

# Fight, Work, Pray!

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Luther on the Lord's Supper and Care for the Needy  
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By Martin Luther



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*The Blessed Sacrament Of The Holy And  
True Body Of Christ, And The Brotherhoods*

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**By Martin Luther**

– 1519 –

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## PREFACE

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Dear reader, you have in your hands Luther's most profound treatment of the ecclesial, ethical and practical ramifications of the Lord's Supper. Until now, this document has been almost completely overlooked in the LCMS. We have greatly emphasized the necessity of doctrinal assent and agreement as requisites of participation in the Sacrament. Well and good. We have noted the benefit that comes to the individual in the Sacrament, namely, forgiveness of sins. But we have sorely failed at what Luther so gloriously achieves in this treatise. Here Luther, in breathtaking manner, bases the church's communal and ethical life completely upon the shared participation in the Sacrament. "I leave you this sacrament . . . in order that you may not forget me, but daily call to mind and admonish one another by means of what I did and am still doing for you, in order that you may be strengthened and also bear one another in the same way." Here you have the most powerful theological rationale for the church's corporate life of mercy.

Indeed, Luther's indictment of his age strikes us in our time: "Christians [in the early church] cared for one another, supported one another, sympathized with one another, bore one another's burdens and affliction. This has all disappeared, and now there remain only the many masses and those who receive this sacrament without in the least understanding or practicing what it signifies." Luther never again so thoroughly explicated this aspect of the Supper, though the theme of the Lord's Supper as source of the church's life as a merciful body is recurrent throughout his life. In this treatise Luther has the luxury of treating the topic before the sacramentarians had begun their frontal assault on the true presence of Christ's

body and blood in the Sacrament. Luther would struggle with that battle, in one way or another, until the day he died. Even his once trusted associate Melanchthon lived to compromise Luther's most cherished New Testament conviction on just this point. Luther was forced to spill a great deal of ink on the question of the true presence of the body and blood, and this struggle overshadowed the themes of love and communal care, which dominate this treatise. In many ways it seems we have followed the same course.

The reader need not be confused by Luther's use of the word "sign" for the Sacrament. He never means by this to deny that Christ's true body and blood are present in the Lord's Supper. The "signs" seen are bread and wine, which bring the body and blood. As the Church and her churchly institutions of mercy "fight, work and pray" for those in need, Luther points us to the beating heart of the church's life and her greatest motivation for such works of mercy — the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament, and the fellowship of love created by them. ("The Sacrament is the Gospel," Luther would write later.) The treatise was written relatively early in Luther's reformation development, though Luther's mention of the saints need not trouble us. The Lutheran confessions recognize that while we are not to call upon the saints in prayer, we need not doubt that the saints are in fact praying for us. This treatise demonstrates Luther's profound conviction of the trans-generational nature of the church.

Read on, and prepare to have Luther revolutionize your view of the Lord's Supper and what it means for the Church as a compassionate, caring body of believers.

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## INTRODUCTION

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This last treatise in Luther's trilogy of 1519 on the sacraments<sup>1</sup> is his first extended statement on the Lord's Supper. He addressed it specifically to laymen<sup>2</sup> and dedicated it to Margaret, duchess of Brunswick. He also made it double-pronged in that he contrasted the spiritual reality of the communion with the corrupt practices of certain fraternal groups; this accounts for the bifocal title.

Luther structures this treatise according to the three parts of the sacrament: the outward sign (paragraphs 1–3, but cf. 14–16), the inward significance (4–16), and the living faith (17–22). He then appends his critique of the brotherhoods.

His proposal that the laity should receive both of the elements was promptly attacked by Duke George of Saxony when he read one of the first copies just before Christmas, 1519. By December 27 he was complaining to the Elector Frederick of Saxony, and soon forwarded his protests also to the Saxon bishops of Meissen and Merseburg. Later Pope Leo X echoed this protest in the bull of June 15, 1520, which condemned forty-one of Luther's alleged errors.

Here, as yet, Luther raised no such controversial issues as the sacrifice of the mass or the mode of the Real Presence. In fact there is a strong suggestion that he probably still accepted the doctrine of transubstantiation. The main thing is that here he offered a practical interpretation of what the body of Christ means in the life of those who would seek to die as well as to live like Christians.

Ecclesiastically, Luther admitted, a person can be excommunicated and thus deprived of the formal ministrations of the papal hierarchy. But what Luther is here talking about is a fellowship

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 5, 25.

<sup>2</sup> The subtitle read, "*Fur die Leyen.*" WA 2, 739.

that goes deeper and rises higher than human designs. Therefore Luther could later show uncommon confidence in burning the bull of Leo X; no such device, he believed, could ever separate him from the communion of saints.<sup>3</sup>

The third part was theologically the crux of the treatise. The nature of faith, Luther points out, is all too often misunderstood, particularly because of the confusing terminology employed by the scholastic theologians. In trying to guarantee the objective reality of the sacrament, the scholastics had called its celebration an *opus operatum*, a faithless work. Luther, on the contrary, contended for the sacrament as an *opus operantis*, a working faith.

This led him to the practical problems of Christian living. Between the sacraments on the one hand, and an upright moral and ethical life on the other, Luther saw a profound connection. The brotherhoods or fraternal associations provided a kind of case study for Luther's sacramentally sensitive theological ethics. Societies or sodalities of laymen organized for charitable and devotional purposes; they also filled a social need among the workers in the various trades and occupations from which they drew their membership. Luther looked upon them as centers of group selfishness, spiritual pride, and immoral conduct, far removed from the opposite pole of the communion of saints.

The following translation, based on one made originally by Jeremiah J. Schindel,<sup>4</sup> is from the original printing by Johann Grünenberg, *Eyn Sermon von dem Hochwirdigen Sacrament, des heyligen waren Leychnams Christi. Und von den Bruderschafften*, that appeared in Wittenberg some time before Dec. 24, 1519, and has been reproduced with annotations from later texts in WA 2, (738) 742–758. By 1525 a total of fourteen editions had come out in German, and in 1524 a translation in Latin.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. A Treatise Concerning the Ban (1520). *PE* 2, (35) 37–54.

<sup>4</sup> *PE* 2, (7) 9–31.

## THE BLESSED SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY AND TRUE BODY OF CHRIST, AND THE BROTHERHOODS

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1. The holy sacrament of the altar, or of the holy and true body<sup>1</sup> of Christ, also has three parts<sup>2</sup> which it is necessary for us to know. The first is the sacrament, or sign. The second is the significance of this sacrament. The third is the faith required with each of the first two. These three parts must be found in every sacrament. The sacrament must be external and visible, having some material form or appearance. The significance must be internal and spiritual, within the spirit of the person. Faith must make both of them together operative and useful.

