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Contents

PAGE

EDITORIALS

M. Luther, b. Nov. 10, 1483(?)..... 2

Who speaks for the Missouri Synod?..... 4

A DANISH LUTHERAN DOGMATICS IN ENGLISH GARB: A REVIEW ARTICLE OF PRENTER'S CREATION AND REDEMPTION

RAYMOND F. SURBURG, Department of Exegetical
Theology, Springfield, Illinois

EVANGELICAL TESTIMONY AT SITTENSEN..... 3

OTTO F. STAHLKE, Department of Systematic Theology,
Springfield, Illinois

WHO CAN THIS BE? A REVIEW ARTICLE..... 4

EUGENE F. KLUG, Department of Systematic Theology,
Springfield, Illinois

BOOK REVIEWS 6

BOOKS RECEIVED 6

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A Danish Lutheran Dogmatics In English Garb:

A Review Article Of Prenter's Creation And Redemption

By RAYMOND F. SURBURG

REGIN PRENTER is today considered to be one of the outstanding Lutheran theologians of Europe. At present he is professor of theology at Aarhus University, Denmark. He began his career as preacher in a rural parish, later becoming one of the preachers at the Cathedral at Aarhus and assistant professor at the University. In 1944 he received his doctor's degree in theology from the University of Copenhagen and was named full professor. During the Second World War he served in the resistance movement against the Nazis. He was a participant in the Anglo-Scandinavian Theological Conferences of 1935, 1939, 1947, and 1950. Later Prenter became chairman of the Commission on Theology of the Lutheran World Federation. In 1952 he delivered the Ely Foundation Lectures at Union Theological Seminary, New York, N.Y. In 1958 he delivered one of the Luther lectures (published in the volume: *More about Luther*), sponsored by Luther College of Decorah, Iowa. He has been the recipient of honorary doctorates from the universities at Strasbourg, Lund, and Reyjavik.¹

He is the author of a number of major works and of numerous periodical articles. Four of his major books have been translated into English from Danish. They are: *The Word and the Spirit*,² *Spiritus Creator*,³ *Creation and Redemption*¹ and *The Church's Faith*.^{4a} *Creation and Redemption* was first published in Danish between 1951-1953. A wider circle of students became acquainted with the work when it was translated into German and appeared under the title of *Schöpfung und Erlösung* in 1958. An authorized English translation was made by Theodore Jensen of Wartburg Theological Seminary of Dubuque, Iowa. In the preface to the English edition Prenter states that although some significant theological works have appeared between 1955 and October 1966, "in everything that pertains to the dogmatic substance of the present work my position remains unchanged" (p. v.). The title of the book, *Creation and Redemption*, might give the impression that the volume was limiting itself to a discussion of the doctrines of creation and redemption. However, a reading will show that Prenter covers the entire field of Christian theology from a Lutheran point of view and it, therefore, can be considered a Lutheran dogmatics. The reason for this designation will later be discussed and evaluated. In contrast to other Lutheran dogmatics, it should be noted that Prenter's volume was written out of the culture of his native Denmark and takes especially into consideration Biblical studies as reflected upon the European continent.

Reviewers of the German and English editions of Prenter's

volume have been highly complimentary of and favorably impressed with Prenter's dogmatical organization and presentation. One American Lutheran reviewer has boldly stated that the work of the Scandinavian theologian should be adopted by American Lutheran theological seminaries. He believes that Prenter's book is able to relieve the long theological drought that has characterized the American scene, "where dogmatics at the theological schools has passed through a long, dry season with little harvest, the publication of this English translation is good news. Yet it is not only the seminary that feels the drought; the parched earth shows in the church colleges and in the parishes too."⁵ "This dogmatics is recommended because it will make sense to clergy and laity alike."⁶ The reviewer in the *Concordia Theological Monthly* stated that he had been looking forward to its publication in English ever since he reviewed the Danish version.⁷ In his estimation "it will undoubtedly be used in Lutheran theological seminaries as well as those of other denominations as well."⁸ In his review of Prenter's dogmatics, Hendry of Princeton asserted: "This book should be of great value to serious students, not only within the Lutheran Church."⁹ It is "a work of ecumenical significance. On the face of it, it is a pure Lutheran dogmatics, firmly entrenched in traditional Lutheran positions, which it defends vigorously and uncompromisingly. But it is a catholic Lutheranism, or Lutheran catholicity, *i.e.*, a reinterpretation of the catholic tradition under the criterion of the Reformation."¹⁰

In view of the accolades and kudos that have been accorded Prenter's dogmatics by Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike, and in view of the fact that it is being used at a number of American Lutheran theological seminaries, and thus will exercise a considerable influence on American Lutheranism, the purpose of this essay will be to set forth the differences between this Danish dogmatics and traditional Lutheran dogmatics. Prenter's hermeneutics will be evaluated in terms of a sound hermeneutical method and his theology evaluated with that as found in the Lutheran Confessions.

Readers in America, Australia, Central and South America, Asia, Africa and Europe that have been nourished on a dogmatic fare prepared before Lutheran theology was influenced by higher criticism, form criticism, and existentialist philosophy, will find significant differences between Prenter's volume and the following dogmatics used in American Lutheranism since the beginning of this century: H. E. Jacobs, *A Summary of the Lutheran Faith*, 1905; Milton Valentine, *Christian Theology*, 2 volumes (1907); Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev.-Lutherische Dogmatik*, 4 volumes (1909-1917); A. C. Voigt, *Biblical Dogmatics* (1917); J. A. Singmaster, *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (1927); C. P. Lindberg, *Christian Dogmatics* (1910); G. H. Gerberding, *The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church* (1919); H. E. Hove, *Christian Doctrine* (1930); Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 3 volumes (1920-1924); English translation: 4 volumes (1950-1957); Joseph Stump, *The Christian Faith* (1932); T. Engelder, W. Arndt, Th. Graebner,

and F. A. Mayer, *Popular Symbolics* (1934), pp. 1-136; J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (1935); E. J. Braunlich, *Principles of the Christian Faith* (1938); E. W. A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (1939); M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (1944); C. H. Little, *Lutheran Confessional Theology* (1945); C. H. Little, *Disputed Doctrines* (1933); Martin Reu, *Lutheran Dogmatics* (1951; revised edition), the doctrinal essays in the three volumes of *The Abiding Word* (1946-1959); the doctrinal essays in the *Concordia Cyclopedia* (1932); *The Lutheran Cyclopedia* (1954); John R. Lavik, *The Way, The Truth, and the Life* (1957), and Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (originally published in 1899, reprinted by Augsburg in 1961).

From a confessional and Lutheran point of view *Creation and Redemption* is superior to Gustav Aulen's *The Faith of the Christian Church*. Prenter writes with vigor, freshness, and versatility. The reader will discover that Prenter can develop a point at length and that he also has the ability to summarize exegetical and historical materials succinctly and incisively. Nor does he use old clichés to state dogmatic truths. His material is presented in a closely knit and often in a forthright, moving manner.

Prenter intends his dogmatics to be a contribution to the ecumenical cause. One Episcopalian reviewer of *Creation and Redemption* asserted of the German translation that the work of the Danish theologian reflected "a hard-won, authentic ecumenical theology."¹¹ Regarding Prenter's ecumenism Hendry said: "If it is true, as some held, that ecumenical understanding is best served by fidelity to one's own confessional tradition, Prenter's dogmatics which has been translated from the Danish, is a work of ecumenical significance."¹² However, despite the new phase of ecumenical dialogue that the Second Vatican Council has inaugurated, Prenter has made some harsh criticisms and evaluations of Roman Catholicism. Commenting on Luther's excommunication by Rome Prenter wrote:

Though a similar excommunication has for good reasons not been pronounced by the Lutherans, it is clear that Lutheran Christians are not able to have church fellowship with a church which has openly condemned something which they hold to be not ideas of Luther, but the message of the Scriptures and the witness of the confession of faith (p. 160).

