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The Crisis of Theological Historicism and
How It May Be Overcome

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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series

(Except for the extended study of the Gospel for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, by the Rev. Robert H. Smith, Chappaqua, N. Y., the outlines which follow were condensed and translated from C. F. W. Walther's "Evangelien-Postille" by Prof. Alex. W. Guebert, St. Louis, Mo. The notes on the "Hymn of the Week" are supplied by Prof. Robert R. Bergt, St. Louis, Mo.)

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MARK 8:1-9

By Robert H. Smith

The New Testament records a remarkable number of dinner parties from the life of Jesus and the primitive church. The first followers of Jesus seem to have spent an inordinate amount of time eating. Or at the very least, they rated their meals worthy of special note and frequent mention.

Jesus' provision of bread for 4,000 is a twice-told tale (Mark 8:1-9; Matt. 15: 32-39), and the story of His gift of bread to 5,000, so similar that some commentators think the identical event underlies both narratives, stands in no less than four places in the New Testament (Mark 6:32-44; Matt. 14:13-21; Luke 9:11-17; John 6:5-13), a sign of the story's popularity.

I

Most cultures and religions know the sanctity of bread. Eating is not only a common, ordinary, natural act. It is basic and significant. Human beings know that they must eat in order to live, but they recognize also that eating is more than calories and vitamins.

Eating is important, serious business, and it really requires at least two people if it is to be done properly. One of the most unnatural, inhuman tortures ever devised by

mortal man is eating alone. If there is anything that rubs against the grain, it is solitary nourishment.

Those who break bread and eat salt together declare that they are brothers. The United States census takers, in trying to determine how many families live in a house, ask one simple question, "Do you eat together or not?" If you sit at table with one another, you are one family. If not, you are two or more.

Even Christians whose prayer life leaves much to be desired probably pray when they retire at night and when they sit down at the table to eat, marking out eating as somehow special in relation to the other activities of the day.

II

Besides the foregoing natural or psychological significance the first-century Jew would see in the gift of bread other meanings, learned from history and Scripture.

When Israel had enjoyed six weeks of liberty from Egyptian bondage, the people began to hanker after food instead of freedom. They murmured against Moses and Aaron (Ex. 16:3). But the Lord opened His hand and satisfied the people with manna, "bread from heaven" (Ex. 16:4). So prodigal was God with manna that the people began to tire of it and wish a change of diet (Num. 11:6). But later generations remembered with gratitude the gracious abundance poured out by God in His mighty mercy. (Neh. 9:15; Ps. 105:40)

Zealous for God, Elijah was the troubler of Israel (1 Kings 18:17) and the cause of drought. God preserved the champion of the covenant alive, feeding him by ravens and a widow (1 Kings 17:1-16). Later he partook again of a table set for him by the Angel

of the Lord in the wilderness. (1 Kings 19:4-8)

An early Jewish commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes (1:9) links the first times and the last times thus: "As the first Redeemer caused manna to descend, so shall the last Redeemer cause manna to descend." Countless comments of similar structure and import show that *Endzeit* equals *Urzeit*. The last times will bring again the wonders of the great and good primeval times of the world and of Israel's history.

The Old Testament looks to the time when God will gather His people and "make for all peoples a feast of fat things" (Is. 25:6; 49:10). Later Judaism (1 Enoch 62:14; 2 Baruch 29:8) and the New Testament (Rev. 2:17; 3:20; Matt. 8:11; Mark 14:25; Luke 14:15; 22:15ff.) picture the eschatological kingdom in terms of a royal banquet or wedding feast.

III

As centuries passed and generation followed fugitive generation, people questioned anew the power and promise of God: "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" (Ps. 78:19). Does God care? Can He act to help us in such a world as this? Will God ever remember His covenant with His people? Will the last times ever dawn? In response to the questions and the hunger of the people, Jesus took the initiative with His disciples and a vast array of curious followers in a desert place. (Mark 8:1-9)

V. 1 — In all but the actual words the description is of people "like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34; Num. 27:17). The throngs who gather eagerly about Jesus are a disorganized, leaderless rabble. They are common folk and not the intelligentsia or the propertied. They are simply *ὁ ὄχλος*. Here it is not the disciples (cf. Luke 9:12; Mark 6:35; Matt. 14:15) but Jesus Himself who first speaks up about the hunger of the people in the wilderness.

