

Private Confession And Sacred Absolution

A Call for Pastoral Care in Ministry

By Mark F. Bartling

[September 16, 1997

Mississippi Valley Pastoral Conference]

Today, in pastoral ministry where is the emphasis being placed? What is being stressed in our pastoral ministry? Is the accent on Bible classes or is it on Baptism and the celebration of the Sacrament? Are we pastors or are we psychotherapists? In our congregations, do we have confessionals or counseling couches?

As pastors we are called to represent Christ. Jesus said, "as the Father sent me, so send I you," (St. John 20:21-23; 17:18.) The functions of the office of the pastor are sacramental. As Lutheran pastors we are to speak in sacramental terms and use a sacramental vocabulary.

The Lutheran Church has a liturgy, but may not be liturgical. It has sacraments, but may not be a sacramental church. To pass the test sacraments must inform not only our theology but our practice in a consistent and meaningful way. A sacramental church integrates them into every level of theology and does not confine them to one *locus*. In turn public practice and private piety express the confidence believers find in the sacraments. Church theology and the common practice inform and reflect each other. One can hardly claim to be sacramental in practice, if, although baptized as an infant, he later makes a decision for Christ or if he defends the real presence but does not receive the sacrament. ⁱ

However, sometimes we, Confessional Lutherans, are impressed and taken up with a few of the "mighty acts" that are seen today in the various religious movements on the horizon. We are struck by such things as Promise Keepers filling sport stadiums, the spectacular of TV Evangelism programs, the zeal of the charismatics, the excitement and enthusiasm in a contemporary worship service, the need for clinical counseling. The temptation is always there to try to imitate, -- to beg, borrow or steal a little. Take a successful method or program, even from a heretic movement, add a little Lutheran "salt;" and low and behold -- we too can be successful, exciting, and growing.

Now, not everything that comes out of some other publishing house is wrong. Some of these methods and programs of church growth, pastoral psychology, and TV Evangelism can be useful. It is like a bathroom in a house; it can be very useful on some occasions, but you shouldn't spend the whole day there.

However, as we view the "mighty acts" on the church scenes of today, let us continue to remind ourselves that we are a Sacramental Church. ⁱⁱ

God comes to us, and continues to deal with us, not in the spectacular and the sensational "theologies of glory," but in the simple humble things -- WATER, WINE, AND WORD.

But the water is the water of Baptism that saves us. The wine, with the bread, are the very Blood and Body of Christ in the Sacrament, -- for the strengthening of faith and increasing our love and hope. And the words in the Book are the very power of God unto salvation. **Here are the true treasures of our Lutheran, Sacramental, Church.**

If we lack spiritual zeal, and we do. If we lack dedication and commitment, and we do. If we want interest and enthusiasm in our worship services, and we do. Then we must realize that these blessings are given to us only through the Means of Grace. Only the Gospel, as it comes to us in Holy Baptism, in Bible Preaching, in Sacred Absolution, and in Blessed Eucharist, that can instill in us such fruits of the Spirit as commitment, dedication, evangelism, stewardship, spiritual renewal, and church growth. **Through daily Sacramental contrition and repentance, God forgives sins and gives to us a new life in Christ.**

Jesus said, "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke 24:44-47 With these words of Jesus, the Bible sums up for us the method and purpose of our ministry. It is the best mission statement or vision objective ever written.

But in this last decade of the second millennium the church seems to be adrift with another Gospel, seems to be in confusion, in doubt, and in unbelief as to its mission and purpose and ministry. Just look at what has happen to the ELCA (I won't say what those letters mean, for the only thing true about ELCA is that it is in America. It is not Evangelical, not Lutheran, and not a church. ELCA has ceased being Lutheran according to the definition given by *Augustana*. The Sacraments administered in ELCA are not valid! You cannot have a true Sacrament of the Altar when you are in a fellowship with Calvinistic churches that deny the real presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament. Confessional Lutheranism has always taught that Reformed Calvinist church bodies do not have the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. You cannot have a valid baptism when you are in a communion with a Unitarian church, like the UCC. You then do not have a Trinitarian baptism. This is an issue that our leaders and our theological seminaries of what is left of Confessional Lutheranism in the U.S.A. need to address.

