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INTEGRITY BAROMETER: FALLING

It is always interesting and often instructive to hear veteran churchmen reminisce about important events in which they themselves have participated. Such recollections are so much more colourful than the dull official minutes and other bureaucratic leavings among which historians are forced to fossick. A case in point is the forthright and spirited critique, "Observations on Parts of Dr. Nelson's Lutheranism in North America, 1914-1970" (*Lutheran Quarterly,* May, 1977), by Dr. Fredrik Schiotz, former President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, of The American Lutheran Church, and of the Lutheran World Federation.

By far the most important issue raised by Dr. Schiotz in his article is that of the very nature of Lutheran churchmanship today. The upshot of Schiotz's argumentation is startling, if not to say shattering. For it means, to put it bluntly, that theological, doctrinal honesty is not particularly relevant in our ecumenical era, dominated by the will-to-union. What is at stake here, be it clearly understood, is not the personal ethics of Dr. Schiotz. He is obviously quite sincere in his belief that the supreme good of pan-Lutheran union demands and justifies the sort of policies he defends and advocates. The point rather is to address, and assess, the objective merit of his argumentation, which must carry considerable weight, given the author's eminently representative status in world Lutheranism.

Schiotz is miffed at Clifford Nelson's claim that he, Schiotz, made, within the short span of one decade, a complete "about face . . . with regard to inerrancy." What is astounding however is Schiotz's line of argument. He does not deny that in 1955 he publicly took the "old Lutheran" position on Scripture and inerrancy, or that in 1966 he was defending the opposite, "neo-Lutheran" view. But he explains that he had held the neo-Lutheran view all along, even while for the sake of peace he had been publicly proclaiming the "old Lutheran" view, which he did not believe! He suggests also that doctrinal candour is a luxury in which theological professors may indulge, but which administrators must sometimes forego. Here are his own words:

> In Dr. Nelson's discussion of Lutheran unity efforts, he is preeminently the theological professor. He follows the straight line of what he terms the "neo-Lutheran" view with regard to scripture. My position had to be that of an administrator. . . . I had to pay very careful attention to the thinking of our people. . . . In my own mind I did not conclude that Dr. Nelson's position was wrong theologically, but it became a question of timing. Since the constitution charged the president with the responsibility to watch over the peace of the church, timing was of the essence. I had not forgotten the debacle in 1948 when the convention was frightened and thoroughly rejected consideration of World Council of Churches membership. . . .
>
> In my speaking of the ULCA's attitude regarding the Word as "liberal" I was announcing the prevailing attitude of the Church Council, most of the pastors, and the cross-section of lay people in the congregations. My own attitude was represented by the United Testimony.

Such a defence is really more damaging than the original accusation. There is no disgrace in an honest change of mind. But for the first officer of a church-body to pretend to hold one doctrine while subverting it behind the scenes in favour of another, quite contradictory doctrine (Schiotz: "Thus, there was emerging in the church among the younger pastors a consensus that refused to settle for a fundamentalist interpretation of the meaning of inerrancy.") amounts surely to a complete abandonment of the ordinary and accepted canons of integrity.

To justify his dissimulation Dr. Schiotz appeals from the ALC's constitution, which teaches biblical inerrancy, to the United Testimony on Faith and Life, which deftly manages to create the impression of teaching inerrancy without actually doing so. Because the United Testimony was the earlier and basic document (1952), Schiotz argues, he was entitled to set aside (he calls it "interpret") the strict inerrancy language of the Constitution in favour of the loose language of the United Testimony. The argument is as tricky as it is false. In the first place, the strict inerrancy language of the ALC's Constitution goes back beyond the United Testimony to the even more basic Minneapolis Theses of 1925 and 1930. On Dr. Schiotz's own admission public opinion in the uniting churches was such in 1952 that the United Testimony would have been roundly rejected had it been openly presented and understood as a repudiation of the Minneapolis Theses' strict stand on inerrancy! And secondly, Dr. Schiotz himself concedes that Clifford Nelson's account of the rise of the "neo-Lutheran" view of Scripture is "substantially . . . accurate." If so, then Dr. Schiotz must know very well that the ALC's constitutional formulation on inerrancy, taken from the Minneapolis Theses, was deliberately designed to counter and rule out the ULCA view embraced by Schiotz, secretly at first and later in public. Why does he assume that the Constitution required the President "to watch over the peace of the church" but not to uphold its solemn confession of inerrancy?