V. 2 — "I have compassion on the crowd."

σπλαγχνίζομαι is found only in Jesus' mouth in the New Testament. It describes an active sympathy resident uniquely in His heart, which corresponds to the heart of God (Matt. 18:27; Luke 10:33; 15:20). Only God and Jesus have such pity. (Ps. 40:11; 51:1; Luke 1:78)

Vv. 3, 4 — They are far from home in a desert spot (*ἐπ' ἐρημίας*). The disciples feel there is nothing to do but to send the poor away empty. But Jesus has decided to fill the hungry with good things. (Luke 1:53)

Vv. 5, 6 — The crowds sit down in orderly fashion. Jesus stands in the midst of the vast array as Head of the family. Jesus took into His hands seven loaves. He neither laughed nor despaired at so little among so many. Rather He gave thanks (*εὐχαριστήσας*) and distributed the food to His disciples, who passed among the people and served them dinner.

V. 7 — A few fish, and small ones at that (*ἰχθῦδια*), were also received into His hands. For these also Jesus blessed (*εὐλογήσας*) the name of God, perhaps in the words of this ancient prayer, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the world, who bringest forth bread from the earth."

V. 8 — From the creative hands of Jesus the crowd had not bits and scraps but a full and satisfying meal. The fragments left over from the hearty feasting filled seven baskets. Moses had seen a good day coming when he said, "Blessed shall be your basket." (Deut. 28:5)

V. 9 — Four thousand persons were filled, but only one knew what had really happened.

IV

It is a real feeding with real food for real pangs of hunger. Jesus is no mystic, otherworldly ascetic careless of the needs of the body. As Satan makes his power felt in the palpable and empiric realities of disease, evil, inhumanity, and death, so Jesus presses

the attack to free God's good creation from the powers it has been subjected to.

The significance of Jesus' deed escaped the crowds, nor did the disciples "perceive and understand" (Mark 8:14-21). It cannot be said that the modern church has demonstrated any more aptitude or profundity than the Twelve. But the modern church, living after the resurrection and Pentecost, has less excuse.

Many contemporaries blink only at the magnitude of the miracle and would, they say, be happy enough to accept it if only the 5,000 or the 4,000 could be drastically reduced in number.

Some years ago a favorite interpretation (and it still circulates) was that the real miracle occurred in the hearts of men under the spellbinding influence of Jesus' preaching. Fearful and greedy at first, they heard Jesus speak of love and saw the action of Jesus in sharing His provisions, pulled out their lunches from beneath flowing robes, and, lo and behold, there was plenty to go around with more to spare.

Albert Schweitzer thought of each person (certainly not 4,000, however) receiving a tiny fragment of bread as a sacramental pledge and guarantee of future participation in the eschatological kingdom.

Others dismiss the story as an idyllic legend shaped on the pattern of Old Testament stories or derived from purely pagan sources.

But the worst perversion of the miracle is another, here reproduced in the well-turned phrases of Helmut Thielicke:

In the evil hands of men the miracle loses its transparency; they no longer see the master behind it, who uses it as a sign which should lead them to praise God; they have only the pleasant feeling of perfect, lip-smacking satiety, and thus the belly becomes their god and with it the bread—which means that they praise the gift of God instead of the Giver (*Between God and Satan*, Grand Rapids, 1958, pp. 37f.).

We Americans have been described aptly as "generous materialists." That is to say, we are not misers who hoard up money for its own sake. Rather we are lavish in our expenditure of moneys on ourselves, our families, our fellow citizens, and on the inhabitants of the four quarters of the globe. But we seem to believe that tangible things alone are worth having and that money will buy anything. (J. W. Krutch, *Human Nature and the Human Condition*, New York, 1959, pp. 5 ff.) It is our peculiar temptation to see in Jesus one who can give us the material and psychological goods which we crave.

The gospels do stress the brute reality of the actual feeding and filling, neither explaining how Jesus did it nor resting content with the mere doing of the deed. They insist that there has come one among men who is greater than Moses. One has come who, as John recalls, gives bread which satisfies forever. Jesus came to give Himself as Bread for the life of the world (John 6:51). The miracle of feeding is perceived and understood only when people believe in Jesus, the Crucified One, and receive life from Him.

