

Sacramental Evangelism In a Postmodern World

Wade R. Johnston
Evangelism
President Valleskey
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Getting Started

“Because in Hollywood, these people are more concerned with appearing to do the right thing than they are with attaining actual results. They’re more concerned with saying the right things than with doing them. That’s the essence of symbolism over substance. And that’s why I will continue to remind liberals that **words mean things.**”¹ This is how Rush Limbaugh ends a chapter entitled “Words Mean Things” in his 1993 best-selling book, *See, I Told You So*. While one could easily dispute that so-called liberals are the only ones prone to the shortcomings El Rushbo has listed, one must to some extent grant that these shortcomings are rampant and becoming ever more so in our day and age. These things are symptoms of what many scholars have termed postmodernism. Gene Veith, in his book, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, describes modernism, the precursor of postmodernism as the name implies, as the Tower of Babel age (20-21). The modern, western man was convinced there was nothing he could not do. The architecture, art, literature, hermeneutics, etc. of the age testify to that. Everything was subjected to the mind and will of the modern man. Thousands of skyscrapers, innumerable works of art seeking the “pure form,” libraries of detailed historical and psychological novels, landfills of irreverent higher critical commentaries later, postmodernism has ushered in the age of disillusionment. Modernism failed, and now new buildings don vestiges of unconnected time periods, art has become commercial and mass-marketed, novels are incongruous and mix the real and imagined without distinction between the two, and higher-criticism has given way to a subjective and uncritical acceptance of whatever seems spiritually relevant to the individual. The tower has fallen and the postmodern man revels in the pieces, making no attempt to reassemble them. Titles, classifications, symbols, and subcultures abound and, in the process, words often fail to mean things anymore.

¹ *See, I Told You So* by Rush Limbaugh, page 252. Words are bolded by Limbaugh.

David Liefeld, in his recent *Logia* article entitled “Coming to Grips with ‘Civility’: A Strategy for the Postmodern Parish,” writes: “Postmodern does not mean nor does it imply, that we can stop being modern. It does mean that much of the early enthusiasm about being modern, which some historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries characterized as ‘modernism,’ has evaporated. ‘Postmodern’ refers to living in the aftermath of the rise and fall of modernism” (17). Aftermaths are never unified, easily identifiable, congruent, absolute things, and neither is postmodernism. Rather, the postmodern revels in a lack of unity, an abundance of identities (read: diversity), a lack of congruity (go to the art museum recently?), and relativism.² Let our prayer be that the vacuum postmodernism is sure to create, and is really already creating, may be filled by Christ and not another.

What does this Mean?

What does this talk of postmodernism mean? Has the modern left us completely? Can we realistically operate based on admittedly generalized and imprecise stereotypes of the citizens of this age? These are some questions to answer before we can move on to the main point of this paper: that the sacraments can be a most useful tool in the evangelization of the postmodern man and woman.

Postmodernism is the reaction to modernism. Two world wars, various acts of genocide, decades of infanticide, new deadly and incurable diseases (AIDS, cancers, SARS, etc), the breakdown of the family unit, a spiritual vacuum left after modernism’s all out assault on the Scriptures and institutionalized/organized religion of any sort, etc., led to widespread disillusionment, apathy, spiritual hunger, and subjectivism. Scientific theories, often taught and

² Wolfgang Kubik lists the following characteristics of young postmoderns: syncretism, worldly (e.g. “what does this do for me?”), animistic, and they hunger for salvation. The sacraments offer visible Word (worldly elements), addressing that hunger with food for the soul and eternal cleansing. This is from *Confessio Augustana*, III, 2003. The article is entitled, “Herausforderung: die postsaekulare Sehnsucht: Christi Dienst an uns—Voraussetzung zum Dienst an anderen” (55).

regarded as hardened-fast laws, have been disproved and abandoned. Long established and revered institutions have crumbled. The Titanic sunk, famine only became more widespread, and even in America, the so-called war on poverty produced only greater disparity between rich and poor as generations of families have become wholly dependent on government handouts. Rather than reacting against these failed theories and attempts as such, postmodern man has rejected not only these, but the purportedly objective truth they claimed to represent. What matters is what is real to me now, not what society and history has held to be real. What I must do is what I want to do now, not what society, religion, or history has shown to be the right thing to do.