What is alarming is that such pragmatic disdain of doctrine is accepted as perfectly normal in ever wider circles today. Nor is it merely tolerated as a regrettable administrative necessity. It is perceived rather as a positive virtue, *viz.*, "dealing pastorally"!

Now, of course, there is such a thing as pastoral tact and wisdom. No pastor worth his salt would normally accost a prospective convert with a discourse on predestination or a blistering attack on Freemasonry. Nathan used discretion to lead King David to repentance. Richard Wurmbrand once disarmed a morose atheist in a Rumanian Communist prison by saying, "Atheism is a sacred word to us Christians, for the first Christians were called atheists in ancient Rome!" There is obviously a vast gulf between the missionary largeness of heart of a good pastor and the petty, brittle rule-book mentality of the bureaucratic pedant. But taking into account the hierarchy of Christian truths or the state of mind of the person to whom they are to be applied, is one thing. It is quite another to resort to outright misrepresentation, or even to mislead whole church-bodies by playing fast and loose with the language and intent of solemn, public doctrinal definitions and pronouncements. Even among politicians it was until recently considered honourable to tender one's resignation if one's principles had changed or even if they had only fallen into disfavour.

The great crash in the Missouri Synod must stand as an awesome warning of what happens to the greasy sort of "pastoral dealing" if and when the lavish promissory notes of its inflated theological currency can no longer evade the demand for payment. Dr. Schiotz has chosen to describe the LC-MS New Orleans (1969) Convention as giving "evidence of a big city-like, ward political machine at work. What a jolt that was! For me such highly unevangelical action revealed that whoever was responsible for it was blind to the meaning of the Gospel. This was the natural Adam gone wild." On the contrary, New Orleans was basically the repudiation of a church-political establishment which had frittered away its credibility. After a generation of pussy-footing, people were sick and tired of all the touching speeches and all the "pastoral dealing." They were fed up with gutlessness dressed up as Gospel-sweetness. They had been deceived, manipulated, and exploited long enough. The day of reckoning had arrived, and all the heady, windy, and evasive neo-Lutheran rhetoric was weighed and found wanting. A chastened, sobered church demanded a return to basic honesty in theology and church practice.

Dr. Schiotz's apologia raises for American Lutherans in acute form the watershed issue posed by the old-Lutheran/neo-Lutheran conflict: that of theological integrity and credibility. No doubt Dr. Schiotz intended, for instance, to give a genuinely pastoral and evangelical speech to the assembled delegates at New Orleans. But when in the course of his emotional address he suggested that the ALC's United Testimony—which by then he was in the habit of taking in a neo-Lutheran sense—really took the same stand on inerrancy as the well-known Missourian conservative, Dr. Robert Preus (LC-MS *Proceedings*, 1969, p. 74), Dr. Schiotz was clearly transgressing the bounds of truth. No amount of personal goodwill and sincerity can remove from such tactics the stigma of disingenuousness. When the zeal for outward church-union becomes so all-consuming as to override dogma and confession, then the rule of Christ is replaced by the whims of men. Since objective standards and controls are thereby abolished, truth becomes indistinguishable from falsehood, pastoral leadership from political manipulation, and Christian unity from bureaucratic empire-building.