In addition to the old issues of liberalism and fellowship (ecumenical), still found in churches that yet can be called Lutheran, Christian, Church a new and subtle theology of glory is being preached and taught. Church Growth it is called. ⁱⁱⁱ

What this means is that the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins is being replaced by a result orientated ministry of methods and programs, of user friendly services, and a watered down Confessional theology. And so countless numbers of videotapes and computer programs and seminars are being offered on how to have a flourishing stewardship program, a thriving evangelism committee, a successful counseling ministry, a growing and active congregation.

We seek to program evangelism so that we might have at least a semblance of what came naturally to the early church. Program stewardship to stimulate thankfulness and appreciation among the most richly materially blessed people in the world. Program spiritual renewal so that we will not become weary with all of our other programs.

It seems that more attention is being given to a "theology of money," than a theology of the cross; that the counseling couch is replacing the confessional before a Pastor, that church growth methods instead of church discipline is being practiced, that seminars and workshops are being given greater importance that Bible Study and Catechesis, and that small group (cell) ministries are emphasized, instead of Sacraments. We are now being told to minister to the flock instead of shepherding it; to disciple people instead of teaching them the whole counsel of God, to nurture people instead of leading them into the pleasant pastures of the means of grace. **And so as the church becomes more and more of a gymnasium than a hospital, we feel a greater need for a coach, than for a pastor.** ^{iv}

The problems in congregational life are great, and becoming greater and greater. We struggle to maintain even the *status quo*. Problems of broken families frustrate us. We lose members to immoralities, indifference, and apathy faster than we can baptize and confirm new ones. The life style of many of our members is indistinguishable from the pattern of life among unbelievers. Church contributions receive a low priority in our lives, as we tip more at a restaurant than we contribute on a Sunday morning.

And even in safe and sound WELS, storm clouds are beginning to gather on the horizon and thunder is being heard in the distance. "The pluralism of the American Protestant churches is also affecting the Wisconsin Synod. A wider diversity than image affects us, for we do not all do ministry the same way." ^v

New programs and new methods are not the answer to our spiritual problems. We cannot adopt the theology and methods of "Church Growth" and still call ourselves Confessional Lutherans. These only deal with symptoms, not with the causes of the problems. The Bible tells us to feed and protect the flock. It tells us to warn, rebuke, teach, exhort. It says that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached.

In the Word of God, in preaching Law and Gospel, hearts will be filled. At the manger of Bethlehem (God became flesh); the Cross of Calvary (Christ delivered for our offenses) and the empty tomb of Easter (Christ raised for our justification) is where hearts will be filled with joy and commitment, zeal and dedication.

In an age of mounting confusion, doubt, and indifference, there is a need for the clear proclamation of Law and Gospel in our pastoral ministry. This is how God deals with us. God does not come to us in spectacular and sensational "theologies of glory." But God continues to come to us in the simple message of a theology of the cross. "I wanted to know only one thing while I was with you," Paul writes, "and that is Jesus Christ and him nailed to a cross." (I Cor. 2:2)

Through daily contrition and repentance, God forgives sins and gives to us a new life in Christ. This is the Gospel that our fathers heard and believed; and this is the Gospel that we must continue to preach and teach.

What Do The Scriptures Teach About Private Confession

The Bible presents repentance as necessary: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30) "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out." (Acts 3:19) "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" (Matt 4:17)

The Gospels clearly indicate that repentance and the forgiveness of sins constitute the very core of Jesus' preaching. He entered upon His work with the appeal to people to "repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15) and He left this world with the charge that "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). Furthermore, the divine willingness to forgive the penitent knows no bounds (Luke 15:29ff). Forgiveness is excluded only when the sinner hardens his heart against God through persistent, blasphemous, and final impenitence... Moreover, if the Father in heaven will forgive people's sins in the same measure as they are ready to grant repeated forgiveness to their brothers and sisters (Matthew 18:2,35), then repeated acts of divine forgiveness are obviously presupposed. ^{vi}

The Bible says, "Confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another, so that you will be healed." (James 5:16)

Confession of sins is called for in Scripture before there is forgiveness from God, "if my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land." (II Chron 7:14)

