

Richard Charles Henry Lenski: The Exegetical Task

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A New Home

On April 12, 1872, Jesse James and his thieving band entered a bank in Columbia, Kentucky, and then left with \$1500 . . . of other people's money. That same month Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, died. Those spring days also saw two significant patents issued, one for the gasoline engine and the other for dried milk.

The fourth month of 1872 witnessed at least one more noteworthy event, the arrival to the United States of a family from Europe. Higher wages and reluctance to serve in the German army played parts in motivating a father to move. When Richard Charles Henry Lenski arrived in his new country, he was seven years old. Born in Greifenburg, Prussia, on September 14, 1864, Richard Lenski joined his younger brother Paul and his parents William and Ernestine in making a new home in Jackson, Michigan. Richard's dad was a tailor. Richard's mother inspired these words, written by her soon-to-be-prolific son when he was eighteen:

My mother sits And knits	Her eyes so meek Still speak
A pair of mitts For me.	The peace I seek And love.
The coal-stove glows And shows	When sorrow pressed My breast
In sweet repose Her face.	And broke my rest, When friends
That face well known Has shone,	Left me to bear My care
When I was lone, A star,	Alone, that fair Sweet form
My soul to guide Beside	'Midst all my woes Arose
The foaming tide Of sin.	And brought repose Once more.
Life's cares erase The trace	O image dear Appear
Of quiet grace From some;	And even cheer My life! ¹

¹ R.C.H. Lenski. Handwritten poems.

Loves Of A Lifetime

Richard attended Capital College in Columbus, Ohio, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1885. Two years later he had graduated from the seminary, a course of study compressed due to the urgent need for Ohio Synod pastors.

During the fall months of 1886, in his last year at the seminary, he penned these lines:

MARIETTA

Rich heart and true and tender, I shall taste
Thy sweetness all my days. For when the blast
of wintry disappointment long has cast
To earth the fickle promise-bonds that graced
Fair days of others, thy love rich and chaste,
Thy sweetness ripe and full unchanged shall last
Till all the hungry days of want are past
And new Spring feeds with plenty Winter's waste.
Oh, I shall love thee ever! Thy rich soul
Shall nourish all my high resolve and crown
Achievement with its loving, fond caress;
The strong wine of applause, the hemlock-bowl
of failure or neglect shall never drown
The lips that kiss thy tear-gained tenderness.²

On February 1, 1888 he and Marrietta Young were married. Of their five children, Gerhard and Oscar became pastors, Esther and Miriam married pastors, and Lois became a well-known writer and illustrator of children's books.³

In her autobiography, *Journey into Childhood*, Lois recalls moments as a young girl in the Lenski household. "Around [the large kerosene lamp] we clustered to read or study each night after supper in the cold months. Papa and Mama sat reading in comfortable rocking chairs. . . . After school work was done, we played games—no playing cards (they were wicked!) but flinch, dominoes, or parchesi. My father was a great chess player, but alas! none of his children learned to play. After games, Papa would pull out his watch and say, 'Time for bed, children.' We rose dutifully to kiss our parents good night. 'Good night, Mama.' 'Good night, Papa.' Each in turn. A light kiss for each."⁴

Describing her father, Lois writes, "My father was very strict about moral matters. . . . He was harsh in dealing out punishments. When he was angry, he could strike fear into the heart of a child. When he expected obedience, you obeyed, and instantly, without question, delay or argument. He was cold and undemonstrative in affection. It was hard for him to show the soft side of his nature."⁵ She also notes, "Each night after supper, we had family worship. My father read from the Bible, spoke a prayer, and we all prayed the Lord's Prayer together."⁶ Lois adds, "As a child, I felt that I had the right kind of father. He always had a good supply of pins under the lapel of his coat, a sharp penknife in his pants pocket, and half-a dozen pencils in his vest pocket. All

² R.C.H. Lenski, Handwritten poems, 42.

³ A recent search of Amazon.com found close to forty titles currently available for purchase. In 1946 Lois won the coveted Newbery Medal for her book *Strawberry Girl*. The award is presented by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.

⁴ Lois Lenski, 25-26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

these things came in handy when a little girl had need of them. On his desk there was a big jar of library paste, which he used for mounting photographs. That came in handy, too, especially when Papa wasn't looking."⁷

The Fourth of July was a special occasion in the Lenski household.⁸ "In the evening everybody came to our house for my father's sensational display of fireworks. . . . Our front yard and the whole street filled up with people. They sat in rows on our lawn, they perched on our picket fence, boys climbed trees and telephone poles, and old ladies crowded neighboring porches. Suddenly my father appeared on the little second-story porch over the bay window of our house, which made a perfect stage for his performance. The firing of each skyrocket, Roman candle, and pinwheel was met with shouts of surprise and wonder from the excited audience, many of whom had never seen the like before. Sometimes three or four fireworks were shot off in unison—marvelous!"⁹

Family life took a tragic turn in March of 1923, when Marrietta suffered a stroke. The following year daughter Lois wrote, ". . . last spring I went out and helped to take care of her for six weeks. She has been a helpless invalid all winter. Of course, we could not wish that kind of life to be prolonged. But she was so young—only sixty."¹⁰ Richard's dear wife had died on Easter evening, April 20, 1924.

The loss of one love was soon lightened by the entrance of E. Helen Gruner into Richard Lenski's life. On June 10, 1925, the newlyweds set off on a honeymoon trip to Europe. They traveled for over two and a half months, starting in England, traversing western Europe, sailing to Greece, hitting highlights in Syria and the Holy Land, and ending up in Egypt. The happy husband kept copious notes. To peek into his diary is to discover a mind never far from the passion, as well as the new love, of his life.

Monday, July 6, 1925.

