

Foreword

The empty tomb of Christ is the public declaration of absolution for the whole world. The whole world was declared “not guilty” through Christ’s resurrection. This is the point of the sermon on Matthew 28:1-10, which has the theme *Easter – the Assurance of Our Redemption*. This sermon was prepared for Easter in 1957 by the Rev. Milton Otto. He was the second dean of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Our catechism states, “Prayer is an act of worship in which we speak to God from the heart, asking something of Him, or thanking Him for His mercies.” In his essay *Pastoral Prayer*, the Rev. Kenneth Mellon points out the importance of prayer in the ministry of a Lutheran pastor. The Rev. Mellon is pastor of Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Bowling Green, Ohio.

In the New Testament we hear of many individuals who were demon possessed and we see our Lord’s authority over the demons. It has been said that when God became flesh Satan intensified his attacks on humanity taking bodily possession of individuals. While demon possession is not as evident today as in the New Testament era, demon possession is still a very real occurrence. This is the point of the essay *Demon Possession: Biblical and Historical Testimonies* by the Rev. William Mack, who is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Oregon, Wisconsin.

Questions of Christian freedom continually occur within the church. Each Christian faces the extremes of libertinism and legalism. These are the issues that the Rev. Joel Willitz is addressing in his essay *Christian Freedom: A Proper Understanding of Adiaphora*. The Rev. Willitz is the pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan.

An individual’s worldview is the set of presuppositions to which one ascribes. An improper worldview will erode our doctrinal heritage and affect many areas of our culture and society. This is the point of the Rev. David Thompson’s essay entitled *An Introduction to the Study of Worldviews*. The Rev. Thompson is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Audubon, Minnesota.

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Easter Sermon on Matthew 28:1–10

April 21, 1957

Milton Otto

Prayer: O Christ, our ever-living Lord and Savior, who on this day didst again rise from the dead to proclaim to the world of sinners that Thou hast for them conquered sin, death, and the devil, we pray Thee, do Thou through the Gospel of Thy living, dying and again rising for us grant us the sure hope that Thou hast won full pardon and everlasting life for us, which life we can have for our comfort here and our salvation hereafter by believing in Thee as our all-sufficient Savior. Grant us such an abiding Easter blessing for Thy saving Name's sake. Amen.

Text: *Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" And they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."*

In Christ Jesus our crucified, risen, and ever-living Savior, dear fellow-redeemed!

Where is the Christian who does not look forward to this day with joyful anticipation? It is the conclusion of a sorrowful tale of sin, shame and death that reaches its climax in a burst of never-fading glory. But have you ever given any thought to how those who were involved in what had happened on Good Friday greeted that first Easter dawn?

It was the end of a second cold night after Jesus had died and had been buried. Unfriendly soldiers were guarding His tomb to prevent anyone from stealing His body. His enemies were congratulating themselves on having effectively rid themselves of Him and His opposition to them. Worst of all was the night that prevailed in the hearts of His disciples. He who had shown Himself to be such a mighty Lord and such a persuasive teacher, who had more than once eluded His enemies, who had in various ways indicated that He was also the Son of God, who had just a week before publicly accepted the honor as the Messiah and Savior — He now lay buried in a cold and almost inaccessible grave. What a gloomy prospect the first day of the new week had for them.

But, dear hearer, it would have been a tragedy for us as well as for Jesus' first disciples if this were the end of the story. But thanks be to God this is not the case! Having during the Lenten season studied the story of our redemption, let us on this festive day, on the basis of our text, God's Holy Spirit assisting us, consider:

Easter – the Assurance of Our Redemption.

I. We in the first place note that the Savior who died is again alive.

After Jesus had been crucified and then had died and been buried, the hopes of even His closest disciples were shattered into a thousand pieces. The world had, it seems, come to an end for them, for what could they now hope for in the way of a Savior? But look, there's the open tomb. The women, Mary, Mary Magdalene and Salome on the way to Jesus' tomb at the break of day to complete the anointing of His body did not yet know it, but the tomb of their beloved Lord and Master was open and empty. We are told that an angel came down from heaven to roll away the stone to show that it was empty. At His appearing there was an earthquake, so that the

guards about the tomb were what we would call “petrified.” The very fact that they had been guarding it serves to emphasize all the more that Jesus body had not been stolen away but that a miracle of tremendous significance must have taken place, for the grave is now empty.

There is, however, more. There’s the message of the angel. It is from his lips that the women who have now arrived learn what has taken place, “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified” (28:5). And without further ado he tells them what has happened, “He is not here for He is risen, as He said” (28:6a), as much as to say that they should not be so surprised, for they must have seen how things had a habit of coming to pass as He said they would. He had, for instance, several times told His followers that He would be put to death by crucifixion, and that had come to pass; but He had also said He would rise again on the third day, so why should not that come to pass, too? Furthermore, the women are invited, “Come see the place where the Lord lay” (28:6b), after which they were instructed to tell His disciples that He was risen from the dead and that they would see Him in Galilee. Though difficult for them to believe, Jesus must then be alive.

Still more, there’s the living Savior Himself. According to the Evangelist John, Mary Magdalene had returned to the city as soon as she saw that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, to tell Peter and John of this event. As the two remaining women, Salome and the other Mary, turned back to the city, Jesus suddenly appeared to them. His first word to them likewise was “Be not afraid,” lest they might think they were seeing a ghost. Certainly it must have seemed to be almost too much for them actually to see the Lord whom they had mourned as dead. Yet they accepted Him at once, for we read “And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him” (28:9b). Then Jesus repeats the instruction given them by the angel “Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me” (28:10b). There could now be no doubt about it—the Savior who had died is alive again. Yes, before the day was over He appeared to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, to the two disciples from Emmaus and to the ten disciples gathered behind locked doors that evening. Good Friday was not the end. Now Jesus would mean far

more to them than He ever had before, and that leads us to our next point:

II. Because of Easter there is no longer any reason to fear.

So it was for the first disciples. When the angel asked the women not to fear he also gave them the reason, “For He is risen.” On Friday they might well have wondered whether they had not been entertaining false hopes concerning Jesus. Like the Emmaus disciples they no doubt “trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel” (Luke 24:21), but they had forgotten that to be such a Savior He would have to, as He had said He would, give Himself as a sacrifice. Now that He was again alive they could indeed hope that He was a victorious Savior, one stronger even than death. Yes, if there was an earthquake when Jesus gave up the ghost at the conclusion of His sacrifice of Himself, it is most fitting that an earthquake herald His coming back to life. Though Scripture does not describe the miracle of the ages, Jesus’ resurrection, it times without number testifies to His having risen in triumph on Easter morning. While the women were naturally frightened by the sight of a holy creature from heaven, the realization was slowly dawning on them that it was by dying and again rising from the dead that Jesus was to become a Savior, so that they had no reason whatsoever to fear, for we read that they left the sepulcher with fear “and great joy.” In addition, they have it from Jesus’ own lips that they should not be afraid. It made all the difference in the world to them that Jesus was alive again.

There is no reason for us to fear either, “Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3), says Paul, when He was put to death on the cross. He had repeatedly said that He would give His life as a ransom for many. Of His life, He had said not only, “I have power to lay it down,” but also “and have power to take it again” (John 10:18). That is exactly what He did on that first Easter morning, and by so doing He was “declared to be the Son of God with power” (Romans 1:4) as the Scripture says. For, remember, He by the grace of God was to taste death,

the wages of sin, for every man (Hebrews 2:9; Romans 6:23). By rising again from the dead He had shown that He had paid those wages, had paid the penalty for our sin in full, for the Father who had sent Him otherwise would never have permitted Him to rise. By rising from the dead He showed that He was stronger than death. He had destroyed the real destructive and damning power of death by taking the sting out of it, so that the Scripture can now say, "He hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10), the Gospel that reveals Him to us as the sin-atoning Savior.

There is then no reason for us to fear, for God is reconciled to us. Jesus rising from the death which He had suffered in our stead declares to all who will listen that the Father's justice has been satisfied, His wrath over sin appeased. When the Scripture says that He "was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25) it is telling us that for Christ's sake we are now declared free, pardoned, justified. Because He has made full satisfaction for the sins of the world, there is nothing left for us to do to be saved; Jesus has with His holy, innocent, and bitter suffering and death freed us from the guilt and punishment of our sins; besides, we could not do anything to save ourselves anyway. Therefore the Scripture now says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). When that same Scripture asks, "Who is he that condemneth?" it answers, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

Easter, the story of Jesus rising from the dead, gives us the assurance of our redemption. In view of all that He has done and suffered in our stead there is no reason for us to fear. No matter who we are, how greatly we may have sinned, and how much we may heretofore have ignored or been indifferent to Jesus, He in our text says "go tell my brethren," which is what we redeemed sinners have become, His brethren. Rightly does Luther therefore say, "If now Christ is our brother I would like to know what we still lack? Brethren in the flesh have common possessions, have together one

father, one inheritance, else they would not be brethren; so we have common possessions with Christ, and have together one Father and one inheritance, which does not grow less when divided (as earthly inheritances do), but whoever has one part of the inheritance has it all” (Lenski, *Eisenach Gospel Selections*, p. 480). As the Savior of all men He can then well say to each one of us “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine” (Isaiah 43:1).

Today, then, it is not a question of what we do for Jesus but what He as our Substitute and Savior has done for us. His coming back from the dead is a mighty “Amen” to His “It is finished” spoken from the cross; He therewith shows Himself as a victorious Savior, the conqueror of sin, of death, and of hell. Having then such a Savior—and, dear hearer, He is such a Savior for each one of us—why not then receive Him as such? We have nothing to fear; our sins have been atoned for. God is no longer angry with us; death is only a shadow, yea, becomes an entrance into the heaven now opened to us; hell has no claim upon us; peace and pardon are the gifts He dispenses to us sinners; redemption by His blood, and a salvation in glory He gives us as our eternal inheritance with Him. With the prophet of old we may then well say, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1). All this is ours because our Substitute and Savior, who once died for us, again lives for us.

It is the risen Savior Himself who tells you and me and all who will hear, “Be not afraid.” May we believe Him when He tells us that His coming back from the dead is proof conclusive that we have been redeemed, and that we are then worshipping, praying to, trusting in and serving a living Savior, who, as the Scripture says, “Is able also to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Hebrews 7:26). God grant us such an abiding Easter hope and blessing. Amen.

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

Chapel Homily on Colossians 3:12–17

Michael K. Smith

Men and women are...*different*. I know, I know, you're wondering how many years of advanced education were necessary before I could come up with such a startling and insightful statement.

But seriously, we know men and women are different. Let's take just one example from life. Imagine you've been invited to a moderately fancy dinner. What's the first thing you guys are most likely to think of? "Wonder what's on the menu?!" And more than likely, what's the first thing that runs through the mind of you ladies? "What am I going to *wear*?!"

Now, please forgive me for stereotyping. And I'm definitely not advocating the idea that what you ladies wear is unimportant. You see, today we're going to hear from St. Paul that the clothes *do*, in this instance, and as the saying goes, "make the man" (or woman, for that matter!). Listen to this text from Colossians 3:12-17.

Text: *As believers, then, whom God has chosen and loved, dress yourselves with tenderheartedness, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience; bear with one another and forgive one another if you have any complaint against anyone. Forgive just as the Lord forgave you. On top of all these virtues put on love, which binds it all together to make it perfect. Also let the peace of Christ, to which you were called as one body, rule in your hearts—and continue to be thankful! Let Christ's word live richly among you, as with all wisdom you teach and warn one another by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And everything you say or do, do it in the Name of the Lord Jesus. In this way continue to give thanks to God the Father through Him. (GWN)*

Just prior to these words Paul had told the Christians at Colossae to get rid of (actually, to kill) all the sins the practice of which made them appear not to be God's people. He included sins such as sexual immorality, anger, slander, obscene talk.... Being dressed in these sins only brings God's eternal punishment.

But in this section Paul stresses that God has washed us clean

of all sins, and so we're to put on the new! – "As believers, then, whom God has chosen and loved, dress yourselves with tenderheartedness, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience..." (12). What a difference! What a contrast to the sins he listed earlier!

You're familiar with the fairy tale of "Cinderella." Think about how she was dressed in poor-looking, ragged clothes...before she was transformed by her fairy godmother. Then she had on a beautiful, elaborate gown.

The clothes we had on prior to God making us His people were much worse than Cinderella's shabby dress. – "All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment," Isaiah says (64:6). Apart from Christ, we're covered head-to-toe in our death-causing sins.

But in our baptisms we received a new set of clothes. "All of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). The perfect, spotless life of Christ was given to us to wear! That's why we can "dress ourselves" with all these virtues Paul mentions: tenderheartedness, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience.

Now, we know full well this is not an easy thing to do. It's tough to get rid of all our sins and sinful ways, but it's even tougher to act the way Paul tells us to act.

So what's the key? How can we be tenderhearted, when we may want to rip someone's heart out? How can we show kindness when all we want to do is act meanly toward a brother? How can we be humble when we know our ideas are better than everyone else's? How can we be gentle when we don't feel like it? How can we be patient when no one seems to be moving at our pace?

Paul gives the answer in v.13: "Forgive just as the Lord forgave you." Forgiveness is the key to putting on the new self!

Think about the account of Joseph in the Old Testament. You remember how it went. Joseph's eleven brothers were jealous of him because he was their father's favorite. So they decided to kill Joseph and tell their father he had been eaten by wild animals. But one of the brothers (Reuben) talked them out of killing Joseph and they decided to sell Joseph into slavery instead. And then they went back to their father and said Joseph had been killed.

Joseph ended up in Egypt and over time became the second most powerful man there, next only to Pharaoh. There was a fam-

ine in Canaan, and Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food. Eventually Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers. And what was their reaction? "What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" (Ge 50:15)

A fair reaction? Sure! Look what they did to Joseph! – they sold him into slavery! And that was only after they were talked out of killing him! They had every human reason, every earthly reason to be scared.

But what did Joseph do? Oh sure, he had the power – he could have ordered them executed on the spot. That would have been the vengeful thing to do, in some ways, the logical thing to do.

Joseph ended up telling his brothers, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid..." (Ge 50:19-21a).

What a picture of God's forgiveness of us! As we acted out our anger and fury and malice and slander and filthy talk and lies, we had only evil intentions in mind. But God wiped the slate clean. Even though He could have sent us to hell to roast for all eternity, He didn't. Instead He sent Jesus. Jesus took our place on the cross and suffered hell, God's abandonment, for us, so that we don't have to.

So what do we do as a result of being forgiven? We live our lives as God's people, including forgiving others. Again, as Paul said in v.13: "Forgive *just as* the Lord forgave you."

So what's the bottom line? MOVE ON! "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us," the psalmist says of God in Ps. 103. God has taken our sins so far away that in His mind they don't even exist anymore. Wouldn't it be great if we could even *begin* to approach that level of forgiveness in our lives!

Every time you go to God and ask for forgiveness, He gives it to you. And then He moves on. Case closed. New slate. Paul very plainly tells us we need to do that with each other! As you look around you...right now...what do you see? Do you see people

against whom you're holding grudges? Forgive and MOVE ON! Do you see people you think might have grudges against you? "Bear with one another and forgive one another if you have any complaint against anyone," Paul says (13). In other words, forgive and MOVE ON!

The unity of the body of Christ is not based on distrust and hurt feelings and grudges—it's built on love. "On top of all these virtues put on love, which binds it all together to make it perfect" (14). Exercise that love, the love God has for us, as we continue to live as His people. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Kenneth Mellon

“Dear God, if only we were as diligent to pray, at least with a longing in the heart, as you are in coaxing, bidding, commanding, assuring, and constraining us to pray.... Forgive us, dear Lord, and strengthen our faith. Since I cannot pay the penalty, and my name has no prestige, let satisfaction be made in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.” (*Luther’s Prayers*, Herbert F. Brokering,; Ed. page 4)

Among the many topics of prayer, this paper will be directed to pastors regarding devotional prayers. Pastors are often praying. We pray in our church services, Bible classes, meetings, at counseling sessions, and with those who are sick or shut-in. Pastors typically have no problem praying these types of prayers. It is expected of us and is part of our calling. At other times pastors pray spontaneously. Frances Pieper described prayer as “the conversation of the heart with God... without the prayer in words of the mouth or whether the mouth utters the prayer of the heart.” (*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, page 77.) These prayers may be unspoken and not be lengthy in thought. It may be a sigh like Jesus gave before healing the man who was deaf. (Mark 7:34) It may be a reaction of praise to God in seeing a beautiful sunset. It may be a thankful glance to heaven for an unexpected blessing or for being spared injury in an accident. This would be a fitting description of the verse “*Pray continually.*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) All Christians pray in this manner as a fruit of their faith and as a response to the grace of God in Christ at any time without preparation. “Prayer itself is an act of devotion in which we respond to God for all that He has done for us.” (Arnold Koelpin, “Sanctification and the Individual Prayer in Lutheran Theology,” page 19)

Devotional prayer is more specific, where pastors set aside time each day to let God speak to them through His Word and then give their response. Martin Luther had many such devotional prayers, like the one above. He would usually include: A. praise, recalling the love or promise of God through Christ, B. a confession

of sins which he often combined with requests, and C. thanks.

In St. Paul's letter to Timothy we see that there are varied types of prayer. He wrote, "*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.*" (1 Timothy 2:1) R. H. Lenski wrote in his commentary about these different aspects of prayer. The first word is "request." It pictures a humble petitioning of God to fill our needs. It keeps in mind the vastness of our needs but also the greater amount of God's blessings. The second word is "prayer." It is a term of reverence or worship of God. In prayer people are addressing the Lord of heaven and earth in a respectful manner. The third word for prayer is "intercession," which could be pictured by a confident child drawing close to his loving father knowing that he will provide what is best. The last word is "thanksgiving," which "adds grateful acknowledgements for past mercies to humble, worshipful, trustful requests." (Lenski's *Commentary on First Timothy*, page 538)

A paper about pastoral prayer should not be received as the law: "You had better have a devotional life and pray or else!" It does not seek to add guilt or shame to pastors already busy with many duties at church and home. It will serve as a review of the commands and promises of God regarding prayer. It will include Bible verses concerning the prayers of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. It will also consider the Lutheran Confessions and writings of Martin Luther regarding prayer. It is hoped that in the reading of this paper we will all be encouraged to increase our prayer and devotional life as Christians and as pastors of God's flock.

