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The Written, Spoken, and Signed Word

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OUR title points us to the Word of God. It tells us that God speaks to us in three different ways. But it is the same Word that He speaks in all three. There is only one Word of God. The Word, whether written, spoken, or signed, is the same Word. It is the same message from God. It is the same Gospel, proclaiming God's salvation to lost sinners. It is what Luther calls "die ewige Wahrheit Gottes,"¹ God's own revelation of eternal truth.

The terms need to be defined. The *written Word* is Holy Scripture, the Bible. It includes also sections of the Scriptures found in catechisms, prayer books, hymnals, and other places where words of Scripture may be read.

The *spoken Word* refers to preaching or speaking publicly or privately the truth contained in Scripture, to be heard by men—the proclamation of the Gospel.

The *signed Word* is a much misused term. Strictly speaking it should be used only with reference to the Sacraments. Some use the term loosely to refer to symbols, such as cross, crucifix, icons, and pictures. But these things are neither Sacraments nor means of grace. True, a crucifix may help us remember the Gospel of Calvary and thus bring us comfort. But that does not make the crucifix a means of grace. The Word of the Cross, which we recall, is the means of grace. Similarly care must be used not to confuse symbols with Sacraments lest we inadvertently deny our

Lutheran doctrine of the Sacraments. Baptism is not a mere symbol of God's grace. It is the bearer of grace. It is a means of grace. It is a Sacrament. The Lord's Supper is not a mere symbol of grace, but a bearer of grace, a Sacrament. In Lutheran, as in Roman and Orthodox theology, the bread and wine are not symbols of the body and blood of Christ. They *are* the body and blood. Crosses and crucifixes, pictures and images, belong to a totally different category. Hence they will not be a part of this study.

It is not difficult to parallel the written and the spoken Word. The content of these is coextensive. But the signed Word, though it has basically the same content, is nevertheless more limited at this point. The central element of content which makes all three the Word of God is Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.²

What the early seventeenth century Wittenberg theological faculty said about the term "Word of God" throws light on historical Lutheran thinking on this expression. They describe five uses of the term: "It can be thought of as being in the Holy Ghost, who first considered it; in the mind of the Apostles, in whom it has been inspired; in the speech of the Apostles, where it is read; in our hearts and memories, where it is kept. And yet no one will conclude that there are five kinds of Word . . . but it is one Word according to its essence, because everywhere it has one meaning and sense."³

Johann Gerhard says: "It is one and the same Word of God, whether it becomes known to us by way of preaching or of writing."⁴ In all three cases before us the Word of God is God speaking to men. In all three God is revealing Himself, His eternal truth, His will for men. All three are bearers of the Gospel, bestowing the same gift: saving grace, forgiveness, life. All three are "means of grace." For all three give Christ. Hence the term "living Word," so popular in present-day discussions, may be applied equally to all three, to written Word, spoken Word, signed Word.

THE WRITTEN WORD

The written Word must be called the Word of God in a unique and basic sense. It is indeed *Urkunde*. It is the original source, the Word of God as God Himself wanted it expressed and

recorded. In this respect it is different from the spoken Word, where God permits men to express His thoughts in their own way and where they are not under the compulsion of the unique "inspiration" by which men wrote the Scriptures. In calling the Scriptures the *Urkunde* one must be careful not to define the Scriptures as the source where the Word of God is merely available, as though the Scriptures could in no sense themselves be called the Word of God. This involves the ancient argument whether Scripture *is* the Word of God or *contains* the Word of God. There is no purpose in rehearsing that argument, except to say in passing that both Luther and the Confessions would say that both statements, correctly understood, are true. "God's will is completely contained therein . . . for the Scriptures are divine; in them God speaks, and they are His Word,"⁵ the "*verbum Dei infallibile*."⁶ They are "His own witness concerning Himself."⁷ Hence Luther says: "You should so deal with Scripture that you believe that God Himself is speaking."⁸

This freedom of Luther which enabled him to call the Bible the Word of God reflects none of the alarm that Tillich finds in this kind of terminology, when he writes: "If the Bible is called the Word of God, theological confusion is almost unavoidable."⁹ The question is: Who brings about the confusion? Not Luther, who freely called the Bible the Word of God, but later theologians, who deny that it is the Word of God. Not the followers of Luther manhandled and mangled the text of Scripture, but the theologians who pulled the Bible down from its place of honor where the Reformation left it, as the inspired Word of God and the divine revelation of truth.