2. The sacrament, or external *sign*, consists in the form or appearance of bread and wine, just as baptism has water as its sign; only the bread and wine must be used in eating and drinking, just as the water of baptism is used by immersion or pouring. For the sacrament, or sign, must be received, or at least desired, if it is to work a blessing. Of course at present both kinds are not given to the people daily, as in former times.<sup>3</sup> But this is not necessary since the priesthood partakes of it daily in sight of the people. It is enough that the people desire it daily and at present receive one kind, as the Christian Church ordains and provides.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Waren Leychnams* is the actual body which was given into death. MA3, Er 2, 540, n. 382, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Sacrament of Penance*, in this volume, p. 11, and *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism*, in this volume, pp. 29–30.

<sup>3</sup> The custom of giving only the bread but not the wine to the laity was enacted into canon law by the Council of Constance which burned an earlier advocate of both kinds, John Huss, as a heretic, even though the council itself admitted the custom's divergence from the institution of Jesus and the practice of the early church. Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, No. 626.

<sup>4</sup> Later Luther continued to allow for the voluntary use of one kind, but he soon expressed himself more forthrightly on the propriety of both kinds and the wickedness of forbidding both kinds. Cf. *A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass*, in this volume, pp. 106–107. LW 36, 19–28.



3. For my part, however, I would consider it a good thing if the church should again decree<sup>5</sup> in a general council that all persons be given both kinds, like the priests. Not because one kind is insufficient, since indeed the desire of faith is alone sufficient, as St. Augustine says, “Why do you prepare stomach and teeth? Only believe, and you have already partaken of the sacrament.”<sup>6</sup> But it would be fitting and fine that the form, or sign, of the sacrament be given not in part only, but in its entirety, just as I said of baptism: it would be more fitting to immerse in the water than to pour with it, for the sake of the completeness and perfection of the sign.<sup>7</sup> For this sacrament [of the Body of Christ], as we shall see, signifies the complete union and the undivided fellowship of the saints; and this is poorly and unfittingly indicated by [distributing] only one part of the sacrament. Nor is there as great a danger in the use of the cup as is supposed,<sup>8</sup> since the people seldom go to this sacrament. Besides, Christ was well aware of all future dangers, and yet he saw fit to institute both kinds for the use of all his Christians.

4. The *significance* or effect of this sacrament is fellowship of all the saints. From this it derives its common name *synaxis* [Greek] or *communio* [Latin], that is, fellowship. And the Latin *communicare* [commune or communicate], or as we say in German, *zum sacrament gehen* [go to the sacrament], means to take part in this fellowship. Hence it is that Christ and all saints are one spiritual body,<sup>9</sup> just as the inhabitants of a city are one community and body, each citizen being a member of the other

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<sup>5</sup> The Council of Basel had concluded the *Compactata* of Prague (November 30, 1433), which reversed the decision of Constance to the extent of allowing the followers of Huss to administer the sacrament in both kinds. Cf. LW 36 27, and 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Sermo* 112, cap. 5. Migne 38, 645.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> The danger, readily conceded by pious laity who trembled at the thought of it, was that a drop of the consecrated wine might fall to the floor. Since the bread was regarded as the more important anyway—and could be placed in the mouth of the communicant without his even having to touch it—it seemed possible, by dispensing with reception of the wine, to avoid the danger of desecrating the sacrament. Cf. Albert Hauek (ed.), *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (3rd ed., 24 vols.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896–1913), XII, 721.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:5.

and of the entire city. All the saints, therefore, are members of Christ and of the church, which is a spiritual and eternal city of God.<sup>10</sup> And whoever is taken into this city is said to be received into the community of saints and to be incorporated into Christ's spiritual body and made a member of him. On the other hand *excommunicare* [excommunicate] means to put out of the community and to sever a member from this body; and that is called in our language "putting one under the ban" — though a distinction [is to be made in this regard] as I shall show in the following treatise, concerning the ban.<sup>11</sup>

To receive this sacrament in bread and wine, then, is nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all saints. It is as if a citizen were given a sign, a document, or some other token to assure him that he is a citizen of the city, a member of that particular community. St. Paul says this very thing in **1 CORINTHIANS 10[:17]**, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

5. This fellowship consists in this, that all the spiritual possessions of Christ and his saints<sup>12</sup> are shared with and become the common property of him who receives this sacrament. Again all sufferings and sins also become common property; and thus love engenders love in return and [mutual love] unites. To carry out our homely figure, it is like a city where every citizen shares with all the others the city's name, honor, freedom, trade, customs, usages, help, support, protection, and the like, while at the same

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Is. 60:14; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12.

<sup>11</sup> See *A Treatise Concerning the Ban* (1520) (PE 2, 35–54), where Luther distinguishes between the external ban (excommunication) which excludes from the church's sacramental fellowship and the internal ban (sin and unbelief) which excludes from the fellowship with Christ. Cf. in this volume, p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> As early as 1515–1516 in his lectures on Romans [12:13] Luther distinguished between the contemporary understanding of "saints" as those who "are blessed and participating in glory" and the biblical understanding of "saints" as "all those who believe in Christ." WA 56, 469; MA3, Er 2, 398. This second sense is implicit in his use of the term here and throughout this treatise.

time he shares all the dangers of fire and flood, enemies and death, losses, taxes, and the like. For he who would share in the profits must also share in the costs,<sup>13</sup> and ever recompense love with love.<sup>14</sup> Here we see that whoever injures one citizen injures an entire city and all its citizens; whoever benefits one [citizen] deserves favor and thanks from all the others. So also in our natural body, as St. Paul says in **1 CORINTHIANS 12[:25–26]**, where he gives this sacrament a spiritual explanation, “The members . . . have the same care for one another”. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” This is obvious: if anyone’s foot hurts him, yes, even the little toe, the eye at once looks at it, the fingers grasp it, the face puckers, the whole body bends over to it, and all are concerned with this small member; again, once it is cared for all the other members are benefited. This comparison must be noted well if one wishes to understand this sacrament, for Scripture uses it for the sake of the unlearned.

6. In this sacrament, therefore, man is given through the priest a sure sign from God himself that he is thus united with Christ and his saints and has all things in common [with them], that Christ’s sufferings and life are his own, together with the lives and sufferings of all the saints. Therefore whoever does injury to [the believer], does injury to Christ and all the saints, as he says through the prophet [**ZECH. 2:8**], “He who touches you touches the apple of [my] eye.” On the other hand whoever does him a kindness does it to Christ and all his saints; as he says in **MATTHEW 25[:40]**, “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” Again, man must be willing to share

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. the English aphorism, “What’s none of my profit shall be none of my peril” (Vincent Stuckey Lean, *Lean’s Collectanea* [Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1904], IV, 178) with its German equivalents in Karl F. Wander (ed.), *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon* (5 vols.; Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1867–1880), I, 1557, “Geniessen,” Nos. 3, 4, 10, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the English aphorism, “Love is love’s reward” (*Lean’s Collectanea*, IV, 39), with its German equivalents in Wander (ed.), *Sprichwörter-Lexikon*, III, 136ff., “Liebe,” Nos. 146, 386, 388, 635, 661, and especially No. 410 which also cites the English, “Love can neither be bought nor sold, its only price is love.”

all the burdens and misfortunes of Christ and his saints, the cost as well as the profit. Let us consider more fully these two [sides of the fellowship].

