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Sacraments as an Affirmation of Creation

David P. Scaer

Recently a Lutheran pastor was reported shocked when he heard that a pastor of another synod was giving communion to non-Christians including Buddhists. The reason for this practice, as it was told, was based on deriving the meaning of the sacrament from the first article of the creed and not exclusively from the second article. The account is probably apocryphal, but considering the open-door policies of many churches, it is not implausible and may have happened more than once.

The problem was not simply that the pastor had no fellowship communion principles. He did, though most of us would disagree with them.¹ At the root of a totally open communion policy was a faulty view of God. Anyone who attempts to derive theology from one article of the creed without the others has a deficient trinitarianism. In Christian theology God is never simply God, but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. A natural response to such an aberrant practice of giving communion to non-Christians is that the principles and practices of the holy communion derive from either the second or third article, but not the first. Speaking about first, second, and third-article Christianity might be a trendy thing to do to impress the impressionable. Such talk is only theo-babble, because it attempts to speak of one person of the Trinity in isolation from the other two. It is inevitably so misleading as to be heretical.

Each article is dependent on the others and in a certain sense one prepares or recapitulates the others. A good case could be made for placing the holy communion in either the second article, because it is the supper of Jesus, or the third article with its reference to the "communion of saints," as will be explained below. Placing communion under the second and third articles and not the first article where God is confessed as the creating Father leaves us with a truncated view of the sacrament. Worse, it violates the fundamental rule of trinitarian theology, which does not allow attributing a work to one or two persons and not the other (*opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*). Speaking of the Father's sovereignty, the Spirit's indwelling, and the Son's redemption as if each person possessed that peculiar characteristic exclusively is careless.

Old ecclesiastical and Lutheran tradition gives the Father a prominent role in the holy communion. Consider that all the

eucharistic prayers, including Luther's *Formula Missae*, following the devotional and liturgical practices of Jesus Himself, were addressed to the Father. The proper preface begins: "We give thanks unto Thee, Lord God, holy Father, almighty (*omnipotens*) everlasting God."² This is, of course, the language of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds where the Latin *omnipotens* translates the Greek *pantokrator*, the creator of all things. Though the Father is not explicitly mentioned as the one whom Jesus thanked in the institution of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:27), it could not have been otherwise. In other places this is made explicit (11:25). The *Didache*, dated by scholars between 60 and 125 A.D., includes the idea of creation in the eucharistic prayers: "You, Lord Almighty, created all things for the sake of Your name and gave food and drink to men for their enjoyment, that they may give You thanks."³ This does not mean that "a common ordinary first-article meal" becomes "a religious second or third-article meal" in the holy communion, but that in the sacrament the Father's intentions for mankind in creation to come into a closer fellowship with Him are realized.

Historically in the development of the creed the second article, with the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus, was the most detailed and prominent, making Christianity distinct from Judaism. Later Constantinople (381 A.D.) detailed the Spirit's relationship to the Father and the Son. Luther saw Christianity in christological terms because of the incarnation and atonement. The eternal treasures of the Father are given not directly but through the Son and the Holy Spirit (Large Catechism II, 24).⁴ The three persons exist in the others and in this sense share a common nature.⁵ Consider also this line from St. Ambrose's hymn "O Splendor of God's Glory Bright": "The Son with God the Father one, and God the Father in the Son."⁶

Having said this, we would not want to fall into the aberration of christomonism in any doctrine, and this must include holy communion, even if this sacrament is properly called the *Lord's Supper* (1 Corinthians 11:20). Any doctrine including that of the sacrament cannot be located in one article alone, simply because the three articles are not a succession of truths or realities, but concentric

realities, revolving around the person of Jesus Christ and revealing themselves in Him.⁷ We cannot know or speak about God or the Holy Spirit apart from Jesus. The proper preface for the Christmas holy communion prays that we may see the Father in the person of His Son.⁸ This is hardly more than a paraphrase of "he who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The Son's revealing of the Father depends upon and reflects the inner trinitarian relationship.

Isolating one article from the others has allowed for recent identifications of the persons of the Trinity not as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, attributing to each person an activity peculiar to Him alone. This is not only a confusion of the *opera ad extra* with the *opera ad intra*, a supplanting of the ontological Trinity with the economic Trinity, but tritheism. Though God is known in His historic acts, His tri-personal essence is above history. Pannenberg's trinitarian understanding fails because it does not go beyond an historical to a transcendental definition. Such identifications of the three divine persons as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, as one wit with *Lutheran Forum* said, would be appropriate of the Hindu triad or trinity, Trimurti, with its (his, her) creative, preserving, and destroying principles.

Through Jesus we know God as Father (Matthew 10:27), and we are given the Spirit and consequently confess Father-Son-Spirit. God is Father because He is the Father of the Son in eternity and the Father of Jesus in time. The Spirit receives His eternal identity from the Father *and* from the Son simply because the Son is the Son of the Father and is *not* an independent source of the Spirit.⁹ In time the Spirit receives His identity from the incarnation and more specifically from the moment of the cross (Hebrews 9:14).¹⁰ This is hardly christomonism, but the christological perspective allows us to understand all doctrine as trinitarian. The Small Catechism requires that the sign of the cross be made at the name of the Trinity,¹¹ because it is precisely in the cross, at the moment of the eternal atonement, that we see God as triune with the Father offering up the Son who is assisted by the Spirit (Hebrews 9:11-14; 13:20). Knowledge of the Father apart from Christ is Arian or Unitarian, and

a revelation from the Spirit which is not completely christological is fanaticism.

