

On Mercy

Volume I

By Wilhelm Löhe



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PREFACE

“The formation of a deaconess does not depend solely on knowledge and studies. Commensurate with studying, there must be a formation and sanctification of her heart.” That is what we are after with these little pamphlets on the church’s corporate life of mercy – the “formation and sanctification” of the heart. Wilhelm Löhe is an amazing, towering figure of nineteenth century Lutheranism. His voluminous writings cover the range of the church’s life: mission, pastoral theology, liturgy, history. Whatever his weaknesses, he was a veritable consuming fire for the cause of genuine Lutheran mission and care for the needy. His deaconess training institution has perdured to this day, as have numerous congregations, institutions and church bodies his missionaries founded. Löhe never tired of noting that God’s gracious mercy in Christ over our sin begets mercy in our hearts and merciful action for the needy. This little treatise, written originally for deaconesses in training, presents a brief but thorough overview of the church’s life of mercy, from the Old and New Testaments to Löhe’s own day. We present it here for the first time in English, thanks to Rev. Holger Sonntag, praying that it would spark a flame for the church’s corporate life of mercy.

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison

President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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FOREWARD

The following text is not motivated by the request of others, but by the desire of the editor to do the house of deaconesses at Neuendettelsau a little favor. It seemed to him that prospective servants of mercy should themselves primarily receive instruction on mercy. Because of this, he initially gave them instruction in the form of dictation meant to be copied by the students by hand and later interpreted by a teacher. However, because a deaconess's time for studying is limited, the dictation turned out to be too long for copying.

Someone tried to solve the problem by publishing portions of the dictation in the deaconesses' journal at Neuendettelsau. However, it became clear that the space available in the journal was limited as well and that the dictation would have to be torn into too many parts. Some people suggested that the text be published separately to reserve the space in the journal for other things. Those who made the suggestion thought the text's content was applicable to a wider audience, even though one chapter out of seven, though by no means the longest, was solely addressed to prospective deaconesses. A publisher was found, and the whole matter was settled when it was decided that the origin and purpose of the text could be explained in the foreword, as it is actually done here.

There are many people who can read and write something better about mercy; they, of course, will not find the following text necessary to read. However, there are also those who find other books on the same topic too long and difficult or who find this text more accessible and understandable in their particular circumstances. Perhaps those people will welcome this book. If after reading this they are stimulated to study the works of mercy themselves, then the publication has served its purpose.

I do not have to make any preliminary comments regarding this little book other than that I will gladly accept it if someone wants to make me aware of mistakes in my writing. May God grant this booklet His blessing. Let it serve others as much as it pleases Him and do no damage.

Neuendettelsau, 28 June 1860
Wilhelm Löhe

FIRST CHAPTER

WHAT IS MERCY?

1. Mercy is goodness, goodness is love, and, therefore, mercy is love. Mercy is goodness and love but in a specific relationship, namely, in relation to the unfortunate and wretched. Love is manifold. When it is directed to God on high, it becomes devotion and adoration. When it is directed over the whole earth to other redeemed brothers, it becomes goodness, affability, and friendliness. But when it enters areas filled with misery and brings with it consolation, relief, and help, then it becomes mercy. May the God who is love grant us manifold love and awaken in us a sense of and a will for mercy at the beginning of this inquiry.

2. The Old Testament uses five different words that mean “mercy” and the New Testament uses three. But these words are distinct in the sense that they point to the different stages of mercy’s existence from the first inner impulses of mercy to its external practice. Other languages, too, have many words that mean the same thing, but rarely do the words so clearly and markedly point to various expressions that are used in the Old and New Testaments. Usually all of these expressions are translated in the same way into German, because the German language does not have distinct expressions for the different stages and forms of mercy. But there are some things that are understandably lost in the translation, which the text in the original languages reveals to the diligent reader.

3. One could ask whether mercy has been from eternity or whether it slowly came into being over time. The answer for the question is not difficult. Insofar as mercy is love and goodness, it is certainly from eternity. Insofar as it is a relation of love and mercy to misery, it cannot be older than misery itself. And because one always has to see love and mercy together, it is fitting to say

that mercy came into being like misery, that is, in time, but that it lasts in eternity even when there will be no more misery. Eternal love cannot forget the misery of the creature, even when it is taken care of. There is no doubt that misery would return if mercy would not keep watch at the gates of heaven.

4. What is mercy? Is it a mere impulse? Is it a state? Is it a doing? Those are three questions in one. A possible answer is this: mercy is love toward the wretched, and it comes into being with misery. As we saw, it does not even cease to exist with misery. But if it does not end with misery, does it cease before misery itself ends? Is it, therefore, something that lasts or is even a state of being? Whenever love meets misery, mercy is awakened. However, because misery is continually present in God's eyes, mercy cannot be an impulse, but it has to be a continuous inner movement of God, who created the world and who did not cease to love it although it fell. Mercy is, therefore, a state, that is, a state of continuous transfer of divine love to the wretched. But is it thinkable that God's love toward the broken is given to them without physical deeds? Can anybody stop the waters of grace, which want to come down from heaven, so that they would not flood the languishing earth? As the inner impulses of mercy are without number, so also are the deeds of mercy without number. Therefore, mercy is a state that does not suddenly cease after coming into being, but it is an endless impulse of God's heart toward the lost world, an endless row of God's gifts given to sinners. Thus all three questions are answered in the affirmative. If anyone wants to contradict, let him contradict, but it is more profitable that your mercy become like God's.

5. Mercy is only one thing, but its relations are without number, and in every relation it appears in a different form. This is why one can say that mercy is manifold. Misery, however, comes in just one form. And the greatest misery that there is, the origin and source of all other misery, is sin. It is difficult for mercy to

relate to sin because they are so opposite. But in the end, mercy wrestles with justice and holiness and comes into a cleansing fire, and it emerges with a new name. From then on it is not called mercy anymore but grace.

Grace is mercy in its relation to sin and the sinner. After winning the victory for the salvation of the sinner and, as Scripture says, rejoicing against judgment (**JAMES 2:13**), all other relations become easy for mercy. Once it has dealt with the sin itself, it only has to deal with the consequences of sin.

The consequences of sin are both bodily and spiritual, and we all know there is much bodily and spiritual misery. There is poverty in the bodily realm as well as nakedness, sickness, disease, age, and death. They are all vast, expansive areas in which mercy reigns as queen according to the will of the Lord, which is rich in activity, continually moving, and overflowing in good works. There is much misery in the spiritual realm as well. There is ignorance and error, lust, passion, outrage, and crime. Along with this, spiritual death and a hardening of hearts are constantly lurking around the corner. Oh, what expansive areas and lands Queen Mercy must not simply conquer, but also, according to the orders of her almighty Bridegroom, occupy and rule with the powers of the world to come!

