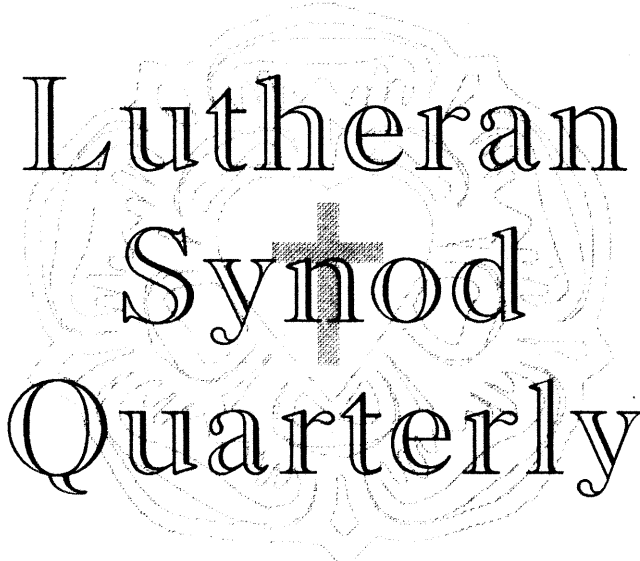


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Lutheran
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Quarterly

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Introduction

President Wilhelm Petersen, editor

This issue begins with a paper by Pastor Thomas Rank on Habbakkuk and the Theology of the Cross. The essayist correctly points out that “the Christian struggle with the bearing of the holy cross is an on-going condition. As long as one bears the name Christian one must expect repercussion from a world at odds with God who made it. This was true for believers of the Old Testament. It is no less true today.”

Also included in this issue is an exegetical study of I Corinthians 11:23-29 with special reference to close(d) communion by Reverend Martin Teigen, pastor of Our Savior and Rock Dell Lutheran Churches, Bellview, Minnesota. This is a timely topic in a day when open communion in many churches is pretty much the order of the day.

Our readers will also appreciate the article by Pastor Steven Petersen entitled *We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain*. It deals with the subject of death in the devotional writings of Martin Luther. The essayist observes that “clergy in any era can learn from Luther that the chief pastoral responsibility will always be to care and provide for the soul in time of death. In Luther’s pastoral ministry the Means of Grace form the foundation of preparation for death.”

Each year our ELS synodical convention holds a memorial service for fellow pastors who during the year have been called to their eternal rest. This year the service was held for Dr. Neelak Tjernagel and Pastor Norman Harstad. The sermon was delivered by Professor Erling Teigen, a nephew of Dr. Tjernagel. Blessed be their memory!

We wish our readers a blessed Epiphany season in the precious name of the Christ Child who reveals his glory and in whom we have true and lasting peace.
WWP

The 1994 Reformation lectures will not appear in the LSQ, but they are available on video tape. The lectures are entitled:

- Luther: Man Between God and the Devil.
- The Riddle of Erasmus: The Pursuit of True Catholicism
- The Mystery of the Impact of John Calvin.

The cost of the tapes is \$25 plus \$3.00 postage.

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Habakkuk and the Theology of the Cross

or Habakkuk: A True Theologian¹

Pastor Thomas L. Rank
Scarville, Iowa

E.L.S. General Pastors Conference
January 5-7, 1994
Bloomington, Minnesota

Introduction

1. This paper was assigned under the topic of "doctrinal" paper. However, much of the discussion invariably has a "practical" nature. And that is at it should be. For the practice of the Office of the Ministry involves the blending of all the disciplines of theology, whether exegesis, dogmatics, history or practical. All serve as tools to apply the Scriptural truths of God's Law and Gospel to the individual parishioner and to the congregation in worship.

2. The Christian's struggle with the bearing of the holy cross is an on-going condition. As long as one bears the name of "Christian" one must expect repercussions from a world at odds with the God who made it. This was true for believers of the Old Testament. It is no less true for us.

3. How one resolves the issue of the Christian's cross is in part answered by how one explains evil in the lives of believers. To what should a pastor resort when faced with a parishioner angry at God for the loss of a beloved wife or husband or child? How does a pastor explain a tragic accident involving God-fearing members of the congregation? How can one continue to expound the love and care of the Creator of all while observing the havoc which natural disasters like tornadoes, hurricanes, or floods (like this past summer) wreak on the lives of our flocks? These are issues pastors face on a more than an occasional basis.

¹ Editor's Note: The formatting for this paper has been preserved as much as possible in the LSQ for consistency. The endnotes have been converted to footnotes with separate numbering for each page.

4. The Theology of the Cross is the answer to the cross of the Christian. The Theology of the Cross demonstrates the connection between the believer's cross and trials and the cross and trials of Jesus Christ. The Theology of the Cross, at its core, is an exposition of the way in which God works here in this world. It is called the Theology of the Cross due to the nature of God's revelation of the Gospel through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross of Golgotha.

O darkest woe!	O sorrow dread!
Ye tears, forth flow!	God's Son is dead!
Has earth so sad a wonder?	But by His expiation
God the Father's only Son	Of our guilt upon the cross
Now is buried yonder.	Gained for us salvation.

(TLH 167:1,2)

With the words "God's Son is dead" the hymnwriter captured the essence of the Theology of the Cross. Here is the scandal of the Christian faith, here is the stumbling block. A stumbling block because this is not what the world expected or, for that matter, even wanted from God. But as one comes to grips with the "backwardness" of God's revelation through faith, particularly there at the cross, one gains insight into the connection with the cross of the Christian. It is towards this end that this paper is dedicated.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF HABAKKUK

5. Why choose Habakkuk as an example of the Theology of the cross? It has to do with the very beginning of the book. It has to do with the simple phrase, "How long?". This phrase is directed by the prophet to the Lord. This lament is similar to many other passages in the Old Testament.¹

¹ "My soul also is greatly troubled; But You, O LORD; how long?" Psalm 6:3 "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" Psalm 13:1,2 "Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue me from their destructions, My precious life from the lions." Psalm 35:17 "O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?" Psalm 74:10 "How long will you judge

Habakkuk's cry is a cry of faith, a troubled groping faith, but still faith. He cries out just because he is convinced that God is the God of justice and the Guardian of the covenant and has the will and the power to intervene.¹

6. The occasion for this question or lamentation by the prophet is the point at which we begin. Here is where we find the cross which burdened Habakkuk. What circumstances prompted the prophet to question the Lord with the implication that the Lord was forgetting, neglecting, His promises of help and comfort? What, exactly, was Habakkuk questioning and lamenting about? Several options present themselves. The problem Habakkuk saw, the event or circumstance which caused him to lament, could have been an internal problem between the righteousness of Judah and the apostasy of the king (most likely Jehoiakim) and nation. Or it could have been an external problem brought about by a foreign nation. There is really only one firm historical anchor in the book of Habakkuk to offer help and that is the reference to the "Chaldeans" in 1:6.²

For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs.

The reference to the "Chaldeans" is usually taken to mean the neo-Babylonian empire which toppled the Assyrian empire by destroying Nineveh in 612 B.C. Perhaps at this point a brief excursus into the Ancient Near Eastern history is helpful.

7. Three dates highlight the events of this time: 612, 609, and 605 B.C. 612 B.C. (noted above) is the date which marks the downfall of the Assyrian Empire as it succumbed to the might of the Babylonians led by Nabopolassar (625-605). However, the Egyptians led by Pharaoh Necho, recognizing the threat of the Babylonians and an opportunity to increase their influence in the area of Palestine, directed

unjustly, And show partiality to the wicked?" Psalm 82:2 "How long, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?" Psalm 89:46 "LORD, how long will the wicked, How long will the wicked triumph?" Psalm 94:3

¹ Concordia Self-Study Commentary, p. 636.

² The Word Becoming Flesh, H. Hummel, p. 345.

an army to aid the remnants of the Assyrians at Haran in the north-west territory of Assyria. Josiah, king of Judah, was determined to prevent the Egyptians from aiding the Assyrians. In a reckless attempt to stop the Egyptians Josiah fought them at Megiddo in 609 B.C. The army of Judah was defeated and Josiah, the great reformer of the Old Testament church,¹ beloved king, last of the God-fearing monarchs of Judah, was killed in battle.² Four years later, 605 B.C., at the battle of Carchemish, Babylonian forces completed their domination of the area by defeating a combined army of Assyrian remnants and Egyptians. This left Babylonia with considerable influence extending to the southern border of Judah and brought to Judah the great scourge, Nebuchadnezzar (605-562), who would defeat Judah in 605, again in 597, and raze Jerusalem to the ground in 586 B.C.

8. Meanwhile, after the death of Josiah, Judah returned to the apostasy of former kings. Jehoahaz' reign, son of Josiah, lasted only months after his father's death. He was succeeded by his brother Jehoiakim (609-597). The biblical record relates this about Jehoiakim: "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done." (2 Kings 23:37)

9. The "Chaldeans" of Habakkuk 1:6 are the Babylonian empire which God used to bring down the evil of Assyria, many smaller nations around Judah and Judah itself. But this identification does not solve the question: about whom or about what was Habakkuk lamenting when he wrote:

The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth.

¹"And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left." (2 Chronicles 34:2)

²"In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went to the aid of the king of Assyria, to the River Euphrates; and King Josiah went against him. And Pharaoh Necho killed him at Megiddo when he confronted him." (2 Kings 23:29)

For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds. (1:1-4)

Why is there “plundering and violence”? Why does Habakkuk observe that the law seems powerless or that the “wicked surround the righteous” or that “perverse judgment proceeds”? Options from which to choose for the prophet’s lamentation include: 1) the evil of foreign domination signified by Assyria and/or Egypt; 2) the internal theological and moral decay of Judah after the death of Josiah; 3) the death of Josiah itself, which may have caused great “Anfechtungen”¹ for the prophet; or 4) a combination of several of these.

H. Hummel, in The Word Becoming Flesh, opts for:

...the view that Habakkuk in 1:2-4 is concerned primarily with Judah’s faithlessness, but by no means excluding the problem of Assyria’s tyranny. This happens also to be the oldest and traditional viewpoint among both Jewish and Christian interpreters.²

Martin Luther interpreted this section in the same way. Luther commented in regards to verse 3:

Here we note that Habakkuk is speaking of the Jewish nation and not yet of the king of Babylon. For he is bemoaning the evil conditions in his country, he laments that wickedness is so

¹ “*Anfechtung* is a proper synonym for the life of the Christian lived in faith. It is a bridge that brings the realities of revelation from the Biblical history into the personal life of the Christian. The historical realities of the Bible remain fixed within their own appointed time, but the supernatural realities, e.g., atonement for sin, faith, conquest over Satan, death, and sin transcend history and are made alive for the Christian through faith. As the Christian encounters these supernatural realities through faith, he struggles within his faith. The revelations made to the Biblical figures are unrepeatable because of their place in salvation history, but the *Anfechtungen* are shared not only by them but also by all who through faith accept the history for personal salvation. As Satan afflicted the Biblical saints in their *Anfechtungen*, so he continues to afflict all those who share their faith in Christ. For as faith provides a positive bond between all believers, so the struggles of the *Anfechtungen* provide a negative bond and definite mark among all Christians with themselves and with Christ. Luther is so bold as to say Christ himself has already gone through all sufferings now endured by Christians.” Dr. David Scaer, 1981 Reformation Lectures, “Anfechtung, Prayer, and Resurrection,” Lecture I, Lutheran Synod Quarterly, March 1981, p. 24.

² Hummel, p. 346.

rampant round about him and that he is obliged to look on helplessly.¹

10. I believe, though, that it fits well with the book of Habakkuk to provide a definite focal point for the lamentation of Chapter 1. Instead of finding the reason for Habakkuk's lament in just the general conditions of Judah, whether due to external or internal afflictions, I prefer the placement of Habakkuk in the chaotic times of the year 609 B.C., shortly after the death of Josiah. There we find the great struggle between faith and sight, promise and experience. The faithful people in Judah and their prophet Habakkuk strive to deal with the death of a great and godly king at the hands of evil as signified by Egypt. Too, they are confronted by the intrusion of Egypt into the affairs of Judah as Jehoahaz is forcibly removed from the throne (subsequently to die in Egypt) and replaced with Eliakim (renamed Jehoiakim by Pharaoh Necho). There is also the decay of the life of worship and trust in promises of God, as the true Lord is abandoned in favor of political solutions. There, at the end of the last great king of Judah, as the nation begins its last slide toward destruction, I believe are compelling circumstances for the writing of Habakkuk. It is with this isagogical background that I view the book.²

¹ LW 19:159. The remainder of the paragraph reads: "In view of this, he is growing tired and weary of preaching. That is the experience of every godly preacher who is so eager to avert punishment from his people and to make them godly. When he sees that he is not progressing in this but that conditions are, as it were, growing worse, he almost despairs of his preaching. And yet he may not and dare not desist from it because of a few elect. And this happened and was recorded for our consolation and for our admonition, lest we be taken aback and lest we regard it strange when but few people are reformed by our teaching or when people even grow worse. For preachers generally assume, especially when they are novices and have just come off the production line, that things will prosper as soon as they speak, that all will come about and change in a moment. But that is far from true. This did not happen to the prophet either, not even to Christ Himself. The saying applies: 'You are too young to reform old rascals.' That was also the experience of our good friend Habakkuk. He is grievously vexed that his teaching is not translated into pure works and deeds."

² As far as the combination of Habakkuk and the Theology of the Cross go, it is clear from Luther's writing, and also Hummel's, that the Theology of the Cross is evident even from the slightly different aspect of their viewpoint from the one I advocate. The problem lamented by Habakkuk is still: why this evil?

11. This leads us to the consideration of the assigned topic: Habakkuk and the Theology of the Cross. Habakkuk serves as an excellent example of how the cross is applied and dealt with in the life of a Christian. As we move in the book of Habakkuk from Chapter One to the end of Chapter Three we go from the doubts of a Christian facing the inscrutable will of God to the resolution which faith provides. This is what we will now examine in more detail.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

12. The Theology of the Cross is defined in the much-quoted theses of the Heidelberg Disputation. The ones which deal with the Theology of the Cross are these:

18. It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [been made] (Rom. 1:20).

20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who **comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.**

21. **A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the things what it actually is.**

22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

23. The law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ (Rom. 4:15).

24. Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner. (emphasis added)¹

13. Luther's definition of the theologian of the cross was based upon his understanding of passages like the following (especially those from 1 Corinthians):

- ♦ And [Moses] said, "Please, show me Your glory."... But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and

¹LW 31:40,41

live.”...“So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”

- ♦ Truly you are God, who hide Yourself.... — Isaiah 45:15
- ♦ **For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.** — 1 Corinthians 1:18
- ♦ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.
— 1 Corinthians 1:27
- ♦ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.
— 1 Corinthians 2:7

14. It is best simply to allow the good doctor Luther to instruct us at this point. How does he expand on the Theology of the Cross as set forth in the Heidelberg Disputation?

...[F]aith has to do with things not seen [Heb. 11:1]. Hence in order that there may be room for faith, it is necessary that everything which is believed should be hidden. It cannot, however, be more deeply hidden than under an object, perception, or experience which is contrary to it. Thus when God makes alive he does it by killing, when he justifies he does it by making men guilty, when he exalts to heaven he does it by bringing down to hell, as Scripture says: “The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up” (1 Sam. 2[:6])....Thus God hides his eternal goodness and mercy under eternal wrath, his righteousness under iniquity. This is the highest degree of faith, to believe him merciful when he saves so few and damns so many, and to believe him righteous when by his own will he makes us necessarily damnable, so that he seems, according to Erasmus, to delight in the torments of the wretched and to be worthy of hatred rather than of love. If

then, I could by any means comprehend how this God can be merciful and just who displays so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith. As it is, since that cannot be comprehended, there is room for the exercise of faith when such things are preached and published, just as when God kills, the faith of life is exercised in death.¹

15. The Theology of the Cross deals with the hiddenness of God, in fact, with the paradoxical nature of God's "method" of revelation. In his "Preface to the Prophet Habakkuk" Luther makes direct application of the Theology of the Cross to Habakkuk. He discussed the seemingly contradictory news between the prophetic proclamation of the Advent of the Messiah and the destruction of Israel. Then, as if Israel's demise was not bad enough it was followed by the destruction of Judah. The apparent "nonsensical" nature of these events led Luther to explain:

While they were waiting for the Christ, the king of Babylon appeared and dealt worse with Judah than the king of Assyria had dealt with Israel. My dear man, who could believe the prophets any longer under those circumstances? What hope remained now that the country was ravaged and devastated, now that kings, princes, priests, prophets, and all others had vanished and only the peasants remained in the country and alien, pagan princes ruled at will? Is that what you call the coming of the Christ and the establishment of a new, great, and mighty kingdom that would reign throughout the world? Indeed, that is what you call destroying kingdoms and laying them waste. No, they did not understand this work of God; for it is impossible for flesh and blood to comprehend that life should originate where life ends, that honor should come forth where dishonor appears, and that a kingdom should arise when captivity is at hand. For all of this is entirely contrary to and beyond the thinking, the custom, and the experience of the whole world. But God does not act otherwise and cannot act otherwise.²

In a similar vein Luther comments on the Second Chapter of Habakkuk:

¹ The Bondage of the Will, 33:62-3.