I. The pastor's need for prayer

There is a personal need and privilege for pastors which leads them to pray as any Christians should do. We have many personal challenges. None of us is perfectly gifted in all areas of ministry. At times, we can be impatient, lax, lose our focus in serving, be unloving, or be overly proud and think that we are God's "gift" to mankind. Jesus warned His disciples about their sinful nature. "*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" (Matthew 26:41 NKJV)

The Apostle Paul wrote of his struggles against the sinful nature in Romans 7:14-25.

¹⁴We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.... ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.... ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Take note of Paul's prayer in verses 24 and 25. First, he confesses his sinfulness, saying that he is a wretched man. Second, he calls on God to rescue him from this sinful state. Third, he praises God for sending Jesus to forgive his sins and save him. This pattern of prayer (unworthiness, leading to a plea, and resulting in praise to God) can be found in the words of many believers in the Bible, e.g. Moses, David, and Jonah. Their prayers to a gracious God begin with the humble recognition that they are sinners in a sinful world who need his help.

Martin Luther wrote in his introduction to the Lord's Prayer that there is always a need to exhort Christians to pray. "Mankind is in such a situation that no one can keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, even though he has begun to believe. Besides, the devil, along with the world and our flesh, resists our efforts with all his power. Consequently nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and drum into his ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and obedience to the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our way and hinders us from fulfilling them." (Tappert, *The Book of Concord, The Large Catechism*, page 420.)

We also need to call on God when we suffer from trials and

temptations in the world. Luther wrote that three things make a theologian: “*oratio, meditatio, and tentatio,*” i.e. prayer (based on the truth of God’s commands and promises), continued study of the Scriptures, and affliction (*Anfechtung*). Luther often wrote about the value of affliction. In his commentary on Psalm 118: (5) he stated:

Were there only peace and no trials, we would never learn to know God Himself. In short, we could never be or remain true Christians. Trouble and distress constrain us and keep us within Christendom. Crosses and troubles, therefore, are as necessary for us as life itself, and much more necessary and useful than all the possessions and honor in the world.

We read: “I called upon the Lord.” You must learn to call. Do not sit by yourself or lie on a couch, hanging and shaking your head. Do not destroy yourself with your own thoughts by worrying. Do not strive and struggle to free yourself, and do not brood on your wretchedness, suffering, and misery. Say to yourself: “Come on, you lazy bum; down on your knees, and lift your eyes and hands toward heaven!” Read a psalm or the Our Father, call on God, and tearfully lay your troubles before Him. Mourn and pray, as this verse teaches, and also Ps. 142:2: “I pour out my complaint before Him, I tell my trouble before Him.” Likewise Ps. 141:2: “Let my prayer be counted as incense before Thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!” Here you learn that praying, reciting your troubles, and lifting up your hands are sacrifices most pleasing to God. It is His desire and will that you lay your troubles before Him. He does not want you to multiply your troubles by burdening and torturing yourself. He wants you to be too weak to bear and overcome such troubles; He wants you to grow strong in Him. By His strength He is glorified in you. Out of such experiences men become real Christians. (*Luther’s Works, Vol. 14, Selected Psalms III, page 60.*)

Even Jesus in his life of humility had constant temptations and difficulties which led him to pray. From his temptation in the wilderness to the garden of Gethsemane Jesus was praying for guidance, strength, and help. The tribulation he suffered in the garden gives us the wonderful example of submission to God’s will. His suffering on the cross led him to pray his seven words which are

of great comfort for us all!

There are several parallels in the lives of St. Paul and Luther. Both grew up with rigorous religious training, with fasting, daily prayer, and the study of the Scriptures. St. Paul was a disciple of the Pharisee Gamaliel. He wrote, *“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”* (Philippians 3:4-6) Paul also described his devotional life as a runner in training: *“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”* (1 Corinthians 9:27 NKJV) Prayer was a daily part of Paul’s life, not just a part of his job.

Training wasn’t Paul’s only reason to pray. There were his daily concerns and troubles which accompanied the preaching of the Gospel. Paul warned the Corinthians of the false teachers among them. *“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ?.... I am more. I have worked much harder; been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death.... Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”* (2 Corinthians 11:22-28) Paul’s external and internal troubles drove him to turn to God for help. In the next chapter he prayed three times for God to remove his “thorn in the flesh” (12:8) Another time when Paul was beaten in Philippi and put into the inner prison, he brought his needs to God. *“Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...”* (Acts 16:25)

Luther grew in His understanding under the strict discipline of the Augustinian monks, with its schedule for daily prayers and study. He, like Paul, knew the Psalms forward and backward not just to teach people, but for his devotional use in prayer. Next to his use of the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms were Luther's greatest resource for prayers. Like Paul, Luther was hard-pressed by troubles. He was sick from stomach ailments. He had concerns not only about the threats from the established church of his time, but also the emperor. This drove him to prayer. Luther wrote,

At the Diet of Augsburg the devil was trying to devour us. The situation was so desperate and intense that the whole world expected violence to break out, as some spiteful people had been threatening. The swords were already drawn, and the guns loaded. But through our prayers God came to our aid and made it possible for those screamers, with their scratching and threatening, to get what was coming to them. He gave us a good peace and a year of grace, the likes of which there have not been for a long time, better than we could have hoped for. Now if danger and distress arise again, we will ask Him again, and He will help and deliver us again. Of course, He may let us suffer oppression for a little while in order to strengthen us and to drive us to pray that much harder. What sort of prayer would there be if there were no distress oppressing us until we felt it? Feeling your distress helps to make your prayer stronger. Let everyone, therefore, learn not to despise his prayer, nor to doubt that it will surely be heard and that in God's good time he will receive what he wants. (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 21, *The Sermon on the Mount*, page 233.)

We all have our share of situations which distress us, whether personal problems of sickness or financial concerns, problems in the church, or our need to minister to other people who are suffering or near death. These will drive us to prayer. James wrote, "*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.*" (James 5:13) An ill Hezekiah was told by Isaiah that he would soon die. He prayed that the Lord would extend his life, and God granted him 15 more years. (2 Kings 20) Luther used this example to say that our prayers do make a difference with God. In areas where we do not know the clear will of God, we can only bring our trouble or affliction to him in prayer and trust that he will answer in the best way possible for us. We pray as

Jesus did in the garden, “*My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.*”(Matthew 26:32)

The hymn “What a Friend we have in Jesus” expresses Luther’s concern about the “peace we often forfeit” and the “needless pain we bear” without bringing them to God in prayer. Luther wrote,

There is an evil and clever devil riding me and other people and frequently playing these tricks on me in my temptation or anxiety, whether it has to do with spiritual or with secular affairs. He immediately butts in and makes you start stewing over it. In this way he snatches us from our prayer and makes us so dizzy that we do not even think of praying. By the time you begin praying you have already tortured yourself half to death. He is well aware of what prayer achieves and can do. That is why he creates so many obstacles and disturbances, to keep you from getting around to it at all. Hence we ought to learn to take these words to heart. We should develop the habit, whenever we see anguish or need, to fall on our knees immediately and to spread the need before God, on the basis of this admonition and promise. Then we would find help and would not have to torture ourselves with our own ideas about looking for help. This is a very precious medicine, one that certainly helps and never fails, if you will only use it. (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 21, page 232)

As Christians and as pastors we underestimate the forces of evil which confront us. We may assume that problems may work themselves out in our lives or among the members of the congregation or in our synod, so there is not always on our part a great effort to pray. We sometimes assume that since it’s usually peaceful at church council meetings there is no need pray for God’s help beforehand. Yet, we’ve been warned by God that the devil is never at rest and always ready to strike. He will constantly look for opportunities to harm our lives and to discredit our work as pastors and to disrupt our congregations and stop the work of spreading the Gospel. We need to watch and pray. Remember how the Gibeonites tricked Joshua and the leaders of Israel. They lied, saying that they had come from a faraway land to make a treaty with Israel. The deception worked because, “*The men of Israel...did not inquire of*

the LORD.” (Joshua 9:14) How often could that be said of us?

On the other hand, Luther was so thankful for the prayers of even a few Christians. In introduction to the Lord’s Prayer in the *Large Catechism* he wrote,

This we must know, that all our safety and protection consist in prayer alone. We are far too weak to cope with the devil and all his might and his forces arrayed against us, trying to trample us under foot. Therefore we must carefully select the weapons with which Christians ought to arm themselves in order to stand against the devil. What do you think has accomplished such great results in the past, parrying the counsels and plots of our enemies and checking their murderous and seditious designs by which the devil expected to crush us, and the Gospel as well, except that the prayers of a few godly men intervened like an iron wall on our side? Otherwise they would have witnessed a far different drama: the devil would have destroyed all Germany in its own blood. Now they may confidently ridicule and mock. But by prayer alone we shall be a match both for them and for the devil, if we only persevere diligently and do not become slack. For whenever a good Christian prays, “Dear Father, thy will be done,” God replies from on high, “Yes, dear child, it shall indeed be done in spite of the devil and all the world.” (Tappert, *Book of Concord, Large Catechism*, page 424)

Other personal challenges which lead us to prayer are the commands of Jesus, which seem impossible to follow. He said in Matthew 5:44 “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...*” Later in the same sermon he stated, “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*” (Matthew 6:27-28) Jesus always wants us to show His love and forgiveness to everyone without exception. He once told his disciples, “*If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.*” The disciples could not get along even with each other, let alone the other Jews. Their response to Jesus was a prayer! “*Lord, increase our faith!*” (Luke 17:3-4)

Prayer is a response of faith fed by the means of grace. Rev. Richard Newgard wrote in a conference paper regarding prayer, “Lutherans in distinguishing between the means of grace and prayer

speak of the one as the hands of God extended to man, and the other as the hands of man extended to God. We do well to maintain this distinction.” (*Lutheran Synod Quarterly* Vol. 24, #4, March, 1984, page 23) Since prayer is not directly a means of grace, Lutheran pastors are tempted to think that a prayer life is low in priority.

Yet, Dr. Ludwig Fuerbringer in an article entitled, “May God preserve unto us a pious ministry!” stated, “The temptation is ever present for us pastors to read the Scriptures only “officially,” only with the thought of employing what we read in our official duties or to enrich our theological understanding... Too conscious of our profession, we do not permit God to draw near to our soul. The result is a mechanical ministry.... God does not want the pastor’s own soul to starve and perish while he directs others along the way of life.... When God speaks to us thus, we cannot but speak to God. More and more we shall become men of prayer, daily we will appear before God in prayer, without prayer we cannot live.” (*Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. 6, #1, January, 1935, page 16)

Martin E. Lehmann wrote a book entitled *Luther & Prayer*. It served as a helpful resource for this paper, with many end notes from *Luther’s Works*. He stated that for Luther there was a close connection between the message of Christ’s forgiveness and prayer.

We would always like to be free from sadness, worry, impatience, and evil thoughts; to find constant delight and comfort in the Gospel; to be able to see the grace and the power of the Spirit to make all men pious, be devoted to the Gospel, and act in conformity with its teachings. To that end we pray, exhort, and implore faithfully and diligently, and do what we can.... Yet opposition and resistance are always there to be overcome; in fact, they grow stronger with time. What, then, are we to do, caught as we are in this deep mire, in which we must wade and travel, struggle and fear without being able to get out?

“There is no other help,” says Christ, “than promptly to raise your eyes and heart heavenward and to pray to My heavenly Father. After you have taught and admonished, have done everything your calling demands, and still things will not and can not progress, then seek help, get a fresh relay of horses, and all help one another with grunts and groans to lift and shove

the wagon through the mire. That is what God wants. You are not only to recognize the doctrine and what you have already as given to you by Him, but you must also seek from Him what you still need and lack. In this way you will discover that you can do nothing, but that everything—both the beginning and the end, the willing and the doing—must be sought from Him and be given by Him,” as St. Paul says (Phil. 2:13). (*Luther's Works, Vol. 24, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16*, page 384.)

In the same sermon on the Gospel of John Luther gave another exhortation to diligent prayer. “Next to the preaching of the Gospel, in which God speaks to us and offers us all His grace and goods, the greatest and foremost work we can do is to speak to Him in turn through prayer and to receive what He gives us. Thus we truly have great need of prayer; for, after all, it is through prayer that we must act to keep what we have and to defend it against our enemies, the devil and the world.” For Luther prayer was not to replace the work of our vocation. Instead, Luther saw God answering our prayers by giving to us the blessing and strength to do the things for which we asked, i.e. praying for good crops and being given the strength and ability to plant and harvest. True prayer can only be said after a person hears the Gospel and is brought to faith by the Holy Spirit. As soon as a person has faith, he is to pray that God would direct him by His Word and keep him in the true faith. God answers our prayer through His Word which we study and through His sacraments which give us strength.

Luther certainly knew the promises of God regarding prayer. He not only could recite them, but he had a child-like faith to take God at His word and hold those verses in God's face with confidence that God would hear his prayer and answer him. Luther wrote, “Where this foundation, which is the Word of God, has been laid, there prayer is the ultimate help. No, it is not help; it is our power and victory in every trial. Thus God's Word declares: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you” (Ps. 50:15). And in Is. 65:24: “Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” And Gabriel says to Daniel: “At the beginning of your supplications a Word went forth” (Dan. 9:23). For when the heart prays seriously and ardently, it is impossible for those prayers not

to be heard by God as soon as one begins to pray. (*Luther's Works, Vol. 7, Lectures on Genesis, page 369*)

Other promises of God are listed below to encourage all Christians to pray.

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

Matthew 7:7-8 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matthew 7:11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Matthew 18:19 I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

John 14:13-14 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

John 15:7-8 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Jesus also told parables to encourage his disciples to pray. He taught of humility in prayer with the tax collector in the temple. (Luke 18) He taught of persistence in prayer with the widow and the unjust judge. (Luke 18) He taught of repentance in prayer with the prodigal son. (Luke 15) He taught of boldness in prayer with the man who came to his friend's house to borrow some food. And after that parable in Luke 11 Jesus taught of a loving heavenly Father who has great abundance and is waiting for our prayer. He compared God's kindness to the kindness that human fathers show to their children.

II. Our calling as pastors

Prayer is part of our calling as pastors. How many times haven't members asked, "Could you pray for me or for a family member?" Why should members ask pastors to pray for them? Are we holier than they? Do we have an inside track to God's throne with our petitions? We do not! We are all sinners just like our members. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ just as they are. The invitation and privilege to pray through Christ applies to them as well as to us. So, why do they make a point of asking us to pray?

It is part of our calling. In *The Lutheran Agenda* of the Synodical Conference the installation service of a pastor includes these words: "They are appointed to... offer before Him the prayers and supplications of His people..." (page 106) The installed pastor is also asked if he will "perform the duties of [his] office in accordance with the Confessions..." (page 107) Those Confessions include the Large Catechism in which Luther clearly encourages all Christians, including pastors, to pray. (Tappert, *Book of Concord, Large Catechism*, page 420)

Luther wrote regarding the duty of pastors. "The first thing that needs to be said concerning our ministry is this: 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear' [Matt. 11:15].... The second thing that needs to be said is that we should turn with genuine prayer to God. These are the two tasks of the preacher: toward the people, to teach them what is right and good; toward God, to pray that we may do right and that we may win a happy victory. As I Samuel 12 [:23–24] says, 'Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and right way. Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart.' Here we read that it is a sin against God if we preachers do not rightly instruct the people and pray for them." (*Luther's Works, Vol. 43, Devotional Writings II*, Pages 229-230.)

Luther had similar comments on Matthew 6:7. He wrote, "After teaching His disciples and instituting the office of the ministry, telling them what they are expected to preach and how they are to live, Christ, the Lord, now adds an admonition to prayer. By this He intends to teach them that, second only to the office of preaching,

prayer is the chief work of a Christian and an inseparable part of the sermon. He also wants to indicate that because of all the temptations and hindrances we face, nothing is more necessary in Christendom than continual and unceasing prayer that God would give His grace and His Spirit to make the doctrine powerful and efficacious among us and among others.”

Certainly for Luther and for Lutheran pastors the Word is our source of help and strength from the Lord. Yet, due to continued attacks from our spiritual enemies from within and without, we need to ask God to help us grow in our understanding and application of his Word. Luther wrote, “Once you have the Word of God right and have made a good start in both doctrine and life, then inevitably temptation and opposition arise, not one kind but thousands of kinds. In the first place, there is our own flesh, that rotten old bag. It quickly becomes bored, inattentive, and indifferent to the Word of God and the good life. Thus we always have less of wisdom and of the Word of God, of faith, love and patience, than we should.” The second enemy is the world. “It begrudges us the dear Word and faith and refuses to put up with anything in us.... It goes ahead and condemns us, it tries to take away what we have, and it gives us no peace.”

Then Luther adds that the devil is the strongest enemy of all from which we need to be defended. “Therefore all we can do is to go on crying to God, asking Him to strengthen and advance His Word in us and to restrain the persecutors and the sects so that it is not extinguished.... There, you see, are three troubles that press us down hard and will not get off our neck as long as we have life and breath. Hence we have continual reason for prayer and invocation. This is why He adds the words “ask,” “seek,” and “knock....” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 21, page 230)

The Bible gives many examples of prayer from God’s chosen leaders. Many times in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy Moses interceded for the people to bring them sustenance, protection, healing, and rescue from God’s angry judgment. In 2 Samuel 24:16, 18, 25, David prayed and offered sacrifices to stop a punishing plague. It states in that chapter that the Lord had already decided to stop the plague, but he moved David to pray so that the plague

actually stopped. In 1 Kings 8 King Solomon had a wonderful prayer for God's people at the dedication of the temple. Part of that prayer (v. 48,49) was answered by God when years later He moved Daniel to pray in Babylon three times a day facing toward Jerusalem. (Daniel 6) The book of James (5:17-18) gives the example of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1) and how he prayed at God's command and promise and it stopped raining and later started again. Even Jesus as a leader of the disciples prayed that Peter's faith would not fail him. (Luke 22:32) When the deacons were chosen in Acts 6:3-4 it was so that the Apostles could give their full "attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." In almost every epistle, Paul begins with a prayer of thanks for the people of God. Certainly all this should encourage us as shepherds of God's flock to be praying, interceding, and thanking God for his people in our care. One experienced pastor suggested to me years ago that I use the church membership list as a way to remember all the people when I prayed. I still do that to this day, and I am happy to share this suggestion with you.