The Bible says, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness, for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, washes away all sins." (I John 1:9) Repentance and forgiveness are tied to our baptism. Peter says, Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. (Acts 2:38) ^{vii}

On Easter evening the Risen Lord breathed on His apostles, saying to them, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." John 20:21

Martin Luther's first thesis in his Ninety-five Theses was, "When Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent," he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." ^{viii}

Luther writes in another place:

You should not be debating in the first place whether or not your contrition is sufficient. Rather you should be assured of this, that after all your efforts your contrition is not sufficient. This is why you must cast yourself on the grace of God, hear His sufficiently sure word in the sacrament, accept it in free and joyful faith, and never doubt that you have come to grace -- not by your own merits or contrition but by His gracious and divine mercy, which promises, offers, and grants you full and free forgiveness of sins in order that in the face of all the assaults (*anfechtung*) of sin, conscience, and the devil, you thus learn to glory and trust not in yourself or your own actions, but in the grace and mercy of your dear Father in heaven. ^{ix}

Absolution In The Lutheran Confessions

The pastoral office is not that of some counselor or psychotherapist. The office of the ministry is that of a pastor, a shepherd. *Seelsorger* our fathers called it -- to care for souls. And at no better place is this seen than in the confessional. Let us not turn the Lutheran confessional booth into some counseling couch like that of the modern Protestant churches

The Lutheran Confessions present both positive and negative aspects of private confession. The Augsburg Confession teaches, "Confession is of human right only, not commanded by Scripture, but ordained by the church." (AC XXV, 12) And it says, "in private confession enumeration of all sins is not necessary." (AC XI, 2.)

Luther, in the Smalcald articles, advises, "that one should not search for and invent other sins and turn confession into torture." (SC V, 24.) The Confessions teach that confession is not *ex opere operato* (AP. XII, 12)

But the same symbols, on the other hand, teach and urge private confession. The *Augsburg Confession* teaches:

Confession has not been abolished by the preachers in our churches, for it is not customary to administer the body of Christ except to those who have previously been examined and absolved. Our people are taught to esteem absolution highly because it is the voice of God and is pronounced by God's command. Confession is retained among us on account of the great benefit of absolution and because it is otherwise useful to consciences. AC, Art. XXV. Tappert, p. 61.

Our Lutheran Confessions also state:

The genuine sacraments, therefore, are Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution (which is the sacrament of penitence), for these rites have the commandment of God and the promise of grace, which is the heart of the New Testament. When we are baptized, when we eat the Lord's body, when we are absolved, our hearts should firmly believe that God really forgives us for Christ's sake. Apology, XIII, Tappert, p. 61. ^x

The *Augsburg Confession* says, "It is taught among us that private absolution should be retained and not allowed to fall into disuse." (AC XI, 1)

Furthermore, the *Augsburg Confession* goes on to state and teach:

It is taught among us that those who sin after Baptism receive forgiveness of sin whenever they come to repentance and absolution should not be denied them by the church. Properly speaking true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest. Amendment of life and the forsaking of sin should then follow, for these must be the fruits of repentance as John says, "Bear fruit that befits repentance." (Matt 3:8) (AC art. XII)

In another place it is taught,

We retain confession especially on account of the absolution, as being the word of God which, by divine authority, the power of the keys pronounces upon individuals. Therefore it would be wicked to remove private absolution from the church. Neither do they understand what the remission of sins or the power of the keys is, if there are any who despise private absolution. (Apology VI: 6-8)

The Symbols of our Lutheran Church teach that Absolution is nothing less than the very voice of God Himself:

We also teach that God requires us to believe this absolution as much as if we heard God's voice from heaven, that we should joyfully comfort ourselves with absolution, and that we should know that through such faith we obtain forgiveness of sins. (AC XXV)

In an essay on the Means of Grace, C.F.W. Walther says, "Absolution also belongs here, which is nothing else than the preaching of the Gospel to an individual sinner." ^{xi}

Luther in his 1531 edition of the *Small Catechism* inserted between Baptism and the Lord's Supper, a section entitled "Confession and Absolution, How plain people are to be taught to confess." ^{xii}

In the *Large Catechism* Luther writes,

If you are a Christian, you should be glad to run more than a hundred miles for confession, not under compulsion but rather coming and compelling us to offer it. ...Therefore, when I urge you to go to confession, I am simply urging you to be a Christian."

