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Word and Sacrament: An Introduction to Luther's Sacramental Theology

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WORD AND SACRAMENT: AN INTRODUCTION
TO LUTHER'S SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

A Graduate Research Paper
Presented to
the Faculty of
Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Divinity

by
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Word and sacrament is central to Luther's theology. No adequate introduction to Luther can pass over this aspect of his thought. In every matter, whether it be the study of Luther's doctrine of justification, of his ethics, or any other fundamental teaching, we are forced to consider this concept.

In modern times, however, sacramental thought on the whole, has not been looked on favorably.¹ Sacramental theology does not lend itself well to the rationality of the twentieth century mind. A mystery which cannot be further explained is an anomaly in a structure where everything has an answer. It is incomprehensible to modern man that some mysteries defy explanation.

It would, perhaps, be quite tempting to designate anything "offensive" in sacramental theology as an outmoded vestige of an earlier age. But what does scripture say? This of course, must be the final word in our beliefs. One author has written forcefully on the subject and claims, "The Bible's message is misunderstood where the sacrament is held in contempt."² Redemption is the salvation of the whole man, which

¹The one notable exception is the liturgical movement. Cf. James F. White, New Forms of Worship (New York: Abingdon, 1971), pp. 1-37.

²Regin Prenter, Creation and Redemption (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg, 1967), p. 121.

includes both spiritual and physical. It is no mistake that salvation is found in history and comes through the man Jesus Christ. Salvation is wrought out of the concreteness of incarnation not on the wings of Gnostic speculation. In this light, it comes as no surprise that God has ordained that our very perception of the gospel of salvation comes through the sacramental practices of preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

Justification of Study

The fact that modern man needs to hear a message of complete salvation is good reason for this study in sacramental thought. The choice of Martin Luther as the theologian to give us entrance into this arena of thought has definite reasons for it. First, the dogmatic thinking of our own age cannot avoid encounter with Luther. Since the church schism of the sixteenth century evangelical thought has been destined to center on Luther. Some of the theological issues of our own day have been influenced by him. What must be kept in mind, however, is that scripture is the authoritative rule for faith and practice. Luther, as great a church father as he is, cannot take its place. A fruitless repetition of his thoughts must be avoided. Only as we allow Luther to lead us back to scripture itself will our task be properly executed. Why then, should we study another theologian at all? Why study anything but scripture? This question finds its answer in the following reason.

Second, holy scripture cannot be read apart from an historical perspective. Theology is a science that is pursued within the Christian Church. And that church has an history. The biblical theologian cannot do his work apart from historical theology or systematic theology. The historic character of theology plays its part whether recognized or

unrecognized. We do better to actively understand our history in the church than to leave it as vague presuppositions.

Method of Procedure

This study will be descriptive in nature. It will give introduction to Luther's sacramental thought. Of greatest importance to us is what Luther thought concerning the subject as opposed to discussing and debating the merits of his view. The perspective is primarily systematic. This does not mean, however, that all historical development will be set aside. The design of this study is fashioned around the historical sequence of events. So, although the development of the controversies will not be detailed in terms of dates as much as they will be outlined by way of ideas, the historical framework will nonetheless make itself known.

Our focus will be upon Luther, his thoughts and his methodology. This will not allow us the space to dwell on the views of Luther's opponents. Neither will our concern be with the roots or development of Luther's own thoughts. We are not so concerned with the "whence" as with the "what" and "why" of Luther's views.

Limitations of Study

A word must be directed to the limitations of this study. Fundamental to the Reformation controversies is the question: "What constitutes a sacrament?" It goes without saying that there has been considerable discrepancy on the subject. The Catholic Church recognized seven sacraments while Luther and the rest of the Reformers only recognized two. This phase of the Reformation debate will not be discussed here. The Protestant point of view recognizes only those signs connected with

God's Word and instituted by Christ. This study presupposes this Protestant view and baptism and the Lord's Supper as the only sacraments.

Luther himself understood that the definition of a sacrament must be somewhat arbitrary, for nowhere in scripture is the term "sacrament" used as a technical term. But Luther believed the designation "sacrament" to be more useful if restricted to baptism and the Lord's Supper. In any event, Luther's two sacrament system is the starting point of this study.

Design of Study

The design of this study will follow something of the historical setting in which Luther's views were formed. His eucharistic doctrine evolved roughly in two stages: the first in his controversy with Rome and second in his controversy with Zwingli and the Swiss Reformers. Part I of this study, consisting of two chapters, will outline the major differences in methodology between Luther and Rome and discuss the subsequent controversy. Part II of this study, also consisting of two chapters, will outline the major differences in methodology between Luther and Zwingli and discuss their subsequent controversy. Part III will discuss Luther's view of baptism and give a brief explanation of his belief in infant baptism. Because this controversy did not play a major role in Luther's sacramental thought this section will be limited to one chapter. The final chapter will bring into focus some of the insights discussed earlier in the study with a view toward bringing the study to a close.

Chapter 2

THE WORD AND PHILOSOPHY

We misunderstand theology when we regard it as being the aggregate of a certain number of doctrines variously related. Theology is not a religious body shop where the fender of one model is fastened on to the chassis of an altogether different make. The theological task is not dominated by whim or mere choice in doctrinal matters. Rather, the theological task is characterized by faithfulness to the revelation of God in Christ. An inner coherency is achieved by the divine revelation that excludes the "pick and choose" approach to theology.

In like fashion, we do a disservice to our understanding of Luther if we view his sacramentarian controversies as offering insight only into an obscure chapter of his theology. By investigation into these moments of Luther's theology we should be able to determine much more than the "what" of the conflict. That has been documented elsewhere and in greater detail than will be possible in this study.¹ Of equal interest for us will be the "why" of the conflict. This will be made clearer as we make contact with Luther's theological method. By knowing his method we will hold the key that opens the secrets of his perspective and integrating principle.

¹Herman Sasse, This Is My Body (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959).

Luther's Theological Method

Luther's theological approach is not just a comment about theology but it is a complete program for doing theology.² He set his thoughts forward in the Heidelberg Disputation.³ This disputation, in effect, was Luther's presentation of his evangelical theology before his own Augustinian order. The gathering had been precipitated by the vigorous encounter between Luther and the Dominican Johann Tetzel over the matter of indulgences. Their skirmish was a caveat of the greater conflict to come. For Luther had his eyes on a more profound divergence than the details concerning indulgences. His concern was over the proper domain of theology. In theses 19 and 20 of the disputation he set forward the qualifications of a theologian.

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened (Rom. 1:20). He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.⁴

The question at stake is clearly one concerning knowledge of God.

Perhaps the most appealing approach to God is by observing the image of God in creation. Creation is a likely reflection pond for those

²For a good summary of Luther's theological method see Justo Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought, Vol. III (New York: Abingdon, 1975), 35-41. Also, Regin Prenter, Luther's Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

³This little studied disputation is the starting point for the definitive study on Luther's theological method, Walther von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, trans. Herbert Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976).

⁴Luther's Works, Vol. 31, Helmut T. Lehmann gen. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 41. Hereafter abbreviated LW with volume and page number.

who seek after Him. The invisible things of God, his power, virtue, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth (LW 31, 52), shine forth from creation. These invisible qualities have been perceivable in the things that are made (Rom. 1:20). Whether one becomes aware of God's glory through meditating on nature in quiet solitude, contemplating history, or even through prayer, the approach is still by way of creation.

Luther does not altogether reject a knowledge of God from creation. He admits that, it is possible to perceive the invisible attributes of God (i.e. virtue, wisdom, justice, goodness, etc.) in this way. However, Luther is in agreement with the apostle when he declares that such knowledge is of no avail (Rom. 1:22). He makes it clear that the approach to God through creation leads always and everywhere to law. And although the law is holy and pure, it "cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him."⁵ The gospel makes very plain that there is no approach to God through works. Luther deals decidedly with the issue when he declares that the recognition of the invisible attributes of God "does not make one worthy or wise."⁶ It is this approach that Luther calls the theology of glory.

The clearest picture of the theology of glory is to be seen in Romans chapter one. Here we see that man would attain a knowledge of God through unaided reason. The theologian of glory wishes to see God in his glory without suffering and the cross. The hope is for direct access to God. By making this kind of bid they seem to be wise, but scripture says they became fools (Rom. 1:22). This is true because the world did not

⁵LW 31, 39.

⁶LW 31, 52.

know God through wisdom (I Cor. 1:21). This wisdom was misused and became the cause of the futility, ingratitude, and darkness of their minds.

It is over against the theology of glory that the apostle develops the theology of the cross in I Corinthians chapter one. There it is maintained that the door to the true knowledge of God is not the wisdom of this world, but the foolishness of preaching. The object of this preaching is Christ crucified. It is only at the foot of the cross that man comes to a true knowledge of God. Luther takes this theology of the cross up as his own. By so doing, he places a great emphasis on suffering as the means to knowledge of God. He claims,

Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things by means of wisdom concerning visible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering. As the Apostle says in I Cor. 1, 'For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.' Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross.⁷

Here Luther makes clear that the knowledge of God does not come through works, whether they be works of creation or works of man.⁸ Rather, the knowledge of God comes through suffering and the cross. In the first instance this means the suffering of Christ, and in its derived sense

⁷LW 31, 52-53.

⁸von Loewenich shows that there is ambiguity in the use of the term "works" which yields an important insight. "Religious speculations and holiness by works are two consequences of a single human desire - the desire for an unbroken and direct communion with God. But for Luther this desire . . . constitutes the theology of glory." p. 20.

includes the suffering of the believer.⁹

The invisible things of God are revealed in the incarnation. Thus, the kenosis of Christ is the starting point for man's understanding of God. The nadir of God's condescension to man is the cross. At the depths of this shamefulness, which is folly to Greeks and a scandal to Jews, the true knowledge of God is imparted.

There is then, a radical opposition existing between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory. To put it simply, the differences are irreconcilable. We shall see how Luther's theology of the cross plays a significant role in the sacramentarian controversies as our study proceeds. In the mean time, the following will neatly summarize in Luther's own words the disparity between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory.

Ever since the scholastic theology - the deceiving theology (for that is the meaning of the word in Greek) - began, the theology of the cross has been abrogated, and everything has been completely turned up-side-down. A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all and the most sacred relics¹⁰ which the Lord of this theology himself has consecrated and blessed.

A theologian of glory does not recognize, along with the Apostle, the crucified and hidden God alone. He sees and speaks of God's glorious manifestation among the heathen, how his invisible nature can be known from the things which are visible and how he is present and powerful in all things everywhere . . . Disagreeing with the theologian of the cross, he defines the treasury of Christ as the

⁹ von Loewenich notes that there is also ambiguity in the use of the terms "cross" and "suffering". "To know God through suffering and cross means that the knowledge of God comes into being at the cross of Christ, the significance of which becomes evident only to one who himself stands in cross and suffering." p. 20.

¹⁰ LW 31, 225.

removing and remitting of punishments, things which are most evil and worthy of hate. In opposition to this the theologian of the cross defines the treasury of Christ as impositions and obligations of punishments, things which are best and most worthy of love. Yet the theologian of glory still receives money for his treasury, while the theologian of the cross, on the other hand, offers the merits of Christ freely. Yet people do not consider the theologian of the cross worthy of consideration, but finally even persecute him.¹¹

Luther and Reason

Luther's theology of the cross led him into a profound rethinking of the role of reason in the Christian faith. But at many times he seemed to merely repudiate reason. The last sermon Luther preached at Wittenberg in 1546 has become something of a locus classicus for his invective against reason. Here reason is called "the foremost whore the devil has."¹² We are advised to "hold reason in check and do not follow her beautiful cognitions."¹³ Instead, we are to "throw dirt in her face and make her ugly."¹⁴ The end results attributed to reason are idolatry, heresy and fanaticism, among others. Reason is, "God's bitterest enemy", "a beast", "the fountainhead of all evils".¹⁵ Not surprising then, is the shock that even John Wesley experienced at his initial glances at Luther's lectures on Galatians.¹⁶ Luther's view is certainly more balanced than what a onesided presentation would indicate.

In addition to the accusations against reason we find that Luther also inveighed heartily against philosophy. This follows because

¹¹LW 31, 227.

¹²LW 51, 374.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵LW 26, 229-230.

¹⁶Works, I. 315 (Journal for 15th June 1741). This reference was brought to my attention by P. S. Watson, Let God Be God! (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1947), p. 86.

philosophy is the science in which reason is principally exercised. Luther's accusations run the length and breadth of his writings. From his earliest to his latest writings philosophy is described as having nothing in common with theology. Aristotle, is for Luther the personification of philosophy. As such, he often comes in for critical review. Among other things, he is called "the twice accused Aristotle",¹⁷ and "the destroyer of godly doctrine."¹⁸

This attitude taken against reason and philosophy has been an embarrassment to Luther supporters and a ready made weapon in the hands of his enemies. The weapon has been wielded by several. One such author is Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). His work Three Reformers is divided into three sections, the first of which deals with Luther. At the outset we are put on our guard by the fact that Maritain openly identifies his sources concerning Luther to be Denifle and Grisar, two learned, but not impartial researchers.¹⁹ They give the unfounded impression that Luther was nothing more than a villain. Fortunately, a new wave of more sober research has largely displaced the earlier polemics.²⁰

The thrust of Maritain's work is aimed at showing that the story of Luther marks 'the advent of the self'. In the process, Maritain comes up with some astounding opinions. It is his belief that Luther's theology is dominated by an implacable egocentrism. The self becomes the unbridled

¹⁷LW 32, 217.

¹⁸LW 32, 258.

¹⁹Jacques Maritain, Three Reformers (London: Sheed and Ward, 1928), p. 6.

²⁰Cf. Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider, eds., Interpreting Luther's Legacy (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), pp. 40-54.

rule of all religion. Self pushes all external laws and rules out, indeed, to the point that Christ himself is replaced. This evaluation by Maritain is especially interesting in light of Swedish research which maintains that Luther's 'Copernican Revolution' was his uncompromising theocentrism.²¹

Maritain goes on to characterize Luther as "a man wholly and systematically ruled by his affective and appetitive faculties."²² His will was primary and truly absolute. This animal force subdued, and perhaps in Maritain's view, completely annihilated what he would call 'the spirituality of intelligence.' For Maritain, Luther is the master of a profound anti-intellectualism. He is the pre-eminent "enemy of philosophy."²³

Here, at least two lines of thought must be brought out concerning Maritain's position. First, Maritain's view of Luther as an enemy of reason is characteristic and representative of opinion that has often gone down in textbook accounts. Even in spite of the changing attitude toward Luther in Catholic circles, until recently not much change has taken place in the area of Luther's view of reason.²⁴ Secondly, this one sided appraisal does not do justice to the evidence. In other words, Luther does not reject reason in total, or as Wesley said, "in the gross."²⁵ From Luther's own works we turn to see evidence to this effect.

²¹Watson, pp. 37-38. Also, Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), pp. 681-691.

²²Maritain, p. 28.

²³Ibid., p. 4.

²⁴Brian Gerrish, Grace and Reason (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p. 2.

²⁵Works, I. p. 315.

While it is true that Luther spoke harshly against reason he also praised its worth. The evidence is not as one sided as Maritain would have us believe. Rather, the evidence is interestingly ambivalent. On the positive side of the ledger, Luther claims that reason is "something divine",²⁶ it is "the most important and the highest in rank among all things."²⁷ "It is the inventor and mentor of all the arts, medicines, laws, and of whatever wisdom, power, virtue and glory men possess in this life."²⁸ "All wisdom rises up out of reason as from a fountain."²⁹ Luther claims that reason is the essential difference distinguishing man from beast.

We see then, that Luther confronts us with seemingly contradictory evidence concerning his attitude toward reason and philosophy. On the one hand, he disqualifies reason and philosophy and on the other, he defends reason in rather exalted terms. What is the key to understanding Luther's attitude toward reason?

First of all, it must be recognized that Luther's negative attitude toward reason and philosophy is conditioned by his theology of the cross. Any approach to God that is to be legitimate must reject reason and rely on the revelation of Christ crucified. Here, in the theology of the cross reason is passed by in favor of the foolishness of preaching. The Word of God becomes the overwhelming fact as reason takes a subservient role. Revelation is opposed to unbridled reason. Because of this, Luther said, "We must carefully discriminate between philosophy and

²⁶LW 34, 137.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹LW 34, 144.

theology."³⁰

Secondly, the evidence must be seen in light of Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms.³¹ Very briefly, the doctrine recognizes two realms in which every Christian must deal: 1) the kingdom of Christ and 2) the kingdom of this world. The Christian is a member of both simultaneously. This is in recognition of the fact that man holds relationships in two spheres; before man (coram hominibus) and before God (coram Deo). Externally, the Christian is related to all men through the laws that govern all men. In this realm reason is adequate, for reason is capable of perceiving the natural laws that restrain evil in the world. When reason operates in this sphere Luther praises its worth. The use of reason is indispensable in law, philosophy, and other relationships in the temporal sphere. Internally, the Christian is related to God in faith through the gospel. In this sphere reason is inadequate. The only righteousness acceptable before God is the righteousness of faith. Reason is stone blind in spiritual matters. In the God-ward relationship unbridled reason is out of place needing to come under the dominance of the Word of God. When reason attempts to operate in this sphere Luther repudiates it soundly.

Brian Gerrish has neatly summarized Luther's attitude toward reason by distinguishing 1) natural reason, ruling within its proper domain

³⁰Ewald Plass, ed., What Luther Says: An Anthology, II (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 1052.

