

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

# CTQ

Volume 52, Numbers 2-3

---

APRIL-JULY 1988

---

Reflections on the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Today.....	Eugene F. Klug 81
Walther as Pastor.....	Arthur Drevlow 99
Pietism and the Church Growth Movement in a Confessional Lutheran Perspective.....	Carter Lindberg 129
The Pastor's Communion.....	Toivo Harjunpaa 149
Homiletical Studies.....	169



CONCORDIA  
THEOLOGICAL  
QUARTERLY

ISSN 0038-8610

CTQ

Issued quarterly by the faculty of  
Concordia Theological Seminary

The *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, a continuation of the *The Springfielder*, is a theological journal of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, published for its ministerium by the faculty of the Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

DAVID P. SCAER, *Editor*; DOUGLAS JUDISCH, *Assistant Editor*; DONALD L. DEFFNER, *Homiletical Editor*; WILLIAM C. WEINRICH, *Book Review Editor*; G. WALDEMAR DEGNER, HEINO KADAI, ROBERT D. PREUS, *Associate Editors*.

*The Faculty:* JAMES BOLLHAGEN, HAROLD BULS, EUGENE BUNKOWSKE, STEPHEN CARTER, G. WALDEMAR DEGNER, WILLIAM G. HOUSER, DOUGLAS McC. L. JUDISCH, ARTHUR JUST, HEINO KADAI, EUGENE F. KLUG, GEORGE C. KRAUS, CAMERON A. MacKENZIE, WALTER A. MAIER, KURT E. MARQUART, NORBERT MUELLER, RICHARD MULLER, ROBERT D. PREUS, DANIEL G. REUNING, WILBERT H. ROSIN, JOHN SALESKA, DAVID P. SCAER, ALVIN J. SCHMIDT, RAYMOND F. SURBURG, JAMES W. VOELZ, WILLIAM C. WEINRICH, DEAN O. WENTHE, HAROLD H. ZIETLOW, MELVIN ZILZ.

The CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY is indexed in Religion Index One: Periodicals, and abstracted in Old Testament Abstracts and New Testament Abstracts.

The CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY is published in January, April, July and October. All changes of address (including Missouri Synod clergymen), paid subscriptions and other business matters should be sent to Concordia Theological Quarterly, Concordia Theological Seminary, 6600 N. Clinton Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46825.

Annual subscription rate: \$5.00

©Concordia Theological Seminary Press  
1988

# Reflections on the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Today

Eugene F. Klug

Needless to say, this topic is a complex one because of the great volume of material issuing from the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues conducted over the course of twenty years. The record of the dialogues has been published in a series of books, which incorporate most of the papers that were presented, plus summary statements, if there were such. Each round, usually of six meetings, focused on a given topic. It will not be possible here to treat each of these at length or in depth. We must perforce limit what we have to say to very abbreviated sketching for the most part.

In addition there is an underlying problem involved. The Roman church is a massive, complex, often ambiguous entity. Who speaks for the church? I remember that Hermann Sasse, visiting our campus in Springfield, Illinois, in 1965, having just returned from a visit in Rome where he had met with Cardinal Bea, raised the same question. It was a time of turmoil for the Roman church and Pope Paul VI. It seemed as though Vatican II (1962-1965) had opened all kinds of windows and that fresh air and a new openness to change were coming into the Roman church. People within that communion and on the outside came to believe, or at least to hope, that the old authoritarianism of Rome was past and that a new age of collegial openness, even freedom, had dawned. It took some doing but eventually the mild-mannered, frail-appearing Paul VI pressed home again supreme papal authority in all matters concerning faith and life for the faithful, and his successor once removed, John Paul II, even more so. This is not to say that the people, including also the bishops and the clergy, particularly here in the United States, have given up their agitation for relaxing the rules on things like celibacy, women priests, use of contraceptives, divorce, homosexuality, and so forth.

The commotion is widespread, but it is important to note that the resistance does not involve the *corpus doctrinae* of Rome directly, but rather questions or teachings related to canon law and so-called moral theology. Everybody seems to agree that the former cannot and will not be changed, but that in matters of canon law and moral theology the church's teaching and pronouncements have in the past been changed and can in the present and future be modified—hence the agitation. But when the voices, especially of

the elite, the bright and vocal theologians, like Hans Kueng, Eduard Schillebeeckx, Charles Curran, and others, become too public and brazen, demonstrating insubordination to the papal *monitum*, or warning, then the axe falls.

Pope John Paul II has made it painfully plain to all concerned that such attempts at speaking the mind of the church for the church will not be tolerated, that the papal authority must be respected, and that the pope's voice as the teaching authority in the church, the *magisterium*, is final and must be obeyed. Not to do so, to engage in dissent, must be seen according to John Paul II as "totally incompatible with being a 'good Catholic'"; nor should the bishops and the clergy proceed in thinking "that disobedience 'poses no obstacle' to receiving Communion and other church sacraments." Self-evidently the question of who speaks for the church is not open for discussion, certainly not debate. The American bishops were reminded pointedly as infallible teachers and shepherds of the church of their need to comply, not to curry dissent or tolerate it, but to work for and attract assent to the *magisterium*, the church's teaching, in all matters where the church speaks, and at no time in their dialogue with the theologians accept "dissent and confrontation as a policy and method in the area of Church teaching."<sup>1</sup>

With such demonstrations of authoritarian rule this question naturally arises: what possible benefit or fruit can one expect from dialogues in which Roman and Lutheran theologians engage on matters that concern not merely canon law and moral practices but the nitty-gritty of both communions, the disputed articles of the faith itself reaching all the way back to the Reformation? It is a fair and reasonable question, one which implies another question of whether such dialoguing should at all continue in the future in view of Rome's impervious nature even on lesser matters as they are perceived. We shall endeavor to address that question again, particularly towards the end of the essay.

In assessing the dialogues and their claimed accomplishments, consensus to some, I propose to follow an uncomplicated approach, evaluating the documents issuing forth from each round, except that I have chosen to begin with the results of the fifth round. This dialogue between the Lutherans and Catholics focused on "Papal Primacy and the Universal Church" and resulted in the publication of a book with that title in 1974. This matter was pivotal because

it confronted and dealt with the authority issue. It at least broached the subject in a beginning sort of way, though it had to be followed up by the topic, "Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church," in Dialogue VI. Paul Empie, who spearheaded the dialogues from the beginning on the Lutheran side (he also played a leading role in the formation of LCUSA, now disbanded with the forming of the new Lutheran church, ELCA), wrote in retrospect of that round that "it was a tough nut to crack, and one cannot be blamed for asking whether or not it was worth all that time and effort."<sup>2</sup>

Even before beginning the discussion of these two documents, I am reminded of something that Hermann Sasse stated in a *Christianity Today* article entitled "Protestant-Catholic Dialogue: A Lutheran View" (Sasse's article was set in parallel consideration with a Reformed view written by G.C. Berkouwer of Holland); Dr. Sasse stated that one principle will forever remain key in Romanist thinking: "The Catholic will understand the *Una Sancta* as the great visible church under the pope."<sup>3</sup> This is a fixed principle and it needs to be remembered as presuppositional in any and all discussion having to do with authority in the church as understood by Rome. Early in 1975 I had occasion to review the document produced by Dialogue V and I should like to repeat some of what I said then:

"The question is," said Alice (in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*), "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things." "Quite the contrary," retorts Humpty Dumpty, "the question is which is to be Master—that's all."

Ah, there's the rub also on papal primacy—who's to be master?—that is all! Though filled with many scholarly words and thoughts, this volume of essays by participants in the Lutheran and Catholic Dialogue V does little to change the situation on rapprochement between Lutherans and Catholics on papal primacy. The Lutheran and Catholic participants have sparred skillfully and knowingly for a long time now, but observers may rightly wonder whether there has been any real advance on the basic issues which have divided the churches, not least among which is the ticklish question of who is master. Papal primacy does not move over easily to make room for anything else. Moreover, the even stickier problem of papal infallibility still lies there untouched by the conversations.

Proceeding forward with a certain amount of euphoria,

“because agreements substantially outweighed differences” (p. vii), according to the book’s editors, on the previously discussed areas (the Nicene Creed as dogma; baptism; the eucharist as sacrifice; the character and function of the ministry), the fifth round of dialogues converged on the knotty questions connected with papal primacy:

Is it of divine or human origin?

What basis does it have in New Testament teaching?

What ground or link is there for Peter’s primacy?

Can the churches agree on a “Peter function” (“whatever that may be”—it never becomes really clear, as Roman Catholic Geo. H. Tavad admits, p. 208)?

How valid is the patristic evidence for the papal claim of primacy?

Can the papal structure be renewed to meet evangelical standards?

Is it true that there is no better unifying factor than the papacy in an ecumenical age like ours?

Side by side with these questions comes another set, prompted by the concern of a thoughtful reader:

Do all participants accept the historical-critical handling of the New Testament—specifically the by-now-famous companion piece, *Peter in the New Testament*, published as a result of Dialogue V?

Do the Lutheran theologians involved really agree, as far as papal primacy or the office is concerned, that they “recognize many of its positive contributions to the life of the church” (p. 19), that it is God’s “gracious gift to his people” (p. 21), that there exists “even the possibility and desirability of the papal Ministry” (p. 23)?

What precisely is the norm of the “Word,” by which the dialogues proceed (p. 19)?

On what ground does it follow that “initiatives should

be encouraged in order to promote a wholesome *diversity* in theology. . .” (p. 20)?

What is “the future inspiration of the Holy Spirit,” for which at least one essayist opted (p. 193)?

Is it not just a little short of incredible for a Lutheran to say that “we have a situation in which the Reformation denial and the contemporary Catholic affirmation of the *ius divinum* (i.e., on papal primacy!) are not irreconcilable” (p. 195) and to expect Lutherans to believe that “they should be delighted to recognize papal primacy to the degree that this becomes truly a servant of the gospel and of the evangelical unity of the church” (p. 208)? (Only a reversal of Trent could bring that about, and that would mean that Rome would give up its very soul.)

The lengthy introductory chapter (of Dialogue V), adopted as a composite, common statement, notes, among other things, that “many Lutherans as well as Roman Catholics will be startled by the convergence on papal primacy” achieved by the participants. That is hardly a mild understatement. But it does not explain really the ground of the astonishment, which has to do with the claimed convergence; for the essays do not demonstrate such alleged convergence.

In view of the fact that to this point in the long discussions none of the really central issues that divided the churches at the time of the Reformation had been faced, particularly on the three *solae* (*Scriptura, gratia, fide*), it is difficult to see (1) how the Lutheran side of the table could conclude with the suggestion that “we ask our churches to affirm a new attitude toward the papacy” (p. 32); and (2) how the Roman Catholic side could actually expect Lutherans to believe that “the papacy has been a signal help in protecting the gospel” (p. 37) and a viable “instrument of unity” in the church (p. 38).

There are many fine essays in this collection, from both sides of the table. . . This is especially true of the historical essays on papal primacy in the patristic period—if in fact one can speak of it as existing at all in that era. Even the Roman Catholic essayist (James F. McCue) admits that it exists “neither

as a theoretical construction nor as a *de facto* practice” up to Nicaea; and the Lutheran co-essayist (Arthur Piepkorn) demonstrates essentially the same thing, but perhaps not as convincingly as it might have been. The other essays are likewise instructive, though understandably a certain degree of overlap and repetition obtains in a symposium of this kind.

Ultimately, the question about the future of the dialogues has to be asked. By proceeding along lines where disagreement is less likely to be found—though the claimed agreement in the previous discussions might well be questioned at a number of points!—the participants have managed to maintain a rather irenic atmosphere. Soon the main issues—the central articles which Martin Chemnitz laid out so plainly in his still unanswered (by Rome) and brilliant *Examen Concilii Tridentini*—must be confronted, if a degree of credibility is to be kept for our day. Integrity finally demands that the *unresolved* issues be squarely faced. Like it or not, the long shadows of the Leipzig Debate, the Diet of Worms, the Augsburg Diet, and the Council of Trent still fall across the path of twentieth-century Lutherans and Catholics in dialogue, and this volume does very little to move those shadows away.<sup>4</sup>

Such was my review of Dialogue V.

In an ecumenical age like ours it ought not be too much to hope and expect that Roman Catholic scholars would take seriously the critique of Trent offered by Chemnitz. It is incredible and inconceivable, therefore, to see contemporary Romanist scholars simply ignoring and bypassing Chemnitz’s incisive dissecting of Trent’s theology, especially since all four volumes are now available from Concordia Publishing House in translation. Chemnitz’s *Examen* does not even rate mention in David N. Power’s *The Sacrifice We Offer*,<sup>5</sup> which purports to be a reinterpretation of Tridentine dogma. Rome has not to this day answered Chemnitz’s challenge. But why should Romanists bother, as long as the heirs of the Reformation on the Lutheran side have not taken Chemnitz seriously either, not to mention Protestantism in general? Christian theology, including much that passes for Lutheran, is in a deep, desperate state of malaise.

The sequence of dialogues began, as the reader may remember, with a discussion of “The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma

of the Church,” on July 6-7, 1965, in Baltimore. There was no debate as regards the creed’s articles since both sides continue to confess the faith as therein expressed, especially against Arian thinking, and the participants could say in summary that “we confess in common the Nicene Faith.” Luther in the Smalcald Articles, Part I, cut to the heart of the matter even more quickly, stating: “These articles are not matters of dispute or contention, for both parties confess them. Therefore, it is not necessary to treat them at greater length.” If Luther had been involved, the dialogue would have been over before the participants from the Midwest, and certainly from the far West, even arrived. But there was a question of how dogma comes to be in the churches, or “two communities” as they were called in the dialogue, and it became clear almost immediately that “the nature and structure of the teaching authority” for the two church bodies differed, especially on “the role of Scripture in relation to the teaching office of the church.”<sup>6</sup>

The second round of dialogues focused on baptism, a topic chosen because of the Nicene Creed’s statement in behalf of “one baptism for the remission of sins.” No consensus statement issued forth from this round though the participants who by this time were undoubtedly growing to know each other better, perhaps even enjoying the company and discussions, apparently all agreed that “the conversations are carried out with the utmost good will and sincerity on each side.”<sup>7</sup>

The two chairmen, Bishop T. Austin Murphy and Dr. Paul C. Empe, were prepared, however, to assure their readers “that the teachings of our respective traditions regarding baptism are in substantial agreement, and this opinion has been confirmed at this meeting.”<sup>8</sup> The fact that there was no real confrontation and resolution of the ongoing difference as regards baptism’s power and significance, not only for original sin, but especially also for the sins after baptism, did not prevent the upbeat declaration from being made.

Lutherans know that Catholics baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thus practising a valid Christian baptism. But Lutherans also know how the so-called Sacrament of Penance, the second plank, supersedes baptism in the life of the church, especially in the penitential practice required of the faithful, thus shunting baptism’s ongoing power and significance to the side.

It was clear that with "The Eucharist as Sacrifice" the third round in the dialogues was finally willing to risk going into "a topic which produced great heat at the time of the Reformation."<sup>9</sup> The size of the resulting published document also bears out this point. But when it was all over the conferees had come to agreement to speak of the Lord's Supper not only as sacrifice (Melancthon points out in the Apology in what way Lutherans would be willing to speak thus), but even as "unique propitiatory sacrifice,"<sup>10</sup> although the Lutherans bridled at this being "offered for the living and the dead." Agreement was expressed on "the full reality of Christ's presence," also that transubstantiation is a misleading concept and therefore to be avoided,<sup>11</sup> but the participants recognized that there was still a way to go and that "our agreement is not yet complete."<sup>12</sup>

So the dialogues went on into the fourth round, continuing the focus on the Sacrament, this time with the topic "Eucharist and Ministry." The result is a large book also, over three hundred pages, and contains commendable essays. For example, John Reumann of the Philadelphia Lutheran Seminary sketches very nicely the office of pastoral ministry as understood by the various Lutheran bodies. Harry McSorley tries to show for the Catholics that there is a way of interpreting Trent which does not make illicit the Lutheran clergy or their sacramental practice. Likewise, from both sides there was a clear assertion of the understanding each had concerning the phrase "apostolic succession," the one side holding to the unbroken transmission of the ministerial office from the apostles, the other to succession in terms of the apostolic doctrine.

Enough sincere expression in behalf of the evangelical mission of the church was present that the Lutheran participants felt prepared to say that they had "again seen clearly a fidelity to the proclamation of the gospel" and to assert that their counterparts were "engaged in a valid ministry of the gospel."<sup>13</sup> And for their part the Catholic conferees reached a similar conclusion in behalf of their Lutheran friends. No doubt it was true, as stated in the concluding assessment, that "for the first time the Roman church has recognized that Protestant denominations are more than sociological groupings, but are true churches in a true theological sense."<sup>14</sup> This may be a somewhat exuberant overstatement, but clearly there was a new atmosphere prevailing on the basis of rather careful attention to biblical, patristic, confessional sources. One may rightly wonder,

however, about the “ministry of the gospel.” Luther never doubted that the Gospel was still present, being heard, and being believed in the Romanist church of his day, but he undoubtedly would have raised questions as regards the nature of the “gospel” in this case. Was there agreement on the article on which the church stands or falls, *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, the justification of the sinner by the grace of God for Christ’s sake by faith alone?

This question led the conferees to decide finally that they must investigate that central Christian teaching on which the two churches have historically stood apart. First, however, the need was still there to address further the question of authority; this discussion was then continued in the sixth dialogue, “Teaching Authority and Infallibility.” It seemed that Lutherans bent over backwards in speaking of their sins and failures to overcome the many divisions in the Lutheran church (over a hundred bodies!), even though all purport to affirm the *sola scriptura* principle. And the Catholics for their part were really unable to move any further from the traditional answer which locates authority in the church with the *magisterium*, the teaching voice of the pope, a fact so well illustrated by Pope John Paul II in his recent dealings with his flock in the United States. Committed as they were to the higher critical view of the biblical text, the dialoguers paid little serious attention to the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, with the exception of the LCMS participants; the concern was more on how to deal with the question of papal infallibility by both sides, Catholics and Lutherans alike. The overall issue remained largely unresolved, but both sides agreed that there was need for less polemical language.

As Paul Empie assessed the situation he concluded that “we Lutherans are stuck with the problem of authority,” while the Catholics meanwhile are perceived as being stuck with the pope. To Empie the problem was as severe for the Lutherans as for the Catholics, grounding it on this sort of reasoning: “Although we Lutherans talk about *sola scriptura*, the simple fact is that our tradition consists of our confessions, and our confessions are our way of looking at scripture.” Obviously confessional Lutheran theology was an embarrassment to him, as it has become to many others in contemporary Lutheran theology.<sup>15</sup> George Lindbeck, too, spoke in behalf of a softer, more understanding view of papal infallibility: “On the Lutheran side, the new understanding should allay ‘fears that papal infallibility is a usurpation of the sovereign

authority of Christ and make clear that this dogma. . .does not displace Christ from his redemptive and mediatorial role.’ ”<sup>16</sup>

If the dialogues on that subject failed to allay fears as regards the question of who or what governs in the church, there was hope that as the discussions moved to the central issue of the Reformation—how a sinner comes to be righteous before God, the doctrine of justification—there might possibly be a breakthrough that could bridge the existing gulf dividing the churches. The best that the conferees could achieve, however, after intense concentration on the position which each communion held on justification (they had agreed to affirm that salvation rests on Christ Jesus) was the somewhat ambiguous statement that “agreement on this Christological affirmation does not necessarily involve full agreement between Catholics and Lutherans on justification by faith,” and, in the compromising spirit of our day which adopts reconciled diversity as its theme, they wondered out loud “whether the remaining differences on this doctrine need be church-dividing.”<sup>17</sup> That approach required that the common statement had to adopt a posture agreeing not to “exclude the traditional Catholic position that the grace-wrought transformation of sinners is a necessary preparation for final salvation” and to affirm that this doctrine “can be expressed in the imagery of God as judge who pronounces sinners innocent and righteous, and also in a transformist view which emphasizes the change wrought in sinners by infused grace.”<sup>18</sup> On the basis of that kind of theological manhandling of Scripture’s clear teaching on justification—an article of which Luther states in the Smalcald Articles that it is “first and chief” and that “nothing in this article can be given up or compromised,” since on it “rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world” (SA II, i)—the conferees agreed to say that they had reached a consensus and “were able to confess together what our Catholic and Lutheran ancestors tried to affirm as they responded in different ways to the biblical message of justification.”<sup>19</sup>

Is the healing of the division as simple as recognizing different images in Scripture? Did Luther err in his judgment against Rome’s *gratia infusa*, or infusion of sanctifying grace for the sinner’s salvation, when he said that it was a confusion of sanctification with justification, of the fruits of faith with saving faith itself, which clings to God’s pardoning grace in Christ? In a recent thesis devoted

to an evaluation of the dialogue on justification, a student of mine observed that what has happened is a blurring of the second article of the Creed into the third, and this right in front of the eyes of the Lutheran participants, the result being “that the doctrine of forensic justification with the imputed alien righteousness of Christ to the sinner has fallen victim to pictorial interpretation.”<sup>20</sup> “Neither side has been faithful to its respective confession, but the Lutherans have lost much more in their failure,” states the same thesis.<sup>21</sup>

This judgment is correct, I believe, in spite of the fact that there are some really very good essays in the documentary collection. Karlfried Froelich, for example, demonstrates persuasively on the basis of linguistic analysis that it was “no mere coincidence that Martin Luther claimed his discovery of the true meaning of justification as the fruit of his exegetical endeavors. . .[in] the ‘original’ Paul—in Greek.”<sup>22</sup> Also on the Lutheran side Gerhard Forde, though confessing that he has a problem with the Formula of Concord’s upholding of the third use of the law, finally affirms support for the proposition that justification in Scripture must be understood as “the righteousness imputed by God for Jesus’ sake.”<sup>23</sup> John F. Johnson of the LCMS presented a faithful account of the Augsburg Confession’s and the Formula of Concord’s teaching anent justification.

On the Romanist side Avery Dulles politely yet firmly upheld Trent’s position, giving “strong emphasis to human responsibility and to the created gifts of grace,” though today, according to Dulles, there is a more theocentric outlook which “is strongly oriented toward mystery and symbol.”<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the clearest indication that Romanists were not about to move away from their Tridentine position came from Carl J. Peter, who stated as regards the possibility of the Catholic accepting the Reformation’s principle, justification by faith alone, “Yes, but—but on the condition that another critical principle. . .be designated,” namely, “to recognize grace and its renewing effects.”<sup>25</sup> He left this question for the Lutherans to settle in their minds: “Does the element of human cooperation in justification and its growth still imply for Lutherans a *partim-partim* view of human salvation?”

The signals coming out of the Romanist camp are really still the same, in harmony with Trent, albeit with much greater friendliness toward the Lutheran side, much softer tones on the place of Luther

in the world of theology, a man who was “improperly condemned,”<sup>26</sup> whose condemnation was “a terrible mistake,” according to Hubert Jedin. Be this as it may, an evaluation of the dialogues on justification demonstrate that it would be the height of naivete, if not in fact a terrible mistake, for Lutherans to conclude that a breakthrough has occurred on the meaning of justification as seen by Rome and the Lutheran churches.

It was my privilege early in 1987, from January 30 to February 6, to be among the sixty or so participants invited to an ecumenical conference sponsored by the Department of Theological Studies of LCUSA and the Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute, meeting in Puerto Rico. There were guests from virtually all mainline Christian denominations and from various parts of the world, chiefly Europe and America. The overall theme for the conference was “Fundamental Consensus and Church Fellowship,” undoubtedly prompted by the ecumenical hope that, after the various dialogues around the world by the various communions, with some claimed convergence and consensus, the question now might arise of where we go from here. At the insistence of the LCMS president, Dr. Ralph Bohlmann, lest there be misunderstanding on any side, the topic was modified with a subtitle which was to govern the wide-open discussions at the conference, “Fundamental Consensus and Fundamental Difference.”

Many of those presenting essays had been participants in one or the other of the dialogues going on in the United States or in Europe. The underlying theme and motif which each essayist was to address from his point of view was the significance and relevance of the Reformation's key article on justification. Thus the conference could be seen as stemming from the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues on that subject. A friendly atmosphere prevailed once again, as is generally the case in all the dialogues. But the fundamental question, of course, is whether there has been any movement towards the chief article of the Lutheran Reformation, *sola gratia-sola fide*. It became evident very soon that there has not been, whether reference is had to Carl Peter responding to Gerhard Forde's paper, or Father Pierre Duprey speaking for the Vatican (he is secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, previously the Inquisition, of which Cardinal Ratzinger is the present chief), or Archbishop Methodios for the Eastern Orthodox, or Henry Chadwick and Robert Wright

for the Anglicans, or Geoffrey Wainright for the Methodists, or James Dunn for the Baptists, or Paul Fries for the Reformed. The papers were of general excellence, though varying significance, and will eventually be published. Discussion was free and open. Dr. Bohlmann had opportunity to present a strong case for Scriptural authority and sound hermeneutics in determining consensus on the Gospel and a proper basis for fellowship among the churches.

In another paper Dr. Samuel Nafzger reiterated Bohlmann's position that the LCMS takes the stance that there must be agreement in doctrine if fellowship is to be established, arguing also that certain levels of fellowship need to be recognized if we are going to view things practically and existentially—for example, that there are other Christians who love their Lord Jesus, that dialogues and exploratory meetings with other Christians may take place to examine the things dividing them, but finally that “we in the Missouri Synod understand the Scriptures to teach the necessity of agreement in the confession of the apostolic faith as the prerequisite for church fellowship.” If one asks for fruits or results from the Puerto Rico conference, it would be hard to turn up any, at least any meaningful and significant advances towards convergence of the church bodies involved, any actual agreement in the confession of the Reformation articles of the faith. It could be argued, no doubt, that there was benefit in the various representatives being able to state where they and their churches stood as regards the article on justification, which is such a key to the understanding of the Gospel.

When Luther reflected on his meeting with Cardinal Cajetan in October of 1518 and the prelate's efforts to get him to recant, he stated that “it would have been easy to say, ‘I recant,’ but I will not become a heretic by recanting the belief that has made me a Christian.”<sup>27</sup> Later in the Smalcald Articles—which in some ways are superior to the Augsburg Confession and the Apology,<sup>28</sup> especially in cutting through the teachings and practices within Romanist theology that were out of cinque with Holy Writ and, therefore, subversive of the Gospel—Luther zeroes in on the nature of true repentance in the longest article in Part III. It is not to be found, he says, in a contrived, works-righteous sort of contrition but in godly sorrow for sins against God's holy will and trust in “the consolatory promise of grace through the Gospel, which must be believed, as Christ declares (Mark 1:15): ‘Repent and believe the Gospel’ ” (SA

III, iii, 4.) For Luther this still always was the question: "Wie bekomm ich einen gnaedigen Gott?" How could he be contrite enough so that God would be favorable to him? The nagging doubt always remained—was he contrite enough? Contrition and repentance in Romanist teaching was "our work" and God's forgiveness was made contingent upon our attainment of repentance. "Making conditions for repentance," writes George Yule perceptively of Luther's struggle out of the theological woods, "especially when coupled with a legalistic view of sin and an impersonal view of grace, makes Pelagianism almost inevitable."<sup>29</sup> As Luther had so clearly declared in his famous lectures on Galatians (1531-1535), between the righteousness which is in Christ and God's imputation of this righteousness to sinners, both so wondrously objective, nothing stands besides faith, which itself is drawn or elicited from the heart by the Gospel concerning the imputed righteousness of Christ for sinners.

Smalcald was in many ways a miserable affair in Luther's life. Becoming deathly ill so that people feared for his life, he was unable to present the articles on which he had worked so hard. They were not even publicly read through the maneuvering of Melanchthon and others, though they were heartily subscribed privately by the Lutheran theologians present (except for Melanchthon, who acceded grudgingly, with the princes looking over his shoulders). Luther eventually had to be carried out of Smalcald on a bumpy wagon that jostled the suffering man terribly and perhaps by its jostling helped dislodge the kidney stones which apparently almost killed him. Of Luther's firm and clear defense of the Reformation's chief article Friedrich Milderberger has stated very well that, "if we really agree with the basic decision of the early church that God alone works our salvation, we cannot reject the Reformation's interpretation of the Scripture" that "the gospel is a unity," and that, "therefore, when someone disagrees about the understanding of this gospel, we are compelled to ask whether they really agree with us in accepting the traditional teachings of the early church."<sup>30</sup>

Luther is often criticized for his vehement, cutting, blunt polemic. Harry McSorley, himself a Catholic, shunts such criticism to the side, stating in Luther's behalf that such a "critique of Luther's harshness ignores the hard fact that Luther did not think he or any Christian preacher was bound by those standards when confronted with enemies of the Gospel."<sup>31</sup> Luther never thought of himself

as a “man of destiny,” writes Gordon Rupp. Using an analogy from soccer, Rupp looks at the closing chapters of Luther’s life, seeing in the great Reformer a man “who had begun as a striker [but now] was ending as a goal-keeper.”<sup>32</sup> The Smalcald Articles represent Luther at his maturest, as striker and goaltender both, still contending with unflagging spirit for the Gospel with genuine ecumenical, catholic emphasis, using his breath, even though it be his last, in behalf of the precious Gospel, the justification of the sinner before God for Christ’s sake through faith. Can there be, dare there be, any other stance for the church, Lutheran or Catholic or whatever, in our day?

Charles V called an imperial diet to meet in Regensburg in 1541. It convened on April 5 with the avowed purpose to achieve religious unity in his realm, if he could, and also military and financial backing for his campaign against the Turks. To get the latter he believed he needed the former. He appointed dialogue teams for both sides: John Eck, Julius Pflug, and John Gropper for the Catholics, Philip Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, and John Pistorius for the Protestants. John Calvin was present as a Strasbourg delegate at Melanchthon’s special request. Bucer as always was optimistic about a possible compromise, chiefly because of the presence of moderate princes from both sides; but Calvin was less so. On the theological agenda were discussions of original sin, free will, and also justification. A compromise position was worked out between the parties, surprisingly, on the doctrine of justification by faith, but only because the Protestant side, including Melanchthon, was willing to drop the *sola*. It was a fateful moment in the distressing history of this doctrine. As things turned out the compromise was rejected by both Wittenberg and Rome.

Regensburg or Smalcald—which will it be today? The mood of Melanchthon still pervades the Lutheran churches, compromise for the sake of unity. But that was not the stance of Luther, the striker and goaltender of the Reformation. Of the central article, as well as of all the articles treated in the Smalcald Articles, Luther affirmed, “I can change or concede nothing!” Can there be any other stance for us four hundred and fifty years later?

## ENDNOTES

1. *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, September 17, 1987 (a report from the *Los Angeles Times*).
2. Paul C. Empie, *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I to III*. Personal Notes for Study (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 127 (published after his death in 1979).
3. *Christianity Today*, October 23, 1964, p. 5.
4. *Springfielder*, June 1975, p. 76 ff. Cf. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds., *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V. Papal Primacy and the Universal Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974).
5. David N. Power, *The Sacrifice We Offer* (New York: Crossroad, 1987).
6. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds., *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I - III. Nicene Creed, Baptism, Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968), p. 32.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
13. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds., *Lutheran and Catholics in Dialogue IV. Eucharist and Ministry* (New York: published jointly by Lutheran World Federation and Catholic Bishops Conference, 1970), p. 22.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
15. *Interchange*, Newsletter of the LCUSA, October 1979.
16. "Roman Catholics and Lutherans on Teaching Authority and Infallibility," *Ecumenical Trends*, October 1979, p. 142.
17. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII. Justification by Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p. 16.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
20. Rolf Preus, "An Evaluation of Lutheran-Roman Catholic Conversations on Justification" (S.T.M. thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana, January 1987), p. 62.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
22. Anderson, *Dialogue VII*, p. 161.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

- 
26. Daniel Olivier, *Luther's Faith. The Cause of the Gospel in the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), p. 21.
  27. *LW* 31, pp. 259-292.
  28. "In a way far superior to that of the Augsburg Confession and Apology, the Smalcald Articles provide a systematic definition of the Reformation's basic decision." Cf. Friedrich Mildenberger, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 135.
  29. George Yule, *Luther, Theologian for Catholics and Protestants* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark), p. 6.
  30. Mildenberger, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, p. 136.
  31. Yule, *Luther*, p. 27.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

This essay was first presented at the Symposium on the Smalcald Articles at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, on October 1, 1987, to mark the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Luther's drafting of these historic articles.



# Walther as Pastor

Arthur Drevlow

In the School Visitation Book of the Lutheran congregation at Braeunsdorf, Saxony, a fledgling pastor made this notation on January 18, 1837: "This visit was my first in this class as pastor."<sup>1</sup> The substance of that visit was also recorded: "After an address of welcome delivered by the pastor [Bible] passages and the Third Chief Part were recited; then followed reading, writing, arithmetic, singing, and a closing prayer."<sup>2</sup> Seventeen such official pastoral visits were made between January 18, 1837, and September 19, 1838.

Each entry listed the purpose of the pastor's visit. On January 26, 1837, there was "a short address to the little ones; reading, spelling, arithmetic, and the story of the deluge were covered." On some occasions the children were catechized about the gospel for the next Sunday, the Passion narrative, and orthographical exercises. The visitation of March 9, 1837, was school examination day. In addition to the pastor, the local school inspector, and the school trustees were present. The schoolmaster catechized the children about the prophetic office of Christ; the local school inspector's catechization was addressed to the history of Moses; then the children were examined in reading, writing, arithmetic, orthography, and singing. The visitation closed with the reading of the censures included in the admonitions and prayer and song.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Convention of the Lutheran World Federation at Helsinki, the *Australasian Theological Review* made this sage observation: "Future events cast their shadows before!" When one is aware of the devotion to the Braeunsdorf Parochial School, it was predictable that this zeal would be evident when that young pastor found himself in Perry County, Missouri. Four months after the arrival of the Saxon immigrants, *Anzeiger des Westens* carried the announcement of a combination elementary and high school to be opened in Dresden, Missouri. The announcement read in part: "We, the undersigned, intend to establish an instruction and training institution . . ."<sup>4</sup> It should come as no surprise that the first signature under this announcement was the former Saxon pastor, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther.

After Walther followed the call to Trinity Congregation in St. Louis, the cause of parochial school education received the highest

priority. Later when his pastoral duties were broadened to include training of future pastors, some of his priorities were quite predictable. Walther wrote:

It is self-evident that the preacher should direct his care and attention to the school immediately after his arrival. Dr. Johannes Fecht, professor of theology at Rostock, writes: "Since the schools are the nurseries of the church, it is self-evident that any shortcomings in the schools will mean an irreplaceable loss to the church. Therefore the pastor of the church must be concerned with the greatest care that the schools in the places under his pastoral care are entrusted to capable teachers. . . For without the help of the schools, there is no way to plant godly knowledge and godliness."<sup>5</sup>

The ministerial students were advised that a parochial school would require work and sacrifice. Yet the fruits of concentrated instruction would be ample incentive:

So where there is no school teacher, many pastors have been driven by their conscience to take on this very necessary, very beneficial work. . . But where schools have been established, it is absolutely necessary for the pastor to visit them. This is partly to encourage the school teacher to tireless effort; partly so that he can find out how to arrange the instruction faithfully and fruitfully; partly to supply whatever is missing in catechetical instruction; and finally partly to urge the youth to make greater progress every day.

Having said this much, the pastor-professor added another encouraging word to the pastors of the churches:

The pastor of the church must not shy away because this work is difficult and he does not want to spend a lot of time among the children in school. He must also not simply listen to the teacher teaching but must himself take part in the work, praise the industrious children and scold the lazy ones. For in so doing he is laying a firm foundation for the later catechetical instruction in the church.

In view of the increasing efforts being made currently to enlist parents in the work of the school, Walther was in advance of his time in insisting upon parental involvement:

---

Just so [the pastor] must work daily to arouse careless parents, who often care so little about their children that they would let them grow up like animals without any knowledge of God. He must make them aware of the reckoning that they will some day have to give to God, and of the divine curse that neglecting this duty will bring on their whole family life, but the blessing of rearing their children in the fear of the Lord, which is the main reason for sending them to school. At first glance this part of the pastoral office does seem to be of minor importance. But just be sure of this, that primarily from this part one can distinguish between a true pastor of the church and an hireling, between a pastor in name only and a real pastor. For how can someone who does not care about the foundation be seriously concerned about the building?

In his concern about the total involvement of pastors, teachers, and parents, Walther was echoing Dr. Johannes Fecht, Professor of Theology at Rostock in the early part of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

From a discussion of the parochial school, Walther's pastoral theology course in the seminary proceeded to deal with confirmation instruction. He wrote:

The preacher has the duty toward those who want to be confirmed to *prepare* them for it by a thorough instruction in the catechism and then to perform the rite according to the directions of an orthodox agenda.

What follows must be understood according to the challenges of an age where many a pastor moved from settlement to settlement on horseback with his Bible, catechism, hymnal and Augsburg Confession in his saddlebag:

The Constitution of the Synod of Missouri speaks about this as follows: "The District is to be careful that its pastors confirm catechumens only if they can recite the text of the catechism word for word. . . and if their understanding has been brought to the point that they are able to examine themselves according to 1 Corinthians 11:28.

