
The Abiding Word

The
ABIDING
WORD

AN ANTHOLOGY OF DOCTRINAL
ESSAYS FOR THE YEARS
1954-1955

Volume Three

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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

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The Abiding Word

The Means of Grace in an Effective Church Program

IN a humble spirit of thanksgiving we begin this paper on the vital doctrine of the means of grace. We are thankful that in an age of our world when men are busy about many practical issues that press for immediate attention, our church still has time in District conventions, as well as in large synodical conventions, to deliberate on the doctrines of God's Word.

Historically we are a doctrinal church. The Lutheran Church has taken a positive Scriptural stand and has expressed itself dogmatically in its Confessions on the teachings of the Holy Bible. For this we make no apologies. Our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded His church faithfully to teach the whole counsel of God's Word and "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3)

May God graciously grant the present generation of Lutherans to carry on in this spirit with a strong program of doctrinal teaching and preaching. It is our prayer that we may never diminish the traditional Lutheran emphasis on the importance of doctrine in the church. In these days of worldwide ecumenical movements there is a tendency to ignore doctrinal standards in the interest of promoting fraternal relationships between bodies which are not united in the doctrines of the Scriptures. At the same time, we in the church also are affected by the atmosphere of urgency to get things done in the world and, therefore, are inclined to place a very heavy emphasis on the practical aspects of church life. As a result we have many conference papers on subjects like stewardship, evangelism, Christian education, and others that deal with a program of activities within the church. Though this is necessary and good, it also has a tendency to divert our attention from

the importance of a sound doctrinal foundation for the church in all its activities.

It has become our responsibility in the 20th-century Christian Church to maintain a real Scriptural balance in all these matters. We must continue to insist on a strong doctrinal position that is faithful in every respect to God's Word. At the same time we must have a sincere Christian interest in every ecumenical effort that seeks to unite God's people without compromise in the truth of the Holy Scriptures: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all" (Eph. 4:1-6). We also must remember that a sound doctrinal church should be the most effective in leading God's people in a practical program of Christian living and Kingdom service. "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:14-17). To this end we dedicate our presentation on a subject that is both doctrinal and practical, "The Means of Grace in an Effective Church Program."

I

THE DOCTRINE

The doctrine of the means of grace is a happy doctrine for Christian people and one which can be stated simply. The Scriptures teach that God has chosen to use certain designated means to offer to sinful man and to make operative in him His saving grace in Christ Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Savior. These divine instruments of God's grace have been called "the means of

grace." Briefly stated, this is the doctrine that is under consideration in this paper. There are many vital implications in this subject for the Christian Church in an effective church program.

We have spoken of this doctrine as a happy doctrine and as one that has vital implications. This is true, because it deals with the most important aspect of the Christian faith. The doctrine of the means of grace has to do with God's grace, and that takes us to the very heart of our holy faith. God's grace, as that term is used generally in the Holy Scriptures, means God's attitude of love whereby He has loved all sinners who have deserved no love. He has loved unworthy sinners to the extent that He gave His only-begotten Son into death for them all to make satisfaction for their sins. In this marvelous grace of our God there has been accomplished His plan of salvation for sinners. Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man and as the Substitute for sinners perfectly fulfilled the Law of God and took upon Himself the guilt of all men and suffered the penalty of sin for all on the cross of Calvary.

In this grace of God in Christ Jesus there has been established and perfected for all men reconciliation with Almighty God. We read in 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The central truth of Scripture is that "Christ was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). For the sake of Jesus Christ, in His grace God has declared all men just. In this grace God has provided for all men through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. This is the grace we speak of essentially when we speak of the doctrine of the means of grace. Surely this makes it a happy and vital subject for us.

To appreciate fully the truth that God has established certain means through which He brings this grace to sinners and makes it effective in their hearts, we might also review another important teaching of the Bible. I refer to the tragic fact of man's sinfulness. According to the Scriptures all men are under sin, and all men are born into this world in sin, their natures being corrupt. The doctrine of the total depravity of man is taught clearly and emphatically in both the Old and the New Testament. Most of us

can still recite the plaintive statement of David in Ps. 51:5: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Jesus also refers to the fact that until a human being has a spiritual birth, he is still only "born of flesh." The apostle Paul by inspiration makes this significant statement in Rom. 5:12: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Without exception to all people born into the world, we have to apply Eph. 2:3: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and *were by nature the children of wrath*, even as others." In this same chapter we read about the fact that all by nature were dead in trespasses and sin. A general judgment is passed on us in Rom. 3:22 and 23: ". . . For there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

On the basis of these passages and many other references in the Scriptures we are compelled to recognize and teach that man in his native state, when left to his own powers and resources, is spiritually impotent. In this condition he is under condemnation, and he himself is unable to do anything whereby he can please God and through which he can merit God's favor and have any hope for salvation. Many people have resented this basic truth of Scripture concerning man's original sin and its tragic consequences. It is folly to close our eyes to this fundamental truth and to deny it because it is unpleasant.

When we understand the full significance of our own sinfulness and hopelessness and hear that God is a gracious God and that God has established for us His wondrous plan of salvation and in Christ has completed reconciliation for us, forgiving all men their sins, then we can begin to appreciate this doctrine concerning the means of grace whereby God offers to us and makes operative in us His wondrous grace. Truly, when we have as the background for our study of the doctrine of the means of grace the doctrine of man's total depravity and the doctrine of justification, we can approach this whole subject as a very happy one.