³¹For a good introduction, see H. Bornkamm, Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of His Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

(the Earthly Kingdom); 2) arrogant reason, trespassing upon the domain of faith (the Heavenly Kingdom); 3) regenerate reason, serving humbly in the household of faith, but always subject to the Word of God. Within the first context, reason is an excellent gift of God; within the second, it is Frau Hulda, the devil's whore; within the third, it is the handmaiden of faith.³²

Luther and Scholasticism

We have already seen how Luther's theology of the cross and his attitude toward reason constitute two fundamental building blocks of Luther's theological method. They put Luther in conflict with the scholasticism of the Roman Catholic Church. Scholasticism had wedded theology and philosophy. Aristotelian categories and distinctions had become the vehicle for doing theology. It is not surprising, then, to find that Luther did not hold scholasticism in high esteem. Luther saw the wedding of theology and philosophy not as a holy marriage, but as a prostitution. In Luther's view, scholasticism was the height of idolatry. Biblical truths had been exchanged for philosophical categories. Luther saw scholasticism as a weakness. Concerning its beginnings he said,

The Holy fathers of the church saw how the unlearned and those who did not know Christ held Aristotle in such esteem as an authority, and since they were of such meek disposition they permitted themselves to follow in pious simplicity, and since they had fallen into error they became to others a cause for so many confusing opinions, doubts and errors which we see reflected today in the scholastic teachers.³³

³²Gerrish, p. 26. For an insightful critique of Gerrish's book see Robert H. Fischer, "The Place of Reason in Luther's Theology," The Lutheran Quarterly, XVI (February, 1964), p. 41-48.

³³LW 31, 223.

For Luther, mixing theology and philosophy was tantamount to confusing the Word of God and the words of men.

We see Luther's theology of the cross reflected in this analysis. When measured by the theology of the cross, scholasticism showed itself to be a theology of glory. Speculations, particularly concerning metaphysical considerations became quite important.³⁴ The contrast between the theologies of Wittenberg and Rome is decisively highlighted. Wittenberg maintained a sharp distinction between the proper domains of theology and philosophy, on the other hand, Rome did not. For Wittenberg reason opposed revelation, for Rome reason supplemented revelation. The differences between Wittenberg and Rome concerning the Word of God and the respective importance of reason and faith are the starting point for the first phase of Luther's sacramentarian controversies.

There is perhaps, no better example than the Proceedings at Augsburg to make this evident. In 1518, almost a year before Luther was to write his first major treatise on the sacraments he was called to appear before the Papal legate.³⁵ After receiving the imperial safe-conduct, Luther was interviewed before Cardinal Cajetan. Luther approached the Cardinal respectfully, and was received in a fatherly fashion. After brief preliminaries, Luther was asked to do three things: recant his errors, never teach them again, and refrain from anything that might disturb the church. In the ensuing interview it became clear that

³⁴For instance, Luther viewed the doctrine of transsubstantiation as nothing more than speculation.

³⁵For a vivid account of this interview see Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms (New York: Harper, 1964), pp. 59-62.

the Cardinal could not instruct Luther as to what his errors might be. The discussions centered around two of Luther's ninety-five theses. Not surprisingly, the issues discussed cluster around the Word and the sacraments.

Thesis fifty-eight was the first to be discussed. Luther had denied that the merits of Christ constituted the treasury of merits of indulgences. Cardinal Cajetan countered by saying this view contradicted the Extravagte of Clement VI. The Cardinal continued by extolling papal authority. And according to Luther, it was extolled "above church councils, Scripture, and the entire church."³⁶ The more the Cardinal praised the authority of the pope, the more Luther insisted on the authority of scripture. More important for this study than following closely the arguments surrounding this thesis is to notice that this sacramental discussion³⁷ quickly found focus in the concept of the Word of God and particularly its authority, an issue addressed by Luther's theology of the cross.

The second thesis discussed³⁸ also had to do with sacramental grace. Luther had declared that a person taking the sacrament had to have faith or he would take it to his own damnation. But according to Cajetan every person going to the sacrament was uncertain whether or not he would receive grace. Luther countered insisting on the interconnection between Word and faith. He claimed that, "the Word and faith are

³⁶LW 31, 262.

³⁷It must be remembered that indulgences constituted part of the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance.

³⁸Thesis 7.

both necessary, and without the Word there can be no faith."³⁹ Again, we see a decidedly sacramental discussion find its focus in the concept of the word.

For Luther, Word and sacrament is a fundamental association. This is true to the extent that any understanding of the sacrament is conditioned by the Word of promise accompanying it. Thus, the sacrament cannot be bound by any partisan papal interpretation, nor can it be divorced from faith. The promise of God given through the sacrament is to be considered identical with that given through the Word.

The church of Rome, however, in its doctrine of the sacrament had separated the concepts of Word and faith. It was believed that the sacrament was effective ex opere operato. No one was to doubt that the sacrament contained justifying grace. If there was no internal obstacle (obex) or sin in the communicant then that grace was received.⁴⁰ However, no one could be certain whether or not justifying grace was appropriated by them personally. According to the Council of Trent, "Even so each one, when he regards himself, and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension touching his own grace; seeing that no one can know with a certainty of faith, which can not be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God."⁴¹ In other words, the Roman Church of Luther's day had separated Word from faith to such a degree

³⁹LW 31, 271.

⁴⁰John H. Leith, ed., Creeds of the Churches (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 426. Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent A.D. 1563. Seventh session, canon VI.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 413. Sixth session, chapter IX.

that there was no longer any certainty of salvation. The doctrine of the sacrament had been reduced to adherence to certain metaphysical and quasi-metaphysical dogmas. The word of promise in the sacrament was spoken to the elements not to the people. Belief in the living word had been destroyed and only a mechanical participation remained.

Not only had the word been extricated from the Roman Catholic doctrine and practice of the sacrament but also the concept of the word itself had undergone distortion. We see this clearly in the Roman Catholic uncertainty of salvation. The gospel, namely, the word of forgiveness received in Christ requires only faith. Paul described it as "faith apart from works." This is precisely the meaning of the Reformation phrase sola fide. But Rome had turned aside from this biblical truth. In its place a subtle form of works righteousness prevailed. Salvation was certainly thought to be based on the work of Christ and faith. However, as we have already seen in the doctrine of the sacrament an issue of compliance was imposed. In other words the word of gospel was mixed with a measure of the law. Gospel requires faith, and the law requires obedience. And if obedience is required for salvation, how shall anyone know if their compliance meets the required standard? This was the reason for the prevailing uncertainty concerning salvation in the church of Rome. The distortion of the word of justification was and continues to be a live issue in the dialogue between Protestant and Catholic.⁴²

⁴²This is notwithstanding the recent work by Stephen Pfurner O. P., Luther and Aquinas on Salvation (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964) where the author unsuccessfully tries to dissolve any essential differences in the doctrines of these two theologians on the issue of the certainty of salvation.

Luther and Cajetan came to an impasse in 1518 at Augsburg. The theology of the cross had met the theology of glory. The controversy that followed was not simply a medieval tussle over the sacraments but extended itself across a battle line touching the concept of the Word of God.

Chapter 3

THE MASS: SACRIFICIUM OR BENEFICIUM?

Luther's theology of the cross set him apart from Roman Catholic thought on the most profound level. Nothing less than the approach to the Word of God was at stake. And this conflict naturally made itself felt in the area of sacramental theology. Luther took issue with the popular practice of the mass and did not hesitate in making his objection known in various writings.

Already in the year 1517 the Ninety-Five Theses had been published and the battle over indulgences had been engaged. The Proceedings at Augsburg had taken the situation a step further. In 1519 a trilogy of works appeared that set forward the beginnings of an evangelical understanding of the sacraments.¹ In 1520, sometime in between the more famous An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility and The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Luther wrote a work entitled, A Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, the Holy Mass. This work replaces the Roman teaching of the mass as sacrifice with the scriptural teaching of the Lord's Supper as a testament. This was followed with the more polemic stand taken in The Babylonian Captivity. Luther referred to the work as a "prelude", indicating that there would be more to come. On this promise Luther made good, producing several works that set forward his understanding of the

¹At this time Luther still held to the doctrine of transubstantiation.

sacrament. The production of these anti-Roman writings continued up until 1526 when Luther's attention was turned to Zwingli and the Enthusiasts.

All of these writings contain one important element in common: they all maintain that the Lord's Supper finds its proper interpretation in the words of institution. "If we desire to observe mass properly and to understand it, then we must surrender everything that the eyes behold and that the senses suggest . . . until we first grasp and thoroughly ponder the words of Christ by which he performed and instituted the mass and commanded us to perform it. For therein lies the whole mass, its nature, work, profit, and benefit. Without the words nothing is derived from the mass."²

Luther meticulously exegeted the Last Supper accounts of Paul and the Gospel writers.³ He dealt methodically with each passage in more than one of his treatises. But in the Babylonian Captivity we find a harmony of the scriptural accounts in incorporating features of all of them -- Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; I Cor. 11:23-25. By so doing Luther gives us a comprehensive view of the words of institution, which read as follows:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it all of you; for this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is poured out for you and⁴ for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this is remembrance of me.

²LW 35, 82.

³LW 37, 307ff. And elsewhere.

⁴LW 36, 36ff.

The words of institution are the fixed starting point for all expositions and criticisms concerning the Lord's Supper. Luther described the sacrament as the union between word and sign. The point is constantly underscored that the sacrament is defined by the word. "In the sacrament Christ is received. However, this would not happen if Christ were not, at the same time, prepared and distributed through the Word. For the Word brings Christ to the people and acquaints their hearts with him."⁵

Luther stressed that the only proper understanding of the sacrament is determined by the words of institution. He held this view in opposition to the customary practice. "But see what they have made of the mass! In the first place they have hidden these words of the testament and have taught that they are not to be spoken to the laity, that these are secret words to be spoken in the mass only by the priest. Has not the devil here in a masterly way stolen from us the chief thing in the mass and put it to silence?"⁶ The very nature of the mass as being contained in the words of institution had been discarded. Thus, the Roman mass of the sixteenth century was interpreted without the benefit of the words of promise. This led to distortions of the mass on several levels.

Luther declared that, "It must necessarily follow where faith and the word or promise of God decline or are neglected, that in their place there arise works and a false, presumptuous trust in them. For where there is no promise of God there is no faith. Where there is no faith,

⁵LW 42, 57.

⁶LW 35, 90.

there everyone presumptuously undertakes to better himself and make himself pleasing to God by means of works."⁷ This prediction was accurate in the case of the Roman view of the sacrament. The gift of communion had been turned into a good work and a sacrifice. The dogmas of transubstantiation and communion in one kind became established contrary to the words of institution.

The Roman mass was interpreted by means of an allegorical method. The words of institution were left in the background to be secretly recited while the mass was understood by an allegorical exposition of the ceremony itself. "In our day the expounders of the mass make mockery and jest with allegorical explanations of human ceremonies."⁸ Dionysius Areopagita was such an interpreter. Luther takes his case up in the latter portions of the Babylonian Captivity saying, "he is downright dangerous, for he is more of a Platonist than a Christian."⁹ In the words "Do this in remembrance of me" the allegorists found the occasion for the establishment of the priesthood.¹⁰ But with characteristic irony, Luther undercut this argument exposing its groundless assertions.

Luther indicted such methods as being the seedbed for terrible heresies. Whenever the words of institution are neglected then only the human additions, "such things as vestments, ornaments, chants, prayers, organs, candles, and the whole pageantry of outward things"¹¹ becomes the interpreter of the mass. "We must be particularly careful to put aside whatever has been added to its original simple institution by the zeal

⁷LW 35, 92.

⁸LW 36, 56.

⁹LW 36, 109.

¹⁰LW 36, 111.

¹¹LW 36, 36.

and devotion of men."¹² In this regard, it was Luther's aim to re-establish the words of institution as the sole interpretive criterion for the Lord's Supper. In this way, the Word of God would be normative for a proper understanding of the sacrament.

The result of this new method, led Luther to reject the canon of the mass as a valid commentary of the mass.¹³ The canon of the mass, or the Roman Catholic liturgy surrounding the Lord's Supper claims, among other things, that the Supper is essentially a sacrifice. Against this Luther maintained that the assertion of the canon was no proof for the words of institution are the only valid interpretation of the mass and they say something else. Where the canon stands in opposition to the words of institution it stands in opposition to the gospel itself and must be rejected. "Yield, O canon, to the Gospel and give place to the Holy Spirit, since you are a human word!"¹⁴ As far as Luther was concerned the canon had been "collected and compiled by mad, unlearned priests."¹⁵

The words of institution had a significance for Luther that they did not have for scholasticism. Peter Lombard in treating the sacrament in The Four Books of Sentences does not give any attention to the words

¹²LW 36, 36.

¹³Cf. The Misuse of the Mass LW 36, 127ff. Also, The Abomination of the Mass LW 36, 307ff.

¹⁴Luther, as quoted by Carl F. Wisloff, The Gift of Communion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1964), p. 24.

¹⁵LW 36, 317.

of institution whatsoever.¹⁶ "Thus you see clearly how completely the sacraments have been misunderstood by the theologians of the Sentences. In their discussions of the sacraments they have taken no account either of faith or of promise. They cling only to the sign and the use of the sign, and draw us away from faith to the work, away from the word to the sign. Thus, as I have said, they have not only taken the sacraments captive, but have completely destroyed them, as far as they were able."¹⁷ Scholasticism was caught up in a theology of glory that was so occupied with metaphysics that it had lost sight of the true nature of the sacrament.

One added insight into Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper and the words of institution is necessary before we take a look at how Luther's view was worked out in the battle with Rome. Luther's stress on the words of institution obligated the return of the sacrament to the nature of those words. By way of the biblical witness, the Word of God, the sacrament regained the nature of proclamation. By the authority of Christ's Institution the sacrament is nothing other than a summary of the gospel.¹⁸ In the sacrament Christ imparts words of forgiveness. In the sacrament, the sin atoning death of the Son of God is proclaimed. "Christ has gathered up the whole gospel in a short summary with the words of this testament or sacrament. For the gospel is nothing but a proclamation of God's grace and of forgiveness of all sins, granted us

¹⁶Eugene R. Fairweather, ed., A Scholastic Miscellany, Vol. X, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), pp. 334-351.

¹⁷LW 36, 67.

¹⁸LW 36, 56.

through the sufferings of Christ."¹⁹

When the words of institution are all owed to be the sole interpreters of the sacrament, we find that the sacrament is a summary of the Gospel. This is expressed in Luther's works by his use of the terms promise and testament.²⁰ Those terms are used as essential synonyms. The character and nature of the sacrament are derived from an understanding of these terms.

Luther defines the term "promise" as being the way in which God deals with mankind. He is fond of citing Old Testament characters as examples of this fact. Relating to the present he says, "God does not deal, nor has he ever dealt, with man otherwise than through a word of promise, as I have said. We in turn cannot deal with God otherwise than through faith in the Word of his promise."²¹

The term "testament" is a particular type of promise. It is the promise of one who is about to die.²² "Testament" must be understood in the sense of a last will.

According to Luther, there are several elements involved in the testament:²³ first, the testator, next the testament, then the seal of the testament, which validates the will, and finally the heirs of the

¹⁹LW 35, 106.

²⁰Cf. William Lazareth, "Sacraments of the Word in Luther," Lutheran Quarterly, XII 4, 1960, 315-330. For an excellent discussion of Luther's use of these terms.

²¹LW 36, 42.

²²LW 36, 38.

²³Compare LW 36, 38 and LW 35, 86ff.

testament. The analogy is complete only when the elements are identified. Christ is the testator, the testament is the word of promise (the words of institution), the seal is the sign of the sacrament. The inheritance is the forgiveness of sins, and the heirs are those who believe.

In this view, the sacrament is a promise to be believed. It is nothing other than the forgiveness of sins which we have in Christ through faith. The only adequate response to the word of promise is faith. The sacrament does not benefit except with such faith.²⁴ Further, it is poison to the one who partakes without faith.²⁵

At this point we can begin to see the radical reevaluation that Luther brought to bear on the sacramental doctrine of his day. Luther was not just concerned to remedy some of the abuses that were a part of common practice. Luther held to a fundamentally different view of the sacrament. We shall see this more clearly as we turn to The Babylonian Captivity and the issues raised there.

Luther cites three captivities of the sacrament in The Babylonian Captivity. The abuses are of varying degrees, starting with the least offensive and moving toward greater severity. The first captivity deals with communion in one kind (communio sub una). The second captivity is identified as the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the third had to do with the mass as a good work (opus) and a sacrifice (sacrificium).

Communio Sub Una

For several centuries the communio sub una had been a controversial issue. For some, including the Utraquists, Taborites and Bretheren

²⁴LW 36, 43; LW 36, 49.

²⁵LW 37, 238.

the withholding of the cup from the laity was the great corruption of the sacrament. The desire for the cup on the part of the common people had caused something of a rift between the Bohemians and the Church of Rome. The differences were settled in a compromise at the council of Basil that had conceded them the cup. Luther was certainly not the first one to bring up the subject.

According to the words of institution the Lord's Supper consisted in both the bread and wine. Based on this fact, Luther spoke out against Roman practice. But even so, we see a development in Luther's thinking on the subject. In 1519, concerning communion in both kinds he declares, "It is not necessary since the priesthood partakes of it daily in sight of the people. It is enough that the people desire it daily and at present receive one kind."²⁶ That he is not altogether happy about the situation at that time is obvious. The sacrament is "poorly and unfittingly indicated by distributing only one part of the sacrament."²⁷ At that time Luther was hoping that the communio sub una which was established as dogma in 1415 by the council of Constance could be repealed by another general council.

In 1520, Luther was not so careful to ameliorate the church's position. He still claims that those who use one kind only do not sin against Christ. "But they are the sinners, who forbid the giving of both kinds who wish to exercise this choice."²⁸ He speaks of the tyranny of Rome that wrests from the people the complete sign of the Lord's Testament.

We should not assume, however, that Luther thought this issue to be of no consequence. Personal choice was not the touchstone of his

²⁶LW 35, 49-50.

²⁷LW 35, 50.