7. Now adversity assails us in more than one form. There is, in the first place, the sin that remains in our flesh after baptism: the inclination to anger, hatred, pride, unchastity, and so forth. This sin assails us as long as we live.<sup>15</sup> Here we not only need the help of the community [of saints] and of Christ, in order that they might with us fight this sin, but it is also necessary that Christ and his saints intercede for us before God, so that this sin may not be charged to our account by God's strict judgment. Therefore in order to strengthen and encourage us against this same sin, God gives us this sacrament, as much as to say, "Look, many kinds of sin are assailing you; take this sign by which I give you my pledge that this sin is assailing not only you but also my Son, Christ, and all his saints in heaven and on earth. Therefore take heart and be bold. You are not fighting alone. Great help and support are all around you." King David speaks thus of this bread, "Bread to strengthen man's heart" [Ps. 104:15]. And the Scriptures in numerous places ascribe to this sacrament the property of strengthening, as in **ACTS 9[:18-19]** [where it is written] of St. Paul, he "was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened."

In the second place the evil spirit assails us unceasingly with many sins and afflictions. In the third place the world, full of wickedness, entices and persecutes us and is altogether bad. Finally our own guilty conscience assails us with our past sins; and there is the fear of death and the pains of hell. All of these afflictions make us weary and weak, unless we seek strength in this fellowship, where strength is to be found.

8. Whoever is in despair, distressed by a sin-stricken conscience or terrified by death or carrying some other burden

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. pp. 30-34.

upon his heart, if he would be rid of them all, let him go joyfully to the sacrament of the altar and lay down his woe in the midst of the community [of saints] and seek help from the entire company of the spiritual body — just as a citizen whose property has suffered damage or misfortune at the hands of his enemies makes complaint to his town council and fellow citizens and asks them for help. The immeasurable grace and mercy of God are given us in this sacrament to the end that we might put from us all misery and tribulation [*anfechtung*] and lay it upon the community [of saints], and especially on Christ. Then we may with joy find strength and comfort, and say, “Though I am a sinner and have fallen, though this or that misfortune has befallen me, nevertheless I will go to the sacrament to receive a sign from God that I have on my side Christ’s righteousness, life, and sufferings, with all holy angels and the blessed in heaven and all pious men on earth. If I die, I am not alone in death; if I suffer, they suffer with me. [I know that] all my misfortune is shared with Christ and the saints, because I have a sure sign of their love toward me.” See, this is the benefit to be derived from this sacrament; this is the use we should make of it. Then the heart cannot but rejoice and be strengthened.

9. When you have partaken of this sacrament, therefore, or desire to partake of it, you must in turn share the misfortunes of the fellowship, as has been said. But what are these? Christ in heaven and the angels, together with the saints, have no misfortunes, except when injury is done to the truth and to the Word of God. Indeed, as we have said, every bane and blessing of all the saints on earth affects them. Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in his holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is

everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray, and — if you cannot do more — have heartfelt sympathy. See, this is what it means to bear in your turn the misfortune and adversity of Christ and his saints. Here the saying of Paul is fulfilled, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” [GAL. 6:2]. See, as you uphold all of them, so they all in turn uphold you; and all things are in common, both good and evil. Then all things become easy, and the evil spirit cannot stand up against this fellowship.

When Christ instituted the sacrament, he said, “This is my body which is given for you, this is my blood which is poured out for you. As often as you do this, remember me.”<sup>16</sup> It is as if he were saying, “I am the Head, I will be the first to give himself for you. I will make your suffering and misfortune my own and will bear it for you, so that you in your turn may do the same for me and for one another, allowing all things to be common property, in me, and with me. And I leave you this sacrament as a sure token of all this, in order that you may not forget me, but daily call to mind and admonish one another by means of what I did and am still doing for you, in order that you may be strengthened, and also bear one another in the same way.”

**10.** This is also a reason, indeed the chief reason, why this sacrament is received many times, while baptism is received but once. Baptism is the taking up or entering upon a new life,<sup>17</sup> in the course of which boundless adversities assail us, with sins and sufferings, both our own and those of others. There is the devil, the world, and our own flesh and conscience, as I have said. They never cease to hound us and oppress us. Therefore we need the strength, support, and help of Christ and of his saints. These are pledged to us here, as in a sure sign, by which we are made one with them — incorporated into them — and all our woe is laid down in the midst of the community [of saints].

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. p. 82, n. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. p. 30.

For this reason it even happens that this holy sacrament is of little or no benefit to those who have no misfortune or anxiety, or who do not sense their adversity. For it is given only to those who need strength and comfort, who have timid hearts and terrified consciences, and who are assailed by sin, or have even fallen into sin. How could it do anything for untroubled and secure spirits, who neither need nor desire it? For the Mother of God<sup>18</sup> says, “He has filled the hungry [LUKE 1:53], and comforts them that are distressed.”

11. In order that the disciples, therefore, might by all means be worthy and well prepared for this sacrament, Christ first made them sorrowful, held before them his departure and death, by which they became exceedingly troubled. And then he greatly terrified them when he said that one of them would betray him. When they were thus full of sorrow and anxiety, disturbed by sorrow and the sin of betrayal, then they were worthy, and he gave them his holy body<sup>19</sup> to strengthen them.<sup>20</sup> By which he teaches us that this sacrament is strength and comfort for those who are troubled and distressed by sin and evil. St. Augustine says the same thing, “This food demands only hungry souls, and is shunned by none so greatly as by a sated soul which does not need it.”<sup>21</sup> Thus the Jews were required to eat the Passover with bitter herbs, standing and in haste [EXOD. 12:8, 11]; this too signifies that this sacrament demands souls that are desirous, needy, and sorrowful. Now if one will make the afflictions of Christ and of all Christians his own, defend the truth, oppose unrighteousness, and help bear the needs of the innocent and the sufferings of all Christians, then he will find

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<sup>18</sup> Luther often called the Virgin Mary by this term of veneration which was common in Western Christendom. Cf. his discussion of the name in *The Magnificat* (1521). LW 21, 326–327.

<sup>19</sup> *Leychnam*; cf. p. 49, n. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Following Matt. 26:20–25 and Mark 14:17–21, Luther places the announcement of the betrayal prior to the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Augustine’s commentary on Ps. 22:26 (Vulgate 21:27) in Migne 36, 178.

affliction and adversity enough, over and above that which his evil nature, the world, the devil, and sin daily inflict upon him. And it is even God's will and purpose to set so many hounds upon us and oppress us, and everywhere to prepare bitter herbs for us, so that we may long for this strength and take delight in the holy sacrament, and thus be worthy (that is, desirous) of it.