The Synod encourages that more capable catechumens be brought to the point that they can give the basis for the teachings of the Christian faith with the clearest proof texts from the Scripture and can also on that basis refute the false teachings of the sects. Where possible, one hundred hours

are to be spent in confirmation instruction. The preacher is also responsible to see that his confirmands have impressed upon their memory a good number of such good, basic, churchly hymns as may serve as a gift to accompany them their whole life long.”<sup>7</sup>

Throughout Walther’s career as pastor, professor, president, and writer, instruction of the church’s youth loomed large in importance. Repeatedly he emphasizes the value of continued examinations in the fundamental teachings of Holy Writ. The polite Saxon lived out the instruction of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “In our circles the pastors and ministers of the churches are required to instruct and examine the youth publicly, a custom that produces very good results” (Apol. IV, 42). Pastor Walther viewed the instruction of the young as one of the glorious privileges of the holy ministry. In evident emotion he addressed a confirmation class on John 6:66-69 under the theme: “Your Answer to Christ’s Question: ‘Do You Also Wish to Go Away?’ ” Walther declared: “Beloved children, Peter once answered Christ’s question, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’—not only with the words, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go’—but also added: ‘You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God.’ ”

When the children had spoken their vows before the Lord’s altar, their pastor addressed them in evident great earnestness. Walther told them:

So, my dear children, the great work has been completed. The heavenly Bridegroom has sought your souls, and you have given them to Him. The word of acceptance has been spoken, and therewith the bond of faithfulness has once more publicly been solemnized for eternity. He Himself was in our midst and heard your oath and is now ready to give you a friendly embrace. Now remain with Him to the last breath of your life.<sup>8</sup>

Yet this solemn event was to excite the interest of the entire assembled congregation. Its members were now addressed:

But you, dear congregation, and especially you fathers, mothers, godparents, brothers, sisters, friends, and relatives of these children, open the arms of your love and receive these children again from my hands, from the hands of their teachers and

educators. Receive them as your brothers and sisters. Do not say like Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Rather consider, you parents, that you remain the parents of these children until your death; from your hands God will someday require them.

But you who are not so closely related to these children by ties of blood, think of the word of Jesus Christ: "When you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." If you therefore have yourselves been converted to Christ, strengthen these weak ones; watch over them. If you see them in danger, warn them; if you see them go astray, bring them back; if you see them in need, comfort and stand by them; if you see them fall, help them up again. If you do that faithfully, we will also someday with these children—oh, may it be all of them!—stand seeing before the throne of Christ just as we here stood with them hoping.<sup>9</sup>

What a powerful attempt to avoid the necessity of seeing them become "inactives."

Often forgotten is the fact that the pastor whose name is so associated with seminary training and synodical polity chose always to be involved with children of tender age and whose zealous concern went with them into their teenage years. For Walther the reopening of the Lutheran High School in St. Louis was a mountaintop experience. No evolutionist, Walther viewed Christianity as possessing "science that not only equals, but surpasses all human sciences in depth and breadth." When contemplating the educational resources of Christianity, he saw the dogma of Christianity spanning "time and eternity, the beginning and end of the world, God, His essence, His attributes, His counsel, and His works, man, his origin, his duty and eternal destiny, heaven and earth, in short, the whole universe and its most distant purpose."<sup>10</sup>

It was an exuberant speaker who congratulated his fellow Lutherans in St. Louis for their tradition of building schools alongside their churches. He lauded the guests for having "proven [themselves] a living branch of the true Christian church, whose precious gems were always its schools." Neither the horrors of the Civil War nor financial woes had dampened their financial support of this institution. Likewise the staff of Lutheran High School received commendation and encouragement:

But you, respected teachers of our high school, permit me finally only one remark. We have not wanted to send our children to schools directed by unbelievers or false believers. Rather, we ourselves have set up an institution of higher education [so that] in spite of our poverty, our youth would not breathe in with science and art, a false spirit, either one of unbelief or one of false theology. So it is your task, not only to enrich our dear youth with all kinds of useful knowledge, but no less to plant and tend in our youth the spirit of the pure Gospel and pure Christianity and to protect them from the false spirit of unbelief and erring belief.<sup>11</sup>

In the *Schulblatt* of January 1870 there appeared an article entitled "Schools of Higher Learning." The editor included a letter citing the importance of Lutheran Christian schools of higher learning. The *Schulblatt* editor cited a portion of a supporting letter from someone who refrained from signing his name. Since Walther often authored articles which bore no name, it has been assumed by some scholars that he was the author of that letter:

You certainly will share the sense of importance which I attach to these new high schools which are coming into being in our church. For beyond all question, they are the very best means that we have to spread the Lutheran doctrine to the mass of people of this land. From now on our confirmed youth must get the ability to attain to, and to hold with dignity, all American civil positions and state offices, and for this high purpose they must be trained.<sup>12</sup>

When a Baptist church paper commended the German Lutheran schools for offering instruction in two languages, an editorial appeared in *Der Lutheraner* of February 15, 1873, which bore the familiar signature "W." In comments that have been strangely prophetic, Walther sounded a note that merits reading and rereading by his heirs in this twentieth century:

May God preserve for our German Lutheran Church the treasure of her parochial schools. Humanly speaking, everything depends on that for the future of our church in America. As all church bodies in America have worked for their own dissolution from that time on when they permitted the state to care for the education of their children, so the most careful

cultivation of our parochial schools is and remains, after the public ministry, the chief means for our preservation and continuation.<sup>13</sup>

At this juncture Lutheran youth societies began to emerge, beginning with Walther's Trinity Congregation in St. Louis. *Der Lutheraner* carried a series of articles encouraging the formation of societies for the youth. While it cannot be established with finality who authored the articles, "W" published them. These young people were encouraged to use their mites to support ministerial students. The financial plight of these students was related; without apology the youth of the church were challenged to use the financial resources God had given them to offer monetary assistance to those who would man the churches and schools of the Synod. In *Der Lutheraner* young people were challenged to serve God, not just with "the dregs of old age, but also [with] the enthusiasm of. . . youth." With masterful eloquence Walther advised the young people to consider that God "would have us place upon His altar not only the seared and withered leaves of the autumn of our lives, but also the swelling buds and the fragrant blossoms of the smiling springtime of life."<sup>14</sup>

Here we take leave of one aspect of Walther's life to scan certain points that he emphasized in preparing students for the tasks of the parish pastor. We move to the lecture hall, where Walther tells us:

Public preaching is the most important of all the official acts of every pastor. He must devote the greatest effort to it. The most important requirements of public preaching are the following: (1) It should contain nothing but God's Word pure and simple (1 Peter 4:11; Acts 26:22; Romans 12:7; Jeremiah 23:28; 2 Timothy 2:15). (2) It should apply God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). (3) It should proclaim the whole counsel of God to the listeners for their salvation (Acts 20:20, 26-27). (4) It should correspond to the special needs of the listeners (Luke 12:42; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Hebrews 5:11-6:2). (5) It should be suited to the times (Matthew 16:3). (6) It should be well organized (Luke 1:3). Finally (7) it should not be too long.<sup>15</sup>

In his parish activity as well as in the seminary classroom, Walther never veered from the instruction offered in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

For of all acts of worship that is the greatest, most holy, most necessary, and highest, which God has required in the

First and Second Commandment, namely to preach the Word of God. For the ministry is the highest office in the church. Now if this worship is omitted, how can there be knowledge of God, the doctrine of Christ, or the Gospel? But the chief service of God is to preach the Gospel.<sup>16</sup>

Since the preaching of the Word must ever retain the highest place of honor in the churches, Walther's next counsel to his students is predictable:

No matter how good a preacher is at liturgy, administration, and private soul-care, nothing can ever replace good preaching. That is and remains the main means for the blessed administration of the holy office. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession says in Article XXIV, on the mass, "There is nothing that so attaches people to the church as good preaching" [Apol. XXIV, 50].

Walther advised his students to avoid the great unfaithfulness of failing to give the congregation "always the best that one can give." Any type of unfaithfulness "to the public preaching of the Word" would merit the censure of the prophet: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently" (Jeremiah 48:10).<sup>17</sup> The students in Walther's classroom heard a sharp denunciation of careless sermon preparation: "Woe to the preacher who in preparing his sermons is not primarily concerned with his text and the needs of the people, but looks instead for something easy to talk about, or something inoffensive, or something that would please people so that he can shine as a 'pulpit orator!' " The future pastors were advised that careless pulpit preparation was inexcusable, whether from fear of work, fear of men, or desire to please men, or whether from majoring in minors.<sup>18</sup>

Something of that earnest advice characterized the pulpit preparation of generations of pastors. Attention was often directed to the way in which politicians drafted their speeches; in view of the attention to detail in the political world students were advised that the ministers of the King of Kings had far greater reason to be ready to bring a message from the church's Lord. In instances when a pastor failed to be on hand because

---

of an emergency, Walther would not ascend the pulpit because he was not prepared. He directed students to the solemn observation of an early lecturer on pastoral theology:

It is tremendous insolence, impudence, and arrogance, a great sin indeed, worthy of God's wrath and punishment, even a matter of despising God and His Word, and a sign that there must be no fear of God there, when one has time to study for sermons and does not study for [them] but rather runs into the pulpit like a sow to the trough. . . And that says nothing about one's willingness to apply his art and ability, his practice and experience; for even if you are as learned as you can be and have preached as long as would ever be possible, it still takes study.<sup>19</sup>

From Walther's *Pastoral Theology* one can glean many of the principles which the master presented to his students and demonstrated in his own sermonizing. "The first requirement of a sermon," said Walther, "is that it contain nothing but God's Word pure and simple." This assertion is amplified by a statement that was the warp of the instructor's entire life. "In order to have pure doctrine, the Word of truth must also be 'rightly divided,' that is, Law and Gospel must be well distinguished (2 Timothy 2:15)."<sup>20</sup>

The object of a sermon is to "apply God's Word correctly." The injunction of that objective is contained in two Scripture passages, which feature in confirmation classes time and again:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work [2 Timothy 3:16-17].

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope [Romans 15:4].

Following the old Greek terminology, five different ways of applying God's Word were suggested. The pastor might choose to emphasize doctrine or teaching; the Word ought also to be used for reproof, to rebuke and refute false doctrine; Scripture contained advice for correction of life, for instruction or the discipline of righteousness; nor should comfort ever be forgotten.

Walther cautioned against a wooden application of all of these uses in each and every sermon. He cites a contemporary who had cautioned against a well-meaning but utterly ridiculous use of 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

Some preachers bind themselves to the well-known five uses in such a way that they consider it a sin unto death if they would once omit one of them. For they consider it not to be a complete sermon if it does not contain their five uses and if it does not (1) teach a little, (2) refute the heretics a little, (3) correct a bit, (4) exhort a bit, (5) comfort a bit. They think that because Paul says all Scripture is profitable. . . every text must be brought through all five uses. They do so even if it means some of each and none of the whole, and even if they have to drag in the reproving use by the hair and wake up some mouldy heretics from the dead!<sup>21</sup>

After having disposed of a mechanical use of Scripture, Walther enlarged upon profitable uses of Scripture. He noted that the apostle preferred "the didascalical use, for doctrine" before all others. He considered this use not only "the most important" but the foundation of all uses of Scripture. A sermon might be rich in "exhortation, correction, and comfort, [but] if it [is] without doctrine, it is still a lean and empty sermon." Then Walther commented that it was difficult to know "how many preachers sin in this way and how much they sin."

The preacher has barely touched the text and doctrine and already begins to exhort, correct, or comfort. His sermon consists of nothing but questions and exclamations. . . The listener never has time to think it over calmly. Instead of reaching people's hearts and bringing them to life, that does more to preach them to death, to wipe out whatever hunger they have for the Bread of Life, and to make them disgusted with the Word of God. The listeners must get upset by always being reproved or exhorted or blandly comforted without the doctrinal basis having been laid.<sup>22</sup>

When Walther lectured to his students, when he took his pen in hand for his voluminous writings, and when he mounted the pulpits across the Synod, he lived what he taught, namely that on the basis of 2 Timothy 3:16 "the first use of God's Word is

‘for doctrine.’ ” He drew heavily upon St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans. In that epistle “the practical application follows only after the doctrinal foundation has been laid in the first eleven chapters.”<sup>23</sup>

Walther has often been faulted for the intensity of his use of Scripture “for reproof.” Yet he noted that as often as the prophets and apostles were occupied with doctrine, “so often we see them connect it with defense against false doctrine.” This usage of Scripture was adhered to “not only with coarse false doctrines (1 Corinthians 15:12ff.) but also with a minor one (Galatians 5:9); not only in a friendly way (Galatians 4:10-12) but also in an earnest vehement way (Galatians 1:8-9; Philippians 3:2); not only with reference to the matter but also with reference to the persons, that is, they deal with false teachings and with false teachers, with or without naming the person as well as the sect (1 John 4:1; Galatians 5:10; Matthew 16:6; Revelation 2:15; 2 Timothy 2:17, reproof by name!)”<sup>24</sup>

Careful as Walther was in all his preaching and teaching, he advised all students and preachers to realize that “it is just as necessary to use the Word of God to reprove sin as to reprove false doctrine.” In an essay before a pastoral conference, a mild-mannered lecturer cited one pulpit fault that had caused him some anguish. He wondered why there had to be use of the fists when reproving false doctrine and life and why even the blessed Gospel had to be shouted out to people. Walther cautioned against rebuking sin “with undue bitterness lest [the preacher] alienate the listeners.” He advised that “a rebuke can be earnest without being bitter,” and this would be a far better way of reaching the heart of the listener. The impression that must be avoided at all costs is that the pastor is prompted by “personal feeling.” Actually, his office imposes this task upon him, for his task is to save souls. Then, because human weaknesses frequently hinder the best intentions, “if it is necessary to speak very vehemently, it is best to write the words down exactly.” Why should that be done? From the pastor who wrote out every word and memorized his sermons verbatim came the answer: “In that way the preacher can plan very carefully what he wants to say and be sure afterwards exactly what he said.”<sup>25</sup>

With crisis workshops becoming commonplace, every pastor will profit from Walther's use of Romans 15:4. St. Paul said: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Once again the pastor-professor referred to his constant theme, "the use of God's Word for doctrine is the foundation." However, "its use for comfort and hope must be the constant goal of all sermons." Twentieth-century pastors must not assume that the word "crisis" is an innovation of our day. Walther said: "The true Christian is not suspended in blessed and undisturbed rest and joy as inexperienced or enthusiastic preachers all too often say in their sermons." Walther noted that "every true Christian enters into the kingdom of God through much inward and outward tribulation." Because of this situation, future pastors as well as veterans in the field were to realize such individuals were more "in need of comfort than in serene security."<sup>26</sup>

Servants of Christ and shepherds of souls fail in their responsibilities if Christians coming to God's house with "troubled and heavy hearts" still fail to receive the comfort so sorely needed. "Sermons empty of comfort," Walther observed, "for those under the cross and temptation are not true evangelical sermons." The message from the pulpit must offer more than freedom from sin; it must offer the balm of Gilead for the unending crises of life. Walther said:

A preacher must not imagine that every true Christian is so spiritual, so strong and heavenly minded, that he does not even sense earthly problems and does not need any comfort in them. A preacher must rather have a paternal, even a maternal heart, for his listeners (1 Corinthians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:7; see Isaiah 66:13). He should not gauge the causes of all kinds of sorrow as they are in themselves but as they seem to the Christian who is weak or has temporarily become weak. He must remember that nothing is more dangerous for Christians than earthly sorrow and heaviness, and that Satan, the spirit of sorrow, therefore constantly tries to plunge and bury Christians in it. Comfort is the main means to make Christians willing to pursue sanctification and all good works, as David says: "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt comfort my heart" (Psalm 119:32).<sup>27</sup>

Weaknesses which a pastor might see in his parishioners “should not deter an evangelical preacher from spreading abundant comfort.” All who sat in Walther’s classroom were advised: “The whole Gospel is nothing but a joyous message, a great comforting preaching.” Pastors were to study Article XI of the Formula of Concord because it presents eternal election “exclusively as a doctrine of comfort.”<sup>28</sup>

We now leave the classroom to follow the pastoral instructor as he translates theory into practice. In the course of one synodical convention Walther’s pulpit was a mound of upturned sod! Instead of academic serenity there was the trauma of laying aside the mortal remains of a gifted young pastor whose passing had cast a shadow over the convention. Given Walther’s reluctance to preach unless he had ample time for preparation, this was an occasion that cost him, as he tells it, extreme anguish of body and mind. But Synod called upon him to bring a message before the assembly lowered the lifeless body into the earth. Walther bowed to the decision of the Synod and then he agreed, however reluctantly, to offer his message to the readers of *Der Lutheraner*. We join the sorrowing assembly around the grave as Walther speaks in evident emotion:

“Truly You are God, who hide Yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior!” (Isaiah 45:15). We join the prophet in this cry as we stand by this grave. Oh, the pity of it! Whose mortal frame is it that this grave is about to engulf? It is the mortal form of a husband, quickly and suddenly surprised in the prime of his years, and that while some distance from his home. For the first time, in the few months of his marriage, his wife waited in vain for his return. Then, instead of embracing her beloved, pressing him to her heart with tears of joy, she received the heart-rending news of his death.

It is the mortal frame of a father, because of whose death a child has become a little orphan even before seeing the light of this world. It is the mortal form of a thankful son, whose devout mother with joy, hope, and with the crown of her tested age, now sees him let down into the grave. It is the mortal frame of a faithful brother pastor and friend whose death makes the world emptier, darker, and bleaker for a large circle of friends and brethren.

Oh! It is the mortal frame of a young servant of the church, equipped with wonderful gifts of mind and spirit, full of faithfulness and zeal, full of humility and conviction of beliefs, who was a promising pioneer to an oppressed and lonely church. Barely a year ago he came from over there. [Here Walther pointed to a college building, visible from the cemetery; there this young pastor received his schooling.] There he prepared himself for his holy office. Here is the grave where he will rest after a short period of work until the day of resurrection . . .<sup>29</sup>

Somewhat later in Walther's graveside message, certain trenchant words were directed to his sorrowing fellow pastors:

My esteemed brethren in the ministry, it is indeed true but we still must not forget that it is a great work that God has laid into our hands to call us into His holy office. He alone has and can do everything. He has, however, declared that he does His work through us. Immortal souls have been entrusted to us which He has purchased with His holy, precious blood; we need to tell those souls what they need to do to be saved. Impenitent sinners must be told, "You will die," while we must assure the penitent, "You will live!" Ours is the task to wake the dead, to show the erring the right way, make doubting into believers, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, comfort the afflicted, and lead the dying through the valley of the shadow of death to deliver them into the hands of God.<sup>30</sup>

While we in this day would scarcely expect it, Walther's graveside address on this traumatic occasion became a discourse on pastoral theology:

Briefly stated, as faithful and wise stewards, we need to give [our people] their portion of food in due season (Luke 12:42). Someday God will require the blood of these persons entrusted to us, of our hands. If God suddenly takes a young worker from our midst, what is the message He is giving us? He is calling to us and saying, "Be faithful in the performance of the office entrusted to you. Work while it is day before the night comes when no one can work." Listen to this voice! May we not postpone what needs to be done

until the tomorrow. Let us so work that, if the Lord should snatch the shepherd's staff from our hand, we may be ready to give an account to Him who is the Judge of the living and the dead.<sup>31</sup>

In the comments that follow we will note that the challenging preacher was not about to surrender to the notion that pastors are an "endangered species":

Perhaps there has never been a time when the holy ministry has been as despised as this present time. This is not only a result of unbelief, now gushing in on us as Noah's deluge, but unfortunately it is also the result of so many miserable men whose conduct of the holy office is shamed by false doctrine and an unholy life. This may cause even a faithful Christian to undervalue his own faithful pastor.

Walther's graveside address finally returned to the act of God that brought such a climax to a synodical convention:

If God is now giving eternal glory to a hard-working servant of His Word, then He is calling out that gifted preachers are gifts of His free grace which can be retired from service at any hour. Brethren, listen to the urgent voice of God that comes to your ears from this open grave! Always be cognizant of the fact that the making of a faithful preacher is not a work of man, but the work and gift of God. Therefore, if you are faithful in God's work, do not continually dwell on your weaknesses. Do not desire, on the other hand, to be angels while you are sinners. However, consider yourselves as precious gifts of the Most High God who can quickly be removed from this world.<sup>32</sup>

Leaving the site of God's acre behind, we may now look in on the pastor-professor in his study. Not a small part of Walther's pastoral activities were conducted by means of letters. His twentieth-century heirs pause in amazement at the amount of correspondence that he handled and that without all our modern equipment. The letters that have come down to us "are a vivid demonstration of the extent to which his faith and theological understanding permeated his whole being."<sup>33</sup> His letters reveal an often unnoticed compassion for individuals near and far. When Pastor Barth lost four children in one week Walther responded with Christian haste:

First, God's comfort! After reading your letter. . . which I received today with its heart-rending news, I am deeply moved, and I must tear myself away from everything else, no matter how urgent, to assure you that you have brothers who weep and lament with you. "Truly, You are God, who hide Yourself, O God of Israel."

Yet I was reminded at the same time that God has lifted His hiddenness in His Word. For God tells us quite plainly that it is a sign how much He loves His children when He disciplines them, not how angry He is with them. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states: "The Lord disciplines him whom He loves and chastises every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons."<sup>34</sup>

Walther counseled Barth that, since he was God's child, God must love him since He had buffeted him so severely. He suggested that like Job, Barth should go "into the sanctuary of God, i.e., the Holy Scriptures," where he and his dear wife, like Asaph, would overcome all temptations. Satan would indeed shoot his fiery darts, but prayer, meditation, and tribulation would make the sorrowing brother a theologian. God was leading this pastor "in the graduate school of His kingdom, the school of severe tribulations." This letter illustrates why both friends and critics said Walther's forte was in the realm of practical theology. We notice how the counselor set about lifting the sagging spirit of the bereaved father:

I am amazed to see in your letter how heroic God has made you. Oh, may God continue to strengthen you and by you make Satan a laughing-stock and scandal! It may well be that a flood of tears will flow even more abundantly from your eyes and those of your wife after your first victorious struggle with doubt, yes, with despair.

But weep! You would have no parental love if you could restrain your tears, of which the Son of God was not

---

ashamed at the grave of Lazarus. However, I hope that in time your tears will flow less copiously and will often change over into tears of joy for the glory in which you know all your dearly beloved children will be.

Walther treasured the verbal picture which the father's letter had drawn of the sainted child. He sighed under the loss which the father had experienced but suggested that he lift his "tear-filled eyes to blessed Paradise and revel in this, how much your little sweetheart won by way of contrast." The letter closed on a note that once we open our eyes in the eternal home, seeing the loved ones who have gone before us, "no woe can disturb and no death can end."

Concern for individuals is evident in the letters of Walther. His correspondence ranged over a wide variety of issues. Yet it always became apparent that the salvation of the individual was the all-important issue. On September 30, 1860, Walther wrote to a sorrowing pastor, J.M. Buehler, who had just begun his life's labors in San Francisco. Walther advised Buehler, who had been robbed on the way to his first charge: "Don't by any means do the devil the favor of grieving over it." But Walther's main concern was not the missionary's loss of money, but the possible loss of a soul if the young pastor made a mistake in dealing with a lodge member:

As to your question about the Freemasons, I am of the strong opinion that you should not begin with polemics against Freemasonry. If among them one individual should become evident who learns to love God's Word, do not burden that one immediately with the condition that he dissolve his connections. That you have to reserve for a later time and you have to bear the false fellowship for a time as a weakness. But don't say or preach anything which could be construed as condoning it. Just be quiet about it and preach in general that "friendship with the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4).

The advice that followed was typically concerned with guarding every one against spiritual harm:

Above all things be careful not to arrange for the celebration of the Lord's Supper too quickly. Hold those who desire

the Lord's Supper off for a while, till you see that you have a small congregation, that there really is a communion there. At first do not preach about the difference between the Lutheran, Reformed, and United Church, but only about the difference between Christians and non-Christians. Seek to work on the hearts of your hearers and to depict with lively colors the sad condition of those who have no Savior and thus have no hope of eternal life, and at the same time portray the blessedness of those who can say: "Now I have found the firm foundation."<sup>35</sup>

The letters of Walther are a gold mine of pastoral theology in practice. On occasion individuals or congregations wrote to Walther about "misunderstandings of certain areas of doctrine." His letters reveal the heart of a pastor trying to increase Christian knowledge. "He does not hesitate to point out their error, yet all the while his love and concern for them is readily apparent."<sup>36</sup> The 1870 convention of the Western District dealt with a question which is being raised with increasing frequency today: "Why do we not admit those to Holy Communion who believe differently?" Walther informed the convention: "This is a burning question of our time."<sup>37</sup>

By way of response to this "burning question" Walther responded with the biblical doctrine of the church; from this he stated decisively "that communion fellowship without agreement in doctrine is contrary to a scriptural understanding of the sacrament and totally inconsistent with the historic practice of the Lutheran Church."<sup>38</sup> The essayist admitted that "the orthodox Lutheran Church knows full well that it bears in its midst those who are erring out of weakness in order that through admonition and reproof from the Word of God they might be moved to repentance." But what if someone is not willing to entertain the luxury of repentance? Walther answered: "When these efforts fail and one is revealed as a stubborn errorist our church will then no longer recognize him as a brother but will separate itself from him."<sup>39</sup> The Apostle Paul asserted in 1 Corinthians 11:19: "Of course there must be divisions among you to show clearly which of you can stand the test." A "division," said Walther, "means a fellowship of people who hold to erring doctrine contrary to one or more of the articles of faith, a sect." If

---

orthodox Christians wish to be identified as orthodox, “they [will] separate themselves from such sects.” But what about those who fail to separate from those who cause “divisions from sound doctrine?” The essayist responded: “The Christian who unknowingly remains among them can also remain a Christian through the wonderful gracious preservation of God, but he is not revealed to us as such.”<sup>40</sup>

Walther then cited 1 Corinthians 10:18 with its question: “Do not those who eat the sacrifices share the altar?” He maintained:

This text indicates an important element of our separation from the false church, namely, that we exclude all communion fellowship with them. Because in the same way as that Corinthian who ate from the heathen idol offerings had fellowship with the heathen, so still today a Christian who takes part in a false communion service practices fellowship with the heterodox church.<sup>41</sup>

Attention was directed to Exodus 12:43, 48. “These are the rules for the Passover, the Lord told Moses and Aaron; no foreigner should eat of it. . . If a stranger is staying with you and wants to celebrate a Passover for the Lord, all his males should be circumcised; then he may come to celebrate it and be like anyone born in Israel.” While even the heathen could and should be permitted to hear the message of God’s Word, “no Gentile could be allowed at the Passover meal who was not himself a believing proselyte.” Walther continued: “The same holds true now for the sacraments of the New Testament.” St. Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians was cited once more: “All of us are one body because there is one bread and all of us share that one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17). In a lengthy and detailed summation Walther declared:

Communion should be a bond of fellowship in worship. All should come to preaching, but only Christians should come to Communion who have confessed the proper Christian faith with their mouths. Whoever, therefore, goes to Holy Communion in a Lutheran church declares openly before the world: I belong to this church, to the doctrine which is preached here, to the faith which is confessed here, and to all the confessors who belong here.<sup>42</sup>

For example, Holy Communion should not be received in situations where offense has been given or taken and there has been no Christian reconciliation. In the same way those who believe differently should not receive Holy Communion as long as they have not renounced their error or their heterodox fellowship and in this way reconciled themselves with the orthodox church.<sup>43</sup>

Another observation of Walther is worthy of note: "Now we Lutherans who eat of this Holy Communion are poor, miserable sinners, but in doctrine we are pure in spite of the devil who wants us to wander off." Such being the case, Walther stated the principle which answers his earlier question, "Why do we not admit to Holy Communion those who believe differently?" He replied: "He who does not hold to it with us totally and completely cannot go with us to Holy Communion, as has been previously stated."<sup>44</sup>

From the outset Walther had indicated that the doctrine of the true visible church, with its resultant position on communion fellowship with those who espoused a different belief, had been the source of the "most bitter accusations" against Missouri from the majority of American Lutherans. In 1962 *The Cresset* published an article on C.F.W. Walther under the title of "The Orthodox Teacher and the Word of God." It contained this observation of the president of Valparaiso University: "There is much evidence that Walther's burning concern for orthodoxy has survived, especially in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod." This statement was followed by a telling observation: "There is much less evidence that his definition of orthodoxy remains the standard by which orthodoxy is evaluated."<sup>45</sup>

Walther knew that Missouri and its chief essayist were constantly being evaluated. This fact prompted him to declare in his first sermon at the opening of a synodical convention:

Whether our Synod gains friends or makes enemies, wins honor or invites disgrace, grows or declines in numbers, brings peace or incites enmity, all this must be unimportant to us—just so our Synod may keep the jewel of purity of doctrine and knowledge. However, should our Synod ever grow indifferent toward purity of doctrine, through ingratitude forget this prize, or betray or barter it away to

the false church, then let our church body perish and the name "Missourian" decay in disgrace.<sup>46</sup>

The *Cresset* remarks that Walther's monumental *Law and Gospel* contains "a polemical principle," something which is readily apparent in many of his sermons and essays. Mingled with the joys of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Synod are signs of weariness over all the attacks waged against the Synod; yet a spirited defense of the doctrine and polity of the young synod is evident: "In spirit I hear our foes chanting: Pure doctrine, pure doctrine—is that all you have to boast about?" Seemingly this barb had come to the ears of many in his audience; he advised his hearers to let them mock, because this would reveal of whose spirit these critics were. His critics were of a different spirit than King David who prayed: "And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances" (Psalm 119:43).<sup>47</sup>

Since an alarming number of critics, both in America and Europe, were taunting the Synod of Missouri and, of course, Walther for their insistence upon *die reine Lehre*, either Missouri would have to change course or offer an explanation for what many considered majoring in minors. Walther was equal to the challenge:

And what is pure doctrine? Pure doctrine is the pure Word of God, the unadulterated bread of life, the certified seed of the children of God. Pure doctrine is the source of faith and love; yes, a well of divine comfort. In a word, it is a reliable way to Christ and to heaven.<sup>48</sup>

Walther encouraged this anniversary audience to treasure *die reine Lehre* as more valuable than silver and gold, sweeter than honey, and more powerful than sin, death, heaven and hell. Even the spiritual life found among the sectarians owed its genesis to the bits and pieces of pure doctrine found among them. All this but demonstrated the truth of the dramatic promise in Isaiah 55:11: "My Word. . .that goes forth from My mouth. . .shall not return to Me void, but. . .it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

What Walther touched upon so eloquently at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the organization of Synod was a theme that had occupied his attention for many a year. As early as his first sermon

at the opening of a synodical convention, Walther stated that God's gift of pure doctrine and knowledge is to provide people with the best means to salvation. God entrusts the "pure seed of Christian doctrine also for the purpose of enlightening, sanctifying, and saving the lost world through it." Such being the case, Walther asked his hearers if God would allow a church "to have and possess this living seed" if it was not tireless in its devotion to spread it everywhere in the world. God also set about to supply the church with "the key of divine revelation." But would God leave that key in the hand of a church that did not "by incessant reading, searching, studying, and meditating seek to unlock the treasure vaults of divine revelation and ever better to find out their contents?" Likewise, if God gave His church the weapons to fight error, would God leave such weapons in the hand of a church that did not use them to "strike down and destroy every lie and error, in whatever form it may be found?" Walther advised the delegates that God would do no such thing but would rather "take away from a church that talent which is ungratefully wrapped in a napkin and give it to more faithful souls."<sup>49</sup>

The great medical center at Rochester, Minnesota, is the realization of the dreams and ambitions of a once obscure country doctor. And it has rightly been said that every institution is the lengthened shadow of one man. Not infrequently has it been said that the Missouri Synod was but the lengthened shadow of one dynamic pastor. While Walther would be the first to deny this claim, some historians assign him a similar place of influence as the once obscure Rochester doctor. Walther pleaded with fathers and mothers to use their homes to lay the foundation for the pure doctrine together with a "sense of dread of false doctrine." He appealed to the parochial school teachers to "continue where the Christian home leaves off." Then he urged the teachers to conduct themselves as those "who do not hinder, but who help the ministerial office." Pastors were challenged to be up and doing so that by persistent study they might be more "enriched with doctrine and knowledge." The goal was to be "able to refute error and also become ever more ardent in the work of the Lord." Nor were the professors forgotten:

---

“We professors at our institutions for the training of teachers and preachers must incessantly concentrate on making our institutions real training schools of prophets.” The synodical periodicals were to train people “not merely to look for spiritual reading matter for their entertainment, but for articles that stand for purity, thoroughness, and certainty in doctrine and practice, for articles that refuse to prostitute truth to please the spirit of the time, or that hobnob with errorists or that seek the favor of persons.” The synodical watchmen, “our presidents, must have an eye, not so much towards human regulations, but rather towards purity of doctrine and knowledge.”<sup>51</sup>

On February 28, 1879, Holy Cross Church in St. Louis was the scene of the dedication of Concordia Publishing House. Here Dr. Walther delivered a memorable address. In this address Walther noted that, while Gutenberg had no idea other than the enrichment his discovery would bring him, “the world was soon to know that the art of printing was destined by God to be first of all the forerunner and then a faithful handmaiden of the divinely ordained Reformation of the Church.” At length Walther concluded his address with a backward look at Deuteronomy 28 with Moses’ blessing and curse upon ancient Israel:

Let our Concordia Publishing House be dedicated to God as long as it exists; dedicated to Him, the Most Sacred Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Let nothing issue from this institution but what serves the honor of this great God and the temporal well-being and eternal blessedness of men.

Cursed be the hands which write anything contrary to God’s Word for the purpose of having it multiplied by this printing establishment!

Cursed be the hands which offer for sale publications mixed with eternal venom from this printing house! Cursed be the whole house with all its appointments should Satan ever succeed in drawing it into his service! May the wrath of God then consume it with fire and destroy it from the earth.

Contrarily, blessed be the hands which write for this institution to the glory of God and the salvation of men! Blessed be the hands which compose and print the like!

Blessed be the hands which disseminate it! Most blessed in time and in eternity, moreover, be also all finally who in faith have offered and still will offer labor, toil and care, or earthly means, or at least their good wishes and prayers, for this printing house of God.<sup>52</sup>

When the *Cresset* published a detailed commentary on Walther's *Law and Gospel* in 1962, it provided this introduction:

There is nothing more exciting in the world than the disinterment of a document which has been lost in the dust of history and now suddenly reappears, a voice from the past, to speak to a new age with curious relevance and power. This some of us at Valparaiso University discovered several years ago when we began to look again at the famous theses and lectures of C.F.W. Walther on "Gesetz und Evangelium."

The editors hastened to add that their interest "in this voice from a quiet classroom in St. Louis almost a century ago" was related to "the fact that the first scholarly work to emanate from our newly acquired university in 1927 was a translation of these theses and commentaries by the sainted Dr. W.H.T. Dau." Representatives of the university noted: "We are [Dau's] successors and we want to stand where he stood." The successors continued:

Beyond this personal reason, however, there was the dawning realization that in these theses there was something which the Lutheran Church had seemingly forgotten and certainly underemphasized. In the place of the Scriptural truth contained in them much of Lutheranism had succumbed to a completely alien fundamentalism, a shallow moralism, and a painful parroting of old words and phrases which had never passed through the purging fires of hard study of the Word of God. There was still power, we felt, in the old ways and the old paths of the classic Lutheranism which rang through Walther's theses. It was no accident that the last twenty-one of them began with: "The Word of God."<sup>53</sup>

The *Cresset* refers to "the old ways and the old paths"; these enlivened Walther's festive sermon at the twenty-fifth anniversary of Synod in 1872. In a dramatic climax of the first part of his sermon Walther noted:

---

We have adhered, first, to the supreme principle of all Christianity, that the canonical books of the Old and the New Testament are, from the first to the last letter, the inspired Word of the great God, the only rule and norm of faith and life, of all doctrine and all teachers, and the supreme judge in all religious controversies. Next we have adhered to the second supreme principle of our truly evangelical Church, that the article of justification of the poor sinner before God by grace alone, for the sake of Christ alone, and therefore through faith alone, is the chief fundamental article of the whole Christian religion, with which the Church stands and falls.

Furthermore, we have adhered to the doctrine that the Word and Sacraments are the only true Means of Grace, which constantly offer and impart power, spirit, and blessing. The Word is the power of God to save all who believe it. Holy Baptism is the washing of rebirth to eternal life. Holy Communion is the true body and blood of Jesus Christ, the highest pledge of the forgiveness of sins.

We have adhered to the doctrine that the Church has only one head, an invisible Head, even our Lord Jesus Christ. We hold that the Roman Pope, who wants to be the visible head, is the "Antichrist" who is prophesied in Scripture. The Pope is the "Man of Sin," the "Son of Perdition," who, as God, sits in the temple of God, showing himself to be God.<sup>54</sup>

The forthright preaching of Dr. Walther did not appeal to all American Lutherans. This becomes apparent from a letter that Walther dispatched to a New York pastor who had informed the seminary president concerning his disagreements with Missouri. Walther wrote: "You express concern that our synod is stuck on defense of pure doctrine rather than the exercise of true godliness and the planting of real concern for the welfare of souls." Walther granted that if an individual only knew of Missouri's polemics, he would undoubtedly fail to see that Missouri employed both "the sword" and "the trowel." He assured this otherwise friendly critic that the members of the Synod were "constantly [seeking] to live in true repentance" with the constant aim of being faithful to all who entrusted their spiritual welfare to their ministrations.<sup>55</sup>

There are those who dismiss Walther and his generation out of hand because of their supposed intolerance of differing theologies. A graduate history professor once told his colleagues:

Toleration has been so emphasized by our public schools today that college students consider the most valid and socially necessary criticisms of any religious group as unfair, unsporting, and bigoted. Thus we have some grounds for the present ecumenical urge in the world: theology no longer counts or interests the majority of the faithful.