We can see then that mercy is great, and just as a person has and is given many names during his lifetime, so mercy also is given many names according to her appearances. Under all of her forms is hidden a loving essence toward the wretched, a characteristic that is manifested in many different forms. At times it is called punishment, at times it is called teaching, at times comfort, at times reproof, at others consolation, at times admonition, at times strengthening — all depending on which specific sweet fruit the miserable children of man need.

6. All human misery originates in sin, which itself is the biggest misery. Because of his sin, man has become the object of divine justice, which punishes the guilty one. One only has to look to the first chapters of the history of humanity to see this. The sinner has always been the object of justice, which avenges transgression. But he has also been the object of divine mercy, which seeks not only to alleviate divine punishments and the consequences of sin, but also to overcome both them and sin itself. Thus, justice and mercy, the two hands of God, work on the same fallen, sinful being. After the one strikes, the other binds up the wounds made by the first. Thus, there is a tension because of God's effects on and in man. Now the question is, "How can man escape from this? "

He will escape it to the extent to which the will of a man bows under the reprimand, recognizes his state and suffering as punishment, and judges himself and his behavior in contrition and repentance. Indeed, to this extent justice yields to mercy and leaves it plenty of room so that it can drip the heavenly blessing of divine redemption and reconciliation into the justly struck wounds. But to the extent to which the will of a man rebels against justice and the pain of the wounds struck by it, ignores the call to repentance and hardens itself in defiance and pride, to this extent mercy yields to justice and eventually hands the haughty, impudent sinner over to a most holy, cruel sword.

Thus the tension of this double divine effect on the sinner does not last forever, but in one way or the other the divine effect becomes just a single one. Men for their part become either children of God's mercy or people of His avenging hand. And certainly the use and abuse of the remains of His free will is what leads man to mercy. Therefore, the bowls of the scales go up and down. But you, however, are the one to tip the scales, for, because of the way you are, you can do no good, and only hinder all the good that your God wants to do to you. Beware, for from your

stubborn unwillingness, according to divine decree, even almighty mercy retreats.

How long can you go on resisting God's merciful will? When will mercy turn away from you and leave you to justice? Where are the divisions between justice and mercy? You do not know these answers, but grace is there for everyone that seeks it, even in their last moments.

The Church says that the time of grace lasts as long as life. Yet there is already a judgment before death for living people whose sin is so grievous that St. John does not say that one should pray for them (1 JOHN 5:16). In spite of seeing life as a time of grace, there are warning examples along the path of life, which lead us to conclude that mercy might end its work before we breathe our last. Where there is suffering and pain, a longing and desire for grace, then there certainly is grace and mercy. But where there is a false security and the illusion of self-righteousness, there the gruesome air of death blows across deathbeds. Therefore, joyfully comfort all who cry for grace and mercy, but you yourself watch so that you do not pit any evil resistance of your own will against the merciful powers of the Word, lest mercy leave you.

SECOND CHAPTER

HOW DID THE LORD, YOUR GOD, PRACTICE MERCY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

7. The Lord, your God, has miraculously led all humankind since the time of the fall. Indeed, I know of no greater miracle than the combination of justice and mercy as seen in the history of humankind. This miracle takes place in Old Testament times as well as in those of the New, and whoever carefully observes the individual periods and peaks of history before and after Christ will find that there are just as many periods and peaks of this miraculous combination of divine virtues.

Rightly, therefore, the Church paints Moses with the Law and our Lord on the cross in the front of the great history book of God. But history does not merely show us the Law. If it is true that all of history is a continuous testimony to the combination of justice and mercy, then it is obviously also a continuous testimony to mercy alone. During all the periods and peaks of history, mercy clearly is not just combined with justice, but prevails against it with great glory. “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (JAMES 2:13).

8. Through the devil’s envy, man falls; there divine justice combines with divine mercy, and both drive him out of paradise together, so that he may be punished for his evil deed (*says justice*), not eat of the tree of life, and live eternally in his misery (*says mercy*). Before paradise there is encamped the cherub and the striking swords, and the cherub is the angel of the throne of God. For where the angel is, there God has not yielded yet, for He still wills to dwell mercifully on earth. But the swords, however, still bar the access to the tree of life.

In the same manner also after the fall, the combination between the two great divine virtues of justice and mercy is actively doing the work of the Lord. The justice of God drives the one

who committed fratricide out of Eden, but yet his mercy marks the man's forehead lest he be slain by anybody who finds him. Similarly, the justice of God prepared the flood, while the mercy of God allows one hundred twenty years as a time for repentance. When the deluge of water breaks in, justice drowns the whole world, but mercy carries Noah and seven souls safely and peacefully through the awesome waters to Mount Ararat and brings him the olive leaf of forbearance by the means of a dove. There, dear children, you have a catechism of justice and mercy for the first period of the world, an instruction to pursue the matter further and to locate the two divine virtues more often in the same period.

9. Humanity grows in amazing progressions after the flood as a result of divine mercy. That same mercy preserves the little light of godly insight in the growing population. But look! Justice rises to punish humanity because it does not want to follow that light, but instead wants to clear its own ways and to light its own light for the future. Mercy joins it quickly, and both work together to confuse the languages. As a result, humanity's desire for evil is justly punished by the confusion of the languages, with which the variety of nationalities and religions goes along. Yet the punishment is alleviated by mercy, for disunity is better than unity in that it leaves more doors open for the divine truth than the latter. In this manner also, in the first era of the patriarchs after the flood, justice again goes together with mercy.

10. According to His justice, God lets those who flee from Him go their ways, a gruesome leniency of the Most High toward the corrupt creature! But look! At the same time, mercy enters in and lays in Abraham a seed for that plant that begins like a mustard seed, grows, and becomes the great tree under which all the downtrodden and abandoned peoples can gather again and find Him — He who looked for Adam under the trees in the garden and wills to meet lost humanity at the monument of His love, at the tree of Israel, the cross on Golgotha, to save them. Oh, what a noble and lovely combination of justice and mercy!

11. Abraham moves into Canaan, right into the middle of the cursed children who are dragged along unwillingly rather than walking the way of the curse. Justice is preparing them for eventual extermination. However, first Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must pilgrimage in the land and preach the name of the Lord who blesses the sinners. To enable them to do this, wise mercy providentially arranges that they bring from Mesopotamia the language spoken in Canaan. Also, mercy restrains the arm of justice for four generations after Abraham, giving Canaan time to repent if it so wishes. After this respite, the fire of the Lord breaks into the land, and mercy rejoices over judgment.