² LW 19:154.

That is how reason carries on when God fulfills His words differently than it had imagined. For reason always presumes to dictate measure, time, and manner to God for keeping His promise; otherwise it refuses to believe any longer. Therefore God cannot but fulfill His words strangely and far differently than we expect. Thus it happens that man refuses to believe God at any time. When He threatens, our present good fortune and the fact that we do not yet feel the coming misfortune keep us from believing His threats. When He promises mercy, the present misfortune and the fact that we do not yet feel His future mercy keep us from believing also His promise. Then the prophets have to devote their attention first of all to the faint-hearted, unbelieving people. For how could God have initiated Christ's promised kingdom more foolishly and strangely than by having Jerusalem, where His kingdom was to be, destroyed by ungodly scorners and by His enemies and while He had His own people led away into exile? How could they believe that Jerusalem lying in ashes could at the same time become the most magnificent kingdom? Here reason had to sink and despair. And whoever could have sustained himself would have had to soar above all his senses and his reason to adhere solely to God's Word, beholding a new Jerusalem which was as yet not visible anywhere.¹

And

You dare not be confused by the fact that matters appear far differently externally, since you are being troubled. For such is the way of God's Word, that it projects matters that are absurd and profounder than all the senses and reason can comprehend and experience can perceive. You behold and perceive the ruin of your kingdom; therefore you must soar above your perception by means of your faith and be persuaded even in the midst of ruin that your kingdom will come and will be gloriously established.²

16. Luther realized that the method whereby God worked in the Old Testament, *i.e.* under opposites, under the absurd, etc., was the very same way by which God works in New Testament times. This is

¹LW 19:190.

²LW 19:197

what Paul brought out in 1 Corinthians (quoted above). The greatest example of the Theology of the Cross is nothing less than the Word becoming flesh and especially the Crucifixion. There God truly hid Himself deep under human flesh, so deep that it became a “stumbling block” and a “scandal.” “Nowhere is God more deeply covered and hidden than in the Passion.”¹ Yet, nowhere else is He so clearly revealed. To comprehend and appreciate this fact is at the very heart of the evangelical Lutheran theology brought back to light by Martin Luther. The Theology of the Cross is not simply a hermeneutical principle or theological process, it is the very reality of how God works among us sinful human beings. The Theology of the Cross exposes the great Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the “crucial” importance of this teaching for the Christian Church of all times, perhaps never more than now.

17. Why “crucial”? Because of the on-going temptation to follow the Theology of Glory. As noted above, Luther defines the Theology (or theologian) of Glory as one who “looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [been made] (Rom. 1:20).” The Theology of Glory is any and every attempt to deal with God apart from His own chosen ways of revelation or by some counterfeit method. We find both subtle and crass theologies of glory. Most often the Theology of Glory takes the form of the elevation of reason (in whatever form: sociology, psychology, philosophy, etc.) above Scripture.

18. Significantly, Luther found the greatest danger of the Theology of Glory in its encroachment upon and threatened destruction of the means of grace. This was due to the fact that for Luther, as for the orthodox Church of all ages, the means of grace are the bridge between the cross of Christ (all the benefits of it) and the believer. The means of grace was the point at which Luther was determined to resist stoutly the advance of the enemy. In his words against Karlstadt in “Against the Heavenly Prophets” Luther pointed out the danger of destroying this bridge:

With all his [Karlstadt’s] mouthing of the words, “Spirit, Spirit, Spirit,” he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the

¹ H. Sasse, We Confess Jesus Christ, “The Theology of the Cross”, p. 49.

ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and the oral proclamation of the Word of God he wants to teach you, not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit.¹

19. How do the means of grace fit in with the Theology of the Cross? The means of grace are the way in which God hides/reveals Himself in the post-Ascension New Testament times.

Do not seek a new and foolish entrance. But look in faith at the place where the Word and the sacraments are. Direct your step to the place where the Word resounds and the sacraments are administered, and there write the title THE GATE OF GOD. Let this be done either in the church and in the public assemblies or in bedchambers, when we console and buoy up the sick or when we absolve him who sits with us at table. There the gate of heaven is, as Christ says (Matt. 18:20): ‘Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them.’ Throughout the world the house of God and the gate of heaven is wherever there is the pure teaching of the Word together with the sacraments.²

But because of the lowly nature of God’s chosen vessels of grace: water, bread, wine, the voice of the pastor, faith is necessary. Human reason sees these things as the height of folly. How absurd to believe that God brings forgiveness, His own Body and Blood, through these! The Theology of Glory perverts these means of grace into mere symbols or it totally rejects them. The Theology of the Cross confesses that through the truthfulness and efficacy of God’s Word we believe the means of grace are the very ways, the only ways, we can be sure of God’s presence with us (the “Immanuel” of the Christian (i.e. Evangelical Lutheran) Church). They are what bring us the comfort and consolation of the Gospel which we so desperately need. Unfortunately (according to some), these are not as impressive as the sight of angels, or as glorious as the Transfiguration, (or better yet some spectacular spiritual gift or special revelation) and so we can perhaps excuse ourselves for not believing these

¹ LW 40:147.

² “Genesis Commentary” 5:247.

means of grace by blaming God for not bringing us such appearances of God. Luther was well aware of this opinion. To this Luther responded:

You have no reason to complain that you have been visited less than Abraham or Isaac. You, too, have appearances, and in a way they are stronger, clearer, and more numerous than those they [the patriarchs, O.T. believers] had, provided that you open your eyes and heart and take hold of them. You have Baptism. You have the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where bread and wine are the species, figures, and forms in which and under which God in person speaks and works into your ears, eyes, and heart. Besides, you have the ministry of the Keys, through which He absolves and comforts you. “Fear not,” He says, “I am with you.” He appears to you in Baptism. He baptizes you Himself and addresses you Himself. He not only says: “I am with you,” but: “I forgive you your sins. I offer you salvation from death, deliverance from all fear and from the power of the devil and hell. And not only I am with you, but all the angels with Me.” What more will you desire? “Everything is full of divine appearances and conversations.

But here we should complain and sob against our flesh, which is poisoned and sunk in sin and does not let us believe and accept such great blessings. Over and above this, it tells us to argue and to question whether these things are true. I am speaking about us, who are truly Christians, who teach and believe these things. I not only believe in Christ, but I know that He is sitting at the right hand of the Father to be our Mediator and to intercede for us. I know that the bread and the wine in the Lord’s Supper are the body and blood of Christ and that the word of the pastor, whether he preaches or absolves, is the Word of God. Yet the flesh is weighed down by doubt, so that it does not believe these things. This is great wretchedness and is bitterer than death itself. Indeed, the reason why death is bitter is that the hindrances of the flesh prevent us from believing. Otherwise affliction would be a joy, and death would be a sleep for us who believe.¹

¹“Genesis Commentary” 5:21, 22.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CROSS

20. Dealing with the consequences of sin in a fallen world is a problem for the Christian. The world reacts to the sight of evil afflicting seemingly good and pious people by claiming there is no god. The “repulsive” character Thnardier in the musical “Les Misrables” looks upon the battleground on which lie the bodies of many young, noble-minded, students. His reaction to the carnage is:

It's a world where the dogs eat the dogs
Where they kill for the bones in the street
And God in His Heaven
He don't interfere
'Cos he's dead as the stiff at my feet.
I raise my eyes to see the heavens
And only the moon looks down
The harvest moon shines down!

This is the conclusion of reason clouded with sin, without the light of God's grace to dispel the blinding mist of sin. It is a secular theology of glory.

21. Of course, we also find the ecclesiastical version of the Theology of Glory. The Theology of Glory ends up being a theology of despair when confronted with suffering and evil in the lives of “good” people. The conclusion reached by the Theology of Glory when evil invades the Christian's life is that there must have been something bad that the person did in order to reap such a terrible fate. (“Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could.”) It does so because it cannot correlate the justice of God and the mercy of God with the intrusion of suffering into someone's life without coming to the conclusion that there was an evil cause. It looks upon the hidden things of God and sees only the outward appearance. Hidden from it is the working of God underneath external appearance.

22. While one cannot deny direct consequences for certain actions, more often than not Christians are in a quandary when it comes to figuring out “why?”. Like Habakkuk's question, “How long?”, the Christian wants to understand how God can allow certain things to happen, things that don't make sense. Dr. James Dobson notes:

In my work with Christian families in crisis, I find them struggling in many of the same ways as the disciples. As they trudge along in deep thought, there is no evidence that Jesus is in their part of the universe. Because they don't "feel" His presence, they cannot believe He cares. Since the facts don't add up, they are convinced no reasonable explanation exists. Their prayers bring no immediate relief, so they presume they are not heard.¹

23. The cross is an intimate part of the Christian's life. Jesus said, "If you want to follow Me, deny yourself, take up your cross, and come with Me. For if anyone wants to save his life, he will lose it. But if anyone loses his life for Me, he will find it." (Matthew 16:24,25, NET)

To believe in the cross of Christ is also a yes to my cross. If this is not so, we are only playing games. It is not by chance that whenever Jesus spoke of His cross to His disciples He also thought of the cross which they would have to bear in following Him....²

We cannot view the cross as an objective reality in Christ without at once knowing ourselves as crucified with Christ. The cross means: God meets us in death, in the death of Christ, but only when we experience Christ's death as our own death. The death of Christ leads us to an encounter with God only when it leads to our own death. Contemplating the death of Christ necessarily becomes a dying together with him.³

24. This connection between the Cross of Christ and the Christian's cross must be understood by faith. This is what gives the Christian the needed insight to deal with the seemingly evil things which happen to him and loved ones, brothers and sisters in the faith. Where faith is present, there is also the cross; there one can expect suffering. Luther went so far as to make the Christian's cross one of the marks of the Church.

[The Christians] must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord's Prayer indicates) by inward sadness,

¹ Dr. James Dobson, When God Doesn't Make Sense, pp. 48, 49.

² H. Sasse, We Confess Jesus Christ, "The Theology of the Cross", p. 52.

³ Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 28.

timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God's word....¹

Luther's comments in this quotation have their focus more on the anticipated response of the world to the Cross of Christ. But he does not neglect that suffering which occurs for other reasons. He understands that the Christian's cross involves more than the antagonism of the world to the Gospel. Involved also is the paradoxical relationship between God and His people.

25. How does God help His people to grow in faith? Often in ways we find uncomfortable, unreasonable, painful, confusing.

If Christians find it difficult to believe that God would deliberately hide himself under lowly disguise, it's downright shocking to discover that God expects us to suffer....The real God is one who deliberately plans to work in our lives through suffering....To be in partnership with Jesus means to be in the partnership of his cross.²

26. Suffering is more often associated with bad than with good. Yet, in God's wisdom what we consider bad He can use for our good. No one would deliberately choose suffering. As a matter of fact, the cross is expressly not something we choose for ourselves, it must be something imposed.

But we teach that no man should impose upon himself a cross or suffering of his choosing; but if the cross comes to us we should suffer and endure it patiently. We also say that we merit nothing by our suffering. It is sufficient that we know that our suffering is well-pleasing to God, that through it we may be made Christ-like. Thus we see that precisely those who teach so much about a cross and suffering and praise it so highly, know least of Christ and His cross, because they claim their own suffering to be meritorious. My friend, such is not the meaning. Neither is any man constrained or forced to it. If you will not suffer without thought of merit, then leave suffering alone and at the same time deny Christ. This you surely

¹ "On the Councils and the Church", 41:164-5.

² H. Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action, p. 141.

know, that if you will not suffer, you cannot be a servant of Christ. So you may choose which you like of the two: whether you suffer or you deny Christ.

Finally, the suffering of the Christians is nobler and finer than the suffering of all other people, for since Christ plunged Himself into suffering He thereby sanctified the suffering of all His Christians. Hence, now, through the sufferings of Christ the sufferings of all His saints are made into a holy thing, because they are anointed with the sufferings of Christ. And that is why we must receive all sufferings as a holy thing, for it truly is a holy thing.¹

We prefer to avoid suffering, pitying those who are afflicted in some way, but certainly not wanting to participate in any direct way with pain and agony. Times occur when such avoidance is not possible though. Habakkuk lived during such a time. It caused Habakkuk to question God and exclaim to Him:

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he? Why do You make men like fish of the sea, Like creeping things that have no ruler over them?

27. Doubt casts a shadow over the prophet's thoughts, just as it does so many Christians when confronted by God's hiddenness. The Christian, though still believing in God's ultimate victory, does waver.

[Faith] believes that God is just, but when He tarries so long and looks on the evil committed, faith is tempted to think that He is not just, but that He delights in these rogues. That is what we, too, are prone to think now that God permits our Gospel to be persecuted and reviled so miserably, as both violence and the sects increase daily in opposition to it. We, too, are inclined to say: 'To be sure, You are of pure eyes and are loath to see violence and injustice. But when will You give proof of this also by Your action? It seems to us that You think that we are in the wrong and they are in the right;

¹ Luther, "Sermon on Suffering and the Cross", quoted in Day by Day We Magnify Thee, p.118.

nevertheless, we are convinced that we are in the right and they are in the wrong."¹

All of this [victory of evil] poses a real cross for the children of God. Their suffering consists not only in their defeat, but in addition they also find themselves regarded as being in the wrong. They have to witness both their enemy's victory over them and also his boast that God is on his side. Thus Christ, too, says in John 16:2: "The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God." That is what Christ Himself experienced on the cross. But that is where the sublime and profound wisdom of God lies hidden; that is where He deals wonderfully with His saints (Ps. 4:4), indeed, even with His enemies. All of this transcends all human reason and experience.²

28. What was the resolution of this dilemma for Habakkuk? What is our own resolution? We find Habakkuk's resolution in two places in his book. The first is from the second chapter. The second is the close of the great psalm of praise which is the third chapter of the book.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith. (2:4)

Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls; Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills. (3:17-19)

Habakkuk resolves the dilemma of great tragedy and evil coming upon faithful believers by depending solely upon faith in God. He must wait upon the Lord. He cannot determine the chronology or wisdom of God's ways. God Himself must be relied upon to do

¹ LW 19:180.

² LW 19:183.

things in His own good time.¹ This means Habakkuk must be patient.² Nor dare the prophet determine God's favor based upon prosperity or any other worldly measure of goodness and blessing. So Habakkuk concludes that despite no outward signs of God's mercy, still he will depend on the Lord. He will "joy in the God of my salvation." The Lord will keep him safe. Safe in the promises given, but perhaps not safe from the temporal sufferings of this world.

29. The prophet's hope finally is eschatological. Faith's object is "not yet." The Theology of the Cross informs Habakkuk that the hidden God is known only by such faith. Any other attempt to know God is doomed to be a theology of glory, seeing things not by God's reality, but through one's own sin-darkened imagination. A commentator on the book of Job observed:

Through suffering, faith constantly grows and vanquishes doubt until it achieves its eschatological goal, namely the state of glory. This is why God permitted Satan to afflict Job, and why he permits our suffering: it is the vehicle for the exercise, increase, and perfection of our faith.³

CONCLUSION

30. The Theology of the Cross means that the Christian must expect his own cross. The forms of that cross vary from individual to individual. The Christian, even though beset by doubts regarding the Lord's working in his life, will still rely upon the promises of God to see him through. The Theology of Glory is seen for what it really is,

¹ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38,39)

² Note these comments on the connection between Habakkuk 2:4 and its use in Romans 1:17: "For Paul, as for Habakkuk, faith is confronted by an action of God which is offensively enigmatic, namely the weakness and foolishness of the Cross; for both Paul and Habakkuk faith is faith without works, for both it is "quietly waiting "for God to do His saving work. For both, faith is not one aspect of man's existence before God but the whole of his relationship to Him." Concordia Self-Study Commentary, p. 639.

