

USING THE MEANS OF GRACE

essay delivered at
the convention
of

THE NEBRASKA DISTRICT

Norfolk, Nebraska

June 21, 1972

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OUTLINE

- INTRODUCTION: Being preachers of righteousness has serious implications.
- PART I: The terms involved need consideration in a discussion relative to the Means of Grace.
- PART II: The importance of the various Means of Grace in their relation to one another must be noted.
- PART III: The importance of the Means of Grace in relation to the worship-service in which they occur must be recognized.
- CONCLUSION: Preachers of righteousness, ever be what your title implies!

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PREACHERS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS! What a fitting theme for the particular type of convention which brought you together here at Norfolk! What a significant title with which to address all of you who are delegates to this meeting of The Nebraska District!

Preachers of Righteousness! In selecting these words as the theme for your 1972 convention, you have chosen well. In your first attempt at utilizing a theme for your district meetings you did succeed. The words on which your choice as a theme has fallen are infinitely more than just another clever slogan.

Your theme contains, nay better, expresses and confesses a momentous truth, a truth, it seems to me, especially vital for a district convention. I am assuming that your choice of the theme in question was at least in part prompted by the desire to express and also impress this truth: all of you here assembled are preachers of righteousness. As such all of you, not only the pastors and the teachers, are to preach righteousness and have a vital role in the preaching of righteousness. It is this fact which makes your district convention important. The preaching of righteousness is the one business of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. It is likewise the sole reason for the existence of The Nebraska District and any conventions of that district.

It is my opinion that this matter can stand emphasis, particularly if our thinking is to be consistent with our position on the doctrine of the church. As preachers of righteousness we surely subscribe wholeheartedly to words like the following: "Where the Word of God has spoken, the right of private judgment ceases."¹ This Word of God has spoken on many matters concerning the privileged task of preachers of righteousness — but not on all matters which may concern preachers of righteousness as they effect their mission. Scripture, for example, has not demanded that you be assembled here these days in a district convention. There is no word of God which so much as compels even the organization of districts — nor, for that matter, of synods. Such groupings of Christians are forms devised and established by men, by men who indeed know the commission of preachers of righteousness, namely to preach to all nations the word of reconciliation committed to them, by men who know that under God, good order and love are to guide them in devising and designing forms and methods best suited to execute the many-faceted task which the preaching of righteousness is.

Herein lies the reason for our banding together as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Self-evidently, our Synod sincerely desires that all its constituents be able to serve as preachers of righteousness and that the privileged task of all its members be effected as efficiently as possible. That accounts for establishing districts from time to time. As the task of preaching righteousness dictates and requires it, new districts and even mission districts are given birth.

Good order now demands delegation of authority. Accordingly, it is our arrangement that over against the executive powers vested in the Synod, the districts act only in an advisory capacity.

In our Christian liberty we have thus arranged our operation. Obviously, the arrangement is workable; yes, it appears to be good. Though the system itself is not to be faulted, it has seemingly at times led to a depreciation of our district conventions. It is feared that they are at times viewed as of lesser importance and attendance at district conventions suffers by comparison with attendance at the synodical meetings.

Naturally, these things ought not so to be. Are we less preachers of righteousness in an assembly like this than in a general convention at New Ulm or Watertown? Is our being here a lesser assignment than serving as a delegate to a plenary convention of our Synod? Preachers of righteousness have but one assignment. This ever remains the same.

We have already indicated what that task is. We hardly need to elaborate on its importance. The question, however, is this: which role do you, preachers of righteousness assembled here as a district play in executing this task? For God's sake, don't minimize it! You must at this convention carefully consider and weigh whether our Synod is still preaching righteousness, whether the methods and programs devised and suggested by our various boards and commissions truly promote the preaching of righteousness. That renders important your study of The Report to the Nine Districts. Having me in your midst, you have a very specific assignment. You are to watch your institutions! You are to watch that the called preachers of righteousness one day to go out in your name to preach and teach righteousness are being taught in harmony with God's Word.

In this, districts indeed have an important responsibility. Watching, thus done in the spirit of concern for the righteousness to be preached, is not only necessary, it is commendable, yes, noble. The Bereans were not chided for searching the Scriptures daily, whether what even a theologian as mighty as St. Paul had preached to them was in harmony with God's word. I'm certain, too, that the Apostle was not insulted by the fact that the Bereans were concerned that he preached righteousness as it should be preached.

Do you realize how disastrous it could be if you as preachers of righteousness, individually and collectively here as a district, were unconcerned about how the task of preaching righteousness is being executed in all phases of our synodical activity? It is precisely relative to a failure in this vital issue that Holy Writ utters those stern words about being given over to "a reprobate mind"² and to "strong delusion."³ To take lightly our responsibility when we preachers of righteousness are assembled as a district would surely be doing so at the peril of eventually losing the righteousness we are privileged to preach. May the first motto you as a district have selected ever alert you to the situation presented. May it evidence itself in your concern relative to the Means of Grace and how they are used in our circles. There is truly in the church much concerning the Means of Grace that is not as it ought to be. With the fervent prayer that as preachers of righteousness we also in this doctrine trumpet with a clear sound, we present our study of the topic:

