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LUTHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF GRACE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
ADMINISTRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF
CHRIST IN NIGERIA (LCCN)

by

YELERUBI BIRGAMUS

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Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
LW	Luther's Works
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
LCCN	Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria
SUM	Sudan United Mission

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria is the product of the Protestant Reformation promulgated by Martin Luther in the 16th century when he reinstated the good news of salvation, justification by faith alone through Jesus Christ to a vital position in the life of the church.¹ Like other Lutheran denominations in the world, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria follows the teachings of Martin Luther, who believed in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ himself instituted these sacraments as a means by which grace is promised through the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. But unlike other global Lutheran Churches, where the Lord's Supper is administered and given to everyone in the body of Christ freely, pastors in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria do not administer the Lord's Supper to polygamists, co-wives, and the erring, as they are considered fallen members of the church and therefore unfit or unworthy to partake in the Lord's Supper. As if that is not enough, when they die, even though a pastor buries them, their remains are not taken to the church for funeral worship. The "informal" Christian funeral services conducted for such people are different from the so-called "befitting" Christian funeral services conducted for the communicant members.

¹ James J. Reynolds, *A Critical Analysis of the Interpretation of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, Gongola Diocese*, edited by Knut Holter, vol. 21 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2015), 2.

The liturgy of the LCCN is divided into two sections: one is for the communicant members, while the other is for the non-communicant members. The church excludes non-communicant members from communion and denies them “befitting” Christian burial in order to maintain the moral order and integrity of the church and also to discourage plural marriage. The church thinks that allowing polygamists, co-wives and those under church discipline who are the erring to partake in the Lord’s Supper will not only undermine its moral integrity, but will be seen to be encouraging plural marriage and immoral acts. Moreover, the church adheres to the biblical teaching on marriage which is monogamous in nature, between one man and one woman. This is evident in Genesis 1: 27 where it says, “so God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”² The church also considers polygamy as a threat to the spiritual well-being of the family, society, and the church because it is believed there will be rivalry and quarreling amongst the wives and the children. This has been a theological and pastoral issue in the church since its inception, but to this day, the church has not found a solution to this problem. As a result, the church has lost some of its members to other church denominations who allow polygamy, co-wives, and the erring to partake in the Lord’s Supper. As a matter of fact, the non-communicant members do not only feel excluded from the church, but also wonder if they are truly saved.

² Michael D. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Fully Revised Fourth Edition* (New York: University Press, Inc., 2010), 13.

Moreover, another issue, as pointed out by James J. Reynolds, pertains to the renewal of church membership cards.³ Any good outstanding member of the church that fails to renew their membership card will not be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper. In the same way, if they die without their cards being renewed, they will not be given complete Christian burial rites. Because of these attitudes and practices of the church, one wonders if grace is not sufficient when it comes to the issue of salvation.⁴

The question then arises: is the church doing the right thing in denying polygamists, co-wives, and the erring the Lord's supper, since there is nothing we can do on our own to be accepted by God and merit his grace? Paul, in Romans 3:24-25, asserts that, "they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith."⁵ Justification is solely God's doing. There is no way man can approach and relate with God except through faith. This, according to Martin Luther, makes it clear that, "the author of salvation is not man, by any works of his own, but God, through his promise; and that all things depend on, and are upheld and preserved by, the word of his power [Heb. 1:3], through which he brought us forth, to be a kind of the first fruits of his creatures [Jas. 1:18]."⁶ The beginning of our salvation therefore, stems from faith which clings to the promises of God which he gives without any effort on our part but out of his

³ Reynolds, *A Critical Analysis*, 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1981.

⁶ LW 36:39.

unmerited clemency he takes the initiative and gives us the word of his promise.⁷ God's promise is that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace through which God's divine love reaches his people and establishes fellowship. Hence, it should not be denied to anyone in the body of Christ. Is the grace of God so limited that it does not include everyone who belongs to the body of Christ? If the grace of God is for everyone, why should the sacrament, which is a means of grace, be denied to others in the body of Christ?

Ideally, the church as the body of Christ should be a place where people come to hear the gospel, the promise of God in Jesus Christ, and receive the forgiveness of sins through the sacrament, and not a place of condemnation. The Lord's Table should not be a place where church discipline is administered on people, but rather, a mercy seat. As rightly noted by Alex Mkumbo, "The manner in which the church restricts Holy Communion, judging other Christians unworthy to partake until they demonstrate a holy life and right preparation, has led many to view the Lord's Table as a judgement table rather than a table of grace."⁸ He also noted that the way the church judges others as not worthy of receiving the church's blessings or partake in the Lord's Supper the church proves unfaithful to the promise of God and in conflict with God's unmerited love and free forgiveness of sins.⁹ Moreover, this emphasizes works over grace, as one has to be righteous before coming to the communion rather than a sinner who comes to the Lord's Table to receive the grace promised through the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. The whole idea of the Lord's Supper is God's promise to forgive our sins through his grace.

⁷ LW 36:39.

⁸ Karen L. Bloomquist, *Theology in the Life of the Church: Theological Practices that Matter*, volume 5 (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 109.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

The only thing we could do is to come to the Lord's Table with a humble heart, faith, and trusting in this promise of God not as people who have something to offer. God's promise in Christ is that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace and therefore very essential in the life of a Christian and should be given freely to everyone in the body Christ. God's grace embraces all people, of all ages and situations. The church should rise up to this challenge now.

Purpose of the Study

This thesis will describe Luther's understanding of grace and its centrality for the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper. How does Luther's theology of grace relate to his understanding of the Lord's Supper and how does that provide justification for open communion? Luther's understanding of grace will be applied to argue for open communion. The thesis will also describe and analyze theological and pastoral problems of withholding the sacraments to non-communicant members by the LCCN, which claims to follow after Luther's teaching. This thesis is not anti-church discipline, but rather, will argue for a better form of church discipline than withholding the Lord's Supper from the excluded members of the church. This will confront the church's fear that the practice of open communion may encourage spiritual and moral indiscipline amongst its members as well as endanger its moral authority.

The hope is that Luther's understanding of grace may serve as a critique and helpful corrective to the sacramental practices in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria. As a church, we are called into communion with God and with one another. The questions which are central to this thesis are obvious. What communion are we called into if the church withholds the sacrament of the Lord's Supper from others in the body

of Christ? The church exists to dispense the sacrament to people, not to withhold it. If we are justified freely by grace through faith, why should others be denied the right to partake in the Lord's Supper, which is a means of grace promised to us freely by God? The thesis intends to draw on Luther's theology of grace rooted in God's promises to argue for open communion in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria.

The thesis will also provide some suggestions for a better form of church discipline than withholding communion from excluded members of the church. This will help the church to change its sacramental administration or practice to accommodate everyone in the body of Christ without the fear of being seen as encouraging or promoting immoral acts amongst its members. This will help the church check the loss of its members to other church denominations on the grounds that they have been denied access to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Moreover, it will develop a theology for the church where grace and forgiveness of sins are offered freely to people through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper rather than being a place where grace and forgiveness of sins are withheld from people.

Limitation of the Study

Luther's understanding of grace is a very vast topic. This thesis will only examine Luther's understanding of grace as vital to his theology of the Lord's Supper. I will also do an analysis of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria by providing its history and examining its liturgy in relation to its administration and practice of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. To accomplish this task, the researcher will examine Luther and his theology of the Lord's Supper via secondary sources on Luther and grace, Lutheran liturgy, and the Lord's Supper.

Organization of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. In chapter one, I will introduce the project, with a statement of the problem to be researched, the purpose and limitation of the study.

Chapter two presents an analysis of the history of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria. The influence of the missionaries on the attitude of the church towards polygamists will also be addressed. The liturgy of the LCCN will be discussed, specifically the church's administration and practice of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Finally, the issue of communicant and non-communicant members will be discussed in relation to the practices in the LCCN.

Chapter three examines Luther's understanding of grace. It will address how God acts in the Word through both law and promise. It will take into consideration God's promise and gift of salvation and righteousness, the efficacy of Christ's work, justification by faith alone, Christian freedom, and our new vocation to serve the neighbor in love through good works.

Chapter four will examine Luther's understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The chapter will highlight some of the problems that the reformer had with the practice of the sacraments in the Catholic Church (i.e., the Mass being used as a sacrifice of atonement offered to God by the priest and transubstantiation). In highlighting the problems of the medieval church, Luther's understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper will be presented. The role of faith in partaking in the Lord's Supper will be discussed as well as the theological and pastoral problems of withholding the Lord's Supper from non-communicant members.

Chapter five will be the conclusion of the study. It will summarize the findings from the study by discussing the implication of Luther's understanding of grace in relation to the Lord's Supper for the LCCN. The chapter will aim at using Luther's understanding of grace in relation to the sacrament to critique the administration or practice of the Lord's Supper in the LCCN. Drawing on Luther's understanding of grace, an argument will be made for open communion. Finally, the research will provide the LCCN with some suggestions as to how it will change its sacramental practices without the fear of been seen as endorsing polygamous marriage or encouraging immoral act amongst its members.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF CHRIST IN NIGERIA

Brief History of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

According to Margaret Nissen, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria was founded through the endeavor of a prayer group in Denmark. The hallucination of this group to get itself involved in mission work was sparked by a speech delivered by Dr. Karl Kumm at the first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, 1910 on the necessity to “stem the tide of Mohammedan penetrating into the Sudan.”¹ Dr. Niels Hoegh Bronnum, Dr. Young Rose (his wife), and Rose Dogmar became the first missionaries of the Sudan United Mission Danish branch, the mission body which founded the LCCN. These three people were sent to England to study Hausa, the major language spoken in Northern Nigeria. After the training, they were commissioned and sent to Yola Province in Nigeria for mission work on January 8th, 1913.² During the commissioning service, Bronnum quoted Moses' statement from Exodus 33:15: “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here.”³

¹ Reynolds, *A Critical Analysis*, 2.

² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

³ Adama Isa, “Prophetic Authority in the Book of Jeremiah and Its Contextual Relevance to the Leadership Authority in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria” (MTh thesis, Luther Seminary, 2011), 73.

Young Rose gave birth to their son Holger in Rumasha, she died four days later. Bronnum sent Dogmar and his son back to Scotland with a letter written to his mother that gave a detailed explanation of what happened. In the letter he described the death of his wife as beautiful:

In the moment of death, she regained consciousness. Her face changed as by magic, and she smiled. Then, opening her eyes wide, she looked upward. Never in all my life have I imagined, much less seen. Such a look of purity and holiness as I was permitted to see in her eyes. I saw her soul in that look as it left the body to meet her Heavenly Bridegroom, and it was exceedingly beautiful. It is one of the most blessed moments in my life, and I would not have missed it for all the treasures of this world, for it belongs to the realm of eternal, and I know she lives, for it was her soul I beheld. She lifted up her arms, and it seemed to me that the flood of purity came from her eyes. I could see she was blessed, and I felt, I was on the Mount of Transfiguration.⁴

Indeed, the death of Bronnum's wife would not halt the mission work from being achieved, and he remained focused on his goal or mission. No wonder Paul in 1 Thess. 5:24 said, "Faithful is He who calls them, and he will also bring it to pass."⁵ This became the slogan of the mission. Dogmar returned from Scotland in 1916 and joined her colleagues in Nigeria. Bronnum could not see his son until he returned for his ordination as a pastor in 1915. The death of Bronnum's wife did not discourage him because he was sure that God's presence was with him. He forged ahead after looking for approval from the Emirs in Yola. The mission extended from Numan, where the mission work started, to other places. Even though the mission work was constrained for many years by the

⁴ Margaret Nissen, *An African Church is Born: The Story of the Adamawa and Central Saradauna Province in Nigeria* (Copenhagen: Purups Grafiske Hus, 1968), 41-42.

⁵ Isa, "Prophetic Authority," 74.

colonial government, they were able to open health clinics and schools in many places that helped in spreading the good news.⁶

The seed sowed by Dr. Niels Bronnum, Rose Dogmar and others in 1913 with a few converts in Numan Adamawa State of Nigeria continued to grow. From the time that they stepped foot on the soil of Northern Nigeria to bring the good news of Jesus Christ, the LCCN has continued to flourish.⁷ Describing how the church has continued to grow with the foundation laid by the missionaries, Peter Bartimawus asserts that,

The pioneer work of the Danish medical cum missionary evangelist of SUM, Dr. Niels Bronnum soon flourished like tree a tree bringing both shade and fruits to shade as well as feed millions within the Adamawa Province, which was the birth place of the Mission in the small town of Numan.⁸

Due to the fast-growing nature of the church, in 1973 the church consecrated its first bishop. It functioned as one diocese under the leadership of Bishop Akila Todi. In 1996, the church created five more dioceses with a bishop for each of the dioceses under the leadership of Bishop David Windibiziri, who emerged the second bishop of the LCCN in 1987.⁹ In 1997, Bishop David Windibiziri became the first Archbishop of the LCCN, followed by Archbishop Nemuel Babba 2002 to 2017. Currently, the archbishop of the

⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁷ Musa P. Filibus, “An Exploratory Study of the History, Nature and Management Model of Conflict within a Local Congregation with Theological Implications for Pastoral Ministry: LCCN No. 1, Cathedral Numan, Adamawa State, Nigeria, as a Case Study” (PhD diss., Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, 1998), 3.

⁸ Asriel S. T. Myatafadi, Peter A. Bartimawus, Edward R. Ishaya, and Elisabeth Holtegaard, *A Century of God's Faithfulness (1913-2013): Reflections on the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN)* (Kaduna: Press and Publishing Company Ltd., 2013), 73.

⁹ Isa, “Prophetic Authority,” 75.

LCCN is *Musa Panti Filibus*.¹⁰ In order to furnish for the growing population of the church, four more dioceses were created in 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013 respectively.¹¹

The seat of the LCCN is in Numan Adamawa state Nigeria. However, it is largely found in the northeastern part of the country (Adamawa, Taraba, Gombe, Borno, Bauchi, and Yobe states) and in other states like Plateau, Kaduna, Lagos, Niger, Benin, and Abuja.¹² From its beginning in 1913 with a few converts in Numan, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria continues to grow. Currently, the statistics of the church are as follows: there are 1,834 local congregations, 358 districts, 50 divisions, and 9 dioceses. It has a total membership of about 2.7 million all over the country.¹³ The church has over 400 pastors. In order to fulfill the mandate given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20, the church members are involved in active proclamation of the Gospel to our Muslim neighbors in Northern Nigeria and beyond. They also engage in inter-religious dialogue in order to clarify some of the differences that exist between the two religions Christianity and Islam. The church also promotes social work, health care, technical workshops, education, and evangelism.¹⁴ Moreover, the church has sub-groups in the local congregations that also help in the growth, expansion, and propagation of the Gospel all over the country. These sub-groups are as follows: Women's Fellowship,

¹⁰ http://www.wikiwand.com/en/The_Lutheran_Church_of_Christ_in_Nigeria#/History (accessed December 15, 2017).

¹¹ Reynolds, *A Critical Analysis*, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³ The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria LCCN, *Pocket Diary* (Nigeria: LCCN Headquarters, 2016), vii.

¹⁴ Isa, "Prophetic Authority," 76.

Men's Fellowship, Sunday School, Youth Fellowship, New Life for all Gospel Singers, Boys' and Girls' Brigade, Youth Band, Prayer Group, Evangelism Theme, Drama Group, and Choir.¹⁵ The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria maintains a strong partnership with the Sudan United Mission in Denmark (SUM), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA).¹⁶

Structurally, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria has two main structures: organizational and leadership structure. The organizational structure of the church refers to the different strata of administration and councils of the church. The administrative level of the church consists of the following in ascending order: The Local Congregation, Sub-District, District, Division, Diocese, and National. On the other hand, the church councils consist of the following in ascending order: Local congregation council, Sub-District Council, District Council, Divisional Council, Diocesan Council, Executive Council, and General Church Council.¹⁷ The leadership structure includes the following in ascending order: Elected Representatives, Chairman of the Local Congregation, Evangelist, Catechist, Pastor, Dean, Secretary to the Bishop, Diocesan Vice Chairman, Bishops, Secretary to the Archbishop, Vice Chairman, Archbishop, and Trustees.¹⁸ The policy by which the church operates is contained in its constitution and by-laws. The church adheres and operates base on the set rules for running its own affairs.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶ Ibid., 76.

¹⁷ Reynolds, *A Critical Analysis*, 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁹ Isa, "Prophetic Authority," 76.

Theologically, right from its inception, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria has had a solid theological foundation entrenched in the theological tradition of the Reformation.²⁰ Central to its own theology and identity is the idea of the promise of grace through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This idea is key to the entire theological understanding of the LCCN. But the African worldview, which is works-oriented, has challenged this understanding, as many Lutheran members are confronted with a question: How can one be accepted by God on the basis of grace alone as promised through the Holy Spirit? This tension between grace and works has been and will continue to be a challenge in the life of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria as it continues to grow.²¹ This calls for the Lutheran understanding of grace to be reaffirmed in the LCCN.

The Attitude of Missionaries towards Polygamy

Polygamy or plural marriage according to Elijah M. Baloyi “is understood in the broader sense to include any simultaneous multiple marriage unions for one person, such as female polyandry and male polygyny.”²² For T. A. Falaye, the true definition of Polygamy “implies the idea of a man being married to more than one wife (Polygamy) or a woman being married to more than one man at the same time (Polyandry), or more than one man being married to more than one woman all at the same time which is communal

²⁰ Myatafadi, *A Century of God's Faithfulness (1913-2013)*, 73.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

²² http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-95072013000800006 (accessed December 18, 2017).

marriage.”²³ According to Shahzad as cited by Baloyi, “polygamy is as old as human society.”²⁴ Even though it is hard to say whether polygamy is decreasing or increasing, it still remains a substantial and prevalent phenomenon in Africa.²⁵ Polygamy is very common in Africa and is part of the African culture. A majority of African societies, especially in the past, were profoundly involved in the practice of polygamy and it is not shunned at in the society.²⁶ Polygamy in Africa is not a crime, as it is an acceptable form of marriage practiced by Africans. The African culture allows a man to marry more than one wife and bear children with them. The more wives and children a man has, the more wealth, influence and prestige he has in the society.

The issue of polygamy has been a tenacious problem in Africa for the missionaries that brought the gospel to the continent.²⁷ As noted by Julius K. Muthengi,

Though polygamy has been a divisive issue, the early missionary societies were remarkably united on their common approach to polygamy. Since monogamy is the biblical ideal of marriage, the pioneering missions raised a barrier to any polygamist being baptized and admitted into church membership, though the missions readily welcomed them into the Body of Christ.²⁸

I wonder if in the beginning the polygamists were really welcomed to the body of Christ because the sign of one being welcomed to the body of Christ is for him or her to be baptized and granted church membership. If the polygamists were welcomed to the body

²³ <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Polygamy-and-Christianity-in-Africa.pdf> (accessed December 28, 2017).

²⁴ http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-95072013000800006 (accessed December 18, 2017).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Polygamy-and-Christianity-in-Africa.pdf> (accessed December 28, 2017).

²⁷ https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/14-2_055.pdf (accessed December 27, 2017).

²⁸ Ibid., 55.

of Christ by the early missionaries, they would have been baptized and granted church membership like the other new believers. The struggle within the church in Africa today with the polygamists not being baptized and allowed access to the Lord's Supper has its root from the time of the early missionaries. The church's attitude towards polygamy is an influence from the missionaries.

As rightly stated by Falaye, the early missionaries that brought the Gospel to Africa did not take into consideration the culture of the Africans, which includes polygamy, modes of worship, modes of dressing, and other specific traits of Africans. They had no regard for the African culture, but instead, imposed European culture alongside Christianity on Africans, which should not be the case. Falaye goes further to say that the European missionaries were apparently spreading Christianity to the Africans on one hand while, on the other hand, imposing and spreading their tradition and culture on the Africans. There was not an iota of respect for the culture of the Africans. Their culture was not tolerated nor cherished by the European missionaries. To worsen the situation, they did not care at all if their antipathy and objections had biblical backing or not. This has in recent years led Africans to establish indigenous churches where they can worship and commune freely as Africans without any restriction.²⁹

Furthermore, in describing the attitude of the missionaries towards African culture, Bartimawus argues that, though the practice of polygamy was rooted in the Old Testament, it was largely frowned at by the early missionaries. They affirmed that the ideal way of marriage which they come to accept is that of one man and one wife. For the

²⁹ <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Polygamy-and-Christianity-in-Africa.pdf> (accessed December 28, 2017).

fact that this was quite challenging in a new society where the missionaries were working, it came to be approved as the normal standard. This has continued to be a problem which the LCCN has not been able to find a permanent solution to, and possibly may not be able to even in the near future.³⁰

The Practice of Church Discipline in the Liturgy of the LCCN

The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria's Sunday Liturgy starts with an opening prayer followed by the confession of sins. In this confession, every member of the church is expected to recall their sins committed in thought, word and deed. This type of thorough confession is in accordance with Luther, who, in his treatise "A Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made, 1520," counsels that the confession be made brief and in the most general terms, covering sins both known and unknown, for confession is meant to appease rather than trouble the soul.³¹ After confession, absolution is announced and it is believed that the sins of every participant have been forgiven. However, the significance of confession does not rest on the confession itself, but on our trust in God's promise. For Luther, the persons who confess should not put their confidence in the confession, but rather, in the courteous promise of God who promised to forgive those who confess. We should not rejoice over confession or put our trust in it, but in the truth and certainty of God's promise. Therefore, in confession, we do nothing but calling and requesting God to fulfill what he has promised.³² If the promise of God does not stand

³⁰ Myatafadi, *A Century of God's Faithfulness*, 77.

³¹ LW 39:37

³² LW 39:28.

firm, our confession is nothing, for we cannot on our own strength acquire forgiveness by any righteousness unless God, through his promise, has given it to us.³³ To this regard,

Philip Melanchthon, in the Augsburg Confession, stated that:

those who have sinned after baptism obtain forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance and that absolution should not be denied them by the church. Now properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin, and yet at the same time to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ. Such faith, in turn, comforts the heart and puts it at peace. . . . Rejected . . . are those who teach that whoever has once become righteous cannot fall again.³⁴

It is believed that after the confession of sin and the absolution is pronounced by the minister the participants have through their faith in Christ received the forgiveness of sins. No one except Christ can determine who believes and who does not. Our duty is to hold on to God and his promises, as there is no human who can be justified by their own strength or righteous work. God through his divine goodness and grace gives it freely not on account of any righteousness on our part. Justification is a pure gift of God which happens for Christ's sake. For his sake our sins have been forgiven and no longer counted against us. Christ's death makes satisfaction for our sins. They have been taken away and righteousness and life eternal have been given to us.³⁵

The worship of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria is vibrant and lively. It is full of joy, happiness, and emotions expressed through many ways, ranging from singing, drumming, dancing in the power of the Spirit, gospel preaching, and thanksgiving. Sadly,

³³ LW 39:29-30.

³⁴ Timothy J. Wengert and Robert Kolb, *The Book of Concord, The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 44.

³⁵ Leif Grane, *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary*, translated by John H. Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 59.

as noted by Ibrahim Bitrus, “such joy quickly disappears as soon as the celebration of the Lord’s Supper begins. Worse yet, perhaps less than half of those who attend worship partake of communion. The rest of the members vanish. In fact, even those who muster the courage to stay back for the Lord’s Supper often commune with fear and trembling.”³⁶ This undesirable attitude of worshipers towards Holy Communion is entrenched in the belief that, the Lord’s Supper is an enormously sacred meal that is meant to be eaten by only holy people.³⁷

Consequently, apart from the confession of sins made at the beginning of the worship, prior to partaking in the communion members are required to make another confession of sins after which absolution is announced by the minister and a sign of God’s peace shared amongst members. This confession of sins is done in order to ensure that those who come for communion partake of it worthily so that they don’t partake in it unworthily and bring on themselves judgement. This is in line with Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 where he said, “Whoever, . . . eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves.”³⁸ Hence, with the confession, members are allowed to have a thorough examination of themselves and make sure that they have no sin before coming to the table. Those who have the conviction that their sins are forgiven and are of good standing with the church

³⁶ Ibrahim Bitrus, *The Means of Prosperity: The Neo-Pentecostal Interpretation of the Lord’s Supper in Nigeria, Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Volume 55 (Winter 2016): 399-340.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

³⁸ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 2016.

are allowed to partake in the communion. But those who do not have the conviction that their sins have been forgiven normally stay away.³⁹ In some congregations, those considered unworthy or unrighteous to partake in the communion often dismiss themselves as soon as the communion rite begins. The excluded members such as the polygamists, co-wives, and the erring, depart prior to communion because any attempt made by them to commune is often restricted even if they feel their sins have been forgiven and yearn to commune. The people that are allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper are those regarded holy and righteous. This appears as if some Christians are guaranteed forgiveness of sins while others are denied access to it.

The way the church restricts communion has made many members decline to commune as they do not believe God will receive them because of their sins. The church requires members to demonstrate a high level of morality by living a holy life and being of right standing with God before they are allowed to commune.⁴⁰ Regretfully, the fear that communion is meant only for the "righteous" makes some members stray away from it. To this regard, Luther, in the large catechism warns, "We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine that aids you and gives life in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body is helped as well. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison that would kill us if we ate of it?"⁴¹ It is of course true that those who partake in the communion unworthily bring upon themselves judgement. But those who know their

³⁹ Bitrus, *The Means of Prosperity*, 340.

⁴⁰ Bloomquist, *Theology in the Life of the Church*, 109.

⁴¹ *The Book of Concord*, 474.

faintness and desire to get rid of it and need help, should use the sacrament as a precious remedy to cure themselves, for in the sacrament we encounter with Christ and receive from his lips the forgiveness of sins which brings and embodies God's grace and the gift of the Spirit, fortification, protection, power against death, the devil, and any mishap.⁴²

As noted by Bitrus, the moral standards and conditions set by the church for members to partake in communion such as: they must be baptized and outstanding members, they must be in a monogamous marriage, and they must have a renewed membership card. Though imposing such conditions is done out of right intention and good faith to sustain the integrity of the church, the pre-communion self-examination and its stiff requirements are usually self-defeating. It discourages members from participating in the Lord's Supper rather than rousing participation. Moreover, it turns the communion into a monster that terrifies or derides sinners instead of saving lives. The communion table becomes a place where human norms triumph over God's grace, sadness over happiness, the law over grace and a place of despair rather than hope. The communion table turns into a judgement seat where church discipline is administered in lieu of a mercy seat where grace is given freely.⁴³

Beneficiaries of the Lord's Supper: Communicant and Non-Communicant Members

As seen above, in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria it is believed that the Lord's Supper is meant for righteous people only, those with high moral standards and of good standing with the church. Sadly, with the norms and standards set by the church for

⁴² Ibid., 474.

⁴³ Bitrus, *The Means of Prosperity*, 340.

one to partake in the communion, the lord's supper, which is celebrated once a month in some urban congregations and three to four times a year in some rural congregations, is often celebrated by few members as others stay away for fear of partaking unworthily.

But who are those worthy of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

For Luther, the worthy and true guests for whom this valuable sacrament was established and instituted are the believers who are feeble in faith, troubled and flimsy, those who are frightened by sin in their hearts and therefore think that they are not worthy of this precious gift and the benefits that Christ gives because of their impurity, those who desire to serve God in truth, faith and untainted obedience. As Christ says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest [Matt. 11:28]."⁴⁴ Christ also said in Matthew 9:12 that, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."⁴⁵ The avenue which Jesus used in instituting the Lord's Supper also reveals the worthy candidate for communion. In order that the disciples would be well prepared and worthy for the Lord's Supper by all means, Christ first of all made them sorrowful by speaking about his departure and death on the cross, by which they all became extremely disturbed and depressed. He also frightened them by saying one of them would betray him. After they were all full of anxiety and sorrow, anxious by distress and sin of betrayal, at that moment they were fully prepared and worthy, then he gave them his holy body to strengthen and comfort them.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *The Book of Concord*, 605.

⁴⁵ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1759.

⁴⁶ LW 35:55-56.

From the above, it is clear that the Lord's Supper is comfort and strength for all those disturbed and distraught by sin and evil. As noted by St. Augustine, "this food demands only hungry souls, and is shunned by none so greatly as by a sated soul which does not need it."⁴⁷ Similarly, Melancthon in article 10 of the Augsburg Confession asserted that, "the Lord's Supper is the sacrament of love; there we are given a sure sign that Christ and his saints intercede for us with God that our sin may not be reckoned to us; and therefore, we must also be willing to share every evil with each other. The sacrament is of no benefit to self-sufficient people."⁴⁸ The Lord's Supper is meant for the dying soul, people troubled by sin, death, and evil so that they can be comforted and find strength in the communion of all the saints and Christ. That was why Christ instituted it and gave it to his disciples at the point of their tremendous need and peril.⁴⁹

On the other hand, the unworthy guests for the Lord's Supper are those who come to the table without any remorse or sorrow over their sins and without true faith and any intention to improve their lives.⁵⁰ Luther therefore admonishes that,

those who labor and are burdened with sin, fear of death, and the attacks of the flesh and the devil. If you are burdened and feel your weakness, go joyfully to the sacrament and let yourself be refreshed, comforted, and strengthened. For if you wait until you are rid of your burden in order to come to the sacrament purely and worthily, you will have to stay away from it forever.⁵¹

⁴⁷ LW 35:56.

⁴⁸ Grane, *The Augsburg Confession*, 118.

⁴⁹ LW 35:65.

⁵⁰ *The Book of Concord*, 605.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 474.

When we eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus Christ, we receive the forgiveness of sin through faith and become the true children of God. The power in the forgiveness of sins is not freedom to do what we want, but a power to live a new life and serve the neighbor.

Moreover, through communion, the boundless kindness and grace of God are given to us to the extent that our desolation and tribulation are taken away and laid upon the community of the saints and principally on Christ, and comfort and joy becomes ours.⁵² As Luther writes in “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods” (1519), “Though I am a sinner and have fallen, though this or that misfortune has befallen me, nevertheless I will go to the sacrament to receive a sign from God that I have on my side Christ’s righteousness, life, and suffering.”⁵³ Through the communion we encounter with Christ who takes away our sorrows, sin, and death and gives us his own righteousness. Through communion, we are given a sign that we are united with Christ and the saints and have all things in common in such a way that our concerns become Christ’s own concern.⁵⁴ Luther therefore, argues that, “to receive this sacrament in bread and wine, then, is nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all saints.”⁵⁵ It is obvious that the real beneficiary or the worthy of the Lord’s Supper are sinners who come to the table to receive the forgiveness of sins. The communion table should not be viewed as a

⁵² LW 35:54.

⁵³ LW 35:54.

⁵⁴ LW 35: 52.

⁵⁵ LW 35:51.

judgement table where God sits to judge the sinners, but rather, a place where his arms are wide open to welcome the sinner and take away his own burden. God's grace, love, and mercy are given to us freely in the sacrament.

CHAPTER THREE

LUTHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF GRACE

In the previous chapter, I discussed the historical background of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria and how the early missionaries influenced the attitude of the church towards polygamy which gave rise to the problem that the church is confronted with today. The chapter also discussed the communicant and non-communicant members as an effort of knowing the right candidates of the Lord's Supper since worthy participation is the issue faced by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria.

In this chapter I will examine Luther's understanding of grace in relation to his theology of the sacraments particularly the Lord's Supper. If the church is restricting the Lord's Supper to those who are worthy, how then does God's unconditional love come into play in our lives? How are we made righteous before God? Is righteousness something we merit by our own effort or is it a gift from God?