A question that necessarily arises in a discussion of the doctrine of the means of grace is: Just what are the means designated as instruments for God's grace? Our Lutheran Church teaches that the means of grace are the Gospel and the sacraments. Our Cate-

chism defines the Gospel as follows: "The Gospel is that doctrine in the Bible in which God tells us the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ." Through the Word of the Gospel God announces to all the world that He has loved the world and given His only-begotten Son to be the Savior of sinners. This Gospel message with the good news of God's saving grace is found both in the Old and in the New Testament. We know that most of the people attending this convention could readily quote statements from the Scriptures which clearly present this good news of God's love for sinners. We find that the first proclamation of the Gospel occurred in the Garden of Eden right after Adam and Eve had fallen into sin. According to Gen. 3:15 God promised that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of Satan. This promise to provide deliverance from sin and its eternal consequences was repeated by our Lord many times down through the centuries of the Old Testament. We think of the specific promises of grace made to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We find many beautiful statements of the Gospel in the Psalms, the hymnal of the Old Testament church. One of the finest pronouncements of God's grace is the Gospel chapter of the Book of Isaiah, chapter 53. Many Christian hearts have thrilled to the clear statement of the substitutionary death of Christ in verses 4-6: "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

In the New Testament there are many passages that present the good news of God's grace to sinners. Possibly the best known and most loved of all such statements is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Among many other wonderful Gospel statements we also want to quote 1 John 2:1, 2: "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous; and He is the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." All such statements as we find in the Bible announce to

all who hear them the glorious truth that there is forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation provided for all sinners in the grace of God in Christ Jesus, our Savior. This Word of the Gospel is a means designated by God to proclaim and offer His grace unto sinners and to work and maintain in the heart of sinners the faith whereby man can share in the eternal blessings of God's grace.

In addition to the Gospel we find that God also has designated the sacraments as means of grace. Our Catechism defines a sacrament in these words: "A sacrament is a sacred act instituted by God Himself, in which there are certain visible means connected with His Word and by which God offers, gives, and seals to us the forgiveness of sins which Christ has earned for us." We have two such sacraments instituted for us by our Lord. They are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. As we study the subject of the sacraments, we find that in both instances the Word of the Gospel is a vital part of the sacraments. A prominent expression in passages that deal with both Baptism and the Lord's Supper has to do with the forgiveness of sin. There is in them the promise of God's grace and of everlasting life in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

According to the Bible these means of grace have a twofold power or function. First, they exhibit, offer, and grant unto men God's grace in Christ, the forgiveness of sins established for all in the objective reconciliation effected by Christ. Secondly, by bringing this grace to the hearts of men the Holy Spirit uses the means of grace not only to announce to sinners the grace of God whereby the whole world has been justified in Christ, but also to convey to the individual sinner this grace and through these means to work faith in his heart and thus make of the individual sinner a child of God, a new creature in Christ, and keep him in such faith.

Permit me to quote to you numerous passages from Scripture that teach us this twofold power of the Gospel and the sacraments as means of grace. Mark 16:15: "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Luke 24:46, 47: "And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Eph. 3:6, 7: "That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body,

and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel, whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power." John 3:5, 6: "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Titus 3:4-7: "But after that the kindness and love of God, our Savior, toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." 1 Peter 3:21: "The like figure whereunto even Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Eph. 5:25-27: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 22:16: "And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Matt. 26:26-28: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." John 17:20: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word." 1 Peter 1:23: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." 1 Cor. 1:18: "For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." 1 Cor. 1:21-24: "For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto

the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God." Rom. 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." John 20:31: "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name." 1 John 5:9, 10, 13: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. . . . These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." 2 Tim. 3:15: "And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:2-5: "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? — if it be yet in vain! He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit and worketh miracles among you, doeth He it by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith?" Rom. 10:14-17: "How, then, shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So, then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Acts 20:32: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." James 1:18-21: "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak,

slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls." John 8:31, 32: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." 1 Cor. 2:4, 5: "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." 1 Cor. 4:15: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel." Matt. 28:19, 20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (RSV)

On the basis of these passages and many other expressions in the Word of God we teach that God ordained that His saving grace in Christ is to be offered and conveyed to sinners and made operative in them for the creation and maintenance of faith through the means of grace. It is clear from the Scriptures that it is God's will to deal with us in bringing to us His gracious salvation only through the Gospel and the sacraments. It is not a question of whether or not God can do it some other way. God can do all things. But the point is that in His Word God has clearly stated that He offers His grace and imparts its converting power through the means of grace.

This converting power in the means of grace is the power of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of sinners. The means of grace are efficacious, because the Holy Spirit uses them for His holy purposes. Their effective power is not dependent on the human agency through which the Holy Spirit uses them to reach the hearts of men. The Gospel has this power of the Holy Spirit whether it is proclaimed by a great orator or a soft-spoken man or it be read quietly in the privacy of someone's home. The power of Gospel preaching is entirely the power of the Holy Spirit. Ordinarily we think of the Gospel being preached by our called min-

isters and missionaries. At the same time we should be thankful that when our Christian people speak this message to their families or to their neighbors or to their business associates or to a chance acquaintance, it has this same converting power of the Holy Spirit as when it is proclaimed from one of our pulpits. This power is present when people take their Bible and read it, and it is present when some wandering sinner may pick up a dirty piece of paper on which is written John 3:16. In whatever manner the message of the Gospel is brought to the attention of sinners there will be present this gracious power of God's Holy Spirit. Our church fathers have pointed out that sometimes the Holy Spirit may use a picture or some symbol to convey this message unto the heart and minds of people. This is significant for us as we seek to bring the Gospel of our Savior to men through audio-visual aids, including our television program "This Is the Life." In our church we have always had a respect for Christian symbols in art as well as in our liturgical form of service. As they convey the message of God's love in Christ Jesus to men, they are used by the Holy Spirit in His wondrous work of sanctification.