In his *De ecclesia et auctoritate verbi Dei* Melanchthon is even more emphatic than Luther in giving a certain pre-eminence to the written Word. For him it is the written Word alone which is the final rule and norm of doctrine. It is not the Word paraphrased in a creed or catechism or sermon. The noted Norwegian theologian, Caspari, draws on Melanchthon's treatise in his controversy with Grundtvig. "God's Word or the Scripture has for Melanchthon the first and greatest, the highest authority. . . . It is for him the rule of doctrine and the touchstone, by which all doctrines, teachers, and churches shall be judged."¹⁰ Caspari also

follows Melanchthon in his identification of Scripture with the Word of God. In analyzing Melanchthon's work he adds: "There is no doubt that everywhere in Melanchthon's treatise the Word of God is the Holy Scripture. . . . The reason that the Scripture was for Melanchthon the first, the greatest, and the highest authority, the rule and touchstone of doctrine whereby all teachings, doctrines, and churches should be judged, is that it and it alone is God's Word, the Word handed down by God. Throughout and in the very title of his treatise Melanchthon gives it the name God's Word, and he applies this term exclusively to the Scripture and to nothing else." In the conclusion to the Augustana Melanchthon says: "Nothing has been received on our part against Scripture or the church catholic. . . . If there is anything that anyone might desire in this Confession, we are ready, God willing, to present ampler information according to the Scriptures." In its "Comprehensive Summary" the Formula of Concord speaks of the Scriptures as "the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged" (par. 4) and of the Word of God as "the only standard and rule of doctrine . . . to which everything should be subjected" (par. 9). In this context the Formula is clearly equating the terms "Holy Scripture" and "the Word of God."

While recognizing a certain pre-eminence in the written Word when speaking of the ultimate authority of the Word, must we now assign to it a second place when speaking of the Word as a means of grace? Measured by statistics, this would seem to be the case. Undoubtedly more souls are brought to faith by the spoken Word than by the written Word. The Bible says, "Faith cometh by hearing." "How shall they hear without a preacher?" Therefore the Lord gave His church the command to "preach the Gospel to every creature." Preaching the Word, proclaiming the *kerygma*, has the promise that there will be fruit. Such fruit of the spoken Word is evidenced by the preaching of Peter on Pentecost, which resulted in the conversion of 3,000 souls. The Word, when spoken, is indeed a means of grace. What of the written Word?

The answer to this question does not lie in statistics. It lies in the testimony of the Word itself. Luther draws that testimony from 1 John 5:13: "These things have I written unto you that

believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." Luther comments on this passage: "Lest someone deceive us, says John against the 'enthusiasts,' he is writing this ('These things have I written unto you'). To them the *letter* is a dead thing on paper. But John says: 'I write unto you,' since the Scripture is to serve as a means through which a man comes to faith and eternal life. For thus John speaks in chapter 20, verse 31 of his Gospel: 'These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name.' Therefore we should know that God's testimony does not come to us except through the oral voice or through the Scripture." Here Luther quotes 2 Tim. 3: 15, 16: "And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." He also quotes 1 Tim. 4:13: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." "Why," says Luther, "does he command to read the Scripture if it is a dead thing?"

Luther is here fighting the "enthusiasts" and their tendency to separate the Spirit from the Word. That means from the Word whether written or spoken. For he quotes John 17:20 ("Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their Word") and comments: "'Through the Word' is certainly the oral or written Word, not the inner word. Therefore one must above all hear and read the Word, which the Holy Ghost uses as a means. When one reads the Word, the Holy Ghost is there; and so it is impossible that one can use the Scripture without profit."¹¹

The activity of the Holy Spirit is consistently tied to the Word, as Luther teaches against the "enthusiasts" of all times, including our own. In his Large Catechism, Luther therefore stresses the importance of being "occupied with the Word," whether written, spoken, remembered, or what have you. When the message of the Gospel enters the mind, no matter how it comes, the Holy Spirit is there and active. "It is an exceedingly effectual help against

the devil, the world, and the flesh and all evil thoughts to be occupied with the Word of God and to speak of it and meditate upon it, so that the First Psalm declares those blessed who meditate upon the Law of God day and night. Undoubtedly you will not set in motion a stronger incense or other fumigation against the devil than by being occupied with God's commandments and words and speaking, singing, or thinking on them. For this is indeed the true holy water and holy sign from which he flees and by which he may be driven away."¹²