Feminism with its frightening symptoms of a neutered liturgy and women's ordination challenges the understanding of God as Father. It is the resurgence in modern garb of the religion of the Greek mother-earth goddess, Gea.¹² Arguments for a feministic understanding of God and for the ordination of women are cut from the same cloth, though the connection is often not recognized. Christ's choice of males as His apostles, the incarnation of the Son of God as the man Jesus, and the identity of God as Father and Son are also valid arguments against the ordination of women, though they are at times ignored as secondary.¹³ Traditionally Lutheran opponents of women's ordination are more comfortable arguing from the orders of creation. Citing St. Paul's prohibitions is common, but the arguments become more effective when these prohibitions are derived from the doctrines of incarnation, atonement, and the Trinity. All theology, including the church's answer to feminism, must be normed by christology. God's coming in the flesh is historically decisive for theology. Without christology theology is fractured and fragmented into autonomous and unrelated truths. Our Lutheran Confessions proceed from such a christological basis which is axiomatic for Lutheran theology. Theological arguments only reach their full potential when they are offered christologically. If one removes Christ, the biblical references or proofs stand in danger of being interpreted as law or non-christological principles.

Making the redemption—that is, christology—the center of our theological task presupposes acknowledging God as Creator. Creation is the presupposition for redemption. But can the argument go one step further to understanding baptism and the Lord's Supper in light of creation and perhaps subsequently sanctification? Can our understanding of the sacraments be related as much to the Father and the Spirit as to the Son? We have touched on the role of the Father in the sacrament by showing that without exception eucharistic prayers are addressed to Him.¹⁴ Assigning the Spirit a prominent role in sacramental definition can be problematic for Lutherans as historically they have objected to the Reformed replacement of Jesus with the Spirit in the holy supper. This matter is part of a larger

concern with the Reformed, who to compensate for confining Christ's human nature to a spatial heaven have stressed the omnipresent Spirit.¹⁵ John Calvin used the *sursum corda* ("we lift our hearts unto the Lord") of the old liturgy to explain our communion with Christ as our spiritual ascent to heaven. Confined to heaven, Jesus cannot be so abased as to come to earth.¹⁶ What the human nature of Jesus is incapable of doing, our human spirits are. Hermann Sasse notes that the origin of the idea of the Spirit as the "transporter" of Christ's body is unknown.¹⁷ At first glance the substitution of the Spirit for Christ in the holy supper is attractive, because God is pictured, falsely let it be immediately said, with a more equal division of trinitarian labors. The problem is that the Spirit does what the human Jesus cannot do.¹⁸ Any division of trinitarian labors is intolerable. The old ecclesiastical adage stands that the trinitarian works are *indivisa*, undivided. Related to this is the way in which the Reformed assign divine works to the human nature of Jesus. One Reformed scholar, to avoid the issue of whether the divine or human natures performed the miracles of Jesus, attributed His miracles to the Holy Spirit. This solution not only depreciates Jesus' human nature, but it shows a deficient trinitarianism.¹⁹

Yet no fear of an aberration should force us into an unacceptable christomonism which eliminates the Father and the Spirit from christology or our teaching of the holy communion. The Lord's Supper would be a natural place to develop a legitimate christomonism as Jesus is the originator of the sacrament and its sole content. But at the same time the Lord's Supper must be thought of in trinitarian terms, since Christ is the Son of God only in relation to the Father and there is no presence of Christ without the Spirit. There is good reason to argue that the holy communion belongs in a certain sense to third-article Christianity, since scholarly opinion leans toward interpreting "the communion of saints" as a reference to the "communion of holy things," that is, the holy communion. Taken by Luther as a reference to the church, it was obvious to him that the word "communion" was an awkward reference to it.²⁰

Without sifting through the convincing arguments of Elert²¹ and Sasse²² favoring the *communio sanctorum* as a reference to the

holy communion, we would at least want to agree to the Spirit's activity there. With baptism there is no problem, as the Constantinopolitan Creed's article on the Spirit has an explicit reference: "I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." The reference to "forgiveness of sins" in the Apostles' Creed has the same baptismal reference. Placing the holy communion along with baptism into the third article can and should not be *a priori* excluded.

The Formula of Concord does speak of spiritual reception of the Lord's Supper in the sense of a supernatural eating (Solid Declaration, VII, 104-105).²³ It makes no explicit reference to "spiritual" as referring to the Holy Spirit, but seems to imply it in condemning the Reformed meaning of the word "spiritual" as "the power of Christ's absent body" (Epitome VII, 5). Including the Holy Spirit as a factor in the holy communion is also not without biblical support, as Paul speaks of the Jews eating the spiritual food and spiritual drink which was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:3-4.) New Testament instances of *pneumatikos* may in some cases be translated "Spiritual" with an upper case "S," as the adjective for the Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit. One may take, for example, the resurrected body (1 Corinthians 15:44). It is raised a Spiritual body, because it has been taken into the realm of perfection by the Holy Spirit. The use of the lower case allowed historical gnosticism to deny the physical aspect of the resurrection and in a sense to use Paul's words against his own arguments for the resurrection. The same understanding of "spiritual" is used by the Reformed to their own advantage. In 1 Corinthians the Holy Spirit is in view with the word "spiritual" (10:3-4). The "Spiritual" food devoured by the Israelites was not non-material, Platonic, non-substantive food and drink, but real food and drink provided by the Holy Spirit. Similarly the Lord's Supper is real food and drink supplied by the Holy Spirit. The *epiklesis* of the Eastern Church invoking the Spirit acknowledges His activity in the holy supper.²⁴