And in another place Luther writes:

We urge you, however to confess and express your needs, not for the purpose of performing a work but to hear what God wishes to say to you. The Lord or absolution, I say, is what you should concentrate on, magnifying and cherishing it as a great and wonderful treasure to be accepted with all praise and gratitude. ^{xiii}

In the Lutheran Confessions the term "confession" includes both confession of sin and absolution. ^{xiv}
The Lutheran churches retained confession for the sake of private or individual absolution.

To administer absolution or the Keys publicly on behalf of the church of Christ, we have those in the public ministry who act in Christ's stead and do not represent their own persons, according to the Word, "he who hears you hears me." ^{xv}

Dr. Walther uses this illustration concerning absolution:

A pastor in the confessional is like a letter carrier. A letter carrier only brings the letter which he is to deliver, and that is all. The content of the letter may be what it will; that is immaterial to the bearer. He is concerned only, if he is an upright man, with handing the letter into the proper hands. Pastors must be precisely such upright letter carriers. For they bring God's letter which proclaims grace to us, and consequently they should be concerned only that we receive that letter properly, that is, that we accept the grace in faith. ^{xvi}

Private Confession Verses General Confession

The Lutheran Church from the time of Luther to the age of Pietism had a strong practice and encouragement of private confession. All through his life Luther was vitally concerned for the proper use of private confession. It was really this concern that started the Reformation. Luther opposed the sale of indulgences and wrote his Ninety-five Theses dealing with the true meaning of repentance, confession, and absolution.

Luther wanted people to go to confession not as a matter of ecclesiastical discipline, but for the benefit they would derive from it. He violently denounced the view of the Roman church that made absolution conditional upon the proper attitude and penance of the penitent. According to Luther, the absolution that one Christian offers to another in the name of God is absolutely valid. ^{xvii}

Luther retained confession especially for those who were about to receive the Sacrament. In his Catechism (1529) Luther had a section on Confession, *A Short Order of Confession Before the Priest for the Common Man*.

Reverend and dear sir: I beseech you, for God's sake, give me good counsel for the comfort of my soul. What then do you desire?

Answer, Miserable man that I am, I confess and lament to you before God that I am a sinful and weak creature. I do not keep God's commandments; I do not really believe the gospel; I do nothing good, I cannot bear ill. Especially have I committed this and that (here the penitent enumerates the particular sins which distress him.) which burdens my conscience. I therefore ask that you, in God's stead, would declare unto me my sins be forgiven and comfort me with the word of God.^{xviii}

Martin Chemnitz, the second Martin, continued this practice of private confession. He writes:

For none are received to the Lord's Supper, unless they first, by general confession, attest their repentance and faith to the pastor of the church, who on that occasion also enters into private discussion with individuals. The rite of private confession is retained and used in our churches chiefly for the sake of absolution, namely so that it might be rightly and salutary sought, received, and used in earnest repentance and true faith.^{xix}

In Leipzig, as late as the 18th century, only the form of private confession was used.^{xx} This was also true in many other orthodox confessional congregations in Germany and other countries. The use of public confession in place of private confession came out of the pietistic movement. Through the influence of pietism, rationalism, and reformed theologies, especially in America, the formal use of private confession died away. Other considerations also contributed to its demise, such as larger churches and time concerns on the part of pastors.

In the *Definite Synodical Platform* (1855) private confession was rejected. S. S. Schmucker, a leader in the General Synod, proposed his *American Recension of the Augsburg Confession*. The *Recension* deleted the "errors" of the Augsburg Confession. The major ones were, 1) ceremonies of the mass; 2) private confession and Absolution; 3) denial of Sabbath obligation; 4) Baptism regeneration; and 5) the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament.

