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Standard Abbreviations

AE	<i>Luther's Works</i> , American edition, 55 vols (St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958-).
	Bauer, Walter, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
BAG	1 st ed., ed. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957.
BAGD	2 nd ed., ed. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 1979.
BDAG	3 rd ed., ed. by Frederick W. Danker, 2000.
BELK	<i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche</i> , 12 editions [cite edition used] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930-).
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984).
LSB	<i>Lutheran Service Book</i> (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006).
LW	<i>Lutheran Worship</i> (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982).
NA ²⁷	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , ed. Kurt and Barbara Aland, et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).
TDNT	Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-).
TLH	<i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i> (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941).
W ²	Walch, Johann Georg, ed. <i>D. Martin Luthers sämtlichen Schriften</i> , 2 nd ["St. Louis"] ed., 23 vols (St. Louis: Concordia, 1880-1910).
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> , Weimarer Ausgabe ["Weimar ed."] (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883-).
	WA DB Weimarer Ausgabe Deutsche Bibel [German Bible]
	WA Br Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe [Letters]
	WA Tr Weimarer Ausgabe Tischreden [Table talk]
	Abbreviations for the Lutheran confessional writings:
AC	Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
SA	Smalcald Articles
Tr	Tractate/Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
SC	Small Catechism
LC	Large Catechism
FC Ep	Formula of Concord, Epitome
FC SD	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration

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Editorial Foreword

WHILE THIS ISSUE OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW does not have a specific theme, and covers a range of topics and a range of research, we do see a strong emphasis on preaching, both as the topic of three of the papers and with the inclusion of two sermons from our seminaries' opening services for the 2008-09 academic years. Four of the articles in this issue, including the three dealing with preaching, were presented at the East District Pastors' and Deacons' Conference in November 2007. The other articles come from various sources.

The issue opens with two short studies. The first, by Pastor Brian Dunlop, is a meditation on the question of laughter as it relates to the Christian life, comparing laughter as it exists in the world with laughter as seen from God's side, and finally the laughter of God's people as they experience deliverance at the hand of God. The second, one of the studies from the East District Pastors' and Deacons' Conference, is a discussion of the use of wine in the Sacrament of the Altar, looking exegetically at the words used in Scripture, serving as a reminder to the church that we are mandated to follow Christ's own command and usage in the celebration of the Sacrament.

The next three papers, all dealing with the task of preaching, were presented at the East District Pastors' and Deacons' Conference. The first, by Pastor Kurt Reinhardt, is on sacramental preaching. He moves us from Christ to Christ crucified, to the Incarnate Christ, to the sacramental life of the church which He established. The second, by Pastor Paul Williams, puts the focus on preaching Law and Gospel, noting that Law and Gospel must actually be proclaimed by Christ's mouthpiece (the pastor), and not merely talked about, and that the Gospel must predominate in our preaching (as the sainted Dr Walther most clearly stated). In the third paper, Dr Thomas Winger discusses textual preaching, discussing lectionaries, texts, and exegetical tools, and noting the importance of putting the Gospel at the centre of all preaching.

The final major article is a paper by Dr Manfred Zeuch, written in French and published in France while he was serving there as pastor and missionary. In this paper Dr Zeuch compares Luther's understanding of the work of the Spirit with that of the "Spiritualists" of the Radical Reformation. In view of the inroads of Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism in Canadian Christendom today, this study, reminding us that for Luther the Spirit comes wrapped in flesh and is given in the means of grace, is quite relevant.

Included also in this issue is a document prepared by Lutheran Church-Canada's Commission on Theology and Church Relations for its Council of Presidents regarding the status of retired clergy. This study is being

published for the benefit of the whole church with the permission of the Council.

The issue concludes with the sermons which were preached at the openings of the 2008-09 academic year at our two seminaries. By way of working together, the two seminaries chose the same theme for their academic year: “Great is Your Faithfulness”, based on Lamentations 3:23.

The seminaries of Lutheran Church–Canada commend these works to you for your study and edification.

EGK

Feast of St Michael and All Angels 2009

Errata

Volume 20 of *LTR* mistakenly attributed the entire translation of “Geh aus, mein Herz” to Joseph Herl. He has kindly provided a more accurate attribution:

Paul Gerhardt, 1653; trans.: sts. 1–2, 9, Joseph Herl, 1996; sts. 3–4, 6–7, 10–11, Frances Elizabeth Cox, 1841, alt.; st. 5, John Kelly, 1867, alt.; st. 8, Edward Massie, 1866, alt.; sts. 12–14, Robert Massie, 1854, alt.; st. 15, Margarethe Münsterberg, [dates unknown], alt.

Short Study

Laughing Matters

Brian Dunlop

“NO, BUT YOU DID LAUGH,” the LORD in angelic form corrected fearful Sarah when Isaac’s birth prediction seemed so ludicrous she burst out in laughter.

Is that a bad thing? Do Christians laugh less than unbelievers? Why do human beings alone in all of creation (yes, I know about hyenas) possess the ability to laugh?

Search high and low, and you will be hard-pressed to find a picture of Jesus laughing. That’s just fine, according to dour-faced Puritans. After all, life and death, hell and heaven are serious matters. Serious salvation requires a serious Christ. No, but God does laugh. The LORD has another side.

From the heavens, the LORD laughs in derision at the nations whose purposes oppose His own (Ps. 2:4; 59:8). The LORD laughs at the wicked who plot against the righteous: his day is coming (Ps. 37:13).

Laughter certainly takes on an offensive and sinister tone. The world laughs at the foolish sight of God’s dear Son hanging in shame on the cross for us. The soldiers mocked the Christ with false homage as they carried out their deadly task (Mk 15:16-20). Bitter laughter echoed Satan’s temptation as Christ’s own words were cast into His teeth as a joke: “Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself and come down from the cross” (Mk 15:29-30).

Our senses of humour are askew. Our sins lead us to be offended easily by the same joke that triggers fits of laughter in another. Seemingly endless jokes come at the expense of another or worse, that blasphemously mock the person and work of God.

Yet, the laughter arising from this world’s pleasure is terminal (Eccl. 3:4; Lk. 6:25). Even while producing the illusion of happiness, laughter often provides an ever-so-thin veneer over the sorrows of life (Prov. 14:13). Repentance worked by God’s holy Law silences laughter (Jam. 4:9).

Like a dismissive wave of the hand, the world laughs off the church’s proclamation of Law and Gospel. The laughter at King Belshazzar’s massive feast could not silence God’s sentence of death against the proud king (Dan. 5). The mocking laughter of those who mourned the dead daughter Jairus could not stop the Lord of life from taking her by the hand and speaking her back to life (Mk 5:39-42).

When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing (Ps. 126:1-2).

The Christian has a reason to laugh like no one else in the world. The LORD has delivered us from the captivity of our sins. The Lord's gift of life to Abraham and Sarah, themselves ageing and past the ways of nature for having children, triggered bursts of laughter. The joy of new life in us, generated in a ludicrous manner by all natural accounts—of water and the Word—triggers the joy that frees us to laugh in the face of death, devil, and hell. Loved by God, we are free to give with cheerful, hilarious abandon. Laughter springs from a heart where God has worked true, lasting, eternal joy.

Laughter is the froth on the beer of joy.

Rev. Brian Dunlop is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Desboro, Ontario.

Short Study

The Mandated Element of Wine*

Thomas M. Winger

THE USE OF GRAPE JUICE IN THE LORD'S SUPPER in a Lutheran congregation threatens our fellowship in the place where it is most intimately expressed. For our historic common practice is the exclusive use of natural bread and natural wine, as the following anecdote from Luther's table talk illustrates:

When somebody inquired whether, when a sick person wished to have the sacrament but could not tolerate wine on account of nausea, something else should be given in place of the wine, the doctor [Martin Luther] replied, "This question has often been put to me and I have always given this answer: One shouldn't use anything else than wine. If a person can't tolerate wine, omit it [the sacrament]¹ altogether in order that no innovation may be made or introduced. (Winter of 1542-43, AE 54:438)

This story explodes our modern myopia that presumes we are the first to have such pastoral concerns. But it begs the basic question of precisely why this is our common practice. What is the biblical and historical basis for our church's insistence on the exclusive use of natural wine? The following is an exposition of the historical, scriptural, and confessional data and logic that support it.

1. The Lord instituted His Supper during the last celebration of the Passover with His disciples. Though higher critics have disputed this setting, it is the clear teaching of the Synoptic Gospels.² The Passover meal is the historical context in which to investigate the Sacrament's institution.

* This short study was presented to the East District Pastors' and Deacons' Conference on 13 November 2007 at the request of its chairman.

¹ It is not clear whether this bracketed insertion by the AE editor correctly interprets Luther's intention, for he might have been suggesting Communion under one species (i.e., omit the second element, rather than changing it).

² JOACHIM JEREMIAS has decisively proved that the Synoptics are to be trusted on this point. See *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 15-88.

2. Unfortunately for our investigation, the Old Testament knows nothing of a cup of wine in the Passover. Exodus 12 speaks only of unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and a lamb or goat. For an explanation of the cups, we need to turn to rabbinic sources.
3. The Mishna, compiled in the 2nd century AD on the basis of long-standing oral tradition, teaches: “Even the poorest in Israel must not eat unless he sits down to table, and they must not give them less than four cups of wine to drink, even if it is from the [Paupers’] Dish” (Moed, Pesahim, 10:1). Throughout the discussion the content of the cups is consistently called “wine” (יַיִן *ha-yayin*). It is sometimes referred to as “mixed”, that is, diluted with water. The third cup, known as the “cup of blessing”, is thought to be the cup our Lord blessed.³
4. Tosefta Moed, a later commentary on the Mishna, elaborates that the cups must contain “a volume of a quarter-*log*,⁴ whether this is straight or mixed, whether this is new or old. R. Judah says, ‘But this is one condition that it has the taste and appearance of wine’” (10:1). Lacking a scientific framework, this is the closest they can come to saying that, though it may be old or new wine, good or bad, mixed or straight, it must be real wine, and this fact must be obvious to all participants.
5. The Tosefta goes on to explain the meaning of wine as an element of the Passover:

F. For the wine is what causes the blessing of the day to be said. ... A. It is a religious duty for a man to bring joy to his children and dependents on the festival. B. And how does he give them joy? C. With wine, since it says, ... *wine to gladden the heart of man* (Ps. 104:15). (10:3-4)
6. The emphasis on joy demonstrates that the key feature of wine is its alcoholic content, its ability to inebriate, which is further emphasized by

³ It is called the “cup of blessing” because of the action of the *pater familias* at that point: “After they have mixed for him the third cup he says the Benediction over his meal” (10:7).

⁴ A *log* is usually defined as about 300ml. Thus a quarter *log* is about 75ml. Jeremiah, 67-68, addresses the question of whether each participant at the Passover had his own cup, or whether one cup was shared around the table. Later rabbinic literature (the Talmud) could be interpreted as describing the former (individual cups), in which case each person drinks 75ml per cup. But Jeremiah argues that earlier Jewish practice was to share one common cup, in which case 75 ml would barely suffice for a sip each. Thus it is more likely at that time that the cup was filled up and shared. In any case, the New Testament account is unequivocal that at the institution of the Lord’s Supper Jesus gave one common cup to be shared by all (Mt. 26:27; Mk 14:23; Lk. 22:17, 20; I Cor. 10:16; 11:25-27).

the requirement of taking no less than four cups of wine. What of the weak, who cannot handle this? Rabbi Judah says, “[One gives to] women what is suitable for them, and to children what is suitable to them” (Tosefta Moed 10:4). He offers no further explanation of what this means, but since he has previously referred to the possibility of diluting the wine with water, this would seem to be what he has in mind.

7. Joachim Jeremias points out that “In everyday life water was drunk. The daily breakfast consisted of ‘bread with salt, and a tankard of water’, and even at the main meal bread and water were the chief ingredients”.⁵ Jesus’ words to the woman at the well (John 4) confirm that water was the basic staple of life. Wine thus served a different function. Aside from the Last Supper, only twice is it reported that Jesus drank wine: in Matthew 11:19 (in which Jesus’ festive meals with tax collectors and sinners are reported), and in John 2 (in which Jesus provides copious amounts of high quality wine for the wedding at Cana). Jeremias assumes rightly that Jesus would have drunk wine at the festive meals to which He was invited, but otherwise would have drunk water in the customary fashion. But the Last Supper was different. Here, as we have seen, it was the duty of every participant to drink wine—four cups, according to the Mishna. There can be no doubt that Jesus and His disciples observed this rule in their final observance of the Passover. The contents of the cup Jesus blessed and distributed was wine.
8. It may also be possible that the use of wine carried medicinal connotations, as it was normally applied together with oil to effect cleansing and healing (Lk. 10:34).
9. Certainly the gift of wine was prophesied⁶ as a feature of the Messianic age to which the Passover pointed, whose fulfilment began with Christ’s gift at Cana and continues in the Lord’s Supper. This may explain why wine is not a feature of the original Passover in Exodus, but becomes characteristic of the Passover in the promised land, and is taken up by our Lord as one of the two elements of the New Testament Sacrament.
10. What kind of wine Christ used cannot be determined with precision. Jeremias makes the assumption that it must have been red wine because he holds to a symbolic view of the Lord’s Supper. If it represents blood, it must have been red wine, he concludes.⁷ We Lutherans have no

⁵ JEREMIAS, 51.

⁶ E.g. Jer. 31:12; Hos. 2:22; Joel 2:19, 24; 3:18; Amos 9:13.

⁷ JEREMIAS, 53.

sympathy for this view. In fact, as Jeremias demonstrates from the Talmud, white, red, and “black” wine were readily available. Some later rabbinic sources lay down the rule that only red wine may be used at the Passover, but it is uncertain whether this held for the early first century. Thus, there can be no requirement that a particular colour of wine be used for the Lord’s Supper.⁸

11. We have established that Jesus most certainly used wine in instituting the Lord’s Supper. What should we make of the fact that He speaks of the cup containing “the fruit of the vine”? Some have asserted that Jesus thereby permits us to use grape juice, but this conclusion is illegitimate. Firstly, Jesus does not use the normal word for “fruit” καρπός, which might be used of something like grapes.⁹ Instead He uses the noun γένημα, from the verb γίνομαι, which might better be translated “product”. Thus, we should translate “product of the vine”, which more naturally refers to something like wine which is “produced”. Secondly, Jesus has not invented this phrase, but quotes a standard, rabbinic technical term used in blessing the wine in the Passover cup. Thus, any Jew would recognize “product of the vine” as a liturgical phrase referring to wine. Thirdly, it is a basic linguistic and logical error to conclude that, because Jesus referred to the contents of the cup as “product of the vine”, He was permitting us to use **any** product of the vine. By this logic we would be as justified in using pumpkin juice as grape juice, for it, too, is “product of the vine”. By this logic, when our Lord on the cross said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son” (Jn 19:26), He was permitting each and every “woman” to take John as her son. No, He was referring to one particular woman: Mary. So also at the Last Supper Jesus did **not** say, “You may take anything that is ‘product of the vine’ and use it in the repetition of this meal.” No, He took a cup of wine, referred to it by a common technical term as “product of the vine”, and mandated us to do what He did.

12. The Formula of Concord is therefore on solid historical and theological ground when it concludes: “For since Christ gave this command at table and during supper, there can be no doubt that he was speaking of true, natural bread and natural wine as well as of oral eating and drinking”.¹⁰

⁸ Indeed, prior to modern times, Lutheran practice was almost universally to use white wine: firstly because that was what was normally available in Germany; secondly because it functioned confessionally **against** a symbolic view of the Sacrament.

⁹ The common Greek words for the grape or a bunch of grapes are σταφυλή and βότρυς.

¹⁰ “von rechtem, natürlichen Brot und von natürlichen Wein” (FC SD 7:48). The Apology rejects the false teaching of the Encratites, who “abstained from wine even during the

Such words, which are binding on Lutheran pastors, exclude all substitutions. Neither grape juice nor so-called “de-alcoholized wine” satisfy these criteria. For though the latter was surely wine once, with the alcohol removed it is wine no longer.¹¹ Some have argued that de-alcoholized wine is chemically identical to natural wine, albeit with a lower amount of alcohol (usually 0.5%).¹² This is, however, a contradiction in terms, for the essential meaning of the word “wine” (from יַיִן *yayin* in Hebrew, οἶνος in Greek) is fermentation and the presence of alcohol.¹³ If we do what the Lord did, if we use what He used, the Formula of Concord concludes, we will have no doubt. The substitution of different elements introduces considerable doubt that we have the gifts the Lord intends to give us. And faith is the very opposite of doubt. Faith clings only to that which is sure and certain.

Ultimately, then, we are left with a theological and hermeneutical question that takes us beyond these questions of history. The Lord’s Supper is called “the Lord’s” because He instituted it and gave it to us for our good. He instructed us to carry it out in His church according to His mandate. His mandate is that we do it as He did it, that men who represent Him in the Holy Office of the Ministry should take bread and wine, consecrating them with the words He gave us, and giving them to repentant and believing Christians to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Because it is “the Lord’s Supper”, not man’s supper, we may not change it to conform to our desires, weaknesses, or unfaith (I Cor. 11:20). For it is indeed unfaith to believe that our Lord would give us something that would harm us. We confess with Luther in the Large Catechism:

Lord’s Supper” (Ap XV:21, KOLB-WENGERT, p. 226; Ap XXIII:45, TAPPERT, p. 245). One must ask even today whether objections to wine stem from a false spirituality that rejects the goodness of God’s created gifts.

- 11 Use of de-alcoholized wine is akin to ordaining a transsexual (a “woman” who used to be a man), and believing that Christ’s mandate of a male-only ministerium has been satisfied.
- 12 See, e.g., “Is ‘Non-Alcoholic Wine’ Really Wine?”, *Concordia Journal* (Jan. 1991): 4-6, which cautiously approves the use of this product—though provides no scriptural, confessional, or historical data to support this opinion!
- 13 In Greek there is a different word for unfermented grape juice or “must” out of which wine is made: τρούξ. See BDAG, 701 (entry for οἶνος). That fermentation is the key component of meaning is clear from the fact that fermented beverages made from fruits other than grapes can still be called “wine” (such as peach or dandelion wine), though they are not included in Christ’s mandate to use what He used, and so may not be used in the Lord’s Supper. Neither is grape juice or “de-alcoholized” grape wine included in His mandate, since they are not natural wine.

We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison which would kill us if we ate of it? (LC V:68)

If such fears lead us to alter what Christ has given, we risk losing entirely His benefits:

For we must believe and be sure of this, ... that the Sacrament does not belong to us but to Christ, ... Therefore we cannot make anything else out of it but must act according to His command and hold it. However, if we alter or “improve” on it, then it becomes a nothing and Christ is no longer present, nor is His order.¹⁴

On the other hand, where faith clings to the Word of Christ and the Sacrament is kept as one undivided whole as He mandated it, it is filled with rich blessings:

See, then, what a beautiful, great, marvelous thing this is, how everything meshes together in one sacramental reality. The words are the first thing, for without the words the cup and the bread would be nothing. Further, without bread and cup, the body and blood of Christ would not be there. Without the body and blood of Christ, the new testament would not be there. Without the new testament, forgiveness of sins would not be there. Without forgiveness of sins, life and salvation would not be there. Thus the words first connect the bread and cup to the sacrament; bread and cup embrace the body and blood of Christ; body and blood of Christ embrace the new testament; the new testament embraces the forgiveness of sins; forgiveness of sins embraces eternal life and salvation. See, all this the words of the Supper offer and give us, and we embrace it by faith. Ought not the devil, then, hate such a Supper and rouse fanatics against it?¹⁵

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¹⁴ MARTIN LUTHER, *Concerning the Private Mass and the Ordination of Priests* (1533), WA 38:240.24; AE 38:200.

¹⁵ LUTHER, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), AE 37:338.

Preaching Sacramentally*

Kurt E. Reinhardt

We preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23)

IN HIS FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS, St Paul, with these profound words, lays out the heart and centre of all Christian proclamation. A Christian sermon should have something to do with Christ. It is a truth that should perhaps go without saying, but sadly all too often the word that comes from many “Christian” pulpits lacks this one needful thing (Lk. 10:42). A question that rightly belongs in the sermon writer’s repertoire for constructive critique of his own work should be precisely this: “What have I said about Jesus?” The answer will help him to identify to what extent his work is truly Christian. Again, it should go without saying that a sermon that has nothing to do with Christ cannot be truly Christian. Yet as one of C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* characters, Professor Kirk, rightly wonders, “Logic! Why don’t they teach logic at these schools?”, in our reason-phobic world the logical must often be stated. As a product of just such a school system, I find that I need to have such simple logic repeatedly set before me, and have found the question about “Christ” content helpful in assessing my completed work. I am always amazed when I look back over my page at how easy it is to say a lot without saying much about Jesus.

A Christian sermon should have Christ at the centre of it. Simply tacking the name of Jesus onto the end does not fit the bill. Otherwise we would have to admit that Christian sermons are being delivered all over the world in school yards, alleyways, offices, on television, at the movies, and wherever else our Lord’s name is used in its predominant form as an “expletive to express shock or surprise”. A Christian sermon is not delineated by a few nice words about Jesus’ love or forgiveness at the end of ten, twenty, or even thirty minutes. As St Paul rightly lays it out for us, the sermon should preach Christ. He should be the heart and centre of the whole proclamation. He should be its whole point and *raison d’être*. Without Christ the words should tumble into a pile of letters at the bottom of your page and the words of your mouth should degenerate into nonsense. Again, such truths should perhaps go without saying, but a quick

* This essay was presented to the East District Pastors’ and Deacons’ Conference on 14 November 2007.

examination of a completed sermon can reveal surprising results to the most faithful of preachers. How much air time does our Lord get in comparison to that cute story or funny joke that will get a laugh or smile out of the hearers? How much time do we spend talking about ourselves compared to the time we spend talking about Christ? How long do we spend inviting the listener to check themselves out compared to the time that we fix their eyes on Jesus?

A Christian sermon should have Christ at its centre, but not just any Christ, as St Paul further tells us. The Christ at the centre and heart of the Christian sermon should be a crucified Christ. The nail marks in His hands and feet and the spear wound in His side should distinguish the greater prophet we proclaim from the lesser one who came before Him. A sermon can have a high Christ content yet still fail to be Christian if the only Christ who is proclaimed has more in common with Sinai than Calvary. A crucified Christ has a lot to say about sin, since the wounds He bears make a powerful declaration about its depravity, gravity, and toxicity. These wounds leave us without a doubt that the wages of sin are death (Rom. 6:23). They also declare our own inability to free ourselves from our sinful condition and the bonds that so entangle us. Yet these wounds speak their most powerful and dramatic Word about the love of God and the forgiveness His Son has accomplished for us. A crucified Christ is a Christ who has earned salvation for his people by paying for their sins. He has delivered them from the dominion of death by His own journey into it with their burdens around His neck. Although this Christ is the one who placed the tablets into Moses' hands, Christ's hands are the ones that suffer their consequences for Israel and all mankind (Jn 1:17).

Yet again, another self-evident truth about this wounded Jesus, who stands in the centre of the Christian proclamation and so should have pride of place in every sermon that aspires to be Christian, is that He has such hands that can be wounded. A crucified Christ is an incarnate Christ. The Word that the Christian Church proclaims is an enfleshed Word. As St John lays out for us in his Gospel, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14)." The incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ involves the permanent binding of the Word of the Father with the flesh and blood He took on in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The only-begotten Son of God was for us and our salvation made man, and remains man to this day. There is no Word of God that can be encountered apart from the flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth. We have no Gnostic Christ who encounters us in some spiritual way floating down to us from the heavens on the whims of fancy. We have no Christ who is present with us everywhere who is not present bodily. Mary Magdalene grabs hold of a real body when she lays her hands on to her beloved Lord (Jn 20:17). The Emmaus disciples are not accompanied by a spiritual Christ on their evening journey. Hands made of real flesh and blood break the bread at the table to reveal the identity of their

companion of comfort (Lk. 24:30). A real man eats fish and bread before the disciples in the upper Room (Lk. 24:41-43). Thomas puts his fingers into real tangible wounds in living hands and feet and side of a human body that his doubt might be fleshed away (Jn 20:27). This incarnate Christ is the one who promises to be with His people even unto the end of the age as they gather in His name (Mt. 18:20; 28:20).