Pastors who practice devotional prayer serve as examples to the flock. We see this in Luke 11 where the disciples learned from Jesus' example. *"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." (v.1)* Also, the Apostle Paul had many prayers throughout his epistles which not only asked for God's blessing on the Christians, but which also served as examples for the people so they could better learn how to pray. Here are a few examples.

Romans 1:8-10 I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.

Philippians 1:3-5 I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

The pastor's devotional prayers are not only an example of Christian living, they are a confession of faith. Daily prayer shows how pastor and people depend on God in all situations. When Paul and Silas prayed in the jail of Philippi they were not only obtaining help from God, they were witnessing to all the other prisoners of God's saving power. So, a pastor's prayers, when based on the commands and promises of God, will also serve as a witness to members and the community alike. Another example of this is when prisoner Paul was in a storm with the ship about to be wrecked. He took bread and prayed a word of thanks to God expressing trust in his care. All the people on the ship were encouraged by this.

Pastoral prayers for members should be a comfort to them and serve as a way of bonding between a pastor and his people. Paul in his epistles shows a loving concern for the people. In Ephesians 1 he prayed,

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (v.17-19)

In Ephesians 3 Paul wrote,

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (v.16-19)

Paul's prayers above served as a double blessing. First, God blessed the people in answer to his prayer. Second, God was blessing Paul with loving insight about his people while he prayed on their behalf. Today as well, what members would be angry at a pastor who spends time each day praying for their good? What

pastor can continue to see members as “troublers of Israel” or “sinners” while at the same time saying intercessory prayers for his people? If the people know that a pastor is praying for them, they will also have more confidence in him. They may be more willing to listen to instruction or correction if they know that the pastor has the good of their soul in mind. A third blessing of the example of a praying pastor is that some of his members will act in response to his example and pray for him. Paul requested Christians to pray for him in his epistles, e.g. Ephesians 6:19-20.

It must have given the disciples a great amount of comfort to hear Jesus speak his high priestly prayer for them in John 17. *“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.... so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.... Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”* (v.11,13-17) The disciples would certainly remember Jesus’ prayer for them knowing that God would give them joy in His Word, His protection, a knowledge of the truth, and growth in their sanctification just as Jesus requested.

III. Scheduling time for devotional prayer.

Luther found that it was easier for him to preach God’s Word than to approach God in devotional prayer. He stated that it was easier to tell his neighbor, “‘Dear friend, here it is written; you are hearing God’s Word’ When I have said this, I have done my duty.” But when it came to prayer he said, “A hundred thousand obstacles immediately present themselves before I can begin. The devil can put all sorts of reasons in the way and can hem me in and hinder me on all sides. As a result, I go my way and never give it a thought. Let him who has never experienced this just give it a try. Earnestly resolve to pray, and you will soon see what varied thoughts of your own come upon you to distract you from beginning....”

The principal obstacle and impediment is this, that we think in accordance with the devil’s prompting. “Ah,” we say, “you are not yet ready to pray! Wait a half-hour or a day, until you are

in a better condition to do so or have first accomplished this or that.” Meanwhile the devil is there to distract you during that half-hour, and during the entire day you no longer think about praying. From one day to the next he keeps you busy with other affairs and thus diverts you.... Our flesh and blood, which is sluggish and cold enough as it is, gives him an advantage and hinders us from praying as we ourselves would like to do. (*Luther's Works, Vol. 24. page 385.*)

Pastors with busy schedules will wonder how to make the most of a time set aside for devotion and pastoral prayer. Keeping in mind the words of Luther's statement above, we would do well to have a set time and a quiet place away from other distractions. That may not always be possible, but pastors should make every effort to do so. We think again of the life of Christ that as busy as he was, he took time to get away from the admiring and demanding crowds, to get away even from his disciples, so he could pray and meditate on God's Word. Several times he went up into a mountain to pray, into the wilderness, sometimes completely out of Israel, and finally He was alone in the Garden of Gethsemane.

What matters more than a place is that we determine devotion and prayer to be a higher priority on our daily schedules. It has often been stated that the more work Luther had to accomplish the more time he spent in prayer before beginning it. To him it was a matter of a stewardship of time. He first gave his time to the Lord in letting the Lord speak to him in the Word, then Luther gave his response and requests for help for the day. He was confident that the Lord would bless the remaining time and he would accomplish what God wanted him to complete.

Some people have used the verses from Jesus' sermon on the mount to encourage prayer in an isolated place. Jesus said, "*When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* (Matthew 6:5-6)

Luther commented on this:

Here the emphasis is on the fact that it must be a genuine prayer and not a piece of hypocrisy, as their prayers were Therefore, in instructing them how to pray correctly, Christ begins by showing them how they should go about it: . . . they should pray at home, in their own room, alone, in secret. This means that, above all, they should rid themselves of the false motive of praying for the sake of the appearance or reputation. . . . It does not mean that prayer on the street or in public is prohibited; for a Christian is not bound to any particular place and may pray anywhere, whether he is on the street or in the field or in church. All it means is that this must not be done out of regard for other people, as a means of getting glory or profit. . . . ‘in order to be seen by men.’ Still, it is a good idea for a person to be alone when he intends to pray, so that he can pour out his prayer to God in a free and uninhibited manner, using words and gestures that he could not use if he were in human company. (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 21, page 140)

Luther's point is worth remembering. The purpose of our devotional praying is not first to impress family or parishioners or God! It is to implore God for his mercy that he would help us battle our sinful natures, the evil world, and the tempting devil. If Christians happen to notice our praying and are encouraged to do the same, that is a blessing worked by God beyond the intention of our prayer.

There are other instances in the Bible where prayers to God served as a confession of faith. Daniel did not hide his praying to the LORD after prayer to God was outlawed. (Daniel 6) It became a matter of confession for him to pray to God publicly. After Pentecost the disciples spoke and prayed in the name of Jesus as they witnessed and healed many people. (Acts 3-4) Elijah was commanded by God to stand before the people when he confronted the prophets of Baal. He then called on the name of the Lord to send down fire to burn up his offering by God's command and to help the people identify the one true God. (1 Kings 18) Jesus prayed to the Father at the tomb of Lazarus in front of many people. He said in his prayer, "*I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.*" (John 11:42)

The public prayers of most of these men were not devotional, but these men had spent time in study and prayer before they made their public confession of faith.

IV. Sources of devotional prayers

For Luther the best words to pray were those of the Lord's Prayer. He wrote, "The words read, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, etc.' Since our Lord is the author of this prayer, it is without a doubt the most sublime, the loftiest, and the most excellent. If he, the good and faithful Teacher, had known a better one, he would surely have taught us that too. This should not be misunderstood to mean that all other prayers which do not contain these words are worthless. Before Christ's birth many saints who never heard these words of Christ also prayed.... The psalms, to be sure, are also good prayers, but although they fully embrace the main points of this prayer, they do not express them as clearly." (*Luther's Works, Vol. 42, The Lord's Prayer*, page 21.)

We as pastors say the Lord's Prayer in the worship service. We pray it with our shut-ins and with those in the hospital. We may end our various meetings with it. How often do we pray the Lord's Prayer as a part of our devotional life? When we pray the Lord's Prayer devotionally, do we follow Luther's proposal and as soon as we say, "Our Father" claim no merit of our own, but only the gracious intercession of his Son? (see *Luther's Works, Vol. 43, A Simple Way to Pray*, pages 187-211)

In his introduction to the Lord's Prayer in the *Large Catechism* Luther gave four points regarding prayer. First, it is our duty to pray because God has commanded it. He based his teaching on the Second Commandment, "You shall not take God's name in vain." The command to pray is just as important as the other commandments, according to Luther. Even if we feel unworthy to pray or when our sinful nature does not want to allow prayer, we are to turn back to God's command and say that we have no choice but to pray! At the same time, since God has commanded us to call on His name in prayer, we should consider it a privilege that He will welcome us, even though we are sinners. For Luther, who

had to fight the teaching that only holy saints could be heard by God, stated, “God does not regard prayer on account of the person, but on account of his Word...” (Tappert, *Book of Concord, Large Catechism*, page 422)

Second, as we trust in Christ, our intercessor, we turn to the promises of God that our prayers will not only be heard but also answered by Him. Luther prayed with such confidence only because of his solid connection to God’s Word of command and promise. When he latched on to a promise of God with his child-like faith, he would not let go. Through the lesson of Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord, He would remind us of the graciousness of God who hears our pleas. We also can come to God and hold him to his Word. This is why devotional readings and prayers are to go hand in hand.

Third, God has given us words from the Lord’s Prayer. We are to know that when we pray the Lord’s Prayer in faith we are certainly praying according to the will of God. Our prayer must be pleasing to him as long as we don’t doubt God or lose our attention during the prayer and think about other things.

The fourth reason for praying the Lord’s Prayer is need. The Lord’s Prayer rightly teaches us to pray not just for ourselves, but for all others in need. The first three petitions express our need to honor the Lord’s name, his kingdom, and his will and put his honor before any other prayer requests. The fourth petition includes all our physical needs. And the last three petitions include our spiritual needs.

Luther would also suggest praying through our use of the Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed. Doing this would certainly lead us to see and confess our sins more clearly. Daily it would remind us of the gracious working of the almighty Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It should also be noted how Luther prayed from the 10 Commandments or the Apostles’ Creed. He said, “I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer.

(See *Luther's Works*, Vol. 43, *A Simple Way to Pray*, pages 187-211)

There are many other prayers from Scripture itself which can be read and prayed in a devotional manner. Consider reading this portion of Psalm 119 before studying God's Word.

Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. (v.12-18)

Other prayers for blessing in studying God's Word are found in Psalm 119:97-105, Psalm 18:28, Psalm 19:7-14, and 2 Samuel 22:29.

When desiring to praise God for his goodness consider using Psalm 103. Here are a few verses:

Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (v.1-5)

When discouraged consider praying Psalm 61:

Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings. (v.1-4)

There are many more Psalms for our devotional reading and for use in prayer.

There is also a wealth of prayers from Martin Luther. You can find his prayers throughout all his writings. Often while commenting on the Scriptures he breaks into a prayer as the Apostle Paul did in

his epistles. Here is a sample of one of Luther's prayers from his commentary on Genesis:

Above all a ruler in the church should pray in this manner: "Lord God, Thou hast appointed me in the church as bishop and pastor. Thou seest how unfit I am to attend to such a great and difficult office, and if it had not been for Thy help, I would long since have ruined everything. Therefore I call upon Thee. Of course, I want to put my mouth and heart to use. I shall teach the people, and I myself shall learn and shall meditate diligently on Thy Word. Use me as Thy instrument. Only do not forsake me; for if I am alone, I shall easily destroy everything." (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 5, page 123.)

In Luther's time prayer books were in use in many areas. They were sold by Catholics almost as good luck charms more than for actual reading. Martin Luther wrote a wonderful book of prayer, which you will find in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 43, pages 11-44. He presents the 10 Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer in much detail and with many applications. It would not only help a pastor devotionally, but bless his teaching if it is read thoroughly.

There are many other devotional readings and books with helpful prayers. Below are some suggestions that I have found helpful to my ministry, faith, and devotional life: *Manna*, by Carl Manthey-Zorn; *Book of Family Prayer* by Laache; *Day by Day We Magnify Thee* (Devotional readings for each day taken from Luther's writings).

Hymns are a good source of prayers for us as we live our Christian lives—and especially as pastors. The hymns in our *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* include praise, confession, petition, and thanks. Whether the hymn be from the section on prayer (#381-387) or from the section of confession and absolution (#493-500) or the section on cross and comfort (#372-377), all can be useful for our devotional reading and prayer and will serve as a great encouragement to us when we read or sing them. Many more hymns which are personal favorites could be added.

Conclusion

It was not the purpose of this paper to include all the aspects of prayer. In summery, we can be certain that God has commanded us to pray not so that we earn something from him, but that we learn to depend on his goodness. The promises of God and the biblical examples of answered prayer should convince us to take every opportunity to pray, knowing that Christ will intercede before God on our behalf. It is our privilege as pastors to serve the Lord and make use of God's Word for instruction, correction, and encouragement. As we apply God's Word to our own lives in personal devotion, the Holy Spirit will lead us to understand how privileged we are to bring petitions before Lord and to give him thanks for his grace for us, for our congregation, and for our synod.

We will close with a hymnodized version of the Lord's Prayer: *Our Father, Throned in Heav'n Above*. Text by J. Guthrie, c. 1814-1878 Tune: Tallis' Canon by T. Tallis, 1505-1585

1. Our Father, throned in heav'n above,
All glory to Thy name of love.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy holy will
May earth as well as heav'n fulfill.
2. Give us this day our daily food
With all we need of promised good;
And freely all our sins remit
As we our debtors freely quit.
3. Defend us from the tempter's ways,
Uphold when tried, when fallen raise:
For pow'r is Thine, and boundless reign,
In glory evermore, Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary # 384)

To God alone the glory!

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Demon Possession

Biblical and Historical Testimonies

by William C. Mack

In the sixteenth century Doctor Daniel Sennert, a physician, believed that demon-infested bodies should be treated so violently that the demons would be forced to leave.¹ Voices challenging his views sprang up decades later. Reacting to the horrible and inhumane mistreatment of so many mentally disturbed patients, many people discarded belief in demons along with the tortuous methods that had been prevalent in treatment of demonized people for years. The “baby,” so to speak, was “thrown out with the bath water.”

The question for us today is, how should we Confessional Lutherans think of demonic possession? Demonic possession is a phenomenon largely ignored by the American people and mostly sensationalized by the American media. However, the reality of this occurrence cannot be verified by personal experience nor dismissed by human reasoning. We must base our beliefs (regarding demonic possession) on Holy Scripture; embracing the witness of our forefathers and our dogmaticians in the light of God’s inerrant Word.

Let us first consider the Biblical evidence for demonic possession. In the Old Testament, while “Satan” is mentioned in three books (I Chronicles, Job and Psalms) and “devils” in four (Leviticus, Deuteronomy, II Chronicles and Psalms, all from the NKJV), the only case the author could find of (coming close to) demonic possession is found in I Samuel (16: 14-23 & 19:9) where an “unclean spirit was upon Saul.”² Perhaps Leviticus 20:27 (referring to “familiar spirits” (NKJV) can be considered in that category as well.

However, the New Testament has over 100 references to “devil, devils, demons,” 36 listings of the use of “Satan” and 13 listings of the term “possessed with devils” (δαίμονίζομαι).³ For the writers of Holy Scripture, Satan and his demons were as real as God Himself.

Concentrating on the subject of demonic possession we see

demons possessing people in the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke. In the first Gospel Matthew records a boy falling into fires or bodies of water because a demon had control of his body (Mt. 17: 15-16. Compare also Mk. 9: 14-29 & Lk. 9: 37-43a). In that same Gospel Jesus “gave (His disciples) power over unclean spirits, to cast them out” (Mt. 10: 1 & 8). Matthew also records the story of a Gentile woman whose daughter was “severely demon-possessed” (Mt. 15:22).

Saint Mark records the casting out of a demon from a Gentile’s daughter (Mk. 7:26 & 30). He also writes about Christ casting out demons from a man in a synagogue (Mk. 1: 21-27, Lk. 4: 32-37, cf. Mk. 1: 32-34). The Lord would, in addition, give His disciples “power...to cast out demons” (Mk. 3: 15, 6:7).

Saint Luke, too, records Christ’s bestowal (upon His disciples) of the ability to have “power and authority over all demons” (Lk. 9:1). Perhaps the best known case of demon possession is found in Luke 8:26-39 (cf. also, Mk. 5: 1-20 & Mt. 8: 28-34) where “a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time” was healed. In this Gospel Jesus also gives a description of the actions of a demon “when (it) goes out of a man” (Lk. 11:24, cf. also Mt. 12:43) and of souls being “healed” who had demons (Lk. 6: 18, cf. Lk. 7:21). Perhaps the most infamous case of demonic possession in the Gospels is found in Luke, which says, “Then Satan entered Judas...” (Lk. 22:3). Overall, there is no question that, according to the Gospel accounts, demonic possession was real. Demons/devils are also referred to in the New Testament as “unclean spirits” (ἀκάθαρτος)⁴ (Used over 20 times in the New Testament).

Aside from passages already mentioned in the Gospel accounts, we also see demon possession mentioned in the book of Acts. In Acts 5:16 the apostles healed those “who were tormented by unclean spirits.” Philip caused unclean spirits to “cry out with a loud voice” and to “come out of many who were possessed” (Acts 8:7). A slave girl in the town of Philippi who was “demon-possessed” was relieved of that demon by Saint Paul (Acts 16: 18). While in Ephesus, the apostle Paul worked miracles “so that...evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:12). There is no question that demonic possession was real according to the book of Acts.

The Testimony of the Patriarchs

The evidence in the Holy Scriptures is overwhelming as to the reality of demon possession. But what do the “patriarchs” of the faith say? Do we have any testimony from the early church fathers? Yes.