USING THE MEANS OF GRACE

I. THE TERMS INVOLVED IN A DISCUSSION RELATIVE TO THE MEANS OF GRACE

A profitable discussion of our topic, obviously, demands an understanding of the terms involved. Yet, before engaging in this part of our presentation, we shall do well to note how plainly God tells us that He wishes to deal with us in this vital matter of salvation through means. How clear this is from Jesus' words: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."⁴ Paul's words witness to the same in saying: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."⁵ Exactly this is the reason why God has "committed unto us the word of reconciliation."⁶

That the same is true relative to Baptism and the Lord's Supper is evident from words like the following: "... but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration . . ."⁷ and "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."⁸

Because the Scriptures thus speak regarding the Means of Grace, we can unhesitatingly give wholehearted endorsement to 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.⁹

Having briefly noted the important position the Means of Grace occupy in God's economy and, therewith, the urgency of adhering to a correct teaching regarding them, this question is bound to arise: Why did God wish thus to deal with man? Why did God in His desire to have all men to be saved so arrange matters that men must come unto the knowledge of the truth? Without in any way attempting to penetrate the mysteries of God, we are absolutely safe in saying that thus it pleased Him. Through Paul He tells us: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."¹⁰ This foolishness of preaching, naturally, also includes the foolishness of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

From this it must, then, also be clear that operating with the Means of Grace was not a necessity for God. As God, He is absolutely independent. In the final analysis, nothing outside of Himself ever moves Him to action. His employment of means in His work of sanctification is, therefore, the manner which originated entirely within God Himself. And just for that reason it must be labeled blasphemous heresy when Zwingli and his followers contend that the Holy Ghost needs no vehicle. Luther is certainly right in saying:

From this it follows that they act foolishly, yes, against God's order and institution, who despise and reject the external Word, thinking that the Holy Spirit and faith should come to them without means.¹¹

Or again,

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."¹²

Actually, the method employed in restoring in fallen man the Image of God is not an unusual one for God. We are again going to let Luther speak to us on this matter. He says:

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 Anabaptists and other schismatic spirits do.¹³

Indeed, God has employed this method "since the beginning of the world." This method antedates the Fall. In his work, *From Eden to Egypt*, Lillegard states:

The tree of life bore fruit which would enable man to become fitted eventually for the eternal life with God in heaven. For although man as first created was not subject to death, he would still have to be changed into some spiritual, glorified body, such as our resurrection bodies will be, before he would be ready for the immortality of heaven.¹⁴

Luther compares the tree of life with the sacraments, namely that this tree was a means to effect God's purpose.

Before concluding this portion of our essay, we must however, warn against a misunderstanding on this point: Though God has in the arrangement He has made bound us to the Means of Grace, we violate His independence if we conclude that He is also thus bound. For God, whatever He does and in whichever way He does it is a case of self-determination. Dr. Francis Pieper utters some sage words on this matter when he says,

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.¹⁵

In his inimitable manner, Luther has stated the truth in question with scorching words. He writes:

But if it is his (i.e. 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 choose 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 read the Scriptures for himself? 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?¹⁶

In view of the stress and the urgency which we have thus far attached to the Means of Grace, it might now appear strange that we must say that the term Means of Grace is not biblical but rather ecclesiastical. But this is not surprising. Much of the terminology employed by the church originated in the church, yes, often resulted from heresies which confronted the church. The use of terminology is, in a way, a part of the systemization of Scriptural doctrine. And system is arbitrary; it is a

convenience. In this way, by the use of few words, the church can often state thetically and antithetically what Scriptures compel it to say.

Though the origin of the term in question is somewhat veiled, it, too, apparently evolved because of controversy. It was deemed necessary to stress the method God employs in His work and also to pin-point the heretical views which had arisen relative to the field of soteriology, specifically, the order of salvation.

Although it is difficult to ascertain exactly when the term Means of Grace was first used in the church, the term definitely seems to antedate the time of our Lutheran Confessions. Our confessions appear to take the word for granted and a term not unfamiliar even to untrained laymen, for the confessions are by no means intended solely for the learned theologian. Terms like "media gratiae," "media salutis," "instrumenti Sancti," and the like abound in the confessions and in early Lutheran literature.

Already the term's origin has some practical implications for us. Because the origin is ecclesiastical, we dare not, for example, demand as a requisite for church fellowship that the term Means of Grace be employed nor dare we dictate to others, individuals or churches, what they are to understand with this term. Our argument with the Roman Catholic Church does not lie in this that they have augmented the Means of Grace, not only by adding the supernumerary sacraments but also the so-called auxiliary Means of Grace, the sacramentals, namely prayer, pilgrimages, monkery, yes, even holy water, oil, salt, palms, candles. Similarly, in the case of the Reformed Church. In itself, it is of little consequence that they count as Means of Grace prayer, "love feasts and class meetings." So also, we will not contend with others, that is on the basis of the term alone, if they wish to include under the Means of Grace the cross of the Christian, the fruits of faith, and miracles.

Concerning all this, Article XIII of the Apology states our case well when, in speaking regarding the number of sacraments, it says: ". . . no prudent man will strive greatly concerning the number or the term."¹⁷ The matter of importance is how the term is defined. In answer to the question, "What is meant by the Means of Grace?" our synodical Catechism defines the Means of Grace thus: "By the Means of Grace are meant those things by which God offers and gives His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation."¹⁸ It should also be noted that this is our definition of the term. Naturally, we cannot deny others the privilege of defining the term otherwise if they so wish.

