

Who Is a God Like Thee?

MARTIN FRANZMANN

The Theses Of Agreement
And Inerrancy

Creation And Evolution:
A New Departure

STEVEN A. HEIN

The Questions of the
Upper Room

THOMAS JOHN DOBRENA

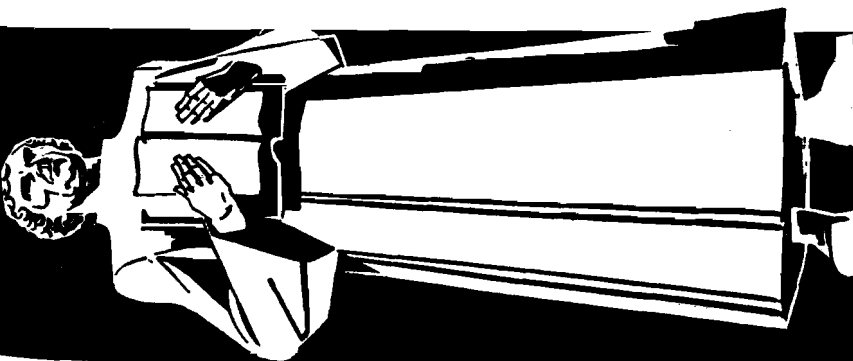
The Beginnings

JOHN D. FRITZ

The Gospel Is What
Lutherans Care About

NORMAN E. NAGEL

Book Reviews



the springfielder

Vol. XXXVII • No. 2

September, 1973



The Gospel Is What Lutherans Care About

NORMAN E. NAGEL

*The writer is Dean of Chapel
of the Resurrection, Valparaiso University*

THE GOSPEL IS WHAT LUTHERANS care about. This is not said to suggest that others do not, but to indicate that source of our life as Christ's, and to indicate that which may not be denied or diminished.

The magnitude of the Gospel is recognized by contrast with the Law, and particularly in its function of disclosing sin. When the Law has demolished every ground in man for making any claim on God, then the Gospel is received as sheer gift. Because of Calvary there is forgiveness and this is bestowed by the absolving "word of the cross."

Such words are linked with water in Baptism where the name of God is named upon us and we are born again, given life by the bestowal of what Christ lived, died and rose again to win for us. The receiving of the gifts, that is faith, is worked by the Spirit whose bestowing, faith-creating and quickening work is done through the word and water of Baptism.

Those baptized confess, when of an age to do so, the Spirit as the Giver of life, the bestower of the gifts Christ achieved for us. They confess Jesus Christ as the one who joined us in all our gone-wrongness, suffered for our sins, answering for them in our place, so that our sins condemned in him no longer condemn us for by Calvary we are freed from the dominion of sin. He went through all of death that is sin's due and rose victorious over all that would destroy us. What he did counts for us, and so through him there is liberation for us from the Law with its demands and condemnation, from the wrath of God, and from the dominion of sin, death and the devil. Through him we know God to be gracious toward us, forgiving, and our Father who embraces us in Christ and his righteousness. God the Creator loves us and we receive the gifts of his creation from his trusted hand.

To the Triune God we belong as his people. We have been baptized. We heed our Lord's bidding to carry the message of salvation through the world so that his words and baptism may make disciples of all people. We gather in his name and know him present with us. We lay ourselves down before him and receive his forgiving word.

The ministers through whom Christ speaks and bestows his forgiveness proclaim and preach the apostolic word, and their ministry is thereby recognized as apostolic. No man may put himself into this ministry. This is done by the church in whatever way it may choose to do it, heedful of the bidding of our Lord that there be an apostolic ministry, and making such arrangements as are serviceable to the apostolic word. The church has said what is regarded

as apostolic word by the canon. The proclaiming and teaching of the apostolic word by those whom the church puts into this task is the continuing apostolic ministry.

Entrusted to this ministry is also the taking of bread and wine with Christ's own Words of Institution which make them Christ's very body and blood which are given for us to eat and to drink. As surely as we are given Christ's body and blood to eat and to drink so surely Christ died for us, so surely we are forgiven, so surely we are made one with him and one with those who eat and drink his body and blood together with us. The bringing into Holy Communion of any contradiction of this oneness with Christ and fellow communicant runs counter to the Holy Communion, and the body and blood of Christ. Whether we come still holding to something that divides from Christ or from fellow or from fellow communicant, whether we come believing that he gives us his body and blood to eat and to drink or whether we do not, he gives to all who receive the bread and wine his body and blood to eat and to drink. It is with our mouths that we thus eat and drink. His saving gifts are not given to some supposedly superior part of us. Christ saves what he became and does not cease to be. The certainty of the body and blood comes from Christ and his words.

Such gifts evoke the sacrifice of praise that animates worship and life. He gives that we may give. He has his joy in giving gifts and enables us to share this joy. Given to and giving is the way of life of Christ's people. We bring bread and wine for his use as he has bidden us, and this may be called a sacrifice. The giving of ourselves to his worship and the service of our neighbor, that his body and blood enliven us for, may be called a sacrifice. His giving us his body and blood to eat and drink is no sacrifice, but only gift from him to us, and enablement to living sacrifice.

The Christian life is shaped by the giving love of Christ and in the Scripture we have his bidding and descriptions of that shape. We would please him. Yet in nothing of our achievements, in no factor of us, do we place our final reliance. That is in his body and blood given and shed for us, in our Baptism, and in his forgiving and life-giving word of the Gospel which does not merely tell but bestows what it says. This is all from him and as sure as he is sure. There is nothing anterior to him which makes him sure. At no point may we insert some factor of ourselves as decisive or guaranteeing. Our competence does not rise above the ability to reject him. He suffers himself to be rejected. His saving way is the gracious giving way which is the way of his Spirit with the means of grace. Outside the means of grace his working with his power is irresistible. He makes no one alive as his forgiven child by use of his irresistible power. From creation and our own faculties we cannot know God as Savior. From these we can at most know him as powerful and just. Only in Christ and his cross do we know the heart of God toward us. The most incredible thing is that God should love us, and love us so much as to go through Calvary for us.

Here is a love beyond the limits of our understanding. We cannot explain it. It derives solely from the heart of God before time

and beyond time. From the cross I know God thus loves me. That redeeming love is not only for me or a limited number of men.

The function of the Confessions is to extol that love and resist any diminution of it. Synergism is such diminution. The ecumenical creeds acclaim God as he has made himself known to us through the Scriptures. The Scripture is the source and norm of all doctrine. Because the creeds and confessions witness and repeat what Scripture says we are committed to them. The cogency of creeds and confessions is Scripture; the cogency of Scripture is Christ, whom the Spirit working with the message of Scripture brings us to receive as our Savior, our Lord, and Son of the Father, with whom and the Spirit he is one God.