³ Christopher Mitchell, "Job and the Theology of the Cross", CJ, April, 1989, p. 176.

a foolish attempt to figure out God with either a denial of God's own revelation or a distorted view of it. All such attempts are doomed to failure and actually are signs of not fearing, loving or trusting in God above all things. Habakkuk serves as a prime example of the faithful follower of the Lord. He notes that despite the lack of empirical verification, he is content to rest in God's Word. "Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines;...Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

31. Thus the prophet Habakkuk proves himself to be a true theologian. He is a theologian of the cross. Habakkuk anticipates the New Testament times but agrees completely with them. He "takes up his cross," and follows the Lord despite the apparent foolishness of it, despite the stumbling block it may prove to be for others. So Habakkuk dealt with the times in which he lived.

32. For the church of the 1990's the same approach must be taken. The Theology of the Cross is our banner, our rallying cry can be, to the amazement of the world, "God's Son is dead!" Is that tortured body on the cross a sign of victory? Is that the sign of hope? By faith it is. For we know also that through our connection with Christ's death through baptism we also participate in His resurrection. We know this by faith even as we struggle with suffering and evil right now. As Joseph said to his brothers, "...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 50:20). Our doubts are put to rest by faith in the guarantee given by Christ's bloody death on the cross and glorious resurrection.

33. How does this answer the questions posed in the opening paragraphs? Maybe not to the liking of our flesh. When disasters strike, when death stalks our loved ones, when parishioners come with the questions of "Why did God allow this?" we still cannot point to such things and claim immediate access to God's ways. But our answer is one of faith: "Trust God."

[God] tempts us and proposes a strange work, that He may be able to do His own. Through our affliction He seeks to get His sport and our salvation. God said to Abraham, "Kill your son." How? With playing, simulating, and laughing. Surely a happy and delightful sport!

Thus God sometimes pretends to be withdrawing rather far from us and killing us, but who believes that He is pretending? Yet with God it is a sport and — if we were permitted to express it in this way — a lie. It is indeed a real death that all of us will have to meet, but God does not carry out in earnest what He is showing. He is pretending and is testing us whether we are willing to give up the present things and life itself for God's sake.¹

“Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Soli Deo Gloria!

¹LW 4:131.

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Exegesis of I Corinthians 11:23-29,

In Reference To Close(d) Communion ELS General Pastoral Conference January 5-7, 1994¹

by
Martin Teigen

I Corinthians 11:23-26

- ♦ Novum Testamentum Graece: Nestle - Aland, 26th Edition

23 Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδετο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον 24 καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν, Τοῦτό μού ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.

25 ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι λέγων, Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν,

26 ὡσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ.

27 Ὡστε ὃς ἂν ἐσθίῃ τὸν ἄρτον ἢ πίνῃ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ κυρίου ἀναξίως, ἔνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου. 28 δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτὸν καὶ οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιέτω καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποτηρίου πινέτω· 29 ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα.²

- ♦ Holy Bible, New King James Version

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it* in remembrance of Me." 26 For as

¹ Editor's Note: Again, the formatting of this article has been preserved as much as possible. The footnotes are numbered as in the preceding paper.

² *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, Allen Wikgren, 26th edition, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1979.

often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread and drink of *that* cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.¹

♦ The Holy Bible, New International Version

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.²

What Herman Sasse denominated "one of the Reformer's profoundest theological perceptions"³ is an appropriate point from which to begin: "This sacrament is the Gospel."⁴

¹ Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1979. English citations from Scriptures in English are taken from this version.

² Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1978.

³ *We Confess The Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel, Concordia, 1985, p. 23.

⁴ *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, Concordia/Fortress, Vol. 36, p. 289. The same idea is found in the Large Catechism, V, 32, 66. See *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert, Fortress, 1959.

I. The Lord's Supper Is The Gospel

A. The Lord's Supper Itself Is The Gospel

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul summarizes the Gospel: “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you ... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” Paul's narration of the “words of institution” in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 repeat the same essential elements. The ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν of 15:3 finds its parallel in 11:24 in the words τοῦ σώματος τοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.¹ The ὑπὲρ affirms that Jesus' death served for the benefit of sinners and that it was also of a substitutionary character (2 Corinthians 5:14-15), for you.²

The concept of substitution by means of sacrifice³ for sin is expressed also by the words of 11:25: Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἔμῳ αἵματι. That God established numerous διαθήκη in the Old Testament era is affirmed by Paul in Romans 9:4, “to whom pertain ... the covenants. The Abrahamic and David covenants (Genesis 12 and II Samuel 7) are Gospel pacts (covenants or testaments).⁴ When, however, διαθήκη is modified by καινὴ, an opposition is drawn between the καινὴ διαθήκη and the παλαιὰ διαθήκη.⁵ When this opposition is made, the new covenant is the

¹ Ἰσορροπούμενον, κλάμενον and διδόμενον are absent from the “better texts” and probably entered the text through the influence of ἔκλασεν in the first part of verse 24, according to Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, 1971, p. 562. The thought is the same with or without the addition. (R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First And Second Epistles To The Corinthians*, Augsburg, 1963, p. 464.)

² *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromily, Eerdmans, 1985, p. 1228.

³ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, (Hermeneia series), trans. James W. Leitch, Fortress Press, 1975, p. 199. See also Lenski, p. 471.

⁴ While διαθήκη can refer to a last will and testament, it can also serve to render *brith* (*A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Walter Bauer, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957; *TDNT*, p. 160), in its context of a suzerainty treaty.

⁵ As Luther does also. LW Am. ed. 37:323.

gospel and the old covenant is the law (2 Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 7:8-13). The new testament, then, as found in Paul is the forgiveness of sins (Romans 11:27), is a vehicle of the Spirit, and gives life and righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:6, 9).¹ The old covenant offers the same thing as the new covenant offers, namely, as the Lord says, "I will be their God and they will be my people" (Hebrews 8:10). The old covenant (law), however, has as its chief purpose the pointing out of the sinner's inability to draw near to God. It is only in the gospel, the new covenant, that the sinner hears that God has drawn near to him through the substitutionary atonement effected by the Savior. Here we are not dealing with a covenant sealed by the blood of animals, but one which has been sealed by the blood of the son of God (ἐν τῷ ἔμῳ αἵματι).

Absolution and Baptism are also the gospel because the new covenant forgiveness is also given through them. In the Absolution the Lamb of God declares to the individual and through a confessor, his verdict of not guilty.² In Baptism the Lamb of God cleanses the sinner of his sin, unites him with Christ and gives him new life through the Spirit. In the Lord's Supper the Lamb of God gives himself to the participant and thus feeds and strengthens him with that by which he has effectively won forgiveness and life.

ΤΟΥΤΟ ΜΟΥ ἔστιν τὸ σῶμα and ΤΟΥΤΟ τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη ἔστιν ἐν τῷ ἔμῳ αἵματι are coordinate expressions that refer to the elements of the Supper. The Lutheran Church confesses that these two expressions are to be taken naturally, just as they read. The neuter demonstrative pronoun ΤΟΥΤΟ does not agree grammatically with the masculine ἄρτον of 11:23. However, ΤΟΥΤΟ is used "deictically," as Blass calls it,³ to point to something present, the bread that Jesus has taken, blessed and broken. The bread which has been blessed, then, is the body of Christ. ΤΟΥΤΟ τὸ ποτήριον refers

¹ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3, p. 351, Concordia.

² LW Am. ed.37, p. 368.

³ *A Greek Grammar Of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, F. Blass and A. Debrunner, trans. Robert W. Funk, University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 151.

to the cup that Christ has taken and blessed.¹ The cup is the new testament in Christ's blood, or, in other words, Christ's blood, as Luther says, "in the sense of synecdoche"² so that "this cup is the new testament on account of the blood of Christ," which everyone would interpret thus: 'The cup is the new testament because Christ's blood is in it.'³ The ἐστίν that is repeated twice in 11:23-26 is vital to a correct understanding of the evangelical character of the Lord's Supper. Luther insisted correctly that it be taken in its natural sense as the Words of Institution themselves indicate,⁴ and as the κοινωνία of 1 Corinthians 10:16 also makes clear.⁵ For this reason the Reformer was so insistent on a clear confession of the real presence and told the people of Frankfurt — who had expressed concerns about their pastor's understanding of the Sacrament — that they should "ask your pastor what it is that he has in his hand in the sacrament."⁶ The Christian should eat and drink in the Sacrament *because* (γάρ, Matthew 26:28) it is the body and blood of Christ.

Luther ties the blessing of the Sacrament to the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament and calls attention to its character as the new testament:

See, then, what a beautiful, great, marvelous thing this is, how everything meshes together in one sacramental reality. The words are the first thing, for without the words the cup and the bread would be nothing. Further, without bread and cup, the body and blood of Christ would not be there. Without the body and blood of Christ, the new testament would not be there. Without the new testament, forgiveness of sins would not be there. Without forgiveness of sins, life and salvation would not be there. Thus the words first connect the bread and

¹ ὡσαύτως, 11:25; compare Matthew 26:27.

² LW 37:330: "...he may answer on the basis of Luke's words, 'The cup is poured out for us,' and therefore may say that since cup and blood and new testament are sacramentally united, the cup is 'shed' by virtue of this unity, in the sense of *synecdoche*, whereas only the blood is shed..."

³ LW 37:320.

⁴ LW 37:252-258.

⁵ LW 37:348-352.

⁶ Cited by Wittenberg, p. 27.

cup to the sacrament; bread and cup embrace the body and blood of Christ; body and blood of Christ embrace the new testament; the new testament embraces the forgiveness of sins; forgiveness of sins embraces eternal life and salvation. See, all this the words of the Supper offer and give us, and we embrace it by faith. Ought not the devil, then, hate such a Supper and rouse fanatics against it? ¹

The Epitome summarizes the Lutheran position as follows:

1. We believe, teach, and confess that in the Holy Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and essentially present and are truly distributed and received with the bread and wine.

2. We believe, teach, and confess that the words of the testament of Christ are to be understood in no other way than in their literal sense, and not as though the bread symbolized the absent body and the wine the absent blood of Christ, but that because of the sacramental union they are truly the body and blood of Christ.

3. We believe, teach, and confess that with the bread and the wine the body and blood of Christ are received not only spiritually, by faith, but also orally. (FC Epi. VII, 6)

The twofold appearance of the phrase εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν (11:24, 25) also points to the evangelical character of the Lord's Supper. The most natural explanation of this phrase is found in 11:26 where the γὰρ is explanatory and calls attention to the fact that both the eating and the drinking in the Lord's Supper (ὁσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε) have as their purpose or goal (εἰς), the ἀνάμνησιν² of Christ. This ἀνάμνησιν is nothing other than a proclamation of the death of the Lord (τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε³, you proclaim the Lord's death). Paul had earlier stated clearly that the whole purpose of his

¹ LW Am. ed. 37:338

² Jeremias argues that εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν refers to God's remembering of Christ (Joachim, Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin, Fortress Press, 1977, pp. 249-256). This could possibly be understood in a way that refers to the intercession of Christ at the right hand of the Father, whether or not Jeremias understands it that way. Conzelmann dismisses Jeremias' argument saying that it is simply "in contradiction to the plain wording" (p. 199).

³ καταγγέλλετε is a present indicative and not an imperative.

proclamation (καταγγέλλων, 2:1) among the Corinthians and elsewhere was that of preaching Christ and him crucified (2:2; see also 1:23) for this preaching is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:24). So also in the Supper, the substitutionary death of Christ (τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν) and the outpouring of his blood in fulfillment of the typical cleansing from ritual uncleanness related to the old covenant (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι) are put before the people so that they may feed upon it, spiritually, of course, and also, which is the *proprium* of the Supper, orally.

The Lord’s Supper is the Gospel. The Words of Institution tell it all, as Luther summarizes:

Everything depends on these words. Every Christian should and must know them and hold them fast. ... They are words of life and salvation, so that whoever believes in them has all his sins forgiven through that faith; he is a child of life and has overcome death and hell. Language cannot express how great and mighty these words are, for they are the sum and substance of the whole gospel. (LW 36:277)

In his summary Sasse ties together the real presence and the forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament:

Why is the Sacrament of the Altar the Gospel for Luther? First of all simply because the Words of Institution contain the whole Gospel. To attack them is to attack the Gospel itself. ... It must be called an attack on these words if part of them is taken literally and another part figuratively, as when “Take and eat” and “Drink of it, all of you” are taken literally, “This is My body” and “This is My blood” figuratively, and the “which is given for you” and “which is shed for you” literally again. It is characteristic of Luther that right in the cited passage, as usual, he regards faith in the “for you” as most essential. It is what brings the blessing of the Sacrament. At the same time he stresses that this “for you” is inseparably bound with faith that the words “This is My body” and “This is My blood” are true and must be taken as they stand.¹

¹ pp. 23,24.

B. The Lord's Supper Presupposes

"The Doctrine And All Its Articles"¹

Paul's account of the Lord's Supper was not an initial instruction (11:23; Acts 18:11) but rather presupposed a knowledge of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Part of what Paul was assuming as common knowledge among the Corinthians were the following doctrines: The True Deity of Christ (11:23; 2:8; 1:30,31). The True Humanity of Christ (11:24; 1:23; 15:4-5; 15:21). The Incarnation and the Communication of Attributes (2:8). The Trinity (1:3; 3:9, 16; 2 Cor. 13:14). The Vicarious Satisfaction 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:19,21). The Doctrine of Creation and the Doctrine of Sin (6:16; 15:22; 5:11,13; 6:9,10). The Unity of The Testaments. The Ascension and the Second Advent of Christ (15:52; 11:26); the Doctrine of Divine Revelation and the Means of Grace (1:21ff; 2:4,5).

On account of the form critical school's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:23 the doctrine of divine revelation merits special attention here. What Paul has to say about the Supper of the Lord is God's Word concerning the matter and is spoken with divine authority. Paul's authority as an apostle rests on the fact that he speaks what the Lord revealed to him (Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, 11:23). While it is undoubtedly true that Paul knew something about the Gospel before his conversion and was probably also informed about the Lord's Supper, the form critical thesis that Paul, in 11:23, is referring to a tradition that he had learned from others is not indisputable. According to the form critical view Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν refers to the *Christian Tradition*, and παρέλαβον and παρέδωκα are a formula that point to the process of passing along a report from one person to another.² However, that which Paul passed on to the church was

¹ FC SD X, 31. See Aaberg, "The Doctrine Of Church Fellowship," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, 1977, pp. 1-42.

² *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin, Fortress Press, 1977, p. 113 for example.

something that he received directly from the Lord. Morris,¹ and Lenski² emphasize that there is no reason to affirm otherwise than that St. Paul received his account of the Lord's Supper via a direct revelation from the Lord,³ just as he received the gospel itself, that revelation of grace that is not just information; but which is also the power of God through which God saves (1:21ff).

In the conclusion to his treatment concerning the essence, effect and benefit of the Lord's Supper, Luther speaks of the power of the Word in the Sacrament as well as of the fact that the Sacrament comprehends all of the Gospel:

Although the work [of Christ] was accomplished and forgiveness of sins was acquired on the cross, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. How should we know that this has been accomplished and offered to us if it were not proclaimed by preaching, by the oral Word? Whence do they know of forgiveness, and how can they grasp and appropriate it, except by steadfastly believing the Scriptures and the Gospel? Now, the whole Gospel and the article of the Creed, "I believe in the holy Christian church, the forgiveness of sins," are embodied in this sacrament and offered to us through the Word. (LC V, 31)

II. The Preservation Of The Eucharistic Gospel

A. The Corinthian Corruption of the Lord's Supper

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians had been occasioned by report[s] (1:11) and letter[s] (7:1) which called attention to what were felt to be problems in the Corinthian church. The matters of women

¹ Commenting on 11:23's ἔγω, Morris says, "...why should Paul say 'I received of the Lord' if he meant 'I received from other men a tradition that derives ultimately from the Lord?'" (*The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans, 1985, p. 157.)

² p. 463.

³ Γνωρίζω δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐγὼ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβον αὐτό, οὔτε ἐδιδάχθην, ἀλλὰ δι' ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, (Galatians 1:11-12). It is clear that Paul is very well able to use παρέλαβον to refer to a direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

in the church (11:1), the Lord's Supper (11:17) and the "spirituals" (12:1) seem to be joined together under the heading of "the worship service". In 1 Corinthians 11:17-31 Paul deals with the Sacrament. However, he is not dealing specifically with an anti-sacramental attitude. The Corinthians were celebrating what they thought was the Lord's Supper (11:17,20). They were also baptizing, and that with the belief that baptism did have a beneficial effect of some kind (15:29).

