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Reaction to paper: "For the Forgiveness of Sins: A Lutheran Response to the Evangelical View of the Sacraments."

"The sacrament is the Gospel." This is Hermann Sasse's thesis to explain Luther's forceful defense of the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper against any and all attacks against it from the Reformed side. I heartily commend Pastor Kassulke for reinforcing that same truth again in his paper. He has shown us that the disagreement over the sacrament is not a foolish quibbling over word and traditions. The sacraments are not mere ordinances which teach about the Gospel. They are the Gospel. Indeed, Luther's very questions, "How can water do such things?" and "How can bread and wine do such things?" not only anticipate the objection of the sacramentarian, but point them to the answer: the Word of God. Baptism, as well as the Lord's Supper can offer and give such great blessings because Jesus says that they do, and confirms it by attaching his promise of forgiveness to them.

The second point in this paper that I commend Pastor Kassulke for making is the sound hermeneutical basis for the Lutheran position: Scripture is its own interpreter. When one studies the Marburg Colloquy, it is clear that the difference between Luther and Zwingli, Bucer, Oecolompadius (and later Calvin and sadly his own Lieutenant, Melancthon) is really not the Lord's Supper. That was just a symptom of the underlying problem. The real underlying problem is the hermeneutical approach to Scripture. The Formula of Concord emphasizes this in article VIII, when it quotes Luther from his *Large Confession concerning the Lord's Supper*, "Beware, beware, I say of this Alleosis¹, for it is the devil's mask, since it finally constructs a kind of Christ after whom I would not want to be a Christian, that is, a Christ who is and does no more in his passion and life than an ordinary saint....In short, it is indescribable what the devil attempts with this alleosis."²

I was pleased to see Pastor Kassulke underscore that no matter what the interpretations of baptism or the Lord's Supper that one finds in Evangelicalism, one always finds a common resistance to the clear teaching of Scripture. I underlined and circled this particular passage on page 18, "...Mark how false teachers must essentially change the wording of Scripture in order to arrive at their conclusions." Alleosis did not die with Zwingli at the Battle of Kappel. It has remained the tool, both crudely and subtly, to deny what the Scriptures clearly proclaim. How different is this from the Lutheran position, which is nothing more than the Scriptural position, which adopts the attitude of Samuel, "Speak, O Lord, for your servant is listening." I have appreciated the story of Francis Pieper giving an evangelical warning to his dogmatics class about the words "my" and "interpretation,"

Doctor, will you kindly give us your interpretation of that verse again?" [asked a student.] Dr. Pieper looked disturbed, slightly bewildered, then, peering sympathetically and intently into the eyes of the questioner, slowly and emphatically said: "My interpretation? Never! We do not

¹ Alleosis is a metaphorical device used by Zwingli to deny the communications of attributes. It allowed Zwingli to ignore the simple sense of "This is my Body" in the discussion of the Lord's Supper.

² *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert
Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000. 623.

interpret Scripture. Just listen to that passage again.” The doctor then read slowly (sounded like an angel) and with great emphasis the passage in question and added: “That is what God says... It needs no interpretation. Believe it!”³

This sound hermeneutical approach, is expounded upon so clearly in pages 18-19, reminds us of the vital importance of taking Jesus at his Word. Who are we to correct our Prophet, Priest, and King or counsel him in his grace or his judgments? Scripture speaks, we listen, we obey, always mindful of keeping reason in its proper place. As S.C Ylvisaker puts it, “Reason is not there to make Scripture clear, as if it were unclear. Reason is not there to play master, as if the Word of God can be made a servant to the whims and fancies of reasons. Reason is not there to test Scripture in order to determine whether it speaks logically and reasonably or not; or to strain the words of Scripture as a prospector strains gold bearing sand in order to discover what nugget of truth may be there. It is not there to make Scripture say what it does not say, or to make it deny what it does say. It is not there to grasp what the Scriptures say, as if Scripture is a thing which must speak only that which may be fathomed by the mind of man and cannot go beyond the limits of that mind...Reason has its place, but it is a very limited place after all. It is there to serve as the eye to read the words, thus: “In due time Christ died for the ungodly”... It is there to serve as the ear to hear, thus: “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”...It is there as the memory to call to mind and remind, as in the case of the prodigal son...It is there to study the laws of language, so that we may clearly distinguish between expressions...or to study the laws of other languages, so that we may translate from one language correctly into another.”⁴

In closing, I would encourage only one addition to this paper. While Pastor Kassulke touched on the dangers of the “professional” use of the Word of God, I would encourage us all to examine how we have applied the Scriptural teaching about sacraments. Are we Lutherans in theory but Catholics in practice? Do we connect our daily repentance and confession with baptism? To we return to the font each day for the relief that all my sins were forgiven and I was united with Christ? If we don’t do this for ourselves, should we be surprised that the camel’s nose of Roman or Reformed belief is intruding at the base of our tent? It seems to me that if Lutherans really want to have an impact in our church and community we should be, well, Lutheran - not only in doctrine, but also in practice. This was an excellent paper and I heartily thank Pastor Kassulke for his hard work and the edification I received through it.

Question: (pg 19) Luther, in the Smalcald Articles, states that no interpretation that violates the chief article of faith is a proper interpretation. Can you please clarify the relationship between that principle and your warning, “Employing, for example, an argument from Christology in order to determine an understanding of the Lord’s Supper is out of place.”

³ Benedict Schwartz, “The Many-Sided Dr. Pieper, I: We Do Not Interpret,” Lutheran Witness, September 29, 1931, 326. Quoted by Professor Lawrence Rast in his Bethany Reformation Lecture, “Franz August Otto Pieper (1852-1931): “A Connecting Link between the Present Age and that of the Fathers and Founders of Lutheranism”, October 2004.

⁴ S. C. Ylvisaker, “The Clearness of the Scriptures” (Paper presented to the 21st regular convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mankato, MN, June 10-15, 1938. 21). Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker was a pastor and professor in the Norwegian Synod, but left after the merger in 1917. He taught at Concordia St. Paul and later served as the president of Bethany Lutheran College from 1930-1950.