Rome – the Old Harlot, Babylon of John's Revelation, Mother of the Inquisition, Seat and Symbol of the Great AntiChrist. Memories of Luther who came to visit Rome!¹¹

Sunday, July 19

Dr. Perry calls us together on various occasions for little preachments, instructions, and statement of what we will do [the] next day, etc. Some people have questions, often silly ones. Once Miss Hawkins asked when Saul changed his name to Paul. Dr. Perry asked me to answer it. I explained that he had always had both names. Miss Hawkins could not believe it. – LITTLE had a silly question and quoted his Dr. Denny. This was passed up to me. I declined to answer. So every little bit we have had meetings. Dr. Perry tries to make his remarks Biblical, but it is always the "human" side that he tries to bring out in a passage; he has never mentioned the divine side. – Since this is a Masonic bunch, and the Presbyterians seem to think themselves a rather superior lot, and all arrangements for services are made without me anyway, Helen and I have attended none. She wanted to go, as one would go once to some other church; but I told her, this was a different case entirely, as we are known and are members of a party. I mean, in no ways to countenance their doings. Their Masonry is an abomination to me.¹²

Near the end of the trip . . .

A couple of days more, a short week perhaps, and we will be back home – two happy, thankful people for all that we have seen and heard on our great wedding trip. The Lord has been very, very good to us, that we

⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁸ This event occurred with regularity at the Lenski home in Anna, Ohio.

⁹ Lois Lenski, *Journey into Childhood*, 61-62, as quoted by Ferne, 14.

¹⁰ Lois Lenski, 121.

¹¹ R.C.H. Lenski, *My Trip Abroad*, 22.

¹² R.C.H. Lenski, *My Trip Abroad*, 46.

have gone so far both safely and happily and with so much enrichment to our little lives. The journey is a memory now, but one that will grow more precious the older it becomes for us. Thank God for it all!^{13,14}

Near a Capital to Capital

Lenski began his ministry in 1887 at Concordia Lutheran Church in Baltimore, Maryland. He subsequently served in Trenton and then in Springfield, Ohio, moving in 1899 to Anna, Ohio, where he would serve at St. Jacob Lutheran Church for twelve years.

His daughter Lois described his pastoral work during these years. “My father was a great student. He spent long hours at this desk, and even though surrounded by children, he had the ability to concentrate.”¹⁵ “My father’s ‘study’ was his *sanctum sanctorum*.¹⁶ We were allowed to come in whenever we liked, if there were no visitors, and if he was not too busy. If we saw him writing, we knew we had to be quiet. Miriam and I learned to read each other’s lips across the room. Papa spent days and days writing at his desk, and we wondered what he was writing about.¹⁷ He never told us.”¹⁸

She also developed a perspective on his public interaction. “Personally, while he was a serious man, he also enjoyed a great sense of humor. He was a popular preacher . . . his intense blue eyes seemed to look right through a person. He could make a guilty individual feel very uncomfortable. He was a determined man and held fast to his own opinions, fighting hard against his opponents or those who differed with him. Because he had the courage of his convictions, he made enemies. But in spite of his enemies, there were hundreds who loved and admired him.”¹⁹

In 1909, during his time in Anna, he was elected president of the Western District of the Joint Synod of Ohio and served for four years. Then, in 1911, Capital University and the Seminary Board extended a call to Lenski to become Professor of Languages. He accepted, and in September of that year he began his teaching in Columbus, Ohio. He offered courses in exegesis, dogmatics, apologetics, and homiletics. In 1919 he became Dean of the Seminary, and in 1921 course loads shifted so that he taught classes exclusively for seminarians. After 1928 he bore the title “Professor of Systematic Theology.”

In 1935 Lenski received a letter, dated June 18, from the Capital University Board of Regents. It read, in part, “. . . the Board accepted your resignation as Dean and Full Time Professor and appointed you Dean emeritus with the understanding that you should be used in the active service of the Seminary as your physical condition warranted.” Lenski had suffered from diabetes for a number of years. Ill health now limited his ability to serve.

Of the Making of Many Books

“Dedicated to the Class of 1928 of the Theological Seminary, Capital University, who read First Corinthians with me in 1927-1928 with such enthusiasm as to inspire the task of interpreting eventually the entire New Testament. I finished the whole New Testament by completing *The Interpretation of Revelation* on January 12, 1934.”²⁰

¹³ R.C.H. Lenski, *My Trip Abroad*.

¹⁴ When the Lenskis met customs officials in New York City, Richard had to go to a special line for non-citizens. Having lived in the United States now for 53 years, he finally received his Certificate of Naturalization on September 24, 1925, two months after his honeymoon trip was over. The official document describes the applicant—Richard Charles Henry Lenski: Age, 61 years; height, 5 feet, 9 ½ inches; color, white; complexion, light; color of eyes, blue; color of hair, white; visible distinguishing marks, bald.

¹⁵ Lois Lenski, 39.

¹⁶ Holy of holies

¹⁷ In 1898 he published *His Footsteps* and *Studies for Edification of the Life of Christ*. In 1910 he published two volumes of *Eisenach Gospel Selections*. He began his editorship the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* in 1904, and no doubt among other things, he wrote a four-issue series of articles regarding objective justification for the Columbus Theological Magazine.

¹⁸ Lois Lenski, 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁰ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, dedication page.

This dedication in his commentary on First and Second Corinthians charts a life's work that was completed in a relatively short time. Beginning with *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, published in 1931, Lenski marched through the New Testament canon to create a series of commentaries that became a starting point for those seeking conservative Biblical scholarship in the English language.

Rev. John Brenner, one of the founders of the *The Northwestern Lutheran* and president of the Wisconsin Synod from 1933 to 1953, offered reviews of Lenski's volumes in the synodical magazine. Referring to *The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels*, Brenner writes, "As far as we have been able to peruse this volume, and we have read liberal portions, we have found that it measures up well with the author's *Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel*, which we reviewed last year. Again we have admired the thorough scholarship of Dr. Lenski. But even more highly do we value his uncompromising stand for the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and his clear-cut testimony to the divinity and the redeemership of Christ our Lord."²¹ Brenner paid additional compliments to the author, speaking of a "thorough and comprehensive knowledge" and "command of the Greek language." He described the writing as "scholarly" and "simple, direct, forceful," and he appreciated the "refreshing style."