12. It is Christ's will, then, that we partake of it frequently, in order that we may remember him and exercise ourselves in this fellowship according to his example. For if his example were no longer kept before us, the fellowship also would soon be forgotten. So we at present see to our sorrow that many masses are held and yet the Christian fellowship which should be preached, practiced, and kept before us by Christ's example has virtually perished. So much so that we hardly know any more what purpose this sacrament serves or how it should be used. Indeed with our masses we frequently destroy this fellowship and pervert everything. This is the fault of the preachers who do not preach the gospel or the sacraments, but their humanly devised fables about the many works [of satisfaction]<sup>22</sup> to be done and the ways to live aright.

But in times past this sacrament was so properly used, and the people were taught to understand this fellowship so well, that they even gathered food and material goods in the church, and there — as St. Paul writes in **1 CORINTHIANS 11**<sup>23</sup> — distributed among those who were in need. We have a vestige of this [practice] in the little word “collect” in the mass,<sup>24</sup> which means a general collection, just as a common fund is gathered to be given to the poor. Those were the days too when so many became martyrs and saints. There were fewer masses, but much strength and blessing resulted from the masses; Christians cared for one another, supported one another,

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. pp. 12–18.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor. 11:21, 33; cf. Acts 2:44–46.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. p. 95.



sympathized with one another, bore one another's burdens and affliction. This has all disappeared, and now there remain only the many masses and the many who receive this sacrament without in the least understanding or practicing what it signifies.

**13.** There are those, indeed, who would gladly share in the profits but not in the costs. That is, they like to hear that in this sacrament the help, fellowship, and support of all the saints are promised and given to them. But they are unwilling in their turn to belong also to this fellowship. They will not help the poor, put up with sinners, care for the sorrowing, suffer with the suffering, intercede for others, defend the truth, and at the risk of [their own] life, property, and honor seek the betterment of the church and of all Christians. They are unwilling because they fear the world. They do not want to have to suffer disfavor, harm, shame, or death, although it is God's will that they be thus driven — for the sake of the truth and of their neighbors — to desire the great grace and strength of this sacrament. They are self-seeking persons, whom this sacrament does not benefit. Just as we could not put up with a citizen who wanted to be helped, protected, and made free by the community, and yet in his turn would do nothing for it nor serve it, no, we on our part must make the evil of others our own, if we desire Christ and his saints to make our evil their own. Then will the fellowship be complete, and justice be done to the sacrament. For the sacrament has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a person that he is made one with all others.

**14.** To signify this fellowship, God has appointed such signs of this sacrament as in every way serve this purpose and by their very form stimulate and motivate us to this fellowship. For just as the bread is made out of many grains ground and mixed together, and out of the bodies of many grains there comes the body of one bread,<sup>25</sup> in which each grain loses its form and body

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<sup>25</sup> The figure is very ancient, going back at least into the second century as attested by a document

and takes upon itself the common body of the bread; and just as the drops of wine, in losing their own form, become the body of one common wine and drink — so it is and should be with us, if we use this sacrament properly. Christ with all saints, by his love, takes upon himself our form [PHIL. 2:7], fights with us against sin, death, and all evil. This enkindles in us such love that we take on his form, rely upon his righteousness, life, and blessedness. And through the interchange of his blessings and our misfortunes, we become one loaf, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common. O this is a great sacrament,<sup>26</sup> says St. Paul, that Christ and the church are one flesh and bone. Again through this same love, we are to be changed and to make the infirmities of all other Christians our own; we are to take upon ourselves their form and their necessity, and all the good that is within our power we are to make theirs, that they may profit from it. That is real fellowship, and that is the true significance of this sacrament. In this way we are changed into one another and are made into a community by love. Without love there can be no such change.

15. Christ appointed these two forms of bread and wine, rather than any other, as a further indication of the very union and fellowship which is in this sacrament. For there is no more intimate, deep, and indivisible union than the union of the food with him who is fed. For the food enters into and is assimilated by his very nature, and becomes one substance with the person who is fed. Other unions, achieved by such things as nails, glue, cords, and the like, do not make one indivisible substance of the objects joined together. Thus in the sacrament we too become

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unknown to Luther, *The Didache* 9:4, "As this piece [of bread] was scattered over the hills [the reference is likely to the sowing of wheat on the hillsides of Judea] and then was brought together and made one, so let your church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom." Cyril C. Richardson (trans., ed.), *Early Christian Fathers* ("The Library of Christian Classics," Vol. 1 [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953]), p. 175.

<sup>26</sup> In the Vulgate of St. Jerome, the Greek word *mysterion* (mystery) in Eph. 5:32 is translated *sacramentum*. Cf. Luther's later discussion of the term in LW 36, 93–95.

united with Christ, and are made one body with all the saints, so that Christ cares for us and acts in our behalf. As if he were what we are, he makes whatever concerns us to concern him as well, and even more than it does us. In turn we so care for Christ, as if we were what he is, which indeed we shall finally be—we shall be conformed to his likeness. As St. John says, “We know that when he appears we shall be like him” [1 JOHN 3:2]. So deep and complete is the fellowship of Christ and all the saints with us. Thus our sins assail him, while his righteousness protects us. For the union makes all things common, until at last Christ completely destroys sin in us and makes us like himself, at the Last Day. Likewise by the same love we are to be united with our neighbors, we in them and they in us.

**16.** Besides all this, Christ did not institute these two forms solitary and alone, but he gave his true natural flesh in the bread, and his natural true blood in the wine, that he might give a really perfect sacrament or sign. For just as the bread is changed<sup>27</sup> into his true natural body<sup>28</sup> and the wine into his natural true blood, so truly are we also drawn and changed into the spiritual body, that is, into the fellowship of Christ and all saints and by this sacrament put into possession of all the virtues and mercies of Christ and his saints, as was said above<sup>29</sup> of a citizen who is taken and incorporated into the protection and freedom of the city and the entire community. For this reason he instituted not simply the one form, but two separate forms — his flesh under the bread, his blood under the wine — to indicate that not only his life and good works, which are indicated by his flesh and which he

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<sup>27</sup> *Vorwandelt*. While this term and the imagery involving change are associated with the doctrine of transubstantiation, it is clear that, through rejecting all scholastic speculation concerning substance (see p. 63), Luther is already beginning to call into question that very doctrine which within a year he was to condemn as “the second captivity of the sacrament” (LW 36, 28–35). Cf. Charles E. Hay (trans.) Reinhold Seeberg’s *History of Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952), II, 286, n. 1, “Literally, transubstantiation is here retained, but really Luther is only concerned to hold fast the idea that the body is ‘in’ the bread.”

<sup>28</sup> *Leychnam*; cf. p. 49, n. 1.