Has modernism disappeared? No. In no age of history has there been a universal acceptance of one trend of thought. Epicureans walked the same streets as Stoics, although one or the other had their own periods of a rather substantial dominance of popular thought. Veith points out, “Myth, classicism, and Christianity—these three different worldviews, in different configurations defined the Western world for centuries. Not everyone was a Christian in the premodern world. Biblical Christianity was always in tension with its culture. Mythology and humanistic rationalism continually tempted the church” (ibid. 29). And so it is today, as premodern, modern, and postmodern dance a dangerous waltz together both inside and outside of the church militant. Hence, in his book, *The Defense Never Rests: A Lawyer’s Quest for the Gospel*, Craig Parton has chapters both for the tough-minded (those more modern) and the tender-minded (our postmodern-leaning friends). Neither modernism nor postmodernism are more inclined to Christianity. Both are merely different expressions of the sinful nature and its powers of reason/emotion. Yes, postmodernism does open many of the doors modernism closed to evangelism, but it then proceeds to slam shut many more. It all comes back to the old question, “Who would you rather try to share the Gospel with, a licentious man or a Pharisee?” This

paper's answer is both, and the sacraments can be an enormous help in the process, relating to each person in a way relevant, appealing, and understandable to them.

The Lutheran pastor and parish will knock on the doors of those who answer, “Modern man has no use for God anymore and the Scriptures have been proven to have errors,” and those who say, “Its good that that is true for you, but that’s just not true for me.” One will claim an objective basis for rejection (the “factual” exposure of Scripture’s unreliability and the seemingly irrefutable progress of man on the basis of his understanding and application of natural law). The other’s reasons are subjective and existential (what is real is what is real for me—i.e. one cannot go to a hell one refuses to believe in, whether or not that hell really exists).

In recent leisure reading, limited though it is due to schoolwork, this seminarian has been reading Russian fiction. Dostoevsky (and to a lesser degree, Solzhenitsyn) make fascinating observations concerning the search for truth made by characters of various ideological persuasions. Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* in particular does an excellent job of presenting the views of a sensualist, a rationalist, a social liberal, a mystic, and a well-educated teacher of the faith. Part I, Book II is especially entertaining and telling in this regard. Not much has changed and we will still in our day find men and women of the same variety, each of which must be approached in a unique and appropriate way. All, however, can be approached with the sacraments, since they, in one way or another, strike to the heart of their thinking. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Alyosha, the mystic brother, responds to a statement from Ivan, the intellectual, during a conversation on the young in Russia and their quest for answers to the eternal questions, “That’s the way it should be—love should come before logic, just as you said. Only then will man be able to understand the meaning of life” (306). Alyosha’s remark sounds very postmodern. Ivan’s view, that logic should precede and hold sway over love (emotion), is very modern. The sacraments can address them both, providing Alyosha with the visible Word,

God's sacramental "I love you," and Ivan with the objective reality of the incarnation and forensic justification, the Logos who trumps all fallen human logic. Even more, the sacraments can serve to temper the leanings of each, keeping them from the extremes of both hyper-subjective enthusiasm and of emotionless, dead orthodoxy.

Can a parish carry out its ministry solely on the basis of such sweeping generalizations and such an admittedly cursory survey of them? No. But one can be better equipped to do ministry with them in mind. Thus, this student thinks the topic of this paper—the sacraments vital role in the evangelization of postmodernists—is extremely relevant and useful. What follows will serve to show why. We will discuss the following: why stress the sacraments with postmoderns and how to stress the sacraments to postmoderns.