Grace is an important component of Christian theological reflection. It refers to God's inclination and action in relation to all creation and particularly towards human being. The Bible bears testimony to the fact that God creates good things and gives virtuous things. God's grace is made known in his divine promises and other gifts portrayed in the scriptures. On the other hand, the scriptures have made us understand that human beings, created in the likeness of God, have a history of belittling, forgetting, and even ill-treating things that are graciously given by God. Hans Wiersma noted that, "part of Christianity's doctrinal development, therefore, consists of attempts to describe

the scope and sequence of God's gracious regard and activity on behalf of a humanity prone to sin and rebellion."¹

Despite the continual rebellion by human beings, God still has a heart for them. God still love and cares for them. To this regard the scriptures bears witness that, the creator remains faithful and gracious, that God still yearns and have intention to be in relationship with human beings regardless of their sin. Even though, God is not under any obligation to think, love, feel, care, and act in favor of the sinful humans, yet God does so. There proceeds from God's grace gifts that overwhelm sin and its penalties. God's gracious love is made known in his divine self-giving in Jesus Christ. The divine word made flesh, who is filled with grace and truth and from his fullness we have received grace as it says in John 1:14-16.²

According to Wiersma, Luther's theology can be basically interpreted as the building of his views about the nature of God's favor, grace, and blessings conferred upon unworthy human beings. Luther's various biblical teachings and theological reflections all aimed at his desire to comprehend the grace of God that is entirely bewray in Jesus Christ.³ Indeed, our salvation is a free gift from God. There is virtually nothing we can do on our own to obtain this salvation, it was given to us freely by God through his grace. Thus, the promise is the gift of grace. This grace or favor is rooted in the fact that Christ has taken on our sin, pain, and death, and has given us his life which we receive through faith in him. When we believe in the promise, we obtain Christ's

¹ <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-335> (accessed December 16, 2017).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

righteousness and thus are freed from sin so that we can turn by faith to our neighbor in love. If we are saved freely by God and through faith Christ's righteousness becomes ours, why should others in the body of Christ be condemned as unworthy for the Lord's Supper? It is my contention that, if grace is a free and unconditional gift for those in the body of Christ, then the Lord's Supper, which is the visible means of grace, must be free and unconditional for everyone in the body of Christ.

The Concept of Grace

According to Luther, "grace actually means God's favor, or the good will which in himself he bears toward us, by which he is disposed to give us Christ and pour into us the Holy Spirit with his gifts."⁴ God's grace is given to sinners freely without their own succor and merit.⁵ To this regard Luther asserted that, "grace involves placing the believer's salvation outside himself, in the action of God."⁶ For Luther, "the grace of God is never present in such a way that it is inactive, but it is a living, active, and operative Spirit."⁷ Grace is God's continued action upon us, "the continued and perpetual operation or action through which we are grasped and moved by the Spirit of God," to believe in his promises.⁸ Grace is not a "momentary operation" but a "continuation of a work that

⁴ Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomir Batka, *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 270.

⁵ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, translated by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 202.

⁶ Carl R. Trueman, *Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God*, edited by Matthew Barrett (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 124.

⁷ LW 31:13.

⁸ LW 12:377-378.

has been begun.”⁹ More precisely, grace is a divine work that has a lasting effect on our lives here on earth, whereby we live incessantly under the forgiveness of sins.¹⁰

Consequently, although we are and continue to be sinners, not just partly but totally, grace is effective within us because the more conscious we are of our sin and dimness, the more we take asylum in Christ “the mercy seat.”¹¹ To this regard Luther wrote, “nevertheless, grace does so much that we are accounted completely righteous before God. For his grace is not divided or parceled out, as are the gifts, but takes us completely into favor for the sake of Christ our Intercessor and Mediator. And because of this, the gifts are begun in us.”¹²

Christ’s righteousness and all that he has becomes completely ours by faith. He who believes in Christ dwells in Christ and therefore has equal righteousness as his. This righteousness is the cause, the source, and the basis of our actual righteousness.¹³ This righteousness for Luther, “meant that grace came to faith in three basic modes: once for all, again and again, and more and more—in that order of significance,” through word and sacrament.¹⁴ As noted by Melancthon, “the image of ‘continuation and perpetual operation’ espoused by Luther is important, because it implies that grace does not stand

⁹ LW 23:377.

¹⁰ LW 34:164.

¹¹ LW 27:86.

¹² LW 35:369-370.

¹³ LW 31:298.

¹⁴ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 299.

at the beginning of Christian faith alone but that it accompanies Christian faith in every moment of its career, giving it substance, nerve, and shape.”¹⁵

Justification by Faith

According to Christine Helmer,

Justification . . . means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. . . . By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.¹⁶

Timothy J. Wengert, noted that, in every part of Luther’s works, “justification is presented as forensic. God evaluates sinners by means of Christ’s alien, external righteousness, which offers a change of status before God, who evaluates, or ‘reckons’ sinners to be righteous, not on the basis of their merit but instead because of the righteousness of Christ, the ‘mediator.’”¹⁷ This transmutation as noted by Helmer has two parts. First, “the person’s sin is forgiven and Christ’s righteousness is attributed to him. The sinner is made righteous through Christ’s alien righteousness. This alien righteousness becomes the believer’s righteousness by faith.”¹⁸ When Luther pronounces that Christ’s righteousness is ascribed to humans, he emphasizes that they can never obtain God’s love or acceptance by their own effort.¹⁹ The classic formulation for

¹⁵ Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters, and Peter Widmann, *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 47.

¹⁶ Christine Helmer, *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 207.

¹⁷ Timothy J. Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 385-386.

¹⁸ Helmer, *The Global Luther*, 198.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

Luther's claim is thesis 28 in the Heidelberg Disputation: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it."²⁰

Melanchthon noted that, humans cannot be justified before God by their own strength that is with the help of their own natural ability, will or reason. For the old Adam makes this impossible.²¹ Again in article IV of the Augsburg Confession Melanchthon asserted that, "human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us."²² Because this righteousness is alien to us it must be conveyed to sinful human beings. Based on the article cited this takes place because "God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight."²³

Our alien righteousness is the righteousness by which Christ justifies us by faith, in spite of our being sinners, and makes us one with him.²⁴ Through this alien righteousness instilled in us by grace, Christ drives out our old self the old Adam so that his alien life can start to take hold of our lives, make progress, and finally be perfected at the end in death.²⁵ Salvation does not rely on our own merits, our noble strivings, or good deeds. We cannot earn it by ourselves. It is fully and wholly God's gift. In the 1999 Joint

²⁰ LW 31:57.

²¹ Grane, *The Augsburg Confession*, 59.

²² *The Book of Concord*, 39-40.

²³ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁴ LW 31:297.

²⁵ LW 31:299.

Declaration on Justification approved by Lutherans and Catholics, it is written that, “by grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.”²⁶ Hans-Martin Barth noted that, “in Jesus Christ the new, saving, successful relationship between human beings and God is made real, a relationship that is meant to be accepted and claimed in faith and consequently to have its effects in action.”²⁷

Moreover, through faith in Christ, his righteousness becomes our righteousness and everything that he has becomes ours, and even Christ himself becomes ours. For he who believes in Christ exists in him, he is one with Christ and possessing equal righteousness with him.²⁸ Luther affirmed that, “faith brings the believer into union with Christ and through that union Christ communicates not just the benefit of justification but himself. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that for Luther the Christian is justified on the basis of nothing else but Christ’s imputed righteousness.”²⁹ Moreover, faith in Christ does not only change the status of a believer but also his nature, he obtains a different, novel, and pure heart. God does not only ascribe a sinner’s faith in Christ as righteousness, but such a trust also holds into Christ, who through the Spirit regenerates

²⁶ Paul O’Callaghan, *Luther and ‘Sola Gratia’: The Rapport Between Grace, Human Freedom, Good Works and Moral Life, Scripta Theologica* 49 no. 1 (Spring 2017): 197-198.

²⁷ Hans-Martin Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther: A Critical Assessment* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 166.

²⁸ LW 31:298.

²⁹ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 268.

us from within.³⁰ Oswald Bayer noted that, the sinful human being becomes clean with the righteous God, in such a way that the human being is ricked away from sin and is equipped with God’s righteousness. In this happy exchange, both God and man have been united in one person, meaning that they are together in a communicative event, which reaches out to the sinning human being but does not leave him alone with his own nature or kind but instead conveys God and his righteousness to him.³¹

As noted by Wengert, Luther’s concept of justification is rooted in the etymology of the German word “*rechtfertigen*, ‘to justify’ or ‘render righteous,’ meaning ‘to do justice to.’”³² When we say that God justifies believers, we are simply affirming that God declares them just, not necessarily that God measured the worthiness of their deed and thus judge accordingly for punishment or reward. For Luther, divine justice means “that righteousness by which through grace and cheer mercy God justifies us through faith.”³³ For Luther, the Lutheran Confessors and Melanchthon, “the righteousness of faith does not depend on human works but instead on God’s favorable regard and his ‘reckoning’ on the basis of grace.”³⁴ Luther’s views on justification arose out of the context of the late medieval scholasticism, specifically the theology of Gabriel Biel, who as cited by Mattes,

balanced God’s initiative for salvation with human cooperation by insisting that “out of purely natural powers” (*ex puris naturalibus*) sinners could “do what is in them” (*facere quod in se est*). By doing their best they could win “congruent

³⁰ Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther*, 387.

³¹ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, translated by Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans, 2008), 235.

³² Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther*, 386.

³³ O’Callaghan, *Luther and ‘Sola Gratia,’* 199.

³⁴ Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther*, 386.

merit,” a worthiness or righteousness before God that is not truly worthy, but nonetheless accepted by God as the basis for receiving his grace.³⁵

This idea leaves one with no clear view and principle by which one can know and be certain that he has done his best. This led Luther to study the scriptures intensively, where in his study of Psalms and Paul, he was convinced to have find a “passive righteousness,” salvation through believing God’s word of promise of forgiveness of sins, which imparted a new status and, by this means creates a spotless heart, and a novel nature for the believer.³⁶ Such perception as noted by Wengert led Luther to an inconceivable move for the scholastic theologians where he distinguished between law and gospel.³⁷ In this distinction Wengert noted, “the law is not a manual that presents the steps to travel to God’s grace and eventually to eternal life, but instead is a tormentor attacking any self-righteousness one seeks to offer to God.”³⁸ The Gospel on the other hand, is not a “new law” but is instead a gift, the word of promise that guarantees frightened souls of God’s kindness given only to sinners, a word that rouses the dead to new life.³⁹ In Christ we have new life by sharing in the power of his life, apart from the law, and not depending on our own merit or effort to become righteous.⁴⁰ For Luther, God’s word can actually change and make a new reality that is to create out of nothing. In this vein, justification by faith alone in which God creates new lives out of nothing is

³⁵ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 269.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

³⁷ Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther*, 386.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 386.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁴⁰ Robert W. Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 403.

likened to Luther's doctrine of justification in which God creates and sustains everything out of nothingness.⁴¹

Moreover, Luther's discovery of a passive righteousness gave him the opportunity to redefine his idea of active righteousness. As rightly noted by Brian Gerrish,

the believer does not earn this divine imputation with his faith, neither is there any legal fiction: God counts the confidence of the heart as "right" because that is what it is. Its rightness lives in the fact that faith, for its part, does not make God an idol but makes him for exactly what *he* is: the author and giver of every good, the precise counterpart of the believer's confidence. In a sense faith, by believing is the "creator of divinity" in us: it lets God be God.⁴²

The fact that righteousness can no longer be constituted as works that makes and aids us to earn righteousness before God, but faith alone "right-wises the sinner," works takes on a novel sense. God desires no works but the neighbor does.⁴³ Luther therefore in contrast to scholastic theology identified two kinds of righteousness, active and passive. In God's presence, people are rendered passive, suffer the death of old creature, in order that God might be allowed to be their God and redeem them in Christ. While before the world, faith gives itself in good works, to help the neighbor and the world, just as how good fruit grows on a good tree.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther*, 386.

⁴² Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 269.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

Law and Gospel

The righteousness of God by which the sinner is justified is what Luther sought to define in his distinction between law and gospel. In his distinction, Luther placed more emphasis on the work of Christ in justifying the sinner rather than on human accomplishment in observing the law. For Luther, the righteousness of God is not something that God demands from us, but that which he confers on us. This righteousness is nothing other than Christ's righteousness with which we are fully clad through faith. This righteousness comes to us as a promise, as a pure gift from God not as a demand. For Luther therefore, the law unveils a righteousness that God requires from us, while the gospel divulges a righteousness that God confers upon us. The law concentrates on our conduct as required by God, the gospel which is the promise emphasizes forgiveness grounded on Christ's work.⁴⁵ As noted by Robert Kolb, "through the law a demand is made for what we should do, it presses for our activity for God and the neighbor. In the gospel we are required to receive a gift. . . . The gospel is a pure gift, freely bestowed, salvation."⁴⁶ For Charles P. Arand, the law "refers to God's plan or design for human living that defines what is right and God-pleasing and rejects everything contrary to his

⁴⁵ <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-346> (accessed February 8, 2018).

⁴⁶ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 171.

will.”⁴⁷ The law terrifies and humbles those that God justifies in order that they might escape to Christ.⁴⁸

In distinguishing between the law and gospel, Luther stated that, “the law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not Christ [Rom 4:15].”⁴⁹ Used in this way, the law accuses and places one under the judging eyes of God, and also under sentence of death. By contrast, the gospel brings relief and comfort to the dying soul. Luther therefore, observed that, if the law says, “do this” but it is never done, while the gospel says “believe in this,” and everything is already done for us.⁵⁰ Paul Althaus noted that, “the gospel contains God’s promise in Christ. It proclaims that all the law’s demands have been met in Jesus Christ, that is, it preaches the forgiveness of sins. ‘The gospel is the preaching of forgiveness of sins through the name of Jesus Christ.’”⁵¹ He went further to state that, the law places one under the wrath of God and leads into death. While the gospel proclaims everlasting life gained by redemptive work of Christ.⁵² To this regard Kolb asserted that, “the gospel or faith is something that does not demand our works or tell us what to do, but tells us to receive, to accept a gift, so that we are passive, that is, that God promises and says to you: ‘this and that I impart to you. You can do nothing for it; you have done nothing for it, but

⁴⁷ Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 198.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁹ LW 31:41.

⁵⁰ LW 31:41.

⁵¹ Althaus, *The Theology*, 256.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 256.

it is my doing.”⁵³ Christ’s atoning work in his death and resurrection is the basis of the gospel for Luther. Christ’s death and resurrection are a substitutionary fulfilment of the demands of the law for the death of the sinner. “Christ’s entire work leads to the justification of sinners.”⁵⁴ As Paul rightly stated in Romans 10:4: “for Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”⁵⁵

Moreover, Jack D. Kilcrease cites Luther by asserting that, “the gospel is the living word of God, God the Holy Spirit works through the hearing of the gospel to create faith in the hearts and minds of believers. As a result, they receive Christ’s righteousness and are judged righteous before the law.”⁵⁶ He went on to say that, the gospel “is God’s promise that Christ has died and risen to redeem humanity. It is an unconditional promise that this salvation is a completed fact ‘for you.’”⁵⁷ For Luther, “the gospel is nothing but a proclamation of God’s grace and of the forgiveness of all sins, granted us through the sufferings of Christ.”⁵⁸ For Arand, the gospel is “a proclamation of comfort and a joyous message which does not rebuke nor terrify but comforts consciences against the terror of the law, directs them solely to Christ’s merit, and lifts them up again through the delightful proclamation of the grace and favor of God, won through Christ’s merits.”⁵⁹

⁵³ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 172.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵⁵ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1990.

⁵⁶ Jack D. Kilcrease and Erwin W. Lutzer, *Martin Luther in His Words Own Words: Essential Writings of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 51.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁸ LW 35:106.

⁵⁹ Arand, *The Lutheran Confessions*, 198.