<sup>29</sup> See pp. 50–55.

accomplished in his flesh, but also his passion and martyrdom, which are indicated by his blood and in which he poured out his blood, are all our own. And we, being drawn into them, may use and profit from them.

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

Here, now, follows the third part of the sacrament,<sup>30</sup> that is, the *faith* on which everything depends. For it is not enough to know what the sacrament is and signifies. It is not enough that you know it is a fellowship and a gracious exchange or blending of our sin and suffering with the righteousness of Christ and his saints. You must also desire it and firmly believe that you have received it. Here the devil and our own nature wage their fiercest fight, so that faith may by no means stand firm. There are those who practice their arts and subtleties by trying [to fathom] what becomes of the bread when it is changed into Christ's flesh and of the wine when it is changed into his blood and how the whole Christ, his flesh and blood, can be encompassed in so small a portion of bread and wine. It does not matter if you do not see it.<sup>31</sup> It is enough to know that it is a divine sign in which Christ's flesh and blood are truly present. The how and the where, we leave to him.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The three parts are listed on p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> *Suchist*, literally "seek" WA 2, 750, n. 1 and MA3 1, 390, 17 both suggest that *siehest* may have been intended. There need not have been a typographical error here, however. The Indogermanic antecedent of *suchen* in meaning was close to the Latin *sagio*, to perceive. Luther may have been using the term with its early connotations, in the sense of tracing a thing down or ferreting it out until you fathom or grasp it. Cf. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm (eds.), *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (16 vols.; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1854–1954), X, 835.

<sup>32</sup> See *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. LW 36, 32–35.

**18.** See to it that here you exercise and strengthen your faith, so that when you are sorrowful or when your sins press you and you go to the sacrament or hear mass, you do so with a hearty desire for this sacrament and for what it signifies. Then do not doubt that you have what the sacrament signifies, that is, be certain that Christ and all his saints are coming to you with all their virtues, sufferings, and mercies, to live, work, suffer, and die with you, and that they desire to be wholly yours, having all things in common with you. If you will exercise and strengthen this faith, then you will experience what a rich, joyous, and bountiful wedding feast your God has prepared for you upon the altar. Then you will understand what the great feast of King Ahasuerus signifies [ESTHER 1:5]; and you will see what that wedding feast is for which God slew his oxen and fat calves, as it is written in the gospel [MATT. 22:2-4]. Then your heart will become truly free and confident, strong and courageous against all enemies [PS. 23:5]. For who will fear any calamity if he is sure that Christ and all his saints are with him and have all things, evil or good, in common with him? So we read in ACTS 2[:46] that the disciples of Christ broke this bread and ate with great gladness of heart. Since, then, this work is so great that the smallness of our souls would not dare to desire it, to say nothing of hoping for it or expecting it, therefore it is necessary and profitable to go often to the sacrament, or at least in the daily mass to exercise and strengthen this faith on which the whole thing depends and for the sake of which it was instituted. For if you doubt, you do God the greatest dishonor and make him out to be a faithless liar; if you cannot believe, then pray for faith, as was said earlier in the other treatise.<sup>33</sup>

**19.** See to it also that you give yourself to everyone in fellowship and by no means exclude anyone in hatred or anger. For this sacrament of fellowship, love, and unity cannot tolerate

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. *The Sacrament of Penance* (1519), pp. 3-22.

discord and disunity. You must take to heart the infirmities and needs of others, as if they were your own. Then offer to others your strength, as if it were their own, just as Christ does for you in the sacrament. This is what it means to be changed into one another through love, out of many particles to become one bread and drink, to lose one's own form and take on that which is common to all.<sup>34</sup>

For this reason slanderers and those who wickedly judge and despise others cannot but receive death in the sacrament, as St. Paul writes in **1 CORINTHIANS 11[:29]**. For they do not do unto their neighbor what they seek from Christ, and what the sacrament indicates. They begrudge others anything good; they have no sympathy for them; they do not care for others as they themselves desire to be cared for by Christ. And then they fall into such blindness that they do not know what else to do in this sacrament except to fear and honor Christ there present<sup>35</sup> with their own prayers and devotion. When they have done this, they think they have done their whole duty. But Christ has given his holy body for this purpose, that the thing signified by the sacrament — the fellowship, the change wrought by love — may be put into practice. And Christ values his spiritual body, which is the fellowship of his saints, more than his own natural body. To him it is more important, especially in this sacrament, that faith in the fellowship with him and with his saints may be properly exercised and become strong in us; and that we, in keeping with it, may properly exercise our fellowship with one another. This purpose of Christ the blind worshipers do not perceive. In their devoutness they go on daily saying and hearing mass, but they remain every day the same; indeed every day they become worse but do not perceive it.

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<sup>34</sup> See pp. 59–60.

<sup>35</sup> *Kegenwertig*, i.e., present in the consecrated host.

Therefore take heed. It is more needful that you discern the spiritual than the natural body of Christ; and faith in the spiritual body is more necessary than faith in the natural body. For the natural without the spiritual profits us nothing in this sacrament; a change must occur [in the communicant] and be exercised through love.

20. There are many who regardless of this change of love and faith rely upon the fact that the mass or the sacrament is, as they say, *opus gratum opere operato*,<sup>36</sup> that is, a work which of itself pleases God, even though they who perform it do not please him. From this they conclude that however unworthily masses are said, it is nonetheless a good thing to have many masses, since harm comes [only] to those who say or use them unworthily. I grant everyone [the right to] his opinion, but such fables do not please me. For, [if you desire] to speak in these terms, there is no creature or work that does not of itself please God, as is written in **GENESIS 1[:31]**, “God saw all his works and they pleased him.” What is the result if bread, wine, gold, and all good things are misused, even though of themselves they are pleasing to God? Why, the consequence of that is condemnation. So also here: the more precious the sacrament, the greater the harm which comes upon the whole community [of saints] from its misuse. For it was not instituted for its own sake, that it might please God, but for our sake, that we might use it right, exercise our faith by it, and through it become pleasing to God. If it is merely an *opus operatum*,<sup>37</sup> it works only harm everywhere; it must become an *opus operantis*.<sup>38</sup> Just as bread and wine, no matter how much they may please God in and of themselves, work only harm if they are not used, so it is not enough that the sacrament be

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<sup>36</sup> Literally, a work (that is) acceptable by (virtue of) the work (having been) performed.

<sup>37</sup> *Opus operatum* is an action that is done, completed, finished, considered as such without reference to the doer of it.

<sup>38</sup> *Opus operantis* is an action considered with reference to the doer of it, the action of the one acting.

merely completed (that is, *opus operatum*); it must also be used in faith (that is, *opus operantis*). And we must take care lest with such dangerous interpretations the sacrament's power and virtue be lost on us, and faith perish utterly through the false security of the [outwardly] completed sacrament.