12. From Israel's passing through the Red Sea until the disintegration of the people in the year AD 70, this people had been — willingly or unwillingly, that does not matter — bearers of God's mercy in its holy mission to the Gentiles. On every stage of its development, clear testimonies of the divine Word show that God chose it to be a light for the nations, even a lighthouse and sign for the rest of the saints. This calling of divine mercy is so thorough and so inevitable that it comes to the forefront during the time the people are in exile and during the ensuing period of loss of national independence. The sin of the people and its consequences do not revoke the holy call; indeed, Israel remains the bearer of the Gospel of the single true God and Redeemer of the world whether it believes in Him or not. But because the people as a whole are not good enough for the sacred task God has commanded them, light and power concentrate even more in individual persons, and the strength of the office of the prophet of God casts its rays even more brightly into the farthest regions. In this manner, God shows mercy through Israel, as well as justice. Israel's service for mercy is in vain. So the Almighty enters in with punishments, and chooses for the execution of His judgments the same hand that had to carry the saving light of His grace as it, for example, took place among the nations of Canaan, who had to be destroyed by the children of the holy patriarchs who had preached them the Gospel. The history of all peoples, especially of the great

peoples before Christ, has no other meaning than this: in and by Israel mercy or justice is offered them, peace or punishment.

13. Just as God offers mercy or justice to the peoples of Israel, so Israel itself as the bearer of God's mercy and justice is constantly experiencing divine mercy and justice. The high hand, which justly practiced arrogance against Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, is for Israel itself a high hand of mercy. It is like eagles' wings and carries the sword of justice, namely, the people of Israel itself against Canaan to exterminate the peoples. This hand mercifully leads the people through the Red Sea to Mount Sinai to Kadesh; the same hand puts the whole people down into the dust of death in just judgment. Mercifully it leads the next generation across the Jordan River after thirty-eight years, and lets the cities and peoples fall because of their cry. Mercy was even seen in the wars that the Lord fought, and Israel's celebration accompanied His victories according to the mercy that happened to them. Yet soon came centuries under the judges, during which times justice, at times mercy, was seen. This depended on whether the people practiced ungodliness and had a longing to be like the peoples of the world, or whether they were tearfully contrite and returned to Jehovah. In a similar manner, this goes on through all history. Yes, mercy and justice change ever more grandly until the just Lord casts the people away.

14. In the times of Samuel, the desire of the people of Israel to have a king like other peoples grew so strong that it demanded an answer. Although Samuel was unwilling (and the Lord did not rebuke him for his unwillingness), he nevertheless gave one king to the people. Moses had already promised them a king, and a monarchy did not directly contradict the theocracy, but rather served as a shadow of the coming kingdom of Christ.

The first king did not persevere according to the mind of God, yet the second one did according to God's heart. Whatever the sinful people demanded, the Lord granted according to His

mercy. Yet He also mingled in His justice, for along with their kings the people had to suffer for the sake of their sin. Indeed, it is under these kings that justice and mercy encounter each other again. However, because kingship is, much like the priesthood, easily prone to corruption, it had to become a chastening rod of the Most High and of His justice for the people. In this way justice could rejoice over mercy, the divine mercy instituted the holy office of the prophets, who were directly influenced by the divine Spirit and who became most prominent whenever the people came into the greatest spiritual danger. In this way mercy rejoiced over judgment again, and the people of Israel had a sure antidote against the human, sinful deprivation of both the priesthood and the kingship during the long period of its kings. The more the people succumbed to the influence of the surrounding peoples and the demons, the louder the prophets became; the more the people pushed themselves closer to the edge of the abyss, the more powerfully God stretched out the saving arm of His holy Word. Before the floods of divine justice broke in, mercy applied all means to save the hardened people of Israel. Even until the Babylonian Exile, mercy wrestles for the sparing of Israel from exile as she wrestles for a prize.

15. The just hand of the Most High leads first Israel and then also Judah into exile. There the children of the saints sat at the rivers of Babylon and wept (Ps. 137:1). The Lord soon was sorry for the punishment, for He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy (Ps. 103:8). In the midst of the exile, He gives the people the greatest prophets to direct their behaviors, their hearts, and their hopes during the exile. This He did just like a shepherd who can lead his sheep, and in so doing, He keeps alive their sense of the old homeland and the mount of their God and the holy service and the coming Messiah. In this way mercy prevents Israel from passing away in misery, from despairing and assimilating to the Gentiles. And so they remain God's people

in the midst of punishment and, like once in the desert, journey toward a better time. Finally, mercy leads the people home as its spoil, while the service of justice is praised at the same time.

16. After coming home into the Promised Land, the Jews still bear the consequences of divine justice; they are seized by one ruler after the other and suffer from different degrees of oppression and tyranny. Even the prophets are muted, and a strange silence from the one who always has been witnessing among His people commences. In turn, however, divine mercy collected the written testimonies of the prophets in a book, and then awakens a widespread zeal to read that Book of books. The whole people paid attention to the Word, and its knowledge spread in all the strata of the congregation of Israel. Satan led them astray so that they did not merely want to be like the peoples anymore, but now wanted to rule over them. They left bloody paths out of their desire for earthly exaltation under the Maccabees and later eventually failed to recognize Him who was to come. But the testimony of mercy was nevertheless burning and shining among them, and the closer to the advent of the Lord, the less they lacked people like Simeon and Hannah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, people who knew the time in which they were visited.

For in the midst of judgment, mercy shows itself, and in the midst of mercy, justice shows itself. Throughout the whole time of the Old Testament one can always find the combination of both, and time and again the mercy we are talking about moves to again rejoice over justice.

THIRD CHAPTER

HOW DID THE LORD, YOUR SAVIOR, PRACTICE MERCY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

17. The work and suffering of our Savior, Jesus Christ, is simply the culmination of that highly praiseworthy combination of mercy and justice. The purpose of God the Father, the execution of the same through God the Son, and the application of the accomplished work to men through God the Holy Spirit — all this is the most irrefutable witness to the fact that justice first had to be satisfied before the Lord could turn to us in grace. What did God want besides this — that His Son should suffer the punishments for our sins and become sin in human nature, so that we might become righteousness that avails before the highest judgment seat? What did the Son do besides suffering the just punishments for our sins and thereby proclaiming their justice, and yet still inviting us to Himself in the sure knowledge of success, so that we might inherit an everlasting mercy from His hand? And what does the Holy Spirit through the preaching of His servants deposit in the hearts of men besides precisely this combination of mercy and justice for the good of the otherwise lost world? In these two thoughts — just and merciful — everything the Triune has done and still does is summed up.

18. In the apostolic period, the streams of mercy go out over the whole world, and justice seems to step back. Yet, nevertheless, the thunders of watchful justice roll right into the heavenly harmonies made by the grace of God, which are heard from the mouth of the holy apostles. First, the congregation gathers around the faith, but the mystery of evil still reveals itself. It also makes itself felt and known, and from the first days of the beginning of the Church of Christ, a great apostasy develops, which will provoke the judgment of the King of all kings. The apostles preach clearly and loudly that the Lamb of God is also the Lion

from Judah, and that the Redeemer of the world with His bleeding wounds is also a just and pitiless judge, whose heart full of love can just as easily pour out eternal torture on those whom He has redeemed. Thus, it is in Him that justice and mercy are combined.