Brenner also noted with some regularity areas of disagreement. In his review of the Revelation commentary, he writes that "one may not always agree that his explanation of certain symbols is the only one the text will permit."²² On occasion he identified specific concerns, being particularly explicit with reference to the doctrine of election.

Lenski's commentaries capped a career of published writing that launched when he was only 31. In 1895 he offered *Biblische Frauenbilder*,²³ followed in 1898 by two volumes in English, *His Footsteps* and *Studies for Edification of the Life of Christ*.²⁴ Between 1910 and 1927 he published at least five sermon text-study volumes,²⁵ adding *Epistle Selections of the Ancient Church* and *Gospel Selections of the Early Church* in 1936. He also wrote books entitled *St. Paul; Active Church Member; The Sermon; and Kings and Priests: The Universal Priesthood of Believers*.

Besides authoring books, Lenski also wrote with some regularity for a number of periodicals and served from 1904 to 1924 as the editor of the Ohio Synod's magazine, the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*.

Conservative in Context

In 1966 Pastor John Raabe of Mequon, Wisconsin, and Pastor Gerhard Geiger of Mishicot, Wisconsin, published a selective index of Lenski's New Testament commentaries. This effort attempted to remedy, in some small way, the absence of a thorough index which had been anticipated but never published.²⁶ On the introductory page the compilers state, "Lenski's commentaries are generally accepted in all conservative Lutheran circles as the finest New Testament commentaries. It is a scholarly work, issued by a man who loved the Lord and His verbally inspired Word, and it is found in the libraries of many of our pastors."²⁷

It is in this spirit that many in the Synodical Conference no doubt received Lenski's volumes. With currents of historical criticism intent on crossing an ocean and polluting the American Lutheran stream, those loving the Word found much to admire in Dr. Lenski's doctrinal positions.

In his role as Professor of Systematic Theology at Capital Seminary, Lenski prepared a set of dogmatics notes for students to use when participating in class.²⁸ Lenski's commentaries offer much insight into his

²¹ *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. XXI No. 6, 94.

²² *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. XXII No. 24, 382.

²³ *trans.* Biblical Pictures of Wives

²⁴ *Ferne*, 4-5.

²⁵ The books noted in this section are identified by *Ferne* without an indication that the list is comprehensive.

²⁶ The 48-page index was officially titled, *Index (Selective) of R. Lenski New Testament Commentaries and A Glossary of "isms."*

²⁷ Geiger and Raabe, introductory page.

²⁸ Two sets of dogmatics notes are stored in the archives of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, which is the new name for Capital Seminary. The first appears to be an earlier version, typed out with very little white space. The second set has an official cover page identifying itself as notes prepared by Lenski and appears to be a later edition, with improved layout. In both cases the notes have handwritten

theological positions. His class notes present in concise form a summary of what he confessed. Under the section entitled “Inspiration,” he writes, “. . . the Word of God is NOT IN SCRIPTURE, but the Word of God IS SCRIPTURE, and SCRIPTURE IS THE WORD OF GOD [emphasis original].”²⁹ Under the subsection “Verbal Inspiration,” he notes, “It is often, by opponents, called ‘the verbal theory’; but it is no theory at all . . . It is a simple fact.”³⁰ “Verbal inspiration then is simply this [sic] that the divine act, moving, enlightening, controlling and governing the holy writers, extended to the words which they used, so that only those words were chosen which God wanted for the conveyance of the thought.”³¹

Lenski knew who his enemies were. “[Verbal inspiration] is much raged against; hardly a Professor in the German theological schools today believes it.”³² “Moreover, if the thought is said to be inspired, and not the words, we can never be certain even as to the thought at any point, for it often turns on a single word and comes to us wholly in words . . . seed, not seeds; Christ argues from the term ‘sons of God’; ‘is’ in the Lord’s Supper; etc.”³³ “It may seem safe to some to admit that the holy writers erred in minor points. But he that is not, or cannot be faithful in that which is least, how shall he be faithful in that which is greatest? (Argument from the minor to the major.) The Holy Ghost is never careless, inefficient, etc., as men are.”³⁴ “But no real truth of science is contradicted in the Bible; theories are not truths, but guesses at the truth. Never hurry to revise your Bible totally with claims of scientists. Learn a lesson from Halley’s comet, which appeared in the West when scientists were sure it would still appear again in the East.”³⁵

In his published volume which includes Paul’s letters to Timothy, and in particular, in reference to the words of 2 Timothy 3:16, Lenski proclaimed to the world what he confessed in class: “The Scripture is thus absolutely incomparable: no other book, library, or anything else in the world, is able to make a lost sinner wise for salvation; no other Scripture [non-Biblical “scripture”], since it lacks inspiration of God, whatever profit it may otherwise afford, is profitable for these ends: teaching us the true saving facts—refuting the lies and delusions that deny these facts—restoring the sinner or fallen Christian to an upright position—educating, training, disciplining one in genuine righteousness. The character of the source (God-inspired) is matched by the profit produced; the profit attests the character of the source.”³⁶

Lenski’s commitment to accept the Scriptures as verbally inspired and without error positioned him well to offer commentary. To read through any of his New Testament volumes is to recognize the wealth of helpful study material offered, surely much of it historical and linguistic and rich in information from Lenski’s vast reading, but possessing its greatest value as it comes together to bring to light treasures from heaven itself. The list of doctrines aptly and accurately defined and proclaimed is long.

Shadows Significant

This makes one wonder whether one is being almost unfair, then, when venturing into areas that cast significant shadows over an otherwise bright presentation of divine truth.

Yet to read and to attempt to digest the subtle and intricate claims that Lenski makes in some key doctrinal areas is to be reminded of the truth that error is genuinely dangerous. Perhaps this reminder is particularly needed when what is false is surrounded by so much that is good.

additions made by the student or faculty member who used the notes. All quotations from Lenski’s dogmatics notes come from the second set. In the notes, not all words are phrased in complete sentences and punctuation is on occasion irregular. Notes are quoted “as is.”

