
The Abiding Word

The
ABIDING
WORD

AN ANTHOLOGY OF DOCTRINAL
ESSAYS FOR THE YEARS
1954-1955

Volume Three

Continuing the Centennial Series

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
Saint Louis, 1960

COPYRIGHT 1960 BY
CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD No. 47-19571
MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Publisher's Preface

The essays in this volume were selected by the Literature Board of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from those presented at the District conventions of 1954 and 1955. They are made available as a continuation of Volume I (1946) and Volume II (1947), issued under the direction of the Centennial Literature Committee and edited by Dr. Theodore Laetsch. Since the original two volumes, published under the title **THE ABIDING WORD**, are still in demand, the publisher is encouraged to make these additional essays available as Volume III of the series.

THE PUBLISHER

Contents

	PAGE
PUBLISHER'S PREFACE	v
THE LUTHERAN SCHOOL IN THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM <i>S. J. Roth</i>	3
YOUTH: FIRST-CLASS COMMUNICANTS <i>Arthur H. Gerhardt</i>	45
THE LAST THINGS <i>A. H. Schwermann</i>	87
OUR DIVINE ADOPTION <i>R. P. Sieving</i>	131
THE DOCTRINE OF THE ANGELS <i>Richard C. Jahn</i>	184
CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS <i>W. H. Wentz</i>	244
THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH <i>Alfred von Rohr Sauer</i>	287
THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH <i>H. Richard Klann</i>	342
THE MEANS OF GRACE IN AN EFFECTIVE CHURCH PROGRAM <i>Carl A. Gaertner</i>	394

THE LORD'S SUPPER	425
<i>Ottomar O. Krueger</i>	
THE PROPER USE OF THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION	476
<i>A. E. Krause</i>	
THE PRACTICE OF HOLY COMMUNION	531
<i>Richard R. Caemmerer</i>	

The Abiding Word

The Practice of Holy Communion

I

HOLY Communion is an act which the Christian Church is to do. Christians are not just to discuss or recommend it, just to debate or analyze it, just to look at it from a distance. "This do." (Matt. 26:26-28)

The Christian Church throughout the ages celebrates Holy Communion because our Lord instituted it. Four times the Sacred Scriptures record that institution. The accounts vary slightly from one another (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). The variations between the accounts are minor, and each version contributes to the same total understanding. One fact, however, is expressed in all four accounts: "This do," says our Savior. I have been asked to present an essay on "The Practical Side of Holy Communion." These words of our Lord indicate that there is no other side. Holy Communion is something to do, something to practice.

A. CHRISTIANS ARE NOT JUST TO DISCUSS OR RECOMMEND IT, JUST TO DEBATE OR ANALYZE IT

In the history of the church, Christians have done with Holy Communion things other than practicing it. They have talked about it a great deal. They have gone into ecstasies of appreciation about it, have written poetry and learned prose about it. They have recommended its use to one another, have reproached each other for not employing it more frequently or thoughtfully. At that point we are going to have to remind ourselves of the fact that also in listening to and discussing this paper we shall be short of the full meaning of the sacrament. Christians have debated it. The Lutheran Reformation is, in part, simply an attack upon misunderstanding and misuse of the Sacrament of the Altar,

which had crept up upon the church of the early and middle ages until the sacrament had been distorted into something quite the opposite of its original intention. In the early years of the Reformation itself a cleavage concerning the doctrine of Holy Communion developed between two reformers, Luther and Zwingli.

That debate has gone on through the ages. In visible Christendom today therefore there are a number of different positions and teachings concerning Holy Communion. Some believe that as the ordained priest goes through the ceremony, bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ, which in this act is, as it were, offered up again, and so produces new and additional merit before God beyond the original act on Calvary. Others imagine that Holy Communion is simply one of the ways by which Christians remind one another that they are Jesus' disciples even as the first followers of Jesus in the upper room. Still others stress that in the sacrament the Lord Jesus Himself is present in the sacred elements, thus dwells in the midst of His people, and is a sacred food, so to speak, which nourishes the spiritual life of the Christian. Others feel that it is a godly act, which, when practiced, in some fashion produces special good will or protection from God in order to counteract impending sickness or difficulty. Our church teaches, on the basis of the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, which is simply a restatement of Jesus' own words of institution, that when the Christian eats and drinks the bread and wine of the sacrament, he eats and drinks that body and blood of our Lord which He gave into death for our redemption, and thus he receives the forgiveness of his sins, which is the foundation of all his life with God in this world and salvation for the life which is to come.

B. CHRISTIANS ARE NOT JUST TO LOOK AT IT

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He said, "This do." Traditionally we love to emphasize that He implied that the sacrament should be celebrated frequently: "This do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." We have also suggested to our people, however, that even when they do not attend Holy Communion for one reason or another, it will still be very useful for them to watch others do so, to hear the words of institution, and

thus through the communing of others themselves remember Christ until He comes again. All of this is probably true. Any way by which a person remembers the suffering and death of Jesus Christ for his sins is important and useful. But the fact remains that Jesus said, "This do." Holy Communion accomplishes for Christians what it is supposed to accomplish when they actually participate in it. That is the first great accent to take home from this consideration: Christians are to do, together, what Jesus did on the first Maundy Thursday evening: they are to eat and drink bread and wine which they have set apart for this purpose, and therewith they are to receive Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins. There are other reasons, as we shall see, why all Christians gathered together at a given moment in a given place for worship and Communion should be receiving the sacrament together. But the first and obvious reason for doing so is that Jesus Himself said so. That is the Sacrament of the Altar: not something to define or debate merely, not something to look at from a distance, but the body and blood of Jesus Christ, to eat and to drink.

C. CHRISTIANS ARE TO EAT AND TO DRINK THE SACRAMENT

In the studies and disputes about the sacrament, people have argued much as to what should be going on when people receive it. In order to have the sacrament, do you have to have an ordained minister or priest? Does he have to be a believing Christian, or is it still the sacrament if he in his heart is an unbeliever? Is it necessary to wear, or not to wear, certain sorts of clothing while receiving the sacrament? Is it a good idea to fast ahead of time? Is it the one right way to do to have people walk up to the altar and stand along a rail or step and then return to their seats, or may they sit in the pews and take their portion from trays as they are passed? Does it do all the members of a church good when some of them, or their minister, receive Holy Communion and they not? Is it possible or proper for Christians to receive Holy Communion elsewhere than in their own parish gathering and in groups and combinations of Christians other than the congregation of their church? In answer to all these questions we have to say that the New Testament is silent. Our Lord simply said, "This do." The only other references to

the sacrament in the New Testament occur in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, where none of these situations are discussed, and possibly in Acts 2:42: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers" — which simply says that the sacrament was celebrated steadily and frequently in the early church. The answers to all the questions which we have just mentioned lie in the church's own provisions for good order, its instruction and discipline of its people concerning Holy Communion, its effort to safeguard the value of the sacrament for each communicant. Suppose we have answered those questions. The major fact in the practical side of Holy Communion still remains to be stressed: "This do."

D. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE SACRAMENT PROPERLY

It is noteworthy that the New Testament references concerning Holy Communion, particularly those in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, do not concern themselves so much with increasing the number of observances of Holy Communion by Christians in a given length of time, but the quality of these observances. When we read 1 Corinthians 11, we find that the Christians of that church were indeed receiving the sacrament frequently. But they were getting it mixed up with an act of sociability and revelry. Hence the apostle had to tell them to do their ordinary eating and drinking at home and clearly to remember what the purpose was of the eating and drinking of the sacrament. That principle pertains to Holy Communion in every age, and much of our thinking in these days will revolve about this: When Christians receive Holy Communion, they should be sure concerning its purpose.

Often Christians are satisfied simply with the purpose of "going to Communion." Our Lord instituted the sacrament not just as a discipline, a token that we are doing what He told us to do. The purpose of the sacrament is much greater and more specific than that. We shall discuss it in a moment. Here we must remind ourselves simply of this: properly to do what our Lord tells us to do in the sacrament implies doing it for the purpose for which He wants us to do it.

This is especially important, since it is easy to get positively faulty purposes at work in attending Holy Communion. The

Corinthians debased the sacrament to an opportunity for gluttony and parading of social advantage and differences. Some of them actually employed the sacrament in order to prove themselves better fed than others. Thus they destroyed one of the central purposes of the sacrament. In our own church body we tend to stress differences from other Christians by not receiving the sacrament with them at all, and we speak of communicant membership in the church. That is important to understand. But it is not the purpose of the sacrament, whether taken or abstained from.

Hence it is important that right from the start we confront the purposes which our Lord Jesus Christ Himself had in mind when He asked that His disciples and their successors should imitate what He was here doing, until He comes again at Judgment Day. When we view those purposes, we shall also discover the other practical considerations that should guide us concerning it.

II

Christians should practice the act of Holy Communion in remembrance of the redeeming death of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the forgiveness of sins for which He gave His body and shed His blood. Any result of Holy Communion is an outgrowth of that remembrance and of that forgiveness. (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)

Holy Communion is something which Christians should do. That is to say, they are to eat and to drink bread and wine which they have set aside for the purpose. As they eat and drink it, they receive Christ's body and blood. We have said that it is all-important that they have the right purpose in doing this. The purpose has been laid down by Jesus Christ, our Lord, in His words of institution and has been restated by His apostle. Hence we should not be at a loss to fix and picture that purpose ourselves as we partake of Holy Communion.

A. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE THE ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE REDEEMING DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

"This do in remembrance of Me," said our Lord Jesus Christ as He celebrated the sacrament the first time (Luke 22:19, 20). Our Lord was gathered with His disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Passover meal. He told the disciples

that this was the last time that He would eat it with them (Luke 22:15, 16). Materials that had been employed in the Passover were on the table, wine in a cup, unleavened bread in sheets on the table. The Passover was celebrated according to carefully outlined proceedings, including the eating of a specially prepared lamb, of a special dish of herbs into which the participants dipped, and a series of sips from the wine and water in a cup, circulated from hand to hand with appropriate ceremony and the singing of psalms. Evidently when all of this was over, the Savior undertook a new ceremony. The disciples would not again eat the Passover, but this they were to do again and again. The Passover was a memorial of a great act of God in leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt. This new Communion was a memorial of the act of Jesus.

Many assume that Jesus meant for later Christians simply to remember that once upon a time He ate and drank with them, walked with them as their Teacher and Master, and shared their simple food. Such interpreters suggest that when Jesus ate and drank with the disciples on the first Easter evening, this was a reminder of the fellowship in which He had always walked with them, and so it is still today (Luke 24:30, 41-43). Certainly every Christian does thrill to that recollection and realize that Jesus Christ still remembers his needs and problems and blesses his daily bread.

Yet the sacrament is a much greater act of remembrance than this. It involves the forgiveness of sins, says the Savior (Matt. 26:28). There is no forgiveness in just remembering that Jesus once ate food with His disciples. Rather are we to remember the great things that were engaging the thoughts of the disciples that first evening. There Jesus had been telling them that He was about to be crucified, and the betrayer had gone out from their own midst. There Jesus had been telling the disciples that they should not sorrow because of His impending death, but that it was precisely this death of His that was to make possible the gift of the Holy Spirit upon them and their life with God forever (John 14:1-7; 16:7). What the disciples were to remember was that in His suffering and death Jesus Christ is at the heart of a covenant between them and God which is greater than the covenant He had with His people Israel, which could be commemorated by the blood of the Passover lamb. This was not the blood of the

new testament (Luke 22:20). The disciples, and all Christians since that time, when they receive the sacrament, remember that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. "As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." (1 Cor. 11:26)

Sometimes the Sacrament of the Altar has been weakened to be only a memorial. But it is at least that much! When stressing other facts about it, let us not weaken this, that it is a memorial. It is to be an exercise for every Christian participant, a discipline of the mind and heart, by which he holds forth to himself and others the fact that Jesus died for his sins.

B. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE THE ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION FOR THE SAKE OF THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, FOR WHICH HE GAVE HIS BODY AND SHED HIS BLOOD

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, it was the fulfillment of a plan which God had before He ever made the world and which He had expressed through many centuries by the Hebrew prophets. This plan was to do something about man's sin. God made man to do His will, but man turned aside in selfishness and disobedience. Man defaced God's image in himself, mishandled and ruined God's purpose for himself. This could mean only the wrath of God for man's disobedience, and that means God's turning away from man, God's leaving man to utter destruction. Yet at one and the same time with His wrath for man's sin God resolved to forgive man's sin, not to hold it against him. This He did by giving His Son into death, by heaping upon Him man's sin and making Him guilty of it, the bearer of it. God caused Jesus Christ to experience the curse of death for the sin which mankind had committed (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 3:13, 14; Isaiah 53; Rom. 3:21-26). The cross of Jesus Christ, His suffering and death, is at one and the same time the great act in which Jesus bears the sins of all the world before the Father and goes to the Father with our sins (John 13:36; 14:5, 6; 16:5-7); and the act by which God shows and demonstrates to the world that Jesus thus redeems mankind (Rom. 3:21-26: "manifest," "set forth," "declare"). In the scheme of God one great act of the Father Himself makes the additional declaration that Jesus is Redeemer through this cross: the resurrection from

the dead of Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:24, 25). Yet another act Christians are to practice, year in, year out, right in their worship and gathered together, by which they lay hold on this forgiveness of sin, this fact that God does not hold their sins against them, because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. That is that Christians eat and drink the very body and blood which Jesus gave on the cross for the remission of their sins. When Jesus uses the term "given for you," it is a phrase not just of giving in general, a *Gabe*, but it is a giving to the uttermost, a giving over of self into death, *Dahingabe*. Here again St. Paul is a useful guide, as he reminds us that we share in Holy Communion in order to show forth "His death." This is why our Lord can speak of forgiveness of sins in connection with the sacrament. This is why Martin Luther can assert that the great good of the sacrament is "the forgiveness of sins." For the act of God and Christ which the sacrament commemorates and causes the Christian to take part in is the act by which God forgives the sins of men.