The importance of meditating on the Word, whether written or spoken or remembered, plays a vital part in Luther's ideas of catechetical instruction. Realizing the impossibility of sitting with an open Bible all day, he urges the memorization of the Small Catechism, which is the core of what "God Himself . . . is engaged in teaching . . . to the end of the world, and all prophets, together with all saints, have been occupied with learning it."¹³ He cites Deut. 6:6, where the Lord enjoins "that we should always meditate upon His precepts, sitting, walking, standing, lying down, and rising, and have them before our eyes and in our hands as a constant mark and sign."

Luther continues to urge the need of this constant exposure to the Word of God, that life may be kindled and kept alive. "You must always have the Word of God in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears. . . . Such is the efficacy of the Word, whenever it is seriously contemplated, heard, and used, that it is bound never to be without fruit, but always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devoutness, and produces a pure heart and pure thoughts. For these words are not inoperative or dead, but creative, living words."¹⁴ Hence the Word is a sanctifying power, no matter how it comes to you. "At whatever hour, then, God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or meditated upon, there the person, day, and work are sanctified thereby, not because of the external work but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all."¹⁵

Thus to Luther Scripture is alive. The written Word is the living Word, the living Gospel. It is a means of grace, with inherent power to create life, even before it is preached. The Word can come into the heart with life through the eye as well

as through the ear. To Luther the written Word is the bearer of the Gospel. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scripture might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Luther knows only *one* Gospel, whether written or spoken, read or heard, Old Testament or New Testament, Gospel or Epistle. "There is only one Christ, so there is and can be no more than one Gospel," and this "Gospel is spoken by God through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures." Hence Luther pleaded with his people to search the Scriptures, assuring them that things would happen to them if they did. Aiming again at the "enthusiasts," who separate the Holy Ghost from the Word, written or spoken, he says: "Look what fine . . . pious children we are! We don't dare to search the Scriptures to learn of Christ, and so we regard the Old Testament as nothing . . . as though it only had the name that it was Scripture and that Gospel really is not Scripture, but the spoken Word, which presents the Scripture, telling what Christ and the Apostles have done. [They say] Christ has not written but only spoken and His teaching is not writing but Gospel, given not with the pen but with the mouth. So we make the Gospel a Law book. . . . Would God . . . that the Holy Scripture might regain its place of honor!"¹⁶

As true followers of Luther we therefore refuse to let Gogarten speak for the Lutheran Church of the world when he says that now finally "both as to its origin and as to its content the Bible has come to be understood [by the church] as any other historical book. . . . Through this historical understanding of the Bible it has become impossible . . . to regard it as the 'objective' foundation of the faith."¹⁷ The church of the Augsburg Confession does indeed believe that the Bible is a historical book. But it refuses to say that it is "to be understood as any other historical book." For this historical book is unique. It alone can claim to be revelation. It alone can claim that unique character of being "inspired" in the sense of 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. In their heated concern lest anyone believe that the Holy Ghost "dictated" the Scriptures to the inspired writers, some theologians have thrown out the baby with the bath water. The miracle of inspiration itself is questioned and with it also the authority of Scripture.

The "Luther Renaissance" has fortunately taught many in the Lutheran Church once more to pray with Luther: "Would to God . . . that the Holy Scripture might regain its place of honor."

THE SPOKEN WORD

Let there be no attempt to measure the relative value of the written and the spoken Word. Without the written Word, what would we have to preach? Without preaching, how could the church live? The Word must be spoken. It must be preached, not because evidence proves that many are converted by preaching but because it is the command of the Lord to His church. And the Word, when preached, is a means of grace, with power inherent in itself. Its power is not dependent on the preacher or on the hearer. It is a far cry from the view of Luther to the view of Tillich on the Word and its power, when the latter says: "The Word depends not only upon the meaning of the words of preaching alone but also upon the power with which these are spoken. And it depends not only upon the understanding of the listener alone but also upon his existential reception of the content. Nor does the Word depend upon the preacher or the listener alone, but on both in correlation. These four factors and their interdependence constitute the 'constellation' in which human words may become the Word, divine self-manifestation. They may and they may not become the Word." The logical conclusion is, as Tillich says, that "no minister should proclaim more than his intention to speak the Word when he preaches. He never should assert that he has spoken it or that he will be able to speak it in the future, for since he possesses no power over the revelatory constellation, he possesses no power to preach the Word."¹⁸

