunnius again responded that the work of the latter (crushing the devil’s head) could only be God’s work. Since there is but one God, the Seed in question was the Seed of the woman, not the man. Yet if “seed” had been collective, males would necessarily have been involved.

Hunnius turned to Pareus’s second reason and declared that confusion of questions leads to fallacies. “For it is not asked whether the promise of victory over Satan ought to be extended to all...but it is asked: Who is it who is about to give this victory?... This one truly is Christ alone...” Hunnius was pleading for a distinction between the work of redemption and its fruit. He reiterated this plea later, in response to Pareus’ rhetorical question, “Does not the church crush Satan in Christ?” Since the predicate in Genesis 3:15 was limited—crushing the devil’s head belonged exclusively to someone with divine power—the subject must likewise have been so limited, and the Seed of the woman must be Christ, not Christians.³⁸

After answering Pareus’ claims, Hunnius resumed his attack. According to Pareus, the Jews said the seed of the woman signified the human race, but not Christ. “The Jews do not draw this conclusion,” Hunnius corrected. “The conclusion of their argument is that it [the seed] is not therefore *only* Christ. For the Jews do not doubt that the Christ ought to be of the human race.”³⁹ He also chided Pareus for his willingness to appeal to Galatians 3:16 against the Jews without simultaneously realizing that this passage dismantled his and Calvin’s interpretation of “seed” in Genesis 3:15.⁴⁰

Hunnius added that he was unimpressed with Calvin’s partners in exegetical error, even if they included Chrysostom and Procopius. However, he said neither of them bore the same guilt as Calvin; they had not formally set forth Calvin’s rule that “seed” *must be* collective, “nor do they accuse the Christian interpreters who take the ‘seed’ without controversy as Christ of ‘violent distortion.’”⁴¹

Hunnius recognized that Pareus had his disagreements with Calvin, but they gave him little cause for celebration. In fact, he pressed his case against Pareus in much the same way as he had criticized Calvin in the first place. Again, the burden of his argument for the singular “Seed” rested on Galatians

3:16 and on the analogy of faith, namely, that only God can defeat the devil.⁴² Two, if not three, underlying premises informed Hunnius' position: (1.) that it was inconceivable to proclaim the Gospel of victory over Satan without identifying the Victor over Satan; (2.) that this Gospel was the only message capable of uplifting people defeated by sin and the devil; and (3.) that to interpret verse 15 as a prophecy of the battle which people wage against the devil would have cast it as Law, not Gospel. Hunnius seems to have had the last consideration in mind when he objected to Calvin's (and Pareus') concluding claim that the church, too, crushed the devil's head.

III. The Conflict Assessed: Lutheran-Calvinist Differences

A. *The Number of Senses*

Calvin and Hunnius agreed that the *protevangelium* would have offered no real comfort to Adam and Eve if it had merely indicated that they would be able to step on snakes, but the inferences which the two sides drew from this realization differed vastly. To Calvin it suggested the existence of a second sense in which he should explain the passage; his champion Pareus even spoke explicitly of a mystical sense besides the literal sense. But Hunnius concluded that the genuine sense of the verse had to involve something other than men versus snakes. His presupposition, so obvious to him that it went unexpressed, was *sensus literalis unus est*. For a Lutheran like Hunnius, the Messianic sense of this passage was the "literal" sense, the one sense God intended in the *protevangelium*.⁴³

B. *The Context*

Pareus established the number of "seed" from the context as he compared the seed of the woman with the seed of the serpent. He apparently found it difficult to believe that the passage meant the collective seed of the serpent should oppose a single Seed of the woman. Yet that was exactly what Hunnius (like Luther) said. While there would be symmetry in a prophecy about a battle between the collective seeds of the serpent and of the woman, the Lutherans felt no compulsion to preserve such symmetry for its own sake. They did not advocate an interpretation that "fit the context" at the expense of other considerations.

C. Experience and Reason

A related subject is the role of appeals to experience in Calvinistic exegesis. As they interpreted Genesis 3:15 both Calvin and Pareus explicitly reasoned on the basis of experience—the former to reach the “one Head,” since all men obviously do not conquer Satan; and the latter to identify “all Eve’s pious sons” as her seed, because it is apparent that hatred for the devil has spread to them all. Calvin and Pareus might have tried to establish these premises on the basis of Bible passages, but they did not.