Why Stress the Sacraments with Postmoderns

We will briefly examine three passages of Scripture (a by no means exhaustive study): Romans 6:1-14, 1 Corinthians 11:23-28, and 1 Corinthians 10:16. The first will show how baptism provides a subjective (real for the catechumen and possible recipient) means to the objective basis (Christ crucified and risen). It is a symbol *with* substance. The last two passages will do the same with Holy Communion. What the catechumen may one day receive upon his reception into the Lutheran Church will be subjectively real (taste, touch, smell, etc.—it is experiential), but is ultimately inseparable from and dependent upon the objective reality that makes it what it is: our Savior's life giving body and blood. It is a symbol *with* substance. These sacraments, these symbols with substance, preach every time they are witnessed, whether or not they are received. They form and strengthen community. They provide individual identity. They bring the spiritual to the physical. They wed the next life with the one we lead now.

Remember that the focus of this paper is not *administering* the sacraments as evangelism, that is, this student is not contending that we should commune non-members with hopes of

eventual conversion or that we baptize everyone who steps on our property willy-nilly. What this paper is contending is that we *use* and *tell* and *teach* the sacraments as part of an evangelism plan.

The early church lived in much more dangerous times than the current day American church does. For this reason, those early Christians had to conceal the sacraments for a time until they were sure the catechumen had honorable intentions—that he was not just gathering names to give to the government, in order to collect on the property of those he turned in. Hence, there was the liturgy of the catechumens and of the faithful. Even though the sacraments were concealed, however, they were teaching tools. Milton Rudnick writes in *Speaking the Gospel Through the Ages: A History of Evangelism*, “It is interesting and significant that evangelism in the early church developed in a manner which conformed to the Great Commission. It was, in fact, a discipling process emphasizing both baptism and teaching as the means to that end” (38). Baptism involved receiving the creed a few days/weeks/months previous and then giving it back [reciting it as one’s own confession] at baptism (Professor Tiefel, Christian Worship 3051, February 13, 2004). The Fathers consistently referred to their flock’s baptisms in sermons and epistles. Various ceremonies were involved in these baptisms, all with a significance, all teaching a different truth about what baptism was.³ The same is true of the Lord’s Supper. It was a teaching tool, an object lesson, a symbol rich in substance, as well as, and most importantly, an efficacious sacrament.

This appealed to a depraved Roman world, as postmodern as our own, which was for much of the early church’s lifetime steeped in subjectivity, materialism, and relativism, which was entertainment-driven (when Rome was conquered the people only cried out when their

³ For a more detailed account of these baptismal ceremonies, see *Christian Initiation*, by Geoffrey Wainwright, pages 20-23 or *For the Life of the World*, by Alexander Schmemmann, pages 76-77. Professor Cortright also presented a paper that gave an account of a baptism in the early church last year at the Seminary. Its title is “*Ego Te Baptizo: The Church’s Liturgy as Instrument of the Baptizing God*,” pages 1-3.

conquerors tried to deprive them of their precious circus), which was experiencing the rapid decline and crumbling of its once strong and innovative institutions (governmental, religious, and familial), so essential to a stable society. Rome, like modern day America, expected men of all faiths to be able to cooperate and interact without incident, even in the religious realm. The Roman was expected, not only to work and live with people of other religious views, but to pray and worship with them (especially where emperor worship—the state religion—was concerned). Michael Green, in *Evangelism in the Early Church*, details the distinctions made between *religio*, popular, pluralistic, state religion, and *superstitio*, a private belief. Christianity was unacceptable because it rejected the *religio* and stood firmly and unwaveringly to its *superstitio*, rejecting all other pagan creeds, customs, and rites (34-36).⁴ We see the same issues surfacing today, or maybe rather just coming to a head—America has always had a certain syncretistic disposition—as conservative Christians are chastised for refusing to participate in prayer services with heretics, sectarians, and pagans. As it did in the early church, so still today, baptism and holy communion can stand as a concrete declaration of one’s rejection of such pluralism and his adoption of, and by, the Absolute Truth (Way and Life). Green says of the first century:

I have indicated in *The Meaning of Salvation* the quest in both Jewish and pagan thought of the first century for ‘salvation’; men sought it either through knowledge (ranging from high philosophy to magic) or sacramentalism (including the mystery cults and the Jewish sacrificial system). Here [Christianity] was a religion that challenged both, and did so in response the personal self-giving and challenge of God become man (119-120).

