

CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Preface	11
Abbreviations	13
1. Lord, Have Mercy; Christ, Have Mercy; Lord, Have Mercy <i>“Dear God, I’ve got an empty sack!”</i>	15
2. Father, Son, and Spirit <i>Who God is and how we will be.</i>	27
3. Mercy Incarnate <i>Have this mind in you.</i>	39
4. The Heart of Mercy’s Heart <i>Justification.</i>	51
5. Baptized for This Moment <i>Water of life in a world of hurt.</i>	63
6. Spoken Free and Living Mercifully <i>“But do you forgive me, Dad?”</i>	75
7. Christ’s Body and Blood <i>“With might and main for our neighbor.”</i>	87
8. Christ Cares for the Needy, Body and Soul <i>We are beggars—this is true.</i>	99
9. The Church: Holy and Whole <i>We’re all in this together.</i>	111
10. God against God <i>Cross, suffering, and what God makes of it.</i>	125
11. Mercy, Money, and Missing the Stewardship Boat <i>Where the Church is in motion, there is mission, mercy, and money.</i>	139

12. Mercy and the Church's Confession	151
<i>The Creeds and deeds.</i>	
13. Mercy and Office	171
<i>Administering the marks and marking the Church with mercy.</i>	
14. What Is Lutheran Leadership?	183
<i>Reason serving the Gospel to get it done.</i>	
15. Mercy in the City	197
<i>A case for two-kingdom theology and cooperation in externals.</i>	
16. Repentance, Word, Vocation, and the Courage to Be Lutheran and Merciful	223
<i>Courage is fear that has been baptized.</i>	
Conclusion: It's Time to Dare Something for Mercy's Sake	251
<i>The Time and the Word of God demand this.</i>	
Study Questions	258

Foreword

by Rev. Ray S. Wilke

I have waited thirty-eight years for this book to be published. We never learned the things presented in this book in the seminary in 1966. All of us suspected that there was some connection between the First and Second Tables of the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai, but we didn't know how that connection played out in the Church and in the world. Nor could we put our fingers on the related theology presented in the Lutheran Confessions or the dogmatics books that we pored over in the seminary.

Seven years as a missionary in the Philippines taught me that the need for "Christ-style mercy" was to be found in the bulging, protein-deficient tummy of every child of the rice paddy. The need for "Christ-style mercy" was to be found in the furrowed brow of the typhoon-blown mother sitting amid the rubble of her nipa hut. The need for "Christ-style mercy" was to be heard from the lips of fathers walking in waist-deep water with a child on each shoulder, chanting his own version of the Kyrie as he pleaded for the thirty-one consecutive days of rain to stop. But we were evangelistic missionaries; our assigned task was to preach and teach the Gospel. It was not to become involved in social gospel. But then my Jeep stalled in four feet of water while delivering sacks of rice to people huddled in elevated huts, water all around. Right then and there I reasoned that there must be some good Lutheran theology somewhere to justify the compulsions of my heart in doing these things. I have finally found that theology in spades in Matt Harrison's comprehensive work *Christ Have Mercy*.

A dozen years ago over dinner and a nice glass of Chablis, the late Dr. Oswald Hoffman said to me, "We Lutherans have the best theology in the world, but we have yet to figure out how to pull it out of the pages of our theology books and down out of the airwaves and into the trenches of people's lives." Missouri Synod Lutherans need sound theology to function. We know no other way to present the Gospel.

Our presentation of the Gospel must be based on good scholarly theology or we cannot function. We dabble in feelings, but we don't trust them. We respect authority, but we don't submit to the "Vicar of Christ." We think logically, but we are suspect of "reason." What are we to do with all of Jesus' invitations to follow Him into the muddle and misery of people's lives? If it doesn't fit the formula of Word and Sacrament, we struggle. Well, perhaps there is more to Word and Sacrament ministry than we thought. What if the evidence was there all along, lying right there, undiscovered, in the Word, in the Confessions, in the writings of our revered Church Fathers? What if it could be proven from good sound theology that the urges of our heart to help the ones who have been beaten down sprang from Christ's own heart? These urges toward acts of human mercy are bound to the cross and to the cup and to the inviolable Word, even to the water poured over to vicariously make us righteous. The evidence of such things is all there, buried in the writings of Luther, the Confessions, and the Church Fathers, waiting to be translated and interpreted and arranged into what has become known as systematic theology.

Sometimes the tyranny of world affairs moves us toward unlikely behavior. The explosions among the relationships of nations and people present us with circumstances never seen before. Such was the case with Luther on the eve of the writing of the Augsburg Confession. He was beset, on the one hand, by the barbarism of the Turkish Islamic Empire and on the other hand by the unrest established between his own thinking and the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Beset by those conflicting interests, Luther invented a new application of the German word *Anfechtung*. This is what he wrote: "The Prince of Demons himself has taken up combat against me; so powerfully and adeptly does he handle the Scriptures that my scriptural knowledge does not suffice if I do not rely on the alien Word."¹ Luther defines this "alien word" as the Gospel, which must be spoken to us. Thus forgiveness comes from outside ourselves. That, Luther feels, is why I need the others, why I am dependent on the intercession and the community of the Church. So when Luther was asked to contribute to the Imperial Diet of Charles V, he set about to write what we now know as the Augsburg Confession. It was written to provide some mutual

ground between the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans in their struggle against the Turks.

This is what Luther wrote in the Smalcald Articles: “We will now return to the Gospel, which does not give us counsel and aid against sin in only one way. God is superabundantly generous in His grace: First, through the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world [Luke 24:45–47]. This is the particular office of the Gospel. Second, through Baptism. Third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourth, through the Power of the Keys. Also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren.”² How few Lutheran believers recall that Luther identified this consolation as an extension of the Gospel and therefore as a means of grace. How powerful has become this fireside/riverside/bedside/field and forest conversation among us, even while not being fully aware that it is truly a God-ordained conversation and consolation that we share.

Indeed, the “mutual conversation and consolation of brethren” might be overheard by a refugee mother and child who are waiting outside a portable LCMS World Relief and Human Care clinic in Malakal, Sudan. An Islamic tsunami widow in the east of India may hear with gladness the “mutual conversation and consolation of brethren” when it is served with bandages, food, and shelter for her fatherless children.

It is my prayer that you may devour this book with gladness. It is destined to become a staple on the shelves of students, scholars, and church leaders everywhere who thrill at the fresh/ancient logic of Jesus.

It is with gladness that Jesus still hears and responds to our Kyrie cry, “Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy.” It is the cry that was heard in Eden and in Goshen and on Moriah’s awful mountain. It is the cry that we hear around the world. Jesus deems it good to answer that cry today by means of His people.

NOTES

- 1 Heiko Obermann, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 226.
- 2 SA III IV (*Concordia*, 278).

PREFACE

Our whole life is enclosed and established in the bosom of the mercy of God.¹ *Martin Luther*

Christ, have mercy! This is an unprecedented time of opportunity for the Church, and mercy is the key to seizing the moment. This book is written with the conviction that mercy—the mercy of Christ to and for us—and our demonstration of that mercy to those within and outside the Body of Christ is the key to the future of the Church. Mercy is the key to mission and stewardship. It is the key to living our Christian lives together in love and forgiveness. We desperately need to learn more deeply of the mercy of Christ so we may learn how to care for one another in the Church. Mercy is the key to moving boldly and confidently into the future with courage in the Gospel—a confidence and courage based on conviction.

I write as a convinced, convicted, and unapologetic clergyman of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The public confession of the Lutheran Church—most fundamentally stated in the Book of Concord—is my own, without equivocation. I believe C. F. W. Walther, the founder of the LCMS, explicated the faith correctly, also on the doctrines of church and ministry. These pages will show a side of Walther’s doctrine of the ministry that is all but unknown—the pastor’s divinely given role of care for the needy. Working with the writings of Martin Luther for this project has convinced me all the more that I am but a drop next to the ocean of insight into Christ that is the great reformer’s. I find Luther’s ability to state the truth with a unique turn of phrase particularly delightful and trust you will too.

Writing this preface, I am now happy to “free myself from the hames, bridle, saddle and spurs of the printers,”² though that metaphor, I must admit, hardly fits the wonderful and helpful staff at Concordia Publishing House!

Lord, have mercy! May He use my stammerings and nascent thoughts to spur on the work of mercy in the name of Christ and His Gospel! May others more talented and capable take up the cause! May

CHRIST HAVE MERCY

He grant us courage to seize the moment, the moment of mercy, for the sake of Christ and His Gospel.

NOTES

- 1 AE 12:320.
- 2 Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, Library of Christian Classics 18 (Philadelphia and London: Westminster Press and SCM 1945), 94–95.