The Lord's Supper may also be developed in relation to the Holy Spirit simply to demonstrate in an obvious way that all articles of faith, including the sacraments, should not be limited to one divine person to the exclusion of the other two. But by saying that the

sacraments belong to the Holy Spirit as a third-article matter, they are also affirmed as completely christological, because Christian faith holds that the Spirit is always the Spirit of the Father sent into the world by Christ. To regard Him only as the Spirit of God without a necessary connection to Christ allows universalism, as Karl Barth held. Relating the sacraments to the Father and the article of creation is another matter.

Paul refers to baptism in Titus 3:5 as "the washing of regeneration," a reference taken over by Luther to demonstrate baptism's saving effects (Large Catechism IV, 27).²⁵ In English "regeneration" can be understood as a rebirth and also a new creation or re-creation. These concepts are interchangeable. The Greek allows the same kind of interchangeability. In Matthew 19:28 the same word refers not merely to a rebirth of the world, but to a renewal of it in the messianic age.²⁶ The messianic age or new creation means that what happened in first creation of Genesis is somehow going to happen again. The Old Testament prophets understand the messianic age in terms of the abundant paradise of Genesis 2. "The renewal of the Holy Ghost," which also belongs to Luther's definition of baptism,²⁷ also carries the idea of going back to an earlier and preferable state. In a certain sense baptism is God's creation of the individual.

In the Small Catechism (IV, 12) Luther continues the allusion to Genesis in requiring that the Old Adam in us should by contrition be drowned and a new man come forth.²⁸ The Old Adam reflects the Genesis imagery of man's creation by God and his fall into sin. A baptismal piety for Luther presupposes the constant reality of the fall of Genesis 3 in the life of the Christian and requires that the restoration, also suggesting Genesis 3, happen daily. Baptism is a kind of creation, a re-creation, patterned after Genesis. After Genesis 1:1 God does not create *ex nihilo*, but He refashions what is sinful and unacceptable to Him into what is holy and acceptable. The baptismal language of John 3 about being born from on high is recognizably incarnational (verse 7), but the concept of creation must be further developed in connection with baptism.

All matter is created in one moment and from that primordial creation God fashions all things. Similarly, the creation of Adam

was a creative event for humanity once and for all. Never again, even in the birth of Jesus, does God work with the dust of the ground in creating humanity. From Adam and Eve the entire race, including Jesus, has its origin. Something similar happens in baptism. The sinful humanity is restored in Christ's resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:22), something actualized by baptism. It is a creation of its own kind. More than a restoration of humanity is involved in baptism; rather, it brings humanity to its intended goal through the Spirit's work, paralleling Genesis 1:2, with the Spirit moving on the face of the waters. Baptism is at the same time a creative, redemptive, and sanctifying act. Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit in baptism, the redemptive work of the Son becomes reality in such a way that we are able to confess God as the creating Father. One may compare Galatians 4:6. The Spirit of the Son enables us to pray to the Father. Yet all three persons together and not separately are recognized as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Baptism is inaugurated by Jesus, but is properly offered in the name "the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:20).

The God who brought about creation out of water by His Spirit's moving across it (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30) brings about a permanent and perfected creation out of the water of baptism. The appearance of the Spirit at the baptism of Jesus points forward to the giving of the Spirit by Jesus through baptism,²⁹ and it points back to Genesis where the Spirit of God was moving across the face of the waters. In our baptism the Trinity who is the world's creator and its redeemer is recognized as the sanctifier by His reconstructing of sinful humanity into the church. It is the Spirit who not only works faith, but keeps the church with Jesus Christ in the one true faith (Small Catechism II, 4).³⁰ It is not that in creation, redemption, and sanctification we move from any one work of God to another, but that every work of God recapitulates an earlier work from which it derives its form and substance. Creation anticipates its redemption and sanctification, and redemption and sanctification presuppose the creation. Any argument from the orders of creation, especially in the continuing debate on the ordination of women, depends upon just this kind of thinking.

Arguments relating baptism to creation may be more accessible than those relating holy communion to the creation. Baptism is a creating water as was the water of Genesis 1:2. The temptation for Lutherans is to become christomonistic to avoid the Charybdis of an exclusively first-article Christianity with its universalism and the Scylla of an exclusively third-article Christianity which is forever making christology something merely past-tense in theology to exalt the Holy Spirit. An exclusively first-article theology can see nothing other in the Lord's Supper than an undefined religious eating. Where Christ is replaced with the Spirit, the Lord's Supper becomes an historical nuisance no longer necessary for true faith.

