

Trinity Te Deum

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Sunday School and Bible Study 9:15 AM – Divine Service 10:30 AM

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Attention!

In a joint decision, Pastor and Elders have decided, as of April 16th, to no longer stream the audio of Divine Service and to no longer mail those who are absent from Divine Services. Shut-ins will still be mailed to. Guests will still be mailed to for up to a month. If you want a specific bulletin or sermon, email the secretary at secretary@trinityaustin.org. The website will continue to have the full text and audio of every sermon. An audio of a complete Divine Service will also be at www.trinityaustin.com for visitors to 'sample' our service.

A Belated Review of Mel Gibson's "The Passion"

Posted on March 13, 2008 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

From this byline, you know that I wrote this 15 years ago. In Lent, I was thinking how my point of view about this film has been vindicated. This was the latest film that was going to convert the nations. This would bring home the Passion in all its gory details. It did. But now what? For the first couple of years, churches had viewing – it seems wrong to call them – 'parties', but where do you go after showing it to them for years? Finally, as I tell Adult Confirmation classes, The Passion contrasts the Catholic versus the Lutheran view of the Passion. Mel Gibson plays the soldier holding the nail as it's pounded into Christ. That's not bad theology. Lucas Cranach the Younger, personal friend of Luther, depicts the blood spewing forth from Christ's side and hitting his deceased father on the head. (Apologies to confirmands over the years. I had this detail wrong.) This highlights that the shed blood of Christ is for us. That's the right way to value the Passion.

Four years seems long enough to wait before writing a critical review of a movie that the church, for the most part, praised. It was thought to be a great vehicle for evangelizing, a great way to bring the Passion of Christ alive. I called it at the time "spiritual pornography," and I stand by that judgment.

First, let's deal with the obvious way someone will try to vitiate this review, "Did you see the movie? If you didn't how can you even review it, let alone call it pornographic?" Well, I call X-rated films pornographic though I don't see

them either. It's the use they make of the human body and sexuality that makes them pornographic. Gibson's use of the Passion of Christ is spiritually pornographic.

Pornography, whether spiritual or physical, must be more and more graphic, base, and evil to produce the same effect. If you go away from *The Passion* with what you think is a favorable spiritual reaction, you will need more of what it showed you for the same response. How much more is there? The next step will be doing what a sect in the Philippines does each Good Friday. Members have themselves crucified literally for 3 hours.

This exposes yet another fallacy: that the physical torment of our Lord is the sum total or even the height of His Passion. He cries out, "My God why have you forsaken Me," not, "My God it hurts so much." Millions of people in history have been crucified, most taking days to die not hours. We get more of a sense of what Jesus endured when we experience the guilt and shame of our sins, when we're despairing of God's mercy, or when the *Anfechtung* has a hold of us than we do by viewing the physical aspects of crucifixion. Moreover, a World War I author said this about trying to write about the war he experienced, "Horror, truthfully described, weakens to the merely clinical" (*The Great War and Modern Memory*, 174). Repeated viewing of *The Passion* will leave a person as emotionally unattached to the events as the 1953 book *A Doctor at Calvary* does.

What about a one time viewing? True, the most common reaction people who have seen the movie express is an emotional one. How can you not have an emotional response to such a violent movie? However, if we are not to weep for Jesus but for ourselves on Good Friday, then no one who merely says, "Lord, Lord I feel so bad for You" will enter into the kingdom on the last day. Isaiah 53:10 says, "It was the will of the Lord to crush Him." The KJV and NASB translate, "It pleased the Lord." Unless we say, "Amen," to this we completely miss the point of the Passion of the Christ.

People who advocate seeing *The Passion* want you to have the experience. I don't want an experience that adds to my worship. It has been in the name of adding experience to worship that the most harm has been done to worshipping. What the Lord gives not my experience of His giving is the proper focus.

But wait; if Paul can be glad that Christ is preached even from evil motives, shouldn't I be glad about *The Passion*? Is Christ really preached in the movie? According to the law His Passion is pictured, but not according to the Gospel. I suppose if pressed, you could get me to say that if even one sinner is turned in faith towards Christ, the movie is worth

it. But then you must acknowledge that the movie is worth millions upon millions of dollars to those who made it, and that's why it was made.

It seems to me that the church, in endorsing this movie, is falling into the trap that Hollywood is where the real experts are. Actors who play struggling farmers are brought before congress to testify about the plight of the American farmer. Actresses who play abused women testify about abuse. Going to Mel Gibson for information on the Passion of Christ is like going to him for information on being a cop (his *Lethal Weapon* series) or on the future (his *Mad Max* series). I watch movies to be entertained not informed. Should anyone be entertained by the Passion of Christ? Furthermore, I believe it is as foolhardy to think you're informing people about the true Passion of Christ by the movie *The Passion* as it is to think you're informing kids about volcanoes by showing them the movie *Dante's Peak*. This is what my local high school claimed when I complained about them showing my son that movie during science class.

Okay, do I think you sin by watching this movie? No, but I am not sinning for not wanting to see it, nor is it sinful for me to tire of people implying I should. I don't go around telling doctors they ought to see *Patch Adams*, mathematicians they ought to see *A Beautiful Mind*, or kids they ought to see *School of Rock*. Wouldn't you think me silly if I did? For crying out loud they are all just movies! The passion of the Christ, however, is much more than a movie, and to reduce it to such seems, in this reviewer's mind, tragic.

Theses on Justification

A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (Continued: IX)

IX. The Gospel and Absolution

39. The justification of the world is Christ's work accomplished once and for all through His obedience of living and suffering. Justification by faith is the work of the Holy Spirit as He works faith in the hearts of individuals. (1 Cor. 2:12; 12:3; Gal. 5:5; Heb. 2:9, 14-18; 9:26; 10:12; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:2; SA II, i, 1-4; LC II, 31, 38, 61-65; III, 88; V, 31; FC Ep III, 3-6; FC SD XI, 15) It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That either of these aspects of justification militates against the other.

