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Διαθήκη In the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Supper's Liturgy in Luther and the Lutheran Tradition

Chuck Ramsey

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, pastorckramsey@aol.com

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Διαθήκη
In The Lord's Supper
And
The Lord's Supper's Liturgy
In Luther and the Lutheran Tradition

for Dr. Nagel's the Lord's Supper's Liturgy
by Pastor Chuck Ramsey
Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost
Summer, 1996

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Introduction

When our Lord instituted the Lord's Supper and as He turned to consecrating the wine, He said, "This is the new *διαθήκη* in My blood which is poured out for the remission of sins." Some have translated this *διαθήκη* as "covenant;" others as "testament." The translation "covenant" can be seen in the three of the most popular modern American translations, namely, *The New American Standard Bible*, *The New Revised Standard Version*, and *The New International Version of the Bible*. The word "covenant" is also seen in many American liturgies and even *The Lutheran Book of Worship*. *Διαθήκη* is translated as "testament" in *The King James Bible* and in *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *Lutheran Worship*.

To English ears what do these two terms convey? According to *Webster's Unabridged English Dictionary*, the first definition of "testament" is "in the Bible, a covenant." The fourth definition is "in law, a will: now rare except in the phrase *last will and testament*."¹ "Covenant" in this dictionary is first defined as "a binding and solemn agreement by two or more persons, parties, etc. to do or keep from doing some specified thing; a compact," and then, it is defined as a theological term meaning "the promises of God to man, usually carrying with conditions to be fulfilled by man, as recorded in the Bible. The synonyms listed for "covenant" are these: contract, bargain, stipulation, agreement, promise, engagement."²

¹ *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, Second Edition, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983) p. 1885.

² *Ibid.*, p. 420.

Except for the third definition of “testament” (as “last will and testament”) listed above, “testament” for English ears is a rarely used synonym for “covenant.”³

What, however, is the Scripturally correct translation of *διαθήκη*?

This paper addresses this question, and in the process reflects on the use and understanding of the word *διαθήκη* in the writings of Dr. Martin Luther, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in Lutheran tradition.

³ Ibid., p. 1885.

I. The Meaning of Διαθήκη

A. The Scriptural Background of Διαθήκη

The Hebrew word בְּרִית is translated into Greek as *διαθήκη*. The Septuagint renders בְּרִית as *διαθήκη* 270 times.⁴ For Old Testament quotes and references in the New Testament, it is also the most frequent translation of בְּרִית. But what exactly does it convey?

In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, J. Behm in the article on *διαθήκη* writes that *διαθήκη* means “covenant” in English. In reference to this translation Armand Boehme states that “most modern Greek lexicons and other studies think that *διαθήκη* should be translated as “covenant.” Concerning this he writes, “This belief arises because they deny that God can die even in Christ.”⁵

Here, Reverend Boehme states that it is Behm’s view of the death of Christ that colors his comments concerning the meaning of *διαθήκη*. In Louw and Nida’s semantic domains Greek-English lexicon, the first definition of *διαθήκη* given is “covenant/pact.”

⁴ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 volumes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: the Paternoster Press, 1985), *διαθήκη* by J. Behm., p. 157. Hereafter this work will be abbreviated as TDNT.

⁵ Armand Boehme, “Covenant or Testament?” A Review Article,” *Confessional Lutheran Research Society Newsletter* 12 (Advent 1988): p. 8; TDNT, Behm, *διαθήκη*, pp. 157-161.

διαθήκη, ης, f: the verbal content of an agreement between two persons specifying reciprocal benefits and responsibilities — “covenant, pact.” . . .⁶

The second definition given reflects the Septuagint’s rendering of תּוֹרָה as *διαθήκη*, meaning “a final will and testament.”

In rendering the O.T. term b[e]rith, the Septuagint translators employed *διαθήκη*, literally “a final will and testament,” in place of *συνθήκη* meaning “contract, agreement,” since they evidently wished to emphasize the fact that the initiative for such a covenantal relationship existed with one person rather than being the result of negotiation and compromise.⁷

Then later in this work, in reference to *διαθήκη* in Hebrews 9:17 and 19, we read,

diatithemai: to dispose of one’s property by means of a will — “to make a will.” . . . “for (a will) is not in force while the one who has made the will is still alive” Heb. 9:17.⁸

and,

διαθήκη, ης, f: (derivative of *diatithemai* “to make a will, 57.123) a legal document by which property is transferred by the deceased to an heir or heirs — “will, testament.” . . . “where there is a will, it has to be proved that the one who made it has died” Heb. 9:16.⁹

In this work, *διαθήκη* is rendered as “testament” in English when it carries both the meanings of “single initiative” in the making of a testament and of “the death of the testator.”

⁶ *Greek--English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* Volume 1, edited by Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) 452:34.44. Hereafter referred to as *Semantic Domains*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 572: 57.123.

⁹ Ibid., p. 572:57.124.

