

# **The Proper Use of the Means of Grace, An Indispensable Requirement for Strengthening the Stakes**

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## **Outline**

- Introduction:* The strengthening of the stakes is God's requirement for God-pleasing lengthening of the cords.
- Part I:* An understanding of certain ecclesiastical terms is indispensable should our study serve its intended purpose.
- Part II:* The relationship of the various Means of Grace to one another must be carefully observed.
- Part III:* The respective role of the various Means of Grace in the worship service needs to be noted.
- Conclusion:* It behooves us ever to be concerned with a lengthening of the cords which takes into account the necessity of strengthening the stakes.

## **Introduction**

We, here assembled, are members of a synod. More specifically and far more significantly, we together with approximately 400,000 other believers in our country and in other countries, are members of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod. As such, we are compatible people traveling home together.

Yet it is not our joint pilgrimage which, at the moment, concerns us. It is rather the activity in which we are jointly engaged as we journey together. Though we here have no abiding city, strange as it may seem, we are here in this world engaged in an immense building project. The mystery disappears the moment we realize that while building in time we are not building for time. We are building for eternity.

By means of a picture, familiar and well understood in his day, Isaiah, the Evangelist of the Old Testament, thus describes our construction project: enlarging the tent, stretching forth the curtains, lengthening the cords. Isaiah is describing our building endeavors as a necessary enlargement of an important building. Why? Because of our mission as the Church of Jesus Christ. By going into all the world with the precious Gospel we bring into Jesus' fold those other sheep for which He also desires and guarantees ample room in His Church.

How beneficial to our construction work to be affiliated with a synod and thus to be at work with compatible people. Because of God's own promise and arrangement, there exists among us a veritable storehouse of treasures and talents. Working together harmoniously, we can pool our resources and gifts. In that way all of us can play a role, be it as members of the clergy or of the laity, be it as such for whom is possible only the contribution of a widow's mite or an infant's *Abba, Father*. The Architect of the project engaging us wanted none slighted. He wanted all to have the joy of the honored and privileged task.

Yet the Architect dare not be charged with the arrangement of an arbitrary method. He not only drew a wondrous plan; He also gave exact specifications for executing His design. Certainly, He desires zeal on the part of His construction crew—but not a blind zeal. He wants His builders to go into all the world—but to be at work only with the tools that He specifies. Often we may envy the zeal and intensity of some who go and work. They go unsalaried, they knock on one door after the other, unperturbed by whatever reception accorded them. And still, could not one wish they had stayed home? Would this not be better than to witness to a gospel which is no gospel?

By no means all who zealously conform to the Master's directive to go into all the world go as He would have them go. Not a few that go do the Lord a disservice. That's why Isaiah, in defining the Church's task, did

not stop with the orders to build. He immediately added an essential factor, the strengthening of the stakes. Therewith he was stating what Jesus later phrased thus: “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever have commanded you.”<sup>i</sup> Lest we forget, *these* are the last words of our Savior’s last will and testament. These words are not intended to dampen the zeal and joy of His building crew; they are to specify and to encourage the work plan and working method which alone will satisfy and please the Chief Architect and be truly successful.

Can you blame Him? His building is for eternity. It simply would not do to build with hay, wood, stubble. Christ’s Church needs a solid foundation, it requires a solidity which neither the rains could weaken nor the winds could destroy. Nor is the proper building material wanting. It is available; it is easily accessible. It is as near to us as God’s Word.

In keeping with our Lord’s second, but not inferior, injunction to us His co-laborers and intent on laboring as His co-laborers should, let us give attention to the topic: *The Proper Use of the Means of Grace, An Indispensable Requirement for Strengthening the Stakes.*

### **Part I: The Ecclesiastical Terms Involved in our Study**

Obviously, a lack of acquaintance with and an understanding of terms pertinent to our discussion will turn our study into an exercise in futility. Yet, before engaging ourselves in semantics, we, being God’s construction crew, do well to note how God has determined and wishes to deal with man in the vital area of salvation. The method He elected is *through means or tools*. Here’s verification from the Architect’s own lips: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”<sup>ii</sup> The inspired Paul merely paraphrases the Master’s definition and formulation of the mode. He states: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”<sup>iii</sup> Is there any wonder that He who wants all men to be saved committed to His co-laborers His word of reconciliation?

The method God originally designed remained unaffected when in New Testament times the Master augmented the Word with the rites of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The addition of the rites only meant that God was pleased also to make wise unto salvation “by the washing of regeneration”<sup>iv</sup> and by His “blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”<sup>v</sup> Addition is not to be equated with annihilation or even alteration. Never need we hesitate wholeheartedly to endorse a statement like the following:

The doctrine of salvation through the Means of Grace is distinctive of Lutheranism. The Catholic churches have no use for the means of *grace*, for a Gospel and for Sacraments which offer salvation as a free gift. And the Reformed churches, while they hold, in general, that salvation is by grace, repudiate the Gospel and the Sacraments as the *means* of grace. It is clear that matters of fundamental importance are involved. The chief article of the Christian religion, justification by faith, stands and falls with the article of the Means of Grace. Justification by faith means absolutely nothing without the Means of Grace, whereby the righteousness gained by Christ is bestowed and faith, which appropriates the gift, is created . . . . The Means of Grace are bound up with the very Vitals of faith. Faith lives on the offer of the forgiveness of sins, as it comes to us in the certain promise and absolute guarantee of the Gospel and the Sacraments. Here, again, Lutheranism fully meets the sinner’s need.<sup>vi</sup>

But why did God elect the method considered? Why did He will that in order to be eternally saved man must come to the knowledge of the truth as contained and presented through tools or instruments? Certainly God did not have to. Surely the method He chose was not the only way possible for Him who is God and as God is resourceful. Whatever of necessity existed did not lie on God’s side. Without attempting to penetrate divine mysteries and without running the danger of engaging in speculation, we leave it with a simple yet satisfying thus-it-pleased-God. This suffices: “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching—which also includes the foolishness of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper—to save them that believe.”<sup>vii</sup>

Were the situation otherwise than we have noted, what right would we have to designate as a heresy Zwingli's slogan, the Holy Ghost needs no vehicle? As things stand, Luther dare not be charged with slander when he writes:

. . . they act foolishly, yes, against God's order and institution, who despise and reject the external Word, thinking that the Holy Spirit should come to them without means.<sup>viii</sup>

Everything thus exalted as Spirit without this Word and these Sacraments is of the devil . . . . Therefore I do not want to go where these hypocrites are going with this "Spirit."<sup>ix</sup>

Why should the method God elected seem strange? What arrogance that men even regard this method as demeaning to God! The fact is:

God has always observed the custom of giving a visible sign, a person, a place, or spot, where He desired to be found without fail. For if we are not bound and held by a physical, external sign, every one of us will seek God wheresoever he please. This is the reason why the holy prophets wrote much of the tabernacle, the dwelling place and tent where it pleased Him to be present. In this way God always acted. In like manner He has built for us Christians a temple where He would dwell, namely, the spoken Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, which are also perceptible things.

Without these means, Word and Sacraments, we obtain none of these things (namely, spiritual blessings). For since the beginning of the world God has dealt with all the saints through His Word and, in addition, has given them external signs of grace. This I say that no one venture to deal with God without these means or build for himself a special way to heaven, lest he fall and break his neck, as the pope has done to his followers and still does, and as today the Anabaptist and other schismatic spirits do.<sup>x</sup>

Lest we forget, the method in question antedates the Fall. How else will we explain the tree of life's presence in the Garden? Was this tree not God's means for enabling man eventually to be fitted for eternal life with God in heaven? True, as created, man was not subject to death. Yet he would have to be changed into some spiritual, glorified body before he would be ready for the immortality of heaven.<sup>xi</sup> For Luther, the second tree of the Garden, like the sacraments, was a means or tool for effecting God's purpose.