On the other hand, there were definite abuses in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. One of these occurred because of the supposedly intimate connection between the agape meal and the Lord's Supper in the early church. It appears that the two were originally celebrated together and were later, if not already at the time when Paul wrote First Corinthians,¹ separated from one another. However, commentators differ in their description of the character of the particular abuse that obtained in Corinth.² What is clear, though, is that the truly communal character of the supper has been put aside, and the Corinthian Christians were not celebrating the Supper together, and that subsequently, some were not eating at all, while others were getting drunk (11:21).

Another abuse of the Supper, and the one from which the first abuse may have arisen in the first place, was that at least some of the Corinthians did not understand the Supper to be a meal in which the true and substantial body (and blood) of the Lord is present and eaten. It is possible that a spiritualizing tendency in the Corinthian church that contributed to an enthusiasm of sorts (chapter 12) and a denial of the physical resurrection (chapter 15) showed itself also in a spiritualizing of the Lord's Supper by which they did not outwardly negate the sacramental character of the Supper but rather minimized or denied that Christ was present with his true body and blood. The words of the apostle in 11:29 have sense only if such was part of the

¹Jeremias, p. 121.

²Morris, p. 156ff; Lenski, p. 456ff; F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, Eerdmans, 1971, p. 110; Conzelmann, p. 202.

abuse of the Supper in Corinth: ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα.

EXCURSUS ON THE MEANING OF Σῶμα IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:29

The word σῶμα in 11:29 and in the words of institution (11:23 and in the Evangelists' accounts) has been interpreted in various ways. A good part of the contemporary literature sees in the σῶμα of 11:29 a reference to the church,¹ the body of Christ. While σῶμα can refer to the church as the body of Christ,² it is not likely that such is the case here. In 11:23 the σῶμα to which Paul refers is the σῶμα that was given for the Corinthians, τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὡμῶν, a reference to the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ on the cross, in other words, his true and essential body. In 11:27 σῶμα appears again, but this time in conjunction with αἷμα, a vocable which nowhere is used as a synonym of the church. The combination of σῶμα and αἷμα would seem to indicate that these words most naturally refer to the person of Christ, and not to the church.

That such is the case is even clearer when one recalls that σῶμα and αἷμα are related to the bread and cup (11:24,25,26) and that these latter elements are related to the death of Christ in 11:26 (ὁσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε). The church, on the other hand, is not related to the death of Christ in the same way.

Furthermore, in 11:27 a one to one relationship is drawn between ἄρτον and σῶμα and ποτήριον and αἷμα (both of which are further delimited as τοῦ κυρίου). There is no reason to believe that the ἄρτον and ποτήριον of 11:28 are not the same ἄρτον and ποτήριον of 11:27 and therefore the σῶμα and αἷμα τοῦ κυρίου. Then, if the

¹ Conzelmann, p. 202. Jeremias, Hans Schwarz and Robert W. Jensen, "The Means of Grace," *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, Fortress Press, p. 346. Robert G. Hoerber, "Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:29," *Christian News*, Vol 31, No. 45, p. 20; William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation, (Anchor Bible)*, Doubleday, 1976, p. 274.

² Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:23, 2:16; 5:23, 28.

σῶμα of 11:29 is a reference to the church, an exceedingly abrupt transition has been made, a transition that would not be impossible, but one that is not very natural.¹

The fact that σῶμα in 1 Corinthians 12 is frequently used for church is not an adequate basis upon which to argue that σῶμα in 1 Corinthians 11:29 also means church since “the immediate context (vv. 23-28) has more influence on the meaning of [σῶμα] than the more remote context.”²

The use of διακρίνω with σῶμα would also indicate that σῶμα in 1 Corinthians 11:29 does not refer to the church.

Paul uses κρίνω in 1 Corinthians 10:15 and says that people are to judge and see for themselves that the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the Sacrament. Elsewhere, he uses a compound of κρίνω, διακρίνω (Acts 15:9, 1 Corinthians 4:7), and says that the Christians are not to judge other Christians and are not to discriminate among themselves. It is significant, then, that Paul uses διακρίνω in 11:29 and says that the Corinthians are to judge, discriminate and discern the σῶμα. If they are not to do this to other Christians, the body of Christ, then we must conclude that Paul is not here speaking of the body of Christ, the church, but rather of the body of the Lord which is the true and substantial body of Christ which is present and distributed in the Sacrament.³

¹ Even a Reformed commentator like Leon Morris sees that there “seems no real reason for thinking of a change of meaning [of σῶμα] from that of v. 27.”, p. 161. Pfitzner’s argument from the variant reading is also interesting: “Some ancient Greek manuscripts have ‘body of the Lord’ instead of ‘body.’ Though probably not original, this reading shows that early copyists understood Paul to be referring to the sacrament, and not the church. Otherwise, they would have used Paul’s normal phrase for the church: ‘body of Christ.’” *First Corinthians* (Chi Rho Series, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1982, p. 185.

² Ernie V. Lassmann, *1 Corinthians 11:29 — Discerning the Body And Its Implications for Close(d) Communion*, unpublished manuscript.

³ Ibid.

We have here taken up the meaning of $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha^1$ in 1 Corinthians 11:29 because it has a bearing on the nature of the Corinthian misunderstanding of the Supper. Its meaning, of course, also has implications for the ancient Christian church's practice of excluding some from the Lord's Supper, which practice will be taken up in another place.

The abuse of the Sacrament that obtained in Corinth was serious enough that Paul could say to the Corinthians, "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper" (11:20). The Christian community at Corinth is being torn apart. The divisions which have come to Paul's attention, however, don't appear to be final yet (11:18). They may have arisen through ignorance, that is, through a failure to recognize that the Christian community is to be bound together in the Sacrament. The failure to recognize this, however, stems from a greater problem, that is, from a failure to recognize the true and substantial body of the Lord in the Sacrament. Persistence in this error will bring to light the existence of real divisions and will do the same thing that all divisions eventually do: point out those who are approved (11:19).²

Paul's Instructions Concerning the Sacrament In Light of the Corinthian Perversion

The instructions that Paul sends to the Corinthians are not new to them (11:23; Acts 20:27). Paul now informs the Corinthians that they had deviated so far from the Supper concerning which he had

¹ Elert touches on the meaning of $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ in a comment on 1 Corinthians 10:16: "Not a few exegetes of today simply ignore that and then compromise with the rest of the sentence in such a way that, in keeping with other Pauline statements, they equate 'participation in the body of Christ' with membership in the church. These are the same exegetes who envisage Holy Communion merely as a table fellowship" (*The Lord's Supper Today*, trans. Martin Bertram and Rudolph F. Norden, Concordia, 1973, p. 24.)

² $\sigma\chi\iota\sigma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ (1:10; 11:18), $\alpha\acute{\iota}\rho\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ (11:19) and $\xi\rho\iota\delta\epsilon\varsigma$ (1:11) are probably used as synonyms in chapter 11. The celebration of the Lord's Supper in Corinth tended to accentuate the divisions that already existed (Conzelmann, p. 193).

originally instructed them that the Supper that they were now accustomed to celebrate was not really the Lord's Supper (11:20). Paul goes forward then and by way of two imperatives, begins to instruct the Corinthians anew concerning the Supper.

ΤΟΥΤΟ ΠΟΙΕΙΤΕ

In the Pauline account of the institution of the Lord's Supper the construction *ΤΟΥΤΟ ΠΟΙΕΙΤΕ* is repeated once after the words spoken over the bread (11:24) and again after the words spoken in reference to the cup (11:25). This same construction in the institution of the Supper is found elsewhere only in Luke, and that after the words spoken over the bread (Luke 22:19). In view of the context, it would seem that the imperative is repeated with the purpose of preserving the integrity and, therefore, the validity of the Sacrament. In the Corinthian account the church has its rubrics for the valid celebration of the Lord's Supper.

With the twice repeated imperative construction Paul puts before the Corinthians that which is truly essential to the Supper. He sets the context of the Supper in the Passover meal that Christ celebrated with his disciples in the night in which he was betrayed (11:23)¹ That the Supper took place during the Passover meal is important in pointing to the work of Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and in pointing to him as God's great Passover lamb (5:7) who fulfills the prophecy of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the time of the celebration of the Supper is an incidental matter which cannot be used to infer that the Supper should be celebrated only once a year and that during the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover (Luke 22:7).² Paul's

¹ ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδετο. See Jeremias, pp. 15-88.

² See also Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Vol. II, trans. Fred Kramer, Concordia, 1978, pp. 330, 391.

μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι refers to the fact that the institution of the Lord's Supper took place in the context of the Passover but that the cup that was blessed was not a part of the traditional Passover Supper nor a continuation of it, but rather part of a distinct Supper, the Lord's Supper (Keil, cited by Lenski, p. 469).

Continued on next page...

reference to the Passover serves to show that “the historic institution of the sacrament is the ground of its present validity.”¹

Paul doesn’t insist that the Corinthians repeat every detail of the first Supper or the subsequent celebrations of the Lord’s Supper administered by the Apostles, but rather he puts before them that which they are to do in order to have the true Lord’s Supper, and then he tells them that they should do it, τοῦτο ποιεῖτε. The demonstrative pronoun τοῦτο,² in both cases where the τοῦτο ποιεῖτε phrase is found in the present pericope, unquestionably refers to what has preceded.³

The bread was taken (ἔλαβεν ἄρτον), it was blessed (εὐχαριστήσας),⁴ it was broken (ἔκλασεν)⁵ and the words of interpretation were spoken (Τοῦτό μού ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν). The cup was taken and blessed (ὡσαύτως⁶ καὶ τὸ ποτήριον) and the words of interpretation were spoken. τοῦτο ποιεῖτε then would

Paul’s rubrics do not make it indispensable that the Supper be celebrated in a house (Acts 2:46), that it be celebrated on the first day of the week, late at night, in a room on the third story (Acts 20:6-10), that those who participate in it do so while in a reclining position (Mark 14:18), that it be celebrated over a table or altar (1 Corinthians 10:21).

¹ Conzelmann, p. 197.

² τοῦτο (from οὗτος) can be used to specify a neuter noun as it does in the phrase τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον in 11:26. It can also be used to subsume a number of elements under one head as is the case in Ephesians 2:8 where τοῦτο refers to τῆ γάρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως. τοῦτο can point to what precedes it, as it does in 1 Peter 2:21 where τοῦτο refers to the preceding virtue of being patient even though one is suffering for doing good. τοῦτο can also refer to what follows as it does in 2 Corinthians 2:3 but, in such a case, is generally used with ἵνα or ὅτι. (BDBF, p. 151)

³ ἔλαβεν ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν, Τοῦτό μού ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἑμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι λέγων, Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἑμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσαύτως ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἑμὴν ἀνάμνησιν

⁴ εὐχαριστήσας and εὐλογήσας can be synonyms, TDNT, p. 1307.

⁵ A reference to the distribution (Conzelmann, p. 197).

⁶ ὡσαύτως: That which was done to the cup (ἔλαβεν and εὐχαριστήσας) was that which was done with the bread (Bruce, p. 112).

refer to *taking* the bread and the cup, *blessing* them and *speaking* over them the corresponding words of interpretation.¹ The eating and drinking in the Supper is assumed in every verse of the context (11:24,25,26,27,28,29). The *τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε* construction appears to emphasize the blessing, the distribution and the speaking of the words of interpretation, assuming, as has already been said, the eating and the drinking.² This emphasis is appropriate because it is the speaking and distribution that were lacking in the Corinthian celebration of the Supper.

The difficulty with the *τοῦτο ποιεῖτε* phrase is that of determining more precisely the content of *εὐχαριστήσας*. Some consider the content of that blessing to be the words that were customarily spoken during the Passover when the third Passover cup was handled.³ Lenski believes that it is not possible to determine the content of the blessing.⁴ Morris admits that it could be another prayer that Jesus spoke. Chemnitz, on the other hand, explains the matter in this way:

¹ The Reformed commentators, Bruce and Morris, while commenting on *τοῦτο ποιεῖτε*, remain true to their Reformed theological stance and emphasize the remembrance (*εἰς τὴν ἑμὴν ἀνάμνησιν*) in the Supper. Morris does point out that the verb is a present tense and implies a continuous doing; both commentators call attention to the eschatological element in the Supper (p. 113. Morris, p. 159).

² Jeremias concurs to a certain extent. "If the command for repetition uses *τοῦτο* in reference to a rite, then the question is which rite is intended." It cannot refer to the simple recital of the words of interpretation (that is ruled out by *ποιεῖτε* which contemplates action); nor can it mean the whole meal (that is ruled out by the repetition with the cup and the limiting 'as often as you drink,' 1 Cor. 11:25); there remains only the possibility that *τοῦτο* refers to the *rite of breaking the bread*, i.e. the rite of grace at table. To be exact it is scarcely possible that the reference is to the normal table prayer — that would need no special instruction — it is rather to the special grace by means of which the table fellowship of the Messianic community was established, which extolled the salvation activity of God and prayed for its consummation, a prayer which Jesus himself may have used during his lifetime. Paul also refers the *τοῦτο* to the rite of grace at table; this can be seen from 1 Cor. 10:16, "The cup of blessing which we bless ... The bread which we break"; 'we bless' and 'we break' refer to the carrying out of the command *τοῦτο ποιεῖτε* ... p. 250.

³ Bruce, p. 111; Morris, p. 143.

⁴ p. 465.

But what if someone now asks what that word of blessing is which, coming to the bread and wine, makes it the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ? Surely this is beyond controversy, that as each sacrament has some certain word of God that belongs properly and specifically to it, so also the Eucharist has a certain specific word which belongs to it, namely the divine institution. ... Christ commanded us to do in the action of the sacrament what He Himself did. He did not, however, perform a mute action, but spoke. And what He said is reported to us in Scripture, as much as the Holy Spirit judged to be necessary for us. ... Paul affirms that he received from Christ what kind of word this is (1 Cor. 11:23-25). Justin also explains himself, for he says that this is the word which the evangelists in their expositions of the institution of the Supper committed to writing. ... the Word, “This is My body” are the words of Christ, not the words of the priest. It is through these that what is set before us is sanctified.¹ (underlining added)

Luther’s understanding of the $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ ποιεῖτε appears in his *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*:

...If we are to do what he did, then indeed we must take the bread and bless it, and break and distribute it, saying, “This is my body.” For all this is included in the imperative word, “Do this,” and we must not leave out these words. But when he said, “Do this,” by his own command and bidding he directed us to speak these words in his person and name: “This is my body.” ... Further, we do not make Christ’s body out of the bread, as this spirit falsely charges us with teaching. Nor do we say that his body comes into existence out of the bread. We say that his body, which long ago was made and came into existence, is present when we say, “This is my body.” For Christ commands us to say not, “Let this become my body,” or, “Make my body there,” but, “This is my body.”²

Luther’s exegesis of $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ ποιεῖτε is brought into the Lutheran Confessions:

¹ p. 225-228.

² LW 37:187.

...the command of Christ, “Do this,” ... comprehends the whole action or administration of the sacrament (namely, that in a Christian assembly we take bread and wine, consecrate it, distribute it, receive it, eat and drink it, and therewith proclaim the Lord’s death) [FC SD VII, 83].

What is of particular concern to the Lutheran confessors is to avoid any and all abuses that may occur in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and to affirm the creative power of the Word of Christ in the Sacrament:

For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup, Christ himself is still active through the spoken words by the virtue of the first institution, which he wants to be repeated. Chrysostom says in the Sermon on the Passion: “Christ himself prepares this table and blesses it. No human being, but only Christ himself who was crucified for us, can make of the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God’s power and grace through the words that he speaks, ‘This is my body,’ the elements set before us in the Supper are blessed. ... when we follow his institution and command in the Lord’s Supper and say, ‘This is my body,’ then it is his body, not because of our speaking or of our efficacious word, but because of his command in which he has told us to speak and to do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking.” (FC SD VII, 75, 78)

Because he has attached his command and deed to our speaking, those who partake of the Sacrament can know for sure that the words of the consecration are true when they say, “this is my body ... this is my blood of the new testament.”

Some Lutheran commentators of the 20th century see the $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ $\pi\omicron\iota\epsilon\iota\tau\epsilon$ as a reference to the consecration and the distribution¹ and to the whole administration.² Jeremias points out that the $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ $\pi\omicron\iota\epsilon\iota\tau\epsilon$ is a special reference to the “rite of grace at the table”³

¹ Lenski p. 468.