I recall an interesting incident in the life of a young man who now represents our church in the Philippine Islands. He is a native of these Islands and was brought to St. Louis as a servant in a wealthy family. In his loneliness he frequently tuned in Radio Station KFUE. As he listened to the Gospel Voice, he was deeply disturbed. Late one night when his spirit would not permit him to rest, he left the home for a walk, seeking to quiet his disturbed spirit; and as he walked out into the darkness, he looked up and saw the huge lighted cross on the tower of Station KFUE. This lighted symbol in the dark sky seemed to hold him, and in that moment there seemed to be born in his soul the conviction that he wanted to be a Christian and serve the Lord. The next day he went to see a Lutheran pastor.

It should also be stated that the validity of the sacraments and the spiritual power in them as means of grace are not dependent on the officiant. These sacraments, like the preaching of the Gospel, are effective means of grace because the use of them is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this power of the Holy Spirit the means of grace unconditionally offer to men the amazing blessings of God's grace in Christ

Jesus. However, it should be stated that this offer of God's forgiveness can be resisted. Man can harden his heart against the Holy Spirit coming to him through the means of grace. This is explained in Heb. 4:2: ". . . For unto us was the Gospel preached as well as unto them; but the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." God therefore earnestly expresses this warning in verse 7: "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Man can become a partaker of these blessings in Christ only by faith, which is a gift of God worked by the Holy Spirit in his heart through the means of grace. We do not teach a mechanical effectiveness of the means of grace in the heart of sinners. These means of grace have a salutary effect in the heart of man only when the Holy Spirit enlightens the heart of the recipient through these means and creates faith to accept the grace that is offered and conveyed in this manner. We read in 2 Cor. 4:5-7: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us."

It should also be noted that when we speak of the means of grace, we restrict them to the Gospel and to the sacraments and do not include the Law of God as a means of grace. Though the Law of God, as it is recorded in the Holy Bible, is just as much the Word of God as is the Gospel, it is not a means of grace. The Law does not bring to man God's grace in Christ Jesus. "Therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the Law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). The Law does not work faith in the hearts of sinners. In the Law God teaches us how we are to be and what we are to do and what we are not to do. Together with this pronouncement of God's holy Law we have His threat against all those who transgress His holy Commandments. Through the message of the Law God reveals His holy wrath against sinners, and God threatens man with everlasting condemnation "because the Law worketh wrath" (Rom. 4:15). God does not use the Law to convey His grace to the sin-burdened heart of man.

The Law also serves Christians as a rule of life. The Christian in love and gratitude seeks faithfully to please God in his daily life. He uses the Ten Commandments, the holy will of God, as a guide in his life, for his thoughts, words, and deeds. At the same time it should be stated that the Law is used in the service of the Gospel to prepare the heart of man for conversion by convicting him of his sin and convincing him of his lost condition. From this, then, it is clear that even though the Law is not a means of grace, it is part of God's Word that also must be preached.

There are a great many people who regard prayer as a means of grace. However, even though prayer is a gracious privilege given to Christian people, it is not a means through which God offers and conveys to us His grace in Christ. Prayer is something that believers do toward God. It is the exercise of their faith. When the Christian prays, he brings to the Lord his adoration and worship, the burdens on his heart and his petitions for God's merciful and gracious help. The understanding Christian, in his prayer life, will ask God to forgive his sins, but this blessing he will seek for Christ's sake according to the gracious promises in the Gospel. It should also be noted that God graciously answers His children's prayers and grants to them His wondrous grace in Christ Jesus, but this He does through His appointed means, the Gospel and the sacraments.

In excluding prayer as a means of grace we do not in any way despise this wonderful privilege God has given us. Just because we do not recognize prayer as a means of grace does not at all mean that we undervalue it.

Thus, once more, we wish to emphasize that the means of grace are the Gospel and the sacraments, the only divinely ordained means whereby God offers and conveys and makes operative in the heart of man His saving grace.

II

THIS IS A LUTHERAN DOCTRINE

It is interesting to note that the primary Lutheran Confessions, including the Formula of Concord, do not contain special articles on the means of grace. This does not mean that Luther and his colleagues did not teach the doctrine of the means of grace. There

are many references in our Confessional Writings which clearly indicate that this was a doctrine accepted and taught by Lutheran theologians since the days of the Reformation.

In the Augsburg Confession we read in Article 5 (Of the Ministry): "That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake." (*Trigl.*, p. 45)

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article 13, we read: "If we call sacraments rites which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added, it is easy to decide what are properly sacraments. For rites instituted by men will not in this way be sacraments properly so called. For it does not belong to human authority to promise grace. Therefore signs instituted without God's command are not sure signs of grace, even though they perhaps instruct the rude or admonish as to something. Therefore Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and absolution, which is the sacrament of repentance, are truly sacraments. For these rites have God's command and the promise of grace, which is peculiar to the New Testament. For when we are baptized, when we eat the Lord's body, when we are absolved, our hearts must be firmly assured that God truly forgives us for Christ's sake. And God, at the same time, by the Word and by the rite, moves hearts to believe and conceive faith, just as Paul says, Rom. 10:17: 'Faith cometh by hearing.'" (*Trigl.*, p. 309)