Sound familiar? Does Christianity not still have the same appeal today? When we hold the sacraments out to the world and evangelize/catechize appropriately, as the sacraments by their very nature themselves demand we do, maybe still today the church will find herself a refuge to

⁴ Pelikan expresses a similar thought on page 24 of *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church*.

all those weary souls who have been crushed and drained by the man-made teachings and “sacraments” of this world, which are spreading as fast as sexually transmitted diseases.

When all the decay and destruction (moral and physical) mentioned above was running wild through the tottering Roman Empire, what received a predominant place in the Fathers’ writings and in the closest things to *Kirchenordnungen* we have from this time? The sacraments. When Constantine rose to power and a so-called Christian society (can there be such a thing?) arose, what was a major tool for catechizing the hordes of ambitious yuppies that flooded into the church (often for all the wrong reasons)? The sacramental liturgy. Does this mean we have to use the sacraments in this way? No, but it is this student’s prayer that it shows they can be used, even beneficially used.

As more and more Americans seek out “spirituality,” a connection with each other and the past, with tradition and ritual (all things many of our youth has been deprived of in recent decades), why should our Lord Jesus Christ not fill those yearnings with the sacraments he instituted in his grace and in his knowledge of the human heart? As droves turn East for ritual and transcendence, not to Jerusalem, but to Tibet and India, why not reach out with water and word, with bread/body and wine/blood? As our neighbors drown in immanence, with *this* available at a mouse click, a turn of the dial, a click of the remote, the dialing of a number, etc., why not provide the transcendent *THAT* we know they most desperately need? They have been bombarded with “buddy” gods. Why not show *the* God, transcendent and unknowable apart from his Word and the sacraments, but immanent and clearly recognizable through them? Professor Leyrer comments in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*:

Why does St. Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle get about a thousand young adults together for worship at the strange time of 9:30 P.M. on Sunday? Because they’ve got the best grunge band doing Christian contemporary or the best multimedia presentation? No, they have neither. But what they do have is a way of impressing God’s presence upon these young adults. They lower the lights, light the candles, burn the incense, and

have a men's choir chant the ancient Compline service from the Book of Common Prayer. Darkened sanctuaries and burning incense are not means of grace. But in this case they support the means of grace. They help to create a worship atmosphere of transcendence. They silently proclaim that worship is a time in the presence of God. Young adults want this. I'm convinced they want their worship time to be a *different* sensation from the sensations they have the rest of the week. Trying to recast our worship to be more like the pop culture twenty-somethings are trying to escape for a time is not, in my opinion, serving them well. Christians may respectfully disagree on what works best to express the transcendence of divine worship without offending the sensibilities or binding the consciences of the worshippers. But respecting and rejoicing in God's presence during worship is something that will resonate with every age group ("Reaching out to Twenty-Somethings," 52-52).

Why quote this article so extensively? Because the sacraments provide the transcendence Professor Leyrer asserts that twenty-somethings crave. The sacraments, by their very nature as grace-bearing symbols, adorn themselves with ceremonies and customs that also work a sense of transcendence in those who witness them—yet, in all this, God is nevertheless also strikingly intimately immanent, in the mouth, on the forehead, in the ears of his assembled guests. This transcendence will be unfamiliar to the postmodern unbeliever, and that is good. It will spawn questions, desires, and emotions. Some will reject all this as foolishness and antiquated superstition. Some will not. They will be moved. The Holy Spirit will be the Mover. How many will these be? God knows. Really, God knows, and we need not worry about it.

Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been

brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Notice the objective and subjective present in this passage. Notice the symbol rich in substance. Notice the sense of identity, of relationship, of community (we, we, we...). Notice the life-changing experience and its constant significance for ever-new life. Notice the death of disillusionment, apathy, confusion, and disorder. Notice the birth of purpose, meaning, understanding, and order. One does not have to be baptized to appreciate this. In fact, those who are awaiting baptism or first learning of it may be even more excited and appreciative. This meeting point of objective and subjective, of substance and symbol, is important because postmodernism rejects both of the former and is enamored with both of the latter.