According to our definition, then, the Means of Grace are sacramental acts, the direction being from God to man. That is why we cannot include prayer under the Means of Grace. Prayer is a sacrificial act, an act from man to God. Our definition restricts the Means of Grace positively to the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments.

For this very reason, it was, to say the least, very disturbing to us to find the Law included and discussed in Article V of the *Common Confession*. This document was produced jointly by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church in 1950. The document was to serve as a basis for a possible exercise of church fellowship between the two bodies in question, a fellowship which did become a reality at Denver a few years ago. Article V, as its heading, the Means of Grace, indicates, was intended to deal with what Lutherans had always recognized to be the Means of Grace. To include a treatment of the Law in an article thus labeled was a definite departure from the traditional way in conservative Lutheran circles. Obviously, it involved at least some concession on the part of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to the rapidly deteriorating doctrinal stance of the American Lutheran Church, especially to the manner in which that church was teaching relative to the Law. History already has recorded the sad consequences of this and other cracks which have developed in what was once a true fortress of Lutheranism.

When we restrict the Means of Grace to the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments, our use of the term Means of Grace of course needs to be rightly understood. The first word of the term, namely "means," is sufficiently clear. The second portion, however, "of grace," requires a word of explanation. The word grace here denotes a quality, or an attribute, of God. Dr. Koehler in *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* offers this definition: ". . . that merciful, affectionate disposition, that good will of God toward men, according to which He forgives sins to those who are worthy of eternal death."¹⁹ This grace, then, is not, as Rome teaches, "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 in His ways."²⁰ Nor is it, as held in Calvinistic circles, a grace which is denied the so-called non-elect.

Because of the definition for the Means of Grace with which our fathers and our confessions operated, it is self-evident that they categorically condemned those who added to the Means of Grace as well as those who, in the final analysis, nullified them. Would we be true children of the Reformation, we must do likewise. Where there is perversion on the doctrine of the Means of Grace, indifference over against such perversion is intolerable.

An interesting and noteworthy observation may well be added at this point. It concerns what we may term the formulation of doctrine, putting into a concise statement any given article of faith taught in God's Word. Whenever heresy rears its ugly head, a proper attitude over against any article of faith will also involve a careful scrutiny of its formulation. Thus, words in which doctrines are couched may vary from time to time. Our Synod acted thus in comparatively recent times. Formerly, we listed the Word and the Sacraments as the constituent parts of the Means of Grace. When, however, as just noted, the Law, because of its negative preparation in conversion, was treated as a Means of Grace, we deemed a revision of our statement to be wise. Our Catechism now puts it thus: "The Means of Grace are the Gospel of Christ in Word and Sacraments."²¹ Who will deny that the intrusion of heresy into Lutheran circles has led us to a far better formulation of what constitutes the Means of Grace than the one which with we had operated for many years.

Since in this portion of our essay, we are dealing with terms, the term "sacrament" should at least receive some attention. Like the term Means of Grace, it, too, is ecclesiastical. Unlike the former, however, its history is by no means a hazy one. Of this history the Abiding Word states,

SACRAMENT is a Latin word which had its origin in profane literature. Classical writers have 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 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.²²

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 it 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 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 collaborators 'stewards of the mysterics of God.'²³

Used in earlier times to designate a variety of Christian rites and activities, this term in Lutheran circles became fixed to indicate certain "rites, which," as our Apology states, "have the command of God, and to which the promise of grace has been added."²⁴

Since this definition did not include the "visible element," our fathers included Absolution among the sacraments. Their definition even permitted them, under certain conditions, to recognize Orders and Marriage as sacraments. Though the definition with which we operate does not permit the inclusion of any of Rome's supernumerary sacraments, we will not strive greatly concerning the number "if only those objects still be retained which have God's command and promise."²⁵

The similarity of the situation prevailing with respect to the terms sacraments and Means of Grace will explain why no more will now be said regarding the sacraments than a reference to the use of the term sacrament in Roman Catholic and Reformed circles. The Council of Trent adopted this definition for the word: "A visible sign of invisible grace instituted for our sanctification."²⁶ This definition not only makes room for all Rome's heresies regarding the authority of the Roman Catholic church and the sacraments but also needs to be understood in the light of that church's teaching regarding "infused grace" or "prevenient grace." In Reformed circles, the sacraments are considered "only to be marks of profession among men."²⁷ Hereby this church actually eliminates the sacraments as media effecting and preserving faith. Add to this their teaching of particular grace, their denial of the inherent power of the Word, and their contention that the Holy Ghost requires no tools, and it is apparent why there is such a low estimate of the Means of Grace in Calvinistic churches.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VARIOUS MEANS OF GRACE IN RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER

Using the Means of Grace as our Lord would have us use them will still be impossible unless we understand the relative importance of the tools which God employs in our salvation and unless we are convinced that here, too, a perspicuity prevails which renders inexcusable any and every deviation and aberration in doctrine and practice.

To begin with, it is imperative to note that, in the final analysis, there is but ONE Means of Grace. Contending for this is by no means tantamount to a depreciation of the sacraments. Rather, only then can the sacraments be rightly appreciated when it is understood what it is that makes the sacraments Means of Grace, namely the Gospel, Gospel here meant in its narrower sense, namely the good news of God's love for sinners.