Again he averred:

Protestantism protests against everything which threatens the gospel and the freedom of faith, because it has positively taken a stand on the side of this freedom. Since it is precisely this freedom which the church of Rome has openly and in principle repudiated by anathematizing Luther's understanding of Christianity, the Lutheran churches must refuse to have church fellowship with the papal church (p. 161).

The Danish theologian takes issue with Rome on its position that tradition is broader than the Scriptures; he is completely unsympathetic with Rome's dogma of papal infallibility, he rejects its Mariological teachings as well as its emphasis on the necessity of adhering to apostolic succession. In his opinion the repudiation by Rome of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith jeopardized the gospel. Prenter is outspoken in his criticism of Rome as a perverter of the doctrine of the gospel. One wonders how those Lutherans in America who in the past two years have been advocating a return to Rome by Lutherans, will receive these judgments and strictures.

Not only is Prenter outspoken in his criticism of papalism, but he is also critical of the Reformed churches and of modernistic Protestant churches "with respect to the sacraments and thus also with respect to the anchoring of faith in the eternal word" (p. 170). He also defended the refusal of Lutherans to participate in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Reformed, because the latter deny the Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper and consequently there cannot be altar and pulpit fellowship between Lutherans and Reformed" (p. 171). Prenter's conclusions are different from those expressed in the volume *Marburg Revisited*, where the following recommendation has been made by Lutheran and Reformed theologians to their respective communions in the United States:

As a result of our studies and discussions we see no insuperable obstacles to pulpit and altar fellowship and, therefore, we recommend to our parent bodies that they encourage their constituents to enter into discussion looking forward to intercommunion and the fuller recognition of one another's ministries¹³.

In his prolegomena and in various statements scattered through the volume Prenter rejects rationalism, pietism, biblicism, fundamentalism, scholasticism, and other theological isms that he believes are not consonant with Biblical Christianity. The Danish theologian shows familiarity with the theological giants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Special cognizance is taken of the views of Schleiermacher, Grundtvig, Kierkegaard, Albrecht, Ritschl, Von Harnack, Karl Barth, Brunner and Bultmann.

Those acquainted with the doctrinal view of Grundtvig on the baptismal confession of the Apostles' Creed, a position which has had a lasting influence upon Denmark, will note that Prenter has been affected by Grundtvig's thinking. In Hendry's judgment: "Prenter explicitly sets himself on the side of Grundtvig and against Kierkegaard, whose existentialism implies a separation of objective and subjective which puts asunder what God hath joined together."¹⁴

Prenter is almost unique among Scandinavian theologians in recognizing the work of Karl Barth. While admitting "Karl Barth's importance for Lutheran theology" Prenter takes issue with the Swiss Reformed theologian on a number of matters. He voices objection to Barth's monistic tendency and opposes it with a dualistic, or

bi-polar one at a number of important points. While Prenter agrees with Barth in rejecting a philosophical basis for faith, yet the Danish theologian does not break off diplomatic relations with philosophy, as long as it respects the rights of theology.

No less than sixteen times Prenter refers to various theological positions of Schleiermacher whom he criticizes for his pantheistic theology and misconception of Biblical Christianity that flow from Schleiermacher's philosophical-religious stance. In view of the new popularity that "the father of modern theology" is enjoying, Prenter's criticisms are worthy of consideration. According to the religious editor of *Time* (March 8, 1968) there is a revival of Schleiermacher's religious views. Thus *Time's* religious editor wrote:

After a generation of religious neglect, Schleiermacher, who died in 1834, is now being reassessed as the most significant Protestant theologian since Luther and Calvin. Last week Vanderbilt University sponsored a four-day conference commemorating the bicentenary of Schleiermacher's birth.

Today an increasing number of U.S. Protestant thinkers regard Barth as somewhat old hat and Schleiermacher as much more of a living force. University of Chicago theologian Langdon Gilkey notes that "when students come across him, they say, 'This guy can help me.'" Students tend to come alive with Schleiermacher. The most obvious reason for the revival of interest in his work is that the "passional" experience of religion—as Schleiermacher called it—makes more sense to modern man than a purely intellectual one.

There are several other major theological questions that Schleiermacher made pioneering attempts to answer. As one of the first thinkers to study the cultural setting of Biblical writings, he was the forerunner of modern critical scholarship on Scripture. Convinced that denominationalism had outlived its usefulness, he was an embryonic ecumenist and worked to achieve a merger between Germany's Reformed and Lutheran churches.¹⁵

"People are learning," says Schubert Ogden of Southern Methodist's Perkins School of Theology, "that Schleiermacher was the first great theologian to articulate a reinterpretation of Christian tradition in reference to modern life."¹⁶

Those interested in a refutation of Schleiermacher's theology will find a good critique by Prenter of Schleiermacher's system. Thus Prenter asserted:

And in spite of the strong positive churchly bent of Schleiermacher's line of reasoning, one must ask whether he has not entirely lost sight of the gospel and its picture of God. One wonders whether we do not have here a grandiose idealistic-Christian *gnosis* which employs Christian ideas to express a romantic-mystical religiousness which is essentially pagan (p. 225).

Special cognizance is taken of Scandinavian theological thought. Prenter frequently mentions Norwegian, Danish and Swedish scholars with whom he sometimes agrees, at other times disagrees. Among those cited and referred to are the following scholars: Aulen, Billing, Bring, Brönsted, Dahl, Geismar, Gogarten, Hauge, Hillerdal, Hök, Holmström, Johansson, Krarup, Lindroth, Lögstrup, Madsen, Martensen, Nygren Pontoppidan, Sjöberg, Schartau, Sjöstrand, Skyds-gaard, Slök, Söe, and Wingren. Kierkegaard is referred to eleven times, most of the citations consist of ideas from his various works to illustrate some point. Luther is quoted over thirty times, often to buttress Prenter's position; sometimes, however, he is critical of Luther's interpretations.

Creation and Redemption is written from a "confessional" point of view, although Prenter himself does not like this term because of its misuse in conservative circles. He is not in sympathy with those Lutherans who use The Three Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions as a criterion for the evaluation of the doctrinal position of theologians or of denominations. As a member of the Church of Denmark, Prenter only recognizes Luther's *Small Catechism* and the *Augsburg Confession* as confessions binding on theologians and pastors, and he believes that to use the confessions as doctrinal standards for judging the orthodoxy of people would result in the impoverishment of the study of Scriptures and in ascribing to the Confessional writings the same infallibility which is accorded the papal teaching office (p. 136).

Prenter's dogmatics has three sections: the prolegomena and two parts. In the Prolegomena there are two chapters in the first of which the task of dogmatics is set forth. The opening chapter is followed by what Prenter called "Prolegomena," which therefore means that in the first two chapters there are 190 pages dealing with matters of introduction (just about one-third of the book). Part I is entitled: "Creation," and has two chapters. Chapter 3 sets forth "The God of Creation," while chapter 4 depicts "The Man of Creation." Part II is called "Redemption." It also has two chapters: chapter 5 portrays "The God of Redemption," and chapter 6 depicts "The Man of Redemption." No other Lutheran dogmatics known to this writer has arranged the chief doctrines of the Bible in this manner. The entire gamut of Christian doctrine is traversed in 40 sections. Prenter claims that while he is returning to the older *loci* method of the Reformation, he intends to avoid the scholastic systematization that was used by dogmaticians in the days of Lutheran orthodoxy. Prenter stated that the structure in his dogmatics that he is going to follow is the arrangement of material as found in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. In so doing this, he claims that he will be presenting the Lutheran understanding of the Biblical witness to revelation (p. 190). However, since after Luther's death there were doctrinal conflicts in the Lutheran Church of Europe and since these were settled by the Formula of Concord, it is difficult to see why these doctrinal statements were not incorporated.