Understood properly, the sacramental element was inherent in the original creation in that creation provided the sacramental vehicles for God's grace. Creation is never autonomous, as deistic rationalism held, but remains dependent on God as much as God is involved in it. It anticipates God's greater purposes. The idea of incarnation is not absent in God's creative activities, as Jesus is described as the agent and goal of all creation (Colossians 1:15-17). Jesus bears the image of God in a way that Adam only anticipated. Fundamental to the Formula of Concord (VII and VIII) as characteristic of Lutheran theology is that the sacraments and the incarnation inform each other. Both presuppose the creation on which they are dependent and to which they give a further meaning. Suggestions for this are found in the account of creation itself. Before and without sin the first pair was promised a higher existence, which was known in Eden. The tree of life, almost in the manner of a sacrament, pledged that temporal life would be elevated to something more permanent (Genesis 2:9.) After sinning the primal pair had to be removed to avoid making their temporal punishment permanent (3:33). To borrow New Testament language, they would have been eating damnation to themselves (1 Corinthians 11:29; one may compare Hebrews 10:29).

Unless redemption is understood and defined in regard to creation, creation is relegated to a mere past-tense event, as was done by the historic gnostics who also disparaged it. The use of created substances in the sacraments is an endorsement of creation. If the creation were as imperfect and evil as the gnostics said, then we

should have sacraments without matter or we should have no sacraments at all. Luther speaks of the word of God coming to an element, an element from creation, and turning it into a sacrament (Large Catechism IV, 17).³¹ In the sacraments our gaze is focused first on things, material things, things belonging to God's creation, through which we look at the supernatural. It is not that we look around them, but through them, to see the supernatural reality.³² What happens in the sacraments has in a sense already happened in the incarnation. In Jesus we see God. In water and bread and wine we find Jesus. In both incarnation and sacrament, the created becomes divine and serves the one divine purpose of salvation. In both Jesus and the sacraments the invisible is hidden in the visible, and thus creation is first affirmed and then elevated. Water, bread, and wine experience through the word of God a kind of redemption from their menial use and a sanctification through which the Spirit brings men into a higher relationship with God and confirms it. Created elements are brought to their highest potential and by God's words surpass this potential without denying their limitations. In the sacraments ordinary things are raised to a higher, spiritual level, a dimension in which the Holy Spirit is working. In baptism water becomes what God intended it to be—an introduction into and a confirmation of the life in paradise. Baptism looks back to the rivers of the paradise of Genesis (2:10-14), anticipates the river of the water of life in the final paradise (Revelation 22:1-2), and centers in Jesus as living water (John 4:10). From His side comes water (John 19:34). Confessional Lutherans are as unalterably opposed to any substitution for the prescribed substances as they are opposed to any alteration of meaning of the words.³³ Luther was so set on the meaning of the word "is" that he said that he would rather drink blood with the pope than wine with the Reformed. If he were alive in our time, he would hardly have that option, as Protestants have offered a variety of substitutions for wine.

It would be callous for Lutherans to say of the Reformed that, since their sacramental elements cannot be identified with Christ's body and blood, the elements used in communion are an indifferent matter. The color of the check matters little with no money in the bank. Authentic and forged Confederate dollars have the same value. Yet the elements *do* matter. Luther notes that substitutions

contravene specific biblical mandates.³⁴ On still a deeper level changing the elements or using no elements at all resembles the practices of ancient gnosticism, which considered creation so inferior that the elements could be changed. Some used water in place of wine for the Lord's Supper. Such an approach not only suggests that God does not need physical or material means to deal with His people, but they are in fact obstacles to true spiritual communion with God.³⁵ Of course, the sacraments are obstacles to anyone who holds that nothing stands between us and God in terms of our mystical union with Him. The Formula of Concord (VIII, 2-4) notes that those with erroneous opinions of the holy supper will fail to understand christology.³⁶ To this may be added creation.

Distaste for the sacraments is often accompanied by exalting faith as if it were an autonomous human work not dependent on the sacraments. Even if the sacraments are not matters of indifference, they can still be treated as if they were not essential for Christian life. The argument asserts that we can be good Christians only with faith and without the sacraments. Commonly the thief on the cross is mentioned (Luke 23:39-43), overlooking the totality of Luke's theology with his strong emphasis, in his gospel (3:3) and Acts (2:38), on the forgiveness of sins through baptism. Luther claims that "whoever rejects baptism rejects God's word, faith, and Christ, who directs us and binds us to baptism" (Large Catechism IV, 30).³⁷ Mark Ellingsen notes that one of the seven marks of contemporary evangelical theology is placing a priority on conversion and sanctification over the sacraments.³⁸ As shown above, such thinking is not only impossible for Luther but rejected by him.³⁹

The sacraments are important not only because of God's commands, but because they derive their life and meaning from a christology centered in the incarnation. The incarnation in turn is a full endorsement of creation. In the incarnation God takes humanity, the crown of His creation, into Himself.⁴⁰ Jesus is both Creator and creature: "equal to the Father with respect to the Godhead and inferior to God with respect to His manhood."⁴¹ Relegating the sacraments to a secondary position as unnecessary in our doctrine or in our liturgical life reflects negatively on what we think of God as Creator, especially as that Creator revealed Himself in the man

Jesus. On the indispensability of the sacraments, Luther should be heard again (Large Catechism IV, 28-29):