Having spoken the Word to the throngs of listeners, Jesus prepared a meal for them. He assumed full responsibility for the needs of the crowds gathered about Him. He presented Himself to them as the One who offers God's total gift: the Word and bread. He declares that He, the poor and lowly Figure standing in their midst, has a royal mission and that He shares in the glory of God. (A. Schlatter, *Die Geschichte des Christus*, Stuttgart, 1921, pp. 364ff.)

A Banquet in the Wilderness

I. Ours is an appealing but dangerous text

A. We Christians of America, as we confront a text such as this, are in danger of making two mistakes which lead to grievous

errors of faith and life: (1) Thinking that Jesus is concerned with the soul alone and so spiritualizing the text. (2) Using Jesus only to gain bodily good. The former leads to social irresponsibility; the latter is a form of idolatry.

B. Certainly in a materialistic age of dogoodism, we are in more danger of the idolatry than of the spiritualizing. It is dangerously easy to cast Jesus in the role of a "generous materialist" and seek to use Him for our own private ends and ambitions.

II. Dangerous as it is, this miracle speaks to our condition

A. Jesus really did multiply loaves and fish and satisfy the real hunger of men and women in a desert place. Efforts to tone down the miracle and make it more palatable have all proved misguided.

B. Jesus' deed is an enacted parable: (1) He acts provocatively, that is, through the satisfaction of hunger Jesus challenges men to see in Him the one real answer to the deepest needs of human life. (2) He is acting significantly, that is, deliberately declaring that the long-awaited last times are present in Him, that He is the Presence of the kingdom of God, wherein the hungers of men are met and satisfied. (3) The Creator serves the creature in Jesus, spreading a table in the wilderness, and the way of such service leads straight to the cross.

III. By His deed Jesus calls us to respond in faith and praise.

A. Cling to the Creator of all things visible and invisible who has revealed His love in the action and Passion of Jesus.

B. Beware of confounding gift and Giver. "Praise Him from whom all blessings flow."

The Hymn of the Week: "All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 19.

Luther D. Reed in *The Lutheran Liturgy* gives the following theme for the second

cycle of Sundays (VI—XI) after Trinity: ". . . the newness of life and righteousness as marks of those who are in the kingdom of grace and alive unto God." The Seventh Sunday After Trinity underscores this theme. The response of the worshiper gives "praise to God" for His "never failing providence" (the Collect). The Feeding of the Four Thousand (the Gospel) proclaims Christ's care for the total man. The appointed hymn declares that the Christian confidently places his trust in God.

Its author, Johann J. Schütz (1640 to 1690), is not to be confused with the great Lutheran composer Heinrich Schütz. But just as Heinrich Schütz was a preeminent musical composer, so Johann Schütz excelled in poetic verse. His hymns appeared in collection in *Christliches Gedenkbüchlein, zu Beförderung eines anfangenden neuen Lebens*, 1675, Frankfurt am Main.

Entitled "Hymn of Thanksgiving," it originally consisted of nine stanzas, each concluding with the sacrificial response, *Gebt unserm Gott die Ehre*. The composite translation is largely based upon Miss Winkworth's version, "All Praise and Thanks to God Most High." Hymnologist Koch praises it as "outweighing many hundred others . . . a classical hymn, which, from its first appearance, attracted unusual attention."

Equal to the dynamic and virile text is the melodic setting, *Lobet den Herrn, ihr*, by Melchior Vulpius. Its rhythmical variation coupled with by-and-large diatonic melodic progression makes it strong.

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 7:15-23

The church has always been militant. She has been attacked by the world at all times. In her own midst false teachers have arisen in every age and caused divisions and offenses.

Why does God permit wolves in sheep's clothing to ravage the church? He does it to prove His children and to punish ungrateful hearers (1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Thess. 2:10b, 11). As your pastor it is my duty to bring you the whole counsel of God, also to warn you against false prophets. In the Gospel for today Jesus said to the multitude, "Beware of false prophets!" He takes the decision out of the hands of the shepherds and puts it into the hands of the sheep. On the basis of our text I place this truth before you:

The Sheep Judge Their Shepherds

I shall show you

- I. That the sheep are judges
- II. That therefore they must know and be certain of the true doctrine
- III. That they may not let themselves be blinded by what may seem to be true
- IV. That above all they must look for the right kind of fruit

I

A. Christ's words in verses 15a and 16a make it clear that He is giving the hearers not only the right of judgment but also the criterion to measure the truth. Everything taught in the church of Christ touches our salvation. Each one of us is saved only by his own faith in Christ. No man can die for us or represent us before the judgment seat of God. If we let someone deceive us, we have deceived ourselves and stand guilty before God.