This incarnate Christ and no other is the Christ of the Christian proclamation. To proclaim a Christ who has not been made flesh and who does not continue to come in the flesh is the not the task of the Christian preacher but, as St John declares, the work of the antichrist (I Jn 4:1-3). The Christian preacher does not proclaim a Christ who is far away but a Christ who comes to His people and dwells with them. The incarnate nature of our Lord determines the means that He uses to abide with and in them. The sacramental life of the Church is not simply a product of her whim¹ or for that matter the Lord's whim, but rather naturally and necessarily flows from the Son's incarnation. The necessity of the sacramental life of the Christian does not exist because God simply wanted it that way. This sacramental life is not something that exists purely because of our weakness and our need for tangible things to assure us of the Lord's active presence in our lives. Although both of these things may be said to be true, the sacramental life of the people of God necessarily flows out of the personal union of the divine and human natures in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no true Christ who is not a sacramental Christ. An incarnate Christ is a sacramental Christ. When our Lord became incarnate, the sacramental nature of our life with Him was determined and fixed. As our Lord was made flesh, that flesh, true to its nature, encounters us in fleshly things. As the Son took on our matter to redeem all matter, He determined that there would be no other means to deal with us than through that matter. This is not to deny the almighty will of God or limit His power as though something from outside Himself was imposed on Him, but rather to simply recognize that His decision to become incarnate for our salvation included the sacramental life that flows from that incarnation.

The Christ that the Christian preacher is called to proclaim is not a God who is far off but a God who is near in the flesh and blood of Jesus. To preach Christ rightly, then, involves preaching an incarnate Christ who encounters His people sacramentally. The preached Word in and of itself has a sacramental character when Christ is proclaimed rightly. The called and ordained servant of Christ who stands in the pulpit proclaiming the word of God does so in Christ's name but also in Christ's stead. The Lord

¹ For the Sacrament has not been invented nor introduced by any man. Without anyone's counsel and deliberation it has been introduced by Christ. (LC 5:4)

says of those He sends out to proclaim the Gospel, “He who hears you hears Me” (Lk. 10:16). The voice of the preacher becomes the means by which the Lord speaks His word into the hearts and minds of his people (Jn 13:20). This word is powerful and effective and creates saving faith in the hearer where and when the Holy Spirit pleases. As St Paul indicates in his epistle to the Romans, “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (10:14). The pastor becomes a meeting point between the Lord and His people, as through the Church the Lord identifies the pastor as the one who speaks for Him. To hear from him in his office is to hear from the Lord (II Cor. 5:20). Interestingly enough, the great writer of letters to the churches emphasizes that faith comes through hearing rather than from reading. Our Lord does not write any letters that we know of in His own hand to the Church, but rather appoints apostles and sends them out to preach the Good News (Mt. 28:19-20). The Good News is meant to be proclaimed from a living mouth to living ears. The Lord, through the pastor, comes not simply to inform the hearer of certain truths but to declare a truth in person to them and about themselves in Christ. The pastor is called to make a “for you” declaration to the Lord’s people which is from the Lord Himself. Thus, the pastor can even boldly take up the voice of Christ in the first person, as he speaks in the stead of the Lord for the benefit of God’s people, as Luther often does when preaching.

Although the preaching office may be recognized as having a sacramental character that naturally flows out of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, it has not traditionally been identified by Lutherans as one of the Church’s sacraments.² The Lutheran Confessions identify three of our Lord’s gifts as belonging to this category: Holy Baptism, Absolution and the Sacrament of the Altar.³ If the proclaimed Word of God creates saving faith in the hearts and lives of God’s people, and if our Lord is present in the pastor to proclaim such a Word, why does He give such gifts to the Church

² But if ordination is understood as carrying out the ministry of the word, we are willing to call ordination a Sacrament. For the ministry of the Word has God’s command and has glorious promises, “the gospel ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” ... If ordination is understood in this way, neither will we refuse to call the laying on of hands a Sacrament. For the Church has the command to appoint ministers, which should be most pleasing to us, because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in this ministry. (Ap 13:11)

³ Therefore, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Absolution (which is the Sacrament of Repentance) are truly Sacraments. For these rites have God’s command and the promise of grace, which is peculiar to the New Testament. When we are baptized, when we eat the Lord’s body, when we are absolved, our hearts must be firmly assured that God truly forgives us for Christ’s sake. (Ap 13:4)

and command their observance (Mt. 28:18; Jn 20:21-23; Lk. 22:17-20)? The sacraments are not optional; they have a divine mandate and are also a divine imperative. The church is not given the option to baptize; she is told to baptize. The church is not given the option of forgiving sins; she is told to forgive sins. The church is not given the option of celebrating the Lord's Supper; she is told to celebrate it. Thus we see in the book of Acts that these very things are taking place as sinners are baptized and forgiven and as the disciples meet every Lord 's Day to break bread together (Acts 2:40-47). On occasion, in wrestling with the question of the necessity of these gifts for salvation, it is possible to slip into considering them as in some way being optional. Our Lord Jesus, however, does not say, "If you want to, you may do these things." Rather, He states them in the imperative which, granted, establishes the church's mandate but also speaks of necessity.⁴ The Lord has commanded these things to be done and, for the church to be church, she needs to be doing them (Lk. 12:35-48). The right administration of the sacraments is rightly identified by the Lutheran Confessions as one of the marks of the church for this very reason.⁵

Although the three Sacraments along with the proclaimed Word of God serve the Lord's purpose of creating faith in Jesus Christ, their individual mandate and command argues for a unique purpose in the lives of Christians. Our Lord never lists them as options to be chosen from depending on the circumstance or preference of the hearer, and the Church historically has not offered them buffet-style either. They form a cohesive whole and are meant to work together for the new life of faith. The question of whether or not one may subsist on one portion alone sadly can degenerate into the laying aside of one or the other because faith does not "need" them to survive. The Lord, however, did not just give us one or the other but gave all and commanded their observance. Faith may indeed survive on one or the other, but our Lord's commandment would imply that faith would be much healthier with a well-rounded diet of all that He has laid out for it. Simply because we can does not mean that we should. The proclaimed Word and sacraments are not independent options but interdependent parts of the life of the Christian. Understanding this interconnectedness can help the preacher to proclaim rightly the incarnate crucified Christ who lives out life with His people sacramentally. In Baptism we know that we have a new birth into Christ Jesus where the Holy Spirit is given and our sins are washed away (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). In Absolution

⁴ For Christ has not instituted it to be treated as a show. Instead he has commanded His Christians to eat it, drink it, and remember Him by it. (LC 5:42)

⁵ The Church is the congregation of saints (Psalm 149:1) in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. (AC 7:1)

we know that we have a return to our Baptism where Our Lord Jesus cleanses our feet from the dirt of our journey through this world (Mt. 9:8; Jn 13:10; 20:23). In the Sacrament of the Altar we know we have a place at our Lord's Table where He joins Himself to us with the feast of His life-giving body and blood (I Cor. 10:16). In all of these three we have an encounter with our incarnate Lord where He creates, renews, and nourishes our unity with Him. The proclaimed Word as it presents the incarnate Christ to His people should direct, encourage, and create a hunger in them for an encounter with their Lord in these places where He has promised to be found.

The proclaimed Word of God undoubtedly creates a bond between the Lord and His people as He declares His love and forgiveness to them. Faith is created through this Word as the Holy Spirit works through it to convert the hearts of the hearers. Yet the sacraments play a unique role in the life of the Christian in uniting them to their Lord through His flesh. In Baptism the Lord unites Himself with the sinner to take on his sins while imparting His holiness in return. In Private Confession the Lord meets intimately with the sinner to touch him to remove the leprosy of his sin. In the Sacrament of the Altar our Lord most clearly comes bodily to His people in His flesh and blood to give them forgiveness, life, and salvation through their union with Him. These sacraments are all given through the Word of God and derive all their power from it, yet remain distinct in that they involve an incarnate impartation of the Lord Himself to His people. In marital terms we see the wooing of the bride in the proclaimed Word which leads to marriage and a life of love together in a unity of one flesh that unfolds in the sacraments. The bride and bridegroom share a life of mutual conversation but also a sharing of themselves in physical union in love. Mutual conversation involves an impartation of themselves to one another as they share their life together, yet it is distinct and different from the physical impartation. Both are essential parts of the unity that the bride and bridegroom share. Both are important and should not be pitted against one another. Neither is dispensable. Yet they are distinct and involve a different facet of the relationship. The relationship of the preached Word to the sacramental Word can be viewed in a similar way as two distinct but indispensable facets of the life of our Lord with His Church. The incarnate Lord both speaks to His bride and shares His flesh with her. This truth has been lived out in the life of the church where, from the beginning, the Divine Service has comprised both Word and Sacrament. The neglect of either is an aberration

from the practice of the church catholic and so also from the Lutheran Confession.⁶

The framework of our Lord's life in the synoptic Gospels follows this pattern. The preaching of John flows into our Lord's Baptism followed by the continued proclamation of His life which culminates in the intimacy of the supper table on the day of His passion. The Gospels follow the framework of the Divine Service as we see it being lived out in the book of Acts in accord with our Lord's command and institution on the night that He was betrayed. Once again, our Lord's life does not exhibit any conflict between these two elements of His incarnate life with His people, but rather shows them abiding in harmony with one another, the one leading to the other and back again. The interplay between the proclaimed Word of Christ and the physical contact between Him and those He has come to save is reflected in His earthly life. The Lord not only proclaims but He reaches out, repeatedly, to touch, to release, and to heal. The Lord not only touches but also proclaims. The Word is an enfleshed Word that not only rings through the air but also reaches out through it to touch. This enfleshed Word establishes not only the communion of the heart, but the communion of the body as well, in order to save both from sin, death, and hell. The Lord's proclamation creates a longing in the hearts of the hearers to reach out and touch Him. The striking image of the woman with the twelve-year issue of blood demonstrates the heart of faith that longs for contact with the divine flesh, knowing all that is contained within in it. She reaches out to touch the hem of His garment, believing that what contains His body bears life and healing for her (Mt. 9:20-22). The Lord's proclamation leads to outstretched hands. He stretches out His Hands on the cross to save us. He stretches out His Hands to touch us with His healing in the sacraments. He

⁶ Furthermore Baptism is most solemnly and strictly commanded so that we must be baptized or cannot be saved. (LC 4:6)

Rather we give this counsel: If you are poor and miserable, then go to Confession and make use of its healing medicine. He who feels his misery and need will no doubt develop such a longing for it that he will run toward it with joy. But those who pay no attention to it and do not come of their own accord, we let them go their way. Let them be sure of this, however, that we do not regard them as Christians. (LC 5, "An Exhortation to Confession")

At the outset, we must again make this preliminary statement: we do not abolish the Mass, but religiously keep and defend it. Masses are celebrated among us every Lord's Day and on other festivals. (Ap 24:1)

Nevertheless it must be known that people who deprive themselves of and withdraw from the Sacrament for such a long time are not to be considered Christians. (LC 5:42)

stretches out our hands to touch Him in turn, to chase away our fear and doubt. The outflow of His sacrificial life is shown in the resurrection narratives where the spoken Word is paired with both touching and eating. The Lord's Word of promise to His Church is not only a spoken Word but also an embracing Word that binds His life with hers in Spirit and truth. The proclaimed Word presents Jesus and leads the hearer to Jesus.

Preaching's role of leading the hearer to sacramental union can be seen throughout the book of Acts, as the apostles fulfil their mandate of preaching the word of God to all nations. The church's inaugural sermon that Peter gives on Pentecost leaves his hearers with one burning question: "Brothers, what shall we do?" to which he replies, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Luke further provides the connection between the preaching of the Word and Baptism with the assessment, "so those who received his word were baptized." Philip's proclamation to the Ethiopian eunuch leaves him questioning, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" The Lord's interaction with Saul also leads to Baptism at the hands of Ananias (Acts 9:18). The gentile Cornelius and his whole household are also brought to Baptism after Peter's preaching as the descent of the Holy Spirit indicates that they also are to have this intimate communion with Christ (Acts 10:48). Lydia has her heart opened by the Lord to what Paul said and she and her household are baptized (Acts 16:15). The Philippian jailer and his whole family also receive Baptism as a result of Paul's proclamation of the Word (Acts 16:30-33). The apostolic preaching and teaching is not an end in itself but leads the hearers to Christ. Their purpose is to preach Christ crucified. Through the preaching of the incarnate, wounded Saviour of the world the hearers are led to the place where He is to be incarnately found in His sacraments. The proclamation makes the Saviour known to them and then draws them into intimate communion with Him. This communion is lived out in the sacramental life, which involves a continuation and development of the intimacy between saved and Saviour. The proclaimed Word continues to play this role in the life of the baptized Christian as he struggles through this world with his own sin and the sins of others. This Word proclaims Christ crucified to him, and leads him to the basin and towel, to the supper table, and to the intimate care of his Saviour, where he learns to live out his life in communion with his Lord.

The sacramental life of the church, it must be remembered, provides the historical background for the reading of the New Testament. The church who receives these documents is the church who is following her Lord's mandate to baptize, to forgive, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The church who is reading the Old Testament is the church who knows that the Hebrew Scriptures proclaim Christ crucified and so also foreshadow the sacramental life that flows forth from Him (Lk. 24:25-27). The Scriptures are

being read by a sacramental people as they are written to be read and understood by a sacramental people. The church and her sacramental life predate the writing of the New Testament. The New Testament does not establish the sacraments, but rather the Word of Christ, who institutes and commands their observance by the apostles. The evidence of this sacramental life is woven into the very fabric of the New Testament writings. The burning question with regard to gentile Baptism resolved through Peter's interaction with Cornelius demonstrates the essential nature of Baptism to the life of the Church in accord with our Lord's command at His ascension. The living out of the baptismal life in communion at the Lord's table is laid out in the apostles' practice observed at the beginning of the book of Acts, but also by St Paul's correction of the sacramental infraction of the Corinthians, where the underlying assumption is that they meet regularly to celebrate the Lord's Supper in accord with our Lord's command to do it often (I Cor. 11:20-34). Paul emphasizes how this sacrament forms an essential part of what He has handed on to them from the Lord. The Gospels themselves must also be read keeping in mind the truth that the sacramental life of the Church is fully established when they are written. They are not written to establish this life, even though they record its establishment and unfold its meaning for the Church. To assert this is not to say that the New Testament material is fabricated to bolster the practice of the Church, but rather simply to bear in mind that the writers of the Gospels would have had a sacramental mindset as they organized and recorded the events of our Lord's life.

A further important christological truth that should be kept in mind is that, due to the personal union of the divine and human natures in Christ, the Lord Jesus fully knows the plan of the Father for the salvation of the world. He knows about the cross and how the fruits of that cross will flow out to His church through the gift of the sacraments that He Himself will establish. Understanding this truth dispels any difficulty with the Lord speaking in a sacramental way prior to the establishment of a given sacrament. To assert that passages like our Lord's great discourse about the benefits of the eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of the Son of Man in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel cannot have any sacramental import or inference because He speaks these words before the institution of the Lord's Supper, negates the truth that the one who speaks is true God, who knows all things and in a way akin to the prophecies of the Old Testament may speak of the gifts before they have been given. For the Lord to speak of these gifts prior to them being given would be consistent with His parabolic teaching where truth is revealed even as it remains hidden. The gift of the Holy Spirit was the Lord's way of revealing these things to the church as the disciples were led into all truth after our Lord's ascension. Repeatedly we hear throughout the Gospels that the disciples only understood certain things after our Lord's resurrection (Jn 2:22; 12:16). The beloved apostle

who lay on our Lord's breast when the gift of His heart was given in the Sacrament of the Altar certainly must have at least given some thought to the Lord's Supper when he recorded the sixth chapter of his Gospel for the church. If the hearer can rightly understand that the sacraments naturally flow out from the incarnation of Christ and from the beginning are meant to and in fact do form an integral part of the Church's life with her Lord, then there need be no hesitation to see a wealth of sacramental inferences within the scriptural texts even if they are not explicitly mentioned. The historical-grammatical method of interpreting these Scriptures would in fact demand such an approach, as the writers and hearers of these writings would in fact have had a sacramental outlook. The early church knows no non-sacramental church, which according to the Lutheran Confession is an oxymoron.

Faithfully proclaiming Christ crucified then involves the preacher fixing the eyes of the hearers on Jesus and directing them to the places where He may be found waiting for them with outstretched arms. The Word comes through the ears into the mind, but its goal is man's twisted heart that needs to be turned around and brought running back to his Lord. The encounter of the hearer with the living Lord who became man that He might dwell amongst His people should be the preacher's goal. Although intellectual in nature in the truest sense, as it brings true wisdom to the hearer, it should not simply be an intellectual exercise but a Word that draws the hearer to Jesus. The effectiveness of that Word lies solely in the purview of the Holy Spirit, but, if it is not a faithful Word that seeks to lead the hearer to Christ, it cannot be a vehicle for Him. The word needs to be the right Word. The goal needs to be the right goal. Otherwise, as stated at the outset, the proclamation is not Christian, and so the Holy Trinity will not be involved with it. We do not preach an aimless word, but a directed Word, that leads people to the Risen Christ for the salvation of their souls. If our preaching does not leave people asking to see Jesus in His gifts, then perhaps the message we have been proclaiming is not true to its source. If our words do not leave the hearer looking for the sacramental life of the Church, then perhaps we do not share as much in common with the Apostles as we should. The proclaimed Word should leave the hearer longing for and looking for the font, the basin, and the table. As Luther rightly points out, we force no one to receive the sacraments, but we should preach about them in such a way that people demand them of us.⁷ In convicting the sinner

⁷ Last, since the tyranny of the pope has been abolished, people are no longer willing to go to the Sacrament, and thus they despise it. Here again encouragement is necessary, yet with this understanding: We are to force no one to believe or receive the Sacrament. Nor should we set up any law, time, or place for it. Instead, preach in such a way that by their

through the law and wooing him with the gospel, the hearer should be left with the question, “Brothers what shall we do?”, to which the faithful preacher should point to the crucified Christ in His gifts. The preached word should create a hunger and make the mouth water. It should make the heart yearn, the mind quest and the soul long for an incarnate encounter with Jesus so that the hearer might be touched and be healed, and so that the believer might touch and believe.

Sacramental preaching is not just a matter of the interpretation of the sermon text, but an understanding of the whole ethos of our Lord’s sacramental life with His people and the impossibility of a life with Him outside of it. While the Church allows the possibility that God can work outside of this life where it is not available, the rejection of it has always entailed eternal death. If this is rightly understood, then every sermon will have sacramental focus in one form or another as it presents the Christ crucified who dwells amongst His people in His flesh. As previously stated, the texts of Scripture provide ample opportunity for encouraging the hearer in and directing them to the sacraments, as they are not an added appendage to the Word of God but are an integral part of it.⁸ They are a part of God’s plan of salvation from the start and so are prefigured along with Christ from the beginning and are reflected upon with Him from the moment of the incarnation. A sacramental interpretation simply takes the end result of the life God has given us and reflects back to see it prefigured from the

own will, without our law, they will urge themselves and, and as it were, compel us pastors to administer the Sacrament. (Preface to SC 22)

Only set forth clearly the benefit and harm, the need and the use, the danger and the blessing, connected with this Sacrament. Then the people will come on their own without you forcing them. But if they do not come, let them go their way and tell them that such people belong to the devil who do not regard nor feel their great need and God’s gracious help. (Preface to SC 24)

In conclusion, since we now have the true understanding and doctrine of the Sacrament, there is also need for some admonition and encouragement. Then people may not let such a great treasure—daily administered and distributed among Christians—pass by unnoticed. So those who want to be Christians may prepare to receive this praiseworthy Sacrament often. For we see that people seem weary and lazy about receiving the Sacrament They act as if they are so strong Christians that they have no need of it Some pretend that it is a matter of liberty and not necessary. They pretend that it is enough to believe without it. (SC 5:39-41)

So here there also is need for us to continue to preach so that people may not become weary and disgusted. For we know and feel how the devil always opposes this and every Christian exercise. He drives and deters people from them as much as possible. (LC 5:44)

⁸ When we are baptized, when we eat the Lord’s body, when we are absolved, our hearts must be firmly assured that God forgives us for Christ’s sake. At the same time, by Word and by rite, God moves hearts to believe and conceive faith, just as Paul says, “Faith comes from hearing” (Romans 10:17). (Ap 13:5)

beginning in the Word of God. St Peter does precisely this when he makes the connection between Baptism and the flood in his first epistle (3:21). As God unfolds the history that leads to the incarnation of the Son and the salvation of the world through the cross which will flow forth from Calvary in the sacramental Word, the history itself reveals its end goal. The genealogy of Christ contains many who provide insight into who their mighty Descendant will be and what He will accomplish. The same is true of that salvation history with regard to the sacramental life that will flow forth from Christ's pierced side. The flood, the parting of the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan, the Passover lamb, the manna in the wilderness, the whole sacrificial life of the people of Israel, and countless other events and mandated observances have all been recognized as prefiguring the sacramental life of the church even as they form part of God's plan to bring it all about. The life of Christ Himself, as well as His teaching, follows a similar pattern in particular with regard to His cross and so also with regard to the sacraments. Our Lord repeatedly speaks of the cross before it occurs, unfolding its import to His disciples prior to its victory (Mt. 16:21; Mk 8:31; Lk. 9:22; Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). As He speaks of the cross in this way, the gifts of the cross may also be seen to appear in similar allusions and events. This homiletical approach to the text does not argue that such texts are to be used to establish the doctrine with regard to a given sacrament, but in accord with the clear truths we know about them, may serve as signposts for the Christian as well as the preacher to these great gifts.

If the sacramental life is embraced as the outflow of the incarnation through our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, and the notion of its prophetic prefiguring in the events leading up to its gift is not rejected out of hand, then the scriptural texts open up before the preacher filled with a veritable gold mine of sacramental references. This treasure trove is brought into deeper relief when the preacher approaches the text looking for its sacramental connection. Some texts speak of the sacraments directly and there can be no question of expounding the truth about them as well as directing the hearer's attention and faith towards them. Other texts, however, contain allusions or elements that certainly raise the opportunity to direct the hearer to God's grace in the Gospel that flows to them from font, basin, and table. With regard to Baptism, its earthly element of water as it occurs in a text certainly provides the opportunity to speak of it as does any references to new birth, new life, sonship, fatherhood, cleansing, drowning, citizenship, kingdom, exorcism, new clothes, etc. The gift of Holy Absolution may be evoked and so referenced with regard to many themes as well that speak of release and forgiveness, such as slavery and freedom, deliverance, cleansing, washing, etc., as well as any references to touching and healing. The Sacrament of the Altar, with its earthly elements of bread and wine, certainly is brought to mind by the more than accidental plethora of meal references throughout the New Testament. Once again you

have to have your mind shut up pretty tight not to see in our Lord's reference to Himself as the bread of life a connection to His ultimate communion with His people through the Lord's Supper. Yes, there is the essentiality of bread to life in the ancient world, but to claim as accidental any possible connection to the eating envisaged in the Lord's Supper borders on the ludicrous. The meal references without question bring to mind our Lord's gift of love in Holy Communion, as do references to the bridal relationship, to blood, to flesh, to sacrifice, to wine, to bread etc. The imagery of the Scripture as a whole is rich in sacramental allusions which again, given the final outflow of our Lord's life in the church, seems hardly surprising. If the preacher identifies the directing of the hearer to the sacramental life that flows out from the pierced side of the crucified Christ as part of His task in Christian proclamation, then indeed he will find a plethora of sacramental connection points within the scriptural texts as is evident in the work of the early church fathers.

The scriptural text, however, is not the only source for sacramental direction in the Christian sermon. The liturgical and social occasion may also provide opportunity to direct the hearers to Jesus in His sacramental gifts. When a Baptism occurs, obviously it is a good time to talk about Baptism and remind all the hearers of what great gifts the Lord has given them in their new baptismal life with Him. The prepared altar of the Divine Service is also an obvious reference point within the sermon. A preacher's hand pointing to the altar, where the crucified Christ will soon be enthroned before His people as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, speaks volumes without directly addressing the Sacrament in speech. The preparatory seasons of Advent and Lent both provide a liturgical context to encourage the hearers to prepare their hearts for their coming Lord through Confession and Absolution. The feast of our Lord's nativity is the perfect setting to talk about the gift of our new birth. The journey of the shepherds to Bethlehem begs the preacher to invite the hearers to the altar to see this thing that has come to pass which the Lord has made known to us. The great Passover of Easter from Maundy Thursday to the glorious first day of the week is one big invitation to the Feast of Victory for our God. A wedding opens up the opportunity to speak of the new life the Lord shares with His bride the church at His banquet table. A bride and groom making their vows between the font and the altar provides an entry into addressing how the Lord would have the couple live out their new life in forgiveness as children of God nourished from the life of Christ given at His table. A funeral provides one of the greatest opportunities to proclaim the objective working of God's hand in a person's life through the incarnate Word in Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper—not only for the soul but the body as well. Thanksgiving allows the preacher to speak about the great Thanksgiving of the Lord's Table, where just as we show appreciation to

Mom by loading our plate at dinner we also give thanks to the Lord by eating of the bounty of His table.