There is only one way out of this morass of nihilism, and that is unyielding insistence on the objective givens: the pure teaching of Christ's Gospel and the right administration of His holy Sacraments. Especially we pastors need daily to abjure the corrupting allurements of success-orientation and to shoulder faithfully the sacred yoke of our office as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Let us leave grinning ambiguities to the White Houses of this world.

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THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD, INC.

The opening words of the first constitution of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod remind us that our fathers in the faith intended that their synodical organization should be established and patterned after the model of the apostolic council described in Acts 15. A quick review of that council and its proceedings indicates that the apostles themselves recognized no discontinuity between their gathering in council in one place as the "whole Church" (v. 22) for the purpose of seeking God-pleasing decisions, and the fact that a congregation meeting in one place around the Word of God and the Sacraments is also the "whole Church." Granted, the history of ecclesiology has borne witness to the breakdown of this understanding of ecclesiastical continuity. The typically hierarchical viewpoint has spoken of the Church gathered as a local congregation as simply a "part" of the whole Church—with the Church-at-large as the "whole"; and the congregationalist point of view has preferred to recognize only the local congregation as a really valid representation of the "whole Church," with the larger gathering becoming a mere political phenomenon. Distinct from the excesses of both of these opinions, our synodical founders sought to recognize the ecclesiastical nature of both the local congregation and the organization and fellowship of the synod. Nothing less than this viewpoint does justice to the first apostolic council and its own ecclesiastical self-understanding. The Orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians share this same understanding of a synod as the Church Representative (*ecclesia representativa*), gathered for the purpose of discussing and deciding matters upon the basis of the Word of God. Such gatherings were in their days primarily ministerial in composition. The clergy were understood to have *ex officio*, as leaders of God's people (F.C.S.D.,X10), the authority of their expertise in Scriptural and theological matters. Provision was also made for the inclusion of knowledgeable laymen. Thus Hollazius states: "In councils, the teachers and delegates of the Church are assembled, to whom the power has been committed, by the entire communion of believers, of examining and deciding concerning the public interpretation of doctrine in doubtful and controverted points." Baier adds that laymen might be included, provided they are experienced and skilful in sacred matters, godly and peace-loving. Such gatherings were understood to possess an authority which is both *decretory* with reference to questions of proper procedure and the correction of abuses and *decisive* (though not in a juridical sense) with respect to the doctrines which are set down in Scripture.

When viewed from this perspective, the first - and tentative - proposals of the Task Force on Constitution, Bylaws, and Structure established by Synod's convention show themselves to be both thought-provoking and troublesome. What is being envisioned is nothing less than a complete body-transplant. Nothing of the Acts 15 model remains. One might go further and state almost categorically that one may no longer speak of synod in an ecclesiastical sense at all. In its place stands a new business corporation which happens to be in the "church business." It is a "servant structure" created by the congregations, after no particularly churchly model, to be the means by which the congregations implement their own longing for some measure of on-going cooperation in the specific areas of doxology, mutual encouragement and support in evangelistic efforts, and a suitable medium for the cross-fertilization of their creative pluralism. Ministers as a distinct group are *excluded* from primary involvement. Thus the inequity which has been suffered by school-teachers is corrected by disfranchising the clergy! An unspecified "professional worker" will now, together with a "layperson," represent each "precinct" of the new body.

The only apparent model for such a "holding company" is the modern, secular corporation. With these proposals the age of the ecclesiastical corporation is finally upon us. Such a corporation is not a Church in any sense of the term, and does not act like a Church. It is simply a business which formulates policies, examines market conditions, develops techniques and "strategies," trains a sales force, and markets a product. It is in every way a "sell-out" to a secular mentality—"There's no business like God's business!" Such a corporation, even one desiring nothing more than to do God service, will not speak in terms of Word and Sacrament, or the Holy Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, or the vocation of the Christian School-teacher. Instead, it will speak in nebulous terms about a variety of "professional workers" whose particular functions will be determined, no doubt, by the corporation and its member organizations from time to time.