Helmer noted that, in the sacraments, the words are succinct expressions of the gospel, voiced in specific circumstance. “‘I call you by your name, you are mine!’ ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ ‘Christ’s body, broken for you.’”⁶⁰

For Luther, the law has two functions, “the ‘political’ or ‘civic’ and the ‘theological.’”⁶¹ Through the political use of the law, external order in creation is sustained, and peace and harmony and the securing of fairness is conserved. The order brought about by the civic use of the law is achieved through the agencies of the temporal authorities, of teachers, of parents, and of judges, established by God for that motive. When the law is obeyed in its political sense, then an “external” or “civic” uprightness is attained to which Luther allotted utmost value. In the second Antinomian Disputation Luther wrote: “Political righteousness is good and worthy of praise, though it cannot stand in the sight of God.”⁶²

The second use of the law “is the theological or the spiritual one, which serves to increase transgressions. This is the primary purpose of the Law of Moses, that through the law sin might grow and be multiplied, especially in the conscience.”⁶³ Consequently, for Luther, “the true function and the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgement, and the well-deserved wrath of God.”⁶⁴ Quoting Jeremiah 23:29, Luther

⁶⁰ Helmer, *The Global Luther*, 201.

⁶¹ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, translated by Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 271.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 271.

⁶³ LW 26: 309.

⁶⁴ LW: 26:309.

describes how the law arraigns, arresting the sinner's "presumption of righteousness" an assumption that keeps the declaration of "free grace and the forgiveness of sins" from penetrating into their mind.⁶⁵

Moreover, in discerning the use of the law, for example, in the 1537 commentary on John 1:17, Luther argued that, "the Law serves to indicate the will of God, and it leads us to a realization that we cannot keep it." That is to say, "the Law was given to us for the revelation of sin . . . and impels us to cry, 'Oh, come, Lord Jesus Christ, help us and give us grace to enable us to fulfill the Law's demands!'"⁶⁶ For Luther, even though the law does not justify it is still tremendously useful and desirable. Apart from maintaining peace and order in the society, the law reveals and makes us aware of our sins so that we can run to Christ for help. Hence for Luther, "the Law is a minister and a preparation for grace. For God is the God of the humble, the miserable, . . . And it is the nature of God to exalt the humble, miserable and afflicted, to justify sinners, . . . For He is the almighty creator, who makes everything out of nothing."⁶⁷ Althaus is right by stating that, "apart from the law, we cannot recognize the greatness of what Christ does for us and to us. . . . It teaches us to long for our Savior. It leads us to repentance and thus open us to receive the comfort of the gospel."⁶⁸

From the above, one is made to understand that, our righteousness does not come from the law but it is a free gift from God when we believe in his promises. We cannot by

⁶⁵ LW 26: 310.

⁶⁶ LW 22: 143-144.

⁶⁷ LW 26:314.

⁶⁸ Althaus, *The Theology*, 258.

our own effort through adherence to the law earn or merit salvation for it all depends on God through his son Jesus Christ. Salvation is a free gift from God which we earn through faith alone.

The Mass Not a Sacrifice Offered to God

For Luther and Lutheran theology, the doctrine of the Lord's Supper insistently received its alignment from the Reformation teaching on Justification. As Luther observes, "the Lord's Supper is the 'sum and substance of the gospel.'"⁶⁹ For Luther, "a sacrament is a sacrament only if the meaning it represents is identical with the gospel. The gospel is a promise and the content of this promise is God's forgiveness of sins."⁷⁰

The Lord's Supper for Luther as noted by Klaus Nurnberger was never envisioned to be a sacrifice offered to God. Christ himself did not offer the sacrament as a sacrifice to God, neither was it intended by him to be a good work. He gave it to his disciples basically as a mark of the forgiveness of God as established by Christ on the cross. Luther believed that, works do not benefit us, only the grace of God can save us.⁷¹

Faith is nothing but believing in the promises of God, says Nurnberger. This trust brings about transformation of hearts, which then produce good works. The word of God is the first thing, then follows faith which is born out of the word, love comes after faith which does every type of good works. Faith is never a work, but "the master and the life of good works." Hence, in the Lord's Supper, we give nothing to God, we just receive

⁶⁹ Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther*, 435.

⁷⁰ Klaus Nurnberger, *Martin Luther's Message for Us Today: A Perspective from the South* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2016), 213.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 216.

God's gift. In celebrating the Lord's Supper therefore, we should focus on the gift of God and our acceptance by him despite who we are and add nothing that could diminish this fact.⁷²

The basis of sacramental theology for Luther is the action of God. He maintained that the "testament [the Lord's Supper] is not '*beneficium acceptum, sed datum*' (not a benefit received [by God] but a benefit conferred). 'It does not take benefit from us, but brings benefit to,' just as an inheritance [testament] is not for the benefit of the one giving the inheritance, but for the recipient."⁷³ Gordon A. Jensen noted that Luther's emphasis on the action of God in the Lord's Supper in his 1521 treatise, "The Misuse of the Mass," intends that understanding the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice offered to God is unsuitable, as it moves away the focus from the promise of God into human activity. Even though human action is of advantage to the public, it does not make the sacrament helpful for our lives and redemption. That only comes from God.⁷⁴

Instead of the Lord's Supper to be seen as a sacrifice, meritorious, and a good work, Luther required it to be seen as a gift. He believed that we give nothing to Christ in the Lord's Supper but instead only receive from him. In the Lord's Supper God makes a solemn promise to us and gives us his mercy and grace freely not because of any merit on our part. For "who has ever heard that he who receives an inheritance has done a good work?"⁷⁵ As noted by Brian Lugioyo, the promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal

⁷² Ibid., 216.

⁷³ Gordon A. Jensen, "The Sacrament of the Altar," *Lutheran Quarterly*, 31 no. 1 (Spring 2017): 1-21.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁵ LW 35:93.

life in the testament were declared by Christ, the testator. The inheritance of forgiveness and eternal life was bequeathed by Christ the testator to his disciples, saying, “this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28).” Through these words Christ made a firm promise of salvation and righteousness to his successors, the church.⁷⁶

Christ Our Atoning Sacrifice

Luther in his treatise *The Misuse of the Mass* (1521), stated that, “we have only one single priest, Christ, who has sacrificed himself for us and all of us with him”⁷⁷ Luther emphasized the sole atoning sacrifice of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. He asserted that, “is our gospel, that Christ has made us righteous and holy through that sacrifice and has redeemed us from sin, death, and devil and has brought us into his heavenly kingdom.”⁷⁸ With Christ’s sacrificial work on the cross for us, we need nothing else apart from faith to trust the work he has done for us. Luther maintained that those who consider the Lord’s Supper as a sacrifice instead of a gift from God are denying God and insulting Christ’s sacrifice that he has made and dishonoring his blood, because they attempt to do that which only Christ’s blood can do.⁷⁹ For Luther, trying to come before God with sacrifice is despising the sacrifice made by him through his son Jesus Christ.

⁷⁶ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

⁷⁷ LW 36:138.

⁷⁸ LW 36: 313.

⁷⁹ LW 36: 313.

Luther believed that, “the grace of God is given to sinners freely without their own merit and assistance.”⁸⁰

Believing in the sacrificial work of the mass, which had raised the duty of the priesthood, weakens the atoning blood of Christ’s sole sacrifice. In *Concerning the Ministry* (1523), Luther wrote:

The gospel and all of Scripture present Christ as the high priest, who alone and once for all by offering himself has taken away the sins of all men and accomplished their satisfaction for all eternity. For once and for all he entered into the holy place through his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption [Heb. 9:12, 28; 10:12, 14]. Thus no other sacrifice remains for our sins than his, and, by putting our trust altogether in it, we are saved from sin without any merits or works of our own. Of this sacrifice and offering he has instituted a perpetual remembrance in that he intends to have it proclaimed in the sacrament of the altar and thereby have faith in it strengthened.⁸¹

Luther believed that on the cross Jesus Christ conciliated the wrath of God and made satisfaction for our sins. Jesus Christ took our place on the cross. In a joyous exchange, he took our debts and guilt upon himself before God. He accomplished that satisfaction which men on their own cannot produce for themselves.⁸² Luther emphasizes that the incarnate Son made satisfaction for our sins once and for all through his death and no other form of sacrifice is required from us to please or reconcile God. To this regard Luther in his *Misuse of the Mass* (1521), wrote:

There are not several ways to reconcile God, but one way alone. . . . The body of Christ is given and his blood is poured out, and thereby God is reconciled, for it was given and poured out for you—as he says: “for you”—so that he may avert from us the wrath of God which we by our sins have deserved. And if the wrath is gone then sins are forgiven. Therefore, he says it shall be given and poured out for the forgiveness of sins. If the body were not given and the blood not poured out,

⁸⁰ Althaus, *The Theology*, 202.

⁸¹ LW 40:14.

⁸² Althaus, *The Theology*, 202-203.

then the wrath of God would remain upon us and we would retain our sins. . . . Here you see clearly that no work of satisfaction or sacrifice or reconciliation is of any use; only faith in the given body and the shed blood reconciles. Not that faith does the reconciling which Christ has performed for us.⁸³

Christ, through his death, has appeased the wrath of God. Through him we have been reconciled to God once and for all. Christ's sacrificial work is not passive that it should be repeated on the altar on daily bases. His priestly sacrifice was accomplished once and for all, and the inheritance gained through his death has been given "for you" through his body and blood given for the forgiveness of sins. What is required of us now is faith that believes in this given body and shed blood.

The Freedom of a Christian

Faith in Christ has so many effects on Christian life: it frees one from sin and death and gives one power over evil forces. Notably, it frees one from all the works of the law which cannot save and declares one righteous and grants one a right standing with God. There is no freedom like that of a Christian. No wonder Jesus himself said in John 8:36 that, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."⁸⁴

Luther's famous treatise, "The Freedom of a Christian," explains two theses: First, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none." Secondly, "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."⁸⁵ In the first theses of the freedom of a Christian, Luther observed that no outward thing or work can generate true righteousness

⁸³ LW 36:177.

⁸⁴ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1897.

⁸⁵ LW 31:344.

or freedom in us only the word of God, which nourishes the soul.⁸⁶ As noted by Helmer, “all that is needed is the faith by which God’s word is believed, accepted, [and] trusted.”⁸⁷ Luther believed that, “Having the word of God makes the soul rich—for what else could it possibly need? The word of God brings life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and every other blessing imaginable.”⁸⁸ One might ask, what is this word of God, since there are numerous “words of God” in the Scriptures, and how are we to use this word of God? To answer this question Luther cites Paul in Romans 1 where he explains: “the Word is the gospel of God concerning his son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies.”⁸⁹ How to use this word of God Luther claims, is to preach Christ, so that the soul will be fed, made righteous, set free, and saved as it accepts the word preached.⁹⁰ Hence, when we preach Christ we are not just to preach historical truths or decrees, instead Christ, that he could not just be Christ but likewise, be Christ for me and you and that what is spoken about him and is marked in his name can be effectual adequate in us.⁹¹

Three things happen when we trust, with a strong faith, to the word of God. First, the promises of God are sanctified, true, accurate, just, free, peaceful, and full of

⁸⁶ LW 31:345.

⁸⁷ Helmer, *The Global Luther*, 34.

⁸⁸ Timothy F. Lull and Williams R. Russel, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, Third Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 405.

⁸⁹ LW 31:346.

⁹⁰ LW 31:346.

⁹¹ LW 31:357.

goodness, and the soul which holds on to them with true faith will not only be united with them but will be totally engrossed or taken hold of by them in such a way that, it will not just “share in all their power” but are soaked and mystified by them. Luther argued that, “if a touch of Christ healed, how much more will this most tender spiritual touch, this absorbing of the Word, communicate to the soul all things that belong to the Word. This, then, is how through faith alone without works the soul is justified by the Word of God, sanctified, made true, peaceful, and free, . . . and truly made a child of God.”⁹² This is made evident in the gospel of John 1:12, where it says, “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the power to become the children of God.”⁹³ In order to illustrate and bring more clarity to how the word has a deep impact on the soul and grants it freedom, Luther used the analogy of iron and flame. He said,

For the word imparts its qualities to the soul in the same way as heated iron glows like fire because it has been united with the flame. Consequently, it is clear that a Christian has all that is needed in faith and does not require works in order to be justified. And if we have no need of works, we also have no need of the law.⁹⁴

However, Luther cautioned that, “This freedom does not lead us to live lazy and wicked lives, but makes the law and works unnecessary for righteousness and salvation.”⁹⁵

Luther believed that, “a person is justified and saved, not by works or law, but by the word of God, that is, by the promise of his grace, and by faith, that the glory may remain God’s who saved us not by works of righteousness which we have done [Titus 3:5], but

⁹² LW 31:349.

⁹³ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1882.

⁹⁴ Lull and Russel, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 408.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 408.

by virtue of his mercy by the word of his grace when we believed [I Cor. 1:21].”⁹⁶ Thus faith is the only requirement for our salvation, not keeping the law, for the law does not have the power to save.

Secondly, through faith God is honored. The effect of faith is that it honors, adores, reveres, and trusts the one it believes in. This is true because faith perceives the one it trust as honest and deserving to be honored. Faith makes us humble in such a way that we do not rely on our own strength or work for salvation but makes us trusts in God’s promises; in such doing, we regard him as truth and righteous and there is nothing higher than this that can be said of God. For there is no greater worship of God than to attribute to him honesty, faithfulness, mercy, love, and righteousness, among many other qualities, which is why we trust him.⁹⁷ In doing this, our soul clings to God and his promises. Trusting in God’s promises strips us of our own dependence in fulfilling the law for our salvation and makes us trust in his promises as pure and true by which we are made righteous. We owe God respect, honor and worship for this faith that trusts his promises because it is a free gift from him, not our own making.⁹⁸

For Luther, the greatest disrespect and rebellion against God is not to trust his promises because in doing so, we are making God a liar and doubting that he is truthful. For him, unbelief is the root of sin rather than lust and anger. That is why works of the

⁹⁶ LW 31:362-363.

⁹⁷ Lull and Russel, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 408.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 409.

law without faith do not save, for they are done out of the sin of unbelief; instead, mercy should be sought for.⁹⁹

Furthermore, Luther maintained that “Faith results in truth and righteousness by giving to God what belongs to him.”¹⁰⁰ This is to say that the end result of our faith is that God inputs his righteousness in us by which we respond by giving him back the glory. This is evident in Romans 4:3, where Paul states that Abraham’s faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness,” this is true because through his faith he gave God the highest glory. In the same manner, our faith will be counted to us as righteousness when we believe God.¹⁰¹

Thirdly, through faith we are united with Christ. According to Luther, faith unites “the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. [As a result], Christ and the soul become one flesh. . . . It follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil.”¹⁰² Consequently, Christ claims whatsoever the believing soul has as his own while the believing soul brag and splendor in whatsoever Christ has as if it were its own. In this union, Christ, the bridegroom, takes on all that belongs to the soul, his bride, and confers on her all that belongs to him. In this union, Christ takes what is his bride’s sin, pains, death, and condemnation and bestows on us his bride, his indomitable life, that is his “righteousness, life, and salvation.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ibid., 409.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 409.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 409.

¹⁰² LW 31:351.

¹⁰³ LW 31:351-352.

Sketching on Paul's motif of adoption, Luther maintained that, "what Christ imparts in this exchange is his inheritance, his 'birthright'—his 'liberty' and 'spiritual power,' which makes him a 'king' or a 'lord.' By faith, the Christian is like Christ a 'lord' of all things without exception."¹⁰⁴

Coming to the second theses of the Christians freedom, "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."¹⁰⁵ Luther turns to how our faith should be lived out in service of the neighbor. Having received salvation freely from God through his mercy, we are expected to serve one another, giving ourselves freely to one another just as Christ has given himself for us. Drawing on Phi. 2:5-11, Luther portrays how, though in the form of God and rich in all good things that he needed no work or suffering to justify and save him, yet Christ was not "puffed up by them" and hence did not use them to "assume power over us" but in lieu became a human being like us, taking on the form of a servant, so that he might become ours.¹⁰⁶ Similarly as noted by Lois Malcolm, Professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary, "a person who is 'justified' by God (and thus a 'Lord') will, like Christ, serve the neighbor spontaneously out of an 'abundance of riches,' not out of need or duty but 'satisfied with the fullness and wealth' of her faith."¹⁰⁷

Moreover, having been loaded and made rich by faith, as Christ has put on us, acting in our own place, so now we can put on our neighbor, acting as if we were in the other's place. To this regard Luther asserted that, "I will therefore give myself as a Christ

¹⁰⁴ Gregersen, *The Gift of Grace*, 94.