In *Use The Right Word: A Guide To Synonyms*, the word “covenant” is defined as follows:

“Covenant” carries strong overtones of obligation and responsibility. A “covenant” is often a solemn pledge made by members of a religious or other dedicated group to maintain and promote a body of doctrine or a set of principles: the “Covenant” of the Liberty of Worship drawn up in Scotland in 1557; the “Covenant” of the League of Nations.¹⁰

The bilateral meaning of “covenant” in English is also seen in the word’s etymology.

The roots of “covenant” are “com-,” “together,” and “venire” meaning “to come.” The “co-” (shortened from “com-”) of “covenant” is bilateral. Of course, it is not a word’s etymology that finally determines its meaning. A word’s context and its usage are primarily what determine its meaning, and as the Greek and English dictionaries quoted above show, both contextually and in terms of usage, the English word “covenant” for English ears denotes bilateral movement and says nothing of death. It is the word “testament” that carries both the meanings of “single initiative” in the making of a testament and of “the death of the testator.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Use The Right Word: A Guide To Synonyms* edited by S. I. Hayakawa, (Professor of English and Speech at San Francisco State College) and the Funk and Wagnals Dictionary Staff (Pleasantville, New York: The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., 1968) p. 134. This work describes the contextual usage and meanings of synonyms.

¹¹ *Semantic Domains*, p. 452:34.44; p. 572:57.124.

B. The Making of a Last Will and Testament is the Context of the Lord's Supper

The question then arises whether “testament” as in the phrase “last will and testament” with both its unilateral meaning and its “the death of the testator” freight is the context of the Lord's Supper. Some would argue that to translate *διαθήκη* as “testament” forces the Lord's Supper into a preconceived theological system. The opposite though is the case. The words and context of the Lord's Supper themselves are permeated with the concept of testament as in the meaning “the last will and testament.” Concerning this Dr. Martin Luther wrote in his 1520 “Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, The Holy Mass,”

Now we see how many parts there are in this testament. . . . There is first, the testator who makes the testament, Christ. Second, the heirs to whom the testament is bequeathed, we Christians. Third, the testament itself, the words of Christ . . . ‘This is My body . . . this is My blood . . . a new eternal testament.’ Fourth, the seal or token is the Sacrament, the bread and wine, under which are His true body and blood. . . . Fifth, there is the bequeathed blessing which the words signify, namely, remission of sins and eternal life.¹²

Dr. Luther sees this testament as God's unilaterally given gift. In this treatise he also writes,

For a testament is not beneficium acceptum, sed datum; it does not take benefit from us, but brings benefit to us. . . . Just as in baptism, in which there is also a divine testament and sacrament, no one gives God anything or does him a service, but instead takes something, so it is in all other sacraments and in the sermon as well.¹³

¹² Martin Luther, “Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, The Holy Mass” (1520), translated by Jeremiah J. Schindel and revised by E. Theodore Bachmann, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960) Volume 35, pp. 86-87. Hereafter this American Edition of *Luther's Works* will be referred to as *LW*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Dr. Luther noted both similarities and differences between the Hebrew בְּרִית and the Greek *διαθήκη*. Armand Boehme writes,

Luther clearly saw the similarities and the differences between the Old Testament Hebrew word *berith* (generally translated “covenant”) and the New Testament Greek word *διαθήκη* (“testament”). The *berith* was prophecy or the shadow of things to come. The *διαθήκη* was the fulfillment or the reality of God clothed in the flesh of Christ dying for the sins of all. Luther’s study of the Greek text of the Bible clearly showed him that the Lord’s Supper is a *διαθήκη* (testament) and not a *συνθήκη* (covenant)¹⁴. Luther writes,

This testament [the Lord’s own word] of Christ is foreshadowed in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; indeed, whatever value those ancient promises possessed was altogether derived from this new promise that was to come in Christ. Hence the words “compact”, “covenant”, and “testament of the Lord” occur so frequently in the Scriptures. These words signified that God would one day die. “For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity occur.” (Hebrews 9:16). Now God had made a testament; therefore, it was necessary that He should die. But God could not die unless He became a man. Thus the incarnation and death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in the one word, “testament.”¹⁵

Kenneth Hagen in an article outlining Dr. Luther’s 1520-1527 testament theology notes that from Jerome Luther had learned that the Old Testament Hebrew word “berith” meant “covenant” and not “testament.”¹⁶ But because of the death of Christ it could be translated as “testament” in the New Testament. Luther writes,

He who stays alive makes a covenant; he who is about to die makes a testament. Thus Jesus Christ, the immortal God, made a covenant. At the same time He made

¹⁴ Boehme, p. 4.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” (1520), translated by A. T. W. Steinhauser and revised by Frederick C. Ahrens and Abdel Ross Wentz, *LW*, Volume 36, p. 38.