What is involved here is no mere change in terminology, but an entirely new animal—the ecclesiological functionary. When one compares the statement of the objectives of the Synod in the new proposals with those found in the present constitution or its earlier versions, the radical shift in tone to the new corporate mentality becomes obvious. Once again we are shown that even a self-consciously "conservative" Christian body can be infatuated and misled by the secular world in which she is meant to stand as God's lonely outpost. While the Task Force is to be commended for its grave practicality, we would be better served searching the pages of the Book of Acts and the history of the Christian Church for more serviceable and appropriate ecclesiastical models of organization.

C. J. Evanson

ANOTHER TRANSLATION: ANOTHER DISASTER

In 1966 the American Bible Society published a new translation of the New Testament and called it *Today's English Version* (TEV), more commonly known as *Good News For Modern Man*. The basic text for the translation is *The Greek New Testament* published by the United Bible Society. To be sure, this contribution to the plethora of translations already on the market had its flaws. Yet it enjoyed a meteoric rise in sales compared to other versions. It is easy to read while maintaining a greater degree of accuracy than such popular paraphrases as *The Living Bible*. It is also cheap; a case of fifty paperback copies can be purchased for about twenty dollars. At that price, thousands of cartons have been purchased by congregations and distributed as one would hand out tracts or Bible study guides. *Good News* or portions thereof can, as a result, be found in most homes as well as in hotels, motels, airports, train stations, hospitals, nursing homes, church pews, and libraries.

Thus an eager market awaited the publication of the Old Testament translation. The American Bible Society tested the market well with early publication of *Psalms for Modern Man* (1970) and *Job for Modern Man* (1971). These booklets maintained TEV's readable format, its simple but effective illustrations, and its low price. And again they were widely distributed. There were some half-hearted protests over certain infidelities to the text and flippancy of language, but on the whole the mainstream of evangelicalism adopted TEV as its Bible for the people. Thus, some awaited the completion of the Old Testament translation with bated breath, even as one would await the parousia.

In 1976 it finally came. After the public had accepted TEV's New Testament and identified its presence with generally evangelical churches, the Old Testament was published. Yet TEV's Old Testament translation has proven to be a faithless version; it is faithless to the original languages, to its readers, and to basic hermeneutical principles. In the preface, the reader is informed:

> The basic text for the Old Testament is the Masoretic Text printed in *Biblia Hebracia* (3rd edition, 1937), edited by Rudolf Kittel . . . Where no Hebrew source yields a satisfactory meaning in the context, the translation has either followed one or more of the ancient versions (e.g. Greek, Syriac, Latin) or has adopted a reconstructed text (technically referred to as a conjectural emendation) based on scholarly consensus; such departures from the Hebrew are indicated in footnotes.[1]

To be sure, the monumental undertaking of translating the Old Testament is a task that must be approached with fear, awe, reverence, prayer, and much study. Luther notes,

> Translating is certainly not everybody's business, as the mad saints imagine. It requires a genuinely pious, faithful, diligent, God-fearing, experienced and practiced heart. Therefore I hold that a false Christian and a sectarian spirit is unable to give a faithful translation.[2]

The translator must use every source and manuscript available to him. He must work and rework his translation until he is satisfied that it represents the original as accurately as possible. This is no easy assignment, as Bernard Ramm notes:

> Nor is it easy to find words in English that closely match the word in the Hebrew or Greek text. Each word is a little pool of meanings. Here again it taxes the learning and judgment of the wisest scholars to decide out of the pool of meanings which is the meaning intended in a given sentence, and then to try to match it with some word in the English language which is itself a pool of meanings.[3]

It appears, however, that there are times when the translators of the TEV depart from their stated principles of textual criticism and their responsibilities as translators in favour of promoting a liberal theology and mentality.