Note then where the necessity for the use of tools lies. It is on man's, not on God's, part. As Dr. Francis Pieper puts it,

We are not concerned with the question whether God could not also operate in the spiritual sphere without means. The issue solely is whether God says in His revealed Word that He wants to work through certain means appointed by Him and has therefore directed us to these means.<sup>xii</sup>

In order to show what now ought to be man's reaction to the method God in His freedom elected but to which He bound man, Luther, in his inimitable manner but with scorching words, asserts:

But if it is his (ie. God's will) to give salvation to you through the humanity of Christ, through the Word, through the bread in the Supper, who are you, insolent, thankless devil, that you dare to ask why he does not do it in a different way and without these means? Will you prescribe and chose means and measures for God? You ought to leap for joy that he does it in whatever manner he chooses, if only you obtain it. Don't you think I also could ask: Since the gospel and the remembrance of Christ can be had in all preaching, what then is the need of celebrating a Supper in addition, and taking bread and wine in it? What is the need for anyone to admonish and

comfort another individually, since all this can happen in regular public preaching? God means to fill the world and give himself to us by his Word and works; shall we be so complacent and bored that we hinder him, and tolerate nothing but the way that happens to please us?<sup>xiii</sup>

Do you now see what an urgency surrounds the Means of Grace? But what will you now say when you learn: that the term is not biblical but rather ecclesiastical? This need not shock you. It is not at all surprising. A good deal of the terminology in use in the church originated with the church. Often excellent designations issued from troublesome and trying times for the church, from heresies and controversies. So far as the . systematization of doctrine, with its accepted terms and formulations, is concerned, that which in itself is arbitrary may nevertheless prove to be a blessing and attest that God is so good that He allows nothing unless He can draw from it some good.

When and how did the term Means of Grace originate? Admittedly, these facts are somewhat veiled. Apparently, the term's use by the church is largely attributable to heresy, heresy which had arisen specifically relative to the order of salvation, heresy necessitating greater emphasis on the *method* God employs for the realization of His salutary purpose over against man. The term in question must antedate our Lutheran Confessions. These confessional writings seem to take the term for granted, employing it not only as one known to the theologians but also one with which untrained laymen were familiar. Terms like Means of Grace (*media gratiae*), Means of Salvation (*media salutis*), and Instruments of the Holy Spirit (*instrumenta Spiritus Sancti*) abound in the Lutheran Confessions and early Lutheran literature.

The term's origin has practical implications. In view of the term's ecclesiastical origin we have no right to demand its use as a requisite for church fellowship. Likewise, we dare not require of others a definition of the term in agreement with our definition. Our argument with Rome lies in what this church contends all of its means of grace are capable of doing, not in the fact that Rome has augmented our so-called Means of Grace with its supernumerary sacraments, its sacramentals, prayer, pilgrimages, monkery, yes, even holy water, oil, salt, palms, candles. Similarly, in the case of the Reformed it is in itself of little consequence that they designate as Means of Grace prayer, love feasts and class meetings. "We do not think it makes much difference if, for purposes of teaching, the enumeration varies," even if churches add as Means of Grace the Christians' cross, the fruits of faith, miracles, and the like, "provided what is handed down in Scripture is preserved."<sup>xiv</sup> Lest we forget, "the Fathers did not always use the same enumeration."<sup>xv</sup> In our case, prudence, too, will dictate not to quibble about the number and the terminology.

Now that we have noted what is not of major consideration, we naturally wonder what is. It is this: the *capability* attached and attributed to the Means of Grace. "By the Means of Grace," we say, "are meant those things by which God offers and gives His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation."<sup>xvi</sup> What, according to such credentials, qualifies as Means of Grace is very limited. For one thing, only that of a *sacramental* nature, being directed from God to man, can be counted. Whatever is by its nature sacrificial, for example prayer and good works, having as they do their direction from man to God, does not bestow God's spiritual gifts. Only the Gospel, be it in Word or in the Sacraments, has the capability of creating and sustaining saving faith.

Once the Means of Grace are restricted to "those things" just noted, we find ourselves in an area where a definite stand is called for. The deterioration of doctrine in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is proof for what we have said. It was, to say the least, a concession on the part of the Missouri Synod in the issue before us where, back in 1950, the camel got his nose into the tent-door. In jointly writing the *Common Confession* with the American Lutheran Church, the Missouri Synod, at least tacitly, permitted the Law to be regarded as a Means of Grace. This altered stance, together with other doctrinal shifts, bore its inevitable fruit when church fellowship was declared between Missouri and the American Lutheran Church. It did not take long before formidable cracks developed in what once was a true fortress of Lutheranism. Even the most innocent appearing beginnings need to be resisted!

Thus far our consideration centered especially on the first word of the term Means of Grace. The word *grace* also demands some attention. By grace is meant "that merciful, affectionate disposition, that good will of God toward men, according to which He forgives sins of those who are worthy of eternal death."<sup>xvii</sup> Since that is

the grace meant in the term Means of Grace, this grace has nothing in common with Rome's grace, namely "a quality that has been infused, instilled, imbued into man, a virtue that is now inherent in him, by which he loves God and walks His ways."<sup>xviii</sup> Used as we with Scriptures understand God's grace, this grace and the particular grace of Calvinistic circles differ from one another more than black and white. Would we be true children of the Reformation, we, too, must condemn any and all who add to the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments other means of salvation; we, too, will renounce whatever tampers with and nullifies that marvelous concept, the grace of God.

At this juncture, a slight deviation from our pattern seems prudent. It concerns the *formulation* of doctrine by the church, putting into a clear and concise statement any article of faith found in God's Word. It is here that heresy often proves to be a blessing in disguise. That was our Synod's experience in recent years. The intrusion of the Law into the domain of the Gospel, the area where the Missouri Synod made a concession to the American Lutheran Church, prompted a revision of our answer to our *Catechism's* question: "Which are the Means of Grace?"<sup>xix</sup> The answer as now found, "The means of Grace are the Gospel of Christ in Word and Sacraments,"<sup>xx</sup> leaves no room whatsoever for an inclusion of the Law under the heading, the Means of Grace.

Also being of ecclesiastical origin, the term *sacrament* must likewise receive some attention in this portion of our essay. Unlike the term Means of Grace, the term sacrament offers a clear and easily traceable history. Here is what an article in *The Abiding Word* has to say concerning the term sacrament:

SACRAMENT is a Latin word which had its origin in profane literature. Classical writers used it to designate a thing dedicated, solemnly set apart, as, for example, a sum of money laid down as a pledge in court and given as a bond or paid as a forfeit or fine. Hence they also employ it to indicate a solemn pledge, specifically, in military usage, the pledge of loyalty, the oath of allegiance of a soldier to the flag of his country, and then, in general, any formal oath.<sup>xxi</sup>

Early Christian teachers, among them Ambrose and Augustine, adopted the word into ecclesiastical language and employed it in the meaning of "a holy thing, a secret, an inscrutable mystery." And thus Jerome employed in his Latin Bible, the Vulgate. We find it there, for example, in Daniel 2:18, where Daniel asks his friends to "desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this *secret*." Again we find the word in the Vulgate in I Tim. 3:16: "Without controversy great is the *mystery* of godliness." And the widespread use of the word in the Church in its looser meaning is undoubtedly owing to the fact that Jerome employed it in his translation of I Cor. 4:1, where St. Paul calls himself and his colaborers "stewards of the *mysterics* of God."<sup>xxii</sup>

In spite of the word's previous and varied use, designating a variety of Christian rites and activities, the term sacrament's connotation in Lutheran circles became fixed to indicate, as our *Apology* states, certain "rites which have the command of God, and to which the promise of grace has been added."<sup>xxiii</sup>