To preach sacramentally, the preacher needs to understand the essential nature of the sacraments to the life of the Christian. They must be seen as an integral part of the Word of God, rather than a distinct entity from it. The Sacraments are simply the Word made flesh. They are the Word of God given in a tangible form, distinguishable in the manner of their giving and their purpose for the life of the Christian, but not separate from the proclaimed Word. The sacraments are not only all about Jesus; in a very profound way they are Jesus. We are baptized into Christ. Baptism's whole purpose is to unite us with Him. He is in Baptism. In Holy Absolution Christ hears us as we hear Him. The pastor's forgiveness is God's forgiveness. Sins are confessed as to Christ Himself and the absolution is given by Christ Himself. The Lord's Supper is none other than the true body and blood of Christ given under the bread and wine for us Christians to eat and drink. This Sacrament is the Gospel in the purest form, where the church proclaims the Lord's death to her children and to the world until the Lord comes. The Sacrament of the Altar sets the cross and its victory before the eyes of the faithful, even as it delivers the fruit of that cross to them. As the Christian preacher seeks to proclaim Christ crucified, his hand should naturally rise to point to the font, to the altar rail, and to the altar itself, where that crucified Christ comes to His people. Sacramental preaching is simply preaching Christ crucified in the fullness of His incarnation and the incarnate life He shares with His bride the church. Here the preacher faithfully gives answer to the believers' plea, "Please sir, we would see Jesus", by presenting their Lord to them and directing them to the places He has promised to be in His gifts for them. In Christian proclamation the preacher takes his brothers and sisters and invites them to come and see Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, whom Moses and the prophets wrote about. He points them to the One who loves them in word and in deed, in spirit and in truth.

The temptation for the preacher, particularly in modern society, is to feel that a faithful hand that repeatedly sets Jesus before the eyes of the people in Word and Sacrament is tiresome and boring. How many times does he need to repeat himself to the people of God? They have heard what he has to say all before and perhaps he should say something different. How many times do they need to be reminded of their Baptism? How often do they need to be encouraged to go to confession? How often do they need the menu for the Supper set before them with the required nutritional analysis? How much do they need to hear about Jesus? The question really answers itself, does it not? Can poor miserable sinners ever hear too much about Jesus? Can poor miserable sinners ever have too much Jesus? Can there ever be a day or a week that can go by that I do not need Jesus? As Luther points out in his questions and answers for those who intend to go to the Sacrament, if you

do not feel a need for it you should pinch yourself to see if you still have your wicked flesh, take a look to see if you are still in the world and know you have the devil around you. The sinner can never have too much of Jesus, as the saint well knows. Faith as it grows stronger only grows in its thirsting for its Lord; it is never so strong that it can survive without its object. An objectless faith is an illogical construct. Faith requires an object to be faith. Furthermore, a faith that claims it can forgo the Lord's gifts is no faith at all, as pride is diametrically opposed to faith. Faith thirsts for Jesus with an unquenchable thirst that even in heaven will not disappear, but will rather be continuously satisfied. We will thirst no more not because we will not desire the water, but because the water will be continuously flowing into us. As a foretaste of that perpetual spring the church therefore as a whole, and the servant of Christ in particular, proclaims Christ crucified week after week, knowing that the bride never tires of hearing of her Beloved, of gazing on Him and being made one with Him.

We preach Christ crucified. Sacramental preaching simply strives to do this great task in faithfulness to the truth of our Lord's incarnation and its resulting life for the Church. The task is no easy one, given the depths of the mystery that we encounter at the heart and centre of the Christian faith. The new life we have of birth, washing, and nourishment is a simple reflection of our life in the world, as our Creator made us, and so is recreating us. The sacramental life is simple, and yet its depths descend far beyond all human understanding within the heart of the Trinity. A lifetime is spent not only being nourished by them, but also reflecting on them. The preacher who seeks to fulfil his calling faithfully has a wealth of wisdom to relay to his hearers that can only be understood and imparted with the Spirit's aid and counsel. As we dare to handle such glorious gifts as the flesh and lifeblood of the holy Son of God, even as we dare to expound upon them, how humbling it is to see God's great grace that imparts such treasures to the care and keeping of sinful men. May the Lord make us faithful, dear brothers, in leading His people to Him, even as He works to draw us to Himself as He is lifted up before our eyes for our salvation in His Word and gifts.

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Preaching Law and Gospel*

Paul R. Williams

PROBABLY THE MOST FORMATIVE EVENT of all my time at seminary—something I shall never forget—was on the occasion of a sermon which I had to preach for one of my homiletical classes at seminary. The professor for the class was Australian Dr Henry Hamann, and the sermon was to be on one of those classic texts discussing Law and Gospel: Romans 3. I endeavoured to write a sermon which would give the best in-depth discussion of Law and Gospel that they would ever hear. At the end of the sermon, I remember Dr Hamann saying, “That was just about the best and most lucid exposition on Law and Gospel that I have ever heard this side of Walther—I’d like a copy of it to hand out to future classes. . . . And it also had the least amount of Law and Gospel of any sermon I’ve heard preached in this class all year!”

Hamann’s comment made a penetrating and enormously important point about preaching Law and Gospel—the distinction between talking **about** the Gospel and proclaiming the Gospel, or, as Gerhard Forde puts it, “secondary discourse-words about God, and primary discourse, Word **from** God.”¹ The high calling and sacred task of preaching which we, as pastors, have been given by our Lord to do is not one of merely talking **about** Christ and the Gospel—describing them in order to elicit a response from the mind which says “this is true and orthodox”. Preaching, rather, involves proclamation—the pastor **proclaims** these truths to the congregation “in His stead and by His command”—God Himself speaking through the pastor’s mouth His very own word. When the pastor preaches the Law, it is not merely to talk **about** God judging sin, reporting such to the hearer, but rather in this very Word being preached, God Himself is speaking His judgment upon the hearer through the mouth and words of the pastor—the actual shattering voice of the Lord to the goats on His left on the Last day, “Depart from me, you accursed”, is being put into the mouth of the pastor preaching Law and is being spoken from God, to the hearer—his Judgement Day is right there going on. Furthermore, when the pastor preaches the Gospel, it is not merely talk **about** the forgiveness and life of God, but rather, the actual ringing voice of the Lord to the sheep on His right hand on the Last Day. “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom

* This essay was presented to the East District Pastors’ and Deacons’ Conference on 13 November 2007.

¹ GERHARD FORDE, *Theology as Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

prepared for you” is sounding through the mouth of the pastor and is spoken to us. God Himself is present speaking, absolving, and forgiving in the mouth and word of the pastor—in His stead and by His command. The Gospel is the power of God to salvation, just as the Law is the power of God to damnation. Such proclamation is what the high, sacred, and solemn task of preaching is all about.

And being Words of the Lord, such preaching must be as the Lord gives it to be—Law and Gospel. There are two utterly disastrous things for a Lutheran pastor to do with Law and Gospel in his preaching: First, is that he keeps a proper balance between them. Cursed be the Lutheran pastor who keeps a proper balance between Law and Gospel—and blessed is the one who keeps a proper imbalance between them, and blessed are their congregations. “Balance” is what one has between two things of equal weight and emphasis—neither which is ever allowed to “outweigh” or take precedence over the other. In the apostolic faith delivered by Christ through the Scriptures to the holy catholic church, and therefore heartily and faithfully confessed by the Lutheran church, nothing must ever be allowed to “balance out”—and thus have equal importance and stress as—the Gospel in preaching and teaching, for it is the Gospel **alone** which creates, builds up and sustains the church and all who are within her. Never can the Gospel be preached alone without the Law and certainly never the Law alone without the Gospel, but, as Walther would put it in his final (and we might venture to say his concluding²) thesis in his magisterial work, *Law and Gospel*, “the Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.”³ And furthermore, Walther goes on to say, “Law and Gospel are confounded and perverted, not only when the Law predominates in the preaching, but also when Law and Gospel, as a rule, are equally balanced.”⁴

But secondly, equally as disastrous for the Lutheran preacher, is when he does not also keep a proper distinction between Law and Gospel, and when they are confused with each other. Note that it is the word “distinction” (not anything like “balance”) which is used repeatedly by the Confessions and the Lutheran fathers to describe the correct way in which Law and Gospel are to be understood and preached. Hence, the title of Walther’s book, and also the confession of the Formula of Concord, article five,

² An observation concerning this thesis made by JOHN PLESS, *Handling the Word of Truth: Law and Gospel in the Church Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 111.

³ C. F. W. WALTHER, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1928), 403.

⁴ WALTHER, 403.

We believe, teach and confess that the distinction between Law and Gospel is an especially glorious light that is to be maintained with great diligence in the church so that, according to St. Paul's admonition the Word of God may be divided rightly. (FC Ep 6:2)

So that the writings of the Holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly. (FC SD 6:2)

As Lutheran preachers, of course, we wish to see the preaching in our sermons shine with such an especially glorious light, but not in order to dazzle others with our homiletical prowess and eloquence, but in order to show forth the Light of the World, who scatters the darkness of sin and death, and in whom is life—the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Essential to such homiletical light shining is that such preaching be solidly grounded in right doctrine—doctrine always must undergird any good preaching—and specifically the doctrinal distinction of Law and Gospel. So, any discussion of sound preaching must first enquire into what this distinction is.

Far from any of the many false distinctions, such as that one is peculiar to one Testament and one to another, that the Old Testament is all Law and the New, all Gospel (both, of course, are in each Testament); or that only one is necessary and the other is not (**both** are necessary components of the Christian faith); or that the Law is not for Christians and the Gospel is (Christians need **both** Law and Gospel preached to them); far from any of these false distinctions, and far more than any of the real differences between the two, for instance, how they are revealed to us (the Law is written in our hearts, the Gospel can only be known by revelation); that the Law tells us what we are to do, the Gospel what God does for us; that the Law holds out conditional promises (contingent upon it being perfectly followed) while the Gospel promises are given freely, unconditionally; the Law threatens us with death and hell with no escape, and the Gospel has no threats whatsoever; the Law causes us to be more unwilling to keep it, while the Gospel puts into us a heart willing to follow the Law; the Law is to be preached to secure sinners, and the Gospel to alarmed sinners—far more than any of these real differences between Law and Gospel, by which they are to be distinguished from each other, is the **one** central and crucial difference (and any of these other differences will only make sense in light of this, and all preaching will be a bungled mess and dangerous confusion without this central distinction), and that is that **only the proclamation of the Gospel is Christ's "proper work"**, the essential work of the church, while the proclamation of the Law is **not**, it is only an "alien" work which is done only in the ultimate service of the Gospel. In the use of His law, God

kills and damns the sinner, but He never does so as His ultimate objective; as Paul Althaus observes, “in doing so, [God] is always aiming at His proper work”,⁵ which is, to give life, forgiveness, and salvation. Indeed, there is a crucial difference between God and Satan in the ways by which they use the Law. As does God, the devil also uses God’s Law to kill and damn—but he does so always as his “proper work”—it is his ultimate objective to do such things toward man. For God, however, “this alien work is only a means through which He accomplishes something else”,⁶ namely, the “proper work” of the Gospel.

There are many within Christendom who would vigorously disagree with this. Karl Barth, for example, after accurately describing the Lutheran position that, “it is only for the sake of understanding the Gospel that the Law has any place in revelation”, continues:

One might go so far as to say that this is an over-emphasis, made with the kind of impetuous wilfulness which is at once the secret and danger of Lutheran teaching in more than one place—an over-emphasis which cannot be substantiated either by facts or by the Biblical testimony to the facts. ... [T]he Law takes its place alongside the Gospel (without in any way detracting from the latter as Gospel), on the same footing and as a part of the selfsame eternal treasure. The demand for repentance stands on the same level with absolution, sanctification with justification, harmonizing the same act of revelation and reconciliation. ... [A]nd as much as one may respect and admire Luther, we would do better not to go along with him in the theological ingenuity which he manifests here.⁷

Whom Barth really **does** respect and admire (at least more than Luther) is John Calvin, who says that “when mention is made of the whole law, the Gospel differs from it only with respect to a clear manifestation”, and indeed, “the Gospel has not succeeded the whole law, so as to introduce a different way of salvation, but rather to conform and ratify the promises of the Law.”⁸ For Calvin, Law and Gospel are, as Sasse observes, “two stages of revelation, each complementing the other.”⁹ What this means is that for

⁵ PAUL ALTHAUS, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 168.

⁶ ALTHAUS, 168.

⁷ KARL BARTH, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 1.1:326.

⁸ JOHN CALVIN, *Institutes*, II, 9, 4.

⁹ HERMAN SASSE, *Here We Stand*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979), 128.

both Calvin and Barth, **both** Law and Gospel are real “proper works” of Christ and the church, essential things by which the church is built up and sustained and by which is faith created—two realities which work with and alongside each other in order to do so.

Unfortunately, views much like this can be found even within contemporary Missouri Synod Lutheran (and also LCC?) circles. For instance, in a popular book printed by Concordia Publishing House about 15 years ago, called *The Goal of the Gospel*, authors Philip Bickel and Robert Nordlie advocate a paradigm of preaching which they called “Law-Gospel-Law-Gospel” (indeed they even go as far as to say that the traditional Lutheran “Law-Gospel” paradigm was incomplete!).¹⁰ In this paradigm, the Law is first preached to condemn sin, the Gospel then to forgive, but then the Law is preached again to inform the Christian how he should live, and then the Gospel again to motivate him to do it. Within this paradigm are enormous confusions of Law and Gospel. As Dr Edward Kettner incisively notes,

these attempts to preach the “goal of the Gospel” are symptoms of lack of faith. These exhortations in reality are no different than the arguments that Rome used against the Reformation; namely, that if you tell people their salvation is free and they have to do nothing to gain heaven because it is a free gift, the people in turn will do nothing, but will take their salvation for granted. ... [T]he problem is not that the Gospel is being preached unconditionally, the problem is that the Gospel is being preached to those who have not been broken by the law. The Gospel, in other words, is being preached to the impenitent, to those who in fact need to hear the Law.¹¹

In Bickel and Nordlie’s framework, there is the assumption that the Gospel cannot be left alone as “proper work”—it cannot by itself bring about renewal of the Christian’s life—but rather, must be supplemented by the Law as another “proper work”. When the Gospel is preached for the purpose and goal of “motivating good works”—as it is in Bickel and Nordlie’s “second use” within their framework—they are using the term “Gospel” in a legalistic way—indeed, the Gospel is turned into Law—for that which attempts to “get someone to do something” is by definition Law, rather than Gospel. The Gospel always speaks of only what God does and gives. Kettner notes that

¹⁰ PHILIP M. BICKEL and ROBERT L. NORDLIE, *The Goal of the Gospel: God’s Purpose in Saving You* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 111.

¹¹ EDWARD KETTNER, “The ‘Third Use of the Law’ and the Homiletical Task”, *Lutheran Theological Review* 7.1&2 (Fall/Winter 1994, Spring/Summer 1995): 72-73.

the goal of the Gospel is the salvation of the sinner, and good works are properly understood as a fruit or result of the Gospel rather than a goal [W]orks are only possible (and indeed, they are inevitable), because the goal has been reached.¹²

Bickel and Nordlie’s framework, therefore, is “Law-Gospel-Law-Law”—and one wonders how sound (indeed, how proper and primary) the Gospel is in such a framework. The Gospel is changed into Law, and the Law is preached in a way in which it is assumed can merely “instruct” instead of condemn. Bickel and Nordlie give the Law a clear “proper” role in the essential proclamation of the church—and to do so is the essence of all legalism (and one must never forget that the central problem of all legalism is not that there is too much law, but rather not enough of it; it is not being preached in its full strength to condemn, but only lightly in order to instruct, with the assumption that someone can profitably and successfully follow it. The solution to legalism is more Law!).¹³

What does it mean when one preaches assuming the Law to have such a “proper work?” First, how does it affect the understanding of faith? The implications of Calvin’s ideas of “balancing out” Law and Gospel for faith are fully developed and put in dogmatic form by the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) where faith is defined as “first, the acceptance as true of whatsoever is revealed in the word, second, a conduct which conforms with each particular passage thereof, and yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God.” Herman Sasse notes:

When the Gospel is no longer understood exclusively as the gracious promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, the concept of faith is altered. No longer is faith simply the response of man to the promise, his trust in the pledge of divine mercy; it is at the same time a response to the commandment, which accompanies the promise in the Gospel. Thus the idea of faith approaches the idea of obedience.¹⁴

In other words, “faith”, by which alone one is saved and justified, does not here grasp a completed work of God, but rather necessarily encompasses within it a necessary work of man—that he obey the Law’s commands. In this way, the denial of “faith alone” compromises “grace alone”, for, as St Paul writes in Romans 11:6, “if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” When the Law, alongside of the

¹² KETTNER, 72.

¹³ [After a doctrinal challenge, CPH withdrew *The Goal of the Gospel* – ed.]

¹⁴ SASSE, 130.

Gospel, is another “proper work”, rather than an “alien work”, then the role of Christ Himself in justification is not merely what He has done for you, which is received by faith, but rather also what He, as the chief interpreter of the Law, says you must do, with Him as the chief exemplar of how that is to be done—in other words, essential to the church’s “proper work” is “WWJD”, What Would Jesus Do?

This has further implications for the doctrine of the church. The church is defined not as the congregation of those who have faith in the promise, with the marks of those who have such unseen faith being the outward Word of the Holy Gospel and Holy Sacraments which produce such faith and sustain it, which, in turn, is known only by faith; but, rather, the church is defined as the congregation of believers and obeyers, and, of course, “obedience” is something which is expected to be seen. The church is “marked” not by where one sees Gospel and Sacrament, where Christ is with His promise, but rather by casting one’s eyes to the individual believer where obedience can be seen to be going on—and perhaps even to the proclamation of the Law which is supposed to exhort such obedience. That’s where the church is. But this becomes quite complicated, because, of course, the Law is also written in man’s heart, and can therefore be found spoken of quite well outside the church by noble and upright pagans. Is the church there, also?

What consequences does all of this have for preaching? Quite simply, if the law is what Calvin understands it to be—a “proper work”—then it is the Law also which builds up and sustains the church, and it is the goal for and reason of the Church’s preaching to use the Law alongside of the Gospel to build up and sustain the church. Therefore, the task of preaching is not yet complete simply when the Gospel has been preached and sinners brought to faith in Christ; the Law, also, must be preached to make such believers into obedient believers. The Law has its own independent end and purpose—it is preached not merely for the purpose of preparing one for the Gospel (indeed, rather, the Gospel, in some sense, is preached in order to prepare one for the preaching of the Law), but rather to complete what the Gospel has left still undone.

For the Lutheran, the **sole** ultimate content and purpose for all sermons—the proper focus for all preaching—is the “proper work” of the Gospel, the free giving out of the Lord’s forgiveness and gifts. No matter what the text, no matter what article of faith is addressed, it is always handled in such a way that the Gospel is what is focussed upon in the text, and the Gospel is proclaimed as the heart, core, and substance of that article of faith. Consider, for example, if on a certain Sunday one has a pericope concerning the topic of prayer. The temptation might be to preach a description of “what prayer is”—or upon “seven Biblical principles for praying”—or, “how to make your prayers effective”. Already with such a thing, one is preaching Law—the way one is to pray, and what one is to do

in one's praying. But, actually, it isn't Law at all, for the Law does not merely and primarily instruct what we are to do, but chiefly, it is the mirror by which we are shown our sin—that we do **not** pray as we should be praying. In fact, the Law which needs to be preached here is to condemn the sinful presumption that all that it takes are some “how to's” for us to pray rightly to God. To say such a thing **is** sin, because it does not take seriously that we can only pray to “Our Father” when we are first His children, and because He has first made us so by His grace. It does not take seriously that we are by nature sinful, and all of **our** “how to's” for making ourselves into successful “prayer warriors” are shot through with self-centred hypocrisy and damning self-righteousness. So, a sermon on prayer must first say that in our sin, we cannot pray at all because our god is an idol, and all prayers coming out of our mouth from our sinful hearts are idolatry and worship to a false god, rather than to the true heavenly Father—and the Father will not eavesdrop on prayer not directed to Him, nor will it be heard by Him. Only Jesus can pray rightly, because only He is, properly speaking, the Son of the Father. But **then**, in the Gospel, Christ freely shares the status of His sonship with us, so that God “tenderly invites us to believe that He **is** our true Father and that we **are** his dear children, so that with boldness and confidence we **may** ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father”, and then “be certain that these petitions are pleasing to Him, sinners though we are, for He Himself has commanded us to pray and has promised to hear us—yea, yea, it shall be so.” In this way, everything which would be preached about prayer is set within the structure and matrix of proclamation of Law and Gospel, contrition and repentance and faith, for only from faith can true prayer arise. As Roger Humann notes, “It is entirely appropriate and necessary to preach sermons with respect to the Christian life”, but “Only the Gospel can apply the needed healing, and bring to bear on the basic problem the needed changing power. Therefore, although we may address life problems in preaching, there can be, properly speaking, only a ‘faith goal.’”¹⁵ Our words to God begin first with His Gospel words to us, grow out from them and confess them.

All other distinctions which might be expressed between Law and Gospel are really only elaborations of this one basic distinction—Law and Gospel, as proper and alien work, respectively—and one knows that one has grasped any of the distinctions correctly and fully when Gospel is kept “proper”, and Law “alien”.

What does the Law do which distinguishes it from the Gospel? We may answer that question by looking at the different ways in which the Law

¹⁵ ROGER J. HUMANN, “Four Theses and Some Auxiliary Statements on Preaching to the Christian”, *Lutheran Theological Review* 1.2 (1989): 56.

affects both Old Man and New Man, and how they both respond to it, and then also, how the Gospel affects both Old Man and New Man, and how each responds to it.

First, what happens when the Law is preached to sinful Old Man—Peccator? The first response from Peccator is that he will attempt to take the Law into his own hands, snatching away from God His own Law, in order to use it for his own selfish purposes, and for his own sinful agenda. What he uses it for is to justify himself. As Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles, Peccator “becomes blind and presumptuous, imagining that he can and does keep the law by his own powers” (SA 3.2:3). But, he can **only** do this by misunderstanding the law, altering it, and changing its demands and accommodating them to their own capacity by eliminations or additions. This is done, above all, by severing each of the commandments from the First Commandment, failing to see that the essence of each of the commandments is not just the outward performance of what it commands—nor even that it must be done from heart—but that what is done must grow out from fear, love, and trust in God. In fact, each of the commandments is merely a commentary on how one “has no other Gods”, and “fears, loves, and trusts” Him. It is **only** from such fear, love, and trust in God that there will be the keeping of the commandments; the First Commandment is the life and essence of all of the others. Furthermore, not only are each of the commandments specific ways in which one acts out the first commandment—how one lives out fear, love, and trust in God—but also each of the commandments is a way in which the preacher can “get a handle on” slippery and elusive Peccator who is quite good at hiding his idolatry and escaping detection from the Law which seeks to condemn him. The law makes specific demands—and not only will the pastor find Luther’s explanations of the commandments in the Catechism of great use for preaching specific Law, but also of equally great use for the preacher demonstrating that the Law’s specific demands are made to specific people in specific places in their life is the Catechism’s third section, the Table of Duties.¹⁶ Peccator attempts to act out commandments apart from the First, and to give the outward impression of fulfilling them, and to claim something from God, much like jiggling about a skeleton, and saying, “he must be alive—he can dance”, but in that very act shows forth for all to see how dead the skeleton really is.

When Peccator attempts to use the Law to hide his sin with a Pharisaic fig leaf of self righteousness, and to justify himself, he bears witness for all to

¹⁶ It is highly significant that in his “model confession” within the Catechism’s Fifth Chief Part, “Confession”, Luther leads one to see his sin by means of how he has failed in his vocation.

see of his own breaking of the first commandment, and does so in three ways. First, he uses the Law “unlawfully”, for the Law was not given for one to justify himself. Secondly, he robs the Law from God and uses it for his own self-centred purposes, for the Law is God’s for Him to use, and God always uses the Law for selfless purposes—*pro nobis*—to lead one to the Gospel. Thirdly, Peccator changes the Law by making additions to or negations from it. He negates it by watering it down into some emasculated, light, fluffy Law which only demands as much as he is able to fulfil and keep—which he may boast about. Or, as with the Pharisee, there are added to the Law various humanly-devised traditions not commanded by God, which are then held to impress God with supposed extra sanctity, earnestness, civil righteousness, and upstanding middle-class decency, natural religion, or, as the Apology lists, “celibacy, fasting, alms, rosaries, pilgrimages”, all where “wretched human traditions are regarded as better than the works commanded by God” (Ap 12:145). And lastly, Peccator changes God Himself, by turning Him from a gracious Father, who freely gives His gifts, to a legalistic policemen, who can be brown-nosed, bought off, and appeased by our works of the Law—which is, of course, breaking the First Commandment.

Therefore, in the very act of trying to follow the Law, Peccator ends up sinning ever more against it—and this brings us to the second effect of the Law on Peccator. As St Paul writes, it “increases the trespass”(Rom. 5:20), and causes one to hate God. The Law says we should love God, but it causes us to hate Him. “Those who hate the Law because it forbids what they desire to do and commands what they are unwilling to do, are made worse thereby. Accordingly, in so far as they are not restrained by punishment, they act against the law even more than before” (SA 3.2:2). And what is more, Peccator will always respond in such a way—he will always want to do so—hence the bondage of the will. Therefore, one cannot get people to do what they should be doing by preaching to them about what they should be doing, nor by urging them that they should be doing it. While such preaching **may**, indeed, bring about certain external improvements in people’s behaviour, it will bring them about **only** from a heart made more sinfully self-centred.

