

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Legalism in an Evangelical Church

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The New Deal—In His Blood

With the printing of this sermon CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY takes note of a tragic and significant anniversary. It was preached last year on Maundy Thursday after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King.

There are additional reasons for its publication. It illustrates how the use of current events can bring electricity into pulpit discourse.

It was preached to a congregation gathered to observe the Last Supper of Another who was killed by evil in the world. It is a helpful example of how preaching can make that Sacrament pertinent to today and to today's people of God.

The sermon is based on a text written by still another man to still other men whose remembering of that Last Supper was being spoiled by evils in the church. It is also an illustration of how the Biblical theologian should help the people of God find God's meanings in the strange events that happen in what is still God's world. Events in our time are not happening merely to supply homiletical illustrations. The preacher needs to say more than that God's in His heaven though all's wrong with the world. If the preacher is to be a spokesman for God, he must help God's people understand what God is implying with the mighty acts He is performing.

If you wish to find even more values in this sermon, watch the Law condemn and the Gospel save. And note how style in words, the fresh analogies and terminology, add the extra dimension to make it all work.

Edward H. Schroeder, teaching this year at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, preached this last year while functioning as the head of the theology department of Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind., and serving as one of a team of vacancy pastors at Immanuel Lutheran Church in that city.

GEORGE W. HOYER

MAUNDY THURSDAY
APRIL 11, 1968

TEXT 1 COR. 11:23-32

I intend to preach this sermon against the backdrop of Martin Luther King's death. But the sermon is really about us. I heard one parishioner say that King was a saint. And I heard another one of us who questioned that. Martin Luther, whose name he also bore, defined a saint as a sinner who trusts Christ and from that trust does what his conscience calls him to do. So even if King were a notorious sinner, his trust in Christ's forgiveness of sinners makes him a saint. But the sermon is not about this man who died. One parishioner warned me Tuesday not to sing a hymn of praise to King so that Christ would get pushed out of the picture. And that's very good advice. Christian preaching is about Christ.

The events of the weekend may not show us much about Jesus. But events do show us much about people, the very people for whom this new deal in Christ's blood is meant.

So we will use the backdrop of the weekend to tell us about us. The text will tell us about God and Jesus. But the text does more. It too will finally tell us about us—tell us even more than the weekend can. Finally the text tells us about the weekend. It gives us insight into world history as well as our own personal individual lives.

When any man is murdered in cold blood, we have a repeat performance of the Cain and Abel story. We have visual proof—deadly proof—that the world is no longer a Garden of Eden. And when people rejoice about another's murder—as many

citizens were doing—even fellow Christians—even members of this parish (as I have heard), then they show how widespread the fallen world is. There is no Garden of Eden anywhere. Whether you do the murder or whether you line up with the murderer because you hated the murdered man—it's all the same. Not because I say so but because your God and Creator says so: *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has God's life residing in him.* Such a man is outside the Garden where God's life does reside. When this hatred is applied to any black man or all black men by any of us white ones, the same is true. And of course the same is true in reverse too. But there's no sense in condemning the black man's racial hatred here this evening since none of us is a black man. The point is not which one of us has the best grounds for being hateful. The point is: Hatred is damnable, and God Himself says so.

Last Sunday as I came down Washington Street to get to the third service here after the second one out at the school, I saw a large Confederate flag flying from one of the mansions just a block up the street. By the time it registered in my mind what that mansion owner was saying (on a day of national mourning), my heart had turned to hate him. And then fear came almost simultaneously—the fear of what trouble would yet come as I had to keep on living in such a town where this man lived and where he probably had more friends on his side than I had on mine.

But this is only another example of what the weekend revealed, in this case, not simply the defiance of the mansion owner but the flimsy, fallen condition of the heart of one of your pastors. The weekend shows us us. It shows us the mess of our inside life, the mess of our public life; it shows us that hell is really any place on the globe that is outside of Eden—any place where people

do not actually live their own lives on the energy of God's life: and that even inside the church it doesn't seem to be much different from what's on the outside. Dog eat dog. Kill or be killed.