40. Not only has God loved all mankind and sent Christ to be the Savior of all, not only is He graciously disposed toward each and every sinner and earnestly desirous that they lay hold on His grace and on Christ's benefits through faith, but God has instituted definite means and instruments of His grace and salvation, namely, His Gospel and sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), through which alone He both offers and distributes to sinners all the treasures of forgiveness and salvation which Christ has merited, and creates in sinners the faith through which these treasures are received and appropriated. (Gen. 12:3; Ps. 19:7-

8; Matt. 26:26-28; 28:18-20; John 17:20; Acts 2:38; 11:20-21; Rom. 1:16; 10:6-8, 17; 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:15; 15:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:5; Col. 1:5-6; 1 Thess. 2:13; James 1:18-21; 1 Peter 1:23; 3:21; 1 John 2:2; AC V, 1-2; XXVIII, 8-9; Ap IV, 73; XII, 40-43; XIII, 1,5; XVIII, 8; SA III, viii, 3, 10; LC I, 101; II, 42, 53-54, 56; V, 31)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That God does not convert people and maintain them in faith through these means; That God has promised to convert and save people apart from these means; That these means inform people about Christ and His work but do not offer and confer the very blessings which result from Christ's atonement.

41. The Gospel is the specific good news of everything that God in Christ has done and is doing for our salvation. Its content is that the Son of God has come into the world to be our Brother and Substitute, to endure the curse of the law and bear our sins and thus to save us. Christ and all His benefits are freely offered and given us in His Word and sacraments. (Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21-23; Acts 2:22-24, 32-33; 5:30-32; 8:35; 10:38-43; 13:32-33 Rom. 1:16-17; 16:25; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2:2; 15:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal 1:11; 2:21; 3:1; Eph. 1:3-10; 2:13-16; Col. 1:21-23; 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:8-11; Heb. 2:14-17; Ap IV, 5, 43, 67, 103, 159-165; VII, 9; XIII, 21; XXIV, 36, 69-70; LC II, 58, 62, 68-69; IV, 80-83; V, 31-32; V Confession, 32-33; FC Ep V, 5; FC SD III, 33; FC SD XI, 16)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That the content of the Gospel, strictly speaking, includes laws or demands of God; That the Gospel includes an individual's confidence that he really believes the Gospel; That Word and sacraments only inform people of blessings that God won for them long ago, at the time of Christ's work.

42. Thus, the Gospel is the message that God has saved the world through the work of Christ, that He is reconciled and at peace with the sinful world because of the atonement of His Son and has by raising His Son from the dead declared the world to be righteous (objective justification). This Gospel Word is a mighty means of grace and salvation which, with the sacraments, the visible Word, the Holy Spirit employs to create and sustain faith (subjective justification), and to build, nourish, strengthen, and sanctify His church on earth. (Is. 55:10-11; Luke 8:11-15; Rom. 10:5-17; 16:25-27; 1 Cor. 2:2; 15:4; Gal. 1:7; 3:1; Col. 1:5-6; 2 Tim. 1:10; 2:8; James 1:18, 21; 1 Peter 1:23-25; AC V, 1-3; XII, 5; XIII, 1; Ap IV, 73, 103; XVIII, 8; LC I, 91-92, 101; II, 38, 43-45, 53-54; FC Ep V, 5; FC SD II, 50; III, 57; XI, 28-32)

43. When Christ died for sinners, He died for each and every sinner individually; when God accepted the redemption of Christ, He did so for each and every sinner. When we proclaim the Gospel of justification, we do so in order that every sinner may know that God loved him and had him individually and personally in mind when He delivered up His Son. And we announce to every sinner personally and individually forgiveness and justification in Christ. (Job 19:25; Ps. 32:5; Is. 53:5; Gal. 2:20; 1 Tim. 1:15; Ap IV, 45, 262-264; XII, 59-65, 72-74; XIII, 21; FC SD XI, 28-29)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That the Gospel is adequately proclaimed if Christ is shown

to have died for the world only in a general or vague way, and not necessarily for the individual hearer; That Christ did not carry out the atonement for the benefit of and in the place of all; That the contrite unbeliever's lack of faith makes it impossible for him to be told he is forgiven and justified.

44. It is essential to the proclamation of the Gospel to declare the work of Christ, His atonement as well as its result. (Luke 24:46–47; 1 Cor. 2:2, 9:16; 2 Cor.5:16–21; 11:4; Gal. 1:8; Ap IV, 53; SA II, i, 5; FC Ep V, 5; FC SD III, 25)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That the Gospel is preached without explicit mention of Christ's work of redemption and His benefits; That mere reference to faith in Christ or to justification through faith is to preach the Gospel, even when no mention is made of Christ's saving work and His benefits; That the Gospel promises and grants not only forgiveness and salvation but also physical healing, material prosperity, political liberation, or other temporal benefits.

45. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convert, regenerate, and sanctify the sinner by means of the Gospel of reconciliation, not to reconcile God to the sinner. The Holy Spirit reconciles the sinner to God by means of the message of God's work in Christ. (2 Cor. 4:6; 5:19–20; Eph. 2:5–8; Col. 2:12; AC V, 2; Ap IV, 64–68; LC II, 38–39, 61–65; III, 51; FC SD I, 14)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That the Holy Spirit reconciles God to the sinner by His work in the sinner.