And ultimately, Peccator attempts to kill the God who gives such a Law, in order to be free from it—and free from Him. But the ultimate effect of the Law is quite the opposite, the Law kills Peccator. It strips away his fig leaf, reveals Peccator for all that he is, puts him to death, and damns him. And in this work of the Law, God is not standing idly by watching it happen from afar—it is not the devil’s work here, for it is not the devil’s Law—it is God’s Law, and by His own design He is using His Law relentlessly to hound down Peccator with His threat of death, and in His Law, God says, “you are my enemy—you can run, but you cannot hide from Me,” and like the Terminator, He will not stop until He has caught you and executed you.

No wonder, then, the Law, when it is really taken seriously, brings total despair and terror. The Law makes one “terror-stricken and humbled”. One becomes “despondent and despairing, anxiously desires help, but does not know where to find it” (SA 3.2:4). “When a conscience is properly aware of its sin and misery, all joking, all playful thoughts vanish and the situation becomes one of utmost gravity; here, no heart and conscience can be pacified or appeased” (Ap 4:20). And this despair is also, in itself, sin, for it is not fully trusting in God.

And if that wasn’t bad enough, the response of Peccator to the Gospel is even worse; he ignores it, mocks it, desecrates it, and will never do otherwise, for he “cannot by His own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ His Lord or come to Him.”

Now, if the Law can **only** condemn, kill, and damn Peccator, and if Peccator will only reject the Gospel, and Peccator cannot ever be reformed, then what hope is there, since all are all born as Peccators? The solution is that the Gospel declares Peccator to be what he is not—forgiven and justified—and from this life-giving and forgiving word of the Gospel there is created in the sinner a new heart, called Justus. And indeed, it is a new creation. The new man is **not** built out of the building blocks of anything within Peccator; Peccator has contributed nothing towards what Justus is, but it is entirely a new creation in Jesus Christ. When Jesus said to Nicodemus that in order to enter the kingdom of God he must be “born again”, he was saying that he needed more than mere reform of the life he was born into—he needed, rather, a new life. The life he was born into was beyond repair already when he was born (indeed nine months before this!). The Law puts Peccator to death, but does so in the death of Jesus Christ, upon whom all the sin of Peccator has been put, so that Peccator dies in Him. And in His resurrection, there is raised to life, breathed into the one who before was only Peccator, something new, the New Life: Justus. What has brought forth Justus? Only the Gospel, the power of God to salvation.

Even more important than keeping the Law distinct from the Gospel, so that it **can** produce true contrition, is keeping the Gospel distinct from Law, so that it can create true faith. Blurring such a distinction is done whenever the Gospel is expressed as something which calls for our co-operation or response in order to “complete” it or in order for it to do what it says it will do. When, for instance, the Gospel is expressed as a mere “potential” gift of forgiveness which God is ready to give, but which He will only do when we “respond” to Him in the right way by our faith or decision, then the Gospel is being muddled with Law. The complete reconciliation of the world to God by the atoning death of Christ has not quite finished the job, and must be supplemented, completed, and put into effect by the work of our response which we are called to make—a work not of Christ, but of the Law. The preaching of the Gospel, here, is therefore not a freely given, unconditional promise of absolution, all which the Lord does, but rather a conditional

promise—conditional upon the hearer responding in the right way. Therefore, the goal of such preaching is to exhort one to do so. And if that is what needs to be done, one had better go all out and do it with all the zeal which one can muster—and so one finds those such as Charles Finney, with his “New Measures”, and revivalistic techniques, supported enthusiastically (no pun intended!) by so-called “Lutherans” of his day such as Samuel Simon Schmucker and Benjamin Kurtz. Their spiritual descendants can be found among today’s television evangelists and megachurch preachers who have refined ways of manipulating the emotions and will in order to lead people to the proper response of a heartfelt decision to offer one’s heart to Jesus in prayer. And, unfortunately, one also sees this in many ways within Lutheran—indeed Missouri Synod (perhaps also LCC?)—circles; hence, the temptation can often be found among those in Lutheran circles today to preach and fashion “contemporary” worship services for the purpose of attempting to pull out from the worshipper what they would like to see in him—and that is the way of the Law. Proper preaching, worship, and liturgy is for the purpose of faithfully conveying Word and Sacrament to the hearer (and then stepping out of its way so that it can do its job!), from which will come faith, and the fruits of faith—that is the way of the Gospel.

Secondly, Walther observes in thesis 14 of *Law and Gospel* that the Gospel is not being kept distinct from the Law when faith “is required as a condition of justification and salvation, as if a person were righteous in the sight of God and saved, not only by his faith, but on account of his faith”¹⁷—another variation of the need for a “proper response”. The Lutheran preacher must always be careful about the way that he preaches about “faith”. On the one hand, against the false idea that one is saved by a mere head knowledge of an “inert acceptance of truth” (which the Confessions note even the devil has!), one must vigorously emphasize that “faith” is required. What distinguishes “faith” from such “head knowledge” is that while the latter speaks of and focuses upon something within and about man (what he knows—which puffs up!), the former takes away all boasting by focussing upon something outside of man—for while faith is a trust of the heart, it is a trust which looks outward towards the promises and gifts given, and which confesses a helplessness which must trust the One giving the Promise and the gift. On the other hand, the pastor must avoid appealing to faith as a cause of salvation—that one little thing left for the hearer to muster up his will to do in order to be saved. Faith is a creation of the Gospel, and only receives, and does not make true what it believes, but rather says “amen” to what comes to it as complete and true already. In fact, it may sometimes be necessary, in order for saving faith to be created

¹⁷ WALTHER, 3, 268.

and sustained in a hearer's heart, for a preacher **not** to mention faith at all, but only the gifts upon which faith trusts and which will give such faith life. When preaching about faith, one must always focus upon the gift—the object of faith, and not on the faith itself. Faith is only spoken of (or not spoken of!) in order to keep the focus upon the promise upon which faith believes.

And finally, the Gospel is not kept distinct from the Law when one believes that one must muster within one's self some sufficient level of contrition as a necessary preparation for the work of the Gospel to begin. The belief in such "contritionism" in mediaeval Romanism—that it is being really sorry enough that will move God to forgive (and if not that, then at least "attrition": being at least sorry that you are not as sorry as you ought to be)—was severely condemned by the Lutheran Confessions. Walther, however, notes that even in his own day it "not infrequently happens that preachers who claim to be true Lutherans mingle Law and Gospel by the way they describe contrition—and do so in two ways—by either saying too little or by saying too much about contrition."¹⁸ First, one may say too little by "soft-peddling" the Law—constantly qualifying it in order to protect the hearer from the terrors of contrition (for instance, saying to those who feel sorely contrite over their sins such things as "Don't worry about it", "it's/you're not that bad", "It's okay", "I know you meant well"). Or, one may say too much by requiring a certain earnestness in the contrition—that he cannot be forgiven unless he really, really does feel contrite enough.

Although, of course, without true contrition, there can be no conversion and faith, such contrition does not make the heart more "convertible". Contrition is not like crying, apologizing, feeling bad and remorseful in front of the policeman who has just stopped you for speeding in order to make him feel sorry enough for you that he will not give you the ticket and fine. First of all, your sins are not comparable to speeding, but rather, to first degree murder, and the policemen will not let murderers go no matter how sorry they feel about it. Secondly, such behaviour is a sign of false contrition, since contrition is, by definition, the terrible recognition that one can never do anything to escape the judgment of God and agreeing with him that he is "justified when he judges" (Ps. 51:4). Any so-called earnest contrition which is believed to be able to get one out of one's judgement from God is not really contrition—in fact, it is the sin of a still secure sinner. And finally, as Walther notes,

The contrition which precedes faith is nothing but suffering on the part of man. It consists of anguish, pain, torment, a feeling of being crushed; all of

¹⁸ WALTHER, 250.

which God has wrought in man by the hammer of the Law. It is not an anguish which man has produced in Himself, for he would gladly be rid of it, but cannot, because God has come down on him with the law; and he sees no way to escape from the ordeal. If a person sits down to meditate with a view to producing contrition in Himself, he will never gain his object that way. He cannot produce contrition. Those who think they can are miserable hypocrites.¹⁹

When proclaiming the Law to produce contrition, it is not the task of the Lutheran preacher to wrestle or cajole the hearer into feeling a certain way—making him sufficiently “bad enough” (so that he can then at least feel good about feeling sufficiently bad enough!), or appealing to his will to do something to that end. Rather, he damns even this attempt to “feel contrite” as Pharisaic hypocrisy—and damns everything else about him, by simply clearly preaching the Law to him, and letting this alone produce contrition. Indeed, Walther can even say that one can have true contrition “even if he does not feel it”—in fact, even if he is “unaware of it”—if there is a “desire to come to Jesus”.²⁰ When, for example, a hearer of the Law might say that “he does not feel that the Law condemns him”,—the pastor is not then to try to wrestle him into feeling as bad and condemned as he should—this focuses things entirely too much on murky feelings and subjectivity. Rather, the pastor is simply to say something like, “Your feelings are telling you a damned lie. God says to you in His Law that you **are** condemned. See how sinful you are that your feelings feel and say something to you so contrary to what God says, and you believe them? Repent!”

And furthermore, at the instance that the Law has taken effect to produce contrition, the pastor must **not** go on with more Law in order to try to produce more or deeper contrition, but rather, must go on immediately with the comfort of the Gospel. When there is contrition, the Law’s work is over. Walther mentions that:

When you preach, do not be stingy with the Gospel; bring its consolations to all, even to the greatest sinners. When they are terrified by the wrath of God and hell, they are fully prepared to receive the Gospel. True, this goes against our reason; we think it strange that such knaves are to be comforted immediately; we imagine they ought to be made to suffer much greater agony in their conscience. Fanatics adopt that method in dealing with alarmed sinners; but a genuine Bible theologian resolves to preach the

¹⁹ WALTHER, 250.

²⁰ WALTHER, 251.

Gospel and faith in Jesus Christ to a person whom God has prepared for such preaching by His Law.²¹

As the Lutheran preacher is not to preach generic, but rather specific Law, so also he is not to preach generic, but rather specific Gospel. The Absolution formula which has the pastor speaking “I forgive **you** all your sins” endeavours to do just that—especially in the context of Private Confession and Absolution. Also, extensive use should be made in preaching of all of the many metaphors used by the Scriptures in expressing the Gospel—resurrection from death, adoption to sonship, payment of a debt, finding the lost, etc. And finally, when preaching on texts which speak of what the Law and the Commandments says one is to do, one can use them not only to preach the Law that we do **not** keep them, but also preach the Gospel that Christ in His active obedience **does** keep them perfectly—and does so for us and for our salvation, and that it is being clothed in **this** perfect obedience which we are given in the Gospel!

From the preaching of the Law, in contrition, Peccator is given the death blow, and from the Gospel, there is created and resurrected the New Life, called Justus. We have heard how Peccator responds to the preaching of the Gospel—but how does Justus respond? In a word, he does so with faith! Upon hearing the Gospel, Justus loves and trusts in its Word of promise, and in the One who made the promises, and there also flows forth praise, thanksgiving, bold and confident prayer and the fruits of the Spirit from a free and merry spirit.

Furthermore, Justus always listens only to what the Word of God says about the Gospel, and not to what subjective feelings of the Christian may say about it when he hears it—and it is to this objective word of such Gospel upon which the preacher must always focus everything. When, for example, one who hears a sermon with clear Gospel preached in it responds with something like “I just don’t feel forgiven”, or “It didn’t uplift me”, the preacher should not respond to him with trying to make him feel forgiven or uplifted—this, again, focuses things far too much on the quagmire of subjectivity. Rather, the pastor should say something like, “Your feelings are telling you a damn lie! The Gospel **does** forgive you; the Lord promises that it does. The Gospel **does** uplift you, whether you feel it or not, for it lifts you up out of the slimy pit of sin and death and gives you Life and forgiveness. It’s the truth, believe it, and if your feelings say something different, tell them to shut up!”

But how does Justus respond to the Law—or should the Law even be preached to Justus? There were some in Luther’s time, such as [Johannes]

²¹ WALTHER, 240.

Agricola and the antinomians, who believed that it should not. For them, true repentance is not the result of the Law, but comes only from the sweetness of the Gospel. If, indeed, one is freed from the Law through the Gospel, what place can it have within the life of a Christian if one is to keep the freedom of the Gospel?

First, it must be recognized that wherever there is sin, there will also always necessarily be the Law of God around to condemn it. As Gerhard Forde notes, all antinomianism is “fake theology”, since one cannot remove the Law until one has removed sin and death. Indeed, even if one removes preaching of the Law from the ears of the Christian, it will still be speaking to him from his heart, since, after all, the Law is written there—and it is God speaking! Therefore, attempts to remove the Law will succeed only in relocating it; since everything is either Law or Gospel (and there is no other third category or neutral thing between them) removing the Law will only result in inserting it in the only place left: in the Gospel! Hence, antinomianism results in a legalization of the Gospel, and a confusion of Law and Gospel.

What then is the place of the Law in the life of the Christian? The confessors of the Formula of Concord speak to this matter by means of a number of careful distinctions, each which must be kept in order to prevent one from slipping into either the extremes of legalism or antinomianism. The first of these distinctions is that every Christian is **both** Justus and Peccator, and every part of the Christian is both thoroughly and completely Peccator as well as Justus, without one ever existing by itself free of the other. Therefore, the Christian is entirely a sinner so that everything in him and everything he does is a sin. Conversely, Justus involves the whole Christian together so that he is entirely justified and so that everything he does, though utterly sinful, is accounted righteous for Christ’s sake. Furthermore, Justus and Peccator do not exist in the person of the Christian in a “Nestorian” way, so that a Christian might have Justus act on one occasion and Peccator on another. There is a “perichoresis” between the two, so that in any act of the Christian they remain inseparable until God Himself separates the two at the resurrection (FC Ep 1:10). There is a Chalcedonian distinction to be kept between the two, without confusion, without change, and until the resurrection, without division, without separation. Nevertheless, mindful of such a careful Chalcedonian balance, one must not fall into some anthropological eutychianism where the two are no longer distinguished. Justus and Peccator are two very real realities in the Christian, though absolutely distinct and at odds with each other. Always within each Christian, in fact, “a conflict between the spirit and flesh continues” (FC SD 6:18).

The Formula, therefore, warns against describing the Christian’s growth in the life of sanctification in any way which implies a truce which lessens the conflict between Peccator and Justus. Such an idea would envision

Peccator in some sense to be successfully won over, reformed, or made more favourably disposed toward the Law of God, and therefore to be made, even if ever so slightly, more like Justus. Against such a blurring of the distinction between Justus and Peccator, the Formula states that Peccator can never be reformed in any way, but rather, can only be put to death. The Christian therefore, is spiritually sick when he seeks “wholeness”, “inner harmony”, and peace within him between Peccator and Justus, and his spiritual life is carrying on in the healthy way that it should when he is totally broken apart within in Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde fashion, with his two “selves”, Peccator and Justus, battling it out to the death within him.

Such a distinction, however, between Peccator and Justus, remains an article of faith hidden to philosophical, psychological, or common sense observations of outward human traits. It is therefore impossible to identify any of the Christian’s observable external or internal powers, aptitudes, or good works as only Justus, not also tied up with Peccator. Every “good work” from the Justus which the Christian does he does also with all that is Peccator within him producing counterfeit works exactly identical to those of Justus (indeed, they are both together the very same acts, but those from Peccator having damnably selfish motives.) While one can, by faith, distinguish the works of Justus and Peccator, one cannot do so simply by observing the Christian, for then an observed part of the Christian is put beyond the reach and condemnation of the Law.

This distinction has enormous practical implications for pastoral work and for preaching. First, it humbles one from becoming self-righteous towards non-Christians. Christians are just as evil and are no better than pagan non-Christians. Everything done by the Christian is totally evil, even if it is at the same time forgiven. Secondly, the line between good and evil does not run outside the Christian—between him and the non-Christian—but rather runs through each Christian. Thirdly, this, in turn, teaches the Christian a theology of the cross. Battles only take place at the point where the armies are facing and clashing with each other. Each Christian must expect himself to be the arena and battleground for the stupendous battle between God and Satan and must expect suffering, trials, crosses, and temptation in the heat of such battle. If one wants relief from all of this before his death, he can only do so by apostasy from the Christian faith. And finally, one sees, therefore, why this first distinction is so critical—it is the only thing which can make sense of the fact that Justus does not sin though the Christian does, and the Christian sinner, nevertheless, is free from the Law, though he does not live without it. This paradox leads us to a second distinction.

Proceeding naturally from the distinction between “Christian” and “Justus” is the further distinction between two assertions: “truly believing Christians have been freed and liberated from the curse of the law” and

“they should exercise themselves in the Law of the Lord” (FC SD 6:4). The question follows, of course: how is it possible for a Christian to exercise himself in the Law which always accuses him without himself being under its curse?

The paradox is resolved in the Formula precisely by viewing the second distinction within the framework of the first. As there is within each Christian the distinction between Justus and Peccator, so the Law must not be understood to impact the Christian in one undifferentiated way. Rather, there must be a distinction made between two different ways in which the Law makes an impact upon Justus and Peccator. We may explore further what this distinction is by first pointing out what it is not. Justus and Peccator do not receive different impacts of the Law because the Law is somehow different in each case as if the Law comes to Peccator condemning but to Justus without condemnation, only with instruction. The Law always accuses (*lex semper accusat*), and it is impossible for it to speak without also accusing, cursing, damning everything which is sin. Therefore, the Formula cannot envision the “Third Use of the Law” in such a way that it only instructs without accusing. Since, as noted before, everything which each Christian does is sin, the Law which instructs him what he is to do also always damns him for not doing so. It follows that one cannot say that the Christian is free from the threats of the Law simply because he is a Christian, so that the Law touches him differently (without its threats) from how it would an unbeliever. Indeed, the Formula notes that “for penitent and impenitent, for regenerated and unregenerate, the Law is and always remains one and the same Law, namely the unchangeable will of God” (FC Ep 6:2).

In order to explain the different ways in which the Law touches Peccator and Justus, the Formula refers not to anything about the Law, nor to anything regarding the Christian, but rather to Christ. Justus avoids the fury of the Law’s condemnation not because of something within him less deserving of it than what one finds in Peccator, but because Christ stands in front of him and receives it in his stead. Justus, therefore, is reckoned free from the curse of the Law only because of Christ. However, though free from the Law’s curse, it does not follow that Justus or the Christian is free from the Law altogether. The Formula notes that “our first parents even before the fall didn’t live without the law”—indeed, in a sinless state, they couldn’t be without the Law since it was “written in their hearts when they were created in the image of God” (FC SD 6:2). In this way, Justus lives with the Law and daily exercises himself in it, and does so without the Law’s curse because he does it “with a free and merry spirit” (FC SD 6:17). Therefore, though the Law speaks even to Justus with all of its imperatives, Justus receives such imperatives, because of his free and merry spirit, as indicatives. The Law works towards Justus as does the Law of gravity toward a falling object, or, as “the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven

regularly run their courses according to their order which God instituted for them once and for all, spontaneously and unhindered” (FC SD 6:4). Thus, being freed from the Law’s curse does not free one **from**, but rather **for** its exercise. For the Formula, the second distinction was necessary because Justus is made free of the curse of the Law not in order to do anything it wants to call “good works”—or even none at all—but only precisely and exactly the good works only as the Law defines and describes them, and this freely and without coercion.

Furthermore, this second distinction is necessary to make within the framework of the first because it is only Justus and not also Peccator within each Christian to which the second distinction has something to say. Only Justus can be free from the Law, and therefore, exercise himself in it. Because the Law condemns Peccator mercilessly, he cannot ever be free from it. Everything in Peccator’s existence is basically an anxious and endless fleeing from the light of the Law. With such a heavy pre-occupation with the Law always hovering over him, Peccator cannot be free from it in the way of Justus, whose compliance with the Law flows from him so naturally, freely, and without selfish calculation. Therefore, since the Law recognizes as good only that which is found already in perfect compliance with it, and instantly executes everything falling short of it, Peccator is incapable of following the Law.

This brings us to a third distinction. To be distinguished from the false “good works” of Peccator called “works of the Law” are Justus’ genuine “fruits of the Spirit”. The “works of the Law” are those actions which are coerced from Peccator by “instruction, admonition, urging, and threatening of the Law” and the “club of punishments and miseries” (FC SD 6:24). The Law’s motivations appeal to the Peccator’s innate self-preoccupation over what he may get out of good works, so that the good work itself is entirely self-serving and inward looking. Therefore, the only way that the Law can successfully get an external “good work” done within Peccator is by stirring up his innate self-centredness, sin, idolatry, and unbelief! Everything which Peccator does is thus done out of fear, as a slave to a taskmaster, whom he does not love and trust above all things. Justus, however, does, in fact, love and trust God above all things and the consequences of this are enormous and colour his whole life. First, unlike Peccator, Justus’ whole relationship with God is not bound up by what he owes Him, and what “goodies” he might extract from Him. Peccator treats God in the same way as he treats his neighbour—perhaps respectfully and kind externally, but with selfish motivations internally. What is, indeed, conspicuously absent in Peccator’s dealings with God is any reference to his neighbour at all. This is because good works are not, strictly speaking, for them, but rather, for God, and ultimately, Himself. Peccator can discourse at length about good works without at all thinking about his neighbour. However, such a thing in the framework of Justus’ life is impossible for two reasons. First, God so designs

Justus' relationship with Himself to be one of pure reception. Justus comes to God simply to receive His gifts, secondly, God designs the life of Justus so that all his good works are not focussed upon God or done for His benefit, but solely for the benefit of his neighbour in love. In this way, both God and the Christian become utterly self-sacrificing in the exercise of good works. Indeed, if Peccator treats God just like his neighbour, Justus does exactly the opposite; he treats his neighbour as if he were God, seeing him and serving him a little Christ, or rather serving Christ in him. Justus recognizes that Christ, incarnate in human nature, has hidden Himself in each neighbour, so that he treats him accordingly. Furthermore, he does such good works not with the cold calculation and planning of Peccator, but spontaneously, with a free and merry spirit, as it is according to his nature to do—as with the fruit of a tree. And indeed, Justus, as a creation of the Holy Spirit, does those things that are fruits of the same Spirit.

What constructive role does the preaching of the Law have in building up the life of the Christian? The answer is none whatsoever. For Justus, the Law acts to describe indicatively what he is fully doing already, while for Peccator, the Law can only extract by coercion a hollow external compliance which is not truly good in any way. One, however, might ask whether the Law should force such external obedience from Peccator, and if so, why it should. The confessions do answer the first question in the affirmative, “The Old Adam”, it notes, “**must** be coerced into obedience of Christ” (FC SD 6:24). But for what purpose? The answer might be found by considering Peccator's state before God as a criminal, as it were, sentenced to death for capital crimes (we assume in this example that Peccator lives in America, not Canada!), who while awaiting execution in prison, cannot just be let loose in society to do whatever he pleases, perhaps committing more crimes. The Law itself locks up such a criminal and coerces a compliance to the Law whether he likes it or not. Such “compliance” may even be considered “good behaviour” by which the criminal can earn various rewards **within** the prison cell, just as the “works which belong to the maintenance of outward discipline and which unbelievers and the unconverted are also able and required to perform ... even God will reward ... with temporal blessings in this world” (FC SD 4:8). However, these works cannot acquit him or rescue him from eventual execution.

But secondly, since no neat division between Justus and Peccator can be made of the Christian by his own observation, Justus' fruits of the Spirit cannot be done without also Peccator doing the works of the Law, and one can only know that there is a distinction between them by considering them from the perspective of a proper distinction of Law and Gospel. Seen from the perspective of the Law, everything a Christian does is utterly sinful, and the Law condemns everything he does, and kills everything he his. From the perspective of the Gospel, however, the Christian's sinful life is not held against him, and he is freely forgiven. From such forgiveness, the Christian,

from “a free and merry spirit”, does for Christ’s sake “what no threat of the Law could ever have wrung from him” (FC Ep 6:7); the Christian is, rather, forgiven of the Peccator within him doing these same works as counterfeit sinful “works of the Law”.