Another reference to the means of grace in the Confessional Writings of our church is found in the Smalcald Articles, where we read in Part 3, Article 4, as follows: "We will now return to the Gospel, which not merely in one way gives us counsel and aid against sin; for God is superabundantly rich in His grace. First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world; which is the peculiar office of the Gospel. Secondly, through Baptism. Thirdly, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar." (*Trigl.*, p. 491)

There are many references to the means of grace in the Formula of Concord. We shall list only a few to indicate that this doctrine

is taught consistently in our Confessional Writings. In Article 2, on the subject "Of Free Will," we read the following statements: "For this reason we shall now relate, furthermore, from God's Word how man is converted to God, how and through what means (namely, through the oral Word and the holy sacraments) the Holy Ghost wants to be efficacious in us, and to work and bestow in our hearts true repentance, faith, and new spiritual power and ability for good, and how we should conduct ourselves toward these means and use them. . . . Therefore God, out of His immense goodness and mercy, has His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan concerning our redemption, namely, the holy, alone-saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, publicly preached; and by this collects an eternal church for Himself from the human race, and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of sins, and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And by this means, and in no other way, namely, through His holy Word, when men hear it preached or read it, and the holy sacraments when they are used according to His Word, God desires to call men to eternal salvation, draw them to Himself, and convert, regenerate, and sanctify them." (*Trigl.*, p. 901)

Again in Article 11 of the Formula of Concord on the subject "Of God's Eternal Election" we read: "Now, God does not call without means, but through the Word, as He has commanded repentance and remission of sins to be preached in His name. Luke 24:47. . . . Moreover, the declaration, John 6:44, that no one can come to Christ except the Father draw him is right and true. However, the Father will not do this without means, but has ordained for this purpose His Word and sacraments as ordinary means and instruments; and it is the will neither of the Father nor of the Son that a man should not hear or should despise the preaching of His Word, and wait for the drawing of the Father without the Word and sacraments. For the Father draws indeed by the power of His Holy Ghost, however, according to His usual order, by the hearing of His holy, divine Word, as with a net, by which the elect are plucked from the jaws of the devil" (*Trigl.*, pp. 1071, 1087f.). We could quote similar statements from our official Confessions, as well as from the writings of Martin Luther and other church fathers. This has always been public doctrine in the Lutheran Church.

However, before leaving the consideration of our Confessions and the writings of Dr. Luther, permit me to quote the familiar words from the explanation of the Third Article in our Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

Another interesting statement from the writings of Martin Luther we find in his Large Catechism under the discussion of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed where we read: "For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, et cetera. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves. Learn, then, to understand this article most clearly. If you are asked: What do you mean by the words 'I believe in the Holy Ghost'? you can answer: I believe that the Holy Ghost makes me holy, as His name implies. But whereby does He accomplish this, or what are His method and means to this end? Answer: By the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. For, in the first place, He has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which He reveals and preaches, He illumines and enkindles hearts, that they understand, accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it." (*Trigl.*, p. 689)

In studying the doctrine of the means of grace in the literature of our church we find that in more recent times this doctrine has been stated in precise language in dogmatical works and in doctrinal or confessional statements. Probably the most precise and

thorough presentation of this doctrine is to be found in the monumental work of Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 3. It will interest us also to know that doctrinal statements accepted by The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, as well as other Lutheran churches in America, contain paragraphs on “The Doctrine of the Means of Grace.” We shall quote from some of these.

In the *Brief Statement* of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod we read in paragraphs 21 to 23 as follows:

Although God is present and operates everywhere throughout all creation, and the whole earth is therefore full of the temporal bounties and blessings of God (Col. 1:16; Acts 17:28; 14:17), still we hold with Scripture that God offers and communicates to men the spiritual blessings purchased by Christ, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the treasures and gifts connected therewith, only through the external means of grace ordained by Him. These means of grace are the Word of the Gospel, in every form in which it is brought to man, and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and of the Lord’s Supper. The Word of the Gospel promises and applies the grace of God, works faith and thus regenerates man and gives the Holy Ghost (Acts 20:24; Rom. 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23; Gal. 3:2). Baptism, too, is applied for the remission of sins and is therefore a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Titus 3:5). Likewise the object of the Lord’s Supper, that is, of the ministration of the body and blood of Christ, is none other than the communication and sealing of the forgiveness of sins, as the words declare: “Given for you” and “Shed for you for the remission of sins” (Luke 22:19, 20; Matt. 26:28), and: “This cup is the new testament in My blood.” (1 Cor. 11:23-25; Jer. 31:31-34, “New Covenant”)

Since it is only through the external means ordained by Him that God has promised to communicate the grace and salvation purchased by Christ, the Christian Church must not remain at home with the means of grace entrusted to it, but go into the whole world with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16). For the same reason also the churches at home should never forget that there is no other way of winning souls for the church and keeping them with it than the faithful and diligent use of the divinely ordained means of grace. Whatever activities do not either directly apply the Word of God or subserve such application we condemn as “new methods,” unchurchly activities, which do not build, but harm, the church.

We reject as a dangerous error the doctrine which disrupted the Church of the Reformation, that the grace and the Spirit of God are communicated not through the external means ordained by Him, but by an immediate operation of grace. This erroneous doctrine bases the forgiveness of sins, or justification, upon a fictitious "infused grace," that is, upon a quality of man, and thus again establishes the work-doctrine of the papists.

In the *Common Confession, Part I*,* we read in Article 5, "Means of Grace," the following:

God has willed that the knowledge and benefit of Christ's redemption from sin be brought to man through His means of grace, namely, through the Gospel in the Word and in the sacraments. Through these means He not only offers but actually bestows His grace in Christ unto forgiveness of sins and a life of fellowship with Him.

The Holy Scriptures teach both Law and Gospel, but the chief content of the Holy Scriptures is the Gospel. The Law enters into the service of the Gospel by bringing man to a knowledge of his sins and by convincing him that he is under God's judgment because of his sins, and by telling the believer what fruits of faith he should produce.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, God adopts men as His children. In Baptism, God confers the benefits of Christ's redemption and graciously bestows the washing of regeneration and newness of life. We recognize it as the Lord's will that men should be baptized even in their infancy, knowing that the promise of God also applies to little children.

In the Sacrament of the Altar, Christ gives us His body, offered up for us, and His blood, shed for us, to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of our faith, and the increase in holiness of life.

At the present time [1955] negotiations are being completed for a merger of the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Lutheran Free Church. The basis of this merger is their accepted statement of doctrine entitled "The United Testimony on Faith

* See Resolution 13 (*Proceedings of the Forty-third Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod*, p. 505), in which the *Common Confession* was recognized as a statement in harmony with the Sacred Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions even though it was no longer to be regarded or employed as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship with other church bodies.

and Life." In this document we read in Article 3, "The Means of Grace of God," the following:

God has willed that the knowledge and benefit of Christ's redemption be brought to man through His Means of Grace, namely, through the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments. Through these Means of Grace He not only offers, but actually bestows, His grace in Christ unto forgiveness of sins and a life of everlasting fellowship with Him.

We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of man's salvation. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit informs and convinces us that His Word is true, and He will keep all His promises to us, and testifies in our hearts that our faith in Christ is not in vain. "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth." (John 17:17)

In and with His Word Christ has instituted for His Church two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which bear His seal and promise.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, which is the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," we are born again of water and the Spirit, receiving the Holy Ghost and the forgiveness of sin, and are made members of Christ's Body and citizens of His Kingdom. In receiving Baptism we are made partakers of Christ's death and resurrection.

In the Lord's Supper, Christ gives us His body offered up for us and His blood shed for us, to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of our faith, and the increase in holiness of life. "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?" (1 Cor. 10:16 AV)

It is also encouraging for us to read from the Union Theses adopted by the Breslau Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Europe, the following statement on the means of grace: "The Holy Spirit performs His work not immediately, but through means, Word and sacrament (2 Corinthians 3, 6, 8). All men are, therefore, directed to the means of grace. (Mark 1:15; Matt. 17:5; John 3:5; 1 Cor. 11:25; *Trigl.*, 908:71, 72)"

From all the quotations that we have given from Lutheran Confessional Writings and doctrinal statements, it is clear that the Lutheran Church always has taught and still teaches the Biblical

doctrine of the means of grace We are sorry to say that this teaching of the means of grace is unique to the Lutheran Church. In Protestantism those who follow the theological systems of Zwingli and Calvin have taught that the inner illumination or conversion of a man is effected by the Holy Spirit immediately without any external means. Zwingli especially scoffed at the idea that the Holy Spirit should be in need of any means, declaring that the Holy Ghost needs no vehicle. Modern Reformed theologians have continued in this position that the Holy Ghost works without any particular means in bringing men to faith and keeping them in faith. Calvin's system of theology is centered about the doctrine of God's majesty and absolute sovereignty. This has affected his whole system of theology and, therefore, also has caused him to ignore the Biblical doctrine of the means of grace. His denial of universal grace and his teaching of absolute predestination also have caused him to deny the power of the means of grace as they are brought to men in general.

It should also be stated that all those who teach the false doctrine of synergism do not teach correctly about the means of grace, because they believe that man can assist in his conversion. The Pietists and others who place a heavy emphasis on the emotions also disregard the doctrine of the means of grace and seek to receive the power of God's Spirit immediately. A word from Dr. C. F. W. Walther in his *Law and Gospel* is pertinent here: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and the sacraments, but to their own prayers and wrestlings with God, in order that they may win their way into a state of grace. . . . Every man by nature is minded to base his redemption not on something outside himself, but entirely in himself."

The Roman Catholic Church does not teach the Biblical doctrine of the means of grace. This is due to the fact that they do not teach properly the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of total depravity. Their teaching is that God is moved by the grace that Christ won for us to infuse into man such grace that enables him directly to merit before God his justification and salvation. According to this doctrine it is asserted that Christ has supplied only sufficient grace to enable men to merit salvation for themselves. In

connection with such teaching they also speak about the sacraments as being effectively operative in the hearts of men without faith in the divine promises. They speak of a mechanical effectiveness of the means of grace (*ex opere operato*).

In my humble opinion we Lutherans should be profoundly thankful that God graciously has kept us faithful in this Biblical doctrine of the means of grace. As the Holy Spirit through these means works faith and maintains faith in our hearts, we find an unailing source of strength and comfort in all experiences of life. We are sure of the forgiveness of our sins and of life everlasting in the glories of heaven because our faith is anchored in the eternal promises of God as they have been brought to us and made effective in us through the Gospel and the sacraments whereby we believe.

This doctrine that God offers and conveys to us His grace in Christ Jesus and makes it effectively operative in our hearts in creating and maintaining faith is a vital doctrine which necessarily must greatly influence the entire program of the church.

III

THE EFFECTIVE CHURCH PROGRAM

A church program as we use this term in our paper is the program of the local congregation. It begins when believers in our Lord Jesus Christ join together for the preaching of God's Word, the administration of the sacraments, the worship of, and service to, the true God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Such a congregation should have an effective church program.

The first aim of such a program should be to keep for God by faith in Christ Jesus every single member of the church. Every soul that holds membership in a Christian congregation is exceedingly precious. It has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and has been brought into living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost through the means of grace. It ought to be apparent that a congregation made up of souls valued so highly by God must be concerned above everything else to keep these souls safely unto the Day of Christ. The first consideration in an effective church program should be the keeping of souls.

This seems so obvious, but apparently this phase of the church's program frequently is haphazardly administered and at times almost

totally neglected. It would be shocking for most of us if we would have an honest accounting of all the members of congregations in our Texas District who show little or no spiritual life. A startling article by L. J. Dierker, "Pennies More Than People?" in the December 1954 issue of *Advance* spells out the tragic fact for our church that we are losing one out of every eight baptized children. The losses from Baptism to confirmation among our children alone have averaged more than five thousand per year during a twenty-year period. We are warned that unless something is done in the church's program in keeping the souls of children, we are likely to suffer a loss of one hundred thousand children in the next fourteen years. Studies of membership in other age brackets also would be most disconcerting to every thoughtful Christian in our midst.

Let me repeat with emphasis that an effective church program is first of all a soul-keeping program. Lest we take this lightly, let us be reminded that the Lord has placed this as a responsibility on each individual Christian, on the ministry and on the whole church. We direct your attention to the following passages: Rev. 2:10: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev. 3:11: "Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Ezek. 3:17: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me." Luke 15:3-7: "And He spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." Acts 20:28-30: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

In addition to the responsibility of keeping safe every soul in the church with the Lord Jesus, the church also has the responsibility to conduct an effective soul-winning program. The passages in the Scriptures that make soul-winning a vital phase in a church program are familiar to all of us and need not be quoted in full. I would direct your attention to the following passages: Matt. 9:37, 38; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:45-48; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8. That this program of soul-winning should be carried on with determination and with consistent effort is evident from the parable of our Lord on the Great Supper. We quote Luke 14:21-23: "So that servant came and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." Soul-winning is a glorious activity in the church. There is nothing that is quite so stimulating as having the experience of being used by God to lead sin-burdened souls to the Lord Jesus Christ through the use of the means of grace. It is an activity that carries with it a remarkable promise of the Lord as recorded in an Old Testament passage, Dan. 12:3: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."

Though soul-winning is generally recognized as a vital part of an effective church program, we find that in practice a great many congregations do very little in reaching out to bring souls to the Savior, and we also believe it is not uncommon to find many Christian people who have never made an honest effort in winning souls for the kingdom of our Lord. For almost two thousand years Christian people have heard that the church is to have a soul-winning program. Many Christians have made valiant efforts to bring the Gospel to every creature. The task is far from complete. Sorrowfully we must acknowledge that in spite of all the consecrated efforts that have been made throughout the past centuries there are today four hundred million more unbelievers than there were twenty-five years ago. Though there has been a greater interest in churches in our own country the past few years, it remains a dis-

turbing truth that there are many millions of people who have never heard of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus. It is estimated that during the past generation seven hundred fifty million souls entered eternity without faith in Jesus Christ, the only Savior of sinners. Every congregation individually and jointly with sister congregations needs to be about the Father's business and work in saving souls while it is day, before the night comes when no man can work.

As we look at the effective church program in its broader aspects, we speak about it as a program of soul-keeping and soul-winning. However, it would be a mistake for us to limit our thinking on the effective church program to these two major emphases.

An effective church program also takes into account that it is God's will for the Christian to grow in knowledge and grace during the entire time that he is a member of the Christian church. The church with an effective program will be concerned that the members of the congregation are drawn into a learning process whereby they mature spiritually and more and more grow into the full stature of Christ. There must be in an effective church program an educational and nurturing process whereby the babes in Christ will grow into strong believers who have a good understanding of God's holy Word and who are well equipped to meet the responsibilities of discipleship in a crooked and perverse world. Listen to the Word as it is written in 1 Peter 2:1-5: "Wherefore laying aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming as unto a Living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." The Lord has given to the church the responsibility to supply to the individual members of the congregation the spiritual sustenance whereby God's children are strengthened and whereby they grow up into Christ in all things. Permit me to quote here Eph. 4:11-16: "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowl-

edge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." An effective church program includes a program of Christian education from the cradle to the grave, making use of every teaching agency in the church and of all modern, useful teaching aids and methods.

Another phase of the effective church program has to do with strengthening and directing Christian people into a full life of sanctification. Members of a congregation must be reminded time and again that the Lord expects them to be lights in this world. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus expressed it in this way: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:13-16). The Lord expects the church to impress upon His people the constant necessity for crucifying the flesh and walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5: 24, 25). An impressive admonition that certainly must touch the hearts of Christian people of every generation is Rom. 12:1, 2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

The church that wishes to fulfill its mission in God's kingdom must also recognize as a vital part of an effective church program the stewardship life as taught in the Scriptures. An effective

church program seeks to lead Christian people into a happy and full stewardship life. The church should lay this responsibility upon the heart of every child of God to such an extent that everyone prayerfully will seek to make his life count for the Lord. The people who have received the greatest blessing in all the world are the people who have received into their heart the Lord Jesus Christ and His gracious salvation. Such people need to know that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." An effective program of stewardship will make the Christian conscious of his responsibilities in the use of his time, talents, and treasure. There is no Christian who is not a steward accountable unto the Lord. This the Lord teaches in His parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), as well as in the parable of the steward. (Luke 16:1-12)

