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Fasting and Bodily Preparation — A Fine Outward Training

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THE statement, "Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training,"¹ was used by Luther with immediate reference to preparation for Holy Communion. However, to understand this statement in its proper perspective, we need to consider the purpose of fasting as it appears in the Scriptures and in the worship of the church. This paper is an attempt to present such a survey with conclusions as to the specific purposes and benefits of Eucharistic fasting.

I

FASTING IN BIBLICAL TIMES

Only one fast was commanded by the Law of Moses, that of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-34). This is specifically called a "fast" in Acts 27:9. Later four fasts were observed in commemoration of the dark days of the fall of Jerusalem.² These are referred to in Zech. 8:19: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth. . . ." The conditions that gave rise to these fasts are described in Jeremiah 41 and 52. In addition fasts were undertaken by public prescription in seasons of drought or public calamity (Judg. 20:26; 2 Chron. 20:3; Joel 1:13 f.; 2:12, 15). Fasting was also done on an individual and voluntary basis from time to time.³

In pre-exilic days fasting probably meant total abstinence from food.⁴ However, in individual instances prior to this period, and certainly afterwards, it was a partial abstinence.⁵

¹ *Concordia Triglotta*, The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, Small Catechism, p. 557.

² Geo. B. Eager, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, I, 24, 25.

³ The Nazarites: Num. 6:2, 3, 13; Judg. 13:5; 1 Sam. 1:11; Lam. 4:7; Amos 2:11.

⁴ Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, p. 79.

⁵ Daniel is an illustration of partial fasting. Here it meant abstinence from delicacies, meat, and wine. (Dan. 10:3)

The specific motivations for fasting differ. Fasting was frequently undertaken in times of great distress. Hannah fasted because of her grief in not having a son (1 Sam. 1:4-7). Jonathan fasted because of his "fierce anger" as the result of his father's attitude toward David (1 Sam. 20:34). Ahab fasted in his disappointment that Naboth refused to sell him his vineyard (1 Kings 21:4). Grief was a frequent cause for fasting. David's fasting at the death of Abner is an example (2 Sam. 3:35). David's action in fasting after Bathsheba's first child was born is peculiar in that he continued the fast only as long as the stricken child was alive and discontinued the fast when the child died. His servants commented on this unusual procedure, saying: "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." David's reply shows that he sought the pity of God by his fasting. He said: "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:21-23). Associated with fasting either in times of national or individual distress there was frequently confession of sin as evidence of penitence. T. Lewis suggests that since God communicated with the ancients through dreams, and since one fasted while sleeping, it was inferred "that fasting might fit the person to receive those communications from the world of spirits." He cites the case of Daniel as an instance of this.⁶ This, however, is highly unlikely.

In New Testament times it is obvious that the Pharisees regarded fasting as a work of merit (Luke 18:12). However, this was an abuse that was apparent already in the Old Testament. Isaiah rebuked the people of his day for their cold and formal fasts and calls upon them to accompany their fasting with a humble spirit and righteous living (Is. 58:3-12). It was customary for the Pharisees to fast two days each week, Mondays and Thursdays, because Moses was believed to have gone up to Mount Sinai on the fifth day of the week and to have come down on the second (Eager, p. 25). Individuals seem to have been in the habit of imposing extra fasts

⁶ Dan. 10:2. T. Lewis, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, II, 1099.

upon themselves, as did Anna (Luke 2:37). The disciples of John the Baptist set considerable store by fasting.

Jesus spoke of fasting only twice. In Matt. 6:1-18 He condemned the ostentatious practices of the Pharisees. "He, however, assumes that His own disciples would fast, just as He assumed that they would pray; but He enjoined them to fast 'in secret,' so that men would not know of it: such fasting would have its reward" (Richardson, p. 80). In Matt. 9:14-17 and its parallels He replied to a question put by the disciples of John and of the Pharisees. Here He does not enjoin fasting.