The preaching of the Law has a crucial role in the life of the Christian, and therefore in the Lutheran pastor’s preaching to his congregation of believing Christians. “To people who are genuinely believing, truly converted, regenerated, and justified by faith, the preaching of the Law is to be diligently applied” (FC Ep 6:3). The Formula is very clear to point out that this necessity is “on account of their old Adam” (FC Ep 6:4). Because this Old Adam “inheres in people’s intellect, will, and in **all** their powers” (FC Ep 6:4), not merely in some of it, this Law must be preached to the whole of the Christian life. The purpose of such preaching is to prevent the Old Adam from taking the Christian in its “own self-willed way” (FC Ep 6:4). The Old Adam in its “self-decreed and self-chosen acts of serving God” (FC Ep 6:4) always seeks to lead the Christian “to imagine that their works and life are perfectly pure and holy” (FC Ep 6:21). Therefore, the Law must be preached to the Christian in order to reveal to him its true content, and to “light their way” (FC Ep 6:4) through its instruction. Such instruction is the “Third Use of the Law” which gives Christians “a definite rule according to which they should pattern and regulate their life” (FC Ep 6:1). The instruction of this third use seeks to show the ultimate concern for the Law to be to “fear, love, and trust God above all things.” Since this is something which the Christian cannot do perfectly, the same Law which instructs him also always condemns and kills him. “To reprove”, says the Formula, “is the real function of the Law”—and this is not gentle reminder, but is equivalent to the Holy Spirit’s work when “He kills” and “brings down to Sheol” (FC Ep 6:12). Therefore, when the Law instructs the Christian according to its Third Use, it cannot do so without also condemning him. The preaching of the Law instructs the Christian what he is to do, but gives him no power to do it, and so immediately puts into effect the operation of its Second Use against him.

However, though having a necessary role in the Christian’s life, it is crucial to note that the preaching of the Law has for the Christian no eternal role. After the resurrection the Christian “will no longer require the preaching of the Law, nor its threats or punishments, just as he will no longer require the Gospel” (FC Ep 6:24). The Law’s preaching is therefore a “temporary measure” which is directed to the temporary and abnormal situation of the existence of sin corrupting God’s perfect creation. Once the abnormality is removed, then the temporary measure of the Law’s preaching is no longer needed. For this reason, even in the Christian’s present life, where the temporary measure of the Law is absolutely needed, such preaching is still only an “alien work”, which has no ultimate independent purpose. Such preaching is always only for the sake of “more

important purposes”, namely, “in order” for God to do His “proper work” (Ap 12:158) of the Gospel, “to preach grace, to comfort, and to make alive” (FC Ep 6:10). Such Gospel preaching teaches Christians that “even though in this life they are imperfect and impure because of the sin in our flesh,” nevertheless, their “good works ... are pleasing to God”, and their “spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God” (FC Ep 6:22). From such preaching of the Gospel, there is created Justus, who will be *simul* with Peccator for the Christian’s whole life on this earth, and faith, which is sustained by the preached Gospel in which it puts its faith. When the Christian dies, he will finally cease to be *simul justus et peccator*, but rather only *solus justus*, for God will finally separate Peccator and Justus from each other, the former buried away in the tomb from which Christ rose again, and Justus rising and ascending with Christ.

It is the pastor’s high and sacred calling to proclaim—indeed, pronounce—this very future of Peccator in his preaching of the Law, and this blessed reality of Justus—and the Christian—in the preaching of the Gospel. And in the resurrection, with no more Peccator, there will be no longer any reason for the preaching of the Law, for being already perfectly there in His heart, with perfect fear, love, and trust in God which the Law demands, with His will done spontaneously, without coercion, unhindered, perfectly, completely, and with sheer joy, there is no reason to feed the Law any more into the heart through one’s ears. And with nothing more that needs to be forgiven, the preaching of the Gospel has also come to an end, or rather, has reached its fulfilment. The only preaching going on which is left is the chorus of praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength sung to our God in the eternal rejoicing of the saints with one another which will have no end.

Rev. Paul Williams, at the time of this conference, was pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Kitchener, Ontario.

Textual Preaching*

Thomas M. Winger

I TAKE PICTURES. WELL, THAT'S AN UNDERSTATEMENT. My camera with its bag full of equipment is my constant companion. It's so often hanging around my neck or attached to my hip that my wife has come to refer to it as "the other woman". It's no surprise, then, that I often put together slideshows for my family and friends of the pictures I'd most like to share. And often when people wish to say something nice, to express their appreciation and respect, they say, "You must have a really good camera!" Thanks, very much ... I think. Of course it has nothing to do with years of experience and training, study and persistent labour, early to rise and late to bed to get the right light, hours in the darkroom or at the computer processing the images; it's just that I spent more money on a better camera than everyone else.

Now, I don't want to sound snooty. Good equipment does matter to any craftsman. But these comments display the de-humanizing spirit of our times. Everything's about technology. We all want better toys, but such toys don't make us better craftsmen. When's the last time you preached a really great sermon, and Mrs Schmidt commented on the way out of church, "Pastor, you must have a really good Bible!" Of course, the joke is that, whether we use one Bible version or another, whether we have it in some fancy computer programme or sandwiched between two old-fashioned covers, we're all using the same Bible. Now, that gives us a real leg up on the competition. We have the very Word of God, and so it doesn't all depend on us. It doesn't even depend entirely on the sermon. For we must acknowledge from the outset that the sermon exists in a liturgical setting in which three Scripture readings have already been proclaimed, through which God's Spirit has already been at work. In classic Lutheran liturgical thinking, the high point of the Service of the Word is the Gospel reading; the sermon stands subordinate to it, unpacking and applying it, but not lordling over it. And then there are the canticles of the liturgy, which are 99.44% Scripture, rich in Gospel, proclaiming the saving deeds of Christ. And the great hymns of the church extol, elaborate, and apply those Scriptural words within the context of the liturgy of the day and of the church year. The Word is then given visible form and substance in the sacraments, which work effectively despite our failings. So, it doesn't all

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depend on us. We can have a bad week, our homiletical engine can be firing on just one cylinder, but the rest of the liturgy keeps the Gospel moving.

Now, this isn't meant to excuse bad preaching, merely to highlight the church's defence against it. No, the point towards which I'm heading is that bad preaching still happens even when everything else is going right—and so we hope that everything else does go right. We thank God that the Gospel is preserved in our Western rite of the liturgy and in the church's great hymns, which we strive to preserve for the sake of the Word of God they proclaim. But we also strive for good preaching. For, though we're all working with the same Bible, we need to work on the skills and the craft of preaching it. Granted, the Bible is more than just a high quality tool; it is the living and active Word of God. But preaching is only the living and active Word of God insofar as it is faithful and true to the inscripturated Word, only insofar as the text determines, directs, and enlivens the sermon, rather than serving as a mere launching pad for the opinions of men.

It may sound strange to begin with a defence of textual preaching; it should be, as the Germans say, *selbstverständlich*, it should “go without saying”. But the reality is that preaching, even in our own tradition, has not always been textual. This is true at the formal level: Richard Caemmerer's basic text, *Preaching for the Church*,¹ distinguishes between textual sermons and topical sermons, though even the latter are supposed to be broadly biblical. This distinction recalls earlier times when topical sermons were far more common than they are today. But we must recognize even today, when every sermon begins with the announcement of its text, that the preacher's common habit of closing the Bible and setting it aside before beginning his sermon is deeply ironic.

So if we are agreed that biblical, textual preaching is a good thing, the first question must surely be, “Which text?” When surveys of worship habits in the LCMS were conducted in preparation for the new hymnal project, an astonishing fact appeared: despite the liturgical deep divide between pastors that have adopted the principles of the Church Growth Movement and those who remain faithful to orthodox Lutheran practice, upwards of 90% of pastors and congregations reported that they consistently used the one- or three-year lectionary! Now, we cannot necessarily assume that those who read from the lectionary also preach on it. In bygone days when a one-year lectionary was the norm, it was unusual for pastors to preach exclusively on its texts, as many preached topically or used other preaching series. But today's norm is that we preach on one of the assigned texts, which can only be a good thing. Now, some have insisted that the pastor must always preach on the Gospel lesson, and this reflects good historic precedent, for in

¹ RICHARD CAEMMERER, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959).

our Western and Lutheran liturgical tradition the sermon in the Divine Service on Sundays and festivals was almost always based on the Gospel of the day. Furthermore, it makes good sense in that the Gospel usually sets the theme of the day, particularly in the festival half of the church year. And we Lutherans do place a theological priority on the very words and deeds of Jesus during His earthly ministry. But there is an anachronism in enforcing such a rule too vigorously. For in the days when Luther preached on the Gospel in the chief service, he probably went on to preach on the epistle text in the afternoon Vespers service. And he most certainly preached on the OT and other biblical texts read on a continuous basis at Matins services throughout the week. In our context, where parishioners rarely attend services more than once a week (if that), it would be unwise to restrict preaching to the Gospel readings only.

With the nearly universal move into a new hymnal, we have all recently adopted a new edition of our lectionary. Without going into the debate between the three-year and one-year versions, it is worth stressing the goals of using a lectionary in the first place: that through the lectionary we are presented on an annual basis with the entire life and work of Christ, the full Gospel; that through three readings we are given the so-called “full counsel of God” so that we neither ignore the Old Testament nor the difficult portions of the New; and that the lectionary protects the congregation from the pastor’s own human limitations, so that they hear everything God wishes them to hear, not just the pastor’s favourite stories.

So I hope we’re in agreement, firstly, that textual preaching is a good idea; and secondly, that the lectionary is a good way to organize it. But it’s also worth considering the evidence for the opposition. Firstly, it’s inaccurate to speak of “**the** lectionary” (whether one- or three-year) as if it is unchanged or unchangeable. Even through the Middle Ages the lectionary varied considerably from place to place in the Western Church. Though it broadly follows the life of Christ, in its details the lectionary is man-made and fallible. In his proposed reform of the Latin mass, the *Formula Missae* (1523), Luther committed himself to the lectionary, but commented nonetheless on the need for reform:

Certainly the time has not yet come to attempt revision here, as nothing unevangelical is read, except that those parts from the Epistles of Paul in which faith is taught are read only rarely, while the exhortations to morality are most frequently read. The Epistles seem to have been chosen by a singularly unlearned and superstitious advocate of works. But for the service those sections in which faith in Christ is taught should have been given preference. The latter were certainly considered more often in the Gospels by whoever it was who chose these lessons. In the meantime, the sermon in the vernacular will have to supply what is lacking. (AE 53:23-24)

So here we see the opposite point: that sometimes preaching is called upon to protect us from a bad lectionary. Luther alludes to the fact that the balance of Scripture had been skewed in favour of works righteousness by the choice of Epistle lessons. In the 16th century this was usually remedied in Lutheran revisions of the lectionary by the inclusion of more core texts on justification by faith from Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. In the 20th century we again adopted a lectionary that was in its origins Roman Catholic. The Law often dominates the Gospel in the three-year lectionary, despite attempts by Lutheran committees to revise it. In fact, in the *LSB* lectionary committee's work on the Revised Common Lectionary, they specifically noted a series of key Epistle texts that were no longer found in the RCL, and needed to be restored for Lutheran use.

We could spend more time on lectionary issues, but perhaps two final comments will suffice. Firstly, pay close attention to the pericopal divisions. The original framers of the three-year lectionary were higher critics. Often they cut readings short based on theories about what Jesus did or didn't originally say. The *LSB* editors have mostly restored these pericopes to their full form, but don't be afraid to lengthen a Gospel reading when it appears that key verses have been omitted. Secondly, the RCL in its political correctness towards Jews has steadily moved away from the classic Christian idea that the OT prophesies the New. It prefers to "read the OT on its own merits". Thus, many of the OT typological readings that we were accustomed to connecting with the Gospel of the day have disappeared in the RCL. Now, the *LSB* editors have done a pretty good job of restoring them. But ultimately it's down to the preacher to make sure these inner biblical connections are made. Though we receive the lectionary from the greater church, the pastor's calling to preside over the liturgy may sometimes lead him to make subtle modifications for the sake of the Gospel.

Textual preaching may also be a bad idea when it unduly restricts the preaching of God's whole counsel. In the context of the historic Western rite, the readings are followed by the Nicene Creed, which flows out of Scripture and norms the interpretation of Scripture in the sermon. Preaching which fails to read the text through the lens of the Creed is not truly biblical in the broad sense. So, to use an extreme example, if the text includes Matthew 24:36, "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only", the Creed would forbid us to preach an Arian interpretation of Jesus' inferiority to God. And in its liturgical context, the sermon also leads towards the Sacrament of the Altar. Textual preaching, too narrowly understood, can diminish this function of the sermon if the preacher finds no sacramental references in his text. On the one hand, he may just have to try harder, as we are so often blinded by the non-sacramental exegesis of the Reformed commentaries on our shelves. But we may also need to move beyond that specific text to the full Christian message that our hearers need. For the hearers must not be left

out of the equation. Textual preaching can be too narrowly expository, failing to move beyond the world of the text and apply it to the people. It may even happen on occasion that the preacher chooses to depart from the lectionary altogether because of a specific crisis that needs to be addressed. And finally, textual preaching can be dangerous if a narrow reading of the text fails to proclaim Jesus Christ and the Gospel message of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Him, which is always the goal of Christian preaching. This may happen because the narrow confines of the specific pericope are dominated by the Law. But that's not a good enough excuse. If you can't find the Gospel of Christ in the text, try harder.

These dangers inherent in textual preaching we willingly embrace in order to remain the church of *sola Scriptura*. We trust that God will accomplish what He wants to accomplish through His Word alone. So, very often the dangers we perceive are not inherent in textual preaching *per se*, but in our failure to be adequately textual. I have to admit that the process of writing a sermon has terrified me ever since I was a child wondering if I should be pastor like my dad. I stare at a text and wonder what I can say to entice the hearer to listen to me; I struggle to think of an interesting way to present its message. But for me it has been an infallible rule that if I can't come up with a sermon idea, I must go back to the text again and do some more exegesis.

I don't mean to repeat here the exegetical method that you all learnt so well in seminary! But perhaps we've become a tad jaded, or dare I say, lazy. Perhaps we think we already know the meaning of these well-known texts, and just need that cute story to make people listen. If so, we've lost the appropriate awe that we should feel before the holy Word of God. Shouldn't we be shocked to discover that our listeners remember all the stories we tell, but can't begin to connect them to the meaning of the text? So textual preaching is just that: textual. It begins with basic questions of context. Who wrote this book? When, where, and why? We may not always know, but if we do know, then surely it must matter. Virtually the entire epistle to Philemon appeared on Proper 18 back in September. In order to preach this text it is necessary to know why Paul was in prison; it helps to fit it into the chronology of Acts so that you can figure out his relationship to the Christians at Colossae. It's worthwhile pursuing various reconstructions of who's who: Onesimus is the runaway slave, but is Philemon his owner or his pastor? And it's useful to know something about slavery in the Graeco-Roman world. What might result is a Gospel-centred sermon that sees Paul as an image of Christ, who, though suffering in prison, pleads with the master for the release of a slave, just as Christ intercedes with the Father on our behalf.

In a longer book the question of context includes the placement of this particular pericope within the book itself. Here we might take a cue from Luther's introductions to the New Testament in which he discusses the

order of Romans. Can you properly preach a pericope from Romans without knowing where Paul is heading at the time? Chapters one through three expose the failure of both Jew and Greek to live up to the righteousness of God's Law. Chapter four shows that even in the OT true righteousness before God was received through faith, not works, and chapter five locates the power in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Chapter six applies that righteousness to the individual through Holy Baptism. How then should we read chapter seven? Most modern commentators interpret Paul's words about his struggle with sin ("for I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" [7:19]) as a flashback to his life as a Pharisee before conversion to Christ. This is because they cannot conceive of a Christian who is still so troubled by sin. But in the context of the flow of Romans, this is a highly unnatural reading. Chapter seven follows chapter six; Paul speaks of the baptized Christian here, describing a struggle with sin that is common to us all. What a disservice we would do to our congregation if we suggested that they should experience no conflict in their desire to obey God's Law!

After surveying the lie of the land from the eagle's perspective, the exegete swoops down low to scrutinize the details. But, unfortunately, the details sometimes give up their treasures only after long, hard work. The challenge is to slow down the scrutiny of the text until the meaning emerges.² Although we were all required to learn Greek and Hebrew, I'm sensitive to the fact that very few of us will ever reach such a level of competency that we can challenge the experts. But, as I now teach New Testament courses on a weekly basis, I'm convinced that the value of working with the text in its original language is simply this: it forces us to slow down and scrutinize everything. English is too easy (well, for most of us). We read the text in the NIV or the ESV and we think we understand it. But no one breezes through the Greek or Hebrew and draws the same conclusion. In the slow and painful process of translation we're forced to examine every sentence, clause, phrase, and word. Dispel your memory work from your mind and ask yourself how you might understand these words if you'd never heard them before. Which verb is modified by this particular phrase, the one before or the one afterwards? What, for example, does the phrase "in love" explain in Eph. 1:4-5? Did God "predestine us in love for sonship through Jesus Christ" or did He choose us "to be holy and blameless before Him in love"? The placement of the phrase significantly changes the meaning of these verses. The former translation emphasizes that the **cause** of our predestination is purely the love of God—a Gospel thought;

² CAEMMERER, 82.

the latter suggests that the **goal** of our salvation is to carry out holy acts of love—a Law thought. Two vastly different sermons would therefore arise.

Once the exegete dives down for an even closer look, he will want to pounce on individual words. Now, no preacher can devote exhaustive care and attention to every word in a text. But it's worthwhile choosing just one word in each verse for a closer look. What might be hiding behind that particular blade of grass? In a particularly hurried week it might be just one word in the whole pericope that catches your attention, but you get my point. To continue our reading of Ephesians one, it might be the word "sonship" that's worth a closer look. It's a politically incorrect word, and we might be tempted to substitute, "He destined us to be His children through Jesus Christ".³ But move more slowly. In Greek it's υιοθεσία, from υιός "son" and τίθημι "to appoint". So it's not just "being a son" but "being designated a son". In the context of the ancient world this evokes the custom of adoption. A Graeco-Roman man of means may have fathered many children, some legitimate, some illegitimate. He cannot risk his power and wealth being diluted among so many heirs. So it was common under law to choose one young man to be the heir—even if he was not biologically his son. The heir was adopted under law for the purpose of receiving the inheritance. And it had to be a son, because women couldn't inherit in most ancient societies. All this is evoked by the word Paul chooses to use here: we are adopted to be God's sons, i.e. the ones to receive the inheritance of eternal life that Paul describes later in the pericope (v. 14). And this interpretation can be enriched by tracing the word through the New Testament, for in the famous Sarah/Hagar allegory of Galatians three and four, Paul concludes, "if a son, then an heir" (Gal. 4:7). And then we learn that this adoption comes through a rite of **rebirth** in Holy Baptism, by which we are clothed with **the Son**, Jesus Christ. So to be "sons" is to be one with Christ. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

So a whole Gospel-filled sermon can be found in the word study, achieved by the use of a good, reliable lexicon like Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich (which has significant Lutheran influence), and by the careful sleuthing available through a concordance or marginal cross-references. And it's here that I make my pitch for using the Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek NT, even if your Greek is a little rusty. For cross-references are the means by which Scripture interprets Scripture, but they're not all created equal. Remember Luther's debate with Zwingli? Next to the Words of Institution for the Lord's Supper, Zwingli might write a cross reference to

³ Interestingly, though the Vulgate had "sons", the KJV and Luther translate "children", while most modern translations have "sons". An unfortunate departure from this trend is the ESV, which removes the word "sons" from its RSV forerunner.

John 6:63, “the flesh is of no avail”—which leads to denial of the Real Presence. Can you rely on the marginal references in a Bible produced by his theological heirs? The quasi-inspired cross reference system of the Nestle text, by contrast, rarely leads you astray, and often bring you extraordinary insights—such as the reference to Isaiah 59:17 in the margin of Ephesians 6:14, suggesting that the armour Paul describes is not just given by God but is first and foremost the armour that God Himself wears in fighting the battle for us. To put on the armour of God, then, is to be wrapped in the protection of a proven champion, to be given His victory as a gift.

It’s only after he’s done this basic spadework that the careful exegete will turn to a diversity of English Bible versions and commentaries. For if he turns this order around, no mortal can resist their power of suggestion. If we begin with the versions and the commentaries, we tend to read the text exactly as they did; they exclude the process of exploration that leads to our own understanding of the text. What’s wrong with that? Well, if we had good Lutheran commentaries and versions, it might not be so bad. But if you take the time to compare the NIV with the NKJV, the NRSV, the ESV, and the NASB, what will you have accomplished? They all arise out of the same basic American Protestant theological culture, and their repetition of essentially similar interpretations will numb the reader to any genuinely Lutheran alternative. And I mean “interpretation”, because every Bible translation is an interpretation. There is no truly neutral translation of many texts. So these comments apply also to the commentaries. What’s the difference between the NICNT and the NIGTC? Both come from the same conservative Reformed circle of exegesis. So, on the one hand, this is a plug for the Concordia Commentary series; but it’s also a warning to think for yourself, and to use the commentary mainly as a resource for linguistic and historical data about the text.

For the goal of exegesis should not be simply to find the “one meaning” of a pericope. If so, we would probably always produce the same sermon (with minor variations for the audience) each time a text pops up in the lectionary; and we would all preach the same sermon as the brother down the road. But this flattens and fills in the undulating beauty of the scriptural landscape. Exegesis isn’t an mechanical act of mining the single hidden gem out of each text. It is rather a journey of exploration by which we navigate some old familiar pathways, but find something new each time, turning this way and that down laneways we didn’t have time to explore last time. When you read a text, do you find questions or just look for answers? Of course, I don’t mean the sceptical questions of the higher critic which arise from unbelief. I mean that the text always has more to offer than you’re looking for, so you need to be open to finding something unexpected. Are you open to a discovery that isn’t in the commentaries, that Luther didn’t say, that you didn’t get last time you preached on it? Are you willing to put yourself in the place of the unsophisticated layman who sometimes asks

stupid questions, but wants to know anyway? What is there in the text that shocks you? Play devil's advocate. Take nothing for granted. And don't be afraid to ask those questions in your sermon, even while driving towards an answer all the while. A compliment I most treasure came from a layman who said, mischievously, "Your mind works like mine; I like that." He found sympathy in the way I had preached that day.

So exegesis is intended to lead to preaching, and it remains to consider how that step is made. We're all familiar with the famous method of "goal, malady, and means" as formulated by Richard Caemmerer. But it's a method with which I've become increasingly uncomfortable, particularly from an exegetical perspective. For seems to me, firstly, that Caemmerer's method is essentially topical, even when it's ostensibly textual. The goal, not the text, drives the sermon. Now, the goal is supposed to come from the text, but very often that's the last point of contact between the two. Even Caemmerer admits this. He writes:

A preaching text serves its purpose if it provides at least one of the three primary components of preaching: the goal for the hearer, the diagnosis of the hearer's malady, a statement of God's redeeming grace, which empowers the hearer toward the goal. Where a text supplies only one of these components, the others can be developed by inference from other statements of Scripture. If a text can supply two or even three of these factors simultaneously, it will be especially useful for suggesting and defining the message.⁴

These words trouble me. You see, he admits that most of the time only one of the three major components of his sermonic method is drawn from the text. Let's assume the goal is drawn from the text. The malady is then whatever stands in opposition to the goal—not necessarily the Law that the text itself proclaims. Likewise the means towards the goal is derived from the preacher's own creativity, rather than from the text. If we wish to use this method and preach textually, wouldn't it be better to seek all three from the text, even if they don't fit neatly together?

But the deeper question is whether "goal-oriented preaching" is really preaching in the biblical sense. It's been a long time since I read Caemmerer as a student, so I re-read a bit in preparation for this occasion. And I was surprised (to say the least) at what seems to me a distortion of the preaching task. Firstly, Caemmerer promotes far too broad a divide between so-called evangelistic preaching and preaching to the Christian congregation. His goal-oriented approach leads him to believe that these are fundamentally different occasions, in that the former is aimed towards the creation of faith

⁴ CAEMMERER, 68.

in the forgiveness of sins through Christ, while the latter apparently isn't. This is a troubling thought, which does not arise from a Lutheran anthropology of *simul justus et peccator* nor from a Lutheran view of the Divine Service and the means of grace. In other words, Caemmerer's statements presume that the Christian is no longer in need of preaching that would lead him to repentance and faith in Christ. Now, you may object that Caemmerer clearly divides preaching between faith goals and life goals. Yet when I look at what he means by faith goals, it seems to me that it's just a variation on life goals. That is to say, he's talking about increasing the Christian's trust in the work of Christ and the providence of God; he speaks of faith as a measurable thing which preaching aims to increase quantitatively. He focuses on faith as a quality in man that is in need of strengthening and enlarging towards greater action. We heard this a moment ago: that preaching is to empower the hearer towards the goal (p. 68, above). This is synergistic language, at least superficially. It works against the biblical idea that preaching is a divine activity, that the power unto salvation lies in the Gospel (not in the hearer), that preaching accomplishes something in the believer, rather than empowering him to do something himself.