The problems which have arisen, or better, which men have manufactured in this connection, may stem from the fact that the one true Means of Grace comes to man in various forms. It comes in Word and Sacraments, the Gospel in the Word often called the audible Gospel and the Gospel in the sacraments the visible Gospel.

We shall do well briefly to rehearse how Scriptures speak of the Gospel. It is "the tidings of great joy,"²⁸ "the power of God unto salvation,"²⁹ "the wisdom of God,"³⁰ "the mystery of godliness."³¹ Small wonder that human language is simply incapable of doing justice to the greatness of this Gospel. The Gospel message transcends every ability of man to comprehend it. It proclaims the highest manifestation on the part of Him who is love.

Expressions like Luther makes in the sixty-second of his ninety-five theses are, therefore, self-evident on the part of the beneficiaries of God's love abounding. "The true treasure of the Church," Luther declares, "is the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God."³²

For this reason we then also wholeheartedly endorse Luther's contention that the Gospel is "the chief thing in the Sacrament."³³ Thus our Lutheran dogmaticians have ever held. Preuss in his work, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, writes: "It is the conviction of all the dogmaticians that only the Gospel, properly speaking, is a means of grace. They only speak generally of the Word being a means of grace, but they mean the Gospel."³⁴ In doing this, they are using the term Word as it, for example, is used by Peter when he speaks of "being born again . . . by the word of God."³⁵ Unless this be our stand, we would hardly be able to say of Baptism that without the Gospel the water is "simple water only,"³⁶ and that in the Lord's Supper "it is not the eating and drinking, indeed, that does these great things."³⁷

From this it then also follows that whatever the Gospel offers the Sacraments offer, no more, no less. This simply must be true since He who is the sole author of the Word also instituted the sacraments and did so to attain the same ends. Through various agencies, each in its own way adapted to convey His "good news" to lost and condemned creatures, it pleased our God to make them "wise unto salvation."³⁸

And this the Gospel is able to do, in whatever form it be employed, because it is endowed with power, an omnipotence for which nothing can be impossible. Over against the Reformed view that the Gospel is a "dead letter" and that the sacraments are "empty symbols," we emphasize that this power is inherent. We subscribe to dogmatician Quenstedt's words:

We say that 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 . . .³⁹

This power is indeed, as Hollaz states, "indissolubly" joined with the Word. Over against false teaching, it is necessary here to add that this power or efficacy of the Gospel is, in itself, not dependent upon its use. It is powerful before and outside of any use of it. It is not a dead letter when not in use. The Gospel is powerful intrinsically.

This is also the reason why the power and efficacy of the Gospel, again no matter in which form it be used, is in no way dependent upon the ministrant or the recipient. Whether the ministrant be, as Luther says, godly or wicked, whether ordained or unordained, called or sneaking in, the devil or the devil's mother, whether the recipient possess faith or be without faith, none of this in any way affects the efficacy of the Gospel and hence also of the sacraments. The Gospel has its efficacy in itself, no matter what the results be, whether it prove to be the "savour of death unto death" or the "savour of life unto life."⁴¹

" . . . unto life" — in a nut shell these words define the benefit of the Gospel. It is "the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls."⁴² Exactly the same is true of Baptism wherein we "put on Christ"⁴³ and are baptized "for the remission of

sins."⁴⁴ Thus, too, Christ's body and blood are "given and shed for many for the remission of sins."⁴⁵ ". . . unto life" — here is also our basis for labeling as heresy the views of the Reformed Church as well as of the Roman Catholic Church relative to the benefit of the Means of Grace.

Though a discussion of the role which faith plays in this matter, especially over against the Papistical view of "ex opere operato," namely an automatic benefit, and over against the Reformed position of "gratia particularis," a restricted grace, would be much in place, we shall hasten on to certain items of even more importance to our topic. To one we have already alluded, namely that all the Means of Grace offer the same benefit. And this benefit includes all which God is pleased to bestow upon His children. *The Abiding Word* rightly says,

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.⁴⁶

Pieper expresses this same view in these words, "We are not to imagine that each of the three means transmits one third of the forgiveness."⁴⁷ As the *Apology* attests, our Lutheran Church has ever thus held: "The effect of the Word (Gospel) and of the rite (Sacraments) is the same."⁴⁸

We might have thought that something so clearly taught in Scriptures would have escaped falsification at least by those bearing the name of the Reformer. But what Dr. Pieper says of modern theologians in general is, sad to say, also true of modern Lutheran theologians. Here are Pieper's words:

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 Word and Baptism by a special physical effect, for example, the implanting of the resurrection body.⁴⁹

On this *The Abiding Word* adds:

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.⁵⁰

A bit more concerning this benefit called the physical effect. True, some Lutheran may with Dr. Reu, in his *Lutheran Dogmatics*, label this as just a possibility, but others, and among them some trained at the institution which Dr. Pieper served so long and so well, mince no words about the reality of a physical effect even though they may hesitate to define precisely whereof it consists. If such a position be Lutheran, to say nothing of being biblical, a subscription to our *Augustana* is a farce, for this confession says that through the Gospel and the Sacraments "are granted not bodily, but eternal things, as eternal righteousness."⁵¹

A second item suggested by our topic is the attaching of a superstitious belief to the sacraments. I am thinking, for example, of the idea, not at all uncommon, that in spite of a separation from the Word and the Lord's Supper the mere fact of once having been baptized assures of continued membership in the Kingdom of God. Much more prevalent, however, I feel, is the opinion that partaking of the Lord's Supper is like a panacea and makes all end well, no matter what. The notion that to fall asleep peacefully requires reception of the Lord's Supper is by no means a rare one. One wonders how much such a notion shapes the thinking regarding the military chaplaincy.