In the epistle of Barnabas, written about the beginning of the second century, men are warned to hate the works of iniquity “lest the ‘black one’ should enter into them.”⁵

Justin Martyr (105-167 AD), in his second Apology addressed to the Roman senate, says, “(There are) numberless demoniacs throughout the whole world and in your city, [and] many of our Christian men, exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, have healed and do heal, rendering (help to the) helpless, and driving the possessing demon out of the men, though they could not be cured by all other exorcists, and those who use incantations and drugs.”⁶

Tertullian (160-230 AD) says in his Apology addressed to the rulers of the Roman Empire, “Let a person be brought before your tribunals who is plainly under demoniacal possession.”⁷

Cyprian (200-258 AD) said, “Nevertheless these evil spirits adjured by the living God immediately obey us, submit to us...and are forced to come out of the bodies they possess.”⁸

Athanasius (293-373 AD) writes, “Let him (the believer) use the sign of the Cross, which the heathen laugh at, and they shall see how the devils fly away affrighted, how the oracles immediately cease, and all the enchantments of magic remain destitute of their usual force.”⁹ Whether we agree with the early church father’s approach to demonic possession or not, there is no doubt that they considered it a reality.

We now consider the Fathers of Lutheranism. In the *Book of Concord* “demon/demonic” and/or “demons” are mentioned 20 times.¹⁰ “Devils” and “devilish” are used 14 times. The term “devil” is listed 214 times! The reality of demons and the Devil is unquestionable as far as the writers of our Confessions are concerned.

Luther writes in the *Smalcald Articles*, “They (those who ‘neglect their parishes, their wives, and children, etc.’) do so simply

because the devil has possessed the pope to praise and approve of these practices in order that great multitudes of people may turn aside from Christ to their own merits and (what is worst of all) become idolaters” (SA, II: 19). It appears that Luther took the presence of demons seriously.

In his anthology of *What Luther Says*, Ewald M. Plass gives 43 citations from Dr. Martin Luther’s works pertaining to the reality of the devil.¹¹ Humorously (I assume), in *Table Talk*, Luther said of the devil, “I often drive him away with flatulence.” But on a more somber note, Luther writes elsewhere concerning demonic possession itself, “We cannot now and also should not drive out the devils with certain ceremonies and words as previously the prophets, Christ and the apostles did. We should pray in the name of Jesus Christ and seriously admonish the church to pray that the dear God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will free the possessed person through His mercy. If only such prayer is made with faith in Christ’s promise in John 16:23, then it is strong and powerful so that the devil must retreat from the person, as I could relate some examples. Otherwise we cannot drive out evil spirits and also do not have the power to do it” (emphasis mine).¹² There is no doubt that Doctor Martin Luther believed in the reality of demonic possession!

Johannes Quenstedt (1617-88), an orthodox, Lutheran dogmatician in Wittenberg writes,

The proper marks of physical (demonic) possession are:

1. The knowledge of foreign languages as well as arts and sciences which the possessed persons have never before learned and, if they are freed, no longer know.
2. Knowing and stating things which are hidden, which have happened elsewhere, in very distant regions, or which are in the future.
3. Superhuman or supernatural power and strength
4. The exact reproduction of the voices of birds, sheep, cattle, etc., without the disposition of the (speech) organs necessary for it.

5. Obscenity in speech.
6. Monstrosity in gestures.
7. Horrifying screaming (Mark 5:5).
8. Blasphemy toward God and scorn for the neighbor.
9. Fury and violence against one's own body and against the others watching (Mt. 8: 26, 17:15, Mk. 5:5, Acts 19:16).

Physical (demonic) possession can be recognized from these and similar signs, which, however, do not all occur at the same time in every possessed person but sometimes more, sometimes less. But a special caution is required so that those who are severely ill are not considered possessed.”¹³ Needless to say, Quenstedt believed in the reality of demonic possession!

In the 18th century, **King Christian V** commissioned “some of the foremost clerics here in our kingdom of Denmark” to “humbly prepare a ritual, according to the order and reason” to introduce “the conduct of the Divine Service and the Church ceremonies in our kingdom Denmark and Norway.”¹⁴ Chapter six of this Church Ritual is entitled, “How One Shall Deal With The Afflicted, Possessed, Imprisoned and Evil-doers.” Article three (of same) is entitled, “On The Possessed and Those Who Are Plagued By The Devil Or His Evil Instruments In Some Other Way” (see appendix 1). The Lutheran king of Denmark and Norway in the 18th century believed in the reality of demon possession.

Another “patriarch” we now turn to, in the latter part of the 19th century, is **C.F.W. Walther**. He states,

As far as bodily possession by the devil is concerned, the preacher must know that physical possession can be imposed by God even on devout children of God. J.W. Baier writes: “Satan’s works include also physical possession, by virtue of which Satan dwells essentially in the bodies not only of godless persons but sometimes even of devout persons, and works in them by divine permission. Namely when God either directly or indirectly (that is, through people, either through good ones, for example, ministers of the church when they exclude coarse sinners by excommunication (I Cor. 5:5, I Tim. 1:20), or through

evil ones who intend to harm others, for example, by means of spells and curses) permits people to be subjected to Satan.

For although the purpose of this possession from Satan's side is harm and corruption, in part to the person himself, in part to other people; yet from God's side, Who permits it and is thereby either visiting severe sins (despising God's Word, carnal security, blasphemies, conspiracy with the devil) with His serious judgment or is rebuking and testing devout persons through physical chastening, the purpose is the revelation of His power, righteousness and goodness, and the repentance, faith, and salvation of people, if not of the possessed person himself, at least of others, namely the eye and ear witnesses."¹⁵

Walther, too, accepted the reality, not only of demons, but of their ability to possess people...even Christians! Perhaps he was referring to the demon-possessed man who "worshipped Him (Christ)" (Mk. 5:6) before being delivered from demon-possession.

The Testimony of Modern-day Theologians.

But what of more modern-day theologians? In spite of all the testimony of the Scriptures and the earlier Church fathers, conservative, highly respected men like Dr. Paul E. Kretzmann would write, "In regard to the question whether this peculiar malady, possession of evil spirits, is still found in our days, and especially, whether this is true in individual cases, it is best to hold opinion and judgment in abeyance...We have no Scriptural ground for assuming the existence of this form of disease in our days."¹⁶ Even a man who thoroughly documented the activities of Satan in the New Testament with his conservative commentary questioned, for no apparent reason, the ability/activity of the Devil today in possessing people! Could the school of German higher-criticism, active at that time, have sown seeds of doubt even in this renowned theologian? Separating the historical facts of the New Testament from application in "our days" (without Biblical reason) is a dangerous spiritual precedent to set indeed. From such thinking liberalism, modernism and post-modernism have sprung up; enemies of the Christian Church.

From denying the existence of demon possession to denying that it occurs in believers, we turn to Neo-Pentecostals/Charismatics.

They are perhaps best known today for “casting out demons” in their “worship” services. But they, too, like post-modernists, deny that believers can be possessed. “The Assemblies of God denomination issued a 15 page position booklet refuting the idea that Christians can have indwelling demons. It concludes that such teaching is unbiblical and erodes the biblical concept of salvation and peace.” (Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, MO. 1972). So speak the “holiness” errorists.

However, a few years after P.E. Kretzmann’s work appeared, Doctor John Fritz, professor at Concordia Theological Seminary and author of *Pastoral Theology* wrote, “Demonic possession”..... Among those who were afflicted and healed by Jesus four different kinds of sick people are mentioned..... 2.) those which were possessed with devils... We have no reason to believe that cases of demoniac possession were limited to the time of Christ and the Apostles, and to the early Church. Nevertheless, great care must be exercised in the diagnosis, especially if demoniac possession is suspected in a person who is known to be a sincere Christian, a child of God.”¹⁷ (He continues by listing the same symptoms as Quenstedt had listed previously).

We now turn to the testimony of Professor Joh. Ylvisaker; author of *The Gospels* (published originally in the Norwegian language). This conservative Lutheran writer states, “When a person is possessed (by demons), the situation is, however, somewhat different (than illness). The personality is also, to be sure, in restraint, but the condition is quite different from mere bodily disease. Human nature is then wholly stifled under the alien power of the devil—it is unresisting and submissive. In obsession, the devil employs the human organism as his personal instrument, he speaks and acts as if it were his own. Even the spirit is forced from its central position in the personality of the possessed person, and the human entity is null and void. It is the demoniac spirit which rules and controls the individual. It is the rational principle of the demon which operates through the human personality, thinks its thoughts, speaks its words, and acts its deeds. A foreign entity has forced out the human, and has taken the entire personality into its service. The relation is, so to speak, purely mechanical.”¹⁸

Doctor John T. Mueller, author of *Christian Dogmatics*,

writes “Bodily obsession (possession) occurs when the devil immediately and locally inhabits and governs the body, controlling it according to his will, (Mk. 5: 1-19, Lk. 8: 26-39). Bodily obsession is an affliction which may befall even true, believing Christians, as the passages just quoted show. In all cases of bodily obsession a person has no intellectual, emotional, and volitional functions of his own, but as long as the obsession endures, Satan, who is personally (κατ’ οὐσίαν) present in him, acts in and through him, so that in all cases of bodily obsession human responsibility ceases. (Cp. cases in which persons who are bodily obsessed deplore in moments of recovery the blasphemies which they uttered).”¹⁹

Doctor Francis Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics* books writes, “Bodily possession (*obsessio corporalis*) presents an entirely different case. Also **children of God** may suffer this affliction; by it the devil, under God’s sufferance, takes possession of a man by personally (κατ’ οὐσίαν) dwelling in him, so that the demoniac, bereft of the use of his reason and will, becomes the involuntary instrument of Satan. The human personality no longer functions; the devil in person (αὐτοροσώπως) becomes the acting subject. The demoniac is no longer responsible for his actions” (emphasis mine).²⁰ In reference to the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, Pieper writes, “...Excluded (from the Sacrament) therefore are children, the sleeping.....and [those] possessed while not in their right mind, etc.”²¹

Doctor William F. Arndt, orthodox Lutheran writer and author of *A Greek-English Lexicon of the The New Testament and Bible Commentary: Saint Luke*, writes an entire page and a half (!) on “Demonic Possession” (not to be reprinted here in full!). He says, in part, “The real nature of this terrible scourge (demonic possession) can be spoken of only with awe. The evil spirit or spirits control the victim in such a way that what the latter says and does is the work of the demoniac visitor in him. Demonic possession means that the person afflicted constitutes a dual personality. He has a will, but his will is in the power of a visitor who has come to occupy him....Why were there many cases of demonic possession at the time of Jesus? The only reply we can give is that Satan saw a Stronger than He had come to deprive him of his power (Lk. 11:22), and he was now making a desperate effort to keep his dominions.”²²

The Testimony of other, modern-day, orthodox Lutheran theologians.

Let us now turn to other, modern-day, orthodox Lutheran theologians. Professor Armin W. Schuetze and Professor Irwin J. Habeck (both WELS), co-authors of *The Shepherd Under Christ*, who write,

Demonic Possession: Older textbooks of pastoral theology go to some length in discussing this phenomenon. That it can still appear is beyond question. We know from the gospels that the symptoms resembled those of insanity. But both the term and our Lord's treatment of the cases with which He met show that demonic possession was different, due not to natural causes but to direct intervention of the devil. If a pastor were to encounter a case where a supernatural cause seems indicated, his resort will be prayer; both on his part and on the part of his congregation....

If he (the pastor) should encounter a bona fide case of demonic possession, the pastor will fervently pray for the deliverance of his afflicted member. In counseling with the troubled person, I point out again and again that he or she is a redeemed child of God and that the demon has no right to that person's body!²³

Pastor Werner Franzmann (WELS), author of *Bible History Commentary- New Testament*, writes,

From Luke's account of this incident it is still more clear that we have here a case of demoniacal possession....First of all, Scripture makes a clear distinction between demoniacal possession and ordinary diseases. Note that in this case (Lk. 4:33), as in others, Jesus addressed, not the person dominated by the evil spirit, but the demon who had taken possession of the sufferer. He did not address a mere disease, but a personal being.

This evil, personal being knew things concerning Jesus which the person afflicted by him could not possibly have known. Note also that the demons often did physical violence to the body of the person they possessed...

Another point we should observe is that often those who want

to reduce demoniac possession to insanity or epilepsy do so in the interest of taking the miraculous out of Jesus' healing of the demon-possessed. But the healing of the insane would be a miracle too. So what do they gain by their contention?

Now we take up the most serious aspect of this matter. If Jesus did not know that the people he healed were mere mental cases, then our Savior was as ignorant and superstitious as the people of his time are alleged to have been. If Jesus really did know the true condition of the afflicted people, and yet acted as though they were demon-possessed, then we are asked to believe in a Savior who was a deceiver. We reject either conclusion. We have a Savior who knows all things and in whose mouth there is found no deceit.²⁴

He continues in another place, "Recall especially that in such cases (of demon possession) it was not the person possessed by demons who acted and spoke, but that demons used the bodies of their victims as their unwilling instruments. And note once again that Jesus always addressed the demon or demons, not the person in the grip of demons."²⁵

Pastor Harold E. Wicke (WELS), author of *Mark—The People's Bible*, says, "Many theologians deny the possibility of demon-possession then (in Jesus' time) and now. It is true that we, today, do not identify many such cases. Perhaps the trouble is with us – we fail to recognize them. But we also know that Satan and his evil angels are sufficiently wise to adapt themselves to the times."²⁶

In a paper written for the North WI District, Rhinelander Conference (WELS), Rev. Robert Smith writes,

Can there be demon-possession today? Since there was demon-possession in the days of the apostles after Christ ascended into Heaven, there seems to be no reason to claim that there can be no demon-possession today. In a country such as ours, where human reason has accomplished much and where supernaturalism is considered unreasonable, reported cases of demon-possession are few....Indeed, in cultures that do not lay so much stress on science and human reason, there are many reports of demon-possession....Dr. Nevius (a missionary to China in the late 19th century) later studied cases of demon possession and came to the conclusion that there were real cases of it in 19th century

China. His study led him to come up with certain classical signs of possession. (listed in J.W. Montgomery's book, *Demon Possession*, 1976, p. 224).

In his book *Wizards That Peep*, Dr. Siegbert Becker (WELS seminary professor) writes,

I would be inclined to agree with Dr. Walther that we can assume that also believers can be possessed, but that they should be comforted with the assurance that the Lord Jesus has taken away their sins and will not hold them accountable for obscenities and blasphemies which they have uttered involuntarily. On the other hand, they should be reminded of the promise of God that says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."²⁸

In his conference paper, "Exorcism in The Bible and Today," written for the Metro North Pastoral Conference, the Rev. Arthur Koepsell (WELS) writes, under sub-section, "Possession Today":

Naturally there are many who oppose the idea that possession exists today, or even the Scriptural truth that it existed at the time of Christ and that He actually performed exorcisms. There are essentially three theories that oppose the Biblical truth. First, there is the "Mythical Theory." The basic idea of this hypothesis, advanced notably by David Friedrich Strauss and the Mythical School, is that the whole narrative of Jesus' demon expulsions is merely symbolic, without actual foundation of fact. Demon possession, so called, is but a vivid symbol of the prevalence of evil in the world, and the casting out of demons by our Lord, a corresponding figure of triumph over evil by His doctrine and life. The second theory is the "Accommodation Theory." The proponents of the accommodation theory say that our Lord and the Evangelists, in making reference to demon possession, spoke only in accommodation to the prevalent ignorance and superstition of their auditors, without making any assertion as to the actual existence or non-existence of the phenomena described, or the truth or falsity of current belief. The third theory is the "Hallucination Theory." Demon possession is explained, under the hypothesis of hallucination, as a mere psychological delusion on the part of the victim, who, diseased and distraught, becomes wrought up to such a high pitch of emotional frenzy or mental excitement that he imagines himself possessed and controlled by another and more powerful being. Under the suppression of human consciousness and

the dethronement of reason, he speaks in the character of the fancied demon. The cure of this strange illusion is virtually the same as the ejection from him of a real demon.

It simply must be said that with our view of Scripture, which is merely the view that Scripture gives us of itself, all three of these theories can be shot full of holes. It's merely an attempt to deny the existence of God and His divine intervention in man's affairs.²⁹

Thus “endeth” the testimony of the Scriptures, the early Church fathers, the early and latter patriarchs of the faith and more modern-day, orthodox Lutheran theologians (as far as this paper is concerned). However, this research is but the “tip of the ice-berg.” Needless to say, there is an overwhelming plethora of information on this subject by other Lutheran sources, other reformed and Roman Catholic writers.

Practical Suggestions

We now come to the sub-section of this paper entitled, Practical Suggestions. With all of the aforementioned information in hand, we must answer for ourselves, “What do we do with it?” If we do, in fact, accept the testimony of the Holy Scriptures and that of the forefathers of the faith, how shall we orthodox Lutheran theologians handle cases of demon possession today?

First let us differentiate between actual demon possession and conditions which have physical roots which may be confused with demonic possession. Broadly speaking, these include organic, psychotic conditions.

As Doctor Rodger K. Bufford, editor of *Counseling and the Demonic* writes, “Organic mental disorders may result from a host of biological causes, including the effects of aging, toxic effects of prescription drugs, alcohol or substance abuse, brain tumors, strokes and hardening of cerebral arteries, brain injuries, infections, and nutritional deficiencies or excesses. The symptomatic manifestations are quite diverse; including such features as delirium, delusions, hallucinations, impaired judgment, dementia, amnesia, apathy, lethargy, incontinence, psychomotor impairment, anxiety, and

depression.”³⁰ These conditions/ disorders, however, do not negate the reality of true, demonic possession.

So how should we handle demon possession? As already noted, Dr. Martin Luther did not believe that demons can be cast out “as they were in the time of the apostles.” Neo-Pentecostals and “Charismatics” of today, however, profess to have the same miraculous gifts of the apostolic era, including that of casting out demons. Should we, then, seek out the “gift of miracles” so we might cast out demons? No! I agree with Luther and Walther that demons must be dealt with differently today.

Why? While Mark 16: 17-20 says, “And He (Jesus) said to them (the 11 apostles), ‘And these signs (σημεῖα) will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons....(etc.),’” these miraculous gifts (tongues, healing, casting out demons, etc.) were given to the apostles and they, solely, were able to bestow them upon other believers. These “confirmatory (βεβαιούντα) signs” (Mk. 16:20, Heb. 2:4), while publicly validating the preaching of the apostles as divine, were apostolic (2 Cor. 12:12), ceasing when all of the apostles, and those who came into contact with them, passed away.