¹⁰⁵ LW 31:344.

¹⁰⁶ LW 31:366.

¹⁰⁷ Gregersen, *The Gift of Grace*, 94.

to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.”¹⁰⁸ As Christians, we are to be “Christ to another” so that “Christ may be same in all.”¹⁰⁹ We live not in ourselves, but in Christ through faith and in our neighbor through love.¹¹⁰ Because we ourselves are the recipients of grace, Luther noted,

the good things we have from God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should ‘put on’ his neighbor and so conduct himself toward him as if he himself were in the other’s place. From Christ the good things have flowed and are flowing into us. . . . From us they flow on to those who have need of them. . . . That is what Christ did for us. This is true love and the genuine rule of a Christian life.¹¹¹

The good things we receive from God should flow from us to the neighbor to the extent that we can even present to God our faith and righteousness in order that they might cover and mediate for our neighbor’s sins. We should carry one another’s burden as if they were our own. This is indeed what Christ did for us.¹¹² We should empty and give ourselves in order to serve and help our neighbors in every possible way. We have been freed to respond to the specific needs of the neighbors before us, which is in essence our vocation.

Our call to serve the neighbor is also rooted in Luther’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper. In *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the*

¹⁰⁸ LW 31:366-367.

¹⁰⁹ LW 31:368.

¹¹⁰ LW 31:371.

¹¹¹ LW 31:371.

¹¹² Lull and Russel, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 423.

Brotherhoods, Luther articulated how Holy Communion is a multidimensional act, and brings us into deeper union with both God and the neighbor. Depicting our union with Christ and with one another through the Lord's Supper Luther maintained that,

For just as the bread is made out of many grains ground and mixed together, and out of the bodies of many grains there comes the body of one bread . . . so it is and should be with us, if we use this sacrament properly. Christ with all the saints, by his love, takes upon himself our form [Phil. 2:7], fights with us against sin, death, and all evil. This enkindles in us such love that we take on his form, rely upon his righteousness, life, and blessedness. And through the interchange of his blessings and our misfortunes, we become one loaf, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common.¹¹³

The tangible depiction of “one loaf,” made up of “the bodies of many grains” is a helpful image as we seek to engage in the fullness of what it means to love our neighbors and to share “all sufferings and sins” as well as the “love that engenders love in return.”¹¹⁴

While there is certainly much mystery in the sacrament, and while it is rooted in Christ's love for us as he first takes on all of our sin and suffering, and bestow upon us his blessings and righteousness. The theological claim of being physically bound with our sisters and brothers through Christ's body and blood helps make the sacrament concrete, giving us a space out of which to live God's call to truly love our neighbors as ourselves.

In this chapter I have discussed Luther's understanding of grace. It reveals how we in our fallen nature cannot reconcile ourselves to God but God in his grace took upon himself our sin, pain, and death and has imparted us with his righteousness. Christ is the one who paid the price for our sins and through faith in his promise we are made one with him. He takes our sin, pain, and death and bestows his righteousness upon us. The

¹¹³ LW 35:58.

¹¹⁴ LW 35:51.

promise which is the gift of grace is given to us freely by God without any work on our part. When we believe in the promise we obtain what it declares namely, the forgiveness of sins. After we have been transformed, our faith is then lived out through our service to the neighbor. It is my contention that, if grace is a free and unconditional gift for those in the body of Christ, then the Lord's Supper, which is the visible means of grace, must be free and unconditional for everyone in the body of Christ. Worthiness for the Lord's Supper is not something we merit but a gift from God. Through faith we are imparted with Christ's righteousness which enable to come before the Lord's Table.

CHAPTER FOUR

LUTHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The previous chapter discussed Luther's view of grace. The promise which is the gift of grace is given to us freely and unconditionally by God without any work on our part. Through faith we are imparted with Christ's righteousness. This faith is lived out through our service to the neighbor. In this chapter I will discuss the Lord's Supper which is a means of grace. The Lord's Supper is a means of grace in that in communion we encounter Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper embodies God's words which means that it is rooted in the promise. This promise is the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper in that the real presence in the Lord's Supper is made possible through the word which is the promise. The promise which is visibly present in the Lord's Supper unleashes faith and brings about transformation.

Luther and the Medieval Mass

The medieval mass induced a deferential, and sometimes crippling, anxiety in the minds of a lot of people in the sixteenth century. Throughout this time, it was famous to overhear stories of dreams of a bleeding fragment of flesh that took the dwelling place of the host. These "bleeding host" tales disclose that the attendance of Christ might be a

condemning presence.¹ In addition to the profound sense of dread was the well-known opinion that in the mass the recipient faced Christ not exclusively as a savior but also as a craving magistrate. This concluding part of the medieval piousness was true for Luther.

Beginning from his first mass in 1507 and throughout his vocation in the Erfurt cloister, Luther was petrified or scared of the mass. The cleanliness from sin that was required as a precondition for partaking in the mass triggered him an endless pact of anxiety that sometimes kept him from partaking in it. He lacked the guarantee of forgiveness since Christ was not only considered the mediator but also the judge in the mass. Nothing could suppress his distress as his nervousness over Christ as a judge escalated.² To this regard Luther exclaimed:

I almost fasted myself to death, for again and again I went for three days without taking a drop of water or a morsel of food. I was very serious about it. I really crucified the Lord Christ. I wasn't simply an observer but helped to carry him and piece [his hands and feet]. God forgive me for it, for I have confessed it openly! This is the truth: the most pious monk is the worst scoundrel. He denies Christ is the mediator and high priest and turns him into a judge.³

Luther was before a dictating magistrate who had established a more needing internal righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). Christ was both a magistrate and lawmaker. This knowledge about Christ intensified Luther's nervousness to "work out his own salvation."⁴

¹ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

² Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, translated by James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 72-73.

³ LW 54:339-340.

⁴ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

The medieval logistics of how one is saved presented Luther a righteousness of Christ that was unwhole for salvation. As Biel puts it, “if our merits would not complete those of Christ, the merits of Christ would be insufficient (for our salvation).”⁵ This means that the demands of God’s righteousness were only met when one’s works were joined to Christ’s righteousness. Luther came to see this way of one working out his salvation as making “both Christ and the Father as terrible judges and tyrants, and the Holy Spirit as taskmaster, since we have been taught nothing else than that God must be reconciled by our works.”⁶ It was against this background that Luther came about his reformation finding in 1515. He therefore maintained that justification is by God’s grace alone. For Luther, the conception about Christ as a judge in the medieval church, had turned Christ into an arena of terror and works, instead of ease and grace. Rebuffing Christ and relying on our works curved the gospel and accentuated a livid God as magistrate, instead of “a suffering God coming near.” Such conception showed that the church had not seriously considered the gracious coming of God in human nature in order to save us.⁷

⁵ Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 117.

⁶ LW 24:116.

⁷ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

Luther's Objection to the Roman Catholic Concept of the Lord's Supper

The move in Luther's theology of the Lord's Supper started in 1519 by the publication of the *Lord's Supper, A Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, the Holy Mass*.⁸ In this essay, Luther examines the Lord's Supper as a testament or will, given by Christ to his followers under the symbol of bread and wine. This testament promises forgiveness of sins which is received by faith.⁹ Luther stressed that, "the efficacy of the sacrament is depended on faith (in the word of Christ) and that it was such faith . . . that justified."¹⁰ This change in perception Jensen notes, starts to open the sluiceways to Luther's review of numerous eucharistic practices.¹¹ Luther's principal analysis stresses on the sacrifice of the mass, in which we offer or give something to God of our own.¹² Instead, Luther claims that as a testament, the Lord's Supper is the gift of promise, given by the testator to the successors. He observes that it is not about a "benefit received [by God] but a benefit conferred" to us by God.¹³

⁸ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 324.

⁹ LW 35:93.

¹⁰ LW 31:107.

¹¹ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 324.

¹² LW 36:169.

¹³ LW 35:93.

For Luther, “the (Lord’s) Supper grew not in our garden but in God’s. It is something God wants to do for us, not something we do for God.”¹⁴ For Paul, the “Lord’s Supper is the Lord’s Supper” so that the principal actor in this sacrament is the exalted Jesus seated at the right hand of God, who encounters his church in holy splendor, making the bread and wine to be his sacrificed body and blood, offering these holy things to be eaten and drunk for the benefit of the repentant souls.¹⁵ Hence in the Lord’s Supper we give nothing to Christ but instead Christ giving himself to us under the bread and wine. As Nurnberger rightly observed, “we cannot give anything to God; we can only receive God’s gift. It is arrogant and foolish to try and give a gift to God that God actually wants to give to us.”¹⁶

Melanchthon noted that, “to understand the Mass as an offering is to turn everything upside down. The Mass then becomes a human work given to God instead of God’s gracious promise, confirmed by the sign of bread and wine, under which Christ himself is offered to us with all his gifts.”¹⁷ For Luther, the biblical conception of the Supper as a promise surpasses any idea that its benefit can be earned. As has been said, if the mass is a promise, then access to it should be gained by faith alone not with any works, or merits, or power of one’s own.¹⁸ The believer receives this promise through

¹⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 134.

¹⁵ Gordon T. Smith, *The Lord’s Supper: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 45.

¹⁶ Nurnberger, *Martin Luther’s Message for Us Today*, 216-267.

¹⁷ Grane, *The Augsburg Confession*, 124.

¹⁸ LW 36:38-39.

faith in the word of God without any works. The promises of God become vital, substituting the emphasis on human work. The sacrament is functioning to the believer in harmony with God's grace and the word of promise, and by the power of Christ's testament.

Moreover, the emphasis on the promise of God led Luther to disparage masses for the dead as works used to lessen one's duration in the purgatory, and the practice of the priest inarticulation of the words of institution into the cup so that it will avert the recipients from earshot the promises contained in the testament. Similarly, disparaged are the practices of communion in one kind, handling the Lord's Supper as fairylike to ward off the devil, and the way the sacrament is commercialized, either by holding secluded masses or masses for the dead. These practices take away the gift God offers at his table. Though, the fact that God's actions and promises in the Lord's Supper remain crucial for Luther at this time, yet he underscores the faith of the believer, assuring the right receipt of this declared gift from God.¹⁹

Another attack of Luther was on the doctrine of transubstantiation. This is contained in his treatise, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520*.²⁰ The doctrine of transubstantiation R. David Nelson notes, summarizes the notion that, while the appearances or look of the elements of the Eucharist bread and wine remain unchanged during the time of the mass, their natures are by divine decree altered "into the body and blood of Christ." This Eucharistic alteration happens as the priest sanctifies the elements

¹⁹ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 324.

²⁰ LW 36:3-236.

and performs the rite of the sacrament through the declaration of the words of institution.²¹ Though, Luther did not disapprove the notion of transubstantiation per se, since it was an effort to defend the concept of real presence of Christ in the sacrament, he thinks that it is not suitable as doctrine. As a matter of fact, he regards it as a disobliging human idea without sound basis.

That notwithstanding, Luther also actualized that the notion of transubstantiation was intertwined with the doctrine of the “real presence,” which he did not want to renounce. Even though transubstantiation and consubstantiation all aimed to describe how and in what manner the bread and wine turn into the body and blood of Christ by using rational categories, by so doing they distract our attention from what is offered in the meal namely: the forgiveness of sins. However, Luther maintained that the forgiveness of sin can only be made possible “if Christ were truly present in the Supper.”²²

Luther maintained that, the efficient foredeal of the Lord’s Supper did not rest on the ability of the priest, conferred on him during consecration, “to transubstantiate the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ,” as the Roman Catholic Church apprehended. Neither does it hinge on the piousness of its beneficiaries as underscored by Zwingli and others, regardless of how welcome that piety may be.²³ As noted by John R. Stephenson, “both Jesus and Paul locate the Lord’s ‘real presence’ in the consecrated

²¹ <http://religion.oxfordre.com.luthersem.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-375?rskey=oMqCWF&result=2> (accessed February 8, 2018).

²² Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 324.

²³ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 2.

elements of bread and wine and not merely in the hearts of the communicants,”²⁴ hence seizing the sacrament from any human influence.²⁵ For Luther, the principal thing in the Lord’s Supper is the word of God and his command. It was not designed by any human being but was founded by Christ himself without anyone’s advice.²⁶ He therefore believed that the words of institution, proclaimed the entire gospel.²⁷ In his treatise on *the New Testament, That Is, The Holy Mass* (1520), he stated that,

the mass was instituted to preach and praise Christ, to glorify his suffering and all his grace and goodness, so that we may be moved to love him. . . . And had there been no preaching, Christ would never have instituted the mass. He is more concerned about the word than about the sign. For the preaching ought to be nothing but an explanation of the words of Christ, when he instituted the mass and said “This is my body, this is my blood,” etc. What is the whole gospel but the explanation of this testament? Christ has gathered up the whole gospel in a short summary with the words of this testament or sacrament.²⁸

The promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life were made in the testament declared by Christ the testator. Christ as the testator has bequeathed the inheritance of forgiveness and eternal life to his disciples, saying, “this is the cup of a new eternal testament in my blood, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”²⁹ With these words Christ made a solemn vow or promise of righteousness and salvation to his followers.

²⁴ Smith, *The Lord’s Supper*, 45.

²⁵ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

²⁸ LW 35: 105-106.

²⁹ LW 35: 84-85.

Moreover, Luther also criticized the practice of withholding the cup from the laity. For Luther, withholding the cup from the laity is disobeying Christ's command in Matthew 26:27 "Drink of it, all of you." If all are meant to drink of it, then the words should not be understood as referring to the priest alone.³⁰ Luther's focus on God and his word as the subject and not the object of the action of the sacrament brought Luther's resuscitated comprehension of justification evenly into the "heart of the sacramental action." The emphasis must not always be on what humans offer but, on the benefits God, gives.³¹ Luther would again return to this argument in his treatise *The Misuse of the Mass* where he stated that, "sacrifice and promise are further apart than sunrise and sunset. A sacrifice is a work in which we present and give to God something of our own. The promise, however, is God's word, which gives to man the grace and mercy of God."³² The sacrament as rightly stated by Luther, "is really to be understood as God's gift. As a gift is indeed present for faith. . . . Human activity adds nothing to it."³³

The Real Presence

Another major debate surrounding the Lord's Supper centered around what is eaten during communion. As Jensen rightly observes, since the time of the reformation one of the chief contests among churches, particularly in ecumenical discourse, has been reaching an accord on what is eaten in the Lord's Supper. The cause of the combats of the

³⁰ LW 36:21.

³¹ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 325.

³² LW 36:169.

³³ Althaus, *The Theology*, 392.

sixteenth century still remains the bone of contention in the twenty-first century. These contentions centered on the question of the “real presence” of Christ in the Lord’s Supper: Is Christ really and bodily present in the consecrated bread and wine, or is the Lord’s Supper just a memorial event that makes us ponder on the last supper that Jesus had with his disciples before his crucifixion?³⁴

To begin with, Luther believed “in the true presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacramental elements. He did so because he believed that Christ had placed his body and blood there through his almighty Word and that this presence provided deep comfort and assurance for fragile souls.”³⁵ As Thomas J. Davis notes, “for Luther, the whole issue of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist was controlled by his view of the Words of Institution as God’s Word of Power.”³⁶ He maintained that, “For as soon as Christ says: ‘This is my Body,’ his body is present through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. If the Word is not there, it is mere bread, but as soon as the words are added they bring with them that of which they speak.”³⁷ For Luther, if God orders us to say the reality then his body must truly be present in the Lord’s Supper not by virtue of our pronouncement but of his “command, bidding, and action.” Luther therefore maintained that,

if I were to say over all the bread there is, “This is the body of Christ,” nothing would happen, but when we follow his institution and command in the Supper and say, “This is my body,” then it is his body, not because of our speaking or our

³⁴ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 8.