²⁸LW 36, 27.

views. We can see this clearly enough by the practice within the Lutheran churches just a few years after the writing of The Babylonian Captivity. If a person could not partake of both kinds in good conscience they were not required to force participation in both kinds, thus violating consciences, would be to exchange one tyranny for another. However, after sufficient preaching and teaching on the subject the one still refusing the sacrament as it was instituted by Christ, was advised to abstain until their conscience would allow them to partake in both kinds. The principle which Luther employed here and elsewhere denies the use of force in spiritual matters. The only sword to be wielded in such instances is the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

Transubstantiation

The second captivity Luther spoke out against was the doctrine of transubstantiation. This was the belief that when the words of institution were addressed to the elements, a transubstantiation occurred. The bread and wine no longer were present but the body and blood of Christ became present under the accidents of the bread and wine. In 1215 this theory became a dogma, but not without opposition.²⁹ Transubstantiation was the Roman attempt to explain the real presence in the sacrament. And up to 1519, Luther believed in transubstantiation. But in the treatise under scrutiny he gave insight into the development of his own view. While reading the Cardinal of Cambrai on the fourth book of the Sentences Luther found what he called "food for thought." The Cardinal argued that

²⁹Cf. Herman Sasse, This Is My Body (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), pp. 36-52. for a discussion of the Medieval background of transubstantiation.

it would take fewer superfluous miracles to claim that real bread and real wine existed on the altar, in which the real body and real blood of Christ are present then to require the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation - if only the church had not decreed otherwise. Luther became bolder when he found out that the "Aristotelian church" had made the decree. And after some battles he found rest for his conscience. He rejected transubstantiation.

Like the first captivity, the second was rejected because the doctrine did not have the support of scripture. Luther considered the doctrine nothing more than an opinion - and a bad one at that. The belief was the result of scholasticism hopelessly tied to Aristotle. St. Thomas had set it forward in his theology and had thereby established the doctrine practically until it had been pronounced a dogma officially. We have already seen Luther's obdurate attitude toward any theologian that thinks to approach God through philosophy and in speaking of St. Thomas in the matter of transubstantiation claims, "This great man is to be pitied . . . for attempting to draw his opinions in matters of faith from Aristotle."³⁰

Luther attacked transubstantiation on grammatical grounds. Here, we see again the vital role that the words of institution have in Luther's defense of the sacrament. He claimed that it would take "an absurd and unheard of juggling with words"³¹ to support the doctrine. The term "bread" would have to be made to mean "the form or accidents of bread." Likewise the term "wine" would have to be made to mean "the form or

³⁰LW 36, 29.

³¹LW 36, 31.

accidents of wine." To make such a false interpretation would be to enfeeble the words of God and to deprive them of their true meaning. When this is done, it cannot fail to reduce the sacrament to something less than what it is.

Luther also attacked this doctrine on the grounds that it was unheard of in the early church. He claims that for twelve hundred years the church never even mentioned transubstantiation. Only "until the pseudo philosophy of Aristotle began to make its inroads into the Church" had there been any talk of such a thing. Luther goes on to call transubstantiation "a monstrous word, and a monstrous idea."³²

But for all of this, Luther actually dealt mildly with the doctrine. For Luther, it was not the worst captivity. In fact, Luther considered it even less grievous than communio sub una. Unlike the first and third captivities transubstantiation did not violate the nature and function of the sacrament. It was, however, an unnecessary philosophic theory attempting to explain the real presence, which defies such explanation. It must be rejected because Paul speaks of the consecrated bread as bread. It is a wrong attempt to explain the miracle of the real presence. This miracle can only be described as an article of faith.

Luther praises the laity who do not "dispute whether accidents are present without substance, but believe with a simple faith that Christ's body and blood are truly contained there."³³ He then goes on to exhort the learned readers of the treatise by saying: "Why do we not put aside such curiosity and cling simply to the words of Christ, willing to

³²LW 36, 31.

³³LW 36, 32.

remain in ignorance of what takes place here and content that the real body of Christ is present by virtue of the words? Or is it necessary to comprehend the manner of the divine working in every detail?"³⁴

We see from these and other statements that Luther professed the real presence. His rejection of transubstantiation in no wise undercut this conviction. The marked difference between Rome and Luther on the issue of the real presence is not to be explained wholly in terms of transubstantiation, we must look elsewhere.

Rome affirmed the need for faith, for our human senses can not apprehend the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament. But, this "faith" that St. Thomas declared was necessary to supplement the weakness of our human senses is directed toward the church established dogma.³⁵ For Luther, this was unthinkable. Faith, for Luther was directed toward the words of the sacrament. This "faith" is faith in the gospel. It is not only the acceptance of a dogma, but the acceptance of Christ. The sacrament of the altar is the gospel. The true acceptance of Christ is at stake in the sacrament.

In this connection we have come again to what for Luther was so critical. We have come again to the words of institution.

We stand over against two profoundly different interpretations of the character of the Words of Institution - one ties them to transubstantiation and sacrifice, and the other sees them as a proclamation of the Gospel. In the one instance the words are addressed to the elements only; in the second instance they are addressed primarily to the hearts of believers.³⁶

³⁴LW 36, 33.

³⁵Cf. Sasse, p. 108.

³⁶Wisloff, p. 40.

The Mass as a Good Work and a Sacrifice

Luther cited the third captivity of the sacrament as being the widely held opinion that the mass was a good work and a sacrifice. He considered it to be the most wicked captivity of all. "This abuse has brought an endless host of other abuses in its train, so that the faith of this sacrament has become utterly extinct and the holy sacrament has been turned into mere merchandise, a market, and a profit making business."³⁷ "I fear therefore, that there is at present more idolatry in Christendom through the mass than ever occurred among the Jews."³⁸

Luther realized that opposing the mass was a blow at the heart of Catholic teaching. He did not do so without recognizing the gravity of the matter. "I am attacking a difficult matter, an abuse perhaps impossible to up root, since through century-long custom and the common consent of men it has become so firmly entrenched that it would be necessary to abolish most of the books now in vogue, and to alter almost the entire external form of the churches and introduce, or rather reintroduce, a totally different kind of ceremonies."³⁹

There has been some discussion as to whether or not the abuses Luther attacked, the "good work" and the "sacrifice" are to be understood as synonymous terms. Vilmos Vajta claims they are.⁴⁰ Carl Wisloff disagrees.⁴¹ In any event, this discussion will proceed following the order

³⁷LW 36, 35.

³⁸LW 35, 91.

³⁹LW 36, 36.

⁴⁰Cf. Vilmos Vajta, Luther on Worship (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1958), p. 105.

⁴¹Cf. Wisloff, p. 41. "'Work' and 'Sacrifice' are indeed often used without making clear the distinction between the two concepts, but it is obvious that in other connections a very special significance has been given to the concept sacrifice." p. 60.

that Luther sets out in his treatise; first, dealing with the mass as a work and secondly dealing with the mass as sacrifice.

When the essence and character of the Lord's Supper is expressed in terms of "promise" and "testament" it becomes clear that on the side of man, only faith corresponds to the sacrament. In other words, when God offers a gift it can only be received, it cannot be worked for. Where the Word of God is making a promise faith is the necessary response. "For anyone can easily see that these two, promise and faith, must necessarily go together. For without the promise there is nothing to be believed; while without faith the promise is useless, since it is established and fulfilled through faith. From this everyone will readily gather that the mass, since it is nothing but promise, can be observed only in faith."⁴² In this way, any idea of the mass as a good work is excluded.

When the promise is neglected or forgotten, faith which exists solely on that promise dies. And where faith does not exist, works of all kinds enter in.⁴³ Where the word of promise does not have authority human ideas will promptly come in to take its place. And since faith is the only thing that corresponds with the Word these human ideas will foster works. This is a fundamental spiritual law that shows itself with great consequences in relation to the Sacrament of the Altar. In Luther's day the sacrament had been changed from a gift from God into a work to be done in order to please Him. "This has been the fate of the mass; it has been converted by the teaching of godless men into a good work."⁴⁴ When

⁴²LW 36, 42.

⁴³LW 36, 42; LW 35, 92.

⁴⁴LW 36, 47.

faith is extinguished a works righteousness that leads from abuse to abuse is the inevitable result.

Luther spoke out against the abuses that had built up; such as participations, brotherhoods, anniversaries, etc.⁴⁵ A brief explanation of these selected abuses is in order. By gaining a participation it was supposed that, although not being present, one could gain the benefits of a mass that was read. The brotherhoods were fraternities that paid to have masses said for them and engaged in activities calculated to achieve merit. Membership in such a group supposedly provided each person the benefits that all of the others achieved. Anniversaries were masses read daily for a year or annually on the deceased persons birthday.⁴⁶ As can be seen, these abuses violate the promise nature of the sacrament. Luther called these abuses "the height of madness." According to him, they were the result of, and promulgated by, the more basic abuse - the mass as a "work." The mass was called an opus operatum, and to this problem we must now turn.

Carl Wisloff claims that the opus operatum principle of the Roman mass is often misunderstood by Protestants.⁴⁷ According to him the teaching attempts two things. Negatively, it attempts to express that sacramental grace is not given on the basis of the subjective worthiness of the communicant. Positively, it attempts to express that sacramental grace is occasioned by the validly administered sign. This teaching however, does not do away with the subjective factor (opus operantis).

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Cf. LW 36, 35-36 footnotes 79-81.

⁴⁷Cf. Wisloff, pp. 47ff.

Grace is received, "according to each one's proper disposition and co-operation."⁴⁸ The reception of this grace ex opere operato (by the work wrought) is assured to those who do not place an obstacle in the way.⁴⁹ The opus operatum and the opus operantis concepts must be viewed together to do justice to the Catholic position. The subjective side of this doctrine means that the mass can not properly be called magic, if by magic we mean an action which merely by its execution brings with it operations of divine grace.

Catholics have criticized Luther for interpreting the sacrament in what they view to be an entirely subjective light. Luther demands faith for the sacrament to be beneficial, while the Catholic doctrine only requires that no obstacle be placed in the way for there to be a worthy reception. On the surface, then, it would seem that the Catholic doctrine is the more objective, recognizing the great significance of the sacrament, and relying less on the subjective worthiness of the communicant.

Luther's view is not so subjective as it at first glance appears. His objection was not that the sacrament had no objective nature. Luther's argument for faith was set over against the Catholic "non ponere obicem" (not to set up a barrier). This expression has to do with the subjective disposition. The criticism leveled against Luther vanishes when it is seen that the Catholic opus operatum does not set aside the human disposition and the disposition is faith's precise opposite. Far

⁴⁸Leith, Trid. Sess. 6 chap. 7.

⁴⁹Leith, Trid. Sess. 7. Canon VI.

from being a subjective disposition, faith is that which, before any, admits to being unworthy.

So then, we see that Luther was not taking exception to a purely magical conception. If he had, the struggle would not have been difficult because he would have had the support of the church's entire traditional theology. But Luther attacked Catholicism at its very heart. The stroke was aimed at the notion that there is continuity between revelation and reason, that sacramental grace corresponds to the human disposition, even though these can express themselves only weakly. It is against this conviction that Luther places his demand for faith. The necessity of faith is asserted both against a false externalism and an unbiblical piety based on human disposition.

We come now to what is the most important side of the opus operatum doctrine. The appalling feature of this teaching is that it seeks to find benefit apart from the promise and faith. In other words, grace was supposedly conferred according to the degree of worthiness and personal piety. In this sense, the mass as opus operatum is not so much superstition as it is works righteousness, it is as such that Luther fought against it.

Luther attacked the mass as sacrifice with no less energy than he attacked the opus operatum. In fact, he claimed that this stumbling block was "the most dangerous of all."⁵⁰ It was more of a problem because the opinion that the mass was a sacrifice was widely held. The canon of the mass gives evidence of this view by using the words, "these

⁵⁰LW 36, 51.

gifts, these presents, these holy sacrifices" and other similar phrases. The priest at the closing of the mass prays, "Be pleased, O holy Trinity, with our service, and grant that the sacrifice which I have offered, . . . may be pleasing to thee."⁵¹ The mass was performed by the priest on behalf of the people. The movement is Godward. The priest offers and God receives.

The words of institution led Luther to oppose the mass as sacrifice. In his battle against this abuse he came again and again to the formulation "the words and example of Christ." Only these could be authoritative in matters of faith. "Let the priest bear in mind that the gospel is to be set above all canons and collects devised by men."⁵² The canon wherever opposed by scripture must give way. The words of institution must be the sole interpreters of the sacrament, and "they contain nothing about a work or a sacrifice."⁵³ Luther found in the words of institution only the promise of Christ which is to be received in faith by man. It is clearly evident that here the movement is manward. The sacrament is graciously offered by God to man, without the need of meritorious works.

The difference between these two views is striking. Luther sums it up neatly when he says, "Sacrifice and promise are further apart than sunrise and sunset. A sacrifice is a work in which we present and give to God something of our own. The promise, however, is God's word, which gives to man the grace and mercy of God."⁵⁴ For Luther, it was

⁵¹LW 36, 54.

⁵²LW 36, 54.

⁵³LW 36, 52.

⁵⁴LW 36, 169.

incomprehensible that anyone could take the words of promise and turn them into words of sacrifice. This was nothing less than abandoning the clear Word of God by substituting in its place a human word. Rome neglected the words of promise making the mass into a work and a sacrifice, thus, "they offer a work; Christ demands faith. They give to God; Christ promises to men."⁵⁵

The mass as sacrifice forces a question to arise: how do we know whether our sacrifice is pleasing to God or not? This question of conscience becomes plaguing for among all massholders there are none who can be sure that their sacrificing is pleasing to God. In this way we see that the sacrifice concept produces unsettled, or frightened consciences. The certainty of the divine promise is in this case exchanged for the uncertainty of a work. Whatever is not gospel cannot ease, but only incite a conscience. Only a word of promise, that is, only gospel can give confidence to an injured conscience.

Further, the mass as sacrifice reveals a false view of God. If it is necessary to sacrifice in order that God might be appeased,⁵⁶ God must be angry and unmerciful. The only thing one can rightfully expect from such a God is judgment and condemnation. But nothing can be more opposed to the view of God revealed to us in the words of institution. There we find a great treasure of goodwill and forgiveness. To regard the mass as sacrifice means "that we have turned our treasure that gives us life and salvation into something that gives us death and damnation, the certain into the uncertain, faith into doubt, in short divine love

⁵⁵LW 36, 170.

⁵⁶Leith, Trid. Sess. 22 chap. II.

and grace into anger and hate. We consider the Father to be an enemy, and have confused heaven with hell, the highest with the lowest."⁵⁷

Luther also spoke out against another prominent feature of Catholic teaching. He opposed the belief that sacrifice of the mass was propitiatory. By this doctrine it was believed that masses read could benefit persons not present both living and dead. There was no recognition for the Word-faith relationship in the sacrament only sacrifice-work. The words of institution were secret, they were reserved for the priesthood only. They were not spoken openly to the congregation but whispered inaudibly to the elements.

Luther did not only have a negative criticism of the mass as sacrifice, he had a positive side as well. He discussed in what way the mass could be described as a sacrifice in his Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass, 1520. "What sacrifices, then, are we to offer? Ourselves, and all that we have, with constant prayer, as we say, 'Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'"⁵⁸ Luther argued for a sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. This can occur apart from the mass even as testament can exist apart from the sign of the sacrament. However, it is more precious, more appropriate, more mighty and also more acceptable when it takes place with the multitude and in the assembly.⁵⁹

The sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving which includes the entire life of the believer is not one which he offers before God on his own behalf. There is one mediator before God and man, namely, Jesus Christ. He is the one who makes intercession for us. We do not present

⁵⁷LW 36, 176.

⁵⁸LW 35, 98.

⁵⁹LW 35, 98.

our offering ourselves. But our offering is laid upon Christ who in turn causes the offering to be acceptable to God. "From these words we learn that we do not offer Christ as a sacrifice, but that Christ offers us. And in this way it is permissible, yes, profitable, to call the mass a sacrifice; not on its own account, but because we offer ourselves as a sacrifice along with Christ. That is, we lay ourselves on Christ by a firm faith in his testament and do not otherwise appear before God with our prayer, praise, and sacrifice except through Christ and his mediation."⁶⁰

Luther's controversy with Rome over the Lord's Supper answers the question: is the sacrament a human work or a divine gift? Is the mass a sacrificium or a beneficium? Luther found the answer in the words of institution where the Lord declares, "This is my body broken for you." In the Supper, the word of promise is offered to man, justification is extended, forgiveness of sins is offered. This blessed meal, this holy sacrament is a summary of the gospel.

⁶⁰LW 35, 99.

Chapter 4

THE WORD AND SPIRIT

We come now to the second phase of Luther's sacramentarian controversies. The bitter dispute between Luther and Rome reached a lull in 1525, the date of his last sacramental treatise directed toward Rome. By this time the overthrow of the Catholic mass had gained widespread support. But no sooner had the first victory been won, than, as Luther stated it, the devil decided "to fall upon our host from the rear, incite rebellion and raise an uproar against us, in order that caught between two enemies, we may be more easily destroyed."¹ The sacramentarian controversies were far from over, they had merely entered on their second stage.

Zwingli had come to his view of the Lord's Supper by the end of 1524.² But it was not until the year 1525 that he published two Latin treatises in defense of views.³ Only in 1526 did Zwingli write a treatise for the common people in German.⁴ Luther had been approached several times to give reply to this new view of the Lord's Supper but the busy Luther was reticent to give answer. Finally, in 1526 a few preliminary writings came from his pen, but it was not until 1527 that the controversy

¹LW 37, 16.

²Sasse, p. 137.

³G. W. Bromiley, ed., Zwingli and Bullinger, Vol. XXIV, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), p. 176.

⁴Ibid., p. 177.

with Zwingli was fully engaged.

At the beginning of the controversy with Zwingli, Luther said that up until that time he had spoken very little concerning the object of faith (objectum fidei) that is, the sacramental presence of Christ in the bread and wine. His attention had been riveted upon the proper and faithful use of the sacraments "which is also the best part."⁵ He relates, however, that he must speak to the matter of the real presence because it is being assailed by many factious preachers.

Luther once again turned to the words of institution. He relied upon them in this second phase of the sacramentarian controversy no less than he did in the first. Against Zwingli, the words of institution were considered not only as the vehicle for the promise of the forgiveness of sins but were also understood as the promise of the real presence. Luther maintains that the word, "brings with it everything of which it speaks, namely, Christ with his flesh and blood and everything that he is and has."⁶

The controversy between Luther and Zwingli can be reduced to this one question: are the words of institution which say "This is my body" to be understood literally or symbolically? Although the hermeneutical battle ranged over various passages the issue always came back to these simple words. The whole controversy with Zwingli can rightfully be said to be a commentary on this passage. Zwingli understood these words symbolically, Luther understood them literally. These men never came to agreement on the Lord's Supper.

⁵LW 36, 335.