And this brings us to the "life goals". Caemmerer defines five: the goals of life, church, family, hope, and prayer. But these are just examples that should suggest other life goals you might find in the text. Now, I've always been uncomfortable with the idea that sermons could be directed **either** to faith goals **or** to life goals, for life goals are only achievable through the increase of faith. The preacher who wishes to change behaviour must always be aware that the power for this change lies only in the Gospel. The Law convicts us of failure, describes and commands true obedience, but has no power to get us there. But Caemmerer's description of the relationship between faith and life goals is ... a little different:

This writer feels that goals of faith are important in preaching, just as the autoist [driver] will check his fuel line or carburetion even when he is not setting out at once on a journey. Preaching to the goal of faith is prophylaxis, repair, and safeguard for maintaining the right relationship with God which the Christian needs for his whole existence. ... Yet it is altogether true that the ultimate purpose of the atonement is action; "faith ... worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6).⁵

Here the relationship of faith to works has been entirely set on its head. Caemmerer reveals his view that the ultimate goal of preaching (indeed of the atonement itself) is to change behaviour—and with his quotation of

⁵ CAEMMERER, 185.

Galatians 5:6 he aligns himself clearly with the mediaeval teaching of *fides formata* “faith formed by works of love” in opposition to Luther’s teaching of *sola fide* “by faith alone”.

My objection arises not just out of Reformation theology, but, at a more basic level, from the biblical view of Christian proclamation. The most recently published issue of *Lutheran Theological Review* contains an essay by my former colleague, Reg Quirk, Preceptor of Westfield House, who puts this argument far more eloquently than I could. He argues that goal-oriented preaching is not biblical because it defines the essence of preaching in terms of the Law. By contrast, the NT consistently couples the verbs for preaching with the message of the Gospel:

Sometimes in the New Testament, the verb “to preach” is used intransitively, especially in the Synoptic Gospels to describe the activity of Jesus or His apostles in a particular place. Mostly, though, it is used transitively, and overwhelmingly the object is the same thing. In 44 of the 78 examples in the English New Testament (in the RSV version), what is preached is the Gospel or the Good News, either as the object of κηρύσσω, or because it is contained in the choice of the verb εὐαγγελίζομαι. Of the others sixteen are references to preaching Christ, six to preaching the Word, four to preaching the Kingdom of God, four to preaching Baptism, one to preaching the forgiveness of sins, one to preaching peace, one to preaching the faith, and one to preaching circumcision, or more precisely to **not** preaching circumcision.⁶

Now, please don’t misunderstand. I’m not suggesting that preachers should proclaim only the Gospel and not the Law. But Law proclamation is intended to lead to the Gospel and not the other way round (“repentance towards the forgiveness of sins should be preached” [Lk. 24:47]). Repentance, as John Stephenson recently illustrated in our seminary chapel, is the ground in which faith is planted, germinates, and grows. It is the absolutely necessary environment for faith to exist. It requires the gardener’s toil and intimate attention as he tills and enriches it. But no gardener can ultimately look with pride upon a bare patch of ground; it is the living flower that he seeks. Goal-oriented preaching, then, turns the garden on its head, and views the plant of faith merely as the means to further enrich the soil as it is grown up merely for the purpose of composting back into the soil. That is to say, the Gospel becomes just a means to an end: empowering the individual to achieve his life goals.

⁶ REGINALD C. QUIRK, “Justification and Preaching”, *Lutheran Theological Review* 18 (Academic Year 2005-06): 55.

Preceptor Quirk perceptively notes that the Gospel is not only diminished in significance by this scheme; it is also flattened into a one-dimensional tool that is wielded by the preacher in clichéd and repetitive phrases. For if the goal is derived from the text, and the malady is what hinders reaching the goal, the Gospel is trotted out as the universal answer to the dilemma. Week in and week out, no matter what the text, the answer is always, “but God forgives you ... and His forgiveness enables you to do what you would otherwise be unable to do”. Is this all there is to the Gospel? Does not the forgiveness of sins lead to “life and salvation”, as the Small Catechism puts it? And here we must be careful to distinguish life as a gift from life as an experience under the Law. In Greek the classic distinction is between ζωή and βίος.⁷ The former, ζωή, is the sustenance of one’s body, the opposite of death, and from a Christian perspective also the transcendent gift of God’s own life in Christ. It is therefore entirely Gospel, the gift of an eternal sustenance that allows us to live with God for ever, and to experience His intimate fellowship already now. By contrast, βίος includes one’s “life story” and “way of life”. It focuses on what we do, how we do it, and its moral quality. Thus it is a matter of the Law, not the Gospel. While the Christian preacher may be concerned with βίος as he rebukes a sinful way of life and describes God’s standard of pleasing works, the Christian preaching of the Gospel will be concerned to deliver ζωή. To this St Peter refers in the now well-known words of our liturgy: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (Jn 6:68-69). This confession repeats Jesus’ own prior promise, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63). The Christian preacher is charged to continue this proclamation, as the angel said to the apostles after releasing them from prison: “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life” (Acts 5:20). To preach is to deliver this life—not to preach about it, but to preach it.

Now, “life” is just one example of the many facets of the Gospel that are not in any way disconnected from the forgiveness of sins but are rich expositions of its consequences. So also we could speak of new birth, regeneration, renewal, giftedness, nourishment, sustenance, strengthening, union with God, and the blessed vision of things eternal. If your evangelical imagination needs a boost, try Francis Rossow’s *Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively*,⁸ or Jack Preus’s *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel*.⁹

⁷ On which see JONATHAN F. GROTHE, *The Justification of the Ungodly: an Interpretation of Romans*, 2 vols (Canada, 2005): 307-10.

⁸ St. Louis: Concordia, 1983.

Preus identifies fully 23 different “metaphors” of the Gospel—which are more than metaphors, of course—including light, bread, water, ransom, redemption, adoption, inheritance, reconciliation, peace, cleansing, liberation, and victory. This is the stuff of which the New Testament is made. The Christian sermon grows from these rich nutrients in its text. Exegesis for preaching is a process of exploration and mining, seeking after this multi-faceted Gospel. In other words, **the preacher who seeks the central thought of his text is always looking for its central point of Gospel.** So then, there should be no sermons with life goals. Change of life (and here I’m talking about βίος) is indeed a **consequence** of good Gospel preaching, for the Gospel will have its fruits. But the **goal** of a sermon is always to proclaim Christ, to deliver His goods, to forgive, enliven, sustain, and bestow God’s gifts upon His children.

This means, then, that no sermon preparation is complete if it derives only a life goal or malady from the text. Exegesis for preaching must find that central Gospel thought (not as a means to another end, but the thing itself to be delivered). This can be hard work, and it is often counter-intuitive—if our intuition has been moulded by the *opinio legis*. Sometimes “scientific exegesis” or “context” can be a smokescreen for this natural pre-occupation with the Law. Caemmerer, for example, argues for a distinction between preaching that proceeds from a “natural” or “direct” reading of the text, and preaching that works “indirectly”. He favours the former, of course, which sounds sensible. But listen to where it gets him when he looks at Matt. 20:28 “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”:

To use a text for the goal for which it was originally written or spoken has been termed the direct method of using a text, and every textual preacher should seek to make this method standard. To utilize an idea in a text toward a goal for which the text was not originally written is then termed the indirect method. ... When Matt. 20:28 cues a sermon on Jesus as Ransom for the sins of the world, the method is indirect. When the text is used by the direct method, it suggests, in its context, the goal “The Christian is great as he serves.”¹⁰

In other words, the Christian preacher misuses this pivotal NT text if he proclaims it as Gospel; the real point of Jesus’ words is that we ought to strive to imitate Him in humble service.

⁹ St. Louis: Concordia, 2000.

¹⁰ CAEMMERER, 69-70.

It takes hard work and deep commitment to the centrality of the Gospel in preaching to overcome these instincts. But mostly it involves the development of new habits. This comes from watching other people do the job. In the aforementioned article, Reg Quirk tries his hand at a few texts, beginning with the familiar Thanksgiving Day Gospel reading of the healing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19). He illustrates first the traditional life-goal approach:

One cannot fail to be impressed by the contrast that is drawn between the thoughtless, self-absorbed ingratitude of the nine, and the exemplary humble thankfulness of that lone Samaritan. Were not ten cleansed, where are the nine? Need one look further for malady or goal? Application is simple: do our own lives even achieve 10% gratitude? For every ten blessings we receive, do we remember to return thanks for even one? The Gospel is equally self-evident to us: Christ has died for this sin, and in Him we find forgiveness. The conclusion, then, is that we are enabled to live a life of gratitude in Him.¹¹

But what happens if we look instead for the Gospel in this text?

The chief element of Gospel in the healing of the ten lepers is the unconditional love of God, even towards the ungrateful. Were not ten healed? St Paul expressed this by explaining how God showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). And this is a comforting dimension of the Gospel indeed. There is Law to be preached here, but actually the admonition of the Law is not related to the sin of ingratitude, but the dangerous belief that we in any way earn the love and the healing of God.¹²

In this way, a Gospel reading of the text has saved us from a simple moralistic message that our people can as easily hear on the television at Thanksgiving time.

A few more texts from Luke come to mind, as the three-year lectionary has so recently presented them to us. A simple parallel to the ten lepers is the story of the persistent widow from Luke 18:1-8. The parable is introduced as follows: "And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart" (v. 1). And the judge himself says that he'll grant the woman's request because she keeps pestering him. So we've heard many a sermon emphasizing the persistence of the widow, suggesting that if we keep praying for something, eventually God will give it to us. Sounds like a life goal. But there is another side to this. For, firstly,

¹¹ QUIRK, 58.

¹² QUIRK, 59.

Jesus doesn't say that our prayers are heard because of our persistence; He merely indicates that the parable will give us a good reason to pray. Secondly, Jesus contrasts the unrighteous judge with the righteousness of our heavenly Father. It's what Rabbi Hillel would have called *qal wāḥōmer* an argument "from the lesser to the greater". If an unrighteous judge will answer an annoying old woman just because he wants his sleep, how much more will the righteous God fulfil His promises to you, His children? Thus, the Gospel point is located in Jesus' words, "will not God vindicate His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them? I tell you, He will vindicate them speedily" (vv. 7-8). The emphasis is on God's promise to hear and save us. So it's not the parable of the persistent widow but of our gracious God.

One of the most difficult texts in the Bible, from any perspective, is the parable of the dishonest steward (Lk. 16:1-9). That title derives from the traditional interpretation of the story, by which the man is portrayed as abusing his master's trust by reducing the debts. This act is plainly dishonest, particularly as it's designed to curry favour with them after he loses his job. So how can Jesus commend this man, a law-breaker, as model for Christians? The usual explanation, which flows from the theory that parables have only one point of comparison, is that Jesus is commending the man's shrewdness (v. 8), not his dishonest actions. Sounds good. But then Jesus goes on to say, "make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon" (v. 9), and discusses the disciples' attitude to money. So myriad sermons have directed the hearer to be shrewd in his dealings with people of this world, to focus his attention on the goal of eternal life rather than earthly wealth, etc.—all of which are statements of the Law.

To find the Gospel in this text is difficult but hardly impossible. Kenneth Bailey in his book *Poet and Peasant*,¹³ highlights the steward's brazen confidence in his master. For he firmly believes that his master will not overturn the changes he has made to the accounts. Through his actions he throws himself upon his master's mercy, confident that his trust is not misplaced. The Gospel point comes then in the beginning of v. 8, in which Bailey sees ὁ κύριος as a reference to the steward's master (not directly to Jesus). That is, the master commends the steward for his shrewdness—or better put, the master forgives him because of his faith.

An even more brazenly Gospel-oriented reading arises from the work of Duncan Derrett, an expert in oriental law, who treats it in his *Law in the New Testament*.¹⁴ Derrett argues that the steward is not himself "dishonest/"

¹³ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

¹⁴ London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970.

unrighteous”, but that he is a “steward of unrighteous things”. Jews, you may recall, were forbidden to charge each other interest. It’s not the steward who’s breaking the law, but the master. The steward, realizing his days of comfortable employment are numbered, sits down with each debtor and reduces the bill by precisely the amount of illegal interest that would have been expected in each case. By doing so, the steward satisfies the law. Like Bailey, Derrett argues that the steward is confident his master will not contradict what he has done. The reasons are twofold: (1) as the master’s steward, he carries the master’s full authority in the matter; and (2) the master will see that his reputation in the community will be enhanced, for the debtors will believe that the master approves the forgiveness of their debt. Now, Derrett himself takes the interpretation no further. But it’s easy to see how the parable can be given a Gospel twist. For the steward appears as a type of Christ, who cancels our debts and reconciles us with our heavenly master. And our heavenly Father looks favourably on the work Christ has done, and graciously accepts His work as payment for our debts.

Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus’ description of the events on the day the Son of Man returns, has traditionally been read in the last weeks of the church year and now finds its place fixed on the Last Sunday in LSB’s series A. Its description of Judgement Day has been challenging, to say the least, to the Lutheran confession of justification by faith alone. For when the King invites the righteous into heaven, He cites as a causative factor their actions in feeding, clothing, and visiting the poor. This text was hugely influential in mediaeval theology. Charity to the poor was consequently the top-rated good work. If you want to guarantee a place in heaven, give alms, either in life or in your last will and testament. Even today, as Mother Theresa is beatified for her work among the poor, this text is proclaimed as the fundamental dominical mandate for all diaconal work. In our theological embarrassment, we Lutherans have lamely attempted to interpret it as saying that Jesus highlights these good works merely as evidence of faith. This leads to life-goal sermons that seek to make our hearers more confident of their salvation by exhorting them to good works. But this is scant improvement on the Middle Ages. Where is the Gospel?

Firstly, many a preacher has noted that Jesus divides the sheep and the goats **before** He says anything about their works. Secondly, Jesus calls the sheep at His right hand those “blessed by My Father”, and He invites them to “inherit the kingdom prepared for you”. These are words of purest Gospel that precede any reference to their works. But thirdly, a little exegetical sleuthing uncovers the fact that our English versions have mistranslated the phrase ἐν τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων. It isn’t “one of the least of these My brothers”, as if Jesus is speaking of care given to any old poor person, or even any old poor Christian. It should be translated, “one of these least brothers”. The demonstrative phrase “these least brothers” suggests that Jesus was pointing at a particular group of

disciples standing to His right. A brief romp through Matthew's Gospel suggests that "these least brothers" are the apostles, whom Christ has exhorted to strive not for greatness but for meekness. Sending them out on a preaching mission, Jesus pronounced, "*whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is My disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward*" (Mt. 10:41). The reward was the Gospel they were preaching, and to give them a cup of water was to receive their message with thanksgiving, caring for the messenger as for the Lord Himself, whom they represented. Thus, the Gospel in Matthew 25 is that Christ has indeed visited people ... through the office of the ministry, and that those who listen to such preachers have listened to Christ Himself. Blessed by this great gift, they will be invited into the Father's kingdom.

Let's try an epistle text. A text that readily springs to mind is the great *Carmen Christi*, the hymn of Philippians 2:5-11. The stage is for a life-goal sermon seems to be set by the run-in from verse 3, which I quote in the NIV:

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

It seems then that Paul is concerned to correct a certain self-absorption in the Philippian congregation by directing them to look at the example of Jesus. Was Jesus concerned only with His own needs? No. Rather, He set aside the prerogatives of His divinity, took on human flesh, humbled Himself in taking on the form of a slave, suffered and died like a criminal upon the cross. The Christian ought to take this as a model and behave with similar humility and self-sacrifice. It's the original WWJD. In his famously exhaustive study of the text, Ralph Martin¹⁵ called this the "ethical interpretation" of the text.

Now, inasmuch as Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law of God as a new and better Adam, there is some truth in looking at Him as a model of Christian behaviour. But this, firstly, is always in the sphere of the Law and takes us no farther than that. And secondly, if it is applied rigorously to this text, we get a rather peculiar model: for is it the Christian's obligation to imitate Jesus in setting aside His divine rights, in taking on the form of a slave, in

¹⁵ *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 In Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983; first published in 1967).

suffering and dying for all men, and then being exalted to the right hand of God to be worshipped by all creation? “Go, thou, and do likewise”? No, it is this thought ultimately that led Ernst Käsemann to suggest a rather different interpretation of the text, which was persuasive even to the Reformed scholar Ralph Martin. With a few modifications, it goes like this: The behaviour of some Philippian Christians is breaking the fellowship they have with one another through their mutual Baptism into Christ. Their selfishness is contrary to the law of love, and needs to be rebuked. But in this behaviour they are not so much failing to imitate Christ as they are denying what He has made them to be in Him. Paul knows that the power to change lies not in themselves, nor in words of rebuke and encouragement, but rather in a re-affirmation and proclamation of the message of Jesus Christ through which they first became one with Him and each other. So he preaches the Gospel. Now listen to the opening line in the RSV translation: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who” Here the NIV’s Law has become purest Gospel. Paul **gifts** them with a new mind by proclaiming the work of Jesus Christ. The great creedal hymn he sings to them is all about Christ’s work, not theirs.¹⁶ This results in a sermon very different from the one we first pondered. Paul himself draws the conclusion that “it is **God** who is working in you both to will and to work for **His** good pleasure” (2:13).

Not too many weeks back (Proper 20) we had the opportunity to preach on Paul’s difficult words concerning the role of women in the church in I Timothy 2. Now, they’re not difficult simply because they’re counter-cultural. A deeper problem comes in the final verse, “yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (2:15). Again, it’s not even problematic because it asserts a traditional role for women. Everything here is natural for a Christian. Child-bearing is a godly vocation, and who can object to faith, love, holiness, and modesty? No, the stumbling block is the verb, “she will be saved”, for it offends against the Gospel itself. And this Gospel has just been clearly expressed near the beginning of the pericope: “for there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all” (2:5-6). Is it credible to suggest that Paul takes this away from women at the end of the text? Is it any better to propose here what’s been called “covenantal nomism”, that we get into the kingdom by grace alone, but we stay in God’s favour by our acts of

¹⁶ Sadly, CAEMMERER, 70, expresses disdain for a Gospel reading of this text: “Thus Phil. 2:5-11 is a splendid text. By the direct method it suggests the goal ‘Be humbly self-sacrificing as Jesus was.’ If it should suggest ‘Believe in Jesus, who humbled Himself to redeem us,’ an important goal is set up, but then this text is used by the indirect method.”

faithfulness to this calling? This merely shifts the legalism further down the line. No, it's time again to look more closely at the text. Firstly, it's important to keep in mind the context: that Paul has just appealed to the story of Adam and Eve and their deception in the garden. This is the unchangeable Word of God to which He appeals for His prohibition of women teaching in the church. Secondly, the phrase translated "through bearing children" in the RSV is διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας in Greek. This is one instance when it is important to translate the definite article and to maintain the singular number of the noun. Literally it says, "through the child-bearing", or "the bearing of the Child". Thus, in context, it is probably a reference to the *protevangelium* (Gen. 3:15), the promise made to Eve that a messianic Child will one day issue from her offspring to reverse the curse. This, then, is purest Gospel. And it helps to explain why the next verb is in the plural: "if **they** abide in faith and love and holiness", for the birth of the child redeems not woman alone, but men and women together.

Permit me to draw these examples to a close with a similar text from Ephesians. I'm sure you've all experienced the difficulty that I've had in explaining chapter five to couples in pre-marital instruction as I would work through the marriage rite with its appointed readings. For the line, "wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord" is offensive to modern sensibilities. Matters are not helped by the fact that our traditional rite, rooted in Thomas Cranmer's translation of the early Sarum rite, asks the wife to "obey", which is stronger even than the Greek verb ὑποτάσσω permits. Of course, who could deny the obligation for all people to obey Christ, as He is the Second Person of our Sovereign Triune God. But to identify obedience as the over-arching characteristic of the church's relationship to Christ ("as to the Lord") strikes me as a gross distortion, and leads to sermons on this text that proclaim a generic form of old-fashioned morality unworthy of the Christian pulpit. For, firstly, as John Kleinig has skilfully demonstrated in another recent *LTR* article,¹⁷ the NT idea of "subordination" is not simply about obeying commands, but has to do with accepting one's appropriate place in God's order. What is the church's place with respect to Christ in the order of salvation? It is to "be saved" not to save (passive not active). The subordination of the church to Christ is a renunciation of works righteousness, a refusal to fall into legalism, a humility of spirit with respect to our own spiritual strength. So also, Paul argues, wives are to take their proper place in the marriage, accepting the sacrificial love of their husbands and not trying to be the husband. But even this is still a Law sermon.

¹⁷ "Ordered Community: Order and Subordination in the New Testament", *LTR* 17 (Academic Year 2004-05): 45-59.

The Gospel is found, firstly, by backing up a few verses. For it is perplexing to the exegete that the verb in v. 21 is a participle, not an imperative. It doesn't actually say, "wives **be subject** to your husbands". The only imperative to be found is way back in v. 18 where Paul encourages us to "be filled with the Spirit", one of those odd passive imperatives that seems to give what it demands, for the Spirit comes through such words. The reception of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament leads naturally and by the Spirit's grace to three results, each of which is a type of worship. Paul describes them with circumstantial participles: addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (v. 19); always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father (v. 20); and "being subordinate to one another in fear of Christ" (v. 21). This last is a form of daily worship of which the subordination of wives to husbands is one significant example, followed by the subordination of servants to masters, and children to parents. So this subordination is, firstly, a gift of the Spirit. But, secondly, and more importantly, even within our pericope Paul moves very quickly away from describing our acts of subordination to proclaiming again the work of Jesus Christ in making us all His bride. The raw statistics are alone surprising: only three out of twelve verses talk about wives; the rest of the words are addressed to husbands, whose obligation (as a representative of Christ) is greater than the wives'. But even then Paul very quickly moves away from what the husband does (three verses) to what Jesus Christ has done (all the rest!). In other words, there's far more Gospel than Law in this passage, in such words as

Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present the church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

And then Paul concludes the section by appealing (as he did in I Timothy) to a foundational text from Genesis: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Eph. 5:31; Gen. 2:24). But what does he say about it? That it's a Law for Christian behaviour in marriage? No. Instead he says that it's a mystery whose real content is only discovered if it is interpreted as a reference to Christ and the church. In other words, we usually get the lines of "typology" backwards: we tend to think that Paul uses Christ's relationship with the church to say something about how to behave in marriage. But what Paul himself tells us at the end of the text is that he's only talking about marriage in order to proclaim Jesus Christ! Or put even more strongly, God instituted marriage way back in Genesis 2 with the primary purpose of proclaiming the coming work of Jesus Christ for His Bride, the Church! Every marriage that ever existed should be seen and read as a proclamation of the Gospel!

And what a fitting place to end. For it reminds us, likewise, that the central thought of any text is its Gospel point. No preacher should be ashamed to abide in the words of St Paul:

²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (I Cor. 1:22-24)

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Spiritus in carne involutus*: Luther et les spiritualistes de la Réforme. Quelques aspects systématiques

Manfred Zeuch

« Ô sainte braise, douce consolation, aide-nous maintenant à persévérer dans ton service avec joie et confiance [...] »¹

« JE NE ME GLORIFIE PAS D'AVOIR UN ESPRIT ÉLEVÉ. Mais je me glorifie (avec raison, j'espère) d'avoir reçu de grands dons et de grandes grâces de mon Dieu et de l'Esprit. »² Luther, un homme qui se glorifiait soi-même? Certainement pas. Son dernier mot avant de mourir peut résumer son attitude fondamentale: « nous ne sommes que des mendiants, ceci est vrai ».

Luther, un spiritualiste? Certains chercheurs l'ont ainsi qualifié, en effet. Il y a chez lui un enthousiasme foncier, qui finit toujours par reprendre le dessus sur toute heure de profonde dépression et tentation qu'il ait connue. Comme mot d'ordre il s'était choisi: *non moriar, sed vivam e narrabo opera Domini* (Ps 118:17). Dire les oeuvres de Dieu fut le but de sa vie en tant que père, pasteur, professeur et réformateur.

Mais la question de l'Esprit? Peut-on voir en Luther un enthousiaste spiritualiste, mystique? Un certain mysticisme peut difficilement être nié chez Luther.³ Un certain spiritualisme non plus. L'Esprit avait une grande importance dans sa piété et dans sa théologie. La question cruciale que se posent les chercheurs est de savoir si Luther peut être classé parmi les spiritualistes de la Réforme. Si nous ajoutions le qualificatif Réforme "radicale", on pourrait plus aisément conclure par la négative.

Ces quelques pages visent tout simplement à rappeler aujourd'hui certaines données théologiques de ce thème, et ne prétendent pas exprimer

* Article publié auparavant dans *Positions Luthériennes*, (Paris), 46^e année, - n°1, Janvier-Mars 1998 : 65-78.

¹ « Du heilige Glut, süsßer Trost, nun hilf uns, fröhlich und getrost in dein'm Dienst beständig bleiben [...] ». *Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch* 98,3 (*Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott, erfüll mit deiner Gnaden Gut deiner Gläubigen Herz, Mund und Sinn* [Strophes 2 et 3: M. LUTHER, 1524]).

² WA 23,281.

