

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I was delighted to see Bp. FitzSimmons Allison's article on predestination (Summer 2008) but ultimately disappointed by his conclusions. Of course, he is entirely correct about the bondage of the will in this world. This, however, has nothing to do with predestination.

The beginning of the muddle is the quotation from William Temple. Contrary to Temple, predestination is not offensive because we see ourselves rather than God as the center of creation. It is offensive because it implies that some are damned even before they are born because of the foreknowledge of God. The foreknowledge of God derives from our understanding of the omniscience of God.

Our understanding of the omniscience of God may well be mistaken.

It is unfortunate that the sixteenth century appears to have lost track of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. The sixth chapter discusses predestination from an entirely different direction, which I have never seen addressed in Reformation writings.

Briefly, based on our Lord's remark, "Before Moses was, I AM," Boethius concludes that time as well as space is a creation of God. This means that God looks on all of our sequential passage through time from the outside, as a single whole. If this is true, to say that God knows what is going to happen before it happens is about as meaningful as saying, "I am going to live for green years." It is a categorical error. God "sees" the whole of human history as a unity, beginning to end, as if He studied it in the palm of His hand. He is free to manipulate it, and does, for our good, knowing what each change at one point will cause at another point. On the other hand, He does not know what you are going to do before you do it. He sees you do it in His unlimited now. The implication of inevitability does not hold in this understanding.

While FitzSimmons Allison's obser-

ventions about the severe limitations of our freedom in this world are powerful, the implication of individual determinism does not follow. It just isn't predestination. The concept of freedom as the recognition of necessity was touted by the communists because they were materialists. Materialists cannot but be determinists: there is nothing to them but cause and effect. For those of us with the potential to become children of God, there is a bit more. With a lot of help from the Spirit, we can be made free to accept redemption. It seems that this also implies that we are free to refuse it. How exactly this happens is the mystery that FitzSimmons Allison mentioned.

The freedom this implies is one of the two great gifts God has given us in the gift of time. The other, of course, is the possibility of learning from our sins and so learning to repent.

Interestingly, modern cosmological investigations suggest that the creation of the universe, by mathematical necessity, implies the simultaneous creation of time. It appears Boethius may have been right.

David C. Gilbert
Earlysville, Virginia

I am an eighty-year-old ELCA Lutheran layperson, and I quote below from a letter to my pastor in response to his "Seven Weeks of Easter 2008" request for our members to write or email him during this period, telling our own story of faith by responding to a series of questions he posed, such as, "What is your greatest struggle as a Christian?"; "Where are you now in your faith journey?"; and, "What might you be looking for now to help you along the way?" Here, in part, is what I wrote him.

"The 'struggle' and 'help along the way' questions might need amplification as to the way I really feel about these churchly things and happenings. I have had trouble articulating these

feelings in any coherent way, and must give it all over to Pastor Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, whose *Lutheran Forum* editorial 'Church Breaks Your Heart' (Fall 2007) says it better and more poignantly than I could ever say it myself, notwithstanding that she is much younger and our careers and lives were hardly similar, although sometimes parallel. This seems especially so with respect to the 'American Lutheran schism' she speaks about. Helen and I were in the middle of that mess and knew John Tietjen, the LCMS seminary president, and others of his associates with whom we attended Concordia College in Bronxville, New York. All I know is that I closely identify with her struggle and where she has arrived in her journey, and I remember breathing a huge sigh of relief when I first read what she had to say in this very hopeful piece."

I started out as an LCMS Lutheran, and was on the LCMS New Jersey Board of Trustees (under president Walter Zeile) when the "Great Punishment" wrought by Synod President Preus and Herman Otten occurred. I resigned from the Board, and we left for what is now the ELCA, where we have been ever since. There is much more to this story, but my main purpose in writing is to say "thank you" and provide some context to my gratitude.

Arthur Birkenstock
Telford, Pennsylvania

With joy I read "Missionary Miseries" (Fall 2008), Arthur Carl Piepkorn's lament on his life as a missionary pastor in Chisholm, Minnesota. Piepkorn took a dying mission congregation and helped it thrive. Grace Church is still there, though the original building has become a house. The congregation has moved to a larger building in the suburbs.

Rev. J. Jeffrey Zetto
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