Our know-it-alls, the new spirits (Zwinglians or Anabaptists), assert that faith alone saves and that works and external things contribute nothing to this end. We answer: It is true, nothing that is in us does it but faith, as we shall hear later on. But these leaders of the blind are unwilling to see that faith must have something to believe—something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus faith clings to the water and believes it to be baptism in which there is sheer salvation and life, not through the water, as we have sufficiently stated, but through its incorporation with God's word and ordinances and the joining of His name to it. When I believe this, what else is it but believing in God as the one who has implanted his word in this external ordinance and offered it to us so that we may grasp the treasure it contains? Now, these people are so foolish as to separate faith from the object to which faith is attached and bound on the ground that the object is something external. Yes, it must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart, just as the entire gospel is an external, oral proclamation. In short, whatever God effects in us He does through such external ordinances.⁴²

As the sacraments are not abstract commands or additional laws, as the Reformed hold, their meaning can be informed by creation and God's redemptive acts in Israel's history. They presuppose God's activity in the Old Testament which was in a sense sacramental. Paul found precursors for baptism not only in circumcision, but in the passing through the Red Sea and under the cloud (1 Corinthians 10:2) and in the creation itself (Titus 3:5), if the argument above stands. First Peter sees a baptismal correlation in the the flood (3:20-1); so also Luther incorporated the Noahic flood and the Red Sea into his baptismal prayer of 1526.

Unless we think in precisely these terms of moving back from sanctification through incarnation to creation and then perhaps even to God Himself, we stand in danger of a kind of gnosticism with its

disdain for the creation. This distancing of the divine from the human is also characteristic of the Reformed christology and sacramentology. A non-sacramental piety may at the first level show low regard for the sacrament itself, but it may reflect the more serious problems of an undeveloped christology and doctrine of creation. In a non-sacramental piety creation becomes what God did once upon a time. His important work is now sanctification. Not only is the creed's organic unity destroyed, but placing God's activities into time frames is dispensational, especially if one person of the Trinity seems to be acting at one time in isolation from the others. As mentioned, our response is that one person of the Trinity is in the other and that one article of the creed anticipates or incorporates the others. Luther in his explanation of the creed makes creation and redemption as contemporary for the believer as sanctification: "God has made me . . . redeemed me . . . called me" (Small Catechism II).⁴³

Absorbing creation into redemption and then through redemption into sanctification is derived from and patterned after the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father with the Son. If creation is patterned after what God is in Himself, so redemption receives its form from creation, and sanctification from redemption. Sanctification is dependent on the creation through the redemption. The Spirit sanctifies because He is the Spirit of Christ, and thus all spirituality must be christological.

The suggestion that the Lord's Supper may be distributed to non-Christians short-circuits the process whereby the Spirit's sanctifying activity is dependent on the creation only *through* the redemption. Putting creation, redemption, and sanctification in this order of dependency reflects the higher dependency of the Spirit on the Father through the Son and the Son's dependency on the Father. The concept that God is the creating Father not only allows Him to work sacramentally with His people, but suggests that He will in fact act in this way. In a certain sense, simply because He is the Creator, He is committed to acting sacramentally with His people. If God steps outside of creative means to deal with His people, He is in a certain sense denying Himself as Creator. This He cannot do because God is essentially and not incidently the Creator. Luther

approaches the same topic from the creation in insisting that God works with us through external ordinances and things.⁴⁴ God remains in a kind of "sacramental union" with His creation, because even in its sinful condition He remains its Creator. Historically the demiurge was invented by the gnostics so that God would not have to contaminate Himself with the creation. To act sacramentally means to act through the creation ("means") or creatures. With this definition, the incarnation can be understood sacramentally and our sacraments have incarnational dimensions. Relating christology to sacramentology was essential for the defense of the Lutheran position against the Reformed.⁴⁵

The regulations, threats, and promises surrounding the trees of the garden verge on the sacramental. Eating one fruit brings death and removal from God's presence. Eating the other brings life and eternal bliss with God. One could almost transfer these descriptions to our use of the Lord's Supper, to which some are invited and from which some are prohibited for the same reasons surrounding the trees of the garden. For some the sacrament works death and for others it works life. In similar fashion the Old Testament is more than an historical account of an ancient people; it is the continuation of creation in which God continues to act sacramentally. Abraham is in a certain sense "an Adam" in whom the peoples of the earth are reconstructed as God's people and who prepares for Christ in whom this reconstruction is completed. In the Old Testament the themes of paradise are repeated and held up as Israel's destiny. Religious and secular uses of bread and wine and the eating of elders with God on Sinai are references forward to a more significant eating and drinking in the messianic age. The Old Testament is not an isolated history, but a redemptive history in which the themes of creation and paradise are held before the people in anticipation of their completed perfection in the messianic age which appeared in Jesus. The problem is not that we find too much of Christ in the Old Testament, but that we find too little.⁴⁶

Luther in answering his opponents' arguments about the uselessness of water in baptism claims that a straw used by God would have more value than all their good works (Large Catechism IV, 12).⁴⁷ He did not intend to say that God acted arbitrarily in

choosing the elements for the sacraments or that they suggested no meaning. Water suggested to Luther drowning and the Lord's Supper "food and sustenance" (Large Catechism V, 24).⁴⁸ Luther used the reference to the straw to say that in the sacraments God's word is everything. Of course, the same is true of incarnation and conversion. To assert that the human makes a contribution would synergistic. We must be clear on this point. Bread and wine no more make a contribution to the sacrament than we do to our conversion. In the incarnation the divine embraces the human and not the reverse. The initiation of the incarnation rests with God and not the Virgin Mary. Mariolatry assumes that Mary did make a contribution and, thus, devotion to her is not unrelated to synergism. Yet God's choice in any matter, including the elements for the sacraments, is neither accidental nor arbitrary. In the incarnation God chose one particular woman as the Lord's mother (Luke 1:30). Similarly Jesus is not any man, but the one particular man chosen in eternity. The same is true of the Lutheran doctrine of election. Selecting the sacramental elements reflected what God had already done in the creation. One may consider the incarnation. It did not and could not take place with an inanimate object or an animal, because certain characteristics, such as lifelessness and irrationality, contradicted what God was. Man made in God's image was fitted as was no other creature for the incarnation (Psalms 8:4-8; Hebrews 2:6-8). The same thought is applicable to the sacraments. Water has characteristics prior to its use in baptism which are carried over into this sacrament. The external washing ability of water is raised to a higher level in baptism. Its destructive characteristics in drowning and flooding points to the destruction of sin in baptism, a point not lost on St. Peter or Luther. The means of God's revelation do not contradict the revelation. The outward created element with God's word is a sign, that is, a window into the sacramental mystery. External elements and outward rites in the sacraments are by themselves not totally without meaning, but are in some way related to and reflect the internal reality. This is essential also to incarnational theology. That God is the Father of Jesus in His birth indicates His higher and eternal birth from the Father. In the Small Catechism (II, 4) Luther does exactly this by saying that Jesus is born from His Father in eternity and born of His mother here in

time.⁴⁹

In the same manner we should ask the same questions about the Lord's Supper. Faith sees through ordinary eating to a deeper kind of eating involving the Christian in the depth of his existence so that body and soul are receiving sustenance in the same moment and the same act. Essential for Lutherans is the *manducatio oralis*, a nourishment through the mouth for the body. The external nourishment of the body involves the deeper nourishment of the body and soul with Christ's body and blood.⁵⁰ Unbelievers are kept away from the holy supper because their bodies are receiving what their souls despise, and they are torn apart in the very midst of their existence. Christ's body, intended to join human beings in the depths of their existence with God, becomes destructive of this unity and destines them to the most severe of all judgments. What unbelievers despise with their souls they eat with their mouths and it is joined to their bodies. An act of redemption becomes one of condemnation. They thrust themselves prematurely and unprepared before the judgment throne of Christ.

While the physical eating and drinking in the sacrament points to a supernatural consumption, we ask whether the elements of bread and wine have significance. Are they divine but still only arbitrary choices? All divine decisions are purposeful and never arbitrary. God's actions in history are hidden, but in regard to salvation some of His purposes may be revealed. The sacrament stands in a tension between continuity with Israel's past and the idea that a new testament and covenant has come into existence through Jesus. The passover was the occasion for the sacrament (Matthew 26:17-8) and seems to have provided the basis for its celebration in the early church (1 Corinthians 5:7). Paul correlates the sacrament with the giving of the manna (1 Corinthians 10:3-4; one may compare John 6:31-2). Apart from the institution of the Christian sacrament, bread is not without cultic and theological significance in Israel. Wine points to a time of unbridled happiness pointing to the end-times (Genesis 49:11-2). Israel's cultic life was as much *sacramental* as it was sacrificial, a topic which must be pursued at another time.⁵¹ Yet note can be made in a preliminary way of how the sacramental substances differ from each other. Whereas water serves a purpose

in God's creative activities (Genesis 1:2), bread is first mentioned in connection with man's fall into sin: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground" (3:19). The hand-to-mouth existence of Genesis 2 from trees providing fruit is replaced by a complex system involving tilling the soil, struggling with unwanted growth, cultivating, harvesting, threshing, converting harvested grain into flour, and finally baking. Bread is man's minimal requirement for existence in a world now condemned to corruption. Its production is accompanied by sweat at every step of the way. As difficult as is its production and as unadorned as is its taste, bread is basic to man's existence. With the toils and sorrows that accompany its production, bread is not a denial of creation in spite of its bondage to sin; bread is an affirmation. Creation, beset by its own problems, still serves the needs of sinners. Men in spite of their sin and on account of God's goodness are allowed to live in anticipation of a future redemption. Bread is given further significance by the references of Jesus to Himself as the "bread of God," "the true bread out of heaven," and "the bread of life." This has found a place Lutheran piety.⁵²

The parallel between ordinary bread and the bread of the sacrament is obvious. Ordinary and sacramental bread are each in its own way necessary for man in his state of sin. The physical man lives by bread alone. The man destined to live with God requires Jesus Christ as the bread of heaven. All work for bread which will eventually perish (John 6:27). The bread of eternal life is provided through the toil of the one man Jesus Christ.

Wine presents another facet. It makes human existence palatable. There is no reference by Jesus to Himself as wine, but there is as vine (John 15:1). In spite of alcohol's destructive affects, it has religious significance for the ancient Graeco-Roman world and for Israel, where it was considered God's gift. Here was the nectar of the gods. Canaan is not only the promised land, but the promising land because of the abundance of grapes. If Judah's teeth are made white with milk, his eyes are made red with wine (Genesis 49:12). The ecstasy of the messianic age is anticipated by wine.

Creation has undergone a deterioration because of sin. Now in the sacraments the process is reversed. God has overcome the

obstacle of a condemned creation with bread making spiritual life possible and with wine promising a permanent, heavenly ecstasy. The failure to recognize the theological symbolism distinctively inherent in bread and wine seems to be akin to the old Roman Catholic view that one did not need to receive the cup, since blood is already present in flesh. Bread and wine each have their own signification anchored in God's continued creative activity now perfected in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Now through the bread and wine of the holy supper God permanently overcomes the obstacle of sin with an atonement for sins once and for all. Through bread and wine, each with its own significance and symbolism, believers take hold of Him who is expiation, propitiation, sacrifice, and atonement. Bread focuses on that which is absolutely necessary. Wine indicates the luxury of God's goodness. God gives us exactly what we need and much more than we can anticipate. Christ's body sustains us, and His blood is the anticipation of unmeasured eschatological joy. Not only has God reserved the best for last, but there is more than anyone can consume (John 3:10).

We are too frequently tempted to work with a minimum in theology. The lowest common denominators become the norm, but what is absolutely required for salvation does not begin to exhaust God's intentions. Baptism and the Lord's Supper can become indistinguishable in the piety of the people because they are explained in terms of the forgiveness of sins as their common denominator. Overlooked is the fact that each has its particular and unique place in the plan of salvation. Similarly neglected is that God's creative materials in the sacraments point to the distinctiveness of each sacrament.

Plenary inspiration stands awkwardly in tension with a proclamation which often does not go beyond the bare minimum for salvation (Hebrews 6:1). Our insistence that the whole Bible is inspired prevents defining and proclaiming Christianity, including its sacraments, in minimal terms. This leaves us with a christomonism which does not do justice even to our christology and ignores the theological significance of creation in our theology. In redemption and sanctification God is only bringing what He planned for His

original creation to its intended perfection. The first article of faith is that we believe in God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. Redemption and sanctification confirm and endorse this. The sacraments are first an endorsement of our redemption, but they are also a confirmation of creation.

Endnotes

1. For a full discussion of communion fellowship practices see Martin Wittenberg, "Church Fellowship and Altar Fellowship in the Light of Church History," trans. John Bruss, *Logia*, 1 (1992): 23-58. This issue was sent gratis to many of the readers of the *CTQ* and covers church practices from the year 200 up to the modern era. For the sake of future reference it should find a permanent place on library shelves.
2. *Prayers of the Eucharist Early and Reformed*, ed. R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cumming, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 138.
3. Jasper and Cumming, p. 15.
4. *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 413.
5. See Kenneth Paul Wesche, "The Triadological Shaping of Latin and Greek Christology," *Pro Ecclesia* 1 (1):63-75 and 2 (1):84-105.
6. *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), Hymn 550.
7. The following reference from the late fourth-century church father and defender of the trinitarian faith, St. Gregory of Nyssa, is taken from Wesche, 2 (1):87-88. "We do not learn that the Father does something on His own which the Son does not cooperate; or again, that the Son acts on His own without the Spirit. Rather does every operation which extends from God to creation and is designated according to our differing conceptions of it have its origin in the Father, proceed through the Son, and

reach its completion by the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that the name of operation is not divided among the several *actors* because their objective in any matter is not divided or independent of the others. But whatever takes place . . . takes place through the three . . . So then, the Holy Trinity carries out every operation in accordance with the number of *hypostases*, but there is one motion and regulative order, issuing from the Father, through the Son, and to the Holy Spirit."

8. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, Hymn 25.
9. Wesche calls attention to the Eastern Church's insistence on the use of the term "Godhead" solely for the Father, since quite literally it means "the source, or head, of the Trinity" (2 [1]:87, note 8); "divinity" is the preferred term for the three divine persons.
10. This thought is discussed by Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI. The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1987), p. 931.
11. Tappert, p. 352. "In the morning, when you rise, make the sign of the cross and say, 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.'"
12. Olivia Vlahos, "The Goddess That Failed," *First Things*, 28 (December 1992), pp. 12-19.
13. *First Things* has regularly been addressing feministic theology at its foundation. See, for example, Michael Novak, "Women, Ordination, and Angels," 32 (April 1993), pp. 25-32.
14. See Jasper and Cumming.
15. John Calvin is quoted as follows by Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1958), p. 323: "While we as long as we sojourn in this mortal life cannot be included or contained in the same place with Him, the efficacy of His Spirit is not limited by boundaries of space and therefore is able to bring together and to connect what is separated by local distance. Thus we recognize that His Spirit is the bond of

our participation of Him."