19. Every subsequent period of Church history is an echo of the first and a prelude to the last era in history. It is an echo of the first because of the activity of mercy and a prelude to the last because of the breaking in of justice. The history of every Christianized people is nothing but proof of the cooperation between the two great divine virtues. Wherever the Gospel is received, there is blessing everywhere; wherever one deviates from it, there blessedness and fortune go away. What happened so many times in the Old Testament after the sermon of the angel at Bochim (**JUDGES 2:1-5**) repeats itself in a New Testament fashion. The way a people acts toward the Gospel determines the way the hand of the Lord and its rod (**ZECH. 11:7**) act toward them. The people's fortune changes according to changes in their behavior toward the Gospel. This remains true in the history of all peoples despite the many and extraordinary differences.

20. One of the most remarkable combinations of mercy and justice is seen in the persecution by the Roman emperors, men who came over the Church. The Christians suffered outrageous injustice, and the Lord paid back the tyrants as they deserved it. Books have been written on the different death penalties the persecutors suffered, but the Christians were rightly persecuted. One should not imagine that the people of the first centuries carried and appreciated the impulses of the Gospel more persistently than other, later generations. Close to the time of the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the first examples of the secularization of the Church and of making a covenant between the Church and Belial can be seen. Indeed, there the persecutions come as a punishment of God, as a revelation of His justice. But the very same persecutions are cleansing storms and a blowing of wind, which rekindle

the existing sparks and little flames of faith into the desired fire. After a time of deepest corruption, the most beautiful examples of the holy martyrs shine and show us that one should never despair of the power of God and of His Gospel. The Lord knows to fill His judgments with the powers of mercy and to do according to what is written (2 SAM. 22:36; PS. 18:35), “When you humiliate me, you make me great.”

21. A highly remarkable mingling and combining of divine mercy and justice can be learned from the fate of the Arian nations. These must be looked at in comparison to those who fell away from the pure doctrine of the divine Word. The most gifted Germanic nations belonged to the former group, namely the Goths, the Gepidae, the Vandals, and so on. Some of these (e.g., the Ostrogoths under Theodoric) even enjoyed excellent governments and considerable intellectual freedom. Nevertheless, their measure of mercy was used quickly. By God’s justice, they were carried off in wars as mushrooms are torn from soil, although they seemed rooted firmly like oaks. Indeed, there is nothing more detestable in history than the story of the Franks and of their abominations, that is, kings. Nevertheless, the Lord was with them and showed mercy, not justice, toward their sins and abominations while they honored the Son and the Father and confessed the Most Holy Trinity. Here one can see not only mercy and justice but also mercy’s limits.

22. In earlier days, the Gospel spread over southern Europe. We are not entirely familiar with its successes because a great extermination arose, but there were successes nevertheless, great and remarkable instances of the impact of the divine Word. Sometimes even whole nations bowed in belief. But the swift hand of God soon came over this harvest of the Gospel, and Attila, the king of the Huns, “the scourge of God,” as he called himself, blew from east to west like a storm and flattened the plantations of the Gospel.

Even though, like with other storms, a mountain or a forest provided shelter for some congregations, several nations as a whole needed time to recover from the misery caused by Attila's storm across Europe. His path was one of divine justice over the depravity that was prevalent in Europe. Yet even at his time mercy was still active, and even if the impact of the Gospel was not very broad, it was very intense. The Lord made the glory of His Church shine even brighter over the destruction of the kingdoms and caused His saints to lighten the world with divine mercy. The mercy they passed on to others is still alive, but the destructive wars and calamities they experienced are recognized and remembered by but a few.

23. Other than Rome, the most prosperous congregations of the old world were located in Asia and Africa. We have not always understood the amount of mercy that the Lord showed to His saints in those parts of the world. But it bears noting that this time of grace lasted longer than, for example, the time of grace of the European congregations who experience Attila's scourge and were mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Yet here too mercy came to its end, and the Lord brought the terrible rod of justice to Asia and Africa through the deceiver of the nations, Muhammad. It is a great testimony to the corruption of mankind that scores of people in all lands were willing to exchange the religion of the thorn-crowned, almighty, and holy Jesus for the aberration of an epileptic obsessed by lust. And yet it happened, and God quickly used His hand of justice, for the Lord uses it to punish men. But other punishments were added to it, namely, the pressure and barbarism of Muhammadanism, a pressure that fills all of history, a barbarism that was never more obvious than right now. One must have an open and keen eye to perceive traces of mercy in God's judgment that swept across the nations through Muhammad.

24. Even as judgment spread across Asia and Africa, mercy was not idle in those lands and, moreover, won great victories and triumphs for Christ the Lord in other countries, especially those of northern Europe. What a life emerged at the same time in both Ireland and England and then migrated from there into the Frankish kingdom on both sides of the Rhine! Who can reflect upon the missionary journeys of the old monks — who came across the English Channel, built places for the adoration of Jesus and for moral betterment in the midst of the wildernesses, and had the most hallowing influence on Europe north of the Alps — without confessing that mercy was remarkably busy in those times? Again, we see that mercy is mingled with justice. The lack of total devotion to the Word, however, causes justice to manifest itself in the form of hardships in life and shortcomings of strength for the nations. These are merely signs of the same justice that punishes men mostly through their own deeds. It is, nevertheless, always safe to assert that God strikingly revealed Himself through justice in the Orient and through mercy in the Occident.

25. In those times, divine mercy awakened one man in the Occident who is without par in the world ever since. For the Church, he was an abundance of grace, but for the heathen he was a sword of justice. Although he meant only good for the heathen and gave them scores of teachers and preachers, he, against the declared opinion of his advisers, asked that the heathen either accept or reject the Gospel. One has to admit that his actions reflected a divine providence. Yet here it, too, is clear that the combination and mingling of justice and mercy is not, nor should it be, always the same, and specific inner reasons often determine divine permission.

During the long period of the Roman emperors who succeeded Charlemagne, two main topics were continually discussed, namely, the relation of the Church to the pope on the one hand and the relation between Church and state on the other hand.

Groups within the Church arose everywhere, criticizing the right of the pope over the Lord's congregations and seeking to establish a more inward and scriptural life instead of the external and ecclesial life of the Roman church.

Between state and church, however, strife over who ought to submit to whom arose. The popes claimed that the state has to submit to the Church; the emperor, conversely, that the Church be subject to the state. The Church, therefore, was engaged in a double contention against both the emperor and the sects. In both relations, the Church applied somewhat just principles in a sinful manner and, therefore, suffered much from both sides. In the end, divine justice punished its sins.