³ Voir par exemple KARL-HEINZ ZUR MÜHLEN: « Luthers Frömmigkeit und die Mystik: seine Auslegung des *Magnificat* von 1521 », in *ibid.*, *Reformatorisches Profil: Studien zum Weg Martin Luthers und der Reformation*, hrsg. von Johannes Brosseder, Athina Lexutt unter Mitarbeit von Wibke Janssen (Göttingen, 1995), 86-100.

l'état de cette recherche,⁴ bien qu'il me semble que cet aspect de la théologie de Luther y soit quelque peu négligé de nos jours.

Certains sont de l'opinion que la pneumatologie de Luther était au centre de toute sa théologie. Néanmoins, Regin Prenter a montré en son temps que l'on ne peut le dire si l'on prend en considération la conception luthérienne de la relation de l'Esprit avec les instruments de la grâce divine. La désignation de Luther comme un spiritualiste devient dès lors relative.

Le spiritualisme de la Réforme radicale

Aussi bien l'humanisme que le retour à la culture de l'antiquité ont favorisé, au XVI^e siècle, un renouveau spirituel. Dans beaucoup de domaines, l'homme commençait à respirer une liberté et une individualité nouvelles. Cette liberté a été également ressentie par rapport aux réalités de la piété et de la spiritualité. L'impulsion vers un retour à un christianisme originel a suscité la recherche de nouvelles formes de piété, ce qui se fit souvent dans une approche critique voire hostile aux formes établies, institutionnelles du moyen âge. Même si la Réforme luthérienne ne s'explique pas uniquement par les phénomènes de la Renaissance, elle ne manqua pas de réveiller bien des esprits mécontents des institutions ecclésiales, que profitèrent de l'élan pour mettre en oeuvre de nouveaux programmes et idéologies spirituels, que prirent les couleurs les plus variées.

Parmi les dits spiritualistes, nous connaissons spécialement les noms liés à l'histoire de Luther et de son cheminement, comme Müntzer, Carlstadt ou même Zwingli. Il faut cependant prendre en compte les mouvements créés parallèlement, ou à l'ombre de ces personnages, des réformateurs qui soit revendiquaient pour eux-mêmes l'appui de Luther, soit le diabolisaient. Dans tous les cas, ces mouvements se caractérisaient par une relativisation voire la négation des médiations extérieures de la foi, et par conséquent par le rejet de l'Église institutionnalisée, par l'insistance sur une Église spirituelle et céleste, par une privatisation ou une intériorisation de la

⁴ Je me réfère ici le plus souvent à l'étude du danois REGIN PRENTER, *Spiritus Creator, Studien zu Luthers Theologie*. Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus, hrgs. von Ernst Wolf, Zehnte Reihe, Band VI (München, 1954). Étant plus systématiquement qu'historien, j'ai été sensible à l'agencement du matériau chez Prenter. Pour un aperçu plus global on consultera MICHAEL PLATHOW, *Freiheit und Verantwortung: Aufsätze zu Martin Luther im heutigen Kontext* (Erlangen, 1996), spécialement p. 45-80: « Der Geist hilft unserer Schwachheit: ein aktualisierender Forschungsbericht zu M. Luthers Rede vom Heiligen Geist ».

religion et de la piété.⁵ Le plus souvent ces mouvements n'avaient pas de prêtres ni de pasteurs, et exigeaient de leurs fidèles une capacité de lecture et de réflexion, créant des racines très souvent dans les couches les plus aisées de la société. Le mouvement a attiré non seulement des religieux et des clercs, mais aussi d'autres croyants cultivés, des artistes, des médecins et des politiques.⁶

Le spiritualisme de ces hommes et femmes n'était pas quelque chose de complètement nouveau. D'un point de vue sociologico-théologique, on constate, de manière comparative, certains éléments constants dans tous les mouvements spirituels qui s'étaient exprimés antérieurement dans l'histoire de l'Église. A toute époque il y a eu la négation de l'élément extérieur de la foi chrétienne, et il y a un certain répertoire de versets bibliques utilisés comme *dicta probantia*, commun à tous les mouvements. Le dualisme grec entre matière et esprit y était toujours latent, aussi bien que l'insistance sur la relation directe de l'individu avec Dieu. L'Église spirituelle en est la réalité et le but constant. Citons enfin comme élément commun aux mouvements spiritualistes et mystiques la continuelle émergence de la revendication de la liberté de l'homme.

Certains de ces mouvements étaient plutôt discrets, rêveurs, pacifiques, attendant la Jérusalem céleste. D'autres étaient radicaux, martiaux, violents, opposés à l'autorité ecclésiastique et civile, cherchant à anéantir les impies et à fonder la Jérusalem céleste *hic et nunc*. Le point commun qui les reliait le plus fortement était la position centrale de la personne et de l'oeuvre de l'Esprit Saint. Des chercheurs comme Karl Gerhard Steck voient là un point commun avec Luther, et classent le réformateur de Wittenberg, par conséquent, parmi les spiritualistes plus radicaux, leur attribuant une origine théologique commune.

Avec d'autres auteurs je serais plutôt d'avis que cette conclusion ne saurait être acceptée comme telle, et qu'il faut toujours mettre en relation la pneumatologie de Luther, dans une approche oppositionnelle, à la fois avec les mouvements spiritualistes et avec sa propre tradition romaine, et pénétrer le sens des concepts communs pour en différencier le sens.

⁵ Voir aussi TIMOTHY GEORGE, *Die Spiritualität der Radikalreformation*, in Jill Raitt, et alii, éd., traduction de Cordula D. Brown (Würzburg, 1995 [angl. 1987], 341-82.

⁶ Comme Juan de Valdes, humaniste; Hans Hut, commerçant; Otto Brunfels, pédagogue, humaniste, théologien, botaniste et médecin; Heinrich Vogtherr, peintre à Strasbourg; Pierre Poiret, qui a édité plusieurs ouvrages de femmes spiritualistes; Johannes Sturm, homme politique à Strasbourg; Teophraste Paracelse, alchimiste, théologien, médecin, sans oublier les théologiens comme Sébastien Franck et Caspar Schwenckfeld, David Joris et les anabaptistes, des femmes comme Jeanne Bouvier de la Motte, Armelle Nicolas, Catherine de Gênes, entre autres, que Poiret admirait tant pour leur « disponibilité envers l'Esprit ».

La chair et l'Esprit

Un des ces concepts fondamentaux, communs à la scolastique, à Luther et aux spiritualistes, est l'élément anthropologique de la notion dualiste de chair et esprit. Alors que les spiritualistes tendaient au dualisme de type grec, matière/esprit, la scolastique séparait l'homme en deux natures: la nature « inférieure » et la nature « supérieure » de l'homme. La vie spirituelle véritable est possible par la « nature supérieure » de l'homme: dans celle-ci l'homme peut se hisser à la hauteur de Dieu, une fois qu'il a reçu l'infusion de la grâce divine.

Luther avait découvert dans l'Écriture une notion différente de la « chair »: cette réalité y décrit l'homme dans son intégralité lorsqu'il se trouve sans Dieu, « l'esprit » étant, par contre, l'homme intégral dès lors que Dieu habite en lui et le gouverne par le Saint Esprit. La conscience de la radicalité du mal et du péché chez l'homme a mené Luther à cette conception de l'homme intégral, du *totus homo*. Luther découvre que l'Esprit de Dieu ne travaille pas seulement dans la nature « inférieure » de l'homme, mais dans l'homme dans son intégralité. Si Luther peut attribuer à Dieu deux pôles absolus dans les conceptions de la colère divine et de la grâce divine, il voit une correspondance chez l'homme dans les notions de péché et de foi, ces pôles humains n'étant en lui-même, dans son *totus homo*, à la fois pécheur et croyant, *justus et peccator*. Il ne sera donc ni totalement péché, ni totalement foi. Sa situation devant Dieu se décrit dans une dialectique relationnelle, qui trouve son sens et son équilibre vital dans le pôle absolu de la grâce de Dieu.

Pour Luther, l'homme est, par soi-même, capable de piété, de spiritualité. Cependant, hormis la foi en Christ, cette piété reste ce qu'elle est, c'est-à-dire une donnée propre ou inhérente à l'homme naturel, ce qui lui est *proprium*. En tant que telle, elle est « chair », étant de ce fait *sub ira Dei*. Par la présence du Christ, néanmoins, la spiritualité dont l'homme fait preuve n'est plus une donnée qui lui serait inhérente, mais une réalité nouvelle, un don. La piété chrétienne est ainsi un *donum*, étant, par conséquent, *sub gratia Dei*.

Il y a, ainsi, une différence entre la notion luthérienne et la notion spiritualiste du vieil homme et du nouvel homme. Le vieil homme sera toujours, pour Luther, l'homme intégral, invisible, dans sa nature pécheresse, tandis que le nouvel homme n'est autre que le Christ lui-même habitant dans le croyant et luttant contre la vieille nature. Cette notion de l'homme entier est décisive pour les implications de la pneumatologie de Luther sur les médiations extérieures de la foi, sur les *äusserlich Ding*, et son opposition aux spiritualistes.

Aussi bien pour la scolastique que pour les mouvements enthousiastes, l'Esprit Saint était considéré comme étant une réalité métaphysique qui est donnée à l'homme pour le rendre capable d'exercer la foi. Prenter montre

dans son étude que pour Luther l'Esprit est avant tout la réalité dans laquelle Dieu place l'homme pour se révéler à lui en Christ. Pour les spiritualistes, il y avait des nuances dans la conception de la révélation. Certains utilisaient jusqu'à un certain degré l'Écriture, mais la plupart rejetaient la « lettre » (« qui tue ») et s'ouvraient à « l'Esprit » (« qui vivifie »), que l'on s'attendait à recevoir au travers de révélations directes, de manifestations immédiates, de visions, de songes et de voix. On rejetait, ici, de manière quasi systématique toute médiation extérieure. De manière générale, on accordait donc peu de valeur à la vie liturgique et sacramentelle. Dieu se révèle directement à l'esprit humain.

L'Esprit et la Parole

Luther voyait toujours la Parole comme étant l'instrument de l'Esprit. Augustinien, il distinguait entre une parole externe et une parole interne. La parole externe est l'Écriture, le *verbum vocale*, ou le sacrement dans sa forme extérieure. Cette parole ne dépassera pas sa limite humaine si Dieu n'y ajoute pas son propre parler, par l'Esprit, ce qui est la parole interne. Sans celle-ci, l'autre n'est que lettre et loi pour l'homme. On ne saurait comprendre la Parole de Dieu de manière adéquate sans la présence de l'Esprit.

Ici il semblerait que la position de Luther ne se distingue pas profondément du schéma spiritualiste. Dans son commentaire du *Magnificat*, il affirme que « personne ne peut comprendre vraiment la Parole de Dieu, s'il n'a pas cette compréhension immédiate de l'Esprit Saint ». Dans *De l'usage du sacrement sous les deux espèces*, il parle d'un sentiment ou d'une perception intérieure qui mène le croyant à la certitude concernant la Parole de Dieu. Il faut néanmoins voir ces affirmations dans la perspective de toute la théologie de Luther. Dans sa confrontation avec les spiritualistes, il exprime sa compréhension fondamentale sur le sujet dans *Contre les prophètes célestes* : depuis que Dieu nous a envoyé son Évangile, il traite avec nous de deux manières, à savoir, l'externe, par la Parole audible de l'Évangile, et par les signes physiques du Baptême et de la Sainte Cène, et l'interne, par l'Esprit Saint et ses dons. Néanmoins, il faut – insiste Luther – que les choses internes viennent à nous à travers les choses externes, et après ces dernières! Dieu ne donne rien d'interne et de spirituel à l'homme si ce n'est par un élément extérieur. La notion des moyens de grâce est fondamentale pour Luther, et ici son « spiritualisme » ou sa spiritualité s'éloigne de celle des mouvements radicaux parallèles.

Le combat de Luther allait dans deux directions, il se dirigeait contre deux conceptions polarisantes : d'un côté la tendance de l'Église établie de vouloir transformer la chrétienté spirituelle en une communauté institutionnalisée et fortement hiérarchisée, et de l'autre côté la tendance

spiritualiste de vouloir ignorer voire rejeter tout élément extérieur, institutionnel. Pour Luther, Dieu nous a donné des choses spirituelles et corporelles. Et c'est lui qui établit l'ordre et le rapport entre elles.

Un rapport capital est celui entre l'Esprit et la Parole. L'Esprit étant souverain, il agit comme Dieu le veut et quand il le veut. Mais il est inséparable de la Parole. La tension entre cette souveraineté de l'Esprit et son indissolubilité de la Parole a amené certains chercheurs à conclure à une évolution dans la pensée de Luther, au fur et à mesure qu'il était confronté aux spiritualistes. Une des conclusions contestées de Prenter est sa thèse – qui sous-tend tout son exposé – selon laquelle la position du « jeune Luther » était déjà celle qu'il aura plus tard, en 1520. Selon Prenter, il est indéniable que Luther a déplacé des accents, face aux enthousiastes, mais il aurait conservé foncièrement sa position initiale.

Pour Prenter, cette tension peut être résolue dans la christologie de Luther. Comme la christologie du Logos de l'Église ancienne, il identifiait la Parole de Dieu au Christ, selon la tradition Johannique. L'Esprit Saint opère la présence véritable du Christ chez l'homme par le moyen de la parole externe. Dans *Grund und Ursach aller Artikel D. M. Luthers, so durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt sind* (1521), il affirme que l'Écriture est le corps spirituel du Christ, c'est-à-dire que la parole externe est le corps dans lequel le Christ ressuscité est présent parmi nous aujourd'hui.

Il y va aussi d'un lien entre la promesse et le moyen de la transmettre : la Parole est nécessaire pour que le contenu de la promesse, le Christ, puisse être transmis à l'homme. La Parole est le moyen par lequel Dieu donne le Christ, Christ étant en elle. L'Évangile en tant que parole a ainsi un caractère sacramentel puisqu'il propose et donne ce qu'il annonce. Étant sacramentel, il implique un moyen ou élément extérieur. Pour recevoir le Christ, l'homme ne peut pas se confier en sa propre recherche, ni en sa « nature supérieure », ni en sa propre piété ou spiritualité, mais c'est Dieu qui donne le Christ à l'homme, et il le fait dans la Parole et les sacrements.⁷

Il existe, pour Luther, un ordre (chrono)logique dans la relation entre l'Esprit et la Parole. La Parole doit être lue, entendue, pour qu' « ensuite » vienne l'Esprit qui donne le Christ. Il n'y a pas de lien métaphysique entre elles, mais il s'agit ici d'une séquence de promesse et d'accomplissement, de prière et d'exaucement de la prière. Il y a un « espace » nécessaire entre la Parole et l'Esprit pour que l'homme puisse se débarrasser de tout *sensus*

⁷ J'ai abordé la relation entre parole et sacrements dans la théologie protestante contemporaine dans ma thèse intitulée *Signe du Royaume de Dieu. L'Église et les sacrements dans la théologie de Wolhart Pannenberg* (Strasbourg: Faculté de Théologie Protestante, 1997), notamment dans les p. 327-48. Pannenberg relance la réflexion luthérienne concernant une spécificité sacramentale par rapport à la parole prêchée.

proprius, de sa propre intelligence en matière de religion et de sa vertu, afin de se tourner vers la justice du Christ dans la Parole.

Il y a là un des points principaux de divergences entre Luther et la réforme spiritualiste : même si certains spiritualistes admettent que l'Esprit Saint agit de manière externe, par l'Évangile prêché et les sacrements, et de manière interne, par ses dons, la plus grande polémique se concentre sur la question de savoir quel est l'ordre de ces choses. Pour Luther les « illuminés » inversent l'ordre correct. Selon lui cet ordre commence avec la loi, qui rend l'homme conscient de sa nature de pécheur, qui le « tue », qui suscite en lui le désir d'entendre une autre Parole qui puisse lui donner la vie. Cette Parole est l'Évangile. Lorsqu'il est entendu, l'Esprit de Dieu est communiqué comme un don, et il opère la foi qui justifie. Il le fait où et quand il veut. Il est ainsi remarquable que, même en pleine polémique avec les groupes spiritualistes, ou « l'aile gauche de la Réforme », Luther a maintenue la notion de la complète souveraineté de l'Esprit sur la Parole.

L'Esprit et la piété

Considérant l'Esprit Saint comme un champ ou un domaine de révélation, Luther comprend qu'une fois inséré dans ce champ de force et de puissance, l'homme est capable d'un mouvement, d'une action. Non pas dans le sens de se hisser jusqu'à Dieu, car il n'est que récipiendaire de Dieu. Mais l'homme se meut en direction du monde, en direction des hommes. La foi devient active dans l'amour. L'homme participe à l'activité de Dieu au bénéfice de ce monde, qui est une activité de salut et de Rédemption. L'homme croyant est ainsi appelé à transmettre la Parole aux autres, leur faire entendre l'Évangile libérateur.

Dans cette activité l'homme doit cependant compter avec l'hostilité d'autres pouvoirs et réalités, comme le « monde » et sa propre « chair ». Le deuxième fruit du salut, opéré dans l'homme, est donc la modification du « vieil homme ». C'est l'Esprit Saint qui mène cette lutte. Et comme troisième fruit nécessaire de l'action salutaire de l'Esprit, il y a les oeuvres d'amour à proprement parler, les bonnes oeuvres. Ces différentes étapes sont inextricables, et sont une action constante de l'Esprit. Dans la conception plus spiritualiste, le don de l'Esprit était souvent vu comme une sorte de récompense accordée à l'individu à la fin d'un processus de mortification, qui se fonde sur une piété que Luther considérera comme étant charnelle et nomiste. Ici, ce n'est pas Dieu qui « tue » pour faire (re)vivre, mais l'individu « agit » lui-même, travaille en soi pour se préparer à recevoir la grâce. Il y a dans ce système un mouvement du bas vers le haut, similaire au système scolastique. Luther peut, certes, parler lui aussi d'une *agricultura sui ipsius* du croyant, d'un travail sur soi-même. On trouvera cette notion par exemple dans ses sermons sur le sacrement, de 1519. Mais, une fois encore, ce labeur

que le croyant fait en soi est une oeuvre exclusive de l'Esprit Saint, par la Parole.

Les spiritualistes négligent et la Parole et les autres médiations. Prenter a bien exprimé la constante tension entre une justice de la foi et une certaine « justice des œuvres » : ceux qui ne pensent qu'à se hisser vers le haut n'ont pas d'yeux pour des ponts à sens unique qui descendent d'en haut. Dans leur préoccupation centrale de monter vers Dieu, les spiritualistes ont développé une piété de nature privée et intériorisée, beaucoup vivaient seuls, d'autres se rassemblaient en groupes repliés sur eux-mêmes, élitistes (sans parler de ceux qui sortaient pour essayer de convertir les impies par la force). Il y a là une autre différence par rapport à la théologie de Luther. Les moyens de grâce ont pour lui un caractère éminemment public. Dieu vient vers l'homme par des moyens et des voies qui concernent tous les hommes. La vraie piété chrétienne ne devrait jamais rejeter son caractère ecclésial, culturel e public inhérent.

L'Esprit et les sacrements

Malgré le fait que Luther a rejeté la compréhension scolastique des sacrements, il n'a pas pour autant opté pour une « spiritualisation des sacrements ». Lorsqu'il insiste face à la théologie officielle de son temps sur le fait que le bienfait du sacrement dépend de la foi du croyant qui le reçoit, il ne préconise nullement une espèce de synergisme, mais souligne la totale dépendance par rapport à Dieu. Car la foi est la seule et vraie posture dans laquelle la grâce peut réellement être grâce : la foi est une capitulation inconditionnelle de l'homme devant la grâce souveraine de Dieu. Dans la compréhension scolastique, la grâce est comprise plutôt comme une force métaphysique donnée à l'homme et le rendant capable de conquérir son salut. Les sacrements étaient, par conséquent, classés par ordre d'importance pour la piété des individus.⁸ Luther, dans la notion de la *promissio*, ne peut faire cette différence : les sacrements transmettent le Christ. Le contenu des sacrements est toujours le don de la promesse faite aux premiers hommes comme Adam, Abraham et Jacob, et ce don est le Christ lui-même. Il arrive, avec les sacrements, la même chose qu'avec la Parole :

Christ passe au travers de l'Évangile, dans l'oreille et dans ton coeur, et là il habite par ta foi Si tu as une telle foi, et si le Christ est dans ton coeur, tu

⁸ Dans une conception catholique-romaine contemporaine il est question des sacrements ayant une différence entre eux selon les « situations fondamentales de la vie » des croyants.

ne dois pas penser qu'il viendrait dénudé et pauvre. Mais il apporte avec lui la vie, l'Esprit et tout ce qu'il est, ce qu'il a, et ce qu'il peut faire.⁹

Pour lui, le sacrement c'est le Christ même.

La parole des deux sacrements est toujours la même que celle de la prédication. La prédication chrétienne n'est autre chose que la proclamation de l'alliance du Baptême et du témoignage donné dans la Sainte Cène. Prenter conclut ici que le lien que fait Luther entre la prédication et les sacrements ne signifie pas une spiritualisation du concept de sacrement, mais bien plutôt d'une sacramentalisation de la prédication.

Prenant, donc, en considération les thèses opposés de Steck et de Prenter, nous pourrions conclure qu'il existe au centre de la vie et théologie de Luther une spiritualité « radicale », mais qu'elle est de nature sacramentelle ou incarnationnelle. C'est là une différence capitale par rapport aux mouvements de l'« aile gauche de la Réforme ». La prédication et la foi en général sont revêtus d'un caractère sacramentel, parce que Dieu a choisi cette manière médiate de se révéler à nous. Dieu est proche de l'homme, entièrement présent dans le sacrement, caché dans le signe. C'est en s'incarnant de manière voilée dans le signe corporel que Dieu se révèle pleinement. Marc Lienhard parle d'une obsession de Luther pour la majesté de Dieu. Luther disait dans son combat face aux enthousiastes que l'on ne peut pas s'approcher de Dieu dans sa « nudité », mais qu'on serait forcément écrasé par sa majesté. Il y va de la distinction luthérienne bien connue entre le *Deus absconditus* et le *Deus revelatus*. Néanmoins, en tant que Dieu révélé, il se « cache » dans ces signes si humbles et fragiles qu'il a choisi pour se révéler pleinement aux hommes.

Pour bien saisir cette tension entre la souveraineté de l'Esprit et le caractère indispensable des moyens extérieurs, il faut bien comprendre la conception luthérienne du signe. Le signe étant la présence réelle du Christ incarné, il a tout d'abord une fonction de révélation. Il révèle dans le côté humain de Jésus la majesté cachée de Dieu, permettant ainsi d'éviter toute spéculation au sujet de celle-ci. Une deuxième fonction du signe est instrumentale. Par lui, Dieu transforme notre existence et la rend conforme au Christ, lui donnant une dimension eschatologique. Là où se trouve le signe visible, Dieu est véritablement présent, caché dans l'enveloppe du signe. Ainsi Luther affirme dans un sermon de 1523 : « Ubi illa externa signa sunt, ne dubita certissimum patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum adesse et remissionem peccatorum »¹⁰ (« là où se trouvent ces signes extérieures, sans aucun doute le Père, le Fils et le Saint Esprit sont présents,

⁹ WA 10¹¹,48¹⁶; 49,1.

¹⁰ WA 11,54⁷.

ainsi que la rémission des péchés »). Toute autre forme de recherche de Dieu sera une tentative de trouver le *Deus nudus* de la foi. Et cela signifie mourir. Dieu est présent d'une autre manière, la manière choisie par lui-même, à savoir, dans les moyens extérieurs ou les signes du Baptême, de la prédication et de la Sainte Cène.

Pour Luther, le signe est toujours efficace. Soit il opère le salut de l'individu, soit le rejet divin. Si la foi du communiant fait défaut, il ne peut pas s'approprier la promesse, le signe opérant dans ce cas, dans la sphère de la loi, le rejet divin. C'est ici la notion typique de la *manducatio indignorum*.

Il y a, donc, un lien étroit entre les signes de la révélation et le Christ. Il est la réalité terrestre et concrète dans laquelle Dieu se manifeste. Son humanité a, elle aussi, besoin de la Parole (pour nous) : cette parole est capable de la distinguer de toute autre humanité, de distinguer l'enfant de Bethléhem de tout autre enfant. Ainsi Luther qualifie aussi le Christ de *signum*, et sa christologie repose fondamentalement sur le passage de Colossiens 2:9 : « Car en lui, habite corporellement toute la plénitude de la divinité » et Jean 14:9 : « Jésus lui dit: il y a si longtemps que je suis avec vous, et tu ne m'as pas connu, Philippe! Celui qui m'a vu, a vu le Père. Comment dis-tu: Montre-nous le Père? »

Épilogue

Luther se savait mendiant et totalement récepteur devant Dieu. Il se glorifiait volontiers des dons reçus de l'Esprit Saint. Son « enthousiasme » était fondé sur les moyens visibles et palpables par lesquels Dieu vient à nous. Il était spiritualiste dans le sens de savoir toute la foi chrétienne et toute théologie possibles uniquement à travers le Saint Esprit, « car, ni toi, ni moi, nous ne pourrions rien savoir du Christ ni croire en lui et le recevoir comme Seigneur, si, par la prédication de l'Évangile, le Saint Esprit ne nous offrait ces choses et ne nous les plaçait dans le cœur comme un don ». ¹¹ C'est peut-être une des raisons aussi pour lesquelles les cantiques d'invocation de l'Esprit créateur occupent un rang notoire dans ses compositions hymnologiques, étant donné que « *Musica est insigne donum Dei et theologiae proxima* ». ¹²

¹¹ M. LUTHER, *Grand Catéchisme*, 3^e article, n° 38 (traduction empruntée à: *La foi des Églises luthériennes. Confessions et catéchismes*. A. Birmelé, M. Lienhard, éd. [Paris – Genève, 1991], p. 375 [n° 741]).