One of the more glaring examples of this is witnessed in their translation of Gen. 6:1,2: "When mankind had spread all over the world, and girls were being born, some of the supernatural beings saw that these girls were beautiful, so they took the ones they liked." This rendering of the text brings to mind the mythologies of the ancient Near East, Greece, and Rome in which the gods come to earth to accommodate their hedonistic desires and copulate freely with human women. This is exactly the idea which the translators wish to convey!

According to liberal theology, this portion of Scripture and the following flood account is borrowed from the Babylonian "Gilgamesh Epic." In this Epic, moral confusion is the order of the day. Not even the gods can agree as to the necessity or justice of the flood according to their moral system. While sin is suggested as the cause, the flood descends on all people regardless of their righteousness or lack of it.[4] Historical Criticism holds that the first five verses of chapter six in Genesis is an attempt to improve on the rationale for having a flood:

> The writer (J) uses this ancient story not only to explain the increasing lawlessness and violence of mankind which leads to divine judgment upon the world by the flood, but he is also probably indicating by the illicit marriage of supernatural creatures with human beings that evil is cosmic in nature, and therefore far more sinister than any mere defect in human nature.[5]

This interpretation contradicts the clear testimony of Scripture which teaches the doctrines of original sin and monotheism.

Neither is there any textual or contextual evidence to support the rendering "supernatural beings." The phrase *bene elohim* does have two possible meanings: (a.) sons of God in reference to human beings who worship and serve the living God; see Deut. 32:5; Ps. 73:15; and Hos. 1:10 (Leupold identifies these "sons of God" more specifically as the tribe of the Sethites[6]); (b.) sons of God in reference to the angels; see Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7 and Dan. 3:25; also *bene 'elim*, "sons of the Mighty," Ps. 29:1 and 89:7. The latter possibility is ruled out by the context just as the former is attested to by the context. In any case, the textual evidence for producing the phrase "supernatural beings" is nil; and if the Hebrew appears to be vague, the Septuagint leaves no doubt (*huioi tou theou*). Luther is certain who these "sons of God" were:

> The true meaning of the passage is that Moses designates as sons of God those people who had the promise of the blessed seed. It is a term of the New Testament and designates the believers who call God Father and whom God, in turn, calls sons. The Flood came, not because the Cainite race had become corrupt, but because the race of the righteous who had believed God, obeyed His Word, and observed true worship had fallen into idolatry, disobedience of parents, sensual pleasures, and the practice of oppression.[7]

Gen. 6:1,2 is only one of many distortions of the text which betrays liberal dogma in the TEV. Witness, for example, Job 19:25: "I know that there is someone in heaven who will come at last to my defense." Perhaps, in the interest of consistency, TEV would have done well to eliminate every instance of the word "Redeemer" and replace it with the word "someone." Or again, Is. 7:14: "Well then, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: a young woman who is pregnant will have a son and will name him 'Immanuel.' " A footnote to this verse instructs the reader that the Septuagint, which translates the Hebrew word *almah* as *parthenos* ("virgin"), was produced five hundred years after the prophecy and is therefore inaccurate. One cannot help but marvel, then, at the accuracy of TEV, which was produced some 2,700 years after the prophecy.

The translators also seem to think that it is part of their task to instruct the reader in liberal theology. At the beginning of every Old Testament book, there is a brief introductory section. The introduction to the Book of Isaiah holds forth the theory of the multiple authorship of the book without acknowledging the possibility of one author for all sixty-six chapters. At the end of the preface, the translators state;

> It is with the prayer that the Lord of the Scriptures will be pleased to use this translation for his soveriegn purpose that the United Bible Societies has now published *The Bible in Today's English.* And to Christ be the glory forever and ever![8]

A good prayer indeed. But what Scriptures is the Lord pleased to use? When the "Scriptures" become so distorted that the Word of God becomes the word of men, is the Lord pleased to use them? It is obvious that this translation emerges from the neo-orthodox tradition where any word has the potential of being the Word. For the sake of honesty and "good churchmanship," this should have been stated in the preface. But it has not been stated. Thus it is necessary to add the warning: "Let the buyer beware!"