The *Apology's* definition of the term did not include the "visible element"—nor did it have to. The fathers' definition permitted them to number Absolution among the Sacraments. This inclusion, they insisted, was not to be equated with counting as a Sacrament Rome's Penance or Confession. Because of the definition with which the fathers operated, they were not even averse to recognizing as Sacraments Orders and Marriage as long as "those objects still be retained which have God's command and promise."<sup>xxiv</sup>

As is obvious, many significant parallels exist between the terms Means of Grace and Sacrament. For that reason we can conclude our investigation of the two words with a brief reference to the use of the term sacrament in Roman Catholic and Reformed circles. The Roman definition, formulated by the Council of Trent and still in force, classifies a Sacrament as "a visible sign of invisible grace instituted for our sanctification."<sup>xxv</sup> The definition reveals clearly Rome's conception of itself as possessing the authority to pronounce as Means of Grace items which, by no stretch of the imagination, offer God's spiritual gifts. Rome's reference to grace must

be understood as Rome understands grace, namely, as “infused” or “prevenient grace.” Though in a different manner, the Reformed definition errs by downgrading and minimizing the Sacraments. In Reformed theology, the Sacraments are reduced to the point where they are “only the marks of profession among men.”<sup>xxvi</sup> Gone is the Sacraments’ inherent power to salvation. No wonder, what else could be expected from such who contend that the Holy Ghost requires no tools! To make matters worse, to the Reformed Church’s low estimate of the Means of Grace, including also the Sacraments, must be added the Reformed teaching of particular grace, a self-evident and logical consequence of and counterpart to Calvin’s Double Predestination.

## Part II: The Importance of the Various Means of Grace in Relation to One Another

More than an acquaintance with terms is necessary would we employ the Means of Grace as the Designer and Donor of these tools would have it. The *relative importance* of these means, specifically their relationship to one another, must also be understood.

Above all, it is imperative to know that there is, in the final analysis, only *one* Means of Grace. Placing the *Gospel* in this position, namely, as absolutely indispensable, never permits nor occasions a depreciation of the Sacraments. Rather, doing so immediately indicates what alone renders the Sacraments Means of Grace. Thus it pinpoints that which also affords the Sacraments their value. In assigning to the Gospel the importance and prominence noted, we must realize that what was stated holds true only if the term Gospel is used in its narrower sense. In this sense, the term designates the actual good news of God’s love in Christ for sinners. In this sense, it does not signify the entire Word of God, a meaning the word Gospel also has when employed in its wider or, as we may say, improper sense.

It is the Gospel, in its narrower sense, which constitutes the one Means of Grace. Yet here is where problems arise—for men and not of God’s doing. The Gospel comes to man *in various forms*. It comes in the *Word*, namely, in words alone and, therefore, is designated as the *oral* or *audible* Gospel. Yet the Gospel contacts humans also in the Sacraments, because of this form then known as the *visible* Gospel.

The high estimate the Word places on the one Means of Grace strongly suggests hearing at least some of the Word’s testimony to and praise of the Gospel. Listen, the Gospel is “the tidings of great joy,”<sup>xxvii</sup> “the power of God unto salvation,”<sup>xxviii</sup> “the wisdom of God,”<sup>xxix</sup> “the mystery of godliness.”<sup>xxx</sup> Human language, even when employed by God in His Word, simply is incapable of doing justice to the Gospel’s magnitude and preeminence. How could it? The Gospel is the superlative of the love of Him who is love. The beneficiaries of the Gospel, as highly as they value this Means of Grace, are at a loss for words to describe it adequately, to say nothing of defining it satisfactorily. In holy awe, the great Reformer labeled the Gospel “the true treasure of the Church.”<sup>xxxi</sup> To him it was “the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

Luther further revealed his high, yet correct, estimate of the Gospel when he designated it as “the chief thing in the Sacrament.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> Evangelical Lutheran theologians have ever noted and taught that same relationship between the one true Means of Grace and the secondary Means of Grace, the Sacraments. Unless this be and remain our stand, we will be found false witnesses when we say of Baptism’s element that it is “simple water only”<sup>xxxiv</sup> and confess in the Lord’s Supper that “it is, not the eating and drinking, indeed, that does these great things.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

This is of major importance. Whatever the Gospel promises and offers the Sacraments promise and offer, no more and no less. The Sacraments were not added to the Gospel to compensate for some deficiency of the Gospel. The ends to be achieved by the Sacraments are no different from those assigned to the Gospel. By means of the various modes by which the Gospel approaches men God is pleased to make sinners “wise unto salvation.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

No matter in which form the Gospel strikes the sinner, its power and capability to save the lost are identical. In every case, the Gospel is endowed with the omnipotence for which nothing is or can be impossible. As Quenstedt says,

there is a natural efficacy in the Word of God, because it naturally belongs to it, and its essence and nature are such that it could not be the true Word of God unless it contained within itself that divine power and virtue to convert men . . . .<sup>xxxvii</sup>

God's omnipotence, think of it, is indissolubly united with the Gospel. The Gospel is all-powerful, independent of its use. The Gospel is the power of God *before* and *outside* its being used or in use. At no time is the Evangel a "dead letter" in its oral form nor "empty symbols" in its visible form, regardless whether in use or not in use. Reformed theology errs badly and with dire consequences when it denies the Gospel's intrinsic power and efficacy.

Lose the truth just enunciated and gone is also one of the most comforting elements concerning the Means of Grace. The power and efficacy of the Gospel, be it in its oral or in its visible form, are in no wise dependent upon the *administrant* or the *recipient*. As Luther puts it so graphically, you could have been baptized by a godly or wicked person, by one ordained or not ordained, yes, by the devil's mother, thank God, this would have no bearing on the validity of your Baptism. But remember also, as the recipient of any Means of Grace it was not your faith nor a lack of faith that determined the efficacy of that Means of Grace. The Gospel, in Word or Sacraments, always has its validity in itself. No matter what the results of the Gospel's use be, whether it prove to be the "savour of death unto death" or the "savour of life unto life,"<sup>xxxviii</sup> the Gospel's power and efficacy remain unaffected.

Is God, then, indifferent over against the eventual outcome of the Gospel and its use? Of course not. The Gospel was designed and created to be "unto life." However the Gospel be used, in Word or in the Sacraments, it is "for the remission of sins."<sup>xxxix</sup> In God's wisdom the Means of Grace are *the way* by which God's good and gracious will toward all men is to be realized.

In connection with what has just been stated we must at least say a word about Rome's contention that the Means of Grace benefit "*ex opere operato*," namely, mechanically, automatically in consequence of the performance of and participation in the act involved. Of such an automatic benefit derived without and apart from faith the Word knows nothing whatsoever. Over against the Reformed, it behooves us at this point to state that God's Word also knows nothing of a particular grace, a grace restricted to certain individuals. God's grace is always unrestricted even as it is always unconditional. To all it offers the same benefit. It is scriptural to state, "The blessings offered and promised in the Sacraments are not something in addition to, or beyond, the promises of the Gospel, or part of them, but the identical blessings."<sup>xl</sup> It would violate completely God's intent in instituting several forms by which the Gospel reaches men were we "to imagine that each of the three means transmits one third of the forgiveness."<sup>xli</sup> "The effect of the Word (Gospel) and of the rite (Sacraments) is the same."<sup>xlii</sup>

Would you not have thought that a truth so clearly taught in God's Word and so convincingly confessed in our Lutheran Confessions would have escaped falsification at least by such who bear the Reformer's name? But alas!