Yet this historical specialist lectured to his colleagues in a frame of reference which theologians will do well not to ignore. He said: "We owe it to the entire past, the past which supports us, to understand to the best of our ability; and we owe it to the future to make this past understandable."<sup>56</sup> The *Cresset* article already mentioned commented from a theological viewpoint: "It is our hope. . . that the study of these great principles will persuade many of our brethren to look again to the rock from which we were hewn." The editors grant that even Walther's famous lectures comprising *Law and Gospel* "contain a polemical principle, but the weapon they give us is fashioned by the majesty and mercy of God and not by human opinion and subscriptional theories."<sup>57</sup>

Few Lutherans of this part of the twentieth century would preach a sermon like the anniversary sermon Walther delivered when Synod celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. But he had noticed that his beloved Synod was no longer so swayed by its first love as in 1847. So attention is directed to the battles that had been fought against "unbelief and mockery of religion in general." Then he mentions a word that few understand today: "unionism. . . sweeping like a plague over all of Christendom, destroying love for the truth." He cites dangers from the camp of the "enthusiasts." He sounds a warning against "the growing claims of the anti-Christian papacy." Nor were Missourians to be unmindful of the thrust of "American Lutheranism [swaying between] Reformed or Romanist doctrine and principles."<sup>58</sup>

Yet denunciation of error is followed by the joy that amidst such waves of opposition, the ship of Missouri had remained afloat; it had stood in the old way of the unaltered doctrine of the old church and repeatedly had to call for help to pull in the net. Speaking of blessings beyond expectations, Walther noted:

The net of the Gospel which was cast out among us is filled so abundantly that again and again we had to call to our brethren across land and sea: "Come and help us pull in the net." . . . Even here and now God allows us to see such abundant results of our planting and watering that in humble astonishment we have to cry out: "The Lord has done great things for us whereof we are glad."<sup>59</sup>

Easily overlooked in a discussion of the great issues of Walther's sermons is the technique the master preacher employs. Walther's sermons are more goal centered than text centered. Thus, for example, his first sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity (on 2 Corinthians 3:4-11) has as its theme "The Difference between the Law and the Gospel." The second sermon for that same Sunday has this theme: "The Greatness and the Glory of the Office of the Gospel Ministry." The text for the First Convention of the Synodical Conference was 1 Timothy 4:16: "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." While noting that the assembled delegates had achieved unity of doctrine after bitter conflicts, Walther's theme was drawn closely from the text: salvation was the common goal for which they now would strive. In the language of the stadium, there was a change-up from his usual style. But his comforting Christmas Day sermon on Luke 2:1-14 begins with the Fall in the Garden of Eden and takes God's children to the very portals of heaven. "O my dear hearers, in conclusion I therefore call to you once more: Rejoice! The Savior is born; heaven is open for you." All his hearers heard the challenge to be done with hesitancy as they stood "before the open gates of heaven." There is a touch of the angelic message in the plea: "Believe the joyful message which I have brought you today." Having done that, the hearers would go through heaven's open door—from sin, from banishment from Eden, through Christ to heaven's mansions, all in one sermon.<sup>60</sup>

Against the background of Reformation Day, Walther concluded:

Yes, dear brethren, the Church will not always be a militant Church. A day is coming, a blessed day that is earth's final day, when the Church will at last lay her weapons down to grasp the harps. This will be the day when,

at the sound of the trumpet by the Archangel, all who would not fight will be filled with fear; the sound of the trumpet will indicate the Lord of Hosts will begin the eternal fight against them.

On the other hand, all the faithful fighters will rejoice because the last trumpet spells the end of all strife. Then heaven and earth will be consumed and all the children of the world will shake with fear since all their desires will perish with the world. Then all the faithful warriors will join with their victorious leader because their battlefield will vanish forever. Wearing the victor's crown, they will enter the Church Triumphant to the feast of peace and life eternal. O may all be numbered among the exuberant guests! In this may Jesus Christ, the Prince of our salvation be our help. Amen.<sup>61</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. "Protokoll ueber die von den damaligen Lokalschulinspektor zu Braeunsdorf, C.F.W. Walther dasselbst gemachten Schulbesuche," excerpts made by Johannes Huebner, Ev. Luth. pastor of Hartenstein-Erzgebirge, trans. Carl S. Meyer, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, 38 (July 1965), pp. 103-107.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
4. Paul Burgdorf, "Saxon Centennial Calendar, 1839," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, 11 (January 1939), p. 100.
5. C.F.W. Walther, *Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, 5 Auflage (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), p. 75; all items from this work have been translated by John Drickamer.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
8. C.F.W. Walther, *Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille*, Zweite Auflage (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), pp. 54, 56.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
10. C.F.W. Walther, "Rede zur Feier der Wiederoeffnung der deutschen ev-luth. hoeheren Buergerschule zu St. Louis, gehalten im Versammlungs-Saale der Dreieinigkeitsgemeinde, den 20. September, 1868," *Der Lutheraner*, 20 (1 October 1868), pp. 18, 19; trans. John Drickamer.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

- 
12. C.A.T. Selle, "Schools of Higher Learning," *Schulblatt* (January 1870), pp. 6-12; trans. Walter F. Wollbrecht.
  13. C.F.W. Walther, "Gemeindeschulen," *Der Lutheraner*, 24 (15 February 1873), p. 76; trans. Carl S. Meyer.
  14. Lewis W. S. Spitz, Sr., *The Life of Dr. C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 90, 91.
  15. Walther, *Pastoraltheologie*, p. 76.
  16. F. Bente, ed., *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), Apol. XV, 43.
  17. Walther, *Pastoraltheologie*, p. 77.
  18. *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 77.
  19. *Ibid.*, p. 77, fn.
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
  27. *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 89.
  28. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
  29. C.F.W. Walther, "Grabrede beim Begraebnisz eines jungen Predigers," *Brosamen* (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. Staaten, 1876), pp. 386, 387; trans. D. Hesse.
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 389.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
  33. George J. Gude, Jr., "Walther's Pastoral Approach Reflected in His Letters," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, 60, 2 (Summer 1987), p. 2.
  34. Letter of C.F.W. Walther to Pastor Barth.
  35. Roy A. Suelflow, *Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther: Selected Letters* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 71.
  36. Gude, "Walther's Pastoral Approach," p. 76.
  37. C.F.W. Walther, *Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently*, trans. Lawrence L. White (Pittsburg: mimeographed publication), p. 1.
  38. *Ibid.*, Translator's Preface, p. i.
  39. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
  40. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
  41. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
  42. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
45. Robert W. Bertram et al., "C.F.W. Walther on Law and Gospel," *The Cresset*, 50 (May 1987), p. 5.
46. C.F.W. Walther, "First Sermon Delivered at the Opening of Synod, 1 Corinthians 1:4, 5" (St. James, Minnesota: St. John's Lutheran Church, 1962), p. 8.
47. C.F.W. Walther, "Synodal-Jubelfest-Predigt," *Lutherische Brosamen* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1876); trans. Otto Hinrichs.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 562.
49. Walther, "First Sermon", p. 7.
50. Paul Burgdorf, *This Blest Communion* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1948), p. 41.
51. Walther, "First Sermon," p. 8.
52. Walther, *Lutherische Brosamen*, p. 582; trans. Paul Burgdorf. Those who fail to appreciate the vigor of Walther's words will note that in the denunciation of error Walther consistently followed a scriptural and Lutheran practice. In a Reformation sermon on 1 John 2:19 Walther warns against a "kind of love. . .that goes against God's explicit prohibition. This is nothing but a show of love, an empty, deceiving picture of love." Where such "love" was followed to accomplish mergers, Walther condemned such efforts to create a "damnable union, that is based on a love that is only a stolen appearance of love, but has sacrificed God's eternal truth and has trodden God's eternal command under foot!" *Brosamen*, p. 264; trans. John Drickamer.
53. *The Cresset*, p. 4.
54. Walther, "Synodal-Jubelfest-Predigt," pp. 556-559; trans. Theodore Engelder.
55. R. Suelflow, *Selected Letters of Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 113.
56. Carl Bridenbough, "The Great Mutation," *The American Historical Review*, 68 (January 1963), pp. 321-324.
57. *The Cresset*, p. 5.
58. Donley Hesse, "Walther the Preacher," in *C.F.W. Walther: The American Luther* (Freeman: Pine Hill Press, 1987), p. 136.
59. Walther, *Brosamen*, p. 563.; trans. O. F. Hinrichs.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 29, trans. Henry Eggold.
61. Walther, *Brosamen*, p. 244; trans. D. Hesse.

The Rev. Arthur Drevlow, D. Min., is pastor emeritus of St. John's Lutheran Church, St. James, Minnesota.

# Pietism and the Church Growth Movement in a Confessional Lutheran Perspective

Carter Lindberg

The Church Growth Movement itself, as far as I have seen, makes no self-conscious reference to historical pietism. But my biases against historical pietism paled in comparison to my reaction to my encounter with church growth materials. The very titles triggered all the alarm bells that warn of a theology of glory. As I surveyed the shelf of church growth materials in the library, the following titles leaped out at me: *I Believe in Church Growth*, *Body Building Exercises for the Local Church*, *Our Kind of People*, "How to Build High Morale in Your Church," "How to Find a Pastor Who Fits Your Church...," "How to Find Receptive People," "How to Light a Fire under Your Church Members Without Getting Burned."<sup>1</sup> It seems that faith no longer comes by hearing but by organizing. I admit that there may be a bit of professional jealousy coloring my reaction. It is not that I have never been tempted to sell my inheritance for a snappy book title; it is just that I lack imagination.

But as I began reading about the Church Growth Movement, it became increasingly apparent that there was more to my reaction than professional jealousy. Although there are indications now that church growth theorists may be concerned for developing biblical warrants for their program, the movement itself is notorious for its self-consciously sociological, pragmatic, and a-theological approach to ecclesiology and mission. Donald McGavran, the pioneer of the Church Growth Movement, protests this evaluation. But his very protest sharpens the question of whether ecclesiology is simply correct sociology plus the doctrine of one's choice. In his revised edition of *Understanding Church Growth*, McGavran wrote: "As you set forth church growth theory and theology for your congregations and your denomination use your own creedal statements, your own system. . . Do not attack church growth as theologically inadequate. Make it adequate according to the doctrines emphasized by your branch of the Church. The test as to whether you have done this or not is whether your congregations are stimulated to vibrant grateful growth such as the New Testament churches exemplified."<sup>2</sup> In short, if one's churches grow, one's doctrine cannot be all bad!

We are all familiar with the evaluation of Americans as peculiarly prone to promises of success through techniques. Thus, it is not surprising that the Church Growth Movement has been one of the most influential recent movements in American churches. Luther's remark that we are all born Pelagians had proleptic significance for America.

The popularity of the Church Growth Movement is also not surprising when we stop to consider that the necessity of choice—what Berger calls “the heretical imperative”—is characteristic of modern culture and its religion. Numerous critics have pointed out how our cafeteria culture promotes the dissolution of confessional differences and the development of pragmatic and utilitarian values with respect to religion in order to increase, as it were, shares in the ecclesiastical marketplace.<sup>3</sup> But as James Scherer succinctly points out: “Pragmatism represents a betrayal of the norm of *sola scriptura*. The entire basis, methodology, and goal of mission today must be rethought in faithfulness to the Scriptures, and in light of the current situation.”<sup>4</sup>

What is surprising, at least to me, is the account of how popular the Church Growth Movement is among confessional Lutherans. Glenn Huebel, a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastor, in a recent article in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* wrote: “The [Missouri] Synod has enthusiastically embraced church growth principles. Great numbers of our pastors have been trained at Fuller Theological Seminary in California. Many districts, including my own, are emphasizing and integrating church growth principles. Lyle Schaller has rated the Church Growth Movement as the most influential development of the 1970's. It is becoming a tidal wave in our synod at the present time.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in this context it may be helpful to consider the Church Growth Movement in the light of a prior renewal movement such as pietism. We may gain some perspective by detaching ourselves from immediate causes. Historical awareness of the context of pietism may provide clues to the appeal, orientation, potential impact, and theological profile of the Church Growth Movement. It seems to me that pietism and the Church Growth Movement are similar in suggesting that Word and Sacrament are *not* sufficient for the church. Each in its own way piously desires something more, some additional mark by which the church may

be "really" evident among us. From this orientation there arise a number of issues which are problematic to Lutheran theology. It is very tempting to attempt to ring all the changes on a theological critique of renewal movements from the perspective of Luther's theology: justification by grace alone through faith alone, sin as being curved in upon the self, faith as confidence in God which comes by hearing, the Christian and the Christian church as simultaneously righteous and sinner, the theology of the cross and the dialectic of Law and Gospel as lived hermeneutics, life between the now and not yet of the kingdom of God, etc. Obviously such an approach would take far more space than is possible here. Thus, I have narrowed my approach to a consideration of the church; but all these other themes are presupposed.

### *Pietism*

Each of the renewal movements we are considering means many things to many people. The understanding of pietism depends upon which "pietist" orientation is perceived as the paradigm for renewal of the church. Those who look to pietists such as Christian Høburg (1606-1675) and Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714) will find a radical mystical spiritualism which to confessional Lutherans appears as *Schwaermerei*.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, a focus on the acknowledged "Father of Pietism," Philipp Spener (1635-1705), has prompted some interpreters of pietism to claim that he really contributed nothing new theologically but only summarized the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> There is not time to review the various interpretations of pietism between these two poles, so I will only refer to F. Ernest Stoeffler's statement that pietism is "one of the least understood movements in the history of Christianity."<sup>8</sup>

Understood or not, however, there is a clear consensus among scholars of pietism that it was "the most significant religious. . . reform movement of Continental Protestantism since the Reformation [and that it] was a movement for the renewal of the church, theology, and piety from the experiential vitality of the Holy Spirit."<sup>9</sup> What is common to pietism throughout its various expressions in Halle, Württemberg, Switzerland, Herrnhut, and elsewhere is the complaint that the church is spiritually impoverished in every respect.<sup>10</sup> Since from the

perspective of early pietism, clergy, parishioners, and polemical confessional theology all lacked the Spirit, thus urging and expectation of a new, richer, experiential work of the Holy Spirit was common.<sup>11</sup>

What was the context for this loss of congregational and spiritual vitality? The intra- and extra-Lutheran polemical struggles of the late sixteenth century are well known. The orthodox concern for the purification of doctrine was expressed in lengthy discourses not infrequently characterized by dogmatic rigidity and polemical attacks on Lutheran, Catholic, and Calvinist opponents. The theological absolutism of orthodoxy fit in well with the developing political absolutism of the seventeenth century. Church life suffered not only from this dogmatic orientation, but also from the fact that the clergy were perceived as being out of touch with the common life and as serving a government-maintained church. The printed sermons of the time suggest, according to Jaroslav Pelikan, that "the type of preaching to which the people were being exposed was unproductive of religious, spiritual, or ethical power."<sup>12</sup> The orthodox church of Spener's time clearly tied religious, spiritual, and ethical power to the office of the ministry and the institutional church. This fact is graphically illustrated by the title page of the dogmatics text by Spener's orthodox teacher, Johann Conrad Dannhauer. The title page of Dannhauer's *Hodosophia Christiana* (Strasbourg, 1649) depicts an altar upon which is a crucifix, paten, chalice, candlestick, and Bible; behind the altar is a clerically robed Lutheran pastor with the great keys of binding and loosing in hand; before the altar a Christian kneels in submissive mien, uncertain as to whether to direct his gaze to the pastor or to God the Father who looks down from the clouds above. In order to participate in the helping grace of the Holy Spirit, the Christian is entirely dependent upon the pastor and the ecclesial means of grace administered by the pastor.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, there was a decline in and even a corruption of pastoral care. "The cure of souls was much neglected and largely confined to a limited amount of visitation and the rather mechanical practice of private confession. . .for which a fee (*Beichtpfennig*) was paid to the pastor. . .Critics revived a saying of Sarcerius [1501-1559]: 'The binding key is quite rusted away while the loosing key is in full operation.' "<sup>14</sup>

---

It is in reaction to this situation that the pietists developed their well-known slogans of "life versus doctrine," "Holy Spirit versus the office of the ministry," and "reality versus the appearance of godliness." The latter slogan indicates the shift of pietism's attention from the doctrine of justification to regeneration. The edification of the individual and the increase of the community was now related not to doctrine but to personal growth in spirituality. The mark of the church became the reciprocal love of its members rather than Word and Sacrament. This point meant that reflection on the church focused on its history and structure and located its deficits in its members rather than in their relationship to their Head. "That the church is the body of *Christ* disappears behind the fact that it is a *body* suffering from disease. Its earthly life condition is taken to be more important than its heavenly nourishment, the Word and sacraments."<sup>15</sup> A consequence of this focus on the praxis of piety was an extensive de-dogmatization and confessional indifference. The earlier quotation from McGavran seems to echo this pietist orientation.

But the intellectual, dogmatic system of orthodoxy was not the sole context for the rise of pietism. The historical-social context was also important. This context was one of physical, moral, and religious crises caused in large part by the horrors of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Mercenary armies tramped back and forth across the German territories, living off the land of friend and foe alike and wreaking destruction. Cities were plundered, the countryside ravaged, and populations decimated by warfare, plague, and starvation. This destruction and confusion not only wrecked the economy but also adversely affected religion and culture. Churches and schools had been burned, many of those still standing were leaderless, and care of the sick and poor was practically nonexistent. In the light of this religious and spiritual disintegration it is not surprising that orthodox debates were of little interest to the people.<sup>16</sup>

Spener's critique of the church, in brief, was not that it lacked the Word or pure doctrine, but rather that it lacked the Spirit and life; the church suffered from a lack of the Holy Spirit, a poverty of the Spirit, indeed, a loss of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup> Spener's remedies and some of their consequences are well-known. The

small groups (the *collegia pietatis*) for the cultivation of holiness brought in their train tendencies toward otherworldliness, Donatism, legalism, and divisiveness (the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*). These tendencies will surface in later renewal movements such as the charismatic renewal. But what is of interest here in terms of analogous expressions in the Church Growth Movement is the pietist understanding of the church. The irony is that in the attempt to expand the Augsburg Confession's definition of the church, these movements constrict the church even more. When Word and Sacrament are no longer sufficient marks of the church, then the church is reduced to the like-minded, the like-experienced, the like-classed. The intent of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* was to provide more room for the activity of the Holy Spirit but it led to a problematic "spiritual priesthood" consisting not of all baptized Christians but of those who had experienced the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Pietist ecclesiology foreshadowed another problem for renewal movements as well—a chiliastically flavored eschatology. "The awakening of chiliastic expectations is one of the most pregnant marks of early pietism in Frankfurt."<sup>18</sup> The immediate context of pietism was already characterized by a strong eschatological tension related to the terrors of the Thirty Years' War. As few other times in church history, there was a widespread expectation of the near end of the world. But Spener's hope was not for the end of all times, but rather the hope for a better time. As he stated in the *Pia Desideria*: "If we consult the Holy Scriptures we can have no doubt that God promised His church here on earth a better state than this." For Spener, this "better state" is linked to the conversion of the Jews and the fall of the Roman papacy;<sup>19</sup> for church growth advocates this "better state" is linked to what McGavran calls "the harvest of peoples."

The ecclesiologies of both pietism and the Church Growth Movement displace the tension-filled dynamic of *simul justus et peccator* and the theology of the cross by the motifs of progress and perfection. For pietism this alteration is pointedly illustrated by the title of an influential chiliastic writing of the time: "Assertion of the Thousand Year Reign or of the Prosperity of the Church of Christ on Earth."<sup>20</sup> Around the turn of the year 1674-1675 the goal of the Frankfurter pietists was announced as

not only the withdrawal from the depraved *Volkskirche* to a circle of pious friends, but to make alive once again the form of the primitive Christian church in the midst of the outwardly corrupted church. This desire is closely related to the expectation that the fulfillment of the divine promises and the beginning of a better time for the church are no longer far off. "The orientation to the ideal of primitive Christianity of the chiliastic hope, as is so often the case in the history of the church, also belong together in their roots in Frankfurter pietism."<sup>21</sup>

Thus Spener's new perspective which detached pietism from orthodoxy and raised the *Pia Desideria* to the programmatic writing of a new epoch in Lutheranism was twofold. It was the concept of the gathering of the pious into particular assemblies patterned after the primitive Christian community and the concept of a promised glorious kingdom of Christ on earth to the pious.<sup>22</sup> This orientation will continue in the Church Growth Movement, albeit with variations on the theme.

### *The Church Growth Movement*

The broad context for the rise of the Church Growth Movement hardly needs to be spelled out. Analogously to the context for pietism, contemporary Western culture is experiencing the pervasive deterioration, if not breakdown, of the external supports for belief systems and social structures. Government, church, and family all seem incapable of resolving or ameliorating alienation, poverty, war, injustice, economic failure, and social dislocation. Our time is marked by enormous insecurity of every type; fears of the future; breakdown of traditional values; plurality of competing worldviews, norms, and definitions of reality; loss of power by nations as well as individuals; individual isolation and dehumanization. Traditional mainline churches are declining in membership, but conservative churches are growing. While the declining churches continue to agonize over the "why" and "whether" questions of mission and evangelism, the growing conservative churches focus on the "how" of mission and evangelism.<sup>23</sup> Recently the Lutheran missiologist, James Scherer, wrote: "Reticence, hesitation, and loss of nerve, especially in ecumenical circles, characterize the attitude of many Christians toward mission near the end of the 20th century."<sup>24</sup> According to McGavran:

This was the case in Christian missions overseas in the mid-twentieth century. Tremendous resources were spent in mission work, often for very little growth of the church. Where growth was impossible, this outcome was understandable, but sometimes little growth was unnecessary. Christians, pastors, and missionaries were coming out of the ripe fields empty-handed. During the decades following World War II, little or no growth also marked most denominations in the United States. Some biological and transfer growth did occur but conversion growth was spotty and slight. Whole denominations became static or actually declined. Pastors in America, like their brothers overseas, often led congregations which remained at about the same number of members for years, or even lost a few hundred.<sup>25</sup>

It was this situation which prompted Donald McGavran, a former missionary with over thirty years of experience in India and now Dean Emeritus of the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary, to begin urging a rethinking of missions. He claimed that the lack of growth in missions was the consequence of a mission theology which posited slow growth and was preoccupied with social rather than evangelical issues. Beginning in the fifties, McGavran argued that the fields were ripe for harvest but that missionaries and pastors were blinded by false presuppositions. "He challenged the 'seed-sowing' concept of missions, that 'the objective and measurable growth of churches must neither be expected nor counted as a measure of effectiveness.' He argued for a narrow definition of mission, emphasizing the goal of church planting, in place of one which 'attempts to take in everything that the church and the Christian faith ought to do.' For McGavran 'the whole gospel for all mankind means little, unless it is preceded by stupendous church-planting. There can be little hope of sustained signs of the Kingdom in the world without the influence of a sufficient number of sons and daughters of the Kingdom. . . What the fantastically mounting population of this world needs is fantastically multiplying churches. . .'"<sup>26</sup> One commentator goes so far as to say that, on the basis of a narrow evangelical hermeneutic and theology, the Church Growth Movement "deduces that everywhere and in all circumstances the numerical increase of the church is the one goal for which

---

everything else may be sacrificed.”<sup>27</sup>

This quotation would, of course, send Luther, were he alive, into a rage. The kingdom of God does *not* depend upon attaining a critical mass of church members, nor even a critical mass of Christians. We do not need to turn to Luther’s vigorous and extensive attacks on the *Schwaermer* of his day to document this truth. We need only recall his simple explanation of the second petition of the Lord’s prayer: “To be sure, the kingdom of God comes of itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us.”<sup>28</sup> Certainly Luther was concerned for the growth of the church as well as its reform. His writings attest to this fact, especially his works on the liturgy. But Luther never identified the visible church with the kingdom of God nor did he place his hope on an increase of church members, for even Christians are and remain sinners. Neither pietism nor the Church Growth Movement has any sense of the motifs of the dialectic of Law and Gospel and the Christian as *simul justus et peccator*. And when Luther lamented that there are too few Christians in the world, he did not then suggest that the Word and Sacrament are insufficient for the church.

McGavran’s concern not only to multiply the churches but also to multiply the numbers of Christians within them is expressed in his principles of church growth, which in recent years have been applied to established congregations as well as mission fields. These principles are straightforward. First of all, as I already mentioned, the primary orientation of the Church Growth Movement is sociological rather than theological. The social sciences such as sociology and anthropology provide diagnostic tools for the analysis of the church and for suggesting directions to maximize church growth. “The numerical approach,” McGavran wrote in 1980, “is essential to understanding church growth. The church is made up of countable people and there is nothing particularly spiritual in not counting them. Men use the numerical approach in all worthwhile human endeavors. Industry, commerce, finance, research, government, invention, and a thousand other lines of enterprise derive great profit and much of their stability in development from continual measurement. Without it they would feel helpless and blindfolded.”<sup>29</sup>

The sociological utility of this numerical approach was perceived by McGavran during his mission work in India when he and others recognized that group "conversions" alleviated the isolation of individuals whose joining the church pulled them out of their social context.<sup>30</sup> This orientation is what is behind the people-movement type of church growth. "A people movement results from the joint decision of a number of individuals—whether five or five hundred—all from the same people, which enables them to become Christians without social dislocation, while remaining in full contact with their non-Christian relatives, thus enabling other groups of that people, across the years, after suitable instruction, to come to similar decisions and form Christian churches made up exclusively of members of that people."<sup>31</sup>

A people-movement approach to church growth utilizes what is one of the most frequently criticized aspects of the Church Growth Movement, the homogeneous unit principle. Simply stated, the homogeneous unit principle is that "men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers."<sup>32</sup> McGavran's point is this: "It takes no great acumen to see that, when marked differences of color, stature, income, cleanliness, and education are present, men understand the Gospel better when expounded by their own kind of people. They prefer to join churches whose members look, talk, and act like themselves."<sup>33</sup> In capsule form this statement collapses the prophetic and reconciling power of the Gospel into a baptism of the world as it is.

#### *Some Lutheran Reflections on Pietism and the Church Growth Movement*

The first thing that is clear is that the Church Growth Movement is a growth industry. In recent decades more than a hundred titles have appeared on the principles of church growth. On the basis of my very limited acquaintance with this literature I venture the following initial observations. Only a very few books raise critical theological questions of the movement. As far as I am aware, there seem to be few if any Lutheran contributions to this literature. Certainly it is clear that Lutheran publishing houses are not among the five major publishers of church growth materials: Lutterworth Press, Eerdmans, Zondervan, Moody

Press, and the William Carey Library.<sup>34</sup> But although the names of these publishers indicate the primarily Reformed orientation of the theorists of the movement, its popularity is by no means limited to Reformed and evangelical churches. In fact, this self-consciously transdenominational and transconfessional orientation is a characteristic which the Church Growth Movement shares with historical pietism.

Historical pietism transcended ecclesial and confessional barriers because finally *the* criterion for the church was not doctrinal but experimental. The Church Growth Movement also transcends ecclesial and confessional barriers by emphasizing experience as the criterion for the church. But the difference from historical pietism is that the experience to which the Church Growth Movement points is not the experience of the Holy Spirit but the experience of increasing numbers of people in the church. In good Lutheran dialectical fashion we may say both yes and no to this approach.

First the “yes”—in terms of a Lutheran theological perspective, the Church Growth Movement’s utilization of sociological method may be seen in terms of the civil use of the law, that is, reason. McGavran is right when he says that there is nothing particularly spiritual in not counting church members. In fact, every pastor, evangelist, and Christian should be as sensitive as possible to not only the mechanics of church organization and direction but also the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic variables of the congregation and the larger community. To paraphrase McGavran, it is not particularly spiritual to ignore non-doctrinal factors in ministry.<sup>35</sup> It hardly needs to be said that the Gospel ought not be conveyed in a manner that creates false stumbling blocks to its acceptance.

The Church Growth Movement can remind us that it is poor discipleship to denigrate the skills and responsibilities requisite to overseeing the work of the church. Too many Lutherans have lost sight of the fact that we have a remarkable tradition of church organization rooted in our very origins. Luther himself was involved from the earliest stages of the Reformation in the development of church orders for Wittenberg, Leisnig, and Goettingen. And certainly we cannot forget that Luther’s own pastor, Bugenhagen, is renowned for his organizing churches

throughout the length and breadth of the land. Our tradition took very, very seriously the organization and growth of the evangelical churches. Furthermore, as James Kittelson reminds us in a recent article, Luther not only self-consciously assumed the role of pastor and bishop, but knew that even church bureaucracy was spiritual when joined by the Word of God.<sup>36</sup>

However, while the Lutheran tradition affirms reason, wisdom, and human sensitivity in service to the Word and Sacrament, these are not interchangeable. As Luther once remarked in his own inimitable style, when reason becomes a means to the kingdom of God, it becomes "the devil's whore." In less colorful terms, various critics of the Church Growth Movement have questioned whether methodologies for increasing church membership may be so easily presented as theologically neutral. In terms of the Lutheran tradition, adiaphora are not always adiaphora. This is clearly the case when it is posited that the correct use of sociological methods will result in the growth of the church, which is then proclaimed as the will of God. McGavran asserts that God requires church growth. McGavran further asserts that, "where there is no faithfulness in proclaiming Christ, there is no growth."<sup>37</sup> Another leader in the Church Growth Movement asserts that "... the evangelical church that grows in membership is providing an irresistible demonstration of the will of God being accomplished in its midst. Indeed, church growth is a test of the faithfulness of the people of God to the ministry to which he has called them."<sup>38</sup>

These assertions are clearly a theology of glory which identifies the visible church with the kingdom of God. Like every theology of glory this approach provides ample opportunity for either presumption or despair. If our churches grow, we simply assume we are faithfully proclaiming Christ; if they do not grow, we assume we are not faithfully proclaiming Christ. Obviously St. Paul in his sermon in the Areopagus falls into the latter category! This insidiously Pelagian and Donatist ecclesiology puts the burden of proof for the Gospel upon the pastor and the congregation. As one advocate of church growth puts it, "Church growth does not just happen; it must be made to happen."<sup>39</sup> This is a kind of ecclesial Kantianism; that is, the church ought to grow; therefore it can. In short, it seems to me that the Church Growth Movement is subtly adding a third mark to the church

by implying that Word and Sacrament are insufficient marks of the church without numerical growth. This tendency also appears to me to be but a modern variation of the age-old alterations of the marks of the church, with statistics taking the place of such marks as perfection, discipline, and church government.

It also seems to me that the Church Growth Movement has various parallels to the ecclesiology of historical pietism although I would not grant it the theological depth of pietism. Like pietism, the Church Growth Movement assumes it can model itself on the early church and collapses eschatology into the conviction that this is a "better time" for the church. As pietism hoped to convert the world through the conversion of individuals, the Church Growth Movement foresees "christianizing" culture through conversion of the masses. In its crass forms, church growth is a culture religion.

The fundamental principle of the Church Growth Movement which has received the most criticism is the homogeneous unit principle. Here we have the *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* orientation with a vengeance not known in historical pietism. For Spener and his colleagues an unintended consequence of the *collegia pietatis* was the tendency to create ecclesial in-groups of the like-experienced. For the Church Growth Movement the creation of like-minded, like-colored, like-speaking in-groups is an intentional means to further the institutional church. This approach has serious repercussions on the Gospel itself as well as on social ethics.

The good news of reconciliation in Christ is side-stepped by proposing churches be homogeneous units, for then the church becomes a reflection of its culture. A church of this sort does not offend anyone or anything but rather sanctifies the status quo. The homogeneous unit principle also is false to the historical development of the church.<sup>40</sup> Now there is no doubt that the Lutheran churches in this country have a long history of homogeneity, and in some places Lutherans may still think that a mixed marriage is between a Swede and a Norwegian. But at least today the struggle for inclusiveness has begun; and we have not raised ethnicity to a theological principle over against the New Testament. McGavran and others in the Church Growth Movement have more recently become sensitive to the charge of racism directed against the homogeneous unit principle. But

popular materials of the movement, such as filmstrips, portray black folks going into black churches and white folks going into white churches. Commentators from South Africa clearly see the homogeneous unit principle as a support of apartheid. Regardless of what one thinks of the Lutheran World Federation's *status confessionis* position, it is difficult to argue away the fact that human actions can be a denial of the Gospel. There is no doubt that humankind craves community, but there should also be no doubt among Lutherans that not all community is authentic to the Gospel. In recent history, talk about "our kind of people" is most frequently associated with the Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, and upholders of apartheid. Our understanding of sin as being curved in upon ourselves also reveals the demonic potentiality of communities.

This brings me to a final point, and that is that the Church Growth Movement is a bedfellow, if not an advocate, of culture religion. Ironically the movement has protested against the World Council of Churches and others for adopting the world's agenda. McGavran has criticized the WCC for its attention to "organized good deeds and social action [which] takes the attention of many younger churches off the propagation of the Gospel."<sup>41</sup> Yet the advocacy of sociological methods for church growth mirrors the world's agenda by positing that the church is a "business" like any other. Eddie Gibbs, who is basically favorable to the Church Growth Movement, has written: "The failure of church growth thinking, at least in its early formulations, to differentiate between church and kingdom has led to a great deal of misunderstanding and criticism. It has resulted in Christian mission being caricatured as denominational aggrandisement, or a plea for survival for western-based churches and their related mission agencies. Church growth thinking. . . has consequently given the impression that mission is simply making more and more people to become like ourselves."<sup>42</sup> René Padilla makes much the same point when he writes: "Because of its failure to take biblical theology seriously, it [the Church Growth Movement] has become a missiology tailor-made for churches and institutions whose main function in society is to reinforce the status quo. What can this missiology say to a church in an American suburb, where the bourgeois is comfortable but remains enslaved to the materialism of a consumer society and blind to the needs of the poor? What can

it say in situations of tribal, caste, or class conflict? Of course, it can say that 'men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic and class barriers.' But what does that have to do with the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ, who came to reconcile us 'to God *in one body* through the cross?'"<sup>43</sup>

Article VII of the Augsburg Confession is elegant in its simple definition of the church as "the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient (*satis est*) for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."<sup>44</sup> Luther can liken the church to a "mouth house,"<sup>45</sup> because faith comes by hearing the Word. The point is that the unity and marks of the church are not the like-mindedness—the homogeneity—of the community but the proclamation of the Gospel of the unconditional promise of God embodied in Word and Sacrament. "The human structures of the church, of course, exhibit the same life as the church's members—a life under the cross which is simultaneously sinner and righteous. Thus the church, like its members, also lives by the continuous encounter with the Word of God, which is why it needs constant reform. This is another way of saying that the church is not specified by the character of its members but rather by the character of the assembly—the preaching of the gospel. This is the basis upon which the church stands or falls."<sup>46</sup> The church is recognized not by its holiness of life—*contra* the pietists—nor by its numbers—*contra* the Church Growth Movement—but by the "possession of the holy Word of God." For as Luther stated in *On the Councils and the Church* in 1539, "Now, wherever you hear or see this Word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, 'a Christian holy people,' must be there, even though their number is small. . . And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's word cannot be without God's people and, conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word."<sup>47</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Eddie Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); *Body Building Exercises for the Local Church* (London: Falcon, 1979); C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979); The essays are found in Win Arn, ed., *The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook I, II* (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1979, 1982). These volumes are subtitled thus: "America's leading authorities on church growth share the keys to building a dynamic church."
2. Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 8.
3. See for example, Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1979), and Jens Glebe-Moeller, *A Political Dogmatic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).
4. James A. Scherer, *That the Gospel May Be Sincerely Preached Throughout the World. A Lutheran Perspective on Mission and Evangelism in the Twentieth Century* (Geneva: LWF Report 11-12, 1982), p. 181.
5. Glenn Huebel, "The Church Growth Movement: A Word of Caution," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 50 (1986), pp. 165-181, 178.
6. Hoburg quite starkly stated that justification is a fiction whereas rebirth is a reality, and Arnold in his famous innovation of church history (*Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688*) excoriated the orthodox and elevated traditional heretics as models of true faith. Cf. Martin Schmidt, *Wiedergeburt und Neuer Mensch: Gesammelte Studien zur Geschichte des Pietismus* (Witten: Luther Verlag, 1969) as well as his other writings for an interpretation of pietism in terms of the motifs of mystical spiritualism and rebirth.
7. Cf., for example, Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity, II: From the Reformation to the Present*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 238ff.; 260-261.
8. F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), p. 1. For a survey of Pietist research see Martin Schmidt, "Epochen der Pietismusforschung," in Berg and Dooren, eds., *Pietismus und Revail* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 22-79.
9. Johannes Wallmann, "Geisterfahrung und Kirche im fruhen Pietismus," in Trutz Rendtorff, ed., *Charisma und Institution* (Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1985), pp. 132-144, 132. Similarly, Aland, op. cit., p. 234, writes: "Pietism is undoubtedly the most significant

movement which has happened within Protestantism since the Reformation.”