Even if they had, however, it is still important to note the ways in which they employed these items of information in their arguments. Calvin took the failure of the seed (all men) to defeat the devil as an opportunity to draw the New Testament concept of Christ’s headship into his discussion of Genesis 3:15. Pareus, as noted previously, constructed a faulty syllogism from his insight. But in neither case was it clear, from the Lutheran viewpoint, that such reasoning was at all appropriate. Calvin mixed distinct biblical themes with the result that one mitigated the other. Pareus attempted to reason from effect to cause (namely, that since the elect of all ages have hated the devil, therefore they must be the seed described in Genesis 3:15) without a clear word that God willed that and only that effect. In this respect Lutheran-Calvinist exegetical differences on Genesis 3:15 parallel more celebrated controversies between the two groups, as in the case of Lutheran objections to the Calvinist use of experience and reason in discussions of predestination.

D. The Use of the New Testament

If Hunnius appeared rather satisfied with his case concerning “seed,” this was largely due to the authority on which he rested it. Important as all other factors might have been, the testimony of Galatians 3:16 settled the matter for him. Lutherans routinely regarded New Testament interpretations of Old Testament texts as correct and binding.⁴⁴ Hunnius simply assumed this principle; he took pains to show that Galatians 3:16 genuinely applied to the woman’s Seed as well as to the Seed of Abraham, but beyond that he maintained that the text spoke for itself. He did not dismiss Calvin’s reference to Romans 16:20 because he objected to explaining Old Testament passages on the basis of the New Testament.

Rather, he observed that the verse said *God* would subdue Satan, not that the church would (as Calvin claimed).

Since Lutherans recognized only one sense of the text, they held that the same meaning obtained in Old Testament times as in New Testament times. Luther and Hunnius were confident that Adam and Eve and their offspring, no less than they themselves, understood Genesis 3:15 as a description of the Messiah's person and work.

On the Calvinist side nothing quite compares with this attitude. Certainly, Calvin and Pareus were aware of Galatians 3:16, but they regarded it as, at most, one factor among many to be considered in expounding Genesis 3:15. In any case, it is *not* clear that Calvin thought the New Testament interpretation of an Old Testament passage was necessarily the only correct one.⁴⁵

E. The Approach to the Old Testament

Heinrich Bornkamm characterized Luther's approach to the Old Testament by saying that, while the reformer recognized the presence of many christological prophecies there, he also recognized the import of Old Testament history as such: "Thus even the events of Israelite history attained a significance for the believer; they were not just transparencies for a higher future event."⁴⁶ To be sure, Luther regarded Genesis 3:15 as a direct Messianic prophecy. The point which can be made here, however, is that his exposition did not turn subsequent history into a "transparency," as the Calvinist approach was wont to do. For Luther, the *protevangelium* did not point to a general human fight with the devil as a picture of what Christ would eventually do, or even what He would do preeminently well. Rather, the passage foretold the decisive battle which God alone could win over Satan and which He would win in the Messiah.

F. Doctrinal Implications

The previous portions of this summary of Lutheran-Calvinist differences have been devoted mostly to hermeneutical issues. In this last part, however, we focus on a point with direct doctrinal significance: though Hunnius insisted that the battle against Satan in Genesis 3:15 could only be fought by the Messiah, Calvin and Pareus each held in his own way that the battle was also that of men against the devil. Thus, the Calvinists included the Law as part of the "first Gospel."

Perhaps Pareus' disagreements with Calvin struck Hunnius as something of an improvement, but in the overall soteriology of Genesis 3:15 Hunnius held that the basic difficulty remained, even with Pareus. For Pareus still viewed the *protevangeliu*m as a mixture of Law and Gospel, while for the Lutherans it was pure Gospel. Here too we encounter a classic and characteristic difference between the two traditions: "Both acknowledge that the chief article of the Christian faith is the forgiveness of sins: the Lutherans consider it the *whole* content of the Gospel, while the Reformed consider it the *principal* content of the Gospel."⁴⁷

Conclusion

It comes as no surprise that Lutherans and Calvinists tried to repristinate the views of the magisterial reformers also in exegesis. Though Pareus did not adhere to Calvin's view in the strict way that Hunnius repeated Luther, he refused to concede that there was anything doctrinally objectionable about Calvin's exposition. He reasserted the two aspects of it which Hunnius had singled out for attack. His willingness to defend Calvin while disagreeing with him over the "He" of 15c illustrates the Calvinistic opinion that there were many ways to walk the path.

