

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

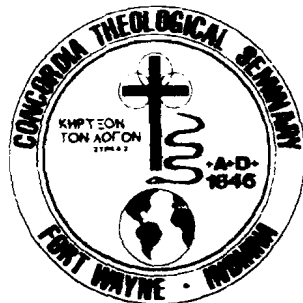
Volume 44, Number 1

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63125

JANUARY 1980

Harry A. Huth, D.D., 1917-1979.....	1
Perceived Influences on Occupational Choice of Seminarians	William M. Cross 3
The Purpose and Fruits of the Holy Supper.....	C.J. Evanson 17
Luther's Understanding of "Church" in His Treatise <i>On the Councils and the Church</i> of 1539	Eugene F. A. Klug 27
To Raymond Surburg on His Seventieth Birthday.....	39
Raymond F. Surburg: A Selected Bibliography	41
Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology	46
Theological Observer.....	50
Homiletical Studies.....	62
Books Reviewed.....	79
Books Received.....	99

102720



CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63125

The Purpose and Fruits of the Holy Supper

C. J. Evanson

The object of this study is to explore briefly several closely related aspects of Lutheran theology and practice: the goal toward which we move in using the Sacrament of the Altar; its place in the life of the church; and the frequency with which it is to be celebrated. In the present situation, even when there is certainty concerning the doctrine of the Real Presence, there is sometimes a lack of certainty concerning the goal and fruits of participation and such practical considerations as how often the Sacrament should be scheduled. Theologians have sometimes appeared loath to speak about the Sacrament of the Altar in any but the most general way — that is, as a particular example of a sacrament by which the fruits of Christ's redemptive work are in some manner appropriated by Christians.¹

In view of the conspicuous place which the doctrine of the Real Presence of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ has assumed in Lutheranism (and with it the contentions caused by the correlative teaching of the *manducatio indignorum*), it may at first seem surprising that Lutheran theologians should come to treat the matter of the specific goals, fruits, and use of the Supper with such apparent reserve. In the centuries immediately following the Lutheran Reformation, when frequent celebration was a common feature of Lutheran parish life, it was perhaps unnecessary to dwell at great length about the significance of obedience to the word of Christ, "Do this!" With few dissenting voices, scholars appear generally agreed that the Holy Eucharist was celebrated rather frequently in those days.² The rise, however, of rationalism and pietism brought a dramatic change, so that the Eucharist was almost universally displaced as the chief service of Christian worship. Surprising as it may seem, those who later rebelled against this new theological and spiritual milieu and attempted to undo the devastations of the Enlightenment were unable to restore fully the sacramental attitudes and practices of earlier generations.

It is noteworthy that from the beginning of the Reformation, Lutheran theologians tended to avoid doing battle with contrary minds by appealing to the goal and "profit" of the Sacrament of the Altar.³ For them the primary consideration was the specific commandment of Christ that we should "Do this," rather than any detached statement about the positive values which would

accrue to the act of reverent obedience. They recognized that the church's action in the Supper must derive from the Word of the Lord, and not from the notion that we ought to do what Christ has enjoined because in this particular case obedience will occasion certain spiritual benefits. To the question "Why do we do this?" the best answer must be this one: "Christ our Saviour has solemnly told us to do this and added great promises to His command!" It is in precisely this vein that Luther speaks so often,⁴ and in this way many of the particular medieval problems concerning the Mass are circumvented. But the question must inevitably be raised as to the specific content of these promises added to the command in the Holy Supper. How, for example, is one to address the charge that Lutheran sacramental theology remains vestigial — an essentially foreign blemish on the face of Evangelical faith, one which is hard to reconcile with the doctrine of justification by grace through faith? How does one do battle with the notion that the Augustinian definition of a sacrament as a visible word (*verbum visibile*) is absolute and exhaustive with the consequence that the uniqueness of the Sacrament of the Altar is vitiated? For it becomes little more than a visual (or, better, a tactile) aid to preaching and Bible reading — or perhaps even a human action by which one identifies himself with the benefit of the person and work of Christ.