Since our contention with respect to the benefit of the Means of Grace may occasion speaking of them desparingly, yes, even questioning their value, we must next concern ourselves with such questions as these: Are the sacraments actually necessary and what value do they really have?

First, then, are the sacraments actually necessary? In answering, we must remember that all through history God's will was, as stated by Paul, that all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.⁵² During the Old Testament dispensation, however, Baptism and the Lord's Supper did not exist. Still, as the catalog of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, for example, demonstrates, men in Old Testament times did "come unto the knowledge of the truth" and were "saved."

Nor does the fact that we live in New Testament times compel the teaching of an absolute need of the sacraments. As proof, we cite the case of the malefactor on the cross. It is not likely that he was baptized nor that he partook of Holy Communion. Then, too, what of those "little children," yes, little children who according to the very directive of God are, in spite of being such as "believe in" Christ, not as yet to receive the body and blood of their Lord.⁵³

So positive can we be that there exists no absolute need for the sacraments that we in no uncertain terms label as heresy the teaching of ROME, as expressed in the *Tridentinum* as follows: "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."⁵⁴ Similarly, we reject the type of necessity taught by Calvinism, namely a necessity on account of human weakness or as a matter of duty and obedience.⁵⁵

Augustine's well-known statement that it is not the privation but the contempt of the Sacraments which damns is also our position. While we recognize that no absolute need for the Sacraments exists, we dare not consider them useless, unnecessary, and superfluous as the Quakers and Unitarians do. The necessity of the Sacraments may be spoken of as relative. This must follow from the fact that the Gospel is, in the final analysis, the one thing absolutely needful.

The mere stating of the preceding position virtually compels the consideration of two passages, passages often regarded as disproving the above, particularly with reference to Baptism. The passages are John 3:5 and Titus 3:5b. The first reads: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," the second: ". . . by the washing of regeneration . . . he saved us." Dare we, in the light of these words, still contend that there is no absolute need for the sacraments? Indeed, unless we assume that the Bible contradicts itself. With Luther we hold that Jesus' words, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,"⁵⁶ fully justify our contention regarding the necessity of Baptism.

Regarding the passages just quoted, we shall let Francis Pieper speak:

Those who teach an absolute need of Baptism quote John 3:5 as proof But the scope of this passage is reproöf 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."⁵⁷

Although the words, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,"⁵⁸ have also been used by some to disprove our contention on the matter at issue, the impropriety of thus applying Paul's words should immediately be apparent.

Since a Scripture passage has also been misapplied to establish an absolute need for the Sacrament of the Altar, we shall briefly examine this passage. It is Jesus' words in John 6:53: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Here can be seen the importance of what is known as the historical rule of Hermeneutics, namely observing the historical context in which the Holy Spirit placed the things written by His penmen. The words quoted in no wise refer to the Lord's Supper, but rather to the necessity of faith in Christ and His vicarious atonement. Indeed, except a man believe thus, "faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved."⁵⁹

Before concluding this point, a word is in place regarding the matter in question relative to Infant Baptism. Even here we cannot categorically insist on an absolute need. We deem the words of *Popular Symbolics* well spoken when it says:

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, and that God works faith in them in a special manner, as in the case described in Luke 1, 44. Speaking of Jewish infants who died before the eighth day and of our children 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."⁶⁰

This leads us to a question, bound to arise in view of the foregoing. In the words of *The Abiding Word*, it is this: "Why did God ordain these additional means of grace when already the Word suffices to confer and appropriate to the sinner His grace and the forgiveness of sins?"⁶¹

We fully agree with *The Abiding Word* that this question should never have been raised. Suffice it to say, God did add the sacraments, and "What God ordains is always good."⁶² This act on His part is obviously further evidence of His unbounded grace, by which He amply provided for every requirement of man's salvation, or as Prof. John P. Meyer in his Dogmatics Notes states, "The varied way of offering grace serves the purpose of giving stronger assurance."⁶³

But we can be much more specific on this matter, as, for example, the *Apology* is in stating:

But 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.⁶⁴

It is precisely this reason for which Augustine called the sacraments the "visible word" and also spoke of them as "pictures of the Word." In this way, they then serve as a seal, or as the *Apology* says, "signs and testimonies of God's will toward us."⁶⁵ How blasphemous, in the light of this, to speak of the sacraments as unnecessary and superfluous.

Such blasphemy is all the more pronounced when we consider another value which the sacraments have, namely that they individualize God's promise of grace in Christ. Compared with the Gospel, which, as Luther says, is "preached into a crowd," the Sacraments may be said to be more personal.

Nor dare we overlook the nature of the rites involved in the sacraments. Certainly God did not arbitrarily select the application of water and the distribution of bread and wine. Far from being the chief thing in the sacraments, the rites nevertheless are meaningful and enlightening.