1 *Good News Bible,* (Toronto: Canadian Bible Society, 1976), Preface.
2 Plass (ed.), *What Luther Says,* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), I, p. 105.
3 Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation,* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), p. 5.
4 Tablet XI, line 179: "On the sinner lay his sin; on the transgressor lay his transgression!" W. H. McNeill and J. W. Sedlar (eds.), *The Origins of Civilization* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 148.
5 Charles T. Fritsch, *The Layman's Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 40.
6 H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis,* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), I, p. 250.
7 Jaraslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works,* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960) II, p. 12.
8 *Good News Bible, op. cit.* Preface.

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SHOULD CHILDREN GO TO THE COMMUNION RAIL FOR A BLESSING?

Worship customs in connection with the celebration of Holy Communion are not identical in every Lutheran congregation, and there should be no attempt to achieve absolute liturgical uniformity. Churches with the same confession, however, will tend towards a certain sameness. Certain customs have grown up in connection with certain beliefs. Lutherans, for example, kneel at the altar rail instead of standing as a confession of their faith that Christ's body and blood are really present in the Sacrament of the Altar. Certainly there is no prohibition against standing, and in certain situations standing is preferable. Those who are ill or infirm receive the Sacrament standing, sitting, or lying down flat on their backs. Yet kneeling became a confessional sign against the Reformed who prohibited kneeling and insisted on standing or sitting in order to indicate their denial of the presence of Christ's body and blood. Thus, for Lutherans, kneeling at the reception of the Sacrament is not a mere custom without meaning, but a sincere confession of belief in the real presence.

In recent years the practice of children coming along with their parents to the altar rail at the distribution of the Sacrament has grown in popularity. A generation ago children were not seen at the altar rail. Previously the children were left in the pew with another adult, or the parents took turns in going up to the altar. Today it is quite common for parents to go to the altar with their children in their arms to receive the Sacrament. Quite common, too, is the practice of older children walking along with their parents to the altar rail, but not receiving the Sacrament. In some cases, indeed, unconfirmed children, unaccompanied by adults, go with the communicants to the altar rail. In some churches all these children receive a blessing from the pastor by the imposition of hands. There seems to have been a gradual development from the bringing of infants to the altar by the parent as a matter of convenience to the final practice of blessing unconfirmed children of all ages at the altar. The encouraging of children to go up to the altar rail at the celebration of the Sacrament may have resulted from the same general school of thought that encouraged reception of the Sacrament by children at seven or eight years of age, before the time of confirmation.

Liturgical uniformity for its own sake is an unacceptable goal in the Christian Church. Doctrinal diversity has frequently been covered up by liturgical uniformity. Yet altering the liturgy has always been an effective method of introducing new doctrines into the church. Since liturgy is a very sensitive issue in the church from both practical and doctrinal points of view, the church must take time to reconfirm the doctrinal roots behind time-honored customs, like kneeling for the reception of the Sacrament, and to scrutinize new, though popular, practices in our churches, like bringing children to the altar during the distribution of the Sacrament.

Consideration of the place of children at the altar rail should not get muddled up with a discussion of who will sit with the infants while the parents attend Communion. The obvious answer is that each parent may go separately, or a nearby adult may serve as a five-minute babysitter. The Holy Communion is the celebration of union with Christ and not of marital and familial solidarity. The real question is this: "Do children receive any extra benefit by going with their parents to the altar rail at the time of the distribution of the Sacrament?"

We are now getting into an area where practical and doctrinal questions demand equal space and at times can hardly be separated. Some will contend that a child who accompanies the parent to the altar will more likely be faithful in his reception of the Sacrament later in life. This is an opinion for which there is no solid evidence; at best it is only a pious and perhaps wishful opinion. It could be argued that remaining in the pew and observing from several feet or yards away is an equally, or even more effective, learning device than going to the altar. If the purpose is to inculcate in the children a rote, unthinking practice, then the custom really already stands condemned. If the approach of the children to the altar rail is chiefly an educational device, then another arrangement could readily be made. A place for the children in the front of the nave or in the sanctuary itself could be found so that they could watch more closely, without having them kneel at the altar with the communicants.