¹⁶ Kenneth Hagen, “From Testament to Covenant in the Early Sixteenth Century,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, III 1 (April 1972), p. 8.

a testament, because He was going to become mortal. Just as He is both God and man, so He made both a covenant and a testament.¹⁷

Dr. Norman Nagel writes in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* in reference to בְּרִית, *διαθήκη*, and “testament,”

The Hebrew word *berith* went into Greek as *διαθήκη* (not *συνθήκη*). The Latin for this is *testamentum*, giving us the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament.” Chrysostom expounded testament in the way of Hebrews 9, and Luther followed him in his first account of the Lord’s Supper, an account that swells with the Gospel. Testament continued as a vehicle of the Gospel better able to extol the fact that everything depends on and is fulfilled by the sacrifice of Calvary. “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). It is possible to have a covenant without a death, but not a testament. Luther read the fulfillment back into the promise, confessing more than is carried by *berith*. *Berith* is fulfilled and burst by Jesus the Messiah, the Lord. Lev. 26:12 is the *berith* formula: “I will . . . be your God, and you will be My people.” We are the ones to whom the Lord is speaking: “for many,” “for you.” It is only from him, his body and blood which He gave and shed for us. The words of Christ to us, they say and do and bestow what follows.¹⁸

For Luther this gracious, unilateral, Christ crucified for us testament is foundational.

In the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), he writes,

Let this stand, therefore, as our first and infallible proposition – the mass or Sacrament of the Altar is Christ’s testament, which he left behind him at his death to be distributed among his believers. For that is the meaning of his words, “This cup is the new testament in my blood” [Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25]. Let this truth stand, I say, as the immovable foundation on which we shall base all that we have to say. For, as you will see, we are going to overthrow all the godless opinions of men which have been imported into this most precious sacrament. Christ, who is the

¹⁷ Martin Luther, “Commentary on Galatians” (1519), *LW*, 27:268.

¹⁸ Norman Nagel, “Holy Communion,” *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, edited by Fred L. Precht, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), pp. 299-300.

truth, truly says that this is the new testament in his blood, poured out for us [Luke 22:20].¹⁹

He states that all the promises in the Old Testament find their complete fulfillment in this testament. He writes,

This testament of Christ is foreshadowed in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; indeed, whatever value those ancient promises possessed was altogether derived from this new promise that was to come in Christ.²⁰

Luther calls this testament “the most perfect promise of all.” He writes,

And so it finally came to the most perfect promise of all, that of the new testament, in which, with plain words, life and salvation are freely promised, and actually granted to those who believe the promise.²¹

And because this promise is Christ’s unilateral and gracious testament, Luther rejects any false teachings that would suggest in any fashion that it is our work. He writes,

You have seen that the mass is nothing else than the divine promise or testament of Christ, sealed with the sacrament of his body and blood. If that is true, you will understand that it cannot possibly be in any way a work; nobody can possibly do any thing in it, neither can it be dealt with in any other way than by faith alone. However, faith is not a work, but the lord and life of all works. Who in the world is so foolish as to regard a promise received by him, or a testament given to him, as a good work, which he renders to the testator by his acceptance of it? What heir will imagine that he is doing his departed father a kindness by accepting the terms of the will and the inheritance it bequeaths to him? What godless audacity is it, therefore, when we who are to receive the testament of God come as those who would perform a good work for him! This is ignorance of the testament, this captivity of so great a sacrament – are they not too sad for tears?²²

¹⁹ Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” (1520), *LW*, 36:37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

Thus Luther praises the gospel sweetness of Christ's last will and testament and denounces any attempts to consider it our work. In time Luther declined to use the word "Mass" when discussing the Lord's Supper because of the term "Mass" being so entrenched with the Roman Catholic understanding of the our Lord's testament as actually our sacrifice to him. He writes,

I really wish and would very gladly see and hear that everyone would recognize the difference between the two words "Mass" and "Sacrament" to be as great as the difference between darkness and light, nay, between the devil and God, since the Mass, as its performance and all their teachings and books prove, is nothing else than a perverted disorder and a marketing of the Holy Sacrament, even though it be celebrated in the most devotional manner. . . . God grant all pious Christians such a heart that they are afraid and cross themselves, as against an abomination of the devil, when they hear the word "Mass." On the other hand, may they leap for joy when they hear the word "Sacrament," or "Lord's Supper," nay, may they even, in a kind of real, spiritual joy, sweetly weep.²³

"Testament" carries the gospel meaning of a last will and testament established by a rich and gracious benefactor for his heirs. The translation "testament" is not forced on the text but arises out of it through the Christ and Him crucified gifts of the Supper itself, gifts that are received by faith. "Testament" theologically speaking is both monergistic and centered in Christ's death. One's theology concerning the death of Jesus Christ informs one's translation of *διαθήκη* as "testament" or "covenant." Those theologies that do not have Christ and Him crucified for our sins as the center of their theology translate *διαθήκη* as "covenant," and the

²³ Martin Luther. Ewald M. Plass, editor, *What Luther Says*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1954), p. 793:2466.

theology that is centered in the wounds of Christ historically has translated *διαθήκη* as “testament.”²⁴

²⁴ I do not wish here to impugn the faith of Christian pastors and teachers who have translated *διαθήκη* in the Words of Institution as “covenant” in English who at the same time have stated that the covenant that they are speaking of is a unilateral covenant in which God is the sole initiator and establisher of the Lord’s Supper and the sole grace alone giver of his gifts in the Supper. But what I am saying is that for English ears the phrase “unilateral covenant” is a contradiction in terms; the words “unilateral” and “covenant” contradict each other. “Unilateral” means “of, occurring on, or affecting one side only” or “involving or obligating one only of several persons or parties; done or undertaken by one only; not reciprocal; as, a unilateral contract.” But “covenant” involves bilateral movement. Without thorough explanation, the phrase “unilateral covenant” is confusing and can be misleading.