B. In the kingdom of God we are all alike. Holy Baptism clothes the king as well as the beggar in the righteous robes of Christ. Scholarship, holiness, a keen mind, and prudence are not decisive in divine things. If a learned man would enter heaven, he must become like a child. In divine things no one is excluded from being a judge. Here all the sheep of Christ are judges. The apostles

praised the Bereans because they searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether the preaching they heard was God's Word or not (Acts 17:10, 11). St. John counseled his readers not to believe every spirit but to try them whether they were of God. (1 John 4:1)

C. Therefore know and preserve what is properly your right. Prove everything, and cling to that which is good.

II

A. Since the sheep are judges of the shepherds, they necessarily must know and be sure of the true doctrine. Nothing but the Word of God has a right to rule and be heard in the church (Ps. 82:1; 1 Peter 4:11a). Christ alone is the Head of the church. The entire church sits at His feet and from the Bible judge as subordinate judges. According to love each one of us is a servant to every other Christian. But according to faith we are servants to none besides Christ. If we, the sheep, are judges of our shepherds, we must search the Scriptures daily, so that we can distinguish between truth and falsehood.

B. If you want to be true judges in the church, you must not only love the pure Word of God above all things in the world but also be so certain of it that you will be ready to die to preserve it. Let us take the words of Peter in John 6:68, 69 and Luther's Small Catechism as our guide.

III

A. "Beware of false prophets," Christ says. He is not talking about people who have slipped away from the church, who deny Christ, who blaspheme the Triune God and declare the Bible a book of fables. The most dangerous false prophets wear sheep's clothing.

B. This is what Christ is saying: True prophets base all their teachings on the Word of God. If a man comes to you and claims

to teach the pure Word of God, do not trust him immediately. He may be a false prophet in sheep's clothing. When Scripture is held before your eyes, be careful. By comparing one Scripture passage with another, you can readily detect the enemy.

C. True prophets do not force themselves on you, but come to you through a legitimate call. If a preacher appeals to the office into which he claims God has called him, do not despise the office, for that retains its power and legitimacy, though a Pharisee or a Sadducee occupies it. But be on your guard! The office of the preacher may be used as nothing more than sheep's clothing.

D. True prophets should lead exemplary lives. If you should see a preacher who outwardly appears to be a Christian pastor and Christian gentleman, you certainly will not reject these qualities. Still you want to be careful. They may be sheep's clothing, hiding a false prophet. The life of a teacher may be blameless, yet his teaching can be destructive.

E. True prophets frequently receive rich intellectual endowments from the Lord. If you should hear a preacher whose eloquence shatters the hardest heart, stirs up the indolent, encourages the disheartened, comforts the troubled, do not let yourself be deceived. Some false prophets also have great intellectual endowments which as sheep's clothing can lead you astray.

IV

A. Finally, when Christ says, "By their fruits ye shall know them," He is telling His sheep to look for the right kind of fruit from the hands of the shepherds. This fruit in the first analysis does not point to *life*, but to *teaching*. If a teacher does not bring the fruit of the pure teaching of the Word, he is a false prophet, for God sends only such men who preach Christ crucified for sinners. (Cf. John 6:40; 1 John 4:2, 3a; Acts 10:43; Matt. 7:22, 23)

B. A pious life without pure teaching does not make a true prophet. But pure teaching adorned with pious living points to a preacher after the heart of God (cf. Matt. 7:18; Gal. 5:22, 23a). Therefore heed the words of Jesus in Matt. 7:15, 16a.

The Hymn of the Week: "Oh, Enter, Lord, Thy Temple," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 228.

The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit (the Epistle) that we may be enabled to live according to the will of God (the Collect). Genuine fruits manifest the true life of God within the Christian man (the Gospel). To underscore this rich doctrinal stress of the day the chief hymn (*Hauptlied*), "Oh, Enter, Lord, Thy Temple," has been chosen.