²⁹ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³² *Ibid.*, 31.

³³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁶ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, 852.

Consideration of such matters may also be especially appropriate in light of the passage of time. In days gone by, the areas of doctrinal divergence reflected in Lenski's commentaries were prominent issues in the church. Differences over the doctrine of election took the Ohio Synod out of the Synodical Conference in 1881. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod was born from the fires of the election controversy, joining the Synodical Conference in 1920. The doctrine of justification was on the front burner as well in the early part of the twentieth century. The 1930s saw the Missouri Synod and the Ohio Synod in its new form, the American Lutheran Church, engaged in doctrinal discussions to determine if union was possible. The importance of identifying divergent views of justification in these discussions became the focus of Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly articles.

Because these issues were so prominent and because, in the process, orthodox pastors had so thoroughly immersed themselves in relevant Scriptural truth, it might be argued that such a group of spiritual leaders was exceptionally prepared to sift out bad from good in these areas.

One wonders in our day, with the controversies more distant, if additional care is well exercised to understand the issues and to recognize how saving truths are in fact at stake.

Reason's Role

It would appear that the starting point for Dr. Lenski when approaching certain doctrinal questions was his understanding of the Analogy of Faith. This phrase is found in Romans 12:6. In translation, the passage (ἔχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν διάφορα, εἴτε προφητεῖαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως³⁷) reads, "and having different gifts in line with the grace that was given to us: if [the gift is] prophesying, [let him use it] in proportion to the faith."

An initial interpretative challenge is in the understanding of "the faith." Some have read the verse as referring to *fides qua*, that is, the faith by which things are believed. J.P. Koehler felt quite strongly that this was the correct interpretation.³⁸ Others suggest that "the faith" could be *fides quae*, that is, the body of doctrine which we believe. Dr. Lenski took this position.

While it may seem, then, that orthodoxy hinged on which direction one went with "the faith," in fact this doesn't seem to be the crux on which doctrinal divergence occurred. One can make a solid argument for understanding a *fides quae* interpretation properly: when one proclaims God's message, one must speak in conformity with the Scriptural body of doctrine.

Where then did the divergence occur? Koehler describes two sides:

The Synodical Conference maintains that in explaining the so-called *loci classici* or the *sedes doctrinae*³⁹ one may not, when it is a question of obtaining a doctrine, deviate from the grammatical-historical sense that is immediately and clearly contained in these passages. And if these passages contain terms that according to our human understanding even seem to contradict other doctrines of Holy Writ, one may not modify (*umgestalten*) these terms according to these other doctrines, provided that they are clearly present in these *loci classici* and are integral parts of this particular doctrine.

An adequate (*entsprechend*) comparison may be made only between passages dealing with the same doctrine, and in such cases the more obscure passages must be interpreted according to the clear passages.

Now it may happen that according to *purely human* understanding a difficulty is present which consists of this: that this doctrine according to our reason cannot be brought into harmony with other doctrines. Then it is part of correct interpretation and presentation of doctrine to establish this difficulty and make it known.

The position of the opponents is as follows:

³⁷ Black, Romans 12:6.

³⁸ See J.P. Koehler's "The Analogy of Faith" in the *Wauwatosa Theology*, Volume I.

³⁹ "places belonging to the highest class" and "seats of doctrine," i.e. the first passages one might read to identify or explain a particular doctrine

Not all doctrines are revealed with the same measure of clarity. The doctrine of justification is central to all doctrines and is unconditionally clear. That is not the case with the doctrine of election by grace.

Now, the doctrines of Scripture cannot contradict one another, but must be in harmony with one another. It is, therefore, the task of the theologian to discover this harmony, which must also be recognizable by our reason, and present the doctrines in this sense.

Thus it cannot be but that the discovery and presentation of the less clearly revealed doctrines finds a criterion in the wholly clear doctrines that form the heart of Scriptures. Of course, this does not mean that the clear doctrines of Scripture are somehow the source from which other doctrines could be evolved and constructed. But in the explanation of the so-called *loci classici* of the less clearly revealed doctrines, the expressions that contradict the clear doctrines of Scripture will have to be stripped of their usual, immediate meaning and be weakened or modified according to the pattern of other clear doctrines of Scripture.⁴⁰

As Koehler describes it, the one side is ready to accept Scriptural claims in their most naturally understood sense even should such a claim challenge the natural conclusions of human reason. The other side permits movement away from the simple understanding of a verse in order to achieve a system that is perceived to be more consistent. The one side rejoices to profess only what is consistent with the body of Scriptural doctrine. The other side focuses on an element of Scriptural doctrine and permits the subtle adjustment of other clearly revealed truths to better integrate the system.

The actual point of doctrinal divergence, however, may be more elusive than simply to note that Lenski permitted reason a higher position than is proper. Lenski many times exalted truth in the face of human reason. He happily accepted mystery. He rejoiced in the mind-numbing reality of the Trinity. He treasured the virgin birth. The danger of his approach could not be described as universal discomfort with revelation that surpassed reason.

Rather, the danger of his approach appears to be that he became comfortable finding mystery in a place where God had not positioned it.

Consider the case of predestination.

Conversion Is Key

In Ephesians 1 Paul praises God because in Christ he blessed us with every spiritual, heavenly blessing. In Greek Paul then inserts an “equal” sign.⁴¹ What is it that could be equivalent with God blessing us in every spiritual way? God reveals an action that is the very definition of being blessed in every way: “He chose us in Christ before the creation of the world in order that we might be holy and blameless in his sight; all of this happened in the realm of God’s love for us.”⁴²

What a stunning thought. Before I even existed, God graciously determined to make me his child, all in the realm of what Christ did. God graciously chose to bring me to faith. God graciously chose to preserve me in faith. God graciously chose to bring me to heaven when I die. In all this, Christ is the key. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for my sins, and not for my sins only, but for the sins of the entire world. I am forgiven. And what peace to know that salvation, whatever it is, depends completely on my God. I am weak. I am tormented by doubts. Satan can suggest that my weakness is evidence I will never make it to eternal life. The Holy Spirit assures me that human weakness is not the evidence of exclusion because my salvation is the work of God, not of me.