10. Part One of Spener's famous *Pia Desideria* (1675) reviews what he perceives to be the corrupt conditions in the church with sections on the defects in civil authorities, clergy, and the people. Cf. Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Pia Desideria* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).
11. Wallmann, loc. cit.
12. Jaroslav Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard: A Study in the History of Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 80.
13. Wallmann, op. cit., pp. 136-137.
14. John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York, 1951), p. 182.
15. Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), p. 169.
16. Tappert's introduction to his edition of the *Pia Desideria*, op. cit., provides a useful overview of this context.
17. Wallmann, op. cit., p. 134.
18. Johannes Wallmann, *Philipp Jakob Spener und die Anfaenge des Pietismus* (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986), p. 325.
19. Tappert, op. cit., pp. 76ff.
20. Pierre Serrurier, *Assertion du Règne de Mille Ans ou de la Prospérité de l'Eglise de Christ en la Terre* (Amsterdam, 1657). The influence of Serrurier and his work upon Spener and his colleagues is discussed by Wallmann, *Spener*, op. cit., pp. 349ff.
21. Wallmann, *Spener*, op. cit., p. 353.
22. Wallmann, *Spener*, op. cit., p. 354.
23. For an overview of the crisis of church and mission among contemporary Lutheran churches, see chapter 2 in Scherer, op. cit.
24. Ibid., p. 37.
25. McGavran, op. cit., p. vi.
26. Gibbs, op. cit., p. 19. For a discussion of McGavran's heritage (Christian Church-Disciples of Christ), theology, and methodology, cf. Arthur Glasser, "An Introduction to the Church Growth Perspectives of Donald Anderson McGavran," in Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 21-42.
27. Charles R. Tabor, "Contextualization," in Wilbert R. Shenck, ed., *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 117-131, 119.
28. "The Small Catechism," in Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 346.

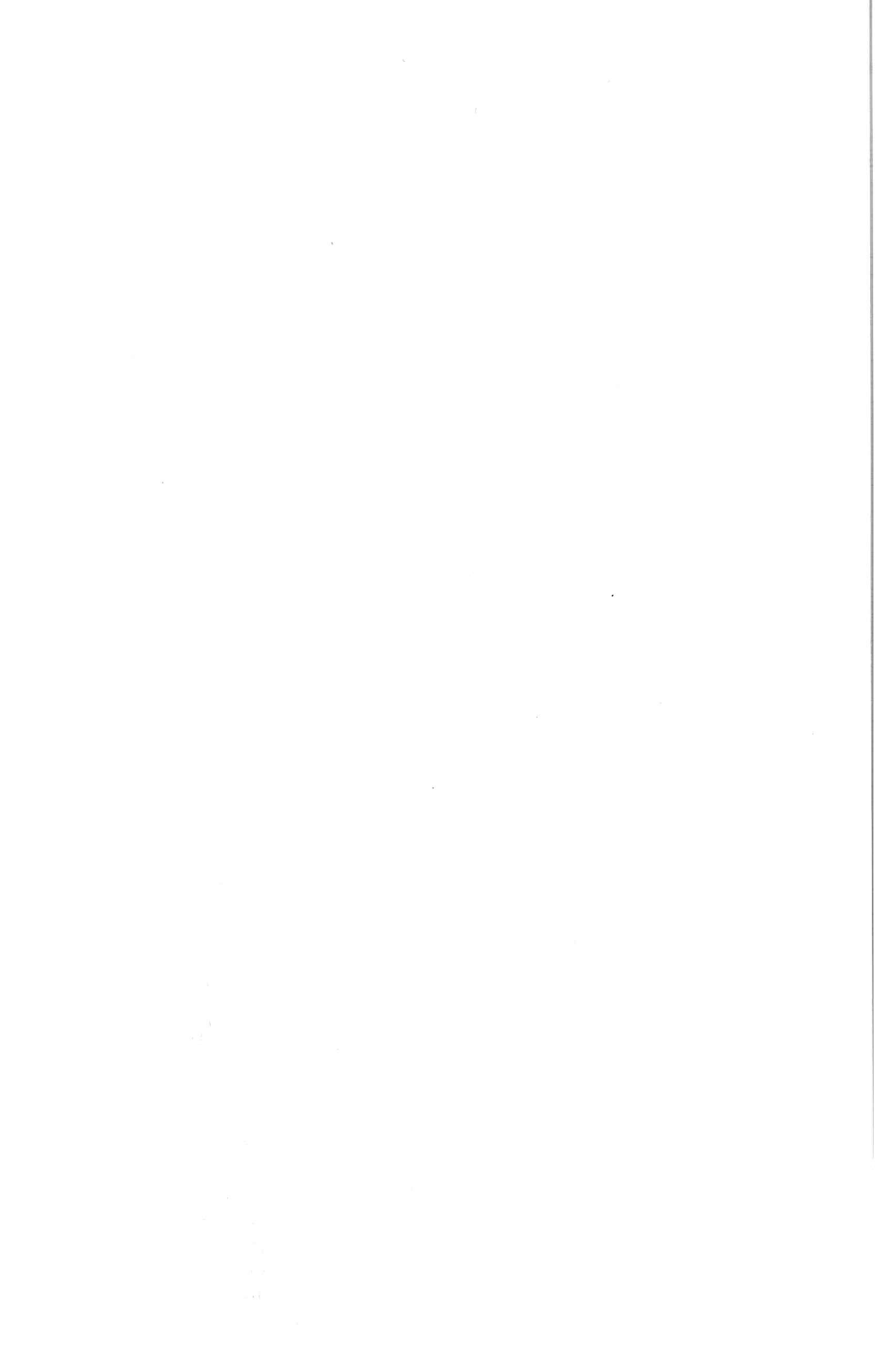
- 
29. McGavran, op. cit., p. 93.
  30. Christian Kreyszer (1877-1961), a German Lutheran missionary and author serving the Neuendettelsau mission society, may have been influential on McGavran. Kreyszer's experience was that individual conversion methods were impracticable in communities structured along collectivist lines.
  31. McGavran, op. cit., p. 335.
  32. Ibid., p. 223.
  33. Ibid., p. 227.
  34. Cf. George W. Peters, *A Theology of Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 263. The Church Growth Book Club (Pasadena, California) publishes bimonthly lists of books on church growth and related subjects in the *Church Growth Bulletin*.
  35. The significance of non-doctrinal factors in local ecumenical relationships is discussed in a recent study by the LWF-related Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg. Cf. André Birmil  , ed., *Local Ecumenism: How Church Unity Is Seen and Practised by Congregations* (Geneva: WCC, 1984). To insist, however, that "the great obstacles to conversion are social not theological" is an attack on doctrine not limited to Lutheran theology. This McGavran quotation is cited in Harvie Conn, "Looking for a Method: Backgrounds and Suggestions," in Wilbert R. Schenck, ed., *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 79-94, 79.
  36. James M. Kittelson, "Luther, the Church Bureaucrat," *Concordia Journal*, 13 (1987), pp. 294-306.
  37. McGavran, op. cit., p. 5; cf. also p. 7: "Church growth is basically a theological stance. God requires it."
  38. Arthur F. Glaser, op. cit., pp. 21-42, 31.
  39. George W. Peters, op. cit., p. 133.
  40. Cf. Frederick W. Norris, "Strategy for Mission in the New Testament," in Wilbert R. Schenck, ed., op. cit., pp. 260-276.
  41. McGavran, op. cit., p. x. Cf. also the numerous criticisms of the WCC in Donald McGavran, ed., *Church Growth Bulletin*, Second Consolidated Volume (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1977).
  42. Eddie Gibbs, op. cit., p. 52.
  43. Ren   Padilla, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle," in Schenck, op. cit., pp. 285-303, 301.
  44. *The Book of Concord*, p. 32.
  45. WA 10: 1:2, p. 48.

---

46. Lindberg, op. cit., p. 51, with documentation.

47. *LW* 41, p. 150.

Dr. Carter Lindberg is a professor in the School of Theology of Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts. The original form of this essay was presented to the Eleventh Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions (Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, January 20-22, 1988).



# The Pastor's Communion

Toivo Harjunpaa

This essay deals with a peculiarly Lutheran problem. It is inconceivable that such a topic should be discussed in the midst of any other major denomination, whether Catholic or Protestant. Only Lutherans show an interest in the question of the minister's self-communion. To us, all over the world, it has been and continues to be a problem of both practical and theological importance.

## *1. Self-Communion outside Lutheranism*

This particular matter seems to have been discussed surprisingly little outside the Lutheran Church, whereas Lutheran writings on the subject from the sixteenth century down to the present day amount to thousands of pages. Probably the largest single volume ever written on the subject is the recently published work in Swedish by Dr. Helge Nyman, professor of practical theology in Finland, *The Minister's Communion in the Lutheran Service*.<sup>1</sup> What I have to offer in this paper is largely based on this book.

The celebrant's self-communion is not known to have been a problem before the latter part of the sixteenth century. It has always been a consistent practice and definite rule, both in the Roman and the Greek Orthodox Churches, that the consecrating priest, or the celebrant, must also receive the sacrament in order that the liturgical action be properly completed. Furthermore, the celebrant is to receive the sacrament in both kinds before it is distributed to others. The form of his own reception is always the self-communion, whether assisting priests are present or not.

It is a widely held and very old opinion both among Catholics and Protestants that self-communion was an apostolic custom, following, indeed, our Lord's own example as He instituted the sacrament. It is so self-evident to Roman liturgiologists that it is scarcely discussed by them. Thus, for instance, one finds no information concerning the origin of self-communion in the recent, very detailed history of the Roman mass by Jungmann (*Missarum Sollemnia*). Scudamore quotes Irenaeus as the earliest author (c.200) who represents the opinion that Christ, when He consecrated the bread and the wine, also partook of the elements. Among other early fathers Jerome and Chrysostom also stress our Lord's own example as the basis of the celebrating priest's self-communion. In some ancient Eastern liturgies brief

interpolations have been added to the words of institution, such as "after he had given thanks, he brake it and ate and gave to his disciples. . ."<sup>2</sup> As scriptural evidence in support of the celebrant's self-communion in the apostolic church 1 Corinthians 2:13 and 10:18 have been quoted. These passages read as follows:

(1.) Do ye not know that they which minister holy things live of the things of the temple and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

(2.) Are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?

The context of the latter passage deserves our attention. The preceding two verses constitute St. Paul's important theological interpretation of the eucharistic action: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." Reference to Acts 20:11 has also been made. This passage describes how during a Christian assembly at Troas Paul broke bread and ate of it himself.

As soon as ceremonial rubrics began to appear in ancient liturgies, both Eastern and Western, they testify to the rule of the celebrant's obligatory self-communion.<sup>3</sup> The Council of Toledo, in the year 681, made a rule that the priest had to commune himself each time, even if he had to celebrate more than one mass in the same day. The council quoted Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 10:18. To consecrate and not to commune the council regarded as a punishable offense against the Sacrament of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> A priest who offended against this rule was to be suspended from his office for the period of one year and one day.<sup>5</sup>

Well over a thousand years later, in 1831, the Lutheran diocesan chapter in Gothenburg, Sweden, was prepared to go even farther in the opposite direction. It proposed a change in the church law which would categorically prohibit the pastor's self-communion. To make it effective the chapter specifically proposed that culprits among the clergy be punished for the first offense with six month's suspension and for the second offense with removal from the ministry.<sup>6</sup> It may be a relief to some readers to learn that this

motion was never carried. However, such was the situation toward the end of the last century in Scandinavia that Swedish pastors, serving alone in rural parishes, were known and reported by name who had not once received Holy Communion for five or even seven years.<sup>7</sup>

How do we explain this unique Lutheran attitude, even more strange and peculiar in the light of the fact that, not only is the entire pre-Reformation tradition of the church fundamentally opposed to it, but so is also the practice of the other churches of the Reformation, the Anglican and the Calvinist? Has not the Lutheran Church stressed to some degree always, and in the first century of its existence quite emphatically, its identity with the one holy catholic and apostolic church? Has it not safeguarded with greater care and piety the historic continuity of many of the time-honored traditions and customs of the universal church than most Protestant denominations? Have not our Lutheran fathers given considerable weight in the work of reformation to the ancient principle: "quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus traditum est" — what has been accepted always and everywhere and by all?

How is it possible, then, that in the question of the minister's self-communion, our church has so radically departed from others, following its own solitary course? A categorical denial of self-communion can no longer be explained as a mere matter of outward ceremony and adiaphora. Important theological and dogmatic principles must be involved in such an attitude. Is there a serious scriptural reason for this unique Lutheran position which to others seems rather sectarian? Or should we reverse the statement and venture a suggestion that the rest of Christendom has gone astray and we alone are on the right road? There have been times when voices to that effect have been heard in the Lutheran Church.

## *2. Luther and the Era of the Reformation*

One of the basic principles of the Lutheran Reformation, both liturgically and theologically, was the restoration of the congregational nature of the public worship. The Roman Mass of that day violated this principle in a most serious way. It was understood chiefly as a priestly sacrificial drama, at which, in

the case of the high mass, the people were mere passive onlookers and, in the multitudes of private masses, their presence was not even encouraged. It is especially against the latter that Luther let fall the full force of his holy anger. The private mass was an abomination and a source of corruption, both religious and moral, in the church. The complete abolition of these "corner masses" (*Winkelmeesse*) was early given a high priority by Luther in the task of the Reformation.

The heart of the evangelical mass is the gift of God, the sacramental real presence of the risen Christ, and the bestowal of the life-giving fruits of His passion and death on Calvary. Thus the evangelical mass defeats its purpose if it does not lead to the climax, the communion as a table-fellowship (*koinonia*) of the believers with their Lord and with one another. For this reason even the very name for the evangelical mass gradually changed to that of the Service of the Holy Communion. A logical consequence of this interpretation of the mass, which certainly agrees with the statements of St. Paul already quoted, is the rule that the mass is not to be celebrated in the church unless there be at least a few communicants.

What was the celebrant's position concerning the reception of the sacrament in the early Lutheran Mass? What was done (a) when no more than one pastor was present or (b) when assisting clergy were present? Do we know Luther's own thinking and liturgical practice on this matter? To answer these questions we have at our disposal a wealth of material in the liturgical writings of the sixteenth century, above all in the German church orders. Luther did not say much about this subject but enough that we may form a clear picture of his views and usage.

A very important early description of the nature of the mass as a "sacrament of the whole church" and hence as a parish communion is his famous polemical writing "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520). Throughout this work Luther regards it as a matter of course that the celebrating minister include himself in the communion fellowship of his people whom he serves. The sacrament is a true means of grace only when it is received. Our Lord's command is "Drink ye all of it." He means all who are gathered around the table. We people can pray for one another, but we cannot receive communion for one another.<sup>8</sup>

In the year 1523 Luther published two of his three liturgical orders, of which the *Formula Missae et Communionis* is the more important and also more detailed, containing a great deal of theological interpretation. In the *Formula Missae* there is the following rubric after the consecration, the Lord's Prayer, and the Pax: "deinde communicat, tum sese tum populum" (then let him communicate himself first, then the people).<sup>9</sup> In other words, Luther follows here the traditional usage of the church. The *Formula Missae* would have been intended, as its full title indicates, for use in the city parish of Wittenberg. There would have been no difficulty there in having the celebrant receive the sacrament from another pastor. The rubric does not suggest such a procedure but, as we shall see later, it became a law in the Lutheran tradition nevertheless.

Three years later, in 1526, appeared Luther's important German Mass (*Deutsche Messe*). The absence of this rubric here has led Lutheran writers from at least the early seventeenth century down to the present-day to the conclusion that Luther gave up very soon this "popish" custom. This argument *ex silentio* (for there is no rubric of any kind in *Deutsche Messe* concerning the celebrating pastor's communion) becomes quite explicit, they say, in the light of what Luther has to say about the pastor's self-communion in the Smalcald Articles (1537):

But that one administer communion to himself is a human notion, uncertain, unnecessary, yea even prohibited. And he does not know what he is doing because without the Word of God he obeys a false human opinion and invention.<sup>10</sup>

It is this passage which has been widely used as a doctrinal basis for regarding the pastor's self-communion either as an entirely illegal or, at least, a highly irregular form of communion to be tolerated only under exceptional circumstances.

Nyman and a number of other Lutheran scholars are convinced that such an interpretation of this article is incorrect; it reads into the text something which is not the intention of Luther. The above passage must be reviewed in the light of the context in which it appears. Earlier in the same article Luther speaks of the buying and selling of masses and in the same paragraph makes this statement:

If anyone should advance a pretext that as an act of devotion

he wishes to administer the sacrament, or communion, to himself, he is not in earnest. For if he wishes to commune in sincerity, the surest and best way for him is in the sacrament administered according to Christ's institution.

The whole paragraph ends, finally, with these significant words:

It is not right for one to use the common sacrament of the church according to his own private devotion and without God's Word and apart from the communion of the church to trifle therewith.<sup>11</sup>

It seems, then, that this passage, in the light of the whole context, is quite obviously directed against the practice of private masses, which the Lutherans had rejected from the beginning, rather than against the pastor's communion as part of general communion. Some, however, may still doubt this conclusion; since private masses had already been abolished among Lutherans, why would Luther still write about them? To those who might use such an argument it is necessary to point out the purpose of the Smalcald Articles and the political-ecclesiastical situation which had then arisen in Germany. The articles were drawn up by Luther with the possibility in mind that they might be presented to a general church council which Pope Paul III was expected to summon at that time. It is natural that the private mass be discussed in such a document.<sup>12</sup>

For information, moreover, on Luther's views on self-communion we are not limited only to those writings which we have already discussed. In a later work, *Von den Konziliis und Kirchen* (1539), Luther again regards it as a natural thing that the pastor in an evangelical service should receive the sacrament together with his people. This practice in his opinion is in accordance with Christ's institution. The minister who serves in the service is included in the *Communio*, in the fellowship of the people who have called him.<sup>13</sup> In 1541 Luther made a written reply to a request concerning the order of the communion. Luther was of the opinion that the celebrant should always commune whereas the assisting clergy, who distribute the wine, may decide for themselves ("is qui officium publicum exercat in missa omnino una communicet").<sup>14</sup>

One very important point must be made clear, a point which might easily be overlooked. Although both the Roman Catholic

---

tradition and Luther seem to regard the celebrant's communion as an obligation, the motivation is entirely different. The Roman priest communes on behalf and for the people, in order to bring the eucharistic sacrificial action to its completion, but the evangelical minister or pastor receives the sacrament as an individual member in the fellowship of his people, not as part of his priestly function as liturgist. The pastor needs the gift of the sacrament for his own spiritual life and furthermore, as the shepherd of his flock, he is duty-bound in Christian love to show an example to his people. Luther thus makes a vital distinction in the case of the pastor between what he calls *Amtsperson* and *Einzelperson*, the pastor as an official person and the pastor as an individual Christian. When he conducts the liturgy, he functions as an *Amtsperson*. Only when he himself receives the sacrament is he simply one of the congregation. Luther asks: "Unless the servant of the church has been sent to receive the sacrament himself, he is not the proper person to preach and pray and baptize."<sup>15</sup>

Such then was Luther's view and the liturgical practice he used and recommended to others. The Book of Concord does not discuss the question at hand beyond what has already been mentioned. A great deal of additional light is shed by the church orders which regulated the liturgical life of the churches in various places during the sixteenth century. Nyman and others doubt whether a single Lutheran church order or liturgy existed before 1600 which prohibited the celebrant's self-communion. In fact, in several church orders of the period, rubrics similar to the one in the *Formula Missae* exist. In a number of church orders the celebrant's communion follows after the communion of the people or is said to be voluntary. In still others there is no rubric about this matter. Kliefoth's view, that the absence of the rubric indicates the disappearance of self-communion almost from the beginning throughout wide areas of the Lutheran Church, must be regarded as erroneous.<sup>16</sup> Evidence from Lutheran churches outside Germany follows on the whole a similar course, both in Luther's time and after. In Scandinavia the custom of the minister, whether alone or with assistants, receiving the communion last was known already in the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. *The Irregularity and Abolition of the Self-Communion*

A change in thinking and liturgical practice becomes noticeable as the pastor's self-communion developed into a problem and a point of controversy in the Lutheran Church. Even in far-away Sweden, as early as 1562, Archbishop Laurentius Petri spoke of pastors who declined to receive the sacrament unless it was placed in their mouths by other pastors. Such a novelty the archbishop regarded as the devil's work and warned against it.<sup>18</sup> That a gradual change was taking place during the latter half of the sixteenth century can be seen also from the writings of Martin Chemnitz. While defending the celebrant's right to self-communion, he is willing to admit that it should not be regarded as the only solution. A Christian's conscience must not be bound by any rule which the Bible has not made.<sup>19</sup> Self-communion was granted in theory, but in actual practice it was becoming more and more customary for pastors to serve communion to one another. What were the reasons for this gradual change which eventually led to such radical proposals as those mentioned earlier, wherein self-communion was regarded as a punishable crime? The most important factors in the new development were a changed view of the nature of the sacrament, the obligatory preparation for its reception by private confession, and finally a changed view of the nature of the ministry.

The order of the evangelical masses that Luther prepared seems strange to us as they have no specific form of confession and absolution, without which we cannot think of Holy Communion. In place of public confession Luther warmly recommended, and he himself rather regularly practiced, private confession before going to communion. This confession usually took place a day or two before the communion. Communion was, as a rule, celebrated every Sunday and festival day. Luther does stress very clearly the voluntary nature of the confession. The common people were to come at least a few times a year to private confession for instruction in the Christian faith if for nothing else. There is a brief communion exhortation, homiletical in style, right after the sermon in Luther's German Mass. But it has no absolution, nor is it intended to take the place of private confession. In the *Formula Missae* Luther gives this brief explanation of the Pax Domini in the liturgy:

But immediately after the Lord's Prayer shall be said the Peace of the Lord, etc., which is, so to speak, a public

absolution of the sins of the communicants, truly the Gospel voice announcing remission of sins, the one and most worthy preparation for the Lord's Table, if it be apprehended by faith and not otherwise than as though it came forth from the mouth of Christ Himself.<sup>20</sup>

At the turn of the century dogmatists were ready to advance several reasons against the practice of self-communion. The fact that, for instance, the famous John Gerhard in his widely read *Loci Theologici* accepted such arguments indicates the rapid spread of these views. It is more in harmony with Christ's institution if the sacrament is received from another person's hand. Nobody can absolve himself but must go to another pastor for confession. The usage should be the same in receiving communion. One's own faith is strengthened when another person is present. It is also an expression of the mutual love and respect between the servants of the church. It now became common to interpret the previously cited passage in the Smalcald Articles as prohibiting the practice of self-communion. It was also claimed by some that the apostolic church did not know the custom.<sup>21</sup> Some of these arguments seem rather weak and forced. One of the favorite arguments was the close parallelism that was said to exist between the two sacraments. The orthodox fathers often referred to baptism, pointing out that nobody baptizes himself and arguing that similarly no one should administer communion to himself.

The necessity of receiving absolution before communion became, in the course of the seventeenth century, the most important single impediment to the practice of self-communion. Everywhere the Lutheran Church now introduced a strict rule of obligatory private confession without which communion was not allowed. No one, not even a king, was excepted from this rule. Thus each pastor had to have his own father-confessor to whom he confessed his sins privately and from whom he obtained divine absolution. It was only natural that he should want to receive the blessed sacrament from the hand of his *confessionarius*. But this reception was only possible as part of the communion of the congregation. Thus arose the custom that two pastors always administered communion to each other, a custom still almost universally observed by Lutherans. A problem of real difficulty existed, however, in the case of numerous pastors

who served congregations alone, where ministerial help on communion Sundays was not to be had. When we consider that public opinion, the views of influential theologians, and the rules of ecclesiastical and civil authorities all warned against the dangers of self-communion, we can sympathize with the plight of many lonely pastors at that time—and for that matter, long afterward, down into the latter part of the last century, in fact.

This development in the meaning of Holy Communion and the obligatory nature of private confession had important consequences for the life of the Lutheran Church. The pastor became more like a judge, or a strict schoolmaster, than a sympathetic shepherd of souls. In the institution of private confession he had an effective means of controlling the lives of his people. The orthodox pastor used this authority, above all, for a strict and frequent rehearsal of the catechetical knowledge of his people. The number of communion Sundays began to drop considerably from what it had been in the days of the reformers. The gulf between the clergy and the laity became wider. The seventeenth-century Lutheran pastor, unlike Luther, found it difficult to consider himself anything but an *Amtsperson*. He was often eminently aware of the great *potestas jurisdictionis* which was his by virtue of ordination. This authority was, above all, manifested in “the power of the keys” to loose and bind, to excommunicate and to absolve.<sup>22</sup> What had been natural to Luther and others a century earlier seemed unnatural and wrong to the men of orthodoxy, that one and the same pastor could function both as a giver and receiver in the communion service. In fact, the incongruity of the dual position of the pastor at the service was time and again used as one of the reasons why self-communion should not be practiced.

The obligatory use of private confession proved in the long run to be too ambitious a program, even when the number of communions per year was reduced. Practical necessity, therefore, led to a change. Gradually, as an obligatory institution, the order of public confession, which still is with us, came into existence. Private confession was kept, but from now on as a voluntary rite of the church. It is obvious that the nature of confession and absolution changed when private confession gave way to general confession. The latter gradually became merely another preaching service (featuring a *Beichtpredigt*) with a pronouncement of

forgiveness after a general confession. In some churches, notably in Denmark and Norway, private absolution survived as a custom, even though group confession became established as a separate preparatory service.<sup>23</sup> The change from private confession to public confession was not necessarily a negative development. It has been pointed out that obligatory private confession had become a hasty, mechanical formality where the demands of time pressed hard on the pastor with a large number of communicants. In the case of general confession, a longer address by the pastor, together with questions and prayers, could better prepare the people for a worthy reception of the Lord's Supper.<sup>24</sup>

This change did not, of course, solve at all the acute problem of the communion of unassisted pastors. Even where definite legislation against self-communion was not introduced, public opinion had become so opposed to it that pastors would tend to avoid the issue. Various solutions were tried to help the clergy. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries pastors in a certain area would come together with their families and have a special communion of their own, followed by feasting in the parsonage. That this custom aroused criticism is no wonder. It looked too much like the private masses which the Lutheran Church had so definitely rejected.<sup>25</sup>

In many of the Lutheran churches self-communion had been declared illegal by definite ecclesiastical or state legislation. The church of Saxony, Luther's own church, was the first to point the way.<sup>26</sup> However, Germany always remained divided on this question. In some territorial churches, interestingly enough, especially in those where the Calvinistic influence had always been a notable factor, such as Wuerttemberg and Hessen, the pastor's self-communion was theologically defended and liturgically practiced.<sup>27</sup>

Although pietism and rationalism within the eighteenth-century Lutheran Church presented two markedly different movements, and both again differed greatly from the orthodox tradition, yet in the matter of the pastor's self-communion there existed remarkable agreement between these three schools both in thought and practice. This is the reason that seventeenth-century orthodoxy has been able to hold the field so tenaciously where the practice of the minister's self-communion is concerned.

Examples of the tenacity of this position are provided by the prominent theologians Klaus Harms and Christoph Ernst Luthardt. Harms became famous through his ninety-five theses issued against theological rationalism and unionism. Publishing his, as well as Luther's, theses on the eve of All Saints Day in 1817, Harms made a passionate plea to his fellow Lutherans to return to the faith of Luther and the confessional heritage of the Reformation. That Harms himself had not reached that noble goal, at least in every respect, becomes apparent when we learn his views on Holy Communion. Harms was categorically opposed to the pastor's self-communion, and he employed all the usual seventeenth-century arguments to prove his point. A person should not go often to communion. In his *Pastoraltheologie* Harms gives the advice that pastors should carefully examine the motives of those who desire communion more than twice or three times a year. Such tendencies are unhealthy and must be brought under proper control! That very frequent communion was the practice of the early church did not disconcert Harms. Those were still primitive, undeveloped times, he said.<sup>28</sup> Luthardt, half a century after Harms, goes so far as to insist that pastors should not receive communion at all when they are officiating, even when an assistant is present. They should only receive communion when they have no official function at the service.<sup>29</sup>

#### *4. The Restoration of the Pastor's Self-Communion*

A gradual restoration of the legal right and liturgical practice of the pastor's self-communion began about a century ago in Germany and spread later to other countries. The restoration is not yet complete, but the situation has changed very markedly during the past century. Many factors have contributed to this development.

The revival of church life and the growing sense of churchmanship, both during the last century and in our own age, have led to a widespread practice of more frequent services of Holy Communion. In such a situation the pastor's own desire to commune in the fellowship of his congregation has pressed upon him with an urgency which has demanded a satisfactory solution. The study of the Bible and church history has helped to remove old obstacles. J. L. Koenig's careful and well

documented study of the history of the celebrant's self-communion since New Testament times had a very wide influence and has contributed greatly to the new movement in Germany.<sup>30</sup> In 1879 the General Synod of the Prussian Church took legal action to make the pastor's self-communion permissible where assistant clergy was not available.<sup>31</sup> Other churches followed Prussia's example. No doubt the widespread and intensive research on Luther which began with the publication of a critical edition of Luther's works has also been a contributing factor in the solution of this problem. A better knowledge of the sacramental theology of the reformers and their liturgical practice has been welcomed by many.

In our own time two additional factors of some influence should be mentioned. The ecumenical movement awakened interest in the liturgical life of other communions. The work which the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has done in the field of worship has affected concepts of corporate worship and its underlying theological principles.<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, recent investigations concerning the origin of the Christian eucharist and its Jewish background have lent support to the view that the consecration of the bread and wine at the Jewish sacred meal, whether the passover or another religious fellowship meal, was followed by the "self-communion" of the host before others participated.<sup>33</sup> The Talmud has a rule that he who pronounces the benediction over the bread and wine must also receive them. Similarly, in some versions of the canons of Hippolytus of Rome (c. 200 A.D.), the duty of the consecrating bishop to commune himself is mentioned.<sup>34</sup> There is no need to assert that our Lord Himself partook of the bread and wine which He consecrated at the Last Supper. In the light of Jewish customs some New Testament scholars of in our day maintain this view. They would so interpret the meaning of the words of Jesus, "I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."<sup>35</sup> The majority of New Testament scholars, however, take the position that Jesus did not partake of the elements which He consecrated. The very purpose for which Jesus instituted the sacrament would seem to exclude His own communion.<sup>36</sup>

This point, however, constitutes no barrier to the minister's

self-communion. Even though the liturgist functions as Christ's representative, as His ambassador (2 Cor. 5:20), he cannot identify himself with Christ. He is and must always remain one of the disciples for whose spiritual well-being this sacrament was instituted. As such he is asked to "take and eat" and "to drink of it." Is it not the risen Lord who is present and who gives Himself to us in this sacrament?

Nowhere in the Lutheran Church is private confession any longer regarded as an obligatory preparation for communion. In wide areas, both among the pastors and the laity, private confession has completely disappeared. Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts have taken the place that once belonged to the pastor. The individual care of souls has become largely secularized and the church has suffered a real loss. Lutheran theologians in our time represent the view that the officiating minister participates in the public confession and absolution and thus has the right to commune as well.<sup>37</sup>

Many pastors, however, have undoubtedly felt that their own spiritual preparation does not receive enough attention at services where they function as liturgists. Therefore they tend to refrain from self-communion. The liturgical tradition of the church has been aware of this need. Since early times various prayers have preceded the act of communion. Some of these prayers have been intended for the celebrant only, others for all communicants. The Roman tradition included such prayers long before the time of the Reformation. In some German sixteenth-century Lutheran church orders these are recommended for the use of the pastor before he communes himself.<sup>38</sup> In the proposed revision of the liturgy of the Church of Finland a silent prayer for all communicants is suggested at this point in the service. It is partly based on the scriptural prayer, "Domine, non sum dignus," which in the Roman tradition precedes the celebrant's communion. The Finnish proposal reads:

Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter into the unclean room of my heart. Have mercy upon me for Thy precious blood and Thy life-giving death and victorious resurrection. As I receive Thy holy grace, grant that it may be for the nourishment and strengthening of my soul and body. Amen.<sup>39</sup>

---

Nearly everywhere the legal and theological barriers have been removed and the way opened for the Lutheran pastor's self-communion. It is, however, quite generally understood to be intended as a right to be used only when the pastor serves the congregation alone. The former Swedish Archbishop Eidem, for instance, urged his clergy to use this privilege and show a good example to his people. But he took it for granted that, where two pastors are present, they commune one another.<sup>40</sup> When this dual form of the pastor's communion is stressed in the way which Dr. Eidem does, it easily creates the impression that self-communion of the celebrant is not quite right and should only be practised as a kind of second-best solution. Nyman touches this question at the end of his investigation:

The difference in the form of communion must not be emphasized in such a way that it would appear to be better and more appropriate for a minister to receive the sacrament from a fellow minister and that he would consequently feel himself prevented from communing when such assistance is not available; nor should he have a feeling that he is using an emergency form when he practises self-communion. In order to have two forms of the liturgist's communion practised side by side it must be presupposed that they really are considered equally correct. If the liturgist's communion by the hand of another person is presented even in some measure as a better kind of usage than self-communion, then one has allowed himself to be bound up by a tradition which has arisen through a series of misconceptions and misinterpretations.<sup>41</sup>

Nyman's argument is certainly worth serious consideration and would appear to be in harmony with the theology of the Reformation. However, a custom which has become a nearly universal Lutheran tradition through centuries of use cannot be changed all at once. Liturgical changes are always delicate matters and should only take place when the necessary teaching has come first.

Nothing has been said about the views and practice of American Lutheranism. I have not had the opportunity to explore articles written by Lutherans in America. Undoubtedly the Lutheran churches in this country reflect largely the views and usages of

European Lutheranism. In conclusion, however, two well known American liturgiologists may be quoted. Dr. Stöckli in his widely used *Manual of Worship* refers to "the abundant historical Reformation precedent" in recommending self-communion. During the singing of the *Agnus Dei*, this action should take place in the following way:

[The minister] will stand before the altar and first receive the host, saying privately, *The Body of Christ given for me*. Then he receives the wine, saying privately, *The Blood of Christ shed for my sins*. After this, with folded hands and bowed head, he says privately, *The Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His precious Blood strengthen and preserve me in true faith with everlasting life*. Then if time permits he will offer his own thanksgiving and consecration of self to his Lord.<sup>42</sup>

The eminent liturgiologist Luther D. Reed made this statement in his *Lutheran Liturgy*:

The ministers at the altar make their communion first. When there is an assistant minister he may administer to the officiant whose reception of the elements is necessary for the formal, if not for the actual, completion of the ceremony. After his own reception the officiant administers to the assistant minister.