Paul Gerhardt, author of this hymn, like Luther, rejoiced in the presence and closeness of a loving God. As Luther stressed the grace of God heavily in his hymns, so Gerhardt emphasized the love of the Righteous One sent from the Father. In this hymn Gerhardt sets forth the role of the Spirit, conveying to man the comfort of his deliverance from evil by the work of Christ.

Originally consisting of 15 stanzas, it was written during the early period of his life under the stress of the Thirty Years' War. The entire 15-stanza hymn is translated in English by Catherine Winkworth in her *Lyra Germanica*, "New Edition," 1862. The stanzas which do not appear in *The Lutheran Hymnal* express the joy of the Comforter amidst the anguish of war and hardship and would fill a need also in our own age.

The *cantus firmus* (the melody) was written by Johann Crüger especially for the hymn text in the same year that Gerhardt wrote the hymn, 1653. The melody is simple and straightforward and offers little difficulty for congregational singing. It is of a more subdued nature than other Crüger melodies. (*LH*, 206, 192)

THE NINTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 16:1-9

Many believe that happiness for all people will be a reality when injustice, out of which riches and poverty grow, is eliminated and goods are equally divided among all inhabitants. If sin had not come into the world, there would be no inequality among men. Sin brought selfishness into the world, a constant warfare over mine and thine. Therefore God wrote the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" into man's heart and on stone tables on Mount Sinai. This commandment stands like a guardian over every man's house, garden, farm, and property of every description. Not all riches and poverty, however, can be attributed to injustice (cf. Prov. 22:2), for God has power to distribute His gifts as He chooses. Before men we can claim ownership of property, but before God we are nothing more than stewards. This is the truth the Lord places before us in the Gospel for today. On the basis of the parable of the unjust steward I shall show you that

*Christ Points to the Unjust Steward
as a Warning and as an Encouragement*

- I. As a warning so that we never forget that we are not lords, but only stewards of our earthly possessions
- II. As an encouragement to use our earthly possessions for the good of our neighbor and the glory of God

I

A. Sin made man want to be his own master. He believes he can use his gifts, reasoning, power, knowledge, skill, as he pleases and need not give an account to anyone for what he does. He supposes that whatever he produces with his hands or mind, gains through trade transactions, receives through inheritance or gifts, is his to dispose of as he sees fit.

B. In the parable of the unjust steward

Christ draws a line through man's foolish idea regarding himself and his property. He shows that God alone is Lord over all things. He alone is the All-wise, the All-powerful, the real Owner of all things. To Him belong all praise, honor, and glory. In himself man is desperately poor. All he owns before God is his own sin. Whatever he has besides is a gift from God. Whatever it is, before God man is only a renter and steward and has no reason to feel proud of his gifts and achievements.

C. In verses 1b and 2 Christ points out that a man as a steward of all his possessions and gifts must give a strict accounting of his conduct to God Himself. You may have the gift of keen insight and sharp judgment, or the gift of eloquence, or the gift of unraveling complicated business affairs, or skill in some art. All these gifts come from God. Woe to you if you use these gifts to build yourself up and do not use them for the purpose for which God gave them to you. Remember the words of Christ in Luke 12:48b.

II

A. Christ does not want us to give up all possessions, separate ourselves from people, and retreat to desert areas. Though He is holding the unjust steward before our eyes as a warning, He is also using him as an encouragement for us. His words in verse 8 strike us as very strange at first. Yet Christ is not advocating dishonesty. He is advocating that a man shall use his gifts and possessions, which belong to God, in such a way that they may secure his future before God. Just as the godless wisdom of the unjust steward is praiseworthy before men, so, Christ says, this true wisdom is praiseworthy before God.

B. If a steward uses his master's goods to secure his own future, he is deceitful. That is not the case with the goods God has entrusted to us for administration. He has graciously given them to us so that by proper

use we can demonstrate our good stewardship. (V.9)

C. Rejoice, therefore, if God has given you a keen mind and the opportunity to acquire much learning, if He helped you to master useful skills, if He has put you in an important office where your influence touches many people, if He has filled your hands with money. Whatever your gift is, use it to the glory of God and the good of men. So to avoid pride and greed and any other sin that may rise when men heap praise, honor, and glory upon you, be sure to give all praise, all honor, all glory to God, the Giver of all good gifts. Then when you must answer the summons of death, those who have been blessed through your gifts will receive you into the everlasting habitations. As you were rich in temporal possessions here, you will also be rich in eternal possessions in heaven.