⁴⁰ Jahn, 221-222.

⁴¹ καθὼς Black, Ephesians 1:4.

⁴² καθὼς ἐξελέχαστο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ Black, Ephesians 1:4.

As the doctrine of election assures me that my personal salvation is completely and entirely, without any qualifications, a gracious act of God, it fits perfectly with all Scripture reveals about conversion. “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

To such a verse Lenski would claim whole-hearted subscription. He professes such a divinely authored conversion often.

Up to and including the moment of conversion the will of man is passive; i.e., it is wrought upon by grace. Changes indeed are wrought in the will by the influence of grace, but yet not the change that the will actually wills to embrace Christ; this vital change takes place in the moment of conversion.⁴³

Man can do nothing with his own corrupt natural powers towards his conversion. Synergism supposes that he can do at least something: *facultas applicandi se ad gratiam*,⁴⁴ *voluntas non repugnans*,⁴⁵ etc.⁴⁶

The will in conversion. All the powers of man, the intellect, the sensibilities, and the will are affected in the work of conversion, but the will in particular as the very center of our personality and being is changed in conversion. The change may be briefly described: The unwilling are made willing (*ex nolentibus facit volentes*). Every case of conversion mentioned in the Scriptures corroborates this description, as also in their way, the cases of resistance [*sic*], Matt. 23, 37: “Ye would not.”⁴⁷

It is at this point that his words take on a concerning tone. “Just how this inner change is wrought cannot be stated fully. An element of mystery always remains.”⁴⁸

Initially one might wonder, “What mystery is he speaking of?” Is he simply marveling at how the Spirit through the Word miraculously creates faith? That is a miracle to be wondered at, in which one rejoices. He continues, “But the following can and should be said: Man in his sinful condition is able to read and hear the Word of [God.] [*sic*] God makes use of the natural power; he brings he [*sic*] Word with its regenerating and converting power to bear upon the sinner. Mark 16, 15: ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.’”⁴⁹

The quotations which follow will further clarify. Already here, however, hints at what he identifies as “the mystery” are given. The mystery which Lenski is grappling with is question of why some are converted and why some aren’t. While he doesn’t explicitly state the link, he appears to imply some connection between the answer to that question and the fact that people, even as sinners, can choose to come to a Christian church or not, can choose to open a Bible and read or not, can choose to ask a Christian friend a question or not. So, can the question, “Why are some converted and some aren’t?” be answered in part by saying, “Some sinners choose to expose themselves to the Word and some don’t?” Focus is moving from God’s grace to man’s action.

The danger grows. “The first effect are [*sic*] the *motus inevitabilis*⁵⁰. The power of the Word, in Law and Gospel, stir the heart of man, his thought, feeling and will, and this effect cannot be avoided; it is inevitable, may even be called irresistible. When these *motus inevitabilis* set in the sinner may completely cast off the Word and its power. Then the work stops.”⁵¹ While we certainly confess that the word has effect, being to some “the smell of death” and to others “the fragrance of life,”⁵² we hesitate greatly to imply that those varied reactions to the word constitute a peek into the initial stages of the “process” of conversion.

⁴³ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 224.

⁴⁴ *trans.* ability to apply oneself to grace

⁴⁵ *trans.* the will not fighting against

⁴⁶ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 224.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵⁰ *trans.* inevitable movement

⁵¹ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 226.

⁵² 2 Corinthians 2:16

Lenski goes on. “But here the very first mystery appears: some do thus cast off the Word, others do not, and we are unable to explain why this difference appears. The same mystery appears at every stage, and even after conversion, for even then man’s will may cast off all God’s grace and fall back into the old stain of sin.”⁵³

The question, “Why are some saved and others aren’t?” has appropriated first place in the discussion.

Consider the line of thought which follows: “In considering the will in conversion we must hold fast that up to the point of faith the will remains hostile, does not aid or help the divine power or grace, but strives against it. This is natural resistance called natural because due to our sinful and depraved nature and thus found in all sinners alike, with never an exception. Yet the grace of God in the Word keeps hold of the sinner’s will, working upon it by means of the Law and the Gospel. In this work there may be great fluctuations. Now the Word may draw man’s will forward, now that will may draw back again. But the work proceeds as long as man does not by a special determination on his part break the contact for good. Matt. 23, 37: “How often would I have gathered,” Gen. 6, 3: “My spirit shall not always strive with man.” John 6, 44: “No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me, draw him.” The work ceases when man WILFULLY RESISTS [caps by Lenski], i.e., when by a set and lasting determination he casts off the Word and its converting power. The resistance begins with a special wicked volition, which deepens to a set determination. Matt. [2]3, 37; Felix; Agrippa; etc. No man is able to explain how in the wills of some men such resistance arises. This mystery is the same as that in Satan, when as a good angel he nevertheless fell from God; and in Adam, when though holy and righteous, he yielded to temptation. But the fact of willful resistance, as something specific and rising over and above our natural resistance, is beyond denial, and attested in all Scripture where reference is made to those who turn permanently against God’s saving grace. Where this resistance does not arise the power of God succeeds in changing the will, working contrition and faith, thereby converting the will.”⁵⁴

One need not deny that certain individuals may take more violent visible actions against the truth than others. One need not deny that there are elements of revealed truth which we might call “mysteries,” things that go beyond our human reason. But it is a far different matter, after raising the question of why some but not others, to identify as the mystery the fact that some resist with only natural resistance while others resist with willful resistance, with the implication that this difference in human resistance has something to do with the fact that some are saved.

Scripture handles the question by dividing it. Why are some saved? The answer is in God. “It is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:8). “For he chose us . . . to the praise of his glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:4,6). Why are some damned? The answer is in man. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37).