Had Luther used the Word with that kind of apologetic uncertainty, there would hardly have been a Reformation. The Reformation resulted from Luther's preaching of the Word of God, and Luther knew it was the Word he was preaching. And when he had preached, he knew he had preached the Word, and he was confident that the Word he had preached would accomplish its divine purpose. "A preacher, after preaching his sermon, need not say the Lord's Prayer nor seek forgiveness (if he be a right preacher), but he should boast with Jeremiah: 'Lord, Thou knowest

that what came out of my mouth was right and well pleasing to Thee.' He should say boldly with Paul and all Apostles and Prophets, 'Thus spake the Lord,' and 'I have been in this sermon an apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ.' Here it is not necessary, indeed, it is not right, to ask forgiveness of sins, as if the teaching had been wrong; for it is God's Word and not my own, so that God neither need nor can forgive me, but must rather confirm, commend, and crown my work, saying: 'Thou hast taught well, for it is I that spoke by thee, and the Word is Mine.' Whoever cannot boast thus of his sermons, let him leave his hands off preaching; he will of a certainty only lie and blaspheme God."¹⁹

In the Second Wittenberg Sermon of 1522 Luther reminds the preacher what a tremendous power has been put in his hands. "We have the *ius verbi*, but not the *executio*; we should preach the Word, but the consequences must be left to God's own pleasure."²⁰ And the abandon with which Luther trusts the power of the Word he has preached is a tonic to any preacher: "I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friend Philip and with Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the Papacy that never a prince nor emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing; the Word did it all."²¹ And this "Word" was the Word which Luther preached.

The notion that the Word and its power are dependent on the preacher or the hearer is equally strange to Luther's theology. Likewise the thought expressed above that it depends on the hearer's "existential reception of the content." Luther maintained that "the holiness of the Word and the purity of doctrine are so powerful and certain that even if Judas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Pope, Heinz, and the devil himself, preached it or baptized rightly . . . then the right pure Word and the right Holy Baptism would still be received."²² Luther is most emphatic about this inherent power of the means of grace when he deals with Baptism. The faith of the preacher has nothing to do with Baptism's power or efficacy. Neither does Word or Sacrament cease to be a means of grace and the power of God because the recipient disbelieves or despises it. To say that "the Word of God is present only when the response of faith occurs, just as no sound occurs when no ear is present

to hear it,"²³ is as foreign to Luther as to say that the preacher can in no case preach the Word of God unless he believes rightly.

Theologians of our day remind us that the preaching of the Word is God's *Anrede*, or personal address to the hearer. But it is God's *Anrede* irrespective of the attitude and reaction of preacher or hearer. God Himself confronts us in the Word. And He addresses us as the risen Christ, who was crucified for our sins in the "fullness of the time" and who calls us through the Gospel to follow Him. This Word of the Gospel is a "living Word," in and through which the Spirit is active, calling, convicting, converting, bringing to faith, sanctifying, and saving men. It is a *living* Word because its content is the living Christ and because it proclaims the same living Gospel, which is the "power of God unto salvation" today as it was when Jesus walked on earth as the *living* Word and proclaimed the saving Gospel to men. Our preaching of the Gospel is the living Word, because it proclaims the event of Calvary and of the resurrection as our redemption, accomplished in time, and applied to lost sinners wherever that Gospel is preached. And the "event of Calvary" is not something that first happens in the consciousness of a hearer of the Gospel. It *happened* 1900 years ago, and that happening is the "good news" which the church proclaims. The cross is history. It is not merely an "eschatological event." Schniewind put his finger on the danger of an overemphasis on the existential factor when he says: "Everything Bultmann says about the cross is located not at Calvary but in our human experience. His talk about 'the legend of the empty tomb' makes Easter Day not the resurrection itself but the beginning of the disciples' faith in the resurrection."²⁴ Even without entering in on Bultmann's view of history, we see that it is a grave subtraction from the Gospel to say that "side by side with the historical event of the crucifixion it [John's Gospel] sets the definitely nonhistorical event of the resurrection."²⁵

Luther was as aware of the existential element in preaching as any modern theologian. But he did not expunge the "then" with an overemphasis on the "now." He stressed both. He did not thrust aside the *Deus dixit* in his enthusiasm for the *Deus loquens*, nor the historical for the existential consideration. He insisted on both. The redemption was accomplished once for all, and it is

bestowed as a gift on every sinner when he comes to faith. At this point the written and the spoken Word merge into the one Word, the Gospel.