Postmodernism, taken to its logical conclusions, is the Jerry Springer Show, with guests pleading cases based on emotion, relativism, audience participation (postmodernism loves mixing the audience with the show—think: reality shows), group mentalities, power struggles (when anarchy is the goal, as is the case with many postmodernists, at least as a logical consequence, a desperate grab for power results where ends justify means—think: support your candidate no matter what moral bankruptcy he shows so long as you maintain power), and shock value (in a reaction against conventions, shock becomes the highest art, constantly pushing the envelope of what is acceptable, oftentimes at the expense of our tax dollar). This student is sure that the guests on Jerry's show do not intend to be models of postmodernism, but the episodes he has seen seem to indicate they are just that. Against this subjectivism and relativism, this desire for a sense of belonging, etc., baptism brings an objective, absolute reality at the same time as it makes one a member of the most important group in the universe with the most powerful ruler: the family of God.

Frederic W. Baue writes, “True Christianity will oppose the subjectivism of lingering Romanticism with an emphasis on the tangible elements of faith such as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and forensic justification.”⁵ He also notes, “He [Jesus] is really and truly present in the sacraments of baptism and holy communion. It is these concrete realities which the church puts forward in a superspiritual time” (ibid, 14). Observe that in both these passages Baue stresses the objective nature of the sacraments, especially in their relationship over and against the subjectivity of our age. One can easily agree with this sentiment. One must not forget, however, the strong subjective, experiential appeal of baptism as well. Paul did not forget it. Our passage under consideration is replete with references to individual experience, status, and growth, all in connection with this sacrament.

The “we” in Romans 6 is significant. Paul is writing to Jew and Gentile, woman and man, slave and free. He is truly multicultural—a real Postmodern man. He is multicultural, however, because baptism is multicultural. As Paul writes in Ephesians, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (3-5). Veith writes, “The Church is in fact one of the world’s most ‘multicultural’ institutions, extending throughout time and throughout the world, both unified and diverse, ‘a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9)” (ibid. 156).

Baptism is also familial. Romans 6’s “we” expresses that to an extent, but Scripture expounds further on that thought elsewhere (Galatians 4:4-6, while not mentioning baptism directly, would certainly apply, as it is in baptism that God adopts us as his sons and daughters). The postmodern youth have a definite interest in family, many of them having been deprived of it

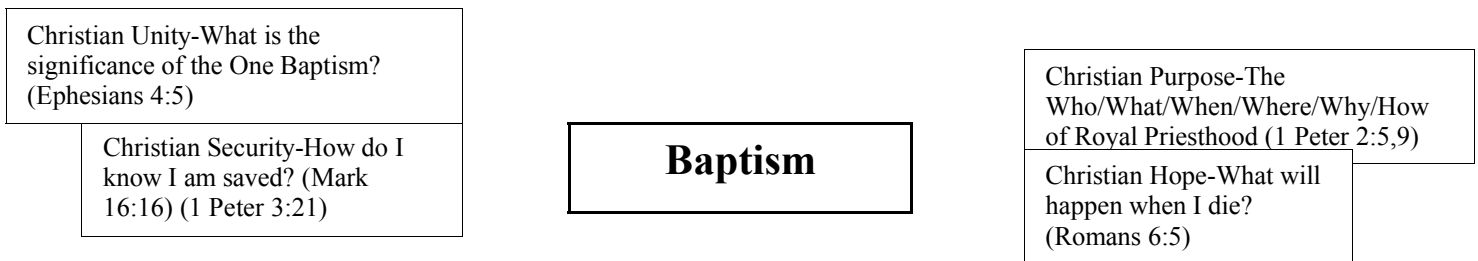
⁵ “What Comes After postmodernism,” page 13, from *Logia* 13.1.