² Conzelmann, p. 198.

³ p. 250.

While Jeremias' analysis of the text is correct here, his presuppositions, form critical among others, probably do not allow him to completely concur¹ with the Lutheran confessors of the Formula of Concord who affirm that the τοῦτο ποιεῖτε includes the words of consecration² as that which effects the presence of the true and essential body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament:

In the administration of Communion the words of institution are to be spoken or sung distinctly and are under no circumstances to be omitted. Thereby we render obedience to the command of Christ, 'This do.' ...thereby the elements of bread and wine are hallowed or blessed in this holy use ... (FC VII, SD 80)

The twofold repetition of τοῦτο ποιεῖτε in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 is extremely significant in light of the fact that it does not appear in Matthew (26:26-29) or Mark (14:22-25) and is found only once in the Lucan account (22:15-20) and that in reference to what was done with the bread. When the issue is whether the Corinthians have a supper that is the Lord's Supper or one that is not the Lord's

the Lord's death), must be kept integrally and inviolately (FC VII, SD 83)

The τοῦτο ποιεῖτε is not just a phrase that was directed to those present at the first Supper. It is also directed to the Corinthians as the grammar makes clear. The words are Christ's εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. The bread which is the body of Christ (τὸν ἄφθονον τοῦτον) and the cup (τὸ ποτήριον) which is the blood of Christ are eaten (ἐσθίητε) and drunk (πίνητε) by the Corinthians as the second person plural verbs show. In the phrase τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε the appearance of the noun phrase τοῦ κυρίου instead of some form of the first person pronoun (μοῦ) and the appearance of the third person singular form of the verb in 11:26 (ἔλαθη) instead of a first person form, point to the fact that the τοῦτο ποιεῖτε is indeed directed to the Corinthians. If they do what Christ has commanded (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε), something that they were apparently not doing (11:20), they will have the sacrament as will all those who do likewise until the Lord comes again (ἄνοις οὐ ἔλαθη. 11:26).

Supper (11:20), the τοῦτο ποιείτε phrase is placed into a prominent position.

The conclusions of the Lutheran confessors are clear:

But the command of Christ, "Do this," which comprehends the whole action or administration of this sacrament (namely, that in a Christian assembly we take bread and wine, consecrate it, distribute it, receive it, eat and drink it, and therewith proclaim

¹ Jeremias sees in the bread a simile of what would happen to Christ's body and in the grapes a simile of his outpoured blood (*Eucharistic Words*, p. 224); else-where he refers to the body of Christ as the church (p. 237). Sasse comments on the "symbolic exegesis in which Jeremias and other modern commentators engage,"

saying, "In fact, symbolic exegesis today does not seem to have gotten beyond the situation of the 16th century, when Luther again and again had to point out that his opponents were united in only one thing: *that* the words of the Lord's Supper were to be understood symbolically, while they differed widely on the interpretation itself" (p. 69).

² That the words of consecration are not a distribution formula in the contemporary sense of the term is evident from the handling of the cup, for the words "this is the new testament in my blood" are spoken with reference to the cup.

On the other hand, where the institution of Christ is not followed (11:20), there is no sacrament, and when there is no sacrament, a loss of the sacramental Gospel is the result. But Paul wishes to protect the validity of the sacrament and thereby the sacramental gospel. Therefore Paul emphatically says, τοῦτο ποιείτε.

δοκιμαζέτω

While the phrase τοῦτο ποιείτε serves to protect the evangelical character of the entire sacrament by guarding its character as a sacrament, that is, as the true Supper of the Lord, the Supper that the Lord himself instituted and not another, the third person imperative δοκιμαζέτω (11:28) serves to protect the evangelical character of the sacrament for the individual participant. The sacrament administered according to Christ's institution (τοῦτο ποιείτε) is the Gospel. Paul's concern here is that those who receive it come away from it with its evangelical benefits. In 11:27 Paul has established that there does exist an eating of the bread (of the Lord) and a drinking of the cup of the Lord which is unworthy (ἀνάξιως). The one who eats

and drinks unworthily becomes guilty (ἔνοχος) of the body and the blood of the Lord.¹ Therefore, a self-examination or testing (δοκιμαζέτω...ἑαυτόν) is to be made prior to the eating and drinking in the sacrament. The explanatory γὰρ of 11:29 specifies the reason for the self-examination: The one who eats and drinks without discerning (μὴ διακρίνων, a circumstantial participle [NIV - not recognizing]) the body² eats and drinks judgment (κρίμα) to himself (ἑαυτῷ).

Two questions arise concerning this examination. The first concerns the nature of the eating that is unworthy (ἀναξίως). For some modern commentators the unworthy eating in the sacrament consists in an inappropriate attitude toward those who participate in the same table.³ The manner in which one answers the question concerning ἀναξίως appears to depend in part upon his exegesis of σῶμα in 11:29, whether he considers it to be a reference to the true and substantial body of Christ or to the church. However, the introductory word ὥστε also is an important consideration here. In 11:23-26 Paul has established that the Lord's Supper is the body and the blood of the Lord which is intended to convey the Gospel to the participant. As a result of the fact that such a great gift is offered in the sacrament, it follows that an offense against the rest of the sacrament, the body and blood of the Lord, is a great offense. The intimate

¹ The parallel structure of 11:27 is emphasized to refute the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation (Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, trans. Luther Poellot, Concordia, 1981, p. 127-132. The same verse is also used to demonstrate that the sacramental bread and cup are indeed the body and blood of the Lord (p. 120).

The term ἔνοχος, a word that is used principally in a legal framework indicates that someone has committed an offense. The following genitive indicates the person or thing against whom the sin has been committed, in this case τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich).

² The textual variants in this verse indicate that the scribes felt some difficulty about its structure and felt it necessary to repeat the ἀναξίως and τοῦ κυρίου of 11:27.

³ Bruce says that the ἀναξίως is "a just assessment of the discourtesy mentioned in verse 21" (p. 114); See also Conzelmann, p. 201; Schwarz-Jensen, p. 346.

connection between 11:23-26 and 11:27 make it unlikely that the unworthy eating and drinking can refer to anything other than an unworthy eating and drinking of the body and blood of the Lord.¹ Furthermore, it is also quite clear on other grounds that the offense in question is against the body and blood of the Lord (ἐνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου). Σῶμα standing alone might make it possible to interpret that vocable as a reference to the church. Σῶμα in conjunction with αἷμα, however, make such an interpretation more difficult if not impossible.

The second question concerns the nature of the judgment (κρίμα) that results from the unworthy eating and drinking. Does κρίμα refer to everlasting condemnation? Virtually all modern commentators prefer “judgment” as the translation of κρίμα² and at least one repudiates the translation “condemnation” as being too strong.³ The word can be used to indicate “judgment” or “condemnation,”⁴ and here there is latitude for both. The διὰ τοῦτο of 11:30 would seem to indicate that the specific judgment that Paul has in mind refers to sickness and death.⁵ These afflictions would therefore be a chastening, a term that is indeed used in 11:31 (παιδεύομεθα).⁶ Furthermore, in the same verse, the chastening that the Corinthians are suffering is the opposite of the condemnation (κατακριθῶμεν) that they would

¹ Morris observes: “Therefore [ὅστε] introduces the consequence. Because the Lord’s Supper is what Paul has just shown it to be, people must observe it with due care.” Even from his Reformed stance Morris sees that the syntax demands that the unworthiness be understood in relation to the body and blood of Christ in the bread and the wine (Morris’ “symbols of his death”) and not primarily to the church. See also Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, p. 127-132.

² Conzelmann, Pfitzner, Hoerber, Bruce.

³ Lenski, p. 481; Conzelmann, p. 203.

⁴ TDNT, p. 473.

⁵ The fact that there are illness etc. in Corinth because of an abuse of the Lord’s Supper does not necessarily imply that the Lord’s Supper brings physical benefits. The Lord’s Supper is a medicine of immortality to be sure, but there does not seem to be any promise that the supper produces physical health and well being. The promise of the Supper is forgiveness of sins.

⁶ Not too much can be inferred from κοιμῶνται since that word is a *general* euphemism for death (Conzelmann, p. 203).

suffer if they were not disciplined by the Lord and thereby led to true repentance. Luther apparently understands the judgment of 11:29 as a judgment that will come upon those who *persist* in their unbelief:

If, however, we are unwilling to do this, we ought not to approach the Lord's Table; for we would surely eat and drink damnation there. *Let us carefully meditate upon what eternity has in store for us, if we thus fall under the judgment of God.* If we are mindful of this, we will not be slow to repent, to put aside anger and other kinds of wickedness, and to make our peace with God in His Holy Supper. ... the Lord's Table was prepared, [in behalf of sorrowing and contrite spirits] so that they might find there consolation and joy. *Those, however, who are without penitence, and who continue in their haughtiness and sin, will not be relieved of their fear and will surely be damned.* (Italics and emphasis added.)¹

That which for the believer is an aroma of life to life is for the unbeliever an aroma of death to death (2 Corinthians 2:16). So also with the sacrament: the one who eats of it and sees in it a source of life, receives all the benefits that Christ has put into it. But he who participates unworthily does not receive its benefits, but becomes guilty of the body and blood of the Lord and eats and drinks judgment against himself. He who does not repent will find that his persistent refusal to repent will result in his condemnation, a condemnation that is as severe as that which will befall Capernaum and Chorazin, the cities that saw the wonderful works of the Lord but did not repent. (Matthew 11:21-24).²

¹ That this is also Luther's understanding of this verse is seen in a sermon from 1534 that he preached on Maundy Thursday. *Logia*, p. 64.

² Anticipating the next section of this paper that deals with admission to and exclusion from the sacrament, one may ask whether the present interpretation of 11:28 makes it unnecessary to practice close[d] communion. If κρῖμα does not refer to immediate condemnation, then why bother to exclude anyone from the sacrament? Such a question, however, overlooks the fact that exclusion from the sacrament is done in accordance with a command of the Lord delivered through the Apostle Paul: "let a man examine himself." Exclusion from the sacrament does not depend on a conclusion drawn from the consequences but rather on a direct command from the Lord. On the basis of the apostolic command the Christian church

Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians to examine themselves.¹ This δοκιμάζω, then, is a parallel to the τοῦτο ποιεῖτε and serves as a safeguard of the Gospel in the sacrament so that a person will receive the sacrament properly as a means of grace unto life.

III. The Invitation To Receive The Eucharistic Gospel

1 Corinthians 11:28

The Gospel is to be preached to all people. “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations...” (Luke 24:47). The preaching of the remission of sins also includes the administration of the sacrament, for the Sacrament is the Gospel and the Sacrament is included in the “all things” that Christ’s church is to teach until the end of time (Matthew 28:20). Therefore, the Sacrament should be administered to all who become disciples, the visible Gospel should be applied to all Christians. However, as to the question “Who specifically should be invited to receive the gospel in the Lord’s Supper?” 1 Corinthians 11:28 does make a more precise statement: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.” A discussion of this “examination” is found in Luther.

Much of the contemporary exegesis concerning the examination that is to take place before one sits down at the Lord’s Table would seem to part company with Luther. Conzelmann, for one, contends that the “object of this self-examination is not one’s inner state in general, but one’s attitude to the sacrament, that is, the propriety of the participation, whether one ‘distinguishes’ the body of the Lord.”²

evangelically excludes from the sacrament those who are not able to examine themselves, those who do refuse to examine themselves because of impenitence, and those who do not wish to examine themselves because of indifference and rank unbelief. Exclusion from the sacrament is an exercise of the Office of the Keys, but the keys are always used evangelically.

¹ For Luther the *examination* is very often an examination of oneself with reference to his sin. His emphasis in this aspect of the examination may well stem from the fact that he was obliged to deal at length with the personal examination due to abuses similar to those related to the indulgence trade.

² p. 202.

Conzelmann understands the body of the Lord to be the church, and therefore, affirms that the examination is “a consideration of one’s relationship to the church.”¹ Luther, on the other hand does include an examination of “one’s inner state in general” in the command to examine oneself:

In reference to this fact the apostle Paul says: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” To examine one’s self means to consider well in what condition we are. If we find that our hearts are hardened, that we are not willing to refrain from sin, and that we do not fear its presence, then we may well conclude that we should not go to the Sacrament; for we are then no Christians. The best thing we could do, under such circumstances, would be to put a stop to such wickedness, to repent, to trust faithfully in the promises and mercy of God, and to unite again with Christians in the participation of the Holy Sacrament. If, however, we are unwilling to do this, we ought not to approach the Lord’s Table; for we would surely eat and drink damnation there. Let us carefully meditate upon what eternity has in store for us, if we thus fall under the judgment of God. If we are mindful of this, we will not be slow to repent, to put aside anger and other kinds of wickedness, and to make our peace with God in His Holy Supper. Again, if our hearts are contrite, if we confess our sins before God and are heartily sorry on account of them, if we believe that God in mercy, for Christ’s sake, will pardon us, then we are well prepared and can confidently say to the Savior: “O Lord, we are poor sinners, and therefore come to Your table to receive consolation.” If we

¹“It is the criterion of the community.” (Note 109). The criterion is institutionalized in *Did.* 14 (confession of sins and reconciliation with one’s enemies before the Eucharist.). Also, “... the understanding of the sacrament is oriented not to the sacramental substance, but to the act of administration and of participation in the Supper. We offend against the Lord because we offend against his body, the community.” (Note 104), p. 202. It is perhaps with similar reasoning that Hans Schwarz and Robert W. Jenson affirm that “all and only the baptized are to be communed, unless there is powerful reason to exclude some of them” (Braaten and Jenson). Does one see here a rationale for the aberrant practice of communing children?

approach the Sacrament in such a spirit, we shall be truly ready and receive the richest blessings. In behalf of such contrite and sorrowing souls the Lord's Table was prepared, so that they might find there consolation and joy. Those, however, who are without penitence, and who continue in their haughtiness and sin, will not be relieved of their fear and will surely be damned.¹

But, Luther's understanding of the examination preparatory to participation in the Lord's Supper was not limited to an examination of "one's inner state in general." For Luther the proper examination preparatory to the Supper included knowledge of a *what* and *why*.

...we do not intend to admit to the sacrament and administer it to those who do not know what they seek or why they come.

(LC V, 2)

What Luther means by *why* concerns the sinner's guilt and God's gracious activity of granting forgiveness of sins in the Supper. For this reason the "remembrance" in the sacrament is of utmost importance.

Our blessed Lord desired, by means of this Sacrament and Testament, to keep alive in us our remembrance of Him and our faith. He therefore instituted His Supper as a constant memorial of His death, through which we are delivered from our sins and eternal misery.²

"Remembrance" in the Sacrament implies a proper instruction concerning that which the Lord has done:

Christ's chief desire, as He Himself declares, is that we shall not forget Him. It is His earnest intention that our whole being shall be impressed with the memory of His passion, that we may never forget how He died for us upon the cross and rose again from the dead. It was His purpose that coming generations should know Him as their Lord, that they might be saved by Him; and therefore, also, He earnestly enjoined upon

¹ A sermon preached by Martin Luther in his home on Maundy Thursday 1534, from *Sermons On the Gospels for The Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year by Martin Luther*, trans. E. Schmid and edited by M. Loy, Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Company, 1871), Reprinted in *Logia*, Vol. I, 1, October 1992, p. 64).

² *Sermons*, p. 60.

Christians to instruct the young in His word, and to keep His remembrance sacred, that those who come after them may also be induced to worship Him in the congregation of believers, and own Him as their Christ and only consolation.¹

But, to reduce the “remembrance” of Christ just to the real presence and make admission to the Sacrament dependent on a single question concerning the what of the Sacrament would not be what Luther had in mind.² “Remembrance” in the Lord’s Supper is to include, in some way,³ knowledge concerning the doctrines that are explicit and implicit in the Words of Institution, in other words, all of Christian doctrine, for the Gospel is a unity.

For it is certain that whoever does not rightly believe in one article of faith, or does not want to believe (after he has been admonished and instructed), he surely believes no article with an earnest and true faith ... for this reason we say that everything is to be believed completely and without exception, or nothing is to be believed. The Holy Spirit does not let himself be divided or cut up so that he should let one point be taught and believed as trustworthy and another as false ... for it is characteristic of all heretics that they start by denying one article of the faith; after that, all the articles must suffer the same fate and they must all be denied, just as the ring, when it gets a crack or a chink, is totally worthless.⁴

It is assumed that those who come to the Communion Table are able to examine themselves and know *what* they seek there and *why* they seek it. The ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1) and it is assumed that Lutheran ministers are able to

¹ *Sermons*, p. 60.