Many doctrines, while incidentally alluded to, receive no systematic treatment. Prenter's book does not present systematically what the Scriptures teach on sin, good and evil angels, the devil, the providence of God, the attributes of God, the state of integrity, and the freedom of the will, to mention a number of topics concerning which the older dogmatics give systematic presentation. Scattered throughout the dogmatics are eleven "excursuses," which might be described as Scandinavian attempts to present dogmatics in religious-philosophical form, as for example, "the providence of God in the Bible," "Imago Dei in Gen. 1:26," "an Interpretation of the Biblical story of the Fall," "The Biblical View of Time and Eternity," etc.

The Task of Dogmatics

Prenter contends that dogmatics is important for the church because preaching needs to have a doctrinal content. On page 3 he defined dogmatics "as the critical reflection which prepares the way for the actual proclamation of the message of salvation by seeking constantly to interpret the dogma through a re-examination of the witness of the Scriptures, with due consideration for the contemporary situation in which the proclamation takes place."

Later in the same chapter he asserted:

It is not the task of dogmatics simply to reproduce the thought patterns of the past, however venerable they might be. In order to interpret the dogma anew in such a way that it may serve as the church's actual proclamation, dogmatics must be allowed unrestricted freedom in its interpretations of the Scriptures and its development of those concepts which are indispensable for making the interpretation vitally relevant. A recognition of the indispensableness of this freedom is the valid concern of present-day efforts at "demythologizing" (p. 9).

Prenter is critical of theologians who take their start from philosophical or metaphysical premises rather than from "faith given by divine revelation, mediated through the witness of the Biblical writings, and formulated in the creeds, confessed in the worship service of the congregation" (p. 5). In his approach Prenter rejected the prolegomena of theologians like Schleiermacher who based their interpretations on philosophical considerations about the nature of religion.¹⁷

Although the Ecumenical Creeds of the church speak with definiteness, their wording, asserts Prenter, should not be considered final and as exhaustive definitions of the mysteries of the faith. Therefore, Prenter insists that dogmatics deal critically with the dogmatic and confessional interpretations handed down by the church in the course of the centuries. He also claims that dogmas are determined within the context of the confessing and worshipping congregation; as an example, the virgin birth might be cited. The ecumenical creeds all incorporated a belief in this doctrine, all the

creedal confessions of Roman Catholicism and of the various Protestant denominations accepted this basic doctrine of Christology. But because of the rejection of the virgin birth by many scholars and the skepticism which modern Protestant scholarship has manifested over against this doctrine, Prenter claims this Christological truth need not be accepted.

The Danish theologian claims that members of the same communion can disagree about the theological meaning of various statements of the Ecumenical Creeds. Even though a theologian may entertain a different understanding of the traditional meaning, he should have the right to dissent and yet be considered a Christian in good standing. Ultimately this means that one cannot be certain about the doctrines of the Christian faith. This is not in harmony with the position taken by Luther and the Protestant Reformers.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

Topics usually not treated under the caption of "Prolegomena" are placed by Prenter under this caption. The doctrine of the Trinity, the differences between Law and Gospel, the comparison of Lutheranism with Roman Catholicism, the Reformed churches and other religious groups (usually discussed in comparative symbolics) are treated by Prenter as topics introductory to the study of the main doctrines of the Christian faith. Unique is the Danish dogmatist's procedure of beginning his prolegomena with the section, "The Idea of the Trinity as the Point of Departure for the Critique of Authority." Most reviewers considered this somewhat novel. Santmire claimed that this procedure is reminiscent of Barth who placed the doctrine of the Trinity at the very beginning of his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.¹⁸

In the estimation of this writer, Prenter is taking a wrong position relative to the manner in which he proposed to establish the doctrine of the Trinity. He claims it is impossible to arrive at this fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith on the basis of specific Bible passages, and reasons that:

Since the doctrine of the Trinity presupposes the Scriptures' own doctrine of God in that it wants to call attention to the distinctiveness of this scriptural doctrine, it is unreasonable to look for a doctrine of the Trinity in the prophetic and apostolic writings themselves. When the older dogmatism tried to present biblical proof for the Trinity it was, in the first place, guilty of bad exegesis. . . . Such a "biblical proof" is, in the second place, guilty of a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine is not to be sought in the Scriptures, since it is not one doctrine among others (p. 53).

Prenter accepts the doctrine of the Trinity and makes it central on the strength of the fact that it is found in the Nicene Creed and that the doctrine was used by the Augsburg Confession. However, inasmuch as the doctrinal contents of creeds were obtained by the early

church from Scripture, one must ask Prenter: From where did the early church obtain the Trinitarian doctrine? If it is a doctrine that cannot be deduced from various passages of the Old and New Testaments (such as Gen. 1:26; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; I Cor. 12:4-6; II Cor. 13:14), how did the formulators of the creeds arrive at such a doctrine? A doctrine admitted by Prenter to be a mystery beyond human comprehension. Were the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds inspired by the Holy Spirit? A strange inconsistency in methodology is to be found in Prenter's volume in that frequently he will establish doctrinal positions by an appeal to specific Bible passages, while in some sections of his dogmatics he makes assertions without any Scriptural warrant for his conclusions.

If the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be established from specific Scriptural texts, then the Church does not have the right to incorporate it into the creeds and confessions and to insist that it is the doctrine that distinguishes Christianity from Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and other non-Trinitarian faiths. A perusal of Prenter's volume will nevertheless show that the doctrine of the Trinity is basic and vital. The work of redemption, creation, and renewal is said to be that of the Triune God, and not of the individual persons of the Godhead. Yet there is a definite weakness in Prenter's presentation of the *opera ad extra* of the Trinitarian Godhead. Correctly Santmire observed: "Prenter is more interested in depicting the work of the Father-Creator and the Son-Redeemer than he is in setting forth a systematic Trinitarian structure of thought."¹⁹

Prenter's Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures

In traditional Lutheran theology there is frequently found a discussion of the source for Christian doctrine; sometimes this is contained in the prolegomena; at other times it is a part of the teaching on the Means of Grace. In Prenter the topic is elaborated in the prolegomena. The Danish theologian avoided the use of the terms Holy Scriptures or the Bible as a designation for the written Word of God. In contradistinction to the older dogmatics he refuses to identify the Bible with the Word of God but refers to what conservative Lutherans called "The Word of God" by the designation of "the prophetic and apostolic writings." The latter he identified with the term "*Sola Scriptura*." The creed upon which Prenter places a great deal of emphasis he claims "expresses an understanding of revelation which may be summarized in two principles, *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*, which rightly understood are not two principles but one" (p. 55). Central to the Two Testaments is the concept of the covenant through which the history of revelation was manifested.

Prenter's views about the nature of Scripture show the influence of neo-orthodoxy and are not in harmony with Luther's views nor with the statements about the nature of Scriptures enunciated in the Formula of Concord. His understanding of the meaning of 2 Timothy 3:15-17 is different from that held by Luther and a

sound Lutheran understanding of this Pauline message. According to Paul, the entire Old Testament Scripture is "theopneustos," *i.e.*, "breathed-out from God."

What does Prenter understand under the term "the inspiration of the Scriptures?" In answer he wrote: "As the unity of the prophetic and apostolic witness, the Scriptures are inspired, because, they serve as the instrument of the Holy Spirit." Again he asserted:

By the inspiration of the Scriptures we understand their revelatory quality, the fact that they are means used by the Holy Spirit in his work of gathering a people for God in the Son Jesus Christ, a work the Spirit carries on by revealing the Father's saving activity through Jesus Christ, and by making his activity known to the condemned through the witness of words supplied by the Scriptures. The inspiration of the Scriptures, then, has no reference to the letter (verbal inspiration), according to which the literal inerrancy of every sentence is guaranteed. Inspiration actually refers only to the *message* of the Scriptures as it is heard by one who, instead of concentrating upon the letter or isolated detail, sees the details in the light of the whole prophetic or apostolic witness, and in turn, as we have tried to suggest, recognizes these two witnesses in both their difference and their unity. (p. 88)

According to Prenter, Lutheran orthodoxy made the mistake of emphasizing the inspiration of the letter and insisted that the very words of truth were to be held inerrant. From the belief that the very words of Scripture possessed the attributes of *sufficientia* (sufficiency) and *efficacia* (efficacy), orthodoxy is supposed to have made the mistake of holding that the Bible contained reliable information pertaining to natural science or history. "Thereby the Bible took on the character of a body of correct statements about all kinds of subjects, at the same time naturally as it also contains the correct doctrine concerning the way of salvation" (p. 90).