⁶LW 36, 278.

The reasons for disagreement are several as we shall see. The exegetical problem, far from being the single issue, is indicative of much more fundamental differences between these two Reformers. At stake is not simply one among many views of the Lord's Supper but the essential character of the gospel, the doctrine of the Word of God, revelation, and the person of Jesus Christ.

We shall therefore, first discuss Luther's exegesis and then his view of Word and Spirit.

The Exegetical Problem

It did not take long in the course of the polemical writings to realize that there was no middle ground. For Luther, clearly one side was right, the other wrong.⁷ Attempts had been made to show that Zwingli and Luther had fundamental agreement on the Lord's Supper.⁸ But Luther would have nothing to do with that misunderstanding. And one of the reasons for writing his famous Confession Concerning Christ's Supper was to lay to rest any such false claim.

The words of the sacrament "This is my body" were understood symbolically by Zwingli. He likened them to such passages as John 15:1 where Christ says, "I am the true vine." Zwingli maintained that if scripture uses a metaphor such as this then surely the words "This is my body" should be understood metaphorically.

⁷LW 37, 26.

⁸In 1526, Leo Jud, a Zurich theologian and friend of Zwingli attempted to show that Luther was really in agreement with Zwingli.

Luther did not think much of this argument of Zwingli's.⁹ He asserted that it was not enough to show examples of metaphors from scripture. The proof for this new symbolic interpretation had to be certain. Zwingli had to prove that the words of the Supper must be understood symbolically. This is something Zwingli could never do.

Luther's critique of Zwingli's attempt at the symbolic view was pointed. He claimed that Zwingli had not produced one instance in scripture where "is" is the same as "represents", which was essential if the words of the Supper were to read, "This represents my body." Several passages from both Old and New Testaments were discussed, but none to Zwingli's advantage. Even the passage already quoted, "I am the true vine", does not qualify. This is true because the metaphor does not reside within the copulative but in the predicate. In other words, Jesus does not represent the vine, he literally is the true vine, that is, the spiritual vine. This passage is "expressed in terms of being not representing."¹⁰ Zwingli's attempt at circumventing the clear words of institution failed.

Luther understood the words "This is my body" literally. He was certain of the real presence in the sacrament and held firmly to it. But he had not always been so firm. Luther had intense inner struggles about that belief. In his letter to Strassburg in 1524 he confessed that he was tempted to interpret the words of institution symbolically, for in

⁹"If I were to judge between Karlstadt and Zwingli, I would say that Karlstadt's touto served this error better than Zwingli's metaphor." LW 37, 39.

¹⁰LW 37, 38f.

that way he could have struck most violently against Rome.¹¹ But that kind of Machivellian attitude he ascribed to the old Adam. Although he had received correspondence more compelling than the arguments of either Zwingli or Karlstadt he could not yield his belief.¹² He says of his own conviction concerning the real presence, "I am a captive and cannot free myself. The text is too powerfully present, and will not allow itself to be torn from its meaning by mere verbiage."¹³ And again in Table Talk Luther states, "If they can prove to me that the word 'is' is the same in this passage as 'signifies', I will believe them. They haven't had the temptations I have had about the sacrament."¹⁴

The clear meaning of the words "This is my body" was the foundation for Luther's conviction. But it was the apostle Paul who explained these words for Luther in I Corinthians 10 and 11.

Paul Althaus points out that on two different occasions Luther asserts that Paul's statement in I Corinthians 10:16 ("The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not participation in the body of Christ?) is the real confirmation of his position.¹⁵ In 1525 Luther declared, "That is a verse which is a thunderbolt on the head of Dr. Karlstadt and his

¹¹LW 40, 68.

¹²The correspondence was probably from Franz Kolb and Cornelius Hoen, whose views were the impetus for Zwingli's own.

¹³LW 40, 68.

¹⁴LW 54, 91. See also LW 36, 345.

¹⁵Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 384.

whole party. This verse has been also the life-giving medicine in my trials concerning this sacrament. Even if we had no other passage than this we could sufficiently strengthen all consciences and sufficiently overcome all adversaries."¹⁶ And in 1528 he said, "This text I have extolled, and I do so still, as my heart's joy and crown, for it not only says, 'This is Christ's body' indeed, 'The bread which we break is not only the body of Christ but the distributed body of Christ.' Here, now, is a text so lucid and clear that the fanatics and the whole world could not desire or demand anything more."¹⁷ As can be seen from these quotes Paul's statement is quite important for Luther. It clearly expresses the objective content of the doctrine of the real presence.

Of course, this passage too came under contention. Luther interpreted the passage in this way, "Now Paul speaks thus: 'The bread which we break is a participation in the body of Christ,' i.e., whoever partakes of this broken bread, partakes of the body of Christ as a common possession distributed among many; for the bread is this common body of Christ says Paul. This is stated in clear and distinct terms, which no one can understand differently without changing the words."¹⁸ The opponents wanted to interpret the "participation of the body" which Paul speaks of as being "spiritual". They based their opinion on verse 17 which reads, "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body because we all partake of the same loaf." Since the "participation in the body of Christ" also means belonging to the spiritual body of Christ, the "participation" itself must be understood as a spiritual one.

¹⁶LW 40, 177.

¹⁷LW 37, 348.

¹⁸LW 37, 353f.

Therefore, even in verse 16, Paul was not speaking of a physical eating of the body of Christ. However, Luther did not accept the validity of this argument. He maintains that the partakers of the bread include the worthy as well as Judas and the unworthy. "It is not possible that the latter partake of it spiritually, for they have neither spirit nor faith. . . . Thus, if the worthy partake of it and have it in common among them, it must be physical and not spiritual, since all partaking must be either physical or spiritual."¹⁹ "Body" and "blood" cannot be understood as tropes here. Over against this attempted interpretation Luther referred especially to I Corinthians 11:27 and 29, "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." In these verses the tropological understanding is impossible. Paul does not speak of a sign or symbol here but of the body itself. "How can you sin in eating the body of the Lord, if he is not present in the eating or the bread?"²⁰ On this basis Luther reached a decision also about I Corinthians 10:16 and all passages relating to the Lord's Supper. "If body and blood in this passage . . . are not a trope but rather refer to the true body and blood of Christ as our doctrine holds, then they also cannot be tropes in other passages referring to the Lord's Supper."²¹

It was in this way that Paul's statements made clear the meaning of the words of institution for Luther. The statement concerning the Lord's Supper require a literal interpretation. Luther's own hermeneutical principles would have led him to such a view in any case. Frequently in his writings he states a formula to the effect that, "In Scripture we

¹⁹LW 37, 354.

²⁰LW 40, 183.

²¹LW 37, 351.

should let the words retain their natural force, just as they read, and give no other interpretation unless a clear article of faith compels otherwise."²² According to this formula there is no need to interpret the words of institution in a non-literal fashion. In maintaining the literal rendering of the words "This is my body" he says, "I have kept them just as they read, especially because I do not find that they conflict with any article of faith."²³

Luther responded in no uncertain terms to his opponent's symbolic interpretation of the words of institution. He was convinced that they had not been compelled by the words of scripture, as he had been, but by certain radical presuppositions. The awkwardness of admitting a real presence was too much to ask of reason. So instead of conforming their thoughts to scripture Zwingli and the Swiss tried to bend scripture to their view of rationality.²⁴

In 1528, Luther identified yet another of his opponents presuppositions. "The foes of the sacrament want to believe only in bread and wine, in opposition to the pope, thinking thereby really to overthrow the papacy."²⁵ For Luther, this represents the height of irreverence. "This is not Christian teaching when I intrude my own ideas into the Scripture and compel Scripture to accord with them. On the contrary, the Christian way is to make clear first what the Scriptures teach and then compel my

²²LW 37, 270.

²³LW 37, 306.

²⁴"This is what all factious spirits do: they first concoct an opinion. If it pleases them, they then attempt to force the Scriptures to agree with it." LW 36, 337.

²⁵LW 40, 231.

own ideas to accord with them."²⁶ Not only do such interpretations show a lack of reverence but they are an unmerciful act toward consciences that are trying to find certain basis for faith. Luther points out that where conscience is involved one must proceed with certainty.²⁷ It is not enough to say, "It might be interpreted this way." "Might" and "must" are not the same. Any interpretation that is so uncertain does damage to the earnest conscience. "What becomes of my conscience, which would like to have a good, sure foundation? Is it supposed to stand on this hungry, thirsty, needy gloss?"²⁸

Even here in the sacramentarian controversies we see Luther faithfully adhering to the Reformation principle of sola scriptura. Only the clear words of scripture can establish doctrine. Thus, all human thoughts and presuppositions are put aside by God's Word. Only in this way, by submitting to scripture, can true faith be established. God's Word demands obedience.

Also, in this connection, we begin to see the interplay between the sola scriptura principle and Luther's theology of the cross. Luther felt his opponents were rationalists and philosophers no less than his Roman objectors. They wanted to learn to understand God's clear word with their human thoughts in terms of what they thought was possible and impossible, useful and not useful. This kind of approach to theology is opposed to the theology of the cross, the view that requires reason to submit to revelation.

Luther points out the absurdity of establishing doctrine by means of reason. "On these grounds it is certainly not true that Christ is God

²⁶LW 36, 283.

²⁷LW 36, 284.

²⁸LW 37, 344.

and man. For it is difficult, yes, impossible to believe - with the exception of the saints, to whom it is not only easy but also joy and gladness, yes life and salvation, to believe all the words and works of God."²⁹

Word and Spirit

As it has been said before, Zwingli's objection to a literal rendering of the words of institution stems from multiple factors. But perhaps the most compelling factor was his belief that nothing physical could contain spiritual truth. Underlying Zwingli's theology is the conviction that all reality is divided into two realms: the spiritual and the physical. This division is indicative of the relation between God and man.

When describing the nature of man Zwingli is consistent with his division of reality. The uniqueness of man as he sees it is in the coexistence of the two natures of spirit (soul) and body. Man is unique because he is both heavenly and earthly. He is set apart from the rest of the created order by token of the rational side of his being. And although these two natures are joined together in the same individual, they have no essential overlap in their functions. What applies to one in no way applies to the other. For Zwingli, the divergence is decisive: the spiritual and the physical are divorced.³⁰

²⁹LW 37, 75.

³⁰This belief adversely affected Zwingli's Christology and played a significant role in the formulation of his sacramental views. For Luther's critique see LW 37, 230f. Also, Sasse, pp. 148-155.

We see this fundamental dichotomy in Zwingli's attitude toward worship and the arts.³¹ Since the physical aspect of Roman ceremonialism could in no way aid true spiritual worship, he determined that all external trappings were to be abandoned. In 1524 a ban was placed on organ music in churches in Zurich and in the next year congregational singing was likewise stopped.³²

Insofar as it was possible, Zwingli eliminated everything sensuous from worship. Music, vestments, incense, ritual gestures, and images - all were of no avail to man precisely because his faith, the only reality, the invisible action of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts, had nothing whatsoever to do with the senses.³³

Zwingli's negative attitude extended not only to the sacraments but to everything sensory in worship.

It is evident that Zwingli showed the strong influence of classical philosophy in his view of man and reality. Zwingli leaned heavily on Aristotle and the Stoics³⁴ and the via antiqua.³⁵ He maintained a spiritualistic-rationalistic view of reality that makes a sharp distinction between body and spirit. Zwingli understood the biblical antithesis in light of classical philosophy. In this way the Pauline-Johanne formula flesh-spirit is reduced to a hopelessly philosophic body-spirit dualism.

³¹Cf. Charles Garside, Jr., Zwingli and the Arts (New Haven: Yale, 1966), pp. 178ff.

³²Robert James Goesser, "Word and Sacrament" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Drew University, 1960), p. 208.

³³Garside, p. 178.

³⁴Jaques Courvoisier, Zwingli: A Reformed Theologian (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 44.

³⁵Sasse, p. 117.

It is precisely this dualism which is fundamental for Zwingli in the controversy on the sacrament. The physical elements are not to be rejected but they convey no spiritual reality. The sacrament itself is to be retained because Christ instituted it as an observance of the church. On the strength of this alone Zwingli is kept from the extreme position taken up in later years by the Quakers. The central issue for Zwingli in the controversy over the sacrament is the confusion of the spiritual and physical realms.

The scripture that Zwingli turned to with predictable persistence is the statement in John 6, "The flesh profiteth nothing." Zwingli argues that by these words Jesus is pointing the church away from physical considerations to those that are purely spiritual, and invisible. Further on in the passage, Jesus meant by "His body" the spiritual food that brings forgiveness. The physical eating and drinking in the sacrament can have no value, because the physical cannot touch the soul.

Zwingli arrives at this conclusion that the Spirit alone can be the means of the grace of God because of the disjunction between the spiritual and the physical.³⁶

Luther's position differs radically from Zwingli's. Unlike Zwingli's view, Luther's thought contains no body-spirit dualism. Because of the profound role that his theology of the cross and therefore the incarnation plays in his thinking, Luther has no room for such a dualism. Using slightly different terminology Regin Prenter sums up this same idea.

³⁶Goeser, p. 164. Goeser also maintains this belief is related to Zwingli's doctrine of predestination.

The theology of the cross, according to Luther, demands the radical rejection of any division of the world into two realms - the sacred and the secular.³⁷

The concepts of "flesh" and "Spirit" are principles that come from without to exercise their control. Thus, it is possible for the physical to be fleshly or to be spiritual. The deciding factor is not metaphysical in nature but in the moral attitude or relation that is played toward God's will. Thus, matter and mind are not judged to be fleshly or spiritual on static grounds. Instead, they are determined dynamically, that is, in their relationship to the Spirit. The following passage makes Luther's position quite clear.

We do not call 'flesh' that which can be seen by the eyes or touched by the fingers, as the fanatics do when they call Christ's body useless flesh; but, as I have said above, all is spirit, spiritual, and an object of the Spirit, in reality and in name, which comes from the Holy Spirit, be it as physical or material, outward or visible as it may; on the other hand, all is flesh and fleshly which comes from the natural power of the flesh, without spirit, be it as inward and invisible as it may. For St. Paul in Romans 8 calls even the fleshly mind 'flesh' and in Galatians 5 enumerates among the 'works of the flesh' even 'heresy, enmity, ~~envy,~~' etc., which however are entirely inward and entirely invisible.³⁸

Over against Zwingli's dualism Luther argues the inseparability of the physical-historical from the spiritual. Not only is it possible for the physical to be spiritual but it is insured by the acts of God in history. For Luther, God confronts men by His Spirit in the concreteness, the bodiliness of history. To despise that which is outward is to despise the revelation of God in history. "God . . . sets before us no

³⁷ Regin Prenter, The Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 14.

³⁸ LW 37, 99.

word or commandment without including with it something material and outward."³⁹ The entire biblical history gives evidence to that.⁴⁰ "The Spirit cannot be with us except in material and physical things such as the word, water, and Christ's body and in his saints on earth."⁴¹

Luther does not understand the Spirit in terms of the metaphysical separation of the "higher" and "lower" natures of man. Neither does he understand the Spirit as a transcendent reality standing completely outside of the world and creation. Luther's trinitarian perspective compels him to conceive the role of the Spirit as being intimately involved in the processes of redemption creation, and sanctification. The Spirit is God in the gracious preservation of the bodily creation. This is reflected in the Old Testament concept of the Spirit as the life-giving force. The Spirit of the Father and Son also seeks the redemption of creation. The new creation in Christ is not only spiritual but is a spiritual-bodily creation.

The world, in decisive fashion, receives her Redeemer as God become man. Jesus is the Word made flesh, Emmanuel, meaning, God with us. God's creative redemption stands unbroken, that is, it encompasses the whole man. Thus, the distinction between "outward" corporeality and "inward" spirituality, that is so critical for a spiritualizing

³⁹LW 37, 135.

⁴⁰"To Abraham he gave the word including with it his son Isaac. To Saul he gave the word including with it the slaying of the Amalekites. To Noah he gave the word including with it the rainbow. And so on. You find no word of God in the entire Scriptures in which something material and outward is not contained and presented. LW 37, 135f.

⁴¹LW 37, 95.

metaphysic vanishes. Luther does not know a Christ that is not bodily as well as spiritual. Accordingly, Luther does not know of any reception of the forgiveness of sins that is not simultaneously a hope of the resurrection of the body.

At this point, we begin to see the superiority of Luther's position over that of his opponents. He breaks through their dependence on humanism and their idealistic views equating the Spirit with inwardness and "spirit". He preserves the relation of the Spirit to the totality of reality including creation. The Spirit is not a timeless abstraction that stands behind the world. Rather, the Spirit is an eschatological reality who works in the context of salvation history to bring all things to the day of resurrection.

Luther's opponents held a view that was so "spiritual" that all externals were denied spiritual significance. This was true to the extent that the "Word" was considered as merely external. As the enthusiasts often expressed it "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." On the other hand, Luther consistently set forward the value and further, the necessity of the externals such as preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Why did Luther do so? And in doing so did he fall back into a papalism, as his opponents accused him of doing?

We have already compared the fundamentals of the views of Luther and Zwingli on the Spirit.⁴² In this way, a general understanding of the Spirit and externals has been given. But, of particular concern at this

⁴²Cf. Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953), pp. 247-302 for a complete comparison of Luther and the Enthusiasts on the Spirit.

point are the differences of approach concerning the Word.

On the surface, Luther's insistence on the necessity of externals looks like a reversion to Roman ceremonialism, and a move back to opus operatum. However, upon closer observation this assumption is proved to be wrong.⁴³ Luther nowhere asserts a metaphysical tie between Spirit and Word (including sacrament), but maintains the sovereignty of the Spirit over the external sign. When the means of grace is understood to have a metaphysical tie with the Spirit the means of grace becomes a device by which man controls the Spirit. Through it man manipulates his efforts to reach God. This view is decidedly anthropocentric. The concern is, "How does man reach God?" And far from revealing an answer the anthropocentric view can only confute the seeker.