C. The Confessions of Our Church

In the Concordia Triglotta, the Latin text of the Small Catechism has “testamentum” for *διαθήκη* in the Words of Institution. (The German has “Testament.”)²⁵ Likewise The Apology Art. XXII. (X.) and The Formula of Concord. (Epitome. VII. Of the Lord’s Supper: 811.7) use “testamentum.” In The Apology the Latin text reads:

*Cur mutatur ordinatio Christi, praesertim quum ipse vocet eam testamentum suum? Quodsi hominis testamentum rescindere non licet, multo minus Christi testamentum rescindere licebit.*²⁶

And in the Formula the text reads: *Credimus docemus et confitemur, verba testamenti Christi non aliter accipienda esse,*²⁷

Thus “testamentum” is the word of the Confessions, not “pactum” or “foedus”, for translating *διαθήκη* in the Words of Institution.

This does not mean that the word *foedus* translated into English as *covenant* is not used in the Confessions. For example, *foedus / covenant* is found parallel to *testamentum* in the Formula of Concord:

*Hoc, quod ore ex calice bibitus, est sanguis meus novi testamenti, quo, videlicet hoc testamentum meum et novum foedus, videlect remissionem peccatorum vobis hominibus sancio, ferio, obsigno et confirmo.*²⁸

²⁵ “The Small Catechism,” *Concordia Triglotta*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p. 555.4.

²⁶ “The Apology” XXII (X.), *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 356.1.

²⁷ “The Formula of Concord: the Lord’s Supper” *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 811.7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 990.52.

*Hic in declaratione imprimis ultimae suae voluntatis, testamenti et perpetui foederis
atque coniunctionis*²⁹

But when *foedus* is used, the context in the Confessions is clearly that of a unilateral last will and testament, as seen in the above quote. When Luther uses *foedus*, *pactum*, and *promissio*, they are also used in a unilateral sense and even better, in a Gospel sense. Dr. Hagen notes that for Luther *testamentum* describes the God-man relationship from paradise to the eschaton. *Foedus*, *pactum*, and *promissio* are read as a gratuitous and unilateral *testamentum*.³⁰ But to clarify, these words are used in connection with “testamentum,” and not as substitutes for it, and never as a translation of the Words of Institution into Latin or German. Without a thorough explanation the use of the word, *covenant* (*συνθήκη*, *foedus*) is at best confusing to English ears and may actually be misleading.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 989.50.

³⁰ Hagen, p. 14.

II. Christ's Finished Work of Salvation And His Last Will And Testament

A. Nothing Can Be Added To Christ's Finished Work of Salvation

In the Lord's Supper our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gives to us all that He earned for us through His living a perfect life for us and giving that life on the cross vicariously for our sins. In Jesus' living and dying for us (in our place, as our substitute) He earned for us the complete forgiveness of all our sins, righteousness before His Father in heaven, and new, eternal and abundant life. The Apostles' Creed reads,

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.³¹

Concerning this salvation, the Small Catechism has,

What does this mean? I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.³²

³¹ "The Apostles' Creed," *Lutheran Worship*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), p. 301.

³² "The Small Catechism," *Lutheran Worship*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), pp. 301-302.

This salvation is complete in Christ; nothing needs to be, can be or has to be added to it. Nothing needs to be added, for our salvation is the work of the God-Man Jesus Christ, and He Himself declared on the cross, “It is finished.”³³ Nothing can be added, for God in Jesus Christ alone is Savior,³⁴ man is powerless to save himself,³⁵ and salvation is only by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.³⁶ And nothing has to be added, for we have been redeemed from the law by Jesus.³⁷

Dr. Luther in his “Commentary on Galatians” (1531) says that God graciously and freely gives us this salvation and righteousness through faith alone in Christ and that there is nothing that is required of us at all — we do not have to add anything to Christ’s work. Faith simply receives what God has given in Christ. We do nothing at all!

But this most excellent righteousness, the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works, is neither political nor ceremonial nor legal nor work-righteous but is quite the opposite; it is a merely passive righteousness, while all the others, listed above, are active. For here we work nothing, render nothing to God; we only receive and permit someone else to work in us, namely, God. Therefore it is appropriate to call this righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness “passive.” . . .