It is Prenter's opinion that the event of modern science and the development of the historical-critical method have shown the untenability of the view once held by orthodoxy. The historical-critical method has revealed that the Bible contains numerous errors and mistakes. Furthermore, the study of comparative religions also has shown that biblical religion has been influenced by non-biblical religions. Orthodoxy mistakenly has placed too much emphasis on the *fides humana*. This is the error that "fundamentalism" supposedly is repeating today by its rejection of the conclusions of the historico-critical method.²⁰ The biblical texts themselves—so Prenter claims—demand that one recognize their contradictions and their time-conditioned presentations.

In Prenter's 40-page discussion of the "Prophetic and Apostolic Writings" the reader will find many views expressed where great differences will be evident between the Danish dogmatician's position of what the Bible is and that held by historic Lutheranism, before being affected by rationalism and higher criticism.

Prenter's Hermeneutics

To understand the positions taken by Prenter on exegetical matters, it is necessary to examine his hermeneutical methodology which often differs from the laws of interpretation espoused by Luther and the writers of the Lutheran Confessions. In both the Old and New Testament areas Prenter has adopted a number of the conclusions of higher criticism which has rejected the concept of direct revelation by God to man, repudiated the miraculous²¹ as found in many passages of the two Testaments, refused to accept direct prophecy, and has questioned the New Testament's interpretation of Old Testament historical events. The conclusions of higher criticism and form criticism as applied to both Testaments are adopted by Prenter and are made the basis for doctrinal deductions. The reconstruction of Old Testament religion as envisioned by the Uppsala School is followed despite the fact that other critics have questioned the basic assumptions of the Scandinavian school. Thus Prenter follows Mowinckel in his belief that like in Babylonia, so in Israel, an enthronement festival was supposed to have been celebrated. According to our knowledge of the Babylonian *enkitu* festival, it is known that as a part of the eleven-day celebration, the *Enuma Elish* epic was read, in which Marduk is depicted as being victorious over Tiamat and his forces. According to Mowinckel, it was customary in Israel at the new year's festival to read Genesis 1:1-2:4, which is based on the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* epic, reinterpreted in Genesis to represent the victory of Jahweh over the forces of evil and destruction. Prenter utilized this idea in claiming that the doctrines of creation and redemption are related because in both the work of creation and redemption God is depicted as being victorious over His foes. This comparison rests on an erroneous interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:4. It takes a great deal of imagination to read a conflict between Jahweh and the forces of chaos into this episode. In harmony with modern critical scholarship Prenter treats the opening chapters of Genesis as mythological, an interpretation which places him in opposition to the Lutheran Confessions on the historicity of Genesis, chapters 1-3. The fall of Adam is interpreted in a different way from what Luther did in his *Commentary on Genesis*. According to the Aarhus University professor, the fall of Adam and Eve is not a once-for-all happening, but is supposed to be repeating itself constantly throughout the whole of covenant history.

According to Prenter, the Messianic hope is not the central theme of Old Testament religion, as it is recorded in the Book of Acts. Together with modern biblical scholarship he rejects the New Testament concepts of "prophecy" and "fulfillment." Some of Mowinckel's extreme positions on the interpretation of the psalms are followed.

Also in the New Testament area the reader of Prenter's book will find that the conclusions of critical New Testament scholarship have been adopted. Thus in his interpretation of the deeds and

sayings of Jesus, Prenter follows the school of form criticism as may be seen from his distinction between the Jesus-tradition and the Christ-theology. The gospels are considered to be replete with contradictions and inaccuracies. Both the Old and New Testaments, he asserted, contain divergent theologies. Thus to look upon the Old and New Testament Scriptures as reflecting a unity, produced by its author, the Holy Spirit, is therefore ruled out. Prenter states that it is uncertain whether or not Jesus was born of a virgin. Since critical scholars are agreed that the Virgin Birth narratives were not a part of the original kerygma, Prenter holds that it is unessential to the gospel narrative and need not be accepted as an important Christological belief. Here the Danish dogmatician is placing himself against the united testimony of the Three Ecumenical Creeds and the position of historic Lutheranism. Luther surely cannot be cited in support of such a Scripture-denying stance! The narratives treating the post-resurrection period of Christ's life are characterized by contradictions so that the Biblical student really cannot ascertain what transpired at and after the resurrection.

Because Prenter takes the conclusions of the modern hermeneutic seriously, he has espoused a position about the resurrection of Christ that is ambiguous. While he is willing to concede that the crucifixion and death of Jesus are real historical events recognized by modern scholars as happenings that transpired in history during the governorship of Pontius Pilate, he nevertheless contends that Christ's resurrection is an event not in the same category of history as the death of Christ. Thus Prenter wrote:

Nevertheless, it is very clear that this event is not historical in the same sense that all other events are. Because it is an eschatological event it cannot be substantiated. Its reality can only be proclaimed and believed as proclaimed; it cannot be proved (p. 424).

Again he asserted:

. . . The historical reality of the resurrection is interwoven with its eschatological reality in such a way that it is not possible to establish scientifically what actually occurred, nor that it did actually occur. As historical event the resurrection event is shrouded in ambiguity (p. 427).

Prenter also states that "the New Testament contains no clear historical witness concerning the factual character of the resurrection which is accessible to historical research" (p. 429). That the New Testament reports the fact of the empty tomb is for Prenter no proof for the actuality of Christ's resurrection. It would seem to the writer that the only way in which St. Matthew's statement about the empty tomb can be explained is either to accept the explanation advanced by the Jewish leaders that the disciples had stolen the body and hidden it, or to accept the testimony of the evangelists that the tomb was empty because the grave could not hold the Son of God, and that Jesus Christ arose and was seen alive

during a forty-day period by men and women at different times and localities in Palestine. Paul's statement in I Corinthians 15 surely argues for the historicity of the resurrection of Christ. It is because Prenter wishes to be in tune with modern New Testament critical scholarship that he can state that Jesus arose and at the same time assert that this fact cannot be proven which calls into question the New Testament's testimony. Prenter's position is irrationalistic and suffers from the inconsistencies that characterize modern neo-orthodoxy.

Prenter also believes that some form of "demythologization" is necessary. While he rejects the Bultmannian use of the term, he claims that in the Bible the Christian will find "mythology." The latter is defined as follows: "Mythology, incidentally, is not the same as myth; mythology is myth which has been turned into a world view. In the second place, it is not the biblical writings which are to be demythologized, since they do not contain mythology but only mythical ideas" (p. 158).

Because of his belief that the Bible contains "mythical ideas" Prenter can consistently reject the Biblical view in which a picture about God and man is given. According to the Dane it is not the purpose of the Scriptures to give a description of the world nor of the nature of man. Insights which science furnishes concerning the nature of man are to be preferred to similar information found in the Bible. This means that in the conduct of the sciences of psychology, anthropology, geology, philosophy, geography, biology, zoology, and education there is to be complete freedom and their conclusions are to be accepted even though they may contradict the Scriptures. When there is a difference between the teachings of the Bible and the speculations of scientists, the latter are preferred. Only where the Scriptures have spoken regarding spiritual matters, are they to be given serious consideration. The main concern of the "prophetic and apostolic writings" is to proclaim the gospel, which dare not be tied to any particular world view. The account of the creation of the world in Genesis I and the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 have nothing to contribute to the question of the "how" of creation. The important emphasis of Genesis 1-2 is the fact that ultimately God is Creator; *how* the universe, the earth, life, animals and men came into existence belongs to the province of the sciences.