It may appear that we devoted an undue amount of space to the discussion of the importance of the various Means of Grace in their relation to one another. We make no apologies for having done so. We were not, first of all, motivated by the down-grading and depreciation the Sacraments have experienced and are experiencing. Rather, the opposite occasioned our lengthy discourse: the intense emphasis placed on the Lord's Supper in present-day Lutheranism. At the risk of being accused of minimizing the Supper with its incomparable blessings, I label the stress on the Sacrament of Holy Communion an overemphasis. The so-called Liturgical or High-church Movement, where this emphasis especially is found, ought disturb us no end. Sacramentarianism can with full right be labeled a Romanizing tendency. The danger of falling prey to this trend has surely been augmented by the friendly overtures emanating from Rome since the aggiornamento introduced by Pope John XXIII. Is it not likely that at the bottom of the changed attitude toward Rome is disagreement with Luther's "death-bed" confession "that the Pope is the very Antichrist"⁶⁶? Would we not be justified in saying of those not heeding a clear revelation of God's Word that they are "weak in Christian theology"⁶⁷ and are much more likely to fall prey to all manner of perversions of God's Word?

Because it rightly regards Rome as "semper idem," (always the same), the *Confessional Lutheran* did not exaggerate when already in 1957 it said:

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."⁶⁸

And let us not think that the Antichrist has not taken note of all this and is not rejoicing over the so apparent success of his "deceivableness of unrighteousness."⁶⁹ How else could we interpret such words as the following issuing from Roman Catholic sources?

. . . there would be no insurmountable difficulty now from them (these Lutherans) to accept Trent's definition of the Eucharist as a sacrifice.⁷⁰

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."⁷¹

... two movements tend to reduce Protestant fear of Catholicism: the ecumenical and liturgical.⁷²

In light of this, it is surely not an overstatement when Dr. Sasse goes 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.⁷³

May we beware of any overemphasis of the Lord's Supper, whether this springs from the High Church Movement or from a wrong understanding of the Means of Grace. It is not only dangerous, it is heretical. We do well to take to heart these words of the Great Reformer:

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 abominations of these tonsured masqueraders who would move the heart away from the Word of power and truth and turn it to this dead transubstantiation of the bread and wine.⁷⁴

III: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEANS OF GRACE IN RELATION TO THE WORSHIP-SERVICE IN WHICH THEY OCCUR

The Means of Grace play a vital role in our worship-services. The investigation of this role forms the concluding portion of this essay. To that end, a word about the so-called worship-service is called for.

That God desires worship on the part of His children and that this is to be done individually as well as collectively is taught amply in Holy Writ, both by precept and by example. A few passages will suffice to establish this fact:

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.⁷⁵

I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.⁷⁶

Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.⁷⁷

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.⁷⁸

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.⁷⁹

God's encouragement of both private and public worship is wrongly interpreted if it is presented as an option or that one type of worship can exclude the other. One does not make the other unnecessary, rather, one complements the other. To question this would be tantamount to questioning whether God is to be worshipped at all. The fact that God wishes to be glorified in all things indicates both private and public worship.

That God is in and by our worship to be glorified, also indicates of which nature our worship must be. It must be in "spirit and in truth."⁸⁰ This does not permit legislation nor vain repetition. True worship is a natural outgrowth, yes, an evidence of faith.

Worship has been thus defined: "It is the total adoring response of man to the one Eternal God self-revealed in time."⁸¹ It is man's response flowing out of appreciation for what God in grace has done for man. Thus worship has been well called a "way of thinking, believing, acting, living, dying."⁸²

But He who is the object of our worship has also spoken these words: "Let all things be done decently and in order."⁸³ It may indeed be questioned whether disorderly, so-called "free service" meets God's stipulation. Yet even in arranging an orderly public worship, Christians will witness to that liberty with which Christ has endowed them and made them free. Though they will full well realize that liturgical matters may become a matter of confession, they will, while endeavoring to be orderly, nevertheless consider liturgical matters essentially adiaphorous.

In arranging an orderly public worship, children of God are cognizant of the twofold aspect of such a service, namely the sacramental and the sacrificial portions of a service. In a visible manner, these two portions are normally evidenced by the position taken by the liturgist and officiant in relationship to the altar, a position indicating whether God's grace is being received or whether something is being offered to God in response to His free grace.

On which of these two aspects prime importance ought to be placed must surely be clear. The very fact that we are able to love God only because He first loved us is ample proof that our receiving from God must have preeminence in our services. The understanding of this is fundamental to a correct evaluation of the order of worship. It is indispensable if an undue emphasis on liturgics, even a liturgical show is to be avoided. Webber's words, in his *Studies in the Liturgy*, merit constant repetition 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 unutilated and a doctrinally pure liturgy. It is a better thing to have an unutilated 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.⁸⁴

Since the sacramental act, the administration of the Means of Grace, is the "chief thing" in our services, without which the sacrificial portion become dead formalism and hollow mockery, it is natural to ask: Are there degrees of importance among the various sacramental acts?