An effective church program in teaching stewardship will also promote a bold presentation of God's demands upon His Christians in regard to the stewardship of their material possessions. The church should not be timid in leading God's people in bringing liberal offerings unto the Lord (1 Tim. 6:17-19). The directions in the New Testament are explicit (1 Cor. 16:2): "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." This should be a happy experience for the Christians (2 Cor. 9:6-9): "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work; as it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; He hath given to the poor, His righteousness remaineth forever." Such a program of faithful stewardship also has the wonderful promise of the Lord in which He assures us: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." (Luke 6:38)

Finally, an effective church program also is concerned with keeping the congregation of God's people happy and content in the Lord. Every congregation should seek to develop the program of

worship and service and Christian living in such a way that all the members are thrilled in their holy faith and in their fellowship with God and with each other. The Lord Jesus clearly expressed this as one of the aims of His teaching (John 15:11): "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." There are many other statements that indicate that God's people should be guided in life in such a way and should be strengthened in the faith in such a measure that they have fullness of joy. (1 John 1:4; Phil. 4:4)

Thus briefly we have outlined an effective church program. As we give thought to the demands of such an effective church program, we easily can develop a sense of frustration and be overwhelmed with all the responsibilities the Lord has placed upon His people. I am thankful to say that there is no need for such a spirit of defeatism because the Lord has given to His people the means of grace through which such an effective church program can be promoted and maintained.

IV

THE MEANS OF GRACE ARE ESSENTIAL IN AN EFFECTIVE CHURCH PROGRAM

Surely every Christian, whether he be a minister or a layman, approves of such an effective program for every Christian congregation. We all want to see our congregations effective in their responsibilities of winning and keeping souls for Christ. We understand how necessary it is that there be spiritual growth for every Christian, that all be strengthened to lead righteous lives, that all be faithful as stewards of God, and that all rejoice in the Lord.

In thinking about this type of congregational program there may be some who will be inclined to suggest that it is rather idealistic. That is true, but it also has the virtue of being Biblical. For that reason we must never cease to strive most earnestly for that kind of program in our congregations.

At this point let me state emphatically that such an effective church program is possible only through the power of the Holy Ghost in the means of grace. The means of grace are essential. Moreover, for our encouragement let me say that the means of grace are a veritable powerhouse for an effective church program. What man can never accomplish with all of his accumulated wis-

dom, with all of his highly developed ingenuity and skill, with all of his wealth, and with all of his glamorous promotion, God performs through the Gospel and the sacraments. Souls are won and kept for Christ and built up in Him and made useful in His kingdom through the divine power in the means of grace.

But all of this can have meaning for us only if we properly use these wondrous means of grace in the work of God's kingdom. First of all, we who have the privilege to serve the Lord ought to be thankful that He has placed into our hands these instruments of His grace, through which the Holy Ghost performs the greatest miracles on earth. In the second place, we ought to approach our responsibilities in God's kingdom in a very humble spirit, because it is not our ability and personality and resources that accomplish such great spiritual works in God's kingdom. We must foster the spirit of the apostle Paul as it is expressed in 2 Cor. 3:4-6: "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward; not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."

At the same time we must remember that God in His wisdom and in His love has arranged to use His Christian people to handle for Him the means of grace. In that regard we are colaborers of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We proclaim the Gospel, we baptize, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and through these means the Holy Ghost accomplishes God's holy purpose of grace in gathering into His kingdom His redeemed children and also thereby keeping them faithful unto death. To the degree that Christian people will recognize and understand their responsibilities in handling the means of grace in the work of God's kingdom will there be developed and maintained effective church programs in the local congregations.

This necessarily has a great bearing on all phases of church work. Those who preach and teach publicly have to exercise care in their use of the means of grace. If the Holy Spirit is to work faith in hearts of people and maintain this faith in them through our preaching and teaching, then we must be cautious rightly to divide the Word of truth. Though we always have to present the Law of God with its demands and its threats, because man by nature is

proud and self-righteous, still our emphasis will have to be on the proclamation and application of the good news of God's saving grace in Christ, our Lord. It is necessary to point out the importance of this. By nature all of us are legalistic. It isn't too difficult to preach impressive sermons in which we thunder against the scandalous sins of our generation. Many modern and ancient preachers have been drawn by the temptation to crusade against popular vice and terrifying crime. In passing let me say that there is a right time for a forthright preaching of the Law to arouse the conscience of the public, but let us never even for a moment forget that hearts and lives of men can be changed only through the power of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

Oh, how concerned we preachers of God ought to be that we truly fulfill the responsibilities of our high calling! We must be careful that we do not impede the work of the Holy Ghost by an indifferent or careless proclamation of the Gospel. Every time we preach we should be concerned to do our very best. Prayerfully and earnestly we ought to strive to preach the Gospel as Jesus preached it. By word and deed, Jesus preached the love of God for sinners with understanding and compassion. He presented His message of salvation in simple language and with earnest conviction. An effective church program that wins and keeps souls with Jesus, that equips and trains God's people for sanctification, demands such Gospel preaching even in this generation of educated people.

It may be well to state in this connection that the members of our Christian congregations ought to be sincerely thankful to the Lord of the church when their pastors are faithful in the use of the means of grace and especially when they are truly evangelical in their preaching. Our congregations should expect nothing other from their pastors in their preaching than that they "preach the Word," both Law and Gospel, bringing to all that hear the precious promises of God's grace in Christ, the wondrous assurance that for Jesus' sake our sins are forgiven and that heaven stands open to all that repent of their sins and trustingly believe in the Savior. It is necessary also today to warn our Christian people to guard against itching ears, lest they seek from their pastors in their preaching the perishing wisdom and philosophy of man to their own perdition.

The encouragement to make full use of the Gospel also should be given to our parochial school teachers and to our Sunday school workers. The purpose in all our teaching agencies is identical with the purpose of preaching. What a marvelous privilege is granted to those workers in our church who are in the teaching ministry! The lambs of Christ are committed to their care five days a week, nine months in each year. These children are to be built up in their holy Christian faith, and they are to be trained for the responsibilities of Christian living and Christian service. It is tremendously important that they have a rich spiritual diet of the Gospel. Only in that manner will their faith be strengthened, and only in that manner can they be properly motivated in life.

This insistence on the proper use of the Gospel is necessary also for all those who work with delinquent members in our congregations. To be sure, the indifferent and careless church members must be shown their sin in neglecting their spiritual responsibilities. For this we must use the Law of God. But if we wish to draw such erring and straying members back into the fellowship of the congregation and into a living relationship with the Savior, it will be necessary to appeal to them with the Gospel to give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to warm their hearts with the love of Jesus and quicken them again with His converting power. An effective program of soul-keeping always must be geared to the proper use of the Gospel. The elders in our congregations are to assist their pastors in this spiritual work. They must be trained and equipped for such effective use of the Gospel.

For many years we have been encouraging our members to do mission work. Every earnest Christian really wants to help in winning souls for Christ. Unfortunately many seem to know nothing else to say than to invite people to come to church. That is better than nothing, but usually that is not enough. Our people must be trained to witness for Christ. That means they must deliver the Gospel message for Christ to the people they seek to win. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit calls and draws men to the Savior. To have an effective soul-winning program in a local congregation, it is necessary to have many members who go out into the highways and byways and hedges, compelling people with the Gospel to come to the waiting Savior, whose nail-scarred hands reach out in love for them.

The means of grace also are essential in motivating our people in Christian living and in faithful stewardship. We are not under the Law but under grace. It is God's will that Christian people be built up in their faith and in their understanding in such a manner that they in love and gratitude dedicate themselves to their Lord. The Holy Spirit uses the means of grace to sanctify us and strengthen us to overcome sin and do good works.

In promoting an effective church program, it is important that we do not overlook the sacraments which with the Gospel are the means of grace. In Holy Baptism God has given us a means of grace through which the Holy Spirit wins souls for Jesus by the washing of regeneration. How wonderful that God has given us a means whereby our little children are brought to Jesus in faith to have all their sins washed away. It is important that our Christian people are taught to understand and appreciate the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. When parents believe that their precious infants are given a spiritual birth in Holy Baptism (John 3:5, 6), being baptized into Christ and putting on Christ (Gal. 3:26, 27), then surely they will hasten with their beloved babes to bring them to Jesus. Instruction for such understanding is part of an effective church program and apparently is necessary at all times.

Holy Baptism also is a means of grace to confirm in the faith such as believe before they are baptized. For such people Baptism should be a most comforting and faith-strengthening experience. It is a vital means in this phase of an effective church program.

Another means of grace that is important in keeping souls with Jesus and building them up in their holy faith is the Sacrament of the Altar. If a congregation wishes to develop an effective program in keeping God's people strong in the faith, happy in their fellowship, sanctified in their life, and busy in the Lord's vineyard, then much use should be made of the Lord's Supper, through which the Holy Spirit extends His blessed work in the heart of God's children. We need to teach our people to have a high regard for this means of grace and should give them many opportunities to partake of its blessings.

It is evident therefore that an effective church program is dependent on the proper use of the means of grace. A Christian con-

gregation could lose its material possessions, including the church building with its fine appointments, and yet it could carry on an effective church program as long as it has the divinely ordained means of grace. They are essential. On the other hand, a congregation could have the finest church plant and highly talented leaders, but if it does not have the proper use of the means of grace, it cannot carry on an effective church program of God.

V

CONCLUSION

God has been good and gracious to our beloved Lutheran Church. And especially is this true of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. The doctrine of the means of grace is a meaningful article of faith for us. From generation to generation we have been operating in our church on the basis of this truth, that God maintains and expands His kingdom through the means of grace. May God preserve this precious doctrine for us and our children and teach us ever better to use His means of grace in an effective church program.

As we celebrate the golden anniversary of the Texas District in 1956, let us remember that the Lord has gathered us together in His kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit, operating through the means of grace. The blessings in our Texas District that rejoice our spirits have all come to us because under God the means of grace have been used properly in our congregations.

In this convention we have before us the challenging motto "Sanctify yourselves, the Lord will do wonders among you." Only in relation to the means of grace can this motto have significance for us as we celebrate our golden anniversary and look forward to more years of serving the Lord. If we are to be sanctified, that blessing must come to us through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace. And the wonders the Lord will do among us, He will do as always in His kingdom through the means of grace, whereby He offers and conveys His saving grace in Christ Jesus and makes it operative in the hearts and lives of men.

Thus we pray: "Come, Lord Jesus. Sanctify us in Thy truth, and mercifully continue to do wonders in us and among us through Thy means of grace. Amen."