Modern theologians in particular have the idea that a different effect must be attributed to each means of grace. Baptism, they say, differs, from the Word of the Gospel in working regeneration, and the Lord's Supper differs from both the Word and Baptism by a special physical effect, for example, the implanting of the resurrection body.<sup>xliii</sup>

Even some so-called Lutherans have ascribed to the Sacraments magical and medicinal qualities, by which a mere partaking of them has been said to confer various benefits, all the way from an indelible character to a better state of physical health.<sup>xliv</sup>

Both of the quotations just heard spoke of a certain *physical effect* connected with the Lord's Supper. It is true, some Lutherans may label this effect only a possibility. Others, among them some trained in the schools of our former sister-synod, mince no words. While they are often at a loss to define precisely what the physical

effect is, they make no bones about teaching such a benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar. One wonders how such Lutherans can expect to be taken seriously when, on the one hand, they pledge loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions and then, on the other hand, they reject the confessional statement that through the Gospel and the Sacraments “are granted not bodily, but eternal things, as eternal righteousness.”<sup>xlv</sup>

Something also needs to be said concerning the attachment of superstitious beliefs to the Sacraments. This does happen; it happens in spite of the Bible’s plain and positive renunciation of anything of a superstitious nature. How frequently Baptism is regarded much as a charm or amulet assuring a safe homecoming in heaven merely by virtue of the fact that the event of Baptism did occur. Without a doubt, even more frequently the Lord’s Supper is viewed as magical panacea making all end well, no matter what. One wonders, for example, whether the high favor with which the military chaplaincy is regarded does not, at least in part, result from the belief that the chaplain’s administration of the Lord’s Supper is necessary for a dying soldier to fall asleep peacefully.

Hopefully, we are not being misunderstood. We are not speaking disparagingly or possibly even questioning the value of gifts so great as the Sacraments. But questions like these are in order: Are the Sacraments actually necessary? What value do they have?

The answer to the first question is immediately apparent from the situation prevailing in Old Testament times. God’s will then was also that all men be saved. But no Sacraments then existed. Obviously, there was no such need for the Sacraments that coming to faith was impossible without them. Untold Bible passages, especially the catalog of heroes of faith, listed in Hebrews 11, testify otherwise.

Now the Sacraments do exist. Still even now no absolute need dare be attached to them: The media of communication being as plentiful and effective as they are, no doubt many a person is brought to faith by the Gospel heard or read. Such a person’s inability to know of or to avail himself of the Sacraments will not bar him from heaven. Happily that it is so. Now little ones brought to Jesus are not shortchanged because, according to their Savior’s own directives, they are not as yet ready and prepared to partake of their Lord’s Supper.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Our conviction relative to the absolute necessity of the Sacraments justifies fully our rejection of Rome’s contention in its *Tridentinum*, namely:

If anyone says that the sacraments of the new law (covenant?) are not necessary to salvation, but superfluous, and that without them or without their offering (vote) men obtain the grace of justification from God . . . let him be accursed.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Similarly, our position compels a rejection of the type of necessity as taught by Calvinism, namely, a necessity on account of human weakness or as a matter of duty and obedience.<sup>xlviii</sup> Augustine’s sane stance in this issue is also our stance: it is not the privation but the contempt of the Sacraments that damns. That position does not relegate the Sacraments to a place of worthlessness, yet at the same time it does deny an absolute need for them. The necessity of the Sacraments is *relative*. They are not useless nor superfluous as Quakers and Unitarians hold.

Having said what we did, we know full well how some will counter. They will cite two passages, particularly with reference to Baptism, by which they contend that our previously stated position is unscriptural. The passages are John 3:5 and Titus 3:5b. The first reads thus: “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The second states: “. . . by the washing of regeneration . . . he saved us.” Do such passages compel us to retract or at least modify our stance? By no means! Jesus’ words fully justify our teaching. He left no doubt about the correct position when He said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”<sup>xlix</sup> Nothing in His words so much as hints that a lack of the Sacraments damns.

We’ll quote Francis Pieper in rebuttal in connection with the passage from John:

. . . the scope of this passage is reproof of the Pharisees and scribes, who rejected God’s counsel of salvation appointed for their day and despised the Baptism of John, while the publicans



repented and were baptized. This is what Luke reports (7:29-30): “And all the people that heard him (John), and the publicans justified God being baptized with the Baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.” In view of this contempt for the Baptism of John as well as for God’s counsel of salvation, Christ says to Nicodemus, who was “a man of the Pharisees,” “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.” We, too, would have to tell a despiser of Christ’s Baptism: “Except a man be baptized, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”<sup>l</sup>

Thus, when carefully and contextually examined, every passage employed to refute our position is found to be wanting.

The same can be said of passages adduced over against our position associated with the Lord’s Supper. Here the verse usually cited is John 6:53, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” Here again, Hermeneutics’ historical rule, to observe the historical context, suffices to undergird our position. The words used against us do not pertain to the Lord’s Supper. They speak of the necessity of faith in Christ and His vicarious atonement. Of that we readily admit, except a man believe thus, “faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.”<sup>li</sup>

Returning to the Sacrament of Baptism, we know that our stance is especially challenged in connection with infants. Yet even here no modification of our position is necessary nor permissible. We’ll stand by what is found in *Popular Symbolics*, namely:

Insisting on the absolute necessity of Baptism, Catholicism excludes those infants who are deprived of Baptism by reason of sudden death and the negligence of the parents from heaven. The Lutheran theologians hold that God, who intends the blessings of Baptism for these infants, Mark 10:14; Matt. 28:19, deals with them as He dealt in the Old Testament with the female infants and those dying before the eighth day, who were not excluded from the covenant because of the lack of circumcision, Gen. 17: 7, 10, 12, 44. Speaking of Jewish infants who died before Baptism could be administered, Luther says: “They do not sin against the covenant of circumcision or Baptism. For since the Law prescribes that they must not be circumcised before the eighth day, would God damn those who die before that day? Therefore we should commit their souls into the hands and will of their heavenly Father, who is, as we know, merciful.”<sup>lii</sup>

Our discussion up to this point almost inevitably suggests the question: “Why did God ordain these additional means of grace (the Sacraments) when already the Word suffices to confer and appropriate to the sinner His grace and the forgiveness of sins?”<sup>liii</sup> Perhaps we could conclude the matter by saying: the question should never have been asked. God did add the Sacraments. It pleased Him to do so. That satisfies faith. Yet it cannot be construed as improper to explain this addition as did Prof. John Meyer: “the varied way of offering grace serves the purpose of giving stronger assurance.”<sup>liv</sup> Nor can we fault Melancthon for stating, “...just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our hearts so the rite itself strikes the eye in order to move the heart.”<sup>lv</sup>

Actually, it is the truth just stated which led Augustine to designate the Sacraments as the “visible word” and also to speak of them as “pictures of the Word.” In their special way, the Sacraments serve as seals, as “signs and testimonies of God’s will toward us.”<sup>lvi</sup> The Sacraments dare not claim for themselves an absolute need, yet they are treated with contempt if they are regarded as unnecessary and superfluous.

The contempt for the Sacraments is only compounded and magnified when then the value of their *personalizing* and *individualizing* nature enters the picture. Compared with the visible Gospel, which, as Luther says, is “preached into a crowd,” the Sacraments are directed to and intended for one particular soul.

The Sacraments are *rites*. Elements form a vital part of the Sacraments. These facts, too, dare not be overlooked nor in any way minimized. Surely nobody could imagine the Lord arbitrarily designating water as the element in Baptism and bread and wine as the visible, earthly aspect of the Lord’s Supper. While not being

the chief thing in the Sacraments, the rites and elements, respectively, of the two Sacraments have their own specific meaning and significance.