All this comes from the fact that they pay more attention in this sacrament to Christ's natural body than to the fellowship, the spiritual body. Christ on the cross was also a completed work which was well pleasing to God. But to this day the Jews have found it a stumbling block because they did not construe it as a work that is made use of in faith. See to it, then, that for you the sacrament is an *opus operantis*, that is, a work that is made use of, that is well pleasing to God not because of what it is in itself but because of your faith and your good use of it. The Word of God too is of itself pleasing to God, but it is harmful to me unless in me it also pleases God. In short, such expressions as *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* are vain words of men,<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Opus operatum* and *opus operantis* were terms used generally in discussion of the difference between the sacraments of the old law and those of the new. The latter, according to Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), are in their own right signs and causes of invisible grace, and hence superior to the former which were merely signs but not causes. "Otherwise," added Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), "they would have obviated the necessity of Christ's passion (Gal. 2:21)." Thus the sacraments of the Old Testament signified the passion of Christ and its effects; but they had no power to justify — their effect depended rather on the faith they were able to stimulate in the believer. The sacraments of the New Testament, on the other hand, in and of themselves effectively impart grace *ex opere operato*, i.e., simply through the use of them, apart from any act of the soul. Thomas, however, still presupposed faith; not as the cause of the sacrament's effect to be sure, but as the receptivity for the sacrament's effect. Bonaventura (d. 1274) also included faith as a factor in the justification of the New Testament sacraments, only he regarded it as something supplementary to the *opus operatum*, the external action in and of itself, to which the justifying grace and its effect were inseparably attached. From this reduction of faith to something supplementary, it was only a step to the elimination of it as something altogether expendable. The step was taken by Duns Scotus (d. 1308) and Gabriel Biel (d. 1495) when they defined the subjective condition for the sacrament's effecting a blessing no longer in terms of a positive disposition, but in terms of the negative absence of any impediment. Reception of the sacrament in and of itself invariably imparts grace so long as man does not "interpose an obstacle," such as positive disbelief or mortal sin. Thus the scholastics all agreed that the sacraments impart grace *ex opere operato*. They differed as to whether faith was necessary for the reception of that grace. According to Duns Scotus and Gabriel Biel the necessity of faith is expressly denied and a purely passive receptivity is held to be sufficient. Intended originally to affirm that the power and effect of the sacrament are caused not by any disposition on man's part but solely by God and the sufferings of Christ, the concept *ex opere operato* thus came ultimately to mean that the proper disposition on the part of the recipient need not be one of positive faith but of merely negative passivity. It was this latest, fullest, and perhaps logical development of the scholastic view



more of a hindrance than a help. And who could tell of all the abominable abuses and misbeliefs which daily multiply about this blessed sacrament, some of which are so spiritual and holy that they might almost lead an angel astray?

Briefly, whoever would understand the abuses need only keep before him the aforesaid use and faith of this sacrament; namely, that there must be a sorrowing, hungry soul, who desires heartily the love, help, and support of the entire community — of Christ and of all Christendom — and who does not doubt that in faith [all these desires] are obtained, and who thereupon makes himself one with everyone. Whoever does not take this as his point of departure for arranging and ordering his hearing or reading of masses and his receiving of the sacrament is in error and does not use this sacrament to his salvation. It is for this reason also that the world is overrun with pestilences, wars, and other horrible plagues,<sup>40</sup> because with our many masses we only bring down upon us greater disfavor.

**21.** We see now how necessary this sacrament is for those who must face death, or other dangers of body and soul, that they not be left in them alone but be strengthened in the fellowship of Christ and all saints. This is why Christ instituted it and gave it to his disciples in the hour of their extreme need and peril. Since we then are all daily surrounded by all kinds of danger, and must at last die, we should humbly and heartily give thanks with all our powers to the God of all mercy for giving us such a gracious sign, by which — if we hold fast to it in faith — he leads and draws us through death and every danger unto himself, unto Christ and all saints.

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that Luther is attacking. F. Kattenbusch in Hauck (ed.), *Realencyklopädie*, XVII, 363–365.

The concept of the *opus operatum* also proved useful for guaranteeing the validity of the sacrament irrespective of the personal worthiness of the celebrating priest (see p. 102 and LW 36, 47, 55). Ultimately Luther's solution lay not in the preference for *operantis* over *operatum* but in the rejection of the *opus* altogether. The sacrament is not a good work or sacrifice on the part of man, but a testament or promise on the part of God, to be received by man in faith — not an *officium* but a *beneficium* (see p. 93 and LW 36, 35–57).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 11:30.

Therefore it is also profitable and necessary that the love and fellowship of Christ and all saints be hidden, invisible, and spiritual, and that only a bodily, visible, and outward sign of it be given to us. For if this love, fellowship, and support were apparent to all, like the transient fellowship of men, we would not be strengthened or trained by it to desire or put our trust in the things that are unseen and eternal [2 COR. 4:18]. Instead we would be trained to put our trust only in things that are transient and seen, and would become so accustomed to them as to be unwilling to let them go; we would not follow God, except so far as visible and tangible things led us. We would thereby be prevented from ever coming to God. For everything that is bound to time and sense must fall away, and we must learn to do without them, if we are to come to God.

For this reason the mass and this sacrament are a sign by which we train and accustom ourselves to let go of all visible love, help, and comfort, and to trust in the invisible love, help, and support of Christ and his saints. For death takes away all the things that are seen and separates us from men and transient things. To meet it, we must, therefore, have the help of the things that are unseen and eternal. And these are indicated to us in the sacrament and sign, to which we cling by faith until we finally attain to them also with sight and senses.

Thus the sacrament is for us a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher, by which and in which we pass from this world into eternal life. Therefore everything depends on faith. He who does not believe is like the man who is supposed to cross the sea, but who is so timid that he does not trust the ship; and so he must remain and never be saved, because he will not embark and cross over. This is the fruit of our dependence on the senses and of our untrained faith, which shrinks from the passage across the Jordan of death; and the devil too has a gruesome hand in it.

22. This was signified long ago in **JOSHUA 3[:14-17]**. After the children of Israel had gone dry-shod through the Red Sea [**Ex. 14:21-22**] — in which [event] baptism was typified — they went through the Jordan also in like manner. But the priests stood with the ark in the Jordan, and the water below them was cut off, while the water above them rose up like a mountain — in which [event] this sacrament is typified. The priests hold and carry the ark in the Jordan when, in the hour of our death or peril, they preach and administer to us this sacrament, the fellowship of Christ and all saints. If we then believe, the waters below us depart; that is, the things that are seen and transient do nothing but flee from us. The waters above us, however, well up high; that is, the horrible torments of the other world, which we envision at the hour of death, terrify us as if they would overwhelm us. If, however, we pay no attention to them, and walk over with a firm faith, then we shall enter dry-shod and unharmed into eternal life.

