

Eucharistic Themes in the Gospels

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SOME YEARS AGO the student association of Concordia Theological Seminary sponsored two presentations of pro and con lectures on the eucharistic character of John 6. In the first series there were four presenters and in the second, two. The issue of which biblical texts are eucharistic cuts across the usual liberal-conservative lines. This forum brought a disputed issue to the surface. *Sola scriptura* recognizes the Scriptures as the source of all church doctrine and proclamation, but the principle itself does not help resolve hermeneutical disputes, including the eucharistic character of John 6 and other texts. A preacher's announcement that he accepts the inspiration and the inerrancy of the text for his sermon does not guarantee that he understands it as the Evangelist intended. In a recent service of installation, the clergy were asked if they would interpret the Scriptures according to sound principles, but this raises the question of what these principles are and who determines them. Eucharistic issues also concern church life, since the Lord's Supper is something nearly all Christian churches do. In a perfect world, biblical interpretation and liturgical practice should influence and be reflected in what the preacher says.

In support of a non-eucharistic interpretation, the one side had Luther and the classical seventeenth-century Lutheran theologians on its side, though their piety perpetuated what their hermeneutic did not allow. Historical Lutheran tradition has not favored a eucharistic interpretation of John 6 and has been content in letting the weight of Eucharist arguments rest chiefly on the words of institution, the *verba*. Another argument for the non-eucharistic approach was that Jesus did not and could not have spoken about the Lord's Supper before its institution on the night of his betrayal. This argument arises from seeing the Gospels as chronologically arranged biographies. Such an approach eliminates potential eucharistic references apart from the *verba*.

Before reading John 6 at First Congregational Church in North Conway, New Hampshire, on 27 August 2006, an elder, Gerry Tilton, gave a brief homily on why John 6 had nothing to do with the Lord's Supper and dealt with a spiritual mystery only. At a light lunch that followed, I asked her if eating manna

was a physical eating, how was it that eating Christ's flesh was only a spiritual eating. For a moment she was convinced by the argument, but concluded by saying that on these matters disagreement was allowed. Ironically, sermons preached in the most conservative Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod (LCMS) churches that same August said hardly anything different.¹

At the heart of this debate is defining what a Gospel is and whether one definition fits all. Books and courses in biblical hermeneutics set forth principles for interpreting literature, including the Scriptures. These rules are prolegomena in their own right and both predetermine and place limits on what will be discovered in the Gospels. In some sense the Gospels, including non-canonical ones, presume to be lives of Jesus, but each Evangelist had his own intentions. They have biographical data, but apart from the birth and death narratives, their order may not be chronological, though this was the prevalent view until recently. Approaching them as chronological documents allowed finding discrepancies among them. Luke seems to suggest that the events recorded in others' writings — or was it just Matthew? — were in need of rearrangement.

A comparison of one Gospel with the others and references in the post-apostolic literature shows that the individual literary and theological character of each was not grasped by those who came after. Recognizing Matthew's Hebrew character did not mean that its difficult passages were understood. A once commonly held view was that, at the end of the apostolic era, the meaning of the Scriptures was gradually lost until it was recovered by the Reformation. This self-serving defense of the Protestant Reformation carries this grain of truth, that what made one Gospel unique from another was soon lost. One wonders if even the Gospels' first hearers caught their intent, or if the second and third Evangelists grasped the Gospels they had at their disposal. Being inspired does not translate into hermeneutical correctness.

We should consider how a Gospel was written. The Evangelists came upon the materials that they incorporated into their Gospels from their direct experiences, their own and others' recollections, and reflections on these experiences, especially as preached recollections and reflections, and written documents like other Gospels. They all had the one purpose of creating and

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1. The Gospel lessons in August 2006 according to Year B of the Three-Year Lectionary were from John 6.

confirming faith, and doing what the oral tradition or other documents had not done. Our discovery of each Evangelist's unique and perhaps previously unrecognized themes serves the homiletical task. We can actually preach something that we or someone else has not preached before.

In the earliest church Christianity was challenged as a morally inferior and historically suspect religion. Matthew responded to the Jewish accusations about the illegitimacy of Jesus and the disciples' stealing his body. Further fuel for discrediting Christianity came about with the church's allegiance to four Gospels, which allowed the opponents to point out discrepancies in the accounts. Religions with one authoritative book like Islam and Mormonism do not have to face the problem of authority that Christianity does with four books. Apologetic concerns belonged to the oral tradition and were taken over into the Gospels, especially Matthew; however, Luke's precise reference to Roman imperial rulers shows that this was an issue for him also. This apologetic was more of a defense of the Christian message than it was a frontal attack on secular views.