D. But is not this teaching contrary to the Gospel, which teaches that man is not saved by any kind of work but only by grace through faith in Christ? Not at all! Remember, there are two reasons why someone should take us to heaven. Either he has earned and prepared the way for us to enter, or he is bearing testimony that we have the right to enter. Christ has indeed earned our way into heaven, but no man can enter who has no one to bear witness that he actually believed in Christ. Among these witnesses are our brethren whom we served with our possessions and gifts.

E. Therefore, brethren, let us poor sinners not only believe in Christ but prove our faith as good stewards of our possessions and gifts. And Christ Himself will greet us at the portals of heaven with the words of Matt. 25:21.

The Hymn of the Week: "One Thing's Needful; Lord, This Treasure," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 366.

In both the Epistle and the Gospel as well as in the Collect the theme "Walk in the

wisdom of the knowledge of God" is stressed. The Gospel especially commends wise use of transient possessions. "One Thing's Needful; Lord, This Treasure" by Johann Heinrich Schröder captures this central thought. The fifth stanza especially echoes the Epistle and the Gospel appointed for this day. Here Pastor Schröder finds the knowledge of Christ to be the center of wisdom most high, which roots out all hypocrisy and gives direction for life's pilgrimage. (Stanza 7)

Entering the ministry at 30 (1696), Pastor Schröder served a congregation at Meseberg, Germany, till his untimely death three years later. In spite of his short life he composed four hymns for which he is famous. Two of these have passed into common English use.

The 19th-century melody which appears in *The Lutheran Hymnal* was written especially for the unusual number of feet in each line of this hymn. The original melody, still used in Germany today, is *Grosser Prophete*, written by Joachim Neander in 1680. The popularity of this melody doubtless aided the fame of the text to spread throughout Germany as the two became wedded together in 1697. The melody by Friedrich Layriz in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is to be preferred, inasmuch as the tune *Grosser Prophete* becomes sentimental through the use of repeated notes.

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 19:41-48

If man had remained holy, clean, and pure as when he came from the creative hand of God, there would be no need for repentance. But sin came and drove a wedge between man and God. As a result man is not able to please God or enter into communion with Him. He makes his own god, lives only for this world, and is exceedingly selfish. Not even those who live according to the strictest morality, but do not know and worship the true God, are one whit better than the most

despicable sinner. To be saved every man must have a change of mind and heart. He must reach a point where the true God means everything to him (cf. Acts 17:30b; John 3:6a; 3:3). It is sad enough when a man remains in his natural sinful state. It is sadder still if a man has sunk so deep into sin that there is little or no hope for his conversion and salvation. Such a man is caught in the sin of hardness of heart. That was the sin that held many of the Jews captive in Christ's day, that drew tears from the eyes of Christ according to our Gospel for today. Let us use this opportunity to hold the sin of hardness of heart before us as a warning. I shall, therefore, talk to you about

The Terrible Sin of Hardness of Heart

I shall point out to you

- I. What this sin is
- II. How a person gets into this sin
- III. When and how a person may be helped out of this sin

I

A. The words "hardness of heart" do not occur in the text. But it does describe people who were caught in that sin (vv. 41, 42). Though Christ talked to them again and again in friendly terms about the way to salvation and substantiated His words with many miracles, many of the people looked upon Him as an impostor and called His doctrines false and dangerous. They derided and detested the thought that faith in Him should save them from sin.

B. The people of Jerusalem had no inkling of the gravity of their sin of rejecting Christ. They did not dream that because of this sin the wrath of God would sweep over them and their children. With tears in His eyes Christ warned them of God's inevitable punishment for their sin (vv. 43, 44). But they considered His words a mere empty threat, or they thought: "We are God's people. No harm can touch us."

C. But at the end of our text Christ's words in v. 47 show how blind the people of Jerusalem had become. Having lost all fear of God's punishment, they lapsed from one sin into another without recognizing the gravity of their sins. From the rejection of Christ they proceeded to enmity against Him, and from that to thoughts of murder until they finally crucified Him.