Ironically, the position of the Enthusiasts has profound similarities to that of the Roman position, even though the external expressions are widely separated. In both instances the overriding concern is, "How does man reach God?" Rome points to the means of grace operating ex opere operato, the Enthusiasts point to the concepts of imitation (imitatio) and mortification (mortificatio). The reception of the Spirit according to the Enthusiasts was the result of a sincere practice of the above concepts. It is not surprising then, in the case of both Karlstadt and Zwingli, that the primary role of the sacrament is one of contemplation and remembrance.⁴⁴ In this connection, human actions in the form of

⁴³Ibid., p. 259.

⁴⁴Cf. Ronald Sider, ed., Karlstadt's Battle With Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), p. 77. And also, G. W. Bromiley, ed., Zwingli and Bullinger, p. 229.

disposition or mortification-imitation precede a worthy reception. In either instance, faith is bypassed and a works righteousness is to be seen, that places man in controlling position over God's grace.

Luther's position is characterized by a totally different perspective. The work of the Spirit is not seen in terms of man's efforts to reach God, but in a theocentric perspective emphasizing the downward motion of God to man. The work of the Spirit is not a device to be manipulated by man in his upward journey, but an act of God, from first to last, on behalf of man. Thus, there can be no metaphysical tie between the means of grace and the Spirit. Luther views the Spirit as being sovereign over the means of grace. The Spirit is the sovereign, living God acting personally in the external signs of preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

Still unanswered however, is Luther's emphasis on the indispensibility of the outward sign. We find the answer in Luther's concept of signum, or sign.⁴⁵ Word and sacrament are signs of revelation under whose veil God is present. The signs of preaching, baptism and the Supper are established on the order of God (Christ) to convey the gospel. The signs are signs of revelation. As such the sign prevents all loose speculation concerning God's majesty which is the way of the theology of glory, and instead witnesses concerning God as he truly is, God who is for us in Christ. The sign, in Luther's thought, is a visible confirmation of all God's promises. The sign itself is insufficient and only by way of the presence of God in and with the sign does it accomplish its

⁴⁵Cf. Prenter, Spiritus Creator, p. 259-266.

task of ongoing revelation. The emphasis of the signum concept finds expression in this way: Where the sign is present, there God is present veiled in the covering of the sign.

The concreteness of this understanding of the ongoing nature of revelation is nothing short of the scandal of the cross. The sign becomes a challenge to the way of speculation, and piety, which by way of works wishes to reach God in his majesty. Opposed to this is the God who says, "Seek me where I am to be found." The Christ of the stable and the cross is always an affront to human ideas concerning the way to God. Attempts to find God by speculation and works lead only to the Deus Nudus of the law. And to meet God in this way means to die. The sign signifies that God is present in another way. He is present, not according to human speculation, but as He has chosen. It is by choice that He is pleased to be in our midst according to our impotent nature.

For Luther, the signum concept is a means by which to express the gospel's way of salvation. There is no room for the exercise of human disposition. We are not to run after Christ in heaven, it is Christ that runs after us here on earth. Every attempt from earth to heaven is swept aside in God's active seeking of man here on earth. In this way we see that the signum concept is an expression of God's freely determined presence here on earth.

Luther's approach to external signs can best be described in a two-fold way. First, external signs are a necessity. This is the necessity of the incarnation, where the Deus Nudus became the Deus Incarnatus "for us". The necessity of the sign is for our protection that we might not be consumed in the presence of God in his majesty. Secondly, the signs are insufficient. This indicates the impossibility of the

manipulation, by man, of the means of grace. Only God can redeem man, and only by a sovereign act of His faith-producing presence can salvation be assured.

There is a helpful passage found in Luther's treatise Against the Heavenly Prophets that describes the relation between Word and Spirit.⁴⁶

In this passage, Luther describes the work of God in our lives in a two-fold way: outward, and inward. Outwardly, He deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through material signs including baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly, He deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith and other gifts. The inward experience follows and is affected by the outward. This is true because God has determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward. The inward and outward correspond to the Spirit and Christ. The question of the relation of Word and Spirit is answered by describing the relation of the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit.

The Spirit that Luther here describes is from the Father and Son. The work of the Spirit is to bring men to the Father through the Son. This can only be accomplished by the outward signs of the gospel. In the humanity of Christ and in the signs of his humanity God has come to meet us. It is this Christ, clothed in these signs, and he alone, that the Spirit must establish in our hearts in living power.

Luther's controversy with Zwingli concerning the Lord's Supper involves disagreement along several lines. The exegetical problem pitted Luther's literal interpretation against Zwingli's symbolic view. This is

⁴⁶LW 40, 146ff.

not separate from, but directly related to their divergent understandings of anthropology and the flesh-spirit antithesis. Zwingli starts with the anthropology of Greek philosophy. Consequently, he opts for a thorough going dualism separating the physical from the spiritual. Luther maintains the Hebraic view of man as a totality. As a result he emphasizes the inseparability of the physical and spiritual. These factors among others led to the disagreement concerning the Lord's Supper between Luther and Zwingli.

Chapter 5

THE EUCHARIST: MEMORIAL OR MEANS OF GRACE?

In the previous chapter we have seen how Luther and Zwingli were divided by the exegetical problem and their respective views of the flesh-Spirit antithesis. There can hardly be any doubt that the deeper reasons for Zwingli's attitude concerning the sacrament were not exegetical. No one, not even Zwingli, has ever doubted that grammatically the words of institution can be understood as Luther interpreted them. But he rejected Luther's view because of the "absurdities" that would arise from a literal interpretation. One absurdity we have already touched on from the perspective of the relation of Word and Spirit. This Zwingli's belief that spiritual reality cannot be conveyed bodily. Another absurdity is the idea that Christ can be seated on the right hand of God and on earth in the sacrament simultaneously. Another absurdity is the usefulness of a bodily, or real presence in the sacrament.

Zwingli's Christology gave rise to these so-called absurdities. His reliance upon a philosophic dualism forced his Christology toward the Nestorian side of orthodoxy. His tendency was to separate the natures of Christ in line with his previously discussed dualism. For Zwingli, the physical aspects of the incarnation were an unavoidable incidental, not a necessity of divine redemption. It is no wonder then, that Zwingli differed with Luther so radically on the issues of the Lord's Supper.

The task at hand is to pursue further the issues dividing Luther and Zwingli. This will be done under two headings: The Christological

Difference and The Real Presence. In the course of this discussion Luther's explanations for Zwingli's "absurdities" will be given.

The Christological Difference

Zwingli was convinced that, "Christ cannot be in more than one place at one and the same time . . . Therefore if the body of the risen Christ is necessarily only in the one place, without doubt that place cannot be any other than at the right hand of the Father. And if so, how can he be here below in the bread?"¹ Zwingli is not here trying to limit God to one locality. Zwingli maintains that the right hand of God is everywhere and that, consequently, Christ is omnipresent. This, however, is true only of His divinity.² The human nature of Christ is not everywhere present as is the divine. Otherwise there would be two infinite categories thus, according to Zwingli's logic, threatening the exclusive existence of God as infinite. Therefore, the humanity of Christ resides in heaven in one locality until the end of the world, otherwise it would not be a real human body. Zwingli considers Luther's view to lead to Marcion's heresy, that is, docetism.³

This argument reveals the profound christological differences between the two Reformers. Both desired to express their respective understandings of Christ in orthodox positions consonant with church

¹G. W. Bromiley, ed., Zwingli and Bullinger, p. 222.

²Ibid., p. 221.

³"If we wish to argue that Christ's body is in the bread in the same way as it is born of the Virgin Mary and passed through closed doors, etc., then we . . . have to accept the heretical doctrine of Marcion. Ibid., p. 219.

councils and creeds. But in actuality this single desire led to a diversity not explainable simply in terms of their views on the sacrament alone.

Over against Zwingli's tendency to separate the two natures of Christ, Luther emphasized the unity of the God-man. In fact, the strongest stress in Luther's christology is on the unity of Christ's person.⁴ Luther took the lead of scripture that asserts that "God became man." On the basis of scripture's adducing to the one person Christ properties, peculiar to humanity (such as being born, drinking milk, suffering, dying), and properties peculiar to divinity (such as creating, residing in heaven, answering prayer), Luther reconciles the two natures in one person. The human and the divine are, for Luther, inseparably united in one person.

The effect of this union is mutual predication: the attributes of Christ's divinity are communicated to His humanity and His humanity to His divinity. By this means, he can explain how He who possesses all things can be given all things. And we can understand when Luther attributes human properties to the divine, "Mary makes broth for God," "Mary suckles God with her breasts, bathes God, rocks and carries Him;" "the infant Christ, lying in the cradle and suckled by the Virgin Mary, created heaven and earth."⁵ Conversely, because the human nature shares in the glory of the properties which properly relate to God, Luther can

⁴On the union of the two natures in Luther's theology, Cf. Ian D. Siggins, Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ (New Haven: Yale, 1970), pp. 227-239.

⁵Luther as cited by Siggins, p. 232.

say, "to worship this man is to worship God;" "outside this man Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and who suffered, you must not seek God or any salvation or help."⁶

Luther's christology can neatly be summarized by Colossians 1:19 ("that in him should dwell all the fullness of God") and John 14:9 ("he that hath seen me hath seen the Father"). Luther's basic christological insight is that there is one mediator between God and man: the man Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:5). As an expression of this truth Luther claims "I know of no other God except the one called Jesus Christ."⁷ God is present for us only in Christ's humanity. The incarnation, then, is not an incidental, nor is it past history, but it is the present means of God's dealing with divine transcendence and immanence. Christ is the one revelation of God to men. Wherever Christ is present there the fullness of the Godhead is fully present. There the Father is present as sender (Christ is at His right hand) and the Spirit is present as witness. Any attempt to circumscribe Christ as the present means of revelation is an attempt of natural theology to win through to God unaided.

Due to the communication of attributes, otherwise known as the communicatio idiomatum, Christ's humanity is present wherever His divinity is present. In other words, Christ's humanity is also at the right hand of God, that is, everywhere. This confession stupifies the imagination. Reason cannot explain it, it can only be believed. John 1:14 states that the Word became flesh, which for Luther could not mean that part of the Word did not become flesh. The incarnation cannot be

⁶Ibid.

⁷Althaus, p. 191.

explained by reason. This is the trap Zwingli fell into. Neither can the incarnation be adequately expressed in quantitative terms, such as, "finite" and "infinite". The miracle of the incarnation is beyond all mathematics and beyond all philosophy. In this way, we see how Luther took seriously the unity of both human and divine natures in Christ.

Such was not the case with Zwingli. For him, the communicatio idiomatum was only a form of speech that he called "alloesis". This form of speech is defined by Zwingli as "an exchange or interchange of the two natures which are in one person. By which in naming one nature we mean the other, or name them both but mean only the one."⁸ Luther inveys vehemently against Zwingli's alloesis claiming he never proves its existence,⁹ that if it did exist it still would not disprove the fact that Christ is present in heaven and in the sacrament,¹⁰ and that his argument concerning alloesis is irrelevant.¹¹ "He fashions his own tropes to pervert Scripture and divide the person of Christ."¹²

As we come back again to the question, "How is it possible for Christ to be on the right hand of God and in the sacrament?", we see there are different motivating factors behind the answer. Zwingli answers with a christology on the Nestorian side of orthodoxy. His tendency is to separate the person of Christ into human and divine.¹³ Zwingli maintains

⁸LW 37, 206 n. 63.

⁹LW 37, 207.

¹⁰LW 37, 207.

¹¹LW 37, 209.

¹²LW 37, 211.

¹³"Of Christ's two natures the divine nature never left heaven, for being one with God the Father the divine nature could not ascend into heaven as his human nature did." G. R. Potter, Zwingli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 299.

that the body of Christ must be in a certain place in heaven.¹⁴ Therefore, the real presence in the sacrament is an absurdity that must be avoided at all costs.

Luther, on the other hand, approaches the question with a christology that clearly sets forward the inscrutable reality of the God-man. His tendency is to affirm the unity of the person of Christ.¹⁵ Luther maintains that due to the communicatio idiomatum the humanity of Christ is everywhere at the right hand of God. And since He binds the words "This is my body" to the sacrament, the real presence is an article of faith contradicted by no others and must be retained at all costs.

Luther says that, "Christ's body is everywhere because it is at the right hand of God which is everywhere, although we do not know how that occurs. For we also do not know how it occurs that the right hand of God is everywhere."¹⁶ This statement made no sense to the Swiss who thought only in terms of a visible mode of presence. But Luther did not think simply in terms of a visible or "local" mode of existence. "Christ is neither in heaven nor in the Supper in a visible manner, nor as fleshly eyes judge a thing to be in this place or that."¹⁷ According to Luther,

¹⁴Sasse points out that this is, "one of the arguments for transubstantiation advanced by Thomas: Since the body of Christ is in that heavenly place, it can be present on the altar only through a conversion of the substance of bread into the substance of the body." p. 150.

¹⁵Siggins, p. 232 claims that Luther's "is an unexceptional statement of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. On the one hand, both natures are predicated of one subject, so that there is no danger of Nestorianism; on the other, there is a genuinely mutual predication of the attributes of these natures, so that there is no danger of Monophysitism."

¹⁶LW 37, 214.

¹⁷LW 37, 208.

Christ is not in heaven as a bird perched in a nest. God's ability to make possible the impossible obviates such a simplistic view of heaven.

The Real Presence

We come now to the question concerning the usefulness of the bodily, or real presence in the Supper. This question was put to Luther by his opponents with the added assertion that if he could not give adequate answer this would prove there is nothing to it. The assertion infuriated Luther who retorted, "Even if we could not show how it is useful and necessary for Christ's body to be in the bread, should God's Word for that reason be false, or be twisted around according to our notion?"¹⁸ Luther therefore rejects his opponents questions regarding the real presence as presumption against God. Luther does give an answer. He does not, however, give it to those who demand a reason before they believe God's clear words. Rather, he gives it to those who reverently and humbly believe.

A faithful, Godfearing heart does this: it asks first whether it is God's Word. When it hears that it is, it smothers with hands and feet the question why it is useful or necessary. For it says with fear and humility, 'My dear God, I am blind; truly I know not what is useful or necessary for me, nor do I wish to know, but I believe and trust that thou dost know best and dost intend the best in thy divine goodness and wisdom. I am satisfied and happy to hear thy simple Word and perceive thy will.'¹⁹

Luther is here concerned to express the sovereign authority of the Word over against the insight of human reason. What God's Word says is good for us. This fact remains in spite of our question of the necessity or meaningfulness of God's actions. It is not for us to establish the

¹⁸LW 37, 127.

¹⁹LW 37, 127.

standard of meaningfulness by the weight of reason. On the contrary, this would be an expression of the original sin of human self assertion that reverses the rightful relationship between God and man. For a man to condition his subjection to God on the basis of logical insight is to set himself above God. "For he who asks why something which God says and does is necessary is trying to elevate himself above God and be wiser and better than God."²⁰ This is the kind of pride that reminds Luther of Munzer.

At the Marburg Colloquy Luther expressed the same sentiment in shocking fashion, "If He should command me to eat dung, I would do it."²¹ In all of this there is no mention of submitting ourselves to an arbitrary will. The point is this: what God commands is good and useful, even necessary for us. Luther is concerned that we not base our faith on our understanding of God's thinking and the inner "how" of his actions. For, "the authority of God's Word is greater than the capacity of our intellect to grasp it."²² Our understanding must do its seeking in faith. Our notions of reasonableness and absurdity are not to be the standard of meaningfulness. Rather, God's Word is the standard for meaningfulness.

For Luther, the real presence in the sacrament is a token of Christ's abiding presence for us at all times. The fact that the Word became flesh means for Luther that it became body. This bodiliness means that Christ is near and comprehensible to men. God deals with them as a physical and spiritual totality. The contemporaries of Jesus were able to enter into a spiritual and at the same time physical relationship with

²⁰LW 37, 139.

²¹LW 38, 19.

²²LW 36, 35.

Him. Mary gave birth to Him both spiritually and physically. The shepherds and Simeon saw him both spiritually and bodily. The same is offered to us in the Supper. He wishes to be as close to us as he was to them. "He is just as near to us physically as he was to them, except that it had to be by another mode in order that he might be equally near everywhere in the world, which would not have been possible were he to appear visibly."²³ Thus, he is definitely present bodily but in a hidden way.

While he was on earth visibly, Christ's bodily presence was extremely important. This is true to the extent that anyone he touched with his flesh, he helped.

Through his body, with his physical voice, he called Lazarus from the grave (John 11:43). He touched the Leper and made him clean (Matthew 8:3). He walked upon the sea, and stretched forth his hand to the sinking Peter and drew him to the land (Matthew 14:31) and all his acts were miracles and good deeds. It is also his character and nature to do good wherever he is. Why should he now be of no avail in the bread, when it is the same flesh, the same Word, and the same nature, and must be altogether good and useful?²⁴

If, as according to Zwingli, Christ's flesh is of no avail when eaten, why is it not also useless, "when it is physically conceived and born, laid in the manger, taken up in one's arms, seated at table at the Supper, hanging on the cross, etc. All these are outward modes and uses of his flesh as truly as when he is physically eaten. Is it better when it is in his mother's womb than when it is in the bread and in the mouth? If it is of no avail here, it can be of no avail there either; if it avails there, it must also avail here. For nothing more can be made out of this than that Christ's body is dealt with physically and outwardly, whether it is eaten or conceived, born or carried, seen or heard.

²³LW 37, 94.

²⁴LW 37, 133f.

Nowhere in sight is the spiritual eating which avails, but only the physical using or handling."²⁵ Luther here argues the usefulness of Christ's flesh over against Zwingli's denial of its usefulness. In the last chapter something of their difference regarding the biblical antithesis of flesh-Spirit has been explored. And once again in the issue of the real presence it comes into focus. Zwingli, on the basis of John 6:63 claims that the flesh is of no avail. This, according to Zwingli, applies also to Christ's flesh. His argument is simple: if Christ's flesh is eaten nothing but flesh comes of it, because all that is born of the flesh is flesh (John 3:6).