He says fasting, as a recognized form of mourning, would be inconsistent with the joy which the "sons of the bridechamber" naturally feel while "the bridegroom is with them." But he adds, suggesting the true reason for fasting, that the days of bereavement will come, and then the outward expression of sorrow will be appropriate. Here, as in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sanctions fasting, without enjoining it, as a form through which emotion may spontaneously seek expression. His teaching on the subject may be summarized in the one word *subordination*. (Eager, p. 26)

Richardson considers the reference to the inappropriateness of fasting while the bridegroom is present as applying to the Messianic Age. He adds:

The interpretation of the next verse, however, is the key-problem in determining our Lord's attitude towards fasting in the Christian Church: "The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast" (Mark 2:20). If we regard this saying as historical, then it must be supposed that Jesus enjoined the practice of fasting; but some scholars have held that it has been read back into the narrative in order to justify the practice of observing regular fasts which had already arisen in the church for which St. Mark wrote. (Richardson, p. 80)

We certainly must consider this statement, which occurs in all three Gospels, to be genuinely historical. Yet the conclusion that Jesus here enjoins fasting is unwarranted. The fasting that would follow His departure could well be understood as a natural and voluntary expression of emotion.

It is well to note that the alleged words of Jesus "But this kind goeth not out save by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21) is not contained in some MSS. In Mark 9:29 the words "and fasting" are

omitted in some MSS. Geo. B. Eager says that these words "are corruptions of the text" (p. 26). Alan Richardson says they "are probably not a part of the original text" (p. 80). The Revised Standard Version places these words into a footnote. However, on the basis of the evidence for and against it would be difficult to say for certain that they are not a part of the actual text.

Some have suggested that Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness, His abstinence from marriage, and His voluntary poverty make Him a founder and example of asceticism. But the rest of His life certainly does not substantiate this. He attended a marriage feast, enjoyed domestic life at Bethany, and accepted the hospitality of many. He was even accused of being a "gluttonous man and a wine-bibber" (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34). Jesus certainly did advocate self-discipline and self-denial for the sake of the kingdom of God. The Kingdom was always to be sought before personal need or convenience. (Matt. 6:33; 13:44-46; 16:24 f. and parallels; 19:21; Mark 9:43-47; 10:21; Luke 9:59 f.; 14:26, 33)

The apostles fasted at times (Acts. 13:2; 14:23). In the former passage it was associated with prayer and the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas prior to their first missionary journey. In the latter it is again associated with prayer and the appointing of elders for the newly formed congregations of Asia Minor. Paul mentions his own fastings, though these may have been entirely involuntary.⁷ Paul's admonitions in Col. 2:16-23 and 1 Tim. 4:1-3 are that care must be exercised that various forms of abstinence and external performances are not made a matter of legislation or grounds for spiritual pride. At the same time he frequently advocates that Christians exercise watchfulness, patience, sobriety, and self-control.

II

FASTING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The earliest regular fast observed by all Christians, Gentile as well as Jewish, is the paschal fast, immediately before Easter Sunday. St. Irenaeus (A. D. 200) speaks of it as "of long standing." Eusebius claimed that release from Easter Sunday fasting has apos-

⁷ 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27. The RSV does not use the translation "fastings" in these passages as does the AV.

tolitic tradition.⁸ The Pascha was a commemoration of the redemption, including the Passion and the resurrection. Following the Jewish custom, the Lord's Day began at 6 P. M. Saturday. But since Jesus rose from the dead early Sunday morning, Christians fasted until the Eucharist, which was celebrated at about 3 A. M.

Edward T. Horn reports that

as late as the early third century the important fast was still restricted to Saturday, according to the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, though Friday was sometimes fasted. By the middle of the century in Syria, according to the *Didascalia*, the fast had been extended to six days. In other places, too, the pre-Pascha fast was gradually extended, first to forty hours (the time our Lord was believed to have spent in the sepulchre), then to six days before Easter.⁹

It was from the Pascha that the season of Lent developed. One of the early features of the services of the Pascha was the Baptism of candidates on Saturday night. At that time the church was a *religio illicita* and members were scrutinized carefully and subjected to a prolonged period of probation. This normally terminated with Baptism at Easter. The final period was the most rigorous. Candidates were required to fast in preparation and to attend catechetical lectures and periodic examinations. After the Edict of Toleration in 313 and the legalizing of Christianity these disciplines were relaxed, and what had been a period of preparation for Baptism became a general period of preparation for all Christians. Dom Gregory Dix says:

Thus Lent in the form we know does not originate as an historical commemoration of our Lord's fast in the wilderness or even as a preparation for Holy Week and Easter, but as a private initiative of the devout laity in taking it upon themselves to share the solemn preparation of the catechumens for the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. It was the fact that these were normally conferred at the paschal vigil which in the end made of Lent a preparation for Easter. . . . When the whole world was becoming nominally Christian there was a great wholesomeness about this annual requirement of a season of serious self-discipline for Christian reasons, which should cover every aspect of social life — as it soon

⁸ Kenneth D. Mackenzie, *The Catholic Rule of Life*, p. 70.