The emperors were certainly no better than the popes, and their discipline for the popes was more questionable than that of the popes for the emperors. This is why the nations generally followed the discipline of the popes more readily than that of the emperors. In this way, divine justice was done not only against the popes, but also against the lords of this world. However, while one side was always punished by the other, the victory was never clearly won by either side, and divine mercy showed itself on both sides. Finally, the two sides evaluated each other, and the Lord showed to all parties involved how they should better themselves. Whoever reads the long stories of the period briefly mentioned here may find again a combination of justice and mercy and a great example of how mercy rejoices over judgment.

26. Immediately preceding the Reformation era was a time of grave justice. Constantinople and the East Roman Empire, or whatever was left of it, fell under the sword of Muhammad. Whatever great and glorious things the Greeks possessed from age-old times, pagan as well as Christian, were carried away into all the world, just like the wind blows into chaff and disperses it into all different directions. The glory of the Greeks flew out of its nest and was carried to Italy and then to the Alps. This glory

was a spirit of knowledge and of delight in languages and literature. Divine mercy helped further this movement in the sense that the languages of the New and Old Testaments were studied more carefully and that Holy Scripture as a whole was also read more carefully. However, this same spirit of the Greeks was also a spirit of wantonness and moral depravation that sowed its seeds wherever it went. This seed grows exuberantly, and once again the warning justice of the Lord is seen in a strange way. It allows men to walk on wrong paths and looks on, watching whether they will turn from their ways and seek mercy before it brings the final judgments.

Prior to this, mercy and justice seem to be engaged only in preparatory work during the so-called Renaissance of the arts and sciences; they are busily preparing for the Reformation. The Reformation era itself appears to be a time filled with grace and some of the most blessed evidences of mercy. Yet Martin Luther, the foremost among the reformers, often complained that mercy did not find open windows and that, therefore, punishment would come over the world, especially Germany. And so it happened. At the end of Luther's life the situation changed, and the religious wars began to rage over the world like hurricanes filled with evil and sin. They were especially destructive in Germany and our homeland is suffering from those wounds to this day. Thus, in the Reformation era, God shows Himself as great in justice as in mercy. And yet here again mercy rejoices over justice, especially because His Word and Sacrament remain among us even after gruesome times.

27. From the second half of the seventeenth century until recently, one finds an odd combination of justice and mercy in the Church that was hardly ever heard of in previous time periods. Apostasy awoke in the form of freely promoted freethinking, which refused to be bound to the divine Word, and in licentious lifestyles, which refused to abide by the divine law anymore. The emergence of this liberal spirit planted seeds of religious and moral calamity that sprouted wildly and in whose cancerous

expansion consisted the just punishment for the Church, which did not resist the evil with any resolve. As the sin we are talking about did not cease, the punishment, which keeps up with sin as it spreads, did not either.

However, divine mercy was not altogether lacking. The pietists, as well as those who follow Zinzendorf's name, are testimonies of divine grace and pity, even though they have many errors and shortcomings as a result of sin. Nevertheless, they saw times of revival and awakening for thousands. They are like fingers of divine mercy, helping the Church see that it was touched by God's grace, even when men like Ernst Valentin Löscher or Albrecht Bengel opposed them. But the Church did not always understand God's fingers and the awakened communities began to go their own ways. The result of their actions was more punishment, but this does not render the assertion invalid that God's mercy did indeed show itself.

28. Recent times are no more than a continuation of the previous. Apostasy ran rampant, its channel wider, its consequences more visible in the life of the Church, the state, and the family. Upon the shores of mighty sins divine justice broke and still breaks as well as executes and prophesies ever more severe punishments. But it is true that more recent times have seen special outpourings of divine graces. The children of God, who became great in number, have learned how to apply the plunder of the enemies of the Church — the erudite studies that originally had been begun with a different intention — to favor the kingdom of God. The spirit of prophecy has joined the people's faithful study of Holy Scripture and history, and the hope of the Church has begun to shine more truly and beautifully than many centuries before. People have started to discover what is wanting and wrong in the current state of ecclesial affairs, and many hearts have a deep and great longing to live in a better state.

Even in this era, the separation is increasing: justice and mercy go their separate ways, but mercy still rejoices over judgment. Whoever has eyes to see and ears to hear can flee the future wrath and become worthy to stand before the Son of Man.

29. So there you have an overview of the vestiges of mercy and justice in both new and old times. We were unable to separate one from another. However, the intention was always to pursue the thesis that there were never evidences of divine mercy lacking in the Church and not even in the world. Since the fall of humanity, God has remained faithful in His merciful will to save it. And we know that in the end God the Lord will set aside His mercy and exercise pure justice according to our merit. The kingdom of the Lord is a kingdom of mercy. As the temple of Solomon has two pillars, so this kingdom has two foundational pillars, Boaz and Jachin (**1 KINGS 7:21; 2 CHRON. 3:17**), that is, justice and mercy. There will never be just one. There will never be either one lacking, and we will always hold to this theme and will always preach: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (**Ps. 103:8**).

FOURTH CHAPTER

HOW DID THE LORD IN THE LAW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT COMMAND HIS PEOPLE TO PRACTICE MERCY?

30. While the Lord separated His people Israel from the other peoples and led them — with their own government and with their own worship — into a land whose borders caused the people to be separated from the others, God did not want this people to interpret this special role in a merciless and selfish manner. On His part this separation took place as an act of divine mercy, and it should be seen by the people in the same sense. Yet by commanding this, that is, by commanding in a very strict way that His people be separate from other peoples, He did not mean to give them a precept and instruction of selfish mercilessness, but rather they were supposed to keep the commandment of separation out of love and mercy. Israel could not accomplish its mission to be a light to the Gentiles if it did not separate from all Gentiles. If Israel became like those who looked to Israel to learn how to worship rightly, Israel might experience what had happened when Balaam set up a snare for them (**NUMBERS 22–24**): instead of converting others, they themselves might be perverted. Whoever wants to shoot arrows has to have a good stand neither too far nor too close from the game. Whoever wants to catch birds cannot step on their wings, and the fisherman does not swim with the fish in the water. This had to be understood if Israel was to fulfill its calling to the Gentiles.

31. God does all His works through His servants. Therefore, His works are divine and human at the same time, and wherever He works He soon opens a wide course of mercy for His saints. But they are only to be, as they should, coworkers of the divine worker.

When, therefore, during the time of Samuel, the Lord mercifully poured out the spirit of prophecy on the children of the prophets,

He thereby invited the same children of the prophets to prophesy, to witness, and thus to direct the beams of His mercy into the night of their surroundings. When He gave them David, a king according to His own heart, then the chosen king was to spread the holy and great gifts he received from the mercy of the Lord to the whole people like a well of mercy. When a marvelous glory of worship is unfolded under the prophets Samuel and David, when sacrifices, prayers, psalms, and hymns, moreover the sound of all instruments, the sweetness of the aroma, and everything that was pleasant to the eye had to join in to serve the God of Israel worthily, then all this was a revelation of the Lord, an outpouring of His mercy. But the priests, the Levites, the singers, and the king were also bearers and servants of mercy. As each of these in his specific place made contributions to the great harmony of the whole, they all helped to lead the people to the understanding that the Lord is merciful and gracious, and they, in turn, all practiced mercy.