Against this line of argument Luther has quite a lot to say. First, he maintains that the words do not read, "My flesh is of no avail," but simply, "flesh is of no avail." Luther at this point rebukes Zwingli for emending the words of the text. Secondly, he maintains that "flesh" in this passage can not be understood of Christ's body. This is true, for it has been shown that Christ's body is of great avail. "Christ's flesh belongs with the saying, 'that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' For his flesh was born not of flesh but of the Holy Spirit, as even children and the whole world confess in the Creed: 'I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit.'"²⁶ The opposition in John chapter six is between that which is sinful (flesh) and that which is righteous (spirit). In light of this, Luther stubbornly refused to identify Christ with "flesh" in this passage. On the contrary, he distinguished Christ from all flesh maintaining that His is a spiritual

²⁵LW 37, 85.

²⁶LW 37, 98.

flesh, born not of the flesh but of the Spirit. This enables Luther to receive the words elsewhere in the sixth chapter where Christ says, "Labor for the food which does not perish, which the Son of man will give you;" and again, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (6:51); again, "If anyone eats of me, he will live forever" (6:51).²⁷

What does the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper effect? All receive it, not just those who believe.²⁸ The eating profits those with faith but assails nothing for those who only eat physically and not spiritually. "I have taught and still teach that Christ's flesh is not only of no avail but actually is poison and death if it is eaten without faith and the Word."²⁹ Thus, Luther teaches that the unworthy receive the body and blood of Christ. He bases his belief on Paul's words in I Corinthians 11. The reality of the real presence is not contingent upon the worthiness, or heart attitude of the recipient and of whether he believes or does not believe. Luther attributes the same dual thrust that Paul does, to both Word and sacrament. In both instances the presence of grace demands a decision from man either for life or death.

In the sacrament, then, there are two kinds of eating: physical and spiritual. The unworthy eat physically to their doom and the worthy, that is, those with faith, eat both physically and spiritually to their profit. The two-fold eating of faith includes both mouth and heart. The mouth eats the body with the bread physically, and at the same time the heart believes that this is the body which was given for the forgiveness of sins. The unworthy, however, receive the body with the bread but

²⁷LW 37, 99ff.

²⁸LW 37, 354.

²⁹LW 37, 238.

because they have not responded to the word of forgiveness in faith remain under the law and judgment.

The benefits of the Supper is the forgiveness of sins. "This is plainly evident from the words just quoted: This is my body and blood, given and shed for you for the remission of sins. In other words we go to the Communion because we receive there a treasure through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins."³⁰ The forgiveness of sins, in the sacrament, however, is always interrelated with the real presence. The forgiveness of sins depends upon the presence of the New Testament in the sacrament, which in turn depends upon the presence of the body and blood of Christ. "The words first connect the bread and the cup to the sacrament; bread and cup embrace the body and blood of Christ; body and blood of Christ embrace the new testament; the new testament embraces the forgiveness of sins; forgiveness of sins embraces eternal life and salvation."³¹ Body and blood thus guarantee the forgiveness of sins. For Luther, the two cannot be separated.

The sacrament, as well as imparting the forgiveness of sins, also serves to strengthen faith. These two functions are complimentary and are, in that sense, indicative of the one focus of the sacrament, namely, Christ. Christ is the subject imparting forgiveness as well as the object of forgiveness receiving faith. This means that the receiving of the forgiveness of sins is to the strengthening of faith.³² The word

³⁰ J. N. Lenker, ed., Luther's Large Catechism (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1967), p. 143.

³¹ LW 37, 338.

³² LW 37, 102; 142.

elicits

which accompanies the sign ~~elicits~~ faith, the only adequate response to the promise of God in the sacrament.

The manward movement from God in the gracious gift of the Supper insures that the new man is nourished and strengthened. The sacrament is a necessity because the world and the devil continually attack the life of faith.

But what shall a person do if he be not sensible of such trouble and feel no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?

To such a person no better advice can be given than that, in the first place, he put his hand into his bosom, and feel whether he still have flesh and blood, and that he by all means believe what the Scriptures say of it in Gal. 5 and Rom. 7.

Secondly, that he look around to see whether he is still in the world, and keep in mind that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15 and 16; I John 2 and 5.

Thirdly, he will certainly have the devil also about him, who with his lying and murdering, day and night, will let him have no peace within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; I Peter 5; Eph. 6; 2 Tim. 2.³³

Faith needs the re-creation and the strengthening found in the sacrament. The life of faith not only submits itself to preaching and the sacraments but is dependent upon them.

The answer to the question about the effect of the real presence does not end here. Does not the Word convey the same thing? The unique significance of the real presence is far too great for Luther to express its worth simply in terms of the guarantee for the forgiveness of sins. For this reason Luther attempts to demonstrate the saving effect of Christ. "When we eat Christ's flesh physically and spiritually, the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshly sinful, mortal men, makes spiritual, holy, living men. This we are already,

³³Luther's Small Catechism (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), p. 35.

though in a hidden manner in faith and hope; the fact is not yet manifest, but we shall experience it on the Last Day."³⁴ It is impossible for Luther to exclude the body from the benefit of the Lord's Supper. To exclude the body from the benefit of the Supper is to set the body outside the redemptive plan of God, and thus to deny the resurrection of the body. The body is included in sin and therefore has a part in the forgiveness of sins.

The condescension of Christ for us on the cross and in the sacrament is complete.³⁵ He comes to the depths of man's sinfulness to procure the way of release. God's condescension cannot stop before it has reached the very depths itself. A symbolic understanding of the sacrament is an attempt to stop God's condescension halfway, that is, at the boundary between body and soul. In the view of Zwingli and the Enthusiasts, fellowship with God does not take place on the level of sinful man in the depths but on the level of the highest faculties of man.

The presence of Christ on the altar means that He will take care of our mortal body. Christ is not too "spiritual" for that. Otherwise, it really means nothing that Christ said, "Take eat, this is my body, do this in remembrance of me." He could just as easily have said, "Remember me when you eat."³⁶ The remembrance in the Supper is not an

³⁴LW 37, 101.

³⁵"The glory of our God is precisely that for our sakes he comes down to the very depths, into human flesh, into the bread, into our mouth, our heart, our bosom; moreover, for our sakes he allows himself to be treated ingloriously both on the cross and on the altar." LW 37, 72.

³⁶To the same effect see LW 37, 126.

accompanying aspect of the sacrament. The meal itself is the remembrance. "Do this," that is, eat this meal in remembrance of me. Only when the meal and the words are brought together is the sacrament rightly comprehended. The words of institution only have meaning when the body is included in the participation of the body.

Only in the spiritual and bodily celebration of the Supper with its spiritual and bodily effect is the full meaning of the real presence understood.³⁷

The controversy between Luther and Zwingli over the Lord's Supper centered around one question: "Is the Supper a memorial or a means of grace? Zwingli maintained that it was a memorial, an action of the Christian, a badge of his faith. Luther maintained the Supper was the action of God wherein the forgiveness of sins was proffered to the strengthening of faith and ratified by the real presence of Christ on the altar.

³⁷Prenter, Spiritus Creator, pp. 282f.

Chapter 6

BAPTISM

Luther's controversy over baptism was not of the same intensity as the controversies over the Lord's Supper. In fact, he wrote only two major treatises on the topic.¹ Together with the catechisms, several sermons, and incidental references to baptism found scattered elsewhere in his writings, these form the basis of our knowledge of Luther's views on baptism.

Luther had created some stir in the Catholic church with his first treatise on baptism. Even so, it was not until later on in the Reformation, with the emergence of the Anabaptists, that baptism became a hotly disputed topic. And even then, Luther was not a principle character in the debate. When Hubmaier, a leader of the Anabaptists set up a disputation, it was in Zurich not in Wittenberg, with Zwingli not Luther. When Luther entered the debate it was in a second person way. The treatise Concerning Rebaptism was a letter sent to two priests asking advice on the problem. So even this treatise was not directly addressed to those he disagreed with.

In light of the lesser role that the controversy over baptism played in Luther's sacramental theology our inquiry into Luther's view of baptism will be restricted to this one chapter. First, we shall investigate Luther's general view of baptism and then the question of infant

¹LW 35, 23-44 The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism, 1519; and LW 40, 225-262 Concerning Rebaptism, 1528.

baptism.

Baptism

Luther's catechisms set forward an orderly introduction to baptism. First he deals with the nature of baptism and its dignity. Luther does so on the basis of primarily two scripture passages. "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). And "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mk. 16:16). These scripture passages point to God's command and ordinance. This is crucial for Luther, for this establishes beyond doubt that baptism is from God and not man.

In light of scripture, Luther boasts that "baptism is no human plaything, but is instituted by God himself."² Because God has instituted baptism it is to be taken seriously. It is incomprehensible to Luther that many sects of his day disdained baptism claiming that it was merely an outward sign. From his special point of vantage Luther can declare, "whatever God institutes and commands cannot be useless; it is most precious, even if in appearance it is not worth a straw."³ He admits that the works done by a Carthusian monk present a finer appearance but this in reality is the devil leading us from God's work to our own.

To look at it, baptism seems to be a human action. But this is not the case, "to be baptized into God's name is to be baptized, not by man, but by God himself."⁴ To be sure, a priest is present, but his

²Luther's Large Catechism, p. 125.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

actions are only instrumental in character. The priest baptizes in the name and stead of God. God himself is the baptizer.

With all of this behind us, the ground is cleared for us to ask the question, what is baptism? Luther answers in this way, "It is not simply common water, but the water comprehended in God's Word and commandment and sanctified by them. It is none other than the water of God, a divine water; not because the water itself is better than other water, but because the Word and commandment of God are connected with it."⁵ Luther's concern is to maintain the clear association between word and sign. "I admonish that these two, the Word and the water, be by no means disunited and considered separately. For when the Word is taken away, the water is no different from that which the servant uses for cooking purposes."⁶ Baptism is to be held in high esteem because of the Word.

Secondly, after a discussion of the nature and dignity of baptism Luther goes on to deal with its purpose, what it confers and effects. In his Small Catechism he refers to this section as the blessings of baptism. Luther says, "This cannot be learned in a better way than by the words of Christ cited above: 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.'"⁷ "What does baptism give or profit? It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare."⁸ The power and purpose of baptism is to save. Luther describes this in terms of deliverance from sin, death, and Satan and in terms of entrance into Christ's kingdom

⁵Ibid., p. 126.

⁶Ibid., p. 127.

⁷Ibid., p. 128.

⁸Luther's Small Catechism, p. 16.

where we shall live with Him forever.

Luther maintains that this is another argument for the high esteem in which baptism ought to be held. It contains a precious treasure, for "where God's name is, there must also be life and salvation."⁹ It is no trivial matter, "for through the Word, baptism receives the power to become the washing of regeneration, as St. Paul calls it in Titus 3:5."¹⁰

How is it that water can perform such blessings? Luther answers that it is not the water but the Word of God that accomplishes the benefit. The water itself does not save but the Word received in faith. It is faith alone that saves us.

The necessary question that arises is this: why the external sign of water? There were those in Luther's day that believed external things affected nothing. They disdained baptism. Why did Luther hold so tenaciously to what these radicals called externals? Luther's reasons were clearly founded in scripture. Because God had ordained baptism and had connected his word with the water, "this alone should be sufficient motive for its observance, even though baptism were altogether an external matter."¹¹ For anyone to reject the external sign of baptism is to reject the God of scripture and the one who stands behind baptism. For, Luther believed that God had ordained that the gospel should come to us in different modes such as, preaching, the Supper, and baptism. The incarnation is a condescension of Christ into the physical realm. Thus,

⁹Luther's Large Catechism, p. 128.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 130.

the gospel itself is wrapped in the most elemental signs. Faith must have an external object that can be perceived by the senses so that the truth, conveyed by the Spirit can gain access to the heart. In this way, the gospel itself comes by an external method, namely, by oral proclamation.

After treating the power and purpose of baptism Luther extends the discussion to the question, who receives the benefit of baptism? Luther states, "Faith alone makes one worth profitably to receive this saving, divine water. Inasmuch as the blessing is proffered and conveyed in the words which are connected with the water and in union with it, it can be received only on condition that we heartily believe it. Without faith baptism avails nothing."¹² Here Luther sets forward the connection of word and faith. This recurring theme in Luther's thought finds special expression in this discussion of baptism. Faith is the only response to the promise of God in his word. Works cannot receive the promise of God, activity in the sense of works righteousness is too busy offering. Faith on the other hand, is that quality which is opposed to works toward God and receives with open arms the promises proffered. In this way, Luther's discussion reiterates the prominence of the word in the sacrament. Baptism can in no sense be characterized as a work. It is rather, a gift extended to us by God through Jesus who himself honored it in his own life.

In Luther's treatment of baptism it might be easy to get the impression that there is a one sided emphasis on God's commandment. And

¹²Ibid., p. 129.

surely this aspect of baptism is a major consideration. However, Luther is not blind to other facets of the sacrament. He also affirms the covenant aspect of baptism. Luther declares, "This blessed sacrament of baptism helps you because in it God allies himself with you and becomes one with you in a gracious covenant of comfort."¹³ "Now, we have not only God's commandment and injunction, but also his promise."¹⁴

The covenant aspect of Luther's presentation is brought out in his stress on the continuing significance of baptism in the life of the believer. "For just as the truth of this divine promise, once pronounced over us, continues until death, so our faith in it ought never to cease, but to be nourished and strengthened until death by the continued remembrance of this promise made to us in baptism."¹⁵ For Luther, the significance of baptism was not that we are dunked under the water for a moment but that we stand with Christ for eternity. Baptism then, is not of insignificance once accomplished, but plays a continuing role in the life of the believer. Baptism is not something one merely does once and forgets, it is something one constantly believes. This is true because baptism is nothing other than the Word of God in water. It is said that when Luther was severely tempted he would defy the devil with the cry Baptisatus sum! I have been baptized!¹⁶

In terms of Romans 6 Luther demonstrates the continuing significance of baptism throughout life. Like Paul, he begins with the external

¹³LW 35, 33.

¹⁴Luther's Large Catechism, p. 130.

¹⁵LW 36, 59.

¹⁶Jaroslav Pelikan, Spirit Versus Structure (New York: Harper, 1968), p. 96.

rite of baptism including the immersing and the raising of the one who is baptized. In this action the one baptized is incorporated into Christ, through the drama of redemption that includes both death and resurrection. The meaning of this is that the old man is put to death and the new man is raised from the dead. Although, this death is achieved once and for all it nevertheless must be reenacted daily in faith. This constant appropriation of the significance of baptism is precisely what Luther is getting at when the Small Catechism says that baptism signifies "that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."¹⁷ "You will understand, therefore, that whatever we do in this life which mortifies the flesh or quickens the spirit has to do with our baptism."¹⁸

Luther is convinced that the believer does not need to be washed so much as he needs to die. "Here again you see that the sacrament of baptism, even with respect to its sign, is not a matter of the moment, but something permanent. Although the ceremony itself is soon over the thing it signifies continues until we die, yes, even till we rise on the last day. For as long as we live we are continually doing that which baptism signifies, that is, we die and rise again."¹⁹ For Luther, the sanctification of the believer is nothing else than a completion of baptism. The entire Christian life is lived under the obligation of baptism.

¹⁷ Small Catechism, p. 17.

¹⁸ LW 36, 69.

¹⁹ LW 36, 69.

Luther places baptism in the center of Christian life. It is, like the Supper, a summary of the gospel. Luther's understanding of baptism exactly expresses his doctrine of justification.²⁰ Through baptism our sins are forgiven and we put on the righteousness of Christ and thereby "become children of grace and justified persons."²¹ God now wills to take us, who still remain sinners throughout our lives, and actually make us what we already are in his gracious judgment. He does this through the continual drowning of the old man. In baptism we receive the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ. We cling to the totality of this truth in faith. Daily, through the enabling power of the Spirit, we continue to move toward that purity, which is sanctification. Luther's doctrine of baptism incorporates both these elements just as they are in his doctrine of justification.

Infant Baptism

How do we know that infants can be properly baptized? Luther answers this question in his Large Catechism and elsewhere by pointing to the work of Christ.²² God himself validates infant baptism. Thus, through God's work and evidences infant baptism has been established. We shall see how Luther meant this. Paul Althaus, in his presentation of Luther's view of infant baptism, begins by saying, "Luther places the common Christian tradition in the foreground of the discussion."²³ This use of the term "tradition" is liable to misunderstanding without thorough

²⁰Ibid.

²¹LW 35, 30.

²²Large Catechism, p. 131f. LW 51, 186.

²³Althaus, p. 359.

explanation. That Luther's theology is not unduly controlled by tradition is shown by his career as a Reformer. But neither did he disdain tradition as the radical wing of the Reformation did. He made a distinction between human traditions and legitimate tradition within the church. Luther fought against human traditions, the anti-scriptural accretions of various rationalistic systems. And he upheld the legitimate traditions of the church. For Luther, legitimate tradition is nothing else but the work of God. If it cannot be dismissed by a clear word of scripture it is to be embraced. "God is wonderful in his works. What he does not will, he clearly witnesses to in Scripture. What is not so witnessed to there, we can accept as his work."²⁴ It is from this favourable analysis of tradition that Luther begins his arguments for infant baptism. "For where we see the work of God we should yield and believe in the same way as when we hear his Word, unless the plain Scripture tells us otherwise."²⁵

Infant baptism "derives from the apostles and has been practiced since the days of the apostles."²⁶ It has been the custom of all Christendom from the beginning.²⁷ Infant baptism is accepted by all Christians the world over. This uninterrupted acceptance of infant baptism is a sign of God's approval. God has not merely permitted it but has ordered it so that it has not disappeared. Luther believes that God would not have allowed it to become so universally and thoroughly established if it were not valid. No heresy endures to the end but comes to light and is disgraced. And all kinds of heresies have been disgraced and have

²⁴LW 40, 255.

²⁵LW 40, 256.

²⁶LW 40, 254, 245.

²⁷LW 40, 241.

disappeared that are more recent than infant baptism. It is God's work that has established infant baptism and sustained it through so many centuries of practice. This miracle of God is an indication that infant baptism is valid. This argument from tradition and Luther's theology of history is only conditionally valid. It is valid only if scripture does not contradict it. Thus, this argument is not Luther's final word on infant baptism but only his first.