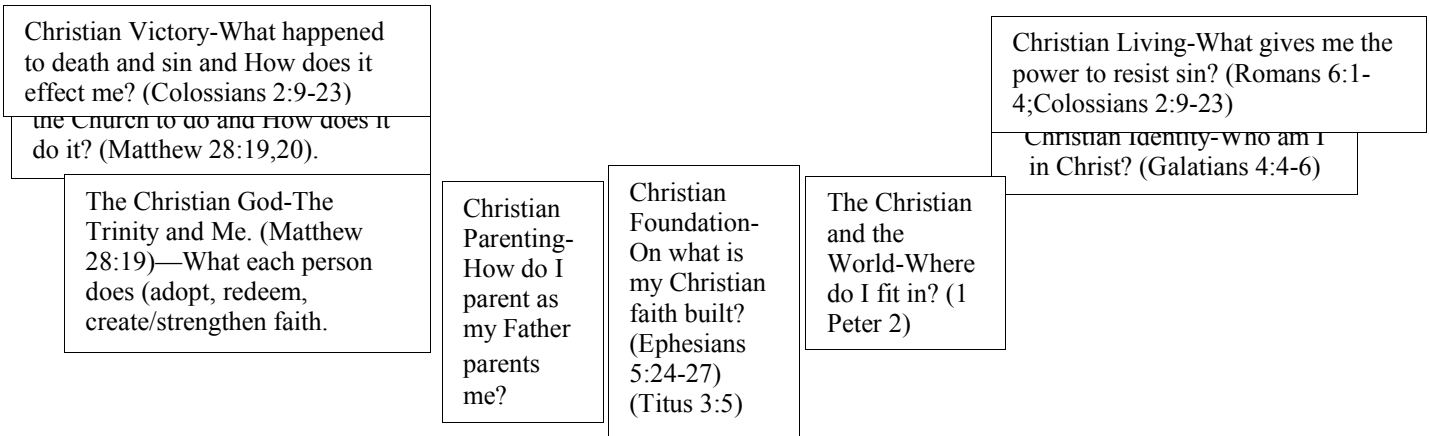
themselves. David Davenport writes, “Becoming even more specific, young people in the postmodern world are highly interested in family. Believing that their modern parents caused them great pain in fractured families, surveys indicate that being good parents and having strong families is a high priority among postmodern youth” (“Going Boldly with the Net,” in *One Incarnate Truth*, page 91). As we seek to welcome new families into *the family* of God, why shouldn’t we hold out our birthing center (font) and family table (altar) for them to see, both of which are so central to the Christian/Lutheran faith and hold prominent places in the architecture and life of the church (visible and invisible).

One last note before we move to the map. With the number of unchurched parents growing in the communities around us, infant baptism, too, can be a discussion for our members and their unbelieving friends. The birth of a child may well serve as an excellent opportunity to discuss the value of baptism and the responsibility of the parents to consider the spiritual welfare of their children. What is said about the baptism of the child also will obviously apply to the parent’s need for this sacrament, and the gospel as a whole. And, of course, as they discuss baptism, they cannot help but discuss what we are baptized into and who gives the benefits of baptism. As David Scaer notes, “Baptism is the perfect parallel to justification which is perfectly complete from the divine perspective but a constantly new reality in the Christian life” (CTQ, January, 1981, pg. 45).

Baptism Map

Here is a map of possible lessons/classes that could spring from baptism:





None of these lessons would center on baptism alone, but baptism could serve as a springboard, symbol, or reference point for all of them.

1 Corinthians 11:23-29 and 1 Corinthians 10:15,16

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Like holy baptism, this student holds that the holy supper of our Lord can likewise prove attractive to the postmodern mind. It, like baptism, has a subjective appeal that is nonetheless inseparable from its objective reality. The communicant tastes forgiveness, but only because Christ is there—Christ who lived, died, and rose, who did all this for that communicant with the very body and blood the communicant now receives. We can sin against Christ's body and blood in the Supper because his body and blood is there. We are participating in it. Here God is more

immanent than any god a postmodern man or woman could ever create on their own. He is a God who loves them. He is giving his body and blood after all. He is a God who accepts them, though only because they have been washed in baptism and won by the body and blood he now gives. However, he is also a God of absolute and irrefutable truth. Here modern and postmodern meet and dissolve before the face of the holy, merciful, just, and gracious Lord of all creation.