46. When one proclaims Christ's finished work and world justification this must always be done with the purpose that it be received through faith (Mark 16:16; Rom. 1:16–17). When one speaks of faith or justification through faith, this must be done in such a way that it is clear that faith is logically subsequent, not prior, to the Gospel of objective justification. (Rom. 3:21–28; 5:1–11; 2 Cor. 5:19–20; Gal. 4:4–7; Col. 1:20–23; Ap IV, 43–45, 80–81, 84, 87, 97; SA II, i, 1–4; FC Ep III, 3–6)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That there is any more basic goal in Gospel proclamation than the Holy Spirit's creation of faith in the hearers; That the psychological dimension of justifying faith is more basic and important than justifying faith as receptivity.

47. It must be proclaimed in the churches and in the world that man is a sinner (law), just as it must be proclaimed that man is forgiven and righteous for Christ's sake, that God forgives sins because of Christ's fulfillment of the just demands of the law (Gospel). (Matt. 19:16–22; Rom. 3:9–19, 25–26; 10:4; Gal. 3:10–14, 21–26, Ap II, 13; IV, 166–168; XII, 53; FC Ep I, 9; FC SD I, 8; V, 10–13, 17–18)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That people at any time in history do not need the law to expose their sin.

48. It must be proclaimed in the church and to the world that God is reconciled and at peace with all (Gospel), just as that God is angry and punishes sinners (law) must be proclaimed in the church and to the world. (Ps. 5:5; 90:7–8;

103:10–12; Is. 52:3–7; Luke 24:47; Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 4:13–15; 2 Cor. 3:9; 5:19–20; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 John 2:1–2; AC II, 1–2; Ap IV, 128; FC SD V, 10–13, 17–18)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That people can have saving faith in God even though they have not heard the definite Word which tells them that God for Christ's sake is no longer angry with them.

49. With the command to preach the Gospel to every creature, Christ has commanded that the forgiveness of sins which He has acquired for all, that is, complete absolution, be preached to all. But the distinction between law and Gospel must always be observed, lest the penitent be further afflicted with the law, or the impenitent be falsely comforted with the Gospel. (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Ap IV, 43, 62; LC II, 38)

50. This absolution, or forgiveness of sins, based upon Christ's perfect and vicarious obedience of life, death, and resurrection, is the Gospel, whether proclaimed to many or few. (Matt. 9:1–8; Luke 24:47; AC XII, 5; XXV, 1–6; Ap IV, 271; XII, 39; SA III, iv; FC Ep V, 5)

51. Private absolution is nothing else than the proclamation of the Gospel to the individual sinner. (John 20:23; Ap XII, 39, 99, 105; SA III, iv; LC V Confession, 29, 32)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That private absolution has, is based on, or confers some power outside the Gospel, e.g., a power inherent in the person or office of the person pronouncing the absolution.

52. The proclamation of forgiveness, or absolution (God's justification, or acquittal), does not consist in the fact that the confessor, or pastor, sits as judge over the confessant and renders a verdict over his worthiness or faith, nor is it an empty announcement, or mere wish, that the confessant be forgiven, but it powerfully imparts forgiveness and salvation. (Matt. 7:1–5; 9:1–5; John 5:39; Acts 11:14; Rom. 1:16–17; 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21; 4:3–5; James 4:11; Peter 1:23; Ap XII, 40, 104–105; SA III, vii, 1–3; LCV, 31; Confession, 14)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That the word of absolution may be pronounced conditionally, e.g., "I forgive you your sins, on the condition that you believe and change your life"; That absolution is not a true forgiveness, a divine verdict by which God exonerates and forgives sins, but merely an offer of forgiveness to those who believe; That since we cannot be certain of the true contrition and faith of anyone, we cannot pronounce an unconditional absolution.

53. The efficacy of the proclamation of forgiveness, or absolution, does not depend upon man's worthiness, confession, or faith; rather absolution solicits faith and, like Baptism, creates and sustains the very faith that it solicits. (John 17:20; Acts 11:20–21; Rom. 1:16, 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21–24; AC V, 1–2; XII, 5; XXV, 4; Ap IV, 555, 267, 272, 324, 397; Ap XII, 42, 56; XIII, 19–20; LC II, 62; IV, 35; V, 34; LC V Confession, 15)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That anyone receives for himself the forgiveness granted in absolution without faith; That the proper object of faith, that to which it clings, is the "inner assurance," the "indwelling

Christ,” or some other inner experience or feeling of forgiveness, instead of the external means of grace; That the hearing of the Gospel and the use of the sacraments are merely the evidence that true faith exists in the heart, rather than that the hearing of the Gospel and the use of the sacraments are the means by which God awakens and confirms faith in those who use them.

Defection by Television

Posted on November 14, 2022 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

Forty Autumns, the story of East Germany and Germans inside and out of that dystopian regime is worth the read. It illustrates why the most effective way of undermining an Iron Curtain is not an effective way for spreading the Gospel. The ubiquity of Zoom services and Facebook streaming notwithstanding.

The author, living in the West, details how radio signals reached into the benighted land of East Germany, but how exponentially greater was the impact of TV. It was so effective and so damaging from the East German authoritarian state’s viewpoint that they coined the phrase “Defection by Television.” That name in and of itself tells you why it’s problematic to stream video of services.

When you do audio only, you do what good old Ozzie Hoffman’s Lutheran Hour claimed: You bring Christ to the nations. Via the Word Christ enters the time, space, and *Sitz im Leben* of the individual regardless of where they might be. Dale Meyer followed the venerable Ozzie of the 44, and it was definitely a step down. Think Medes and Persians sliver to Nebuchadnezzar’s gold. He had a genius for marketing, a penchant would be a more accurate term, changed the Lutheran Hour forever and probably irrecoverably when he added “and the nations to the church.”

Do you see what Dale did there? He turned radio into something it wasn’t meant to be. It’s a delivery vehicle not a pick-up vehicle.

But what about “Defection by Television” it was called this because TV did what radio can’t. Video brings you to where the video is coming from. Hence, you defect to a Western World View, the author speaks of them being agog at the opulence of *Dallas*. It’s funny. We were agog at Dallas too but for its over-the-top-ness.

So when you stream your service, you’re doing the old push/pull which is conducive to muscle growth but not mental and certainly not spiritual growth. Your audio is of course going out confronting and comforting them right where they are with the Word, but you’re video is a come thither appeal pulling them to you. That is what video does. All the audio books I’ve listened to, well over 100, end with a thank you for listening to this ‘production of’ or ‘performance of’ whatever book it is. Yes, audio-only can certainly be a production, a performance. Video is meant to be and always is.

A Jewish man, who is now Lutheran, said that it was in listening to our service that he was drawn to start doing with

his body what the congregation was told to do with theirs, sit, stand, kneel, etc. where he was. He then started saying what we were saying where he was. The Church was coming into his time and space. He did come on Christmas Eve and Day. He told me: “It was wonderful. All this time I heard you celebrating Communion but never actually saw it till today.” In some sense, he was drawn to defect bodily, i.e. come to the actual service. I wonder if we’d always been streaming it, would he have been content with defection by television?

How is Easter Sunday Date Determined?

SUMMARY

Easter Sunday is the Sunday following the Paschal Full Moon (PFM) date for the year. (Paschal is pronounced "PAS-KUL", not "pas-chal"). See *Christian Prayer Books* for proof of this concise definition.

In June 325 A.D. astronomers approximated astronomical full moon dates for the Christian church, calling them Ecclesiastical Full Moon (EFM) dates. From 326 A.D. the PFM date has always been the EFM date after March 20 (which was the equinox date in 325 A.D.)

From 1583, each PFM date differs from an Astronomical Full Moon (AFM) date usually by no more than 1 date, and never by more than 3 dates. (Each AFM is a two-dates event due to world time zones. Each PFM is a one-date event world-wide).

HISTORY

Easter Sunday is the date of the annual celebration of Christ's resurrection. The aim of the Easter Dating Method is to maintain, for each Easter Sunday, the same season of the year and the same relationship to the preceding astronomical full moon that occurred at the time of his resurrection in 30 A.D.

This was achieved in 1583 A.D. using skill and common sense by Pope Gregory the 13th, and his astronomers and mathematicians, predominantly Lilius and Clavius, by introducing their new larger (revised) PFM Gregorian dates table. This replaced the (original) 326 A.D. "19 PFM dates" table in the Julian calendar.

Easter Sunday, from 326 A.D., is always one of the 35 dates March 22 to April 25. From 31 A.D. to 325 A.D. Easter Day was celebrated either:

(a) on or just after the first day of the Jewish Passover (no matter on which day of the week that Easter Day occurred), or

(b) on a Sunday close to or on the first Passover Day. Both of these methods existed continuously throughout this period.

From 326 A.D. to 1582 A.D. Easter Sunday date was based on the Julian calendar in use at that time. It became defined as the Sunday following the Paschal Full Moon date for the year, using a simple "19 PFM dates" table. Precise

information on this subject can be found on pages 415 to 425 of the Explanatory Supplement to the 1961 Astronomical Ephemeris.

The Julian calendar was replaced by the Gregorian calendar in October 1582 to re-align March 20 (and therefore Easter) with the seasons by removing 10 dates October 5 to 14, 1582. This replacement did not occur until later in many countries e.g. in September in England. See GM Arts Easter Date Calculations for more information. ENGLISH Easter Sunday dates for 1583 to 1752 can be calculated using information near the end of this Easter Dating Method document.

The Gregorian calendar very closely maintains the alignment of seasons and calendar dates by having leap years in only 1 of every 4 century years, namely, those divisible exactly by 400. One additional February 29 date will need to be removed in about 4140 A.D., therefore Easter calculations will need to use the changed Days of Week of PFM dates when the exact year for this removal is decided.

From 326 A.D., the Easter Sunday Date for any given year is NOT determined by the March Equinox date for that year. March 20 (not March 21) is the most common Gregorian Equinox date from 1583 to 4099 A.D.

Historically, references to March 21 have caused mistakes in calculating Easter Sunday dates. March 20 has become the important date in recent Easter dating methods. Despite frequent references to March 21, this date has no special significance to any recent Easter dating methods.

The present method describing the Easter Dating Procedure can be found in Christian Prayer Books. This procedure has been dramatically simplified by Ronald W. Mallen, Adelaide, South Australia. See Finding Easter Sunday Dates with a Calculator for a clear and unique explanation of this procedure.

<http://www.assa.org.au/edm.html#List20>
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The Definitive Article on Translating “Covenant” in Scripture

Below is an article from 1988 on the Hebrew and Greek words usually translated ‘covenant’ by others most of the time ‘testament’ or ‘promise’ by me. This article by confessional Lutheran Hebrew and Greek scholars is a fair treatment of the issues. This will set you in good stead to make a defense of this point. (Prh)

Diatheke = ["covenant" or "testament"?)

In 1988, God's Word to the Nations Bible Society published *The New Testament: God's Word to the Nations (GWN)*. This distinctly Lutheran New Testament translation contained a huge set of Appendixes containing valuable information regarding the translation. One particular Greek word that was rendered differently from modern translations was *diatheke*. While most modern translations use

"covenant", GWN went with "last will and testament," or a variation thereof. This word is *very significant* regarding the Lutheran understanding of the Sacrament of the Altar (Lord's Supper).