Walther, for example, says (re: “the ancient gifts of the Holy Spirit”), “For in the beginning of the churches the manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to the people when the apostles laid hands on them.”³¹ This is exactly the main theme of Concordia Theological Seminary Professor Douglas Judisch’s book *An Evaluation of Claims To The Charismatic Gifts*.³² The Reverend Arthur Clement (WELS) writes in his book *Pentecost or Pretense?*, “By the second century the number of men upon whom the apostles laid hands and bestowed miracle-working power was dwindling. Only Saint John lived to the end of the first century (or close to it).”³³ A former president of the WELS seminary, the Rev. David Valleskey, writes in his *Gifted to Serve*, “Gifts for the apostolic age: 1. Foundational: a. apostle, b. prophet and discernment, 2. Confirmatory: a. miracles/healings, b. tongues/interpretation.”³⁴ Even P. E. Kretzmann says, “The most extraordinary gifts of the apostolic days are not found in our congregations today....” (among them the gift of miracles, e.g., casting out demons).³⁵ Finally, in its first edition, the *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (1954) states, “Among special gifts bestowed by the

Holy Spirit upon the Early Church were some of a miraculous character – speaking in tongues, prophesying, healing the sick, and **casting out demons**. I Cor. 14; Matt. 10:8, Mk. 6:13... In apostolic times these were bestowed by the laying on of hands, (Acts 8:17, 19:6)” [emphasis mine].³⁶ They are no more.

We, therefore, need not be “wooded,” nor intimidated, by the Neo-Pentecostal movement of today because we do not have the “gift of casting out demons!” No! Satan, I believe, is working with the methods of the Charismatics and the Roman Catholics. They (the “Charismatics”) are not working against the Prince of Darkness but are in league with him (insofar as their false doctrines and false methods are considered)!

However, this is not to say that God (in answer to the Christian’s prayer and in conjunction with His efficacious Word) does not cast out demons today. In fact, He does ! The Lord heals, protects us from harm and miraculously bestows upon Christian souls many gifts and abilities that we, naturally, could never attain.... And He casts out demons!

Thanks be to God, demons are cast out today by the Lord Himself, as the faithful fathers of the past have encouraged us. We should pray in earnest for, and with, those who are possessed by Satan or his demons. After speaking with the individual and carefully discerning, to the best of our Christian knowledge (and, perhaps, with the assistance of a physician) that we may indeed be dealing with such a case, we must pray boldly and with conviction; using the Gospel as our defense (Eph. 6: 12-18) and the Law as an offensive weapon, when needed (Heb. 4:12); ex., Jesus in the desert, tempted by Satan.

Obvious signs, such as those already noted by Walther, Quenstedt, etc., lead us to immerse the possessed souls in the love, mercy, grace and forgiveness of Christ, both audibly in their presence and privately in our own devotions. If possession is publicly known, the congregation can be asked to intercede in prayer.

Let us not forget that counseling the demon-possessed has for its purpose to bring the soul back to, or strengthen him in, the baptismal reality; to the salvational joy and certainty of being Christ’s own, forgiven child. Many “trips to the Cross” may follow, but what blessings await those who were snared by the father of lies,

but are now released, find themselves in the arms of their Savior. “Songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesus, Lord to Thee we raise” echo throughout the grateful soul.

For the Christian counselor willing to endure the vicious assaults of the devil through the possessed, incredible blessings also await. Actually to be a part of God’s plan to cast out a demon from a soul possessed is a rare privilege, albeit hard work!

Though threatened by the unwanted “guest”(demon) and seemingly thwarted by demonic determination to stay within the soul of the possessed, the counselor works as a loving friend and (if a believer) a brother in Christ; knowing that (beyond all doubt) the Holy Spirit is there working on the soul of the possessed and on the mind of the demon(s) through the medium of the Word of God. As Luther reminds us, “We cannot separate the Spirit from His Word,” so we cling tenaciously, and solely to it in our care of these precious souls. The “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17) cuts (Heb. 4:12) and heals (Ps. 94:19), thus acting for the defense of both our soul and that of the possessed, for powerful attack on Satan and for the balm and healing of the possessed. Divine defense, powerful offense and much-needed healing, all found in God’s Word.

It cannot be emphasized too often that the soul of the possessed needs to hear the promises of the Gospel often; for defense and for strength to attack Satan himself. The comfort of the Cross and empty Tomb, the many “facets” of baptismal grace, and the blessed peace offered in the forgiveness of the Lord’s Supper are all sources of healing and strength.

To those pastors who simply “cannot deal with it” (demonic possession), the souls need to be referred to an orthodox Lutheran shepherd who will. The reformed and Roman Catholic “pastors” know little, or nothing, of God’s grace; hence the absence of comfort and true defense. Too often they just exacerbate the problem. Satan, being a very intelligent being, knows “how to work a crowd;” that is, he will work with errorists as long as they use sinful techniques. Threats (e.g., physical harm) and superstition (anointing homes with “holy water,” etc.) may give the illusion of validity to the error. But it is yet another lie! Demons also seem to enjoy thoroughly psychoanalytic psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists who draw the possessed into a continual review of their demonic

experience; focusing the individual's source of healing to be "from within." This, in my experience and contacts, only serves to deepen the nightmarish experience! One "orthodox" brother pastor I know continually tells those who come to him with "severe problems" to "go to a psychiatrist and he'll give you a pill." The sad part is that he is serious!! "Pills," while needed for many conditions (perhaps even needful, in part, for a short period for this situation due to organic situations that arise – already noted – are not the overall, final "answer" for demonic possession! Essentially it is a spiritual problem. The answer lies in the pure Gospel.

Caring, understanding shepherds are needed for this traumatic side of the ministry. Respecting the soul, especially if that of one of our brothers-or-sisters-in-Christ, and assuring him/her that we will work with him/her, regardless of difficulty and inconvenience, brings loving reassurance and care to souls reaching out in desperate need and hope. Unfortunately, too many who cannot find help "end it" (demonic possession) by suicide.

The Word of grace needs to be the daily companion of one possessed. In-depth study of the many "facets" of the Gospel is invaluable for the pastor. I have found blessed help, for example, in ministering to these souls by personally meditating on *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, by Johann Gerhard. Personal contact by the pastor must also be supplemented by daily exposure to the Scriptures through private and family devotions which focus on God's grace in Christ. Hymns and Christ-centered songs are an additional blessing of spiritual defense and nurture for the soul. As mentioned, a continual reminder of baptismal blessings and the frequent reception of the Lord's Supper (to those, of course, in spiritual fellowship), both in worship and in private, also aid in recovery from demonic possession.

Suddenly, or gradually, the soul can be healed. Satan can be forced to leave. Possession can be stopped! As the soul learns more and more of demonic defeat through the "armor of grace," the traumatic nightmares, voices within, "blackouts," feelings of extreme hopelessness, etc., will become a thing of the past. The Holy Spirit, working through the means of grace, reclaims His own children, reassuring them of forgiveness, everlasting life and their status as His beloved, cleansed lambs.

The challenge is great! With all of our other responsibilities demanding our attention, counseling the demon-possessed often seems like the “straw that breaks the camel’s back.” We simply, at times, are overwhelmed!....But God has given us the “tools,” the weapons and “medicine” we need in the Law and in the Gospel (the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ). Whether we refer to another pastor, or ask the Lord for strength in dealing with it ourselves, we know (ultimately) that the victory lies in our Savior. May we learn to use God’s Word of grace even more effectively so that we may valiantly “hold our ground” and “fight the good fight,” to the glory of God and to the casting out of many demons from souls who are hurting beyond imagination. Let us bring them Jesus, their Savior, Friend and loving Shepherd.

In summary, we see that in the light of God’s holy Word we cannot deny, nor ignore, the reality of demonic possession today. May the encouragement of the testimony of our spiritual forefathers and modern, orthodox theologians inspire us to delve into the Scriptures as never before so that we may “Lift High the Cross” and the empty tomb of Christ to comfort and enlighten those poor, hurting souls possessed by demons. We end with these faith-building words:

*Though devils all the world should fill,
 All eager to devour us,
 We tremble not, we fear no ill,
 They shall not over-power us.
 This world’s prince may still
 Scowl fierce as he will,
 He can harm us none,
 He’s judged; the deed is done;
 One little word can fell him.
 (Martin Luther - ELH #250)*

Appendix 1

CHURCH RITUAL of Denmark and Norway Copenhagen 1761

Published and paid for by Andreas Hartwig Godiche
the University Book Publishers and found at his shops
[[©] Translation by Mark DeGarmeaux]

ARTICLE III

ON THE POSSESSED AND THOSE WHO ARE PLAGUED BY THE DEVIL OR HIS EVIL INSTRUMENTS IN SOME OTHER WAY

If a pastor is called to the side of someone who is considered to be possessed or plagued by the devil in some other way, then he must in no way refuse; but, according to the duty of his call, after first continually praying and interceding with God, he ought immediately to go to the sick person, in the Lord's name, and perceive his condition.

Even if he is not called, and it is known that there is such a person in his congregation, then he ought to go on his own, and, if he considers it wise, he can take with him his assistants or some other believers from the parish.

He must not be too hasty to judge in such a way as to make either too little or too much of it. For such examples (for which God be praised!) are rare nowadays in Christendom, since the Stronger One has come upon the strong, since the Lion of Judah has won the victory, and since the Angel from heaven, the great Serpent-Bruiser, Christ Jesus, has shown His power over Satan and bound him with the chains of His eternal omnipotence, so that he cannot rule now as before (Rev. 20:1). Yet one still ought not to consider it fables, dreams, melancholy whims or other uneasiness of mind, when such are heard of among us, and should not think that we now are completely free from such afflictions of Satan, as though there was no place for him in Christendom any more, so that he is not so bound to the abyss. He still walks about on the earth daily, as a roaring lion, to seize, tear, and devour whomever he finds (1 Pet. 5:8). And why shouldn't

he be found among Christians now, as he was before among the Ephesians and Philippians, since Christ is taught and preached just as well among us (Acts 16:16; 19:15)? Satan was even in paradise and did not spare the perfect inhabitants (Gen. 3:1,13). He was even in the holy Temple, and did not spare God's own only-begotten Son (Matt. 4:5). What peace can we expect from him then while we live here in this church militant on earth? And, unfortunately, we have all too many examples here and there in Christendom, both of his cunning and great power, as well as his ferocity, force, and tyranny, which he exerts on men inwardly and outwardly, and sometimes on the most God-fearing and innocent of them.

Nor shall a servant of God be too quick to believe the common talk about such a sick person. But he ought to be careful in his judgment, and in such a case well know how to make a distinction in such works of Satan, so that he does not mistake the one for the other, and judge someone to be possessed, who either is only plagued outwardly by the devil or by poison or if other witchcraft is brought in the situation, or if perhaps such a thing can be caused by a natural weakness, just as there are several diseases that in one way or another resemble one who is possessed, such as insanity, rage, epilepsy, and others like them.

Therefore when the pastor comes to someone who is afflicted in this way, before anything else he shall first pay attention to the condition of the sick person, and find out from him exactly how this affliction came upon him. He shall immediately inform the Superintendent of this, according to all the circumstances, and meanwhile diligently wait on the sick with prayer, comfort, and exhortation, as well as by daily noting what things happen, for a better understanding of the nature of the illness.

Then the Superintendent shall summon any such pastors around, who, together with the parish pastor in the place, should be called upon to wait on the afflicted with prayer and reading.

These shall gather around the afflicted, first in the presence of some doctors, and indeed together consider whether the infirmity can be natural or not; and if not, whether it may be, as can happen, a mockery and trick of Satan (Wisdom 17:17), by which he sometimes blinds men, and thus alters their mind and senses, so that they think they see before their eyes, yet it is nothing; or even if such a person

can indeed be considered to be bodily possessed by the devil, so that he doesn't have control over his whole body and all his members, as well as his mind, reason, and all the properties of his soul, or even, so that he has control over only one or another certain part of his body, which he himself inhabits, and shows his power especially, just as he did with the mute in the Gospel (Luke 11:14).

For although for many and great reasons it may be more difficult now in these last times to discern the spirits, and really to know for sure and to search out such bodily and personal possessions of Satan in men, yet a servant of God cannot go wrong when he asks God for advice about it, and conducts his test according to God's holy and saving Word, in which all Satan's attacks against us poor men are revealed to us by God himself together with a powerful prescription and cure for each one of them.

And as Christ himself says that such devils do not go out except by prayer and fasting (Mat 17:21), which Paul also saw for himself when Satan's angel buffeted him, and he prayed to the Lord three times, to remove the plague from him (2 Co 12:8), then a servant of God shall chiefly deal with such afflicted persons so that they resist Satan with all their might, and with a heartfelt pious and earnest prayer keep their great need and affliction before God their heavenly Father, so that for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ He would graciously have mercy on them.

And in such cases the bishop shall finally add a special prayer for the gracious deliverance of the afflicted, according to God's good will, which the pastor (and) the other believers present shall pray on their knees with the afflicted at least twice a week with earnest zeal and piety, and always close with the Lord's Prayer and Benediction over the one who is suffering.

Otherwise close friends and those who are in the house, should read the same prayer to him twice a day: likewise also at all hours of prayer, as well as at each service, prayer should be made for the same person both before and after the service, not only in the parish church of that person, but also in all other churches in the city, as well as all the churches in the township if it is in the country. Yet the sick and afflicted himself should not be brought to the church, while this prayer is said, as has been done in other places, but less for the sake of each circumstance thus it may be commended, so

that the congregation with great earnest and piety may make their prayers for him.

If the afflicted himself with his depravity has been the cause of this great affliction, either by entering into a pact with Satan and in such a way binding himself willingly to his service, or if with any depravity he has given Satan room to perpetrate his tyranny against him, then the pastor, always from God's Word, should hold before him how gravely he has sinned against his Lord and God, show him what power Satan has over those who despise God (Job 1:8, Tobit 6:17, Eph 2:2), how wickedly he [Satan] deals with his servants, and what a horrible reward they finally receive for all their service. He [the pastor] shall also continually admonish him to acknowledge his sin, for which he is so harshly afflicted, and in God's stead finally offer him God's grace and salvation if from his heart he rejects his evil ways, denies Satan all his service, and resists him with fervent and pious prayer, seeks God with his heart when he cannot pray with his mouth, and finally in firm confidence turn to the most precious merit and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, his dearest Redeemer and Savior, for whose sake he [the pastor] forgives him in God's mercy and steadfastly hopes, according to God's fatherly will, that he will be delivered from this snare of the devil, so that after this he may honor and praise God always and eternally.

But if he has been God-fearing and has led a Christian life, so that no one can say that in one way or another he has caused this great trouble and wickedness himself, as a sign of God's wrath, and a just punishment for any gross devilish deed, then the pastor shall diligently comfort him from God's Word and show him that also in the end God for special reasons often thus gives the faithful and God-fearing a time to be plagued by Satan, as He did with Paul (2Co 12:7), and with good Job in the days of old (Job 1:12 and 2:6). God gave him the testimony that there was no one equal to him [Job] in the land, a faithful and upright man, who feared God, and fled the evil one. And in all this a child of God shall say with David: "The Lord is righteous, and all his judgments are just" (Ps 119:137). "For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). Therefore he shall exhort him not to look at Satan or his evil instrument and give them the glory as though they had such power in themselves and could deal with God's children

as they themselves want to. Not at all! But he should look to God alone, from whom all things come, the evil, as well as the good (Job 2:10, Deu 28:59). “Not a hair can fall from our head unless He wills it” (Mat 10:30).

And until He will say to Satan: “Let him be in your hand,” never dare Satan lay his hand on any child of God, nor can he trouble or hurt him any longer than God himself will allow, as can further be seen from the story of Job. So such an afflicted sinner should not immediately think that God has forsaken him or delivered him completely into Satan’s power and tyranny, for He allows him to be plagued and hurt outwardly; but he should receive it as a fatherly chastisement from God, and go back and consider his sinful ways, and say with God’s people to the prophets: “I will bear the Lord’s wrath; for I have sinned against Him” (Micah 7:9). Perhaps He shall also thereby test his firmness in faith, hope, and Christian patience, if finally he also regards God and Jesus so highly that he will gladly suffer in the world for the sake of his honor, and not therefore deny them. But in all things be of the confidence of Job: “Even if the Lord slay me completely, yet I will still hope in him” (Job 13:15), because even in the midst of his great anguish he knew that God is a gracious God and that he would not tempt him beyond his ability (1Co 10:13). He will never give Satan power to touch his soul, but that he may be preserved blameless for the day of our Lord Jesus Christ; for “there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). And no matter how much he tried, either with force or violence, Satan shall never be able to separate any child of God from the love which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39).

If the pastor then finds the afflicted one full of faith and love toward God, patient under the burden of the cross, confident and zealous against his enemy and especially yearning for participation in the most holy Body and Blood of his Savior Jesus Christ, then sometimes he can serve it to him in the same name of Jesus, when he is free from the afflictions of the evil one and can give proper attention, for which he briefly reminds him of the promise, which he has made with God in Baptism up to now, which he has now repeated here, so that he renounces the devil and all his ways, and with the shield of faith in the perfect armor and equipment of God fights manfully against his own and God’s great enemy, who is already

sentenced, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, so that he may keep faith and a good conscience to the end, and joyfully see and know the power of Jesus' death, by which He destroyed the devil, and took from him all power over those who love and fear the Lord.

He closes with the Lord's Prayer and Benediction over the afflicted each time he leaves him, as the pastor always does.

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³⁰Bufford, Dr. Rodger. *Counseling and the Demonic*. Page 87.

³¹Walther, C.F.W. *Pastoral Theology*. Page 187.

³²Judisch, Dr. Douglas. *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts*.

³³Clement, Arthur. *Pentecost or Pretense?* Page 17.

³⁴Valleskey, Rev. David. *Gifted To Serve*. Page 29.

³⁵Kretzmann, Dr. P.E. *Popular Commentary. Vol. 2*, Page 151.

³⁶Lueker, Erwin L. *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. Page 414.