The Doctrine of Creation

One of the outstanding features of Prenter's volume is his use of the doctrine of creation as primary and basic for structuring his theological system. In contradistinction to former Lutheran dogmatics, Prenter insists that creation and redemption must be considered together.²² Thus he wrote: "Creation and redemption belong together. Creation is the beginning of redemption, and redemption is the consummation of creation" (p. 200). Again: "These two activities, creation and redemption, go hand in hand from the very beginning. Both are a struggle against the same enemy with the

same end in view: the final consummation of God's creative work and the final destruction of all powers of chaos" (p. 200). According to Prenter it is incorrect to distinguish between creation and preservation as the old dogmatics did, because creation is a continuing process. However, Genesis 2:3 clearly stated that God ceased from His creative activity, and described the original creation as occurring in six days. That which God by the Word brought into existence was unique and was never repeated in the manner described in Genesis 1:1-2:3. On this basis, traditional Christian theology has correctly distinguished between creation and preservation.

Prenter accepted the Babylonian concept of Marduk's defeat of Tiamat as reflected in his adoption and reinterpretation of Genesis 1:2. Jahweh is depicted as being victorious over his foes and is made to be parallel to Jesus' victory over the forces of evil; thus both in creation and redemption God is said to be victorious over his enemies. This is alleged to establish the unity of these two doctrines. It is only by resorting to a fallacious exegesis that such a relationship can be developed. Six times the Genesis account asserts that everything God made was good. At the end of the hexameron the Biblical writer says: "And behold everything was very good." The *tohu* and *bohu* of Genesis 1:2 that characterized the earth before God separated the land from the water was not evil; these words simply describe the two directions in which the newly created earth would further undergo changes. After the creation of Adam and Eve there was no evil or sin in the world. When the revolt of the devil and his evil angels took place Scripture does not relate but evil was there in the person of Satan prior to the fall of man into sin. It was as a result of the fall that nature came under a curse. The death of Christ did not make possible the salvation of nature nor of its animals, but only man created after the image of God.

By asserting the unity of creation and redemption Prenter is able to apply to creation what is said about redemption. The New Testament clearly teaches that it was grace (*charis*) that prompted God to provide the reconciliation of sinful mankind through the death of His Son. Frequently Prenter speaks of creative grace, an expression not used in the Scripture. Both the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions use the term grace of that attitude of God that was shown toward sinners because of the sacrificial death of Christ, whose benefits only are able to save men when they are enabled by the Holy Spirit to accept the Gospel's gracious offer.

The purpose of creation was God's glory. At the end of the doctrinal section of Romans, Paul wrote: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to whom be glory forever" (11:36). Man was created to be in fellowship with God. It was only after Adam and Eve had violated God's command and had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that the need for a Savior arose. The only relationship between creation and redemption is to be found in the fact that God the Creator also made provision for the redemption of man through his Son, the Word, who was the

Person through whom creation also was effected. However, the sanctification of man is likewise the work of the Triune God. The Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, also participated in the creation of the universe. Therefore, following Prenter's logic, creation and sanctification should also constitute an inseparable unity.

According to Prenter there is an intimate relationship between creation and redemption because of the fact that there must be a man before he can be a Christian. There is furthermore supposedly a close relationship because the Creator and Redeemer are one. "It is the same God who is active in both, with one purpose in mind. Whether through creation or redemption, it is his own image that he imparts to man" (p. 282). It is true that all men, whether they recognize this or not, have received life and existence from the Triune God and automatically enjoy the blessings of God's providence. The same parallel does not, however, apply in the area of redemption. God has provided for the reconciliation of the whole race through Christ's vicarious sacrifice on Calvary, but it does not follow that men automatically receive the blessings earned by Christ for mankind. These must be accepted by faith which the Holy Spirit must create. Man can refuse to accept Christ and hence be deprived of the blessings of the atonement. Thus at a very important point the analogy between creation and redemption breaks down. Prenter's statement that "creation and redemption belong together. Creation is the beginning of redemption, and redemption consummates creation" is not a correct portrayal of what Scripture asserts regarding these two doctrines and their relationship to each other.

Prenter draws some unwarranted conclusions from his assumed interrelationship between creation and redemption which he claims constitute an indissoluble unity. One such result of this unity is that "through this connection between creation and redemption the proclamation of the creation becomes a gospel" (p. 208). Since Jesus is the Logos, the agent of creation, Prenter contends that the cross is at the center of creation. "That the work of creation is one with the work of redemption means that God brings his creative work on behalf of man to its realization through man's death and resurrection with Jesus Christ. God's providence is the fixed redemptive purpose of his creative work; it is the conformity of his creative work with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the death and resurrection of the whole human race in Christ" (p. 208).

Prenter interprets the providence of God as being the hidden agreement between God's creative will and his redemptive will in Jesus Christ, who is the agent of creation and redemption. In contradistinction to Luther and historic Lutheranism Prenter claims that the providence of God cannot be ascertained from natural theology.

Against Prenter's phrase "the gospel of creation" a strong demurrer must be entered. The New Testament uses the word "gospel" to describe the good news of what God has done for the sinner,

"that while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly." The gospel announces the comforting truth that "there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." The expression "gospel of creation" can lead to a misunderstanding and tends to remove the uniqueness that the New Testament associated with the word "euangelion," which always refers to God's willingness to forgive men their sins *propter Christum*.²³

Prenter's Anthropological Views

Traditional Lutheran dogmatics (including The Lutheran Confessions) held to the view of dichotomy, that man has a body and a soul or spirit. Christian theology, according to Prenter, however, is not supposed to have an independent anthropology (p. 245). Because man is a theonomous being who stands in relationship with God, Prenter claims that it is improper to adopt any one type of philosophical anthropology. He claims that Medieval scholasticism and Lutheran orthodoxy were influenced by Aristotelian anthropology and thus a Greek understanding of man became connected with Biblical thought. As the Biblical student interprets the statements of the text in the Old Testament that deal with the creation of Adam, it will be found that two separate acts were involved: the formation of the human body and the inbreathing of the breath of life into man. This double action resulted in man becoming a living being. Ecclesiastes chapter 12:7 infers this dual action when it states that the body will return to dust and the spirit will return to God who gave it. This is also in harmony with Jesus' statement in Matthew 10:28: "Fear not them that kill the body, but cannot kill the soul but rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell." The Danish dogmatician, however, tells us that "theology has little interest in a special 'Christian' psychology, sociology, or history as in a special 'Christian' literature or religious films." What dogmatics has to say about the nature of man neither can be nor should be a substitute for what man can learn through association with others through art, science, and philosophy. On the contrary, dogmatics wants these forms of human self-knowledge to enjoy full freedom and to make the greatest possible progress (p. 250).

The Doctrine of Sin

Most Lutheran dogmatics have a section in which they discuss sin, its origin, nature and the classes of sins. While the reader will encounter numerous references to sin, Prenter devotes only five pages to hamartiology, and that to a discussion of "original sin" (pp. 284-288). In his presentation of the doctrine of "original sin" he goes his own way and presents ideas that make the reader wonder how he has arrived at his interpretation. Thus he claims that sin cannot really be made the object of any doctrine (p. 284). He did, however, give this definition of sin, describing it as "rebellion against creation, as death, and as denial of truth" (p.284). He maintains that when sin is explained, it is explained away. Because sin is the contradiction of all meaning, it cannot be compre-

hended. Theologians cannot show how sin originated. Since Prenter does not accept the historicity of the fall narrative, he logically has no solution for the origin of human sin and claims that it cannot be understood in its origins. The Bible, however, clearly teaches that sin is a transgression of the law. As to the origin of human sin Paul wrote: "By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, and so death has passed upon all men" (Romans 5:12).