That's some of what the weekend reveals. Suppose we turn now to the text and ask what light it can throw upon us. If Paul were around personally to preach on this text, I imagine his first word would be: *You're making the same stupid mistake, Schroeder, that the Corinthians did.* Huh? How so? I'm just being realistic. Using the story of Cain and Abel to show what the true situation is in the world today. *Nope, you're just like the Corinthians were. You're not discerning the Lord's body.* What does that mean? I know that in, with, and under, the bread of the Communion is the body of Christ, and in, with, and under the cup of wine is His blood. *That is true. But body of Christ also means you. You and all the others who have been connected with Christ.* *The big punch line in this discussion of Holy Communion is what I told the Corinthians a few verses later: YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST.* That doesn't make sense. At the Sacrament I don't eat myself. *No, that's true. You eat and drink Him. But thereby you become what He is. That's what I had to tell the Corinthians: You are the body of Christ. Now think through the text again with that in mind. You can even use your own supposedly catchy sermon topic, The New Deal in His Blood, and carry it through.*

All right, let's go back through the text again to see what it tells us about God, Jesus, and us, even at this moment in our own lives. The events of this Holy Week are God's new deal for us: "Jesus' body broken for you; His cup a new testament in His blood for us—remembrance." It all sounds strange.

But here's what it says for us who have just lived through the past weekend. As you look at events, keep your deals straight

—old and new. *Life apart from Christ is not without God, but it is living in the old deal with God.* It means living with God around, but living outside of Eden. Life in the fallen world outside of Eden can survive as long as God holds off His final verdict. In fact, God wills that it survive, and He has initiated emergency measures within it; the emergency measures that keep everyone from doing to his brother what Cain did to Abel. Remember, in a fallen world it is no surprise to find yourself hating your brother — and murder is the reasonable consequence of all hatred. If I don't like someone interfering with my life, I eliminate his life.

Yet God's emergency measures keep that from happening all the time. He has initiated various agents for restraint. One restraint is fear — the fear of what Abel's friends and family will do to me when they find out what I did to him. That's the law of retribution. It's built into the very mechanism of the fallen world. To operate out of fear is not very good, but it's better than murdering and being murdered. And if people do not have the life of God in them, such fear is a powerful agent to compel them to live and let live. It's not the kingdom of God, nor is it the new deal, but it is a kind of survival that is possible. And it is possible within the resources of the old deal. And whether we like it or not, it will happen.

Until heaven and earth pass away, this law of retribution will not pass away. Why? Because God Himself is behind such a law of retribution. According to Genesis He actually put it into operation. So it makes no difference if some of us think: The black man ought to work to deserve his rewards. That is true when all other things are equal. But the story of Cain and Abel is more illustrative for understanding the events of our day: If the black man says, "I feel like Abel did at the hands of Cain. I'm being strangled. And some interior drive tells me

to grab Cain by the throat until I can get him to let go of my throat," that interior drive is God's own mechanism of retribution. It can operate more rationally than mutual choking of one another. But *if fallen men* do not wish to regulate their affairs in terms of *reasonable* retribution of live and let live, then irrational explosions of kill and be killed will happen, and they should be no surprise to Christians. We know that God keeps retribution going in the fallen world, because the most dangerous threat to any other person's life is another person, me. That's the OLD Deal, and it's not without God working in it. But there is no *life-of-God* in it, neither in the participants nor in the operating mechanisms.

But that precisely is what's new about the NEW DEAL IN HIS BLOOD. In fact St. Paul can say elsewhere that God puts the emergency mechanism of retribution into action in the old fallen world just to preserve it for the new deal that God has in mind. Jesus is that New Deal, sealed and delivered by God in the curious events of His own death. Here He Himself submitted to the law of retribution. He let Cain destroy Him. And at this point He did not grab back to get at Pilate's throat or Caiphas' or Judas'. And in the mystery of God's work in history that event broke the back of the old deal of retribution.

Luther used to say: In the death of Christ the law of retribution was applying itself to the very Lord who instituted it. And that amounted to a radical rebellion of the law of retribution against its own Lord. At Easter we see who won. Retribution gets killed during Holy Week as the new deal comes into full-scale existence. Wherever the old deal still functions, there retribution also still operates by God's own will. But in the new deal of Christ-connected sinners it does not.

We participate in that NEW DEAL wherever the Lord of the new deal comes to us.