The Lord's Supper is multicultural (one loaf, one body), and has always been, even before postmodernism made multiculturalism cool. Sit and watch the communicants approach the altar some day. Old and young, healthy and sick, black, white, red, yellow, and green all approach the one true God together, kneel before him, and receive the same universal grace—it is for all people—and are reminded of the same solemn declaration of God, a declaration that knows no ethnocentricity or xenophobia: “not guilty.” That will preach to the postmodern seeker, who has been reared in multiculturalism but who also desperately wants to belong to a group—or subculture—with which he can identify. Here he finds both.

The Lord's Supper can be a springboard for the discussion of other doctrines. What expresses fellowship principles clearer than the Lord's Supper (notice Paul draws on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 as he deals with participation at pagan altars)? True, this sacrament cannot express these principles in a purely didactic way, in which every intricacy is explained, but it does proclaim them in a very clear and real way. It is a symbolic presentation of our unity, of our disunity, and of the divisive nature of truth.

Maybe the Lord's Supper being celebrated on the same day as we bring a visitor does not need to be a source of consternation, but rather can serve as a discussion starter. What kind of discussion? On the nature of truth, of sin, of real unity, of community, of fellowship, of real multiculturalism, of acceptance, of rejection, etc. These are critical discussion themes in our time. All these things are misunderstood, slighted, or rejected outright by many postmodern

Americans. And as educational experts keep reminding us, our prospects today learn visually and interactively. The sacraments, and especially the Lord's Supper in this case, provide such a visual illustration of Christian principles and thought and a springboard to interaction and discussion. Here Christian suffering and joy meet (we celebrate the Supper in remembrance of the crucified One whose resurrected body and blood we receive) and are proclaimed to all, both those who commune and those who only observe the feast (see Schmemmann in *For the Life of the World*, page 24, for a similar thought, although it is from an Eastern perspective).

Throughout the history of the church, almost every error has manifested itself in a significant and noticeable misunderstanding or misuse of our Lord's Supper. Conversely, it would seem that if the Lord's Supper can act as a vehicle for error, it could also serve as an instrument for catechizing and evangelizing with the truth.

Holy Communion as Teaching Tool and Springboard

Well, this paper has far exceeded the page limit by now and to anyone reading this, besides the one doing the writing, this student probably seems to be simply rambling and repeating himself. For this reason, we will not map the Lord's Supper as was done with baptism. It should be noted, however, that many of the same topics that were noted in that connection apply to Holy Communion as well. The interested reader can simply take a glance at the table of contents for Gaylin Schmeling's devotional work, *God's Gift to You: A Devotional Book on the Lord's Supper*, and see how many doctrines/topics/life issues/Bible stories he aptly ties to this Holy Supper. What the visitor sees on Communion Sundays can serve as a teaching tool, a springboard, to fuel conversations on the very essentials of the Christian faith (for instance, the incarnation and the salvific importance of the body and blood of Christ).

Depart in Peace

The aim of this paper has been more to demonstrate the utility of the sacraments for evangelism in the postmodern world than to provide a ready-made plan on how to do so.⁶ Let it be repeated again that this paper is not advocating a willy-nilly *administration* of the sacraments, a tossing of the pearls to pigs to “grow the church” (for instance, “You can commune if you promise to come back”). What this paper is saying is that we can use what the visitor *sees*, and not only what he *hears*, on Sunday to teach the faith, to share the Good News. Moreover, our people can testify to the significance of these events, that is, of their experiences in the sacraments, at work, in the narthex, or at the gym. Experience, symbolism, community— these things appeal to many a modern American, and the sacraments address these exact desires. Just as importantly, they do so without abandoning objective truth. Indeed, they are founded upon objective truth. Rather than hiding the font and altar from our visitors (banishing the Sacrament of the Altar from Friendship Sunday), maybe it can play a role in bringing our visitors back, giving them something to wonder about and maybe even desire. Maybe the sacraments can help make Friendship Sunday also Education Sunday. Would that be such a bad thing?⁷

Dr. Klaus Detlev Schulz writes in “Missionary Encounter with People of Other Faiths through the Sacraments of the Church,” “The Lutheran Church, which treasures the sacraments, would describe her mission as a *kerygmatic-sacramental act* in which administering baptism and holy communion hold pivotal roles in overcoming the missionary frontier of faith an unbelief. Lutheran missions consist of what makes Lutheranism unique from other Protestants and from

⁶ For a good resource on explaining the sacraments and liturgy to the seeker, read Harold Senkbeil’s book, *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*, especially Part II of that work, or, *The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals*, by Gene Edward Veith, Jr., pages 40-53.