In this matter differences of opinion definitely prevail, differences which need to be viewed in the light of what has been previously stated. To my knowledge the sacramental act of Baptism does not play a role in this problem. The importance which the Lord's Supper occupies in our worship-services is the issue. It is hardly necessary here to say much about those who are on the extreme left in this matter, namely those who have virtually sold out to the Antichrist and are bold and open in their expressions. I mean such who like to employ the name Eucharist and even Mass, who speak of a "real presence" before the sacramental act, who speak of the "elevation," which is, in effect, tantamount to the Roman adoration of the host. Concerning these we need say little. Or is it perhaps necessary to say more, after all? Those who hold this view no doubt also began with a view which at first seemed almost innocent and harmless. Where there is even the slightest inclination toward aberration it is necessary to note: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,"⁸⁵ and also, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."⁸⁶

Over against this crassest position, stands one which we will label simply crass. Those holding it today possibly still have some fear for Rome's pernicious doctrines, perhaps are not totally blinded as yet, but nevertheless have apparently lost sight of the importance of the tenets and principles earlier enunciated. In their own words this is their position, namely 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."⁸⁷ These views were presented by an essayist (Dr. Adolph Wismar) at the First Liturgical Institute held at Valparaiso University. Another advocate of these same views (Von Schenk) even went so far as to say: "There cannot be true discipleship without the Communion."⁸⁸

According to this position, a service can never be complete without the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The sermon could well be dispensed with as long as a beautiful liturgy, particularly that associated with the Sacrament of the Altar, comprised the service. Herein the laity would be offered sufficient instruction.

There is yet a third view which we must mention. Actually, it is but a step removed from the former. We will call it a subtle position. Possibly it even proceeds from a certain concern and respect for the Lord's Supper. Possibly, too, it is a reaction to an all too frequent neglect and indifference over against this Sacrament. This position expresses itself this way: The Sacrament of the Altar is the highest point in a worship-service, everything in the service builds up to this climax.

This has a holy ring indeed. Much of its argumentation is based on the fact that the early Christians observed Communion every Sunday, always concluding their public worship with this celebration. From Tertullian we even learn that at the beginning of the third century the Lord's Supper was celebrated daily, also at wedding ceremonies and anniversaries of the dead, yes, that people even "partook of the Eucharistic bread before every meal."⁸⁹ "Hence," as Wiederschilling informs us, "in ancient liturgy the Order of Communion followed the Order of Service without a break."⁹⁰

The stress on Communion in Tertullian's time, however, bears a bit of investigation. Dierks states, "Tertullian is rightly called the father of Roman Catholic Theology, for in his writing we have practically all of the un-Scriptural teachings of modern Rome, especially the core of all its false teachings."⁹¹

It must also be noted that while the Lord's Supper was being so heavily stressed, positive heresies were developing with respect to this Sacrament, for example, the idea of the unbloody sacrifice offered at every observance of the Mass. In view of this, we can hardly label it an overstatement when Dierks asserts:

They (namely 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.⁹²

No one will contest the fact that Luther retained much of the ancient liturgy. On the other hand, it cannot be disputed that he restored the sermon to the first position in the service. Reed is correct in stating:

The Reformation simplified and purified the text of the Liturgy, restored the sermon to its rightful place in the Service.⁹³

This agrees with what certainly must be the truly Lutheran concept of a worship-service. Following quotations express the historic Lutheran position on this issue:

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.⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵

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 tries so hard to remedy.⁹⁶

Indeed, such a tendency is un-Lutheran. We'll let Luther, in his own words, tell us how he believed and also taught relative to this question:

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.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸

Hearing how daringly and decisively Luther spoke on these matters, we are perhaps also ready to say as did Heinrich Bornkamm:

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.⁹⁹

Whoever holds contrariwise can hardly be in agreement with Luther on the office of the ministry. Luther labels this the highest office in the church just because it is privileged to proclaim the "good tidings of great joy." Among many utterances on this matter, we select this one:

To whom ever 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.¹⁰⁰

Self-evidently what God in His Word has to say relative to this issue is much more important. Hence, we shall take note of Paul's description of a service. He writes: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord: giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁰¹ Then also: "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."¹⁰² One would certainly

ly know Paul poorly were one to charge the Apostle with minimizing the Lord's Supper because he did not mention it in the above descriptions of a service. Rather, Paul's reason was undoubtedly like Luther expressed it in saying:

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.¹⁰³

Dr. L. Fuerbringer once uttered these sharp and pointed words on this matter:

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.¹⁰⁴

In the same context, Dr. Fuerbringer then directs our attention to these words of the *Apology*: "the Lord's SUPPER . . . WAS INSTITUTED for the sake of preaching."¹⁰⁵

It is also worth noting that when our fathers speak of holding "one communion every holy-day"¹⁰⁶ they had already discarded many other masses that had been in use in the church. Yes, they even quote from *Tripartite History*, describing the situation which prevailed "in olden times":

Again in Alexandria, every Wednesday and Friday the Scriptures are read, and the doctors expound them, and all things are done, except the solemn rite of Communion.¹⁰⁷

In passing, I feel we should also take note of some statements made by Dr. Hermann Sasse in his work, *This Is My Body*. He tells us that when the question of more frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper arose in the church, the ideas prevailed, at least in the mind of one faction, namely that the Sacrament was necessary for salvation and that Communion should also be administered to children, whether they were able to comply with the examination of which Paul speaks in I Cor. 11:28-29 or not.¹⁰⁸ It is surely apparent that a mystic, superstitious belief attached itself to the Sacrament, a belief which one fears might underlie some thinking regarding the Sacrament in our day, especially with respect to arguments in favor of the military chaplaincy.