Christology

In traditional Lutheran dogmatics, the article on Christology naturally followed the locus on saving grace. In the latter there was developed on Scriptural ground the fact that saving grace is God's grace in Christ (Eph. 1:6). It sets forth how grace was procured and showed that the world was redeemed by the God-man, Jesus Christ. However, in Prenter Christology follows immediately after the discourse on anthropology. The Danish dogmatician's interpretation of Christology has been vitiated and influenced by modern higher criticism and form criticism. In his elucidation of Christology, he mistakingly injects the doctrine of creation. Thus he asserts: "All theology is christology." When dealing with the data from which he constructs his christological interpretation, he distinguishes between the Jesus-tradition and the Christ-theology. Because all Christology is said to have an historical content and reflection, the historical part is subject to the canons of historical criticism. Furthermore, in setting forth a Christology, Prenter holds that there is no uniform and systematic Christ-theology in the New Testament. The Synoptics and Paul are said to have divergent types of Christology. Here the influence of modern criticism comes to the fore in its failure to comprehend that the Holy Spirit is the author of the New Testament books, and that by assembling all the revealed data, these can be arranged and interpreted in a manner that does not reflect upon the veracity and reliability of God's Word.

Traditional Christology was usually presented under the following topics: 1. Concerning the benevolence of God regarding fallen man; 2. Concerning the person of Christ; 3. Concerning the salutary work of Christ (the prophetic, priestly and kingly offices of Christ); 4. Concerning the two states (humiliation and exaltation).²¹ Prenter rejects the traditional organization of christological data because it was influenced by scholasticism which he claims was often not Biblical. His explication of the locus of Christology has the following structure: 1. The kingdom of God; 2. Promise and fulfillment; 3. The apostolic witness concerning Christ; 4. The person of Christ; 5. The work of Christ; 6. The christological dogma and 7. The limits of Christology.

Prenter finds the coming of Christ promised in the Old Testament. But this promise is not to be deduced from individual Messianic predictions, as is done in the New Testament.²² The Lutheran Confessions following the example of the New Testament writers also believed that the heart of the Old Testament centered in those

predictions given over the centuries announcing the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Here again Prenter simply follows the conclusions of modern Old Testament scholarship which rejects the "prophecy-fulfillment" scheme employed by New Testament writers.

New Testament Christology, according to Prenter, rests upon a threefold basis: the Old Testament promise, the New Testament kerygma concerning Christ, and the Son of Man Himself who proclaimed the kingdom of God, and who died as its rejected Messiah and arose as the one who was to reestablish it—the Son of Man, the living center toward which the two witnesses point, from the standpoints of expecting and fulfillment (p. 333).

Prenter is not sympathetic with the teaching of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches on the relationship of the two natures in Christ. He is critical of the Lutheran doctrines of the *communicatio idiomatum* so clearly set forth in the Formula of Concord. In his discussion of the relation of the two natures in the anthropic person of Christ, Prenter has, however, correctly noted the weaknesses in the positions of Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack and Rudolf Bultmann. A study of twentieth-century christological thought reveals that it is characterized by a docetism "in which there is only a Christ of proclamation, in which the teaching is the only really important thing, and from which the historical Jesus has disappeared" (p. 366-367).

In his section treating of the work of Christ, Prenter has limited his discussion to the doctrine of the atonement. He recognizes the centrality and importance of this doctrine for the Christian faith. The doctrine of the atonement is explicated in the context of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. These two events in the life of Jesus are the basis of Biblical Christology. In the history of Christianity many different views have been held as to the exact meaning of these events and their significance for the Christian faith. Prenter gives an extended review of theories regarding the atonement which have been adduced in the history of Christian thought. The views of Athanasius, Anselm, and Luther are reviewed and evaluated. Compared with the view on the atonement held by orthodox Lutheranism, Prenter again takes a position which is different. Thus he wrote: "The idea of the atonement, which expresses the unity between the God of creation and the God of redemption in the history of salvation as completed in the incarnation, is always either the presupposition for or the result of a particular Christology" (p. 368). He contends that this paradoxical unity between creation and redemption is emphasized more by Luther than by Athanasius and that Luther did not regard Christ's sacrifice as being exclusively vicarious (p. 385). Melancthon was responsible for having advocated a doctrine which was in harmony with that of Anselm. Prenter objects to the idea that God (in Jesus Christ) made satisfaction to the Father. God, making satisfaction to Himself, results therefore in a strange line of reasoning. The active

and passive obedience of Christ are not a part of the doctrine of the atonement but is a conception introduced by orthodox Lutheranism.

Regarding the threefold office of Christ, the Scandinavian professor has a different conception than that set forth by Luther and Lutheran orthodoxy. "The Old Testament points to his kingly office, because he is the one who is to liberate, gather, and rule the chosen people of God. The witness of Jesus concerning himself expresses his prophetic office, because he is to proclaim the kingdom of God in its offer of forgiveness in the midst of opposition from sin and death. And the apostolic kerygma points to Jesus' priestly office, his vicarious sacrificial death and his resurrection" (p. 411 footnote 98). This statement does not adequately express what is involved in the threefold office of Christ according to Scripture and as set forth in many Lutheran dogmatics.

The Doctrine of Soteriology

As a result of emphasizing the unity of creation and redemption, Prenter has fallen into the pitfall of failing to do justice to the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. Hendry has correctly noted in his review of Prenter's dogmatics that "while Prenter lays great stress on the dialectic of unity and cleavage in the relation between the first and second articles the distinction between the second and third articles virtually disappears and the emphasis is wholly on the unity."²⁰ That this is the case may be seen from the following statement of Prenter: "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The eternal unity of Father, Son, and Spirit is the basis of the unity between creation and redemption, between atonement and renewal. The proclamation of the word, that is, of the gospel, through preaching and sacrament, is the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. Faith, which is the human 'echo' (response) to this divine gospel, is the Spirit's return to the Father and the Son with man's renewed image of God. It is, however, one and the same Spirit who through the word of the gospel proceeds from the Father and the Son to man, and who through man's faith returns to the Father and the Son. Therefore the word and faith can never be separated from one another" (p. 443). Here the Danish scholar is guilty of speculating and philosophizing, and placing truths together in a manner not justified by Scriptural assertions.

Prenter differs from traditional Lutheran theology regarding the manner in which he conceives the Holy Spirit bringing about the conversion, regeneration, and justification of the sinner. One of the major misconceptions held by Prenter regarding the work of sanctification is his assertion that renewal is found in the atonement. On what basis these two are united is difficult to see. According to Scripture, Christ is represented as reconciling the world to God through His vicarious death upon the cross. This is an act which took place in the first century. The benefits of Christ's death are not automatic but the effects and blessings are offered the unconverted

sinner through the Means of Grace. By faith in Jesus man receives the blessings of the work of Christ. However, this offer can be rejected by the sinner and thus renewal does not always take place.

The Order of Salvation

Lutheran dogmatics speaks about the order in which the sinner is brought to Christ and kept in the one saving faith. Thus Joseph Stumpp described the order of salvation as follows:

The great moral and spiritual change which the Holy Spirit, through the Means of Grace, brings about in the heart and life of man may be regarded as taking place in various steps or stages following one another in a certain logical order. This order is called the Order of Salvation. It is customary to consider the work of the Holy Spirit under the heads which this order furnishes. It includes the whole work of the Holy Spirit in the bringing of man to faith and to the functioning of his faith in his life.²⁶

The Danish theologian rejects the order of salvation as set forth in historical Lutheran theology. Thus he writes: "Tendencies toward of psychological conception of the *ordo salutis* are evident in Lutheran orthodoxy. Luther's explanation of the Third Article in the Small Catechism was understood to suggest that man's way to salvation through redemption is comprised of certain elements appearing in a definite order: The Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctifies and preserves me in the true faith" (p. 446). Prenter claims that sanctification does not follow justification. It is wrong to hold that conversion and justification are momentary acts, "which constitute the transition from a state of unbelief and condemnation to the state of grace." Prenter nowhere gives Scriptural proof for his dissenting position; he simply makes these assertions without grounding them in the Scriptures. We believe the distinctions made by orthodox Lutheranism are valid because they can be supported with statements from the Word of God.