At this point many a Christian will say, "You are not talking about the practical side of Holy Communion, but about its doctrine." Not so. There is nothing more practical in the life of the Christian than the forgiveness of sins. There is only one way, only one mode of existence, in which the Christian lives before God at all, namely, that God continually forgives his sin (1 John 1:8 ff.). Hence our worship is a continual mutual reminder of the forgiveness of sin. That is the great act by which God moves upon us with His love, that is His great guarantee of being, not the remote and impersonal god of the scientist, not the ruthless and hateful god of the Hindu, but the forgiving Father whom Christ came into the world to reveal to us. Holy Communion, then, is the act of facing and receiving the forgiveness of sins by the very way in which God achieves it, namely, through the sacrifice into death of Jesus Christ, His Son.

C. ANY RESULT OF HOLY COMMUNION IS AN OUTGROWTH OF THAT REMEMBRANCE AND OF THAT FORGIVENESS

Christian theologians and poets make much of the values of Holy Communion, and the rank and file of Christians agree with them in many particulars. They find comfort and consolation in

the sacrament. They feel that Jesus is very close to them. They are moved to courage and rejoicing because God loves them and His Son lives in them. They feel special power to overcome the illnesses and handicaps of life. They find themselves drawn into a powerful fellowship and brotherhood with one another.

Very well, those are practical results of practicing Holy Communion. But let us remember that all of them stem from the forgiveness of sins. Only one of them, namely, fellowship with one another in the body of Christ, is singled out for discussion in the New Testament at all (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The others are not even specially mentioned. But that which is greater than all of them and the source of all of them is indeed mentioned: "What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?" "That is shown us by these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins'; namely, that in the sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." There is nothing more! For life is the presence of God at work in the heart of man, the direction, the encouragement, the victory that we have with and through God day by day. And salvation is the fashion in which God meets our needs of life day by day and finally in the world to come grants us the renewed and perfect life with Him beyond the reach of sin, flesh, and devil. All of that is ours — because in Jesus Christ God forgives our sins. All of that is ours to take over and over again, as in the Sacrament of Holy Communion we eat and drink that body and blood which was God's own tool for bringing us the forgiveness of sins and causing us to come into the relation with Him of a new covenant in Christ's blood.

D. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE THE ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION FOR THE SAKE OF FAITH IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Through Jesus Christ and His death on the cross God has forgiven the world its sin. But now comes the telling of it to men, now comes the great Word of God by which this forgiveness is hurled into the heart of man so that the Spirit of God can set up and maintain His home within man. Holy Communion is such a word of God. It is at once a means by which the Christian thinks of God's redeeming him through Jesus Christ and by which the

Christian reaches out to lay hold upon that forgiveness. Years before Jesus instituted the sacrament He gave a definition of saving faith, that faith by which the Christian man possesses life. He attached the definition to a discussion that had arisen about physical eating of the manna and spiritual eating of that food that sustains a more important life. And so He said, "I am the living Bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. . . . Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life" (John 6:49-58). It will remain debatable whether Jesus thought of the later sacrament when He spoke these words. But it is not debatable that Jesus thinks of faith as a clinging to, a consuming of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and that redemption is that He gives into death His flesh and blood for men. Hence our Lord arranged it that the sacrament should remind not merely of His redeeming us, but it should be an act in which we literally practice the faith and the kind of faith that takes hold of the redeeming work which He accomplished. Lutherans are touchy about terming the sacrament a picture or a symbol. They want it to be clear that the sacrament is not just a picture of the body and blood of Christ, but that we there really receive it. Very well, but let us remember that the sacrament is also a picture, and more than a picture, of the faith of the person who receives the forgiveness of his sins. It is a practice of feeding on the one food, tapping in onto the one current that we have for the life of God, namely, the forgiveness of sins to us because of Jesus Christ. The sacrament is God's pledge of forgiveness of our sins. Receiving the sacrament is our response of faith in it, our taking it and profiting from it.

III

Christians should practice the act of Holy Communion in order mutually to convey the forgiveness of sins through the redeeming work of Christ. Holy Communion is thus an exercise of Christians as they are together in the body of Christ, and is a strengthening of that togetherness. (1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:33)

Above we said that through Holy Communion Christians find themselves drawn into a powerful fellowship and brotherhood with

one another. Out of all the results and accompaniments of Holy Communion, this is the one to which the New Testament gives attention. Hence it is so vital a part of the practice of Holy Communion. It is not simply a result but a purpose of the sacrament.

A. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE THE ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION
IN ORDER MUTUALLY TO CONVEY THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS
THROUGH THE REDEEMING WORK OF CHRIST

When our Savior instituted the sacrament, He did not call it "communion." That title probably comes from one of the assertions of the apostle Paul concerning the sacrament: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." (1 Cor. 10:16, 17)

When we use the word "communion," we sometimes think simply of several things together. Church communions are thought of as groups of people under the same denominational heading. And so this word "communion" in 1 Corinthians 10 can be thought of as implying simply: "When we partake of the cup of blessing in the sacrament, which contains wine, at the same time we receive the blood of Christ. When we eat of the bread of the sacrament, at the same time we are receiving the body of Christ." That is of course quite true. Our Savior said that when we eat the bread, we are eating His body; when we drink of the wine, we are drinking His blood. The apostle is discussing this subject in connection with his advice to the Corinthians to refrain from sacrifices to idols; and so he says, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of devils." (V. 21)

But the word "communion" means more than simply "several things together." Almost always the word concerns the togetherness of people, a sharing mutually of what people are doing together. That is why St. Paul ties into our thinking at this point the fact that when we receive the sacrament, we are with one another "one bread and one body." He wants Christians not to share together in the company of those who through their eating and drinking worship the devil. In the sacrament we are together

eating and drinking so that we are mutually exchanging and receiving one and the same thing, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

Thus it is that we could restate 1 Cor. 10:16 as follows: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a way by which we together are consuming the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the means by which we are together sharing the body of Christ?"