It is also in place to call attention to Jesus' those well known words, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."¹⁰⁹ Though, in the context, a Christian service, as we conceive of it, need not be directly involved when two or three gather together in Jesus' name, nevertheless Jesus' description does fit a worship-service. Of such a service, then, whether the Lord's Supper be celebrated or not, it must be said that the Lord is present with all His blessings. Those present and participating need not feel that they are being short-changed.

And since it is true that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,"¹¹⁰ does not the Holy Ghost work equally efficaciously in any gathering in Jesus' name and in every part of a service? Would it not almost border on a questioning of the ability of the Spirit of Power to insist that Holy Communion be a part, yes, the high point of every worship-service?

To me, another vital matter is involved, the danger of encroachment upon Christian liberty. That such a danger can today exist ought to be borne out sufficiently by past history. Surely the theology of the church was legalistic in the age when the many peculiar ideas relative to the Lord's Supper made their appearance.

Assuming the position which this essay has attempted to present, the essayist perhaps will be thought of as such as Dr. Webber speaks of when he says, "When we speak of liturgics, most people see red. They work themselves into a state that is closely akin to fanaticism."¹¹¹ I will admit, I do see red; however, not at anything liturgical but rather at the modern liturgical movement. In my opinion, this trend in the church militates against the true and original purpose of liturgics.

You will notice that I spoke of this trend as being a reality in the church. Whoever has eyes to see and ears to hear will hardly dispute this. Is there, therefore, not danger that this trend, found all about us, also threaten our ranks? Where we note any symptom of it, may we be bold to speak up and point out the danger involved. No symptoms, as not to faint as they may be, dare be minimized or ignored. Not to warn against them, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, prescribe a preventative and a cure would be inconsistent with the service enjoined by the great Physician.

Nor has that Physician left any doubt about the medicine to prescribe, for actually there is but one, the one to which He directs through the Evangelist of the Old Testament: "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."¹¹² This prescription is, indeed, as old as the proverbial hills, but it is absolutely reliable. It is the one that deserves truly to be called a panacea.

Though, of course, in no way on a par with the former, another method to counteract any symptoms or sicknesses in the church is that referred to in some very apt words by Dr. Martin Scharlemann. In a review of the book, *Eucharist and Sacrifice* by Gustaf Aulen, Dr. Scharlemann said:

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.¹¹³

The application is too clear to require that much be said about the grave dangers involved in imbibing too freely of heterodox and heretical literature, especially for the immature. No warning with respect to this matter can be too strong.

Fortification against the onslaughts involved in High Church movements demands a correct understanding and true appreciation of that doctrine with which the Church stands and falls, the doctrine of justification by faith. Though in its early stages the disease of High Churchism may not reveal this, the fact still remains that whoever is not well grounded in this chief article falls an easy prey to any movement which in any degree places stress on works over against faith. A word from a true advocate of the liturgical movement, Pastor Berthold von Schenk, ought to be sufficient to illustrate this point. Listen to these words:

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.¹¹⁴

There is another doctrine on which we especially need to possess Scriptural clarity to offset any Romanizing tendencies. That is the doctrine of the Church. Advocates of the movement in question, admitting that the liturgical movement is "really a seeking and questing for the Church"¹¹⁵ offer this definition of the Church: "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."¹¹⁶ Or in the words of another such disciple:

For the Liturgical Movement 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.¹¹⁷

"What further need have we of witnesses" that we need to be on our guard lest by means of a situation which may indeed have a very pious appearance we slowly but surely lose the One Thing Needful. All of us, yes, all without any exception, have reason to heed the words of a person who experienced how easily one may fall:

. . . be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by

Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.¹¹⁸

Preachers of righteousness, make full proof of your ministry, here as delegates to this convention as well as everywhere where you may be while wandering here below. Never forget, when the foundations are destroyed, when God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure no longer endure, "what can the righteous do?"¹¹⁹ Men will indeed "revile you, and persecute you, and . . . say all manner of evil against you"¹²⁰ when you quit yourselves as true preachers of righteousness. But what of it! ". . . our light affliction, which is for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."¹²¹

Preachers of righteousness, stand fast in your profession! Ever be preachers of righteousness not only by basking in the glory your lofty title merits but by proving your claim to that designation by letting your light shine before all men. "Therefore, my beloved brethren — preachers of righteousness —, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."¹²²

TO THIS, HELP US, DEAR FATHER IN HEAVEN!

Roland H. Hoenecke
New Ulm, Minnesota
June 15, 1972

NOTES

- 1 – *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Koehler, p. 2
- 2 – Romans 1:28
- 3 – II Thessalonians 2:11
- 4 – John 17:17
- 5 – Romans 10:17
- 6 – II Corinthians 5:19
- 7 – Titus 3:5
- 8 – Matthew 26:28
- 9 – *Popular Symbolics*, p. 4
- 10 – I Corinthians 1:21
- 11 – *What Luther Says*, Plass, Vol. II, p. 914
- 12 – *Ibid.*, p. 918
- 13 – *Ibid.*
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