Those who believe that when there is no other minister present the officiant should commune himself urge this as the natural and fitting completion of a liturgical action which has other than purely personal values. They also believe that participation by the minister in the reception is essential to the idea of fellowship inherent in the very nature of the Communion.<sup>43</sup>

We may add that Dr. Reed's view was officially accepted in American Lutheranism with the publication of the *Service Book and Hymnal* in 1958. Among the general rubrics concerning the service the following is included: "The minister himself may first receive the bread and wine and shall then administer the same to the people."<sup>44</sup>

In the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, in widespread use since 1978 among Lutherans in this country and in Canada, a rubric occurs in the Communion Rite itself which has a more direct wording

than the optional general rubric of 1958. After the bread and wine have been consecrated and are ready for distribution, rubric 35 states in part: "The presiding minister and the assisting ministers receive the bread and wine and then give them to those who come to receive."<sup>45</sup>

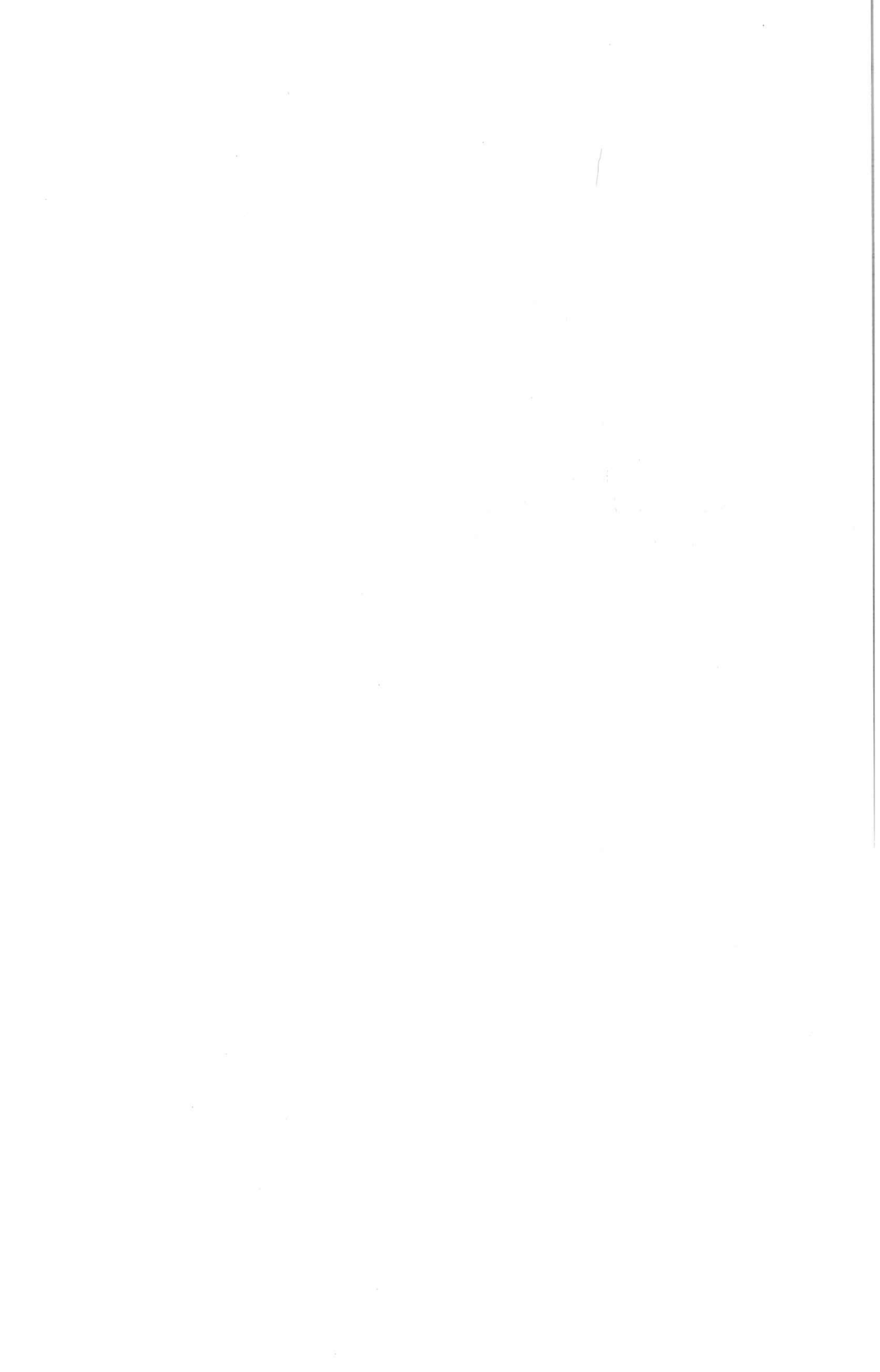
#### ENDNOTES

1. Helge Nyman, *Kyrkotjaenarens naatvardsgant i lutherskt gudetjaenstliv*, Acta Academiae Aboensis, Humaniera XXXI, 4 (Abo, 1955), 280 pp.
2. W. E. Scudamore, *Notitia Eucharistica* (London, 1872), pp. 542-543.
3. The celebrant's self-communion is mentioned as a rule to be followed in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (VIII, 13), in the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, XVII (Edinburgh, 1870), p. 235.
4. Scudamore, *op.cit.*, p. 605.
5. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 12.
6. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 100.
7. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 146.
8. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Works of Martin Luther*, II (Philadelphia, 1916), pp. 209 ff.
9. Nyman, *op. cit.*, p. 37; *Works of Martin Luther*, VI (Philadelphia, 1932), pp. 90-91.
10. *Concordia or Book of Concord* (St. Louis, 1950), p. 138.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
13. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 39.
14. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 44.
15. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 47.
16. Th. Kliefoth, *Liturgische Abhandlungen*, V (Schwerin, 1858), p. 119.
17. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 56.
18. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 62.
19. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 66.
20. *Works of Martin Luther*, VI, pp. 90-91.
21. Nyman, *op. cit.*, pp. 74f.
22. Nyman, *op.cit.*, pp. 165f. The strongly institutionalized concept of the ministry may be illustrated by the following question which the pastor asked of those who came to confession: "ob Sie vor Gott und dem Predigtamt sich als armen Suender bekennen. . ." See Aleksi Lehtonen, *Die Livlaendische Kirchenordnung des Johannes Gezelius* (Helsinki, 1931), p. 149.

23. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 168.
24. Lehtonen, *op.cit.*, p. 161.
25. Nyman, *op.cit.*, pp. 103-104.
26. Nyman, *op.cit.*, pp. 94ff.
27. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 86.
28. Nyman, *op.cit.*, pp. 121-122.
29. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 128.
30. The title of Koenig's book is *Der jedesmalige Mitgenuss und das Selbstnehmen des heiligen Abendmahles von Seiten des konsekrierenden Geistlichen nach Schrift und Geschichte dargestellt* (Demmin, 1859).
31. Nyman, *op.cit.*, pp. 128 ff.
32. The commission's report, *Ways of Worship* (New York, 1951), deserves careful study.
33. See Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster, 1952), p. 52; Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York, 1955), pp. 22, 44. *The Manual of Discipline*, one of the Dead Sea scrolls refers to a similar custom; see Theodor H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures in English Translation* (Garden City, New York, 1956), p. 310.
34. Hans Lietzmann, *Messe und Herrenmahl* (Bonn, 1926), p. 210.
35. See Charles Gore on Luke 22:18 in *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture* (London, 1943), III, p. 235; also Frederick C. Grant on Mark 14:28 in *The Interpreter's Bible*, VII (New York-Nashville, 1951), p. 878. A.U.B. Higgins, too, takes the position that Jesus partook of the bread and wine in the Upper Room; see his *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (London, 1952), p. 47.
36. Jeremias, *op.cit.*, p. 165, takes this view and cites several other authorities who share his position. C.H. Dodd's comment on Luke 22:15-16 in his *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London, 1952), p. 56, may be quoted as an illustration of this view: "I earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before my passion (but I shall not do so), for I tell you, I shall never again eat it until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."
37. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 178. Dr. Reed quotes Martin Chemnitz in support of this view, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 349.
38. See Bernhard Klaus, "Die Ruestgebete," in *Leiturgia. Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*, II (Kassel, 1955), p. 555.
39. *Suomen Evankelis-Luterilaisen Kirken Kirkkokaesikirja*. . . Ehdotus (Pieksaemaki, 1957), p. 32.
40. Nyman, *op.cit.*, pp. 152-153.
41. Nyman, *op.cit.*, p. 247.
42. Paul Zeller Strodach, *A Manual of Worship* (Philadelphia 1946), p. 241.

- 
43. Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, pp. 348-349.
  44. *Service Book and Hymnal*, authorized by the Lutheran churches cooperating in the Commission on the Liturgy and Hymnal, p. 275.
  45. *Lutheran Book of Worship*, prepared by the churches participating in the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), p. 71.

Toivo Harjunpaa is Professor Emeritus of Church History in Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, California. This essay is an updated version of *Una Sancta Study Document 1* (1964).



# Homiletical Studies

## Gospel Series C

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Planning the series of studies which follows was one of the last tasks of Dr. Gerhard Aho, homiletical editor of the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* for many years. Even on his deathbed Gerhard was planning to do those studies which he had assigned to himself. Dr. Douglas Judisch completed that work and graciously finished the bulk of the correspondence which his colleague had entrusted to him.

“And his works do follow him.” *Requiescat in pace*, Gerhard.

Donald L. Deffner,  
Homiletical Editor

### THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 21:25-36

November 27, 1988

Luke 21:8-36 constitutes the Lucan version of the “Olivet Discourse” (cf. v. 37), also denominated the “Gospel Apocalypse” or “Little Apocalypse” (to distinguish it from the Book of Revelation, traditionally called *the* Apocalypse without modification). The parallels in the prior gospels occur in Matthew 24:4-25:46 and Mark 13:5-37. In the first section of the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21:8-24) Jesus speaks purely of developments preceding the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (vv. 20-24). This description, nevertheless, remains relevant to us of the post-apostolic period in a perspicuous manner: since all the things which Jesus assigned to the apostolic generation actually happened (21:9, 12, 32), we can, therefore, be quite sure that the rest of world history will also unfold in exact accord with His predictions here and elsewhere.

Verse 24 implies that a considerable period will intervene between the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the parousia of Jesus: “the times of the Gentiles.” In this phrase the plural form *kairoi* (“times”) emphasizes the long duration of this period, which is described as *ethnōn* (“of Gentiles”) because dur-

ing this era God would gather His people mainly from the Gentiles rather than concentrating His attention upon the Jews as He had during the previous two millennia. (This statement, of course, in no way excludes the conversion and salvation of individual Jews, something for which the church works and prays; but Jews now have no different relationship with God than do Gentiles.) From the subsequent verses, as well as prior predictions of the prophets (assumed by the use of *plēroō*, "fulfil"), we see that this Gentile age comprehends the whole remaining course of earthly history. (It follows that the Israelis currently ruling Jerusalem God regards as Gentiles in general rather than Jews; because of the lapse of reliable records during the turbulent millennia now expired, none but God knows the degree to which those who today think themselves Jewish actually descend from the Jews of 70 A.D.)

Verses 25-27 speak exclusively of the parousia. The *tote* ("then") of verse 27 means, not "sometime thereafter," but "thereupon" (in closer approximation to the classical usage, "at that time"). For the "signs" of verses 25-26, which Luke describes less specifically than Matthew (24:29) or Mark (13:24-25), accompany the appearance of Christ to all men rather than preceding it. So all those passages demand which speak of His return occurring suddenly and unexpectedly (e.g., Luke 17:24, 26-36). These natural phenomena are *sēmeia* ("signs") in the sense that they symbolize the spiritual reality of the situation, the return of Christ to condemn unbelievers (the *anthrōpoi* of verse 26), which makes the reaction of verse 25 completely appropriate (to such people). (In Matthew 24:30, indeed, the appearance of Jesus itself is called a *sēmeion*.) Nor do these signs represent a dissolution of nature, but rather the termination of its blessings. God, that is to say, will deprive the faithless of all those boons of divine providence which also unbelievers enjoy until death or judgment day. Nature itself is to experience a purification from the effects of sin in connection with the parousia (Romans 8:19-21). When Jesus, then, says that heaven and earth will "pass away," He refers (as does 2 Peter 3:10, using the same word) to the passage of the present sin-infected form of things (1 Corinthians 7:31; 2 Peter 3:10-13, *stoicheia* denoting, not "elements" in the modern chemical sense, but rather "the elemental spirits which the syncretistic religious tendencies of later antiquity associated with the physical elements" [BAG, p. 776]; cf. Galatians 4:3, Colossians 2:8, 20).

Verses 28-32 form a distinct paragraph with the same point being enunciated in slightly different ways before (v. 28) and after (vv. 31-32) a parable designed to illustrate it (vv. 29-30). That "these things" (*toutōn*) in verse 28 refer not to events involved in the parousia itself (vv. 25-27), but rather to its historical precedents (vv. 8-24a), appears from the parallel phraseology in verses 9 and 12, as well as from the Lord's use of aorist imperatives ("straighten up," "lift up your heads") which He was clearly addressing to the apostles before Him. (To be sure, this exhortation applies equally to all us Christians of later generations now that the events predicted in verses 8-24a have already taken place

and our “redemption” has drawn even nearer—“redemption” being used here, as in Romans 8:23, in a sense wider than usual to mean a release from sin and all its results.) Likewise, in the parable the disciples see the leaves of the tree, but not necessarily the summer itself. In the parable’s explanation too, therefore, “these things” (*tauta*) refer specifically to the events of verses 8-24a. Thus, since the *panta* (“all things”) of verse 32 are equivalent to the *tauta* of the previous verse, Jesus is assuring the apostolic generation of seeing, not the parousia, but rather the destruction of Jerusalem and all its precedents (vv. 8-24b). This point has, of course, great practical importance: although the parousia has not yet come, all the events which Luke 21 places before it already occurred in apostolic times, and the phenomena accompanying the Lord’s return as judge will occur so suddenly that there will then be no time left to repent (vv. 34-36; cf. 2 Peter 3:10). The word *genea* does not mean a “race” (and so does not denote the Jewish people, as dispensational authors desire); in the New Testament the ordinary meaning is a “generation,” the sum of “all those living at a given time” (BAG, p. 153).

The “kingdom of God” in verse 31 refers specifically to the Lord’s kingdom of glory, the “glory” mentioned in verse 27 (cf. my study on the passage from Luke 17 assigned to the Third Last Sunday in the Church Year). The language of this latter verse Jesus borrows from Daniel 7:13, identifying Himself as the divine “Son of Man” who there receives glory and eternal kingship. The title recurs at the end of verse 36 in the same context of divine dominion. There, although the *panta tauta* (“all these things”) are specifically the events of verses 8-24a, the exhortation, we know from other scriptures, applies to us as well in the midst of whatever tribulations may come upon us, whether similar or dissimilar to those of the first century.

*Introduction:* Today we cross the threshold of a new church year, and specifically we step into its month-long vestibule — the season of Advent. The special emphasis of Advent is the coming of Christ, His threefold coming—in the past, in the present, in the future. In other words, Advent describes Christ as

#### THE COMING ONE

- I. He Who Was to Come.
  - A. God inspired the prophets to proclaim that the Messiah would come to redeem us (e.g., Genesis 49:10; Psalm 40:7; 118:26; Zechariah 9:9).
  - B. Jesus (the speaker of the text) fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah’s first coming (Luke 7:18-23; 19:38; 24:25-27, 44-46).
  - C. God inspired the apostles (the audience of the text) to proclaim that the Messiah did come to redeem us (Luke 24:47-49).
- II. He Who Keeps Coming.
  - A. Through His Word (v. 33), such as the present text and the sermon based upon it.

1. To warn through the Law (vv. 25-26, 34, 36).
  2. To strengthen through the Gospel (vv. 28, 36).
  - B. Through the sacraments which He instituted (Luke 22:19-20; Matthew 28:19).
- III. He Who Is to Come.
- A. In accord with His own description.
    1. Without doubt (since all His other predictions have proven true, vv. 28-32).
    2. With the power and glory of God (vv. 27, 25-26, 31).
    3. Without warning (v. 34).
  - B. In accord with His own purpose.
    1. To complete the condemnation of the faithless (vv. 25-26, 34-35).
    2. To complete the deliverance of the faithful (vv. 28, 36).

Douglas MacCallum Lindsay Judisch

## THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 3:1-6

December 4, 1988

Many thousands of dollars will be spent this Christmas season on gifts that people neither want nor need. God's Christmas gift, however, is one that the entire world needs desperately. It was John's mission (and the pastor's today, too) to show people their need for God's gift and to prepare them to receive it eagerly and happily.

This text is included in all four gospels. Luke's account is unique in two ways. First, he alone (in typical fashion) carefully ties John's ministry and the advent of God's kingdom into history by mentioning the ruling civil and religious authorities of the time (vv. 1-2; see Arndt who, among others, answers the questions of those who have criticized Luke's accuracy). St. Luke wants us to know that a real Jesus came to a real world which had (and still has) real problems and needs. A. Edersheim in his *Life and Times* details the times and lives of these rulers (see pp. 255-264), showing how great the need was for salvation at the time (Lenski disagrees with such an approach, p. 172).

Secondly, Luke alone includes several additional lines from Isaiah's prophecy (see vv. 5-6). He undoubtedly does this because these additional lines clearly announce the universal aspect of God's advent and kingdom. (The word "all" occurs three times.) Verse 6 is noteworthy: "All flesh will see God's salvation!" The universality of God's grace in Christ is, of course, a key theme in Luke's gospel and one of the beautiful themes of the Christmas message.

Luke quotes Isaiah's prophecy (vv. 4-6) from the LXX. According to the LXX (and Luke) the voice would be crying from the wilderness (as John, in fact, did, v. 2). The Hebrew text, however, does not put the "voice" in the wilderness but makes the wilderness the goal of the Lord's advent; for the accents indicate that the words "in the desert" should be taken with the words "prepare the way of the Lord." But since these accents are not original and were devised, in fact, after the LXX, there is no reason to change the point Luke seems to be emphasizing, that John preached in the wilderness (v.2) as Isaiah had predicted he would do, thereby forcing people to come to the wilderness to hear his message. Luke also follows the LXX in verse 6, which renders the Hebrew "all flesh shall see it together" with "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

*Introduction:* Have you ever received a gift you did not need or want? How much money do you think will be wasted this Christmas on useless presents? In the text God tears open a little corner of His Christmas gift to give us a peek. This "peek" causes us to cry out:

#### NOW HERE IS A GIFT OUR WORLD CAN USE!

- I. Because of sin, our world will always have unsatisfied needs.
  - A. Our world has problems and needs it has never satisfied nor ever will satisfy by its own resources.
    1. The world to which God first sent the gift of His love was in desperate need of help—the leaders in the secular state were weak and corrupt and the religious leaders were no better (vv. 1-2; see Edersheim and Josephus for details).
    2. Have our own secular and religious leaders fared any better in making our world a safer and happier place, in satisfying people's needs?
    3. Perhaps we can see ourselves mirrored in these men who ruled the world at the time of John—self-centered, selfish, petty.
  - B. Our world cannot satisfy itself because we are all sinners.
    1. John preached in the wilderness (v. 2), thus forcing the crowds to come to this place of death to hear the word of life; with this backdrop people were reminded of sin's curse (see Genesis 3:17-18; also Romans 8:20-21).
    2. Isaiah had called all people "flesh" (v. 6), a word which reminds us also of decay and death.
    3. We are all sinners, cursed to die if left to ourselves; spiritually we are a "wasteland," rotting flesh which merely decays more when left alone (John 3:6; Romans 7:18).
- II. God urges us to clear the way for His Christmas gift of salvation.
  - A. God offers mankind a gift in the Christmas gospel which can give us life and save us from this decay and certain death.
    1. God gives us the gift of Himself; "prepare the way of the Lord!" (v.

- 4). The baby in the manger is the mighty Lord God Himself (see Isaiah 9:6; Colossians 2:9).
2. God comes to our world not to condemn and destroy us (as we certainly deserve) but to save and deliver us from sin's curse ("salvation," v.6).
3. God accomplished this "salvation" on a cross; He sealed the world's salvation and restored life when He rose from the dead.
- B. God wraps His gift of salvation in the Means of Grace.
  1. John was giving people the gift of God's forgiveness through the Word and Sacrament (v. 3, "preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins").
  2. Today God still "wraps" the gift of His forgiveness in His Word and Sacrament; in His Supper we receive the true body and true blood of the baby in the manger for the forgiveness of all our sins.
- C. God urges us today to clear the way for our Lord's gift.
  1. John urged the people to clear the way for the Lord (vv. 4-5).
  2. Just as our living rooms often get so cluttered with gifts there is little room for anything else, so also our lives can get so cluttered that there is little time for Word and Sacrament and the gift of forgiveness God wants us to have through these Means of Grace.
  3. "Repent!" God urges us today; we must turn from all this "clutter" to that gift more precious than everything this world could ever give us; we must turn to the God who came at Christmas for our salvation; we must turn to the God who still comes to us today in His Word and Sacrament.

*Conclusion:* It is God's Spirit who enables us to repent, to turn from sin to God. Let us all then pray as we did in the Introit, "Restore [literally, "turn"] us, O God; make Thy face shine upon us, that we may be saved." Then we too will celebrate Christmas properly, realizing, "Now here is a gift the world can use!"

Steven C. Briel  
Corcoran and Maple Grove, Minnesota

### THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 3:7-18

December 11, 1988

Luke's summary of John's preaching is the most complete of the synoptic gospels (cf. Matthew 3:7-12; Mark 1:7-8). Even so, it is tempting to concentrate on the text's report of John's vivid and incisive use of the Law and only treat his preaching of the Gospel in quick, uneven fashion. Yet Luke makes it clear that John was

first and foremost a preacher of the Gospel (v. 18). John was, next to our Lord, the greatest of prophets and a master of distinguishing between Law and Gospel. He always used the Law in a proper relationship with the Gospel. The text tells of John's use of the Law to prepare his hearers for the Gospel (the second use of the Law, vv. 7,8,9,17b) and to guide believers in proper living (the third use, vv. 10-14). Thus, even in his preaching of the Law, John used it in the service of the Gospel. John was consistent in his preaching (note the imperfect *elegen*, "he repeatedly said") and emphatic in pointing to Jesus as the hope of his hearers (vv. 16-17). John pointed to Jesus' work of baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire. The "fire" is most certainly the Holy Spirit and His work on the hearts of people (both Holy Spirit and fire are governed by one preposition, *en*), as Luther correctly observed (*LW* 13:3-4).

*Introduction:* Those people who are unusual and unique in comparison with the rest of society often leave lasting impressions. Liberace's dazzling clothes often seemed more important than his performance on the piano. Some stars' bizarre makeup and dress are more memorable than their performances. John the Baptist was, to be sure, unusual—he lived in the wilderness, wore sackcloth and ate locusts and wild honey. Perhaps we think of him as a religious hermit. Perhaps we see him as a baptizer of great crowds in the Jordan River. Perhaps we view him as a popular preacher. But Luke reminds us that the most important thing about John was his preaching of the Gospel. When we read John's words which he spoke, we should ask ourselves:

### DO WE HEAR JOHN'S GOSPEL MESSAGE?

- I. A message which did not ignore God's Law.
  - A. John's condemnation of those who tried to earn God's favor (v.7).
    1. Who went through the motions of baptism.
    2. But whose deeds were evil ("children of vipers").
  - B. John's condemnation of those who thought they deserved God's favor (v. 8a).
    1. Though they had no repentance in their hearts.
    2. Though their outward acts showed no repentance.
  - C. John pointed to God's power to keep His promises (v. 8b).
    1. To raise up a holy people (Abraham's children).
    2. Wherever He chooses.

*Transition:* God continues to raise up children to Abraham. He has chosen to make us those children, though we have neither earned nor deserved it. We also can trust God to keep His promises.

- II. A message which brought forth good works.

- A. Done willingly by those who received the forgiveness of God offered in John's preaching and baptism (v. 10).
- B. Done for others' benefit.
  - 1. In general (v. 11).
  - 2. In each believer's specific situation (vv. 12-14).

*Transition:* We, like John's hearers, wish to do God's will since we have received His promises. In each of our lives God provides us with ways to do good works which serve our neighbor.

- III. A message which pointed to Christ.
  - A. Who graciously grants the Holy Spirit (v. 16).
  - B. Who will gather His own safely into His kingdom (v. 17a).
  - C. Who will destroy all evil.
    - 1. Of those who do not bring forth good fruit (v.9).
    - 2. With unquenchable fire (v. 17b).

*Conclusion:* John points us to Jesus who gives us faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, grants us eternal life, and rescues us from the everlasting fire of hell.

Andrew E. Steinmann  
Fraser, Michigan

## THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 1:39-45

December 18, 1988

It is apparent that, very soon after being visited by the angel Gabriel, Mary set out on her journey to visit her relative Elizabeth, with whom she would remain for some three months (v. 56). And this sojourn would only be natural since they both had the common bond—besides being relatives—that they had received a special blessing from God. Mary was anxious to share her excitement with someone who could really understand and appreciate the joy she felt. Upon Mary's arrival, and at her first utterance of salutation to Elizabeth, two remarkable things occurred: the child in Elizabeth's womb leaped, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. That John was filled with the Holy Spirit, even in his mother's womb, had, of course, been foretold (v. 15). And here in his prenatal state, being empowered by the Spirit, he reacts to the presence of his Maker. The baby's movement in his mother's womb is nothing extraordinary in itself after six months of growth, and some may say that it was merely brought on by the agitation of the mother or that John paid "involuntary homage" to his Lord, but Elizabeth exclaims that

the child "leaped for joy" (literally, "in exultation," v. 44).

Elizabeth, being filled with the Spirit, also was in a state of great joy, signified by her exclamation in "a great voice." What follows is the first "magnificat" in the New Testament, which together with those of Mary and Zechariah formed the basis for early church hymnody. The expression, "blessed are you among women," has the force of the superlative in the original: "You are most blessed among women." Elizabeth then speaks of the child which Mary is carrying. After recognizing the blessedness of that child, she expressed, in complete humility, her unworthiness to be visited by the mother of "my Lord." This statement is of extreme christological importance, for it is the first time that Jesus, the God-man, is referred to as "Lord." The humiliation of Christ is due not to the fact that He became man, but to the manner; that is, He lived a human life of humility even from conception. This entire process — His whole substitutionary life, without sin from the very beginning — belongs to the work of redemption.

Elizabeth terminates her discourse speaking of faith and the fruit of faith, happiness. Mary is blessed because she believes. In verse 45 "what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished" refers not simply to the impending birth of a son, but to the entire promise communicated to her by the angel Gabriel in verses 31-33. The *hoti* of verse 45 is best translated "for." Elizabeth could only have known all this by the revelation of the Spirit with whom she was filled. Therefore the underlying motifs of this text are the humility of Mary and Elizabeth along with the joy which proceeds from faith (*pisteuo*).

*Introduction:* You can almost feel the anticipation growing this morning. Only one more week until Christmas, that joyous celebration of God's love, "peace on earth, and good will toward men." Many of the children are eagerly waiting for the day when they will be able to open the gifts that have shown up around the base of the Christmas tree. And as we poke around and examine the beautifully wrapped packages, wondering what is inside, we may be reminded of the old proverb: "Good things come in small packages." It is true that almost everything that we might consider great has its humble beginnings. Whether it be the large corporation that started out in someone's garage, or a little seed that grows into a mighty cedar tree, we see that many big things start out very small. In the gospel we are told about two seemingly ordinary women. But something very special is happening to them, because God is using them to change the history of the world. Here we see

#### THE SMALL BEGINNINGS OF SOMETHING BIG

- I. God, too, planned a humble beginning for the birth of a King.
  - A. We would expect something greater for the birth of God's Son.
  - B. But it had been anticipated for many years.
    1. The Old Testament lesson speaks of Bethlehem, Jesus' birthplace, being the smallest of clans (Micah 5:2).

2. God had used many other people who were poor or unesteemed in the world's eyes for great things (Noah, Rahab, David, many prophets, etc.).
- C. Mary and Elizabeth were very humble women.
  1. God chose Elizabeth, who had been despised (v. 25), to bear the son who would prepare the way for the Lord.
  2. God chose Mary, a nondescript young girl, to bear His Son.
- II. The results would be the greatest event that could ever happen to mankind.
  - A. When we think of the Christmas events, many times we focus merely on the concept of a child's birth.
    1. Mary visited Elizabeth because she could hardly contain the joy she felt.
    2. But it was joy, not merely because she was going to give birth, but mainly because she knew the consequences of what was happening.
      - a. She had been given a promise regarding her Son (vv. 31-33).
      - b. She believed (trusted) God to fulfill that promise.
  - B. We are all made holy through the Son's sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10).
  - C. Salvation brings joy to all who believe (v. 45).
    1. Mary and Elizabeth react accordingly.
    2. They do so by the power of the Holy Spirit (vv. 15, 41).
  - D. We, too, are partakers of the joy that these women felt.

*Conclusion:* We again marvel, then, at how God brought from such a small, humble beginning something so big, that would have such tremendous implications for us. It truly does bring us joy to trust in Him and His promises, as Mary and Elizabeth did, as we anticipate the celebration of Christ's birth.

D.L. Rutt  
St. James, Minnesota

## THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

December 25, 1988

Luke 2:1-20

The three chronological references of verses 1-2 (the imperium of Augustus, the governorship of Quirinius, the first census) underline the distinctive historicity of biblical religion (cf. Luke 3:1-2) as opposed to the essentially non-historical (whether mainly mythological or mostly moralistic) nature of all other religions. The same integral historicity of Christianity appears likewise from all the geographical specifications of verses 1-4: the "inhabited world" (*oikoumenē*, clearly referring to the Roman Empire), Syria, Galilee, Nazareth, Judea, Bethlehem. The same significance attaches to the genealogical references

to Mary as the mother of Jesus, Joseph as His stepfather, and "the house and family of David." This last point pertains, in a closely related way, to the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy of the incarnation, the hinge of biblical historicity—the hypostatic intersection of deity with humanity. God the Son, in order to redeem mankind, was to assume a human nature in the womb of a virgin descended from the politician David (2 Samuel 7:10-29; Isaiah 7:10-25; 11:1; etc.; Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 3:31).

There are a multitude of other points of importance in the Lucan nativity, but this study will restrict itself to the song of the heavenly host in verse 14, "doxa en hupsistois theōi kai epi gēs eirēnē en anthrōpois eudokia." These words constitute the first line, and so form the basis, of the Gloria in Excelsis. The song of the angels consists in two parts, in which the individual members are paired in an artful and significant manner—with a contrast between the datives ("God" and "men") and the principal prepositional phrases ("in the highest" and "upon earth") as well as a complementary relationship between the principal subjects ("glory" and "peace"). Reasonably enough, the angels sing in the first place of the divine glory of which they are always so aware (cf. Isaiah 6:1-4; Matthew 18:10). Even the Latin version of this line is familiar to most Lutherans, laymen as well as pastors, by virtue of its use as the refrain in the popular (originally French) carol, "Angels We Have Heard on High" (*Lutheran Worship*, 55): "Gloria in excelsis Deo." Although the jussive form "be" is used in most English translations which supply some form of the copulative verb, there is no verb in Greek; and in such a case the usual procedure is to understand the simple indicative form *esti*. Thus, the idea is that the news just announced by the angel (v. 11) redounds in itself to the glory of God. This *doxa* is the awesome manifestation of any or all of God's attributes to His creatures. The divine attributes which are particularly manifest at this time are (1) the grace of God in coming into the world ("the Lord," v. 11) to save men from His wrath (as the second half of this hymn will assert; cf. also "for you a Saviour," v. 11) and (2) His faithfulness in fulfilling His previous promises to do this very thing (in addition to the comments above cf. "in the city of David" with Micah 5:2; cf. "Messiah" with my studies of Isaiah 42 and 61 in *CTQ*, XLVI, pp. 307-312). Although the *doxa* of God in Christ is usually veiled from human view in this world (vv. 7, 12, 16; cf. J.T. Pless, "Martin Luther: Preacher of the Cross," *CTQ*, LI, pp. 83-101), it is quite visible in heaven (literally, "in the highest places"), that is, to the angels and those who have died in faith.

The second half of the celestial song consists in two coordinate clauses of parallel thought (for the purpose of emphasis)—with "on earth" equaling "among men" and "peace" expounded as "good will." Thus, the reason why the birth of Christ fills all of heaven with divine glory is just because in Christ God declared peace on mankind. For by becoming man God the Son was able to keep the divine law perfectly in the place of all men and, in His state of

humiliation (vv. 7, 12, 16), to endure in the place of all men the divine wrath aroused by rebellion against God. In this way Christ has neutralized the enmity toward all people aroused in a just God by human sin and, in its place (in the mind of God), He has established an attitude of "peace" (*eirēnē*) toward the whole world ("on earth") or, in other words, "good will among men" (*anthrōpōis*, "human beings" without qualification). (On this concept cf. my studies of 1 John 1-2 and Ephesians 2 in *CTQ*, XLVI, pp. 44-46, 62-65.) The word *eudokia* ("good will") refers to God's gracious desire to save people from eternal death (cf. Ephesians 1:5-9). For this reason Isaiah, in the traditional Christmas Old Testament reading (9:2-7, used also in the gradual), had called the divine child whose birth the angels announced (cf. Isaiah 9:6 with Luke 2:11) the "Prince of Peace," of whose peace there would be no end (Isaiah 9:7; cf. Isaiah 26:3, 12; 54:10; 57:19; 66:12). Unfortunately most of the world's people have not heard of God's declaration of peace upon them or have rejected it when they heard; in this way they continue to war against God; and the justice of God requires Him to take up arms once more against them through the use of His law (in creation and His Word) and ultimately to surrender them to hell.

This exegesis of Luke 2:14 assumes that the correct reading is the nominative *eudokia* in accordance with the great majority of manuscripts, the reading accepted by the Authorized Version, the *Lutheran Hymnal*, and *Lutheran Worship*. If one follows most of the modern versions in accepting the genitive *eudokias* as the correct reading, the analogy of faith will, of course, exclude the synergistic dream of the Romanists and Arminians that peace with God is obtained only by "men of good will" ("hominibus bonae voluntatis" in the Vulgate), as if such men existed (cf. Psalms 14, 53). This interpretation also runs counter to the common meaning of *eudokia* (which never refers to a moral quality) and the common usage of *anthrōpoi* (which is not otherwise modified by a qualitative genitive). The analogy of faith (e.g., John 3:16) would likewise rule out the Calvinistic idea, prevailing among contemporary commentators, that the work of Christ was meant to bring peace with God only to "men of His good pleasure," that is, the elect (by supplying a supposedly self-understood "His"). (Thus, the NASB, like the TEV, speaks of "peace among men with whom He is pleased," while the NIV errs in the same direction: "peace to men on whom his favor rests.") If *eudokias* is accepted as the reading, the best course is to connect it with *eirēnē* as a genitive of source: "and on earth peace coming from His good pleasure with men" (see T. Mueller, "An Application of Case Grammar to Two New Testament Passages," *CTQ*, XLIII, pp. 323-325).

*Introduction:* One of the things that makes Christmas so enjoyable is singing Christmas carols. There are many of them, and most we sing only at this time of year. But the first Christmas carol, the song of the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem, we are able to sing all but ten weeks of the year: "Glory be to God on high: and on earth peace, good will toward men." We have abstained from using this hymn during the month of Advent, but today it bursts anew

from joyful hearts. Today we have joined with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven in singing

### THE ORIGINAL CHRISTMAS CAROL

- I. Stanza 1: "There is glory for God in the highest places."
  - A. Because of His grace.
    1. Despite our attempts to seize the glory which is His alone.
    2. Evinced by His assumption of a human nature to allow us to enjoy once again the sight of His glory.
  - B. Because of His faithfulness to His promises.
    1. Relayed by the Old Testament prophets.
    2. Fulfilled by Christmas and the saving work which followed.
- II. Stanza 2: "There is peace on earth, good will for men."
  - A. Not war.
    1. A war which man declared on God and still continues through his sins.
    2. A war which God, therefore (because of His holiness and justice), was obliged to declare on man.
  - B. But peace (referring to the attitude of God toward man).
    1. A peace which God achieved.
      - a. Becoming a human being like us.
      - b. Enduring the wrath of God which we deserved.
    2. A peace which God declares to man through the Gospel.
      - a. Which angels declared to the shepherds.
      - b. Which the Word of God declares to us today.

Douglas MacCallum Lindsay Judisch

### THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD

Luke 2:21

January 1, 1989

The brevity of the text does not leave us wanting for themes. To focus one's thoughts a review of the hymn, "The Ancient Law Departs" (*Lutheran Hymnal*, 115), may be useful. "On the eighth day" follows the Jewish method of counting. As we count, it is a week after birth. The purpose of Jesus' coming was celebrated in the song of the angels and now is enacted by the newborn babe. Here is active obedience to the Law in our behalf. Here is passive obedience in suffering in our behalf. Luke's grammar stresses naming over circumcision. Verse 21 does not even say that Jesus was circumcised; verse 39

does. The infinitive with *tou* is genitive of time, not of purpose. The phrase *to klēthen* reminds us of Matthew 1:21 and Luke 1:31. When Joseph and Mary give the name "Jesus," they are not only obedient to the Lord's command through the angel, but express faith and hope. We too use His name through faith (Acts 4:12). Through His name we receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43). The name of the Lord is made great through proclamation and pure service of the heart (Malachi 1:11).

*Introduction:* "On the eighth day of Christmas" our heavenly Father gave to us the blood of Jesus that we may be forgiven, the life of Jesus that we may live, the name of Jesus for us to proclaim.

### BECAUSE A BABY BOY BLED

- I. We celebrate forgiveness in Jesus' name.
  - A. Jesus shed a few drops of blood to fulfill the mandate God gave to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 17:9-14) and Moses (Leviticus 12:3).
  - B. At just the right time (Galatians 4:4) Jesus lived and died and lives again, obedient to the Law.
  - C. We need not pay with eternal death for the sins of 1988 nor for the sins of 1989.
  - D. We drink His blood and eat His body with the assurance of forgiveness.
- II. We live in the name of Jesus.
  - A. We bring our children to the Lord's house, not for circumcision, but for baptism. Just as God took the initiative with Abraham and Moses, so too God is the primary actor in baptism today.
  - B. We joyfully begin the year in spite of frightening circumstances.
  - C. We regularly invoke the blessing God gave to Aaron to reassure one another (Numbers 6:22-27).
  - D. We offer pure service (Malachi 1:11).
- III. We proclaim the name of Jesus.
  - A. By bringing Jesus to be circumcised and by giving Him the name the angel had commanded, Mary and Joseph made a statement of hope and faith.
  - B. We proclaim Him boldly (2 Timothy 4:2).
  - C. Jesus' blood calls us to belong to Him (Romans 1:1-7).
  - D. We exalt His name (Malachi 1:11; Ephesians 1:21).

*Conclusion:* The world around us celebrates today as the first day of a secular new year. The church has much more to celebrate. Today we celebrate Sunday as the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. And today in particular we rejoice that a baby boy shed His blood for us and was given the name "Jesus," that is, Savior, that at the "name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:9-11).