An undue amount of time and space may seem to have been devoted to the relationship of the various Means of Grace to one another. We make no apologies for this. We did this, to be sure, because of the down-grading and depreciation suffered by the Sacraments. Yet, more so, we treated the matter at some length because of the intensity of the emphasis placed on the Lord's Supper in present-day church circles, especially in Lutheran circles. At the risk of being accused of minimizing the Supper with its incomparable blessings, we make bold to label the emphasis on the Lord's Supper an *overemphasis*.

We consider as guilty in this matter the advocates of the Liturgical or High-church Movement. Their statements and stance ought, to disturb us no end. Their, allegation, well deserving of the name Sacramentarianism, definitely reveals a Romanizing tendency. Without excusing this trend, we realize full well that the danger of falling prey to it has been augmented by the friendly overtures emanating from Rome since the *aggiornamento* introduced by Pope John XXIII. Those who wished to reciprocate and have, in consequence, assumed a changed attitude to Rome do not surprise us. They are such who have discarded Luther's "death-bed" confession: "the Pope is the very Antichrist."<sup>lvii</sup> Whoever, in the face of what Scriptures label a revelation, fails to recognize and identify the Antichrist is certainly "weak in Christian theology."<sup>lviii</sup> For such a person, it is but a small step to falling victim to all manner of perversions of God's Word.

Because it rightly saw in the Roman Papacy the full realization of Scriptures' prophecies concerning the Antichrist, the *Confessional Lutheran* did not exaggerate when already in 1957 it stated:

The High Church Movement does not represent a mere careless slip on the part of some unfortunate individual; it is not a bundle of mistakes that some group of individuals has inadvertently become guilty of in thoughtless moments. It rather represents a concerted effort and a determined endeavor which like all heretical tendencies is seeking to establish its views as the accepted form of teaching and practice in the Church. With perhaps somewhat less than becoming modesty its enthusiasts recently said: "The Liturgical Revival (The High Church Movement) is . . . the most important contribution to the Church since the Reformation."<sup>lix</sup>

Let us not think that the Antichrist is blind to what is occurring in the church named after him who, knowing the Papacy to be the very Antichrist, assailed it with might and vigor. Why would not the Antichrist rejoice at noting such a success with his "deceivableness of unrighteousness."<sup>lx</sup> Note the words that have in recent times issued from Roman Catholic sources:

. . . there would be no insurmountable difficulty now for them (these Lutherans) to accept Trent's definition of the Eucharist as a sacrifice.<sup>lxi</sup>

Such tendencies on the part of non-Catholic brethren seem to us a good sign. They are a compliment to the beauty and dignity of Catholic worship and a secret admission of the "mistake" made by early reformers in abolishing them. Perhaps they will result in the "opening the eyes" of many well-disposed non-Catholics to take the step back to the mother Church from which they have been so long separated . . . . When large Protestant churches like the Lutheran admit the need of "reformation" of their manner of worship, there is hope that the true Church of Christ may again exert her perennial appeal to her prodigal wandering children dissatisfied with the husks of imitation with which they are being fed by their religious leaders and will turn back the steps of many to "their Father's house."<sup>lxii</sup>

. . . two movements tend to reduce Protestant fear of Catholicism: the ecumenical and liturgical.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Small wonder that Dr. Sasse went so far as to say, “The deeper reason why High-Churchism has become the ruin of so many seems to me to lie in the fact that we modern Lutherans no more understand the article of Justification.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Aware of what has happened in other Lutheran circles, we do well to be on guard against any overemphasis of the Lord’s Supper invading our midst. Whether the overemphasis springs from some version of a High Church Movement or a false understanding of the Means of Grace, it is dangerous; nay, it is heretical. Aiming to be and remain loyal Lutherans, may we carefully note the Great Reformer’s words:

We see how rarely the evangelists and the apostles mention the Lord’s Supper. Many people wish these writers had said more about it. But everywhere the evangelists and apostles urge the ministry of the Word and stress it almost to the point of becoming wearisome. This was done because the Spirit foresaw the perverse abomination of these tonsured masqueraders who would move the heart away from the Word and turn it to this dead transubstantiation of the bread and wine.<sup>lxv</sup>

Issuing from the source whence they did, Luther’s observations ought to say volumes to those dedicated to true Lutheranism.

### **Part III. The Respective Role of the Various Means of Grace in the Worship Services**

The Means of Grace play a role, a vital role, in our worship services. In consequence, each of the Means of Grace arrests our attention conspicuously and frequently. That in itself affords sufficient reason to note the role played by the Holy Ghost’s human instruments in the services where they are led by Him to worship and praise and also are instructed concerning the how of worship and praise.

Only a casual acquaintance with Holy Writ is required to learn that God desires worship and praise from His children. A casual acquaintance also reveals that God desires worship and praise as a part of the individual’s faith-life as well as from His children in assembly. Chosen almost at random, passages like the following speak of, reveal and demonstrate God’s will in matters of worship:

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.<sup>lxvi</sup>

Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.<sup>lxvii</sup>

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Not, forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.<sup>lxix</sup>

It’s apparent, neither private nor public worship are optional. As the Third Commandment directs and as countless passages found here and there in God’s Word verify, it is God’s will that those who are His express and confess this fact, among other ways, by their worship of their Lord and God. It is also apparent that one type of worship does not exclude the other or make unnecessary the other. Private and public worship *complement* one another, one is the natural outgrowth and fruit of the other. To question this would be as foolish as to question whether God is to be worshipped at all. He who desires to be glorified in all things already thereby expresses His will and encourages to becoming worship of every kind.

Worship is to glorify God. Thereby the nature of worship is indicated. It must be worship in “spirit and in truth.”<sup>lxx</sup> God’s will in this matter does not permit legislation nor vain repetition. Though being in accordance with God’s will, worship is vain and an abomination if, it is not motivated by faith-born love and is not an expression of faith.

Here is one person's definition of worship: "It is the total response of man to the one Eternal God self-revealed in time."<sup>lxxi</sup> We should add, it is such a response flowing out of an appreciation of all God in His unmerited grace has done for man. With this addition, worship is indeed a "way of thinking, believing, acting, living, dying."<sup>lxxii</sup>

In the best sense of the word, worship can be casual. Yet it can be seriously questioned whether the incidental aspect extends beyond private worship. A so-called "free service," often bordering on the disorderly, just does not seem to conform to the injunction: "Let all things be done decently and in order."<sup>lxxiii</sup> This is not to say that the concern for arranging an orderly public worship can run roughshod over those in the possession of the liberty with which and by which Christ has made them free. Orderliness does not cancel out the adiabatic nature of a worship service. Liturgical matters may indeed at times become a matter of confession. Yet, in themselves, matters of this kind belong to the area of Church or Congregational Government. In this area dictation has no place; here Christians, in the exercise of their liberty and with Christian judgment, decide—of course, "with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another."<sup>lxxiv</sup>

The arrangement of an orderly service calls for an awareness of the twofold aspect of such a service. There are to be considered the *sacramental* as well as the *sacrificial* elements. Externally and visibly, these two aspects are normally apparent from the position occupied by the liturgist or officiant in relationship to the altar. The position indicates whether any given portion of the service is of a sacramental nature, the offer of God's grace to the worshippers, or sacrificial, the response of worshippers to grace received.

For God's children, there is no question which of the two elements will be accorded preeminence in a Christian service. This matter is decided by the fact that we can love God only because He first loved us. Here John expressed a principle fundamental to a proper understanding and correct evaluation of any worship and worship form. Nay, an awareness of this principle is indispensable lest an undue emphasis be placed on liturgies and a service degenerate into a liturgical show. Methinks, Webber's words, in his *Studies in the Liturgy*, warrant reading and re-reading in our day:

The liturgy itself cannot save. It can only declare audibly the truths of God's Word. It is a good thing, therefore, to have an unmutated and doctrinally pure liturgy. It is a better thing to have an unmutated and doctrinally pure understanding of the teachings of our Lord, and to believe in them. We can if need be, dispense with all liturgies; but we can never dispense with the saving truths which the Lord has made known to us.<sup>lxxv</sup>

The sacramental act, the administration of the Means of Grace, is the "chief thing" in the worship services. Without the sacramental given its due, the sacrificial portion becomes dead formalism and hollow mockery. Thus it is in place to inquire concerning the "chief thing" whether degrees of importance exist among the various sacramental acts. The question has special significance for the simple reason that differences of opinion here prevail. These differences need to be viewed in the light of what previously has been stated.