The Appendixes from *The New Testament: God's Word to the Nations (GWN)* did not make it to subsequent editions and the 1988 version of *The New Testament* is now out of print and no longer available. We are pleased to make available online this one, small, but *significant* section of the Appendixes from 1988. Our sincere thanks to God's Word to the Nations for granting us permission to post this section on our church website.

APPENDIX 2

SPECIAL GWN TRANSLATION FEATURES

C. THE SPECIAL HANDLING OF CERTAIN GREEK TERMS

3. *Diatheke*

Diatheke is one of the most important and fascinating terms in all of Scripture. Its depth and conceptual richness, the history of its translation into English, and the debate over its meaning in several Biblical contexts have demanded as much in-depth research and prayerful decision-making as any other single term translated in GWN.

The Greek *diatheke* (coupled with the Hebrew term *berith*, which is rendered "covenant" in virtually every English Old Testament translation) needs—almost demands—a volume of explanation. This is illustrated by the many pages that have been written concerning both of these terms in the history of the church. This present article adds another contribution to that ongoing discussion, a discussion, however, which by our day has become quite one-sided. GWN, *via* its particular translation of *diatheke* in various New Testament contexts, hopes to encourage a renewal of discussions that are more willing to look once again at all the evidence available.

The questions are: (1) Should *diatheke* be translated "covenant" or "testament" ("last will and testament")? (2) Are the two English concepts mutually *exclusive*, or do they overlap? (3) How much should the usage and context of given passages influence the translation of the term, exegetically speaking, as one applies the raw Greek lexical data? Related to these questions is the call to examine translation history a bit and to reexamine additional Scripture passages quite a bit. By the fact that GWN variously translates the 33 New Testament occurrences of *diatheke* with "covenant," "last will and testament," or with one of the two terms followed by the other in brackets indicates that GWN does not believe that a simple answer can be given.

Setting the tone. After considerable research of the term *diatheke*, GWN conclusions have sought to avoid polarization toward either opposing position: (1) the almost exclusive usage of "covenant"; or (2) the almost exclusive usage of "testament." This approach reflects the evaluation

of much evidence. (In fairness, it is also stated that not every GWN translator had a strong opinion in the matter, and parallel to the discussions-at-large in the field of Biblical scholarship, not all GWN translators saw eye to eye on the final translation of each passage.)

On the one hand, even though *diatheke* was used in the sense of a "last will and testament" from Democritus (c. 400 B.C.) onward, there is no evidence that the term was too narrow to permit its inclusion of "covenant" if New Testament writers wished to use it that way. (Those who see *diatheke* only in terms of a "last will and testament" and/or who also see *berith* ["covenant"] as an independent concept must explain how *diatheke* could have been used to designate the "*berith*" of Exodus 24:8 or Jeremiah 31:32 in passages like Hebrews 8:9 or 9:20, when the two Old Testament *berith* verses could hardly be viewed as "testamental" in their "law" contexts. This is especially true in the light of certain implications given in passages like Romans 4:13-25.)

On the other hand, one cannot help but be impressed with Moulton and Milligan's assertion that "...a Hellenist like the *auctor ad Hebraeos* [author of Hebrews], or even a Jew like Paul, with Greek language in the very fibre of his thought, could never have used *d[iatheke]* for *covenant* without the slightest consciousness of its ordinary and invariable contemporary meaning."²

Finally, from the Old Testament end of the spectrum, the idea that the Jews of the Old Testament were not accustomed to writing "last wills and testaments" is not decisive. For example, God gave His promises through the *word*; that was His signature. His people signed by *faith*. Thus, Old Testament Jews would not necessarily have had to put personal promissory testaments into writing in their everyday life. As God's people, they were also expected to be as good as their word (Prov. 6:1-3).

Diatheke: Its history of translation. Biblically speaking, the Greek term *diatheke* was first employed to translate the Hebrew *berith* some 250 years before Christ. This was done by the translators of the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Later, the New Testament used this same term to communicate given messages of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20; 1 Pet. 1:12b).

In time, the entire Bible came to be translated into Latin. The Vulgate became the dominant Latin version. Jerome, its translator, consistently rendered *diatheke* with the term *testamentum* throughout his New Testament. He also used this word quite often in the Old Testament. It was Jerome who entitled Scripture's two distinct units as "Old Testament" and "New Testament," terminology that still holds to this very day.

Martin Luther followed Jerome's *diatheke* or "last will and testament" approach, but not blindly. He knew the writings of the church fathers well. Church fathers, such as Chrysostom, had spoken consistently of Christ's "last will and testament." Reformers like Martin Chemnitz, "the

Second Martin (Luther)," continued this tradition. Though such reformers occasionally interchanged *testamentum* (when they wrote in Latin) with *pactum* or *foedus* (the regular words for "covenant"), their writings clearly indicated why they were using *testamentum* in the narrow sense in particular contexts. In such passages, they contended, *diatheke* referred to a "last will and testament," not to a "covenant" in the wider sense.

Luther, in his German Bible, displayed amazing insight as he skillfully moved back and forth between *Bund* ("covenant") and "*Testaments*" in his New Testament. (He did, however, consistently use *Bund* to translate *berith* throughout his whole Old Testament.) Luther's writings ably explain his methodology. Whenever the *diatheke* was a mere *promise*, he used *Bund*, that is, when the context implied that the fulfillment of a "covenant" promise, especially in terms of Jesus' death and His work as the God-Man, Luther used some form of *Testaments*.