16. Sasse, pp. 324-325.
17. Sasse, p. 325. The role of the Holy Spirit as the conveyor of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper remains essential to the Reformed understanding. Compare Gabriel Fackre, "Call and Catholicity," *Pro Ecclesia*, 1 (1):20-3: "the Holy Spirit alone, as recognized in the *epiklesis* and *sursum corda*, provides 'the bridge between "the sign" and "the thing" in the Supper"' (p. 23). Fackre's essay was a positive response to "A Common Calling," a foundational document for Lutheran and Reformed unity in the United States.
18. Robert W. Jenson concludes that "A Common Calling," intended to unite Lutheran and Reformed churches in North America, does not settle the issue. "Comment on *A Common Calling*," *Pro Ecclesia*, 1 (1):19-20. "And the christological-sacramental *propositions* so far put forward by Lutherans and Reformed are indeed flatly contradictory, and do *not* state a common *telos* of the two sets of concerns. Is the Logos' divine attribute of omnipresence really communicated to the man Jesus, so that He as a human person transcends spatial separation as He chooses (Lutheran), or is it not (Reformed)? Is a personally specific ecclesial imitation of God the Spirit constitutive for the real presence (Reformed), or it is not (Lutheran)?"
19. Wesche is worth quoting on this point (*Pro Ecclesia*, 2(1):88): "There are not three separate actors, each one scheming against the other to effect his own agenda, as one finds in the Olympian pantheon, nor is there one common operation performed independently by each of the Three, as in the case, for example, of several human orators, or farmers, or shoemakers who each one performs the same activity, but independently of others; there is but one natural operation which all three persons perform, each in his own way, but in natural union with the others. There is accordingly identity of purpose, will, and knowledge; the Son knows what the Father is doing because His action is the Father's action and it is the very action perfected by the Holy Spirit."

20. Large Catechism II, 49-50; Tappert, pp. 416-417.
21. Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. Norman Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House).
22. Sasse, pp. 389-398.
23. Tappert, pp. 104-105.
24. Sasse, p. 15. Tappert, p. 179, note 4. The prayer in "Divine Service II" of *Lutheran Worship* ([Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982], p. 171) seems to have a remnant of the *epiklesis*: "Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts . . ." This is probably a reflection of the earliest Eastern liturgies. Other liturgies have the sending of the Spirit on the elements. Taken out of the historical context of the ancient church, it could be understood in a Reformed sense. The liturgy's editors have shown that the Spirit can have a rightful place in the holy communion without being judged as Reformed. For examples of the *epiklesis* see Jasper and Cumming (p. 44). The following prayer is traced to the sixth century: "We pray and beseech you to send your Holy Spirit and your power on these (your?) (gifts) set before you, on this bread and this cup, and to make the bread the body of Christ and (the cup the blood of the) new (covenant) of our Lord Jesus Christ."
25. Tappert, p. 440.
26. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:649.
27. Tappert, p. 349.
28. Tappert, p. 349.
29. This is Luther's thought in the second stanza of "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord," *Lutheran Worship* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), Hymn 223.

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30. Tappert, p. 345.
 31. Tappert, p. 438. For a recent discussion see John Frederick Johnson, "Evangelical Sacraments: A Look at the Apology," *Concordia Journal*, 88 (1992):259-264.
 32. Consider Luther's baptismal hymn "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord": "All that the mortal eye beholds is water as we pour it. Before the eye of faith unfolds the pow'r of Jesus' merit." *Lutheran Worship*, Hymn 223.
 33. Sasse, p. 235.
 34. Sasse, pp. 235-236.
 35. This may be inherent in the words of Oecolampadius at the Marburg Colloquy quoted by Sasse, p. 236: "As we have the spiritual eating, why should there be any need for bodily eating?"
 36. Tappert, p. 592.
 37. Tappert, p. 440.
 38. *The Evangelical Movement* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), p. 204.
 39. Large Catechism IV, 28; Tappert, p. 440. For Luther "faith clings to the water and believes it to be baptism."
 40. Athanasian Creed, 32-33; Tappert, p. 20. "Although he is God and man, he is not two Christs but one Christ: one that is to say, not by changing the Godhead into flesh but taking on the humanity into God."
 41. Athanasian Creed, 31; Tappert, p. 20.
 42. Tappert, p. 440.
 43. Tappert, p. 345.
 44. Large Catechism IV, 28-31; Tappert, p. 440.

45. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VIII, 2; Tappert, pp. 591-592.
46. For a fascinating treatise on the christological content of the Psalms see Maurice Schild, "Approaches to Bugenhagen's Psalm Commentary (1524)," *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 26:(1992):63-71. Bugenhagen, Luther's colleague and the pastor at Wittenberg, understood the Psalms as reflecting the sentiments of the original writers, Christ, and the believer.
47. Tappert, p. 438.
48. Tappert, p. 449.
49. Tappert, p. 345. While the English translations distinguish between Christ as "begotten of the Father from eternity" and "born of the virgin Mary"; Luther's German uses the same word, *geboren*.
50. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII, 8; Tappert, p. 580. "There is therefore a twofold eating of the flesh of Christ. The one is spiritual, of which Christ speaks chiefly in John 6:48-58. This occurs in no other way than with the spirit and faith, in preaching and contemplation of the gospel as well as the Lord's Supper."
51. This topic is slated for a forthcoming volume in *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*, ed. Robert D. Preus.
52. *Lutheran Worship*, Hymn 244, "O Living Bread from Heaven"; Hymn 239, "Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness," stanza 6: "Jesus, Bread of Life, I pray you"; Hymn 240, "Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord," stanza 2: "With heav'nly bread he makes the hungry whole"; Hymn 248, "Lord Jesus Christ, Life-Giving Bread," also stanza 3: "O bread of heav'n, my soul's delight"; Hymn 126, "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing," stanza 4: "Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed, paschal victim, paschal bread; with sincerity and love eat we manna from above."