Christian Freedom: A Proper Understanding of Adiaphora

Joel Willitz

Outside of Two Extremes

Adiaphoron, pl. –a, (Ancient Greek ἀδιάφορα “indifferent things”; German “*Mitteldinge*” “middle matters”) things neither commanded nor forbidden by God. What a huge area! It must include at least 90% of what we do each day, from what we wear to what we eat, to where we go and what we do when! What God commands and what he forbids are indeed two extremes. Adiaphora properly fall not between these two extremes, but outside of them. Neither commanded nor forbidden by God, adiaphora are outside of that scale of the law, and fall under the gospel and Christian freedom.

The German *Mitteldinge* appears to me to be a weaker, more subjective term, describing the application of virtually every situation of adiaphora, where we find ourselves surrounded by circumstances where God’s commands and prohibitions clearly touch the particular situation.

In our Christian lives, while we are guided by God’s law and strive to live according to his holy will, there are two other extremes outside of which adiaphora also fall. Those are the extreme of demanding or indulging one’s own desires or preferences, as unselfish as we might try to make it sound, and the extreme of judging, making demands of, or even condemning others, as caring as we might try to make that sound. Both licentiousness and legalism are a departure from the gospel and Christian freedom, and a return to the bondage of the law.

An Impossible Task

Two general areas of adiaphora can be identified, not only the host of personal adiaphora in the sanctified life of the Christian, but also ecclesiastical adiaphora in the life of Christ’s sanctified

Church. Many aspects of how the church worships are adiaphora: the schedule of services, the holidays of the church year observed, the order of service, the attire of the pastor, the practice of acolytes lighting the candles, or the use of the common or individual cups in communion, just to mention a few. The structure of mission programs, evangelism and outreach efforts, and the many ways and avenues through which the church carries out the great commission fall under the area of adiaphora. Many questions of casuistry, which comes up next on our agenda, have to do with adiaphora. No doubt we could come up with thousands of examples of adiaphora. Many papers and books could be written on each one, as no doubt has been done in some instances, and we could fill an entire library. Thousands of different circumstances for each adiaphoron could be pointed out. Answers could be given, guidelines and rule books drawn up. Oh, how the devil would love it if we would deal with these matters under the law, with all of its condemnation. But we are not under law. We are under grace.

I have to tell you that in writing this paper I felt like the little boy at the ocean shore who digs a hole, then takes his bucket, fills it with water, and dumps it down the hole. When asked what he is doing, he replies, "With this bucket I'm going to take all that water out there and dump it down this hole." Brothers, we will not get to the bottom of this one in this life, but will keep dumping water. This paper grants me the unique opportunity to outline for all of you just what you should do in areas of adiaphora. I will have to admit that there is a part of me that would relish doing so, and has even considered it. But God help me to simply present his word to you, and let the freedom he won for us in Christ remain. I have studied, written, restudied God's word and rewritten several times. Still I am not satisfied with what I present to you today. Every time I try to come up with answers, the devil and my Old Adam get in the way and try to present law instead of gospel, sin instead of grace.

An Exercise in Christian Love

Christian freedom, with its vast area of adiaphora, falls directly under the proper distinction of law/gospel, sin/grace. It is the

direct result of justification in Christ. Adiaphora lie in the area of Christian sanctification, for those who are being restored in the image of their Creator through their Savior, guided by God's immutable will (law), but motivated totally by the gospel of God's grace that won our salvation in Christ. We rejoice in the salvation our Savior won for us, and the freedom and gracious privilege he gives to us with the answer to this question: "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus said, "The most important one... is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." [Mark 12:28-31]¹

I am satisfied with the total and perfect freedom Christ won for you and for me, and am privileged to declare that total freedom to you. But I am not satisfied with the way that I, with my sinful nature, deal with that freedom.

An Example: Gambling

For an initial example, let's briefly consider gambling, to see the quagmire we get ourselves into. Is gambling right or wrong? The Bible does not say, "Thou shalt not gamble." So some will say, "It's an adiaphoron; therefore, I may gamble." Others will argue, "Gambling is driven only by greed and covetousness, and is contrary to the 9th and 10th commandments." (It could be noted that not too many generations ago a pastors' conference could have been easily divided over the question of whether or not it is wrong and lacking trust in God to purchase insurance policies or even invest money.)

It's easy to say, "Gambling is wrong. I don't do it, so I'm fine. But those who do had better watch out!" However, the 9th and 10th commandments condemn those who refrain from gambling but secretly wish that they could. It is true, many people do sin when they gamble. Many of us also sin when we go to Walmart and, before we even get inside the store to view the abundant shelves of merchandise, already are wishing we had a car as nice as some in the

lot. When we understand Christian freedom, it becomes a non-issue whether or not it is an adiaphoron to gamble or to shop at Walmart. The issue becomes: How can I best serve my Lord and my neighbor in Christian freedom in this particular situation?

The law does not serve us well if we have a box in which we keep all the “obvious sins” and feel that we are innocent if we can steer clear of them. When we teach the 6th commandment in confirmation class, it is not our goal to find out who is sexually active. When we preach, it is not our goal to single out those who are guilty of stealing, drug or alcohol abuse, cursing and swearing. It is our goal to condemn them all, even the most pious, Christian grandmother, that we might then proclaim the gospel to convince the worst sinner before us that he is forgiven in Christ, that he is free from sin, that he is free from the law, that he is free to serve the Lord in love as his new creation.

Are There Really Any Adiaphora?

The term “adiaphora” is not used in Scripture, though it is used, and properly, in our confessions. Under the law, it is difficult to get a handle on what adiaphora really are and are not. In my humble opinion it has become an unfortunate term, too often used as an excuse to refrain from serving the Lord. We don’t approve when people say, “I serve the Lord on Sunday morning. The rest of the week I can do as I please.” To a lesser extent, isn’t it the same argument to say, “This area is adiaphora; I can do as I please here?” 1 Corinthians 10:31 instructs us: “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 states, “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” Galatians 5:13-14 says, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single

command, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Countless other passages could be cited. It could easily be argued that there is no such thing as an adiaphoron.

Under the law there are no adiaphora. Take for example the pastor’s vacation. Most of us would agree that it is an adiaphoron whether or not a pastor takes a vacation. But we would be quick to add that taking too many vacations or too long a vacation would not be right. Nor would it be difficult for us to describe a vacation that is in and of itself wrong, because of its sinful activity. On the other hand, never to take a vacation might not be the most beneficial either. And what about the pastoral calls that are not made while we are on vacation, and the work of the ministry that is left undone? While on vacation, are we using our time in the best possible way, every second perfectly? Are we taking a perfect vacation according to the law? The law will always condemn us, no matter what we sinners do.

Or take the example of chanting in church. It’s an adiaphoron, at least for those of us who can sing. But if we chant, some people won’t like it, and if we don’t chant, some people won’t be the most happy with that. Either way, we are not serving our congregation perfectly, and even the best singers among us do not chant perfectly. Under the law we can’t get anything right.

O silly pastor, you are not under the law, but under grace!

Is Everything Christian Freedom?

At the same time it could be argued that for the new man, everything is Christian freedom. We are not under the law, but under grace. The new man, guided by God’s perfect law of love in his heart, and fully motivated by the gospel, is free in every area, matter, and situation to serve the Lord. This is the perfect sanctification that our Lord won for us, to be set apart as holy, to serve God according to his will and ways. Our new man delights in and is totally guided by God’s holy word. But there are areas outside of God’s revealed will. These are what we call adiaphora. God has left these areas to our Christian freedom, to rejoice in serving him guided by his will in Christian love.

Our Old Adam

But in this life we retain our Old Adam, so that even our righteous acts are like filthy rags. Our Old Adam rebels against the freedom Christ has won for us, so that he says, “If I am free, then I may do as I please, contrary to God’s law,” and returns us to sin and condemnation under the law. In areas of adiaphora he says, “Ah, here I am free to do as I please, regardless of serving others in love.” Beyond that he says, “Here there are no rules. I know I can make the best rules here, and everyone else should follow my rules. If they don’t follow my rules, they aren’t as good as I am.” The Old Adam is powerful, persistent and perverse. He is egotistical, proud, and self-righteous. He wants to be famous, popular, the one in charge. He is stubborn and insistent. The Old Adam tries to turn the gospel to his own advantage, exchanging Christ for his own efforts and thinking. If he is kept from doing evil, then he becomes a Pharisee. If he is made to accept the gospel, then he turns it into law, returning us to prison.

God’s law condemns every thought, word and deed of our Old Adam, but Christ’s gospel gives us the victory over him. We struggle with our Old Adam just as the Apostle Paul struggled with his:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be

to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. [Romans 7:14-25]

Christian Freedom Means Slavery to Righteousness

In Romans 6, Paul explains that we were buried with Christ by baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we, too, may live a new life (v.4), and that we should count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (v.11). He then concludes this powerful section with the words: "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." [Romans 6:14] This is true Christian freedom.

Then Paul continues in the next section:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 6:15-23]

There are only two possibilities in these verses: either being a slave to sin, or being a slave to God, to righteousness. Our Old Adam does not like that word "slave." But there is no such thing

as being your own person apart from God. That ends up being the same as slavery to sin. As much as we in our sinfulness hate to admit it, we are God's creatures. More than that, Paul has emphasized that we are God's justified and redeemed ones (Romans 3:24). What an awesome blessing and privilege to be "slaves to God!" The wages for being a slave to sin is death. There are no wages for being a slave to God. But he has given us a gift – "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Gratitude is our motivation to serve him. This is our Christian freedom.

Freedom Given – In Eden

Adam was created in the "image of God." He was holy like God, with a perfect knowledge of God's will. Adam had "free will." We know how many people misunderstand "free will" to mean that Adam could do whatever he wanted, do as he pleased. He could serve God if he wanted, or he could disobey God if he wanted. That is not "free will." We good Lutherans all know that "free will" refers only to Adam's ability to serve God in perfection. He was "able not to sin," and as soon as he did sin he totally lost his "free will," so that all he could do was sin, and by himself he could not serve God in any way.

It is a similar mistake to say that in areas of adiaphora we are free to do what we want, do as we please. This fails to take into account the sinful nature of fallen mankind, a sinful nature that Adam did not originally have. He had no Old Adam. In the Garden of Eden, everything was left to Adam's freedom, and the tree gave him the greatest opportunity to demonstrate and practice that freedom. In the image of God, with law undefiled written in his heart, Adam delighted to live in perfect love toward God and toward Eve in his every deed, every second, without ever demanding his own desire contrary to another. Adiaphora was a non-issue until the eating of the forbidden fruit.

Freedom Lost – The Fall

Adiaphora was still a non-issue even for a short time after the fall, until God graciously came to Adam and Eve and granted them

forgiveness through the promise of the Savior. Apart from God's forgiveness sinners can do nothing that is not forbidden by God. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." [Hebrews 11:6]

Freedom Restored – The Promise

When God came to Adam and Eve and promised the Savior (Genesis 3:15), freedom was restored to them and their descendants. When the Holy Spirit worked the miracle of faith in their hearts, that freedom became their own. But now they were unable to live perfectly according to that freedom, because they retained the Old Adam. Only in heaven are God's people able to live totally their Christian freedom. It is important to note that in heaven where people are not able to sin they are living in Christian freedom. To serve God perfectly is the true exercise of Christian freedom.

The Mosaic Law Added – To Supervise until the Savior

In the Old Testament God's people had freedom through the Savior to come. Abraham was justified by grace through faith just as we are. At Mt. Sinai God gave his Old Testament chosen people of Israel the Mosaic law, containing ceremonial, civil and moral law. The Mosaic law was given to curb their wickedness, show them their sin, and guide their lives as God's people. In addition, especially the ceremonial law served as a hedge to separate them from their heathen neighbors and set them apart as God's chosen nation through which he would send the Savior of all nations. These laws also served as shadows of the Savior until the reality was found in Christ (Colossians 3:17). We think especially of the sacrifices, the Sabbath, Passover and other holidays, laws regarding the priesthood, etc.

Little Adiaphora in the Life of Christ

"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." [Galatians 4:4,5] There was little

adiaphora in Jesus' life on earth, as he, in accord with Old Testament prophecy, was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, taken to Egypt, and brought back to Nazareth in fulfillment of prophecy (Matthew 2). When Jesus was baptized, he said to John, "It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." [Matthew 3:15] "Now he had to go through Samaria" to talk to a woman at Jacob's well. [John 4:4]

Numerous times Jesus told his disciples, "We are going up to Jerusalem," and then he explained what must happen there. When threatened by those who said, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you," Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!" [Luke 13:31-33] During the accounts of Holy Week, how many times do we hear that Jesus did this, or this or that took place, that the Scriptures would be fulfilled. After his resurrection, Jesus explained to his disciples, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." [Luke 24:44] Jesus didn't get time to do what he wanted; however, he didn't want to do anything else, for he had no sinful nature.

Little adiaphora characterized our Savior's life in our stead under God's holy law, for his life was the complete fulfillment of God's word, God's will, God's law. For all of the times when we have lovelessly insisted on doing things our own way, for all of our misguided adiaphoric deeds and sins, Jesus, every second of his life, lived God's law perfectly for us. Ultimately, he suffered the full condemnation of the law for us on his cross.

Yet even this ultimate service to his Heavenly Father, done in perfect and boundless love toward all mankind, was done freely. In freedom Christ went willingly, and even delighted in doing what he did. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." [Hebrews 12:2] In the garden he prayed, "Thy will be done!" His will agreed perfectly with that of his Heavenly Father. This is a freedom far beyond Christian freedom, the ultimate freedom demon-

strated and done only by our Savior who said to his disciples, “But I am among you as one who serves;” [Luke 22:27] and who said to his Heavenly Father, “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.’” [Hebrews 10:5-7]

The Mosaic Law Is Abrogated in Christ

At every point and in every way Christ was the perfect fulfillment of the Mosaic law. The law was a shadow of him, and he did it, all of it perfectly, totally, for all people. That law is done and gone. We have the reality. “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” [Colossians 2:16-17] “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” [Galatians 3:23-25] “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” [Romans 10:4] Though he took a lot of criticism for it, Jesus earned our Christian freedom, indeed, demanded Christian freedom, when, as Lord of the Sabbath, he worked Sabbath after Sabbath, helping, healing, and saving. The things commanded in the ceremonial law are now adiaphora.

Freedom from Sin’s Curse, Death’s Horror, Satan’s Power, Sin’s Control, Law’s Demands

Not only did Jesus win our freedom from the ceremonial law, he also won our freedom from the moral law, freedom from viewing the moral law as that which must be kept for salvation. The law is unnecessary for righteousness or salvation. In Christ, we are free to act in pure liberty. The immutable will of God stands

and will remain immutable, so the moral law continues to guide our Christian lives. But we sinners have not been, are not now, and will not here in this life be able to live according to that law. This is sin. It causes guilt. It deserves punishment and ends in death, eternal death in hell. The law compels us to keep it or die, and would make our lives a living hell.

But Jesus carried out every word, God's every law, God's total will perfectly for us and atoned for our every sin on the cross. It's all done. We are justified, declared not guilty. That's liberation! Jesus said, "The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." [Luke 4:18-19]

We are free from the devil, his temptations and accusations. Jesus overcame his every temptation for us, rendering Satan inoperative. We are free from sin, free from guilt, free from punishment, free from death and hell, and free from the compulsion of the law. We are free to live our lives of thanks and praise in love toward God and toward others guided by his immutable will. "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" [John 8:31,32] We are free to live, breathe, think, talk, and act as God's children.

Christian liberty consists in the freedom of the believer from the curse and coercion of the law. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" [Galatians 3:13] "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." [Romans 6:14]

"But the meaning of St. Paul is that the Law cannot burden with its curse those who have been reconciled to God through Christ; nor must it vex the regenerate with its coercion, because they have pleasure in God's Law after the inner man."² We are set free from the demands, coercion, threats, curses and condemnation of God's law. The law's demands are a yoke too heavy for any of us to bear, but Jesus invites us: "Come to me, all you who are weary

and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” [Matthew 11:28-30]

We Are Free, yet Struggle

As God’s redeemed servants in Christ, we are free to serve the Lord. We are a “new creation.” [Galatians 6:15] Our “new self” delights in that. But in this life we are constantly hampered by our “old self” that insists upon clinging to us, dragging us down in sin and under the law with all of its condemnation. Our Christian freedom is total and secure in Christ. But our “old self” must be put off and our “new self” put on. “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” [Ephesians 4:22-24] “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” [Colossians 3:9-11]

The righteousness of grace or the liberty of conscience does not apply to the flesh at all; for the flesh should not be free but should stay in the grave, in prison, on the deathbed; it should be subject to the Law and should be worked hard by the Egyptians. However, the Christian conscience should be dead to the Law, that is, free from the Law, and should have nothing whatever to do with it. It is useful to know this well, for it helps to console troubled consciences.³

Adiaphora Are Objective and Concrete

Those things which God has neither commanded nor forbidden are just that. While we might say they are the rest of things, they are in and of themselves definite areas. They are objective and concrete items. In and of themselves they do not depend upon the

circumstances surrounding them. Eating meat sacrificed to idols or drinking a beer, in and of itself, remains an adiaphoron, regardless of where or with whom we are. The application of our Christian freedom will change depending upon the situation. That is the part that is subjective. But the item of adiaphora remains adiaphora regardless – a thing neither commanded nor forbidden by God.

The often-repeated line spoken by Flacius in the 16th century is true: “*Nihil est adiaphoron in casu confessionis et scandali,*” that is, “Nothing is an adiaphoron when confession and offense are involved.”⁴ This is true, and is properly stated. But it is obvious that this refers to application in situations of adiaphora, and in no way denies the concrete reality of the adiaphoron itself.

Much has been written, even entire papers, about when adiaphora cease to be adiaphora. Some of this is done properly, but at times it is carried too far, as if the circumstances surrounding the item determine whether or not the item itself is commanded or forbidden by God. This confuses the issue and runs the risk of putting shackles on our Christian freedom. I even found the idea expressed that in our Christian freedom, we can *choose* the adiaphora. While this can be understood correctly, it can also be misunderstood, and is plainly confusing. Note later when we read the quote from our confessions that adiaphora are left intact as objective and concrete reality, unchanged by the circumstances, though clearly and definitely we will apply our Christian freedom to the circumstances.