Tonight on the anniversary of the night in which He was betrayed we celebrate the event that was even more significant than betrayal, His Sacrament. Our Lord's Supper is His new mechanism within the new deal (functioning parallel but contrary to the old mechanism of the old deal) to give us His body and blood and thereby to make us His body. *You Christians are the body of Christ.* And if you have forgotten it or forsaken it (as all of us have this past week by reverting to the old deal of fear and hate and anxiety and what not), then come tonight and literally "*Do it in remembrance of Him*" — remembering Him for what He really was. And above all in *remembering how God remembers us* when He remembers us as connected to His only-begotten Son.

That's what it means to "discern the body of Christ" when going to Communion — discerning that Christ is really remembering us as He acts through this mechanism, and discerning that any other human being who is under this new deal is remembered by Christ in just the same way. Therefore any Christian people who may have said this week, "I'm sure glad that King is out of the way," are first of all foolish in terms of God's old deal. Murderers and haters have retribution coming. And they have decided not to "discern the Lord's body" in both senses — in what's really going on tonight and during that first holy week, and also in not discerning what it means to be a member of the body of Christ, that new people of the new deal. If I were the called pastor of this flock, it would be my called assignment to put such a person under church discipline. Not because I'd like to "get" him, but because the Lord of the church would.

It's not damnable just being a sinner; but being an unrepentant sinner is what puts one outside the community of Christ's people. That means excommunication. Outside the community. Anybody who hates another man and enjoys that hatred and nourishes

it has put himself outside the new deal and asks God to treat him under old deal terms: "Give me retribution, God. That's what I want." But that man is not unreachable, even tonight, if he is here. All of us have uncontrollable hatreds — I mentioned mine earlier — but the point is: being in Christ's church. The big question about being His body is not: Are there hatreds still there, but, What do you do with them? This side of the grave we will never rid us of them — they will be our thorns in the flesh — but the question is: Do we foster them, or put them under God's own judgment? The Christian says: God, I do hate Negroes or whitey or Negro haters or wife haters or husband haters; but, God, be merciful to me, a hater, and crucify this hatred once more today. Nail it, Lord, nail it to Christ's cross.

Paul concludes the text with just this thought: How do you judge yourself as you come to the Lord's Table? He says in straight terms: If you make that kind of judgment on your chronic sinfulness (God, that hater is me. Nail me!), then you are delivered from the final judgment that still awaits the old world. That's the kind of self-examination that Paul speaks of. That's the point Luther makes in the Catechism. Self-examination is not to test whether I am good enough to come to the Sacrament, but whether I am open enough to let God's own action get through to me. The first action is the action of repentance (God, I'm a sinner, I admit it. Nail me!) and the second is the action of the new deal: Christ's body and blood for you. That's God's new deal for you.

You do not have to know a lot of things about the Lord's Supper; you just have to discern the body, as St. Paul says. Who is it that meets me there? What happens to me after the meeting? And once you do that, your eyes are opened for lots of other things — even the things of the past weekend.

Christians are actually able to see what others cannot and do not see. They can see the world as Christ sees it. In fact they look at Christ, at themselves, and at every other man (black man included) through Christ's own eyes. As St. Paul said elsewhere in his correspondence with the Corinthians: "From now on, therefore, we look at no one from a human viewpoint, even though we once saw Christ from such a human perspective, but we no longer look at Him like this. Here's the new view: If any man is in Christ, he is new creation, new deal." That's the new pair of glasses for looking at Christ and other people and yourself. And if you run into someone who clearly confesses that he is not interested in the body and blood shed for him, then you do not hate him. To hate is simply not to discern the body of Christ about yourself, nor to discern the body of Christ with reference to this one who is not of it.

Christians look at non-Christians with Christ's own eyes. Our eyes are opened to see that this old creation, old deal victim,

old sinner is potentially Christ's man (even if he denies and betrays Christ — as did His disciples so many years ago this very night). But you look discerningly at such a person and see: "Such a one was I. Often it is still true, such a one *am* I." But if you discern that you are a functional unit in Christ's body, then you discern on the one hand how lovelessness and nourished hatred kills your own participation in that body. It excommunicates you from that communion. On the other hand, you discern how the body works to bring outsiders into connection with Christ; you discern the very mechanism whereby the NEW DEAL moves in on any man. The new deal we celebrate tonight. The new deal in His blood. So let's do it. Not just watch others do it. Or run out as if we didn't really care for the new deal. For as often as we do it, St. Paul says, we are proclaiming the Gospel, the good news of the Lord's death right up until the very day that He finally comes.

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