God's approval of infant baptism in every age is shown in still another way; he has obviously granted the Holy Spirit to many who were baptized as infants and has sanctified them right down to the present day. Luther mentions such diverse persons as St. Bernard, Gerson, and John Huss as examples of those who received the Holy Spirit in a divine confirmation of infant baptism.²⁸ Luther also mentions present examples by saying, "We also, by the grace of God, have received the power of interpreting the scriptures and knowing Christ, which is not possible without the Holy Spirit."²⁹ By the granting of the Holy Spirit God confirms the validity of infant baptism. This line of argument once again underlines Luther's concern for the abiding significance of baptism. The matter of its proper use is a lifelong affair. The granting of the Holy Spirit shows that God honors his covenant in a most sure way. And Luther is quick to point out that God is not his own opponent and would not support infant baptism in such a convincing way if it were not valid.

²⁸It is interesting to note the diversity of these individuals mentioned. Gerson was one who helped to condemn Huss at the council of Constance.

²⁹Large Catechism, p. 132.

Further, he claims that if infant baptism were not right, "it would follow that for more than a thousand years there was no baptism or any Christendom, which is impossible. For in that case the article of the creed, I believe in one holy Christian church would be false."³⁰ Without baptism there is no church. This conclusion, however, is an irreconcilable contradiction to an article of the creed and the certainty of faith that the church cannot perish until the end of the world. If the church continues to exist in spite of this, then infant baptism must be proper.

As we have said already, however, Luther did not set these arguments forward to be convincing by themselves. Tradition has only limited authority. Scripture itself is the only rule for faith and practice. While this is true, "We should not discard or alter what cannot be discarded or altered on clear scriptural authority."³¹ In this way, tradition witnesses outside itself to scripture. For the church does not constitute the word but is itself constituted by the word. The decision about infant baptism, then, must be made on the basis of scripture. But what kind of scriptural proof is necessary? As the above quote would indicate the required minimum is that the subject in question have no scripture in contradiction to it. If a subject has the approval of universal acceptance from the days of the apostles and no clear scriptural warrant to discard it, it should be allowed to remain. This is the approach that Luther takes.

Luther was candid as he approached the scriptural question. He admitted that there was no clear and convincing scripture to validate

³⁰LW 40, 256.

³¹LW 40, 255.

infant baptism. And if it were a matter of initiating it as a new rite in his day, Luther would not be able to do so on the basis of the scriptures on the topic. However, given the weight of tradition and the ambiguity of scripture on the subject he was able to say, "that in our day no one may reject or neglect the practice of child baptism which has so long a tradition, since God actually not only has permitted it, but from the beginning so ordered, that it has not yet disappeared."³²

First, Luther adduces the gospel of the children in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18, to show that Christ allowed the children to come to him. We are told by scripture that the kingdom of God belongs to the children. They must not be turned away. "Who can exclude the children? If the old covenant and the sign of circumcision made the children of Abraham believe that they were, and were called the people of God, according to the promise, . . . (Gen. 17:7), then this new covenant and sign (baptism) must be much more effectual and make those a people of God who receive it."³³ Since the words of our Lord forbid us to exclude children from the covenant community, they are in essence, a command to bring the children to him. Only in this way are the Lord's words fulfilled: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matt. 18:10). Secondly, Luther emphasizes the command to baptize. The command is explicit and although children are not expressly included in the command neither are they excluded. No distinction as to sex or age is given. The order is to baptize all nations. This includes children. In Acts we are told how whole households were baptized, and "children are surely a

³²LW 40, 256.

³³LW 40, 257f.

good part of the household."³⁴ Since the apostles write so much about there being no respect or difference of persons among Christians, then they surely would have explicitly mentioned it if there was a differentiation of persons in the matter of baptism.

The scriptural witnesses used by Luther show that the doctrine of infant baptism is not opposed to scripture, but according to scripture. The Anabaptists, however, proceed along dangerous lines. The arguments used for rebaptism are uncertain at best. They completely disregard tradition which is very dangerous, especially in this subject where tradition is so compelling. Also, the Anabaptists counter scripture by creating differences among persons that God has not made. Luther sees their position as very serious indeed because of its uncertainty. "For in divine matters one should act on certain, not on dubious, grounds."³⁵

For Luther, the Anabaptists are the innovators. It is they who must support their views from scripture with such certainty so as to overthrow infant baptism. For the adherents of infant baptism it is enough to show that scripture is not against infant baptism, but that it is compatible with infant baptism. The consensus of the church, and even more, the work of God in history is on their side.

For Luther, the command to baptize all nations (including children) is reflective of the universality of the gospel. It was his understanding of the gospel that caused him to adhere to the doctrine of infant baptism. The doctrine, in this sense, is not a vestige of his Catholic background. It is rather, integrated with Luther's rediscovery

³⁴LW 40, 245.

³⁵Ibid.

of the gospel during the Reformation.

At this juncture, the question of the validity of infant baptism must be raised at another point. The Anabaptist position claimed that infant baptism was invalid because infants do not have faith. The lack of faith at baptism was sufficient grounds for them to argue the necessity of rebaptism. They went so far as to say that the first baptism was not valid and therefore they were not rightfully "Anabaptists".

Luther approached the question of infant faith in two ways. First, he argued from scripture that infant faith cannot be ruled out. In Luther's opinion the contention that infants cannot believe is groundless. "When they say, 'Children cannot believe,' how can they be sure of that? Where is the scripture by which they would prove it and on which they would build?"³⁶ Luther points to scripture that would indicate that infants may and can believe even "though they do not speak or understand."³⁷ Luther maintained that John the Baptist as an infant had both faith and the Holy Spirit. As proof Luther adduced the passage in Luke depicting the visitation. This scripture tells us that John leaped for joy in Elizabeth's womb. From this time on he was filled with the Holy Spirit and faith. Luther's purpose was not to show that every infant has faith but only to prove it was possible for infants to have faith. If infant faith is not contrary to scripture, but rather in accord with scripture, then the argument that children cannot believe is unscriptural.

Secondly, Luther maintains that baptism is not constituted by faith. To center the discussion around the possibility or impossibility

³⁶LW 40, 241f.

³⁷LW 40, 242.

of infant faith is to miss the point. "We maintain that the vital concern is not the presence or the absense of faith inasmuch as the latter cannot vitiate baptism itself; God's Word and command is the vital concern. This is perhaps a little strongly expressed, but it is based upon what I have already said, that baptism is simply water and God's Word in and with each other: that is, when the Word accompanies the water, baptism is rightly administered although faith be not present; for faith does not constitute baptism, it receives it."³⁸ The validity of baptism rests solely upon the word and command of God. The Anabaptists in arguing the way they did failed to distinguish properly between the validity of baptism and its proper use.

The mistake of resting the validity of baptism on faith is a great presumption. "For if they follow this principle they cannot venture to baptize before they are certain that the one to be baptized believes. How and when can they ever know that for certain? Have they now become gods so that they can discern the hearts of men and know whether or not they believe?"³⁹ To base the validity of baptism on faith is to rest the sacrament on an uncertainty. For faith is unseen and is in constant peril. Thus, neither the priest baptizing nor the one being baptized can be certain that faith is present. All men are liars and only God looks upon the heart. "The Anabaptists cannot be sure their baptism is a right one, since they base their rebaptizing on a faith of which they cannot be sure."⁴⁰

³⁸Large Catechism, p. 132.

³⁹LW 40, 239.

⁴⁰LW 40, 260.

Faith is the second factor in baptism, following after God's Word and command. To cause it to be first, is an attempt to invert the order of God's dealings. It places the work of man prior to the work of God. It makes that which is last first. This is nothing short of a works righteousness. The Anabaptists placed confidence in the emptiness of works and the uncertainty of faith. Luther accused them of having faith in faith rather than faith in God. Faith only exists where God's Word is, and they had denied the primacy of that word, exchanging it for the uncertainty of their own work.

Luther's position is much different. The covenant of God comes first. Baptism, as a sign of this covenant accompanies the preaching of the gospel. It is administered on the basis of the divine command. The word of promise that accompanies and constitutes baptism is to be believed. The one baptized must believe for it is not enough to pretend that it is sufficient for a person to be baptized. Each person must believe for himself. If, however, a person does not believe at the time of his baptism it does not invalidate the sacrament, he only misuses it. In baptism and the Lord's Supper alike, it is possible for persons to disbelieve but they still receive the validly administered sacrament to their harm or their good. "One should add faith to baptism. But we are not to base baptism on faith. There is quite a difference between having faith, on the one hand, and depending on one's faith and making baptism depend on faith, on the other."⁴¹

⁴¹LW 40, 252.

Chapter 7

WORD AND SACRAMENT

The previous chapters have given introduction to Luther's view of the sacraments. His theocentric perspective placed him over against both Rome and Zurich in the controversy on the Lord's Supper, and against the Anabaptists on the issue of baptism. But in order to understand Luther's theology of the means of grace it is necessary to place his sacramental theology in a larger context. Only then will the formulation "Word and Sacrament" take on its full significance.

Word in the Sacrament

Luther gives word the greatest emphasis in his treatment of the sacraments. For him, the word is much more important than the sign.¹ The word is that which gives meaning and conveys grace in the confrontation between God and man. The promise of God contained in the word is what faith feeds upon. The word is attached to or accompanies the sacramental sign. Baptism, Luther claims, "is not simply common water, but water comprehended in God's Word and commandment and sanctified by them."² The Lord's Supper is, "bread and wine comprehended in God's Word and connected with it."³ But at this point Luther goes on to assign

¹LW 35, 91.

²Luther's Large Catechism, p. 126.

³*Ibid.*, p. 141.

definitive significance to the word in the sacrament. He claims that it is the word that distinguishes mere water from baptism, or mere bread and wine from the Lord's Supper. "When the word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament."⁴ At times, Luther goes even farther in emphasizing the significance of the word. In his lectures on Galatians he says, "If you want to obtain grace, then see to it that you hear the Word of God attentively or meditate on it diligently. The Word, I say, and only the Word, is the vehicle of God's grace."⁵ This hearing of the word is possible in Word and sacrament.

Given the close relation between Word and sacrament it is not surprising to find Luther speaking of preaching and the sacrament together. Preaching and the sacraments proclaim the gospel through the word. The word of grace in preaching is addressed to the whole congregation, to the community; the individual must apply it to himself. The word through faith becomes a word "for me". The sacrament is somewhat different. The advantage of the sacrament is that the gospel is directly addressed to the individual. It is personal from the outset. Luther, in the following passage states this exactly.

When I preach his death, it is in a public sermon in the congregation in which I am addressing myself to no one individually; whoever grasps it, grasps it. But when I distribute the sacrament, I designate it for the individual who is receiving it; I give him Christ's body and blood that he may have forgiveness of sins, obtained through his death and preached in the congregation. This is something more than the congregational sermon; for although the same thing is present in the sermon as in the sacrament, here there is the advantage that it is directed at definite individuals. In the sermon one does

⁴Ibid.

⁵LW 27, 249 Cited by Regin Prenter in "The Living Word" in More About Luther (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1958), p. 65.

not point out or portray any particular person, but in the sacrament it is given to⁶you and to me in particular, so that the sermon comes to be our own.

It is significant to note that the usefulness of the sacrament is expressed according to the word in the sacrament. The sacrament does not give something different than the word gives; it gives only the word. This is merely another way of expressing Luther's frequent assertion that the sacraments are summaries of the gospel.

It becomes clear then, that the formula "Word and Sacrament" receives its power from the single concept of the word. The God-revealing word stands behind the ministry of the church. It is all that the church has to offer. And the church itself is constituted by the word given through preaching and the sacraments.

If the benefit of the sacrament is identical with that of preaching, namely, the gospel or word of promise, of what necessity is the sacrament? If the forgiveness of sins is received by hearing the word of promise in the sermon in faith, why bother with needless externals? How does Luther's concept of sacrament differ from the sermon when they offer the same benefit?

When Luther says it is possible to be saved without the sacrament but not without promise there is a tendency to diminish, if not to extinguish, the unique role of the sacraments. This is especially true in a non-sacramental modern Protestantism. But it must be pointed out that the exception Luther is talking about is one of emergency. The case involves one who is unable to be baptized or who is unable to communicate,

⁶LW 36, 348f.

whatever the reason. The abstention from the sacraments is not a matter of personal choice for God has commanded his people to participate in His Word sacramentally.

The command of God is reason enough to go to the sacrament and to honor the divine signs, but there is a further reason in Luther's thought. It is to be found in his concept of sign. The unique character of the sacrament obviously resides here.

For Luther, the terms "symbol", "sign", and "sacrament", do not mean an empty shell pointing to a reality. These terms are not to be understood in modern sense like Zwingli and his followers understood them. These terms indicate a sign filled full of reality.⁷ They are "a form of something present and yet invisible."⁸ The sign concept means that the sacrament points to present reality in which God really moves in a person's life. The sign becomes God's seal of his promise. All the weight and significance of the real presence in the sacrament is assurance that the sign becomes a sign of confirmation. God is faithful who has promised. The sacrament is the sign confirming this truth. Even as the word of promise was accompanied with signs such as the rainbow, circumcision, and the like, so in the New Testament the promise of Christ is accompanied by the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The testament of our Lord and Savior, according to Luther, is ratified and sealed by the sacraments.

Word and Sacrament as Means of Grace

Christ achieved the forgiveness of sins on the cross. With his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death Christ has won

⁷Sasse, p. 29.

⁸LW 37, 104.

what no other could. But he has not distributed or given forgiveness on the cross.⁹ Christ distributes it through the word of promise as found in gospel preaching and the sacraments. There the word distributes, presents, offers and gives that forgiveness won for all men. Word and sacrament is the means by which God conveys the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Thus, Word and sacrament constitute the means of grace. In Word and sacrament the grace of God is extended to man.

Here we must differentiate between Luther's concept of grace and that of scholasticism. Gratia infusa, or infused grace, dominated medieval sacramental theology. Grace, in this system is not a power which may be injected into a person in spite of his personal attitude toward God. Rather, gratia infusa was something more of an energy emanating from God which by the sacrament is infused into human nature and helps it to strive upward to God who is far away. This view substitutes a genuine sacramentalism concerned about Christ's real presence under the sign, and turns it into an impersonal energy, under man's control, that enables him to search after God. This is seen in the fact that the fundamental aspect in medieval sacramental piety is the sacrifice of the mass. This was a work to reach God. The body and blood are on the altar, but not primarily as a means by which God descends to us. In that case communion would be the dominant view of the sacrament. In reality then, the Roman view which is anthropocentric, in character, is decidedly antisacramental. This is true of any system of merit that is a means for man's lifting himself to God.

⁹LW 40, 213f.

For Luther, grace is not infused and it can never become a tool in the hands of man. Grace is the attitude of mercy on the part of God that caused Him to send Christ into the depths to redeem man. Grace is not infused into man it is shown to him in the person of Christ. Grace then, is not an impersonal energy but the presence of God "for me". Grace is not a power by which I lift myself up to God; to the contrary, it is God in search of me. The confrontation is personal in nature; this is assured by His real presence. God freely determines the meeting place in Word and sacrament and there his forgiveness is extended in the word of promise. Man can only respond in faith or disbelief, for God himself has initiated the meeting. In this way the grace of God can in no way be determined by man. Luther recaptured the biblical concept of grace and thereby made room for a genuine sacramentalism. His view is decidedly theocentric emphasizing God's presence under the sign "for me". Communion becomes the dominant character of the Supper thus displacing the angry judge Christ that needs to be appeased in the sacrifice of the mass.

Luther's sacramental view and his concept of grace are seen clearly in his understanding of baptism. For, in baptism, the totality of God's grace is bestowed in promise and sign. The promise of baptism is salvation complete and entire. In this sense it can be said that "when someone comes forth out of baptism, he is truly pure, without sin, and wholly guiltless."¹⁰ The promise indicates that man is not saved by works but only through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism is a covenant in which God promises to drive all sin from our

¹⁰LW 35, 32.

lives. This does not happen instantaneously. The old nature persists and must be constantly put down in this life. Its real expulsion has only started in baptism and will not be complete until the second coming. The sign, or symbol, is the immersion in water and subsequent raising from the water. This symbol is not merely an allegorical picture of our death and resurrection with Christ in such a manner that we are required to realize this allegory through humility and faith. Luther discards this notion. Immersing and raising does not "symbolize" (in an empty sense) a death and resurrection initiated by ourselves but it signifies our true physical death and physical resurrection.¹¹ The immersion of baptism means the real cross and not a self chosen cross by which we attempt to raise ourselves to God. The decisive point is this: God is in full possession of the symbol. God is the acting subject in baptism. It is not the pastor who baptizes, he is only instrumental. From start to finish God sees to it that the whole visible symbolic act containing promise and sign has God as its subject.

The purely sacramental symbolic act is of course quickly over. But God is constantly at work to assure the realization of the promise. The work of the sacrament is a life-long process. Baptism includes our whole life and is completed only in the resurrection. All the suffering that God places before us in daily existence that leads to the mortification of the old man is part of baptism. Thus, baptism characterizes the whole life of the Christian. As can be seen there is no spiritualizing tendency in Luther's sacramental view. It is all decidedly concrete and

¹¹LW 35, 32.

physical; as concrete and physical as the incarnation.

Like baptism, the grace of God is offered in the Lord's Supper in promise and sign. The promise of the Supper is the forgiveness of sins. The words "This is my body broken for you" are indeed words of promise. The sign of the Lord's Supper, the physical eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ under bread and wine, confirm the promise. The significance of the symbol is the deliverance from sin, death and the devil. By giving us the symbol and realizing its significance in us God confirms the fulfillment for us of his promise. Communion with Christ in the Supper must not be seen as a benefit other than forgiveness. The real presence of Christ is thus basically the same as the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord's Supper is closely allied with baptism. Their mutual dependence gives witness to the fullness of God's dealing with promise and sign. Regin Prenter gets at the dependence of these two sacraments in the following quote.

This is the relation of the Eucharist to Baptism. The lifelong struggle between the old Adam and the new man in Christ, begun in our Baptism, necessitates the institution of the Eucharist. We would not be able to stay within the covenant of our Baptism without the help and protection offered us by Christ in the second sacrament, the Holy Eucharist.¹²

The second sacrament, then, refers us back to the original covenant established in baptism. The sacramental signs serve as boundary markers designating the path of the covenant community. The signs confirm the realization of God's promise. The promise of God finds concrete grounding in the sacramental symbol.

