Septuagesima
Rolling Meadows - 1965

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Philippians 1: 20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

HONOR CHRIST IN YOUR BODY!'

I believe that God has given to me my body and soul, my eyes and ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them. With this sentence Martin Luther began his explanation of the Apostles' Creed. Martin Luther, himself too much of a man for the stomachs of many people today, never forgot the earthly character of man - created by God, redeemed by Christ, called by God's Holy Spirit to faith in Christ, and enjoying all of God's good gifts to sustain this body and life. Luther's understanding of man came straight out of the Holy Scriptures which emphasize that man is made up of body and soul in this life and in the life to come. In down-to-earth language the greatest of the apostles, St. Paul, described himself as a boxer who does not beat the air. I really put up a fight! he said, I am my body's sternest master for fear that when I have preached to others I should myself be disqualified. While engaged in the battle of life, St. Paul looked forward to the Day of the Deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure the body belonging to our present humble state and give it a form like that of His own resplendent body in resurrection from the dead. It never occurred to Paul to think of resurrection in terms that did not include the body. As our Lord was raised bodily from the dead, even so shall they be raised who put their trust in Him.

It surprises some people to hear that Christianity gives so much attention to the body. They are under the impression that Christian faith exalts the life of the soul and disparages the life of the body. Some even identify Christianity with Platonic philosophy which looked upon the soul as the source of everything good and the body as the seat of all evil. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Christian faith does not close its eyes to the evil in the world, nor does it attempt to explain evil away as if it did not exist. Christ and His apostles recognized the fact that evil is at large in the world, affecting man on every level and cutting across both body and soul. As man is infected, both body

and soul, by evil, so he is redeemed from evil, both body and soul, by the atoning blood of the Son of God in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. Man is redeemed in all his earthiness by a Savior who came to earth, became a Man, rose bodily from the grave, and in His glorified Manhood waits to receive into glory those who walk in His way.

Christ enjoyed life, though He viewed it seriously and in dead earnest. Some people in His own time called Him a glutton and a winebibber. Some of Christ followers today have given the impression that they are not interested in the body at all and that they would just as soon be rid of their own bodies. They apparently think of themselves as being so spiritual that their airy and etereal nature will not permit their feet to touch the ground. Our Lord never exhibited this attitude toward the bodily nature of man, and He never encouraged His followers to adopt it.

The great God made matter as He made man. He does not look upon the material as unholy. Material becomes unholy only when man becomes attached to it as if it were the end of all his being. There is a great difference between the material which God made and materialism, the captivation with things that so easily gets hold of a man and absorbs all of his attention. The answer to materialism is not to deny the existence or the value of what God has created, but to use it in the right way. God is interested in the well-being of man - mental, physical, and spiritual. Of Him the psalmist says: Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle and plants for men to cultivate that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the heart of man, and oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart. The Bible reports approvingly: Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. The prophet Jeremiah was filled with sorrow upon seeing the results of rebellion against God: The voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, could no more be heard in the streets

of Jerusalem. God is not a kill-joy, you see. His plan for man includes the happy enjoyment of the things He has made: You shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household, in all that you undertake in which the Lord your God has blessed you.

I need not tell you that people throughout the world do not live in this happy fashion, receiving God's good gifts with thanksgiving. They take themselves seriously, but they do not take God seriously at all. Refusing to attach themselves to God, they fall into the trap of worshiping themselves and the things they have made. St. Paul recongized this trap. He knew how easy it is to take God for granted, to take God's grace, and mercy, and forgiveness for granted, to live for himself, to gratify his own selfish aims and ambitions, to pamper his body as though this were all there were to life. That is why he said, I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. He compared himself to an athlete, keeping his body physically fit, that he might the better serve Christ and his fellow men, and faithfully run the race of life to its final goal - eternal life.

God does not hate the things He has made. He wants us to enjoy them in the right way. His concern is over the tragic misuse of His creation. He wants men to find joy in the world around them and in their own bodies. The tragedy of history is that men have consistently misused what God has made and have abused their own bodies in the bargain. Physical enjoyment is not wrong. Forgetting why and how to enjoy the body - disregarding the plan and purpose of Him who gave us bodies - this is at the heart of so many of the world's problems. We are His creation, and we cannot live as if we had created ourselves. That is why St. Paul declared: It is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. The apostle did not speak these words in a comfortable dinner club. To use his own words, he was at that time the prisoner

of Christ. Sitting in prison, he did not know whether he was going to live or die. He did not say that he didn't care whether he lived or died. He had met Jesus Christ, and he did care. From that moment on he had a purpose: to magnify, to glorify, to honor Christ, whether by life or by death. In each case he was going to be a man in the body playing his role - the role of a believer in Christ.

Living in a sinful world did not produce in St. Paul a revulsion toward life. He just put himself into God's hands and resolved to do his part, whatever God would assign to him. He was ready to live life to the hilt and to its end. Whether he was released or executed, his purpose was still going to be the same: that Christ be honored in his body.

It doesn't make any difference whether you are young or old, you can live your life to the hilt. God has given you a body. It is good, for He made it. It is good, for He has redeemed it. He sent His own Son to live in the body, to die in the body, and to be raised from the dead in the body - that by faith in Him you and I might enjoy His favor, His forgiveness, His life. Now that Christ has come - now that He bore in His own body our sins upon the tree - nothing can stand in the way of enjoying life in Christ - not even death. There are no shadows over your life when the sun of Christ is shining. Therefore honor Christ in your body. Worship Him in everything you do, even in little things like eating and drinking. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all th the glory of God. In Christ God has laid claim on you - both body and soul. He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. No longer is it a question of What do I want - or What's in it for me - but What does He want - how can He be honored by what I am doing? Thank God for every moment you have in the body. What is time but an opportunity to honor Christ in your body, to say with St. Paul: It is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. Amen.