³⁵ Arand, *The Lutheran Confessions*, 228.

³⁶ Thomas J. Davis, *This Is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 46.

³⁷ LW 36:341.

declarative word, but because of his command in which he has told us so to speak and to do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking.³⁸

Luther's opponents Karlstadt, Zwingli, and Oecolampadius had a different meaning to the phrase "This is my Body" each looking at a different word. Karlstadt held that when Jesus spoke "this" he was pointing to himself when he said "this is my body." Zwingli believed that the "is" was to be understood as "represents." For Zwingli, the expression "this is my body" means "this represents my body." While Oecolampadius held that "body" should be understood as "this is a sign of my body."³⁹ To Luther these were just attempts by irresponsible fanatics who "juggle and play the clown with the words of the Supper according to their fancy"⁴⁰ Luther's proposal is most evidently seen in his passionately disputatious writing against Zwingli: That This Words of Christ, "This Is My Body," etc., Still Stands Firm against the Fanatic.⁴¹ In this disputation Luther argued that, Christ's words, "'this is my body,' should be allowed to stand and remain just as they read."⁴² Luther asserts, "Here we have Christ's word. . . . Here we shall take our stand . . . For as Christ lips speak and say, so it is; he cannot lie or deceive [us]."⁴³

Dirk G. Lange a professor of worship at Luther Seminary noted that, Luther's tenacity on the literality of the words "This is my body" is the doggedness on a reality

³⁸ LW 37:184.

³⁹ LW 37:30-41.

⁴⁰ LW 37:27.

⁴¹ LW 37:5-150.

⁴² LW 37:55.

⁴³ Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms*, 134.

that cannot be apprehended or controlled by the reason or senses. These words do not have a concealed connotation. These words, “This is my Body,” challenge the believer, and anyone who attempts to conceal them or cover them up by elucidating them away, they twig as an “‘everlasting splinter’ to the flesh.”⁴⁴

Luther also argued that, “had Jesus willed to found a memorial supper featuring symbols of his (absent) body and blood, he would have been well advised to retain the old Passover meal, for the slaughtered lambs was a much more symbol of his sacrificed body and blood than are the inanimate elements of bread and wine.”⁴⁵ Luther believed that the words “This is my Body” are self-explanatory and therefore, the interpreter or the translator should not look for a different meaning for what has already been plainly stated, “for anyone who ventures to interpret words in the Scriptures any other way than what they say, is under obligation to prove this contention out of the text of the very same passage or by an article of faith.”⁴⁶ This is to say that, we are compelled argues Luther, to consider the words, “This is my Body” literally when referring to the bread. We should not interpret “is” as “represents” and “body” as “sign of the body.”⁴⁷ Hence Luther’s assertion that

Now, here stands the text, stating clearly and lucidly that Christ gives his body to eat when he distributes the bread. On this we take our stand, and we also believe and teach that in the Supper we eat and take to ourselves Christ’s body truly and physically. But how this takes place or how he is in the bread, we do not know and are not meant to know. God’s Word we should believe without setting bounds

⁴⁴ Dirk G. Lange, *Trauma Recalled: Liturgy, Disruption, and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 121-122.

⁴⁵ Smith, *The Lord’s Supper*, 49.

⁴⁶ LW 37:32.

⁴⁷ LW 37:32.

or measure to it. The bread we see with our eyes, but we hear with our ears that Christ's body is present.⁴⁸

The emphasis for Luther is the word of God which we should believe without putting any limits to it. When God speaks his words stand because he is not a liar.

The fanatics as Luther referred to Zwingli and all those who insisted on the symbolic explanation of the words sought to “remove these words, ‘This is my Body, given for you,’ entirely and utterly from the Supper.”⁴⁹ And said, “Christ took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, ‘Take, eat, do this in remembrance of me.’”⁵⁰ As noted by Lange, the fanatics sought to eradicate the tension, and the confrontation that the phrase “This is my body” presented to the human search for cognizance and trust in God.⁵¹ Luther argued that, the fanatics made an effort to have God “locked up in a closet, and do not believe that he is present in his Word and in the outward things of which his Word speaks.”⁵² They are not convinced of the presence of God in the outward word, which means that they are not certain that God can in some sense reappear in the outward celebration of the word. Lange noted that, “the sense of ‘presence’ here needs to be read in light of this confrontation the words create. God is not present in a fully accessible conscious form but in the bread that has these words (‘This is my body’) *added* to them.”⁵³ For Luther, the body of Christ is contained in the word and

⁴⁸ LW 37:28-29.

⁴⁹ LW 37:126.

⁵⁰ LW 37:126.

⁵¹ Lange, *Trauma Recalled*, 122.

⁵² LW 37:137.

⁵³ Lange, *Trauma Recalled*, 122.

is actually required “in order that our faith may be correct and consistent with the Word, because the two, Word and body, are not to be separated.”⁵⁴

As Davis rightly observed, for Luther, the whole thing in the sacrament relies on the word. In talking of the words of institution, which embodies God’s promises, Luther stressed that it is by those words alone that Christ’s body is passed to participants through the bread. Although the bread might be the vehicle, it is the word that actually brands Christ’s body present, merely as it brands the promises of God real and present.⁵⁵ He believed that, “the forgiveness of sins gained on the cross is ‘given and distributed through the word’ in the Lord’s Supper just as in the gospel where it is preached.”⁵⁶ He therefore termed the words of institution as “great treasure of the gospel.”⁵⁷ For Luther, “the mass is nothing but the word of Christ. . . ‘take and eat etc.’ [Matt 26:26], as if he were saying: ‘Look, you sinful and condemned man, out of the pure and unmerited love which I love you (because the Father of mercies wills it), before any merit or desire of yours, I promise you in these words the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.’”⁵⁸ Jensen notes that, “this encounter with God’s promising Word realized (in the sacrament) never leaves a person or community unchanged (Isa.55:11). That is what makes the

⁵⁴ LW 37:140.

⁵⁵ Davis, *This Is My Body*, 46-47.

⁵⁶ Althaus, *The Theology*, 380.

⁵⁷ Davis, *This Is My Body*, 49.

⁵⁸ Nummerger, *Martin Luther’s Message for Us Today*, 214.

sacrament a means of grace—people intimately encounter Christ in the bread and wine and in the Word that actually forgives sins and gives life and salvation.”⁵⁹

Another argument put forward by Luther for the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper as noted by Jensen, was to halt the trend to separate the spiritual from the physical presence of Christ. Echoing Cornelius Hoen, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Karlstadt, had claimed that, “Christ was only spiritually present in the Lord’s Supper, based on their exegesis of John 6:63: ‘flesh is of no avail.’”⁶⁰ Kohler observed that Zwingli could not agree that the act of bodily eating would have a spiritual impact, even if it were the body of Christ. In his thought, “body of Christ” could only refer to the church, and the blood to the blood of Christ poured out on the cross.⁶¹ Zwingli believed that, salvation did not come from Christ’s humanity but from his divine nature, though it was compulsory for him to suffer and die through his human nature.⁶² Luther maintained that, “Christ incarnational presence in the sacrament was different than the meaning of ‘flesh’ as reliance on created objects, and ‘spiritual eating’ did not mean the absence of the physical but, rather, eating that which was offered in faith.”⁶³ Faith and God’s “Word made flesh” are now irreversibly linked. Hence, Luther argues that, if the physical were

⁵⁹ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 9.

⁶⁰ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 326.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 326-327.

⁶² <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

⁶³ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 327.

of no benefit, that means the incarnation would be of no benefit. For the incarnation included both the physical and divine nature of Christ, which cannot be divided.⁶⁴

Luther underlined the accord of the two natures in the person of Christ. In his sermon on John 6:47 (1532), he stated that,

our fanatics—Zwingli and others—also declare that Christ’s human nature must be excluded here, that it is His divinity and not His humanity which imparts eternal life. In this way they divided Christ. But who teaches them to tear Christ asunder, to fashion out of Christ, the Son of the Virgin Mary, another person, one who is also the Son of God? They divorce Mary’s Son from God’s Son, and in defense they quote Christ’s own words (John 6:63): “The flesh is of no avail.” They aver that Scripture points to the fact that one must not place trust in man, but in God alone. Therefore, they conclude, the passage which declares that he who believes in Christ has eternal life must refer to His divinity to the exclusion of His humanity.⁶⁵

For Luther, Christ’s humanity could not be eradicated for his divinity. To postulate that the presence of the body of Christ in the bread and wine would “avail not,” was a symbol of heresy for Luther. He believed that it was in Christ’s humanity that we were able to gain assistance from his being and work. There was no salvation outside Christ’s humanity. The central position that the presence of God is beneficial, only where related with the humanity of Christ is paramount to Luther’s theology. It was critical for Luther to prove beyond doubt that Christ’s humanity was not only reachable in the bread and wine, but beneficial too.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., 327.

⁶⁵ LW 23:101.

⁶⁶ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

Luther held that Christ founded the Lord's Supper so that he will dispense the power of his suffering and hence in the bread and wine was the forgiveness sins. He believed that the forgiveness attained by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was disseminated in the sacrament. Christ has delivered the benefit of his sacrifice in the sacrament through his testament glued to the bread and wine.⁶⁷ The word is imperative to the delivery of the benefit in the Lord's Supper, since it is the word that makes possible the forgiveness of sins in the bread and wine. Luther firmly believed that, "the presence of Christ's body and blood is based upon the words of God."⁶⁸

Luther in his treatise, *That These Words of Christ, "This is my Body," etc., Still Stands Against the Fanatics* (1527), outlined three benefits of the presence of the humanity of Christ in the Lord's Supper. The first benefit in the bread and wine as stated by Luther is that, it blinded and disgraced the proud and shows worldly reason to be foolishness.⁶⁹ The second benefit of the real presence is a bodily one in which "our body is fed with the body of Christ, in order that our faith and hope may abide and that our body also may live eternally from the same eternal food of the body of Christ it eats physically."⁷⁰ According to Luther, "as we eat him, he abides in us and we in him. For he is not digested or transformed but ceaselessly he transforms us, our soul into righteousness, our body into immortality."⁷¹ The third benefit is "the forgiveness of

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Arand, *The Lutheran Confessions*, 228.

⁶⁹ LW 37:131.

⁷⁰ LW 37:132.

⁷¹ LW 37:132.

sins,” since the powerful word of God is in it.⁷² The word of God that accompanies the bread and wine actually accomplishes that which it speaks. As it is written in Isaiah 55:11, “God’s Word shall not return empty, but shall accomplish that which avails?”⁷³

As noted by Lugioyo, “at the Supper, one encounters Christ himself, fully and not divided.”⁷⁴ At the altar as Luther rightly observed, “one either loses Christ completely, or has him completely.”⁷⁵ Luther believed “in a unique joining of the divine and human concretely in the Christ’s person, which was so intimate that each nature shared the characteristics of the other even though these characteristics never actually became the property of the other nature.”⁷⁶

Another argument put forward by Zwingli and others against the “real presence” was the notion that Christ could not be at the right hand of God and at the same time be in the Supper.⁷⁷ They took the phrase “right hand of God” to denote that the body of Christ that rose from the dead was confined in heaven and hence could not be in two different places at once. Luther had gathered that, Oecolampadius and Zwingli, dreamed up “an imagery of heaven in which a golden throne stands, and Christ sits beside the Father in a cowl and golden crown, the way artists paint it.”⁷⁸ Luther responded by describing what

⁷² LW 37:132.

⁷³ LW 37:132.

⁷⁴ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

⁷⁵ LW 37:131.

⁷⁶ Arand, *The Lutheran Confessions*, 228.

⁷⁷ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 327.

⁷⁸ LW 37:55.

the right hand of God means, he claimed that, “the right hand of God is not a specific place in which a body must or may be, such as on a golden throne, but is the almighty power of God, which at one and the same time can be nowhere and yet must be everywhere.”⁷⁹ Appealing to the right hand of God as a particular place for Christ body to dwell was a “childish idea” says Luther.⁸⁰

The ascension had turned out to be the midpoint of argument in that what the ascension meant for Luther was not the case with Zwingli. For Zwingli, the humanity of Christ was limited and remained the same after his resurrection, hence narrowing the means in which Christ’s body could be present in the Lord’s Supper. With the ascension, Zwingli held that, the body of Christ is now locally situated in heaven, at the right hand of God. While for Luther after the resurrection something unusual occurred to the body of Christ, exhibited in its capability to walk through the doors. Christ body had assumed novel possessions that it did not have before the resurrection. This novel body turned out to be the root of how Luther would comprehend the collaboration between the divine and human nature in the person of Christ (*communication idiomatum*). Christ risen body now partakes in ubiquity of God and hence can be present in the Church in manifold ways.⁸¹

To prove Christ’s true presence in the Lord’s Supper, Luther identified three ways in which an object can be present at a certain place. The first mode by Luther is circumscribed or local. An object is circumscriptively present, “if the space and the

⁷⁹ LW 37:57.

⁸⁰ LW 37:56.

⁸¹ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

object occupying it exactly correspond and fit into the same measurements, such as wine or water in a cask, where the wine occupies no more space and the cask yields no more space than the volume of the wine.”⁸² The second manner in which an object can be present is the definitive or uncircumscribed. This occurs when “the object or body is not palpably in one place and is not measured according to the dimensions of the place where it is, but can occupy either more room or less.”⁸³ This mode portrays the presence of an angel in an entire city, house, or in a room, demons in a body as was the case in Matthew 8, Christ’s presence when he came out of a closed grove, and when he passed through a wooden door when he entered the upper room where his disciples were gathered. This is the mode that Christ uses to be present in the Lord’s Supper. “For as the sealed stone and the closed door remained unaltered and unchanged, though his body at the same time was in the space entirely occupied by the stone and wood, so he is also at the same time in the sacrament and where the bread and wine are, though the bread and wine in themselves remain unaltered and unchanged.”⁸⁴ The third mode is the repletive that is the supernatural mode. In this mode an object can be concurrently present everywhere “whole and entire.” This manner of existence is God’s alone, as he declared in Jeremiah 23:23f., “I am a God at hand and not afar off. I fill heaven and earth.”⁸⁵ This mode is

⁸² LW 37:215.

⁸³ LW 37:215.

⁸⁴ LW 37:215-216.

⁸⁵ LW 37: 216.

unconceivable, beyond any human reason, and can only be sustained by faith in the word.⁸⁶

The word of promise remained imperative in Luther's view of the real presence. He claimed that, if Christ in his word declared that, "this was his body and blood," then it is really true.⁸⁷ For Luther, the body and its presence in the Supper had to do with the "truth of the divine words," the heavenly word being the essential thing that directs and discloses the concealed body of Christ, "the incarnate Word necessary for salvation."⁸⁸ Ralph Quere argues that, "even when Luther's doctrine of ubiquity . . . is introduced as a further argument for and basis of Christ's eucharistic presence, that presence remains tied to the word."⁸⁹ This is evident in Luther's assertion that,

He is present everywhere, but he does not wish that you grope for him every. Grope rather where the Word is, and there you will lay hold of him in the right way. Otherwise you are tempting God and committing idolatry. . . . He is present through the Word, although not in the same way as here in the Sacrament, where through the Word, he binds his body and blood so that they are received corporeally in the bread and wine. . . . Heaven and earth are his sack; as corn fills the sack, so he fills all things. And as seed bears a stalk, an ear, and many . . . much more is Christ able to distribute himself whole and undivided into so many particles.⁹⁰

For Luther the priority is always on God's word which accompanies the bread and wine and makes the forgiveness of sins possible. As Luther wrote in his small catechism, "the words 'given for you' and 'shed for you for the forgiveness of sins' show us that

⁸⁶ LW 37:216.

⁸⁷ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 328.

⁸⁸ Davis, *This Is My Body*, 15.

⁸⁹ <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641901.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199641901-e-16?rskey=rnK0aZ&result=1> (accessed November 20, 2017).