Warren E. Messmann  
Plain City, Ohio

---

## THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

January 8, 1989

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The baptism of our Lord reveals the eternal mystery of the Trinity by relating an event in the life of Jesus which has direct bearing upon us as baptized children of God. This text displays the favor of God the Father toward His beloved Son and, through the relation of Christ's baptism to ours, God's favor toward us. The contrast between John's baptism with water and Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire is not a derogation of "water baptism," but the humble confession of John that Jesus is the divine Christ from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds. The NIV renders the last words of verse 16, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." The second preposition in this sentence does not occur in the Greek and should probably be omitted. A recommended sermon hymn is "To Jordan Came the Christ, our Lord" (*Lutheran Worship*, 223). Stanza four of this hymn is especially applicable to the chosen theme of this text.

*Introduction:* When we consider the joy we receive from people who are well pleased with us, we might also think that they would not favor us so if they *really* knew us as we are. Surely the One to whom nothing is hidden is offended by what we succeed in hiding from others. But here is a word from God which assures us that our omniscient Lord is well pleased with us. He shows us His gracious favor. He does so by declaring to the world His approval of Christ, His Son and our substitute.

### GOD'S FAVOR REVEALED FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

#### I. God is pleased with His Son.

##### A. Because of who He is.

##### 1. He is the eternal God.

- a. John is not worthy to untie His sandals (v. 16).
- b. He baptizes His people with the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son (v. 16; cf. the Nicene Creed).
- c. He has the authority to judge the world (v. 17).
- d. He is publicly presented as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity (v. 22).

##### 2. He is the perfect man.

- a. The Father has from eternity been "well pleased" with His eternally begotten Son. Here He announces that He is well pleased with the Word made flesh.
- b. God had promised that a *man* would be the Savior (Christ).

- c. John was *not* the man; Jesus *was*.
- B. Because of what He did.
  - 1. Christ's perfect obedience to His Father throughout His life.
    - a. Loving God.
    - b. Living a life of humble service.
  - 2. Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross.
  - 3. Christ's baptism.
    - a. It announces that He has come to be prophet, priest, and king.
    - b. It announces His willingness to "fulfill all righteousness."
    - c. It announces divine approval of His saving work.
- II. God is pleased with His baptized children.
  - A. Because He is pleased with His Son.
    - 1. Whose life was given the ransom of mankind (Matthew 20:28).
    - 2. As we consider God's verdict of approval upon our substitute, we hear God's favorable verdict upon us.
  - B. We find God's gracious favor in our baptism.
    - 1. Christ placed in baptism the merits of His blood (1 John 5:6).
    - 2. We receive in baptism the merits of Christ's blood.
      - a. The effects of His death and resurrection (Romans 6).
      - b. The quickening Spirit (v. 16; Titus 3:5).
      - c. The innocence which brings the favor of God (Ephesians 5:26-27).

*Conclusion:* How we crave the fickle favor of sinners such as we are! Listen to the word from heaven, a word of favor toward God the Son, who has become our brother. In your baptism you stand there with Him, receiving the favor of the One who knows your every sin but has buried them all in the waters of the Jordan. As the sermon hymn (*Lutheran Worship*, 223:7) puts it:

All that the mortal eye beholds  
 Is water as we pour it.  
 Before the eye of faith unfolds  
 The pow'r of Jesus' merit.  
 For here it sees the crimson flood  
 To all our ills bring healing;  
 The wonders of His precious blood  
 The love of God revealing,  
 Assuring His own pardon.

Rolf Preus  
 East Grand Forks, Minnesota

---

## THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

John 2:1-11

January 15, 1989

"Without wine," the rabbis had said, "there is no joy." Thus, a situation of considerable embarrassment if not disgrace had arisen for the married couple and for Mary the mother of our Lord, who apparently had considerable responsibility for the wedding feast arrangements. In verse 3 "they have no wine" is a request for help, not necessarily the expectation of a miracle. In verse 4 "woman" implies no rebuke or disrespect, but is rather a highly respectful and affectionate term (cf. John 20:13, 15, "What is that to me and to you?"). Jesus implies misunderstanding rather than reproach. His "hour" is usually a reference to a period of crisis associated with the passion of our Lord. Here, however, it is the time of His messianic manifestation (cf. v. 11).

*Introduction:* "Our Father who art in heaven." To this invocation Luther attaches this meaning: "God would by these words tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father." At the very heart of this boldness and confidence is the Gospel, through which the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts and whereby God claims us to be His sons and daughters and names us to be His heirs. Because God has answered our most basic need, we confidently turn to Him in every need. Yet how often, as the disciples before us, we come to Jesus with the request, "Lord teach us to pray." In the narrative before us of the wedding at Cana, our Lord uses the example of His mother Mary to teach us to pray.

### MARY'S EXAMPLE IN PRAYER

- I. The Lord teaches us to pray with understanding hearts.
  - A. There is frequent ignorance in our prayers.
    1. Mary turns instinctively to Jesus in her time of need.
    2. Jesus' response, rather than being a reproach, implies that Mary's petition was the result of misunderstanding and ignorance.
    3. Frequently we do not know what to pray for.
    4. The Spirit helps us (Romans 8:26ff.).
  - B. We do not realize the implications of our prayers.
- II. The Lord teaches us to pray so as to cope with His silence and seeming rejection.
  - A. There was apparent rejection by Jesus.
    1. "Woman" is a term of respect not of rebuke (cf. John 20:13, 15).
    2. Jesus was not subject to human manipulation.

3. Nor can Mary or anyone else peddle influence.
4. Nor is there such need for manipulation and influence-peddling for the believer.
- B. We fail to cope because we fail to accept the answer.
  1. So often for us a prayer is only considered answered if it results in the satisfaction of our desires.
  2. We are reluctant to leave everything in the hands of the Lord.
  3. We can learn from Mary to "do whatever he tells you."
- III. The Lord teaches us to pray in faith.
  - A. We pray in the certainty that our faith will be vindicated.
    1. Jesus turns the water into wine.
    2. God in His own good time and in His own good way will answer our prayers.
    3. He who knows our infirmities and weaknesses will not withhold from us any good thing (Romans 8:32).
  - B. For us, God's people, God answers all our prayers with His own emphatic "yes."
    1. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him and cry out to Him in trouble.
    2. This answer comes even though it is the "wrong" trouble about which we are crying out.
    3. Such confidence is born of the cross.

Norbert H. Mueller

### THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Luke 4:14-21

January 22, 1989

The dramatic setting for this text is Jesus' return to His hometown of Nazareth. He had become well-known in Galilee because of His preaching and teaching, and those in Nazareth who had watched Jesus grow up from a little boy to a man of about thirty must have been eager to hear Him (cf. v. 20—"the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him"). Important elements in the text include these: (a) that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, and (b) in verses 18-19 the passage from Isaiah. Concerning (a) Luke mentions Jesus returning "in the power of the Spirit" (v. 14), which ties in the prophecy of Isaiah in verse 18a (cf. Luke 3:22; 4:1). With regard to (b) these verses allow the preacher to talk about sin, but also to bring Gospel comfort to the hearers. A careful exposition is needed for the various nuances of the poetic language.

---

*Introduction:* We enjoy hearing good, but not bad, news. Nobody likes to hear that his favorite team lost a crucial game, or that the candidate for whom he voted was not elected, or that he has a serious illness. Our text tells us that

### THE MESSIAH PREACHES GOOD NEWS

- I. The good news had been foretold.
  - A. Isaiah, under inspiration, wrote about the coming Deliverer, the Messiah (the Anointed One).
  - B. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, who would empower the Messiah for His work.
  - C. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would preach to helpless sinners.
    1. He would preach to the "poor."
    2. He would preach to the "prisoners."
    3. He would preach to the "blind."
    4. He would preach to the "oppressed."
  - D. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would preach "good news."
    1. He would proclaim "freedom."
    2. He would proclaim "recovery of sight."
    3. He would proclaim "release."
    4. He would proclaim "the year of the Lord's favor."
- II. The good news happened during Jesus' earthly ministry.
  - A. Jesus was the promised Messiah (v. 21).
  - B. Jesus, according to His human nature, was anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14).
  - C. Jesus preached good news to sinners throughout His earthly ministry.
    1. He had been preaching and teaching throughout Galilee (vv. 14-15).
    2. He was preaching now in His hometown Nazareth (vv. 16, 20-21).
  - D. This good news was possible because of the work of the Messiah.
    1. He lived a perfect life for every human being.
    2. He took all the sins of every human being on Himself, paid completely for those sins with His suffering and death, and arose from the dead.
- III. The good news continues to happen.
  - A. The Messiah continues to preach good news to helpless sinners, in His Gospel (and through His Gospel messengers).
  - B. The Messiah has caused us to believe His good news.
    1. He has bestowed on us "freedom."
    2. He has bestowed on us "recovery of sight."
    3. He has given us "release."
  - C. Let us keep on hearing and believing the good news of the Messiah.
    1. Let us continue to hear, read, and study His Gospel and partake of the Gospel visualized (the Lord's Supper).
    2. Through this Gospel our faith will be strengthened and we will continue to receive power to live God-glorifying lives.

D. Let us continue to support the spreading of the good news of the Messiah and share it with others.

*Conclusion:* How wonderful that the Messiah preaches good news! It had been foretold, it happened during Jesus' earthly ministry, and it continues to happen today. His news is the best news; it has made all the difference in our lives. May we always cling to His good news and share it with others. Amen.

Walter A. Maier III  
River Forest, Illinois

### THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Luke 4:21-32

January 29, 1989

Early in His earthly ministry, our Lord's own proclamation of His Messiahship was rejected by the people in His hometown of Nazareth. The precipitating event behind this shameful scene was Jesus' reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue at Nazareth (vv.16-21). He shocked His hearers by announcing that the prophecies of Isaiah 61 were fulfilled, and that He Himself was the source of that fulfillment. Their familiarity with Jesus' humble origins fueled their doubts. When Jesus rebuked their skepticism, His remarks offended the ethnic pride of His hearers, and their reaction foreshadowed the blind fanaticism that later characterized the scenes of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Their contempt flared into violence and consequently an attempt was made on Jesus' life. With an amazing escape from the grasp of the mob, Jesus left to go to the town of Capernaum where the authority (*exousia*) of His teaching was greeted with greater appreciation.

*Introduction:* In the midst of changing times, many people feel skeptical whenever anything is described as "the ultimate." How many new things have you and I bought recently that were advertised as "the ultimate..." only to be outmoded within a year? Not only is the imagery overused in commercial marketing; the philosophy which dominates modern times categorically denies the possibility of something being "the ultimate." Bound by their own prejudices, the people of Nazareth gave a similarly skeptical reception to Jesus as the Messiah, not willing to believe that they were

### CONFRONTED BY THE ULTIMATE

- I. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of Messianic prophecy.
  - A. Jesus identified Himself as the One foretold by the prophets (v. 21; Luke 24:25-26).

1. Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy is one of the most astonishing proofs of His divinity.
2. No interpretation of Messianic prophecy is legitimate which fails to see how clearly Jesus is its fulfillment.
- B. Jesus Christ is identified as the One who was revealed to Moses and the prophets (Acts 3:22; 7:37).
  1. All disciples of Moses and the prophets must honor Jesus as the Christ or forfeit their position as God's people (John 5).
  2. John the Baptizer, as the last prophet to herald the Messiah, required all to recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ if they wished to have eternal life (John 2:36).

*Transition:* As the One who came to earth in fulfillment of the ancient Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus did not merely impress people with His power or glory. He came to sacrifice His prestige and glory — indeed, His very life — for the salvation of sinful humanity by substituting Himself for us under the judgment of God.

## II. Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice of atonement.

- A. As Jesus of Nazareth, God's Son sacrificed His outward glory to the extent that He was mistaken for an ordinary carpenter's son (v. 22).
- B. The paradox of Christ's humiliation was that the Great Physician willingly submitted Himself to human scorn for sacrificing His own life (v. 23; Isaiah 53:4; Luke 23:35).
  1. Christ's work on our behalf is our ultimate basis for any and all approaches to God (John 14:6).
  2. So ultimate was the price that Jesus paid for our salvation that nothing can equal its value before God (1 Peter 1:18-19).
  3. Those who would approach God apart from faith in Jesus insult His sacrifice and are doomed to be rejected (Acts 4:12; John 3:18; 1 John 5:12).

*Transition:* Reverent and faithful regard for the divinity of the Son of God and the value of the enormous sacrifice that He has made requires that the authority of Jesus Christ be unquestioned. Furthermore, against the trends of modern religious thought, the authority of Christ must be placed above anyone else's.

## III. Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority.

- A. We are told that one of the foremost of Jesus' qualities, discerned by the believers in Capernaum, was His authority (v. 32).
- B. The authority of Jesus is more than a human authority.
  1. The authority of Jesus was contrasted with that of "the scribes" and other religious leaders (Matthew 7:29).
  2. The authority of Jesus was manifest in His exorcisms and miracles (v. 36).

C. The authority of Christ compels us to respond in faith and obedience.

1. St. Peter had the divine truth when he admitted that only Christ has the words of eternal life (John 6:68).
2. In the religious world today only those who hold Jesus Christ as the only object of religious faith really understand His authority.

*Conclusion:* It is true that in our changing world most claims to be "the ultimate" have a hollow ring. But when we are confronted with Jesus of Nazareth as revealed in the Word of God, then we truly meet the "Ultimate," the Messiah of God foretold by the prophets. Only His is the sacrifice which ultimately reconciles God and man. By His authority as the Living Word of almighty God, Christ alone offers the answers for the greatest questions that challenge us today.

Jonathan Naumann  
East Kilbride, Scotland

### THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Luke 9:28-36

February 5, 1989

All three synoptists record the transfiguration of Jesus. It is obviously an important occasion in the life of Jesus. The Last Sunday after the Epiphany is known as Transfiguration Sunday. This Sunday is a bridge between the Epiphany season, the period in which we consider the appearances of Jesus, and the Lenten season, at which time we concentrate on the suffering and death of our Lord. A well-known contemporary scholar has written: "It is not easy to see exactly what happened at the transfiguration or why it occurred." We cannot agree with this sentence. We do not underestimate the difficulties but we know what happened and why it happened. What causes the main difficulty is the fact that the transfiguration, like many other things in Scripture, is paradoxical. We are dealing with what seems to be a contradiction, but it only *seems* to be so. Christians constantly deal with paradoxes. For example, as Luther said: "The Christian is at one and the same time a saint and a sinner." How paradoxical! Again, we rightly say that Christ gained life through death. Again, we correctly say that in the person of Christ God was born, God died, God rose from the dead. In the present text, too, we are dealing with a paradox. This paradox is also the theme of the sermon suggested below: the Changeless One is transfigured.

In a well-known hymn we address Christ thus: "Oh Thou who changest not." That statement is Biblical. Hebrews 13:8 tells us: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (NKJV). And yet our text tells us that while Jesus was praying on this occasion "the form of His face became different and His clothing was

gleaming white" (v. 29). This paradox is caused by the nature of Jesus' person. He has two natures, indivisibly united (but not mingled) ever since His conception. They will continue as such into all eternity and in heaven we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2.)

*Introduction:* We know from Scripture that Jesus Christ is true God and true man in one indivisible person. He was true God in Mary's womb. He was true God when He died. He is still true man today. While visible on earth, His human nature did not always make full use of the qualities of the divine nature. But on this occasion, the Transfiguration, the glory of His divinity shone through His humanity. His humanity was suffused with His brilliant divinity, so much so that the disciples could not bear to look at Him.

### THE CHANGELESS ONE IS TRANSFIGURED

#### I. The occasion and setting of this paradox.

##### A. It happened eight days after an important occasion (v. 28).

1. It was an occasion of confession and prophecy. In verses 18-22 we are told that the disciples gave various answers as to who people thought Christ was. Then Peter gave a good confession, which was followed by the first of three prophecies by Christ concerning His suffering, death, and resurrection (cf. Luke 17:25 and 18:32). These were words hard to hear from the mouth of the Master.
2. It was an occasion of sober reflection. In verses 23-27 follow some more hard words, words which are not easy for flesh and blood to hear. To bear the cross, to deny oneself, to lose one's life for Jesus' sake, who is equal to such tasks?

##### B. It was a day of glory.

1. As to Jesus' nature. Verse 32 tells us that the three disciples "saw His glory." John wrote of it later (John 1:14). Peter too spoke of it (2 Peter 1:16). His divinity suffused His humanity. Matthew and Mark give further information. Jesus shone like the sun.
2. As to those with Jesus. Verse 31 informs us that Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets respectively, appeared in the bestowed glory of heaven. These two "glories," the inherent glory of Jesus' person and the bestowed glory of redeemed Old Testament saints, fill us with wonder as to the person and work of Jesus. Jesus redeemed all men, also those under the Old Testament (see Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 11; and Revelation 13:8). But Moses and Elijah could not bring sin to an end. Only Jesus could and did do that.

*Transition:* But what follows strengthens Christ, His disciples, and us. In this world of sin and sorrow the eyes of all, even those of Jesus, must be lifted heavenwards. That is what this text does for us.

## II. The purpose of this paradox.

### A. The purpose for Jesus.

1. He is strengthened by Old Testament saints. Luke 22:43 informs us that an angel from heaven strengthened Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Similarly, verse 31 of our text tells us that Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about His impending suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. The only possible explanation is that they strengthened Him for what lay ahead.
2. He is approved by the Father. Verse 35 reminds us of Isaiah 42:1 and Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:22). At Luke 3:22 the Father addressed Jesus personally. Here the Father speaks of Jesus in the third person. But in both cases we know that the Father approved of Jesus' person and work.

### B. The purpose for us.

1. Like the disciples, we are strengthened for what lies ahead. Like Peter, very often we do not know what we are saying (v. 33). Like all of the disciples, very often we are afraid (v. 34). In later years both John and Peter spoke of this occasion. What they wrote about this occasion is in a context of comfort and strengthening.
2. We are given direction, as were the disciples, in verse 35. The Father says to them and us: "Be constantly hearing Him [Jesus]." This statement is plainly a fulfillment of what was prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:15. Today we hear Jesus' voice through His Word and His ministers (Luke 10:16).

*Conclusion:* The person, work, and word of Jesus must constantly be at the center of our attention. Antichristian forces are constantly producing all kinds of false teachings about Jesus. This text contains much material to strengthen the Christian who comes to church burdened by his own sins, by the things which he is suffering, and by the false things which he is hearing. This text strengthens him and lifts his eyes heavenward.

Harold H. Buls

## THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Luke 4:1-13

February 12, 1989

Luke's report of the temptations of our Lord differs from Matthew's report in three respects: the order of the second and third temptations are reversed, there is no mention of the ministry of the angels to our Lord at the close of

the temptations, and the conclusion notes that the devil left Jesus "until an opportune time" (NIV) (*ap' autou achri kairou*). Satan would return, to enter Judas, at the Passover, on the night of betrayal of Christ.

## THE CONFESSING CHRIST AND THE CONFESSING CHURCH

- I. A confession of faith stands at the center of our Lord's temptation.
  - A. His threefold confession is the surrender of His will to the will of His Father.
  - B. His threefold confession epitomizes the work of Christ for our salvation.
    1. "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone' " (v. 4).
    2. "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only' " (v. 8).
    3. "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test' " (v. 12).
  - C. His threefold confession of faith lays the foundation of His public ministry.
    1. His confession of faith is faith's response to temptation.
    2. His confession of faith is formed and nurtured by the Word of the Father.
    3. His confession of faith expresses great confidence in the faithfulness of the Father's Word, against all contrary evidence.
- II. A confession of faith must stand at the center of our own temptations.
  - A. Our confession is like our Lord's, because His temptation was like ours (Hebrews 4:14-16).
    1. His words reveal what is in His heart.
    2. His confession of faith is the Word of the Son expressing confidence in His Father.
  - B. Our words reveal what is in our hearts, as a confession of faith or a confession of unbelief.
    1. Our confession of faith is faith's response to temptation.
    2. Our confession of faith is formed and nurtured by the Word of the Father.
    3. Our confession of faith expresses great confidence in the faithfulness of the Father's Word, against all contrary evidence.

Charles J. Evanson

## THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Luke 13:31-35

February 19, 1989

The scene before us is a potent one. Jesus' words about Herod are reminiscent of His response to Pilate in John 19:11 or again the words that He shared

with the Pharisees in John 10: 17-18. Jesus, the Son of God, is in control. He is not swayed by any earthly power. He publicly labels Herod a fox and then, as He so often does, He proves the right He has to make such a pronouncement. He is the King of Kings who cast out demons (cf. Matthew 12:25-28) and performs cures (cf. John 5:36; 14:10). He even sets down His time-schedule—today, tomorrow, and the next day—and He will not be swayed. On the third day He will continue His trip to Jerusalem and not before (cf. Luke 13:22; 17:11). Jesus' time-schedule was the Father's time-schedule. For this reason He told Mary, "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4).

It is likewise a pointed observation which the Lord makes about Jerusalem, the city that God loved, the capital city of the people He had called to be His own, and the site of so much bloodshed. The Lord would speak the very same words about Jerusalem a few short days later to the Pharisees in the temple during the week of the Lord's passion (cf. Matthew 23:29-39). Still, cradled in all this law, the heart of a loving Savior is clearly displayed in the beautiful picture of love expressed in the words, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!" The consequence of this persistent, stubborn rebellion is summed up in verse 35. "Your house is left to you" by God. Jerusalem is now left to her own devices and her own disaster. Jesus would comment on this point on the way to the cross (cf. Luke 23:28-34).

One can clearly see here the love and personal compassion of God, who cradles us in hands of infinite power and authority. What a blessing to know that such a God cares for us. He is great enough to handle all our needs in this life and in that to come. He is more personal and compassionate than anyone we have ever met here in this life. Isaiah captured this thought in chapter 40:6-11 and Jesus expressed it in those matchless words recorded in Matthew 10:29-31. Surely He is, as the hymnist Johann Franck expressed, a "priceless treasure."

#### AN OPPORTUNITY WE DARE NOT MISS

- I. Tomorrow Christ may come in judgment.
  - A. Jerusalem provides an important lesson to us all.
    1. She rejected the Saviour (vv. 31, 34).
    2. She was condemned to destruction (v. 35).
  - B. Few people today, however, heed the lesson of Jerusalem.
    1. Most people still reject the Savior.
    2. Most people will, therefore, be condemned to eternal damnation.
- II. Today Christ still comes in mercy.
  - A. He came in visible flesh to save all men (vv. 32-34).
  - B. He comes now through the Gospel.

Ahlert J.C. Strand  
Kerrville, Texas

---

**THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

Luke 13:1-9

February 26, 1989

The thirteenth chapter of Luke is pivotal to his gospel as many pastors discovered last week by preaching on Luke 13:31-35. Jesus clearly announces here to His religious opponents that Jerusalem is the city of His inexorable destiny of death and resurrection. Luke 13:1-9 follows closely upon last week's gospel by confronting the problem of suffering. Is there a direct link between one's sin and one's suffering? During this Lenten season of instruction and penance our Lord's suffering looms as a major theme for contemplation that assists us in addressing this pastoral problem. Last week gave us an opportunity to look closely at Jesus' suffering in Jerusalem. This week, by means of a pericope that anticipates Jesus' discussion of His death in Jerusalem, the preacher has an opportunity to explore the causes of human suffering and draw a correspondence between Christ's suffering and our suffering. The placement of lessons in this Lenten Series C (Luke 13:31-35 preceding Luke 13:1-9) reflects good homiletics—the Gospel of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection precedes the application of that Gospel.

Every pastor knows that suffering is one of the major problems in his congregation. If people are not asking *why* there is suffering, they are asking the pastor *how* to deal with it. The temptation to question God's merciful presence is sometimes overwhelming, even for the most faithful of the saints. The answer lies in the Gospel of a suffering Christ who has fully identified with us in every way. We now identify with Him through our incorporation into His suffering, death, and resurrection through baptism and our continuing proclamation of His death until He comes in the Lord's Supper. Jesus knows our afflictions and our suffering; He has heard our cries for mercy; and through His death He leads us to the promised land (Exodus 3:7-8). Just as God was present to Moses in the burning bush and revealed His name to him (Exodus 3), so also is God present to us through His Word and Sacrament. Paul in the epistle (1 Corinthians 10:1-13) seems to be commenting upon God's presence among His people in Exodus and His presence in His church today. But the holy presence that delivers us from sin and death will also create a distance of fear and trembling if we are tempted to take God's mercy for granted and reject His offer to live a life of repentance and forgiveness, as both Moses and Paul attest. But Paul comforts us by saying, "God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Jesus Christ in His suffering flesh is always the way of escape.

Jesus seems very sensitive to the problem of suffering in Luke 13:1-9, where the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices and the eighteen

upon whom the tower of Siloam fell serve as examples of those who were not punished by death because they were such great sinners. Jesus forcefully rejects a correspondence between sin and punishment and tells the parable of the fig tree to explain the proper way to understand the world in which we live. Instead of calling for judgment, Jesus calls for repentance and reveals God's merciful patience toward those who do not bear fruits of repentance. Anyone who does not repent will perish (13:5). The Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ remains hidden in a world of sin, suffering, and death. One must be ready "to interpret the present time" (12:56)—to see that the end of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:11) through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of God's Son, although suffering and death continue in a fallen world of sin. For the forgiveness of sins is present in the Risen One who remains present in His church through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. It is here that the suffering Christian meets the suffering Christ and sees in those sufferings His comfort, His peace, His redemption. The words of Jesus in Luke 13:1-9, not only apply the message of last week, but are words appropriate to the season of Lent.

The preacher may want to begin his sermon by raising the questions that are constantly being asked in his congregation: "Why is this happening to me? Why does God allow me to suffer like this? What did I do to deserve this punishment?" The sermon itself may then address these questions with the Gospel of Him who has suffered on our behalf, because we are those who "share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that if possible we may attain the resurrection of the dead" (Philippians 3:10).

### THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

- I. He offers Himself up on a Jerusalem cross in suffering and death (13:31-35).
  - A. To reveal that He is "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3).
  - B. To redeem a suffering humanity from eternal suffering and death.
  - C. To provide a way of escape in our suffering and temptation (1 Corinthians).
- II. He offers an answer to the problem of our suffering (13:1-9).
  - A. To reveal the need to repent of our fallenness (13:5)—our Lenten task.
    1. The example of the Galileans and the eighteen at Siloam (13:1-4).
    2. The parable of the fig tree (13:6-9).
  - B. To reveal the solution in Christ's redemption of suffering.
    1. In His suffering we see the way of escape in our suffering.
      - a. We identify with His suffering in baptism.
      - b. We benefit from His suffering in the Lord's Supper.
      - c. We rejoice in our sufferings for it strengthens faith (Hebrews 12).
    2. In His resurrection we have the promise of the end of the suffering.

- a. We identify with His resurrection in baptism.
- b. We will rise with Him one day to feast at His eternal table.
  - (1) We rejoice in the celebration of the resurrection with all the saints in the Lord's Supper.
  - (2) We look forward to the celebration of the resurrection on Easter day.

Arthur Just

### THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

March 5, 1989

This parable is the story of two lost sons. At the center of the story is the compassionate father. It invites us to rejoice in the grace of our God. Verses 1-3 provide the setting. Verse 1 relates what follows closely to 14:35; the tax collectors and sinners were the sort who did have ears to listen to Jesus. In verses 2-3 the issue is Jesus' welcome and acceptance of sinners. The parables which follow are a defense and vindication of the Gospel. In particular, verses 11-32 have something to say both to "the tax collectors and sinners" and to "the Pharisees and scribes."

Verses 11-32 set forth the parable itself. Verse 11 makes reference to "two sons"; the older brother is in the story from the start. In verses 12-19 the sin of the younger son is his desire to live independently from his father. In effect he says, "Father, I cannot wait for you to die." He wants to be his own god (*contra* the First Commandment). Such freedom results in the ultimate degradation. Noteworthy is the prodigal's use of *apollumai* (v. 17). The term has definite overtones in this chapter of a fate worse than starvation (verses 4, 6, 8, 9, 24 and 32). There is rabbinic evidence that the phrase *eis heauton erchesthai* means "repent"; at least he realized that he had sinned against God (*eis ton ouranon*) and offers no excuses for himself. However, in seeking to become a "hired hand" he may still feel that he can do something to make up for what he has done; he will earn his way from this point on.

In verse 20 *esplagchnisthē* expresses the heart of the story. The father takes the initiative and runs down the road; his compassion precedes any confession of repentance by the son and corresponds to the seeking and searching in the two preceding parables. The kiss is a sign of forgiveness and of the restoration of the broken relationship. The story shows God's compassion toward sinners. Says Miller, "But this attitude was depicted in Jesus' behaviour as He was on the way to Jerusalem. Forgiveness finally meant the Cross! It could not be meted out with a gracious word alone. It must be given by a costly deed." In verses 21-24 there is no more talk about becoming a "hired hand," simply an

acknowledgement of total worthlessness and the father's compassion in restoring the rebel to sonship.

In verses 25-32 we see the break in the relationship between the older son and his father. The older son in effect declares that he does not want to be a part of his father's family. He has lived in the house in the spirit of a slave (*douleuō*) and is seeking or claiming merit and reward. He publicly insults his father by refusing to participate in the celebration. His actions are a clear violation of the Fourth Commandment. Once again the father demonstrates his compassion. For the second time in one day he goes out of the house; he comes to entreat, not scold or rebuke. He leaves the ninety-nine who need no repentance and seeks the lost. His address is tender, *teknon*; they are both sons and he loves them both. The father's statement concludes the parable, but it leaves this question for the listener to answer: Will the older son go in? Each hearer is invited to respond.

#### YOUR FATHER'S PARTY—WILL YOU JOIN IN?

- I. Look at your Father running down the road to welcome you.
  - A. You were determined to live life on your own terms.
  - B. You ended up lost and alone.
- II. Look at your Father trudging across the field to entreat you.
  - A. You thought religion was a matter of rules and obedience.
  - B. You thereby excluded yourself from home.
- III. Look at the compassion of your Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ.
  - A. He freely offered His obedient life into death.
  - B. He therefore welcomes back the rebel and entreats the self-righteous.

*Conclusion:* It's your Father's party—will you join in?

Roger J. Humann  
St. Catharines, Ontario

#### THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Luke 20:9-19

March 12, 1989

At this point in Jesus' ministry, although He had gained a popularity with the people, the scribes and chief priests had been questioning His authority and even had begun to look for ways to kill Him (19:47). He spoke this parable, depicting God's relationship with His people (especially with the leadership of the Jews), *pros ton laon* — to the people — for the benefit of all within hearing range, but

He was fully aware of the presence of those leaders who wanted so much to be rid of Him. It, of course, uses much the same imagery as Isaiah 5, the parallels of Matthew and Mark following even closer by elaborating on the preparation and care of the vineyard. The great patience of God is shown by the landowner's repeated attempts to collect what is due. In verse 12 *prosetheto heteron pempsaï* (literally, "he added to send another") is a Hebraism found also in 19:11. The servants represent the prophets of the Old Testament, many of whom had been treated shamefully (2 Kings 17:13, 14; 2 Chronicles 36:15-16). Finally the landowner asks: "What shall I do?" He decides to send his own son. It is striking that *ton huion mou ton agapēton* is the exact expression used in 3:22, only the case being changed. The tenants reacted in the most atrocious manner, throwing the son out of the vineyard and killing him. In verse 14 *dielogidzonto pros allēlous* implies a deliberate, premeditated action, having as its goal the wresting of the vineyard from the owner, just as the Jewish leadership sought to reject the authority of God and set itself up as supreme. When Jesus concluded the parable by pointing out the just retribution that the owner would deal out to the wicked tenants, those hearing said: "God forbid!" This reaction was not directed toward only the last part of the parable, that the vineyard would be taken from the wicked tenants and given to others, but was caused by the thought that the horrible events of the entire parable would come to pass.

The point of the parable having been made, Jesus switches the analogy, drawing upon Psalm 118:22. The first part, "a stone which the builders rejected," is a recapitulation of the previous parable. But He continues to express the final victory that would take place; the rejected stone would become the head cornerstone. In verse 17 *apodokimadzō* expresses the rejection of something after scrutiny. The scribes and chief priests had the opportunity to observe and test Jesus, and yet they rejected Him. However, the results of such rejection are complete destruction. To some there is an apparent difference in the punishments *sunthlasthēsetai* and *likmēsei*, the latter being the final and complete destruction to be experienced on judgment day. In any case, they both indicate the consequences of unbelief. The scribes and chief priests were so enraged at these words that, but for the fear of the crowd, they would have laid hands on Jesus immediately. They understood full well what He was saying.

Taken in its Lenten context, this pericope speaks of the sufferings and death of Christ, but also reminds us that He is the final victor. He ushers in a new order, with Himself as Head. This same idea occurs in the Old Testament lesson, "See, I am doing a new thing" (Isaiah 43:19), and in Paul when he speaks of "the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10).

*Introduction:* I would imagine that there are members of this congregation who have had some experience in the management of properties. One of the most difficult aspects of renting real estate is how to deal with the various tenants that occupy those properties. We soon find out that there are some tenants who are very good, who never cause any problems, who take very good care of the property,

who always pay their rent on time. And then, of course, there are those who are not such good tenants. They are the ones who never seem to be able to pay their rent and who many times damage the property. Christ spoke very graphically in this parable when He compared His relationship with His people to that of a landowner with his tenants. Most landowners never need deal with such vicious and wretched renters as those described in this text, but let us see

### HOW GOD DEALS WITH HIS TENANTS

- I. What kind of tenants were the Israelites?
  - A. God gave them everything they needed.
    1. He brought them out of Egypt (Isaiah 43:16) and made them a powerful nation.
    2. He sent them many prophets to teach them.
    3. He let them rebuild the temple after the Babylonian captivity.
  - B. Their response was repeated rejection (Isaiah 43:26ff.).
    1. Many times they even rejected Moses.
    2. They served other gods.
    3. They committed violence and injustice.
  - C. God sent His Son, whom they rejected also.
    1. When Christ preached they did not repent.
    2. Finally they killed Him, like the son of the owner of the vineyard (v. 15).
- II. What kind of tenants are we now?
  - A. God gives us everything we need.
    1. As citizens of the United States we cannot deny that God has blessed this country.
    2. Materially we have more than most people on this planet.
      - a. In comparison with the third world nations.
      - b. In individual rights and freedoms.
  - B. But do we reject Him as did the Jews?
    1. Is the god of America the dollar on which "In God We Trust" is printed?
    2. Atrocities are committed in our own land (e.g., abortion).
    3. Even more subtly, we are tempted into complacency by the prosperity we enjoy.
- III. How does God deal with us?
  - A. Rejection is dealt with severely (v. 17).
  - B. But "a new thing" (Isaiah 43:19) is established for those who trust in Him.
    1. Jerusalem was destroyed some thirty years after Christ's death — no more Jewish temple.
    2. Even though rejected by many, Christ became the chief cornerstone (v. 17).
      - a. A structure depends on having a good cornerstone. If it is weak or improperly laid, it throws off the entire construction.
      - b. Our faith is founded on that cornerstone (Philippians 3:9).
    3. By repentance and faith His resurrection victory is for us also (Philippians 3:10).

*Conclusion:* We build our life, all of our hopes and dreams, our whole future, our relationships with one another, then, not upon an interior beginning, but upon Christ, the stone that has been rejected by so many, but whom God has made the principle stone, so that we may, as Paul said, "win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

D.L. Rutt  
St. James, Minnesota

## PALM SUNDAY

Luke 23:1-49

March 19, 1989

In the three-year lectionary this day is the Sunday of the Passion and it is suggested that the Palm Sunday Gospel (Luke 19:24-28) be read during a procession at the beginning of the worship service with appropriate Palm Sunday hymns sung. The reading of the Passion at the usual place of the Gospel, then, emphasizes the suffering, death, and burial of our Lord, which is the center of all of Holy Week, and the music after the reading of the Passion continues that emphasis. The lectionary lists both a long and a short Passion reading, this text being the short one. But even 49 verses can be a ponderous text and it might be simpler to select only a few verses with a more narrow theme. This outline, however, is an attempt to place before the congregation the broad theme of God's saving actions during Holy Week, using the various participants in Good Friday as illustrations.

*Introduction:* This week we tell and retell the wondrous act of God's salvation which culminated in Jesus' death for us. We saw many people involved as we heard it read to us again. But how does it all relate to our own lives? How can it all be summed up by someone? Who would it take to do it? How about, of all people, a thief? A thief on a cross, himself about to die, getting what he deserved. He believed, as we should, that Jesus in

## INNOCENCE BORE WHAT WE DESERVE

- I. This man did nothing wrong.
  - A. Some accused Jesus of wrongdoing.
    1. The ruling assembly accused Him of being opposed to the Roman rule (vv. 2, 10).
    2. The people shouted for His crucifixion (vv. 18-23).
  - B. Others knew that Jesus was innocent.
    1. Pilate declared Him innocent (vv. 4, 13-15, 22).

2. The women wept for Him (v. 27).
  3. The penitent thief recognized the injustice (v. 41).
  4. The centurion declared His righteousness (v.47).
- C. How do we regard Him? Our salvation rests on our answer.
- II. For He endured what we deserve.
- A. We sin.
1. We resent Jesus calling for change in our lives, much as the ruling assembly did (Luke 22: 1-2), so that they falsely accused Him to be rid of Him (v. 2).
  2. We regard Him superficially as Herod did (v. 8).
  3. We want to rid ourselves of His presence as the people did (v. 21).
  4. We make light of His saving power as those about the cross did (vv. 35, 37, 39).
- B. We deserve God's condemnation (vv. 40-41).
- C. Yet God put our sin and condemnation on Jesus.
1. For Jesus' sake God forgives us (v. 34).
  2. In Him God gives us eternal life (v. 43).
  3. His sacrificial death accomplished it as God has placed on Him what we deserve (v. 46).