Human reason wishes for more. Human reason seeks “sensible” solutions. Human reason looks to locate the answer to both parts of the question either in God or in man. Calvinism chooses to connect both the salvation of one and the damnation of another to a predetermined divine decree. Arminianism connects both the salvation of one and the damnation of another to a choice of the human will.

Lenski so much wants to be neither. After the quotations included above, Lenski immediately adds, “In the entire process nothing in man aids the work. The sole power operative toward conversion is God’s grace in the Word (*sola gratia*). All synergism is a delusion, not in harmony with the reality as the Scriptures reveal it. Monergism alone is the reality.”⁵⁵ Yet while he longs to avoid the synergistic label, to locate the answer to both the “why saved” and the “why damned” questions in the nature of human resistance is already to have picked a side.

Election Is Affected

Conversion is so intimately connected with election.

⁵³ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 226-227

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 227

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

The Scripture, in describing God's gracious election to eternal life, connects the choice in eternity with God's actions in time. As God's choice of us in Christ before the creation of the world brings praise to his glorious grace (Ephesians 1:4-6), so his choice of us inevitably results in bringing us to faith. "Those he predestined, he also called" (Romans 8:30). Luke also notes the connection between a previous gracious determination by God and the creation of faith in speaking of new converts in Pisidian Antioch: "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

God's gracious choice of us in eternity, then, is that which brings about the creation of faith in us in time, through the powerful Word and Sacraments.

Lenski taught, "As to why God elected the one and not the other, the reason for this is not in God (this would be Calvinism in some shape or other); not in any merit of man however slight (this [sic] Pelagianism in some form or other); not in inclination, willingness, or preparation, however slight, on the part of man's natural powers (this would be synergism in some form). God could not elect certain men, because His grace could not bring them to faith and retain them in faith. Why not? This is hidden from us, but the mystery lies in man, not in God, not in the Means of Grace."⁵⁶

One recognizes immediately the consequences of not dividing the "why some, not others" question. Not only must one say that the cause of damnation is not in God, which is accurate. One must also say that the cause of salvation is not in God, which is not. One also recognizes how one's understanding of faith proves key in one's understanding of election. While Lenski will repeat again and again that faith is "wrought wholly by God Himself; never . . . a product in the least degree of man's own powers, or bearing any merit before God in itself,"⁵⁷ yet he cannot then locate the reason for man's salvation completely in God. Why not? Because he has connected faith, which he professes to be completely the work of God, to the fact that some only naturally resist and others willfully resist. Whenever Lenski speaks of the necessity or the importance or the role of faith, then, he is never really speaking only about faith in its proper, God-given, sense. Always in the background is the fact that there is something—or the absence of something—in man that makes it possible for faith to be present.

Lenski taught an election *in view of faith*.⁵⁸ In eternity God used his omniscience to look forward and see who would come to faith. Having observed that reality in eternity, he then from eternity marked those who would come to faith as "chosen." To hear Lenski say that faith is "wrought wholly by God himself" is first to wonder, "Well, maybe he still, though speaking in unusual ways, is finding the cause for salvation completely in God." To understand the natural/willful resistance backdrop to every discussion of faith, however, is to understand why Lenski really didn't believe that election to eternal life was solely and completely due to a gracious choice by God. To say *in view of faith* was to say, "In view of the fact that God knows some will only naturally resist and others will willfully resist, God looked ahead in time to see what people would do and then made his choice based on what he saw."

Lenski also taught that predestination should be presented according to two modes of formulation: "a) The wider is based on antecedent will—embraces the entire plan of salvation—properly includes that faith flows from predestination (i.e. as here defined) emphasizes that God alone is active in our salvation—is directed against all synergistic views. b) The narrower is based on consequent will—restricts itself to the last step in the plan of salvation—properly considers foreseen, persevering faith in the atoning merits of Christ as the mark for the *discretio personarum*⁵⁹—emphasizes man's ability to decline grace and salvation of God—is directed against Calvinism."⁶⁰

He further defines antecedent will as universal and notes that it is for all. It "shows what men ought to do." Consequent will is "particular, all do not accept and use." It "deals with what men do do."⁶¹

⁵⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁸ *intuitu fidei*

⁵⁹ *trans.* separation/distinction of persons

⁶⁰ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 151.

⁶¹ All quotations in paragraph from Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 150.

This additional distinction brings one no closer to the Scriptural presentation of predestination. In the first formulation, Lenski appears to equate predestination with God's sincere and gracious will that all be saved. In the second formulation he employs that concept of faith which is attached to an action—or the absence of an action—in man.

This distinction is employed in Lenski's application of his understanding of predestination to individual hearts.

Souls Are a Target

The Scripture presents clearly two powerful tools that are to be used by Christians according to their operating instructions. The Law is given for my warning. The Law teaches, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). We recognize that because of the continued presence of our sinful flesh, we are constantly in danger of misusing the wonderful promises of God. Our flesh longs to transform forgiveness into a free pass to sin whenever possible. God's warning is sincere. You can fall.

There are also moments when we are terrified. Trials can foster doubt and despair. Struggling faith recalls the warning that Christians can fall. A conscience brings to mind every failure to trust. A soul is tormented by guilt. A soul becomes certain that faith is being lost. "Look, the Bible says I can fall." But at that moment a faithful friend in the Word will remind the sorrowing soul that 1 Corinthians 10:12 comes with operating instructions: "If you think you are standing firm . . ." A faithful friend in the Word will say to the fearful conscience, "God forbids me from speaking 1 Corinthians 10:12 to you." You are not the audience described in that verse's operating instructions. Were I to whisper to you a word of it, the syllables would be of Satan. God commands me to announce to you words that are offered to the weary and the heavily burdened: "Come to me, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). "If anyone does sin, we have one speaks to Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). Be at peace. You are forgiven.

But I'm so weak, my friend in Christ. I'm so weak. To see how quickly I can fall is to wonder if I can remain strong.