We have, therefore, two principal sacraments in the church, baptism and the bread. Baptism leads us into a new life on earth; the bread guides us through death into eternal life. And the two are signified by the Red Sea and the Jordan, and by the two lands, one beyond and one on this side of the Jordan. This is why our Lord said at the Last Supper, “I shall not drink again of this wine until I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” [**MATT. 26:29**]. So entirely is this sacrament intended and instituted for a strengthening against death and an entrance into eternal life.

In conclusion, the blessing of this sacrament is fellowship and love, by which we are strengthened against death and all evil. This fellowship is twofold: on the one hand we partake of Christ and all saints; on the other hand we permit all Christians to be partakers of us, in whatever way they and we are able. Thus by means of this sacrament, all self-seeking love is rooted out and gives place to that which seeks the common good of

all; and through the change wrought by love there is one bread, one drink, one body, one community. This is the true unity of Christian brethren. Let us see, therefore, how the neat-looking brotherhoods, of which there are now so many, compare and square with this.

## THE BROTHERHOODS<sup>41</sup>

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1. First let us consider the evil practices of the brotherhoods. One of these is their gluttony and drunkenness. After one or more masses are held,<sup>42</sup> the rest of the day and night, and other days besides, are given over to the devil; they do only what displeases God. Such mad reveling has been introduced by the evil spirit, and he calls it a brotherhood, whereas it is more a debauch and an altogether pagan, yes, a swinish way of life. It would be far better to have no brotherhoods in the world at all than to countenance such misconduct. Temporal lords and cities should unite with the clergy in abolishing it. For by it God, the saints, and all Christians are greatly dishonored; and the divine services and feast days are made into a laughingstock for the devil. Saints' days are supposed to be kept and hallowed by good works. And the brotherhood is also supposed to be a special convocation of good works; instead it has become a collecting of money for beer. What have the names of Our Lady,<sup>43</sup> St. Anne,<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Originally made up of monks and monasteries, later primarily of laymen, these sodalities ("fraternities," "confraternities") were associations for devotional purposes. Members were obligated to the recitation of certain prayers and the attendance upon certain masses at stipulated times. Each member was believed to participate—and, most important of all, even after death—in the benefits accruing from these "good works" of all the other members. In the case of most of the sodalities, membership (for which the fees ranged from one to twenty gulden) entitled the member to the enjoyment of certain indulgences. In 1520 little Wittenberg boasted of twenty such fraternities; Hamburg had more than one hundred. In 1519 Degenhard Peffinger of Wittenberg was a member of eight such fraternities in his home city and through their cartel relationships derived benefits from twenty-seven more in other places. The brotherhood of St. Peter in Salzburg was united in fellowship with eighty other fraternities. Hauck (ed.), *Realencyklopädie*, III, 434–437; Karl Benrath (ed.), *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation, von D. Martin Luther* (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1884), pp. 106–107.

<sup>42</sup> A brotherhood usually came together monthly—often weekly—as well as on the day of its particular saint and on festival days of its related monastic order, ostensibly for pious exercises but in reality for feasting and debauchery which had long been a source of concern to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities as well as to the Reformers. Henry C. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences* (Philadelphia: Lea, 1896), III, 474–476.

<sup>43</sup> The Carmelites were possibly the first to form sodalities with the specific purpose of devotion to the Virgin Mary, having organized in the fourteenth century the "Confraternity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel." Jackson (ed.), *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, III, 226.

<sup>44</sup> According to tradition, St. Anne was the mother of the Holy Virgin; sodalities to her honor and bearing her name spread, as Kolde says, "like an epidemic" after the fourteenth century. Hauck (ed.), *Realencyklopädie*, III, 437.

St. Sebastian,<sup>45</sup> or other saints to do with your brotherhoods, in which you have nothing but gluttony, drunkenness, useless squandering of money, howling, yelling, chattering, dancing, and wasting of time? If a sow were made the patron saint of such a brotherhood she would not consent. Why then do they afflict the dear saints so miserably by taking their names in vain in such shameful practices and sins, and by dishonoring and blaspheming with such evil practices the brotherhoods named after these saints? Woe unto them who do this, and [unto them who] permit it!

2. If men desire to maintain a brotherhood, they should gather provisions and feed and serve a tableful or two of poor people, for the sake of God. The day before they should fast,<sup>46</sup> and on the feast day remain sober, passing the time in prayer and other good works. Then God and his saints would be truly honored; there would be improvement too, and a good example would be given to others. Or they should gather the money which they intend to squander for drink, and collect it into a common treasury, each craft for itself. Then in cases of hardship, needy fellow workmen might be helped to get started, and be lent money, or a young couple of the same craft might be fitted out respectably from this common treasury. These would be works of true brotherhood; they would make God and his saints look with favor upon the brotherhoods, of which they would then gladly be the patrons. But where men are unwilling to do this, where they insist on following the old ways of simulated brotherhood, I admonish that they not do it on the saints' days, nor in the name of the saints or of the brotherhood. Let them take some other weekday and leave the names of the saints and of their brotherhoods alone, lest the saints one day punish it. Although there is no day which is not dishonored by such

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<sup>45</sup> St. Sebastian was martyred on January 20 (year unknown) in Rome under Diocletian, who was emperor in 284–305. *Schaff-Herzog*, X, 320.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. pp. 39–40.

doings, at least the festivals and the names of the saints should be spared. For such brotherhoods call themselves brotherhoods of the saints while they do the work of the devil.

3. There is another evil feature of the brotherhoods, and it is of a spiritual nature. That is the false opinion they have that their brotherhood is to be a benefit to no one but themselves, those who are members on the roll or who contribute. This damnably wicked opinion is an even worse evil than the first, and it is one of the reasons why God has brought it about that with their gluttony, drunkenness, and the like the brotherhoods are becoming such a mockery and blasphemy of God. For in them men learn to seek their own good, to love themselves, to be faithful only to one another, to despise others, to think themselves better than others, and to presume to stand higher before God than others. And so perishes the communion of saints, Christian love, and the true brotherhood which is established in the holy sacrament, while selfish love grows in them. That is, by means of these many external brotherhoods devoted to works they oppose and destroy the one, inner, spiritual, essential brotherhood common to all saints.

When God sees this perverted state of affairs, he perverts it still more, as is written in **PSALM 18[:26]**, “With the perverse thou wilt be perverted.”<sup>47</sup> So God brings it to pass that they make themselves and their brotherhoods a mockery and a disgrace. And he casts them out of the common brotherhood of saints — which they have opposed and with which they do not make common cause — and into their own brotherhood of gluttony, drunkenness, and unchastity; so that they, who have neither sought nor thought of anything more than their own, may find their own. Then, too, God blinds them so that they do not recognize it as an abomination and disgrace, but adorn

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<sup>47</sup> This rendering is according to the Douay Version, which is based on the Vulgate from which Luther is quoting.

their misconduct with the names of saints, as though they were doing the right thing. Beyond this, God lets some fall into so deep an abyss that they boast publicly and say that whoever is in their brotherhood cannot be condemned; just as if baptism and the sacrament, instituted by God himself, were of less value and more uncertain than that which they have concocted out of their blinded heads. Thus will God dishonor and blind those who, with their crazed conduct and the swinish practices of their brotherhoods, mock and blaspheme his feasts, his name, and his saints, to the detriment of that common Christian brotherhood which flowed from the wounds of Christ.