⁹⁰ LW 36:343.

forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.”⁹¹

Through this word of God Christ is made present in the Supper. As Luther stated in his large catechism, “it is the Word, I say, that makes this a sacrament and distinguishes it from ordinary bread and wine, so that it is called truly Christ’s body and blood.”⁹² Hence, Luther insists that, “it is actually Christ who is in the sacrament, encountering humans in physical ways. In the encounter, Christ grants and distributes forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.”⁹³

For Luther, “the word as a divine promise not only proclaims but also makes God’s justifying grace a reality for the one receiving the sacrament.”⁹⁴ This justifying activity for Luther occurs in that in the sacrament one meets the crucified and resurrected Christ, who declares one just as they stand before God. Jensen noted that, “Christ is the sacrament who gives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation by uniting the believer with Christ. In the process, the believer goes through a death and resurrection with Christ.”⁹⁵ Through the Lord’s Supper we encounter Christ who justifies and transforms us.

⁹¹ *The Book of Concord*, 362.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 468.

⁹³ <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-359?rskey=402MhL&result=1> (accessed February 8, 2018).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Faith in the Sacrament

Haven established the fact that Christ is truly present in the Lord's Supper through his word. Luther also lays great emphasis on the role of faith, upon which everything relies. Out of one's intense yearning for the Lord's Supper and strong confidence that one obtains what the sacrament implies, a believer partakes in the divine body of Christ, in which Christ and all the saints have everything in common.⁹⁶ For Luther, "it is not enough to know what the sacrament is and signifies. . . . You must also desire it and firmly believe that you received it."⁹⁷ Through faith in Christ's word in the sacrament a believer obtains what is promised in the sacrament that is the forgiveness of sins.

For Luther every repentant and believing sinner is worthy of the cup. He believed that, "worthiness . . . did not consist of our works but of faith in the promises, 'given for you . . . shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'"⁹⁸ "However a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words 'for you' require truly believing hearts."⁹⁹

That notwithstanding, Luther laid more emphasis on the sacrament to be understood as God's command, emerging from the word and command of God rather than on human faith because it is the promise that engenders faith. Luther asked, "do you think God cares so much about our faith and conduct that he would permit them to affect

⁹⁶ Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther*, 436.

⁹⁷ LW 35:60.

⁹⁸ Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms*, 139

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

his ordinance?”¹⁰⁰ He insisted on the reliability of the word of God in order to fortify the conscience and to eradicate all efforts to turn the sacrament’s categorical promise into something that rests on the beneficiary. Luther therefore wrote:

[The Lord’s Supper] is not founded on human holiness but on the Word of God. . . . For the Word by which it was constituted a sacrament is not rendered false because of an individual’s unworthiness or unbelief. Christ does not say, “If you believe or if you are worthy, you have my body and blood.” Likewise, when he says, “Do this” . . . this is as much as to say, “no matter whether you are worthy or unworthy, you have here his body and blood by the power of these words that are connected to the bread and wine.”¹⁰¹

Since the sacrament is an action of God, Luther maintained that no human action is required when it comes to salvation. God is the one acting in the sacrament to bring life, hence it must not be seen as a means or ways by which people might display their worthiness.¹⁰²

However, Luther believed that, “it is not the sacrament, but faith in the sacrament that justifies.”¹⁰³ In the same vein, Augustine believed that the sacrament justifies because it is believed not because it is performed.¹⁰⁴ Faith in this case, should not be misinterpreted as a work done by humans, something that one must have and exhibit so that he can gain salvation. To this regard Luther wrote:

If you would be saved, you must begin with the faith of the sacraments, without any works whatever. The works will follow faith, but do not think too lightly of faith, for it is the most excellent and difficult of all works. Through it alone you will be saved, even if you should be compelled to do without any other works. For

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 133-134.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 135.

¹⁰² <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-359?rskey=402MhL&result=1> (accessed February 8, 2018).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

faith is a work of God, not of man, as Paul teaches in [Eph. 2:8]. The other works he works through us and with our help, but this one alone he works in us and without our help.¹⁰⁵

For Luther faith is born out of the word of promise and this faith lets the beneficiary of the Lord's Supper to know the incarnate presence of God in the sacramental union.¹⁰⁶ He therefore insisted that faith and promise must at all times go together. This is true in that, there is nothing to be believed without the promise, whereas the promise is useless without faith which believes in it. Since the mass is nothing but the promise, it is clear that it is only by faith that it can be approached and observed. Hence Luther maintained that, "the only worthy preparation and proper observance is faith, the faith by which we believe in the mass, that is, in the promise."¹⁰⁷ It is evident according to Jensen that, "this faith, given by God through word and sacrament, cannot be considered a human work. It is a gift from God, allowing a person to trust the promises of God, bestowed through word and sacrament."¹⁰⁸ Although, faith is essential to the Lord's Supper, such faith is not a human action but a gift of God. This faith, formed and shaped by the promise, the proclaimed word, and God's actions in the sacrament, opens one's eyes to the presence of God in the sacrament.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ LW 36:62.

¹⁰⁶ <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-359?rskey=402MhL&result=1> (accessed February 8, 2018).

¹⁰⁷ LW 36:42-43.

¹⁰⁸ <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-359?rskey=402MhL&result=1> (accessed February 8, 2018).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

For Luther, that the ungodly and unworthy people received the body of Christ was a pastoral issue of promising the feeble that “Christ comes to them.” Anyone, including those who feel not worthy, when they draw near the Lord’s Supper, can be sure that they are not abandon by Christ at the altar.¹¹⁰ Luther felt that, “all were unworthy since everyone is simultaneously justified and sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*).”¹¹¹ The sacrament is effective in our lives in harmony with God’s grace and the word of promise, and by the inherent power of Christ testament.¹¹²

The Significance of the Lord’s Supper

Christ’s real presence, Jensen argues, is the primary gift or benefit of the Lord’s Supper. This is because the presence of Christ makes all things promised turn into a reality.¹¹³ As Barth rightly claimed for Luther, “Jesus is the center of the event of the Lord’s Supper.”¹¹⁴ Every other gift or benefit proceeds from this, as Luther makes it clear in his small catechism. He begins by noting that in the Lord’s Supper one confronts the Christ for “it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine.”¹¹⁵ In the celebration of the meal, Althaus notes, “is not that we lift ourselves up to

¹¹⁰ Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms*, 135.

¹¹¹ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 329.

¹¹²<http://religion.oxfordre.com.luthersem.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-375?rskey=oMqCWF&result=2> (accessed February 8, 2018).

¹¹³ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 3.

¹¹⁴ Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 235.

¹¹⁵ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 3.

Christ by our own thoughts but that Christ lowers himself to us.”¹¹⁶ In the meal Christ himself comes to us, and he is physically close to us just as he was close to Simeon and the Shepherds at Christ’s birth.¹¹⁷ Jensen argues that, it is only after the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper is named that other benefits like the forgiveness could be spelled out. When the main benefit of the presence of Christ in the sacrament is exchanged by the forgiveness of sins, the significant “treasure” of being unified to Christ is lost, mugging the sacrament of its energetic power.¹¹⁸ Being unified with Christ makes the forgiveness of sins possible and a reality in the Lord’s Supper. As observed by Hermann Sasse, “for Christ came from heaven, where He dwelled among sinless saints, in order that He might dwell on earth among sinners. If this is the meaning of His incarnation, it is also the meaning of the Real Presence of His body and blood in the sacrament.”¹¹⁹

The incarnational presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper also brings about happy exchange through which the forgiveness of sins is made possible.¹²⁰ As Luther rightly observed it is a transformative event. He believed that, “when we eat Christ’s flesh physically and spiritually, the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshly, sinful, mortal men makes spiritual, holy, living men. This we are already,

¹¹⁶ Althaus, *The Theology*, 393.

¹¹⁷ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 3.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁹ Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther’s Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 114.

¹²⁰ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 4.

though in a hidden manner in faith and hope, the fact is not yet manifest, but we shall experience on the last Day.”¹²¹ Barth captured Luther’s vivid explanation of this happy exchange using the following words:

“I . . . let him—Christ—eat what is evil in me”; at the same time, I let him “lap up” what I have “ladled out” for him with my destructiveness; “but from him I receive faith, joy, in chastity, etc., and live from it”; I gain confidence for my life and joy in shaping it spontaneously and freely. So now “I, in turn, let myself be eaten and drunk” by my fellow Christians, as in the reign of Christ each stands at the disposal of the other with everything she or he has.¹²²

In describing this happy exchange Barth also stated that, “food ‘enters into’ the people who receive it, so that the eater and the eaten can—unlike things that are nailed or cemented together—no longer be separated: ‘thus in the sacrament we too become united with Christ, and are made one body with all the saints’; he cares for us and acts on our behalf, ‘as if he were what we are.’”¹²³ To this regard Luther maintained that,

in the Lord’s Supper, the bread and wine—composed of many kernels and yet “one cake, one bread, one body, one drink”—points to the unity, love and communion (*communio*) of the church as members of Christ’s body. In this communion with Christ, Christians exchange sin for his righteousness and are united together in the forgiveness of sin even as they bear each other’s burden.¹²⁴

In this happy exchange Christ takes what is ours and what he has becomes ours. Through this union, our sins raid him, while his righteousness defends us. For this communion makes all things common to all.¹²⁵ Likewise, through this same union, we are

¹²¹ LW 37:101.

¹²² Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 245.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹²⁴ Wengert, *Dictionary of Luther*, 435.

¹²⁵ LW 35:59.

to be transformed and to make the infirmities of our neighbors our own, we are to assume for ourselves their “form and their necessities,” and every good that is within our power we are to make theirs.¹²⁶ By doing so every good thing we receive from God will be for the common good of all.

Lange noted that, the sacraments, particularly the Lord’s Supper, make us conscious of the others in need. They point us to others who by their appearance in our midst, in some way points out the letdown of our often inward-looking and “hermetically sealed rituals.” The Lord’s Supper makes us not merely to be aware but accountable for the roar of the other. “It is the voice of a dead but yet living body, calling out: do this in remembrance of me. A dead voice calls in reiteration, as resurrected voice—a voice over which we have no control, a language we cannot possess or capture but that always awakens us and displaces us.”¹²⁷ We serve God through the neighbor. This is evident in Christ’s words cited by Luther,

Nevertheless, God says: “I do not choose to come to you in My majesty and in the company of angels but in the guise of a poor beggar asking for bread.” You may ask: “How do you know this?” Christ replies: “I have revealed to you in My Word what form I assume and to whom you should give. You do not ascend into heaven, where I am seated at the right hand of My heavenly Father, to give Me something; no, I come down to you in humility. I place flesh and blood before your door with the plea: Give Me a drink! Instead, you want to erect a convent of Me (Matt. 25:40).¹²⁸

In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, we are confronted with an utterance, a hidden voice that does not place us in the safety of our contexts but intrudes “as cry, as call, as

¹²⁶ LW 35:58.

¹²⁷ Lange, *Trauma Recalled*, 124.

¹²⁸ LW 22:520.

addition.” The cross returns and thrusts the participant out the door to be faced by the body in the world, to locate Christ broken body in the world, in the yell of the neighbor.¹²⁹ As support and love are given to us, we must in turn give support and love to Christ in his destitute ones. We must feel all the anguish and disgrace done to Christ in his sacred word, all the unfair suffering of the innocent, all depression of the Christendom, with which the world is universally filled to brimming. We must pray, work, and fight and render a genuine empathy.¹³⁰

The second benefit of the Lord’s Supper “is forgiveness of sin . . . life and salvation.”¹³¹ This is the heart of the gospel. As Luther asserted, “the gospel is nothing but a proclamation of God’s grace and the forgiveness of all sins, granted us through the suffering of Christ.”¹³² He believed that, though, “forgiveness of sins is not more than two words, yet the entire realm of Christ is based on them.”¹³³ No wonder Luther claims, “that we go to sacrament because there we receive a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins. Why? Because the words are there, and they impart it to us!”¹³⁴ Through the power of Christ’s word, body and blood are the treasure in which and through which we obtain the forgiveness of sins.¹³⁵ For Luther, though the

¹²⁹ Lange, *Trauma Recalled*, 124.

¹³⁰ LW 35:54.

¹³¹ *The Book of Concord*, 362.

¹³² LW 35:106.

¹³³ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 4.

¹³⁴ *The Book of Concord*, 469.

¹³⁵ Althaus, *The Theology*, 401.

forgiveness of sins was won by Christ on the cross, he has not allocated it on the cross. He has not won it in the sacrament. There he has allocated it through the word as in the gospel, “where it is preached.”¹³⁶ The forgiveness of sins therefore is proclaimed and realized in the Lord’s Supper.

Though the forgiveness of sins brings life and salvation, but it also overpowers the evil triad of sin, death, and the devil. Through our communion with Christ Barth notes, “He (Christ), with all saints, by his love takes upon himself our form, fights with us against sin, death, and the devil.”¹³⁷ Luther believed that, “the Supper provided the believer ‘food for the soul’ to be used against sin, death, and all evils as a daily living out of one’s baptism.”¹³⁸ For Luther, The Lord’s Supper comforts and fortifies the new creature. In the first place we are born again through baptism. But the human flesh in us have not lost their old skin. There are many obstruction and attacks of the devil that we sometimes become tired or even fall. Hence, the Lord’s Supper that we are served everyday keeps us in order that our faith might be revitalized and armored in such a way that it will not yield in the battle but grow stronger. The new life we have should be one that continually grows. But the devil is a rigorous rival, once he realizes that we withstand him, and when he cannot force us back, he sneaks and creeps about at each spin, trying all he could to have us to himself, and does not rest until he has finally damaged and rendered us useless in such a way that we either relinquish our faith or become despair or intolerant. It is in moments like these, when our heart becomes too

¹³⁶ LW 40:213.

¹³⁷ Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 244.

¹³⁸ Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms*, 135.

exclusively depressed that this ease of the Lord's Supper is given to bring novel potency and renewal in our lives.¹³⁹

According to Luther, in the sacrament, the partaker obtains the inestimable mercy and grace of God. This gift is not to be seized but occasions a disrobing, a discarding of wretchedness and suffering. Tribulations and misery, are rested upon Christ and the community of saints.¹⁴⁰ To this regard Luther asserted that,

So it is clear from all this that this sacrament is nothing else than a divine sign, in which are pledged, granted, and imparted Christ and all the saints together with all their works, sufferings, merits, mercies, and possessions, for the comfort and strengthening of all who are in anxiety and sorrow, persecuted by the devil, sins, the world, the flesh, and every evil. And to receive the sacrament is nothing else than to desire all this and firmly to believe it is done.¹⁴¹

Christ and all the saints are imparted together in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Lange argues that, Luther will nearly on no occasion make reference to Christ without adding "and all the saints." Community and incarnation cannot be separated. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the believer and the neighbor are all caught up in the continual distribution of God's gift. Through partaking in the Lord's Supper, we are united with Christ and all the saints in their suffering, works, and merit in such a way that, "Christ with all his saints, takes upon himself our form, fights with us against sin, death and all evil. This enkindles such love that take on his form, rely upon his righteousness, life and blessedness."¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Ibid., 136.

¹⁴⁰ Lange, *Trauma Recalled*, 173-174.

¹⁴¹ LW 35:60.

¹⁴² Lange, *Trauma Recalled*, 174.