This would imply that Christians are in the business of sharing the forgiveness of sins which God gives them because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. That is not a new thought; it pervades so much of the New Testament. In Matthew 18 our Lord made the mutual communicating of the forgiveness of sins the great business of Christians as they live together in the church (v. 18). He restated this powerful idea on the evening of the first Easter in the charge to the disciples which we have all memorized from John 20:22, 23: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." In effect, Christians are to be mindful of one another's spiritual life. They are to assume responsibility for it, nourish and protect it in one another. This they do as they reassure one another of the forgiveness of sins and hold before one another the death of Christ as its one source. They do this in many ways, and among them the sacrament is so outstanding because it focuses upon the very act of Jesus' dying for their sins.

B. CHRISTIANS ARE TOGETHER IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

This process of mutual care and provision for the life and presence of the Spirit of God in the hearts of all Christians is pictured in the New Testament by the term "body of Christ." St. Paul is thinking about this in 1 Corinthians 10, when he talks about the sacrament and says that Christians, being many, "are one body." In the next chapter he tells his readers that they must beware of the danger that is done when in the sacrament they do not "discern the Lord's body" (11:29). Then in the twelfth chapter he unfolds the picture of the body of Christ in considerable detail. Christians are one body in that the same Holy Spirit works in each member, has through Baptism brought them together into one body, and continually works faith in the one and same Lord

Jesus (12:3, 11-13); and in that each member mutually serves and supplies the spiritual life of each other one (e. g., v. 25). In a very similar way St. Paul describes the church in Ephesus as each member, equipped through the special workers of the Word, ministers to each other one and speaks the truth to him so that the whole body grows up into Christ. (Eph. 4:8 ff.)

The life of the church is thus bound up intimately with the mutual profession of the forgiveness of sins. The great danger to Christians as individuals and to the church as a whole is sin; namely, that Christians go off on their own, live for themselves and by the motives of the flesh, rebel against the will of God, play the role of the world, and fulfill the lusts of the flesh. "For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6), says St. Paul. But God does not leave His church in outer darkness. He does not withdraw from it and condemn it utterly, as He has every right to do. Instead, the heavenly Father through the forgiveness of sins refuses to hold Christians' sins against them and instead moves out upon them with the unflagging supply of His Spirit and love. This supply comes as Christians themselves play their part as channels of the divine forgiveness, as they themselves enter upon the many routines of conversation, worship, and sacrament by which this self-imparting of God takes place.

C. HOLY COMMUNION IS AN EXERCISE OF CHRISTIANS AS THEY ARE TOGETHER IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

One of these many ways by which Christians speak this forgiveness of sins to one another is the practice of Holy Communion. Their pastors speak this forgiveness of God to them on behalf of one another. Their pastors preach to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. In the sacrament each by faith reaches out to seize upon God's forgiveness presented to him in the death of Jesus Christ. But in the sacrament Christians are together. It is an act of communion, of sharing at one and the same time by a number of Christians. It is a seizing upon and feeding on the body given by Christ on the cross to redeem Christians, but in that act of seizing and feeding, says the apostle, Christians themselves are one body.

We speak of Holy Communion as an exercise, a discipline. The Lord thought of it as something to be done again and again. It is an exercise of the mind, a calling before oneself and one's inner vision the work of Christ in redeeming the world and providing this continual forgiveness of sins. It is an act, an exercise, in which Christians practice confronting the assurance of their forgiveness and in which they practice holding it before one another's eyes. Hence it is so powerfully an exercise of the body of Christ. We are told of the first Christians in Jerusalem that they continued "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Later we are told that in this same congregation, so richly blessed with the presence of the Spirit, "they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:46, 47). This shows the early church busy at disciplines for holding the forgiveness of sins before their eyes and for sharing it with their fellow Christians. Perhaps we cannot be completely certain that "breaking of bread" is a name for the sacrament — although this is widely assumed. Yet if it is not explicit in this passage, it certainly is in the lives of Christians today who, pulled together from countryside and teeming city, out of the world with its preoccupations and lusts, heart to heart and shoulder to shoulder concentrate upon God's gift to them of that body and blood which Jesus gave to Him on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Thus the sacrament is in a most special sense a discipline and exercise of the church for the mutual strengthening of its members and the building up of the body of Christ.

D. HOLY COMMUNION IS A STRENGTHENING OF THE TOGETHERNESS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

That is our final thought — Holy Communion is not simply the act of the strong body, but it is a strengthening of that body. The unity of the members of the body of Christ consists simply in their concern for one another's mutual health of spirit. When St. Paul urges Christians to walk worthy of the vocation with which they have been called, he urges them to endeavor to "keep

the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-6). He then goes on to describe the many ways and situations in which this activity of preserving the unity of the Spirit is carried out — mutual conversation, worship, family life, life in employment. Disunity among Christians means that they refuse to reach out over whatever separates them within them or outside of themselves, in order to play their role as members of Christ's body. We shall later review some of these forces as they confront us in practical life. Holy Communion is the strengthening of the basic unity in which Christians stand. For already they stand in that unity, already they have "one body, one Spirit . . . one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:4-6). Holy Communion is, in its simply reaching out to consume and embrace the redemptive work of Jesus, a stifling of obstacles and a strengthening of that true bond of peace.

IV

Christians should practice the act of Holy Communion after examining themselves whether they discern the Lord's body in Holy Communion. This means being aware of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and His conveying of its fruits to us by means of the receiving of the sacred elements; and it means being aware of Christians, communing together, as being the body of Christ. Any other partaking of Holy Communion summons God's judgment over unbelief and lovelessness. (1 Cor. 11:28-32)

The practice of Holy Communion receives more attention in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians than in any other book of the Bible. One reason is that in this letter St. Paul discusses the church as the body of Christ, and, as we have seen, Holy Communion is both an expression and a strengthening of the fellowship of the members in that body. Another reason is that the Corinthian congregation needed to improve in its practice of Holy Communion. The problem was not that they did not attend, or attend it frequently enough. But the problem was that the Corinthian congregation forgot what it was supposed to be doing when it celebrated Holy Communion. Its members divided into parties, according to their preference of religious teachers or their wealth and class. When they came to celebrate Holy Com-

munion, they huddled into these groups and made out of Holy Communion an occasion for gluttony and envy. Those difficulties at Corinth, however, were only surface symptoms of an underlying malady. Down underneath, says St. Paul, was an unworthy eating and drinking of the sacrament which was due to the fact that the communicants were "not discerning the Lord's body." Hence, says St. Paul, it is all-important that when a communicant receives the sacrament, he should examine himself to make sure that he discerns the Lord's body as he eats and drinks.