4. Therefore for the correct understanding and use of the brotherhoods, one must learn to distinguish correctly between brotherhoods. The first is the divine, the heavenly, the noblest, which surpasses all others as gold surpasses copper or lead — this being the fellowship of all saints, of which we spoke above.<sup>48</sup> In this we are all brothers and sisters, so closely united that a closer relationship cannot be conceived. For here we have one baptism, one Christ, one sacrament, one food, one gospel, one faith, one Spirit, one spiritual body [EPH. 4:4–5], and each person is a member of the other [ROM. 12:5]. No other brotherhood is so close and strong. For natural brothers are, to be sure, of one flesh and blood, one heritage and home; yet they must separate and join themselves to the blood and heritage of others [in marriage]. The organized brotherhoods have one roll, one mass, one kind of good works, one festival day, one fee; and, as things are now, their common beer, common gluttony, and common drunkenness. But none of these penetrates so deeply as to produce one spirit, for that is done by Christ's brotherhood alone. For this reason, too, the greater, broader, and more comprehensive it is, the better it is.

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<sup>48</sup> See pp. 50–67.



Now all other brotherhoods should be so conducted as to keep this first and noblest brotherhood constantly before their eyes and regard it alone as great. With all their works they should be seeking nothing for themselves; they should rather do them for God's sake, entreating God that he keep and prosper this Christian fellowship and brotherhood from day to day. Thus when a brotherhood is formed, they should let it be seen that the members are a jump ahead of others in rendering Christendom some special service with their prayers, fastings, alms, and good works, and [that they do this] not in order to seek selfish profit or reward, or to exclude others, but to serve as the free servants of the whole community of Christians.

If men had such a correct conception, God would in return also restore good order, so that the brotherhoods might not be brought to shame by debauchery. Then blessing would follow: a general fund could be gathered, whereby material aid too could be given to other persons. Then the spiritual and material works<sup>49</sup> of the brotherhoods would be done in their proper order. And whoever does not want to follow this [proper] order in his brotherhood, I advise him to let the brotherhood go, and get out of it; it will [only] do him harm in body and soul.

But suppose you say, "If I do not get something special out of the brotherhood, of what use is it to me?" I answer: True, if you are seeking something special [for yourself], of what use indeed is the brotherhood, or the sisterhood either? But if by it you serve the community and other men, as is customarily the nature of love [to do], you will have your reward for this love without any desire or search on your part. If, however, you consider the service and reward of love too small, this is evidence that yours is a perverted brotherhood. Love serves freely and without charge, which is why God in return also gives to it every blessing, freely and without charge. Since, then, everything must be done in love, if it is to

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<sup>49</sup> *Merck* (in WA 2, 757, l. 7) in all likelihood was intended to be *werck*; cf. WA 21, 161, l. 8.

please God at all, the brotherhood too must be a brotherhood in love. It is the nature of that which is done in love, however, not to seek its own,<sup>50</sup> or its own profit, but to seek that of others, and above all that of the community [of saints].

5. To return once more to the sacrament, since the Christian fellowship is at present in a bad way, such as it has never been before, and is daily growing worse, especially among those in high places, and since all places are full of sin and shame, you should be concerned not about how many masses are said, or how often the sacrament is celebrated — for this will make things worse rather than better — but about how much you and others increase in that which the sacrament signifies<sup>51</sup> and in the faith<sup>52</sup> which it demands. For therein alone lies improvement. And the more you find yourself being incorporated into the fellowship of Christ and his saints, the better it is with you. [It is good] if you find that you are becoming strong in the confidence of Christ and his dear saints, so that you are certain that they love you and stand by you in all the trials of life and of death; and that you, in turn, take to heart the shortcomings and lapses of all Christians and of the entire community [of saints] [as these occur] in any individual Christian, so that your love goes out to each one and you desire to help everyone, hate no one, suffer with all, and pray for all. See, as the work of the sacrament proceeds aright, you will come many times to weep, lament, and mourn over the wretched condition of Christendom today. If, however, you find no such confidence in Christ and his saints, and the needs of Christendom and of every single neighbor do not trouble or move you, then beware of all other good works, by which you think you are godly and will be saved. They are surely nothing but hypocrisy, sham, and deceit, for they are

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<sup>50</sup> 1 Cor. 13:5 (KJV); cf. 1 Cor. 10:24.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. p. 49 and pp. 50–62.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. p. 49 and pp. 62–67.

without love and fellowship; and without these nothing is good. To sum it all up: *Plenitudo legis est dilectio*, “Love is the fulfilling of the law” [Rom. 13:10]. Amen.

There are some who have unnecessarily rejected this treatise because I said in the third paragraph:<sup>54</sup> I should consider it a good thing if a Christian council were to decree that both kinds be given to everyone. They have opened their mouth so wide that they are saying, “This is an error and it is offensive.” God in heaven have mercy! That we should live to see the day when Christ — the noble Lord and God — is publicly insulted and blasphemed by his own people, who rebuke his order as an error! It would have been enough had they allowed it to remain a permissive order and not turned it into a command. Then, at least, it would not be forbidden or regarded as an error. Yet I beg them to look carefully at the second and third paragraphs,<sup>55</sup> in which I have stated clearly that one kind is sufficient. I have experienced too that my writings are being rejected only by those who have not read them and who do not intend to do so. To such men I send my greetings and inform them that I am paying no attention to their blind and frivolous criticism; as long as God grants me life, I do not intend to tolerate it, that they so brazenly condemn and blaspheme my Lord Christ as an erring, offensive, and revolutionary teacher — they can act accordingly.

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<sup>53</sup> This paragraph is found only in two of the Wittenberg printings, the so-called Editions C (WA 2, 739) and N (WA 9, 791), the only two which profess to having been corrected by Luther himself.

<sup>54</sup> See p. 50.

<sup>55</sup> See pp. 49–50.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

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1. What meaning is given for the word “communion”? (*p.4, sect.4*)
2. Citing the example of a city, Luther claims that when one citizen is injured all suffer. Do you see that reflected in our society today? (*p.5, sect. 5*)
3. St. Paul puts this in Christian perspective in **GAL. 6:2**. (*pgs. 8-9, sect. 9*)
  - a. How does this affect our thinking about people in need?
  - b. Do you find a parallel here to the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us”?
4. Compare the motives of members of the church (*pgs. 16-17, sect. 19*) with those of members of the brotherhoods of Luther’s time. (*p. 26, sect. 3*)
5. In summary, when we receive God’s grace, through faith, by participating in the Lord’s Supper, we give a public witness of the willingness of the church and all its members to do what?

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