However, C.F. W. Walther and other Confessional pastors of the 19th century felt that both public and private confession should be retained. The first synodical constitution of the Missouri Synod had this to say about the practice of private confession:

Where private confession is in use, it is to be kept according to Article 11 of the Augsburg Confession. Where it is not in use, the pastor is to strive through teaching and instruction to introduce it. Yet in congregations where the total abolishing of general confession and absolution is hindered by insurmountable obstacles, general confession may be kept along with private confession.^{xxi}

In a paper on celebrating the Heritage of Friedrich Lochner, a founding father of the Missouri Synod and a man trained by W. Loehe, Dr. C. MacKenzie writes:

Three times in Lochner's ministry at Trinity Milwaukee replacing private confession with public confession became an issue. As far as Lochner was concerned, general confession had replaced private confession in many Lutheran churches as a result of Rationalism. However, in 1866 Lochner did permit the introduction of general confession on practical grounds, that with the growing number of communicant members, the exclusive use of private confession made more and more demands upon the time and strength of the pastor. Thus general confession soon took its place along side of, but not replacing private confession.^{xxii}

John Fritz writes in his *Pastoral Theology*:

There is no essential difference between private and general confession. Yet private confession offers a certain advantage, which should not be overlooked nor made light of. A Christian may be especially troubled...he may fear...need spiritual advice...must needs positively know that God absolves him from his sins. His pastor, whom God has given him for that purpose, shall hear his confession privately, advise him from the Scriptures, and if he be penitent, absolve him. (II Sam. 12:13) For this purpose private confession must be retained. While a minister has no right to demand that anyone of his members must come to private confession...he must nevertheless insist that those who desire to make use of private confession be permitted to do so, and he should instruct his congregation (catechumen classes) in reference to its proper use and urge them to make use of it, when their needs demand it. ^{xxiii}

Our New Hymnals

There are signs that private confession is being restored to its rightful place as the ordinary and primary means of pastoral care. All the new Lutheran Hymnals published during this last two decade includes a section on private confession and absolution.

Our WELS *Christian Worship*, begins the section on Private Confession,

Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "Christ himself entrusted absolution to his Church and commanded us to absolve one another from sins. So if there is a heart that feels its sin and desires consolation it has here a sure refuge when it hears in God's Word that through a fellow human being, God absolves a person from sin." The following order may be used when someone seeks the ministry of a pastor or another fellow Christian to make personal confession. ^{xxiv}

In the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, recently published by the ELS, the section on private confession is introduced with these words:

It is of great importance that the pastor should have personal knowledge of those whom he admits to the Lord's Supper, and to this end should inquire into the spiritual condition of each member of his flock that he may instruct and encourage them according to need. Christians who desire to grow in knowledge and grace should use this privilege to meet personally and privately with him, who is called and appointed to watch for their souls, that the great consolation afforded by the Word of God may be ministered to them individually.

Private absolution is a service provided by the Church for such personal and individual ministration of the Gospel. The absolution is to be offered to those who are in the communion of the Church as often as they request it. The ministration of absolution is especially appropriate to such as are ill or near death.

The individual desiring absolution may use his or her own words, the words in the following order, the order for Confession and Absolution in the Catechism, or any other suitable words. ^{xxv}

Beginning Private Absolution In Our Congregations

Begin and continue with good Lutheran Law and Gospel preaching. Living in the day and age that we are living in, people no longer view sin as sin. Our members often have a wrong idea about sin. The Ten Commandments are looked upon as merely ten suggestions. "The pious self-consciousness of our theologizing selfs" ^{xxvi} have developed a whole new vocabulary about sin. Adultery is not fortification, but is now simply having an affair. Stealing is misapplying funds. Homosexuality is a different lifestyle. People do something wrong, and we say they need counseling. We no longer have naughty boys and girls, but psychological problems.

If we actually believe what the Bible tells us about sin, it will be easy to see why private confession and absolution is worthy of an important place in our pastoral ministry. Not only do we daily sin much in thought, word, and deed, but we must also confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We only deceive ourselves if we think we can get along without confession and absolution of our sins. ^{xxvii}

What we need more than ever before is private confession of sins and sacred Absolution by the pastor. In the 50s a little book appeared entitled, *The Holy Ghost a God Half Known and Half Used*. Today the Doctrine of the Keys, Confession and Absolution, is a doctrine seldom known, and never used.

So how does one begin to reintroduce this good Lutheran practice of private confession? Great care and careful instruction is needed here. The first response will be, "pastor that is for the Catholic."