For Luther the *berith* of the Old Testament was, in essence, the Gospel-promise of Jesus Christ, while the *diatheke* was the Gospel-promise *completed* in the Christ who was already born, sacrificed, risen, and who was coming again to give His people the ultimate inheritance: forgiveness of sins in heaven. This is why he writes: "And so that little word 'testament' is a short summary of all God's wonders and grace, fulfilled in Christ."⁶

Luther knew that every faithful Bible translator also has to be a capable exegete. This means letting "Scripture interpret Scripture." Hebrews 9 and Galatians 3, therefore, settled much of the *diatheke* question for Luther: "Between a testament and a promise there is this difference: a testament is made by someone who is about to die: a promise, however, is made by someone who expects to continue living.... Since God in the Scriptures again and again calls his promise a testament he means to announce thereby that he will die;.... A testament is nothing but the last will of one who is dying, telling how his heirs are to live with and dispose of his properties after his death.... The testator is Christ, who is about to die."⁷

Luther clearly distinguished between the "old covenant" and the "new 'last will and testament'" (cf. Ex. 24:8; Jer. 31:31; 1 Cor. 11:25). The "old" was picturesque, physical, outward, and temporal; the "new" was real, spiritual, inward, and eternal.⁸ This comprehension was gained from the whole of Scripture in general and from 2 Corinthians 3:7-15 in particular.

As the Reformation spread, the Scriptures were translated into many different languages.

Following Jerome and Luther, the King James (KJV) or Authorized Version (A.V.) translated *diatheke* with "covenant" and "testament" according to the basic guidelines laid down by Luther.

In time, the pendulum began to swing. Between 1881-1885 the Revised Version (R.V.) of the KJV translated *diatheke* in almost all instances with the term "covenant." The trend continued but was also cautioned

against by men of the caliber of Adolf Deissmann (to be quoted below) and Geerhardus Vos. In fact, Vos not only advocated a return to "testament" in certain passages like those of the Lord's Supper, where he said that it "may seem advisable," but he also had a clear concept of the difference between the "old" *diatheke* and the "new" *diatheke*.² But the trend to use "covenant" was to continue.

The late 1940's, especially the 1950's, and the years on down to the present all produced writings by such scholars as G. E. Mendenhall, writings which noted various parallels between the *berith* forms of the Bible and those forms of the ancient Near East, forms discovered by archaeologists.

Such a trend has continued to foster a one-sided conclusion. This has caused every modern translation of the past few decades to turn almost exclusively to "covenant" as its translation of *diatheke*. Even the New King James Version (NKJV) and the Roman Catholic translation known as The Jerusalem Bible have followed this trend. Only in a few selected passages, like Galatians 3:15 and Hebrews 9:16,17, has the term "will" or "testament" been retained.

A choice. *THE NEW TESTAMENT: God's Word to the Nations* (GWN) makes conspicuous use of "last will and testament" for *diatheke*. What warrants such a bold move? Does it merely reflect an older tradition, or is it a serious call for a renewed and ongoing evaluation?

There can be no doubt that much of the switch to "covenant" was well-intentioned and still is. "Covenant" seems to be a more familiar English word, and it introduces an explicit connection between the Old and New Testaments, a golden thread, if you will, that holds both Testaments together as a unified whole.

But as Deissmann says, the whole *diatheke* decision involves much more than the question of whether we retain the two divisions labeled "Old Testament" and "New Testament," instead of changing to "Old Covenant" and "New Covenant." His words are as relevant today as they were in the 1920s:

Perhaps the most necessary investigation still waiting to be made is that relating to the word *diatheke*, which so many scholars translate unhesitatingly "covenant" To St. Paul the word [*diatheke*] meant what it meant in his Greek Old Testament, "a unilateral enactment," in particular "a will or testament." This one point concerns more than the merely superficial question whether we are to write "New Testament" or "New Covenant" on the title-page of the sacred volume; it becomes ultimately the great question of all religious history: a religion of grace, or a religion of works?¹⁰

Those who favor "covenant" for *diatheke* see *berith* and *diatheke* as one-sided promises (suzerainty covenants) wherein God the Suzerain makes the promises and keeps all of them in Christ His Son. In many cases—and in line with Scripture—they teach that a person's response to God's covenant is *faith*, a faith that is solely created by God Himself (1 Cor. 12:3).

In defense of scholars like Deissmann, it is true that certain problems have been created by some "covenant" proponents. Those problems force us to consider very carefully how we translate the term *diatheke*.

There are some reasons for the above. It is a truism that many church liturgies still retain "new testament" in the words of institution at celebrations of the Lord's Supper—and without laypersons or even a number of the clergy being aware that modern Bibles exclusively use "covenant," not "testament," in those Supper passages.

Moreover, the concept of "covenant" has been advocated by some and used by others to deny ideas, such as the fact that "God died" to enact His testament (cf. Heb. 2:14; 1 Tim. 3:16), or that salvation is solely by grace (cf. Eph. 2:8,9). Those who know Scripture well and who are subordinate to it are well aware that no text presents the "covenant" concept as a "deal" between God and mankind.

The latter misunderstandings are often permitted or promoted in certain quarters where "covenant theology" is strong. There one finds a significant amount of the mixing of grace with works under the heading of "covenant." Some of these conclusions have been reached most innocently. Unwisely, many proponents—in zeal to emphasize man's response to God's initial grace—have overstated the human covenant role. (By no means do all advocates of "covenant theology" fall under this particular category.)

It does not seem proper within this article to state the names of those who advocate that which runs so counter to Biblical truth nor to list materials that promote such error. Thus, the avoidance of certain supportive footnotes! Rather, in the spirit of a friendly call toward a reopening of the whole *diatheke* discussion, let it be suggested that those interested read the article entitled "COVENANT" by Leon Morris in his *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 60-107. As far as it goes, it is an excellent, unbiased treatment of *diatheke* by a Christian scholar who favors the translation "covenant."