² John Stephenson calls such an approach “reductionistic.” “Admission to the Lutheran Altar: Reflections on Open Versus Close Communion,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 53:1-2, January-April, 1989, p. 46.

³ Luther’s *Small Catechism*, the Enchiridion, represents for the Lutheran Church the basic understanding of Christian knowledge that would be a prerequisite for a proper reception of the Lord’s Supper. See also the Preface of the Formula of Concord concerning the object of the condemnations found in the Lutheran Confessions. The Lutherans understand that there are different depths of comprehension among Christians (Tappert pp. 11-12).

⁴ LW Am. ed., 38:308.

instruct those who would participate in the sacrament. It is also assumed that they all teach according to the rule of faith — the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions — and that the communicants have been prepared, as children or converts, through catechetical instruction, and that they continue to be instructed through the sermons, as well as in Bible classes and other opportunities, among which some form of personal confession and absolution could be included.¹

These assumptions are safe assumptions, however, only when objective means are established to judge the teacher. This standard of judgment is found in the confessional subscription made by the minister. His teaching and practice is to conform to the confessional stance that he has sworn to uphold when he was ordained. As Walther pointed out, it is only when ministers subscribe unconditionally to their confessions that the church can have any guarantee that its servants will make an effort to teach sound doctrine.² And, it is very clear here that the whole matter of confessional subscription brings one to the matter of the marks of the church.

By way of conclusion to this part of the present paper it can be said that 1 Corinthians 11:28 does deal with closed communion. However, 1 Corinthians 11:28 is not all that Paul has to say about the matter of admission to the Sacrament.

1 Corinthians 10:16

For Luther, the examination is basic to one's participation in the Sacrament. But even while preaching on 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Luther goes to another text to speak further about that participation.

Another benign effect of this Sacrament is the union, in faith and doctrine, which it produces among Christians, and which is so very necessary. To bring about true union among Christians it is not sufficient that they come together to hear the same preaching and the same word, but they must also meet

¹ LC V, 42, 43, 50.

² "Why Should Our Pastors And Teachers And Professors Subscribe Unconditionally To The Symbolical Writings Of Our Church" *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, April 1947.

around the same altar to receive the same food and drink. One may, perchance, hear me preach the word and yet be my enemy; but if one partakes of the Lord's Supper he, by that act, makes for himself, individually, a public confession of his faith, although there may be hypocrites now and then; and thus a more reliable union, between the Christians who unite in this Sacrament, is formed than if they merely had the Gospel preached unto them, though his may also cause them to be of one mind. Those of the same faith and the same hope unite at the Table of the Lord, while those of a different faith stand aloof. Agreement in the church is very desirable and there should be no divisions in matters of faith. This union was properly called by a Latin term, *Communio*, a communion, and those who would not agree with other Christians in faith, doctrine, and life, were called *Excommunicate*, as being different in their belief and conduct, an[d] hence unworthy to belong to the congregation of those who are of one mind, lest they might produce dissensions and schisms. By means also of the Holy Sacrament Christ establishes this union among the little company of His believers.

Our old teachers entertained very beautiful thoughts in regard to this when they said Christ took bread and wine for His Supper to indicate that, just as many distinct and separate grains of wheat, when ground together, make one loaf of bread, so we, being many, are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread, though each one is a distinct person and separate individuality, 1 Cor. 10. And again, as many clusters of grapes and many little berries, each distinct and separate, when pressed together form one delicious juice, one wine, thus it is with the Christians who have the same faith, the same confession, the same love and hope of salvation.

This was the interpretation of our fathers, and they were not mistaken in it. The Holy Sacrament has the effect to firmly join the Christians together in unity of purpose, doctrine, and faith, so that no one should stand alone, nor have his own doctrine or belief. The devil is sorely vexed at this, and is busy in endeavoring to destroy such unity and agreement. He knows full well what injury results to him, if we are united in our confession and adhere to one Head; hence he endeavors to tempt

us, here and there, with false doctrines, with doubt, with lying insinuations in regard to the Sacrament and other articles of faith, hoping to cause dissensions in the Church.

It is true, offenses will come, yet it behooves us to guard against them, so that the devil may not entirely separate us. If one or the other insists on differing with us in the doctrine of the Sacrament, or in other parts of our faith, let us, who agree in one confession, be so much the more united in our faith in Jesus Christ; yea, let us be in this as one man. This, however, is possible only where there is unity in doctrine.¹

1 Corinthians 10:17 is found in that part of 1 Corinthians (8:1-11:1) where Paul treats at length the matter of things offered to idols. Paul doesn't answer the concerns of the Corinthians with a simple "yes, you may eat the food offered to idols," or "no, you may not," but rather deals with the various issues that are involved in the matter. He first affirms an important truth about one of the benefits of the Lord's Supper, or the Lord's Table as he calls it here: "For we, *being* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (10:17). A few words later he draws a very significant conclusion on the basis of the truth that he has just affirmed: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons" (10:21). The principle put forth in these statements is as follows: Since it is true that the altar at which one communes defines his allegiance, one will commune only at that table which truly defines him, that is, represents what he believes. Whether the table be the table of truth or the table of the lie, the table at which one sits and from which one eats represents him.

Luther's understanding of 1 Corinthians 10:17 is clearly in agreement with what the early church taught.² That principle, as understood by the ancient church, is described by Elert:³

¹ *Sermons*, p. 61.

² Elert, p. 23-30.

³ The numbers in the following section are reference to pages in Elert's *Eucharist And Church Fellowship In The First Four Centuries*.

Koinonia of the body and blood of Christ is used of the single communicant without any reference sideways to those who communicate with him. (16) ...communicating is to be understood as Christians having part in the body and blood of Christ. (24) ...fellowship of the Sacrament did not derive from the coming together of the participants but from the fact that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Lord ... and one cup for being made one by His blood. (26) Theologically the Sacrament was always understood as binding its participants together. (27) They do not produce this body. The body of Christ is there before they are and before what they do. They are rather drawn into it so they become its members. The fellowship nature of the Sacrament is in this that Christ incorporates into Himself those who partake of it. (28) ...we have *koinonia* with Christ and partake of His flesh and deity, but through it we also have *koinonia* [among ourselves] and are united with one another. Here the *koinonia* of the communicants with one another is the corollary of the *koinonia* with Christ. (33)

The Sacrament is a fellowship of the communicants because ... it is the body of Christ. (36) [It is not] in harmony with the *koinonia* of the body of Christ that Christians who are not at one should go to the Holy Communion together. (80) Therefore there may be nothing separating or dividing them, for that which divides would do injury to the *koinonia* and so to the unity of the body of Christ. (80) The extending or refusing of Eucharistic fellowship is then always a confessional act of the whole congregation. (80)

The church was never in doubt that unity in doctrine is a prerequisite of altar fellowship. (109) Heterodoxy breaks church fellowship and therefore self-evidently and primarily also altar fellowship. (113)

Those who were counted believers in their former congregations (those already baptized there) were to learn the orthodox confessions by heart and, after their anointing, were permitted to partake of the Sacrament. (116) [In the case of one from a heterodox confession] the church was not content with a mere application for admission. The applicant was made to realize that he was changing his confession. (117) Any disunity does injury to the body of the Lord. ... heterodoxy ...

breaks the confessional unity of the congregation. (118) ...the theological foundation of [the practice of “closed Communion”] was never questioned in the early church. (118) For better or for worse the churches were involved in the lot of their bishops. They were received into fellowship with them, and with them they were excluded. (139)

There is one ground for the denial of church fellowship about which there was never anywhere a difference of opinion in the early church, not even between East and West. Heterodoxy breaks the fellowship *ipso facto*. (143) Doctrinal unity is part and parcel of orthodoxy. Dogma is an expression of the faith, a confession of what is believed. It is not the personal act of believing that forms the unity but what is believed. (143)

Such gradations and distinctions in church fellowship [that where church fellowship is complete there is mutual welcoming of the laity to the Sacrament and of the clergy to its celebration, while where church fellowship is incomplete the laity may mutually receive the Sacrament but the clergy may not mutually celebrate it] have absolutely no connection with the regulations of the early church... (164)

There was either complete fellowship or none at all. (164) ...*communicatio in sacris*... takes place only in full church fellowship, of which agreement in doctrine and unity in confession are the basis and condition. (165) No member may overstep the boundaries of fellowship without the approval of all members. (174) ...that people may communicate to and fro in spite of the absence of full church fellowship is unknown in the early church, indeed unthinkable. (175)

To the early church a man was orthodox or heterodox according to his confession. He was the one or the other according to that confession with which he was “in fellowship.” The fellowship in which he stood, the church to which he belonged, was shown by where he received the Sacrament. (182) By his partaking of the Sacrament in a church a Christian declares that the confession of that church is his confession. (182) Altar fellowship is church fellowship. (193) ...the premise unquestioned in the early church that where Holy Communion is celebrated, there is church fellowship. (193) If a man is not in harmony with the confession of a church, he may not receive

Communion when the Sacrament is celebrated there. Positively put, where men go to Communion together, there is confessional unity. (193) ...confessional unity came first. No church fellowship could be countenanced where there was disunity in confessing the faith. (198) ...Christianity's holy of holies ... is Holy Communion. (200)

From the very beginning the church has understood that it has the responsibility of admitting the baptized to the Lord's Table or excluding them from it. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:28 it has instructed and prepared its baptized for participation in the Sacrament and on the basis of 1 Corinthians 10:16ff, among other passages, the church has seen its responsibility of guarding the external unity of the church.¹ The Lutherans, from the very beginning, have seen their responsibility to be the same. They have included in their confessional writings the catechetical works of Martin Luther, works that have maintained a currency for more than 450 years, works which were written in part as exhortation so that "of their own accord and without any law, the people[those who know the Catechism] will desire the sacrament." (SC Preface 341). They have also stated clearly in their confessions their understanding of what the church is and what is necessary in order to maintain the external unity² of the church:

¹ Note how the ELS Catechism uses these same passages. *An Explanation of Doctor Martin Luther's Small Catechism*, Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1981, pp. 225-229.

² When the Augsburg Confession speaks of the "true unity of the Christian Church: (AC VII) it is speaking of the external unity of the church. The unity of the church is a given, according to St. Paul: τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῆ οὐσῆ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, σὺν πάνσιν τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν· (1 Corinthians 1:2) It is the external unity of the church, that unity that can be seen, in as much as that it possible, on this earth, that is the constant task of the Christian, a task that is to be carried on by looking out for the doctrine. Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες καὶ μὴ ᾗ ἐν ὑμῖν σχίσματα, ἧτε δὲ κατηρτισμένοι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοί καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ γνώμῃ. (1 Corinthians 1:2) That unity is maintained by the same means that it was created, namely, God's Word,

Continued on next page...

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Ephesians 4:4,5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” (AC VII)

Since her beginning the Lutheran Church, in conformity with the ancient church, has confessed that church fellowship is confessional fellowship and that it is the presupposition to altar fellowship.¹ She has followed the principles set down by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:16-22 and 11:28 and has made “close[d] communion”² part of her

the Gospel: Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν, τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν. (1 Corinthians 1:18) τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν (Eph. 1:13). See Aaberg, pp. 9-11.

¹“Church Fellowship and Altar Fellowship in the Light of Church History,” Martin Wittenberg, trans. John Bruss, *Logia*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1992, pp. 24, 25, 29, 37, 40, 41, 42.

²“Both the terms ‘close’ and ‘closed’ communion, are applied to this practice [that of placing restrictions on the use of the sacrament]. The former stresses that those who are one in faith enter into this intimate fellowship in communion. The other stresses that the communion is ‘closed’ against those outside the fellowship. ...” (Armin Schuetze, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, Northwestern, p. 79 n. 9.) Norman Nage., in “Closed Communion: In the Way of the Gospel; In the Way of the Law,” *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 17, January 1991, p. 20ff argues that the phrase “close communion” is new terminology that comes from a Reformed background, and that the term “closed communion” reflects what the early church and the Lutheran Church has held concerning the matter. The definition found in the English translation of Werner Elert’s *Eucharist And Church Fellowship In The First Four Centuries* would seem to indicate the same: “By ‘closed Communion’ we mean the restricting of participation to full members of the congregation” (Concordia, 1966,

Continued on next page...

praxis. This practice clearly involves an exercise of the Office of the Keys, and no playing with words can deny that the binding key is also involved here. But, this practice for them has also been an evangelical practice, “in the way of the Gospel,” just as it was for the early church, and not a legalistic practice “in the way of the law.”¹ She has always wanted to assure herself that the individual participant come to the Supper prepared and thus is apt to receive the sacrament with benefit. She has also desired to call the erring back to a correct confession by insisting that her communion table be open only to those whose confession is the same as hers.

The ministers of the Lutheran Church have had to agonize concerning the matter of closed communion, especially when modern currents have made church fellowship dependent on other matters than the confession of Christian doctrine.² The words of one older Lutheran pastor of another century no doubt reflect the thoughts of many Lutheran pastors today as they struggle with the matter of admission to the Lord’s table and the decisions concerning it that have become seemingly more difficult in these days when people are highly mobile, do not often continue as members of the same congregation in which they were baptized and confirmed, and do not always have a keen sense of confessional loyalty:

Yes, pure altars! — even when it is hard on the heart. If things were to be according to my heart, I would let everyone come to the altar...But then, my altar would not be a so-called pure altar. However, I do not have my heart to ask in these matters, but rather my obedience.³

The Lutheran Church recognizes the principle that altar fellowship is church fellowship. The happy privilege of the Lutheran ministers and Lutheran congregations is that of making a proper confession by

p. 76).

In the present paper closed communion is discussed without reference to ordinary cases of church discipline in the Christian congregation.

¹ Nagel, p. 20ff.

² Kurt Marquardt, “Inter-Christian Relationships: A Minority Report,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 57, Nos. 1-2, January-April 1993, p. 56-63.

³ Wittenberg, p. 51.

means of its fellowship practices. The difficulty comes in applying the principle correctly without falling into crass pragmatism and without fostering indifference to matters of confession.¹ Difficulties in practice can't be allowed to become a reason for changing principles, something that has not been unheard of in the matter of altar fellowship.²

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod has recognized that there are difficulties in the matter of the practice of altar fellowship, but she has always maintained her confessional principle:

Do we hold that the exercise of church fellowship, especially prayer and altar fellowship, can be decided in every instance solely on the basis of formal church membership, that is, on whether or not the person belongs to a congregation or synod in affiliation with us? No. Ordinarily this is the basis on which such a question is decided since church fellowship is exercised on the basis of one's confession to the pure marks of the church, and ordinarily we express our confession by our church membership. There may be cases in the exercise of church fellowship where a person's informal confession of faith must also be considered. This is especially true regarding the weak. But whether one is guided by a person's formal or informal confession of faith, in either instance it must in principle be a confession to the full truth of God's Word. In addition, special care must be exercised so as not to cause offense to others or to interfere with another man's ministry. Further, we are not to judge harshly concerning the manner in

¹“Let us be frank to admit that we ourselves are not always as clear and sharp as we should be in distinguishing and repudiating subjective faith as the basis for the acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship. We all need the admonition contained in Thesis 11: of the Overseas Brethren Theses on Church Fellowship:

The marks of the church are all-decisive. Everything must be referred to them. This duty is hindered by presumptuous judgements or statements concerning the faith or lack of it in individuals. It is Enthusiasm to build on subjective faith (*fides qua*) and love, for faith is hidden and love is variable. Both are in man. The Means of Grace are objective, solid, apprehensible. Since these are God's own means, we must attend entirely upon them and draw from them the distinction between the orthodox church and heterodox churches. (1961 ELS Report, p. 41) [Aaberg, p. 13].

²Wittenberg, p. 44.

which a brother pastor after much agonizing handles such difficult cases.¹

The Lutheran practice of closed communion does not imply a negation of the validity of the ministry or sacraments of other church bodies, nor does it deny the true unity of the church which exists even though it is known only by faith and not by sight. The Lutherans, in the true spirit of the Augsburg Confession, desire outward unity with other Christians and work toward that unity with all forthrightness and honesty through the confession of the truth, the means by which such unity is created and maintained. The fact that the outward unity of the Church is not seen in this world causes distress to the Christian; the Church, which lives under the cross, will experience external divisions until the end of time. Nevertheless, the Christian looks forward to that time when all the children of God who are visibly separated now, and who are unable to approach the same table but are one in Christ, will be seen to be one; he prays with Paul, *μαρωνα θα*, come Lord, eagerly awaiting that time when all believers in Christ will participate in the great celestial banquet that is anticipated in every celebration of the Lord's Supper on this earth.