¹² WA TR 3, n°3185.

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The Role of Retired Clergy in Lutheran Church–Canada

Commission on Theology and Church Relations
Lutheran Church–Canada

The following document, produced as advice to the Council of Presidents, is hereby offered with their consent to the whole church in the hope that it might answer the heartfelt concerns held by some retired pastors concerning their ongoing ministry. The structural changes suggested in the conclusion do not necessarily reflect the opinion or intention of the COP itself.

Concerns

1. According to CA XIV, “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.” Since retired clergy normally do not have a call to serve a specific congregation, the question has been raised as to the right of such clergy to continue to preach and administer the sacraments. While some retired clergy have been named “Pastor Emeritus” of particular congregations, it is not always clear just what that status implies. Is it simply an honorary designation, recognizing the work of a faithful servant of the Lord, or does it have the nature of a call, carrying with it the continuing authority of the office of the ministry?
2. Should all retired clergy who wish to continue to serve the Lord have a specific appointment/call to a local congregation? Must a pastor emeritus receive a permanent Diploma of Vocation if he is to carry out pastoral functions in a congregation? Or are they free to perform the functions of the office wherever they please?
3. The Lutheran Church–Canada Handbook Bylaw 5.45 is very brief: “A pastor or deacon who has retired after reaching the age of 55 or for reasons of total and permanent disability shall be eligible for retention on the roster as emeritus. Any unusual case shall be decided by the Council of Presidents.” How is this status to be granted? Is it just an automatic designation, or does a retiree apply for it? And what rights, privileges or responsibilities does it confer? What are the requirements for remaining on the roster in good standing? The Council of Presidents does not appear to have a policy on this matter.
4. In light of the above, it would seem wise that the Synod provide some clarification, for the sake of unity of practice on the part of both retired clergy and congregations.

Observations

1. In both LCMS and LCC it has been the common practice for retired pastors to preach and administer the sacraments as rostered members of the Synod. Our practice has been that emeriti serve vacancies, and are eligible to serve as Circuit Counsellors (4.11). There have also been instances in LCMS where an emeritus became District President, and there have been at least two occasions when emeriti have held office as Synodical vice-president while retaining their emeritus status. Emeriti are also eligible for Calls. By inference, then, one can conclude that it has been the understanding among us that emeriti continue to hold the office of the ministry.
2. That inference is also evidenced from the following example. In Ontario, where a provincial licence is required to perform marriages, retired pastors' licences were terminated by the provincial ministry a few years ago. The East District succeeded in having that decision reversed for its clergy on the grounds that retired LCC pastors are authorized to perform the usual functions of the office of the ministry, and thus should be permitted to continue to hold a licence to perform marriages.

Theological Rationale

Some retired pastors have expressed the concern: “Do I have a call?” or “Am I *rite vocatus*?” The following theo-logic compels one to answer “yes” to these questions.

1. Although in common practice we use the term “call” to refer to the action of the local congregation in choosing its pastor, this is a derived sense of the term. In biblical usage, continued in the Book of Concord, the “call” is primarily a reference to the action of God Himself. Martin Chemnitz writes, “speaking properly and on the basis of Scripture, the right to call and to send laborers into the harvest belongs to Him who is the Lord of the harvest, and it is good to note in Scripture that the right and administration of this call are ascribed expressly to the individual persons of the Trinity” (*Enchiridion*, p. 30).
2. In harmony with scriptural language, 16th century Lutheranism spoke of the call primarily as God’s action by which He places a man into the ministry, and generally used other language for the locatedness of that call (e.g. election, sending, placing). Thus, the call is “from God into the ministry”. “There is no legitimate or ordinary call to the ministry except from God, and it is twofold: either without means or through means” (Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, p. 30).
3. Only in the case of the prophets and apostles is this call from God “immediate” (without human mediation). Pastors receive their calls

“through the church” (ministers and laity acting together). “For a mediate call is as much from God as an immediate one, but they differ in the manner of the call” (Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, p. 31). The locatedness of the ministry is a vital component of the call, but does not establish its divine legitimacy.

4. The process of a mediate call into the ministry is described by 16th-century Lutheran writers as involving:
 - proposal of a candidate by churches that are capable of testifying to his suitability;
 - theological training by called theologians;
 - examination of competency by the church as a whole;
 - election (*electio* means “choosing”), sending, or designation of a place of service;
 - the rite of ordination by which Christ’s call is publicly attested and the office of the ministry conferred.

It is to this process that Melanchthon refers with the use of the traditional phrase *rite vocatus* “a rightly ordered call” or “a call conferred by rite” (CA XIV). Apology XIV confirms that both Melanchthon and his Roman opponents understood this as a reference to “canonical ordination” (though Melanchthon is not bound absolutely to the use of bishops or the use of a specific rite).

5. Thus, *rite vocatus* “rightly called” is not to be understood as a reference to the “call” in the narrow sense (one or more appointments to specific congregations or church entities). Rather, it is a reference to the call of Christ through the whole church into the office of the ministry. The pastor who by constraint of health or age chooses to retire from full-time ministry, and yet does not revoke that office, is therefore still to be regarded as *rite vocatus*.
6. The phrase which appears in our traditional formula of absolution, “I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word”, should be understood similarly. The term “call” in this context refers to the call into the office of the ministry, not the call to one specific location. As the absolution goes on to explain, the pastor absolves the flock not as a representative of the church through which he was called, but “in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ”. It is entirely appropriate for the retired pastor to continue to use this phrase.

Conclusions

1. Ordination is the final part of the process by which a candidate is made *rite vocatus* “rightly called”, and places him into the office of the ministry. It is assumed that ordination confers the office of the ministry for life,

and that the office is retained until specifically withdrawn, removed, or renounced.

2. Since emeriti continue on the roster of the synod, they are under the supervision of the District President. At the local level, they remain part of the circuit clergy and are under the care of the circuit counsellor.
3. When a pastor emeritus preaches and/or administers the Sacraments at the invitation of a called pastor or a congregation while a pastor is on holiday or sick, for example, it is understood that he is acting on behalf of the called pastor and is authorized to exercise the office of the keys on the particular day in that particular place.
4. In the case of emeriti serving vacancies, it would be wise, even necessary, that some kind of official action on the part of the vacant congregation should be taken. That would include at the very least a formal resolution of appointment by the congregation and a letter stating that fact, preferably reflecting the language of the Diploma of Vocation to the effect that “we entrust our vacancy pastor with all the responsibilities of the pastoral office” and stating the congregation’s acceptance of him as pastor and their obligations of support. (The letter would also delineate such things as starting date, remuneration, specific expectations.) While a formal Diploma of Vocation is not issued, such a letter makes clear that the pastor is called to carry out ministry in that place and for such a time as required. No formal installation would be required.
5. Since the ministry always has a location and a connection to the people of God in a particular place, emeriti must hold membership in and be under the pastoral care of a congregation of Lutheran Church–Canada and its called pastor. They are not authorized to preach and carry out the functions of the office of the ministry wherever they please. This means, to offer one example, that without the specific authorization of a congregation or other entity of the Synod, they would not launch a new mission or some other kind of “ministry”.
6. Distinct from the synodically rostered status of “pastor emeritus” is the position of Pastor Emeritus in the local congregation. It has been a custom for congregations to name their retired former pastor “Pastor Emeritus”, and the continuation of that custom is to be commended. Congregations, however, should clearly define what is meant by that designation. Is it only an honorary title, or do duties, rights and responsibilities go with it? If the latter, it should be spelled out and agreed upon between the two parties. It is not necessary for the pastor emeritus to receive a permanent Diploma of Vocation to assist the called pastor in duties such as celebrating the sacrament for the sick and shut-ins, preaching and presiding at the Divine Service occasionally, teaching a Bible class, etc., but it is recommended that the appointment clearly authorize such duties.

7. Occasionally a pastor emeritus is requested to assist a neighbouring congregation with specific duties on a more or less continuing basis, e.g., being responsible for shut-in ministry. In such a case, there should be a document of appointment.
8. Some structural/administrative recommendations:
 - a. Bylaw 5.45 should be rewritten in such a way as to clarify the status, including attention to:
 - i. how the retiree placed on emeritus status on the roster. (The current bylaw says that a retiree “shall be eligible for retention on the roster as emeritus”. Does the retiree request such status? Or is it automatically given?)
 - ii. the requirement for the individual to hold membership in a Lutheran Church–Canada congregation.
 - iii. what are the criteria for retaining that status. (Note that 5.47 includes such a paragraph regarding candidate status.)
 - b. Article XI of the LCC constitution does not explicitly include pastors emeriti in the list of advisory members of the synod, unless they are included under “2. Pastors not in charge of congregations”. We recommend that the CCMS be asked to look at this.
 - c. If an emeritus serves as vacancy pastor of a congregation, it is understood that he does not return to the active roster of the synod. But may he be granted voting rights at convention during the time of his vacancy service? This, too, should be given attention.
 - d. An emeritus could return to active status upon accepting a call, and later return to emeritus.
 - e. It is recommended that the Council of Presidents prepare several documents to implement the above recommendation:
 - i. A form of application for emeritus status
 - ii. A sample letter of appointment for congregations to use in naming a Pastor Emeritus.
9. It is interesting to note that the Lutheran Church in Australia has the practice of extending calls by the Synod or District to those retired pastors who desire emeritus status.

Sermon

Great is Your Faithfulness*

Jonathan Kraemer

But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:21-23)

GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS, O LORD! What a great verse to have as our theme this year, our 25th academic year.

Anniversaries, are a great time to look back on the past and to reminisce. Have you ever noticed how we dwell on the things that have changed over the years? You talk about the way things were. Those of you who were there in the early years of the seminary can remember how different it was back then when the seminary began. The seminary was in the same location, but it operated out of a house. That house is actually not on the site anymore, it was moved across campus to make way for the new building. The library, at first, was a collection of books donated from area pastors. Now it is 30 000 volumes, not to mention all the libraries we can access through the NEOS system. And we can go on. On anniversaries we note the changes over the years as we reminisce.

The Word of God that engages us this year leading up to our anniversary reminds us of what has stayed the same over the last 25 years, and what will always be the same: God and His faithfulness. In these few verses from Lamentations it is said in several different ways, but what is communicated is the same: God is utterly consistent in His dealings with His people. God's love never ceases, His mercy never runs out, it never comes to an end. In fact, every morning His mercies are new.

When something is completely reliable we say it happens "like clockwork". Some clocks today are more reliable than others. Canada's National Research Council, which is in charge of time measurement for Canada, has an atomic clock. The atomic clock, they estimate, should only

* Preached at the opening service of Concordia Lutheran Seminary's 25th academic year, at Bethel Lutheran Church, Sherwood Park, on the 17th Sunday after Pentecost, 7 September 2008. "Great is Your Faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23) served as the two LCC seminaries' theme for 2008-09.

be off by no more than 3 seconds every million years. That's reliability! And yet as reliable as the atomic clock is, God is yet even more faithful.

God is reliable without deviation. He doesn't change from one day to the next. When does His love reach its limits? Never. Is it only for today? No, His mercies are new every morning! He is not fickle. He is not unpredictable. He is not inconsistent like we tend to be. God is steadfast!

We can sing "Great is Thy Faithfulness", and we cling to God's faithfulness because we live in a world where unfaithfulness is all too common. There are broken promises, broken families, and broken vows of faithfulness once made before God. There are fathers and mothers who are not very parental, employees who just don't stick to a job to get it done, professionals and politicians who betray the public trust. People can be fickle, unpredictable, inconsistent. We all have been impacted by the unfaithfulness of others at one time or another.

But the fact that God is entirely consistent, day to day, year to year; predictable ... this is something we can cling to.

Or is it?

Maybe it might seem strange to question whether the faithfulness of God would be a comforting thing. When you read the rest of the book of Lamentations beyond these few verses, that fear of the faithfulness of God begins to well up within you. These few verses proclaim the faithfulness of God to have mercy; much of the rest of Lamentations proclaims the faithfulness of God in punishing sin.

Lamentations is a collection of five lament poems, all about the sacking of the city of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. This was a significant event for God's people Israel, because it was then when God showed He is utterly reliable in punishing the unfaithfulness of His people. Indeed, the nation, their king, the priesthood and even some prophets had not been faithful. They mixed their worship of the true God with the worship of other gods. They weren't being faithful in their love of others. God sent His prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others to call His people to faithfulness, but they rejected His prophets. They rejected His warnings. They rejected Him. And so God laid upon them His promised punishment.

The book of Lamentations, traditionally attributed to Jeremiah, laments the terror of God's wrath. It captures the lament of God's people because of their unfaithfulness, sorrowing at just how far their sin had brought them from God that He would remove all the blessings He had bestowed upon them. He removed their Davidic King from power. He took away their land—the land promised to their father Abraham. He removed even the temple, the symbol of His presence with His people.

The chapter that our theme verse is found in is particularly terrifying. It begins, "I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of His wrath." And in 18 verses the lamentation describes in every possible way what the

punishment of God is like. He complains: “He [God] has driven and brought me into darkness without any light” (3:2); “He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; He has made my chains heavy” (3:7); “He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding;” (3:10); “He turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; He has made me desolate” (3:11); “He bent His bow and set me as a target for His arrow” (3:12); “my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is” (3:17).

It might sound like the complaint is that God is too harsh, that the punishment was excessive. But then he confesses God is completely justified in His punishment. He says: “Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins?” (3:39).

God was completely faithful—He was predictable in His righteousness, carrying out judgement. It is frightening, but only because we are unfaithful. As much as we see unfaithfulness in those around us, we see it also in ourselves. We confess this in one of the traditional confession of sins when we declare to God, “We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves.” And we confess that we deserve punishment for our sins when we say, “We justly deserve your temporal and eternal punishment.” God’s righteousness and faithfulness means an end for us.

Or does it?

On the one hand, the speaker laments, “My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD” (3:18). Yet at the same time he goes on to declare: “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (3:21-23). On the one hand, God’s faithfulness means the punishment of sin. On the other, God’s faithfulness means mercy—daily mercy without end.

It doesn’t seem that both of these can be true; and yet in Jesus Christ, they are true. In Jesus Christ we do find mercy, even at the same time the punishment for our sins is executed. Paul explained it this way: that Jesus’ death on the cross “was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

On the one hand, God was faithful in upholding righteousness, in the punishment exacted for the sin of the world, for your sins and mine. But on the other He was faithful in showing mercy. We did not receive the punishment, Jesus did in our place.

Jesus was faithful in carrying out His Father’s will; He lived a life of complete faithfulness. He was resolute in carrying out the plan to show mercy and forgiveness to a rebellious people. For the joy of reconciling us to the Father, Jesus endured the rod of God’s wrath for our sin. He was charged the penalty for our unfaithfulness. He was considered to be the unfaithful one, so that we could be considered to be faithful children of

God. Great was His faithfulness in Christ. Great is His faithfulness today, and the day after that and the day after that.

I have been a father long enough to know that human parents have limits to their love and patience. After asking kids to pick up their mess, day after day, you get frustrated, you get angry, you bring the hammer down.

We might worry that God has limitations to his mercy. But our text proclaims: “the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.”

Our Lord instituted a ministry of mercy that we might receive His forgiveness—that we might know His love day after day after day. By Baptism He poured out the Holy Spirit upon us in love, He established a relationship with us of grace, He welcomed us as beloved children of God. Morning by morning we may rise and remember that we are baptized, we are God’s children by His grace. Week after week, Our Lord gives us His own body and blood in His supper, and with it the forgiveness of sins. He gives it that we might know the steadfast love of God, who shows us mercy without end for the sake of His Son.

This year leading up to the 25th anniversary we can look back on the beginnings of the seminary and note the people and events which happened to bring our seminary into existence and thank God for their faithfulness. And well we should. Yet I think they would point us back even farther, back to the faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ. The seminary exists, indeed the office of the Holy Ministry exists to administer these gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation to the world. Men are formed for ministry and called by God that all might know the great faithfulness of God, trust in His faithfulness, and in turn devote their lives to faithful service of God and one another.

This year as we gather again as an academic community, we can marvel at all the blessings of God to our seminary over the years, and well we should. All that we have comes from the Lord’s hand. May these words from Lamentations lead us especially to celebrate the steadfast love of our Lord and live lives that profess the great faithfulness of God to show mercy day after day, year after year ... for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

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Sermon

He Remains Faithful*

Thomas M. Winger

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the Word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; ¹³ if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself. (II Tim. 2:8-13 ESV)

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, brothers in the ministry, and students aspiring to the Holy Office: We may feel a little voyeuristic when reading the intimate conversation between St Paul and Timothy, his child in the faith. This is one of the few places in the Bible in which the word “you” is mostly in the singular. And yet, as Paul closes the letter with the greeting, “Grace be with you all [plural]” (4:22), we’re comforted to know that he expected the church to listen in on the conversation. And if they are written for all, then these words from Paul’s “Pastoral Epistles” are most certainly appropriate to listen to at the inauguration of another year in this seedbed of pastoral formation. For here we’re continuing that vital churchly work that Paul first laid on young pastor Timothy, his delegate, one who might later be called a “bishop” or even “seminary professor” because of the work committed to him by these words just before our text: “You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses, entrust these things to faithful men, who will be capable of teaching others also” (II Tim. 2:1-2). This is the mandate for seminary education; that is to say, it’s the place where we can know for sure that what we do here is instituted by God and therefore pleasing to Him and sure to be blessed by Him. For no one can say “Great is Your faithfulness”

* Preached at the opening service of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary’s 33rd academic year, in the seminary’s Martin Luther chapel, on the 17th Sunday after Pentecost, 7 September 2008. It is traditional for the president to preach at this service; Dr Winger is Acting President. “Great is Your Faithfulness” (Lam. 3:23) served as the two LCC seminaries’ theme for 2008-09.

in a vague and general way, as if God will bless anything they set their hand to. But when He has given us a task through His holy Word, then we can count on His faithfulness to that Word. Our God can't break His promises any more than He can deny Himself.

That mandate to which God commits Himself includes a description of what we're supposed to be doing, of course. It lays the "ground rules", so to speak, within which His blessing will remain on our work. Paul insists that the men we accept into the pastoral ministry programme and ultimately certify for the ministry in the Lutheran Church (to put it in our terms)—these men must be "faithful", and of the sort who are capable of teaching others. Now, we all know what we personally want to see in a good pastor, qualities that none of us can deny are high priorities: he should be kind, compassionate, and loving; pious and holy in his life; vigorous and energetic in his work; a good listener and a wise counsellor. We may even be tempted by the skills that make men popular and highly successful in this world: charm, wit, good looks, style, and an entrepreneurial flair. But Paul eschews all this and simply says, "entrust these things to faithful men, who will be capable of teaching others also".

Faithfulness has lost its lustre when compared to the hierarchy of skills that bring success in today's world. But success is not what Paul's after, at least not success as we might view it. He appeals to faithfulness mainly because of what he says next. The pastor must be **capable of teaching others**—not teaching in a general sense as some sort of educational skill best learnt over at Brock University, but teaching as the activity through which **God's Word** is clearly proclaimed and accurately taught to God's people. What we see here is a kind of man that deflects all attention away from the man. To be a good pastor he must be faithful in teaching God's Word so that the people see nothing but Christ. By teaching well, the pastor gets himself out of the way. This is what Paul hammers home in the verse that began our reading: "Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead, from the seed of David, according to my Gospel" (v. 8). Now, surely he doesn't mean "remember" in the sense of not forgetting. Surely he doesn't think that Timothy or any other pastor is in danger of forgetting **that** Christ rose from the dead! But as fallen human beings all pastors face the perpetual risk of losing the centrality of this Gospel message. So we might paraphrase what Paul wrote as, "Always keep your mind and message centred on that confession of Christ raised from the dead." And if that were all that Paul wrote, it would be enough to chew on for four years of seminary life.

But his keen desire to mould the pastor into the shape of a cross doesn't end here, with this focus on preaching and teaching the Christ-message. Paul turns next to the very **life** of the pastor as he himself first lived it. Far from promising Timothy a comfortable parsonage, good worker benefits, and job security, he exhorts him, "Share with me in suffering evil as a noble soldier of Christ Jesus" (v. 3). It's a strange command, and a difficult one to

fulfil. Are pastors supposed to **look** for suffering, to avoid the pleasures of life, like the masochistic monks of fact or fiction, beating and starving themselves in the wilderness? Should we feel guilty if we get paid well enough to be comfortable in our own house, with a decent car? Perhaps we should, and you've certainly come into the wrong vocation if you're looking for wealth and luxury. But this isn't about lifestyles. Paul isn't telling Timothy to **look** for a life of suffering, but to **accept** suffering in his ministry as a positive thing. Why? Well, here we need to look first at St Paul, whose whole ministry was filled with suffering, and who saw suffering as an indispensable mark of an apostle. When challenging the false apostles that were troubling the Corinthians, Paul filled six whole verses with the list of his experiences: at least three times imprisoned; five times he received 39 lashes from the Jews; three times beaten with rods; once he was stoned; three times shipwrecked; in constant danger, hunger, and hardship. And now as he writes to Timothy, he languishes in a prison's chains for the sake of the Gospel.

"For the sake of the Gospel". Paul's suffering isn't just an unavoidable side effect of his job, like black lung for a coal miner. No, when Paul thought about it for a while—and he had a lot of time to think—he wrote this absolutely astonishing analysis:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the church,²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the Word of God fully known (Col. 1:24-25).

You see, the mystery of the apostolic ministry is that Christ somehow wasn't done suffering—oh, not that our salvation wasn't fully achieved on the cross. That message is crystal clear in the NT. When Christ said, "It is finished", He meant it. Paul himself was emphatic to the Romans that "the death He died He died to sin, once for all" (Rom. 6:10). But still, somehow, Paul reflects, the way that Gospel message is brought to people, looks just like the message itself. Or, put more clearly, when Paul preaches the message of a suffering Christ, He also suffers. And by his suffering, he draws people to the suffering Christ.

These are perhaps troubling thoughts to interrupt the festivities of an opening service. They might not sound like an "encouraging word" to our crop of new students or our veterans nearly ready for a call. But somehow Paul thought that Timothy needed to know it. He needed to know why he would suffer, that if he was going to represent Christ to the world, he would have to be prepared to be a picture of the cross. And there is indeed something formative about suffering. It helps to produce the kind of pastors that we need. It's the opposite of the theology of glory that pervades other churches, in which the pastor is supposed to represent only the victory of the

Gospel and not its cost. But as Paul describes himself as “wearing fetters like a criminal” (v. 9) his language suggests that he notices how he looks like that Messiah who was nailed to a cross between two criminals with a charge of treason above His head. He sees not himself, but Christ. So suffering diverts attention away from ourselves and onto the Gospel we preach. Like faithfulness to the Word, it, too, helps us get out of the way, so that it’s not we who succeed or triumph, but the Word of Christ that is never fettered, but runs on ahead (II Thess. 3:1) to triumph over sin, suffering, and death; that Word which we preach, teach, and place at the heart of everything we do in this place; that Word which makes us always “remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead”.

Ah, yes. “Suffering” alone was never the whole message. Suffering, for Christ and for Paul, was a means to an end. “If we have died with [Him], we shall also live with [Him]” (v. 11). This is most certainly true, Luther translates. This has been our experience already, we who’ve been baptized, we who’ve already suffered and died and risen to new life. “If we endure, we shall also reign with [Him]” (v. 12). The tragic experience of the apostle and the pastors who succeed him is eclipsed by this glory, the fulfilment of our Baptism towards which we’re heading each day of our lives. Because we’ve been baptized, Paul implies, our own resurrection and eternal glory is as sure and certain as the resurrection, ascension, and reign of Jesus Christ Himself, faithfully proclaimed by the Holy Word. Which means, ... which means, that no matter how **we** suffer, stumble, or fail, the faithfulness of **God** will always be the final Word. For if we have become so much like His Son, if we have been clothed with Christ so fully that we’re no longer separate from Him, then God can no more reject us than He can reject His own Son. “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He is not able to deny Himself.” Amen. “This is most certainly true.”

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