⁷ It should be noted as well, that this student is not diminishing the role of the Word. The sacraments are the visible Word and water, bread, and wine is meaningless apart from that Word. “For without God’s Word the water is just plain water and not baptism. But with this Word it is baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit” (*Luther’s Small Catechism: A Contemporary Translation*, 14) What I am saying, however, is that these symbols (which convey what they signify) can open the door for the preached, taught, and read Word by sparking questions and serving as teaching tools.

Rome: Word and sacrament” (1). August Pieper explains in the article, “Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?”:

Afterwards, of course, after we have come to know the gospel in faith, preaching, baptism, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper become for us Christians not a duty—for a duty is a legal concept—but an inner compulsion...Also without the express commands of Christ, the church, the assembly of believers, would have preached, baptized, and administered the Sacrament after the Lord had ordained them as a means of grace. The preaching of the gospel, like prayer, is, because of the Christian’s very nature, the immediate, the most immediate and necessary outpouring of faith. It is so inevitable that the stones would cry out should we keep the gospel hidden. As Christians our heart would burst if we would not confess our own and the world’s Savior and praise his soul-saving grace. That is why we would not need the command to do so if we were wholly spiritually (*The Wauwatosa Theology*, volume II, 125).

In other words, it is the very nature of Christians to gather around and set forth for the world the means of grace. Let’s not be ashamed of who we are. Let’s do what’s in our nature, until it is in the visitors’ nature as well. As Professor Tiefel notes, “We show God what he is worth to us and praise him best when we put forth his means of grace” (*Christian Worship* 3051, February 23, 2004).

Veith writes about the peculiar situation the modern church finds itself in:

For Christianity to be a viable alternative to modernism (now discredited), postmodernism (a formalized anarchy under which few people can live for long), and, for that matter, Islamic fundamentalism, it must get its house in order. It cannot sell out to modernism, as in liberal theology, nor to postmodernism, as in megashift theology. Both liberalism and megashift evangelicalism surrender to the culture. Selling out to the dominant culture is, ironically, not a formula for success but for failure. The liberal churches tried to appeal to “modern man” by embracing modernism, but in doing so they made themselves irrelevant and doomed themselves when the intellectual climate changed. Evangelical churches that uncritically embrace postmodernism risk the same fate. In capitulating to the spirit of the age, both syncretic theologies refuse to minister to the general spiritual needs of the human beings lost in either the labyrinth of modernism, which denies them the supernatural, or postmodernism, which denies them the truth (*Postmodern Times*, 218).

Craig Parton observes in the January 2004 issue of *The Motley Magpie*:

When the good thinkers who are former evangelicals (Os Guinness, Robert Webber, Michael Horton, et al.) are *all* [italics Parton’s] writing about how to adorn the liturgy they have discovered with processional crosses, incense, chanting, liturgical art, better altar space, Latin, etc.—a Synod that is perhaps *in the best formal theological shape to*

lead the way [italics mine] is enamored with discussing “Blended Worship”? Talk about missing our liturgical moment... (11).

Whether or not one agrees with Parton’s preferences regarding worship patterns or with the general tone and content of this periodical, it is hard to deny, as he and Veith observe, that Lutheranism, and our synod in specific, finds itself in a unique situation at the current time. Why can’t we be the grad school of Christianity, the refuge of those fleeing the didactic world of Evangelicalism and the mystical uncertainty (and sacramental bondage) of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, those seeking a kerygmatic-sacramental foundation, the foundation we Lutherans often take for granted, the foundation of Word *and* Sacrament? Why can’t we hold out what we have “received from the Lord” to an unbelieving world decimated by modernism and drowning in postmodernism? Why not teach them how we are buried and raised with Christ? Why not let them know how we “taste and see that the Lord is good? Why not?

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