Another major issue on which Prenter dissents from traditional Lutheranism is in the matter of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner by faith. This conception is attributed to orthodoxy as one of the wrong ideas fostered by it. But Paul wrote: "Now to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

Prenter's definition of conversion seems to espouse a form of synergism as evidenced by his definition: "And this is the conversion which is inseparately connected with faith. In fact, that is what conversion means: to turn oneself away from all that which is empirical in order in faith to listen to the gospel alone" (p.450).

Historic Lutheran theology has spoken of three solas: Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, and Sola Gratia. Sometimes a fourth is added: Solus Christus. Prenter speaks of only two solas; Sola Scriptura and

Sola Fide. The Law and Gospel principle is said to represent the *sola fide* principle of Lutheranism (p. 93). The new birth, synonymous with a new life created the moment a person is converted and regenerated, is defined as "a participation in eternal life through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ." That conversion and regeneration are momentary acts which constitute the transition from a state of unbelief and condemnation to the state of faith is rejected because Prenter contends that "justification is then no longer an expression of the total character of Christianity" (p. 447).

Prenter makes claims for baptism which are not altogether warranted by Scriptural data. Thus he asserts that regeneration is an event which exclusively is connected with baptism. "To connect baptism with any other event than baptism means that the life of renewal is understood as something other and more than faith; participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus" (p. 467). Historic Lutheran theology has held that the Means of Grace, the Word and the Sacraments produce and sustain faith. The establishment of a right relationship with God is effected by the new birth. Peter wrote: "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed, but of the imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). For infants baptism effects this new life in Christ; in adults it is produced either through the spoken or written Word. Thus the Apology states that "the effect of the Word and of the rite (sacrament) is the same" (Apol. 309, 5).

According to Prenter, sanctification is the struggle and training of the new life which was created by baptism and endures as a constant struggle up to death (p. 475).

The Doctrines of Eschatology

The words "eschatology" and "eschatological" occur frequently on the pages of Prenter's dogmatics. Sometimes it is difficult to ascertain in what sense he is utilizing these words. Webster's *New World Dictionary* defines "eschatology" as "the branch of theology dealing with the last things, such as death, resurrection, judgment, immortality, etc."²⁷ This is the understanding of eschatology to be found in all the Lutheran dogmatics mentioned at the beginning of this article. Prenter uses these words in different contexts with different meanings.²⁸ He seems to employ the adjective in the traditional sense when he asserts: "The apostolic message is eschatological; it points forward to Christ's second coming" (p. 196). In other passages he seems to espouse the idea of "realized eschatology." An example of this is his statement: "On this side of the Son of Man, on this side of the proclamation, death, and resurrection we have the apostolic witness which is not history, but an eschatological proclamation. It points back to him and proclaims: *now* he is come; *now* is the new man born into the world; *now* is the glory appearing" (p. 333). Another statement found in the chapter in which he presents what he believes are the limits of Christology is as follows: "Eschatology means the last or ultimate, that which lies beyond the

boundary of our human existence but which, nevertheless, breaks into and determines our existence. All genuine faith in God is therefore eschatological" (p. 422). In another passage he gave this explanation of eschatological: "The living God is beyond our world of ideas and our world of experience; he therefore breaks into our world from the outside. In this sense both creation and redemption are eschatological" (p. 422). The Old Testament eschatological expectation was fulfilled in the coming of Christ, as the Messiah, (p. 454). For Prenter, eschatology means that Christ has come and that he will come again. This is what he terms the tension in New Testament eschatology. It would appear that he uses the word in different senses, thus practically employing it in the sense of "futuristic eschatology;" at other times, in the sense of "symbolic eschatology;" or in the sense of "realized eschatology" and sometimes in the sense of "inaugurated eschatology." To the uninitiated reader this variation in usage proves extremely confusing.

The subjects dealt with in traditional eschatology are discussed by Prenter in the last section, "The Glorification." Three topics are specifically considered: 1. The second coming, 2. The judgment, 3. Eternal life. Christian eschatology does not possess any information about "things which lie hidden beyond death or in the world to come" (p. 547). Lutheran orthodoxy is berated for its "biblicistic eschatology." Prenter claims that there is a special hermeneutics which must be applied when dealing with the eschatological themes of the Scriptures. Thus he writes: "A biblicistic eschatology which conceives of the biblical statements as direct information about the hereafter and which tries to harmonize them in a logical system must therefore be rejected" (footnote 147, p. 548). Prenter claims there has to take place a "de-apocalypticizing" of eschatology. In the proclamation of the church "the last things" (*ta eschata*) are the same as "the last one" (*ho eschatos*). "Jesus Christ himself in the revelation of his glory, who will bring to an end the hiddenness under which both he and his restored people have their existence so long as the power of death has not been broken" (p. 549). The philosophical eschatology which reinterprets the eschatological as figurative is repudiated. The latter understanding began in the 1920's with dialectical theology. Prenter believes that a biblical eschatology recognizes the pictorial and the figurative character of the statements that deal with *De novissimis*.

Prenter's hermeneutics results in his questioning the historical events that are to occur before and in connection with the second coming of Christ. On the day of the ascension Jesus' physical presence was removed from the sight of the disciples. As the followers of our Lord watched Jesus ascend heavenward, angels present said to the disciples: "This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). If these words are taken as they read, it would contradict the position of Prenter who does not believe that the second coming of Christ will be a visible historical return, but he claims that

the return will mark the end of the age. Prenter rejects traditional eschatological conceptions about the second coming. The historical events that are promised as preceding the end of the world and of this age, as outlined in the Mt. Olivet discourse, are not to be literally understood, otherwise Prenter claims they "would make the worship of watchfulness no longer necessary."

In connection with his discussion of the "end-historical ideas" the Aarhus professor takes up those of the antichrist and the millennium (pp. 555-556). After tracing what he considers is the history of the understanding of the concept of the antichrist in II Thes. 2, he stated that the identification of the antichrist with Nero, the Pope, Napoleon, Karl Marx and Hitler is not correct, although "none of these concrete historical references is as such absolutely wrong" (p. 556). The correct interpretation of the New Testament antichrist according to Prenter is to find him in a wide variety of manifestations of the devil's opposition to Christ, an opposition that can express itself not only in the religious realm but also in the sphere of politics.

According to the Danish dogmatician the idea of the Millennium is found only in one passage of the Scriptures, Revelation 20. In the history of the Christian church the passage from the Apocalypse has played an important role. Chiliasm has manifested itself in two forms: *chiliasmus crassus* and *chiliasmus subtilior*. The former brand is the view, revived by pietism, that Christ will reign for a thousand years in earthly splendor, while the latter kind expects a flowering of the kingdom of God coming after the conversion of the Jews and the fall of the papacy. Prenter also objected to Bishop Martensen of Denmark, who understood the millennium as consisting in Christ's spiritual victory in the world. Prenter has expressed his agreement with article XVIII of the Augustana which rejects chiliasm. The Danish scholar cannot accept any of the forms of millennialism, because in his opinion they are based on a wrong hermeneutic in interpreting the end events, which are not to be considered as actually occurring in time.

Prenter does not allow for an intermediate state, a discussion of which is found in many Lutheran dogmatics listed in the beginning of this essay. With the acceptance of the more recent neo-orthodox view and liberal view on the unitary concept of man, there is no need for a place to which the soul or spirit goes when death occurs. *Creation and Redemption* rejects the interpretation of Revelation 20 which refers to the "souls" of those dead martyred as existing as indicating the persistence of human personality beyond death. Prenter questions the explanation that Revelation 20 speaks of a period between the incarnation and the second coming. The idea of an intermediate state is for Prenter a development of late Jewish eschatology, borrowed by the Jews from Zoroastrianism.