In addition, the present article includes other data to facilitate and encourage renewal of discussion. GWN puts an old choice with new approaches before the Bible-reading public by using both "covenant" and "testament" in a varied format.

The English problem. Some would say that *diatheke* presents more of a problem to translators in English than it did to the writers of Scripture in Greek. It is true that the terms "covenant" and "testament" do not track as well with each other in English; on the surface they seem like two unrelated concepts. We talk of a "baptismal covenant" and a "last will and testament," but never of a "baptismal testament" or a "last will and covenant." Obviously the two concepts were also not totally interchangeable in Latin and German, as is evidenced by the fact that (1) Jerome, who uses *pactum*, *foedus*, and *testament* rather interchangeably in his Old Testament, does not interchange them for *diatheke* in the New; and (2) Luther, who translated the

Bible into very down-to-earth German, often decided to avoid the simpler *Bund* in favor of the more complex *Testaments* in the New Testament portion of his translation.

This would indicate that the "testament" approach, followed for over 1,400 years in the history of New Testament translation, had been used after much thought was given to it. The occurrence of "covenant" in one passage and "testament" in another was not arbitrary.

It should also be stated that proponents of the "covenant" concept, perhaps unwittingly, may have made "covenant" too much of a focal point in their theology. In fact, their view may tend to limit Christ and His work (cf. Jn. 5:39). At times it tends to obscure other Biblical concepts, preventing them from exhibiting their full value. It may be accurate to say that modern Biblical scholarship has become overly enamored with the undeniably beautiful concept of "covenant."

Such shift in interpretation and translation has caused many "covenant" advocates to become less precise in terms of communication. This lack of precision is also a symptom in the "testament" camp. In English the words of Jesus, "This cup is the *new testament* in My blood," easily permit one to think of the New Testament portion of the Bible, not the concept of a "will." This is why GWN uses "new 'last will and testament'" to avoid such miscommunication. Likewise, the average churchgoer and English-speaking person who hears the word "covenant" will usually think of a contract between two parties, each of whom makes concessions, has obligations, and contributes something; "covenant" just sounds like it means "let's make a deal."

These very realities certainly create a dilemma for translators. However, the possibility of communicating two beautifully combined concepts in a meaningful way ought to offer them a positive challenge.

Superimposed concepts that challenge. GWN has faced what every translation faces: the question of primary dictionary meaning, plus or minus considerations that let the translation be shaped by the context. In other words, do exegetical considerations play into translation? In the case of *diatheke* it is hard not to answer in the affirmative, especially when *diatheke* is used to speak of the "old covenant" of Mount Sinai, a covenant that certainly did not promise the death of any type of testator. Sacrificial lambs certainly did not put much of anything into effect, as is the conclusion of Hebrews 9:13 and 10:4 (cf. Ex. 24:5-8).

To be sure, no one should deny the presence of a "covenant" concept on the pages of the Old Testament. At the same time, who can ignore the various "testamental" components that sit in so many "covenant" contexts? All should agree that from a Gospel point of view Genesis 12 and 15 are the key "covenant" chapters of the Old Testament. Note how chapter 12 contains the threefold promise (land, seed, and blessings) made to Abraham, a promise that for all intents and purposes contains nothing more than an inheritance oath that was never totally attainable until Christ completed His work (Heb. 11:13).

Chapter 15 is even more amazing as it speaks of God "cutting" a covenant with Abraham. This is done right in the midst of a context that contains "testamental" terminology: "heir," "child," "inherit," "property" (vv. 2,3,7,14). Also compare Acts 3:25.

These Genesis examples are so crucial that the adding of other examples of "promissory testaments," like those of Leviticus 24:8 or Deuteronomy 32:48-33:29, seems superfluous.¹¹

In short, there is a mixture of two concepts on the pages of Scripture, that of "testament" superimposed over the top of the "covenant" picture, but not vice versa.

This can lead one to believe that the translation "**testamental covenant**" (not "covenantal testament") may be the best possible translation for both *berith* and *diatheke*. This, of course, would not work in a modern translation that aims at simplicity of communication. Possibly the easiest of all would be to translate *berith* or "covenant" as "promise" and *diatheke* and its completed "testament" concept as "fulfilled promise." But this would also be unacceptable since the original idioms would be lost.

This forces the faithful translator to consider each individual context and to shape his translation accordingly. "Covenant" seems fine in the Old Testament where animals, not God, died (Gen. 15:10). Once again, Luther says it so well. Quoting Jerome, he writes: "...Jerome mentions, namely, that in the Hebrew one finds 'covenant' rather than 'testament.'" Then Luther explains why: "He who stays alive makes a covenant; he who is about to die makes a testament. Thus Jesus Christ, the immortal God, made a covenant. At the same time He made a testament, because He was going to become mortal. Just as He is both God and man, so He made both a covenant and a testament."¹²

And how things changed at the time of Jesus, "on the night He was betrayed," during the earlier hours of the day on which He would die! Finally God the Testator was ready to make His "last will and testament" (1 Cor. 11:23-25), which would put the inheritance into effect (Heb. 9:16,17). For that reason Paul adds that every time Christians go to the Supper they are "proclaiming the Lord's death—until He comes," that is, they acknowledge that Jesus the God-Man died, that His death has put His testament into effect, and that at His return He will take His people to their ultimate inheritance. This concept cannot be overemphasized.

Let every Bible reader who is interested in the whole *diatheke* question take the time to scan a concordance, looking up words like "adoption," "blessing," "heir," "inherit," "possess," "promise," and "son." One will also be amazed at how many times "testamental" ideas are present in the *berith* ("covenant") contexts of the Old Testament.