The struggle to make the Gospel of Christ contemporaneous, to bring the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection "into the present," is the concern of every right preacher. He lives in the written Word. He preaches the Gospel that he finds there. He contemplates the old story of our redemption. Then he "placards" Christ Crucified before the eyes of his hearers (Gal. 3:1). He takes us back to the first Christmas: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Then he brings this Christmas into the present: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Paul Althaus, discussing history and proclamation, correctly observes: "Although the history of Jesus Christ is once-for-all, finished, by-gone history, it has nevertheless contemporaneity for us, for in the proclamation of the church it approaches us with a contemporary address. In this it differs from all other history. To other history we gain a relationship by studying its sources and presentation. It becomes for us an experience in culture. But it is otherwise with this history. True, it is borne witness to in the Holy Scriptures and has been transmitted in many books since the origin of Scripture. But Holy Scripture may not be placed alongside other historical sources and presentations. It is from beginning to end only a unique form of Christian witness. What John says at the end of his Gospel is true of all Biblical writings which present the history of Jesus: 'Written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life in His name' (John 20:31). It belongs in the category of Christian preaching which calls people to faith. . . . The Bible is not a source book of ancient history which merely tells of a by-gone story. Rather, Scripture proclamation confronts and courts and claims me. And so past history confronts me in the present moment. . . . Therefore the history of Jesus ceases to be merely a historical fact of the past which one can recollect. . . . But rather the day of the proclamation is 'the day of salvation.'" 26

In the proclamation of the Gospel, therefore, the crucified and risen Lord confronts us, speaks to us, and calls us. And the Word preached is a means of grace which God uses to make us what He would have us be. The Word preached is Gospel. It is God's Word of forgiveness. It is *absolution*. "We further believe that in this Christian Church we have forgiveness of sin, which is wrought through the holy Sacraments and Absolution, moreover, through all matter of conciliatory promises of the entire Gospel."²⁷

Here Luther directs our attention also to the Sacraments, the *signed* Word. In moving on to the third section of our study, we note how closely Luther ties together Word and sign. They merge in the idea of Gospel and the concept of forgiveness. "Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the *Word* and *signs*, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here" [italics ours].²⁸

SIGNED WORD

Both Luther and the Confessions are clear and emphatic in their interpretation of the twofold relation of Word and Sacrament. On the one hand, they hold, as in the Small Catechism, that it is the Word which makes the sacred act a Sacrament, in connection, of course, with the divine institution. Water is only water until the Word comes and makes it a Sacrament. Bread and wine become the Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood when the Word is added. On the other hand, Luther and the Confessions place the Word and the Sacraments in juxtaposition as distinct and variant means of grace. "By this means, and in no other way, namely, through His holy Word, when men hear it preached or read it, and the holy Sacraments, when they are used according to His Word, God desires to call men to eternal salvation, draw them to Himself, and convert, regenerate, and sanctify them."²⁹

The relation between Word and Sacrament and the relative importance of the two have caused much debate. In the history of the church the pendulum has swung back and forth in giving pre-eminence to one or the other. Various churches of Christendom reflect differing attitudes toward the problem. In the Roman Church the propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass exalts the Sacrament and

assigns a secondary place to the preaching of the Word. In some sects the preaching of the Word dominates the worship life, and the blessed Sacrament is all but forgotten. Within Lutheranism there has been a wide range of emphasis. One can almost trace this emphasis in the interior architecture of the churches. Usually the altar has the central focus. Sometimes the baptismal font dominates. In some churches the pulpit towers over the altar, a silent but powerful testimony to the relative importance of the two means of grace. In a prominent church in South Germany the pews are ranged almost in a circle around the pulpit. The altar is in the distant background and not used except for an occasional celebration of the Eucharist. The worshipers enter the church and stand in their pews facing the pulpit for silent prayer, some turning their backs on the altar.