To my knowledge, the sacramental act of Baptism in no way affects the problem. The real issue is the role the Lord's Supper plays in our services. It seems hardly necessary here to give much attention to those who are on the extreme left. I mean by that such who, by preference, employ the name Eucharist and even the name Mass, who speak of a "real presence" before and without the complete sacramental action and hence are virtually in Rome's camp also regarding the adoration of the host. Such have fairly sold out to the Antichrist. Of such we need say little. Or is this necessary? Isn't it likely that those now far off key once began with a view at first appearing harmless and innocent? Even where the slightest turn to the left is apparent, God strongly warns against the total aberration possible in reminding: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."<sup>lxxvi</sup> The prudent need not be told a second time: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."<sup>lxxvii</sup>

The view of those considered may be termed the crassest. It permits of more easy and ready detection. It is for that reason that they whose position is less crass perhaps hold the view more to be feared. We are thinking of such who still harbor some fear for the Antichrist's pernicious doctrines. Though not totally blinded, such

have nevertheless lost sight of the importance of the tenets and principles earlier enunciated and expounded. In the matter engaging our attention, their position, formulated by themselves, is that the Sacrament of the Altar

is the one specifically Christian service whether a sermon be preached or read or whether no sermon be read or preached . . . . If there is no Communion this renders it (the service) entirely useless if not somewhat ridiculous . . . . A preaching service only for the main service of the Church is a betrayal of Baptism.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Another propagandist for the same view dared to say: “There cannot be true discipleship without the Communion.”<sup>lxxix</sup>

How sad—if this were true. Pity our baptized infants, our unconfirmed youth, Abraham and all Old Testament believers, the many who, for one reason or another—and valid reasons—did not or do not personally partake of the Lord’s Supper. How shortchanged they would be. Rather than being true disciples they would have to be satisfied with a classification of second-rate children of God—at best.

According to the position noted, a service can never be complete and truly satisfy unless the Lord’s Supper form an integral part of it. Imagine, the sermon could well be dispensed with—as long as a beautiful liturgy featuring the Sacrament of the Altar constitutes the service. Sufficient instruction for the laity, it is said, would be offered by means of such a service.

A third view must be mentioned, one actually but a step removed from the former. We’ll label this one a truly subtle position. It is deceiving because it could well issue from a certain concern and respect for the Lord’s Supper. Yes, it might well result from a reaction to an all too frequent neglect and indifference with respect to Holy Communion. The position is this: the Sacrament of the Altar is the highest point in a worship service; everything in a service peaks and culminates in the Lord’s Supper, a service’s real climax.

The contention does have a pious ring. Besides, the argumentation in its favor is based upon the fact that the early Christians observed Communion every Sunday, always concluding their public worship with this celebration. Tertullian even informs us that at the beginning of the third century the Lord’s Supper was observed daily, also at wedding ceremonies and at anniversaries for the dead. Nay more, Tertullian also reports that people “partook of the Eucharist bread before every meal.”<sup>lxxx</sup> “Hence,” as Wiederschilling states, “in ancient liturgy the Order of Communion followed the Order of Service without a break.”<sup>lxxxii</sup>

But the stress on Communion in Tertullian’s day dare not blindly be accepted as an example to be emulated. It needs to be carefully investigated. We must not forget, “Tertullian is rightly called the father of Roman Catholic Theology.”<sup>lxxxiii</sup> In Tertullian’s writing “we have practically all of the un-Scriptural teachings of modern Rome, especially the core of all its false teaching.”<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

It must also be noted that, contemporaneously with the undue emphasis on the Lord’s Supper, positive heresies concerning this Sacrament were developing. One of them was that of the Mass involving an unbloody or non-bloody sacrifice of the Lord. Dierks had sound reasons to say:

They (namely they of the High Church Movement) forget that the ancient Liturgies developed at a time when little of the true Gospel was found in the Christian Church and when a false and un-Scriptural conception of the Lord’s Supper prevailed throughout the Church.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

We do not deny that Luther retained much of the ancient liturgy. At the same time it is indisputable that Luther restored the sermon to a place of primary position in a service. There is no question about it, “the Reformation simplified and purified the text of the Liturgy. . . . restored the sermon to its rightful place in the Service.”<sup>lxxxv</sup> The sermon’s place in a service, as conceived by Luther, has been the historic Lutheran concept of a worship service. Following quotations are typically Lutheran in their nature:

The Sermon is the high point and most important part of the service. It brings a message from God’s Word, which the pastor expounds and applies to the hearers.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

It is un-scriptural and therefore un-Lutheran to contend that in the Lord's Supper more is received than through the preaching of the Gospel, that without the celebration of the Lord's Supper Christian worship is incomplete, or that Christian worship first reaches its climax in such celebration. That is a thoroughly Roman Catholic conception of the Lord's Supper.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

We are guilty of a Romanizing tendency when we assign too great importance to the administration of the sacraments. An extreme liturgical movement can be dangerous and is bound to be un-Lutheran, that is, inconsistent with Luther's position. As ceremonial is accentuated, the teaching of the Word may all too easily be minimized, and we may then have the unhealthy situation which Luther tried so hard to remedy.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

To that Luther would have said Amen. In fact, to that he did say Amen. Hear what he said:

Now to get rid of these abuses (stress on other items at the expense of the preaching of the Word) we should know first that the Christian congregation should never meet unless God's Word is preached and prayed, be this ever so short . . . . Therefore, where God's Word is not preached, it is better that the people do not sing or read or come together.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The words are of far greater consequence than the Sacrament itself, and the Christian must become accustomed to pay far greater heed to these words than to the Sacraments.<sup>xc</sup>

Luther certainly did not mince words. He truly spoke his—or better, Scriptures'—mind. Luther's daring and decisiveness led Heinrich Bornkamm to write:

We are repeatedly startled by statements of Luther which almost let the Sacraments appear dispensable and secondary. So long as man has the words, i.e., so long as he believes the message to be proclaimed in the Sacraments, it may be that he can dispense with the signs, with the Sacraments themselves. Salvation is possible without the Sacraments, but not without the Testament, i.e., the Gospel. To the end of his days Luther conceded that some people may not need the Sacraments.<sup>xcii</sup>

Whoever disagrees with Luther on the point noted cannot agree with him on the office of the ministry. In labeling the preaching ministry the highest office in the church, Luther gave as the reason this office's privilege of proclaiming the "good tidings of great joy." Among many pertinent utterances we select this one:

To whomever the office of preaching is committed, to him the highest office in Christendom is committed. He may then baptize, celebrate Mass (Lord's Supper), and perform all the cure of souls.<sup>xciii</sup>

We have used Luther to prove our point, not because we idolize Luther but rather because Luther's position is that of God's Word. The fact is that Luther's stance echoes Paul's description of a worship service. Let's hear the inspired apostle. He writes:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord: giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>xciiii</sup>

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.<sup>xciv</sup>

Such was the nature of a service—as the inspired Paul conceived of a service. His non-inclusion of the Lord’s Supper in his description, if interpreted to denote on Paul’s part a depreciation of the Lord’s Supper, would be a case of knowing Paul very poorly and incorrectly. Paul’s as well as the entire New Testament’s infrequency in mentioning and elaborating on the Lord’s Supper, rather than minimizing this precious gift of God, would impress upon the readers of Holy Writ what is of first importance. We think Paul would have added a “well said” to Luther’s words:

A Christian should know that there is on earth no greater holiness than God’s Word. The Sacrament itself is made blessed and hallowed through God’s Word by which we are all spiritually born and consecrated to Christ. If then a Christian with mouth, ears, heart, and the whole body may lay hold of the Word which hallows all things and is above the sacraments, why may he not touch that which is hallowed through the Word? Otherwise he should not so much as touch his own body, because he himself is as hallowed as the Sacrament . . . . A Christian is holy in body and soul, . . . . A Christian is great and rare, and God cares more about him than about the Sacrament, for the Christian is not made for the Sacrament, but the Sacrament for the Christian, and these blind heads want to dispute whether the Sacrament may be touched, and make a heresy out of so doing. Away with these hardened and infatuated heathen who do not know what a Christian is! God deliver us from them.<sup>xcv</sup>

One of Missouri’s foremost theologians pulled no punches in stating:

It is a false liturgical view, because it is an un-biblical, un-Lutheran view when the Sacrament is called the high point of the church service. It is Romanizing sacramentalism when the Sacrament is placed ABOVE the Word whereas it is contrarily a sacrament and a means of grace only THROUGH the Word.<sup>xcvi</sup>

Our *Apology*, briefly yet most decisively, asserts: “the Lord’s *Supper was instituted* for the sake of preaching.”<sup>xcvii</sup>

Why, then, one may ask, did the fathers speak of holding “one communion every holy day”?<sup>xcviii</sup> In answering, we refer to the fact that by this time they had already discarded countless other masses introduced in Roman Catholic circles. To prove that the situation, then in effect in the Roman church did not prevail in “olden times,” the Augustana cites these words from the *Tripartite History*: “every Wednesday and Friday the Scriptures are read, and the doctors expound them, and all things are done except the solemn rite of Communion.”<sup>xcix</sup> An observation of Dr. Sasse, included in his *This Is My Body*, also merits mention. He insists that when more frequent celebrations of the Lord’s Supper were advocated many held that Communion not only was necessary for salvation but also that this Sacrament should be administered to children whether they were able to meet the requirements Paul stipulates in I Corinthians 11:28-29 or not.<sup>c</sup> A mystic, superstitious belief had obviously attached itself to the Sacrament. One honestly wonders whether a similar notion does not underlie some of the erroneous thinking concerning the Lord’s Supper in our day, especially as this thinking is expressed in the arguments supporting the military chaplaincy.

For our consideration of the matter before us, there are words of our Savior which can be most helpful. The words are well known: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.”<sup>ci</sup> Granted, the situation in question does not necessarily imply a Christian worship service. Yet it cannot be denied that Jesus’ description aptly describes such a service. Mark it, in the type of worship Jesus defines, whether the Lord’s Supper be included or not, Jesus is in the midst of the worshippers. Where that is the case,

none of His blessings is lacking. No attendant must come away from such a service empty-handed, perhaps even feeling guilty that the Lord's Supper was neglected.

In this context, also another word of the Lord is applicable: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."<sup>cii</sup> That's an unconditioned guarantee of the complete efficacy of the Holy Ghost's every tool, in any gathering in Jesus' name and in every portion of a service. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Power. It would border on questioning His ability and omnipotence were we to insist that Holy Communion is essential for Him to perform His work.

To teach as modernists do also encroaches on the Christian's liberty. The danger of such an encroachment is all the more real in the light of past history. Forget not the legalism raging in the church contemporaneously, with the appearance of the many and varied ideas associated with the Lord's Supper.

Dr. Webber, a theologian whom I regard as sane and sound in liturgical matters, writes: "When we speak of liturgics, most people see red. They work themselves into a state that is closely akin to fanaticism."<sup>ciii</sup> When sane and sound Christians thus react, it is not their reaction to liturgics as such but to the modern liturgical movement. There is nothing wrong with liturgics. It is altogether different when it comes to anything associated with the High Church Movement. This trend, perhaps in many areas far more than a trend, militates against the original and true nature and purpose of liturgics.

Whoever has eyes to see and ears to hear will scarcely gainsay the reality of modern liturgics' invasion. Would we want to be such fools as to say, "But this can never happen in our circles"? It can. Eternal vigilance against an invasion is certainly dictated. Should we note even the faintest symptom of an attack, may we not palm it off as harmless, minimize and ignore it. It is not likely to go away by itself. It needs to be opposed. True, this may often require boldness. But boldness is ever in place—so long as it is tempered with love. Desisting from opposition might appear to be charitable, yet it would be a false charity.

But a counterattack, to be effective in the church, wants to be more than negative and destructive criticism. Above all, it ought to be positive and constructive. It ought to point out and provide an antidote. Such a one is easily accessible. What's more, it is a panacea. Here it is: "To the law and to the testimony."<sup>civ</sup> Old as this remedy is, it is not in the least obsolete. Like any kind of error invading the church, the modern liturgical trend can and will be successfully opposed and, under God, removed only through the application of God's balm of healing to the wound.

In his review of the book, *Eucharist and Sacrifice*, by Gustaf Aulen, Dr. Martin Scharlemann suggests a reason why the modern liturgical movement has met with the success it has enjoyed. He also offers some sound advice how to counteract this—and, for that matter, any—heretical movement in the church. Some of his words, like the following, we do well to take to heart:

Much of the "fuzzy" thinking and superficial theology practiced by some of those in our ranks who have liturgical leanings has its source in Anglican works rather than Lutheran treatises; and the way to get such individuals—and we have them—into orbit again is . . . through Lutheran sources. This, of course, requires some familiarity with Luther's views and those expressed by our Confessions. Here is the chief danger of the liturgical movement in our midst: that it will once more obscure the propitiatory sacrifice of our Lord, brought once-for-all in His death.<sup>cv</sup>

Beware of what you read! The dangers involved in imbibing too freely heterodox and heretical literature, especially for the immature, are real. Warnings against such a practice can scarcely be too strong.

Safety against any movement in the wrong direction, which the High Church Movement certainly is, will be present in proportion to a person's soundness with regard to that doctrine with which the church stands and falls, the doctrine of justification by faith. In its early stages, the High Church Movement may seem far removed from endangering this heart and core of Bible lore, yet he who is weak and unsound in this cardinal doctrine will easily be deceived even by innocent appearing beginnings. He is a likely target to be ensnared by them and will possibly also, as many have, join the ranks of Universalism. We deem it in place here, by way of warning, to cite some words of a true advocate of the liturgical movement, Pastor Berthold von Schenk:



There are quite a few church members in every parish who think they can go to Communion whenever they please. These people are meant in the 7th and 8th verse (of I Pet. 2). They are disobedient to the Word, to the direct command of Jesus, “Do this” and “follow me.” In the Eucharist we follow our Lord . . . . There cannot be true discipleship without the Communion. You have a job every Sunday. You must be present and do the Liturgy with your fellow priests. You are not only to assist at the Eucharist. You are a priest and you have a very definite part in the Liturgy . . . . The important thing is not what we get out of going to church, but what we do—the offering of the Spiritual Sacrifice acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Of course, you can get much, and you can get very little out of a church service. But this is not of primary importance. The important thing is that every Christian has a job to *do* on Sunday morning. This *doing* is the Liturgy.<sup>cvi</sup>

There is another doctrine where clarity is of the essence are we to offset any Romanizing tendencies. That is the doctrine of the Church. Advocates of the movement arresting our attention, describing their movement as “a seeking and questing for the Church,”<sup>cvi</sup> hold that

the Church is there where the congregation of Christian believers gathers as *ecclesia orans* (the praying Church) about the altar; where the Body of the Lord is received with the mouth in Holy Communion.<sup>cvi</sup>

In the words of another High Church proponent, “the Church is there where the faithful gather around the altar as *ecclesia orans*, where the Mystical Body of Christ receives His true Body in the Eucharist.”<sup>cix</sup>

### Conclusion

Dear fellow-builders, from various angles we have discussed a duty incumbent upon us no less than that of lengthening the cords. It is the complementary duty of strengthening the stakes. Without in any way wanting to boast, I believe we can say that as a synod we have at least endeavored not to be found wanting when it comes to going into all the world. May we be no less zealous in going into the world as we ought. Going into the world, especially with zeal and dedication, is a work assured of the Master’s commendation, “well done”—provided our work itself is well done.