**A. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE THE ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION
AFTER EXAMINING THEMSELVES WHETHER THEY DISCERN THE
LORD'S BODY IN HOLY COMMUNION**

Each Christian is to do this examining for himself. For this examination takes place inside the Christian, where he is asking himself the all-important question. When we say that he should receive Holy Communion "after" examining himself, we may not be speaking as accurately as the apostle. "So let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11:28), says the apostle, and the "so" refers to this act of self-examination, putting to the test. In other words, this self-examination should extend through the entire act of the eating and drinking. Obviously it must begin before. The communicant must test himself whether he is discerning, recognizing the body, namely, the body of Christ, and preferring it above any other. His act of Communion must be at one and the same time an understanding of what goes on in Communion and a demonstration of his faith in the body of Christ and his raising the body of Christ to a position in his own heart and mind above any other. The Corinthians communed badly because they found in the elements of Holy Communion only daily groceries, in the fellowship of Holy Communion only companionship or even occasion for brawling. The Christian communicant should be watching himself to tell whether he prizes what he is here receiving more highly than anything else that he could consume; whether he recognizes that here he is together in a fellowship more important than any other with which he can be joined.

In our practice of Holy Communion our churches devise expedients for assisting communicants in this act of self-examination.

For this purpose we train children most carefully in doctrine and hear a public profession of their faith so that we can presume their ability to examine themselves. Though the practice has nothing to do with Holy Communion itself, our churches arrange some sort of device by which people are encouraged to previous self-examination. This may be a portion of the church service itself, as it is in the Communion Service of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. It may be a request to attend a preceding religious service or act of confession of sins, or at least an announcement of intention to commune with the minister, so that he can speak that word of counsel and teaching which will clarify the purpose of Communion and the practice of self-examination. It is at this point that the churches of Christendom divide between those who practice "close Communion" or "open Communion." In some instances this is only a discipline for admitting professed members of the congregation to the sacrament. Here we note this practice as it contributes to the self-examination of the Christian. Even here, we repeat, the communicant's task of self-examination is not finished when he has gone through these churchly practices. In the very act of receiving the sacred elements he must be saying: "This is the body and blood of my Lord" — "This is the church, the body of Christ, with whom I am communing."

B. TO DISCERN THE LORD'S BODY MEANS TO BE AWARE OF THE REDEEMING WORK OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CONVEYING OF ITS FRUITS TO US BY MEANS OF THE RECEIVING OF THE SACRED ELEMENTS

In 1 Cor. 10:16 St. Paul makes very clear that Christians should realize that they are receiving the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, which He gave for their redemption on the cross, when they receive Holy Communion. There he contrasts this cup and bread with sacrificial meals practiced in the worship of pagan deities. In the eleventh chapter he contrasts the eating and drinking in the sacrament with the eating and drinking of daily food for the body. Self-examination, then, is to involve a comparing between those kinds of food and drink, and it should result in an inner judgment of the communicant that he says: "This is nothing less than the body and blood of my Lord Jesus Christ."

As we look at the ground over which we have come in these talks, we see how important such a self-examination is. For Holy

Communion does not do for us what it is to do, namely, bring us the forgiveness of sins from God, just because we do it. It does it because we reach out in our hearts with this great act of faith to accept this forgiveness of sins. Properly to "discern" the body of Christ in the sacrament means not simply to say in the heart, "I believe that I actually receive the body and blood of Jesus." But it means, "I realize that here I receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and that is worth more to me than any other worship in the world, more than any other food in the world, for Jesus Christ gave that body and blood for me for the forgiveness of my sins." Such discerning is an act of faith. Hence in his Small Catechism Martin Luther correctly defines the worthiness for the sacrament of which St. Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 11 as "faith in these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.'"

**C. DISCERNING THE LORD'S BODY IN HOLY COMMUNION MEANS
BEING AWARE OF CHRISTIANS COMMUNING TOGETHER
AS BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST**

In section III we pointed out that St. Paul, when he calls the sacrament a communion in 1 Corinthians 10, thinks of two things at one and the same time: that Christians receive the body and blood of Christ and that they receive it together, "for we, being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). In this chapter St. Paul had been talking about the Israelites, how on the one hand they "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (v. 4), yet many of them fell into idolatry and hence fell out of the company of God's people (vv. 5-10). Within the Corinthian congregation there were divisions, "heresies." Therefore, says the apostle, when you receive Holy Communion, receive one another too; "wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another" (more literally, "keep on receiving" instead of grasping food greedily and forgetting the brother; 1 Cor. 11:33).

At this point we meet with many problems in the practice of Holy Communion. Many a communicant, trying to concentrate on the sacredness of the moment and the forgiveness of his sins, feels

almost disturbed by the proximity of other people. Some minds are disturbed by the hygiene of the common cup, the dress of other communicants, the process by which the communicants go to the altar, and many other arrangements that revolve about the celebrating of Communion by a number of people at one and the same time. Some communicants assume that because they have sensed so much benefit from a private Communion at times of special stress, therefore every Communion would be improved if it were alone. But St. Paul's injunction, "Let a man examine himself," applies to thoughts that should be going through the communicant's mind in the very moment that he is receiving the sacrament, not just about the presence of Christ in the sacred elements, but about the body of Christ with which he is communing. Certainly there are some difficulties involved in going to the altar, finding one's seat again, preserving decorum at the altar, engaging in devotions before and after communing, all given by the proximity of other communicants. Ultimately these problems are not solved by communing in the pews as is done in some denominations, for then other temptations for inattention may develop. The point is that the communicant's problem is not simply to focus attention on the meaning of the sacrament for himself, but to remember that he is one member of the body of Christ out of many who are in this act setting forth their true nature. Especially where a church practices the helps for self-examination of its communicants, we can expect for the most part a high proportion of worthy worshipers, making the service, humanly speaking, the one most planned and conscious visible demonstration of the invisible church to be had in Christian worship. To discern the body of Christ, then, in Holy Communion means, in addition to our thoughts of a section ago, to be saying this: "Here I am together with people in whom Christ lives and for whom He is Head and who are His members to me even as I am to them. This is the world's most precious assembly, this is the family of God, and I prize it above every other." For again, to "discern" means not simply to "recognize Christ as present," but to make a comparison and judgment between this body of people together and any other that exists in the world. Hence to examine oneself on this score is a great act of faith in which we call upon God to strengthen our unity and to preserve us for His purpose.