One of the easiest ways to stir up controversy in the Lutheran Church is to suggest the "correct" solution of this problem. At this point traditions are stubborn. Quotations from Luther can be multiplied on both sides. All true Lutherans agree, however, that the Word and the two Sacraments are equally means of grace; that all three are bearers of the Gospel; that God bestows His grace and performs His miracles of grace through them all. Baptism is the Sacrament of regeneration and initiation into the body of Christ. It cleanses, it saves, it grafts us into Christ and into His death and resurrection. But its effectiveness does not cease with the baptismal act. "Let everyone esteem his Baptism as a daily dress in which he is to walk constantly." "If you live in repentance, you walk in Baptism. . . . Therefore our Baptism abides forever; and even though someone should fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access thereto, that we may again subdue the old man. . . . Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, that we repeat and practice what we began before but abandoned. . . . Thus it appears what a great, excellent thing Baptism is, which delivers us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, suppresses and takes away sin, and then daily strengthens the new man; and is and remains efficacious until we pass from this estate of misery to eternal glory."³⁰

The blessed Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood is likewise a means of grace, the Sacrament of forgiveness, of sanctification, of Christian growth. It is the holy Eucharist, the church's sacrifice of thanksgiving. It is the bearer of the Gospel, the Gospel of the cross.

My Lord, Thou here hast led me
 Within Thy holiest place,
 And there Thyself hast fed me
 With treasures of Thy grace;
 And Thou hast freely given,
 What earth could never buy—
 The Bread of Life from heaven,
 That now I shall not die.

(Zinck's *Koralbog*, 1801)

The relation of Word and Sacrament and the existential character of both in the life of the church is clearly expressed by Luther: "Although the work is accomplished and the forgiveness of sins acquired on the cross, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. For what would we otherwise know about it, that such a thing was accomplished or was to be given us if it were not presented by preaching or the oral Word? Whence do they know of it, or how can they apprehend or appropriate to themselves the forgiveness, except they lay hold of and believe the Scriptures and the Gospel? But now the entire Gospel and the article of the Creed: '*I believe a holy Christian Church, the forgiveness of sin,*' etc., are the Word embodied in this Sacrament and presented to us. Why, then, should we allow this treasure [forgiveness] to be torn from the Sacrament when they must confess that these are the very words which we hear everywhere in the Gospel, and they cannot say that these words in the Sacrament are of no use, as little as they dare say that the entire Gospel or Word of God, apart from the Sacrament, is of no use."³¹

The factor of the signed Word, or the Word in the Sacrament, gains importance in the dispute regarding the Eucharistic prayer, which is being discussed in liturgical conferences of our day. The Confessions leave no doubt that the Real Presence of the body and blood in the blessed Sacrament is a fact by virtue of the Word of God, particularly the words of institution. The Formula of Concord says: "Not the word or work of any man produces the

true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper . . . but all this should be ascribed alone to the power of Almighty God and the Word, institution, and ordination of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Christ Himself, through the spoken words, is still efficacious by virtue of the first institution, through His word, which He wishes to be there repeated. . . . The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God's power and grace; by the Word, where He speaks: 'This is My body,' the elements presented are consecrated in the Supper. . . . 'This is My body' . . . was spoken once, but even to this day and to His advent it is efficacious and works so that in the Supper of the Church His true body and blood are present."³²

The Eucharistic prayers which are being introduced into the Lutheran liturgy should be closely scrutinized from the point of view whether they are connecting the Real Presence with the prayer of the people or with the Word of God. There is evidently a reason why, since Luther's day, this prayer was omitted in many Lutheran liturgies. A right Eucharistic prayer need not carry a false connotation, but it does so if it relegates the words of institution to a secondary position and if it appears in the wrong place in the liturgy.

It is evident, then, that in the Word, written, spoken, and signed, God confronts us and speaks to us and draws us into the saving relationship with Him, which is the aim and purpose of the Gospel and of Christ's entire redemptive work. This is another way of saying that the content of this Word, in whatever form it is presented, is Jesus Christ.

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28. *Ibid.*, par. 55.
29. Formula of Concord, Th. Decl., Art. II, par. 50.
30. Large Cat., Infant Baptism, pars. 73—84.
31. Large Cat., The Sacrament of the Altar, pars. 31 f.
32. Th. Decl. VII, pars. 75 f.