

# TABLE TALK

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...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall  
teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



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## The LMS Conference Report

by the Rev. Richard W. Horn

The LMS-USA Annual Conference and Convention was held April 17 and 18, 2010. The highlight of this annual gathering this year, as in the past, is the Saturday Conference. Presenters at the conference are pastors and lay-members, and this year seven outstanding presentations were given on “The Means of Grace,” the ways through which God acts: through the Word (both written in the Holy Scriptures and incarnate in Jesus Christ) and through the Holy Sacraments (Baptism and Communion). The Lutheran Ministerium and Synod – USA (LMS-USA) is dedicated to proclaiming and teaching the Word of God and applying the Word to the life of the church and of individual believers as witnessed in the Lutheran Confessions.

Because proclamation and teaching are integral to the Christian faith, the LMS-USA uses various ways to support congregations and individuals. Table Talk, the newsletter of the LMS-USA, is one way; another is through the annual conferences of the church, with CEUs given to those attending. What follows is an edited summary of the presentations given, but allowing the words and character of the presenters to stand.

This is before our readers for edification and for growth, to the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Risen Lord.



### *The Words of Christ Stand True*

by the Rev. Dr. John S. Erickson

Dr. John Erickson, Chairman of the Synod, gave the opening keynote presentation “The Words of Christ Stand True,” setting the overall theme in the context of the history of the LMS-USA. From its origins in October, 1993, the central concern and foundation for the LMS-USA has been the meaning and role of the Bible as the Word of God, to take seriously the words of John 20:31f: that the Scriptures were “written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in His name.”

This paper, in its entirety, is found beginning on page 7.

## *The Means of Grace from the Perspective of War*

by Seminarian Tylan Dalrymple

Seminarian Tylan Dalrymple approached the understanding of the Means of Grace from the perspective of warfare in much the same way that Luther viewed the ongoing battle of the devil as the enemy of God's Word and the world as the battleground, as "enemy-occupied territory." Jesus is the ultimate ruler and asserts this victory over sin and death through His Cross and Resurrection, and He reorients His people to listen to the rightful King. The Last Supper, in this context, is like a meeting of a King and His generals in which He promises to provide His followers, every believer, a sword and armor (God's Word and Sacraments, the Means of Grace). These weapons do not appear to be weapons at all; but as concealed and as used, they are like a two-edged sword. Christ claims the Victory, through His own sacrificial death and, ultimately, His Resurrection. In this eternal victory, Christ brings not only salvation to all who believe and accept His rule, but also annihilation to those who stand against God. This claim of victory and decimation/annihilation is only made in war, a war that is going on around us still, but a war in which victory is already claimed and assured. Holy Communion, through the use of common physical elements of bread and wine, becomes a means through which God, using His own creations, imparts great things to those who believe and who join in His ranks of battle.

To many people, Jesus appears to be a pacifist. But His parables are full of conflict, and conflicts from which He did not back down, even to the point of death on the Cross! In that case, even passivity can be seen as aggressive.

Scripture often uses contrast and conflict. Through the Holy Spirit we see death as victory, life hidden under the guise of death, salvation hidden under damnation. Martin Luther remarked about this in 1515 and 1516 in a series of lectures on the book of Romans. This contrast, even nonsense,

thrusts us into death, permits the devil to pounce on us so that we can be tested and purified, that the power and love of God can be recognized. These trials and strife allow us to experience, first-hand, the power of Christ and how completely the Father loves us.

Scripture also uses the "hidden" to make known. It is Christ's own Body and Blood hidden behind the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The Kingship of Christ was not one expected by the Zealots against the Roman oppressors, but was over an eternal Kingdom not of this world, far beyond the political agenda of Israel. The paradox of Jesus' refusal to lead Israel into warfare has not diminished His words or imagery of war: to eat His Body and drink His Blood are horrific images; the gathering in the Upper Room was to prepare a battle plan for the coming war mere hours away; a new covenant was given that would bind Jesus' to His followers forever. Jesus talks about swords and division (Luke 22:36, Matthew 10:34, etc.).

Paradox also takes another form. Though we are created by God for His purpose of being an object of His love, we are given the freedom to turn away or reject Him. If we were robots, we would not be able to resist. But as people, we affirm His sovereignty over us and are grafted into Him and we become part of the Body of Christ when we partake of the Supper of Holy Communion. We show our allegiance as brothers and sisters, we arm ourselves with sword and shield together. The world is a place of struggle in which we are at war against the forces of evil, and yet a war which continues because of our own sins and the sins of people in ages past. We are fighting against ourselves in a battle God allows to continue so that we can return to Him and to His covenant. This is a very different kind of war – but a war nonetheless.

In this context of battle and Christ's ultimate victory over sin,

death, and the power of the devil,  
Tylan asked that we sing together the  
canticle "This Is the Feast of Victory"

from the Lutheran Book of Worship  
(based on Revelation 5:12-13, 19:4-9).  
Ω



## *The Liturgy as a Vehicle of the Means of Grace*

by Seminarian Kenneth Howes

Because the grace of God is given by the Holy Spirit through the Word and the Sacraments, grace becomes both the gift of God and the reason for the Church. The very existence of the Church is created for and defined by the Means of Grace: The Church itself is the assembly of believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. (Augsburg Confession VII) Where Dr. John Erickson approached the Means of Grace through an emphasis on the Scriptures as the Word of God, Seminarian Kenneth Howes moved from there to examining liturgy as the context in which the Word is proclaimed by the Church and in which the Sacraments are administered. God wants to reconcile us to Himself and work faith within us; we cannot do this on our own (Formula of Concord Solid Declaration, II, 50). For this reason, the Church exists and supports us in faith. Luther reminds us that "no man should be alone when he opposes Satan. The Church and the ministry of the Word were instituted for this purpose, that hands may be joined together and one may help another. If the prayer of one doesn't help, the prayer of another will." (Luther's Works, 54, p. 78, Table Talk 469)

The liturgy is, in itself, a proclamation of the Gospel, proclaiming Christ as the Lamb of God, confessing faith in the Trinity, acknowledging God's creative and redeeming acts, and the words of Christ as He institutes His Supper and promises the forgiveness of our sins. The forms of the liturgy in the Church date back to the liturgies of James in the 2nd century, and of Ambrose (Western) and Chrysostom (Eastern) in the 4th and 5th centuries. But while liturgies are "culture-bound," the Gospel is not.

Further, the liturgy serves as a teaching tool through repetition, impressed into memory by hearing and reciting the words over and over again. Of course, there is the danger that the liturgy can also obscure the Gospel or mislead when it is not understood or when it is changed with the addition of later (non-Scriptural) petitions to saints and bad theological traditions or practices. But when the Gospel is truly repeated in the liturgy, it will be learned in a way more powerful than any other.

Within the liturgy, the lectionary presents the Word as both Law and Gospel. Again, repetition using a one or three-year cycle, allows God's people to learn the Scriptures, to hear the Word proclaimed. The lectionary also ties in with the seasons of the Church year so that we hear the story of Jesus: His nativity, His presentation, His baptism, His miracles, His fasting and temptation, His passion and death, His parables, His sayings, and the promise of His return again.

The dangers of not using or of changing the historic and traditional liturgies can be seen even in our own day when churches made substantive changes in liturgies, then reflected those changes in practices often leading to the abandonment of the people who have held true to the faith as the Scriptures proclaimed. This was true in the medieval church as well as in the modern day.

After Luther's Reformation, many (but not all) of the Reformed churches following Calvin, Zwingli and others embraced the so-called Regulative Principle in which the worship would not say or do anything not specifically commanded by God. In this case, liturgy is reduced to little except readings of Scripture, the sermon as a moral exhortation, and a few prayers.

This minimalism in worship has created the vacuum out of which most of the Post-Reformation sects have grown. Without liturgy and with a bad sermon, you are left with nothing!

As Lutherans, we maintain the continuity of confession and belief. Along with the lectionary readings, the pericopes (introits, graduals, verses and proper prefaces) and the sermon help the flow of worship through the entire church year. All of these - liturgy, lectionary, pericopes and sermons - help to remind us of who and where we are before God, of our need for His grace and of His promise of that grace to all who believe.

Sermons are not an addition to the liturgy, but are an integral part of it, informed by the lectionary and the pericopes. It is, properly, the proclamation of the Word of God, used by the Holy Spirit to bring God's grace to His people, not in the person of the pastor but in the Gospel itself. Because quality sermons were essential, Luther's written sermons were often collected and circulated among the churches ("Haus Postils"), read as the sermon of the day. The sermon proclaims the Law and the Gospel, which tells us of God's grace then directs us to the means of grace coming to us in the sermon, the lessons, the liturgy, and, finally, in the distribution of Christ's Body and Blood in and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

There, in the Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ as we partake of His Body and Blood as He promised to the apostles and to us. The Gospel becomes tangible; we can see, feel, and taste it. Without the Word, there would be no sacrament,

only an empty reminder of an event long ago. But with the Word, the words spoken by Christ Himself, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is a vehicle ("means") of God's grace. These words become the "heart and soul" of the liturgy as the bread and wine bring the Body and Blood of Christ to us.

The liturgy is usually contained within the hymnal of the Church. The hymns accompany the liturgy in bringing the Gospel through words and music. Familiarity with the hymns, like familiarity with the liturgy, helps God's people to remember and recall the Gospel message, a familiarity that arises from frequent (repetitive) use.

Unfortunately, many hymnals are filled, not with the Gospel, but with songs about how Jesus makes us feel. Our feelings have nothing to do with God's grace! In fact, the Augsburg Confession tells us (Article V) that "damned are the Anabaptists and others, who teach that we become righteous through our own works or meditations." Praise songs that do not proclaim how Christ has redeemed us, only that He is "awesome" or "shines," are not bad in themselves but do not belong in a hymnal for worship. The hymns of the Church are Gospel-centered, Gospel-proclaiming, and they become a means of bringing God's grace. A very good example of the importance of a hymnal is seen in the life of Luther who, in 1527, was suffering from severe attacks of doubt and depression; for his comfort, Luther asked that his friends come and sing hymns with him, reinforcing the Gospel message of grace, hope, and forgiveness in Christ. Ω



## *Amazing Grace*

by the Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Spears

With a clear and resounding emphasis on the Word as the basis of our faith and life in Christ, we need to also ask ourselves "What, then, is grace?"  
Dr. Ralph Spears, President of the

Ministerium of the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod - USA, reminds us of our Confirmation vows when we promised "to be faithful in the Means of Grace and of prayer... by the help

of God.” We often hear, and use, the phrase given by St. Paul that “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) Faith and grace work “hand-in-hand” for our salvation which is “not of your own doing;” it is the gift of God. Works and worthiness are not operative forces; only by the gift of God are we saved. And that gift is the gift of God’s grace! Our justification cannot be earned or merited, but is granted by God as a free (to us, but costly to our Lord Jesus Christ) gift of grace.

While Dr. Spears frequently references both Scriptures and hymnody, he also uses humor to bring out the importance of grace: “Grace has its own state more important than Texas or Alaska. (Grace is important even in New Jersey - especially when you are traveling the New Jersey Turnpike bumper to bumper at nearly the speed of sound silently saying the 'Hail Mary' and hoping to survive yet another day.) By Faith we reside in this State of Grace, we can fall from and be restored to it, recognize it or be unaware of it. Grace is employed, assumed and invoked in countless ways. Grace is one thing to be full of - as Mary and Our Lord who grew in Grace.

“Grace is everywhere at once - always in motion - rarely if ever static - unrestricted and free as some secret element or ray loose in the Universe - easily blending and intermixing with all things good such as love and mercy

and peace. It existed before creation but is more important on this side of creation - where original sin and sinful natures must be dealt with. As science and Religion are synthesized increasingly by astrophysics my guess is – that along with gravity, strong force and weak force - some form of Grace will eventually be detected (it can't be isolated) as a player in the very fabric of the Universe. Yet it cannot be defined any more than you can catch the wind in a fish net. People of Faith - are rewarded by a Grace detector - yet people without some measure of Faith - will never see it - as though they exist in another universe - because - they do.

“To come back to earth - Grace is not necessarily - the element in one of those wild stories on the internet where we are admonished to share this immediately with ten other persons - if indeed we are people of faith - but – it could be. It is not of things superstitious.”

It is perhaps crucially important to remember that grace is most often felt in true worship. Without it, worship is empty. It is exciting to know and to recognize that grace abounds in our lives, following us, pursuing us. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we can then become agents of God’s grace in the lives of others; yet we ourselves can never take credit for it.

Think about these questions in your own Christian life: How do you see and define God’s grace present in your own life? What are some examples of it? Does “Grace” explain “coincidence?” Ω



## *Teaching the Means of Grace to Non-Christians*

by Layperson, Maureen K. S. Tullis

While God’s grace is always present in our lives, it can seem overshadowed by aggressive obstacles from people around us. As Christians, we are to share the Gospel, our faith, with those around us; but when anti-Christian, socialist, “progressive” and other “modern” ideologies confront us, that becomes very difficult. Maureen Tullis has a perceptiveness

often expressed through dramatic humor, especially with young people. But in this presentation, she has explained with insight and clarity both the obstacles and methods for teaching and witnessing to non-Christians. She has provided some observations from the secular side and responses from the trenches.

Jesus gives us the responsibility to

proclaim the Gospel. "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" (Matthew 9:36-38 NIV)

But today, you don't just need to be able to "harvest;" you also need to be able to avoid the landmines and sabotaging tactics of the unchurched and the "non-believers." There are a variety of reasons why someone is a non-believer. These can include: someone who doesn't believe there is a reason for the church, someone who was a believer but had a negative experience with the church, or someone who wants to wipe the existence of the church off the face of the earth (much like Saul [St. Paul] wanted to do to the early church)

The words of Scripture give us guidance for this in dealing with the "Gentiles": Luke 22:25-26 (NKJV): And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves." Matthew 10:5 (NIV): These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans." Matthew 28:16-20 (NKJV): Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All au-

thority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. James 5:19-20 (NKJV): Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

It is our clear responsibility as Christians to bring the light of the Gospel to those who don't have it, to bear the light of the Gospel for them until they either take up the light of the Gospel themselves or turn away from it.

To bring the light of the Gospel does require interaction and dialogue. We must first adjust our thinking of them. Though many Christians (especially of the "evangelical"/non-denominational persuasion) may consider non-believers to be pariahs, untouchables who should be ignored or as an evil that must be endured or tolerated, we should think of those non-believers as "Potential Believers." For all of us, there have been times when our own faith was not very strong, when we did not understand (or even try to understand) the Scriptures, and when our thoughts, words and actions were just like those of the non-believers. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Yet Christ directs us to treat the non-believer no differently from the way we treat fellow-believers: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44) Ω



## *The Means of Grace from a Contemporary Perspective*

by Layman Arik Johnson

More than anything else, the internet has opened doors of knowledge and perception to people globally. In preparing for this presenta-

tion, Arik Johnson (who also serves as the webmaster for the LMS-USA) looked, therefore, on the internet. A Google search for "Means of Grace"

yielded over 56,200,000 articles! That quantity can give some very strange interpretations, but also some theologically sound definitions and descriptions of the Means of Grace. One, Wikipedia, has a short but good article which also contrasts the Lutheran understanding with that of the Methodists.

“Lutherans teach that the Means of Grace are the ways that God the Holy Spirit creates faith in the hearts of Christians, forgives their sins, gives them eternal salvation and causes them to grow spiritually. The efficacy of these means does not depend on the faith, strength, status, or good works of those who proclaim the Word of God or administer God's sacraments; rather, the efficacy of these means rests in God alone, who has promised to work through God's gift of these means to God's church.”

“For Lutherans, the Means of Grace include the Gospel (both written and proclaimed), as well as the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Some Lutherans also include Confession and Absolu-

tion as sacraments and as such a means of grace, although they are not counted as such by others because no physical element is attached to Absolution, as is the case in both Baptism and the Lord's Supper.”

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Means\\_of\\_grace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Means_of_grace)

While we may quibble with some of this description, it does summarize well the basic understandings we hold.

The Means of Grace can be defined as the physical manifestation of Christ's sacrifice for us. The Word, the Bible, is a physical presence. But for us as Lutheran Christians, Jesus is Himself the Word. The Word is Christ, embodying that sacrifice.

The format that Arik chose to use for his presentation was to moderate a discussion among all the participants. To do this, Arik then asked some provocative questions of those present: To what degree is the Word authoritative? To what degree is the Word inerrant? How do we describe the Word and help people understand what it really is? Ω



## *The Words of Christ Stand True*

~ Keynote presentation ~

I continue convinced, that in what lead to the formation of our church body was, as we would say, “right on the nose.” A meeting of several pastors and a representative of The AALC was held in Janesville, WI in October of 1993. It was what came out of that meeting that evolved into the formation of this church body a couple of years later. And central to the concerns that were expressed there, was concern over how we should understand the Word of God, the Bible. Is the Bible “God's Word and self-revelation to us, and as such, is it without error in all that it touches, whenever and however it speaks whether in matters of faith, doctrine, history, geography, or science.” And if that is our understand-

ing, then what do we do with it? Is it just words, or do we take it seriously?

It does make a difference. If faith comes “from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17)... if we were “included in Christ [as a result of our hearing] the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation” (Eph. 1:13) ... if it really is the case that the authors of Scripture followed what the apostle John states to be the case as we have it in John 20:31... that what is written in our Bible, “was written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in his name”... then how we understand the Bible and our commitment to

what we say the Bible is, is going to be a matter of supreme importance... a matter of life or death. If we have little confidence in it... it will be with us as with the people spoken of in Mark 6... where we find that the people did not put any credence in Christ and so he was unable to do any miracles there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them (v. 5). Does it not follow that our view of God's Word will make all the difference in the world as to the effectiveness of God's working in our lives? God works through means... He works by means of his Word... Even as at the beginning, He spoke and it was so (Gen.1). So in the Gospel narratives... we find Jesus speaking the word and it is so: "Be healed." "Be still." "Stand up and walk." "Your sins are forgiven."

There are those who speak of the Word as the primary means of grace. They do so because, as the Bible teaches, and as our Catechism makes clear Luther also understood... it is the Word that makes the Sacraments what they are. Without the Word... the water of Baptism is only water. But "when connected with the Word of God, it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life, and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit." Likewise without the Word, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are only bread and wine, but with the words of our Lord, "the remission of sins, life and salvation are given to us in the Sacrament." And... as Luther points out... it is as one believes the words of our Lord in connection with the Sacrament that one then "has what they say and declare, namely, the remission of sins."

In connection with all this, I was intrigued as I read again the opening chapter of Words and Sacrament III [Luther's Works, vol. 37] - (see appendix 1). You would think Luther was among us today. In these pages, Luther speaks of the workings of the devil. Especially, Luther says, the devil "demonstrates his craftiness in

spiritual, inward matters which concern the glory of God and conscience." He writes of how in the beginning of the church, the pure gospel was preached and taught. No human "commandment" was taught but only the Scriptures.

The devil went along with this, but then saw to it that some of his followers got into the Christian schools... and "through them he stealthily sneaked and crept into the holy Scriptures." As a result a "real brawl" was created with regard to the Scriptures. Sects and heresies and what ever else was created with the result that "every faction claimed Scripture for itself and interpreted it according to its own understanding." Thus Scripture lost its worth.

He then writes of how this opened the door for human input into things. Scriptures were not enough... councils were necessary. Now it is Scripture plus.

Well... the outcome is obvious. As pertaining to the Sacraments... now we have all kinds of understandings as to what the Sacraments really are... and as to the place of the Sacraments in the life of the believer. We have differences over what the elements ought to be... or might be? We have differences over who should or who should not participate... over who might officiate... and who knows what else.

As we know all too well, even though the devil allowed the reformers to give Scripture its rightful place once again .. he does not forget his tricks. So, in our day there is a continuing struggle over giving Scripture its rightful place.

And among those who have it in its rightful place... in keeping it so. By means of the Word the devil continues his work on another front also... on that of the Sacraments. Luther writes prophetically of these continuing attacks... attacks on the Word and Sacraments, but also on various articles of faith... "once more, there will arise a brawl over the Scriptures..." How many times



has the fulfillment of that prediction taken place since Luther spoke of it. If the world lasts much longer, men will, as the ancients did, once more turn to human schemes on account of this dissension and again issue laws and regulations to keep people in the unity of the faith... (p. 17)

What Luther speaks of... the founders of the LMS understood something of some 20 years ago now... but it is something that we must not forget... it is something we must always be alert to and be on watch for. It is so easy in matters of faith... to begin to “turn to human schemes... and... [in so doing, to begin to] issue laws and regulations to keep people in the unity of the faith.”

As a pastor of a LCMS congregation... I just received a volume titled, “This We Believe.” This volume includes the position of the LCMS on a multitude of subjects. I did a quick count... and it looks like 92 different position statements are made. Now in this volume... there is little if any Scripture quoted. Scripture is referenced. But for the most part it seems this is pretty much an example of what Luther referred to as a proliferation of words of councils... the issuing of laws and regulations. I am not being critical of what the LCMS has done... it is only reflective of the fact that people will not accept the Word of God as the Word of God. If they did... they would accept what God has said as the final word on the subject.

All this is exactly what Paul warned his readers about... and in turn what he warns us about in his letter to Timothy. “Preach the Word,” he instructed Timothy. “Preach the Word, be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn

their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:2-3).

Our congregation had the privilege a few years ago of learning about a ministry in Fishers, IN called *Families Against Cults*. The ministry was begun by former Mormons, Dan and Augusta Harding. We continue to give financial support to this ministry and many of us appreciate their monthly newsletter. The newsletter from this past July ties into what I am talking about. The article is actually a reprint of an article by Han Markell, founder and president of Olive Tree Ministries in Minneapolis, MN [Website - [www.olivetreeviews.org](http://www.olivetreeviews.org)] (see appendix 2 for entire quote).

A not so funny thing happened on the way to the 21st century, certain leaders came out stating that we needed a “new way of doing church.” That old time religion wasn't good enough. So in came the gimmicks, replacing the solid gospel. We have seen the rise of the “seeker sensitive church” movement that offends no one. The “religious left” has become more prominent, promoting its social gospel. And now there is the Emergent Church.

Emergents really are not interested in doctrine; rather they want things you can feel, touch and smell, such as incense and icons. . .

This movement reinvents Christianity. It takes your eyes off the cross and has you focus on experience [instead]. Scripture is no longer the authority. There are no absolutes, even in the Bible. Emergents will state that, in order to take the world and the church forward, we must go backward in church history and embrace even [Roman] Catholic beliefs. Their doctrine is actually closer to Hinduism and New Age than it is to traditional Christianity.

Hell, sin, and repentance are downplayed so that one one is offended.

In another Newsletter, Rod and Staff, Spring 2010, Rodney Lensch

speaks of how, with the historic Lutheran commitment to biblical authority now having eroded to the extent it has, we now see in the visible church how the heretical seed planted by stealth, decades ago, has grown into a mature specimen in flower and fruit. Its characteristics are unmistakable. There are no moral absolutes anymore. Everything is relative. The only thing that is absolute is that there are no absolutes. In this brave new world, all conscience convictions are equal. Tolerance, therefore, is the glue that holds society together (even the church). For post-modernists, the Gospel of Christ is far too dogmatic and exclusive, even offensive, to the man on the street. The cardinal doctrines of the faith must be dumbed down so apostasy seems normal and loving. Most liberal denominations and even some evangelical groups are embracing postmodernism in order to grow numerically. Even Mark Hanson, the ELCA national bishop said recently that he was hopeful that the church's pro-gay policies would draw in many new members. (p. 3)

All this makes a huge difference not only in how the church responds to the social issues of the day, but in connection with the topic at hand, it also affects church practices with regard to the Means of Grace. Baptism is cheapened to mean little more than an initiation rite, and Holy Communion to little more than a fellowship meal. All of it - the preaching of the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper - cheap grace. If there is no recognition of sin, there can be no repentance... and thus no true forgiveness; maybe something psychologically therapeutic... but not true forgiveness (see among other verses - Jer. 35:15; Lk. 13:3). The Christian life must be more... far more... than a use of the Lord's name in praise and prayer (see Matt. 7:21). In the Missouri Synod Pastor group that I meet with monthly, we are going over the book *Law, Life, and the*

*Living God - The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism*. Something I found interesting is how as we follow the development of theology - maybe I should say - the evolution of theology [and it doesn't make any difference what Lutheran camp one is speaking of - the former LCA, ALC, Seminex, the main stream LCMS, or any predecessor group] - very often we will find theologians who have taken a compromising (maybe this is too strong a term) - but they took a little different position on something. They took a position a little off from what had been traditionally been held. It was a position that certainly could in no way be considered heretical... however... the problem comes in this, that the "trajectory of (their teacher's) approach inspires later students to take a more radical angle [on that issue] (p. 73).

So what do we see with regard to the Lord's Supper? An innocent questioning of wine vs grape juice... and grape juice wins. Or, as my wife heard announced last Sunday in an ELCA broadcast of a church service, the congregants could receive the sacrament by intinction. In so doing they could dip the bread either into grape wine or in apple juice. When it comes to the bread... it can be leavened or unleavened bread... or why use bread at all? Why not a cracker? When it comes to those who receive... if it is grace... ought there be any restrictions on who should receive? Should it be necessary to believe in the real presence? Should it make any difference that one be Catholic, Protestant/Reformed, or Lutheran? Is there need for confession of sin before receiving the sacrament? And what of the words used in the consecration of the elements? Need it be the words of Christ... or... is an Eucharistic prayer appropriate?

The answer to these and many other questions ought not be that difficult to answer. The traditional, his-

toric means of interpreting Scripture leaves little room for error in these matters. If we accept the Scriptures as “God breathed” and as the historical documents that they are... If we consider seriously the words, and the grammar, the type of literature (narrative, history, poetry, symbolism, etc)... And if we then take the plain meaning of what is read we should have no difficulty in understanding what the Bible has to say. [If there is some difficulty with a passage, then use easier passages of Scripture to help in interpreting the more difficult].

Now if this is one’s approach to the Word, then Jesus’ words, “this is my body,” can hardly mean that the bread symbolizes his body. Note Peter’s words with regard to baptism, that in the ark “eight people were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also...” How can one say that baptism is a symbol when Peter clearly says that it is the saving in the ark that symbolizes the saving power of baptism? And when Paul gives instructions on the practice of the Lord’s Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:23-32)... how can anyone suggest that it makes no difference how we come to the Lord’s Table? With regard to wine... how can it be other than wine when the cup the Lord used was one of the cups of the Passover meal? We have clear teachings on the Means of Grace. Let us not set these aside for human innovations, no matter how attractive, or popular, or reasonable they may appear to us. The means of grace are ‘holy’ means. They are a means different than... set apart from... any other means.

All this brings me back to the tremendous truth contained in the title of this paper- The Words of Christ Stand True. Now this is a fact whether we want to believe it or not. The gospel writer John wrote of Jesus... who is himself the Word...

and of how “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

God has given his Word to us (2 Peter 1:21). It was given to us with the intention that we should receive it... and by means of receiving it... being given the faith necessary to believe. We are to believe in Him who is the Word. And if we do... then the benefits of all that which our Lord offers to us through the various means he has ordained... in other words... by means of Word and Sacrament... is ours: Forgiveness of sins, life and Salvation.

No matter what others might think of all this... no matter what various teachers and preachers of our day might have to say about it... no matter what church councils might decide with regard to it... the fact remains... God’s Word is true... the words of Christ stand true. We believe it and hold firmly to His Word and we have everything necessary to salvation. Our response to the Word equals our response to Him who is the Word. Thus to reject the Word... to add to it... to take away from it... or to think that we can reshape it in some way to make it more palatable... and we will have nothing. In fact it will be worse than nothing. It will bring damnation [John 3:18, see also 1 Cor. 12:19-30 (in connection with the Lord’s Supper)].

**Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word:  
Curb those who fain by craft of sword  
Would wrest the kingdom from Thy Son,  
And set at naught all He has done.**

**Abiding, steadfast, firm, and sure,  
The statutes of our God endure:  
Blest he who trusts this steadfast Word;  
His anchor holds in Christ, the Lord. Ω**

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