D. This is a picture of a person caught in the sin of hardness of heart. The Word of God does not make any impression on him. The grace and comfort of the Gospel, the love of Christ for sinners, do not move him. The Law with its threats does not stir him. Grace or wrath, life or death, blessing or cursing, heaven or hell, salvation or damnation, make no difference to him. The more he hears of God's Word, the angrier he grows, and his heart becomes more stormy than ever. Finally, he does not have any sense of sin any more. His conscience is dulled and lets him do what he pleases. So he moves toward his doom.

II

A. Let us now see how a man gets into this sin of hardness of heart. There are churches that maintain that hardness of heart is due to an eternal unconditional counsel of God. They point to Rom. 9:18 and to the example of Pharaoh in Exodus. This is a blasphemous application of these Bible passages. God is not the cause of sin (cf. Ps. 5:4; James 1:13; Ezek. 33:11; Hos. 13:9a). No one need be afraid that God would want to harden his heart because there is no salvation for him.

B. You undoubtedly will say: "Doesn't Scripture report that God hardened some people?" My answer is yes. But Scripture also plainly reports that God hardened a man's heart only after he had hardened himself by despising and rejecting God's grace. That was the case with the people of Jerusalem (v. 44b). God had done everything possible to bring His love and grace

to them through prophets and through His Son. But they rejected them all and crucified Christ. Then God withdrew His gracious hand and let the judgment of hardness of heart step in.

C. That is the way God always proceeds. No one is afflicted with the hardening of the heart who has not received the loving ministrations of God's grace over a period of time. But when pastors, teachers, parents, conscience, and the Holy Spirit have done their utmost in pleading and admonishing to repentance and belief in Christ, and the person deliberately rejects all these attempts, God's mercy finally comes to an end (cf. Is. 1:5), because He knows that such a person will resist grace to his very death. Scripture calls this withdrawal of God's grace hardening of the heart.

III

A. Terrible as this truth is, it nevertheless is clearly set forth in Scripture and dare not be ignored (cf. Prov. 1:24-30; Heb. 6:4-6). People described in these verses have cut off all contact with God. For such there is no help.

B. Do not suppose, however, that because of this teaching of Scripture even the most hardened sinner must despair of his salvation. God does not want to damn any sinner. He wants to save them all. Sinners are lost because they refuse to let themselves be saved. But whoever knows that his heart is obdurate and yet has a yearning for God's grace and deliverance from his sin is not irretrievably lost, for any good in us is due to the grace of God.

C. Do not despair if it should seem that your heart is like stone. In Ezekiel 11 and 36 God promised to turn a stony heart into a heart of flesh (cf. Jer. 23:29). Do not despair if it should seem that your heart is hardened like that of the people of Jerusalem. When Peter told them they had killed the Prince of life and crucified the Lord of glory, some of them cried out in fright,

"What shall we do?" repented, and were saved.

D. All of you who have been aroused by the Word of God, but may have resisted Him, do not increase your sin by rejecting His grace. Remember, another day of grace has come to you today. Throw yourselves at Jesus' feet as lost sinners and accept His grace. He will receive you and save you. (Cf. Heb. 3:15)

The Hymn of the Week: "Lord, to Thee I Make Confession," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 326.

The Holy Gospel appointed for this day is a call to repentance as it portrays Jesus weeping over Jerusalem and cleansing the temple. Those who truly accept the message of Jesus and by the Spirit call Him Lord receive a variety of gifts by the same Spirit (the Epistle). The sorrow of man's plight without God is expressed in the Introit, but joy comes to the penitent, who cast their burdens upon the Lord.

The hymn "Lord, to Thee I Make Confession" has been chosen to undergird the penitential aspect of the service. For the enabling help of the Spirit, emphasized in the Epistle, there is this plea: "Let Thy Spirit leave me never; make me only Thine forever." (Stanza 4)

As is often the case in the hymnodic expression of Johann Franck, we find a personal quality in this hymn similar to the utterances of the Psalms. When coupled with the objectivity of the other parts of the liturgy and with the hymns of Luther, Paul Eber, Michael Weisse, and others, a good balance results for worship in the church. Additional notes on Johann Franck are found in the March issue of this journal. (P. 156)

The original eight-stanza hymn was set to a fittingly personal melody by Johann Crüger, *Herr, ich habe missgehandelt*. This *cantus firmus* appeared for the first time in Crüger's *Geistliche Kirchenmelodien*, 1649.