Because we are convinced of the sacramental value of the Lord's Supper, the temptation is always present with us to try to get people to come to the Sacrament more frequently. One of the most effective ways to do that is to try to make them feel guilty if they don't receive it as often as we think they should. But if we establish a law that says every member in good standing must take Communion at least once a month, the Sacrament becomes a sacrifice. The Gospel becomes a new law. That is why we must not forget that it is in the very nature of a sacrament that Christ invites us to partake, but He never compels us to eat and drink.

I trust the parallel to private confession and absolution is clear. If a pastor becomes convinced that he ought to introduce the practice of private confession and absolution into his congregation, he will likely have a strong desire to awaken in his people the same intensity of appreciation for it as he has come to. But there is no guarantee that they will respond as quickly or as zealously as he may hope. So rather than resorting to legalistic measures, he will do well to meditate on the tears of Jesus, who wept over Jerusalem, saying, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37)

On the other hand, if we simply classify the practice of private confession and absolution as an adiaphoron, the temptation is to take the easy way out. Since it is a matter of Christian liberty, since it is neither commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures, we don't have to do it. So why bother?

So the tension remains. On the one hand, we must be careful not to twist the grace of God into a new law that burdens consciences. But on the other hand, the practice of private confession and absolution is too precious to allow it to be completely neglected.^{xxviii}

Begin with that little section on Confession in the Catechism -- a section we seldom get to in Confirmation Class. Teach and preach about what the Catechism is here saying. Use what Luther says in the Catechism about confession in sermons. Spend more time on the Office of Keys and Confession in Confirmation classes.

A good number of our people are still familiar with the custom of private communion announcements. This would be a good way to begin. After some explanation try reestablishing private communion announcements -- and then use this as a time to teach about confession and absolution, and not merely as a secretary recording names in a book.

In counseling sessions, remember we are pastors. Instead of all the new and strange methods we are being taught on how to counsel, use private confession and absolution. Lead the discussion around to sin and grace, law and gospel.

The ELS' new hymnbook has several different forms of Absolution. One that could lead the way to a greater emphasis on private confession is the III form.

Upon this your confession, come forward to the altar of the Lord and receive the declaration of the forgiveness of all your sins.

(The communicants come forward and kneel at the altar rail. During the individual absolution appropriate and worthy hymns may be sung.)

By the authority of God and of my holy *office* (then, with the laying on of hands, saying to each one) I declare to you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Another suggestion is that at pastoral conferences, teacher conferences, and District conventions private confession could be introduced and used along with the general confession.

Conclusion

Spoken from the human lips of a pastor, the absolution is the very Word of the Lord Himself. Confession and absolution extol the potency of God's Word and the blood of His Son over our sins.^{xxix}

When ministers lay on their hands,
Absolved by Christ the sinner stands
He who by grace the Word believe
The purchase of his blood receives. LW 235

END NOTES

ⁱ David Scaer, "Luther, Baptism and the Church Today," cf. Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, Israel was the sacramental community for Luther and the sacraments were under every biblical bush and under each stone. Genesis was his sacramental paradise.

ⁱⁱ David Scaer notes "While Lutherans traditionally speak about two or three sacraments at the most, Jonathan Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, notes that "Luther's approach to Genesis militates against too closed a group of the means of grace." To avoid confusion, it might be better to speak about the means of grace rather than sacraments, but Luther calls any number of rites sacraments! Whatever form the word takes becomes a means of grace or sacrament. Regardless of terminology God is in the rite or the event and it becomes a sacrament. While Luther in his *Babylonian Captivity* is adamantly opposed to the sacraments added by Rome, he knows of no sacramental exclusivity in his Lectures on Genesis. With this wider interpretation of the means of grace or the sacraments, the space between Luther's and Melancthon's views on the sacraments is narrowed. Luther is generally seen as favoring two sacraments, to which Melancthon adds penance and by expanding the definition he adds several more (*Augsburg Confession and Apology*, XIII) "