¹ A statement of WELS and ELS doctrinal committee adopted in 1976 (*Lutheran Sentinal*, Vol. 59, NO. 14, July 22, 1976, pp. 220-221, cited by Aaberg.)

Sermon:

Synod Convention Memorial Service June 23, 1993

for
Norman B. Harstad
and Neelak S. Tjernagel
by
Prof. Erling Teigen

John 5:24-30

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent me.

Norman Harstad was 74 years old. On the last day of synod convention last June, Norman got in his car and began the 300 mile trip to Ashland. Certainly, driving alone, many things went through his mind. One would imagine that he reflected on the convention. He must have been thinking how nice it would be to feel the coolness of Lake Superior. And he was likely thinking about his sermon for Sunday. Whatever was in his mind, we can be pretty sure that Norman planned to arrive home in Ashland, to see his wife Martha, to do whatever he planned to do on Friday and Saturday, and to preach

on Sunday. Norman came within a few miles of his home in Ashland, but then he was taken to his heavenly home, to the bosom of Abraham, to be with the Lord. Who knows how near my life's expended!

Neelak Tjernagel was 88 years old. Several years ago, he lost his hearing, and for the last years, he could only with great difficulty communicate with others. But his eyes and his mind remained sturdy, and he was able to continue to pursue his studies of the Bible and of church history. Still, he had thrived on listening and conversing with others, and so with the loss of his hearing, something of Neelak died. Eight years ago, another part of him died, when Ada his wife very quickly succumbed to cancer. He told me at the cemetery that sunny, chilly fall day at Saude that he was ready to join Ada any time. But it was not yet the Lord's time. He lived to see his daughter Anna's health marvelously restored by the wonders of brain surgery. And then he was ready to die; but it was not yet the Lord's time. He lingered and grew frail; he had a stroke and he had pneumonia, and still, he lived on through winter. He wanted to die; but it was not yet the Lord's time. But finally, as springtime life began to come to the ground, it was the Lord's time, and Neelak went to the bosom of Abraham. Who knows how near my life's expended!

So, two very different men—alike, husbands, fathers, pastors—and both had served at Rochester New York—but with many different gifts, different ages, different plans. And yet, whether in their minds, it was time to die or if death was not quite a just-around-the-corner expectation—they were alike in this: they were sinful flesh, over whom the physical judgment of death had to be pronounced, but they were above all, children of God. It made no difference that they were pastors, and men of wonderful gifts, and the fathers of children. They stood under the same judgment of the law and the same promise of God. Their bodies will, with time, be reduced to the same, identical pile of dust. And yet, they stand before God with the glorious promises he made to them in the gospel. And

that was the message that they both preached time and time again in pulpit and on paper as well as to their own hearts.

They, as we too, must stand before the Son, the righteous judge with all the authority of the almighty Father, who must execute all judgment. And they stand before him under the gracious promises of God: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. ...All who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation."

Puzzling words, those are—for those whose ears have been tuned to the gospel of Justification by Faith. If it is by faith, then it is not by works. And yet, those words go directly to the heart of the gospel held up by our dear brothers, Neelak Tjernagel and Norman Harstad through the years of their ministries. We can only stand before God if we have the goodness and righteousness he demands. Those who believe that they have that righteousness of God, stand before God with absolutely nothing at all. But those who know that they stand before God with nothing in their hands, stand before him with all of the wealth and all of the goodness that God demands.

And where does that righteousness come from? What is the good with which those who have fallen asleep in Jesus come before their God? It is in Christ's righteousness. When Neelak and Norman were baptized as infants; when they were brought helpless and unconscious to the baptismal font, and were washed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then they received all the good works, all of the righteousness, all of the holy life they needed to stand before God in life and in death.

From that very moment of their baptisms—and Yours—the promise of the voice from heaven is assured. In the Gospel we hear the words of Jesus, "The hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live." Those words have double meaning. "The Hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who

hear will live.” We can carry those words around with us now and every day. We all are the dead, and in the deadness of our trespasses and sins, we have heard the voice of the gospel, the very voice of our Lord Jesus, which called us from that darkness. We heard that word in our baptism and we believed. And we have heard it again and again in the preached, remembered, and read word, in absolution, and in the holy Supper. And by it we have lived.

On the strength of this promise, we rejoiced and celebrated the joy of the resurrection at the graves of our departed brothers in Christ, Neelak and Norman. At Ashland and at Saude, we did look into the darkness of the grave; and we know that the bosom of the earth holds the earthly remains of our brothers in Christ, in trust for the day of our Lord. But because of the promise of our Lord, made in baptism, and in the word which they heard and preached, those graves do not hold Norman Harstad and Neelak Tjernagel. They are held in the bosom of Abraham.

That same promise awaits each of us. “The hour is coming in which all who are in the grave will hear His voice and come forth.” “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”

We are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper is a Villain

The Subject of Death in the Devotional Writings of Martin Luther

**Presented by S. P. Petersen
to the ELS/WELS FORUM
17-18 October 1994
Milwaukee**

We are familiar with Martin Luther the expositor, the gladiator for Scripture's truth, the biting polemicist, the penetrating exegete, the careful dogmatician. But what kind of pastor was he? I have been studying his devotional writings (Volumes 42 and 43 of the American Edition of Luther's Works) in search of Pastor Luther.

As pastors we might be evaluated by the devotions we present at the Ladies Aid Society meeting, of the Confirmation class pot-luck, or by the article we write for the monthly newsletter to members. Most likely some patterns would begin to emerge which would reveal our personal theological perspective.

Through his 21 devotional writings we can gain a sense of Pastor Luther's ministry. Several themes emerge. Prayer is the subject of five of the works. One deals with the Sacrament of the Altar (although this matter is taken up often enough in several seeming digressions in other writings so that I consider it a theme). Far and away the most treated subject is death: what is its fundamental cause? What is the Christian's attitude toward this terror? How can one prepare for death? The devotional writings reveal Pastor Luther's perspective on ministry to those facing death.

Martin Luther did not serve a church with padded pews. Probably he could have; some comfortable appointments existed in his day, of example among the cathedral chapters or the prince's chaplains. In fact, Luther could have been a promising candidate for a plush

parish, given the depth of his theological insight, his wit, his plain-spoken nature and his ability to stand with confidence before the elite and powerful of his world.

But instead Luther's parish was a gritty one. In his devotional writings he seldom enjoyed the luxury of dwelling on relatively innocuous subjects such as the beauty of God's creation and the joy of serving Him. Instead, these writings portray Luther as one whose pastoral perspective is shaped by the hard talk of applying God's truth to the grim circumstances of his day. He writes to a parish in the grip of the Black Death, to a congregation whose pastor was murdered, to Christians whose church was by mob action forced to embrace Romanism, to women who have suffered miscarriage. Is it any wonder that such harshness in daily ecclesiastical life required of Luther a pastoral attitude different from our own, at least in respect to unremitting, intense challenges to Christian faith?

In light of the difficulties of life Luther and his parishioners faced we understand why he would define the central and over-riding duty of a pastor this way:

Because this letter will go out in print for people to read, I regard it useful to add some brief instruction on how one should care and provide for the soul in time of death. We have done this orally from the pulpit, and still do so in fulfillment of the ministry to which we have been called as pastors. (LW 43:134)

Clergy in any era can learn from Luther that the chief pastoral responsibility will always be to "care and provide for the soul in time of death." The prospect of death and destruction animates Luther's pastoral ministry, and because we, too and those we serve "are guests at an inn whose keeper is a villain" (LW 43:146) we must be pastors who will learn from Luther to bring to their parishioners a ministry which prepares them for their own last days.

Death's Cause

Although the death rate for every generation remains at 100%, in our day death is usually sanitized before we have to face it. Not so in Luther's day. He and his people were quite familiar with fellow-

evangelicals who had lost their lives in religious warfare, as had Francis von Sickingen (LW 43: 59), and with those who suffered religious assassination, as had George Winkler, of whose murderer (perhaps a Church official!) Luther wrote,

Let this be the first comforting fact, that we know who that murderer is who slew our dear brother, George, though we certainly cannot know who those gentlemen were who gave the orders or whose fists and weapons did the deed. I hear loud defense of the bishop of Mainz as innocent, and I sincerely hope that he is and will let it go at that. (LW 43:147)

Elaborating on the evil days in which he lived, days when lives were lost or taken in ways so foreign to the more civil atmosphere in which we live, Luther said,

We see this in every experience we have, for he (Satan) shows himself bluntly as the murderer in all the killing that is doing throughout the world, on water and land, at home and at court: this man is stabbed; that one's throat is cut; someone drowns; another burns to death; yet another is slain by a falling wall and the wolves devour the next, and so on and so on. People are killed in all sorts of ways, all of which are the devil's work or that of his servants. (LW 43:146)

Luther himself was not exempt from the threat of violence, although he viewed that prospect sardonically:

They threaten us with death. If they were as smart as they are stupid, they would threaten us with life. It is a shame and disgrace to try to threaten and terrify Christ and his Christians with death for, after all, they are lords and victors over death. It is just like trying to frighten a man by bridling and saddling his horse and bidding him to ride on in. (LW 43: 63)

In August of 1527, the Black Death (bubonic plague) finally reached Wittenberg. This devastation killed one-fourth of the population of Europe. Luther was asked whether it was a failure of faith to flee. In *Whether one may flee from a deadly plague*, we have not only his answer, but an insight to the intimate familiarity people of his day had with death. How offended our sensibilities would be if

we had to answer the question, “But our cemetery, what is it like?” in this way:

Four or five alleys, two or three marketplaces, with the result that no place in the whole town is busier or noisier than the cemetery. People and cattle roam over it at any time, night and day. Everyone has a door or pathway to it from his house and all sorts of things take place there, probably some that are not fit to be mentioned. (LW 43:137)

If Luther’s pastoral ministry was colored (we should say, darkened!) by such a grim and close relationship with death, it is no surprise that the devotional writings focus on its cause: death and all the trouble of this world are caused by man’s fallen status before God. He follows the trail back to the Garden: “From the living wood¹ came sin and death; from the dead wood,² righteousness and life” (LW 43:183). Luther continues the image: “it was difficult to stay away from the living tree;” he even contemporizes it: “there is in man’s heart the deeply rooted desire to seek life where there is certain death” (183). Connected to Adam’s first sin and continuing in it, we are subject to the same consequence, death.

Not only is death the natural result of the general fallen condition of man but Luther attributed it to some specific causes:

But today it is a horrible sight to see how thankless and ungrateful we have been toward it (God’s Word). As if our past sins were not enough in themselves, when we incurred God’s wrath (in our ignorance) by masses, purgatory, worship of the saints, and other deeds of human righteousness, and filled every corner of the land with such idolatries, supposing that we were serving God in a special way, we then top this by persecuting that word which calls us to repentance of past abominations. And we knowingly and deliberately defend such idolatry with violence and executions, with cursing and blasphemy so that it would be no wonder if God would let loose over Germany not only the Turks but also the devils themselves, or if he would long since have swept it away with a deluge. (LW 43:219)

¹ *i.e.* The tree in the garden of Eden, Gen. 2:17.

² *i.e.* The tree of the cross on Golgotha.

Luther sees suffering and death as punishment for sin; not in the sense that specific sin warrants specific penalty but in the sense that sinful humanity deserves nothing better. Things that we might consider to be in the category of testing or chastening, Luther seems to include under the broad heading of punishment.

What are other causes for suffering and death? God's justice is seen when sinners suffer death and hell, and by comparison the Christian is comforted in being spared. In the *Fourteen Consolations* Luther explains: "Great as the evils of death and hell are that we see in the damned, so great certainly are the gains that we see in ourselves, and the greater our blessings, the worse are their evils" (LW 42:155). Though to the world it may seem strange, the death of Christians may also constitute a message of warning and condemnation from God to unbelievers, and at the same time a deliverance from trials for the believers:

... it is a terrible sign to all unbelievers when God decrees that his blessed saints shall be shamefully murdered and taken away. It is a sure indication that a great catastrophe is at hand, which is to come upon this world and from which God has chosen to save his own lest they be caught in this world and perhaps even fall and be lost together with the unbelievers, as happened in Genesis 19. (LW 43:162)

Additionally, Luther would say that death is in the world, not only because sin is in it, but as a demonic counterthrust to the Savior's presence. "Wherever Christ is, Judas, Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas, and Annas will inevitably be also, so also his cross. If not, he is not the true Christ" (LW 43: 63). So it is the Christian's honor to experience what Christ experienced, even death. "It is unimaginable that Christ our head should wear a crown of thorns and die on the cross but that we should be saved without any suffering and with nothing but joy and delight" (LW 43:165).

Man's Attitude Toward Death

Man's attitude toward death is probably best described as it is perceived in two states, the state of unbelief and the state of faith. In this lengthy section, Luther speaks of the former:

Death looms so large and is terrifying because our foolish and fainthearted nature has etched its image too vividly within itself and constantly fixes its gaze on it. Moreover, the devil presses man to look closely at the gruesome mien and image of death to add to his worry, timidity and despair. Indeed, he conjures up before man's eyes all the kinds of sudden and terrible death ever seen, heard, or read by man. And then he also slyly suggests the wrath of God with which he (the devil) in days past now and then tormented and destroyed sinners. In that way he fills our foolish human nature with the dread of death while cultivating a love and concern with life, so that burdened with such thought man forgets God, flees and abhors death, and thus in the end, is and remains disobedient to God. (LW 42:101)

Sin, Satan, self-love and conscience incite in man a great fear of death. These Luther tackled down and triumphed over with the Gospel, which is the basis for the believer's view of death. But before we turn to the Christian's confident attitude toward death, we take up the question of the Christian's natural, human fear. For example, facing plague, can a Christian turn and run? First, no one has the right to abandon fraternal obligations in the effort to flee death, "in disobedience to God's word and command" (LW 43:120). Under this precept, Luther says pastors ought to stay and minister, city officials ought to stay and manage public affairs (unless they have arranged for qualified substitutes). Recognizing differences among Christians, Luther writes:

If someone is sufficiently bold and strong in his faith, let him stay in God's name; that is certainly no sin. If someone is weak and fearful, let him flee in God's name as long as he does not neglect his duty toward his neighbor but has made adequate provision for others to provide nursing care. To flee from death and to save one's life is a natural tendency, implanted by God and not forbidden unless it be against God and neighbor,

as St. Paul says in Ephesians 4 (5:29), “No man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it.” It is even commanded that every man should as much as possible preserve body and life and not neglect them, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 (:21-26) that God has so ordered the members of the body that each one cares and works for the other. (LW 43:123)

This is a pastoral Luther speaking. Knowing both the best of the devout and the worst of the doubter, he has a word for each.

Now, what can and should be the Christian’s attitude toward death? First, and in general, Luther counsels not to doubt God’s good and gracious will because of death. Offering *Comfort for women who have had a miscarriage*, he writes of God’s hidden will

First, inasmuch as one cannot and ought not know the hidden judgment of God in such a case—why, after every possible care had been taken, God did not allow the child to be born alive and be baptized—these mothers should calm themselves and have faith that God’s will is always better than ours, though it may seem otherwise to us from our human point of view. They should be confident that God is not angry with them... (LW 43:247)

Therefore the Christian can face death trusting that God is able to bring blessing from death. “It would be neither good nor useful for man to know what great blessings lie hidden under such trials. Some have wanted to fathom this and have thereby have done themselves much harm. Therefore we should willingly endure the hand of God in this and all suffering.” (LW 42:183)

Though death frightens us, and though faith may be torturously tested when asked to trust God’s promise as we draw nearer death, Luther encourages us to

turn our eyes to God, to whom the path of death leads and directs us. Here we find the beginning of the narrow gate and of the straight path to life (Matt. 7:14). All must joyfully venture forth on this path, for though the gate is quite narrow, the path is not long. Just as an infant is born with peril and pain from the small abode of its mother’s womb into this immense heaven and earth, that is, into this world, so man departs this life through the narrow gate of death. And although the heavens

and the earth in which we dwell at present seem large and wide to us, they are nevertheless much narrower and smaller than the mother's womb in comparison with the future heaven. (LW 42: 99)

With such words Luther encourages the Christian to be unafraid, instead to see death for what Christ's redemption has made it become, a means through which God's plan of salvation is completed for us.