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Most of us became acquainted with apologetics in connection with the fight over inerrancy, which is less of an issue in the LCMS than it was in the 1960s and 1970s. In the early church, external assaults on Christianity forced the earliest interpreters to begin seeing the Gospels as chronologically ordered and arranged historical narratives. When this happened, the unique theological and literary aspects of each was lost. For example, since Mark only duplicated materials found in Matthew and Luke, it was ignored. Seeing the Gospels as history was necessary to respond to Gnosticism, which denied that God had come in the flesh, but this came at the price of losing each Gospel's unique character. With the opponents of Christianity citing one Gospel against another, Tatian created his *Diatesseron*, a composite life of Jesus, a Gospel harmony, for which Matthew was taken as the chronological standard for ordering the accounts of the other Gospels.² Tatian brought to a logical conclusion that if there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, there should be one Gospel for all.

Epistles were easier to deal with. Their confessional affirmations about Jesus were not encumbered with the historical details of the Gospels and an attempt to put them in the right order. Death and resurrection, humiliation and exaltation set the patterns for Christ's life. Paul replaced Jesus as the church's chief theologian. Jesus is center stage and Paul provides the libretto, so we really know what Jesus wants to say. The habit of attributing the history of Jesus to the Gospels and the theology to Paul's Epistles has persisted to this day. Even without any awareness of what a Gospel harmony is, we all naturally combine the events of Jesus' life and his words to create our own harmonies. Shepherds and magi are placed in one Christmas tableau. Easter events are not sorted out. The four Gospels are shuffled like suits — diamonds, hearts, spades, and clubs — into one deck.

Not that long ago a course on the harmony of the Gospels was offered at the Fort Wayne seminary. William Beck wrote a harmony of the Gospels under the title of *Life of Christ. The Lutheran Lectionary* (1941) provided a harmony of the passion story for Wednesday Lenten services. But Gospel harmonies are not without problems. The cleansing of the temple is placed by John at the beginning and by the Synoptic Evangelists at the end of Jesus' ministry. Positing two cleansings resolves this. A three-year ministry may be constructed from the four Passovers in John, but it cannot be deduced from the Synoptic Gospels, which are agreed only on John's ministry at the beginning and the death and resurrection at the end. No time frame can be determined for the events that fall between these book-ends. As an introduction to his Gospel, the Apostle Matthew (4:23–25) suggests that throughout Jesus' ministry, he repeated his teachings and performed the same kinds of deeds over and over again. We are allowed to follow the Evangelists' own clues that they arranged what they knew about Jesus to suit their purposes. Some events may have been preserved because they were seen as more clearly characteristic of who Jesus was. Other events like miraculous feedings and those composing the final week occurred only once. Jesus informs John the Baptist that the dead are raised up, but Matthew reports only the raising of Jairus's daughter. There must have been more. Harmonizing the Gospels comes from a good motive in answering the opponents' claims that the Gospels contain historical discrepancies, but a Gospel harmony provides for a unified account, fitting for documents received as one inspired word of God. Unstated is that the production of Gospel harmonies makes historical origins, their unique character, and theological approaches of secondary, and perhaps, no importance at all.³ So traditionally, dogmatics approaches the Gospels as an absolute word of God, that is, a harmony, not taking into consideration their historical origins and the Evangelists' intents.

Questions about the origins of the Gospels are customarily answered by citing post-apostolic fathers and ignoring the documents themselves. We come face to face with a canon,

2. For a fuller discussion see David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 33–44.

3. Dungan, *Synoptic Problem*, 112–141. In his debate with the Manicheans, St. Augustine developed this line of thinking.

determined by the post-apostolic church, from which various passages are cited to demonstrate its character and that of the individual books. However, introducing extracanonical references compromises *sola scriptura*. Rather each book's claims should be accepted on their own merits and then, having been recognized as Scripture, each is added to the existing canon. So the New Testament is built from the bottom up and not the reverse. A bifurcated approach that regarded the Synoptic Gospels as history and Paul's Epistles as theology hindered the discovery of eucharistic themes in the Gospels apart from the *verba*.

Allegory, which has been officially maligned in Protestant circles since the Reformation, may have risen from the frustration of having to preach on the Gospels, which were seen chiefly as historical narratives. Allegorical preaching was a hit-and-miss operation, often fanciful, but it attempted to reach beneath the historical surface searching for an undergirding theology. Denial of the Gospel's historical materials during the Missouri Synod controversy of the 1970s accentuated their importance for faith, but it did not change the common view that the Gospels were chiefly historic, while Paul remained the church's chief theologian. For all of its weaknesses, allegory was an incarnational method, recognizing that embedded in the shell of the historical report was the core of what God intended for Christians to believe.

Sola scriptura, in its pure form, requires returning to the original documents to discover their intent, but this is easier said than done. The original hearers of the Gospels may have been like the disciples, who did not understand the words of Jesus the first time they heard them. Why should we expect a more informed response to the apostolic writings than Jesus' audiences gave to him? Paul's Epistles created their own confusion, as do our sermons. It comes with the turf. Preaching remains a necessary corrective for not fully formed understandings of the Scriptures and previous sermons. Each biblical author said or clarified what he or someone else had previously said or written. The Evangelists were moved by a sense of dissatisfaction over what they thought was available to their hearers. Preachers are no different than the writers of the apostolic period in focusing and refocusing the apostolic proclamation on today's hearers, but this is not so easily done. I hesitate to describe the Scriptures and preaching as correctives; rather they bring to fuller expression what is *already* believed.

Between us and the apostolic age, layers upon layers of tradition, that is, the early church and the Lutheran fathers, have accumulated, and we have added our own reflections on the apostolic word and the earlier traditions. They stand as angels with fiery swords preventing our return to the pristine message. Even if we could push tradition aside, no one manuscript emerges as the authentic original one. Scribes and then translators adjusted the texts. Some variants were ordinary mistakes, but others were attempts by the scribes to improve the sacred texts. Rare is the preacher who has not adjusted a word in reading the Scriptures here and there or introduced and interrupted the reading to offer a comment.

The production of the Gospels and of pericopic systems consisting of selections from the Gospels was done for similar

motives. Gospels may be described as homiletical, catechetical, authoritative, and biographical. In being written to be read publicly, they are lectionaries. As inspired by the Spirit of the Father and containing the words and deeds of Jesus as preserved by the apostles, they surpass all other biblical books in honor. Michael Goulder attempted to find a lectionary system in Matthew. Others may have done this with other New Testament books. Tomesch has done this with Hebrews. Attempts to uncover a lectionary series in any of the Gospels and then to set it in place in church life cannot be accomplished as long as we are determined to keep our present church year in place. In other words, our intent to keep the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany-Lenten-Easter cycle does not neatly fit into what we have in any of the Gospels. Entire Gospels were the lectionary for one Sunday and then for all Sundays after that.

In *Discourses in Matthew* I argued that 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 presupposes that this church knew Matthew and Luke.⁴ Appearances of a second and third Gospel made reading two Gospels each in its entirety impossible. From this frustration our system of a series of pericopes for each Sunday may have come into being. Evidence indicates that in spite of its often unintelligible Hebrew idioms, Matthew had the lion's share of the attention given the Gospels for the first two or three centuries. When congregations put the four Gospels into what is liturgically called "The Book of Gospels," selections were chosen for each Sunday. In the traditional series Matthew predominates with Luke as a close second. John takes the post-Easter season and surprisingly Mark is given Easter. This may reflect the prominence of Matthew and Luke in the first- and second-century church with the church's little regard for Mark, which has never been regularly read in its entirety. John, with the most post-resurrection appearances, predominated the post-Easter season.

When the three-year lectionary series for *Lutheran Worship* was proposed nearly thirty years ago, a former colleague suggested my analyzing it to detect a liberal plot. He was right in recognizing that pericopic series are open to analysis. This applies to the traditional one-year series and the ones now found in *Lutheran Worship* and the *Lutheran Service Book*. Dr. Daniel G. Reuning could be asked why he chose for the 1997 *Seminary Prayerbook* lectionaries of the 1937 *Swedish Hymnal* and the 1982 *Evangelisch-Katholisches Studienbuch*, an ecumenical endeavor of Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic German territorial churches.⁵ Creation of a pericope system is the creation of another Gospel along side not only other series but the canonical Gospels themselves.⁶ Like the Evangelists, orga-

4. David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 136–142.

5. Normand Bonneau claims that lectionaries appeared in the second century to correspond with the annual celebration of Christ's death and resurrection and points to previous evidences of Old Testament ones (*The Sunday Lectionary: Ritual Word, Paschal Shape* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998], 4–11). Also see *The Revised Common Lectionary: Includes Complete List of Lections for Years A, B, and C* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

6. See Bonneau, *Sunday Lectionary*, 3–4.

nizers of pericopic systems are rearranging prior materials for purposes that they have determined are not being adequately met by current series.

Some have called the traditional pericopic system “the people’s Bible.” *But this is how each Evangelist saw his Gospel.* He attempted to say things differently and to add to or subtract from the tradition or the Gospel(s) at his disposal and to interpret them. Our traditional pericopes cannot carry the meaning that only those sections chosen as pericopes are intelligible, or are superior to portions not chosen, and that the people can understand only those sections deemed suitable for them and so are in need of a pared down *Readers’ Digest* version. As indicated, analyses of any pericopic system are necessary. Should an analysis come up cold on meaningful results, then any random selections can be used. Whether any series catches and preserves the intentions of any or all of the Evangelists is another matter. By mixing and matching Gospels in the traditional one-year series, a disjointed harmony is created. It is like taking parts from Ford, GM, Toyota, Hyundai, and Volkswagen to create a hybrid car.

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Each pericope is impressed with the “rule of faith” of those who created it. An ecumenically constructed system might emphasize common elements and avoid divisive ones. Churches ordaining women or homosexuals will omit certain Pauline passages. Apart from what might be thought of selections in the two- and three-year series, they come closer to the earliest practice of reading an entire Gospel. These series are modifications of the *lectio continua*, allowing for intrusive exceptions to fit our liturgical calendar.

Monasteries followed *lectio continua* long before Philip Spener made it a part of the Pietistic movement. He did not call for an abandonment of the regular Sunday services, but their pericope readings were for him only bits and pieces of what the Bible had to offer. Reading the entire Bible was assigned to the home on Sunday afternoons. Knowing more of the Bible would increase the people’s spirituality, so he reasoned. For Pietism, the Bible provided regulations of Christian living, and so it followed that as one knew more of the Bible, one knew more of its regulations. This distorted the fundamental Lutheran understanding that any section of the Bible has the same message of God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ. This may have been what the “all theology is Christology” controversy was all about.

A quantitative approach by which the importance of a subject is determined by the amount of its space in the Bible would support those who see the Lord’s Supper as secondary or even unnecessary. For them church cannot be church without faith, but it can be church without the Supper. Parallel to measuring the biblical space devoted to the Lord’s Supper is a reluctance to read the Gospels from a eucharistic perspective. For many the command of Jesus to “do this” in the *verba* provides a sufficient reason for a frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and the *verba* exhaust the biblical support for the sacrament and its celebration. It is amazing that the Disciples of Christ, with a Reformed doctrine of the Supper, in which the earthly elements are not identified with divine things, see this requiring a weekly celebration. Looking beyond the *verba* for references to the sacrament in other parts of the Gospels is seen by some as both unnecessary and an offense against the *sensus literalis unus est*. Hence the opposition to a eucharistic interpretation of John 6. Unsatisfactory is the argument that without John 6 the *verba* provide sufficient support for the Lutheran position, simply because John 6 has a superior description of bodily eating and drinking, to use Luther’s terms. While affirming that eucharistic theology can chiefly be drawn from the *verba*, we should see that it can also be drawn from other New Testament citations.

If apart from the *verba* the Gospels are silent on the Eucharist, then it follows that the consecration of the elements to the exclusion of other parts of the Sunday morning service should be the sole focus of our eucharistic attention. Should references to the Eucharist be identified throughout the Gospels, then other parts of the service serve eucharistic devotion. In the rites of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the full meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus come to expression for the believer. Recognition of sacramental themes in the Gospel narratives would provide a basis for sacramental sermons. Then the reading of the Gospel and its exposition would be the means of grace in a fullest sense. Reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and the sacramental rites constitute an integrated totality. They are not parts brought together to create the whole. Holding that the reading and the exposition of the Scriptures and the Eucharist celebration constitute one reality is, after all, what is intended by the frequent Lutheran reference to *word and sacrament*. When it is held that the *and* suggests that the sacraments add something that is not inherently in the word, the phrase *word and sacrament* is misunderstood. Should we be able to clarify this in our thinking, we would no longer hear that while Zwingli had the word, Luther had the word and sacrament. Without the sacraments one does not have what the word promises, or better still, one has not understood the word. Luther read Genesis sacramentally and his lectures on this book provide a model for us. Rather than referencing Luther, especially his Small Catechism, in our sermons, we would do better to learn from his method. Catechism quotations are nostalgic for the people, but they do not qualify as “thus saith the Lord.”

It seems that the seminary graduates in the last twenty years or so are more likely to give attention to the sacramental life of their congregations. *Romanizing* is a shorthand pejorative

bandied about by those who do not see the sacraments as belonging to the core of Lutheran theology and practice. Sacramentally orientated ministers may not constitute the majority, but there are more of them than there were two generations or so ago. Renewed sacramental practice may not have resulted from a sacramentally conscious hermeneutic, so it seems to me, but largely from an historical revival and appreciation of Lutheran traditions. This cannot be equated with recognizing the sacramental character of the biblical texts, because it feeds on Lutheran history. Undefined is which period qualifies as the perfect Lutheran era. Recovery of a golden age is the goal, but the crusaders never reach it. Yes, Luther's 1526 baptismal rite has been reintroduced, but with adjustments like giving a role to the parents and by adding parts of the Creed that he excluded. Liturgy preserves the historic faith of the church, but a pure restoration is rare and in some cases artificial. Restorative changes seem to be motivated by a desire to make things more orthodox than they originally were. Here at work is the principle that only those sons who surpass their fathers are successful.

In every period, a church absorbs the cultures of other churches with that of the world. Culture has to do with worship, and cross pollination among liturgies is inevitable and sometimes deliberate. Since culture is the atmosphere we breathe, sermons about its dangers soon ring hollow. Cultures are diverse and so the liturgy of one communion of churches differs from others. Within our own fellowship liturgy differs from congregation to congregation. Pastors who see themselves as liturgically traditional borrow from Rome, the Orthodox, the Anglicans, Evangelicals, and general Protestantism. *Though we deplore creative worship, we all do it.* No one is immune to external infection. My favorite viruses are singing Reformed hymns on Thanksgiving Day and having sacramental elements being brought to the altar with the financial gifts. The *Lutheran Service Book* is an attempt to bring some unity out of this array of Rube Goldberg creations.

Since the Roman Catholic Church belongs to the Western tradition, as Lutheran churches do, its practices will influence ours. Roman Catholic liturgy and doctrine are thoroughly eucharistic and so a common ground with Lutherans emerges. Liturgy can do only so much. If polls are to be taken seriously, elaborate eucharistic worship has had little influence on Rome's rank and file, whose views on the Lord's Supper are Reformed. Whereas Roman Catholics make the Eucharist central, Luther gave this place of honor to baptism, but this did not prevent him from preserving much — perhaps too much for some — of pre-Reformation eucharistic devotion. Luther drew a line in the sand with the Reformed over the Lord's Supper, but his unique sacramental contribution was reformulating the doctrine of baptism, whose place in obtaining salvation in the medieval system had been diminished by the ascendancy of confirmation, penance, and extreme unction. Strange that the one word *baptism* can mean birth and death. By one act we die and are born, a continual process that far outpaces the death and re-birth cycles of Eastern religions.

Luther's differences with Zwingli over the Lord's Supper were the major cause for Protestant division, but baptism, as

it was developed over against the Anabaptists, provided him with the foundation for faith and a safe haven for troubled believers. Christians were always going back to square one, and for him that was baptism. Every day the believer reverted back to where he started before he became a Christian. Rebaptism was not a possibility for Luther, but absent the water Christians are continually baptized. The road between faith and unfaith was not lineal but circular. Any concept of internal moral improvement has to incorporate Luther's view that the sinful self drowned in the morning came to life during the daylight and night hours, so that the miserable fellow had to be suffocated each dawn in baptism.

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Baptism provides the birth and death parameters of life. The Lord's Supper is the nourishment for its substance. What is born from the grave of Christ is fed from the cross. A new tactic taken by Arthur A. Just sees the Eucharist embedded throughout Luke in Jesus' table fellowship with his disciples. The eucharistic life of the saints in heaven has already begun on earth. He has introduced the phrase *the never-ending feast*, which is so often used that for some it has been canonized as cliché. In a preliminary and totally incomplete way I have attempted this with John.⁷ In my *Sermon on the Mount: The Church's First Statement of the Gospel*, I have argued that the Fourth Petition is eucharistic. In *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, I have argued that the Lord's Supper is the pinnacle of the Gospel, a summit to which the Evangelist is leading his hearers. Eucharistic thought is already found in Jesus' coming out of Egypt, which could only evoke in the memory of the first hearers the Passover Meal, which for the Jews had redemptive significance. Essential to Matthew's eucharistic progress are the two miraculous feedings in which the formulas are first introduced, which are separated by the crumbs in the pericope of the Canaanite woman.

This exegesis presents a challenge to those limiting sacramental references to the *sedes doctrinae*.⁸ Romanizing does not

7. David P. Scaer, "Once More to John 6," in *Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord: Essays in Honor of Glen Zweck on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Houston, TX: Zweck Festschrift Committee, 2000), 217–233.

8. Dale Allison, who may be considered the foremost Matthean scholar in the English-speaking world, recognized what I was attempting and said that the *Discourses* "argues at length that the First Gospel embodies a liturgically regulated faith. . . . Particularly provocative (and largely convincing) in his eucharistic exegesis of large portions of the First Gospel."

fit this approach, because it works with the texts themselves and often contradicts traditional exegetical conclusions. It is also an exegesis not known in the Confessions, but which can look to Luther and the Lutheran fathers for support. This exegesis is not exclusively eucharistic, because what is eucharistic is christological. Those who hold that the *verba* are everything that an Evangelist has to say about the Eucharist will not welcome this approach. Whatever a pericope has to say about the Eucharist will have to be imported from outside, most probably from hymns and Luther citations. A eucharistic reading of the texts does not detract from the *verba* but makes them the goal and focus of a Gospel's previous pericopes. Some have rightly pointed out that the *Discourses* is deficient on baptism.⁹ It is also deficient in aligning some pericopes in Matthew towards a eucharistic goal. Pericopes on the wheat, vineyard, and unforgiving steward parables need to be blended into the eucharistic presentation. Some of our ministers may have already done this in their sermons. Our inability to exhaust the biblical texts in regard to any topic, including the Lord's Supper, may attest to their divine origin.

One perceived danger of sacramental exegesis and preaching is that the sacraments and not Christ become the objects of faith. Jonathan Trigg notes that Luther in his Genesis lectures held that God allowed himself to be found in rituals and historical and natural events. The biblical world was for Luther sacramentally alive. This can be carried over to the New Testament. Jesus who came in water by being baptized by John, and by blood in his death, is still coming by water and the blood in the sacraments. Incarnation and atonement are not replaced by the Eucharist but continued in it. In going to the Father's right hand, Jesus did not discard his humanity but further clothed it in the earthly elements that grew from the same soil out of which Adam was created.¹⁰ As deity was once hidden in humanity, so the glorified humanity is hidden in earthly elements. As Christ's glory was made transparent by the exaltation of his humanity, so bread and wine will become translucent so that we will see in them the sacrificial lamb. In the sacrament we now see him in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Even now that glory in the sacrament is being revealed to faith.¹¹

The proclaimed word, that is, the gospel proclamation, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, follow each in a divinely predetermined order, what Lutherans call word and sacrament. In the Roman system one supplements or is superior or inferior to the other. Ideally the one who hears the gospel and believes, is baptized and participates in the Eucharist. What is ideal with God more often than not fails to translate into reality. For this systemic imperfection the ministry has been established. Our ministry is adjusting the discrepancies, and as much as pos-

sible, living with what resists adjustment. Christ comes in each means of grace and each coming is concentric with and within the others. One is not before or after another, but each exists and functions within the two others, embraces them, and is embraced by them. In each coming Christ is present in a unique way anticipating his coming in the other two. The Lord's Supper is sequential to the gospel proclamation and baptism, but its reception requires a return to the proclamation for the meaning of the Supper and to baptism as foundation of faith. Proclamation in its purest and highest form is found in the *verba*, because for the Synoptic Evangelists no other passage sets forth the atonement doctrine as successfully as the words of consecration. Customarily word and sacrament are spoken of as means, instruments, or vehicles of grace, but they are, as John Kleinig suggested, means of the Holy Spirit or better, Christ's covering. Thus the word that is proclaimed and comes to the elements to make them sacraments is not merely an oral word but Christ himself. Trigg notes that in speaking of the word, it is difficult to determine whether Luther is speaking of the oral proclamation of the Gospel, the Scriptures, or Christ himself. In the means of grace he gives us himself.

Speaking of the word coming to elements to make them sacraments, *verbum accedat ad elementum fit sacramentum*, may allow for the Reformed view of a spatial universe in which the distance between Christ and the elements is overcome by a spoken word delivered over a near infinite space by the Holy Spirit to created things. The Reformed have it right about the Spirit as the *agent* of the sacramental action, but the Spirit is present with Jesus, who is given in the Eucharist and with the Father to whom the thanksgiving, that is, the Eucharist, is offered. The gospel proclamation is not a message from a distant place, no matter how good this news is, but is from Christ himself, who is as much the content of the proclamation as he is the one who proclaims it. Sacramental reality takes its life from the incarnational reality, and one mystery helps to comprehend the other. Just as the divine nature takes the human nature into itself, so Jesus, the incarnate God, clothes himself in water, bread, and wine and identifies himself with them. Baptism is the entrance, foundation, and conclusion of Christian life because Christ is present in the water and before, during, and after the rite, so that he is its content and administrator. The ministers are included in the proclamation and sacramental administration, but their deaths show that they are expendable. Martyrdom is the proper conclusion to the sacramental life, not only for one who receives the sacraments, but for the one who administers them.¹²

Those who are committed to sacramental practice based on a corresponding sacramental reading of the Scriptures have the example of Luther, but the Protestant American climate will frustrate a complete restoration. We are however more of a

9. If more had been said, it would have repeated things said in *Baptism* in the Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics series.

10. See David P. Scaer, "Sacraments as an Affirmation of Creation," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 57 (1993): 241–263.

11. Πρεσβυτέρους οὖν ἐν ὑμῖν παρακαλῶ ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος καὶ μάρτυς τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων, ὁ καὶ τῆς μελλούσης ἀποκαλύπτεσθαι δόξης κοινωνός.

12. Those with a developed eucharistic theology are under suspicion as followers of Wilhelm Löhe, Bertholdt von Schenck, and Arthur Carl Piepkorn. Historical inquiry will have to decide how these men have influenced current movements, if at all. It is my impression that earlier liturgical movements were isolated and were not fueled by a more sacramental reading of the biblical texts.

sacramental church than we were a century ago. Page 5 of *The Lutheran Hymnal* has given way to page 15, which is enshrined several times in the *Lutheran Service Book*, and chasubles are widely accepted. After years of resistance, communion services are common at conferences, conventions, and synod college campuses. *Officially the church is located in an organized congregation, but in practice the church is not bound by a particular form.* The Eucharist has been rescued from the Babylonian Captivity of a particular church polity. On the negative side individual cups, according to *Forum Letter* editor Russell Saltzmann, are here to stay. A return to the common cup may be effected not by theological arguments but by those saddled with washing the “little glasses.” Reformed and Arminian hymns are favorites with our people, as some are with me. We breathe the Reformed air and many a clergy person has gone to his doom by enforcing a clean air act. No matter how tightly the room is sealed, external materials intrude.¹³ Whatever our internal differences may be, the LCMS appears to others as a socially and theologically conservative church body. Problematic is that our biblical interpretation is not as sacramental as our practice and doctrine.

Proclamation in its purest and highest form is found in the verba.

At the center of a thorough eucharistic reading of the biblical texts are the *verba* themselves, but with the awareness that these words define the atonement. Pitting a eucharistic interpretation against a christological one indicates a failure to understand the *verba*. Use of the *verba* in our services is a statement that our consecration is a continuation of the first celebration and on that account the words of consecration are also a narrative on the passion of Jesus. The victim of the cross is the agent and content of the sacrament. Here is where word and sacrament can be seen as one reality in that the *verba* can and should be seen as part of the Gospel narrative in which the death of Jesus and its benefits are proclaimed. This narrative was part of the eucharistic celebration in Corinth and presumably also in Jerusalem where it had its origin, but note should be made of the *Didache* 9–10, in which this narrative is missing. One proposal is that some early Christians modeled their celebration of the Eucharist on the Last Supper at a later time.¹⁴ The absence of a

narrative or the *verba* in the *Didache* cannot be so easily overlooked, simply because this document shows so many similarities with Matthew, including the trinitarian baptismal formula. Some have concluded that the communities that received these two documents may have been the same or closely related. Also consider that the nonbaptized are not allowed to come to the Eucharist. This indicates a highly developed eucharistic practice. Just how one gets around the absence of the narrative of the Supper is not easy. It may be that the *Didache* community looked upon the entire service, especially the events in Jesus’ life and his death, in eucharistic context. One moment was not singled out to the exclusion of others.

In the Small Catechism, Luther cited Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul as the source for the *verba* and so he created, or took over, a Gospel harmony in miniature. For him 1 Corinthians 11 was the standard.¹⁵ We face both problems and opportunities in determining the original *verba*. It is unlikely that Jesus used the liturgically formal Hebrew in a situation riddled with the anticipation of his death. The words of dereliction according to Mark were spoken in Aramaic, but they came from the desperation of his soul. Since Matthew and Mark provide Greek translations, Aramaic did not function as church language. The *verba*, like the other teachings of Jesus, were in Greek, and with the spread of the church, they appeared in Latin and Syriac liturgies. Locating the original language was not an issue for Luther. At Marburg he argued from the Latin Vulgate and Zwingli from the Greek. Zwingli demonstrated his academic superiority to Luther in letting him know he was just learning Latin.

This topic provides plenty of work for textual criticism. Textual problems exist in the manuscripts for Luke. Some texts in Luke conclude with “This is my body” with no mention of the value of eating Christ’s body. Also missing are the *verba* over the cup (Lk 22:20b–21). It is difficult to explain their omission and easier to explain its being introduced into an existing text in which it was missing. Such adjustments were common and eventually resulted in the harmonies of the Gospels. Lest we become too judgmental with early scribes, consider that whoever expanded Luke set a model for Luther, who constructed his rendering of the *verba* from four sources. The scribe who made the addition of the cup to Luke may have been familiar with a liturgy that Paul preserved in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul’s churches may have incorporated the words “in remembrance of me” into the *verba*. An argument for their not being part of the original celebration is supported by their absence from Matthew and Mark. Conformity to the liturgical celebration may have been the scribe’s motive for inserting into the books the *verba* about the cup.

13. More than anyone else Lawrence Rast has traced Reformed and Arminian intrusions into the LCMS, but diagnosis does not translate into therapy.
 14. Gerard Rouwhorst, “Didache 9–10: A Litmus Test for the Research on Early Christian Liturgy Eucharist,” in *Matthew and the Didache*, ed. Huub van de Sandt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 154.

15. 1 Cor 11:23–25: “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”

Do the liturgical texts conform to biblical ones, or is it the other way around? One reason for Luke's omission of the cup was that by mentioning only the breaking of the bread, he wanted to draw a direct line to Emmaus where Jesus was known in the breaking of the bread. What began on the night before his crucifixion was completed on the evening of his resurrection. Textual variants give us a window into the minds of Christians to show how they interpreted the biblical texts. Our version of the *verba* is a harmony that draws lines back to the Synoptic Evangelists and Paul, but as a compilation it does not exactly fit any of these sources or the original occasion.

Now comes the opportunity of determining how apostolic writers viewed the Eucharist. Paul and Luke call it the new covenant, stressing that Christ by entering the world establishes a new relationship between himself and those who receive him in the sacrament; they are included in the covenant in which sins are forgiven. Matthew and Mark see Christ's death as a sacrifice satisfying the demands of the old covenant, from which they are released by reception of Christ's blood. Paul and Luke have the Lutheran element in placing forgiveness at the heart and by focusing on Christ's sacrifice with forgiveness as consequence of that sacrifice. Matthew and Mark have the catholic element.

Agreement on which Gospel was the first written does not mean that its account is the oldest. Matthew may be the first Gospel and may more closely preserve the words of Jesus, but at the time of its writing the form found in 1 Corinthians may have been in use from Jerusalem to Greece. Another possibility is that Matthew preserves the *verba* as the earliest Christians

used them and that a liturgical adjustment was made by the Jerusalem church before Paul's second missionary journey. Paul took over the liturgical forms for the Eucharist, just as he did the resurrection doctrine, from the apostles in Jerusalem. If the words "in remembrance of me" belonged to the original *verba*, why did Matthew omit them? More problematic is Mark's omission of them, especially if he knew Luke and 1 Corinthians, or had often participated in the Eucharist in the churches Paul established. Where Paul includes the words of remembrance and excludes the sacrificial reference, Matthew and Mark do the reverse. This poses the question of whether the remembrance has to do with God's remembering Jesus' sacrifice. The defective manuscripts of Luke exclude both themes.

Locating eucharistic motifs throughout the Gospels is a challenge. Other opportunities may be found in looking at them from the different angles provided by the Evangelists and Paul. Matters may not be as simple as we once thought. All pericopic systems need to be scrutinized to determine which best preserves the sacramental intentions of the Evangelists. In the Matthew sequence in the older three-year series the feeding of the five thousand, the Canaanite woman, and feeding of the four thousand are placed on sequential Sundays, and give the preacher an opportunity for eucharistic preaching that the Evangelist apparently intended. Where the one feeding miracle is isolated from the other one and the Canaanite woman, one is more likely to hear a sermon about the creative energies of Jesus to take care of our earthly needs. Sadly these examples do not even scratch the surface of possibilities for eucharistic preaching from the lectionary. **LOGIA**

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