Given the polemic between Hunnius and Pareus, their allegiance to Luther and Calvin points further, to a less common conclusion: that the fundamental differences between these two conflicting schools of thought were rooted in their very beginnings. There never had been a unified Protestant approach to biblical interpretation. Historically, this observation forms evidence against the idea of a great, originally or essentially united evangelical church. Dogmatically, it can help to explain how theologians with deep commitments to Scripture as the source of theology could set forth such disparate versions of the biblical message.

ENDNOTES

1. See Brian A. Gerrish, "The Pathfinder: John Calvin's Image of Martin Luther," *The Old Protestantism and the New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 31-32; 286-287, n. 53. Luther made these statements at table: "Sic Calvinus de re

sacramenta occultat suam sententiam. Sic sein irr und konnens nicht reden. Quia veritatis oratio simplex est," *WATr* 5, 51 (#5303); "Calvinus est vir doctus, sed valde suspectus de errore sacramentariorum," *WATr* 5, 461 (#6050).

2. See Gerrish, pp. 39, 41, 46, *et passim*.
3. Gerrish, p. 41.
4. This is the RSV translation.
5. *LW* 1, 183, 184 (*WA* 42, 137, 138).
6. *LW* 1, 190-92 (translation somewhat revised; *WA* 42, 142-44). As late as 1520, in the *Babylonian Captivity*, Luther was willing to speak of the *protevangelium* as a prophecy of a woman who would crush the devil's head. See *WA* 6, 514 (*LW* 36, 39).
7. *LW* 1, 193 (*WA* 42, 144). See *LW* 1, 241-42 (*WA* 42, 179) and *LW* 15, 319-23 (*WA* 54, 71-75).
8. *LW* 1, 194 (*WA* 42, 145).
9. *LW* 1, 195-96 (*WA* 42, 146). The American Edition footnote referring to Luther's use of the word "synecdoche" says, "in this case, the species is used for the genus" (*LW* 1, 195, note 42). But this is the opposite of Luther's point; the editor assumed that the intended sense of "seed" in verse 15 is collective, and the figurative aspect therefore consists in that the word can also denote an individual. Instead, Luther said the intended sense in this passage was individual. Note that Luther's position was reasserted in FC-SD, V:23.
10. *WA* 46, 19-20 (*LW* 24, 319), *WA* 50, 653 (*LW* 41, 178); also see *WA* 43, 468 (*LW* 5, 58).
11. *Corpus Reformatorum* 51, 69-70; translated in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, volume 1, tr. by John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), pp. 167-68.
12. King translation, pp. 168-70; *CR* 51, 70-71.
13. King translation, pp. 170-71; *CR* 51, 71. Regarding the church's victory over the devil, Calvin quoted Romans 16:20.
14. See Aegidius Hunnius, *Calvinus Judaizans, Opera Latina, Tomus Secundus* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Impensis Iohan. Iacobi Porsij Bibliopolae, 1608), col. 636f.
15. It is hard to determine which was the work where Pareus first tried to defend Calvin from Hunnius' *Calvinus Judaizans*. According to one source, it was *Clypeus Veritatis Catholicae de Sacrosancta Trinitate* (*Realencyklopädie für protestantische*

Theologie und Kirche, s.v. "Pareus, David"), but it also could have been *Calvinus Orthodoxus de Sacrosancta Trinitate: & de Aeterna Christi Divinitate*. In neither case have I been able personally to consult the work in question; I have had to rely (with results quite sufficient for present purposes) on key Pareus quotations in Hunnius' later writings or on Pareus' *Commentarius in Genesin*, which includes a less polemically-charged summary of arguments against Hunnius and even mentions him by name. The commentary is in Pareus' *Opera Theologica Exegetica*, Pars Secunda, compiled by John Philip Pareus (Frankfurt: John Rose, 1647).

16. Pareus, *Commentarius*, p. 101.
17. Aegidius Hunnius, *Antipareus, Opera Latina*, pp. 697, 701.
18. Hunnius, *Calvinus Judaizans*, col. 654.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., col. 655.
21. Pareus, *Commentarius*, p. 102.
22. Hunnius, *Antipareus Alter, Opera Latina*, col. 932.
23. Hunnius, *Calvinus Judaizans*, col. 655.
24. Ibid., col. 656.
25. Pareus, *Commentarius*, p. 102.
26. In *Antipareus Alter* Hunnius chided Pareus for being unable to make up his mind, since at one point he said the woman's seed was the human race; col. 937.
27. Pareus, *Commentarius*, pp. 102-103.
28. Ibid., p. 103.
29. Again, Pareus was inconsistent. In his first response to Hunnius he ventured to say that Galatians 3:16 did not deny the collective nature of the "seed"; it simply meant that while many offspring might follow to Abraham according to the flesh, the promises were attached to only one, to Christ; see *Antipareus Alter*, col. 941.
30. Pareus, *Commentarius*, p.104.
31. Ibid. Unlike the Jews, Pareus contended, (1.) Calvin took the enmity of which verse 15 spoke to include that which exists between Satan and us; (2.) Calvin would indeed say more about Christ than he would say about a mere man; and (3.) Calvin affirmed that crushing the serpent's head was the victory of Christ over the devil.

32. Chrysostom's *Homily 17 on Genesis* is translated in Thomas P. Halton, et al., gen. eds., *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, 74 vols. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), volume 74: *St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 1-17*, tr. by Robert C. Hill, pp. 237-38. Procopius of Gaza's *Commentarii in Genesin* is quoted in Tibertius Gallus, *Interpretatio Mariologica Protoevangelii (Genesis 3:15) Tempore post Patristico usque ad Concilium Tridentinum* (Rome, 1949), pp. 7-8.
33. Pareus, *Commentarius*, p. 102; on Luther, see the text at note 14 above.
34. Pareus, *Commentarius*, p. 104.
35. Hunnius, *Antipareus Alter*, cols. 930-31.
36. *Ibid.*, col. 933.
37. Hunnius, *Antipareus Alter*, cols. 933-34, 941-42 (compare the text at note 35 above).
38. *Ibid.*, cols. 934, 944, 935.
39. *Ibid.*, cols. 935.
40. *Ibid.*, col. 936.
41. *Ibid.*, cols. 939-40.
42. Hunnius found support for the claim that only God could defeat Satan in 1 John 3:8. Again he echoed Luther, who in 1527 commented thus on that passage: "Here you have the fulfillment of the first sermon of the gospel. The seed of the woman had to be born to destroy the works of the devil"; *LW* 30, 272 (*WA* 20, 705).
43. Karl Holl said Luther broke new hermeneutical ground by not equating spiritual understanding of a text with an allegorical explanation of its meaning; "Luthers Bedeutung für den Fortschritt der Auslegungskunst," *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, sixth ed., 3 vols. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1932), volume 1: *Luther*, p. 556-58. The Lutheran Confessions and the period of orthodoxy followed Luther's idea that the "literal" sense of a text was the native sense intended by the author, not necessarily a non-figurative sense. See Ralph A. Bohlmann, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions*, second ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983), pp. 86-87, and Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), pp. 321-22, 326. This study of Genesis 3:15 shows that it is only partially correct to conclude, "In consonance with

the principle of the one sense of Scripture Calvin, like Luther, flatly denied the Catholic doctrine of multiple senses," as does Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 119.

44. See Preus, pp. 333-35.
45. For example, Calvin indicated that the evangelists did not understand a figure in Psalm 22 and departed from the native sense as they applied it to the events surrounding the passion of Christ. See *CR* 75, 416.
46. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, tr. by Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), p. 259.
47. Herman Sasse, *Here We Stand*, tr. and rev. by Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), p. 121 (emphasis original). The Law and Gospel issue should be raised whenever Calvinist hermeneutics are discussed, including Calvin's typology. To Calvin, a type was like a charcoal sketch while its antitype resembled a finished painting; he said the Law revealed the former while the Gospel revealed the latter. In this scheme, type and antitype can become a vehicle by which to confuse Law and Gospel, which according to Calvin only differ from one another in the clarity of their manifestation. See Lewalski, p. 119. Her entire fourth chapter is quite informative, but unfortunately it treats Luther only in his earlier exegesis.

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