Much has also been written about when and in what situations we should give up or forego our Christian freedom. That is the Old Adam talking, as if I must make the sacrifice and give up my rights for the sake of a weaker brother. I don't hear that sentiment in the voice of the Apostle Paul: “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” [1 Corinthians 9:20-

23] Far from giving up our Christian freedom, doing something or refraining from doing something out of love for a blood-bought soul is the greatest privilege and demonstration of our Christian freedom. In areas of adiaphora, we don't give up our Christian freedom. We practice it to the fullest in Christian love.

Peter

The outspoken Apostle Peter, gifted as he was, misguided and mistaken as he was before Jesus' death, refined and powerful in God's word at Pentecost, still struggled with law/gospel distinctions, just as we do. It took a vision from the Lord to convince Peter that he should not judge and condemn others on the basis of the law.

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. [Acts 10:9-16]

Peter went to the home of Cornelius and preached the gospel for their salvation. Of course, Peter was criticized for this and had to explain his actions (Acts 11).

Yet even after that dramatic episode, Peter still struggled to understand Christian freedom. In Antioch, Paul had to correct him:

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from

James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

“We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

“If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” [Galatians 2:11-21]

Pastoral Conference in Jerusalem

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. [Acts 15:1,2]

The resolution of the Jerusalem Conference is interesting:

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do

well to avoid these things. Farewell. [Acts 15:28-29]

Some of these things, in and of themselves, are not even contrary to the moral law of God, and other items to avoid are conspicuous by their absence. If we were to write a list of things to avoid, I'm sure we would tell them not to kill people, not to steal, not to slander, not to curse and swear. Evidently the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia were living their Christian freedom, guided by God's law, in such areas. One of the items mentioned was something they struggled with in their society: sexual immorality.

What is surprising is that "food sacrificed to idols, blood, and the meat of strangled animals" is lumped into the same category. Such things would have been highly offensive to other Christians (especially Jewish converts). To partake of such things would have been most unloving (even uncaring and hateful) toward others, and thus, totally out of line with the gospel and Christian freedom.

Love Has The Privilege Of Serving The Weak

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then,

why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written:

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’”

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [Romans 14:1—15:4]

Several things: One's conscience may be mistaken; still it is wrong to go against one's conscience, because “everything that

does not come from faith is sin.” And it is unloving and destructive (possibly eternally) for us to do anything that would cause another to go against his conscience. Nor should we look down upon or pass judgment on one who is weak. In many situations of adiaphora, it is difficult to determine who is the “weak brother.” Is there a chance that it could be I?

Also, “Keep whatever you believe about these things between yourself and God.” If your neighbor does not approve of eating a Big Mac, then go through the drive-through at McDonalds, and eat it in the privacy of your own home. That’s what fences and shades are for. Of course, instruction is very important for those whose conscience is ill-informed or weak, so that they don’t continue to stumble. And with instruction must go much patience. The basic and most important principle here is that in situations of adiaphora, love has the privilege of serving the weak.

Many respected scholars have put it this way: “Love makes sacrifices, or gives up its Christian freedom, for the weak.” In this writer’s humble opinion, that is not the best or proper way to express it. Maybe I am being picky, but it sounds to me like the Old Adam is grumbling here that because of someone else’s weakness he is being shafted and cannot do what he wants in an area where he should very well have every right to do as he pleases. Put that Old Man down! This is not a problem for you, O Christian. Your Christian freedom is not being forfeited here. No! This is a special opportunity for you to exercise your freedom in love, and serve your neighbor in an important way. What a privilege!

There was once a man who was blind. Everyone in the village where he lived knew he was blind from birth. One night he was seen carrying a lantern down the street. Why are you carrying a lantern,” a friend asked, “when you can’t see anyway?” He responded, “Because I don’t want anyone to stumble over me.”

Christian Freedom and Love Reject Demands

In areas of adiaphora, if a brother, whether weak, self-righteous, or just plain stubborn, demands that things be done his way, he is dead wrong, is no longer a weak brother, but has become a

false teacher. His is a sin, not just against our freedom, but against the blood of Christ that won our freedom, and against the salvation our God has wrought for us. Any demand on our freedom is a blatant threat to the gospel. Whenever we make a law where Christ has left us free, we return to the prison of self and sin. We must reject and refuse any demand on our freedom for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the salvation of all Christendom, for the sake of the one who makes the demand, and for the sake of the salvation of our own soul. One clear example of this is our mode of baptism. We sprinkle as a testimony against those who say we must immerse.

But we must be willing to restrict this correct theological knowledge in practical use in every case where our use of the right knowledge would induce the brother who is weak in knowledge to act contrary to his erring conscience.

The general rule to be observed is this: We must waive the use of our Christian liberty unless the truth of the Gospel is at stake. And that is the case when the weak brother insists that his error be acknowledged as the true doctrine and judges him who has the right knowledge, declaring him to be a transgressor of God's commandment. In this case the weak brother becomes a false teacher, and then Col. 2:16 applies: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink or in respect of an holy day," etc., and Gal. 5:1 "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." It may happen that by the commanded use of the Christian liberty weak Christians are offended, that is, are induced to act contrary to their conscience; but the responsibility for the offense rests on those who, by demanding recognition for their error [by their κρινεῖν] have forced us to make use of our Christian liberty.⁵

These passages in Galatians especially speak to this:

This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.

We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. [Galatians 2:4-5]

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing-- if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. [Galatians 3:1-14]

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. [Galatians 5:1-6]

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what

counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. [Galatians 6:15-16]

Just a word on circumcision: Paul had Timothy circumcised for the sake of others (Acts 16:3). In a different context, he did not have Titus circumcised (Galatians 2:3-5). In this we are happy for Titus, but pity poor Timothy. Christian freedom not only foregoes things for the sake of others, but also undergoes things. In Christian freedom, Timothy underwent circumcision for the sake of others. In our Christian freedom, what would we be willing to undergo?

Friend, do not consider it a trifle to forbid what God does not forbid, to destroy the Christian liberty that cost Christ His blood, to burden consciences with sin where there is no sin. He who has the audacity to do this will also be audacious enough to commit any wrong; yea, he has thereby already renounced all that God is, teaches, and does, including His Christ.⁶

Neither pope nor bishop nor any man has the right to impose a single syllable of law upon a person who is a Christian unless it is done with his consent. Whatever is done otherwise, is done in the spirit of tyranny.... Only on behalf of this liberty of conscience I raise my voice and confidently cry: Upon Christians no laws may be imposed by any right, neither by men nor by angels, without their consent; for we are free from all things.⁷

Free Lord / Dutiful Servant

Luther's well-known propositions are important: "A Christian is a free lord of all and subject to no one. A Christian is a ministering servant of all and subject to everyone."⁸ Of course, Luther got his words from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19 – "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."

Christian Freedom Protected and Proclaimed in the Formula of Concord

For the sake of time I quote from the Epitome. Read the

Thorough Declaration on your own. Also for a good and concise summary of the history and background behind Article X, which follows, Wilbert Gawrisch's paper, "Christians, Guard Your Liberty! A Sermon Study on Galatians 5:1-6," is excellent.

X. Church Rites

Which are [Commonly] Called Adiaphora or Matters of Indifference.

Concerning ceremonies or church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but have been introduced into the Church for the sake of good order and propriety, a dissension has also occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession.

STATUS CONTROVERSIAE.

Chief Controversy concerning This Article.

The chief question, however, has been, whether, in time of persecution and in case of confession, even if the enemies of the Gospel have not reached an agreement with us in doctrine, some abrogated ceremonies, which in themselves are matters of indifference and are neither commanded nor forbidden by God, may nevertheless, upon the pressure and demand of the adversaries, be reestablished without violence to conscience, and we may thus [rightly] have conformity with them in such ceremonies and adiaphora. To this the one side has said Yea, the other, Nay.

Affirmative Theses.

The Correct and True Doctrine and Confession concerning This Article.

1. For settling also this controversy we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the ceremonies or church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but have been instituted alone for the sake of propriety and good order, are in and of themselves no divine worship, nor even a part of it. Matt. 15, 9: "In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

2. We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its

circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God.

3. Nevertheless, that herein all frivolity and offense should be avoided, and special care should be taken to exercise forbearance towards the weak in faith. 1 Cor. 8, 9; Rom. 14, 13.

4. We believe, teach, and confess that in time of persecution, when a plain [and steadfast] confession is required of us, we should not yield to the enemies in regard to such adiaphora, as the apostle has written Gal. 5, 1: "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." Also 2 Cor. 6, 14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, etc. For what concord hath light with darkness?" Also Gal. 2, 5: "To whom we gave place, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you." For in such a case it is no longer a question concerning adiaphora, but concerning the truth of the Gospel, concerning [preserving] Christian liberty, and concerning sanctioning open idolatry, as also concerning the prevention of offense to the weak in the faith [how care should be taken lest idolatry be openly sanctioned and the weak in faith be offended]; in which we have nothing to concede, but should plainly confess and suffer on that account what God sends, and what He allows the enemies of His Word to inflict upon us.

5. We believe, teach, and confess also that no Church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles, as also in the right use of the holy Sacraments, according to the well-known saying: *Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei*, Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith.

Negative Theses.

False Doctrine concerning This Article.

Accordingly, we reject and condemn as wrong and contrary to God's Word when it is taught:

1. That human ordinances and institutions in the church should be regarded as in themselves a divine worship or part of it.

2. When such ceremonies, ordinances, and institutions are violently forced upon the congregation of God as necessary, contrary to its Christian liberty which it has in external things.

3. Also, that in time of persecution and public confession [when a clear confession is required] we may yield to the enemies of the Gospel in such adiaphora and ceremonies, or may come to an agreement with them (which causes injury to the truth).

4. Also, when these external ceremonies and adiaphora are abrogated in such a manner as though it were not free to the congregation of God to employ one or more [this or that] in Christian liberty, according to its circumstances, as may be most useful at any time to the Church [for edification].⁹

Liberty Is Not Licentiousness

On the opposite side of legalism is licentiousness. Our Old Adam argues that since we are free, we should carry that freedom as far as we can to satisfy our own desires, without care for others, without care for God, without regard for God's word and will, and without care for our own salvation.

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [Galatians 5:13-14]

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. [Galatians 5:16-18]

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. [Galatians 5:22-26]

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. [Galatians 6:7-10]

In the case of many, Satan soon turns the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free into an occasion for the flesh. This is the very thing about which Jude complains in his epistle: “There certain men crept in unawares...ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into licentiousness” (v.4). For the flesh simply does not understand the doctrine of grace, to wit, that we are not justified by works but solely by faith, that the Law has no claim on us. Therefore when it hears this doctrine, it wantonly misuses it by promptly drawing the conclusion: If we are without Law, then let us live as we please.¹⁰

Not Addictive, But Beneficial

“Everything is permissible for me”-- but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”-- but I will not be mastered by anything. [1 Corinthians 6:12]

The most understandable word I can think of for “being mastered by something” is “addicted.” Obviously people can be addicted to many things: caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling, the internet, the TV, over-eating, over-exercising, laziness, money, fame – the list could go on and on. If it is truly an area of adiaphora, we need to ask, “Can I take it or leave it? Am I in control of this free thing, or is it in control of me? Can I exercise my freedom here for the benefit of others, or does my bondage to this adiaphoron harm my neighbor?” When one is addicted, it is no longer freedom, and it is nigh unto impossible for us to live in Christian freedom in that area by foregoing that adiaphoron for the sake of others and for the sake of ourselves. If you feel incriminated here, take comfort in God’s word: “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more,” [Romans 5:20] and let the grace of our Lord be the motivation to strive to serve him. His grace is greater than your

weaknesses and failures!

In this regard, Paul, who treasured, defended, and guarded Christian freedom said, “I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” [1Corinthians 9:27]

The bottom-line question we must ask in every area of *adiaphora* is, “Is this beneficial? Is this the most loving thing to do?” It is not ours to do something simply because it may be done, or to push things to the limits at the edge of the cliff. It is ours to ask, “Is it beneficial?” Just because you may do something does not mean that you should do it. My son has a T-shirt that says, “It seemed like a good idea at the time.” Nor is change for the sake of change usually a good thing. Once in a while change can be good, if it is beneficial, but if it isn’t, you will only find out too late. (I sound like I’m getting old!)

Obviously, not everything in the past done in the name of Christian freedom has been good. With the best of intentions, Christians in their freedom practiced asceticism, entered the monasteries, and went on the crusades. In our country, Christians in their freedom have held revival meetings.

In matters of *adiaphora*, Christians will seek harmony with one another. When discussing baptismal customs, Francis Pieper states: “Self-evidently a local congregation will, as far as feasible, conform to the customs in surrounding congregations of the true faith in order thus to confess outwardly the agreement in doctrine and to avoid confusing members who transfer from one congregation to another.”¹¹

Christians will also seek harmony with one another within the congregation.

In *adiaphora* a vote is taken to ascertain what the majority regards as the best. The natural order is that in *adiaphora* the minority yields to the majority and acquiesces, not because the majority has the right to rule, but for love’s sake. Since, however, love is queen here, it may happen that the majority will yield to the minority. See Walther, *Pastorale*, p. 372 ff. Christians, as Christians, never quarrel about *adiaphora*, since, in so far as they are Christians and walk in the Spirit, “none of them desires to be the ruler of the other, but everyone wants to

be the other's servant," as Luther expresses it. A discussion that in an adiaphorous matter becomes vehement and acrimonious indicates that the temper of the meeting is sinking below the Christian level. The discussion of the adiaphoron should then be interrupted and the Christian spirit and frame of mind be restored by instruction and admonition, e.g., on the basis of 1 Peter 5:5.¹²

If You Think You Have the Answer, You Probably Don't

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.

So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall. [1 Corinthians 8:1-13]

"Everything is permissible"-- but not everything is beneficial.
 "Everything is permissible"-- but not everything is constructive.
 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake--the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God--even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. [1 Corinthians 10:23-33]

The one who realizes that he does not yet know as he ought to know, and the one who thinks he knows (let him think again), come with me to our Savior's cross and take a look there. He won your freedom for all eternity, and the freedom of everyone else. Is this not a glorious thing – is this not what makes us unique in all the world – that we have freedom in Christ for all eternity! The Christian will guard this treasure carefully. More than being a part of the gospel message, Christian freedom is the gospel message: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." [John 8:36] Live your freedom in love. Preserve it! Protect it! Proclaim it! Finally, our salvation is at stake here.

In Heaven We Will Be Free

One day in heaven we will experience our Christian freedom completely. We will experience freedom from all evil and sin, freedom from temptation, trials and persecution, and freedom from the consequences of sin. We will not be plagued by our Old Adam. Finally everyone else will do things the way we think they

should. Finally we will do things the way everyone else thinks we should, and we won't mind. We will no longer be plagued by sin, not be able to sin, but that won't hamper our freedom, our freedom to live forever in perfection according to the perfect will of our God and Savior. We'll be able to worship perfectly. All of us will be able to chant perfectly. And on those streets of gold, gambling will not be an issue.

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Endnotes

- ¹ This and all succeeding Scripture references are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*.
- ² Bente, *Concordia Triglotta*, Formula of Concord, pg. 963.
- ³ Plass, *What Luther Says*, pg. 778, #2417.
- ⁴ Quoted in Professor Wilbert Gawrisch's paper, "Christians, Guard Your Liberty! A Sermon Study on Galatians 5:1-6."
- ⁵ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, pg. 562.
- ⁶ Plass, pg. 777, #2412.
- ⁷ Plass, pg. 776, #2411.
- ⁸ Plass, pg. 776, #2409.
- ⁹ Bente, pg. 829, 831.
- ¹⁰ Plass, pg. 778, #2416.
- ¹¹ Pieper, Vol. III, pg. 283.
- ¹² Pieper, Vol. III, pg. 430.

An Introduction to the Study of Worldviews

David Thompson

In the spring of 2006 my 17-year old daughter found herself engaged in a discussion about homosexuality with her new-found friends from her brand new school, all of them professing Christians and one even a pastor's child. Her friends are intelligent and "Minnesota" nice. Her well-thought-out view on the subject, based on natural law and God's word, was coherently explained (I've heard her do it before); she did so without a soapbox or holding up a placard with a Bible verse on it. After the conversation one of her friends, representing what was on the mind of them all, asked her, "Are you a homophobe?" The concept that homosexuality is unnatural, unhealthy, and biblically wrong was totally foreign to them. It was unthinkable. In fact, they couldn't wait to get together to watch the Academy-Award winning, pro-gay movie "Brokeback Mountain."

Where do these church-going teenagers and thousands of others like them get their views? After all, theirs was the foreign one 30 years ago. What prevents them from understanding and even considering an alternative perspective? The answer: their worldview.

But what is the danger of their belief on this controversial topic? The possibility of becoming gay? Promoting something as a legitimate lifestyle that is anything but? Those are serious dangers. However, there is something more going on here, something more sinister, something that actually undermines Christian salvation for both the individual and the biblically-based church. The issue is not "homosexuality" *per se*, but the false worldview behind it and what it can do.

If Christians treasure justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, then they cannot ignore the study of worldviews. If the doctrines of the Trinity, Scripture, the Son of God, Law and Gospel, Faith, the Ministry, and the Means of Grace are vital to eternal life, God's people must be vigilant regarding worldviews.

The bottom line is that false worldviews are adversarial to the One Thing Needful.

The Deeper Plot

Satan's arsenal of afflictions, temptations, murders, and lies are not ends in themselves; they are always a part of a darker scheme. A good example is Job. Satan's ultimate design in afflicting Job is found in these words to God: "But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and *he will surely curse you to your face.*" (1:11, emphasis added). Satan was eager that Job rebel against and reject the One who had created, redeemed, and sanctified him. Satan uses his lies to the same end – to cause people to rebel against and do away with Christ (John 10:44). And that is where false worldviews come in. They contain lies, lies that are somehow in opposition to the Truth of God's word. The purpose of a false worldview is either to prevent one from coming to Christ, who is the Truth, or to tear one away from him.