Traditional Christian and Lutheran theology has distinguished two judgments, a preliminary one at death, and the other as a part of the Great Assize. That the soul or spirit of a person departs the body and proceeds either to the place of bliss or to the place of con-

demnation is repudiated by Prenter and characterized as a pagan concept, resting supposedly on the erroneous Hellenistic dualism that the soul is held a prisoner and at death is released from its bondage. He asserts that "Lutheran orthodoxy returned to the idea of a twofold judgment but without the inclusion of the intermediate state, so that believers immediately at death enter into blessedness, and the unbelievers into condemnation, which means, of course, that the last judgment is still to come" (p. 567, footnote 160). The one judgment recognized by Prenter will occur at the second coming of Christ and not at the death of the individual. He claims that at death those who die in the Lord continue in the fellowship which they had with Christ "realized in our worship through the word and sacrament" (p. 572). The writer fails to see how there can be fellowship on the part of those who cease to exist at death, who have been blown to smithereens or who have become a part of some marine animal or who return to dust from which God once created the first man, Adam. According to the teaching of our Lord in Luke 16:19-30 the poor man was taken "by the angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man went to Hades, the place of torment." Though the bodies of both the poor man and the rich man were buried, their souls or spirits left their bodies and began an immediate existence in conformity with their deserts.

Since Prenter claims that the events in connection with the second coming are not actual happenings and that the eschatological "events" are to be understood as symbolical terms, it is difficult to imagine what is meant by the great judgment of all nations before Christ in Matthew 25:31-46; and in Revelation 20:11-15. Those who have died in the Lord are not with Jesus and have not entered the church triumphant and the church glorious but are said by Prenter to wait for the coming of Christ in judgment.

What will take place at the second coming? Prenter answers: There will be a twofold judgment. What will be the character of the judgment that will take place? Again the Danish theologian answers: "The judgment is the revelation of the hidden life of faith, hope and love in Christ (Col. 3:3-4)." All Biblical statements and applications indicate either a judgment to salvation or to condemnation. The nature of the judgment is a mystery like the mystery of predestination. Although the judgment will proclaim condemnation, the Bible does not tell men in what the condemnation consists. It is improper, Prenter asserts, to threaten people with hell. The latter he defined as the absolute contrast to heaven, the place where absolute love has conquered. The torment of the condemned will consist in this that the latter will have to acknowledge the glory of Christ. Eternal life is participation in the victorious glory of Jesus Christ. "Eternal life is the complete victory of the glory of Jesus Christ." Eternal life which at present is a hidden unity with Christ through justification and sanctification will after the final judgment be seen and possessed visibly.

According to Prenter the Christian lives in hope. He looks

forward to the hope of the resurrection of the body and eternal life through Jesus Christ. Without hope the church would lose its vigilance and die. The conclusion of Biblical history as well of the Church's proclamation must be expressed in the words of the Apocalypse: "Come. Lord Jesus!"

Conclusion

Prenter's *Creation and Redemption*, a book of 579 pages, consisting somewhere between 250,000 and 260,000 words cannot adequately be evaluated in the brief space permitted for this review article. Not all doctrines discussed by Prenter have been alluded to or evaluated. This writer agrees with the judgment of Fletcher, that "Prenter's work appears not so much as a particular "Danish" or "Scandinavian" theology, but as a personal assessment of Lutheran orthodoxy coupled with an effort toward contributing to a hard-won, authentic ecumenical theology."²⁹ That Prenter's dogmatics takes positions that are different on significant doctrines from the positions held by Lutheranism the writer believes has been demonstrated in this essay. Since Prenter has defined dogmatics, not as a systematic science, but rather a critical science, which is in dialogue with exegesis and preaching, the contents of dogmatics will constantly be subject to change. Willingness to use the historical critical method, concessions to form criticism and adoption of certain positions of the new hermeneutic will mean that the doctrines once considered binding by the Early Church and by the Reformers will need to be changed or even abandoned! Thus Prenter's *Creation and Redemption* will turn out to be a dogmatics, which in many respects will be dated, and whose present stance on many doctrines will be rejected by future theologians and pastors.

NOTES

1. Information on the life and academic and theological achievements of Regin Prenter is taken from the jackets of *Spiritus Creator* and *Creation and Redemption*, supplied respectively by the Muhlenberg and Fortress Presses.
2. Regin Prenter, *The Word and Spirit; Essays on Inspiration of the Scriptures*. Translated by Harris E. Kaas (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965). 163 pages.
3. Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*. Translated by John M. Jensen. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953). 311 pages.
4. Regin Prenter, *Creation and Redemption*. Translated by Theodore I. Jensen. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). 596 pages.
- 4a. Regin Prenter, *The Church's Faith. A Primer of Christian Beliefs*. Translated by Theodore I. Jensen. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968). 224 pages.
5. Edward H. Schroeder, "A Dogmatic that Makes Sense," *The Cresset*. 30:24, September, No. 9, 1967.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Erwin L. Lueker, "Book Review of Regin Prenter, *Creation and Redemption*," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 39:217, May, 1968. Cf. also Lueker's book review of the Danish edition in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 31:523-524, August, 1960.
8. Lueker, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 31:217, May, 1968.

9. George S. Hendry, "Book Review of Regin Prenter, *Creation and Redemption*," *Theology Today*, 24:394, October, 1967.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 392-393.
11. John Fletcher, "Book Review of Regin Prenter, *Creation and Redemption*," *Anglican Theological Review*, 43:116, January, 1961.
12. Hendry, *op. cit.*, p. 392.
13. Paul E. Empie & James J. McCord, *Marburg Revisited. A Reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 197.
14. Hendry, *op. cit.*, p. 393.
15. In the Religious section of *Time*, March 8, 1968, p. 46.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115. Claims that the material discussed by Prenter in his *Prolcgomena* is determined by his definition of Dogmatics. The subjects which are reviewed among others are: a) a point of departure for the ecumenical debate over dogmatic authority, b) Revelation and reason, c) Roman and Lutheran doctrine, d) Catholic and evangelical doctrine, e) Pietism and Rationalism, f) the structure of Dogmatics.
18. H. Paul Santmire, "Book Review of Prenter's *Creation and Redemption*," *Religion and Life*, 37:134, Spring, No. 1, 1968.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
20. In fairness to Prenter it should be noted that in various places he criticizes various conclusions of the historical-critical method, cf. p. 429, 425.
21. Prenter does not reject all miracles in the Scriptures. On page 56 he claims that the people of the Old Testament were wrong in that they held a naive belief in miracles. Yet he berates those who reject the miracle of the resurrection. Nowhere does he state the criteria used to determine when a student of the Scriptures rejects a miracle and when he accepts it.
22. According to Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 115. "Prenter's sections on Creation and Salvation can be seen, in one way, as an effort toward *consolidation and advance* after fifty years of one of the most creative theological periods, which revolved around such persons as Barth, Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Althaus, Werner Elert, and Heinrich Vogel. Certain sections of the book have been added or revised since the original Danish publication in the light of contributions to the field of dogmatics by such theologians as Hermann Diem and Carl Ratschow."
23. Prenter views are utilized by the authors of *Who Can This Be? Studies in Christology. A guide to Study and Discussion* (New York: Division of Theological Studies Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., 1968), pp. 32-36. Prenter's identification of creation and redemption is used to argue for the Social Gospel and for the necessity of the church's involvement in all the social and political problems of our time. The other-worldly character of the Christian faith seems to be completely neglected in this Christological study!
24. Cf. Werner Elert, *An Outline of Christian Doctrine*. Translated by Charles M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1927), pp. 110.
25. Bernhard W. Anderson, editor, *The Old Testament and Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 54.
26. Joseph Stumpp. *The Christian Faith* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 235.
27. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language. College Edition* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1964), p. 495.
28. Cf. Bernard Ramm, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 43-44. for modern usages of "eschatology."
29. Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.