Thus the great institutions of the Old Testament — prophethood, kingship, priesthood — were not merely creations of this merciful God, but at the same time a threefold mighty call for training and knowledge of the mercy of the Lord.

32. In the previous paragraphs we saw human mercy, led by the hand of the Lord, enter vast areas to serve the Gentiles or, at least, the people of Israel. Just as pipes direct the fertilizing water from a well to the different fields and beds, so mercy is poured out over all the holy people according to the direction of the Old Testament. Although the Old Testament legislation is so marvelously just, and although it is, therefore, praised much and recognized by all, one nonetheless can say that the Shepherd's love and mercy permeates the whole, and that all its parts are based upon a tender, divine providence for each individual tribe, yea, for each individual human being. Even where the words sound most severely, they are severe only on the one side, while on the other, one can see the reign of mercy.

33. Let us now examine in detail what the previous paragraph laid out in general. Looking at the persons to which divine providence is extended, we find that neither the citizen nor the foreigner is forgotten, neither the Levite nor the priest nor the layman, neither the old nor the young, neither the healthy nor the sick, neither the blind nor the deaf, yea, not even the murderer and manslayer. Finally, mercy does not even end where humanity ends, for neither the beasts nor the bird in the nest are forgotten. Looking not at the persons, but at the occasions when mercy is to be practiced, we find the will of God expressed mercifully during the harvest, on a feast day, during a love feast, during a sacrificial meal, during a Sabbath year, during a jubilee. Divine grace and mercy crown all these summits of the high life of Israel as a people and Church, and they smell of the rich herbs and alpine flowers of human mercy. Wherever a life reaches a summit, Israel is to prove that it is the merciful son of a merciful God.

And as it is with the persons and occasions, so it is with the different forms and manners of practicing mercy. A famous text in the New Testament locates mercy in giving, forgiving, and not judging (**LUKE 6:36-38**). No one can deny that mercy and giving are commanded in the Old Testament. An attentive eye and a good will will also find, when they look for it, many texts of the Old Testament that reference forgiving and judging and object clearly to absolute justice. Even sparing someone from pain is a form of mercy. If so, who can fail to recognize then that there can be gathered many texts that reflect God's fatherly sparing of us poor sinners. It will be a delightful, sweet, and even happy task for someone to read the Old Testament law with the purpose of finding examples of any kind and form of mercy.

34. There is one thing we do not find in the Old Testament, namely, no institutions or houses of mercy and no distinct office whose purpose is to show mercy. These are fruits of the New Testament. But yet it is also undeniable that the Old Testament

commandments give leeway for the care and institutional practice of mercy. Though the poor have always existed, both in the Old and New Testaments, there were never supposed to be beggars. And there lies the principle, yea, command: to care for the poor and to prevent them from becoming beggars. Even if those in the Old Testament attempted to provide for the poor within the family, there were certainly also in that time, and in the Holy Land, individuals and circumstances that pressed toward an institutional care for the poor. It would, therefore, not be surprising if we somehow discover that such a care actually took place. However, whatever we find or could find will, nevertheless, be different from what is seen in the Church of the New Testament already in the initial time right after its birth.

FIFTH CHAPTER

HOW DID THE LORD, YOUR REDEEMER, AND HIS HOLY APOSTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMAND HIS SAINTS TO PRACTICE MERCY?

35. Out of mercy the Son of God became man; He lived, died, rose, ascended into heaven, and lives forever to practice great mercy. The motive and purpose of all His works is mercy, and mercy is what He desires for those who are His. Because His love and His Father's and the Spirit's love can only be mercy, so our love for the brothers and all men should also include nothing but mercy. The great basic command for our life is: "Be merciful, just as your Father in heaven is merciful" (LUKE 6:36).

36. Just as we see that the mercy of God's children to the heathen in the Old Testament is the will of Jehovah, so the New Testament shows that God's will is to show mercy to the heathen. If eyes are necessary to detect God's will to be merciful to the heathen in the Old Testament, it can be said conversely that blind eyes and deaf ears are necessary to miss the King of eternal glory and His majestic orders when He says (MATT. 28:19-20), "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Evangelizing to the Gentiles is the great work of mercy in the New Testament. The New Testament's inner circle, not just its appendix but its very center, is the evangelization of the Jews, about which the Lord says to His apostles (ACTS 1:8), "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." There can be no greater mercy in this world than to propagate the Most High's Word and Sacrament, complete with their fullness of grace, to the poor, lost children of man of all ages and in all lands.

However, the Lord not only commands mercy upon all the world, but He also promises His own helping presence to those who will exercise mercy saying, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (MATT. 28:20). This, His great Word, is spoken in direct relation to the practice of mercy in His holy mission. He, the King, and behind Him the redeemed throng of His servants journey around the whole world, carrying the holy gifts of Word and Sacrament until Jericho collapses under the sound of the horns of jubilee, and the kingdoms of this world become a spoil of Him who preaches about Himself, “The Lord is merciful and gracious” (PS. 103:8). His whole Church is outwardly nothing but a priestly, royal institute of mercy.

37. Just as the Church outwardly is a holy institute of mercy, so it is also inwardly. The apostle as well as the evangelist, but likewise also the shepherd, the presbyter, and the bishop are nothing but instruments of divine mercy toward the congregations on earth. The sheep and lambs of Jesus supervise, lead, and feed through the valley of sorrow to deep wells of eternal calm. This mercy is just as great as when the sheep are called and brought in to the fold through God’s holy mission.

Think also of the Samaritan, the man who brings to the inn him who has fallen prey to murderers. He is like an evangelist or missionary. The inn is the congregation; the keeper of the inn, to whom the saved is entrusted, is the bishop of the congregation and can make well what the murderers made evil. The whole apostolic order of office and church is, therefore, nothing but an instruction for a shepherd to show merciful love. The highest Shepherd has equipped the office of Word and Sacrament, the office of reconciliation, with obligations and authority to mercifully sacrifice oneself for the salvation of the sheep, just as He sacrificed Himself for the sheep according to the unfathomable gift that He received.

38. Working alongside the office of the Word is the office of bodily mercy. In Holy Scripture, all offices of the Holy Spirit are

called diakoniai, or “service,” just as all those — beginning with Christ all the way down to the most humble ones — who carry out offices and duties in relation to people in the name of God are called diakonoi or “servants.” Nevertheless, however, the words diakonia and diakono were used in the first congregation in Jerusalem and were transferred as specific titles to the office of bodily mercy.

