

Appendix K - What it means to be “Sacramental?”

It is important to clarify our use of the term “sacramental.” We believe, along with Lutheran Christians throughout the world, that a Sacrament is that which has a “command of God, and to which the promise of grace has been added.”[1] Traditionally, Lutheran Christians have held up Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the two Sacraments of the Church, though, in our confessional documents, Confession and Absolution is also sometimes numbered among the Sacraments.[2] The Confessions even muse as to whether or not prayer, alms, and troubles could be considered sacramental in some sense.[3] The number of Sacraments is not really the point, for the very term “sacrament” itself is determined ecclesiologicaly and not biblically, for the term never appears in Scripture. Indeed, our confessional documents warn us against fighting over the number of Sacraments and the definition of what constitutes a Sacrament, saying, “No levelheaded person will labor greatly about the number or the term, if only those things are still kept that have God’s command and promises.”[4]

It is in this spirit that we have chosen to use the term “sacramental” in a broader way, noting the similitude between what happens in the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper on the one hand and what happens when God’s people share the gospel with others on the other. We have said that, in a general sense, God’s people can be considered to be Christ’s small “s” sacraments, for, as Jesus is truly present in the capital “S” Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper according to the promise of His Word, Jesus truly lives in His people by faith (cf. Galatians 2:20). This, in turn, has implications for how His people can live sacramentally before others. Martin Luther explains it well when he says, “As [Christ] gives Himself for us with His body and blood in order to redeem us from all misery, so we too are to give ourselves with might and main for our neighbor.”[5] Luther connects the Sacramental worship of the Church to the sacramental living of her people.

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Luther’s statement also helps clarify the use of the phrase “sacramental entrepreneur.” When we use the term “sacramental,” we mean to confess our commitment to the historic, orthodox teaching on the Sacraments as means of grace specifically and to the doctrines of the Christian faith generally. At the same time, our use of the term “entrepreneur” is a way to declare our commitment, as Luther says, “to give ourselves with might and main for our neighbor.” We support and encourage reaching our neighbors with Word and Sacrament ministry. Indeed, we cannot help but reach out with Word and Sacrament ministry, for faith makes such a desire inevitable:

When a Christian begins to know Christ as his Lord and Savior, who has redeemed him from death, and is brought into His dominion and heritage, his heart is thoroughly permeated by God; then he would like to help everybody attain this blessedness. For he has no greater joy than the treasured knowledge of Christ ... He has a restless spirit while enjoying rest supreme, that is, God’s grace and peace. Therefore, he cannot be quiet or idle but is forever struggling and striving with all his powers, as one living only to spread God’s honor and praise farther among man.[6]

“A restless spirit,” to use Luther’s words above, that is born out of faith in the gospel compels us to go new places and start new ministries and reach lost people. This is at the heart of what it means to be entrepreneurial. But at the same time we are committed to reaching new people, our moorings are in the orthodoxy of God’s Word and His Sacraments so that we might not “spread any new or strange teaching.”[7] Hence, we pair the terms “sacramental” and “entrepreneur” to describe our commitment to both orthodoxy and mission.

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The use of lay preaching

The other topic that is bound to capture some attention overtime is lay preaching. Concerns have been raised primarily over how this practice comports with our confessional documents, which state, “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.”[8] We understand the intent of this statement in light of the title of the article under which it falls: “Order in the Church.” The confessors’ big concern in this article was that everything be done in the Church “decently

and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Historically, this statement was meant as a defense against the Roman Catholic magisterium, which asserted that Lutheran pastors did not have a right to preach because they had not been canonically ordained.

With the Lutheran confessors, we uphold the importance of having good order in the Church. We also uphold the Office of the Public Ministry as divinely instituted. We do not see, however, a specific Scriptural prohibition against all lay preaching. Instead, we see in Acts 8, for instance, when the Jerusalem church was persecuted and scattered, that her members “went about preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4).

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Indeed, when one asserts that a layperson can never preach under any circumstance, he comes dangerously close to denying the priesthood of the baptized what is rightly theirs. Luther explains:

There is no other Word of God than that which is given all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. There is no other remembrance of the Lord’s Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted.[9]

Though not all Christians are pastors, they are part of the priesthood of the baptized. Thus, they can, in a responsible and ordered way, assist a pastor in his functions. Indeed, when Wittenberg is degenerating into rank licentiousness, Martin Luther complains:

I really wish Philip [Melanchthon] would also preach to the people somewhere in the city on festival days after dinner to provide a substitute for the drinking and gambling. This could become a custom which would introduce freedom and restore the form and manners of the early church. For if we have broken all laws of men and cast off their yokes, what difference would it make to us that Philip is not anointed or tonsured but married? Nevertheless he is truly a priest and actually does the work of a priest, unless it is not the office of a priest to teach the Word of God.[10]

Though Melanchthon is not ordained as a pastor, Luther wishes he would and argues he should preach based on his membership in the priesthood of the baptized. In Melanchthon’s case, then, Luther sees lay preaching as salutary and, in this instance, needed. This is why the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod has long recognized that:

The Office of the Public Ministry is so broad that it can effectively employ the gifts of helpers in its performance. The congregation is blessed when it places at the side of its pastor faithful and capable teachers, for instance, who enhance his administration of the Office of the Public Ministry.[11]

No less than C.F.W. Walther, after calling the Office of the Public Ministry “the highest office,” explained that from it can “stem other offices in the church.”[12] From vicars who preach as part of their pastoral training to Communion assistants who help in the distribution of Christ’s body and blood, the Church has long understood that pastoral functions can, in some instances, be carried out by a lay person, provided there is appropriate ecclesiastical supervision. A “rightly ordered call” for preaching prohibits, in the words of Luther, an individual who would “arise by his own authority and arrogate to himself alone what belongs to [the priesthood of] all [believers].”[13] It does not necessarily preclude any and every instance in which a layperson might preach. This is why OSLC accepts the responsible use of lay preaching under careful supervision.

Though we are aware that these brief explanations will not address every concern people may have, we hope they will help clarify and corroborate our deep desire to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions while also reaching lost people with the gospel.

Just 12 straight-up sacramental truths.

1. I don’t confuse what I do with who I am.
2. Who I am in Jesus redeems what I do in life.
3. How I behave reveals what I value.
4. I daily remember my baptism and receive the Lord’s Supper as often as offered.

5. I speak of Jesus rather than God.
6. As a church we incorporate Jesus and baptism into daily conversation and especially into weekly preaching and teaching.
7. I embrace weakness, allowing Jesus' strength to reign in my life.
8. I embrace the unique way Jesus has formed me.
9. I seek ways to bless people, not to take from them.
10. I give grace, never applying law to a broken and contrite spirit.
11. I teach you how to live as a follower of Jesus but at the end of the day, grace is the only thing that heals and grows.
12. I express joy in words and body language because I know the end of the story.