¹²Regin Prenter, "The Lord's Supper" in More About Luther (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1958), p. 106.

On this path, which is marked by the symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper, we also find penance, or the office of the keys¹³ and preaching. Penance is always a return to baptism. Luther speaks out against the Roman belief that the benefit of baptism is irretrievably revoked after a falling into sin. Baptism, in this view, is the ship that founders; repentance is the second plank on which we must swim ashore after the first plank (baptism) fails. Luther claims that this deprives baptism of its value, making it of no further use. Penance, for Luther, "is simply a return and a re-entry into baptism, to resume the practice of what has been begun but abandoned."¹⁴ "Here you see that Baptism, both by its efficacy and by its signification, includes what has been called the third sacrament."¹⁵

The preaching of the gospel, like penance, is a recalling and a reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant. Or, it is a proclamation of the testament in the Lord's Supper. Penance and preaching presuppose the divinely given symbols. In other words, penance and preaching belong in the context of the congregation with baptism and the Lord's Supper. Penance and preaching are sacramental words. They are sacramental because they announce the fulfillment of the promise. Christ is present with His word. They truly effect what they speak of. They have no symbol of their own, that is why they are given with the symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

¹³Luther retained a place for the office of the keys (Jo. 20: 22-23), consisting of confession and absolution, although it was not compulsory as in the Roman Catholic Church. Cf. Luther's Small Catechism, p. 18f.

¹⁴Luther's Large Catechism, p. 136.

¹⁵Ibid.

The grace of God extended to man in Word and sacrament has an eschatological character. The past work of Christ is complete and finished and it is received in the present through faith. But that word of justification will find its consummation only in the eschaton. The age in which the sacraments operate is the age of the "already" but "not yet". The sacraments are not tools in which men use the grace of God as an impersonal energy to help them on their self chosen path to God. The sacraments extend the grace of God to men in such a way that the totality of a man's life is placed into the saving history of God. The path is chosen by God. Grace is divinely determined to bring to realization, in the present as well as in the eschaton, that which has been promised.

Word and Sacrament as Incarnation

Luther claims that "God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament."¹⁶ This statement sounds terribly restrictive and exclusive. But in reality, it is no more restrictive than saying God reveals himself in Jesus Christ. Or, Christ is the only way to God. For Luther, Word and sacrament is an extension of the incarnation. It is a statement equivalent to Luther's theology of the cross.

Briefly put, the theology of the cross is this: man comes to a true knowledge of God only at the foot of the cross. The cross stands opposed to works righteousness and any attempt at self-justification. The cross is a scandal to humankind and thus stands opposed to human religions of the mind and all speculations about God. The one who kneels

¹⁶Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII, The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), p. 313; hereafter abbreviated as BC.

in the shadow of this cross is divested of any hope in self. The cross condemns man as sinner and he is thus reduced to nothingness. Only when a man is reduced to this desolation and abasement where salvation is not a possibility residing within himself does the Word of the Lord speak to his condition. The gracious word of acceptance comes in Christ. Man is raised from his death in the law and receives the promise of God in faith. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law . . . through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:21-22). Jesus Christ is our righteousness! And the man who once stood condemned by the law now stands in newness of life.

A proper explanation of the theology of the cross cannot stop here but must go on to deal with the concept of revelation. On this point we see that Luther agrees with Paul that Christianity stands firmly on revelation. In Romans chapter one Paul repudiates those "theologians" who seek to find out about God on their own. They found certain truths about God, his invisible nature, his eternal power and deity. But they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. The way to God is never through contemplation or speculation. Paul makes this clear in I Corinthians one where he says, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (vs. 20-21). For Paul, the bottom line is this: "We preach Christ crucified" (vs. 23). The difference between Paul and the theologians of Romans one is the difference between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory. The theologians of glory try to seek God in His impassibility. The theologians of the cross find God through incarnation. The theologians of glory try to seek God

through speculation. The theologians of the cross find God in Christ. This is a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. The scandal of the cross finds its locus in the humanity of Christ, in the incarnation.

On the basis of all this we can understand Luther as he says, "We must reflect on God's ordered power, that is, on the incarnate son, in whom are hidden all the treasures of the Godhead (Col. 2:3). Let us go to the child lying in the lap of His mother Mary and to the sacrificial victim suspended on the cross; there we shall really behold God, and there we shall look into his very heart."¹⁷ Luther's position is indeed reflected in the words of Paul, "I determine to know nothing except Christ" (I Cor. 2:2). God has dealt with man through incarnation; that is the unique fact of His dealings. Through incarnation the history of man is wrapped up in the action of God. All of life and all of history takes on meaning through Christ and his incarnation. The totality of a man's life is taken up into the salvation history of Christ. This is the meaning of incarnation.

The theology of the cross is a theology of incarnation. This means, of course, the denial of the unbiblical antithesis that Platonism sets up between body and spirit. The incarnation sweeps this idea aside to reveal a creation under the Lordship of Christ. Matter is not inherently evil; God has created matter and is in the process of redeeming the whole of creation.

Given all this, we must come back to our question: "Why has Luther claimed that God will not deal with us apart from Word and sacrament?"

¹⁷LW 3, 276f.

For Luther, theology holds one central truth: God is revealed in Christ. This is incarnation. God's dealings with man move out from this central fact. This is a fact that for Luther remains unchanged. God still deals with man through incarnation. Word and sacrament are expressions of this truth. In this way, the incarnation extends in either direction from the cross, before and after.

In order to accomplish his work among men Christ took on human nature. "When God reveals Himself to us, it is necessary for Him to do so through some such veil or wrapper and to say: 'Look! Under this wrapper you will be sure to take hold of me.'"¹⁸ The sign of Word and sacrament signify that God is present. God himself has chosen to be in our midst in the impotence of our nature. God may truly be found in the very definite, concrete, outward signs chosen by God. Those external signs are poverty stricken and insignificant in appearance; as insignificant as a babe in a manger. The importance of these signs is great for they obstruct all our own ways to God and leave open only His inexplicable, unforeseen and incalculable way. When we disregard Word and sacrament we have begun the dangerous path of speculation toward the uncovered God of glory. To meet Him apart from Christ the mediator means death.

Word and sacrament is the means by which to express the gospel's way of salvation. We are not to search after God through speculation, He seeks us through incarnation. The outwardness of Word and sacrament makes this possible. In contrast to the way of speculation, which is uncertain and ephemeral, the outward signs are solid and immovable. In their

¹⁸LW 1, 15.

outwardness and firmness Word and sacrament are also public in contrast to the private way of a salvation by works. The salvation of works is reduced to "a Christianity for me only". The works of this kind of piety are determined individually. One person seeks asceticism and isolation another multiplies works of charity. They each try to find their own corner to express their own way to God. This is how sects get started. But God deals with man publically through Word and sacrament. He does not reveal Himself only to the initiated and the especially earnest. Publically, through His signs of revelation, God deals with us where there is no distinction between persons. The gospel is not preached in closed circles but to all men. Word and sacrament are thus certain signs of the church.

It must not be imagined that Luther is here arguing for a formal externalism devoid of any inward meaning. He is not falling back to the Roman sacramental belief of ex opere operato. Along with Augustine, Luther affirms the insufficiency of the external word. Only as the Holy Spirit enlivens the heart of the hearer through faith does the external word accomplish its task.¹⁹ This does not mean that the Spirit is identical to the Word. There is no metaphysical tie between the two, the Spirit remains sovereign over the Word. But the work of the Spirit is always accomplished in and with the external word. The function of the Spirit is to witness to the revelation of God in Christ and always does so under the outward signs of His humanity.

¹⁹LW 27, 249.

For Luther, Word and sacrament is an expression of the way from God to man. It is an expression of the incarnation. The forgiveness won on the cross by Christ is distributed throughout all ages in the public signs confirmed by the promise of His real presence.

Luther's Evaluation of the Controversies

Luther's controversies against the Papists and the Swiss and the Anabaptists were quite diverse. But they do find an essential unity in the fact that they all were controversies surrounding the means of grace. Interesting to note, is the fact that the Reformation began in a dispute over the practice of indulgences, an abuse of medieval sacramental piety. Further, the differences between the Reformers themselves came in this area of the means of grace.

Against the Swiss, or Enthusiasts, Luther argued for the substance of the sacrament. He defended the real presence of the Lord's Supper from the spiritualistic interpretation of the Swiss. Against the Roman Catholics, or the Papists, Luther argued for the communion concept of the Supper. To do so he refuted the sacrifice of the mass and the ex opere operato doctrine.

The following quotes are Luther's comments on the controversies. They serve the purpose of showing the contrast between the two extremes in the controversies over the Lord's Supper.

The enthusiasts make mere bread and wine of the sacrament, peel out the kernel, and give them the husk: the papists on the other hand, make a sacrifice and a commercial business of it in order to forgive sins and to rescue from every need.²⁰

²⁰LW 38, 10.

In their teaching about the sacraments the papists go too far to the left, for they ascribe too much to the sacraments and claim that they justify by their mere observance. On the other hand, the sacramentarians go too far²¹ to the right because they take everything away from the sacraments.

The Catholic position and that of the Swiss could not be farther apart. And it seems that Luther, in his own evaluation, placed himself in between these two opponents. He was not willing to go to either extreme but blazed the middle way. If these three views were to be placed on a continuum, Luther would indeed be in the middle. He could not agree with ex opere operato and the Catholic belief that the sacrament benefited even those who did not receive it in faith. Neither could he agree with the Swiss who devalued the sacrament to a subjective remembrance. This view in Luther's way of thinking stripped the sacrament of its objective nature making it dependent upon man's work. Luther's middle way recognizes that the nature of the sacrament is dependent only upon God's Word. Its objective nature does not change even if it is abused by man. However, the sacrament was instituted with its proper use in mind. Here Luther's view treats the sacrament on a level that, by and large, the other views neglect. Luther maintains that the sacrament was instituted to increase faith, the very area where both the Swiss and the Catholics objected to his thought.

While it is true that Luther evaluated his opponents views as being on either side of his own, this is not his only evaluation. In light of the pronounced differences of view, it is astonishing to find Luther evaluating the controversy by setting his views against the combined

²¹LW 54, 43. Luther put on the right those who today are normally put on the left.

views of the Swiss and the Catholics. In doing so, Luther asserted that in a profound way, the views of the Swiss and the Catholics held common ground together. He maintained that "both sides permit the right use (of the sacrament) to fall from sight."²² We now must turn our attention to see the ways in which the papists and the enthusiasts agree in their sacramental views.

For Luther, the sacramental beliefs of both the papists and the enthusiasts were nothing more than an expression of the theology of glory, that is, an approach to God through human works. This is most easily seen in the Roman Catholic system which included "works" oriented practices. In the Babylonian Captivity, which was directed against the abuses of the sacramental system, Luther attacks these actions, emphasizes and urges a return to the divine promise and faith. For the Roman Catholic Church to use the sacrament as a good work and a sacrifice was nothing other than the impossible approach to God through works. The sacramental views of the enthusiasts were very different than those of Rome and yet for Luther they betrayed the same fundamental weakness. Zwingli fought against the mass as a good work, but his concept of remembrance, with which he replaced it, was no better. The earnestness with which the remembrance was exercised became the key to a worth reception of the sacrament. Again the aspect of human works takes the foreground, communion as a gift from God is left behind. The sacrament for Luther, is a summary of the gospel, it reflects the fundamental nature of the gospel: it is a gift appropriated through faith. This truth is violated by both the

²²LW 36, 347.

papists and the enthusiasts.

The issue of faith was also at stake. Zwingli vehemently denied that the Lord's Supper increased faith.²³ For him it was a memorial meal and a badge indicating the faithful. The Roman Catholic sacramental views also denied that the Lord's Supper increased faith. A recurring theme in Luther's writings against Rome centers on the question of faith and its importance. Rome had so neglected faith that Luther could write, "they say nothing of faith which is the salvation of the people, but babble only of the despotic power of the pontifs, whereas Christ says nothing at all of power, but speaks only of faith."²⁴ In the system of Rome, faith had nothing to do with a worthy reception, it was thought to be unnecessary for sacramental piety. For both the papists and the enthusiasts the Lord's Supper was not an expression of the gospel to be received in faith, but a law to be fulfilled through either a proper disposition (papists) or a sufficiently sincere remembrance (enthusiasts). These extremely different positions find common ground in rejecting faith in the sacrament.

But if the belief that faith is increased in the sacrament is discarded, this says something significant about the role that the Word takes in the sacramental belief. Word and faith go together. Faith is engendered and increased by the hearing of the Word. To say that the sacrament does not increase faith is tantamount to saying that the sacrament does not convey the Word. This deprecatory tendency can be seen in both the papists' and the enthusiasts' views. In the mass, the words of

²³LW 37, 155.

²⁴LW 36, 82.

institution were spoken not to the people but over the elements. Further, the words were mumbled in Latin so that none but the priests knew what was being said. The common people were denied the word of promise. In this way, the word of faith was excluded. Zwingli's view was not much better, for while it did not completely obliterate the Word, it relied upon a truncated form of the Word at best. "Do this in remembrance of me" was all that remained of the words of institution. The sacrament had become a law. No longer was it an expression of God's condescension and redemptive work for man. Now it became a work of man rendered to God. Luther, with great insight, claimed that Zwingli and the rest of the enthusiasts had all but removed the words, "This is my body, given for you."²⁵ They were treated only as something to get rid of. The enthusiasts had rendered the text unnecessary. We now see the common ground between these two groups. In the case of the papists the words were hidden and thereby obliterated. In the case of the enthusiasts, the words of institution were interpreted away. The external word had been substituted for works of various kinds.

The issue of the external word was the bottom line. Both the papists and the enthusiasts replaced it with works, even if very pious ones. They wanted to attain blessings, grace, and the Spirit apart from the Word. With this insight we see that Luther's sacramentarian controversies were, in reality, controversies of the Word.

In these matters, which concern the external spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts - that is, from the

²⁵LW 37, 126.

spiritualists who boast that they possess the Spirit without and before the Word and who therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or spoken Word according to their pleasure. Munzer did this, and many still do it in our day who wish to distinguish sharply between the letter and the spirit without knowing what they say or teach. The papacy, too, is nothing but enthusiasm, for the pope boasts that 'all laws are in the shrine of his heart,'²⁶ and he claims that whatever he decides and commands in his churches is spirit and law, even when it is above and contrary to the Scriptures or spoken Word. All this is the old devil and the old serpent who made enthusiasts of Adam and Eve. He led them from the external Word of God to spiritualizing and to their own imaginations.²⁷

In this quote Luther gives a brief definition of enthusiasm.

Simply put, it is a turning from the external Word of God toward spiritualizing and imagination. Enthusiasm is nothing more than the rejection of the theology of the cross in favor of the theology of glory. In Luther's evaluation both the papists and the Swiss fell into this category. The divergences between the two groups were merely different expressions of the same tendency. The result is the same, for, "Whether one falls out of the ship in front or behind, therefore, one lands in the water."²⁸

In this chapter Luther's emphasis on the priority of the Word over the sign has been reiterated. But at the same time we have considered the necessity of the sacramental sign and Luther's concept of sign. We have seen that Word and sign come together expressing God's covenant and conveying the grace of God. Word and Sacrament is the continuation of the incarnation through all ages. In this way, the salvation of God is

²⁶Corpus juris canonici, Book VI, I, 2, c. 1.

²⁷BC Smalcald Articles Part III article VIII, p. 312.

²⁸LW 54, 43.

distributed to mankind in the concreteness of Christ's appearing.

Finally, we have considered Luther's own evaluation of his sacramentarian controversies. Here, in a twofold perspective we have seen how Luther described his own position: first, as a middle way between two extremes; and secondly, as a position over against all others in adhering to scripture and to the gift aspect of the sacrament wherein the downward mercy of God overshadows every work of man.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS

As this study comes to a close, the following are some of the conclusions that can be made concerning Luther's sacramental theology.

1. Luther's theology of the cross is the fundamental methodology by which his sacramental theology is formed. All speculation about God must be abandoned for He cannot be approached except under the cross. Only those who despair of themselves and all human ways to God, trusting solely in the crucified Christ are justified before God. In the cross all attempts of man to reach God are struck down. Only the pathway of the gracious God to man is left open, in Christ. Luther's sacramental theology is decidedly Theocentric, finding its meaning in the fundamental fact of revelation, that is, the incarnation of Christ. Thus, philosophy as a means to God is swept aside. We are to know God through Christ.

2. The sacraments are summaries of the gospel. This means, of course, that they are not human works by which the ambitious reach heaven. The fundamental character of gospel as "gift" holds true for the sacraments also. The sacraments are divine gifts given to man. They are not and can never be tools by which man carries favor with God. Rather, favor is already shown man in Jesus Christ and the sacraments are an expression of the good news found only in Him. The good news revealed in Christ is the forgiveness of sins, the reconciliation of heaven and earth. The sacraments preach the forgiveness of sins to the heart and speak boldly of the redemption of all creation.

3. The sacraments convey that which preaching does. A sacrament is nothing other than the Word (the same word as in preaching) connected with an outward sign. The Word of promise conveyed in the sacrament is the same Word of promise conveyed in preaching. This fact gives rise to the close association of preaching and the sacraments, and the formula "Word and Sacrament". The Word effects that of which it speaks, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the sanctification of the believer, whether it be communicated by preaching or the sacraments.

4. Word and sacrament, or the office of the ministry, is the expression of the continuing significance of the incarnation in the life of the church. The redemptive action of the incarnation is extended forward and backward through time from the cross by means of Word and sacrament. The redemption of the world was achieved at a point in time but is revealed and distributed throughout all ages. In this way, incarnation and the cross are revealed in history. The revelation of God in Christ is not historically limited and restricted, but a present reality. God continues to reveal Himself through Jesus Christ by way of Word and sacrament. This means that there is a personal confrontation between God and man. It is assured by the real persence of Christ not only in the sacraments but also in preaching. The external action of Word and sacrament leads us to Christ as the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to recognize the Christ who is "for us". Outward action is fruitful only as the inward work of the Spirit is made complete in us.

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