After we are concurred to this “disseminated Christ,” we are concurred to the other, to the neighbor in misery and need. Yet again, through the love of Christ, we are to be transformed and to make the ailment of every other believer to be ours, we are to take their form and necessities upon ourselves. Through this love revealed on the cross that first took upon itself our need, we too are expected to take the suffering of others upon ourselves.¹⁴³

The third benefit of the Lord’s Supper as identified by Jensen is that it “creates a community of faith made possible because of the forgiveness of sins.”¹⁴⁴ Luther claimed that, “the significance of calling this sacrament communion is because when I receive the sacrament, community happens.”¹⁴⁵ For Luther, “the motif of community among communicants was of higher importance.”¹⁴⁶ Community is formed as a result of the communion one has with Christ through the Lord’s Supper. Barth notes that, “the Lord’s Supper reveals its therapeutic power by integrating the individual, with all his or her adversities and also all his or her gift, into the community of salvation, so that the individual on the one hand receives relief and on the other hand finds a field of affirmation into which one can bring oneself, both as sufferer and as active.”¹⁴⁷ In this community, shaped by the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, one experiences the

¹⁴³ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴⁴ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 6.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁶ Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 244.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 244.

fullness of God's grace declared through the gospel, and the joint discussion and solace of other believers. In this community God meets with people in need of his grace.¹⁴⁸

In this chapter I have discussed Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper. Luther understood the Lord's Supper as a testament, the promise which is given to us as a gift by Christ the testator. The promise is the forgiveness of sins promised to us by God in the Lord's Supper which we receive by faith. The Lord's Supper as a means of grace through which we encounter Jesus Christ is a free gift from God which should not be likened to sacrifice. In the Lord's Supper we give nothing to God but rather receive from him the gift of the promise. Through faith in the promise declared in the Lord's Supper we are transformed which pushes us to act in love towards the neighbor. The promise always points us to God's free gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. If the Lord's Supper is considered as a sacrifice offered to God by a believer or if we confront the Lord's table with any "self-righteousness," it shifts away the focus of the Lord's Supper from God's action to human work.

¹⁴⁸ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 6.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to describe Luther's understanding of grace and its centrality for the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper. How Luther's theology of grace relates to his understanding of the Lord's Supper and how that provides justification for open communion. My aim is to use Luther's view of grace in relation to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to argue for open communion in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN). The study discovered how we are justified freely by God through faith in Jesus Christ. Grace or favor is that Christ has taken our sin, pain, and death, and has given us his life which we receive by faith. When we believe in the promise, we receive Christ's life and his righteousness. Luther believed that our justification is forensic, we are imputed with the righteousness of Christ, and are forgiven for Christ's sake not because of any work or merit on our part but by God's grace. We are made righteous through Christ's alien righteousness and this righteousness becomes ours by faith.

On the other hand, the Lord's Supper which is a means of grace is also rooted in the promise. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a gift from God, a testament given by Christ to his followers. This testament promises forgiveness of sins which we receive by faith. The Lord's Supper is the gift of the promise given by Christ to us and should not be equated with sacrifice offered to God. In the Lord's Supper we give nothing to God but instead God comes to us giving himself freely. Christ is present in the bread and wine

through the word; hence, in communion one encounters Christ who gives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Since the Lord's Supper is a means of grace through which we encounter Jesus Christ, it is my contention that the Lord's Supper be free, open, and unconditional to everyone just as the promise which is the gift of grace is free and unconditional for everyone.

The Implications of Luther's Understanding of Grace in Relation to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the Practice of Close Communion in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

Having discussed Luther's view on grace and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, I will now reflect on the implications of the findings to the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN). What challenge does Luther's understanding of grace in relation to the Lord's Supper pose to the administration or practice of closed communion in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria? The issue of worthy participation in communion is very crucial in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria as the church administers the Lord's Supper only to "deserving members" that is those who are believed to be in right relationship with God and are of good standing in the church. The standards set by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, such as one must be baptized, have his or her membership card renewed annually, and being in a monogamous relationship, makes members to flee away from communion as they are not sure if they are pure enough to receive the Lord's Supper, just as the case in the Medieval Church.

To begin with, Luther regarded the Lord's Supper as a testament in which God vows to give us his mercy and grace. The testament is an inheritance that has been promised to us. As Luther argued, "for a testament is not *beneficium acceptum, sed*

datum, it does not take benefit from us, but brings benefit to us.”¹ In the Lord’s Supper we experience the grace of God that is the forgiveness of our sins. In the Lord’s Supper we give nothing to God but instead receive grace from him. It is in the Lord’s Supper that the testament and the promise of God’s forgiveness has been sealed by the death of Jesus Christ our savior who took upon himself our sin, pain, and death and has given us his righteousness. As Luther noted, “If the mass is a promise as has been said, then access to it is to be gained, not with any works, or powers, or merits of one’s own, but by faith alone,”² even this faith is a gift from God that the Holy Spirit creates through listening to the gospel message. Given this fact, the church should not place too much emphasis on the worthiness of the recipient of the Lord’s Supper. Of course, it is good for the church to ensure that people partake in the Lord’s Supper worthily so that they don’t bring upon themselves judgement but if too much emphasis is laid on worthiness, as if it is something that we can do on our own, it shifts the focus of the Lord’s Supper from being God’s gift into a human activity. As a result, those who partake in the Lord’s Supper will brag of their righteousness instead of depending on God’s mercy.

The gift of the promise in the Lord’s Supper is open to all for whom Christ has died and no one who desires it should be denied access to it. I want to argue that the gift of the promise in the Lord’s Supper is actually for the sinners because the promise is the promise of the forgiveness of sins. If there is no sin then there is no need for forgiveness. Hence the worthy candidates for the Lord’s Supper are the sinners who come in faith

¹ LW 35:93.

² LW 36:38-39.

seeking for God's favor in their lives. Lange noted that, the Lord's Supper points us to our vulnerability, our inability to make ourselves holy. Those who participate in the Lord's Supper are passive beneficiaries, receiving Christ and all the communion of saints which brings about faith in the life of the participant.³ Thus, considering the mass as a sacrifice we give to God or focusing on the piety of the person partaking in the Lord's Supper shifts away what God declares and does in the Lord's Supper to mere human activity. We come to the Lord's Supper not because we are righteous but because we are unable to save ourselves. For Luther, we are justified through the encounter with the resurrected Christ in the Lord's Supper, who declares us righteous as we stand before God.⁴ In the Lord's Supper we encounter God's grace, through that encounter, faith is created and life is transformed or re-oriented.

The Lord's Supper is a gift from God, he is the one who instituted it and has given it to us freely. Luther understands the Lord's Supper as an action of God, Christ says that he is truly present in the bread and wine at the table, irrespective of the receiver's faith. Luther insisted on the reliability of the word of God so as to strengthen us and to eliminate any effort to turn the unconditional promise in the Lord's Supper into something that rest on the beneficiary. To this regard Luther wrote in his large catechism,

For the Word by which it was constituted a sacrament is not rendered false because of an individual's unworthiness or unbelief. Christ does not say, "If you believe or if you are worthy, you have my body and blood," but rather, "Take, eat and drink, this is my body and blood." Likewise, when he says, "Do this" . . . this

³ <http://religion.oxfordre.com.luthersem.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-357?rskey=aQbXb2&result=1> (accessed April 14, 2018).

⁴ <http://religion.oxfordre.com.luthersem.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-359?rskey=ML15Q9&result=1> (accessed April 11, 2018).

is as much as to say, “No matter whether you are worthy or unworthy, you have here his body and blood by the power of these words that are connected to the bread and wine.”⁵

The Lord’s Supper is founded on God’s word not on human holiness or piety. It is a gift from God, founded on God’s word of promise, coming from outside of us (*extra nos*), and not based on the recipient’s faith. In this action God justifies the sinner. For Luther therefore, the Lord’s Supper “is nothing less than the life changing presence and action of God’s grace and creating Word for a troubled people.”⁶ In the Lord’s Supper God acts in order to bring life out of nothing, therefore, it must not be seen as a way or means by which people will show their worthiness. The Lord’s Supper is effective because of God’s action not because of the piety of the beneficiary. According to Althaus “the sacrament (Lord’s Supper) is really to be understood as God’s gift. As a gift it is indeed present for faith, but it also exists independently of and prior to faith. Human activity adds nothing to it.”⁷ The action and attitude of the individual communicants in no way nullifies the sacrament. It remains the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The Lord’s Supper in the first place was not instituted because of our worthiness but on God’s word that is the promise. We go to the Lord’s Supper not because we are worthy but in order to seek God’s favor or grace that is the forgiveness of our sins. As Luther asserted, “we go to the sacrament because there we receive a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins. . . . the Supper provided the believer ‘food for the soul’ to be used

⁵ *The Book of Concord*, 468.

⁶ Kolb, *The Oxford Handbook*, 330.

⁷ Althaus, *The Theology*, 392.

against sin, death, and all evils as a daily living out of one's baptism."⁸ The promise is there for us to cling to in our daily dying and rising in Christ. The Lord's Supper is an experience of returning again and again to receive the promise which nourishes and creates faith in us. This faith is then lived out through our service to the neighbor.

Though the church bans the polygamists, co-wives, and the erring from partaking in the Lord's Supper in order to maintain orderliness and to drive them into right relationship with Christ, the civic or institutional use of the law in this case comes into play and often takes the last word. When this happens as Jensen rightly stated, excommunication or closed communion moves away the focus of the Lord's Supper from the action of God to human "criteria defining faith," hence turning the Lord's Supper into human work or a denominational supper. In an effort of shielding the Lord's Supper from being abused, it is ransacked of its transmutative power for everyone who need to be "new creations in Christ."⁹

Apart from the polygamists, co-wives, and the erring who are banned from participating in the Lord's Supper in the LCCN, the unbaptized are also not welcomed at the Lord's Table because they are considered not eligible for the Lord's Supper. The question of whether the unbaptized should be welcome to the Lord's Supper is not peculiar to LCCN as many churches are struggling with the same issue. The church needs to seriously work on this in a cautious pastoral and theological manner in order to come

⁸ Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms*, 135.

⁹ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 13.

up with a lasting solution to the problem. David P. Scaer spoke the minds of many when he argued that,

In baptism, the believer is incorporated into the body of Christ; in the Lord's Supper, one receives that body. Baptism is the presupposition for the Lord's Supper, which in turn is the fulfilment of the baptism—but both offered forgiveness (of sins). One cannot be substituted for the other; nor can the order be reversed. Even the most sincere unbaptized believers dare not be admitted to the Lord's Supper.¹⁰

It is true that people are brought into Christ's body through baptism, and it is only after they have been brought into this body that they can share of the body and blood of Christ in the meal. This assumes a line of evolution, from baptism as birth into the family of Christ, to accurate teaching, and finally to the Lord's Supper. That notwithstanding, even in the gospels, a tidy or neat line of evolution, from remorse to absolution does not always exist. For instance, Zacchaeus welcomed Christ into his house before he repented (Luke 19:1-10). The insistence by the church that baptism along with thorough teaching and confirmation is a precondition for partaking in the Lord's Supper sees being unified into the community of believers the principal significance or benefit of the Lord's Supper. Luther's declaration that the principal benefit of the Lord's Supper is union with Christ is good news to all who are seeking forgiveness, life, and salvation, not only for the baptized. If the Lord's Supper offers forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation as it is proclaimed, then those who need it the most are the unbaptized and the unworthy so that they can be brought into the body of Christ. It is possible that through participation in the Lord's Supper one's life can be changed and then become baptized. On the contrary,

¹⁰ Russell D. Moore, I. John Hesselink, David P. Scaer and Thomas A. Baima, *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*, edited by Paul E. Engle and John H. Armstrong (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 90.

churches may be failing in their responsibility towards the neighbor if they do not warn people that without faith, a gift obtained in baptism, they may be eating poison instead of the gift of life and salvation in the Lord's Supper.¹¹

It is my contention that the Lord's Supper being a means of grace through which we encounter with Christ be free and open to everyone in the body of Christ just as the promise which is the gift of grace is free and unconditional to all. We are imperfect and depend on God's forgiving grace to make us holy and righteous. The church should not deny Holy Communion to others in the body of Christ considering them as unworthy of partaking in the Lord's Supper. Instead the church should allow them to be guided by their own conscience and faith about whether or not to partake in Holy Communion. God accepts us through his grace on account of faith in Jesus Christ not because of any merit on our own part. Our righteousness comes by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. The way the church (LCCN) restricts Holy Communion judging others in the body of Christ as unworthy of partaking in the Lord's Supper until they show a remorse or prove themselves holy and really prepared, has turned the Lord's Supper to something we merit by our righteousness instead of a free gift from God. As Luther rightly stated, "when we ought to be grateful for benefits received, we come arrogantly to give that which we ought to take. With unheard-of perversity we mock the mercy of the giver by giving as a work the thing we receive as a gift, so that the testator, instead of being a dispenser of his own goods, becomes the recipient of ours."¹² As heirs of the testament or the promise we

¹¹ Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 14.

¹² LW 36:48.

do not need any self-righteousness or good work to have access to what has already been promised to us by Christ our testator. The testament is the promise and it exist regardless of the unworthiness of the recipient.

Moreover, restricting the Lord's Supper to those considered worthy has led many to see the Lord's table as a judgement table where God is seated waiting to judge sinners. As a result, many do not partake in communion because they are not sure if their sins are forgiven or if God will accept them. As Luther rightly pointed out they wonder, "have I done enough? Am I worthy? And those who did come forward were often thought to be 'uppity,' spiritually proud of their worthiness."¹³ By so doing the Lord's Supper is turned to a human work instead of a free gift from God. Restricting the Lord's Supper by the church also makes one wonder if the promise of the forgiveness of sins declared during communion is free and unconditional for everyone. The fact that the Lord's Supper embodies God's promise makes it open, free, and unconditional for everyone. Denying the Lord's supper to others in the body of Christ is removing them from the gospel which has power to transform lives. Instead of restricting the Lord's Supper, the concern of the church should be on how to encourage people to receive the gift of God offered to us freely.

As stated earlier on, this thesis is not anti-church discipline. It is good that the church maintain orderliness amongst its members and to ensure that they partake in the Lord's Supper worthily. But instead of establishing laws that will prevent people from communion the church should dedicate itself to preaching the gospel in such a way that

¹³ Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms*, 138.

people will come yearning for the Lord's Supper. The gospel has power to change lives and also gives hope and creates faith in the hearts of people while the law condemns. By preaching the gospel the church will be able to restore the polygamists, co-wives, and the erring back to good standing with the church and right relationship with God through love rather than by shunning them. When the church tries to reprove the polygamists, co-wives, and the erring through love the more they will appreciate God's love and favor in their lives knowing that the church is making effort in winning them back to the fellowship of believers.

Moreover, if we are saved freely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the church should not place too much emphasis on works and thereby relegating Christ's saving work to the background. We cannot obtain the forgiveness of sins and become righteous before God by our own effort or deeds. This happens by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins and has given us life everlasting. If the church proclaims God's promise, which is the forgiveness of sins, while on the other hand judging others in the body of Christ as unfit of partaking in the Lord's Supper, it shows itself treacherous to God's promise and in opposition to God's free forgiveness of sins. The church should learn from our Lord Jesus Christ whose life was characterized by unconditional grace, kindness and welcomed everyone to the table even when he was faced with opposition from the Pharisees as the case in Mark 2:13-17.

Instead of the church to withhold the Lord's Supper from the polygamists, co-wives, and the erring as a way of maintaining its integrity and moral standard amongst its members, I argue that the polygamists, co-wives, and the erring should instead not be given any leadership position in the church but be allowed to partake in the Lord's

Supper. Being a leader in the church is prestigious and something that people aspire to become during their lifetime. If the church would prevent the polygamists, co-wives, and the erring from being elected to any leadership position in the church, that will be a warning to those who might want to engage in such act in the future. By so doing, the church will be able to maintain its integrity and moral standard amongst its members without necessarily withholding the Lord's Supper from them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Lord's Supper is a gift from God founded by his word. In the Lord's Supper we give nothing to Christ but instead receive the gift of the promise from him. Since the Lord's Supper is a gift from God rooted in his words, the worthy participation in the Lord's Supper is faith in the word of the promise which accompanies the bread and wine, not our righteousness. When we lose this focus, we turn it upon ourselves to what we can offer instead of a free gift we receive from God. As a result, we rob the Lord's Supper of its benefits and the comfort it brings to our lives. The Lord's Supper as a means of grace through which God encounter with us giving us life and salvation should be free and unconditional to everyone in the body of Christ, just as the promise which is the gift of grace is free and unconditional for everyone in the body of Christ.

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