To assure the Master’s commendation also upon the manner of our going or of our building requires more than simply going or building. It requires employing the tools the Master assigned for the task., It requires using these tools according to the Architect’s specifications. Where this latter is lacking, there may be much ado about mission work, but it is much ado about nothing. Zeal and activism can easily be false; it can easily deceive. May we not only think and act as if we are about our Father’s business; may we actually be about it. Building thus will require His presence and blessing. How urgent, therefore, that we, individually and collectively, approach the throne of grace with the petition:

**To this, help us, dear Father in Heaven!**

Roland H. Hoenecke  
New Ulm, Minnesota  
June 15, 1978

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Matthew 28:20.
- <sup>ii</sup> John 17:17.
- <sup>iii</sup> Romans 10:17.
- <sup>iv</sup> Titus 3:5.
- <sup>v</sup> Matthew 26:28.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Popular Symbolics*, p. 4.
- <sup>vii</sup> I Corinthians 1:21.
- <sup>viii</sup> *What Luther Says*, Plass, Vol. II, p. 914.
- <sup>ix</sup> *What Luther Says*, Plass, Vol. II, p. 918.
- <sup>x</sup> *What Luther Says*, Plass, Vol. II, p. 918.
- <sup>xi</sup> *From Eden to Egypt*, Lillegara, p. 29 (Adapted).
- <sup>xii</sup> *Christian Dogmatics*, Pieper, Vol. III, p. 129.
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Luther's Works*, Vol. 37, p. 140.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *The Book of Concord*, Tappert, p. 211.
- <sup>xv</sup> *The Book of Concord*, Tappert, p. 211.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Luther's Catechism* (WELS), pp. 190-191.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Koehler, p. 79.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *The Abiding Word*, Vol. II, p. 328.
- <sup>xix</sup> *Luther's Catechism* (WELS), p. 191.
- <sup>xx</sup> *Luther's Catechism* (WELS), p. 191.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *The Abiding Word*, Vol. II, p. 367.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *The Abiding Word*, Vol. II, p. 367.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Triglotta*, p. 309.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Triglotta*, p. 313.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Council of Trent (Tridentinum)*.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Triglotta*, p. 309.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Luke 2:10.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Romans 1:16.
- <sup>xxix</sup> I Corinthians 2:7.
- <sup>xxx</sup> I Timothy 3:16.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> *Luther's Works*, Vol. 31, p. 31.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> *Luther's Works*, Vol. 31, p. 31.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> *Luther's Catechism* (WELS), p. 224.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> *Luther's Catechism* (WELS), p. 199.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> *Luther's Catechism* (WELS), p. 224.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> II Timothy 3:15.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Schmid, p. 505.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> II Corinthians 2:16.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Acts 2:38.
- <sup>xl</sup> *The Abiding Word*, Vol. II, p. 280.
- <sup>xli</sup> *Christian Dogmatics*, Pieper, Vol. II, p. 280.
- <sup>xlii</sup> *Triglotta*, p. 309.
- <sup>xliii</sup> *Christian Dogmatics*, Pieper, Vol. III, p. 109.
- <sup>xliv</sup> *The Abiding Word*, Vol. II, p. 383.
- <sup>xlv</sup> *Triglotta*.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> I Corinthians 11:28; Matthew 18:1-6; Mark 10:13-16.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> *Council of Trent (Tridentinum)*.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> *Dogmatik*, Hoenecke, Vol. IV, p. 68.
- <sup>xlix</sup> Mark 16:16.
- <sup>l</sup> *Christian Dogmatics*, Pieper, Vol. III, p. 281.
- <sup>li</sup> *Triglotta*, p. 35.
- <sup>lii</sup> *Popular Symbolics*, p. 92.
- <sup>liii</sup> *The Abiding Word*, Vol. II, p. 393.
- <sup>liv</sup> *Dogmatics Notes*, Meyer.
- <sup>lv</sup> *Triglotta*, p. 309.
- <sup>lvi</sup> *Triglotta*, p. 309.
- <sup>lvii</sup> *Triglotta*, p. 475.

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- lviii *Christian Dogmatics*, Pieper, Vol. III, p. 469.
- lix *The Confessional Lutheran*, 1957, p. 27.
- lx II Thessalonians 2:10.
- lxi *The Confessional Lutheran*, 1957, p. 28.
- lxii *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 1934, p. 527.
- lxiii *The Confessional Lutheran*, 1959, p. 4.
- lxiv *The Confessional Lutheran*, 1959, p. 27.
- lxv *What Luther Says*, Plass, Vol. II.
- lxvi Psalm 95:6.
- lxvii Psalm 111:1.
- lxviii Acts 2:42.
- lxix Hebrews 10:25.
- lxx John 4:23.
- lxxi *Worship*, Underhill, p. 61.
- lxxii *The Christian Choir Member*, p. 5.
- lxxiii I Corinthians 14:40.
- lxxiv Romans 12:10.
- lxxv *Studies in the Liturgy*, Webber, p. 226.
- lxxvi I Corinthians 5:6.
- lxxvii I Corinthians 10:12.
- lxxviii *The Confessional Lutheran*, 1957, p. 56.
- lxxix *The Confessional Lutheran*, 1957, p. 54.
- lxxx *The Order of Service*, Dierks, pp. 46-47.
- lxxxi *Our Church*, Wiederschilling, p. 27.
- lxxxii *The Order of Service*, Dierks, p. 47.
- lxxxiii *The Order of Service*, Dierks, p. 47.
- lxxxiv *The Order of Service*, Dierks, p. 49.
- lxxxv *The Lutheran Liturgy*, Reed, p. 22.
- lxxxvi *Our Church*, Wiederschilling, p. 19.
- lxxxvii *The Order of Service*, Dierks, p. 3.
- lxxxviii *The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher*, Mueller, p. 40.
- lxxxix *Luther's Works*, (Walch), Vol. X, p. 262.
- xc *Luther's World of Thought*, Bornkamm, p. 106.
- xcI *Luther's World of Thought*, Bornkamm, p. 94-95.
- xcii *Luther's Works*, (St. Louis), Vol. IX, p. 1548.
- xciii Ephesians 5:19, 20.
- xciv I Corinthians 3:16.
- xcv *Luther's Meditations on the Gospels*, Bainton, p. 101.
- xcvi *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 1934, p. 528.
- xcvii *Triglotta*, Apology, Article XXIV, 24.
- xcviii *Triglotta*, Apology, Article XXIV, 24.
- xcix *Triglotta*, Augsburg Confession, Article XXVI, 41.
- c *This Is My Body*, Sasse, pp. 65-67.
- ci Matthew 18:20.
- cii Romans 10:17.
- ciii *Studies in the Liturgy*, Webber, p. 7.
- civ Isaiah 8:20.
- cv *The Confessional Lutheran*, 1959, p. 18.
- cvi *The Confessional Lutheran*, 1960, p. 39.
- cvii *Una Sancta*, 1948, p. 6.
- cviii *Una Sancta*, 1948, p. 7.
- cix *The Liturgical Renaissance in the Roman Catholic Church*, Koenker, p. 38.