ⁱⁱⁱ For an evaluation of the theology of the Church Growth Movement see David J. Valleskey, "The Church Growth Movement," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Spring, 1991 (Vol 88, No. 2). Valleskey states: "Reading Church Growth literature tends to leave one with the feeling that following a set of sociological principles produces growth, this in spite of the claim of McGavran that 'men cannot make the Church grow -- only God's Holy Spirit can do that.' Such a statement sounds good; but it does not go far enough in that it does not connect the Holy Spirit's work with the means of grace, as do the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions." (p. 103) Valleskey attempts to present a biblical, Lutheran theology of Church Growth in 25 theses at the end of the article. (p.117-119) Thesis 8 states "The church is to make disciples by using the means of grace." The best study of the Church Growth movement is by Kurt Marquart, "*Church Growth*" *As Mission Paradigm, A Lutheran Assessment*. Also Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*. See also the LC-MS Commission on Theology and Church Relations study, *Evangelism and Church Growth*. See also Charles L. Cortright, "Church Growth Its Implications for the Use of the Means of Grace in a Confessional, Liturgical Church," *The Confessional Lutheran Research Society Newsletter*, Pentecost, 1989, Letter No. 15 Cortright shows how the Church Growth Movement is rooted in Reformed theology and approach.

Waldo Werning, *Making The Missouri Synod Functional Again*, (Ft. Wayne: Biblical Renewal Publication, 1992). Werning presents a favorable view of Church Growth principles. He has a questionnaire (p.280) given to evangelical leaders at a national meeting. Werning contends that the answers given were 100% opposite of what Senkbeil and others write about Church Growth. The book also presents an evaluation of Missouri Synod's internal problems over the years. Werning calls the confessional movement in the Missouri Synod "Confessional Lutheran Gnosticism." For another point of view on these problems in the LCMS see Robert Preus' essay in *Logia*, Oct. 1992 (Vol. 1, No. L), p.65f and Robert Preus, "Confessional Lutheranism in Today's World," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, April/July 1990 (Vol. 54, No. 2,3), p.99f. Preus discusses four instances where bad and unsound practices undermine pure doctrine in Missouri Synod. They are Church Fellowship, Open Communion, Lay Ministry, Women Pastors. Also, Carter Lindberg, "Pietism and the Church Growth Movement in a Confessional Lutheran Perspective," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, April/July 1988 (Vol. 52, No. 2,3) p. 129f.

See *Lutheran Forum*, Aug. 1990 (Vol. 24, No.3) for articles on "Evangelism and the Church Growth Movement." John Neuhaus, "The Lutheran Difference," writes, "The mission of the church, according to Luther, is the mission of Christ, and it finds its fulfillment in this: "...that I may be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness." (p.19) Also see David Scaer, "Evangelism -- Not Evangelicalism!" He writes: "Any suggestion that membership acquisition, rather than Word and Sacraments, are the true and abiding marks of the church must be rejected. A growth theology contradicts the remnant theology of both the Old and New Testament, denies the hiddenness of the kingdom within a suffering church that confesses that salvation is present now but consummated only in glory, and repudiates that history which we honor as our own. Athanasius was exiled and the majority Arians held the field. A faithful Lutheran minority resisted the Prussian Union. The gospel is not a marketable product like potato chips... Any Lutheran theology of evangelism should be informed by Luther's oft quoted phrase that while he and Melancthon drank beer, God spread the gospel... But foundational to any theology of evangelism is that like salvation, evangelism is an extension of grace 'without any merit or worthiness in us.' Evangelism comes of itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may happen among us." " p. 30,31.

^{iv} Ken Schurb, "The Church: Hospital or Gymnasium?" *Logia*, Vol. 1, number 1, October 1992. See also Kurt Koeplin letter, "Reflections, Concerns, and Questions About Our Beloved WELS --1992" and Nathan Pope, "Proposal for Synod-wide Referendum."

^v *Northwestern Lutheran*, April 1, 1991.

^{vi} Fred Precht, *Lutheran Worship, History and Practice*, p. 322,323.

^{vii} See Eric Stumpf, "Private Confession: A Call for Restoration in Pastoral Care," *Concordia Journal*, July 1993

^{viii} *Luther's Works*, Vol 31, p. 25. The Bible teaches that Contrition + Faith = Repentance.