Lurking behind the custom of inviting unconfirmed children to the altar rail there seems to be some fuzzy thinking about the Sacrament. Those who observe this practice could easily come to the conclusion that proximity to the Sacrament assures a certain advantage. Thus, a child at the altar rail has a spiritual advantage that the child in the pew does not have. This view would have more in common with a Roman Catholic understanding of the Sacrament than a Lutheran one. A worship service in the Roman Church fast falling out of popularity is the Evening Benediction, in which the congregation is blessed by the lifting up of the Sacrament but does not participate in it. Similar is the *Corpus Christi* holiday on which the consecrated Sacrament is paraded through the streets for adoration and the receipt of a blessing. Lutherans, whose respect for the Sacrament is unmatched, have objected to attaching any blessing to the Sacrament which is not derived from the bodily eating and drinking. The words spoken in connection with the Sacrament convey the forgiveness of sins, to be sure, even where no reception takes place. But the benefit of these words is not derived from the proximity to the Sacrament. The words spoken during the celebration of the Sacrament benefit everyone present, child or adult, at the altar rail or in the pew. These words are appropriated by all who are penitent. The believing communicant himself benefits from these words before, during, and after he receives the body and blood of Christ. It must be made clear that a child at the altar rail receives no special blessing because of his proximity to the Sacrament. Such a view is completely un-Lutheran. Behind such thinking lies the infused grace concept of Roman Catholicism, by which grace is a substance to be organically or substantively communicated instead of being, as Lutherans hold, God's forgiving attitude on account of Christ.

In some churches the child receives a special laying on of the pastor's hands during the distribution of the Sacrament. The laying on of hands can be a very effective image in certain cases and occurs in Scripture. The laying on of hands symbolizes the direct applicability of God's word to the individual. In many German Lutheran churches the custom is properly retained in absolution, and in our churches it is used in focusing certain Biblical admonitions on those who are being inducted into certain offices of responsibility, e.g., pastor, teacher, president, etc. The exact purpose of laying hands on the non-communicant children during the distribution of the Sacrament is somewhat elusive. No one has suggested that they are being inducted into an office. Nor is it possible to associate the action with the general absolution pronounced earlier in the service. Could it be that for some the child is, through the laying on of the pastor's hands, receiving the benefit of the Sacrament - the forgiveness of sins - without receiving the Sacrament? Thus, one who is too young to receive the Sacrament of the Altar receives instead a kind of *Ersatzsakrament* (substitute sacrament). Some might see a precedent in Jesus' own blessing of the children (Matthew 19:13-15), where he assures them of a place in God's kingdom with all of its benefits. The orthodox church, however, has never deduced from this pericope a separate sacrament of blessing children by laying hands on them. This pericope has been, rather, one source of the church's commitment to infant baptism. The Lord's promise of the inclusion of children in the benefits of His death and resurrection is fulfilled in their being baptized as He commanded. In the Sacrament of Baptism, the laying on of hands symbolizes a direct word of God to the child and his specific inclusion in God's kingdom because of the Lord's promises.

A certain amount of latitude, then, is allowed in church customs, but explanations for all practices should be available. As the number of children going up to the altar rail without receiving the Sacrament seems to be increasing, the time is ripe for someone to provide a thorough rationale for the innovation on the basis of the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the Lutheran tradition, especially with respect to the Sacrament of the Altar. The issue is a delicate one because children are involved, but it is one which requires a theological rationale. The necessity to provide a theological explanation for any liturgical custom cannot be pushed away by mere sentimentalism. Sentimentalism can never pose as a legitimate theological answer to any question.

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