⁹ Edward T. Horn, *The Christian Year*, III, 100.

came to do. It reminded the careless and the sinful Christian, as insistently as it did the devout, of the claims of the Christian standard: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."¹⁰

Containing, as it did, 36 days of fasting, Lent was thought to represent the "tithe" of the 365 days of the year — a tithe due the Lord in fasting and penance. The addition of the four days from Ash Wednesday to the First Sunday in Lent was made at the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century. In the Middle Ages, Lent was marked visibly by the hanging of the Lenten veil, sometimes called the "hunger veil" because of the fast, between the nave and the choir of the churches. It was a necessary reminder to the common man who had no calendar. It was drawn aside on Sundays to indicate that they were not a part of the fast. (Horn, pp. 102 to 104)

Wednesday and Friday were widely observed as days of fasting already in the second and third centuries. The choice of the days distinguished these fasts from those of the Jews.¹¹ This custom is mentioned in the *Didache*, and by Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen. These days were known as "stations." The fast on these occasions, according to Tertullian, was broken at 3 P.M. "They were universal by the end of the 4th century, and continued into the middle ages. The Wednesday fast slowly faded out."¹² In the West it was a frequent custom to continue the Friday fast on to Saturday. This may have arisen as an "echo of Holy Saturday" or a sacred association with the Sabbath after the Judaizing danger was past.

Fasting was also observed on Ember Days. These are of Roman origin.

It is possible that they may be an instance of the wisdom of the early Church in instituting a religious observance at seasons when a pagan ceremony was already observed. This would account for three of the four seasons. . . . Duchesne considers that they are simply the original fasts of Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday ob-

¹⁰ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, pp. 356 f.

¹¹ Erwin L. Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, p. 62.

¹² Mackenzie, pp. 71 f. Cf. also L. Duchesne, *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution*, p. 229.

served four times in the year with special strictness—i. e., as complete fasts rather than half-fasts. (Mackenzie, p. 72)

Horn says that they originated in Rome possibly as early as the third century and consisted of the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following Pentecost, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Sept. 14), and St. Lucy (Dec. 13). Later there was added the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after the First Sunday in Lent. "The three original embertides were undoubtedly Christian fasts connected with agriculture and the fruits of the earth and had some of the same characteristics as the Rogation Days" (Dix, p. 343). They seem to have been instituted as a deliberate counterobservance to the license of the pagan harvest festivals.

Under Pope Gelasius I (492—496), however, this early agrarian character was replaced by an association of the four seasons with the ordination of the clergy, an association retained in the Roman Catholic church to the present, though the days are still primarily days of fasting, penitence and prayer. (Horn, pp. 215 f.)

Still another occasion for fasting were the vigils. Originally the meaning of a vigil is an all-night watch.

In the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic Church such a watch was observed . . . for part of every Saturday night. But the vigil gradually merged itself in that of Matins, which was the night office of the devout. The true vigilary note soon came to be confined to such great occasions as the vigils of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. To these were soon added the Ember Saturdays. (Mackenzie, p. 77)

During the sixth century undesirable features attended the vigils, especially when in homes, and the vigilary Mass was celebrated in the evening. For communicants this automatically transformed the day into a fast day.

As time went on, all the chief feasts came to be provided with "vigils"; but the term had come to mean simply a fast day in preparation for a feast. This arrangement, however, is purely Western. The only vigil in the East is that of Holy Saturday. (Mackenzie, pp. 77 f.)

Other times for fasting were the days of the Litanies (*Litaniae Miores* on April 25 and *Litaniae Miores* of the Rogation Days),

and at some times and places, the season of Advent. (Mackenzie, p. 79)

As to the nature of this fasting it is to be noted that Lent was never a period of complete abstinence from food such as marked the paschal fast.

It must also be remembered that at the beginning of our era the universal time for the principal meal of the day was about noon. Lighter refreshment would be taken in the evening. The essence of fasting was therefore the deferring of the principal meal, so that no further refreshment was needed until the next day. (Mackenzie, p. 80)

III

CURRENT TEACHING ON FASTING IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Roman Catholic Church still enjoins fasting. However, in many instances it is greatly relaxed and a very tolerable experience. Father Connell's *New Revised Baltimore Catechism* defines a fast day as follows:

A fast day is a day on which only one full meal is allowed, but in the morning and evening some food may be taken, the quantity and quality of which are determined by approved local custom. (a) The one full meal may be taken either at noontime or in the evening. At this meal only meat may be taken. (b) To take liquid does not break one's fast, provided it is not equivalent to food. Malted milk or cream, for example, is equivalent to food. (III, 166)

With respect to the persons obliged to observe fast days the same author says:

All baptized persons between the ages of twenty-one and fifty-nine are obliged to observe the fast days of the Church, unless they are excused or dispensed. . . . The sick and those who do extremely hard labor are excused from fasting. A person who is in doubt regarding the obligation to fast should consult a priest. (P. 166)

A distinction is made between fasting and abstinence. In defining abstinence Father Connell says: "A day of abstinence is a day on which we are not allowed the use of meat." (P. 166)

Those obliged to practice abstinence are:

All baptized persons seven years of age or over who have attained

the use of reason are obliged to observe the abstinence days of the Church, unless they are excused or dispensed. (P. 166)

The reason for the command of the church to fast and to abstain is stated as follows:

The Church commands us to fast and to abstain in order that we may control the desires of the flesh, raise our minds more freely to God, and make satisfaction for sin. (P. 167)

In the United States the days of fast and abstinence are the following:

The days of fast are the weekdays of Lent, Ember Days, the Vigils of Pentecost, the Assumption, All Saints and Christmas.

Days of complete abstinence are Fridays, Ash Wednesday, the Vigils of the Assumption and Christmas, and Holy Saturday morning.

Days of partial abstinence are Ember Wednesdays, Ember Saturdays and the Vigils of Pentecost and All Saints.

The Ember Days are twelve in number, three in each season, namely, the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after December 13; after the first Sunday of Lent; after Pentecost; and after September 14. (P. 167)

IV

THE POSITION OF LUTHER AND THE LUTHERAN SYMBOLS ON FASTING

Commenting on Jesus' criticism of the ostentatious fasting of the Pharisees (Matt. 6:16-18), Luther says:

It is not His intention to reject or despise fasting in itself, any more than He rejects almsgiving and praying. Rather He is supporting these practices and teaching their proper use. In the same way it is His intention to restore proper fasting, to have it rightly used and properly understood, as any good work should be.¹³

Luther denounces the fasting of the papacy for two reasons. First, it was so commonly made a matter of pretense. He writes:

How can I call it a fast if someone prepares lunch of expensive fish, with the choicest spices, more and better than for two or three other meals, and washes it down with the strongest drink, and spends an hour or three at filling his belly till it is stuffed?

¹³ *Luther's Works*, American edition, 21, 156 f. Hereafter referred to as AE.

Yet that was the usual thing and a minor thing even among the very strictest monks. (AE, 21, p. 157)

Secondly, when it was used as a means of seeking merits before God it met with his fierce condemnation. With reference to this he writes: "That is what I call fasting in the name of all the devils, hitting Christ in the mouth and trampling Him underfoot." (AE, 21, p. 158)

There are two kinds of fasts which Luther considered "good and commendable." The one a secular or civil fast ordered by the government to conserve food. "This would be a good and useful ordinance for the country, so that everything is not gobbled up as it is now, until finally hard times come and nothing is available" (AE, 21, p. 159). The other "a general spiritual fast." These might take the form of a few days of fasting before Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. This would serve as an outward discipline and help the simple to keep track of the seasons in commemoration of the principal events and deeds of Christ. "In this sense," he says, "I would be willing to condone fasts on every Friday evening throughout the year, setting it aside as a distinctive day." However, a condition he would attach to either of these is that "it had been agreed upon harmoniously beforehand." (AE, 21, pp. 159 f.)

Luther also discusses what he means by real fasting. He regards abstaining from food as but the smallest part of it. He says:

True fasting consists in the disciplining and restraining of your body, which pertains not only to eating, drinking, and sleeping, but also to your leisure, your pleasure, and to everything that may delight your body or that you do to provide for it and take care of it. To fast means to refrain and hold back from all such things, and to do so only as a means of curbing and humbling the flesh. This is how Scripture enjoins fasting, calling it "afflicting the soul" (Lev. 16:29), "afflicting the body," and the like, so that it stays away from pleasure, good times, and fun. Such was the fasting of the ancient fathers. (AE, 21, p. 160)

He also says that the type and the severity of fasting ought always to be left as an individual matter, varying with one's physical capacities and the amount of curbing that passions of the flesh require. It ought also to be continual, if necessary (AE, 21, pp. 161 f.). See also Large Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar, par. 37.

Luther writes:

But above all, you must see to it that you are already pious and a true Christian and that you are not planning to render God a service by this fasting. Your service to God must be only faith in Christ and love to your neighbor, simply doing what is required of you. If this is not your situation, then you would do better to leave fasting alone. The only purpose of fasting is to discipline the body by outwardly cutting off both lust and the opportunity for lust, the same thing that faith does inwardly in the heart. (AE, 21, p. 162)

It is in this frame of reference that we must view Luther's statement, "Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training."

The Augsburg Confession and the Apology both recommend a proper kind of fasting, namely, that which serves as an external discipline and is not done with the thought of meriting grace or of making satisfaction for sin. Nor are prescribed fasts to be made a matter of conscience. The Augsburg Confession says:

Moreover, they teach that every Christian ought to train and subdue himself with bodily restraints, or bodily exercises and labors, that neither satiety nor slothfulness tempt him to sin, but not that we may merit grace or make satisfaction for sins by such exercises. And such external discipline ought to be urged at all times, not only on a few and set days. So Christ commands, Luke 21, 34: *Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting*; also Matt. 17, 21: *This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*. Paul also says, 1 Cor. 9, 27: *I keep under my body and bring it into subjection*. Here he clearly shows that he was keeping under his body, not to merit forgiveness of sins by that discipline, but to have his body in subjection and fitted for spiritual things, and for the discharge of duty according to his calling. Therefore we do not condemn fasting in itself, but the traditions which prescribe certain days and certain meats, with peril of conscience, as though such works were a necessary service.¹⁴

With the above understanding of "true fastings," the Apology teaches that they have God's command. "And true prayers, true

¹⁴ Art. XXVII, 33—39, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 75. The Apology, Art. XV, 45 ff., *Conc. Trigl.*, pp. 327—329, takes up the same passages. It stresses that such discipline "ought to be perpetual because it has the perpetual command of God."

alms, true fastings, have God's command; and where they have God's command, they cannot without sin be omitted."¹⁵

The Apology also points out that fastings become objectionable when human reason makes of them a means of justification. "Then human reason judges also of bodily exercises, of fasts; although the end of these is to restrain the flesh, reason falsely adds that they are services which justify."¹⁶

V

EUCCHARISTIC FASTING

A. G. Hebert, an Anglican author, says that the fast before Communion has been the rule of the universal church ever since the second century.¹⁷ Brilioth claims there is evidence for this custom from the third century onwards and cites Tertullian as the first actual testimony. He quotes Tertullian (*Ad uxorem*, ii. 5) as saying: "The heathen husband may wonder what it is that his Christian wife receives before taking any other food." He then says that in the following century it seems to have become a rule.¹⁸ Hebert refers to a statement by St. Augustine in the *Epistle to Januarius* as "the classical statement of the matter." The quotation is:

Though at the Last Supper the Apostles were not fasting, yet it has seemed good to the Holy Ghost that in honour of so great a sacrament the Body of the Lord should enter the mouth of a Christian before other food, and for this reason this custom is observed throughout the whole world. (Hebert, pp. 23 f.)

¹⁵ Apology, Art. VI, 42, *Conc. Trigl.*, p. 294.

¹⁶ Apology, Art. XV, 24, *Conc. Trigl.*, p. 321. Although Article X of the Formula of Concord, "Of Ecclesiastical Customs That Are Called *Adiaphora* or Things Indifferent," does not explicitly mention fasting, the literature of the controversy that the article was designed to settle described fasting and abstinence, "as long as they take place for the sake of prayer or some other Christian exercise," as private *adiaphora*; see footnote 2 to par. 8, Art. X, Solid Declaration, Formula of Concord, in Hans Lietzmann (ed.), *Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, herausgegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augburger Konfession 1930*, 2d edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1952), p. 1,056. A survey of Reformation practice — Lutheran as well as Calvinist and Anglican — is provided in W. K. Lowther Clarke and Charles Harris (eds.), *Liturgy and Worship* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1932), pp. 571—574.

¹⁷ A. G. Hebert, *The Parish Communion*, p. 23.

¹⁸ Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice Evangelical and Catholic*, pp. 67 f.

It is acknowledged that there is no clear answer to the question how the nonfasting Communion of the Apostles at the Last Supper became a fasting Communion. St. Augustine is said to have believed that it was included among St. Paul's later instructions spoken of in 1 Cor. 11:34; "The rest I will set in order when I come." Hebert feels that the "Vigil Service" may contain the answer. He calls attention to the fact that at Troas St. Paul celebrated the agape and then after midnight and at some time before dawn celebrated the Eucharist, and that the Christians in Bithynia in the time of Pliny celebrated the Eucharist before dawn. Hebert says: "Certain it is that from the second century onwards the rule is so universal that every real or apparent exception requires special explanation." (Pp. 24 f.)

Eucharistic fasting continues in the Roman Catholic Church to this day. Father Connell says in the *New Revised Baltimore Catechism*:

To receive Holy Communion worthily it is necessary to be free from mortal sin, to have a right intention, and to be fasting from midnight unless for a good reason one has obtained permission from a confessor to take medicine or liquid nourishment, or unless one receives Holy Communion at an evening Mass. (P. 214)

Persons who receive Holy Communion at an evening Mass must fast from solid food for three hours, and from liquids (except water) for one hour, before Holy Communion. They must abstain from all alcoholic beverages from midnight, except at meals where they may take beer or wine. (P. 216)

According to Brilioth, Luther regarded the usual manner of preparation for Communion as being that of prayer and fasting, but declared that it should not be made a new law. The communicant must be sober. He should not come overfull of food and drink. But "the true preparation is . . . a soul beset by sin, death, temptation, hungering and thirsting for penance and strength." Brilioth also says with respect to the practice of Luther and the people of his day:

The formal rule of the fast before communion had been set aside by Luther in the *Formula*, but the value of the fast, as a voluntary practice, was far from being ignored; and the observance of it was made easier by the fact that the "high mass" was normally celebrated at 8 A. M. or even earlier. (Pp. 119, 128)

In speaking of the Anglican Church Hebert explains that fasting was always the rule and the Prayer Book does not specifically enjoin the practice because its compilers "took it for granted" (p. 26). Brilioth says that it seems to have been regularly observed at least for the greater part of the 18th century and lingered on into the 19th century when it was revived by the Oxford Movement. He quotes "The Pious Country Parishioner" of 1747 as follows:

If your constitution be weak, or any great inconvenience come from your fasting the morning you receive, use your pleasure; but if you are strong and healthy, 'tis best to abstain from breakfast: for then, your thoughts will be more fixed; and you will gain more time to yourself, and the consecrated Bread will be, as it deserves, your first Food. (P. 210)

The following three reasons recommending the practice of Eucharistic fasting are outlined by A. G. Hebert. (1) The priority of the spiritual over the physical and the importance of spiritual discipline. "Let that which is spiritual come first, and let the body's demand for food be kept waiting." The Lord's temptation in the wilderness is cited as an example of this.

So great an act as the receiving of Holy Communion must if possible be the first act of the day, and all that precedes it be as far as possible a preparation for it. It comes first that thereby the rest of the day may be sanctified, just as the Lord's Day is the first day of the week, for the sanctification of the whole week. (Hebert, pp. 27 f.)

(2) The body as well as the soul needs to have its part in the preparation for Holy Communion, "since it is not the soul only, but the whole man that is redeemed to God." For the simple folk it also acts as a bond with the learned. (3) "It is a safeguard against any light estimate of the act of Communion, and is in itself a real, if elementary, act of devotion." (Hebert, p. 29)

Luther D. Reed writes:

Fasting before reception has the sanction of early and universal usage. This first developed as a matter of reverence. Most Protestants today give little thought to this ancient Christian custom, but those who in different communions do observe it find spiritual values in the discipline.¹⁹

¹⁹ Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 350.

That "fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training" needs renewed emphasis in our day, when comfort, casualness, easy living, and self-indulgence are fostered by the world as the greatest good. This spirit has undoubtedly affected the people of the church to a large extent and has resulted in an impoverished spiritual life of the individual member and the church corporate. One of the urgent messages for our day must be a call to self-denial and self-discipline on the part of the members of the church. It is in this area that "true fasting" could be of real value.

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