D. ANY OTHER PARTAKING OF HOLY COMMUNION SUMMONS
GOD'S JUDGMENT OVER UNBELIEF AND LOVELESSNESS

To reflect his utmost sincerity in this matter and to put the highest premium upon it, St. Paul adds this reminder: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:29). St. Paul says this in order to strengthen the resolve of each communicant to examine himself before and during his act of communing, in order to be sure that he is discerning, prizing above every other, the Lord's body. Faulty Communion, namely, one in which this clear recognition and high prizing of the body of Christ is missing, means eating and drinking damnation to oneself. The word simply says "judgment." Paul goes on to describe which judgment he means — not our own or our own of one another, but one that happens toward us by God and that is accompanied by His chastening. Paul is here reminding us that every Christian lives under the continuing judgment of God. He stands righteous before God, that is to say, free of judgment and under God's favor, only through the forgiveness of sins, through God's regarding him as His child for the sake of the redeeming work of Christ. Holy Communion is God's way of offering us this forgiveness, it is our way of reaching out, as it were, and consuming it as the one food for our inner life and the unity of the church. When, therefore, a communicant does not recognize Christ's body and God's forgiveness in the sacrament and does not see in this Communion the act of the holy Christian Church, he is in effect placing himself among those with no forgiveness, those who discount, refute forgiveness. Hence the KJV does not badly translate "damnation." For either God forgives or God condemns.

Some Christians have talked themselves into an agony of apprehension about the sacrament. They have thought that if a tiny sin clouded their conscience, if a flicker of inattention crossed their minds during the act of communing, therefore God would damn them for the very act of Communion. This is, of course, taking the whole phrase of the apostle out of its context. In order to receive the sacrament so that we possess the forgiveness of sins instead of God's condemnation, we have to discern the body

of Christ, and that means that we have to prize and value what we receive and our fellowship as we receive it as being in a class apart and above anything else in the world.

In order to stress this sacredness and holiness of the act of Communion, Christians through the ages have adorned it with special phrases and acts of worship, they have practiced preparatory and subsequent devotions. Others have belittled these activities as having nothing to do with the sacrament. True, they do have nothing to do with the sacrament itself. But let Christians be modest and ready to learn about any device which their fellow Christians have found useful for putting this supreme valuation upon what they receive and upon the fellowship of the receiving. For, properly understood and practiced, these elements of worship can be a powerful stimulus toward self-examination and proper discerning of the Lord's body.

("Not all students of the Bible agree that the 'Lord's body,' in 1 Cor. 11:29, pertains both to the real presence of Christ's body and blood as received by the communicant, and the 'body of Christ,' or aggregate of communing Christians, suggested in 1 Cor. 10:17 and developed more fully in 1 Cor. 12:12-27. To omit the second interpretation would then focus the full censure of God for the unworthy communicant upon his unbelief. Also with this interpretation, the concern of the apostle in 1 Cor. 10:16, 17 for the mutual love of the communicants is evident." R. R. C.)

V

Christians should practice the act of Holy Communion with thanksgiving. This implies that their mood is to be one of reverence and good cheer. Whatever discipline is employed in preparation, or method in celebration, the Christian should be filled with rejoicing as he practices Holy Communion. (Mark 14:22-24; Luke 24:30; Acts 2:42; Col. 3:15-17)

A Christian can hear the Gospel to his own damnation. When the Holy Spirit comes into the world and creates faith in human hearts, He reproves the world of judgment, He displays to the world again and again how God has defeated the prince of this world and how God rejects everyone who follows him in unbelief (John 16:8-12). Yet the particular word of St. Paul to the Corin-

thians about eating and drinking damnation to themselves has for many converted the sacrament into an act of gloom and painful repression (1 Cor. 12:29). Hence it is important to remember that the purpose of this injunction, far from counseling to terror of the sacrament, should be to lead us to celebrate it with thanksgiving. That is one of the great names of the sacrament from the days of the early church on, "the thanksgiving," the Eucharist.

A. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE THE ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION
WITH THANKSGIVING

"This do," our Lord says of the sacrament. He is referring to His own actions in distributing the bread and wine after the Passover. That act began with blessing the bread which He then broke and distributed. This blessing was an act of literally "speaking well" of what was happening, invoking God's blessing upon the act and the thing, reviewing God's gracious purpose in the act. We are irresistibly reminded of that great moment when Jesus lifted up His eyes to the Father after the seventy had returned from their first preaching of the Gospel, and said: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered to Me of My Father; and no man knoweth who the Son is but the Father; and who the Father is but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. . . . Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see" (Luke 10:21-23). Jesus was doing more here than simply speaking a table prayer over food. He was doing more than continuing the round of chants and hymns which accompanied the service of the Passover. For He was now holding before the disciples, not the blood of the old testament, the old covenant, and the reminder of release from Egypt, but the blood of the new testament and the seal of permanent forgiveness of sins. This was indeed an act of thanksgiving.

"This do," said our Lord, and so the first Christians practiced thanksgiving with the whole act of the sacrament. The breaking of bread of the first Christians was intimately connected with their prayers (Acts 2:42). As Christians gathered about bread and cup, says St. Paul, it was "the cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Cor.

10:16). Christians tend unduly to separate Word from sacrament in their thinking, as though the Gospel were all words and the sacrament were all sacred elements. In the thinking of our Lord the words by which we review the forgiving grace of God to us in Christ and the purpose of the sacramental meal are to be a part of the total practice of Holy Communion. We do not leave its purpose unsaid or presupposed, but we speak and sing the significance of what we are doing. Yet that speaking is to be not simply an act of teaching or defining, but an act of personal and heartfelt thanksgiving, of joy and adoration to God for His great gift.

B. THIS IMPLIES THAT THE MOOD OF CHRISTIANS AT HOLY COMMUNION IS TO BE ONE OF REVERENCE AND GOOD CHEER

We spoke a while ago of a mood of fear and apprehension that disfigures the minds of Christians as they contemplate attending Holy Communion. The solution to that difficulty is not to have simply no mood at all, a mere carrying out of duty or submission to the forms of worship. In fact, it is quite impossible for a person ever to do or think anything without a mood; there is no such thing as an emotionless person. If we are truly to bless the cup as we celebrate Holy Communion, to give thanks as did our Lord when He instituted it, we must have the mood of blessing and of thanksgiving.

Herewith we suggest no empty sentiment, no emotional paroxysm. In God's plan a good mood is always the outgrowth and accompaniment of good thought. The thought is there: God has redeemed us through Jesus Christ, and as we receive the body and blood which Jesus gave for our redemption, we are receiving the forgiveness for which He died. The mood of the communicant who is truly discerning the Lord's body, therefore, is at one and the same time one of adoration and looking up to the heavenly Father, who in mercy accepts him and forgives him his sins; and the mood of good cheer. For what could stand in sharper contrast to the stupor, the raw selfishness, the godlessness and unhappiness of life than an act in which God is speaking to us as intimately as He can of His love and forgiveness, and in which we are reaching out in faith to accept forgiveness? What is the mood with which a hot and tired worker in the threshing field reaches out for a cool-

ing drink in the heat of the afternoon? What is the mood with which the children at suppertime gather around the table, say their prayers, and beam as mother brings in the food?