*Conclusion:* This Holy Week we can simply walk away from it all (v. 48) or we can just observe (v. 49). Or in the Spirit's power we can daily repent and believe and live anew. The "Hosannas" of this day turned into "Crucify Him" on Good Friday. And yet the death of Good Friday was overcome with new life on Easter. This week we worship the God-man whose innocence covers our sins so that we can have life with God always.

Luther G. Strasen  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

## EASTER SUNDAY

Luke 24:1-11

March 26, 1989

Before Easter morning the world thought that it understood death. Its truth could be summed up by the simple axiom, "Through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin. And death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). The resurrection of Jesus awakened the disciples and Christians everywhere to God's truth about death—namely, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). This revelation was not immediately assimilated

even early that Easter morning. The women were convinced only by angels who reminded them of Jesus' own promises. The disciples' skepticism caused them first to receive the report as nonsense. (It did, however, stir them to investigate the report.) Many skeptics today still need awakening.

The following illustration and application may prove useful in the sermon suggested below: A little boy living in East London made his first trip to the country. There were so many new sights and smells that he could hardly take it all in. As he lay on his back in an orchard stringing a chain of daisies he was suddenly taken by the sight of swallows swooping through the open sky. "Poor birds," he said, "They don't even have cages in which to roost." Those who face death without the comfort of Easter are also limited in their perspective. They do not know the freedom which the Gospel brings and cannot begin to understand Christian peace in the midst of death. Easter changes everything! Death quickly loses its sting and becomes a release from the travails of life. No one would wish the Christian who has died in faith to be again "caged" by the troubles of life.

### THE DAY THE WORLD WAS CHANGED

- I. Easter began as a day of mourning.
  - A. The Sabbath and a hasty crucifixion had not allowed time for a proper burial.
  - B. It must have been a solemn group of women who so early walked to the tomb.
  - C. Still reeling from their loss, the disciples were in seclusion.
- II. The resurrection of Jesus changed everything.
  - A. The women were taken from sorrow, to fear, to exuberation.
  - B. The disciples' fear and confusion were replaced with joy, conviction, and courage.
  - C. God used such as these to establish the Christian church.
- III. So many people still need to hear the truth of Easter.
  - A. Death for too many brings only fear, sorrow, and confusion.
  - B. Like the angels, then the women, and later the disciples, we can use the Gospel to turn their mourning into joy.
  - C. We need only witness to the truth; the Spirit through the Word will answer their searching hearts.

*Conclusion:* Two young boys were having a conversation about how to know when your shoes were on the right feet. The older said it was very simple: "If it hurts, you've done it wrong!" Christians might offer the same counsel about death: "If it hurts, you don't truly understand." Easter morning does not mean

death is now without sorrow. (Where many joys have been shared much loss will be felt.) It does mean that death need not cause lasting sorrow! The Gospel chases sadness, fear, and confusion away, and in its place brings peace and joy that surpasses the understanding of those who know nothing about Easter.

Stephen D. Hower  
St. Louis, Missouri

### THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 20: 19-31

April 2, 1989

"The Sunday following Easter Day presents a liturgical challenge. Inevitably there is a sense of descent from the heights of the Sunday of the Resurrection" (H. Boone Porter, *Keeping The Church Year*, p. 76). Preachers are urged to emphasize the connection between this Sunday and Easter. Notice how the collect maintains this relationship: "Grant. . .that we who have celebrated the mystery of the Lord's resurrection may by the help of your grace bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conduct" (*Lutheran Worship*, p. 50). The Hymn of the Day ("O Sons and Daughters of the King," *Lutheran Worship*, 130) provides us with the Holy Gospel in hymnic form and as such provides the congregation with a bridge which links the reading of the Holy Gospel with the preaching of the same. (For a fuller treatment of the liturgical context of the Second Sunday of Easter, see Adrian Nocent's *The Liturgical Year*, III, pp. 176-188).

The pericope itself is composed of two parts. Verses 19-23 record the Risen Lord's appearance to the disciples on Easter evening while verses 24-30 record the Savior's encounter with Thomas on the following Sunday. Several elements of the text call for special attention. Note the Lord's greeting, "Peace be with you," in verses 19, 21, and 26. The Lord Christ loads an ordinary greeting among Jews (see Judges 6:23; Daniel 10:19) with the fruit of His suffering, death, and resurrection (see Ephesians 2: 14-17; Acts 10:36; Romans 5:1; Philippians 4:7-9; Colossians 1:20; 3:15; also note the essay by P. Stuhlmacher, "He is Our Peace," in *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology*, pp. 182-200). Our Lord promises peace to His disciples on Maundy Thursday (see John 14:27; 16:33). This peace, "which the world cannot give," is established by the Savior's sacrificial death in our place. In His resurrection our Lord distributes and bestows His peace to His disciples—even Thomas! The Lord's wounds (verses 20 and 27) are the visible tokens of His peace! Peace between God and man is now a reality (see Luke 2:14; 19:38). The preacher would do well to review Luther's sermons on this text (in *Sermons of Martin Luther*, II [Lenker Edition], pp. 352-412).

*Introduction:* Peace—how do we get it? We know how fragile and uncertain political peace can be. Such peace is easily dissolved by human greed or the desire for revenge. Some search for “peace of mind,” but we know how tenuous and fleeting is that “peace” which is manufactured by our frantic and feeble attempts to put life together on our own terms. Our Lord is not one who merely teaches us about peace as if, once we could define peace, it would be ours. Rather, our Lord is the Prince of Peace. He is the giver of peace. Peace is His gift for you.

### THE GIFT OF EASTER

- I. The giver of the gift of peace is the Risen Savior.
  - A. He was crucified in order to make peace between God and man.
    - 1. Our sin is a declaration of war against God.
    - 2. Jesus brings the hostility to an end by dying in our place (see Ephesians 2:14-17).
  - B. Easter is God’s declaration of victory.
    - 1. It brings victory over sin.
    - 2. It brings victory over Satan.
    - 3. It brings victory over the last enemy, death.
- II. Peace is His gift.
  - A. Our Risen Lord bestows the gift.
    - 1. Peace was won at Calvary; it is distributed in the Gospel and Sacraments.
    - 2. Angels sang of peace over Bethlehem’s plains; now that peace is to be distributed throughout the world.
  - B. Thomas had made himself absent from the gathering of the disciples on Easter evening. He was locked in doubt.
    - 1. Our Lord comes to Thomas. He does not wait for Thomas to find Him!
    - 2. Our Lord bestows His peace on Thomas as He shows him His wounds.
    - 3. With His gift of peace, our Lord dispels Thomas’ doubt. The gift brings about Thomas’ confession: “My Lord and my God” (v. 28).
  - C. Our Lord sends His apostles into the world with the gift of peace.
    - 1. Where the gift is received, there is life and salvation through the forgiveness of sins.
    - 2. Where the gift is rejected, sins are retained.

*Conclusion:* The Lord Jesus continues to bestow the gift of His peace on His people by Word and Sacrament. Peace is the fruit of Good Friday and Easter. It is the Lord’s Easter gift to you. His peace is indeed the gift that will keep and guard your hearts and minds unto life everlasting.

John T. Pless  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

### THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 21: 1-14

April 9, 1989

The text tells of the Lord's appearance to seven of the disciples at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The whole scene has a sense of *déjà vu*, bringing to mind the episode recorded in Luke 5. On that occasion Jesus Christ also appeared to the disciples after they had fished unsuccessfully all night and granted them a huge catch of fish. The similarities and differences of the two passages should be considered. In the following verses of John 21 we have Christ's thrice-repeated question and command to Peter. A sermon on that passage might take the tone of demand, but a sermon on the present text will take a more encouraging and assuring approach. The presence of the Lord at the seashore results in success, success in fishing, but also a promise of future success in coming labors. The theme of the sermon suggested below is, therefore, that the presence of the Risen Lord assures us of success in our labors for His kingdom.

*Exegetical Comments:* With respect to *hypagō halieuein* (v. 3), it is as though Peter says, "Well, I have nothing to do. I might as well go fishing." The verb *piadsein* (v.3) is used several times by John of "arresting" or "taking" Jesus. The fact that it is used here implies the future labors of the disciples as fishers of men. As to *apebēsan* (v. 9, "they disembarked"), the only other place in the Greek Bible where this word is found in the sense of "disembark" is Luke 5:2. As to *opsarion kai arton* (vv. 9, 13, "fish and bread"), this word for fish is used also in John's record of the feeding of the five thousand. The fact that here in John 21 the two words are in the singular does not imply a kind of sacrament. The singular forms can both be used in a general, plural sense.

*Homiletical Comments:* The disciples are waiting together. They know that something is soon to happen, but what should they be doing in the meantime? Peter's idea, going fishing, is natural and is well accepted. We Christians are in a position of waiting, waiting for the Lord to return in glory and to end our worries and trials on earth and to take us to our true home in heaven. But what to do in the meantime? We can come up with our own ideas to try to fill our lives, and we can convince ourselves that they are good and acceptable ideas. But how successful can they be if the Lord Jesus Christ is not included? How can we keep from letting our selfish, sinful nature control our lives and stop or at least hinder our labors in God's kingdom, if Jesus Christ is not present? We will have just as much success in our spiritual labors as Peter and the others had in fishing.

But the Risen Savior appeared and directed the activity of the disciples. By His almighty power they were given success. The powerful presence did not this time instill fear in Peter, but rather gave him great joy and energy. We need not fear His presence, for He has cleansed us from sin and guilt. He has risen victorious

from the grave. His living presence inspires us and equips us for our labors. With Him in our lives we will have a great catch.

*Introduction:* Once before Jesus Christ had revealed His great power in a miraculous catch of fish. At that time when Peter saw it, he recognized his own unworthiness and sin. This second instance was more welcome. The Lord was present to bless his labors in the kingdom of God.

### OUR LABORS FIND FRUIT ONLY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE RISEN LORD

- I. Our labors are fruitless without His presence.
  - A. There is little hope without His presence.
    - 1. The disciples were simply passing the time.
    - 2. Our lives must not degenerate into merely passing the time.
  - B. There is no accomplishment outside of His presence.
    - 1. The disciples caught no fish on their own.
    - 2. Our labors in the Gospel will have no success if we do not recognize the Lord's presence and power behind our efforts.
- II. The fruit of our labors multiply in His presence.
  - A. The grace of the Almighty God blesses our lives.
    - 1. Jesus Christ showed His almighty power in the catch of fish.
    - 2. Jesus Christ showed His grace in the resurrection from the dead.
  - B. The Risen Lord calls us into His presence and blesses our labors.
    - 1. He calls us to believe, as He called the disciples to the meal.
    - 2. He unites us in fellowship with Himself and works through us.

*Conclusion:* If we know that we are going through our labors in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, that will give us all the confidence we need. He will never fail us, but instead will bless us with His almighty power for the success of our labors and the spreading of the Gospel of life.

Thomas G. Bartels  
Elgin, Nebraska

### THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 10:22-30

April 16, 1989

Most Americans are ignorant of sheep. We need plain talk to understand the overtones of what transpired at the Feast of Dedication two months after

John 10:1-21. See *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* and *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep* by Phillip Keller. When the Jews pick up stones, they show how well they understood, although with hardened hearts. The variant on verse 29 shifts the antecedent. The translations by Weymouth and Knox use this variant. They "tickle our ears" because they try to explain the Trinity. The very existence of a variant suggests that the church has long struggled with this verse. We had best use the accepted text as KJV and NIV do, even if it is beyond our understanding in this world.

The point of comparison is the *continuous* relationship necessary between shepherd and sheep and between the Good Shepherd and us. We are precious because of what He has invested in us and continues to invest in us. We, like sheep, can escape His loving arms and bolt to disease, cliff, poison, wolves, and death. Or we can bask and live, truly *live* now and eternally. The Shepherd's great joy is to preserve us. In John miracles are signs that enlighten and preserve people of faith. We are not special because of *who* we are, but because of *whose* we are. We who had strayed are now safe and precious in the flock of the Shepherd.

*Introduction:* The Jews demanded, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." From John, from Jesus, and from the Holy Spirit, we learn this:

### JESUS' IDENTITY IS PLAIN

- I. Jesus is the Christ.
  - A. His words identify Him (v. 25a).
    1. Jesus spoke many "I Am" passages (John 8:58).
    2. Jesus spoke often of His Source (John 7:28-29).
  - B. His miracles identify Him (v. 25b).
    1. Jesus healed the blind (John 9:7).
    2. Jesus walked on water (John 6:19).
    3. Jesus fed five thousand people (John 6:11).
    4. Jesus did many other miracles (John 20:30).
  - C. His followers identify Him (v. 27).
    1. Jesus' sheep listen to His voice (v. 27a).
    2. Jesus' sheep follow Him (v. 27b).
- II. Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6).
  - A. Absolute truth polarizes people.
    1. Either we embrace truth,
    2. Or we reject truth.
  - B. Jesus spoke the truth plainly (vv. 25-30).
    1. Some rejected His words.
    2. Some embraced Him.
    3. No one can straddle the fence (1 Kings 18:21).
  - C. We do not always react in the same way to Jesus.
    1. Sweet are the moments when we embrace Him.

- 
2. Tragic are the times when we reject Him.
  3. But there is no half-way point.
- III. Jesus is our Preserver (cf. the explanations to the First and Third Articles).
- A. Without nourishment, we die (the reverse of v. 29b).
    1. Without daily use of the Bible.
    2. Without daily renewal of our baptismal vows.
    3. Without regular sharing of His body and blood.
    4. Without regular fellowship in the flock.
    5. Without continual living in Him.
    6. Without His continual living in us.
  - B. Life requires continual sustenance.
    1. Jesus provides the protecting hand (v. 28).
    2. Jesus provides green pastures (Psalm 23:2).
    3. Jesus gently leads and carries us (Isaiah 40:9-11).
  - C. Life in this hostile world requires constant protection.
    1. Jesus fought this world, sin, death and the devil for us on the cross.
    2. Jesus is our strong Guardian (v. 28).
    3. Easter shows His strength over death and the grave.
    4. Nothing can snatch us out of His, nor His Father's, hand (Romans 8:35-39).
  - D. Jesus preserves us by treating us as precious.
    1. In a certain society where the price of a wife varied from two to five cows, one man paid eight cows; and his wife lived with him as though she were worth eight cows.
    2. A sheep's identity and value are in its *owner*.
    3. The identity and value of us all are in Jesus.
    4. A spouse is as precious as we treat her or him.
    5. A child is as precious as we treat him or her.
    6. A pastor is as precious as we treat him.

*Conclusion:* Jesus is your Christ, your Truth, and your Preserver. Jesus is precious to some and rejected by others (1 Peter 2:7). We pray: Lord Jesus, continue to make plain to us who Thou art so that we may rejoice in whose we are.

Warren E. Messmann  
Plain City, Ohio

## THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 13:31-35

April 23, 1989

At Baptism, sinners are called by God into a religious order, the Order of Christian Love. The Christian is to live in a manner befitting a religious order—set apart from the world—exhibiting a Christ-like life. This life-style is one of love. By a life of love, the Christian is to reflect the glory of Christ and His salvation. As a member of the Order of Christian Love, the Christian, having been justified freely by God's loving grace, is to live a life of loving service which is directed towards Christ and toward other human beings.

Life in the Order of Christian Love is exemplified by the wife caring for her gravely ill husband. As he once awoke, he asked, "What are you doing?" "Just loving you!" was her reply. It is also exemplified by the father who in love disciplines his children. It is seen as Christians witness about their faith in Christ to others who have no faith. What are we doing? "Just loving you!" should be the reply.

The self-sacrificing love of Christ for lost sinners is the pattern for the Christian to emulate. Christ's love for sinners prompted Him to suffer and die on the cross. This passion was the crowning glory of Christ and of His Father's plan of salvation. The outline below is based on the word "love."

## THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

- I. L-ove. "All men shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another" (v. 35).
  - A. Christ commands Christians to love one another.
    1. He commands loving acts toward our fellow-men (Matthew 22:39).
    2. He commands loving acts toward God (Matthew 22:37).
    3. These loving acts identify the doers as disciples of Christ.
    4. Even the loving acts of Christians are imperfect because of sin.
  - B. Christ's love for sinners. "I have loved you" (v. 34).
    1. Christ's love is perfect love. It kept God's law perfectly and showed perfect love to sinners by dying for them.
    2. Christ is love personified—incarnated (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8-9).
    3. Christ is love in action—loving miracles; loving death and resurrection for our benefit; loving forgiveness for our sins.
    4. Christ's love is for everyone (Acts 13:44-52, the epistle; note also the references to love in the propers).
- II. O-bedience. "Where I am going, you cannot come" (v. 33).
  - A. Where was Christ going? To the death on the cross. "Christ was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8).

- 
- B. Why could Christ's disciples not go? They were sinners who could not give perfect obedience. They could not save themselves from sin. That would detract from God's glory.
  - C. The Christian's loving obedience is imperfect.
    - 1. At times it is exemplary—a loving, faithful spouse; a devoted parent or child; an honest laborer; a diligent confirmation student; a loving, harmonious congregation; a forgiving Christian. These are Christ's loving disciples.
    - 2. At times it is bad—marital infidelity; fighting; quarrels; disrespect for teachers and parents; dishonesty; neglect of worship, Bible study and the sacraments; a lack of forgiveness.
  - D. Christ's loving obedience was perfect.
    - 1. There was His active obedience—His incarnation, humility, loving service to others, and His perfect keeping of the Law.
    - 2. There was His passive obedience—His suffering and death for our sins.
    - 3. Christ's perfect love and obedience gained for sinners what we do not possess by nature and could not earn by our works—holiness.
- III. V-ictory. "God [the Father] will glorify Him [Christ] immediately" (v. 32).
- A. How can death be glory?
    - 1. To natural eyes, it cannot. Christ died and "lost."
    - 2. To the eyes of faith, it is glory—Christ's death was an act of love enabling lost sinners to love more than self and sin.
  - B. Christ's death on the cross is His glorious victory over sin, death, and hell.
    - 1. Sin condemns sinners—all human beings—to be losers through broken relationships, hopelessness, despair, sorrow and sadness. Without faith, sinners lose eternally in hell. This loss is disgrace and shame. It is not glory.
    - 2. In Christ, sin's power is broken. Christ's victory over sin, death, and hell becomes ours. We receive this victory in Word and Sacrament. It gives us hope, joy, and peace. Christ's perfect love received in faith casts out the fear of damnation, for He forgives sin. This salvation is God's glorious work in Christ. Its effects are eternal.
- IV. E-ternity. "You shall follow me afterward" (v. 36).
- A. The disciples could not go to the cross, but they can follow Christ into heaven (note Revelation 21:1-5, the other epistle).
  - B. God's love in Christ is eternal. Christ's loving forgiveness brings eternal benefit—the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation—heaven's glory.
  - C. Even our loving deeds are eternal.
    - 1. Our good deeds done by Christ in us (Matthew 25:34-40; Revelation 14:13).
    - 2. Our words of witness which God uses to save souls for eternity.

*Conclusion:* In perfect love Christ has gone to the cross to pay for our sins. His loving obedience has gained forgiveness for our sins—our unloving deeds. Christ has gained the victory we could not gain, for we are sinners. Christ's loving deeds last to eternity, for their effects are received by faith in Word and Sacrament that, being forgiven, we might experience the glory of heaven and serve eternally in the Order of Christian Love.

Armand J. Boehme  
Waseca, Minnesota

### THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 14: 23-29

April 30, 1989

*Introduction:* We yearn for peace every day. Brothers and sisters seek peace with one another. Husbands and wives often long for it. The nations of the world find it to be very elusive (Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Soviet Union, Central America, Libya, South Africa). If only we could really be at peace in the midst of all the turmoil in this world. As Jesus was with His disciples for the last time before He would be arrested and crucified, He knew the fears and dissolution that they would face, and so He comforted them with words that speak of peace: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, give I unto you. Do not let your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid." What a beautiful thought—if it could only be! It not only can be, but already is! In Jesus we have complete and full peace.

### MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU

- I. "Peace, not as the world gives, do I give to you" (v. 27).
  - A. The very reason why Jesus came was to make peace, peace with God.
    1. He resolved to go to the cross (Matthew 16:21).
      - a. He went to take the punishment for the sin of the world and appease the wrath of a righteous God.
      - b. He removed the barrier between God and man that created the hostility—our sin (Romans 5:1, 10).
    2. His peace is objective.
      - a. Even when we do not feel forgiven or at peace, we are.
      - b. It is God's gift to us and the world (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19).
  - B. Jesus does not give such peace as the world gives (v. 27).
    1. This peace is not temporary or mere outward peace.

- a. The world's peace only glosses over the real problem—sin.
- b. The world's peace only leads one to despair even more.
- 2. The peace which Christ gives is lasting and complete peace with God.
  - a. The problem of sin is dealt with once and for all.
  - b. Our salvation is assured because of this peace.

*Transition:* This peace with God exists whether we realize it or not, because it is God's gift to us. Therefore Jesus can say to us:

- II. "Do not let your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid" (v. 27).
  - A. This peace becomes meaningful to us when we come by faith to know the love of God in Christ.
    - 1. We know that nothing can rob us of the joy that this peace brings.
      - a. The burden of our guilt and the weight of sin is forever gone (Isaiah 1:18).
      - b. The broken relationships, the threats of war, the effects of sin cannot rob us of this peace because we know our true home is in heaven and not in this world (vv. 2-3, 27).
    - 2. As we know this peace by faith we respond with a life of love (v. 23).
      - a. We show love toward God by keeping His Word (v. 23).
      - b. We show love toward God by loving one another (3:34).
  - B. The life of faith is blessed with the continuing presence of God (v. 23).
    - 1. Christ dwells within our hearts and confirms us in this peace (Philippians 4:7).
    - 2. We have inner peace when we understand the great things that God has done and continues to do for us.

*Conclusion:* There have been many "peace plans" in the history of the world, but there is only one that really has meaning for our lives and that one is God's eternal peace plan in Jesus Christ.

John Kaiser  
St. Cloud, Minnesota

### THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 17:20-26

May 7, 1989

This prayer of Jesus for all believers builds on His prayer for sanctification in the preceding verses. This sanctification is in the truth of God's Word (v. 17). We do not have a call in this pericope for the church to manifest an external unity

at the expense of truth. Nor do we have an ineffective prayer of Christ. The unity of the Christian Church is very real, even in this world. This unity is achieved by God revealing Himself (vv. 25, 26) and the glorious future in store for all believers (v. 24). A common sanctification and faith exist in all who believe in Christ through the word of His disciples (v. 20). Believers today are confused and discouraged by the apparent disunity in Christendom with its hundreds of denominations. The temptation is to assume that Christ's church is not united, or to strive for external unity by weakening our confession. The text tells us that we need not yield to either temptation. Real unity exists in Christ's church, and Christian unity effectively achieves God's purpose of witnessing to the world (v. 23).

*Introduction:* Sayings such as "all for one, and one for all," "united we stand, divided we fall," and "there is strength in numbers" all make sense. Unity is a good thing to have if one is trying to get something done. When we look at the hundreds of denominations in our country alone, there is the temptation to think that the church is so hopelessly divided that it is impossible to be effective in the world. Jesus, in His farewell prayer for the church, tells us how the church, in spite of appearances, has real unity, and how this unity plays an important part in witnessing to the world. It is a

### UNITY WITH PURPOSE

- I. Jesus asks that all believers may be one (v. 21).
  - A. The unity that exists within the Godhead is the type of unity for which Christ prays (vv. 21, 22).
    1. This unity is a perfect unity (John 8:58; 10:30; 14:7ff.).
    2. Because of this unity, Jesus was able to reveal God the Father to the disciples (v. 26).
  - B. All believers are united through the word of the apostles (v. 20).
    1. There is a perfect unity of all who believe (in all times and from every race [Eph 4:4-5]) the Word, by virtue of God's indwelling (vv. 21, 23; John 14:23). These form the invisible church.
    2. Believers desire to make God's name known (v. 26) by showing unity through their confession of the truth of the apostolic teaching and through living it in their lives (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1).
  - C. Jesus gives believers His glory that they may be one (v. 22).
    1. This glory is the glory that Jesus, according to His human nature, has from the Father (v. 22).
    2. This glory is the glory of Christ's divine nature which Christ had before the world was (John 17:5).
    3. Because of our faith, Christ dwells in us, making us partakers of His divine nature and glory (2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Peter 1:2-4).
- II. Christian unity serves the purpose of giving a witness to the world.
  - A. United in Christ we are different from the world (vv. 14, 16).
    1. The world, wrapped in sin and unbelief, has not known about God

- (v. 25), about His love or great salvation.
2. Christians are sent out into the world as Christ was sent out (v. 18).
  3. Because we are united with Christ, we believe and act differently from those who are of the world among whom we live (Romans 6:4ff.; 2 Corinthians 5:17).
  4. People are to see this difference (Matthew 5: 15-16).
- B. Our unity witnesses to the world:
1. That Christ was sent by God (vv. 21, 23). This is an important witness, because Jesus Christ is the only way to God the Father (John 14:6).
  2. That God loves us as He loved Jesus (vv. 23, 26), who was obedient in His saving mission (John 10:17). The proof of God's love is demonstrated in the sacrifice of the Christ, God's Son (John 3:16-17; Romans 5:8).
  3. That God has made a holy people (1 Peter 2:9) to be with Jesus Christ for eternity and see Him in all His resurrection glory (v. 24).

*Conclusion:* Though the church may look divided, we have a great oneness in Christ. Hence, we should not become discouraged by the divisions we see, nor should we sacrifice any of the truth of God's Word in our quest for an external show of unity. The true unity of Christ's church is a unity given to all who believe the message of the apostles with which Jesus sent them into the world. This is the saving message with which we too are sent into the world for the purpose of witnessing to the world by word and deed—that we are united in Christ, that Jesus was sent by God, and that Jesus is the only way to God. Our unity is a witness to the hope we have that heaven awaits the church, where we will see our Savior in all His glory.

Ronald Gebauer  
Springfield, Massachusetts

## PENTECOST

John 15: 26-27; 16: 4b-11

May 14, 1989

This pericope is most instructive as it relates to the celebration of Pentecost in our churches. Although there is much confusion in Christendom today concerning the person and work of the Holy Spirit—and for that reason many of us fear tackling this subject forthrightly—here is an excellent opportunity to present Christ's teaching regarding that great event. The text is of extreme importance, not only concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but also christologically.

Christ here calls the Spirit *ho paraklētos*, which Luther translates “the Comforter.” The term is passive in its origin and has the literal meaning “one who is called to the side (of another).” Though “Comforter” brings out one aspect of this term, the translation is inadequate. A *paraklētos* is one who is called to the side of another, as a friend, to help in coming to a decision or establishing a defense. Therefore modern translations favor terms such as Advocate, Counselor, Helper, or even Friend. Christ is here also ascribing personhood to the Spirit.

There is much difference of opinion as to how verse 26 should be interpreted in relation to the *filioque* controversy. Here Jesus says, on the one hand, that the Spirit *para tou patros ekporeuetai* but, on the other hand, *hon egō pempō humin*. When He uses the future He is obviously referring to an economic, temporal activity and, when He uses the present, to the eternal procession. The text, of course, does not disprove the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and Son, since there are many other texts which point to that truth (cf. Galatians 4:6; John 20:22; Romans 8:9). The work of the Holy Spirit is also indicated here. He is to bear witness concerning (*peri*) Christ, as the disciples would do also; *martureite* in verse 27 could be either indicative or imperative, but in any case the fact remains the same.

Jesus did not at first relate to them the sufferings which they will experience because He was with them and was the target of the attacks. Now it is necessary for Him to go back to the Father in spite of the pain that this fact at first causes His followers. But Christ emphatically says: “I tell you the truth.” It is better that He go to complete the work for which He was sent. He can do more for them by His departure than by staying.

Now Christ unfolds the threefold work of the Holy Spirit. He will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. All three of these have to be understood in their relationship with Christ. The first work, concerning sin, is *opus alienum* to God, but it is done that God may do His *opus proprium*. Sin is not defined by Christ in terms of legal or moralistic rules—the devil too can convict of those sins—but He speaks of man’s unwillingness to surrender his fate to God, that is, unbelief. By righteousness Christ here means righteousness in its highest sense: that which comes only through His work as the Son of God. And the devil and all his works are already judged and condemned. Though Christ had not yet died, in the light of His impending death and resurrection, He spoke of it as already taken place, as sure as done. When confronted with this testimony of the Spirit, the sinner goes one of two ways—to damnation with the “prince of this world” or to belief and eternal life with God. This reaction is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit according to Luther, who says: “Sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain ourselves.”

*Introduction:* Perhaps you have heard about the man who was charged with a crime for which he had to appear in court. He was so convinced of his innocence that he did not seek legal counsel, nor did he desire the services of a lawyer. When

he first appeared before the judge and informed him that he would be defending himself, the judge replied: "May I warn you, sir, that the man who defends himself has a fool for a lawyer." Today this saying is more true than ever, for we know that, due to the complexities of our legal system and the ways in which the truth can sometimes be bent or distorted or even totally disregarded, one must seek out the counsel of an expert in order to defend and protect oneself properly.

Christ knew that we would confront difficulties and trials of our faith in this life as His disciples, and so He has sent the Holy Spirit, because we are not capable of defending ourselves. This Sunday we celebrate the great event of Pentecost when the Spirit was given to the church, and the epistle relates how by the power of that Spirit many people came to faith in Jesus Christ. Today there is much confusion about the Holy Spirit, and we hear much about speaking in tongues and gifts of healing, but Christ tells us very plainly how the Spirit from God works something in fact much more marvelous and of greater and more lasting significance for us and, indeed, the entire world. In the Spirit God provides

### THE DEFENDER OF TRUTH

- I. He tells the truth concerning sin.
  - A. Many times we judge ourselves by the world's standards.
    1. The world asks simple adherence to simple rules.
    2. We can look rather good.
  - B. The Holy Spirit sees and convicts the world for what it really is.
    1. We fall short (miss the mark).
    2. At the heart of sin is unwillingness to submit to God (v. 9).
  - C. By the Holy Spirit alone do we come to this knowledge (He comes to us through Word and Sacrament).
- II. He shows what is true righteousness.
  - A. Christ's ascension to the Father was an assurance that His work was acceptable (v. 10).
    1. His perfect obedience and righteousness we could never have attained.
    2. God accepted His sacrifice.
  - B. True obedience to God is self-surrender to Him.
    1. Self-surrender offends natural man. We do not want something done for us; we want to do it ourselves.
    2. But through the Holy Spirit we come to know that true righteousness can come to us only by faith and trust in Christ.
- III. He condemns the prince of this world, who is a liar.
  - A. Christ's apostles would face much persecution.
    1. He had been bearing the brunt of the attacks.
    2. Now, as His representatives, the apostles, who were entrusted with spreading the Gospel, would come under attack.
  - B. The devil assaults us also.
    1. We must endure the jeering of those who despise Christ.

2. The devil also uses more subtle ways to lure us away from the faith.
- C. The Holy Spirit fortifies us in this battle.
  1. The devil has been condemned through the work of Christ.
  2. He has no power over us.

*Conclusion:* We are not alone, then, to defend ourselves in this world. For if we were, we would certainly have "a fool for a lawyer." And though we may be frightened and tempted to give up our faith when faced with the onslaughts of Satan, the ruler of this world, we can thank God that He has provided for us His Spirit, who brings us to faith and defends and strengthens us.

D.L. Rutt  
St. James, Minnesota

### TRINITY SUNDAY

John 16:12-15

May 21, 1989

*Introduction:* Relationships are an important part of human life. No man is an island unto himself. Each of us needs others. In fact, a defining quality of humanness may be our need for other people. There is no humanity without community. In the text Jesus tells us about a divine community. That community is a Tri-unity of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. He focuses on telling His disciples about His relationship with the Holy Spirit and how that relationship affects them. Jesus tell us the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, will glorify Him. Jesus says,

### HE WILL GLORIFY ME

- I. He will speak the things of Christ (v. 13b).
  - A. He will speak on Christ's authority (v. 14).
    1. The Holy Trinity was and remains active in the plan of salvation for many (John 14:31; 10:30).
    2. Each person of the Holy Trinity has His own place in the plan of salvation ("opera ad extra indivisa sunt").
  - B. He will speak of Christ's forgiveness (v. 15a).
    1. He speaks only what He hears from Christ (v. 13).
    2. He speaks the Gospel, not a list of rules and regulations (John 1:16-17).
- II. He will speak with certainty.
  - A. He will speak of an unchanging Christ for a changing world (Hebrews 13:8).

1. Scripture gives answers to the problems of our modern world (vv. 13c-14).
  2. Christ gives healing to the brokenness of our relationships caused by sin and guilt, just as there is perfect harmony among the persons of the Trinity (v. 15).
- B. He will speak the truth (v. 13).
1. Christ Himself stands behind the Word (v. 14).
  2. The Word can neither lie nor err (v. 13b).

*Conclusion:* This is the real glory of Christ—that we accept the truth of His Word sent by the Holy Spirit and given to the apostles. If you abide in the Word of His grace then He on the last day will say to you: “You have glorified Me.”

Scott Murray  
Gretna, Louisiana

## THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 7: 1-10

May 28, 1989

This Sunday we move from the “Sunday” half of the church year to the “weekday” half. Festivals are mostly behind us. Now we move to daily Christian living. During the non-festival half-year we shall focus on examples of the believer’s life in Christ and of the Holy Spirit building faith. We begin with an example of faith so commendable that even the Lord praised it. The minor differences in the parallel account in Matthew 8: 5-13 reinforce our trust in the evangelists as independent witnesses. Worthy of note is Jesus’ commendation of another foreigner in Matthew 15: 21-28. In verse 3 *erōtōn* shows the urgency of the request. The implication of *autos* in verse 5 is that the centurion paid for the synagogue out of his own pocket. Concerning the centurion’s reluctance to have Jesus in his house, Dr. Lenski’s suggestion is possible. Better is the direct statement of our text that the centurion did not consider himself worthy. Best of all is the faith underlying his statement: “But say the word.” If Jesus says it, it is as good as done. In verse 6 *eporeueto* shows Jesus going out of His way to help. The text comes near the end of His Galilean ministry; He has seen thousands of Jews, but never such faith as in this foreigner. The strength of *ethaumasen* in verse 9 is noteworthy.

*Introduction:* Just say the word! What word? In our time we hear: Just say no to drugs. Just say no to sex outside marriage. What a joy that we are here today to say yes!

### GREAT FAITH SAYS, "JUST SAY THE WORD"

- I. Great faith says yes to others (vv. 2, 4).
  - A. Solomon's prayer in the Old Testament reading (1 Kings 8:41-43) is a yes for foreigners, for outsiders, for *us*.
  - B. To the Roman centurion, Jews were foreigners. Yet he
    1. Said yes to their nation (v. 5a).
    2. Said yes to a synagogue (v. 5b).
    3. Said yes to approaching the Jew Jesus (v. 3).
  - C. To the Roman centurion, a servant was property. Yet he said yes to seeking help for him (v. 2).
- II. Great faith says yes to God's authority (vv. 2, 7, 8).
  - A. Great faith knows we are all weak before illness (v. 2).
  - B. Great faith leads a man of considerable authority (v. 8) to acknowledge Jesus' greater authority (v. 7b).
- III. Great faith says yes to Jesus (vv. 3, 7b).
  - A. The great faith of the Roman knew Jesus as his own Messiah.
  - B. Great faith knows Jesus is God's yes (2 Corinthians 1:20).
- IV. Great faith says yes to God's grace (vv. 6, 7).
  - A. Great faith knows we are unworthy (v. 6).
  - B. Great faith believes that Jesus is the Christ sent by the Father to live, die, rise, ascend, and reign all for us.
  - C. Great faith knows its soul is healed whether the body is well or suffering (v. 7b).

*Conclusion:* We live in a world full of negatives warning us: Just say "no!" Great faith shouts another word. Just say yes to others, to God's authority, to Jesus, to God's grace. Great faith says, "Just say yes!"

Warren E. Messmann  
Plain City, Ohio

### THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 7:11-17

June 4, 1989

In a world of seemingly endless confusion, change, and uncertainty the Pentecost theme is a treasury of divine guidance and certainty, even unto death. The lessons of the day move us to declare with Paul that the Gospel that we preach is not something that man has invented. We traverse the history of mankind in this pericope in order that we may see God's hand over His people, in our lives and into eternity. Much could be said about the surrounding

events and the response by the people and the disciples of John the Baptist. Rather than allowing ourselves, however, to be dragged off in other directions, we follow along with the crowd in the company of Jesus.

*Introduction:* No one likes pain or the loss of life, yet it is inevitable. Although unwanted, suffering and death stalk us and taunt us, and they can crush us. The text relays a message of great pain, yet it also proclaims a message of greatest comfort, comfort available only in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### GREAT PAIN AND GREAT COMFORT

- I. The pain of this world is great.
  - A. The power of pain in this world is apparent in this grief-stricken widow (v. 12).
  - B. Pain is an offspring of sin, the separation of man from his Creator-God (Genesis 3).
  - C. Pain produces its own offspring: doubt, suffering, grief, fear, unbelief, etc.
  - D. The final pain resulting from sin is hell, an eternal death of separation from the Heavenly Father (1 Corinthians 15:56a).