Worldview Explained

The concept of worldview is closely related to the terms philosophy and religion. It is a set of presuppositions to which one holds. A worldview can be compared to a pair of glasses – when putting on different lenses of different strengths, one gets a different view of the world each time. The worldview a person "puts on" gives him a certain perspective; it is how one looks at life and the world. It determines how he thinks, what he believes about nature, the value he places on things, how he views issues like homosexuality, what he thinks sin is or if it really exists, what he thinks about the supernatural, whether or not truth can be known, who Jesus of Nazareth is (or was), where truth comes from, what the nature of man is like. In short, a worldview determines how one sees every aspect of life. Thus, there is a biblical, or confessional Lutheran, worldview. Putting on biblical or Lutheran "glasses," and keeping them on, would give a truly objective and truthful view of life.

No one is exempt from having a worldview or, more accurately, worldviews. They are formed in a person's mind and heart by his upbringing, education, place of worship, friends, the media, art, relationships, culture, etc. Ultimately, however, if it is a false worldview its source is Satan; if it is a true worldview, then God. One does not have to sit at the feet of a teacher or professor to become a disciple of a particular worldview; it is just as likely to be absorbed by osmosis – all one has to do is exist in culture: watch the Simpsons, read Time magazine, curl up with a book, peruse a newspaper, talk with Aunt Helen, listen to the news, socialize, attend history class. And being the sheep that we are, we are more than willing to adopt the more culturally popular worldviews.

The typical person probably does not even know he holds to a certain worldview. And if he does know he will likely not think critically about his worldview. He will not ask himself whether his worldview might be true or false, where it comes from, why it was rejected a generation ago, and, very importantly, how it may conflict with certain religious or doctrinal teachings – another worldview – to which he also holds.

A person will likely rotate “glasses”, even within the same day, depending on the topic. Not even the Christian in every instance wears his biblical worldview lenses (though that is the goal). Whereas his view of the reality of the resurrection of Christ may be directed by his Christian and biblical worldview, his view of controversial social issues like stem cell research or abortion may be influenced by a completely different and contrary worldview.

There are as many worldviews as there are philosophies and religions. Some of the more popular worldviews in our culture would include postmodernism, naturalism, nihilism, utilitarianism, utopianism, liberalism, pantheism, humanism, Darwinism, communism, monism, Catholicism, Calvinism, Evangelicalism, Mohammedism, and Mormonism. Notice that the concept of worldview is quite inclusive: it embraces both philosophies and religions. There is also much overlap among them. Even the confessional Lutheran worldview has much in common with several of the above and at least one or two teachings in common with the rest.

How Are They Dangerous?

It was mentioned above that a Christian may be guided by Scripture regarding the resurrection of Christ but influenced by a false worldview, like utilitarianism, in his view of social issues. But who's to say whether utilitarianism won't eventually distort his view of the resurrection as well, not to mention other Scriptural teachings? Satan loves the "slippery slope" method – on the way down a false worldview can quickly swallow up more and more scriptural teachings, including essential ones.

St. Paul said, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Col. 2:8). Therein lies the key truth about false worldviews: false worldviews are always deceptive, that is, they always look good but are inwardly evil. Many of the *teachings* of false worldviews may be absolutely true; they may be good in and of themselves, but the worldview as a whole is still always deceptive. In fact, the most deceptive worldviews may be those that are almost entirely true, but there's that one subtle teaching which can easily worm its way in to the mind of an individual because it's hard to detect and everything else about it makes so much sense. A false worldview may sound good, necessary, and beneficial, but that should not be used to justify or overlook its ungodly intentions.

While teaching at Bethany Lutheran College, I received a phone call from a student who had transferred to the local state university. She told me she had been struggling with her major, but that things had gotten better. When I asked her to explain, she told me she was being taught things about the family that were in conflict with what she had been taught at home and in her church. What helped, she said, was an "assessment" she and all students in her major had to undergo, an assessment that indicated she was "too narrow" in her views and needed to learn to be more "tolerant." This made sense to her, at which point she started struggling less. Unbeknownst to her she had begun to swallow the worldview of postmodernism which teaches that all views are to be respected and none are to be considered more true or better than any other. However,

how long would it be until she would apply this postmodern way of thinking to the Christian religion as a whole?

Lutherans Love to Judge (or ought to)

In Matthew 7 Jesus told his disciples not to judge. “Do not judge” is now perhaps more widely quoted than John 3:16 (don’t be surprised if you soon see “Matthew 7:1” banners in the end zone seats of NFL games). Non-Christians love that verse these days and the typical thinking that accompanies it. And many Christians and their churches have jumped on this “don’t judge” bandwagon. After all, it’s not only the command of Jesus, it is also the “loving” thing to do.

It is quite interesting, however, that right after Jesus tells people not to judge he proceeds to make judgments – he calls people hypocrites, dogs, pigs, ferocious wolves, and false prophets. Was Jesus contradicting himself? Actually the Christian church has to a degree lost a very valuable tool. When the Lord told his disciples not to judge he meant in the sense that they not consider themselves better than others or to read evil motives into their hearts. That’s the bad kind of judging. But there is clearly a good and necessary kind of judging as well. Jesus commands believers to “make a right judgment” (John 7:24) and the apostle John tells his readers to “test [i.e., judge] the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The Berean Christians did this (Acts 17). In other words Christians are to compare any and all teachings, practices, lifestyles, religions, philosophies, and worldviews to God’s word, the ultimate standard. Christians are simply to say what God says about doctrine and life. If God says something is good, so do his people. If God condemns something, so should Christians. They are simply agreeing with God.

Lutherans have been good at this, at least in the past. In *The Book of Concord*, the confessions of the Lutheran Church, there are over 200 antitheses in roughly 600 pages. Antitheses for confessional Lutherans are simply statements rejecting those teachings which Lutherans condemn because God condemns them.

God condemns them because they are somehow in conflict with his teachings found in his word. Not only are false doctrines and false religions condemned, but also false – “hollow and deceptive” – philosophies. The reason for all these antitheses is that God and his Church understand the “slippery slope” push of Satan, also known as “yeast” (Gal. 5:9), which spreads without even being seen. In other words, Christians are to judge in this good sense not because they are holier than the Islamic fundamentalist, the utopian dreamer, or the Catholic neighbor, or because they personally have a corner on the truth; but because God has established Truth which he desires to spread and in which he desires to preserve his people. For the good of the Church on earth Christians must judge worldviews. (By the way, this current cultural love affair with being nonjudgmental comes from the postmodern worldview and its emphasis on “tolerance.”)

A Confessional Christian Worldview

One of the places Lutherans delved into the subject of worldviews was at the Confessional Christian Worldview Seminar held annually at the Schwan Retreat Center in northwestern Wisconsin from 2003-2005. At these seminars knowledgeable confessional Lutherans made presentations about popular worldviews in our culture, providing valuable insights, and comparing them to Scripture.

What is a *confessional* Christian worldview? Why not simply use the term *Christian* or *biblical* worldview? The word *confessional* helps specify which biblical worldview is being upheld; it is shorthand for confessional *Lutheran* worldview. Confessional Lutherans believe the Bible – that it is God’s word from beginning to end and it’s true and without error in all it says. But since many branches of Christianity claim the same thing, confessional Lutherans state or *confess* which ones are the true biblical teachings in a number of thoroughly-formulated writings. These writings are to be found in *The Book of Concord*.

Actually, all churches, Bible-believing or not, are confessional churches in one sense – they all *confess* certain teachings to be true and others false. Even those who say they have

no confession or who assert they simply teach what the Bible teaches are confessional. As soon as a preacher says, “God says...” and the people respond with an “Amen” the pastor has stated a confession and the congregation confirmed it. The difference, in my opinion, is the confessional Lutheran churches are usually more honest about being confessional. They state clearly and boldly their confessions in writing, confessions that do not change with the spirit of the times or the popular worldviews as do those churches who have unwritten or vague confessions. Thus the Lutheran Confessions help preserve among its churches the truth “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8).

The Apostles’ Creed was the first confession of Christianity. When further clarification was needed due to controversy, the Nicene and the Athanasian creeds were developed and adopted as a true explanation of Scripture. At the time of the Lutheran Reformation, Christians very much needed to distinguish truth from error, so after carefully probing into the Bible they wrote the *Augsburg Confession*, the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, the *Small and Large Catechisms*, the *Smalcald Articles*, *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, and the *Formula of Concord*. All ten of these confessions are included in *The Book of Concord*. They are scriptural and have stood the test of time (please do not take my word for that; read them yourselves). Confessional Lutherans do not put their confessions above or even along side the Bible. They do, however, say they are a totally accurate explanation of God’s word. They are drawn from Scripture and draw the Christian back to Scripture.

There are many “Christian” or “biblical” worldview seminars and publications today. Generally they are associated with theologies or worldviews known as Evangelicalism and Calvinism. These Christian worldview productions should receive a good deal of commendation. They have done an admirable job of describing popular worldviews in conflict with Christianity and where they are to be found. Many Christians, including confessional Lutherans, have been protected in the Christian faith because of the worldview work of evangelicals and Calvinists. To their shame, confessional Lutherans have remained on the sideline in their understanding and

teaching about worldviews. They have allowed these others to have almost a virtual monopoly on the subject. But times are changing.

There are two advantages of approaching the subject of worldviews from a confessional Lutheran perspective. First, confessional Lutherans magnify doctrine. They love doctrine because it is God's word. As they sometimes say, doctrine is life. So when there is a serious confessional Lutheran worldview product (seminar or book), it will start with the doctrine of God, expounding on the true teachings of Scripture. The reason this is important is that there is need for that standard against which to measure other worldviews, and the only standard that will do is God's – his word, his Bible, his doctrine. A careful comparison between the false and true cannot be done unless both are carefully laid out. That is why at the Confessional Christian Worldview seminars, the first order of business was to explain the confessional Christian worldview. Then the readers and hearers can better get on to the business of understanding what is false about other worldviews. Worldview seminars put on by the evangelicals and Calvinists will either assume a solid understanding of the true doctrine among those present or teach a limited or inaccurate biblical worldview to them. Second, there are several biblical doctrines that Lutherans, by the grace of God, have better grasped that directly impact the subject of worldviews. These include:

- Natural knowledge of God
- The nature of man
- Scripture as christocentric
- Justification
- The means of grace
- Vocation
- God's two kingdoms (sometimes called church and state).

Understanding these teachings will enhance one's awareness of unbiblical worldviews and what can or should be done with them.

Two Victims

In the summer of 2005 I got into a lengthy discussion about Darwinism with a young man named Marty who was in his first year of college. We debated the topic on the basis of religion, philosophy, and science. During high school he had become somewhat convinced that the theory of evolution was true, but at that time he was apparently still interested in Christianity. In college, thanks to the zeal of a professor, he had become an ardent disciple of the evolutionary worldview and consequently a good atheist. The slippery slope was very evident. He was convinced math and science “proved” evolution. At the end of our civilized argument, he summed up everything by saying, “Either you trust in God or you trust in numbers.” Satan won this battle. Hopefully there are more to come in this young man’s life and in the end Marty will call Jesus “my Lord and my God.” But his story is all too common – rejecting Christ because of a false worldview.

The individual is not the only one endangered by false worldviews. Christian congregations, schools, synods, and whole denominations are constantly being tempted and influenced by popular worldviews. This is especially true among Christian colleges, including confessional Lutheran colleges. They can hold out their confessional stance with one hand, but offer the fruit of Satan with the other without even realizing it. This is nothing new within Christendom. The Church on earth will always be the Church Militant. But this desperately calls for vigilance and going on the offensive with boldness. “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

Why Christians Should Study Worldviews

Christians need to study worldviews because Satan loves to deceive. So when a Christian studies worldviews, a number of things can happen, all to the chagrin of the devil. First, the Christian will better understand the confessional Christian worldview – he will be

well equipped to look at life and the world from God's perspective. Second, he will better grasp false worldviews and how they conflict with God's word. Third, he will be able to spot false worldviews and know how they manifest themselves in culture, the different avenues through which they come – Hollywood, churches, schools, political ideas, prominent people, government, special interest groups, etc. Fourth, he will be better equipped to guard his faith and help others guard theirs. Fifth, he will know how better to defend the truth of Christianity and challenge the false worldviews. Sixth, he will be more aptly prepared to proclaim law and gospel, sin and grace, within the cultural context of false worldviews. Finally, he will know better how to love his neighbor – his wife, his daughter, his fellow church member, the guy next door, his co-worker, or anyone else who is caught up in a trendy but false worldview.

Appendix I

Tenets of Several False Worldviews

Evangelicalism

- Man is not totally depraved; he can still seek and desire God's love
- Man is not saved by grace alone, but by a decision he makes to accept God's grace
- Faith is not the creation of God or even the passive acceptance of forgiveness, but a decision on the part of man
- Christ is in the Old and New Testaments, but Scriptures exist to direct Christians to the life they should live as much as it directs them to Christ
- Justification is extremely important, but not central to the Christian after conversion
- Worship consists mostly of man coming to God rather than God coming to man
- Minimal doctrinal knowledge is adequate; what is important is the Christian "life"

Postmodernism

- Truth is a construct of the culture, subculture, or individual; there is no truth that applies to all people of all time
- All such truths should be tolerated and even respected; none are more true than any others in a transcendent or absolute sense

Utilitarianism

- The worldview that man has value to the extent that he is *useful* to culture, society or the State. He has value because of what he *produces*. He does not have value intrinsically as Christianity teaches.

Islam

- Allah is God and Mohammed is his prophet
- God is not Triune
- Jesus was a prophet of Allah, but not the Son of God; nor did

he atone for sins, rise from the dead, etc.

- There is only one kingdom on earth, not two as the Bible teaches; thus each government ought to be Muslim and enforce Islam and exclude other religions
- Holy Wars are a legitimate tool to wipe out the infidels

Pantheism

- All things – nature and man – are god
- God is impersonal
- Man is not above nature, but one with nature; trees and animals are viewed as “brothers”
- Since everything is god, everything is as it ought to be
- Sin is disturbing what naturally occurs; man is no longer steward but must get out of the way

Darwinism/Naturalism/Evolution

- There is no designer or design
- Everything can be explained by blind, undirected natural causes and without reference to God and the supernatural
- There is no real, absolute or transcendent, value, beauty, purpose, or meaning *to anything*

Nihilism

- Everything is really nothing, meaningless
- Death is as welcome as life

Appendix II

Quotations from *The Holy Bible* (NIV) and *The Book of Concord*

Genesis 3: ¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” ⁴ “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman.

Colossians 2: ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. ⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Romans 16: ¹⁷ I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

John 15: ¹⁸ “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If

they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

2 Corinthians 10: ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

1 Peter 3: ¹⁵But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

Matthew 7: ¹Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. ⁶Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces... ¹⁵Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

John 7: ²⁴Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.

Act 17: ¹¹Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

1 John 4: ¹Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have

gone out into the world.

1 Corinthians 2: ¹²We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: ¹⁶"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

"Consequently, according to divine right it is the office of the bishop to preach the Gospel, to forgive sin, *to judge doctrine and reject doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel...* – not with human power but with God's Word alone" (*Book of Concord, Augsburg Confession XXVIII: 21; Kolb/Wengert, p. 94, emphasis added*).

"...we confess our adherence to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments, as to the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which alone is the one true guiding principle, according to which all teachers and teachings *are to be judged and evaluated.*" (*Book of Concord, Formula of Concord SD R&N: 3, K/W p. 527, emphasis added*).

The Pascha

Gaylin R. Schmeling

The word *πάσχα* was used in the Greek language for the festival celebrating the death and resurrection of our Lord. The word is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew word for Passover (פסח). In the historic epistle for the Feast of the Resurrection we read, “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover [*πάσχα*], was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:6–8 [NKJV]).

Some of the Greek fathers assumed that the word Pascha was derived from the Greek verb *πάσχω*; thus they understood the Pascha as the Lord’s suffering. Melito of Sardis wrote, “What is the Pascha? It is called by its name because of what constitutes it: from ‘suffer’ comes ‘suffering’” (*On Pascha*, para. 46 [Stewart-Sykes, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha*, p. 49]). The Pascha, then, was considered to be the feast of our Lord’s suffering.

The true meaning of the word Pascha coming from the Hebrew is “to pass over.” It refers to the Angel of Death’s passing over of the homes of the Israelites whose door posts were painted with the blood of the Passover lamb. This is the proper, literal, meaning of the Pascha. As they were saved through the blood of the Passover lamb so we are saved through the blood of the true Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ.

There was still another understanding of the Pascha among the fathers. This was the concept of passage or passing over, not necessarily the passing over of the Death Angel but Israel’s passing over the Red Sea, passing from death to life in the Exodus. This concept applied to our Lord is found in the writings of Augustine. “‘By his passion,’ Augustine writes, ‘the Lord passed from death to life.’ Passion and passing are no longer two opposing explanations but are now conjoined. The Christian Passover is a *transitus per*

passionem: a passing-over through the passion” (Cantalamesa, *The Mystery of Easter*, p. 16–17). Jesus said to the Emmaus disciples that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into His glory, emphasizing the passage from death to life (Luke 24:26). The passion and resurrection of the Lord is the true Passover.

The Pascha was first of all, Israel’s passing over from death to life. Then it pointed to its greater fulfillment: the passing over of Christ from death to life in the greater Pascha. Finally, it points to our passing from death to life by returning to our Baptism at the time of the Pascha culminating in the resurrection of the body on the Last Day. Therefore the Pascha, our Exodus or Passover, is our passage from death to life. This is the emphasis of St. John of Damascus in his hymn, “The Day of Resurrection.”

*The day of resurrection, Earth, tell it out abroad,
The Passover of gladness, The Passover of God.
From death to life eternal, From this world to the sky,
Our Christ hath brought us over With hymns of victory.
(ELH—356:1)*