As a result, the word deacony refers to nothing but the holy duty of caring for the poor, and the deacons refer to those seven who first occupied this office and their successors. This office was first one of service at the table, a distribution of the gifts gathered by the congregation for those who ate there publicly, especially the widows. This, however, was but the first sprout of the whole office that sprang up from the fertile soil. Now when the poor widow did not come to the table because she was sick or had become infirm, was the office of the deacon and his care for the widow to come to an end or did it simply take on a different form? Without any doubt, the latter. After the congregation had eaten, the seven visited those who had not been at the meal — the sick, the infirm, the weak, the aged — and began their holy care for their temporal needs. Or, to investigate the expansion of the office into a different direction, did the holy deacon only care for the widow? Did the widow look at her children, the orphans, with tears of sorrow in her eyes while the needs of her body were met? Or would not the congregation have also directed its love through the holy seven to the children as well? Or when the pilgrims came, hundreds of thousands that used to come to Jerusalem, of which some doubtless turned to the Gospel, would no deacon have cared for them, even if they were poor or sick? Would not a new branch have grown out of the noble plant of deacony, the branch of holy hospitality that through love provides a home to the stranger in a foreign land? Who would even bother to answer these very easy questions?

Everyone sees that the bodily mercy of the Lord was reflected in the office of the seven and that it could be no different according to the holy nature of the matter. An institutional organization of aid and care for every bodily misery developed, and in the splendor of the holiest human love, the deacon, full of blessing, walked alongside the bishop and the elders through the congregation and laid down the earthly gift of mercy alongside the heavenly goods of the divine office. Yet, from the outset, this office was not purely bodily. Those who served the tables in the name of the congregation had to be able to pray at the table, and those who brought the needs to the sick person had to hand it over to him with spiritual hands, offering silver apples in golden bowls. In short, according to the order of the holy apostles, the deacon had to be a man filled with the Holy Spirit in order to know how to administer bodily matters spiritually and to be recognized in many ways as someone who came out of the sanctuary of the New Testament. He had to be permeated by the Holy Spirit to such a degree that the bishop could lay into his faithful hands the earthly gifts with which the body and blood of Christ had joined themselves. Those who brought all temporal gifts to the congregation had to be found worthy to bring also the blessed bread and the blessed cup to those who suffered from a double hunger, the one for daily bread and wine and the one for the heavenly goods, which the hymn of thanksgiving of the elect praises. Thus, the office of holy diacony became a spiritual office, an office of double mercy, which was so deeply rooted in the congregation that it sometimes shone brighter than the splendor of the office of Word and Sacrament. Such glory gives He who on the Last Day will ask His saints about mercy and especially the office of bodily mercy.

39. We have the motivation and the right to give special consideration to the deaconess as a servant of mercy, especially because the goal of this text is to turn the reader's hearts toward the specific service of women to the wretched and needy,

an activity that developed in the New Testament. We certainly cannot say that the deaconess is mentioned frequently in the New Testament, especially because one of the most preeminent texts in that regard (St. Paul speaking about widows in 1 Tim. 5:1–15) is not clear enough that it can be persuasively applied to the office of the deaconess.

However, the deaconess stands in the Bible like the humble violet in the garden, known by its smell, pleasant to God and men, in a hiddenness that God Himself wanted. She does not hold the first and greatest office in the kingdom of God, but she leads the choir of widows and virgins and shows the whole female gender the paths that are meant for them. For the deaconess does not have her own specific duties, inaccessible to everyone else. Her duties are those of women in general, and her peculiarity consists only in carrying out those female duties, not in her own family, but for those who are abandoned in the congregation.

The duty of all women for which God created them is to help men; after the fall, this task constitutes nothing but showing mercy to man and his sphere of activity. Thus, all women pursue the same goal of mercy, led by the deaconess as their forerunner, an example to be emulated by all. She, the widow, as she is called in antiquity and obviously already in the New Testament (**1 TIMOTHY 5**); the virgin, as she is described by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7; the unmarried, emancipated from her own worries, for whom it is made easy already by the circumstances to have a free heart — she is to show to all how to do the works of female mercy. Out of a soul that is betrothed to the Lord, she works in holy freedom, teaching women to help all earthly things from a soul that is betrothed to the Lord. Like the whole deacony, the office of the deaconess is a plant entirely grown on Christian soil. She should and could be a friendly sign of the presence of the Lord in His congregation.

40. If, therefore, the Church's constitution as well as its offices can be understood in light of mercy, then this already gives great glory for the Lord of the Church. All His officers, His male and female servants, practice either spiritual or material mercy. However, we are not to see only His officers in light of mercy, but His whole congregation on earth. His most holy teaching is a religion of mercy. Therefore, everything that is His, every soul that belongs to Him, the individual and as well as the whole, is to be merciful.

Bodily mercy is not enough to accomplish this, His purpose. The whole congregation is meant to be merciful in the spiritual realm, that is, in the realm of holy discipline. That simple, seminal word, which we read in Matthew 18:15, did not come from the apostles, no matter how noble and great their reputation remains in the Church, but from the mouth of the Lord Himself. The main principle of this word, if not the thesis, is that "No Christian is to remain in sin." It is nothing new that a Christian sins; every moment there are new examples, and this is the way it is going to be until the end. But no one who wants to belong to Christ must persist in sin; every brother and sister in Christ is to stand up after lapsing, is to be raised up out of weakness, is to be brought back from error. This mercy is a command of the Lord.

The mouth of the Lord indicates how this holy command is to be carried out. If anybody lapses, then his neighbor is to raise him. If this does not work, then the call of mercy comes to one or two more. If this does not help, then it says (MATT. 18:17), "Tell it to the church," and thus the whole camp is called up in the interest of one individual with the intention of dragging a single person out of sin and, thereby, out of eternal damnation. Only the King of eternal mercy, who knows all things and to whom everything is clear, could have given such a mandate, so perfect, so sufficient, and yet so full of simplicity and usefulness.

It is sad, though, that His holy Word cannot find its due obedience in Christian congregations because of the sinful way the people act. It is also sad that out of the most blessed acts of love and mercy many caricatures grew in the Church, and these were not the image of that holy, merciful love that the good Shepherd carries to His sheep.

41. The New Testament extends its instructions not only to the congregational and official practice of this virtue, but it is also rich and detailed in regard to individual persons and their different kinds of the blessed practice of mercy.

First of all, one notices that the New Testament upholds all those passages of the Old where mercy is commanded and, subsequently, applies them to its own areas of life. Wherever Old Testament situations come up, there the Old Testament admonitions come to life, even if they are not explicitly repeated and confirmed by words of the New Testament. Thus, all the Old Testament exhortations regarding mercy — beginning with the person that wants even a bird to be spared all the way to those that practice mercy toward the aged and parents — belong also to us, the children of the New Testament. Therefore, when one inquires about mercy, this enhances the horizon.