What joy for a Christian friend to remind such a soul, "God is faithful. He will keep you strong to the end. Look not to yourself. That's part of the trick. Know that salvation is God's doing, not yours. In fact, listen to this: so much is your salvation God's doing that he chose to save you, to bring you to faith and to keep you in the faith, before the world began. Be at peace. God is your strength.

That's Gospel. The Gospel is given for comfort.

Just as the Law can be used unrighteously to torment troubled hearts, so the Gospel can wielded unrighteously to enable continued rebellion. But the misuse of either denies the truth of neither. They are tools, powerful truths, that come with operating instructions.

What danger when the truths are misused or mixed.

In his dogmatics notes, under the heading *Preservation*, Lenski writes, "Preservation is the work of the Holy Spirit by which He keeps us from falling away, and helps us to grow and increase in faith. This work culminates in the hour of death. One of the blessed fruits of this work of the Spirit is the believer's certainty of salvation."⁶²

The text goes on. "This certainty is unconditional when we look to God; He will omit nothing to keep us to the end. It is conditioned when we look at ourselves and our frailty. When this certainty is connected with the doctrine of predestination in its first form (F.C.), we see the unconditional certainty resting on God, in Sec. 45, and the conditioned certainty as regards ourselves, in Sec. 21 (7th of the 8 points): "Wo sie an Gottes Wort sich halten etc., si mode."⁶³ [sic] In the second form (intuitu fidei), the certainty centers in the questions: Will I be

⁶² Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 240.

⁶³ quoting the German and Latin of Section 21, Article XI of the Thorough Declaration. In English the section reads, "That He will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work which He has begun in them, if they adhere to God's Word, pray diligently, abide in God's goodness [grace], and faithfully use the gifts receive." Note that Lenski is introducing a conditional sense to

found in faith when I die? The answer is exactly like that involved in the first form. Speaking generally, it is eine Glaubens-gewissheit.”^{64, 65}

What is given by the Lord to use as certain comfort and pure gospel is represented as something offering both certainty and uncertainty. The altered definition of faith, with its context of natural and willful resistance, directs one’s eyes only more to one’s self and to the weakness of human flesh. Finally, our peace does not come from recognizing that we could look at things either from our perspective or from God’s perspective. The judgment of the Law against our human frailties is just as much “from God’s perspective” as is the Gospel. Our peace comes from knowing that when the Law has crushed us, the rock-solid promises of the Gospel are the only sounds to be heard.

Limited Innocence

The heart of the Gospel is the fact that Jesus Christ took the guilt of every single human being who has ever lived or will ever live, made it his, suffered the eternal punishment owed the heavenly Father, and rose again as evidence that the whole world through Christ had been declared innocent.

Writing in the June/August, 1906, edition of the *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Rev. Lenski attacked the Missouri Synod for teaching that in Christ the whole world had been declared innocent. He aimed at Romans 5:19.

Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι’ ἑνός παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτως καὶ δι’ ἑνός δικαϊώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαϊώσιν ζωῆς.⁶⁶

Literally, the verse reads, “Then, therefore,
as through one transgression to all people for condemnation
through one act of righteousness to all people for righteousness of life

Lenski wrote, “εἰς κατάκριμα – we know (12) [Romans 5:12] that condemnation has come; εἰς towards, to, has actually reached πάντας ἀνθρώπους but the same cannot be said concerning the δικαϊώσιν ζωῆς; it too, like the κατάκριμα was pointed, directed εἰς, towards, to all men, but it has reached and actually realized itself, as all the foregoing (and subsequent) teaching of Paul shows only in ‘many,’ not in ‘all.’ . . . This we find indicated in verse 19⁶⁷ where the word “all men” is dropped and οἱ πολλοί appear, as the same ‘many’ appeared already in verse 15. By the disobedience of the one man sinners were the many constituted (and we have already learned from Paul’s explicit statements that no less than all are comprehended here in the ‘many’); by the obedience of the One righteous shall be constituted the many (δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί—and equally Paul has already shown us explicitly and fully that not all are constituted righteous, for all do not believe).”⁶⁸

Lenski teaches that “all” means one thing in its first occurrence and something different in its second, though both occurrences are in the same verse and clearly parallel. The inexact claim on context does not overturn the simple and consistent meaning of “all.” To know that one transgression brought condemnation to every single human being is to know that one act of righteousness brought a declaration of innocence to every single human being.

a section that is identifying characteristics of Christians. God doesn’t encourage good works in us from the cause-effect perspective: “if you do good works, I will strengthen you.” Rather, he notes, for example, that where the hearing of the word is occurring, faith is being strengthened. (The “if” is reflected, in the primary German translation, as “wo” = “where”)

⁶⁴ *trans.* certainty of faith

⁶⁵ Lenski, *Dogmatics Notes*, 241

⁶⁶ Black, Romans 5:18.

⁶⁷ ὥσπερ γὰρ διὰ παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνός ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί, οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνός δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί.

⁶⁸ Lenski, *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 & 4. 146-147.

While the Scripture presents a clear case, it can feel difficult to discover clarity in Lenski's position. In his quoted words on Romans 5:19 he expressly denies the teaching. At other times he laid claim to the term and professed allegiance to it. He spoke approvingly of words composed by Rev. H.A. Allwardt, who was responding to Dr. Stoeckhardt's reference to a previous doctrinal document: "That Report indeed defends the doctrine of a 'universal justification,' but to that Ohio has no objections. Only we maintain that that is not the justification of which we usually speak . . . Universal justification, however, is first of all and properly speaking the acquittal of Christ from all further punishment for our sin and guilt; His sacrifice for our guilt was acknowledged [sic] by the divine righteousness as sufficient. But since He was our substitute we all in a certain sense were justified with Him, namely, in the sense in which 2 Cor. 5, 14 declares: If One died for all, then are all dead."⁶⁹