As Christians plan their services of Holy Communion, they seek to implement these moods of reverence and joy. The music has an especially fervent and joyous note, as we hail God in the Thrice Holy and the Hosanna, and the stately words handed down from generation to generation sound with an earnestness coupled with the serene conviction that God is our Father in Christ. Far from being disturbed by a sense of menace in the sacrament, many Christians find in it an especial time of holy joy which they can share with their fellow Christians. The decorum of the sacred act in a service of worship, far from suggesting pomp or self-consciousness or fancied superiority of celebrant and communicants, should rather discipline and channel the minds of all concerned toward this mood of reverence and gratefulness.

C. WHATEVER DISCIPLINE THE CHRISTIAN EMPLOYS IN PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT, HE SHOULD BE FILLED WITH REJOICING AS HE PRACTICES IT

About the only time that Christians even talk about fasting in catechetical training is with reference to the sacrament, due to the words of Martin Luther: "Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.'" There still are Christians who fast, either totally or by way of token, prior to a celebration of the sacrament. They are seeking to set their mind in order for the great act of self-examination and discerning of the Lord's body. It takes practice and skill to utilize fasting for such a purpose, but he who is skilled therein has a device at his disposal which can be of great help.

The same is true of special habits of dress, plans for the cur-tailing of distraction and amusement, or any other devices which people engage in prior to the sacrament. In view of the customs of revelry on Saturday evenings, leaving worshipers sometimes foggy of mind and discontented during a Sunday morning worship, it may be well again to remember that we are putting our own

mind and mood to a tremendous strain when we propose to celebrate the sacrament adequately. Hence any preparation of mind and body, any relaxing from tensions and distractions, any narrowing of the focus of life and concentrating on the things of God, well in advance of Holy Communion, can be of great advantage. Obviously if a person fancies such preparation to contribute to the sacrament itself, or to replace the grace of God as the value of it, the entire thing has been spoiled. But where a Christian recognizes the tremendous significance of standing forgiven under the judgment of God and so prepared to receive forgiveness in the sacrament, there his preceding exercises, plans, and preparations are of importance. Yet let it be understood that whatever these practices involve, they must contribute to cheer and not to gloom. As we quote the Fifty-first Psalm prior to Communion, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise," we are apt to imagine that God is praised with hang-dog looks. The psalm is simply reminding us that for all of his relation to God, and therefore also for salutary sharing in the sacrament, the Christian must cling completely to God, and that completely because of the mercy of God. But having faith in that mercy, the Christian can be only joyful as he prepares to confront this precious gift of God again. In general it is not necessary to warn Lutherans against ascetic practices and self-righteous acts of devotion. But let every Christian remember as he plans to receive the sacrament that he is going indeed to lift up his heart. This means that his heart has to be in control, he needs to be aware of God as its one Supply.

D. WHATEVER METHOD IS EMPLOYED IN CELEBRATION,
THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD BE FILLED WITH REJOICING
AS HE PRACTICES HOLY COMMUNION

Our Communion services are large and small, adorned and unadorned. Martin Luther said that worshipers need no great apparatus of worship, and even for Holy Communion it is enough to have no hymns and for the pastor to be standing at a little table facing the congregation. He hastened to add that he had no people that could worship well under those circumstances. Some of our most earnest Communion services have taken place privately in a hospital. As a thousand people, on the other hand, pass the

rail at a Maundy Thursday celebration, we sometimes wonder if they are all thinking what it is all about. At this point we remind ourselves that whatever we do in the Communion service by way of form and setting, this is the test of its usefulness: Does it contribute to the sense of reverence and good cheer as we bless God for His great gift to us in Christ?

Every parish will understand the capacity of its people in this respect. Every parish will periodically train its entire membership, and obviously the children and adults who are being catechized for church membership, concerning the significance of the forms and practices of the Communion service. Properly understood and handled, they cannot but be impressive. It is possible that one and the same congregation will conduct some services which are for few members and because of the situation nominal in form, and others which employ the traditional usages as laid down in our *Lutheran Hymnal*. Some Communion services will be choral and others spoken. But all of them, from a private Communion with perhaps a tiny candle gleaming at the bedside to a majestic Easter service with choral accompaniment and several celebrants in the chancel — all should evoke in the worshiper and communicant the sense of awe and thanksgiving to God and joy that He has had mercy on us through His Son. It takes good thinking in the very act of receiving Holy Communion — “discerning the Lord’s body” — to keep this high significance before us. The entire activity of the congregation, its religious education, its conversations, the literature which it distributes, its cultivation of the family altar, its preaching, should all help communicants to this great sense of good cheer: God is good! Give thanks to Him! This is the mood of Holy Communion.

VI

Christians should practice the act of Holy Communion as a means for overcoming the forces which separate them from one another — pride, selfishness, apathy; and the forces which separate them from God — unbelief, irreverence, doubt. (1 Cor. 11:18-34)

The dangerous thing about Holy Communion is that the worshiper can let it become simply a ceremony in which he engages as a badge of his church membership, a pious habit which he has undertaken since confirmation. This is dangerous because it ren-

ders the very partaking of Holy Communion null. It is sad because thus what should be a powerful source of spiritual life becomes a symptom of weakness and decay. St. Paul told the Corinthians, who, you remember, had been attending Holy Communion but had been missing its meaning and purpose, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30). Let us once more confront the practical and daily difficulties in life, the sins and weaknesses, for which a true partaking in Holy Communion is God's own pledge of help and power for improvement.

A. FORCES ARE AT WORK IN LIFE WHICH SEPARATE CHRISTIANS
FROM GOD

Holy Communion is so practical because it comes to grips with problems in the Christian life that are here and now. Let us first look at those which concern the life with God. At the top of this list of problems is unbelief. Unbelief is the attempt to get along without God, to trust in self or in things rather than in God. It is the result not simply of ignorance. In fact, St. Paul says that the horror of the unbelief of the world is that it knows something about God (Rom. 1:18-22). The unbeliever is a fool, for he behaves himself as though he did not know something that he actually knows. Yet this same terrible slight of unbelief can creep into the Christian heart at any time. The law of sin in our members that wages war upon the spirit includes also the will to disbelieve, to behave as though God did not exist. (Rom. 7:14-24)

Associated with this blight is the sin of irreverence. The KJV usually translates the word for reverence simply "godliness" (1 Tim. 4:8). Reverence is the state of mind in which we are aware of the great God about us always and treat Him with profound respect. Irreverence is the ability to dismiss Him from the mind, to grant free reign to sin. God promises His grace and gifts to those who seek Him, who turn to Him, who pray to Him (Luke 11:1-13). Irreverence does not think of God at all, or, thinking of Him, does not think of Him as granting gifts that we want. Our time lulls men to security with the promise of control of nature and possession of wealth. Thus it makes them irreverent, having no demands on God, giving no look upward to Him in adoration, prayer, and praise.