But there are other benefits to consider: for the Christian death is the end of temptation to sin, immense deliverance from the jeopardy of falling from faith or believing error. Of Winkler's murderers, Luther says, "they were his most useful servants, unknowingly and unintentionally, since by the gracious and fatherly dispensation of God and because of the devil's raging hatred, they have helped this good man escape from all the dangers I have just mentioned" (LW 43:161).

It is a recurring theme with Pastor Luther that the Christian's suffering and death are not isolated events, unrelated to the Body of Christ. Instead the dying Christian takes his place among the honorable company of saints who have gone to the grave before, a friendly society.

Eighteenth, in the hour of his death no Christian should doubt that he is not alone. He can be certain, as the sacraments point out, that a great many eyes are upon him: first the eyes of God and of Christ himself, for the Christian believes his words and clings to his sacraments; then also, the eyes of the dear angels, of the saints, and of all Christians. There is no doubt, as the Sacrament of the Altar indicates, that all of these in a body run to him as one of their own, help him overcome sin, death and hell, and bear all things with him. In that hour the work of love and the communion of saints are seriously and mightily active. (LW 42:112)

Christian confidence is in contrast to the fear of unregenerate man facing death. All credit is Christ's, who "has by his most holy touch consecrated and hallowed all sufferings, even death itself, has blessed the curse, and has glorified shame and enriched poverty so that death

is now a door to life, the curse a fount of blessing and shame the mother of glory” (LW 42:141). Luther comments further on the contrast: “In death we are like all other men: the outward mode of our dying is not unlike that of others, except the thing itself is different, since for us death is dead” (LW 42:142).

Preparation for Death

It is not surprising that Pastor Luther first directs those who would prepare for death to God’s Word. “First, such a person must by no means rely on himself, nor must he be guided by his own feelings. Rather, he must lay hold of the words offered to him in God’s name, cling to them, place his trust in them, and direct all the thoughts and feelings of his heart to them” (LW 42:183).

Next, the Sacraments comfort. “In the sacraments God himself grants you all the blessings we just mentioned in connection with Christ. God wants the sacraments to be a sign and testimony that Christ’s life has taken your death, his obedience your sin, his love your hell, upon themselves and overcome them” (LW 42:108).

In Luther’s pastoral ministry the Means of Grace form the foundation of preparation for death. Two particular works deal specifically with the subject: *A sermon on preparing to die* and *Fourteen consolations*. The following is a summarization of Luther’s thoughts in the former. (Luther often numbered each point he made. In these writings successive numbers do not always make different points, but often one numbered point merely furthers the explanation of an earlier point.)

Summary of *A sermon on preparing to die* (LW 42: 99-115)

“First, since death marks a farewell from this world and all its activities, it is necessary that a man regulate his temporal goods properly,” this to avoid “squabbles, quarrels” among survivors.

Second, “take leave spiritually,” forgive and seek forgiveness.

Third, “we must turn our eyes to God, to whom the path of death leads and directs us.” In this section Luther compares death and the entrance to eternity with birth and the journey through the womb. He comments that “the death of the dear saints is called a new birth, and their feast day is known in Latin as *natale*, that is, the day of their birth.”

Fourth, confession of sin and the assurance of the Sacraments are in order (Luther also lists unction, though within two months of writing this he rejected it among other unscriptural sacraments of Rome). “If they cannot be had, our longing and yearning for them should nevertheless be a comfort and we should not be too dismayed by this circumstance.”

Fifth, as the Christian prepares to die, the Sacraments must be esteemed, honored and relied upon because “God himself here speaks and acts through the priest.”

Luther points out the three great evils against which the Sacraments contend: “the terrifying image of death” ... “the awesomely manifold image of sin” ... “the unbearable and unavoidable image of hell and eternal damnation.”

Sixth, preparing to die is not the time to envision our own death; we should do that while we live. Because we are terrified by death’s image as we see it around us, we should (tenth) instead “look at death closely and untiringly only as seeing those who died in God’s grace and who have overcome death, particularly in Christ and then also in all his saints.” “Thus your heart will be at peace and you will be able to die calmly in Christ and with Christ, as we read in Revelation (14:13), ‘Blessed are they who die in the Lord Christ.’”

Seventh, preparing to die is not the time to reflect upon our own sin;

During our lifetime, when we should constantly have our eyes fixed on the image of death, sin and hell—as we read in Psalm 51(:3), “My sin is ever before me” —the devil closes our eyes and hides these images. But in the hour of death when our eyes should see only life, grace, and salvation he at once opens our eyes and frightens us with these untimely images so that we shall not see the true ones. (102)

Instead of focusing on our sin at the time of death, we must (eleventh) “look only at sin within the picture of grace.” ... “How is that to be understood? Grace and mercy are there where Christ on the cross takes your sin from you, bears it for you and destroys it.” ... “In this way you may view your sins in safety without tormenting your conscience. Here sins are never sins, for here they are overcome and swallowed up in Christ.”

Eighth, preparing to die is not the time to dwell on the terror of Hell, lest the soul “burden itself with all kinds of useless presumptions, especially with the most dangerous undertaking of delving into the mystery of God’s will to ascertain whether one is ‘chosen’ or not.” Instead of regarding “hell and eternal pain in relation to predestination,”

(twelfth) ...gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ, who descended into hell (I Pet. 3:19) for your sake and was forsaken by God as one eternally damned when he spoke the words on the cross, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!” — “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46) In that picture your hell is defeated and your uncertain election is made sure. (105)

Ninth, how can we fight against the discouraging images of death, sin and hell? “It is done this way: You must look at death while you are alive and see sin in the light of grace and hell in the light of heaven, permitting nothing to divert you from that view.”

Thirteenth, it was foreshadowed in the Old Testament that on the cross Christ “prepared himself as a threefold picture for us, to be held before the eyes of our faith against the three evil pictures with

which the evil spirit and our nature would assail us to rob us of this faith.”

Fourteenth, as Christ at the cross was tempted by the ridiculing Jews to despair of God’s love (“let him come down,” “if he is the Son of God,” “whether God will deliver him”), the Christian will face the same assaults. We must “hold to Christ and firmly believe our sin, death and hell are overcome in him and no longer able to harm us. Only Christ’s image must abide in us. With him alone we must confer and deal.”

Fifteenth, since the Sacraments are a “sign and testimony” that Christ’s life and death has overcome death, sin and hell, “We must cling to them with a staunch faith...” Why can we do so? “It is God who has promised it, and he cannot lie in either words or deeds.”

Sixteenth, we must “highly esteem, honor, and rely upon the holy sacraments, which contain nothing but God’s words, promises and signs. This means that we have no doubts about the sacraments or the things of which they are certain signs, for if we doubt we lose everything.” But am I worthy to receive what the Sacraments offer? “Just see to it that you believe that these are sure signs, true words of God, and then you will indeed be and remain worthy.”

Seventeenth,

The right use of the sacraments involves nothing more than believing that all will be as the sacraments promise and pledge through God’s Word. Therefore, it is necessary not only to look at the three pictures in Christ and with these to drive out the counterpictures, but also to have a definite sign which assures us that this has surely been given to us. That is the function of the sacraments. (111)

Eighteenth, at the time of death, the eyes of God, Christ, the angels, saints and all Christians are upon us. Concerning our reception by the angels and communion of saints, Luther says, “Therefore we must know that even though the works of God surpass human understanding, God yet effects all of this through such insignificant signs as the sacraments to teach us what a great thing a true faith in God really is.”

Nineteenth, the dying Christian "must practice awe and humility in all this, lest he ascribe these works to himself instead of allowing God the glory."

In summary,

Twentieth, what more should God do to persuade you to accept death willingly and not to dread but to overcome it? In Christ he offers you the image of life, of grace, and of salvation so that you may not be horrified by the images of sin, death and hell. Furthermore, he lays your sin, your death, and you hell on his dearest Son, vanquishes them, and renders them harmless for you. In addition, he lets the trials of of sin, death and hell that come to you also assail his Son and teaches you how to preserve yourself in the midst of these and how to make them harmless and bearable. And to relieve you of all doubt, he grants you a sure sign, namely the holy sacraments. He commands his angels, all saints, all creatures to join him in watching over you, to be concerned about your soul, and to receive it. He commands you to ask him for this and to be assured of fulfillment. What more can or should he do? (114)

As we would have expected, Pastor Luther directs the dying to the Means of Grace.

Pastor Luther's perspective on ministry to the dying

Among the pastoral characteristics of Martin Luther which we ought also to emulate are his ability to empathize with his parishioners and his sense of pastoral responsibility toward them.

In many ways, the members of Luther's parish were not much different from those to whom we minister today. Perhaps more graphically and intimately than our congregations, his hearers were assailed by the reality of death. Knowing they would be tempted to question God's love as they endured privation and death all around themselves, he called them to faith in God's promise.

Faith does not insist on knowing the reasons for God's actions, but it still regards God as the greatest goodness and mercy. Faith holds to that against and beyond all reason, sense, and experience, when everything appears to be wrath and injustice. That is why faith is called *Argumentum non apparentium*, the

sign of things not seen (Heb. 11:1), indeed, the opposite of what is seen. (LW 43: 52)

Encouraging faith in the midst of hardship is a pastoral duty; recognizing and accepting varying depths of understanding and commitment requires pastoral sensitivity. Luther shows that clearly. In *A Letter to Hans von Rechenberg* he takes up the question whether God can or will save people who die without faith.

Therefore, gracious sir, I counsel that you consider who is concerned with this question and with whom it is discussed. In accord with that I enjoin either speech or silence. If the people are rationalistic, presumptuous, and disputatious, eschew the question promptly; but if they are simple, spiritual, profoundly tried and tested in the faith, then no more useful question than this can be treated. For just as strong wine is the death of children, it is a refreshing draught of life for old people. In view of this, you cannot discuss all kinds of doctrine with just anyone. (LW 43:53)

Luther seems willing to acknowledge that his people may not share the same strength of faith which he himself enjoyed. Are we forbidden to speak the Word of God? “Let him who is strong ignore such an order...” (Luther surely did!) “But he who is timid and weak I shall counsel differently, namely, secretly to rejoice, to thank God, to praise his word, as was said before, and to ask God for strength to speak openly about his word that the enemy and avenger may be destroyed” (LW 43:107).

Luther understood man’s frailty. His people were not only vulnerable to violence and death, but also to doubt. The pastor must take this into account. “Since it is generally true of Christians that few are strong and many are weak, one simply cannot place the same burden upon everyone... When a strong man travels with a weak man, he must restrain himself so as not to walk at a speed proportionate to his strength lest he set a killing pace for his weak companion” (LW 43:120). Indeed, Luther claims that “sometimes faith is granted openly, sometimes in secret” (LW 42: 13).

Pastor Luther displays remarkable sympathy. He would never allow his own faith to flinch; he risked his life, compelled to express

it. Yet he understands the weakness of his people's faith and treats them in love accordingly.

Pastoral accountability is a theme Luther addresses in the devotional writings for he feels responsible for a wide parish, all of evangelical Christendom in his day, and for those who would, with him, be its shepherds. He could be direct:

To be sure, there are many preachers of the word nowadays, but they lack power, and they do not preach this word mightily. Even if they do preach the word, they do not do this incisively; for they spare where they should not spare, namely, the big shots. Moreover, their love is so cold and their life is so coarse that they offend more than they improve matters, and thus render God's arrows dull and weak. (LW 43:109)

For Luther pastoral accountability in the face of death might be approached from several points of view. First, aside from his office, the pastor is neighbor to those in need. His obligation to serve others with gifts God has given him springs up from the general duty to be a good neighbor. In fact, this duty extends so far that the pastor may have to risk personal safety. "No neighbor can live alongside another without risk to his safety, property, wife, or child" (LW 43:126). Because of the duty to neighbor, living in society puts all we have at risk. If one is deprived, other caring members may be required to give of their own to meet the needs of neighbors.

Specifically, there is a pastoral obligation which bears on those in the public ministry:

Those who are engaged in a spiritual ministry such as preachers and pastors must likewise remain steadfast before the peril of death. We have a plain command from Christ, "A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, but the hireling sees the wolf coming and flees" (John 10:11). For when people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death. (LW 43:121)

Few pastors today fear physical danger as part of the ministry. Luther and his colleagues did. He points to a murdered pastor and says he died "for the sake of the gospel, most of all because he

wanted to teach and administer communion in both kinds. That was revolutionary; Satan and all his hired assassins had to defend themselves so that no further inroads would be made” (LW 43:150) Against fear Luther urges faithfulness in ministry and showed with his life that he took that precept to heart.

Conclusion

From Pastor Luther we learn that death is Satan’s grip on fallen mankind. Of course we are frightened by it! Who wishes to grapple with such an enemy? But the Christian’s perspective on death is unlike the unregenerate’s. For the believer’s attitude is tempered by the Gospel blessings which are found in death, especially heaven. How shall we prepare for the end of our lives? Luther points us to the Means of Grace, for there we meet our Savior, by whose life and death our souls are redeemed for eternal safety and peace. As ministers in service of the Church, we can learn from Pastor Luther to be sensitive to human weakness, and strong in our commitment to the spiritual needs of those we serve.

Though in the midst of life we be,
Snares of death surround us:
Where shall we for succor flee,
Lest our foes confound us?
To Thee alone, our Savior!

— Martin Luther, 1524
(The Lutheran Hymnary)

Devotional Writings cited

Volume 42

1. *A Meditation on Christ's Passion*, 1519
2. *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*, 1519 (A response to a request for “help in dealing with distressing thoughts about death”) (97)
3. *Fourteen Consolations*, 1520 (Spiritual comfort for Elector Frederick the Wise, thought to be near death)
4. *Comfort When Facing Grave Temptations*, 1521 (Luther on *Anfechtung*)

Volume 43

1. *A Letter to Hans von Rechenberg*, 1522 (A response to a soldier's question about whether a person who dies without faith can be saved)
2. *A Letter of Consolation to All who Suffer Persecution*, 1522 (A letter of encouragement to Harmut von Cronberg, who “renounced an imperial stipend in protest against the Edict of Worms” (59) thereby bringing hardship upon himself)
3. *A Christian Letter of Consolation to the People of Miltenberg*, 1524 (An evangelical congregation had been forced back into Romanism)
4. *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague*, 1527 (Prompted by the Black Death, the bubonic plague)
5. *A Letter of Consolation to the Christians at Halle*, 1527 (Upon the murder of George Winkler, evangelical pastor)
6. *That a Christian Should Bear His Cross with Patience*, 1530 (A sermon Luther preached to the evangelicals on their way to the Diet of Augsburg)
7. *Appeal for Prayer Against the Turks*, 1541 (Written at the time of a perceived impending invasion)
8. *Comfort for Women who Have Had a Miscarriage*, 1542

A Book Review:

by Norman A. Madson
of Tracy, Minnesota

A Family of Sermons

by Arthur H. Drevlow
Pine Hill Press, Inc.
Freeman, South Dakota 57029

The Foreward to this delightful little volume tells us that "this anthology of occasional sermons is the product of several contributors, whose public ministries span nearly six decades." The several authors are members of the Drevlow family, confessional Lutheran pastors, who served parishes in various parts of the USA.

What makes a good Lutheran sermon? First and foremost there must be clear Law and Gospel. These sermons have both. The Law of God that condemns us sinners is so presented that we have nothing to boast of as we stand before a righteous and holy God; all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. But in every sermon the Gospel light shines forth, proclaiming to the reader, or hearer, the wonderful news that in Christ all of our sins have been washed away in the precious blood of our Savior.

What makes a good Lutheran sermon? It must be textual and Scriptural. These sermons are both. The sermons have not been let along side of the text, but they flow out from the text. They expound the text. So that at the conclusion of each sermon you can say, "I now know better what that text means." And there is a good use of Scriptural passages in each message to substantiate the propositions that are set forth. You are strongly impressed by the fact that it is "Thus saith the Lord," and not "Thus saith the preacher."

What makes a good Lutheran sermon? It must be practical. It must be applied to the hearer's life. These sermons do that. They are not cold, lifeless theological treatises, but messages that warm the heart, and encourage the hearer to conform his life to the laws of God.

This book of 49 sermons is divided into five sections: 1. The Church Year, 2. The Church and the Ministry, 3. The Confessions, 4. Various Occasions, and 5. Various Topics. We recommend the book for theological study and for devotion use. As is stated in the Foreward, “The seminary class motto of the primary contributor was ‘Gloria Dei Salusque Hominum’ — ‘The Glory of God and the salvation of men.’ This publication of sermons has been guided by that venerable, homiletical precept.”