Additionally, when the Lord indicated what He will say on the Last Day (**MATT. 25:31**), He did touch on certain classes of misery that could not even be mentioned in the Old Testament in the form given here. He talks about those who were hungry and thirsty and naked and sick because such people obviously existed in the Old and New Testaments. But He also says (**MATT. 25:36**), “I was in prison.” This He applies to His brothers, those Christians who would be in prison for the same reasons as Christ, that is, for the sake of the truth. In saying these words, He points to the New Testament mercy shown the holy confessors and martyrs, and the Church of the first few centuries understood this very well.

Another text, where the general command to be merciful is specified, is that well-known one about the widows (**1 TIM. 5:10**), which lists a number of persons who need mercy: children who are to be brought up, pilgrims who are to be lodged, saints whose feet are to be washed, and afflicted ones who are to be relieved. Each of these indicates an entire class that has come to such a state and situation where mercy is needed. Indeed, it would be a great delight to look at those texts in the divine Word of the New Testament that open ditches for the spring waters of mercy and direct their ways to flow forth.

While there is no time for this exercise here, we must not forget the triumph of mercy in the New Testament. We look to those people who by the pierced hands were, surprisingly for some souls, admitted to the order of those who are to receive mercy, namely, their enemies. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (**Matt. 5:44**). These are words and orders worthy of the one who even on the cross prayed for His enemies, and who, since He is ascended into heaven, has nothing else to do but to heap fiery coals of holy mercy on the heads of His ungrateful Church (**PROV. 25:21FF; ROM. 12:20**), and who preaches ceaselessly (**MATT. 5:46, 48**), “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” In these words, there is a hint of the merciful ones’ merit of grace and of the eternal blessing for those who understand and bestow mercy.

42. By introducing the persons to whom one should show mercy, we have already given an instruction as to how to identify the manifold kinds and manners of mercy. Who, for example, does not realize that mercy is shown to the hungry by food, just as the Lord had mercy upon His people and fed five thousand and four thousand respectively (**MATT. 14:15–22; 15:29–39**)? And who would not, with some dexterity in locating similar passages, remember the word of the Lord in Luke 14:13, where he says that

one is to invite the poor when one gives a feast? Or who could not easily identify the way in which one can have mercy on the thirsty? Who would not remember that passage in Matthew 10:40ff that talks about the cup of cold water, which is to be given to a disciple in a disciple's name? Or, furthermore, who would not know that he is to show mercy to the naked by providing the necessary clothing, just as the highly blessed Merciful pardons the poor, naked world with the clothing of His most holy merit? Or who would not remember upon seeing a sick person that mercy is shown to him when he is healed, just as Jesus Christ healed the many sick in His home country? Who would not realize and find that one has to bring the sick to the Physician and to the medicine of body and soul, to Christ Himself, to practice mercy? Or, finally, what does the prisoner need but either freedom or comfort to strive for a higher freedom, by which one can endure the fetters for a long time?

Everybody sees that the kind and manner of mercy depends on the person it is shown to. Yet it is also seen easily that it is not only defined by the person, but also by the will and the example of the Duke of all mercy. Whoever gave all his possessions to the poor and had his body burned had, thereby, perhaps fed and saved many, but did he also practice mercy, if he does not have love (1 COR. 13:3)? What is love and mercy without works? And, conversely, what are works without love and mercy? Just as in every body dwells a soul, so in every work dwells merciful love. It is and remains a poor deed that cannot be rewarded. Do not simply focus on the holiest form of appearance of mercy, but also consider that a humbled heart is part of the right way of exercising mercy, which deems it a grace to be allowed to practice mercy, and also a filled heart urged by the saying, "Cursed be he who vainly plays around with the Word of God." Full of love, full of humbleness, full of holy urge, full of fervent mercy — this is, generally speaking, the right way to practice mercy. Regardless of

whether it be shown spiritually or bodily or spiritually-bodily, by giving or forgiving, by not-judging or judging, by patience and long-suffering or by the seeming opposite, a sudden outburst of chastisement, it, nevertheless, remains one and the same in its bountiful practice. This it does just as it is the same power of God that brings forth from the soil the manifold plants, and one and the same hearth of light, out of which break forth these myriad beams of the evening sun.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

FIRST CHAPTER – WHAT IS MERCY?

1. What does Löhe mean by, “misery would return if mercy would not keep watch at the gates of heaven”?
 2. What distinction does Löhe make between grace and mercy? What does grace primarily deal with? What does mercy primarily deal with? How are grace and mercy related?
 3. What is the origin of all human misery?
 4. What does Löhe call the “two hands of God”? Describe the relationship of the “two hands of God” to Law and Gospel.
 5. What are the two conditions Löhe describes for all mankind?
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SECOND CHAPTER – HOW DID THE LORD, YOUR GOD, PRACTICE MERCY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

1. What does Löhe mean by this: “The history of all peoples, especially of the great peoples before Christ, has no other meaning than this: in and by Israel mercy or justice if offered them, peace or punishment”?
 2. Löhe notes, “For in the midst of judgment, mercy shows itself, and in the midst of mercy, justice shows itself.” What is the relationship between mercy and justice?
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THIRD CHAPTER – HOW DID THE LORD, YOUR SAVIOR, PRACTICE MERCY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

1. “The people’s fortune changes according to changes in their behavior toward the Gospel.” To what fortune is Löhe referring?

2. How does Löhe describe the justice shown to the Orient versus the mercy shown the Occident?
 3. How did the church try to control the state; and how did the state try to control the church?
 4. How was the rejection of the Lord's mercy destructive to Germany according to Löhe?
 5. How do these statements relate to each other: "Mercy still rejoices over judgment" and "The kingdom of the Lord is a kingdom of mercy"?
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FOURTH CHAPTER – HOW DID THE LORD IN THE LAW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT COMMAND HIS PEOPLE TO PRACTICE MERCY?

1. Why were the Israelites supposed to remain separated from the nations around them? See Deuteronomy chapters 7 and 9. Löhe noted, "The fisherman does not swim with the fish in the water." How is the church to be in the world but not of the world?
2. What was the purpose of the great institutions of the Old Testament (prophets, kings and priests)?
3. Explain how "neither beast nor bird in the nest are forgotten" in the Lord's display of mercy. See Jonah 4:11.
4. In reference to mercy, what is not found in the Old Testament but is a fruit of the New Testament? Discuss the implications of this for us today.
5. Löhe notes, "There were never supposed to be beggars." How does Löhe propose to prevent people from becoming beggars?

FIFTH CHAPTER – HOW DID THE LORD, YOUR REDEEMER, AND HIS HOLY APOSTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMAND HIS SAINTS TO PRACTICE MERCY?

1. According to Löhe, what is the greatest display of mercy?
2. How do the office of the Word and the office of bodily mercy work together?
3. What was the role of the deacon?
4. How did the office of deaconess emerge in the early church? How was this office similar and different in Löhe's day in the 19th century? How is it similar and different in our day?

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