The picture involved in the word "contrition" is that of being crushed. Contrition is something God does to us; it is not something we do for God in order to make ourselves worthy of His forgiveness. God uses the hammer of His holy Law to crush our stony hearts and

to reduce us to tiny grains of dust. ...But contrition is not a synonym for repentance. When John and Jesus and Martin Luther preached repentance, their message was not: God will only be happy if you are miserable." Like the Law and Gospel, contrition and faith must not be separated. God has joined them together, and man has no business putting them asunder. If it is certainly true that Law and Gospel must be distinguished from each other. Contrition is obviously distinct from faith. But contrition without faith is not what Jesus calls repentance. ...Faith is the main thing in repentance. Faith is the hand that receives the gifts which God bestows upon us. ...Repentance is therefore something God does to us and for us. It is not something we do for God. Keep that in mind the next time you hear somebody say, "God will forgive you, if you repent." Although those words can be properly understood, they are probably more likely to confuse people. Michael J. Albrecht, "Private Confession and Absolution."

^{ix} *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35, p. 15.

^x See also Gaylin Schmeling, "God's Gift to You: The Means of Grace," Essay for the 72nd convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. "Lutherans do not usually speak of Holy Absolution as a sacrament. Yet as a continuum of Holy Baptism, we hold it in high regard. 'You see that Baptism, both by its power and by its signification, comprehends also the third Sacrament, formerly called Penance, which is really nothing else than Baptism.' (Large Catechism, IV 74,p.445) Absolution continues the dying and rising with Christ in Baptism. In confession we drown our sins in the baptismal font and in absolution we receive Jesus' forgiveness flowing to us in the baptismal water. Absolution is the administration of the Keys, the dispensing of the Gospel of forgiveness, be that to many or to the individual. ...Public Absolution, Individual Absolution of our Danish Order, and especially Private Absolution are so important because here the forgiveness of Christ is personalized." p. 59,60.

^{xi} C.F.W. Walther, *Convention Essays*, p. 135.

^{xii} Tappert, p. 349.

^{xiii} Tappert, p. 457.

^{xiv} See B. W. Teigen, *I Believe, A Study of the Smalcald Articles*, for an explanation of this point.

^{xv} Teigen, p. 26.

^{xvi} C.F.W. Walther, *Convention Essays*, p. 157.

^{xvii} See *Luther's Works*, vol. 53, p. 116.

^{xviii} *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, p. 117. This appeared in the oldest extant Wittenberg edition of 1529 (actually the second or third edition of the *Small Catechism*) following the Order of Baptism.

^{xix} Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, Sacrament*, p. 136.

^{xx} Gunther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig*, p. 44. See also Eric Stumpf, "Private Confession: A Call for Restoration in Pastoral Care," *Concordia Journal*, July 1993, p 218.

^{xxi} "Our First synodical Constitution," CHIQ 16 (April, 1943); translated by Ray Suelflow. Lochner, "Trinity," pp. 61

^{xxii} C. A. MacKenzie, "Celebrating the Heritage of Frederick Lochner." MacKenzie notes Lochner's pastoral patience with the introduction of private confession. He quotes Lochner "After 26 years of service in one of our old liturgical rich congregations, I was placed into a congregation that was not ready for the old liturgy so that even the chanting at the altar had to remain undone for a time. I could not show my students in my congregational services everything in which I had instructed them; but I could give them an example that a Lutheran pastor puts the highest value on good preaching and can wait for liturgical capacity to reach a better form. With great love and enthusiasm for the old liturgy, one can say with St. Paul in this respect also by God's grace, 'I know how both to abound and suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'" Frederick Lochner, *Der Hauptgottesdienst der Evangelisch Lutherrischen Kirche* (St. Louis: CPH, 1895), pp. Vii-viii.

^{xxiii} John Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, p. 118.

^{xxiv} Christian Worship, p. 154.

^{xxv} Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, p. 129.

^{xxvi} A phrase employed by Nitzsch-Stephan, *Lehrbuch der ev. Dogmatik*, and quoted often in F. Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*.

^{xxvii} Michael Albrecht, *op. cit.* P. 7.

^{xxviii} *Ibid.* P. 5.

^{xxix} John Pless, "Confession and Absolution," *Lutheran Witness*, January, 1996.