In these words, universal justification is described not as in Romans 5:19, a declaration of righteousness to all people, but rather as a declaration of righteousness to Christ. A similar line is taken by Lenski with regard to 2 Corinthians 5:19: "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." Lenski speaks against understanding these words to teach a personal imputation of righteousness to sinners. With disapproval he notes, ". . . Missouri places the personal imputation into the atonement."⁷⁰

What does he confess 2 Corinthians 5:19 to mean? "The phrase: 'not imputing their trespasses unto them,' namely the world, is an explanation of what God did in the work or act of reconciliation. A further explanation is in verse 21: God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin. The Scriptures speak of this transfer of our sin and guilt elsewhere: 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all,' Is. 53, 6, cf. verses 4-5, and 10; Matt. 8, 17; Heb. 9, 28; 1 Peter 2, 24. Hunnius writes on the Cor. passage: Non imputans eis peccata, id est, peccata illorum rejiciens super Christum, et Christo imputans et imponens [*trans.* Not reckoning sins to them, that is, throwing their sins onto Christ, and imputing to and placing [them] on him]."⁷¹ Lenski professes that "not counting their sins to them" means that something was done to Christ but nothing of personal benefit was done for humans.

If God does not count our sins against us, he looks at us and tallies up zero sins. If God does not count our sins against us, then I can say with confidence, "In Christ God is no longer counting sins against the world. We are reconciled. Believe it!" Surely Christ received our sins, but to suggest that the words "not counting their sins to them" point to that side of the transaction and not at all to those of whom it can be said, "their sins," is to pass over the clear and evident meaning of the words.

As Lenski introduces subtle but dangerous re-definitions of terms, one begins to see how some statements can sound so orthodox while others seem so wrong, yet in both cases they may be something less than a precise presentation of the truth.

J.P. Meyer, writing in regard to some of Lenski's comments about justification and faith, noted, "All of these words, although a harmless interpretation may be found, leave a peculiar after-taste . . . it seems necessary to call attention to the danger that may lurk in them."⁷²

There are also times when a harmless interpretation would miss what the writer was attempting to communicate.

Faith in Facts

In identifying the danger of denying objective justification, one desires in no way to demean subjective justification. The fact that benefiting from what Christ has done for us occurs only by faith is a joy-filled proposition and worthy of the greatest of note. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

⁶⁹ Lenski, *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Vol. XXV, No. 6. 333.

⁷⁰ Lenski, *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 & 4. 148.

⁷¹ Lenski, *Columbus Theological Magazine*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 & 4. 148.

⁷² Meyer, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, "Objective Justification: Part I," Vol. 37:1, January, 1940.

And yet objective realities are at the heart of Spirit-given faith. We need to know what it is we can trust. Of what can we be certain? Faith finds certainty in things that are certain whether one believes them or not. Faith rests on facts. The fact is that all people have been declared innocent in Christ. Praise God! Believe it!

He was . . .

An article found prominent position in the August 29, 1936 edition of the *Lutheran Standard*. Titled “Dr. R.C.H. Lenski—A Great Champion of the Scriptures,” it read, “Dr. Lenski was a hard worker, and a thorough scholar, and above all a conservative Lutheran Christian. He was a great champion of the Scriptures and of the Lutheran Confessions which are drawn from the Scriptures, and of a practice which was consistent with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. He was the foe of unionism and near unionism, and stood opposed to any union movement which in any way sought to compromise what he held to be the clear teachings of God’s Word. He was constant foe of all those societies which purposely omit the name of Jesus from their prayers and which seek to put all religions on a level. He had very positive convictions, and when he spoke on a question, there was no doubt as to where he stood.”⁷³

Two weeks earlier, on August 14, 1936, Richard Charles Henry Lenski had died.

Wisconsin Synod President John Brenner, in his September 13, 1936 review of Lenski’s *The Gospel Selections of the Ancient Church* in *The Northwestern Lutheran*, wrote, “A few hours after the arrival of the review copy of this book came also the news of the death of the author. The name of Dr. Lenski will go down in history as that of one of the outstanding men in the Lutheran Church in America, far beyond the bounds of his own church body, formerly the Ohio Synod, now the American Lutheran Church.”⁷⁴

-- continued on next page --

Bought for Me

⁷³ *Lutheran Standard*, XCIII, August 29, 1936, p. 2, as quoted in Ferne, 6.

⁷⁴ *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. XXIII No. 19, 302.

Christ is Dead.

Bend the knee,
Bow the head
Fearfully —
Christ is dead.
Mockery
Has assailed him,
Cruelty
Has upnailed him
On the tree;
And he died
Crucified.
Earth in pain
Trembles, groans;
Massive stones
Burst in twain;
Dead arise
And proclaim
Him whose eyes
Broke in shame;
Hands unseen
Rend the veil
Hung between
Bliss and bale. —
 Crown of thorns
That adorns
Jesus' head,
Nails that drew,
Piercing through,

Streams of red,
Spear that pierced
Jesus' side,
Found him dead —
Mine the guilt
That has spilt
Jesus' blood,
And the woe
That arose
Like a flood
O'er his soul,
Over me
They should roll
Ceaselessly!
But he bled
In my stead,
I am free.
Flow, then, flow,
Tears of sadness,
For the woe
None can guess,
Tears of gladness
Never ending,
For transcending
Blessedness
Bloodily
Bought for me!
March 9, 1887.

⁷⁵ R.C.H. Lenski. Handwritten poems.

From a Distance

We rejoice in such a confession.

We also reflect on how carefully crafted yet subtly defective presentations of doctrine can lead away from such a proper, simple confession of truth.

To remember personal susceptibility to error is to pray always for those who can bring to our eyes Bible truth. To know our many failings and falls is to thank our Lord for his undeserved forgiveness.

To know how error is dangerous to faith is to be on our guard. To know how error can be mixed within such a large supply of truth is to be particularly awake.

As souls are at stake, let us be humbly bold to speak truths of God that blow the mind but comfort the conscience. Let us state what Scripture says even when it seems to violate a construct of human reason. Let us know that the greatest marvel, the objective reality of God's gift to us in Christ, is our greatest treasure.

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