*Transition:* We easily become well acquainted with the pain of this world. Jesus, however, introduces us to the greatest comfort, the only relief from such eternal pain.

- II. The greatest comfort is Jesus Christ.
  - A. He comes into a world of grief and pain (v. 12).
  - B. His heart goes out to pain-stricken mankind (v. 13) (Matthew 23:37).
  - C. His ministry is a ministry of comfort (vv. 13b-14).
  - D. His purpose is to heal and bring new life (vv. 14-15).

*Transition:* This dramatic account demonstrates the uniqueness of Jesus. He was more than a prophet of comfort. He meets death and takes away its power. But this is more than an historical account; it demands a response.

- III. The comfort of Christ is greater than the pain of this world (vv. 16-17).
  - A. We are filled with awe and praise God for what Christ has done for us on the cross of Calvary.
  - B. We see the hand of God in our daily lives (v. 16).
  - C. We spread the news throughout the land (v. 17).

*Conclusion:* In a sin-filled world of daily sorrow the grief of the widow of Nain is just another sad event that would not even make the evening news. Yet it is more than just a story (Galatians 1:11). It is a real-life drama in which

God plays the leading role as Jesus Christ the Savior. He assures a frightened and cynical world that death no longer has dominion over us; we have been freed to live in thankful awe of the grace which He has bestowed upon us.

Daniel J. Vogel  
Miami, Florida

### THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 7:36-50

June 11, 1989

This gospel comes in a series of pericopes from Luke in which Jesus reveals aspects of His unique theanthropic person and power. It is put with an Old Testament lesson and epistle that depict people making judgments in regard to other people. As the text compares and contrasts different approaches to the subject of judging, the expositor should help the listener compare and contrast the responses of the people in the text to their own in a good Law-Gospel fashion.

*Introduction:* Have you ever been misjudged by someone? Have you ever judged someone else too hastily? Have you ever been bold enough to risk ridicule by publicly seeking the total acceptance of a loved one and chancing rejection? All of these elements are found in today's text where three individuals especially stand out:

#### THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

- I. Simon the Pharisee—the Ugly.
  - A. Simon appears to have had bad motives.
    1. Jesus was not welcomed with basic courtesies extended to guests.
    2. Simon was evidently more eager to see Jesus fail than succeed.
      - a. He did not “put the best construction on everything.”
      - b. His attitude reflects Satan rather than God (John 8:44, etc.).
  - B. Simon was smugly self-righteous.
    1. He was evidently engaging in the game of spiritual one-up-manship.
      - a. Most of us know of people who have tried to play this game.
      - b. At times this quality of Simon is one we display too.
    2. Simon was presumptuously judgmental (Matthew 7:1).
      - a. He judged the sinful woman harshly.
      - b. He attempted to judge Jesus.
- II. The Sinful Woman—the “Bad.”
  - A. There is much we do not know about her.

1. Her name (one commentator suggests: "put your own name there").
2. The exact nature of her sin.
- B. We know of her soiled reputation.
  1. Her sin was "public knowledge."
  2. We all have our sins, whether public or private.
- C. She was a woman of good judgment.
  1. Unlike Simon she was aware of her own sinfulness.
  2. She judged that Jesus cared about her plight and would deliver her.
    - a. She had because she asked (Matthew 7:7; James 4:2).
    - b. She loved because she had been loved first (1 John 4:19).
- III. Jesus—the Good.
  - A. Jesus was criticized for His forgiving spirit.
    1. He sought to please God rather than man (Galatians 1:10; Acts 4:19; Acts 10:34).
      - a. God is the ultimate judge.
      - b. God is the best judge.
    2. We can expect the same in our lives when we imitate Christ (John 15:17ff.).
  - B. Jesus loves us (1 John 4:16).
    1. He accepts us in spite of our sin when we approach Him in faith.
    2. He sends us out in peace.

*Conclusion:* God's peace, health, and wholeness are enjoyed and appreciated by those who know the emptiness and futility of self-righteousness and stand humbly before the Lord in grateful acceptance of His love, forgiveness, and empowerment.

Robert A. Dargatz  
Irvine, California

## THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 9: 18-24

June 18, 1989

Jesus Christ is the center of all God's dealings with man. Jesus reveals to us God Himself (1 John 1:18). Jesus' life, death, and resurrection reveal to us God's love for the world (1 John 4:9, 10). The text, therefore, wants us to attain a correct understanding of who Jesus is and to lay aside all false views. It is imperative to see Jesus not just as another man, but as God's own Son. Furthermore, the text wants us to understand that the Christ of God lays aside all ideas of earthly royalty in favor of a theology of the cross and the empty tomb. The key, as it

were, to understanding Jesus is His suffering, death, and resurrection. This is the Christ we follow. He calls us to turn from our sinful selves, to struggle against sin and temptation, and to follow Him through this life into eternal life.

*Introduction:* There are all kinds of ideas floating around in our world today about who Jesus is and what He means for our lives. Some people describe Jesus as a great teacher of moral values. Others consider Him a defender of the civil rights of the poor and the underprivileged. The Muslims contend that Jesus was an important man, but not nearly as important as Mohammed. The Jews consider Jesus to be the biggest fake the world has ever seen. They teach that He deceived millions upon millions of people into believing that He was something that He really was not. But things were not all that different in Jesus' day. The crowds who followed Jesus could not agree as to who Jesus was. The text clears up all the confusion and sets aside all false views. It shows clearly how to

### UNDERSTAND WHO JESUS IS

- I. Understand that Jesus is God (vv. 18-20).
  - A. The crowds who followed Jesus were confused about Him. They, like so many today, thought of Him only as a man.
  - B. But to Peter and the disciples it had been revealed (Matthew 16:17) that Jesus was more than a man. He is the Christ of God. He is God become flesh.
    1. God has done many great things in the history of the world, but sending His only Son is the greatest.
    2. Even historians have recognized the significance of Jesus by dividing history into "B.C." and "A.D."
    3. Jesus is quite different than every other person who has ever lived. His words and actions are the words and actions of God Himself.
- II. Understand that Jesus came to suffer, die, and rise again (vv. 21-22).
  - A. The text gives us a big surprise: "Tell this to no one."
    1. That God sent His Son into the world is Good News for us today and it was Good News for the people of Jesus' day. Why should anyone keep it a secret?
    2. At that time Jesus knew the people would misunderstand His purpose and mission.
  - B. But there would come a time when Jesus could be understood by all—after His suffering, death, and resurrection.
    1. The cross reveals to us the love of God (1 John 4:10; 2 Corinthians 5:20).
    2. The empty tomb reveals to us the victory Christ won for us (1 Corinthians 15: 14, 17).
- III. Understand that Jesus gives direction to your life (vv. 23, 24).
  - A. "Deny yourself." When we look at the cross and see the seriousness of

our sin, we should cry out, "I do not want to be this sinful person anymore."

- B. "Take up your cross daily." The Christian life is not easy. It is a struggle against sin.
- C. "Follow Me." He will lead us through this life to our heavenly home.

Mark Boxman  
Concordia, Missouri

### THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 9:51-62

June 25, 1989

It was the early autumn of 29 A.D. Jesus had just completed His approximately two-year great Galilean ministry. The opening verse of the text tells us that the time was drawing nearer when the Savior, after finishing His earthly mission, was to be received into heaven via the ascension. Having in mind both His coming suffering and subsequent glorification, He determined after some further Palestinian travel to make His way to Jerusalem, where the passion was to occur; Holy Week was six months away.

The immediate occasion of the earlier trip of Jesus and His disciples to Jerusalem mentioned in Luke 9:52-53 was doubtless their intention to attend the Feast of the Tabernacles there (the one mentioned in John 5:2; see William Arndt's commentary on Luke, pp. 272-273) beginning in early October of 29. Proceeding from Galilee to Judea, Jesus took the shortest route south, through Samaria. It was thus that He and His party—probably a larger group than the Twelve—sought food and lodging in this territory. Proceeding onward Jesus encountered the individuals, two of whom offered, and one of whom Jesus invited, to follow Him, that is, become His disciples.

*Introduction:* By the grace of God we who believe have come to be Jesus' disciples. The text provides us with important information as to

#### THE DISCIPLESHIP TO WHICH JESUS HAS CALLED US

- I. It is one like that to which He called His first disciples.
  - A. The Twelve and others with Jesus were people who knew that, though they were sinners, they had in Jesus the Messianic Lamb of God who was—even as He lived among them—bearing the sin of the world for which He would make complete atonement. Trusting in His forgiving grace they knew they had pardon, peace with God, and eternal life.

- B. The Twelve and other followers looked to Jesus as their Lord and Master, accompanied Him throughout His three-and-a-third-year ministry, listened daily to His words of instruction, and sought in His strength to believe and do what He taught.
  - C. Just so, Jesus has called us out of the world and its darkness to be His followers, His twentieth-century disciples, planting saving faith in our hearts. Though we cannot visibly behold Him, we are directed continually to set our minds on His inscripturated Law-and-Gospel instruction, believe the truth of His Word, and endeavor to carry out its directives in our behavior (cf. Matthew 28: 19-20).
  - D. Like James and John, we disciples shall also encounter those who are bitterly opposed to Christ and His entire saving mission and reject the Savior.
    - 1. Because of their fierce loyalty to Jesus, these two disciples reacted to the villagers' refusal to accommodate Christ, the Son of God, with hot indignation and proposed to Jesus infliction of a fitting penalty.
    - 2. For this proposal the Lord, to their surprise, rebuked them. They should have had compassion on those hostile Samaritans. Neither of the two had responded with forgiving love or sought to dispel the opponents' unbelief by proclaiming to them the Gospel of the Christ who would redeem all men from their sins.
    - 3. We ought to feel sorrow over the plight of all those who are lost, pray for them, and seek to bring them the light of life.
- II. It is one which meets the requirements He specifically indicates in the text.
- A. Christ's preaching and ministry powerfully impressed many of His hearers. He invited individuals to follow Him and continue receiving instruction as His disciples, but fully informed those interested of the fundamental requirements of discipleship. A sampling of specific points the Savior made in this connection is given in the text.
  - B. One man by virtue of his association with Jesus volunteered to become his permanent pupil. From Christ's reply we see that this would-be follower was too ready; his was a superficial enthusiasm—somewhat like Peter's in John 13:36-37. There would be hardships to bear. Jesus counsels the man realistically to reckon with the cost of discipleship before committing himself to Him (cf. Matthew 13:20-21).
  - C. When Jesus called another to be His follower and this man procrastinated (he may have wanted to stay with his ailing father until the latter died and was buried), Christ urged him immediately to accept discipleship responsibilities. No other duties were to interfere with the work of prime importance on earth—the proclaiming of the Gospel—of which the spiritually dead are incapable. Let these dead render physical services to relatives and also bury such as die physically.

- D. Another man stated a willingness to follow Christ but asked first to return home and bid farewell to family and friends. Jesus in His response did not forbid this action. Rather he warned against the tug on the heart the home folks and retrospection upon his past way of living would exert to keep him from returning to Christ and following Him. Jesus informs this man that only constant attention and resolute, zealous, single-hearted, undistracted devotion to discipleship duties are acceptable in the kingdom.
- E. The text speaks about men who were standing at the threshold of becoming Christ's disciples. We, who by grace have already come to be such, will do well to review all discipleship requirements, daily seek with the Spirit's help to meet them, and thus under God maintain our blessed discipleship status.

Walter A. Maier

## THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 10:1-12,16-20

July 2, 1989

God had worked through His prophetic word time and time again to bring His people to repentance throughout the history of the Old Testament. Put into the imagery of the text, the seed of the Word had been painstakingly sown and cultivated for centuries. Now the very Lamb of God was in the midst of this people and the time for a harvest had come. Despite this good news, the laborers for this harvest were few. As the narrative unfolds, one can draw parallels between that mission and the mission of today.

However, in view of popular "harvest theologies" (which, among other concerns, teach that the harvest is somehow ripe prior to the Gospel being proclaimed), one must be careful to understand both the contrasts and similarities between this mission and the Great Commission of Matthew 28. One *contrast* would be in the scope of mission. Whether one considers this text parallel to the Matthew 10 account or yet another mission, in either case Jesus is concerned primarily with a mission of proclaiming the Gospel to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6) for a limited period of time. In contrast the Great Commission extends to "all the nations...to the end of the age" (vv.19-20). One *similarity* between the two missions is found in Word and Sacrament as God's only means of producing harvests for all time. This vital point will be an important emphasis below.

*Introduction:* The harvest of a crop occurs only after a time-consuming process of sowing and cultivation. Each aspect of the farming task is hard work. Yet a farmer who desires a bountiful harvest will not take shortcuts, but will use the

right tools and invest the hours necessary to produce his crop. Jesus uses this imagery to teach us something about missions.

### JESUS SENDS OUT HIS DISCIPLES INTO HIS MISSION FIELD

- I. The harvest was plentiful (v. 2a).
  - A. This “spiritual harvest” was ready.
    - 1. God’s Word had been sown among His people for centuries.
    - 2. God’s Word had been sown persistently and cultivated sacrificially (an example is provided by Elijah).
  - B. Before we can expect a “spiritual harvest” to be reaped anywhere in the world today, we must first sow the Word.
    - 1. It must be sown persistently.
    - 2. It must be sown sacrificially.

*Transition:* The hard work and sacrifice required for God’s mission had an effect on God’s work-force. We feel the same effects today.

- II. The laborers for the harvest were few (v. 2b).
  - A. Very few had embraced the pure Gospel.
    - 1. Many rejected Christ.
    - 2. Many followed Him for the wrong reasons.
  - B. Christ’s true followers had obstacles to overcome.
    - 1. Doubts.
    - 2. Fear of the unknown.
  - C. We have obstacles to overcome.
    - 1. Living in an affluent society, we shy away from hard work.
      - a. Physical sowing, cultivating, and harvesting are hard work.
      - b. Spiritual sowing, cultivating, and harvesting are hard work.
    - 2. While the disciples feared the unknown within their own culture, our fears include those around the globe.

*Transition:* The mission of Christ can seem almost impossible to accomplish. God has entrusted sinful, fearful people with the most important task on earth. God provided—and does provide—the way for the Gospel to be spread with confidence.

- III. The power for the harvest came from God alone.
  - A. Jesus instructed His disciples to pray (v. 2c).
    - 1. In prayer we acknowledge our helplessness.
    - 2. In prayer we call upon God’s powerful help.
  - B. The words humans speak are God’s very own words (v. 16).
    - 1. God’s message is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).
      - a. Christ died for all sin.

- b. Christ rose from the dead.
  - 2. Those who reject the message ultimately reject God, not man.
- C. God blessed the preaching of His Word with success (v. 17).
  - 1. Among other positive results, the disciples report that even the demons were subject to them in Christ's name.
  - 2. The disciples seem to think this result is the most important consideration.
- D. Jesus reminds them that possessing salvation, not success, must be the primary focus of the Christian's joy (vv. 18-20).
  - 1. Jesus saw the chief demon cast out of heaven (v. 18).
  - 2. Yet Jesus' greatest joy is found in that our names are written in heaven (see Zephaniah 3:17).

*Conclusion:* The harvest was plentiful only because the Word of God had been sown for centuries persistently and sacrificially. Our human flesh seeks the "quick fix," but God has given us His means of grace with which to accomplish His work. We are to pray for more laborers and motivate them with these same means of grace. Those that reject us are really rejecting God Himself. No matter what the results of our witness may be, we rejoice because our "names are recorded in heaven" (v. 20).

Steven O. Scheiderer  
Paris, Texas

## THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 10: 25-37

July 9, 1989

The "senior pastor" of the ancient Hebrew congregation at Jerusalem, the Apostle James, advised his people to remember, "Faith without works is dead." While Luther may have called James' letter to the young church one of "straw," I believe our Lord would place it in the realm of the third use of the Law. The speaking of this parable is precipitated by a serious, if not somewhat arrogant, question by "a certain scribe who wanted to justify himself." "Good master," he says, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" In response, the Lord asks, "How does the Law read?" The first table is obvious; God should always be number one. The second table is equally plain; "Love your neighbor as yourself." One who can accept himself, in spite of all sins and failures, as one whom God has loved and forgiven, must also extend such loving forgiveness and acceptance to those who are also loved of God, namely, our neighbors, our fellow-men. "Who is my neighbor?" asks the scribe in response. In Phillips' translation the answer

is given succinctly: "He who shows practical sympathy."

As in all the parables of our Lord, the key to understanding is the point of comparison. What exactly does the Lord Jesus want to convey to His audience? They should not merely have a "head knowledge" of faith; they should really give up on the idea of "seeking to justify themselves." For salvation is impossible to men; it is possible only with God. But if a person knows that the justified child of God in Christ is to live that faith, how does he do it? By loving the Lord God and by extending practical help to others in the world.

*Introduction:* It may be easy to love other people if it only means writing a check to Lutheran World Relief, to comment on the tragedy of children with swollen bellies in Africa, or to listen to or read about inspiring missionaries who give their all for those who are destitute and in need in our land and abroad. How well do we do in showing love to those who are our neighbors, the neighbors right in our path in life? Are we willing to say:

#### MAY I HELP YOU?

- I. Whom should we help? Our neighbors!
  - A. A neighbor is one in our path of life who needs our practical love and sympathy.
  - B. In the parable it is the man who is the victim of the robber's thievery and violence.
  - C. In our day it may be someone halfway around the world who is starving, a member of the church who has suffered loss, or the family next door who lost everything in a fire or violent storm.
- II. But do we always help? No!
  - A. In the case of the parable, there were two men of God, a Levite (a special temple servant) and a priest. Both men knew the will of God. Both men knew that love should be extended to others as God has loved us. They offered no help. One pretends not to see; the other sees but deliberately walks away. Such religion, Scripture teaches, is a sham.
  - B. How often do we not see examples of such an uncaring attitude in our world, in the church, and even in our own lives? How many in our world are hurting, crying, wounded in the ditch half dead? Yet how often people just do not see, cannot be bothered, are too busy, etc. "May we help you?" To many, even in the church, this question seems to be a foreign language.
- III. Shall we help? Yes!
  - A. Someone in the parable helped. Surprisingly it was a Samaritan, one despised and rejected by the Jews, but one who showed the image of the compassionate Christ; he helped. He showed practical sympathy.
  - B. Christ helped and still helps. He extends to each of us the practical love of a Heavenly Father by giving Himself for us, that we should not live

unto ourselves but unto Him. Shall we love God? Yes! Shall we love Christ the Savior? Yes! Shall we love our neighbor? Yes! In Christ there is no alternative.

- C. We need not search for someone lying in a ditch by the side of the road, beaten, robbed, and in need of help, before we think that a neighbor needs us. There are many in our world, nation, city, and church who need us. As one who has been loved in Christ and knows what it means to love others in Him, each of us can go to his neighbor and extend practical sympathy, asking "May I help you?"

*Conclusion:* Some years ago, in New York City, a young woman named Kitty Genovese was brutally attacked, raped, and murdered outside her apartment building. Many people heard her screams for help. Many watched for a moment but turned aside, closed their blinds, and pretended that it was none of their business. Practically every day the news includes accounts of man's uncaring attitude toward his neighbor. They are horror stories and sometimes they come close to home, even into our lives. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, but especially to the children of God." Go, and do as Scripture admonishes. Show practical sympathy and love to your neighbors. As one who has been loved by God in Christ, let each of us live that love in his life and say to his neighbor, "May I help you?"

Edmond E. Aho  
Chula Vista, California

## THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 10:38-42

July 16, 1989

Especially worthy of study are the following: "listening (attentively)" in verse 39, "distracted" in verse 40, and "only thing needed" in verse 42. In the commentaries there is much debate about what is meant by the one thing needful, but this one thing is clearly the Word. We have heard sermons, and perhaps preached our share, comparing Mary and Martha. In the context of all that Luke wrote in his gospel and in Acts, this approach is too narrow.

*Introduction:* When we read the five verses of the text by themselves, it is tempting to make a comparison of sisters. When we consider the story within the context of the whole gospel, we focus on the other person at Bethany. The Holy Spirit, through Luke, teaches that

## JESUS COMES AS OUR HOST

- I. Jesus comes as guest.
  - A. The Lord came to Abraham as guest (Genesis 18:1-8, the Old Testament reading).
  - B. The Lord came to Bethany as guest (v. 38).
  - C. The Lord comes to you as guest (Revelation 3:20).

*Transition:* Yet Jesus came not to be served, but to serve, to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

- II. Jesus comes to be the host (Luke 22:27b).
  - A. The Lord becomes the host.
    - 1. For Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:9-10a).
    - 2. For Mary and Martha (vv. 39-42).
    - 3. For you.
      - a. Jesus the host voluntarily laid down His life on the cross and took it up again (John 10:17-18).
      - b. Jesus the host serves you forgiveness of sins in Holy Communion (Matthew 26:28).
      - c. Jesus the host even now prepares a great banquet for you (Mark 14:25; John 14:2b; Revelation 3:20).
  - B. The only thing we really need is the Word (vv. 39b, 42a).
    - 1. The body of Christ needs the Word (Colossians 1:23, the epistle).
    - 2. Wise people listen to the host (Proverbs 8:34, the alternate Old Testament reading).

- III. We serve Jesus the host in response.
  - A. Listening is also service.
    - 1. Mary served by sitting and listening (v. 39).
    - 2. We quite correctly speak of a worship *service*.
  - B. Service is a burden when it causes fretting.
    - 1. Martha focused more on serving than on the host.
    - 2. We too easily forget to focus on the host.
  - C. Service is a joy when it is response to the Word.
    - 1. What could be better than hearing the word of forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation?
    - 2. Mary later had the joy of anointing Jesus' body (John 12:3).
    - 3. Martha later had the joy of faith (John 11:27, 43).

*Conclusion:* The Lord does want us to serve Him. But He wants us to serve in such a manner as to benefit *us*. We pray to better know Jesus as host through His Word. Your host is anxious to serve you the blessings of strength, light, and peace.

Warren E. Messmann  
Plain City, Ohio

---

## THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 11:1-13

July 23, 1989

Many people in the pews (and some at the altar) are uncomfortable with prayer. Part of the problem is lack of practice. Jesus prayed not only at "prayer time" but also at other times, as verse 1 shows. The scope of *legete* in verse 2 is broader than rote recitation. Another part of the problem is teaching which emphasizes form above content. Variants of the text meant to conform it with Matthew 6 show how concern with form above content has dogged us New Testament people just as it did the Old Testament prophets who warned against empty rites. The most serious problem is asking the wrong questions about prayer. Sometimes posture, position, purpose, or petition come ahead of person. Jesus focuses on the addressee with a simple "Father" and verses 11-13. Remembering our Heavenly Father encourages us to persistence (vv. 5-10).

The goal of the sermon suggested below is an attitude of persistent prayer that is continually aware of the Father and His good gifts. As a means to this end the text offers both the words and example of Jesus. The first *kai* of verse 5 bridges ideas as surely as does the *gar* in Matthew 6:14.

*Introduction:* A sign bore these words: "Prayer begins with asking and ends in listening." Such a statement is man's religion which does not recognize that our loving Father has taken the initiative. Prayer begins with listening, continues in adoring, and never ends. Jesus speaks in the text of prayer which leads to the best gift our Father has to offer. We learn today

### HOW TO RECEIVE THE BEST GIFT

- I. The best gift our Father gives is the Holy Spirit (vv. 11-13).
  - A. The world seeks worldly gifts (vv. 11-12).
    1. "If you have your health, you have everything."
    2. "All you need is love..." (song title).
    3. "When I win the lottery, I'll..."

*Transition:* All these things are good, but the best gift is not on man's lists.

- B. The Father in heaven offers a gift for eternity (v. 13).
  1. To have the Spirit is to know the "Father" (v. 2b).
  2. To have the Spirit is to hallow His name (v. 2c).
  3. To have the Spirit is to see Him in action (kingdom) (v. 2d).
    - a. In baptizing.
    - b. In proclaiming.
    - c. In forgiving.
    - d. In fellowship.

4. To have the Spirit is to be a steward of all "possessions" (v. 3).
5. To have the Spirit is to share the forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross (passive) and in prayerful living (active) (v. 4a).
6. To have the Spirit is to recognize the reality and threat of the temptations which surround us (v. 4b).

*Transition:* To ask for the best gift we first have to know what it is. Then we want to learn how to ask for the Spirit.

II. To receive the Father's best, we ask persistently (vv. 5-10).

- A. The invitation is to make "pests" of ourselves (v. 8).
  1. True friends are people who know they can "bother" us (vv. 5-8).
  2. We surely were ultimate "pests" to our Friend Jesus when He more than tolerated our sinfulness on the cross (John 15:13).
  3. Persistence is not necessary to persuade the Father, but to dent us of dull wit and slow mind.

*Transition:* Persistent prayer is more than oft-repeated prayer.

- B. Persistent prayer is *continual* prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
  1. To ask is to seek and knock (vv. 9-10).
  2. Prayer, like all stewardship, is response. The Christian tithe is one hundred percent.
  3. Jesus teaches us by word and example that prayer is the continuing adoration of our Father, not only when formally and consciously addressing Him, but in all of our living.

*Conclusion:* Some people seem to regard prayer as a sacrament. Prayer is actually a response. Prayer is Christian stewardship. Prayer does not begin with asking. Prayer begins with adoring the Father who gives the best gift. The best gift is the Holy Spirit. Ask for it persistently, continually.

Warren E. Messmann  
Plain City, Ohio

## THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 12:13-21

July 30, 1989

At 9:51 and 19:28 Luke reminds us that Jesus' ministry was a journey to Jerusalem and the cross. As He went, however, our Lord revealed Himself and His messiahship by mighty deeds of mercy and, especially in this section of the gospel, by teaching. Although it is difficult to determine the exact

geographical and chronological contexts of the various episodes in this section of Luke, each of them exemplifies an aspect of Christ's ministry as first defined in 4:18, "to preach the Gospel to the poor." In this particular pericope Jesus teaches us that the Gospel is not a message about earthly possessions.

As is common in Luke, Jesus' teaching here is prompted by a comment from someone close by, in this case a man from the crowd who asks Jesus for help in obtaining his inheritance. There would have been nothing strange or untoward about this request had Jesus been simply a Jewish rabbi or even another Moses commissioned to reestablish a Jewish theocracy (cf. Exodus 18:13-26); nor does the text suggest that the requester's claim was unjustified. Yet Jesus reacts with amazement and displeasure (*anthrōpe*, "man," not "friend" or something similar, v. 14). For the question implies first a misunderstanding of Jesus' role (cf. the previous pericope where the Son of Man either acknowledges or denies men before the angels of God) and, secondly, an overemphasis in the man's life upon the things of this world. The result is the parable which follows and, indeed, the entire section down to verse 34.

On the one hand, the Parable of the Rich Fool is certainly a statement regarding the folly of *pleonexia* ("covetousness," "greed," and "inordinate grasping for more," v. 15), especially in view of death (cf. the Old Testament lesson, Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:18-26). On the other hand, the parable also implies that true life consists of a right relationship to God, for the statement of verse 15 (what life is *not*) is rendered more positively in verse 21 as "rich toward God," an idea that the epistle (Colossians 3:1-11) helps to amplify. Therefore, the preacher must make sure that his sermon is not simply a diatribe against materialism but clearly presents the more abundant life of Christ's kingdom.

*Introduction:* A perennial temptation is to reduce life to what we see, experience, and enjoy right here and now. Even the institutional church of today too often leaves the impression that the Gospel of Christ is primarily a message about restructuring society so as to remove all inequities or about enjoying health and prosperity from God as rewards for prayer, faith, and piety. Although Christians must not be indifferent to the material condition of their fellowmen nor ungrateful for the material prosperity of a free economy, they must never forget that the Gospel is essentially the proclamation of everlasting life with God in Christ.

## LIFE IN CHRIST—MORE THAN MATERIALISM

### I. The Folly of Materialism.

#### A. Money is good but not good enough.

1. It cannot guarantee happiness and contentment.
2. As many contemporary Americans can attest, anxiety, marital instability, vice, even suicide all occur within the wealthiest families.

- B. Great prosperity can be the occasion for great wickedness.
  - 1. In his prosperity the rich fool displayed indifference to his fellow-man; he thinks of his own pleasure only (v. 19).
  - 2. The rich fool also displayed indifference to the Giver: the *earth* brought forth its abundance (v. 16), but the rich fool persisted in speaking of "my" crops and goods.
- C. Death makes *everything* in this life "vanity of vanities."
  - 1. The text speaks particularly of material things.
  - 2. But the lesson applies also to fame, success, prestige, friends, family; whatever we value in this life is gone at the moment of death.
  - 3. And nothing of this world can make us fit for eternity, that is, remove sin, put us right with God, or obtain heaven.
- II. Abundant Life in Christ.
  - A. Jesus experienced no temporal prosperity but instead poverty, shame, suffering, and death.
  - B. But Jesus' meekness is our strength.
    - 1. God became man to assume our burdens and to render death harmless; sin is forgiven, righteousness imputed, and eternity guaranteed.
    - 2. What we could not do for ourselves Christ did in our place and so provided blessings that cannot fade away.
    - 3. The blessings of Christ are signalled and sealed by His resurrection.

*Conclusion:* When we realize that real and eternal life is ours by faith in Christ, we have a new perspective on money and all the things of this world. Instead of foolishly enslaving ourselves to them, we can use them to help our fellow-men and especially to propagate the Gospel, for we know that whatever our circumstances now, Christ has guaranteed an eternity of heaven.

Cameron A. MacKenzie

## THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 12:32-40

August 6, 1989

In the gospels and, in fact, the entire New Testament a persistent shadow of urgency overhangs the inspired words. The message is clear that time is not unlimited. This world will someday cease to exist and its citizens will in the meantime individually find that their days in this life are also limited. For the Christian there can be but one reaction to this truth: by God's grace we must get ready and remain ready to meet the Lord at any moment. A fervent trust in Him is the most urgent of qualities.

The text before us builds on this truth as Jesus offers two short parables to underscore the value of readiness. Seeking to order the priorities of His people ("little flock," v. 32), He advises an understanding of what truly counts and a perception of the difference between the temporal and the eternal (vv. 32-34). The urgency of this understanding is supported by the brief parables of the prepared servants (vv. 35-38) and vigilant householder (v. 39). The objective of this sermon is to instill in the hearts of the hearers a realization of what it means to be ready to meet Jesus as the "one thing needful." The problem is that the "live-for-the-moment" mentality of our age has a powerful tendency to blind even people of God to the urgent need for an eternal perspective. The means to the objective is an emphasis on God's overwhelming grace ("your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," v. 32) and its ability to motivate people to be prepared for what truly endures.

*Introduction:* Most people know the piercing feeling of being caught unprepared. A project at work or school which was completely forgotten or a house-guest who arrived too early can cause that sickening sensation that announces to us that we simply were not ready. We will recover quickly from this kind of anxiety; however, a lack of spiritual readiness will be eternally fatal. For this reason Jesus wants us to remember well that this is

### NO TIME TO BE SLEEPING

- I. We are to awake to perceive eternal values.
  - A. Material treasures have a fleeting existence.
    - 1. "Purses" grow old and fail (v. 33).
    - 2. Worldly goods can be destroyed or pilfered (v. 33).
  - B. Heavenly treasures have an eternal future.
    - 1. Our eternal Father wants to give them to His little flock (gift of grace).
    - 2. He knows that to focus on them now helps to put one's heart in the proper place.
- II. We are to be alert to meet the Master.
  - A. The Lord's coming will be unannounced but should not be unexpected.
    - 1. Faithful servants faithfully await a Master (v. 36) who may come at any time.
    - 2. Faithful servants will be rewarded for their alertness (v. 37).
  - B. The Lord's coming will be sure and certain.
    - 1. Preparation must be constant ("second or third watch," v. 38).
    - 2. Preparation must be thorough ("loins girded and lamps burning," v. 35).
- III. We are to be attentive to watch for the Lord.
  - A. The Son of Man will come with the swiftness of a thief.
    - 1. No one expects to be robbed and accordingly plans for it.
    - 2. Proper preparation must include constant attention to what truly counts.

B. The Son of Man desires that His people not be surprised when He comes.

1. He has given a multitude of warnings to be ready (v. 40).
2. He has provided a variety of gifts of grace to strengthen His people in vigilance.

*Conclusion:* The return of the Lord to this world for the final judgment is a certainty. Because its timing is uncertain, however, constant vigilance is required. This vigilance includes the grace-given ability to perceive the eternal value of heavenly treasures and to focus on them. Prepared people are those who are awake, alert, and attentive and whose heart is on and in what truly counts.

David E. Seybold  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

# Building a Personal Biblical Studies Library Doesn't Have to Be Expensive and Time-Consuming

*New*

## Building Your Biblical Studies Library

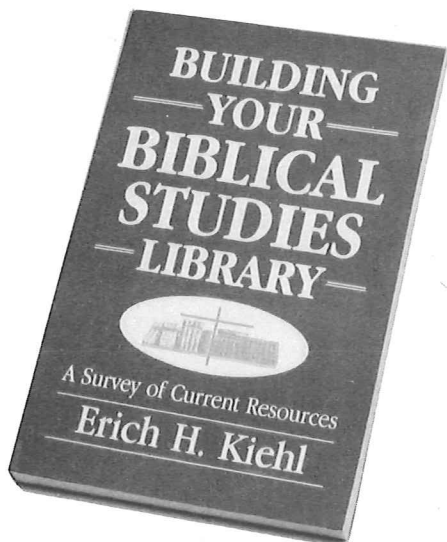
*A Survey of Current  
Resources*

by Erich Kiehl

Building a personal library of theological resources is a necessary task for anyone involved in professional church work. However, finding just the right resource can be difficult when looking at the wide variety from which to choose. Plus, it is expensive and time-consuming to search out the particular books you need.

Now, with **Building Your Biblical Studies Library**, you have ready access to well-informed, succinct information on the development and application of today's most authoritative Biblical resources.

This comprehensive volume is filled with a wealth of information that can provide useful guidance for selecting materials for your personal and professional growth. Textual traditions of the Old and New Testaments, commentaries, and concordances are examined in this handy reference. Careful analysis of hermeneutic, theological, and other topical volumes can help you decide which books are appropriate for your particular situation. This resource also provides selected bibliographies covering subjects arranged in 15 categories.



Erich Kiehl, who is currently a professor of exegetical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, is also the author of several other books, including God and His Covenant People, The Gospel in Paul's World, and Jesus, the Messiah.

**Building Your Biblical Studies Library** is for the student, the pastor, and the college or seminary professor. It's for anyone who believes that remaining a careful student of Scripture is an essential part of ministry. Get your copy today.

**Building Your Biblical Studies Library (12AE3116) .**  
Paperback. 160 pp. \$9.95

Available at your Christian bookstore or  
Christian Living Resource Center. Or, call or write

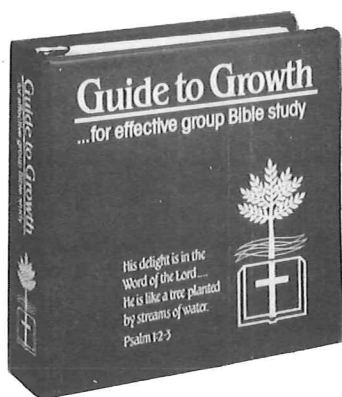
**CONCORDIA**®  
PUBLISHING | HOUSE  
3558 SOUTH JEFFERSON AVENUE  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI 63118

**1-800-325-3040**  
(in MO, 1-800-392-9031)

# Introducing a guide to help you select materials for growth in group Bible study

## The New Guide to Growth Bible Study Binder

Select just the right Bible study and find help in developing your own congregational Bible study program with this new ministry resource.



You'll find descriptions of each Bible study available from Concordia Publishing House (113 of them!), suggestions for improving group Bible study and other helpful features organized in one handy resource tool.

Everything you want to know about Bible studies is contained in this complete guide. Here's how the binder can help you with your Bible study program:

### ***Quickly review information on available Bible studies***

You'll receive fact sheets on Bible studies developed by the Board for Parish Services and published by Concordia. Each one-page sheet includes a concise summary of the Bible study, states its purpose, desired outcomes, and target audience.

### ***Find the right Bible study for the right group***

Handy indexes help you quickly find the Bible study you need by topic, Scripture reference, title, number of sessions, author, or target audience.

### ***Personally evaluate any Bible study***

You can participate in a one-step program that puts a copy of any of these Bible studies into your hands for personal examination and easy reference.

### ***Receive copies of all NEW Bible studies***

Become a member of a subscription service that twice yearly entitles you to receive the student guide of each new Concordia Bible study, for a low annual fee.

### ***Review model Bible study programs***

You'll have the opportunity to evaluate suggested programs for establishing and improving group Bible study in your congregation.

One free binder will automatically be sent to every LCMS congregation in April. If you would like additional binders, they will be available from Concordia at \$49.95 (order number 75BJ7244).

Call TOLL FREE at 1-800-325-3040  
In Missouri, call 1-800-392-9031

H51308 (1/88)

**CONCORDIA®**  
PUBLISHING HOUSE  
3558 SOUTH JEFFERSON AVENUE  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI 63118-3968