The above conclusions tend to reveal a need for permitting "testament" to overshadow "covenant" in several contexts. The idea of fulfillment or enactment of the "testament" by Christ's death dare not be blurred. Just note how the placement of the word "*new*" within the Lord's

Supper accounts indicates the idea of *fulfillment* (Matt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).

It is in relation to these points that Bible students can do themselves and the church a great favor. They also need to obtain a crystal clear understanding of the "old and new covenants" in relation to the term *diatheke*.¹³

Something else besides! The *blood* emphasis which is so present in the "covenant" picture as well as the *heir/inheritance* thought in the "testament" concept will help students of the Bible endorse an acceptable balance of emphasis. Then books like *Hebrews* will come to life in a new way, as one notices that Hebrews 1:2 mentions Jesus as the "Heir"; that 1:14 and 6:12-14 continue the "testament" emphasis; that 9:11-28 speaks of the Testator Jesus in action; and that chapter 11 on no less than eleven occasions uses words that relate to a "testament." For example, Hebrews 11 speaks of Noah as "an heir of righteousness that comes by faith" (v.7); of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as "heirs...of the same promise," who had lived in the "Promised Land" (v.9); and so forth. Then to top it off, the book ends—as it began—with a *diatheke* reference (13:20), speaking of "the Great Shepherd of the sheep" who died, and who "by His blood [implying both "covenant" and death] of the everlasting *diatheke* can take care of all needs. Need it be said that the gifts of inheritance take care of all needs?

An attention getter—John 3:16. Ask a crowd of believers for the most famous passage in the Bible. "JOHN 3:16!" a large percentage of them will reply. Isn't it interesting that this passage just happens to be in "testamental" form?

When a person goes to an attorney to draw up his "last will and testament," five things are usually involved: (1) *a testator*, the one who makes the will; (2) *heir(s)*; (3) *a method of effectuation*, the way by which a testament goes into effect (by death); (4) *a testator's promissory signature*, which validates—through his word of promise—that which will be given to the heir(s); and (5) *the actual inheritance* to be left behind.¹⁴

John 3:16: "For God (the Testator) loved the world (the heirs) so much that He gave (into death) His one-and-only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him would not perish (the Testator's signature by word of promise) but have everlasting life (the inheritance)." Amazing!

A pleasant duty. God calls on us not to add or subtract from His Word (Rev. 22:18,19). Christians joyfully comply and seek to be a check, even on themselves. Several generations have now grown up without having heard much of an emphasis on the "last will and testament" concept of Scripture. GWN translators pray that this present translation may play a part in successfully encouraging many leaders and followers to reexamine God's whole *diatheke* truth.

NOTE: GWN has used "last will and testament" where God's "new *diatheke*" stands fulfilled and "covenant" when it has not yet come to fulfillment. In texts which go back

and forth between prophetic promise and fulfillment, a system of *brackets* is used to help communication, so that the mind of the reader can better track the thoughts being expressed.

Footnotes:

Numbers are from the original text, thus they do not begin with "1".

5. "Diatheke," *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. The words "...its ordinary and invariable contemporary meaning" refer to "last will and testament."

6. *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), XXXV, 84.

7. *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), XXXVI, 179.

8. *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), XXXV, 84f.

9. *Biblical Theology; Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), pp. 34-36.

10. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), pp. 337f.

11. Compare Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 144-149.

12. *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), XXVII, 268.

13. *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), XXXV, 84f: "Therefore whenever in Scripture God's testament is referred to by the prophets, in that very word the prophets are taught that God would become man and die and rise again, in order that his word, in which he promises such a testament, might be fulfilled and confirmed. For if God is to make a testament, as he promises, then he must die; and if he is to die, then he must be a man. And so that little word 'testament' is a short summary of all God's wonders and grace, fulfilled in Christ....

"The old testament was a promise made through Moses to the people of Israel, to whom was promised the land of Canaan. For this testament God did not die, but the paschal lamb had to die instead of Christ and as a type of Christ. And so this was a temporal testament in the blood of the paschal lamb, which was shed for the obtaining and possessing of the land of Canaan. And as the paschal lamb, which died in the old testament for the land of Canaan, was a temporal and transitory thing, so too the old testament—together with that very possession or land of Canaan allotted and promised therein—was temporal and transitory.

"But Christ, the true paschal lamb [I Cor. 5:7], is an eternal divine Person, who dies to ratify the new testament. Therefore the testament and the possessions therein bequeathed are eternal and abiding. And that is what he means when he contrasts this testament with the other. 'A new testament,' he says, so that the other may become obsolete [Heb. 8:13] and no longer in effect. 'An eternal testament,' he says, not temporal like that other one; not to dispose of temporal lands and possessions, but of eternal blessings. 'In my blood,' he says, not in the blood of a lamb [Heb. 9:12]. The purpose of all this is that the old should be altogether annulled and should give place to the new alone."

14. J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), p. 87 with modification.

The New Testament: God's Word to the Nations (GWN) (Cleveland: Biblion Publishing, 1988), pp. 531-540.

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April 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
CRAWFISH BOIL 12:00 P.M.	JR. CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM			MAUNDY THURSDAY STRIPPING OF THE ALTAR 7:30 PM	GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE OF DARKNESS 7:30 PM	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	JR. CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	PASTOR ON VACATION / SABBATICAL				
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
PASTOR ON VACATION / SABBATICAL						
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
PASTOR ON VACATION / SABBATICAL			HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM			
30						

May 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	JR. CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM		HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	ULMA CONFERENCE		
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
		ELDERS MEETING 6:30 PM	HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM			
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
			HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM			
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
ASCENSION DINNER 12:00 PM		7:00 PM VOTERS MEETING	HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM			
28	29	30	31			
VCS PLANNING MEETING			HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM			