"WORD AND SACRAMENT"

Excerpts from a paper
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I.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A. Luther

If any one statement of historical theology is incontestible, it is this: The theology of Martin Luther was a theology of the Word of God. But when one has stated this point one actually has not said too much. For the key question remains. In what sense was Luther's theology a theology of the Word?

When we look at Luther's writings themselves--and forget for a moment our own ideas of "the Word"--we see a rich and complex view of the Word of God. The Scriptures, of course, are the Word of God for Luther. The Word of God in this sense is the criterion for all Christian faith and life. But Luther's conception does not stop here. Indeed, anyone who views the Scriptures alone and isolated as the Word of God can hardly claim to be a Lutheran.

The Word of God for Luther is above all the creative Word of God Himself, the Word depicted in the first two chapters of Genesis and the first chapter of John especially. God speaks and the world is created from nothing. God speaks and the sun melts the ice of winter and brings plants from the ground.

This very creative Word of God, according to Luther, took on flesh in Jesus Christ in order to re-create a world in which sin had become rampant. Jesus Christ, Luther can say, is the Word of God. Significantly, Luther means here the whole Christ, not merely the words of Christ. In His whole life, death, and resurrection, Christ is the Word of God; everything he does, as well as everything he says, is God's creative Word in action.

With this conceptualization of Christ and the Word in mind, Luther can use his idea of the Word in an expansive way with regard to the life of the Church, since wherever Christ is, there is the Word and vice versa. Thus preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, absolution, and the "mutual consolation of the brethren" are all actions of God's creative Word of God's Son, according to Luther. Luther does not identify God's Word with preaching anymore than he identifies God's Word with the Scriptures. Preaching, of course, is God's Word (or it can be God's Word when it is empowered by the Spirit), but so is the word of absolution or the words of loving consolation spoken between common, ordinary Christians.

Luther's view of the real presence of Christ in worship corresponds to his view of the Word. This is important to note since already in Luther's own time, following his debate with Zwingli, discussion of the Real Presence tended to focus on the Lord's Supper. For Luther himself, however, the emphasis is dispersed. Wherever the Word is in the Church, there Christ is truly present. Here is a typical statement:

> For when Christ became man and entered upon His preaching ministry, then heaven was opened. Beginning with that time, it is open and remains open . . . Before the advent of Christ heaven was closed, and the devil had full sway; but in and through Christ heaven stands ajar again . . . When you are baptized, partake of Holy Communion, receive the absolution, or listen to a sermon, heaven is open, and we hear the voice of the Heavenly Father; all these works descend upon us from the open heaven above us. God converses with us, governs us, provides for us, and Christ hovers over us--but invisibly. (Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Vol. 22, p. 210f. Am. Ed.)

Elsewhere Luther also mentions "the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" as a place where God's gracious activity can be discerned; there he cites Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered . . . " (Smalcald Articles, IV). And this means that the real presence of Christ can be discerned, as already intimated, in words (and works) of love between ordinary Christians; this in addition to preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and absolution.

As far as Luther is concerned, then, the Word or the real presence of Christ is evident in a variety of ways in the life of the Church. One perhaps can diagram this by the image of a wheel: the hub is the historical, risen Christ; around the rim are stations where Christ is manifest in the present life of the church, the Scriptures, preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, absolution, and the mutual consolation of the brethren.

This conception of the Word gives shape to Luther's view of communal worship, as will already be apparent. Luther, one can say, has a pluralistic christocentric view of worship: The essence of worship is Christ's presence with His people granting them the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. That essence is in evidence in many contexts.

In this connection it is worth observing that, presupposing his pluralistic, christocentric view of worship, Luther was content to take over the traditional Mass of the Church without too many changes and without too much detailed interest in the historical background of the Mass as a whole or the parts of the Mass. This was not because he was indifferent to external forms. On the contrary, he attacked many external forms (e.g., indulgences, related to what for Luther was a misunderstanding of absolution) when they did not serve as suitable vehicles for the creative Word of God in the life of the Church. With regard to the Mass, Luther generally felt that it was a suitable vehicle (with certain changes) for the communication of Christ.

The theme "Word and Sacrament," therefore, has a very specific meaning to the context of Luther's theology. Luther never set the Word over against the sacrament. In the same vein, Luther never viewed "his" Church as the Church of the Word over against the Roman Church as the Church of the sacrament. Indeed, for Luther the sacraments are an indispensable aspect of the life of the Church; Luther repeatedly condemned the Church of Rome for its failure to celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly with the people, and he frequently wrote about what he considered the unChristian habit (among the laity of his time) of not partaking in the Lord's Supper. Moreover, since the same Christ, or the same Word, is in, with, and under the preaching of the gospel, the Scriptures, and the mutual consolation of the brethren, as well as in, with, and under the sacraments (baptism, the Holy Communion, absolution), one can say that Luther has a sacramental conception of preaching, Scriptures, and mutual consolation of the brethren. Further, and significantly, Luther did <u>not</u> ask what distinguishes the sacraments from the other forms of Christ's presence with His people. That is the question of a later age, an age when men either wished to devaluate the sacraments ("they are not as important as preaching, etc.") or to devaluate preaching, etc. ("the Holy Communion is where Christ is <u>truly</u> and <u>fully</u> present with his people.") The sacraments for Luther, one may suggest, are an organ of Christ's body. Accordingly, one ought neither to tear them away from the Church nor to say that they are the whole body. The plurality of God's presences in and through Christ to the Church can neither be reduced in number, nor can the plurality itself be brought into question (by saying, for example, that <u>one</u> form of Christ's presence is <u>the</u> form).

Having said this much about the theme "Word and Sacrament" in Luther's thought, we should return to the initial observation that Luther's theology is a theology of the Word. It is a theology of the Word in a specific sense, to be sure, but it remains a theology of the Word. Luther's interest is focused on the Word wherever that Word may be found. And this interest defines other concerns. Luther's theology is not a theology of the Sacrament in this sense. The "Word" is the key idea, and this defines the sacrament (and everything else for that matter); the sacrament does not define the Word.

This characteristic of Luther's thought is understandable in its historical context. Against the idea of working one's way into heaven, the idea of the Word stresses the passivity of man: man is the hearer first of all, not the doer. Against a mechanical view of the effectiveness of the sacraments, the Word stresses the personal communion of God with man (see the quote above). Against an exclusive clerical sacramentalism (i.e., the eucharist celebrated by the priest is the essence of the Church's worship) the Word stresses the plurality of Christ's presence with His people, allowing especially a significant place for biblical interpretation and preaching in the life of the Church.

We will see, however, that Luther's theology, specifically because it was a theology of the Word, was open to interpretations which soon pushed the movement of his thought regarding worship in a direction which he did not give it himself.

B. Melanchthon

Our consideration of the theme "Word and Sacrament" in the theology of Luther was necessarily brief, and therefore open to the charge of oversimplification if not plain and simple falsification. As we follow our theme from Luther toward the present, unfortunately, our considerations must, for reasons of space, become even more cryptic. My hope is not to be adequate to every detail, then, but to provide a generally accurate historical picture.

Melanchthon, Luther's personal alter ego and highly respected theological advisor, has been severaly criticized in recent Reformation research for subverting the theology of Luther. Much of this criticism has proceeded without benefit of reading Melanchthon's writings. It is only with great hesitancy, then, that we can turn to the theme "Word and Sacrament" in Melanchthon's thought and criticize that Reformer's handling of the theme, as it seems that we must do, at least by implication.

Luther was trained in Aristotelian philosophy. It was natural for him, accordingly, to see the Form in the Matter: the Word of God in, with, and under physical realities. Melanchthon, in contrast, had a humanistic education and this, in turn, presupposed not so much an Aristotelian philosophy as a Platonic philosophy. According to the latter, and in an oversimplified way, the eternal reality of the Forms is separate from Matter, and only gives Matter shape, as it were, from a distance. Hence it was not immediately congenial for Melanchthon to conceive of the Word of God in Luther's sense, as a creative, immediately present powerful reality. Melanchthon was predisposed toward the dictum finitum non capax infiniti whereas Luther was predisposed toward the dictum finitum capax infiniti.

In any case it seems clear that a subtle shift occurs in Melanchthon's conceptualization of the Word as compared to Luther's view of the Word. Melanchthon tends to view the Word not so much as the creative power of God but more as spiritual communication from God. It is no coincidence, in this connection, that throughout his theological career Melanchthon placed more and more emphasis on the idea that faith is assent to doctrine, and more and more emphasis on the task of projecting a systematic theology (his famous loci theology). Luther, in contrast, continually placed the accent on the idea that faith is a vibrant personal relation to God in Christ, and Luther wrote no systematic theology. Melanchthon pictured the Word, then, more and more as a communication of truths about God and less and less as a communication of the life-giving presence of God Himself.

Corresponding to this development in Melanchthon's thought is a certain indifference to the sphere of physical externality, to the sphere of matter. This was in keeping with the platonic character of his education. Luther had said,

> External rites, even if we are not able to do without them--just as we cannot do without food and drink,--nevertheless do not commend us to God, just as food does not commend us to God. But faith and love commend us to God. (Works of Martin Luther, VI, 92ff.)

And, as already noted, Luther had shown a certain lack of interest in the historical background of the various "rites" which he took over from the tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, Luther was a man who relished physical realities such as food and drink, hence his apparent indifference to "rites" covered over an abiding appreciation for such matters. With Melanchthon the nuance shifts. Melanchthon tends to be indifferent to "rites" in practice as well as in principle. As a general rule "rites" to Melanchthon were "adiaphora." (See Apology, XV; Book of Concord, Tappert ed., p. 222:52) In this connection Melanchthon took up the Augustinian idea (itself having a platonic background) that the Lord's Supper is the "visible Word" (Ibid. XIII; p. 212:5). This idea implies that the Sacrament of the Altar represents or signifies what, in a sense, the Word itself--as preaching--does without becoming intangled in matter. While Melanchthon himself would never have stated that this makes the Lord's Supper into a second-order religious communication, this is the suggestion which his own reflection about the matter seems to present. It is no surprise, then, to find Melanchthon saying, "The chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel." (Ibid., XV; p. 221:42) This remark is made in a context where Melanchthon is castigating the Roman Church of his time for not emphasizing preaching at all. Nevertheless, the tendency in Melanchthon's thought seems to be to set preaching in a higher place than the sacrament of the Altar (though, Melanchthon proudly stated that the Churches of the Reformation celebrate the Mass every Sunday; Ibid, XIV; p. 249:1; and the sacraments in general).

One further consideration may illustrate the point under discussion. In his Small Catechism Luther said: "Baptism is not merely water, but it is water used according to God's command and connected with God's Word." Melanchthon defines the sacraments in general and baptism in particular as "rites which have the command of God and to which the promise of God has been added (addita)." (Apology XIII; Book of Concord, ed. Tappert, p.211:3) This shows how Melanchthon's sacramental theology differs in nuance from Luther's. For Luther the Word, as the creative power and presence of God, is bound up with and in and under the water of Baptism. For Melanchthon the Word, as the spiritual communication from God, is along side of the physical elements.

The theme "Word and Sacrament," then, takes on a slightly but nonetheless significantly different shape in Melanchthon's thought compared to Luther's. Like Luther's theology, Melanchthon's theology was a theology of the Word. "The Word" was a dominating concept. But the meaning of "The Word" has shifted. Hence Melanchthon tends to set the Word over against the Sacrament, as Luther never did. The Sacrament tends to become a poorer form of the Word than preaching, which in turn tends, along with the Scriptures, to be viewed as the "pure" Word.

C. Orthodoxy, Enlightenment Pietism.

Tendencies which were apparent in Melanchthon's treatment of the theme "Word and Sacrament" grew into explicit, defended points of view in the period which extends roughtly from 1700 to 1800. Three major movements of thought deserve our attention in this connection.

Orthodoxy is the name usually given to a large group of Protestant Theologians who, following certain initiatives by Melanchthon (and Calvin), devoted great effort to constructing rationally consistent and complete philosophical theologies. This movement of thought is therefore fittingly known under the title "Protestant Scholasticism." It is interested first and foremost in "pure doctrine."

Orthodoxy could easily have taken up and defended the following statement by Luther:

> Faith is to be the fitting sphere, work, life, and activity with which God wants to be honored and served. Apart from faith God accepts nothing whatever as an act of worship. This is the answer to the question about the right worship of God. (WA 33:28)

But Orthodoxy would have understood "faith" here chiefly as the assent to right teaching or pure doctrine. "The Word" would have been understood in a corresponding fashion, as the communication of truths which are to be accepted by the hearer. In such a schema preaching would naturally be viewed as the significant segment of any service of worship, even though, as was in fact the case, the sacraments continued to be held in high esteem. In other words, the conceptualization of "the Word" and faith was such that in practice, feelings to the contrary notwithstanding, the sacraments became mere adjuncts to preaching. (The legacy of this movement can be seen to this day throughout Germany where the Holy Communion is not frequently celebrated and where, when it is celebrated, it is appended to the Service and attended only by a small minority of those who come to the main Service and who hear the sermon.) In short, Orthodoxy intellectualized "the Word" and faith, and the material-embedded Sacrament tended to become superfluous.

This movement of thought came to fruition in the teachings of the Enlightenment. That group of philosophers and theologians who are generally grouped together under the heading "Enlightenment" were interested not so much in Christian faith as such as in religion in general, more specifically, "religion within the bounds of reason." Immanual Kant, whose chief work on religion bore that title, was typical when he distinguished between empirical-historical religion (or positive religion) and pure rational religion. The Enlightenment kept Orthodoxy's emphasis on pure doctrine, in other words, but it understood pure doctrine not as the exposition of the truths of Christian Faith, but of the truths inherent in the minds of men everywhere prior to and apart from the historical faith of Christianity. It almost goes without saying, then, that Enlightenment thinkers had very little interest in the sacraments. The sacraments, according to the Enlightenment way of thinking, belong to the empirical-accidental-historical tradition of Christianity, and not to the essence of pure religious faith. The sacraments, similarly, are viewed as being bound up with a pre-scientific age when men habitually practiced magic and alchemy. Are not modern men far above and beyond such a barbarous primitive conception as making one's way into an eternal reward by means of the "blood of Christ"? Surely one cannot expect to get into heaven by means of magic; rather one must depend entirely on right living! And so forth.

The "Word" for enlightened man was thus a body of truths developed from autonomous reflection and encouraging proper moral actions. Faith was the appropriation of that "Word." And the sacraments, as a general rule, were laughed at. Preaching--stripped of specifically Christian content as it was--had won the day. It was only in this sense that Christ continued to be venerated: as a preacher, or rather a teacher, who taught eternal moral truths; truths only generally accessible since the coming of enlightened thinking into the Western World; truths veiled by a whole host of superstitions and irrational dogmas and "sacraments" by later disciples of Christ in the Church.

There were men, however, who were neither satisfied with what they considered to be the arid intellectualism of Orthodoxy, nor with what they considered to be the dissolution of Christian faith by the thinkers of the Enlightenment. These men are generally brought together under the heading "pietism." The pietists, interestingly enough, wanted to return to the kind of faith that had animated the life and writings of Martin Luther. Hence they placed heavy emphasis on the experience of conversion. Although many pietists were dedicated theologians, careful biblical scholars, or speculative philosophers, the thrust of all their preaching and teaching invariably was directed toward the inner life of faith. Like the Orthodox theologians, the pietists would gladly have repeated Luther's statement (quoted in full above) that "apart from faith God accepts nothing whatever as an act of worship." But they, of course, would have understood this in their own way.

Although the pietists generally wanted to return to the faith of Luther, they were too entangled with the streams of thought of their own time to be fully successful. They did not easily understand how the "Word of God" was for Luther the creative power and presence of God prior to man's reception of that Word in faith. They tended to look at preaching and the sacraments not as creative forces in the hand of God, but as occasions after which God worked his really decisive work, conversion, through the Holy Spirit in the

heart of the believer. In such a context preaching naturally received more and more attention and the sacraments (excepting believer's baptism) less and less, since preaching naturally seemed to be the more effective instrument for bringing about inner rebirth. In practice, then, the pietists had neither a theology of the Word-sacrament as Luther did, nor a theology of the Word as Melanchthon did. Theirs was a theology of the Holy Spirit more than anything else. The theme "Word and Sacrament" therefore did not play a major role in their thinking.

D. Romanticism.

One further movement of thought deserves our attention, because it was a reaction to some of the historical trends we have been examining.

Around the end of the 18th century a wide variety of thinkers--men like Rousseau, Herder, Goethe, Schleiermacher--became profoundly dissatisfied with the thought and the style of life advocated by the Enlightenment. They criticized the Enlightenment philosophically much as the pietists had criticized Orthodoxy from a theological perspective. They found the Enlightenment arid and removed from real life. Moreover, they saw that the Enlightenment had, by and large, uncritically accepted the idea of a break between man's rational life and man's life in nature. They were interested in man in his totality, not just man the thinker.

These "romantics," as they are called, hungered and thirsted for a world in which man could live life in its fullness. Significantly, many romantic thinkers turned their attention to the Middle Ages, more specifically, to an idealized Middle Ages (hence some of the connotations of the word "romantic"). They saw in that pre-Reformation period of Western history a sense of the wholeness of life, a sense for mystery, and a sense for the organic. A number of romantic philosophers, quite consistently, were converted to Roman Catholicism. They saw in the Church of Rome, one may say, the possibility for a sacramental view of life. To cite a remark of the young Schleiermacher (who did not convert to Roman Catholicism), "to me all is miracle." The romantics thus were not embarrassed with "rites" to a significance which would have astounded not only the thinkers of the Enlightenment (and did) but also the theologians of Orthodoxy, the theologians of pietism, and Melanchthon. Only with Luther (though, the romantics would not have said this) would the romantics have found a thinker who valued "rites" as much as they did.

It is important to observe here, however, that unlike Luther the romantics tended to value "rites" for rites' sake. They did <u>not</u> look at the Sacrament of the Altar, in other words, as being significant because here God had chosen to give the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in and through his powerful presence in Christ. Rather they tended to look at the Sacrament of the Altar as being significant because it was one instance of the possibility of communing with the wholeness of life and its processes (behind which they saw the Divine Life). Furthermore, the romantics generally looked with disdain on the idea that the Sacrament of the Altar was the vital presence of the creative <u>Word</u> of God. To them such an idea sounded like the rationalism of the Enlightenment all over again. And the notion of a God who speaks sounded like anthropomorphism to them. They preferred to look at God as the supra-personal abyss of being in which the world inheres rather than the personal creator of heaven and earth in Luther's sense.

II.

<u>SOME PERSISTING TRENDS FROM THE PAST IN LUTHERAN THOUGHT AND PRACTICE</u>

A hasty look at present-day thought and practice in Lutheranism shows, not surprisingly, that we are very much the children of our fathers. For a number of reasons--which in themselves are significant and deserve our attention--it has not been easy for contemporary Lutheranism to hold to Luther's own delineation of the theme "Word and Sacrament."

The Melanchthonian-adiaphoristic treatment of the theme continues to be represented. Consider this statement by one of our leading Lutheran theologians:

> Nothing matters really--no altar, no vestments, no choir, no cute little cherub putting out the light of God for another week, no starched patterns of congregational life, no hard and fast dogmas fixated in outmoded categories--nothing matters but that the gospel be rightly proclaimed and all its implications spelled out for all of life, that it be taken seriously what it means that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in order that men might be restored to their true humanity and so minister to each other in a universal priesthood of love. (Martin Heinecken, Christ Frees and Unites, p. 64)

Actually the writer of these words would be deeply incensed if he were to be classed with Melanchthon and not with Luther regarding the theme "Word and Sacrament." But if this is the case, as it is, then the preceding quotation must be regarded as careless. For, from the perspective of Luther's theology, something does matter besides the proclamation of the gospel (an expression which seems almost invariably to be interchangeable with "the preaching of the gospel"), namely, the administration of the sacraments. Luther's theology of the Word, as we saw, never set preaching on a level above the sacraments (and Martin Heinecken does not wish to do this either).

The Melanchthonian-adiaphoristic treatment of the theme Word and Sacrament also takes expression in certain kinds of criticism of the twentieth century movement for liturgical renewal. "Why are you so interested in the liturgy," it is asked, "when what is really significant is the pure preaching of the gospel?" In some cases such questioning is only a thinly veiled anti-catholicism: "Why are you interested in aping the Catholics and moving away from our Lutheran stress on preaching?" (Ironically, Melanchthon used the idea of adiaphora in an ironic way, to hold open the possibility of reunion with Rome.)

The Orthodox treatment of our theme is still in evidence today, but only in certain pockets of conservatism, usually pockets where fundamentalism is also in evidence. The Orthodox view, of course, is not that different from the view of Melanchton, so, in a sense, Orthodoxy is very much a live option today with regard to our theme.

In an interesting way the thought of the Enlightenment and the religious interests of Pietism have tended to coalesce in our day. Here the name of Rudolf Bultmann may be mentioned cautiously. His de-mythologizing enterprise parallels Kant's quest for a religion within the bounds of pure reason, and Bultmann's theological emphasis on "existential decision" parallels the concern of Pietism. And it is no coincidence that Bultmann's first great work was entitled "Jesus and the World"; and that Bultmann's outstanding "Theology of the New Testament" strongly underlines the kerygma, that is, the preaching of the gospel. Yet it would not be doing Bultmann's thought justice to carry this kind of analysis much further. One may observe, however, that Bultmann's thought is profoundly anti-romantic and that it shows little sympathetic understanding for the natural-material world. Is it an accident, then, that the theology of Bultmann and others who emphasize similar themes, such as Gogarten, has so little to say about the significance and meaning of the sacraments? It perhaps should be noted in passing that Bultmann has been quite influential in Germany and that he has no small following in Protestantism in this country.

One further persisting trend should be mentioned. This trend, in its present-day shape, can be called romantic ritualism. It is no wonder that a leading theologian should implicitly poke fun at altars, vestments, choirs, cute little cherubs putting out the light of God for another week, and so forth (see the Heinecken quote above). For, throughout Protestantism today we are witnessing growing pockets of sentiment favoring ritual for ritual's sake. The student body of one of our leading seminaries has been bifurcated for some time into students who are "high church" and students who are "low church." The former, it seems, know every

proper action for every proper moment of the liturgy. They bow and scrape, burn their candles, don their robes in a way which baffles most common men. They also castigate the "low church" (the Melanchthonian-Orthodox) students, who return the favor. In practice, if not in theory, these "high church" students wait--naively--for the latest word from Rome.

This romantic ritualism, it is important to observe, should be distinguished from the movement for liturgical renewal, which, despite certain external resemblances, is something quite different.

III.

SOME NEW DEVELOPMENT

As we have already observed on more than one occasion, Luther took over the Mass, changed it to suit his newly developed theology, but did not devote much attention to the liturgy from a historical point of view. The modern movement for liturgical renewal has stimulated much interest precisely in this area. The historic liturgy itself has been subjected to continuing scrutiny.

One of the findings of this scholarship has been that the liturgy has a movement, that it progresses. This movement has been succinctly depicted in the following way:

> The entrance song of the church is, in fact, the first portion of our liturgy (Introit through Collect) during which we journey toward the city of our hope and, like our Hebrew fathers, we bring our baggage (cross, candles, book, and vessels) with us and pitch our tents. The instructional portion (Lesson through Creed) reverses the direction through the gospel procession in which the movement is outward toward the assembly and ultimately to the world. Finally, in the offertory the whole congregation processes to the holy table where the mystery of God's presence is celebrated and where we are commissioned to distribute that mystery in the ordinary routine of daily lives. (William Arnold, unpublished note on the liturgy)

This sense of movement, it would seem, is something new compared to the theology of Luther. Luther was chiefly concerned with the verticle aspect of the liturgy, with its transparency to the creative Word of God. In the new scholarship, on the other hand, we meet an interest in the horizontal aspect of the liturgy, with its coherency in itself.

Actually, more than a mere historical interest lies behind much of the new liturgical scholarship. There is a deep pastoral concern in evidence, not unlike that of Luther himself, a concern that the liturgy become even more transparent to the gracious presence of God with his Church. When the representatives of the new liturgical scholarship refer to the liturgy as drama, then, they are by no means suggesting that the liturgy is a merely aesthetic experience which must be properly "staged" if it is to be a success. They are suggesting that there is a way of allowing the Gospel to permeate the Church even more freely and fluently than we have known in some of the most creative years in our Protestant past.

Undeniably a new accent is emerging here. This is the accent on <u>action</u> from the side of <u>man</u>: The people of God do this and the people of God do that. In former years we had been told that <u>God</u> does this and <u>God</u> does that. Protestants have been taught by Luther himself to accent passivity: <u>Wort und Antwort</u>, speaking and answering. And insofar as Melanchthonian theology has predominated, insofar as the chief act of worship has been seen to be the hearing of preaching, even simple physical action has been kept to a minimum. The model Protestant worshipper has by and large been he who sits and listens.

Contrary to first impressions, however, this new accent on action is quite congenial to the theology of Luther. Luther said, to be sure, that "apart from faith God accepts nothing whatever as an act of worship." But in the same place he also said "faith is a work which man must do, but it is also called God's work." (WA 33:28, underline added) Luther also viewed the Church as the people of God, first of all, not as the place where the Word and Sacraments are dispensed. The definition of the Church in the Augsburg Confession is an accurate reflection of his teaching. The Church, we read, "is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel." The Church is the people of God. We are not told that the Church is the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. That is to say, we are not told that the Church is the movement of God toward man. Rather we are told that the Church is a reality which exists first of all on a horizontal level, a community of men. It is consonant with this that Luther should have emphasized congregational participation in Communion and in the singing of hymns. In the same respect it is not surprising to find that Luther sees the real presence of Christ in the mutual consolation of the brethren. Although Luther constantly emphasized the prius of God's gracious activity with man, then, he did not by any means exclude the idea of action by man in the Church.

The rise of a liturgical scholarship is not the only recent development worthy of note. Parallel to this a new study of the biblical understanding of worship has arisen. Here the work of Oscar Cullmann has been drawing increasing attention. Cullmann has observed that it has been usual, in histories of the early Church and of the liturgy, to distinguish sharply between gatherings for the proclamation of the Word and gatherings for the Lord's Supper, corresponding to the practice in Judaism, where synagogue service and temple cult stood side by side. (Early Christian Worship, p. 27) Cullmann does not make this point explicitly, but it would seem that this traditional scholarship presupposes a Melanchthonian or Orthodox understanding of the theme Word and Sacrament; that is, that somehow Word and Sacrament do not really belong in the same category. Be that as it may, Cullmann shows that "in the early Church there are only . . . two celebrations or services--the common meal, within the framework of which proclamation of the Word had always a place, and Baptism." (Ibid., p. 31) More specifically with regard to the first of these two services:

> In the Book of Acts (2:42 and 4b, 20:7) instruction, preaching, prayer and breaking of bread are mentioned (as essential component parts of the service of worship), and mentioned in such a way as clearly to show that these elements were, from the beginning, the foundation of all the worship life of the community. (Ibid., p. 12)

It would seem clear, then, that the Melanchthonian-Orthodox stress on preaching as the act of worship falls short of the biblical view. The Lord's Supper had an indispensable place in early Christian worship. Even more, Cullmann argues that the Lord's Supper is the "basis and goal of every gathering." (Ibid., p. 29)

Once again we meet an undeniably new accent. Luther, as we have noted on more than one occasion, did not concern himself much with the movement of the Church's liturgy. He did place preaching and the Sacrament of the Altar on the same level and valued both with equal fervor. But he apparently did not view the Lord's Supper as the basis and goal of every gathering for worship. Concerning the basis and goal of gathered worship he seems to have remained silent in this regard if the results of modern biblical scholarship were before him. Or to put this point in a better way: Can a Protestant today, who accepts Luther's principle that the Scriptures provide the norm for all Christian faith and life, afford not to take seriously the results of contemporary biblical criticism?