Another symptom of these maladies that part us from God is doubt. Does God really exist? Can we trust the data that we have about Him in Scripture? Is the church different from any other society? Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead? Is it possible to resist sin or, having failed to resist, to find forgiveness? Doubt is a variation of irreverence, for it turns away from God and asks questions of self. It actually prides itself in its own questions rather than in God's answers.

These are the strong and practical forces parting men in our time from God and bringing in their wake the poverty of character, the cheapness and blasphemy in place of worship, that characterize our civilization and threaten each one of us and our children day by day.

B. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE ~~THE~~ ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION AS A MEANS FOR OVERCOMING THE FORCES WHICH SEPARATE THEM FROM GOD

Holy Communion is an act of faith. To discern the Lord's body means to reach out in faith for the forgiveness of sins which God Himself has for us in Jesus Christ. But therewith, we said, Holy Communion is also an act for the strengthening of faith. For communicants are not simply that tiny bundle of perfect believers who on any given Sunday have decided that they have enough faith for the sacrament. But Holy Communion is to be an act at which believers who know themselves to be sinners, hampered by world, flesh, and devil, reach out as beggars for the forgiveness of their sins and thus for the strengthening of their faith.

Holy Communion is an act of godliness, of high reverence. For there we hold before us the most amazing, incomprehensible grace of God and the most direct and winsome revelation of God and His grace—the very body and blood of His Son which He gave into death for our sins. Christians should think of Holy Communion as the gift of God to them. They are doing God no favor with it, God can get along without them. But in the sacrament He loves them, and they reach out for His sweet love.

What if we doubt when we receive the sacrament? To answer this question takes an understanding of the nature of doubt. A person who denies the body of Christ and defies the grace of God is not really a doubter at all, he is an unbeliever. But the Chris-

tian is the battleground of flesh and devil on the one hand versus the Spirit of God on the other. When he sees that clash of doubt and faith, he is apt to be more impressed with his own doubt than he is with his faith. He is the person who should take the sacrament. He should see in it God's answer to his doubts, the reinforcements for the Spirit's cause in the battle with the flesh. This side of the grave we may expect doubt to continue. But blessed is the Christian who can in the great act of faith consume the body and blood of his Lord as the Word of God straight to his heart that God loves him, forgives him, and wants him with Himself forever.

C. FORCES ARE AT WORK IN LIFE WHICH SEPARATE CHRISTIANS FROM ONE ANOTHER

We are trying to remind one another that Holy Communion is a practical thing. It deals with practical problems. It equips for daily living. Christians should be aware of this as they realize that it concerns forces which separate them from one another.

It should not surprise Christians that the world is full of war and crime, that families deteriorate, trustworthiness is at a premium in business and government, that men compete with and snarl against one another rather than support one another. That is the nature of life without God. But it is a terrible trial for Christians to note that within their own number they can detect forces which crumble the life they live together.

Pride and selfishness are outstanding opponents of the Christian Church. We can expect them to be so to the end of time, because they, too, are the law of the flesh which persists in Christians even after their Baptism. We see them operate on every level of Christian life. Also Christian homes have their bickering, intolerance, and selfishness. Also Christian churches today have, like the Corinthians of old, groups and parties within them that seek for personal advantage rather than for the building of all. We sense the forces that gnaw at the heart of our fellowship with other Christians and nurture a climate of distrust and contention rather than mutual edification and building.

Parallel to these active qualities of disruption is another that we just don't notice at the moment — apathy for the brother. The Corinthians must have been quite busy in their fighting, yet St. Paul

is the one most aware of the fact that they were slack and weak and faint. Ultimately as disruptive as downright cleavage between Christians and hostility between them is the apathy that allows a Christian to forsake his responsibility for his brother, that converts his religion and church membership into an individual game and a search for personal advantage. God made the church to be a body, and when one member suffers, all are to help bear the pain and weakness. Apathy says, "I shall go my own way, and thank you to do the same; don't expect me to act like the member of anybody else." Such an attitude breeds disaster. It actually contributes as much to the disunion in the family or the parish or the church body as does active opposition and contention. And who shall say that this is not an actual and practical situation demanding the concern and care of Christians for themselves and one another?

D. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE THE ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION AS A MEANS FOR OVERCOMING THE FORCES WHICH SEPARATE THEM FROM ONE ANOTHER

In Holy Communion worthy communicants "discern the Lord's body." They play the role of being one body, that is, the role of members to one another. They hold up the Lord's death before one another, they thus speak the Word of God's grace and forgiveness to one another. They come to the sacrament for the forgiveness of sins, among which they discern their lovelessness and apathy for one another. God restores their power to love one another by holding before them how He first loved them. Holy Communion is one of the most striking and memorable ways by which Christians refresh in themselves that power from God for their love to one another.

On the first Maundy Thursday evening two great thoughts agitated the mind of Christ as He realized that He was about to enter upon the way of the cross and to confront God in the final act of redemption. The one was that His disciples might be freed from the selfishness and contentiousness which beset them, and rather carry out His great commandment, to love one another. The other concern of Christ was that His disciples might be ready for the task to which He was now sending them, the task of

bringing His redeeming love to the world in the Word of the Gospel. He foresaw the persecution and hatred with which the world would welcome them, even as they had so welcomed Him. It is into the midst of this setting that Jesus Christ places the Sacrament of the Altar. For, down through the years in which Christians would do again and again what He did that night, they would confront the same two great and interlocking commissions of Christ: to love one another and to bring His Gospel to their world. The sacrament is God's own power for love. It is the great dress parade, the grand review, the commissioning-in of the army of Christ in the given place, standing at attention to have the weapons of offense and defense pressed into their hands, displaying their unity and cohesion to one another, and going forth to tell the next man: "God has forgiven my sins for Jesus' sake — He will do it for you too." An ununited and quarreling church will not hold forth the Word of life to its world (Phil. 2:14-16). The church united in love will speak God's Word in its own midst and sally forth with the saving message to the end of the world. (Col. 3: 12-17)

This, then, is a quick review of the practice of Holy Communion. The words of Scripture concerning it are few and plain. The church's response to these words should be simple and apparent: "This do."