Thus we can obtain it only through the free imputation and indescribable gift of God. . . . Then do we do nothing and work nothing in order to obtain this righteousness? I reply: Nothing at all. For this righteousness means to do nothing, to hear nothing, and to know nothing about the Law or about works but to know and believe only this: that Christ has gone to the Father and is now invisible; that He sits in heaven at the

³³ Jn.19:30

³⁴ Acts 4:12-13

³⁵ Rom. 3:9

³⁶ Eph. 2:8,9; Rom. 3:21-28

³⁷ Gal. 4:1-5

right hand of the Father, not as a Judge but as one who has been made for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption from God (1 Cor. 1:30); in short, that He is our High Priest, interceding for us and reigning over us and in us through grace.³⁸

In fact, to teach that anything has to be added to the saving work of Christ is damnable heresy. Commenting on Galatians 5:2³⁹ Dr. Luther writes,

Paul is profoundly moved, and in great zeal and fervor of the Spirit he speaks sheer thunderbolts against the Law and against circumcision. In his anger over the great wickedness of it all, the Holy Spirit wrests such passionate words out of him, as though he were saying: “Behold I, Paul, etc. I, I say, who know that I have the Gospel, not from men but through the revelation of Jesus Christ; I, who know for certain that I have a divine commandment and authority to teach and define doctrine — I announce to you a judgment that is indeed new but it is sure and true, namely, that if you receive circumcision, Christ will simply be of no advantage to you.” This is a very harsh judgment when Paul says that receiving circumcision is the same as making Christ null and void — not indeed simply in Himself but for the Galatians, who were deceived by the tricks of the false apostles into believing that in addition to faith in Christ circumcision was necessary for believers, and that without it they could not obtain salvation.

This teaching is the touchstone by which we can judge most surely and freely about all doctrines, works, forms of worship, and ceremonies of all men. Whoever (whether he be a papist, a Jew, a Turk, or a sectarian) teaches that anything beyond the Gospel of Christ is necessary to attain salvation; whoever establishes any work or form of worship; whoever observes any rule, tradition, or ceremony with the opinion that thereby he will obtain the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life — will hear the judgment of the Holy Spirit pronounced against him here by the apostle: that Christ is of no advantage to him at all.⁴⁰

³⁸ Martin Luther, “Commentary on Galatians” (1531), *LW*, Volume 26:4-8.

³⁹ Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, “Commentary on Galatians” (1531), *LW*, Volume 27:9.

B. Nothing Can Be Added to Christ's Testament

Just as nothing can be, needs to be or has to be added to the saving work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so too nothing can be, needs to be or has to be added to the Lord's Supper, our Lord's Last Will and Testament. Concerning our Lord's Last Will and Testament, we read in Scripture,

Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.⁴¹

A last will and testament, by its very nature of becoming operative upon the death of the testator, cannot be added to or subtracted from for it has been sealed by the death of the testator. And if this is true in reference to human matters, how much more so in reference to the last will and testament of our Lord. This truth permeated Dr. Luther's writings.

On the above words of Scripture, specifically Galatians 3:15, Dr. Luther writes,

On the basis of this custom of human wills, then Paul argues as follows: "How does it happen that men are obeyed, but God is disobeyed? Political and civic ordinances are observed religiously; here nothing is altered, nothing added, nothing taken away. Only our theology, to which all the creature nevertheless bear witness — only it suffers alteration and addition." It is very persuasive when Paul argues this way from the example and laws of men. That is why he says: "To give a human example." It is as though he were saying: "In wills and in other human business there is a performance, and what the law commands is observed. Why does not the same thing happen even more in the testament of God, which God Himself promised to

⁴¹ *The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996. Galatians 3:15-18.*

Abraham and to his offspring? Therefore this is a sufficiently, strong argument, based as it is on a divine ordinance.⁴²

Concerning this testament, Dr. Luther writes,

Here Paul uses a new term and calls the promises of God a testament. A testament is nothing else than a promise, except that it has not yet been revealed but is still only signified. Now a testament is not a law; it is a gift. For heirs do not look for laws or for enforcement; they look for an inheritance from a testament.⁴³

In his 1519 commentary on Galatians, Dr. Luther spoke also in the same vein on this testament of Christ. He writes,

In every testament there is a testator. There is one for whom the testament is made; there is the testament itself; and there is the legacy that is being attested or bequeathed. This is the situation here. God is the Testator, for it is He Himself who promises and bequeaths. Abraham and his offspring are those for whom the testament is made as heirs of God, the Testator. The testament is the promise itself (Gen. 12:2 ff. And 17:1 ff.) That which is bequeathed is the inheritance itself, that is, grace and the righteousness of faith, namely, the blessing of the Gentiles in the offspring of Abraham. If, therefore, the grace of the promise and the righteousness of God, which has been tendered through Christ — and in this way God's testament has been ratified through His death, yes, executed and distributed — if this does not suffice unless you also have the righteousness of the Law, is God's testament, which has not only been declared but has also been ratified and fulfilled, not now rendered invalid, and is not something being added to it? But this should not be done even in the case of a man's testament. If grace is sufficient, however, and the testament of God is firm, it is clear that one should not seek the righteousness of the Law.⁴⁴

Dr. Luther writes that the promises of God in Scripture pointed to God's incarnation, suffering and death. He writes,

Note in addition that the apostle calls the promises of God a testament. The same term is used in other passages of Scripture. In this way it was indicated darkly that God would die and that this is God's promise, as in a formally announced testament,

⁴² Martin Luther, "Commentary on Galatians" (1531), *LW*, Volume 26:298.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, "Commentary on Galatians" (1519), *LW*, Volume 27:264.

God's incarnation and suffering were to be understood. For, as Heb. 9:17 states, "A testament is ratified only at death." Hence God's testament was not to be ratified unless God died. In the same place (Heb. 9:15) it is stated of Christ: "Therefore He is the mediator of a new testament, in order that they may receive the promise, since a death has occurred." And this is the day of Christ which Abraham recognized and rejoiced in when God gave His promise (John 8:56). Hence one can at the same time harmonize with this what Jerome mentions, namely, that in the Hebrew one finds "covenant" rather than "testament." He who stays alive makes a covenant; he who is about to die makes a testament. Thus Jesus Christ, the immortal God, made a covenant. At the same time He made a testament, because He was going to become mortal. Just as He is both God and man, so He made both a covenant and a testament.⁴⁵

The promise of salvation in Christ is the new testament of our Lord, and because it is His testament, it cannot be added to or subtracted from. Just as Christ's work of salvation cannot be added to or subtracted from so too His testament cannot be added to or subtracted from.

Dr. Luther in "A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass" (1520) discusses the Lord's Supper as God's testament to us in Christ. He writes,

In the New Testament, likewise, Christ made a promise or solemn vow, which we are to believe and thereby come to righteousness and salvation. This promise is the words . . . where Christ says, "This is the cup of the New Testament." . . . Therefore whenever in Scripture God's testament is referred to by the prophets, in that very word the prophets taught that God would become man and die and rise again, in order that His word, in which He promises such a testament, might be fulfilled and confirmed. For if God is to make a testament, as He promises, then He must die; and if He is to die, then He must be a man. And so that little word "testament" is a short summary of all God's wonders and grace, fulfilled in Christ.⁴⁶

And since it is Christ's testament, nothing can be or needs to be added to it.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p., 268.

⁴⁶ Martin Luther, "A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass" (1520), *LW*, Volume 35:84.

Originally, Dr. Luther notes, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, there were no vestments, ornaments, gestures, etc., but in time men made many additions to the Lord's Supper so that the chief thing in the Lord's Supper was forgotten and only the inventions of men received attention.

. . . [Christ] appointed in return but one law or order for His entire people, and that is the holy mass. (For although baptism is also an external ordinance, yet it takes place but once, and is not a practice on the entire life, like the mass.) Henceforth, therefore, there is to be no other external order for the service of God except the mass. And where the mass is used, there is true worship; even though there be no other form, with singing, organ playing, bell ringing, vestments, ornaments, and gestures. For everything of this sort is an addition invented by men. For when Christ Himself first instituted this sacrament and held the first mass, there was no tonsure, no chasuble, no singing, no pageantry, but only thanksgiving to God and the use of the sacrament. According to this same simplicity the apostles and all Christians for a long time held mass, until there arose the various forms and additions, by which the Romans held mass one way, the Greeks another. And now it has finally come to this: the chief thing in the mass has been forgotten, and nothing is remembered except the additions of men.⁴⁷

In a similar manner he states in "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg" (1523):

We therefore first assert: It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use. We cannot deny that the mass, i.e., the communion of bread and wine, is a rite divinely instituted by Christ Himself and that it was observed first by Christ and then by the apostles, quite simply and evangelically without any additions. But in the course of time so many human inventions were added to it that nothing except the names of the mass and communion has come down to us.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

⁴⁸ Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg" (1523), *LW*, Volume 53:20.

C. The Lord's Supper/Testament and Its Liturgy

In his "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg" (Formula Missae), and "The German Mass and Order of Service," (Deutsche Messe), Dr. Luther sought to remove every addition that obscured and opposed "the chief thing in the mass," namely, the forgiveness of sins given to us in the words of Christ's testament. Concerning this testament he writes,

What then is this testament, or what is bequeathed to us in it by Christ? Truly a great, eternal, and unspeakable treasure, namely, the forgiveness of sins, as the words plainly state, "This is the cup of the new eternal testament in My blood, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." It is as if Christ were saying, "See here, man, in these words I promise and bequeath to you forgiveness of all your sins and the life eternal. In order that you may be certain and know that such a promise remains irrevocably yours, I will die for it, and will give My body and blood for it, and will leave them both to you as a sign and seal, that by them you may remember me."⁴⁹

Dr. Luther removed from the liturgical orders that he writes, everything that in any way, shape or form obscured the words of Christ and the benefits of His testament to us. Dr. Luther removed the extra words that the Roman Mass had added to the Words of Institution. He also translated the Words of Institution into German so that everyone might hear of and receive what God had given them in Christ and was bringing to them in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He also removed the offensive offertory of the day which taught a work-righteous, sacrificial view of the Lord's Supper.

⁴⁹ Martin Luther, "The German Mass and Service" (1526), *LW*, Volume 53:85. The adjective "eternal" included with the words of institution is from the text of the canon of the mass.

This does not mean that Dr. Luther was against all additions. Not at all. He simply rejected, on the basis of Scripture and the Gospel, those accretions that obscured and denied the words of institution themselves and what Christ through these words of His testament gives to us. He writes,

Now the additions of the early fathers who, it is reported, softly prayed one or two Psalms before blessing the bread and wine are commendable. Athanasius and Cyprian are supposed to be some of these. Those who added the *Kyrie eleison* also did well. We read that under Basil the Great, the *Kyrie eleison* was in common use by all the people. The reading of the Epistles and Gospels is necessary, too. Only it is wrong to read them in a language the common people do not understand. Later, when chanting began, the Psalms were changed into the introit; the Angelic Hymn *Gloria in Excelsis: et in terra pax*, the graduals, the alleluias, the Nicene Creed, the Sanctus, the Agnus Dei, and the *communio* were added. All of these are unobjectionable, especially the ones that are sung de tempore or on Sundays. For these by themselves testify to ancient purity, the canon excepted.⁵⁰

But what Dr. Luther objected to is the canon, “that abominable concoction drawn from everyone’s sewer and cesspool.”⁵¹ He writes,

The mass became a sacrifice. Offertories [Theses taught a sacrifice view of the Lord’s Supper], and mercenary collects were added. Sequences and proses were inserted in the Sanctus and the Gloria in Excelsis. Whereupon the mass began to be a priestly monopoly devouring the wealth of the whole world and engulfing it — as with an apocalyptic plague — with a host of rich, lazy, powerful, lascivious, and corrupt celibates. Thus came the masses for the departed, for journeys, for prosperity — but who can even name the causes for which the mass was made as sacrifice.⁵²

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg” (1523), *LW*, Volume 53:21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

All such things which diverted attention from the Words of Institution, Dr. Luther opposed. Chief of these was the type of offertory then used in the mass. Of this Dr. Luther writes,

. . . that utter abomination follows which forces all that precedes in the mass into its service and is, therefore, called the offertory. From here on almost everything smacks and savors of sacrifice. And the words of life and salvation [the Words of Institution] are imbedded in the midst of it all, just as the ark of the Lord once stood in the idol's temple next to Dagon. And there was no Israelite who could approach or bring back the ark until it "smote his enemies in the hinder parts, putting them to a perpetual reproach." and forced them to return it — which is a parable of the present time. Let us, repudiate everything that smacks of sacrifice, together with the entire canon and retain only that which is pure and holy, and so order our mass.⁵³

How did the liturgy fall into such a condition? Dr. Luther believed it to be the result of men feeling "free to add to or change [the liturgy] at will" and of the rise of clerical greed and pride. He writes,

But when everyone felt free to add or change at will and when the tyranny of priestly greed and pride entered in, then our wicked kings, i.e., the bishops and pastors, began to erect those altars to the images of the Baals and all gods in the Lord's temple. . . . the mass became a sacrifice.⁵⁴

Other examples of departing from the sure words of the Lord's testament occurred as the Words of Institution were considered to not be powerful enough to either do what they said or give what they promised. Prayers arose that called on the Holy Spirit to make the bread and wine the body and blood of the Lord. In *The Liturgy of St. Mark*, for example, such departures from the Words of Institution can be seen. Jasper and Cuming in *Prayers of the Eucharist* cite a wooden tablet of the eighth century that begins with an epiclesis with

⁵³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

the petition “Fill this sacrifice with your blessing through your Holy Spirit,” Then immediately the Words of Institution follow, being introduced by the word “for.” This, the authors state, treats the Words of Institution as a basis for “what is being said and done” rather than as part of the process of consecration.”⁵⁵ Here the word “sacrifice” is also found closer to the Words of Institution than before, and Jasper and Cuming see this as the first step toward “the full consecratory epiclesis.”⁵⁶ Next they state, that the Words of Institution are enlarged by additions and followed by the “Pauline comment” (1 Corinthians 11:26), which has been put into the first person (“you proclaim My death”), and is treated as though it were part of the narrative [Words of Institution].

After other changes and additions, there follows a prayer calling on the Holy Spirit to make the elements the body and blood of Christ. This prayer Jasper and Cuming describe as a rather “explicit consecratory epiclesis.”⁵⁷

The final form of *The Liturgy of St. Mark* evidences further development of the two epicleses as consecratory. The first epiclesis, which immediately precedes the Words of Institution, reads,

Full in truth are heaven and earth of your holy glory through [the appearing of] our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ; fill, O God, this sacrifice also with the blessing from you through the descent of your [all-]Holy Spirit.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 55.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Then follows the Words of Institution in a rather expanded form.

Immediately following the Words of Institution is the second epiclesis which abbreviated reads,

Proclaiming, [Master,] Lord, almighty, [Heavenly King,] the death of your only-begotten son, our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, and confessing His blessed resurrection . . . we set before you from your own gifts; and we pray and beseech you, for you are good and love man, send out from your holy height, . . . the Paraclete himself, the Holy Spirit [of truth], the Lord, the life-giver, . . . ; [look] upon us and these loaves and these cups . . . and make them the bread the body . . . and the cup the blood of the new covenant of our Lord and God and Savior and King of all, Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

In these examples the clear Words of Institution are treated as too weak to consecrate the elements; our prayers become necessary for the consecration. When what we do becomes the focal point of the Lord's Supper and is seen as necessary additions to our Lord's Testament, the gifts that He gives in the sacrament also are obscured and forgotten. Such practices forget that our Lord through His testament gives His gifts to us. He gives to us, not we to Him. Luther writes,

. . . the mass is nothing else than a testament and sacrament in which God makes a pledge to us and gives us grace and mercy. I think it is not fitting that we should make a good work or merit out of it. For a testament is not *beneficium acceptum, sed datum*; it does not take benefit from us, but brings benefit to us.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

⁶⁰ Martin Luther, "A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass" (1520), *LW*, Volume 35:93.

Dr. Luther also clearly states that we must distinguish between the Words of Institution themselves — on which everything depends for they are Christ's words⁶¹ — from even the godly additions of men. He writes,

For, to be brief and to the point, we must let the mass be a sacrament and a testament; Otherwise we should lose the gospel, Christ, the comfort [of the sacrament], and every grace of God. Therefore we must separate the mass clearly and distinctly from the prayers and ceremonies which have been added to it by the holy fathers. We must keep these two as far apart as heaven and earth, so that the mass may remain nothing else than the testament and sacrament comprehended in the words of Christ.⁶²

How then are we to regard the acceptable additions in the Lord's Supper's Liturgy?

Dr. Luther writes,

What there is over and beyond these words, we are to regard — in comparison with words of Christ — in the same way that we regard the monstrance, corporal, and altar cloths as compared with the sacrament, so we are to look upon all added words, works and ceremonies of the mass in comparison with the words of Christ in which He gives and institutes this testament.⁶³

The idea that we can add to our Lord's work of salvation or to His words which give to us that salvation is work-righteous and denies the unilateral gospel and gracious testament of our Lord. Such a departure from the clear Words of Institution during the days of the Reformation was evidenced in Zwingli in both his theology and his liturgical emphases. Zwingli championed covenantal (bilateral) theology. Hagen contrasts Luther's unilateral — gospel — testamental approach to liturgy with the bilateral approach of Zwingli. Hagen writes,

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶² Ibid., p. 97.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 97.

Luther's Eucharistic treatise of 1527 ["That These Words of Christ 'This is My body,' etc. Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics" — Luther's Works, 35, pp. 13-150] allows a simple but basic contrast with Zwingli's "Commentary on True and False Religion" and "On Baptism" (both of 1525). Their different notions of the Eucharist reflect different notions of testament/covenant. For Zwingli the sacrament as covenant sign is an initiation ceremony, a down payment for future negotiations. It is a *Gemeindemahl*. In his understanding of sacrament-testament as covenant Zwingli is a confederate. God is the initiator, but man must say yes by his actions. For Luther in the Eucharist one drinks to remember the fair and just purchase of forgiveness already completed in the testament of Christ's blood, just as one drinks wine after a transaction to celebrate a good purchase. . . .

For Luther, man's response is not a condition for God's unilateral testament, because man's response is contained in the gift (the *ex opere operato* efficacy of the Word). . . . For Zwingli, with perhaps a different political model, the discussion of *testamentum* develops in terms of covenant. Man's historical life, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is lived in "pact" with God. Man's response to the "foedus" must show that he is a confederate.⁶⁴

Work-righteous ideas are the sum and substance of the re-sacrifice idea of the Roman Catholic Liturgy where it is taught that Christ's death on the cross is not completely and fully sufficient for our sins but that we must add our work of redoing it to complete Christ's work and to fulfill the Supper. All these theories (Zwingli's and the Roman Catholic Mass) add to the Lord's Supper liturgy teaching that we have to do something to fully realize the Supper. This is Law and salvation by works and blasphemes the body and blood of Christ given us in the Supper. The error of these theories is that Christ's death is not alone sufficient for salvation but that it must be added to for it to reach its full intent. Christ crucified seems too weak to them.

⁶⁴ Hagen, p. 22.

CONCLUSION

When liturgies depart from the clear words of our Lord in His Last Will and Testament to us, namely, our Lord's Words of Institution, they go astray, lapse into various bilateral covenant approaches that are centered in man and his abilities and deeds. They obscure and even deny God's word of forgiveness given to us with the bread and wine through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. All these bilateral work-righteous approaches lead to liturgies that require something from us to make the Lord's Supper effective in some fashion or other. They are not the words of faith. The words of faith are spoken in response to what God has done for us in Christ and in thanks for that which He gives us in the Supper. The word *testament* holds all these gifts of God's in Christ for us, gives them to us, tells us that us that they are definite and that nothing has to or needs to or can be added to them. It is the Lord's Testament and faith says, "Amen, Lord Jesus."

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