R. Seeberg, indeed, a nineteenth-century repristinating historian, maintained that Luther's own position was deficient in this regard. He considered Luther's treatment in the Small Catechism of the benefit of the Holy Supper one-sided and inadequate. To say that we receive "forgiveness of sins" is to define the benefits of the Sacrament in terms which are largely negative (i.e., the Sacrament *un-does* something; it takes something bad away) and makes the Supper theologically identical to Confession and Absolution.⁵ The Swedish Archbishop Yngve Brilioth, however, recognized a fundamental error in Seeberg's analysis; Luther's understanding of "forgiveness of sins" has, in fact, a particularly positive content:

It is for the student of Luther's dogmatic theology to show how he came to use the term "forgiveness of sins" as the one comprehensive phrase for God's justifying and sanctifying work, wherein he imparts himself to men: this was only possible because the term was used by him to convey a positive meaning, such as it does not normally bear. It was inevitable, however, that when the term recovered its normal, restricted meaning, the treasures which Luther entrusted to its keeping should be lost; the fatal results are only too evident today -

In Lutheran preaching the idea of the forgiveness of sins has too often been treated as separate from the gift of "life and blessedness" which Luther always connected closely with it; as, for instance, in the *Lesser Catechism*.⁶

One ought to add that Luther is true to the biblical record in identifying the particular benefit of the Holy Supper; Christ offers the blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins," *to peri pollōn ekchunnomenon eis aphasin hamartiōn* (Matt. 26:28). Here forgiveness of sins covers the whole area of the bestowal of alien righteousness, spiritual health, oneness with Christ, and sanctification. As a result, a strong link is established between the on-going Christian life and the crucified and risen Lord whose body and blood have established and won such blessings for us.

Evidence of this positive content can be found, for example, in the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, which was drawn largely from the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and the *Loci Communes* of Melanchthon. Here the Real Presence is affirmed, and the Sacrament is described as "the application [to the communicants] of the benefits of Christ, to make them the members of Christ, and to wash in the Blood of Christ those who are repentant and erect their faith upon Christ."⁷ Lutheran signers of the Wittenberg Concord included Luther, Melanchthon, Jonas, Bugenhagen, Cruciger, Spalatin, and others. The other party at the conference was led by Martin Bucer.

There is, to be sure, no attempt here to posit the particular manner in which the body and blood of Christ accomplish their work in the Supper, as over against the operation of the other means of grace. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of the Supper must be maintained, since Christ Himself has established it. Everything must be built upon what Christ has said. Faith must have something to believe. Faith must believe what Christ has promised.⁸ The unique place of the Holy Supper in the life of the church is not to be diminished in any way, as Luther makes clear in the preface to the Small Catechism:

Christ did not say, "Omit this," or "Despise this," but he said, "Do this, as often as you drink it," etc. Surely he wishes that this be done and not it be omitted and despised. "Do this," he said . . .

He who does not highly esteem the sacrament suggests thereby that he has no sin, no flesh, no devil, no world, no death, no hell. That is to say, he believes in none of these, although he is deeply immersed in them and is held captive by the devil. On the other hand, he suggests that he needs no grace,

no life, no paradise, no heaven, no Christ, no God, nothing good at all. For if he believed that he was involved in so much that is evil and was in need of so much that is good, he would not neglect the sacrament in which aid is afforded against such evil and in which such good is bestowed. It is not necessary to compel him by any law to receive the sacrament, for he will hasten to it of his own accord, he will feel constrained to receive it, he will insist that you administer it to him.⁹

In the same manner, the “forgiveness of sins” is described as a great treasure — “a source of blessing as a sure pledge and sign,” and a “gift provided for me against my sins, death, and all evils” (LC, V, 22), “food for the soul [which] nourishes and strengthens the new man.” Luther, indeed, describes the Sacrament as the “daily food” of faith:

While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord’s Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses.¹⁰

The concept of oneness with Christ expressed in the Wittenberg Concord is again taken up in the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord:

After the Last Supper, as he was about to begin his bitter passion and death for our sin, in this sad, last hour of his life, this truthful and almighty Lord, our Creator and Redeemer Jesus Christ, selected his words with great deliberation and care in ordaining and instituting this most venerable sacrament, which was to be observed with great reverence and obedience until the end of the world and which was to be *an abiding memorial* of his bitter passion and death and of all his blessings, *a seal* of the new covenant, *a comfort* for all sorrowing hearts, and *a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another*.¹¹

This idea of oneness with Christ as a fruit of the Supper is already enunciated by Luther in 1519, when in the treatise *Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the True Body of Christ and Concerning the Brotherhoods* he calls the Supper “a sure sign of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all saints” (WA 2,743,21; LW XXXV, 51). Nor is the concept later dropped along with the doctrine of transubstantiation.¹²

In addition, the Sacrament serves as both a seal and comfort, a personal application of the Word of God to the communicant. The Augsburg Confession speaks in the same vein when it calls the sacraments “signs and testimonies of God’s will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith.”¹³ Again, the antecedents are in Luther:

Thus the sacrament is for us a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher, by which and in which we pass from this world into eternal life. Therefore everything depends on faith. He who does not believe is like the man who is supposed to cross the sea, but who is so timid that he does not trust the ship; and so he must remain and never be saved, because he will not embark and cross over . . . the blessing of this sacrament is fellowship and love, by which we are strengthened against death and all evil.¹⁴

It must be remembered, of course, that it is the Word of God that is here being applied, for the Eucharist offers as its fruits the fruits of the redeeming work of Christ, which is the very content of the Holy Gospel. We have already seen how the Formula of Concord maintains this essential connection by referring to the words and actions of Christ on the night of His betrayal, lest the celebration of the Holy Supper be reduced to a sort of Christian Mystery-Supper which derives its essential significance from ritual action.¹⁵ Thus, Luther insists that the *Verba*, the Words of Institution, must be clearly and distinctly spoken or chanted in the hearing of those present every time that the Supper is celebrated, a feature of the Sacrament which had been lost in the silent Roman Mass as well as in the so-called Mass of the Pre-sanctified of the Eastern and Western Lenten rites.¹⁶

There is a fourth aspect of the value of the Sacrament which one may identify particularly in Luther’s allusion to the Supper as “a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher.” Here, the Sacrament appears as *viaticum* — “the medicine of immortality” (*pharmakon athanasias*), a theme present in Ignatius and Cyril and taken up by the Reformers. Students of Lutheran sacramental theology have handled this aspect with some reticence, because of the obvious danger of overstatement about the particular operation of the Supper in this regard.¹⁷ Albrecht Peters and Hermann Sasse give evidence of overstatements by repristinating theologians of the nineteenth century. Some attempted, indeed, to posit the sacramental elements as the particular cause which makes possible the final resurrection of the faithful. This notion, however, has no direct or causal relation to the nature of a *viaticum*. As Elert has pointed out, the Reformers

themselves did not wrongly understand this concept, which is summarized by Selnecker from the words of Cyril of Jerusalem:

... Christ is, dwells, and wants to remain in us not only spiritually, as through the Word and Holy Spirit, but also physically or by a natural participation, and . . . now we can and should receive a living hope of the resurrection of our bodies and of salvation and life and eternal glory.¹⁸

The later dogmaticians took up this matter under the general heading of the Mystical Union, which in itself is neither substantial nor personal.¹⁹ In the *Examen* Chemnitz quotes both Hilary of Poitiers and Cyril in a discussion of the Sacrament as *viaticum*, which he links together with other aspects of the benefit of Christ:

Because in the Eucharist we receive that body of Christ which has been given for us, and blood of the New Testament which has been shed for the remission of sins, who will deny that believers there receive the whole treasury of the benefits of Christ? For they receive that through which sins are remitted, by which death is abolished, by which life is communicated to us, by which Christ unites us to Himself as members, so that He is in us and we are in Him. Hilary says beautifully: "When these things have been taken and drunk, they bring about both that Christ is in us and that we are in Him." Cyril says: "When in the mystical benediction we eat the flesh of Christ in faith, we have from it life in ourselves, being joined to that flesh which has been made life, so that not only does the soul ascend through the Holy Spirit into a blessed life, but also this earthly body is restored by this food to immortality, to be resurrected on the last day."

Therefore we receive in the Eucharist the most certain and most excellent pledge of our reconciliation with God, of the forgiveness of sins, of immortality and future glorification

...

Beautiful is that statement of Ignatius, which is found in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he calls the Eucharist *pharmakon athanasias, antidoton tou mē apothanein, alla zēn en theō dia Iēsou Christou, kathartērion alexikakon*, that is, "a medicine of immortality, as antidote, that we may not die but live in God through Jesus Christ, a cleansing remedy through warding off and driving out evils."²⁰

Under the title "De Fine et Fructu Sacrae Coenae," John Gerhard presents both a summary and expanded presentation in which he identifies two principal purposes of the Holy Supper: (1) the sealing (*obsignatio*) of the promises of the Gospel concerning the remission of sins and our own confirmation in the faith,

and (2) incorporation (*insitio*) into Christ and spiritual nourishment for eternal life. In the Supper the price of our redemption, which Christ gave over into death on the tree of the Cross, is offered, exhibited, and distributed by means of consecrated bread and wine, for the confirmation of our faith, according to the promise of Christ's own words.²¹ He who took upon Himself our flesh and blood has instituted a Supper in which we receive His own flesh and blood, that we may be conformed to His divine nature, as Cyril has said:

For thus we come to bear Christ in us, because His body and blood are diffused through our members; thus it is, according to the blessed Peter, we become partakers of the divine nature.²²

Minor principles include (1) the exciting of our gratitude toward Christ, (2) our incitement to obedience to Christ's institution and order, (3) our encouragement to patiently bear the cross for the sake of Christ, (4) the preservation of the public gathering of Christians (*nervus et vinculum est sacrae coenae celebratio*), (5) the public confirmation (*comprobemus*) of our repentance and the seeking of forgiveness from Christ, (6) the testimony that we approve of the teachings of the church, (7) the recognition of our neighbour as a brother and fellow-member in the Body of Christ.²³

We have seen that in the period of the Reformation, the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" represented no unduly limited definition of the goal and profit of the Holy Supper. Rather the phrase stands as a kind of shorthand mark for the whole content of the work of Christ our Savior. Thus the solemn celebration of the Eucharist is not to be regarded as a kind of liturgical appendage to the oral proclamation of the Word or as a pious exercise of the caliber of a spiritual retreat to which one turns for periodic renovation. The Sacrament is part and parcel of the Gospel itself, as Luther confesses:

Although the work was accomplished and forgiveness of sins was acquired on the cross, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. How should we know that this has been accomplished and offered to us if it were not proclaimed by preaching, by the oral Word? When do they know of forgiveness, and how can they grasp and appropriate it, except by steadfastly believing the Scriptures and the Gospel? Now, *the whole Gospel* and the article of the Creed, "I believe in the holy Christian church, the forgiveness of sins," are embodied in this sacrament and offered to us through the Word.²⁴

The Church of the Whole Gospel ought by her own practices and piety to bear witness to the integral part which the Lord's Supper holds in the plan of God. She must discourage, then, the perpetuation of a pattern of sacramental practice which almost of necessity gives rise to the suspicion that the Eucharist is not, in fact, integral to our life in Christ. Ought not at least one celebration of the Supper be a part of the Sunday schedule in every parish? After all, Melanchthon writes in the Apology, "In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals . . ." (XXIV, 1). It is toward this end that the preaching of the Word must naturally move. What is here recommended is not the cultivation of some sort of psychological "mood of celebration," but rather the preaching of the Gospel and the sealing of its benefits through the frequent celebration and beneficial reception of the Holy Supper.

Footnotes

1. Cf. Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), pp. 386 ff.
2. Sunday Mass (although without general communion) was the general practice in the medieval period. The confessional literature does not indicate that the Holy Supper ought to be celebrated less often, and Melanchthon in Apology XXIV makes reference to every-Sunday celebration, noting that the difference between the confessors and their antagonists is that among the confessors the sacrament is offered to the people who are prepared to receive it. "Initio hoc iterum praefandum est nos non abolere missam, sed religiose retinere ac defendere. Fiunt enim apud nos missae singulis dominicis et aliis festis, in quibus porrigitur sacramentum his, qui uti volunt, postquam sunt explorati atque absoluti." *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956), p. 349.
3. This "reticence" to speak concerning the blessings of Communion is more apparent than real, at least in the earlier Lutheran writers; but what is most significant is that the benefits are always tied most immediately to the first celebration in the Upper Room, so that the historical foundation of the Supper and its fruits are welded together. Cf. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 315-321.
4. In Luther, the blessings is always tied to the word of Christ, e.g., Large Catechism, V, 12-14.
5. Brilioth quotes from Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, IV, 1:85, 88.
6. Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic* (London: S.P.C.K., 1930), pp. 102 f.
7. *Bekennnisschriften*, p. 65: "Ideo enim propositum est, ut testetur illis applicari beneficia Christi et fieri eos membra Christi, et ablui sanguine Christi, qui agunt poenitentiam et erigunt se fide in Christum."
8. LC, V, 31-32, 34.
9. SC. Preface, 22 f.

10. LC, V, 23-25.
11. FC:SD, VII, 44.
12. Elert makes special note that, at the time of the writing of this treatise, Luther still officially held to the doctrine of transsubstantiation. Cf. Elert, p. 316.
13. AC, XIII, 1: "Vom Brauch der Sakrament wird gelehrt, dass die Sakrament eingesetzt sind nicht allein darum, das sie Zeichen seien, dabei man aeußerlich die Christen kennen muge, sondern dass es Zeichen und Zeugnis seien gottlichs Willens gegen uns, unseren Glauben dadurch zu erwecken und zu staerken . . ." "De usu sacramentorum docent, quod sacramenta instituta sint, non modo ut sint notae professionis inter homines, sed magis ut sint signa et testimonia voluntatis Dei erga nos, ad excitandam et confirmandam fidem in his, qui utuntur, proposita."
14. LW, XXV, 66, 67.
15. FS:SD, VII, 44.
16. C.F.W. Walther, in his *Americanisch-lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897; 4th edition), quotes from Luther's *von der Winkelmesse und Pfaffenweihe*: "Da tritt vor den Altar unser Pfarrherr . . . , der singet oeffentlich und deutlich die Ordnung Christi, im Abendmahl eingesetzt. . . . und wir, sonderlich so das Sacrament nehmen wollen, knieen neben, hinter und um ihn her . . . , allesammt rechte heilige Mitpriester, durch Christi Blut geheiligt und durch den Heiligen Geist gesalbet und geweiht in der Taufe . . . Wir lassen unsern Pfarrherrn nicht fuer sich als fuer seine Person die Ordnung Christ sprechen, sondern er ist unser aller Mund und wir alle sprechen sie mit ihm von Herzen . . . Strauchelt er in den Worten, oder wird irre und vergisst, ob er die Worte gesprochen habe, so sind wir da, hoeren zu, halten fest, und sind gewiss, dass sie gesprochen sind; darum koennen wir nicht betrogen werden."
17. Cf. Sasse, pp. 382-389. Albrecht Peters, *Realpraesenz. Luthers Zeugnis von Christi Gegenwart im Abendmahl* (Berlin und Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1966), points to the dangers of making too direct a connection between the Sacrament and the resurrected body. "Das Proprium des Sakramentes ist, wie wir bereits sahen, die direkte heilshafte Beruehrung unseres Leibes, unseres Mundes, Halses durch den Leib Christi in und unter den Elementen. 'Das Proprium des Sakramentes ist die geist-leibliche Einung mit Christus' (E. Sommerlath: *Vom Sakrament des Altars*, S. 113 . . .). Wir finden aber keine Stelle bei Luther, wo er von dieser Aussage aus das Abendmahl ueber das Wort erhebt und diese direkte communio unseres Leibes mit Christi Leib zum Ausgangspunkt nimmt, dem Altarsakrament eine besondere Dignitaet zuzuschreiben."
18. Elert, p. 319 f.
19. For a general treatment of the *Unio Mystica*, see Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House), pp. 481-486.
20. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), pp. 233 f. Chemnitz begins his section "Concerning the Reason for the Institution of This Most Holy Sacrament" with these words: "A simple and true explanation from the Word of God of the teaching concerning the purpose, use and benefit, or concerning the power and efficacy of the Eucharist is most useful. For by this teaching the minds are stirred up to a more frequent use of this sacrament; by this use minds are incited to faith, prayer, and giving of thanks; finally, the

conscience of the believer is strengthened by the sweetest comfort from this teaching, that the whole treasury of all the benefits which Christ the Mediator procured by the offering up of His body and shedding of His blood belongs also to him in the so great infirmity of the flesh, that it is certainly communicated to him, and firmly given and pledged to him. Because we are subjected to the diverse calamities of this life, this teaching also shows what a pledge we have of our future liberation at some time, of immortality and glory" (p. 232).

21. John Gerhard, *Locorum Theologicorum, Tomus Decimus* (Tuebingen: Cottae, 1779), pp. 368-372.
22. Gerhard, p. 368.
23. Gerhard, pp. 371 f.
24. LC, V, 31-32.

The Rev. C. J. Evanson is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana.