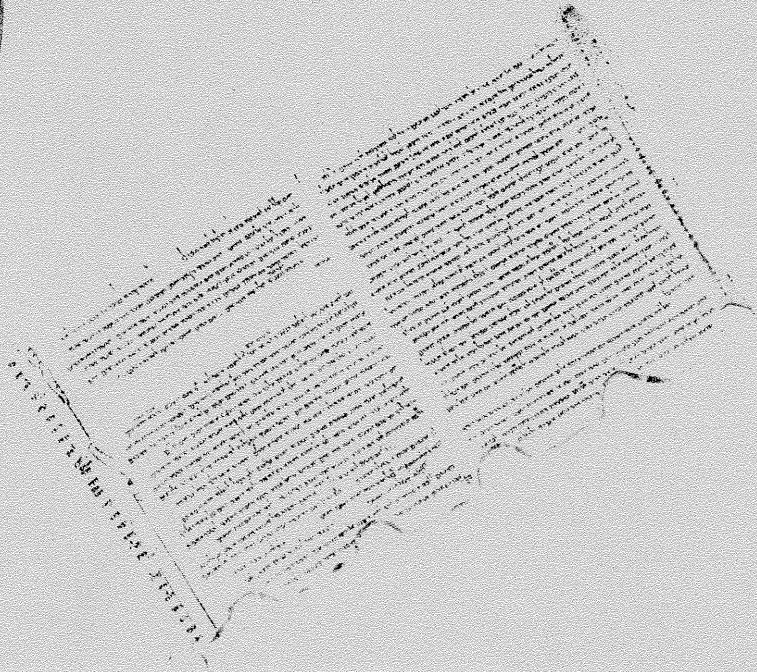




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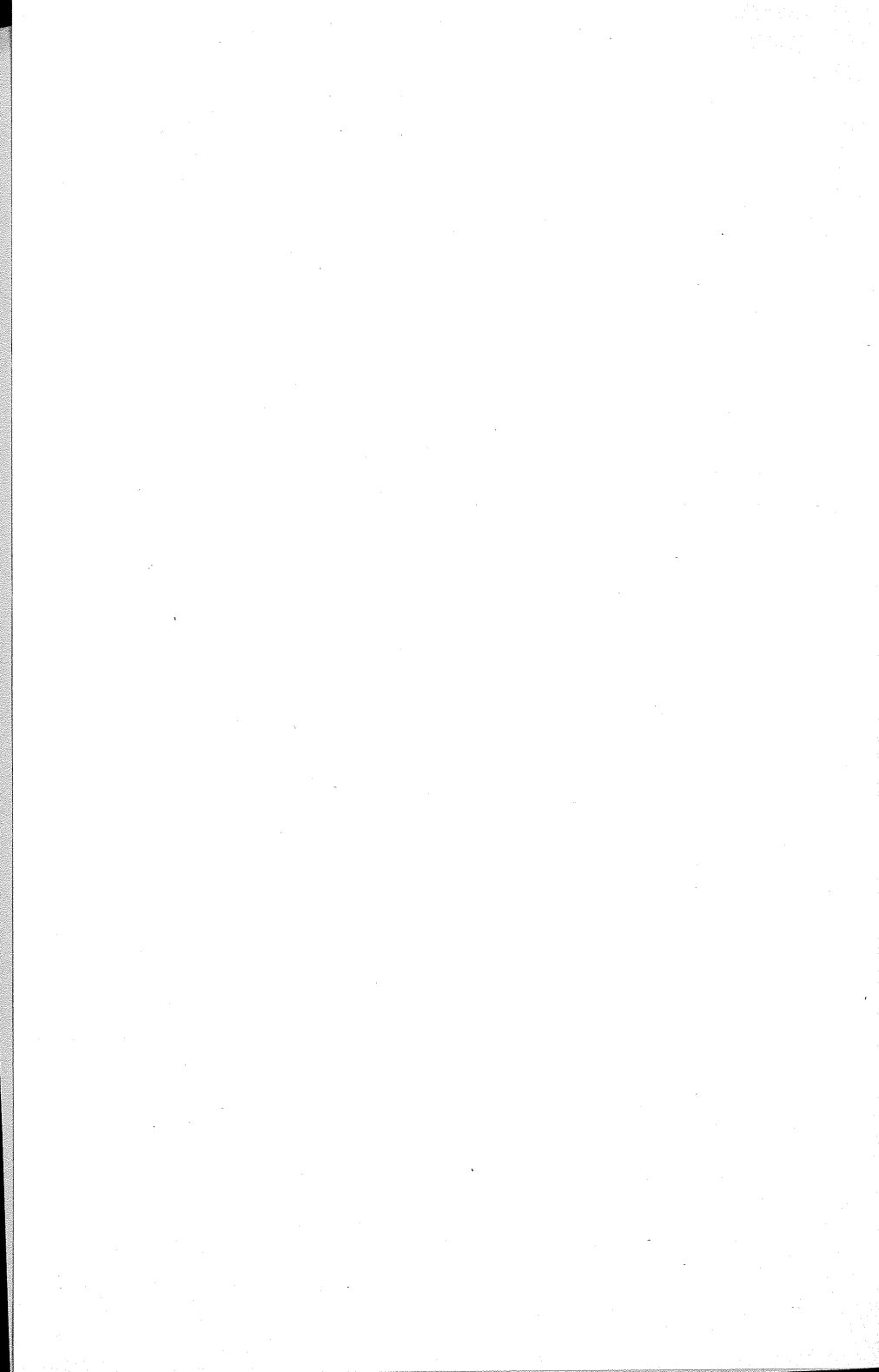
This issue of the LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY comes to you under the direction of a new editor. He is the Rev. Theo. A. Aaberg, President of Bethany Lutheran Seminary at Mankato, Minnesota.

The policy of the Quarterly will not only remain the same as before -- to disseminate for both clergy and lay people doctrinal and practical articles that are in harmony with Scripture -- but under the editorship of President Aaberg it will endeavor also to promote the doctrinal position and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod even more than in the past, and to share its offerings with more of the people in this and in foreign countries who manifest an interest in conservative Lutheranism.

President Aaberg is well qualified to take on this task. He served for a brief term as president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod; he has been and again is a member of the Synod's Doctrinal Committee; he has authored a book on the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod ("A City Set on a Hill"); and he has had over a quarter century of practical experience in the parish ministry.

We are certain our readers will not be disappointed in the fare they will be receiving under the new editor. In fact, we believe the article following these lines is a good example of the kind of writing that can be expected directly from him or under his auspices. May the Lord give Editor Aaberg the grace to render genuinely worthwhile and lasting service to our Evangelical Lutheran Synod and to the church at large, for the sake of His precious Kingdom of Grace!

-- Retiring editor,
M. H. Otto



THE DOCTRINE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

(Presented to the 1977 ELS General Pastoral
Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota,
January 4-7, 1977)

The doctrine of church fellowship is not a set of dry, formal man-made church regulations which hinder the work of the Holy Spirit and make it hard, if not impossible, for pious pastors, teachers, missionaries, and evangelists to witness for Church and to bring the Gospel to mankind.

The doctrine of church fellowship is rather a spiritual, living truth from God's very Word, connected to the heart of the Gospel itself, that of a poor sinner's justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith. As such it should call forth from each one of us the humility, wonder, and praise expressed by Paul:

O depth of the riches both of the wisdom
and knowledge of God! how unsearchable
are his judgments, and his ways past find-
ing out! For who hath known the mind of
the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall
be recompensed unto him again?

For of him, and through him, and to him, are
all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.

(Rom. 11:33-36).

I. From Sinner to Saint.

We treat of church fellowship and this necessitates a consideration of the doctrine of the church, specifically, that of the essence of the church, that is, the believers in Jesus Christ.

What about this church? How has it come into existence? On whom does it rest? How does a lost sinner become a member of it? Here we recognize that we are at the heart of the Gospel, and it is here where the doctrine of church fellowship has its roots.

The church is Christ's church. It belongs to him by virtue of his atoning sacrifice. Paul writes in Ephesians that "Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (5:25-27).

On the basis of Christ's holy life and suffering and death God has justified the whole world and is now reconciled to every sinner, as Paul testifies: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:19).

This is the good news, or Gospel, which goes out to sinful man, and with it also the gracious invitation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

It is through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament that Christ seeks out and calls the sinner, declaring forgiveness of sins to him. All who repent and believe the Gospel are justified and have this forgiveness as their very own possession. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:38). As God's child, the Christian has peace with God and access to every divine blessing as Paul states: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2).

This faith by which one receives the forgiveness of sins and adoption as God's child is God's work and God's gift. Paul stresses this truth in his letter to the Ephesians when he writes: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. . . For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:1.8.9).

God the Holy Ghost creates and preserves faith in the Christian through the Gospel in the Word, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Since it is through these means, and these means alone, that God brings man his grace and makes him a partaker of that divine grace through faith, the Word and Sacraments are called the Means of Grace. That God accomplishes such divine wonders through such humble earthly means is made clear in Scripture. Concerning the Gospel as such, Paul declares: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Speaking specifically of the Word, our Savior prayed: "Sanctify

them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Peter also testifies to the word as a means of grace when he writes: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Peter 1:23). Paul likewise, when he writes: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Our Savior said regarding Baptism: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6). Paul, in writing to Titus, declares: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. . ." (Titus 3:5). While we recognize that the Lord's Supper is instituted for those who have already come to faith we must also remember that it is the Gospel ("This cup is the new testament in my blood," (Luke 22:20) and that it bestows forgiveness of sins ("which is shed for many for the remission of sins," (Matt. 26:28) thus comforting, strengthening, and preserving the Christian in true faith. (cf. also John 8:31.32; John 17:20; John 14:23-26; John 15:3.7.)

Through the continued proclamation of, and bestowal of, the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel in the Word, in Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper, the Christian is preserved in true faith and nourished and comforted and strengthened on his way heavenward. Without the Gospel he is lost. Rightly does Moses say of the Word: "For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life" (Deut. 32:47).

Two things which play a decisive role in the doctrine of church fellowship should be noted already at this time. 1) The one is that the Word,

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are called the Means of Grace, and they are precisely this, means by which God gives His Holy Spirit, and by which the Holy Spirit works faith, and through which God brings and bestows forgiveness and life and salvation. They are the Means of Grace for through these means, and no other, God works faith and bestows His grace and forgiveness. 2) The Means of Grace are limited to the pure Word and Sacraments. "Sanctify them through thy truth," Jesus prayed, adding, "Thy word is truth" (John 17). Scripture never attributes any saving power whatsoever to error or false doctrine. On the contrary, scripture attributes only destructive, damaging power to error or false doctrine, listing "heresies" as one of the works of the flesh, saying: "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:20,21). Paul tells Timothy to "shun profane and vain babbling: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:16-18). Then there is Paul's well-known statement: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal. 5:7-9). Even where truth and error are mixed, as is the case in heterodox churches, it is only through the truth that is still proclaimed there, and never by the error or false doctrine taught in that church, that souls are brought to faith and nourished and preserved in faith. We must not let the fact that we gratefully acknowledge the presence of Christians also in such heterodox communions dull our spiritual senses to the danger of the soul-destroying error there, or to the truth that the Means of Grace and their soul-saving work are limited to the pure Word and Sacraments.

Wherever there is a lack of appreciation for, or a lax practice regarding, the doctrine of church fellowship, especially on the part of pastors and teachers who are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Cor. 4:1), one of the chief reasons must lie in a person's failure to grasp or to believe the vital significance of the Word and Sacraments as the Means of Grace, and to limit the Means of Grace to the pure Word and Sacraments.

The importance of the Means of Grace in the doctrine of church fellowship is seen also when we now in our presentation on church fellowship go on to note how the individual Christian as a pilgrim finds other Christians in this world and joins with them in worship and work. Here too the Means of Grace are indispensable.

II. From Foreigner to Fellow — Citizen.

The Christian does not stand alone, ever. Not only does the Savior abide with him, but he also, in becoming a Christian, becomes a member of Christ's church, the communion or fellowship of saints, and is joined by faith with all those sinners who have been justified by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel, even as he. God Himself establishes this unity between Christians (Eph. 4:3-6).

In spite of distance and even time itself, the Christian is united not only with every Christian presently living on the face of the earth, but also with every Christian who has ever lived on earth from the beginning of time and who is now before the throne of God in heaven, and also with those not yet conceived or born, but of the elect nonetheless.

This unity of the church, and with it the fellowship of the church, is brought out in many passages

of Scripture, under such figures as body, temple, house, etc. The Father, Paul says, gave Christ "to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). Writing to the Romans, Paul says: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). To Timothy Paul writes of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth" (I Tim. 3:15). In 2 Corinthians he says: "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (6:16). The unity of Christ's church is forcefully brought out by Paul in writing to the Ephesians: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; and one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

For our comfort and also for our admonition it is well for us to be reminded of the truth that the church's unity does not depend upon us and our own efforts. There is one body. . ." (Eph. 4:4), scripture says. Likewise the church's welfare and eternal destiny does not ultimately depend upon us and our efforts, but rests alone in the hands of God himself. Jesus says that he will build his church and "that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). He promises: "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).

III. Locating Other Christians for Church Fellowship.

The church is, of course, invisible. It is this because that which constitutes one a member of it is invisible, namely, faith. In connection with this, Pieper also observes: "Suppose we could single out every member of the Church, we still would not be seeing the Church, because our mortal eyes can see only the old man in the Christians, while the new man lives deeply hidden in God during this life (Col. 3:3, 2 Cor. 5:4). Not until Judgment Day will the members of the Christian Church differ in their external appearance from the non-members (Col. 3:4; I John 3:2). The halo with which artists surround the heads of the saints reflects merely our charitable belief" (Pieper, III, p. 409).

But the church, though invisible, is nonetheless real. That is, it really does exist. There actually are people here on earth who believe in Jesus Christ and who through faith belong to Christ. This reality of the church is brought out by the Lutheran Confessions when they say that in the proper sense the church is the assembly of saints who truly believe the Gospel of Christ and who have the Holy Ghost, of those here and there in the world (Apology, VII, 28; the German version; Triglotta, p. 236).

Christians are to acknowledge and exercise here on earth the church fellowship which they have with one another. They are to do this, for example, by a joint use of the Means of Grace, as Scripture says: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebr. 10:23-25). Or again: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all

wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Or again, as regards the Lord's Supper: ". . . This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19); and "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (I Cor. 10:17). Christians are to acknowledge and exercise the church fellowship which they have with one another by giving special help to one another. Scripture says: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Christians are to acknowledge and exercise the church fellowship which they have with one another by striving with might and main to live peaceably with one another, letting nothing disrupt in an outward way the unity which they have in Christ. Paul writes: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3). Christians are to acknowledge and exercise the church fellowship which they have with one another by watching out for and guarding one another's spiritual welfare through admonition, and, if necessary, church discipline. Scripture says: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such as one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). Also: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect

to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:15-17).

Finding other Christians in the world is no great problem for the Christian. Remembering how he himself has become a Christian, namely, through the Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments, and remembering God's promise that His Word does not come back empty or void, but bears fruit (Is. 55), the Christian knows that where the Word is used, there Christ's church is, there Christians are to be found. The Means of Grace thus become also the marks of the church, pointing out where the church exists and is present.

The assembly where the Word and Sacraments are used is not the church as such, since hypocrites may well be a part of that assembly also. Even if one defines the visible assembly as being made up only of believers, it still is not the visible assembly as such that is the church, because it is the believers themselves, rather than any visible assembly, that is the church. The church is the believers and is therefore hidden, as it were, in the assembly. But the church is there, and in fellowshiping with the members of the assembly, the Christian is fellowshiping with the church itself, that is, with the Christians in that place. This is what makes church fellowship such as we have it in our congregations and between congregations, in our synod, and, through our synod, with other synods, such a wonderful, sacred, blessed thing. It isn't a fellowship of this or that congregation, or this or that synod, as such. It is church fellowship, fellowship of the saints.

It is a gross distortion, indeed, a misconception of the church and church fellowship, when we make the church fellowship which we have in the

congregation or the synod or the sister synods, to be an outward, organizational, or even confessional fellowship, and then go on to speak of another fellowship that we have, that of our *Una Sancta* fellowship with the many Christians found in other congregations and denominations. To be sure, the Christian is in fellowship with all Christians the world over; but this is not a different kind of fellowship from that which the Christian has within his congregation, sister congregations, synod, or sister synods. It is the same fellowship, the only difference being that in the former case the fellowship cannot be acknowledged and exercised on earth. And that brings us to our next point, namely:

IV. The Basis for Acknowledging and Exercising Church Fellowship.

Two Latin terms may be helpful in our discussion of this point: Fides qua, that is, the faith by which one believes, hence, personal, subjective faith, the faith of the heart; and fides quae, that is, the faith which is believed, the doctrines taught in God's Word.

We do not want to forget, ignore, or slight the fides qua. It is by such faith that we are justified. Further, it is by such faith that we are made members of Christ's church and are brought into fellowship with all believers. But at the same time we have to remember that such personal, subjective faith, though known to God, is hidden to man and therefore cannot serve as the basis for the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship between Christians here on earth. There are those who try to make it serve this purpose, but it cannot be done. And we must be on guard lest we are drawn into this same subjective, pietistic morass.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the "founder of modern Protestant theology," is largely responsible for the shift from the objective Word of God to the subjective "inner consciousness of the individual heart" as the source of doctrine, which has taken over such large segments of Christendom today.

This has had a profound influence also on the doctrine of church fellowship, and, of course, the modern ecumenical movement. This is frankly stated in A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948, Rouse, Ruth, and Neil, Stephen Charles, ed., Second Ed., The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1968:

It is in the light of all these tendencies that it is possible to estimate the ecumenical importance of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern theology. . . . For him religion could never be exhausted in purely intellectual formulations; it included the contemplation of the universe, but it must also be based upon the deep inner piety of absolute dependence upon God. Dogmatic formulations thus become of secondary importance. . . (pp. 269-270).

Dr. Samuel Mc Crea Cavert, a leader in the WCC for many years, proclaims subjective faith to be the basis for the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship. He says in his book, On the Road to Christian Unity, (Harper & Bros., 1961) that unity "lies in the experience of finding that God meets us in Christ and in our response to him in faith." He also states that agreement in doctrine "is a function of the united church rather than a precondition of it. The community of faith and love comes first, and agreement in doctrinal

statements grow out of this - not vice versa" (p. 99). How he is able to determine the presence of faith in an individual is not stated. That this seems to present no problem is not to be wondered at. If man's "inner consciousness of the individual heart" is the final source and arbiter of doctrine, then determining the presence or absence of faith will also present no great problem.

Let us be frank to admit that we ourselves are not always as clear and sharp as we should be in distinguishing and repudiating subjective faith as the basis for the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship. We all need the admonition contained in Thesis 11 of the Overseas Brethren Theses on Church Fellowship:

The marks of the church are all-decisive. Everything must be referred to them. This duty is hindered by presumptuous judgments or statements concerning the faith or lack of it in individuals. It is Enthusiasm to build on subjective faith (fides qua) and love, for faith is hidden and love is variable. Both are in man. The Means of Grace are objective, solid, apprehensible. Since these are God's own means, we must attend entirely upon them and draw from them the distinction between the orthodox church and heterodox churches (1961 ELS Report, p. 41).

It is fides quae, that which is believed, that is, the doctrine, the objective truth of God's Word that is the basis for the Christian's acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship with other Christians here on earth.

This is Lutheran doctrine:

. . . For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4: 4,5, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism." (Augs. Conf., VII, p. 32 Tappert).

Liberal Lutherans, trying to keep one foot in their Lutheran tradition while planting the other foot in the modern ecumenical movement, have sought to keep from being split apart at the seams through the ever-widening gap by trying to tone down the basis for church fellowship that is set forth in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession. "The Gospel," which must be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it, mentioned in Article VII, does not mean all of Scripture, every doctrine of Scripture, they say, but rather some of the teachings of Scripture, its central teachings, in particular, that which is necessary for salvation. This contention is made again and again, for example, in the essays presented by men from the National Lutheran Council in the NLC - LC-MS exploratory meetings of the early 1960's. Speaking for the NLC, Prof. Conrad Bergendoff said:

The doctrina evangelii (the doctrine of the Gospel), thus, is what the New Testament proclaims as its fundamental truth

and this is the Gospel which is to be preached in the church of Christ. What has been said hitherto clearly points to a Gospel or message which proclaimed what God had done for man in Christ Jesus and what God still does in human hearts by the ministry of the Word. . . . It is the message of Christ dying for our sins and rising to reign in the hearts of his people eternally.

.....

The force of the satis est (it is enough) is as much as to declare that not more than the Gospel could be demanded for true unity as to declare that nothing less was required. This throws the weight of the matter on what is the Gospel, and we have seen that its sum and substance is the forgiveness of sins secured by the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Wherever this Gospel is proclaimed and believed there is unity, and such unity should be witnessed to the world.

There is warrant neither in Scripture nor in the Confessions for a demand that a whole theological system be held in common before a unity can be established between groups of Christians. . . .

.....

The proposition of complete unity or none at all cannot be defended on scriptural grounds, nor is it the description of the relations between Christians in church

history. (Conrad Bergendoff, "A Lutheran Study of Church Unity," Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation, published jointly by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, and The National Lutheran Council, New York, N.Y., 1961, pp. 7.9.10.14.)

The Lutheran Confessions, however, are clear also in this matter. The Article in question (AC, VII) is itself clear, for the contrast in it is not between some doctrines of Scripture and other doctrines of Scripture, but between the doctrine of the Gospel and church ceremonies. If there should be any doubt that the word "Gospel" or "the doctrine of the Gospel" as used in Article VII means all the doctrines of Scripture, one should read the Apology which, written by the same author, and published less than a year later, serves as the chief commentary on the Augsburg Confession. Note how the word "Gospel" is used in the Apology:

The Gospel declares that all men are under sin and are worthy of eternal wrath and death. For Christ's sake it offers forgiveness of sins and justification, which are received by faith. (IV, 62, p. 115, Tappert).

It (the church) is, rather, made up of men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether they have the same human traditions or not. (VII & VIII, 10, p. 170, Tappert).

Our opponents say that universal traditions should be observed because they are supposed to have been handed down

by the apostles. How devout they are! Apostolic rites they want to keep, apostolic doctrine they do not want to keep. (VII & VIII, 38, pp. 175-176).

For the sum of the proclamation of the Gospel is to denounce sin, to offer the forgiveness of sins and righteousness for Christ's sake, to grant the Holy Spirit and eternal life, and to lead us as regenerated men to do good. Christ gives this summary of the Gospel in the last chapter of Luke (24:47), "That penitence and forgiveness of sins should be preached in my name to all nations." (XII, 29-30, pp. 185-186, Tappert).

The Formula of Concord also makes clear how the word "Gospel" is used when it states:

The word "Gospel" is not used in a single sense in Holy Scripture, and this was the original occasion of the controversy. Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that when the word "Gospel" means the entire doctrine of Christ which he proclaimed personally in his teaching ministry and which his apostles set forth (examples of this meaning occur in Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:24), then it is correct to say or write that the Gospel is a proclamation both of repentance and of forgiveness of sins. (Epit., V, 6, p. 478, Tappert).

We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because it has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God, as long as there

is mutual agreement in doctrine and in all its articles as well as in the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the familiar axiom, "Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith." (Epit. X, 7, pp. 493-494, Tappert).

Hence yielding or conforming in external things, where Christian agreement in doctrine has not previously been achieved, will support the idolaters in their idolatry, and on the other hand, it will sadden and scandalize true believers and weaken them in their faith (Solid Decl. X, 16, p. 613, Tappert).

In line with the above, churches will not condemn each other because of a difference in ceremonies, when in Christian liberty one uses fewer or more of them, as long as they are otherwise agreed in doctrine and in all its articles and are also agreed concerning the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known axiom, "Disagreement in fasting should not destroy agreement in faith." (Solid Decl., X, 31, p. 616, Tappert).

This position, as quoted above from the Lutheran Confessions, is what we by our ordination vow and by our promises at our installation, are pledged to "believe, teach and confess" on the doctrine of church fellowship.

Perhaps this would be the place to mention the issue often raised among Lutherans regarding fundamental doctrines. The distinction is rightly made

when the question under consideration regards how much it is necessary to know of Holy Scripture in order to have saving faith. There are truths of Scripture that are non-fundamental in this sense. But the question regarding fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines arises more frequently regarding the doctrine of church fellowship. The Lutheran Confessions, as may be seen from the quotations above, know of no non-fundamental doctrines, doctrines on which it is not necessary to agree, for the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship. That is fundamentalist Reformed teachings, not confessional Lutheran teaching, which makes some doctrines of Scripture non-fundamental for church fellowship.

The matter regarding a "fundamental unity" should also be mentioned at this point. In stressing the scriptural requirement of doctrinal agreement for church fellowship one must bear in mind that among Christians, especially in congregations and church bodies, there will seldom, if ever, be more than a fundamental unity in doctrine and practice. This means that misunderstandings due to an incomplete knowledge and understanding of scripture may well arise among those who are in church fellowship. It does not mean an outright denial of any doctrine stated in scripture, or a rejection of the scripture itself. The church will bear with weak brethren in all patience and love. In so doing the church will also make clear who are the weak and who are the strong (cf. Rom. chapters 14 and 15). But this is something other than saying that certain doctrines of scripture are expendable, or than agreeing to disagree.

But are the Lutheran Confessions right, and is our synod right, when it insists on agreement in doctrine as a prerequisite for the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship? There is only

one sure and true test also for Lutheran doctrine, and that is: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Is. 8:20). What does the Bible say regarding the demands for church fellowship? It says:

Eph. 2:19-20: Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. The foundation of the apostles and prophets is, of course, the holy scriptures, the apostolic-prophetic word, and in this passage the church is tied to, connected to their word, and that is, of course, the pure word.

John 8:31-32: Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. Again, this means the word in its truth and purity.

Eph. 4:3-6: Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. Here the unity of the Spirit is connected to the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Even if you take the "one faith" in the sense of subjective faith, you still have the church and its "unity of the Spirit" connected to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the confession of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit.

I Cor. 1:10: Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Paul here tells the Christians in Corinth that they should be united in the right and in the same understanding of the Word. They should not be divided, but stand together in doctrine and practice.

Acts 2:42: And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Here we see that the early church exercised church fellowship on the basis of agreement in doctrine.

II John, vv. 9-11: Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

The "doctrine of Christ" mentioned here includes all of the Old Testament for Christ himself accepted it, and said of it: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). It likewise includes all that Christ himself taught, Law and Gospel; and also everything that his disciples taught, including their writings of the New Testament. In brief: everything in the Old and New Testaments. We are not to acknowledge or exercise church fellowship with anyone who does not abide in this doctrine, or with anyone who comes to us but does not bring this doctrine. Church fellowship is tied here to the pure marks of the church.

Gal. 1:6-9: I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

The errors of the Judaizers might have seemed to be small and of little consequence since they dealt with certain aspects of the ceremonial law - circumcision, etc. - but they became soul-destroying, and Paul will not tolerate any departure from apostolic teaching. Let the false prophet be damned.

Matt. 16:6,12: Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees . . . Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Matt. 7:15,20: Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Rom. 16:17,18: Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; (appetites, NIV); and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Suffice it to say that "the doctrine" here is the

doctrine of the apostles; those causing divisions and offenses contrary to such doctrine are to be avoided.

I John 4:1-3,6: Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. . . We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Much could be said here about what it means to confess "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," namely, to confess the correct doctrine of Christology. For our purposes in this paper we note only this that the testing of true preachers and false preachers is to be done on the basis of whether or not they hear or accept apostolic doctrine. In other words, the pure marks of the church.

(On the topic treated above, cf. also these passages: I Tim. 6:3ff.; II Tim. 1:13; 2:2; I Pet. 4:11.)

It should be noted that there is no difference between a confession of Christ and a confession of the Word, since it is in the Word that Christ is revealed to man. To confess Christ is to confess the Word, and to confess the Word is to confess Christ. Jesus told the unbelieving Jews: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). The entire Scriptures, both Old and

New Testament, must be taken into account in one's confession of Christ, and not only the four Gospels. Jesus used all of the Old Testament in speaking of the necessity of His suffering and death to the two Emmaus disciples. Luke states: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Perhaps this would be the place to say a few words also about love for Christ as it is related to the keeping of His Word. There may be those who are very indifferent towards false doctrine, but who talk much about love for Christ, perhaps even using love as a reason for their unconcern about truth and error, claiming that love is the higher, the better way. This is not right. Exactly the opposite is true. Love for Christ, if it be true love, will prompt one to hold dearly to the Word. Jesus himself says: "If a man love me he will keep my words. . . . He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" (John 14:23.24).

There are related matters still to be noted in this paper, and undoubtedly still others will be brought out in the discussion of it. However, on the basis of what has already been said, and especially on the basis of the Scripture set forth above, we are constrained to say already at this point that essentially there isn't anything more to be said about the doctrine of church fellowship. The whole issue revolves around the pure Means of Grace, the pure marks of the church. Through the pure Means of Grace the Holy Spirit brings the Christian to faith, and preserves him in faith. The same Means of Grace serve as marks of the church, enabling the Christian to locate other Christians for purposes of church fellowship. On the basis of the pure marks of the church Christians unite to acknowledge and exercise church fellowship.

If we all agree on the doctrine of church fellowship we can profitably consider and discuss its application, which we readily grant can at times be perplexing to a faithful, dedicated pastor. A person can go a long way in agreeing to applications of this doctrine in exceptional situations if there is the firm assurance through word and deed that there is on the part of the pastor or teacher or church member making the application the whole-hearted acceptance of the Scriptural principle of the pure marks of the church as the basis for church fellowship.

If we do not agree on the doctrine itself, as stated above, then it will be most difficult, in fact, impossible, to discuss profitably its applications because we will not proceed from the same starting point. Then it would be far better to confine ourselves to a discussion of the principles and become agreed on them first.

V. Applications.

A. Regarding Terms Pertaining to the Doctrine of Church Fellowship.

1. "Pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship."

The above expression has a history in our circles and in other synods of the former Synodical Conference. The Overseas Brethren, in their theses of 1961, in keeping with their emphasis on the marks of the church, the Word and Sacraments, distinguished between pulpit and altar fellowship, on the one hand, and prayer fellowship on the other hand, but not in such a way as to set a different standard for the one or the other.

For example, in thesis 12 they state:

The fellowship created by Word and Sacraments shows itself in many ways, some of which, like prayer and worship and love of the brethren, the church cannot do without, others of which, like the holy kiss or the handshake or the reception into one's house, vary from place to place and from time to time.

But they do not place a different requirement for the exercise of the one or the other, for they go on to state:

In whatever way the fellowship created by the Word and Sacraments shows itself, all visible manifestations of fellowship must be truthful and in accordance with the supreme demands of the marks of the church. The "sacred things" (sacra) are the Means of Grace, and only by way of them is anything else a "sacred thing" (sacrum).

In thesis 13 they state:

Prayer is not one of the marks of the church and should not be coordinated with the Word and Sacraments, as though it were essentially of the same nature as they.

But they then go on to say of prayer:

As a response to the divine Word, it is an expression of faith and a fruit of faith, and when spoken before others, a profession of faith. As a profession of faith it must be in harmony with and under the control of the marks of the church. (1961 ELS Synod Report, pp. 41.42).

Regarding the term "pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship" we also want to say that we do violence to the scriptural principles of church fellowship when we restrict it to pulpit and altar fellowship, and then only to that little spot in the front of a church building around the altar and in the pulpit. Pulpit fellowship, for example, involves preaching and teaching the Word, whether this is done in the church service, the Bible class, the religion class in church school or synodical college or seminary. The matter of proclaiming the Word in a pulpit or classroom of the heterodox apart from the setting of church fellowship will be discussed later.

2. "Unionism."

The definition of unionism as it appeared in The Concordia Cyclopedia, 1927 edition, accords with the Scriptural principles of church fellowship. It reads:

Religious unionism consists of joint worship and work of those not united in doctrine (p. 774).

The revised definition, as it appeared in J.H.C. Fritz's Pastoral Theology, Second Edition Revised, 1945, does not accord with those principles. It reads:

Joining in religious worship or in religious work or in both by such as are not in doctrinal agreement, or, in other words, joint work or worship by which the truth is either denied or the appearance of denial, or at least of indifferentism, is given, is religious unionism (p. 211).

The ELS accepts the former and rejects the latter. (On the whole matter of unionism we recommend that you read or reread the chapter, "The Great Divide," by Prof. G. O. Lillegard in the Synod's 1953 anniversary volume, "Faith of Our Fathers," pp. 153-162.)

3. "Separatism."

In laying great emphasis on the pure marks of the church as the basis for acknowledging and exercising church fellowship here on earth, we must keep before our eyes not only the "ism" of unionism but also that of separatism. Both are a sin.

We cannot as Christians be indifferent to the spiritual condition and welfare of others beyond our own circles. Wherever the marks of the church are taught in conformity with a pure understanding of them we are in duty bound to acknowledge and exercise church fellowship with such. Distance and other earthly matters may determine somewhat the extent of the exercise of that fellowship, but earthly considerations, even churchly considerations such as church rites and ceremonies, must never keep us from the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship where true unity in doctrine prevails.

B. Offense and Weak Brethren.

A Christian, and especially a Christian pastor or teacher, must always take into account the matter of offense and weak brethren in making decisions regarding church fellowship. (cf. p. 11, Par. 38).

It is true that there is both a giving and a taking of offense. But a Christian, and especially a pastor or teacher, even though he can with good conscience see his way clear to exercise church

fellowship with someone in an unusual situation, will be concerned about the implications of his actions on others, and in Christian love he may at times find himself compelled to forego his intended action for their sakes.

While the same Biblical principles of church fellowship apply to the individual Christian in his personal life as in his congregational and synodical life, the attending circumstances may vary considerably. For example, the danger of giving offense ordinarily is much greater in that which takes place in public, e.g., in the congregation or synod or other assembly, and for this reason a pastor or teacher will have to give extra weight to this concern in such situations.

C. Church Fellowship in Congregation and Synod.

The Christian judges whether or not a congregation or church body has the pure marks of the church by comparing their formal confession of faith with the pure marks of the church. A church's formal confession of faith consists not only in what is stated in their constitution but also in what is actually taught in their pulpits, schools, church paper, and practiced in their church life.

If a church's formal confession of faith is in accord with the pure marks of the church the Christian will acknowledge and exercise church fellowship with them through such things as joint worship, communion, preaching, teaching, church work, etc. If a church's formal confession of faith does not accord with the pure marks of the church, the Christian will withhold the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship in obedience to God's Word.

It might sometimes appear from this that church fellowship is being decided simply on the basis of church membership. We have to remember, however, that we confess our faith by our church membership and that it is really on the basis of that confession rather than church membership as such that the question of church fellowship is decided.

What about the individual church member? Is he responsible for his church's teaching? Is one to withhold church fellowship from him because of what his church teaches? The individual's confession of faith may be better (or worse) than that of his congregation or synod. In these days when church membership doesn't always mean adherence to one's church's confession, a Christian pastor will want to deal very carefully with individuals. We shall treat of this later. Here we want to stress that the individual church member is most certainly responsible for what his church teaches. God himself has given him that responsibility. Furthermore, it is the church member who by his church attendance, church work, and church offerings makes the continued preaching and teaching of a false prophet in a congregation or synod possible. He holds up the hands of the false prophets in his church, and is thereby partaker of their evil deeds. True, our Lutheran Confessions speak of those who are ignorant of the false teaching, and we shall treat also of this, but here we want to recognize and underscore the matter of an individual's personal responsibility for what is taught in his congregation and synod.

D. Religious Organizations.

There are any number of religious organizations and associations today which do not call themselves churches and have no direct congregational or denominational ties. To list but a few: Billy Graham

Crusade; Oral Roberts Crusade; Campus Crusade for Christ; the Navigators; Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts; the various Jesus' groups or rallies; the Charismatic groups, etc.

These groups use the Means of Grace, preach the Gospel, instruct in the Word, and therefore have a duty to the supreme demands of the marks of the church even as you and I. The question of whether or not one should worship or work with or otherwise support such groups must be decided on the same basis as other questions of church fellowship, namely, on that of the pure marks of the church. While there are various doctrinal differences between these groups mentioned, most, if not all, are of Reformed background and doctrine. They do not confess the pure marks of the church.

One can well understand how some of our people may be drawn into worshipping and working with such groups, especially because of the fundamentalist nature of many of these organizations. As pastors and teachers we should be fair in our criticisms of these groups, and patient with our people. But we are not to be false shepherds by ourselves participating in or encouraging our people to participate in such heterodox ventures.

E. Witnessing for Christ.

The Christian is to be a witness for Christ at all times by word and deed. It is, however, a distortion of both the concept and duty of witnessing to insist that witnessing requires one to attend and speak and otherwise participate in whatever assembly or group he has the chance to do so, even if it puts one in a compromising position or gives offense so far as the doctrine of church fellowship is concerned. One can and does also witness,

and sometimes powerfully, by one's formal confession of faith through church membership, and also by one's silence and one's absence from other assemblies.

For a Lutheran pastor to stand before a Roman Catholic altar, or to invite or allow the Roman Catholic priest to stand before his, that is, the congregation's altar, and to conduct jointly a wedding service, as has become quite common in many Lutheran circles, is crass unionism and cannot be defended or excused on the basis of one's duty to witness. We are not to take what God has not given. The disregard of the pure marks of the church by such a joint service and the offense it causes to others, especially the weak and the "little ones" of all ages, children and young people in particular, is staggering to the heart and mind.

It must be granted that personally proclaiming the Word to those with whom one is not in doctrinal agreement, whether by preaching or teaching, may not always involve one in church fellowship and hence unionism. On rare occasions such an opportunity may present itself through an invitation from the heterodox or even unchristian group and one would accept and proclaim the Word in the hope that the Holy Ghost through the Word would so work and draw the hearers to accept the truth, thus making future church fellowship possible. Such occasions are fraught with many dangers of giving offense and would require 1) that the situation be so clearly enunciated to both those he serves and those he would reach that it is clear to all that he is not extending the hand of church fellowship by his acceptance and 2) that the individual involved must be so anti-unionism in doctrine and practice generally that again it is clear to all that he is not extending the hand of church fellowship, and

3) the individual must himself know what he is talking about, i.e., know truth and error, and especially as it pertains to those he addresses, and 4) the individual must then in all kindness but also in all faithfulness and clarity proclaim the truth so that he actually does witness for Christ and the truth, the meanwhile refraining from participating in their worship. Such situations are rare indeed. On that basis few heterodox will ask for your testimony.

F. Co-operation in External.

There is such a thing as a co-operation in externals which does not involve one in church fellowship. For example, pastors in a town or city may get together to meet with public school officials to work out certain arrangements for school and church schedules. Other examples could no doubt also be given, such as joint translation work, etc.

A word of caution is in place, namely, that often the cooperation sought is not in externals at all, but comes under joint worship and church work, and under the circumstances is unionism.

Somewhat akin to this matter of co-operation in externals is the seeking or giving of one's expertise in church methods or technical knowledge in Biblical matters, e.g., ancient languages, etc. This does not necessarily involve one in church fellowship, but it must be clearly laid out for all to see in order that no offense be given.

G. Dealing with the Peculiar Situation.

The highly individualistic spirit of the times and the abandonment in practice of formal confessions of faith by many church bodies have resulted in many individuals being put in a state of flux

regarding their religious convictions and confession. They may not necessarily hold to the present-day position of the church body to which they belong. They may be open to religious instruction, willing to "learn the way of God more perfectly."

When such individuals come to us we must not deal with them simply on the basis of the formal confession of faith which they make by their formal church membership. Neither are we to ignore it or say that here we have an exception to the Biblical principles of church fellowship. Church fellowship with such an individual, too, if it be exercised, must be in accord with the supreme demands of the pure marks of the church, but in considering his confession to the pure marks of the church, we will consider the informal confession of faith which he makes to us as well as the formal confession made by his church membership. We believe that the statement adopted by the doctrinal committee of the WELS and ELS on this a year ago may be helpful to us. It reads:

A reply to the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and of the ELS Board of Theology and Church Relations based on their synods' public confession on the doctrine of church fellowship to a question regarding church fellowship raised by pastors from the Conference of Authentic Lutherans.

Do we hold that the exercise of church fellowship, especially prayer and altar fellowship, can be decided in every instance solely on the basis of formal church membership, that is, on whether or not the person belongs to a congregation or synod in affiliation with us?

No. Ordinarily this is the basis on which such a question is decided since church fellowship is exercised on the basis of one's confession to the pure marks of the church, and ordinarily we express our confession by our church membership. There may be cases in the exercise of church fellowship where a person's informal confession of faith must also be considered. This is especially true regarding the weak. But whether one is guided by a person's formal or informal confession of faith, in either instance it must in principle be a confession to the full truth of God's Word. In addition, special care must be exercised so as not to cause offense to others or to interfere with another man's ministry. Further, we are not to judge harshly concerning the manner in which a brother pastor after much agonizing handles such difficult cases. (Lutheran Sentinel, Vol. 59, No. 14, July 22, 1976, pp. 220-221).

In a way, the problem discussed above is not at all peculiar to our times. The problem of confessing the pure marks of the church by "condemnations, censures, and rejections of false and adulterated doctrine" and at the same time helping those who err innocently and in child-like simplicity confronted the Reformers in the 16th Century also. This is what they said in the Preface to the Book of Concord:

With reference to the condemnations, censures, and rejections of false and adulterated doctrine, especially in the article concerning the Lord's Supper, these have to be set forth expressly

and distinctly in this explanation and thorough settlement of the controverted articles in order that everybody may know that he must guard himself against them. There are also many other reasons why condemnations cannot by any means be avoided. However, it is not our purpose and intention to mean thereby those persons who err ingenuously and who do not blaspheme the truth of the divine Word, and far less do we mean entire churches inside or outside the Holy Empire of the German Nation. On the contrary, we mean specifically to condemn only false and seductive doctrines and their stiff-necked proponents and blasphemers. These we do not by any means intend to tolerate in our lands, churches, and schools inasmuch as such teachings are contrary to the expressed Word of God and cannot co-exist with it. Besides, pious people should be warned against them. But we have no doubt at all that one can find many pious, innocent people even in those churches which have up to now admittedly not come to agreement with us. These people go their way in the simplicity of their hearts, do not understand the issues, and take no pleasure in blasphemies against the Holy Supper as it is celebrated in our churches according to Christ's institution and as we concordantly teach about it on the basis of the words of his testament. It is furthermore to be hoped that when they are rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine Word and unite with us and our churches and schools. Consequently the responsibility devolves upon

the theologians and ministers duly to remind even those who err ingenuously and ignorantly of the danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person let himself be misled by another. (Preface to the Book of Concord, pp. 11-12, Tappert ed.).

Conclusion:

In conclusion permit me to say only that the doctrine of church fellowship as set forth in the body of this paper, namely that the Christian is to acknowledge and exercise church fellowship on the basis of the pure marks of the church, is the truth, and, in the words of the Lutheran Reformers, any teaching to the contrary "cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended" (Intro., Solid Decl., Formula of Concord, p. 503, Tappert ed.).

May God give us grace to declare in the words of the Lutheran Reformers that this too "is our teaching, belief, and confession in which by God's grace we shall appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and for which we shall give an account," and also that ". . . we intend through God's grace to abide by it" (Conclusion to the Solid Decl., F.C. p. 636, Tappert ed.).

A D D E N D U M

in answer to a question raised in the discussion of the paper on the floor of the General Pastoral Conference, namely:

What is the relationship between faithful adherence to the marks of the church and the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to every creature?

Since God has commanded both we cannot say or assume that if we are faithfully to adhere to the pure marks of the church we cannot preach the Gospel to every creature. There is no contradiction between God's commands. We therefore cannot make this an "either-or" proposition.

But this is not to say that a Christian, and especially a Christian pastor, will always find it easy to do both, or that he will not at times have to ask himself, and perhaps also his brethren: "Now what should I do?" There is a tension between faithful adherence to the pure marks of the church and diligently seeking to carry out the Great Commission and one has to learn to live with it. We might add that along with the tension there is also a lot of sorrow and heartache.

Pat answers on either side of the question do not always do justice to the matter. In papers and discussions on church fellowship we should not expect answers to every conceivable situation which might arise, but rather look for the principle above all else. As stated earlier in this paper (cf. Par. 1, p. 35) one can go a long way in accepting how another person, and especially a pastor, deals with a certain situation if only one has the assurance that he accepts the Biblical

principle of church fellowship and honestly wants to follow it in practice.

We must strive to avoid a shallowness, formalism, or narrowing down of theological principles and instead seek to be well-grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. For example, as pointed out earlier in this paper, Scripture teaches that the Christian is to have church fellowship only with those who confess the pure marks of the church. Ordinarily a person confesses his adherence to the pure marks by his church membership. From this follows the practice of having church fellowship only with those who belong to the same church, or to a sister church. But this is not the principle of church fellowship, as such. The principle is that of confession to the pure marks of the church.

The joint statement of the Doctrinal Committees of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the ELS in answer to a question raised by brethren of the Conference of Authentic Lutherans, which deals with the matter of formal and informal confessions of faith (cf. Par. 2, p. 34), is an attempt to deal in a practical way with the tension which can arise between these two principles or commands - to reach out without forsaking the principles of adherence to the pure marks of the church.

In speaking of the relationship between faithful adherence to the pure marks of the church and to the Great Commission, we should be careful that we do not fall into thinking that the Great Commission is a positive matter while the doctrine of church fellowship is a negative doctrine. This is not so. Church fellowship, too, is essentially a positive, joyful thing, and we should keep this aspect of it before our eyes. It is true that it

does have its negative aspect, the "avoid," but we should not immediately think of "avoid" when we hear the term "church fellowship." We should also remember that even the "avoid" is a positive thing in this that God has put it there to protect those in the truth and to warn and to call back those who may stray from the truth.

In considering the relationship between faithful adherence to the pure marks of the church and the Great Commission we should also take a closer look at the Great Commission, especially the "preach the Gospel to every creature." The adherence to the pure marks of the church comes into consideration more in regard to having fellowship with the heterodox than in reaching out with the Gospel to those who do not have it. When a pastor is said to be unionistic it usually is because of his spiritual association with the heterodox rather than because of his going out as a shepherd to seek the lost sheep, that is, in doing real mission work, as we might call it. This does not mean that we are not to be concerned with the heterodox or that we should not seek to help them, especially those who err innocently. (Cf. what has been said earlier in a quotation from the Lutheran Confessions; Par. 2, p. 35.)

We are to be concerned about the heterodox, and this may even be said to be a part of the Great Commission in that Jesus said: ". . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." We are limited, however, in what we can do to help the heterodox back to the truth. The heterodox themselves have put a limit on us by their church membership. We have to respect another man's ministry even in heterodox churches. This, of course, must not be carried to an extreme. For example, anyone who has been a pastor in a rural or small-town parish knows about the "dead

timber" to be found in the community, people who were baptized and perhaps confirmed in a certain church but who for years, even decades, have not been active in hearing the Word or using the Sacrament, yet are generally considered to belong to a certain church. We can and should approach such people with the Law and Gospel.

While limited in what we can do to help the heterodox, we can do something, and we should be alert to every proper way to help. For example, we can be a good friend and neighbor to the heterodox, and as pastors teach our members to be good friends and neighbors to them also. It is in the personal touch and setting that both mission opportunities and opportunities to testify to the truth open up. When the heterodox approach us in spiritual matters we can speak to them of spiritual things without being a meddler or busybody in other men's affairs. Where the fine custom still prevails, as in rural and small towns, of friends and neighbors gathering for funerals, there is a wonderful opportunity for the orthodox pastor to reach the heterodox with the Word without doing violence to the pure marks of the church. But the orthodox pastor must then work hard to preach the Law and the Gospel, sin and grace, repentance and faith. In this way one can give the heterodox a real spiritual meal and treat, and strengthen them spiritually. And they will appreciate it too. The same holds true regarding weddings where an orthodox pastor has an opportunity to reach any number of people with the Gospel in accordance with the Great Commission. But then he must preach the Law and the Gospel; in the setting of the occasion, to be sure, but still, the Word. Is that not why the bride and groom have come, to sanctify their marriage by the Word of God and prayer?

These are some of the things that should be taken into account in a consideration of the relationship between faithful adherence to the pure marks of the church and the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to every creature.

-- Theodore A. Aaberg

"Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will, and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but rich words. In them consists all our wisdom, which surpasses all the wisdom, understanding, and reason of men. Although the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God is and what he thinks and does, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure. In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit."

-- Martin Luther: LARGE CATECHISM, Book of Concord, Tappert edition, p. 419.

"I Am Baptized"*

There are many ways to characterize the theology of the Lutheran Church. One of the most common ways is to make use of the three solas: sola gratia, sola fide, and sola scriptura. Still another way is to stress the Christological approach, which -- in contrast to the Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God, or the Roman Catholic emphasis on a hierarchical church structure -- sees all theology centered in God's love in Christ for sinful, fallen man. Still another approach is through the sharp dichotomy between Law and Gospel. All of these -- and others could possibly be mentioned -- contribute to the uniqueness of Lutheran theology.

But there are also a number of subthemes running through Lutheran theology which are important, too, and which help make the primary emphases stand out. An example of this would be an emphasis on the means of grace. Because these subthemes are subthemes, they are at times neglected, ignored, passed over, presumed, treated lightly, or handled only in part. Such a neglected area is, this writer feels, the doctrine of the baptismal covenant. While Baptism certainly is not neglected, the covenant aspect is. And this is an area of divine truth which needs re-emphasis today because of the blessings which it has for God's people and to counteract some of the current religious fads of our day.

Lutherans must not only say, "I was baptized," but they must also say, "I am baptized." Luther

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never thought of his Baptism in the past tense only, but he saw continued blessing. In his Large Catechism Luther states:

Thus we must regard Baptism and make it profitable to ourselves, that when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.
(Triglotta, L.C., Baptism, #44, p. 743)

Certainly Luther's strong assertion here on the continuing importance of Baptism should cause all to want to look more deeply into this truth.

Furthermore, this concept is a very direct part of Christian piety and Lutheran hymnody. Brorson, in that Christmas hymn all love to sing no matter how old they are -- "Thy Little Ones, Dear Lord, Are We" -- prays:

Keep us, howe'er the world may lure,
In our baptismal covenant pure;
That every yearning thought may be
Directed only unto Thee. (Hymnary, 179:6)

Kingo, in his great Easter hymn, "Like the Golden Sun Ascending," confesses:

As the Son of God I know Thee,
For I see Thy sovereign power;
Sin and death shall not o'erthrow me
Even in my dying hour;
For Thy resurrection is
Surety for my heavenly bliss,
And my baptism a reflection
Of Thy death and resurrection. (Hymnary, 325:7)

And if one has any doubts yet on the emphasis in Lutheran hymns, then only look at Kingo's familiar Baptism hymn, in which he speaks of both present and future blessings. Kingo states:

He that believes and is baptized
Shall see the Lord's salvation;
Baptized into the death of Christ,
He is a new creation;
Through Christ's redemption he shall stand
Amid the glorious heav'nly band
Of every tribe and nation.

With one accord, O God, we pray;
Grant us Thy Holy Spirit;
Look Thou on our infirmity
Through Jesus' blood and merit!
Grant us to grow in grace each day
By holy baptism that we may
Eternal life inherit! (Hymnary: 141)

While one may hesitate to quote Grundtvig in the area of Baptism, yet the words from his familiar hymn, "Built on the Rock the Church Doth Stand," have been sung many times in our churches. Speaking of church buildings, Grundtvig says:

Still we our earthly temples rear,
That we may herald His praises;
They are the homes where He draws near,
And little children embraces;
Beautiful things in them are said,
God there with us His cov'nant made,
Making us heirs of His kingdom. (Hymnary, 132:5)

The refrain -- "I am baptized" -- certainly runs through Lutheran hymns and is a refrain then that should be picked up and sung again and again.

This emphasis -- "I am baptized" -- makes the Lutheran Church unique in contrast to the churches

of the Baptist, the Zeinglians, the Calvinists, and the Romanists.

The Baptist view of Baptism and its continuing significance can be seen in the words of Augustus Hopkins Strong, a Baptist dogmatician, in his Systematic Theology. Strong states, among other things, the following:

In continuing the practice of baptism through his disciples (John 4: 1, 2), and in enjoining it upon them as part of a work which was to last to the end of the world (Mat. 28: 19. 20), Christ manifestly adopted and appointed baptism as the invariable law of his church The analogy of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper also leads to the conclusion that baptism is to be observed as an authoritative memorial of Christ and his truth, until his second coming. . . . Baptism symbolizes the previous entrance of the believer into the communion of Christ's death and resurrection -- or, in other words, regeneration through union with Christ. . . . As the profession of a spiritual change already wrought, baptism is primarily the act, not of the administrator, but of the person baptized. . . . As the outward expression of the change by which the believer enters the kingdom of God, baptism is the first, in point of time, of all outward duties. (Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1912, pp. 932, 940, 948, 950.)

From these words one can see that Baptism is made merely into an external act of the person being

baptized, who is seen as obeying a law of God. There is no thought of God at work. It means simply that one has "joined the club." One shows this by the life which he leads.

There is no really significant difference between the Baptist view and the views of Calvin and Zwingli. According to Zwingli, Baptism was seen as a sign of confession. However, Zwingli did stress this confession in relationship to the confession of the church rather than with the subjective emphasis followed by the Baptists. He saw in Baptism the church acknowledging the person being baptized -- and this applied to infants -- as its member. The Anabaptists who arose in his circle had difficulty in understanding his distinction. (Edmund Schlink, The Doctrine of Baptism. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972, pp. 86-87) Zwingli certainly saw no continuing benefit from Baptism, for he saw no real benefit in Baptism.

Calvin's comments on Baptism are on a higher level, but Lutherans who are familiar with the Crypto-Calvinist controversy which shook the Lutheran Church in its earlier days will also recognize the "spiritualizing" which Calvin does also to Baptism. He states in his Institutes of the Christian Religion:

Baptism serves as our confession before men, inasmuch as it is a mark by which we openly declare that we wish to be ranked among the people of God, by which we testify that we concur with all Christians in the worship of one God, and in one religion; by which, in short we publicly assert our faith, so that not only do our hearts breathe, but our tongues also, and all the members of our body, in every way they can, proclaim the praise of God. . . .

In corporeal things we are to see spiritual, just as if they were actually exhibited to our eye, since the Lord has been pleased to represent them by such figures; not that such graces are included and bound in the sacrament, so as to be conferred by its efficacy, but only that by this badge the Lord declares to us that he is pleased to bestow all these things upon us. (John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, II. London: James Clark & Co., 1957, p. 520)

Calvin's doctrine of Baptism is clearest when, regarding infants, he states that

the children of believers are not baptized, in order that though formerly aliens from the Church, they may then, for the first time, become children of God, but rather are received into the Church by a formal sign, because, in virtue of the promise, they previously belonged to the body of Christ.
(Calvin, p. 526)

The sovereignty of God dominates the theology of Calvin! And the sacraments have no real power in themselves. He points to a Christ Who is alongside of the sacrament, but not in it.

This needs to be remembered when one reads in Calvin the following:

We ought to consider that at whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified once for the whole life. Wherefore, as often as we fall, we must recall the remembrance of our baptism, and thus

fortify our minds, so as to feel certain and secure of the remission of sins. (Calvin, p. 514)

The idea of spiritual blessings through Baptism was rejected by Calvin. In commenting on I Peter 3:21, Calvin asserts:

For he did not mean to intimate that our ablution and salvation are perfected by water, or that water possesses in itself the virtue of purifying, regenerating, and renewing; nor does he mean that it is the cause of salvation, but only that the knowledge and certainty of such gifts are perceived in the sacrament. . . . Nay, the only purification which baptism promises is by means of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, who is figured by water from the resemblance to cleansing and washing. (Calvin, p. 513)

Calvin thus does not see any real benefits in Baptism except in a typical sense, that one is reminded in the act of Baptism of his greater cleansing by Christ. There can, then, in fact be no real assurance from Calvin's view in saying, "I am baptized." But one should also remember that mere casual references to Baptism without stressing a real content in Baptism may come close to Calvin's approach.

A few words must also be said about the theology of the Roman Catholic Church in this area. Rome sees Baptism as an entrance into its sacramental system and into membership in its pope-headed ecclesiastical structure. In commenting on the results of Baptism, A Handbook of the Catholic Faith contains the following summary:

The results of baptism are:

- a. infusion of sanctifying grace and supernatural virtues by means of which one becomes a child of God and capable of performing supernatural actions;
- b. the wiping out of original sin as well as personal sins (provided these latter are accompanied by sincere contrition);
- c. the leaving of an indelible mark upon the soul by which we become members of the Catholic Church and receive actual grace to lead a Christian life. (N.G.M. Van Doernik, S. Jelsma, A. Van De Lisdonk, A Handbook of the Catholic Faith. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1956, p. 489)

Baptism is seen as an infusing of grace which enables man to finish the work which Christ began. Again, the shift in emphasis is away from what God has done in Christ and gives in Gospel and sacraments to man's actions.

A Handbook of the Catholic Faith, when commenting of grace and its meaning for the Christians' life and salvation, comments:

Everyone receives sufficient grace in order to reach Heaven, for the simple reason that Christ died for all men, and these assisting graces have been merited for all men.... The state of grace is not a condition of rest in God, an idle expectation of his interior assistance, or an unconcerned reliance upon His strength and His help; on the contrary, it is life itself -- life based upon faith and love which express themselves continuously in decisions and actions. . . . It is upon his works, upon his own efforts

that a man is judged. . . Good works are, therefore, the reason for which God gives the reward of eternal life. . . Why, then, do we call our life, our work, our endeavors, fruitful? The answer is that God Himself connected fruitfulness with them. He promised a reward for our good deeds. He promised heaven as the inheritance of His obedient children. . . From this it also follows that our meritorious acts in no way detract from the merits of Christ. On the contrary, that which is purely human will never be able to merit a heavenly reward. The sole origin of any fruitfulness or merit in our life lies in the merits of Christ. (Van Doernik, Jelsma, & Van De Lisdonk, pp. 216-217, 219, 220)

While this last extended quotation does not speak about Baptism, it does show the direction of Roman Catholic theology in making grace merely a power which enables man to merit, and grace is given in Baptism. Thus the Roman Catholic thrust in such a statement as "I am baptized" would be to look for works in the life of the Christian which would merit God's favor.

These detours to Calvin, Zwingli, and Rome are necessary to assist Lutherans to understand and appreciate what they have in the Bible-centered and Christ-centered theology of the Lutheran Church.

When Luther stated, "I am baptized," he was stating the continuing value of Baptism even as he stated it in the Small Catechism.

What does such baptizing with water signify?

It signifies that the old Adam in us should be daily contrition and repentance,

be drowned and die with all sins and evil
lusts, and, again, a new man daily come
forth and arise, who shall live before
God in righteousness and purity forever.
(Triglotta, S. C., #11-12 of Baptism, p. 551)

The proof text which Luther used for this statement
of faith regarding the effects of Baptism are the
familiar words of Romans 6: 4:

We are buried with Christ by Baptism
into death, that, like as He was raised
up from the dead by the glory of the
Father, even so we also should walk in
newness of life.

These words, familiar as they are, deserve a
closer look, for they can serve as the starting
point for understanding Luther's statement, "I am
baptized." One needs to remember where these
words occur in the sequence of Paul's chain of
thought in Romans. They occur in the third sec-
tion of Romans; after Paul had pointed out the
sinfulness of man and God's wrather against sin,
and after Paul had pointed out the real meaning
of the righteousness of God, he then in the third
section speaks of the creation of a new life in
man, showing man freed from sin, Romans 6, from
the Law, Romans 7, and from death, Romans 8.
(Martin Fransman, Concordia Commentary: Romans.
St. Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 1968,
pp. 19-20). But these words also serve as an
excellent framework around which to group a number
of other passages from Scriptures.

In Romans 5 Paul had proclaimed the great fact
of justification. "Therefore being justified by
faith, we have peace with God through our Lord
Jesus Christ," Romans 5:1. But then Paul pro-
gresses on to speak of the justified Christian as

he lives out his life in Christ. Paul raised a question which was probably hypothetical in the Roman Christian congregation, but which was not hypothetical in other places. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" Romans 6:1. Deliberate antinomianism of one kind or another has reared its head in the church from time to time according to which some argue: "Let us do evil that good may come," Romans 3:8. Such people argue that, by heaping up their sins, they also reap a larger measure of God's goodness when they do repent. F. F. Bruce, in his commentary on Romans, remarks on that evil genius Rasputin:

A notable historical instance may be seen in the Russian monk Rasputin, the evil genius of the Romanov family in its last years of power. Rasputin taught and exemplified the doctrine of salvation through repeated experiences of sin and repentance; he held that, as those who sin most require most forgiveness, a sinner who continues to sin with abandon enjoys, each time he repents, more of God's forgiving grace than any ordinary sinner. The case-books of many soul-physicians would reveal that this point of view has been commoner than is often realized, even when it is not expressed and practiced so blatantly as it was by Rasputin. (F. F. Bruce, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973, p. 134)

But Bruce does point to the Corinthian congregation as a group which did not take the matter of sin and sanctification very seriously, as shown by their attitude toward sexual irregularities in their

church, I Corinthians 5. (Bruce, pp. 134-135)
Certainly there is a need to have real preaching
of Law and Gospel, so as to destroy the "cheap
Gospel" approach which many seem to have.

Paul also approaches this evil from another
view, the fact that the Christian has been born
again. "God forbid." μή νέουτο "How shall we,
that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"
Romans 6:2. Paul here states a general truth.
The question was: "Shall we continue in sin,
that grace may abound?" Franzmann answers:

Paul answers the question not with an
appeal or a command but with a statement.
The statement speaks not of something we
have done but of something that was done
to us: "We . . . died to sin." What
happened to us makes any further connec-
tion with sin impossible. Sin cannot be
our life-element any longer; it cannot
be the compelling impulse of our wills
and the controlling bent of our desires
as it once was (cf. Col. 3:7), for dead
men have no wills and no desires.

(Franzmann, p. 109)

Paul, in speaking to his Roman readers, uses the
Gospel. To the antinomian who used the Law as a
guide to sin, or to the legalist who uses the
Law to try to beat people into line, Paul may
seem rather naive, at first thought. Yet one
always must remember that it is the Holy Spirit,
in the end, Who sways the minds and hearts of
people, John 3:1-15; Romans 12: 1-2.

All of these are what can be called rather
general statements of Christian truth. But in
Romans 6:3 Paul gets down to specifics, and when
he deals with the "how" of this occurrence, he

points to Baptism. He starts with Baptism!
"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized
into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?"
Romans 6:3. Two points must here be made. Paul
is not discussing here what man knows or thinks
about Baptism, but rather what God does in that
wonder-filled water of Baptism, water joined with
the Gospel promises of God.

The cognitive significance of Baptism
must by no means be underestimated. It
determines our whole life, but it is not
brought into relationship to an act of
God that is distinguished from Baptism,
but to an act of God that takes place in
Baptism. (Schlink, p. 90)

Paul sees God at work.

The second point to be briefly considered
before proceeding is the phrase εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν
"into Jesus Christ." The Greek preposition εἰς,
"into," is of importance here. Lenski pulls to-
gether some thoughts on εἰς, stating:

It is the task of the grammars to
tell the story as to how the Koine εἰς
has expanded and invaded the territory
of ἐν. . . All the old grammars and
all the old exegeses are superseded by
the immense volume of new information
now at hand in the papyri, etc. We
now see how wrong it was in scores of
instances in the New Testament to
interpret ἐν as "into," and how only
sheer ignorance forced the idea of
motion into the preposition. . . .
Although the thought was unthinkable,
men tried to think it: carried by
baptism into the Name, into Christ,

into his death. This ἐν is simple in and indicates no motion but only sphere; it is in with its first meaning: "in connection with." . . . Baptism connects us with the Messiah Jesus, and Paul says that this means the connection with his death. (R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945, p. 391)

With these preliminaries out of the way, we can return to Romans 6:3: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" The verb βαπτίζω is in the passive, and by this form Paul reminds his readers that are the recipients of God's saving activity. Through Baptism Christians share in the death of Christ. This is not the more familiar form connected with the Trinity found in Matthew 28:19. The fact that only Christ is mentioned here does not mean that the older Trinitarian formula was not used in Baptism. The Trinity is present.

If the exalted Christ is the Lord to whom God has subjected all things, then He is not only the One to whom God assigns a person through Baptism. As the Lord He is Himself at work. He draws the baptized to Himself through the Holy Spirit, and He gives Himself to the baptized. In Baptism God the Father and Jesus Christ act through the Holy Spirit. . . . Through Baptism the Holy Spirit implants men in Christ and makes them God's children. Thus Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are active through Baptism: justifying, sanctifying, saving, and making alive. (Schlink, pp. 86-87)

And the blessings? Christians, through Baptism, share in the death of Christ. He is their Savior.

Christ is the Savior through His gracious work -- His life and death. And Christ is the gracious Savior through Baptism, the Gospel promises joined with water.

Here also Titus 3:5 must also be mentioned, where Paul remind us

Not be works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

It is the mistranslation of this latter passage which, more than anything else, turned this writer off on the Living Bible. It dares to offer the following:

Then He saved us -- not because we were good enough to be saved, but because of His kindness and pity -- by washing away our sins and giving us the new joy of the indwelling Holy Spirit Whom He poured out upon us with wonderful fullness -- and all because of what Jesus Christ our Savior did. (Paraphrase by Ken Taylor, Reach Out: The Living New Testament. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1973, p. 537)

The translation by Taylor in the Living Bible completely removes the clear meaning of the great baptismal text, "washing of regeneration." Luther, in commenting on Titus 3:5, says:

You have here a commendation of Baptism such as I can hardly find anywhere else in the New Testament. Luther's Works, Vol. 29. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968, p. 81.)

Luther, who had considerable trouble with the Anabaptists, spoke out again and again, therefore, making use of Titus 3:5:

But if God binds His Word to a tree, it now becomes not only an outward thing, but through the Word there is the presence, will, and mercy of God. Thus in Baptism there is not only mere water, because there is present here the name, or all the divine power joined through the Word in Baptism, and God Himself is the One who baptizes. . . . Thus Baptism bears the Word of God by which the water is sanctified, and we are sanctified in the water. . . . This is a washing of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who bathes you in this washing. It is a glorious commendation that He is present in Baptism, but this is also the warmth that transforms the heart, the anointing, the heat of the fire, and the renewal which renews in such a way. These are very simple words. (Luther's Works, 29, pp. 83, 84)

One of the points of controversy with the Anabaptists that Luther had was over value of Baptism. The present-day emphasis on "believer Baptism" is nothing new. To those who could not see the value of Baptism, Luther, in his "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," states:

The blind fool does not know that the merit of Christ and the distribution of merit are two different things. . . . Christ has once for all merited and won for us the forgiveness of sins on the cross, but this forgiveness he distributes wherever he is, at all times and in all places as Luke writes, chapter 24 /:46f./ . . . Again, Christ has not

redeemed us through our baptizing, ergo it is contrary the faith when one seeks pardon of sins in baptism. My friend, why then does Paul call baptism a washing way of sins? /I Cor. 6:11/. . . . But we know that Christ has died for us once, and that he distributes this death through preaching, baptizing, the Spirit, reading, believing, eating, and in whatever way he wishes, wherever he is, and whatever he is, and whatever he does. (Luther's Works, Vol. 27. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961, pp. 192-193)

A false contrast was and is also made between Baptism and the Gospel, as if there were two ways of saving mankind. One must not forget that it is the Gospel which is joined with the water of Baptism.

Since Baptism is one of the ways in which God has mercy on man, we must not expect less of Baptism than of the proclamation of the Gospel. If the Gospel is the power of God by which faith is created, then faith is also to be expected also as a result of the administration of Baptism. Also through Baptism God is active in the power of the Holy Spirit. . . . Through Baptism man receives his sight and he is enabled to see the light which has dawned in Christ. (Schlink, p. 125)

Some may begin to be rather restless as these statements continue to be made, but one must appreciate the wonder, grace, and majesty of God at work in Baptism before he can go beyond the moment of his Baptism to appreciate the baptismal covenant

that is summarized in the statement, "I am baptized."

What one then looks back at the moment of Baptism and all that it means, one must agree with the few, but crowded comments of Franzmann on Romans 6:3:

When did this all-decisive event of death take place? How did we die? Every Christian knows that, for every Christian has been baptized. We know that we were baptized "into Christ." Our baptism effectually committed us to Him, clothed us in Him (Gal. 3:27), incorporated us all in Him (I Cor. 12:12-13). One baptism gave us one Lord (Eph. 4:5). He is Lord of all in the power of His divine love; that love made His death a death for all (II Cor. 5:14-15). Therefore baptism "into Him" is a baptism into His death. (Franzmann, p. 109).

The effect and effects of Baptism are tremendous.

It is that at this point we must look beyond the moment of Baptism to the continuing meaning of Baptism for us. This writer was baptized on May 22, 1927, in Immanuel Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, by the sainted Rev. Carl F. Dietz, but the benefits of Baptism have, for this writer, continued far beyond that date. This is not a subjective reaction. All should!

One can return again to Romans 6. In Romans 6:4 the Apostle Paul refers pointedly to the death of Christ. The death of Christ was a fact. All of the evangelists place Christ in the grave. They witness to the fact that it was a corpse that was wrapped in grave clothes in the sealed tomb.

But Christ's death was unique. His death was for the sin of the world, II Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6b; Galatians 3:13; I Peter 2:24; etc. Christ suffered the pains of the damned in hell on the cross, Matthew 27:46, until He could say, "It is finished," John 19:30, and lay His work before His heavenly Father, meeting His last enemy, death, Luke 23:46. And this was accepted; "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father," Romans 6:4. The Father glorified Himself by raising Christ from the dead, John 12:28. And the reality of His victory the Baptized share in.

Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

Just as the Christian shares in the death and burial of Christ through Baptism, so the Christian also shares in the resurrection of Christ. There is the resurrection now, the "newness of life," and the resurrection of the future -- "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him," Romans 6:8. It is the former that is of interest now. This theme is recurrent in the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul tells the Colossian Christians:

And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power, in Whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, Who hath raised Him from the dead.

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of the ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross. (Colossians 2: 10-14)

The "newness of life" pictured in these passages is a powerful and tremendous concept.

Since God's act through Baptism takes place once for always and thus determines the entire subsequent life, the relationship between faith and Baptism transcends the baptismal act itself and endures until the end of life. It is not accidental that the New Testament passages speak less frequently of the faith that precedes Baptism than they do of the faith that is referred back to Baptism. Most of the baptismal statements are used as basis for admonition to the baptized. These are admonished to live in accordance with the saving deed that was done in them in Baptism. Hence the connection between faith and Baptism may not be restricted to the temporal sequence: faith-Baptism, but the connection must be maintained also in the reverse order: Baptism - Faith. (Schlink, pp. 124-125)

This is the specific thrust of Romans 6:4:

Paul's first concern here, however, is not our future resurrection; he is

intent on bringing home to us the fact that through our baptism we share in Christ's resurrection now. Christ was raised from the dead "that . . . we too might walk in newness of life." The new life, the life beyond the reach and dominion of death, the life of the world to come which Christ inaugurated by His resurrection is a present reality, present and at work in the Word and sacrament of the Gospel. It is a powerful, dynamic reality. We do not merely exist in it. We "walk" in it. "Walking" is a Jewish expression for conduct and activity frequent in Paul's letters (Cf. Rom. 8:4; 13:13. . .) (Franzmann, p. 110)

What follows in Romans 6:5-10 is an expansion of Romans 6:3-4. Paul becomes even more concrete in his application of this principle to the faith and life of the Romans. Three times the Apostle Paul links us with Christ in these verses:

- v. 5: "planted together in the likeness of His death" "we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection"
- v. 6: "our old man is crucified with Him"
- v. 8: "we be dead with Christ" "we shall also live with Him"

These phrases heap up images of the meaning and effect of Baptism. The word *σύνφυτοι* means literally "grown together" with Christ. He is the first fruits, and we share in the benefits. His death was unique, for the death of a Christian and his resurrection only resembles -- hence the use of *ὁμοίωμα* -- Christ's unique act for all. When speaking of the death of the Old Adam, Paul uses the aorist passive -- *συνεσταυρώθη*, "has been crucified" -- to show that Old Adam died on Christ's cross, again to stress the new life. Finally, Paul

stresses that the life in Christ now means an eternal life with Christ then. These words give the Christian ample reason to understand why he cannot see his Baptism merely as an event in the past.

Since in Baptism God embraces the entire life of man in a saving way, the baptized must ever anew lay hold of this saving deed by faith and draw his life from that deed. The baptized no longer only goes to meet the coming death and the coming resurrection, but he already comes from his death and his resurrection. Through his being given into Christ's death the life with Christ has already been opened up for him. Thus the Christian lives not only in a hurrying forward to ever new hearing of the Gospel and to ever new reception of the Lord's Supper, but at the same time he hurries back ever again to his Baptism through which he has been given over to the dominion of Christ. The New Testament admonitions are thus based primarily on Baptism; they call to mind and exhort the baptized to draw his life ever anew from the source of his being a Christian. You "must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). This imperative, which lays the foundation for the individual concrete exhortations, is the summons to faith in the saving deed which God once performed for each member of the church through Baptism. (Schlink, pp. 125-126)

Hence Baptism has a continuing meaning.

Thus Baptism is not only the beginning

but the firm and abiding basis upon which faith must establish itself again and again. Baptism is not only the means by which God once acted on the baptized, but it is at the same time the weapon for the fight of faith. (Schlink, p. 126)

The quality of the Christian life with Christ, Paul recognized in Romans 6, was under severe pressure. Hence there are a number of points which he also makes to remind them of their present situation before God. They "know" three specific things as Christians:

- v. 3: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?"
- v. 6: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified. . ."
- v. 9: "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more"

This content of knowledge was to be no mere head knowledge, but was to be implemented in their Christian lives. After all, they had been spiritually resurrected by the Holy Spirit. The results were to follow:

- v. 6: "the body of sin might be destroyed"
- v. 7: "he that is dead is freed from sin"
- v. 11: "reckon ye also yourselves to be . . . alive unto God"

The body which gives expression to the ruling mind no longer would serve sin. The slave, having died, is no longer under his old master. But the new life would show itself in living for God.

All that follows in Romans builds on this thought, whether it be the Christian who still sees sin in himself but turns to Christ, Romans 7, or

the life of joyful service to God by the Christian who has had his mind changed by God, Romans 12. It is rather unfortunate that more time cannot be given over to a more complete and adequate discussion of this matter.

But several other thoughts should be added here. While the Lutheran Church is ecumenical in its attitude towards Baptism -- it recognizes the Trinitarian Baptism of other denominations -- it also recognizes Baptism as a congregational act, into which the individual is also brought through his Baptism (Schlink, p. 192). And Christians should be aware of the fellowship which they have in Baptism.

Furthermore, the objective fact and meaning of Baptism must be stressed. Today the visible church faces the problem of Pentecostalism, with its speaking in tongues. One would have to be very obtuse not to recognize the real appeal of Pentecostalism; the desire for spiritual certainty. Yet in the quest for spiritual certainty the Pentecostal turns to his own personal, subjective experience for certainty. How much better by far is the objective certainty of the Baptismal promises of God.

Thirdly, we bewail the lack of spiritual life in the visible church. There is only too often a low level of sanctification and living for Christ and even living with Christ. And what kind of remedies are proposed? Some try this remedy and some try that. But how many try the simple steps outlined by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6, where Paul reminds the Roman Christians of what they had been, of what Christ had made them, and of what they are to be in Christ.

Baptism is often not mentioned in connection with the Christian life until confirmation, when the children are reminded of their earlier Baptism and

that they are standing before the congregation "publicly to make profession of your faith in the Triune God and to confirm your covenant with Him. ." (The Lutheran Agenda. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n. d., p. 23) This writer has never gotten too excited over the phrase "renew the Baptismal covenant" that some use with confirmation, though one must wonder about the aptness of the expression. However, he does feel that there then should be a greater stress on the meaning of Baptism so that this phrase does acquire an evangelical meaning. Furthermore, the emphasis should be away from a one-time concept, i.e., "I have renewed my Baptismal vow and now on to other things!"

Here Luther's Large Catechism has something to say to present-day Lutherans:

Lastly, we must also know what Baptism signifies, and why God has ordained just such external sign and ceremony for the Sacrament by which we are first received into the Christian Church. But the act, or ceremony, is this -- that we are sunk under the water, which passes over us, and afterwards are drawn out again. These two parts, to be sunk under the water and drawn out again, signify the power and operation of Baptism, which is nothing else than putting to death the old Adam, and after that the resurrection of the new man, both of which must take place in us all our lives, so that a truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever to be continued And here you see Baptism, both in its power and signification, comprehends also the third Sacrament, which has been called repentance, as it is really nothing else than Baptism. For what else is repentance

but an earnest attack upon the old man /that his lust be restrained/ and entering upon a new life? Therefore if you live in repentance, you walk in Baptism, which not only signifies such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it. For therein are given grace, the Spirit, and power to suppress the old man, so that the new man may come forth and become strong. Therefore our Baptism abides forever . . . This I say lest we fall into the opinion in which we were for a long time: imagining that our Baptism is something past, which we can no longer use after we have fallen again into sin . . . Thus it appears what a great, excellent thing Baptism is, which delivers us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, suppresses and takes away sin, and then daily strengthens the new man; and is and remains ever efficacious until we pass from this estate of misery to eternal glory. For this reason let every one esteem his Baptism as a daily dress in which he is to walk constantly, that he may ever be found in the faith and its fruits, that he suppress the old man and grow up in the new. . . . But if any one fall away from it, let him again come into it. For just as Christ, the Mercy-seat, does not recede from us or forbid us to come to Him again, even though we sin, so all His treasure and gifts also remain. If, therefore, we have once in Baptism obtained forgiveness of sin, it will remain every day, as long as we live, that is, as long as we carry the old man about our neck. (Triglotta, L.C., "Infant Baptism," #64-65, 74-77, 80, 83-84,86)

-- Glenn E. Reichwald

REVELATION 20*
(An Exegetical Study)

Let me begin this study with a few ground rules.

In studying Revelation, there are two dangers that I want to resist. One is to take the visions in such a literal sense that we lose the distinction between the vision itself and its application. This is what the Millennialists do, and is what we call "Literalism," taking obvious metaphors and figures of speech only in their strictly literal sense, even in their application. But the other danger is so to spiritualize the words themselves that they seem to lose their ordinary meanings, even in the setting of the vision. This tendency also arises from an impatience to move from the vision itself to its application, so that people have a tendency to allegorize each word, giving it a strange or unnatural meaning. It is as though the number 1,000 doesn't really mean 1,000 to all, or that a throne is not a throne, a key is not a key, and a beast is not a beast. I am convinced that much of the confusion in our day about this Book, and much of the confusion among the laity in our own circles, stems from just this tendency: we tell our people not to be "literalists," and they take that to mean that they should forsake altogether the literal meanings of the words themselves.

*Delivered at the ELS General Pastoral Conference, Jan. 4-6, 1977.

There is also another hermeneutical principle which may need a little thought and discussion before we proceed. It is the rule, SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE. Like so many principles, it can be repeated so often without any thought to its original context that its intended meaning is lost. Originally, this rule was a proper reaction, both against the teaching that "The 'Church'" (meaning the Pope and his councils) must decide what the Scripture means, and also against anyone who might set himself up as some "heavenly prophet" and decide from his "inner light" what the true meaning of Scripture is. No indeed! The Bible doesn't need any Pope's Council, or any new "heavenly visions" to have its beautiful message explained. It can speak for itself, and by itself it is perfectly clear in its message.

What should be obvious, though, about this principle, is that the rule, SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE, does not mean that you have to twist the meaning of one Bible passage to make it conform to the meaning of another. Thus the Calvinists, for example, force the meaning of those passages which speak of God's universal grace and Jesus' universal redemption of mankind to make them fit their understanding of the Election passages, while the Arminians force the meaning of the Election passages to make them conform to their understanding of God's universal will of grace. Thus, too, Zwingli wanted to "interpret" Jesus' words, "This is My body: in the light of John 6. No, this principle must never lead us to alter the clear meaning of a text. Even if the Scriptures clearly present two sides of a coin which we cannot logically reconcile, we should simply accept both statements, recognize our own finite mental powers, and let the statements stand side by side (as we do, for example, in connection with the doctrine of Election).

So, too, in Revelation 20, we must first let the text speak for itself! First we must have a careful exegesis of Rev. 20, asking simply, "What do the words say?" Revelation, too, has a literal meaning. John uses ordinary words and ordinary, simple grammar, to convey to us what he saw. And in studying Rev. 20. our FIRST question must be, "What did John actually see in these visions?" To answer THAT question, we use the literal meanings of all words and the simple normal rules of grammar, treating this text like any other text of Scripture. After such exegesis, letting Rev. 20 speak for itself and letting the words tell us what John saw, we can then seek to determine, with the guidance of all of Scripture, the application of these visions. Here we can search the Scriptures for parallel passages, for evidence of these same prophecies and their fulfillment. Such comparisons, though, must always be in perfect harmony with the text of Rev. 20, as determined above. We must not have to change the meaning of a single word, phrase, grammatical construction, or thought.

So my first task here is to state, as simply, clearly, and accurately as possible, the message of this text, so that it can speak for itself. Therefore, I begin this study with a translation of Rev. 20 that is as clear, simple, and accurate as I could make it.

Revelation 20

¹And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the bottomless abyss and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold upon the dragon, the old serpent, which is "the Devil" and "Satan," and bound him a thousand years ³and cast him into the bottomless abyss, and shut him up and set a seal over him, so that he might no longer deceive the nations, until the thousand years be fulfilled.

(After these things it is necessary for him to be loosed for a short time.)

⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And /I saw/ the souls of those killed by ax on account of their witness of Jesus and on account of God's Word, and /I saw/ whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not receive his mark upon their forehead and upon their hand. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵(The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection.

⁶Blessed and holy is the person who has a part in the first resurrection! Over those the second death has no authority, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with Him the thousand years.

⁷And when the thousand years are fulfilled, Satan will be loosed from his prison, ⁸and he will go forth to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to assemble them for the War. Their number is as the sand of the sea. ⁹And they went up over the breadth of the land and encircled the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And there came down fire out of heaven, and it devoured them. ¹⁰And the devil who was deceiving them was cast into the lake of fire and sulphur, where also the beast and the false prophet /were cast/, and they will be tormented day and night into the ages of the ages.

¹¹And I saw a great white throne and the One Who was sitting on it. Earth and heaven fled from His face and a place was not found for them.

¹²And I saw the dead--both the great and the small--standing before the throne. And books were opened. And another book was opened, which

is /the Book/ of Life. And the dead were judged out of the things which had been written in the books, according to their works. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead in it, and death and hades gave up the dead in them. And they were judged each one according to their works. ¹⁴And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death: the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the lake of fire.*

John introduces each new vision, or each new phase of his vision, with the words, "I saw." This verb, together with all of the verbs that unfold the action in the vision, are in the simple past (aorist) tense. John's consistent use of this tense in describing the action as he saw it unfold in the vision has the effect of distinguishing the vision itself from his own "commentary" on it, his own parenthetical explanations of some of its aspects.

In presenting these visions, John begins by introducing the central character of the vision, the one he wants our attention to focus upon. He usually then proceeds to show what this central

*The translation given here was carefully prepared from the original text, and it should suffice for our study. Actually, both the vocabulary and the grammar in Revelation, and especially in Rev. 20, are so simple and straightforward that no real difficulty exists. In fact, it seems to be some of the simplest Greek in the New Testament. And whatever problems some people might have with Revelation, they certainly can't be blamed on the vocabulary or the grammar.

figure is doing, and then brings in other persons or things as they are needed, or as they are affected by the central figure.

Thus, in verses 1 to 3 the central figure is "an angel." He is coming down out of heaven, and is holding the key of the abyss, and a great chain. His action is to lay hold of the "Dragon" (identified by John as "The old serpent, the 'Devil' and 'Satan'"), bind him a thousand years (presumably with the chain), cast him into the abyss, shut him in, and set a seal over him, thus preventing him from deceiving the nations.

The next phase of this vision describes the blessed results of this defeat and imprisonment of Satan. Here John (in verses 4 and 5) describes three things that captured his attention:

- 1) People who sat on thrones and were given the authority of judgment
- 2) The souls of martyred saints
- 3) Those who faithfully refused to worship the "beast" or to receive his mark.

These lived and reigned with Christ during the thousand years. The rest of the dead, we are told, did not live during this period. (The King James Version says they "lived not again." This translation apparently reflects an inferior variant text, which is not even listed in Nestle.)

At this point John inserts his own divinely inspired commentary, explaining that all of this constitutes the "First Resurrection," and that those who have a part in it are blessed and holy, are free from the claim of the "Second death," and shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him during the thousand year period.

(Note the present and future tenses here. John has momentarily left describing the vision itself, which was in the past, and he is talking about the actual blessedness of these saints.)

Verses 7 and 8, in my view, continue with John's commentary. He explains again, as he had in verse 36, that at the fulfillment of this "1,000 year" period, Satan must still be dealt with, according to God's plan. He must be put away forever, together with his allies. So he will be let out of his prison and will go right to work on the nations of the earth. He will deceive them, in order to assemble them for the War. At this point we are returned to the vision itself again.

Satan and the "nations" he deceived went up into battle against the People of God. These People of God are pictured as encamped together in the Holy City, and are surrounded and besieged by Satan and his allies, who have swarmed over the "breadth of the land," that is, over the face of the whole earth. But God himself delivered His saints and His Holy City, consuming these enemies with fire from heaven. Satan was cast into the "Lake of fire," where together with the "beast" and the False Prophet he would be tormented without respite, forever.

This brings John to the last part of this vision, recorded in verses 11 to 15. Here the Central Figure was our Lord Himself, sitting on His judgment throne. John mentions the throne first. It emphasizes both the royal majesty of the Savior, and also His Office as Judge. Further to show His divine majesty, we are told that heaven and earth tried to flee from His presence--only they couldn't escape the presence of Him Who is present everywhere. Next, John saw the dead

gathered, standing before this judgment throne. All of the dead were gathered, both great and small. No one was great enough to escape this summons, and no one was so small as to be overlooked. Nor did it matter where they had been, whether in the depths of the sea, the bosom of the earth, or any other conceivable chamber of death.

John tells us that "Books were opened," records of their lives, out of which judgment was to be made. But there was yet another Book, the "Book of Life." And if anyone was not found written in this Book, he was condemned and cast into the same lake of fire into which the devil had been cast. This, explains John, is what he had meant in verse 6 by "the second death."

* * *

This, then, is what John actually saw in his vision. Now we can proceed to find, on the basis of Scripture, what this vision means for us.

As we go now to the application of this vision, let us begin again where John begins, with the "angel." Whom does this angel actually represent? We answer this question, of course, by seeing Who fits John's description of this angel, who has his power and authority, and who actually does (or did) what the angel did in the vision? Who has the "key of the abyss," the "keys of hell"? John himself told us that, way back in Chapter 1 (v. 18). Who is the Champion That took the war with Satan into His own hands, seized the "Serpent of old," overcame him, bound him, shut him up in his prison, and sealed him in? Already in Genesis 3 God told us Who That would be.

Any time that a prophecy of old is perfectly

fulfilled in the past, so that we can see perfect agreement with prophecy and fulfillment, it is simply foolish to reject that fulfillment and look for a "better" one to come along. How foolish it would have been for Pharaoh, fourteen years after his dreams, to have said: "But maybe the next fourteen years will fulfill Joseph's prophecies even better"! The Jews made this tragic mistake with Jesus Himself, rejecting Him although He perfectly and completely fulfilled all Messianic prophecies. And they're still looking!

Therefore, we need to ask ourselves here, "Has there ever been an age whose conditions perfectly fit what John is describing in verses 1 to 6?" If so, then we can stop looking.

Certainly, the picture in verses 1 to 3 is perfectly represented in Jesus, both in His power and in His work. HE has the keys of hell and of death. HE overcame Satan and sealed him in his prison. HE, and He alone, sets the bounds beyond which Satan cannot go. And all of this He has already accomplished. His redeeming work spelled Satan's defeat. His descent into hell proclaimed His victory to those in hell, and His Resurrection proclaimed it to men on earth.

Now, what about the 1,000 years? Well, first of all, remember that this expression was part of John's vision. It was the imprisonment of the dragon in the vision that John saw as lasting 1,000 years. Now, I'm not saying that the number 1,000 wasn't a literal number in the vision itself. I'm sure that John had the number 1,000 in mind--not 100 or 1,000,000. And he had years in mind, not days or weeks. But this does not mean that these 1,000 years represent a literal 1,000 years in the fulfillment, or application, of this vision. If Christ appears in the vision as an

angel, if His death on the Cross is represented as binding a dragon and dumping him into an abyss, if His almighty power that sets Satan's bounds is represented as locking him in his prison, then the entire age to which this victory of Christ applies, with all its blessed effects as they are described in verses 4 to 6, must be represented by the expression, 1,000 years. As to the actual length of that period in time and space history, Jesus Himself tells us that it is not for us to know the times and seasons. Therefore, rather than limit this prophecy to a literal 1,000 years, let us treat this phrase like the rest of John's expressions, and determine this age by what occurs in it, as John describes these occurrences in verses 1 to 6, letting the chips fall where they may as far as its actual historical length is concerned.

Thus considered, the "1,000 years" are simply the New Testament era--or perhaps I should say, the Church under the New Covenant. For actually the New Covenant is not confined to dates on our calendars, as though the Old Testament saints never had part in the "First Resurrection." In visions, actual time is not always represented by time in the vision. Pharaoh's butler had a dream in which 3 days were represented by three branches. In the baker's dream they were three baskets on his head. In Pharaoh's dream, seven years were represented by seven cows, and then by seven ears of corn. Then, too, we might remember at this point that God's plan of salvation, while it was worked out in the historical life, death, and resurrection of the Savior, applied to men of every age. Old testament saints were justified, forgiven, and received into God's grace on the basis of the promised Savior, even as we are today. So I would take this "1,000 years" to represent not so much a physical length of time, but rather an "age" during which the conditions described in

verses 1 to 6 apply. I would therefore apply it to the COVENANT of grace, as it was established in the redeeming work of the Savior.

At this point I would like to digress for a moment, and make an observation on the side. It regards John's expression, "set a seal over him," in verse 3. This is the same Greek word that Matthew used in Matt. 27: 66, where we are told that Satan's crew tried to "seal" Jesus in His tomb. How ironic, that while they were trying to seal Jesus in His sepulcher, Jesus was actually "sealing" their king in hell! Another interesting thing about a seal is that its power isn't in the strength of the seal itself--not in the strength of the wax--but rather in the authority behind it. Thus, Satan put all of the authority of Pilate and the Roman government behind his "seal" on Christ's tomb; and Jesus put His own divine authority behind His seal over Satan. Is it any wonder, then, that Satan is still shackled, while Christ is free?

Verses 4 to 7 describe the blessed conditions which apply to this age, because of Jesus' Victory over Satan. All of these conditions, too, apply perfectly to the Church under the New Covenant, as we shall see.

First, let us examine the people that John saw in this part of the vision, and see who were all included. He made three observations:

- 1) People sat on thrones, and were given the authority of judgment.
- 2) He saw the souls of martyred saints.
- 3) He saw those who faithfully refused to worship the "beast" or to receive his mark.

The first question we might ask is: "Are these three groups absolutely identical, as though the people on the thrones are only saints who had been previously martyred, specifically for refusing to worship the beast or refusing to receive his mark?" My answer is an emphatic "NO." I just don't think that the grammar allows that understanding. (Of course, this means that I do not consider the "First Resurrection" to be the fact that our souls are taken to heaven while the body is in the grave.) Just look at the grammar here, and observe the sentence structure. The "They" in the expression: "They sat upon them" is actually part of the verb form, and is the subject of the clause. (That clause, moreover, is not grammatically subordinate to "I saw.") The word "Souls," on the other hand, is in the Accusative case, and is the direct object of the verb, "saw." The expression: "Killed by ax" is a Perfect Passive participle, used as an adjective modifying the word "souls." Then, the "Whoever" of the third group of people is the subject of another clause, "Whoever did not worship the beast...", and this WHOLE CLAUSE is again the direct object of the verb "saw." As far as tenses are concerned, "They sat" is in the simple past (Aorist). "Killed by ax," as shown above, is a participle in the Perfect tense, and "Did (not) worship" and "Did (not) receive" are again in the simple past (Aorist) tense--not, as the King James Version would have us believe, in the Past-perfect tense. So, except for the Perfect participle, the tenses are all on the SAME LEVEL. The Perfect participle emphasizes that these saints had been killed and are now dead (as far as temporal life on earth is concerned.) Now, if John were identifying this group solely with those who didn't worship the beast, we would expect him to use a parallel grammatical construction. For example, he might have said, "I saw the souls of

those having been killed on account of their witness..., those having not worshipped the beast..." Or even, "I saw the souls of those who were 'given the ax' on account of their witness of Jesus and on God's Word's account, because they had not worshipped..." Instead, John uses three completely different grammatical constructions. And that just isn't the way that parallelisms work.

Now, I am not saying either that these three groups are mutually exclusive of each other, as though none of the throne-sitters were martyrs, or as though none of those who refused to worship the beast were sitting on the thrones. Rather, we should again let the situation itself suggest who is to be included in these various groups. In this connection, it would be well to remember that the "thrones" are a part of John's vision. They need not represent actual, physical thrones in the application. Thrones normally represent the position that goes with them: that of royalty, or authority. And here we are told that those sitting on them were given "judgment."

I suppose you could take this word "judgment" in either its subjective sense of acting as a judge, or in the objective sense of being "judged" --that is, redeemed, delivered, rescued by God. The word is found in both senses in the Scriptures. (One example of the latter use is in Isaiah 40: 27, "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel" 'My way is hid from the Lord and my judgment is passed over from my God?") Like every other student of Revelation I know of, though, I prefer the first meaning: the subjective sense. This is the normal first meaning of the word, and it makes good sense in this context.

So we have here a group of people who are given (presumably by God) the authority to exercise

judgment, during the era of the New Covenant. But what would such exercise of judgment be, other than applying the message of God's Law to the impenitent (calling sin by its name and condemning it), and also bringing the message of forgiveness and Life to those who have been crushed by the Law? This power has been given to the whole Church by Jesus Himself in Matthew 18, John 20, and similar passages.

The second group which John describes here are obviously the Church Triumphant with Jesus in Paradise. The third group is just as obviously the Church on earth, laboring faithfully amid temptation and persecution, remaining faithful to her Lord. (Remember, the verbs connected with this group are in the simple Past tense, not the Past-perfect.) So, in verses 4 and 5, John is describing the whole Christian Church, on earth and in heaven, under the New Covenant of God's grace.

These people, we are told, "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." In his vision John saw these people as living with Christ and exercising authority with Him. We do "live with Christ." In fact, we live in Christ, and He is ever with us, according to His promise. And with Him we are royalty: princes and princesses in His royal family.

John adds, "The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished." (As stated before, the King James word "again" is not found in the best text.)* The word "live" (ζάω),

*The only place I found any reference to it at all was in Thayer's Lexicon, where he says that αναζάω is found here in the Rec. Text. I found it in no Greek edition of the New Testament, even in a footnote.

of course, is used in the New Testament for spiritual as well as for physical life. In fact, in John's Books, the noun (ζωη) is used exclusively for spiritual or eternal life. (For physical life he uses the word ψυχη, and he is absolutely consistent about this.) A basic thought behind the word ζω is power and energy. (The "living God," for instance, is the God Who acts, Who accomplishes His will, in contrast to idols, who are dead and can accomplish nothing.) Also, of course, the word "dead" is used in Scripture in both the physical and the spiritual sense. Thus, John need not (at least, according to the definition of the words) be saying here that these "dead" were physically dead people in their graves. He could just as well be saying that they are still walking in spiritual death, as Jesus describes them in John 5: 24-25, and as Paul describes natural men in Eph. 2: 1. And this, of course, would perfectly describe the children of this world, even during the New Testament era.

John calls all of this the "First Resurrection." I find a couple of difficulties in referring this term specifically to our going to heaven when we die, as if to say that the "First Resurrection" consists in our soul's being taken to heaven at the time of our death. Forgive me if I seem to be too technical or seem to be splitting hairs. But is this life in heaven of our souls before the judgment really a "resurrection"? Actually, our soul never dies in the first place. It simply continues to live, only now with Christ, in His Home and in His joy. Nor, to my knowledge, does the Bible in any other place speak of this as a "Resurrection," or even as a "new life." But the Scriptures do, over and over again, speak of another "resurrection," or being raised from a "death" and being given a "new life." This happens, of course, when by God's grace, through the Gospel

and Baptism, we are brought to faith. And that life which we receive in Christ is ITSELF an eternal life (John 3:16; 11:26; 17:3). Jesus says in John 5:25, "Verily, verily I say unto you, the hour is coming--and NOW IS--when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; AND THEY THAT HEAR SHALL LIVE." These words cannot refer to the resurrection on Judgment Day, for Jesus says that this hour "now is." And furthermore, He is not there talking about a universal resurrection of all men, but says, "They that hear shall live." So He is talking about bringing spiritually dead people to a new, spiritual, and eternal life, a life which those "who do not hear" will not share. They are the "rest of the dead" who "lived not" under God's New Covenant.

Now let us see how all of this checks out with verse 6. Here John says that those who share this "First Resurrection" have certain attributes:

- 1) They are "blessed."
- 2) They are "holy."
- 3) They are free from the power and claim of the "Second death" (identified in verse 14 as the "lake of fire," or eternal damnation.)
- 4) They are priests of God and of Christ.
- 5) They shall live and reign with Him the thousand years.

Do all of these characteristics fit all believers, all those under God's Covenant of grace? Of course they do. Jesus often pronounced His believers blessed, as He did in Matt. 5, in Luke 10:23, and in Luke 11:28. Paul reminds us of how blessed we are under God's grace in Ephesians 1:3.

All Christians are also called "holy" in God's Word. Paul says of the Christians in Rome that

they are "called to be saints." And even in the case of the Corinthian Church--which in many ways was not what many would call a paragon of perfection--Paul writes, "For the temple of God is holy, which temple YE ARE." Also in Col. 3:12 and Hebrews 3:1, Christians on earth are called holy.

Nor is any Christian subject to the claim of the "Second death." The "Second death," as we have seen from John's words in verse 14, is eternal damnation. Jesus says in John 5:24, "He that heareth My Word and believeth on Him That sent Me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death into life." And in John 10:28 Jesus says of all His sheep, "They shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand."

In I Peter 2:5 and 9, Peter speaks of all his Christian readers as "an holy priesthood" (v. 5), and as "a royal priesthood" (v. 9). And John himself, in the first chapter of Revelation, says, "Unto Him That loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

So, what characteristic is here ascribed to these saints that does not belong to all believers of all times under God's Covenant of grace? None whatsoever!

The next part of John's vision has to do with the final judgment of Satan. It is my belief, though, based again on the tenses of the verbs, that verses 7 and 8, together with verse 6 and verse 5, are really part of John's personal (though inspired) commentary on his vision. He begins by saying, "And when the thousand years are fulfilled..." The word "when" (ὅταν) does not

in itself set a definite date, but usually has the sense of "whenever"--that is, it looks toward a future event without specifically setting the date. The word I translated "fulfilled" (τελεση) comes from the verb "to finish." We are all familiar with this word, I'm sure, from Jesus' sixth Word from the Cross. Here I take it to mean, "When God's Covenant of grace in history is fulfilled: when the last person is received into this grace, and all of God's gracious purposes are fulfilled on earth." However, just as the "1,000 years" itself is not necessarily a temporal concept but rather a reference to the Church under God's New Covenant, so also its fulfillment need not be tied to a calendar date, AS IF TO SAY THAT THE WORLD WOULD CONTINUE, BUT NO ONE WOULD BE BROUGHT TO FAITH AFTER THAT DATE. The Gospel will always be preached as long as this world stands, and it will always have its saving power. So I would rather suggest thinking of it this way: As God's purposes are fulfilled, as Satan has been unable to defeat the Gospel with his lies, he can now "do his worst" against God and His Church. Actually, he will only be playing into God's hands and only be heading toward his own eternal ruin.

Satan's role here is to deceive and gather the nations against God's Church. As Lenski points out (and correctly, I believe, since there is no "and" in the text connecting the verbs), the two infinitives in verse 8 are progressive--that is, the second is subordinated to the first. Satan will deceive in order to assemble the nations. His deception seems to be just this, that the Church--and with it, the Gospel--can be wiped from the face of the earth by one concerted effort. The word "nations" here is used, of course, in the sense of spiritual Gentiles: enemies of Christ, His Gospel, and His Church. It is the "World" in the spiritual sense. This is made clear by the use

of the names "Gog" and "Magog." These names had been used before by Ezekiel (Ezek. 38 and 39), where Gog is called a "chief prince of Meshech and Tubal," and his kingdom is called "the host of the Land of Magog." These are pictured by Ezekiel as a wicked king and his kingdom, who oppose God's saints and who would be smitten on the mountains of Israel by a rain of fire, hail, and brimstone. Here in Revelation they are identified with the "nations" which Satan would gather together against Christ and His Church. (Some Millennialists have tried by hook or by crook--mostly by crook--to identify these words with modern countries, like Russia. Both their exegesis and their scholarship in that regard is ridiculous.) All we really need to know is what is revealed here and in Ezekiel: that these are names given to personify the enemies of God, His Christ, and His Church, as they are gathered by Satan for the final showdown.

Verse 9 brings us back to the vision itself. Once more the action of John's vision unfolds; and its meaning is obvious. The nations literally swarm over the face of the whole earth, surrounding and beseiging God's People. The "Camp of the saints" and the "Beloved City," actual pictures in John's vision, represent the Church, God's "Zion." This, in actual fact, is not a locality, but a description of God's People, banded together by the common Bond of His Word and their common faith in that Word. The Church is spoken of as being surrounded by evil, beseiged by a hostile world. Whether this particular prophecy is being fulfilled right now, I do not know. Each generation can look about and see a world more obviously sinful, more blind to the Truth of the Gospel, more hostile to the Savior than its fathers. But we do not need to know, either. We just need to live in simple trust in our Savior, and in His

promise that no one--man or devil--shall pluck us from His hand; and in that faith we need to be prepared for the end of all things, when Satan will be finally defeated and judged, and we will be finally and eternally delivered from all his evil designs. To that end, we have a faithful and powerful God of grace.

Notice that it is GOD Himself who again defeats Satan and his armies. The Church, in this battle, doesn't have to lift a finger.

Notice, also, that in the last part of verse 10 John tells us about the damnation of Satan, the "beast," and the False Prophet. This, again, I take to be explanation, as he speaks in future terms, and his vision was actually in the past. So, in PLAIN, LITERAL LANGUAGE, he tells us that Satan will be tormented without rest forever. There is nothing symbolic in this language or its application: hell is eternal punishment.

This brings us to the last part of our chapter: John's vision of the final Judgment. The only words of explanation in these final verses are where John identifies the one Book as the Book "of Life." and where he identifies the "Lake of fire" as the "Second death." Most of the meaning of this vision is again obvious. But we might still consider a few of the details, together with their application. Remember, this vision, too, was literal as to what John saw, but is figurative in its application. We can see this again by John's two brief explanations, mentioned above.

Let us consider for a moment the "Books" out of which men were judged in this vision, and also the one separate "Book," the Book of Life. Of the "Books" (plural), we are told that the dead were judged out of the things which had been written in

them, "according to their works." So these books were apparently a record of men's lives, as seen and judged by God. As such, they represented the Law, as it judges us by our works.

The other "Book" is the Book of Life. Anyone not found written in this Book was condemned, while presumably anyone found written in this Book was justified. This Book can represent only one Thing, JESUS Himself, as He is revealed in the GOSPEL. If a man is found in Christ, he is not judged by the record of his works, but by the perfect Righteousness of Christ. Those who are not in Christ are judged by the Law and by their own "righteousness." And they are, one and all, condemned.

So actually, this vision of the Books tells us what all of Scripture tells us, that in Christ and in the Gospel we have forgiveness and eternal life. Outside of Him, in the Law, we would only be condemned. And those who refuse the Gospel will be judged by the Law.

Of course, we need not think as though God has actual physical books in heaven with all of our deeds recorded in them. His omniscience is record enough, and it is just as sure, just as complete, just as accurate, and just as permanent as any book would ever make it. What John saw was books. What these represented was God's way of dealing with us through His Law and through His Gospel.

We might consider one more exegetical point: Why John would say that "death AND HELL were cast into the lake of fire." The word used here for "hell" is "Hades." The Bible, as we all know, uses different terms to describe hell--"Hades," "Gehenna," "The Abyss," the "Prison," the "Lake of fire." All of these refer to the punishment of the wicked after death. And yet, each of these

terms has its own particular emphasis. One of these distinctions that seems to be consistent in the New Testament is that "Hades" describes the state of being of the unbeliever's soul before the last Judgment, while the body is in the grave, while "Gehenna" emphasizes the eternal hell after the Judgment. Lenski points out this distinction, and I cannot find any use of either term which would prove him wrong. Thus, for example, we hear of the rich man "in Hades" in Jesus' parable, because his body was still in the grave--he still had brothers living on earth. The same Savior admonishes us to "fear Him Which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna)." Also in this very chapter of Revelation, we are told that "death and Hades gave up the dead in them." So now, death and Hades, as part of Satan's kingdom, are also conquered, and with him they are put eternally aside, no more to claim the souls of men. Thus, Paul could write, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death," and "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY!' O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the Victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

As thus we see and apply John's visions in this chapter of Revelation, let us remember our Savior's words, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads:

FOR YOUR REDEMPTION DRAWETH NIGH!"

-- H. Vetter

THE DEEPENING LITURGICAL CRISIS

During the past year the theological journals of both seminaries* have raised reasoned protests against the products of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. Some districts of the Synod have joined their voices to this cry of alarm. The South Wisconsin District, indeed, has said what really must be said; at its June convention it urged the Synod to withdraw from plans for an inter-Lutheran hymnal and to concentrate on developing a new hymnal for our Synod (*Reporter*, July 5, 1976, p. 8; *The Lutheran Witness*, August 1, 1976, p. 22). There is unfortunately no alternative for an orthodox Lutheran church. The Synod, indeed, will violate its own constitution if it continues to use the ILCW products. For one of the conditions of membership in Synod is the "exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymn-books, and catechisms in church and school" (*Constitution*, VI, 4).

Yet the products of the ILCW are doctrinally impure in every case. We give but a few of the many possible examples:

- (1) They presuppose the validity of modern higher criticism and the so-called ecumenical movement (*Contemporary Worship* 6, pp. 4, 13-14, and *passim*).
- (2) They correspondingly reject what they call a "narrowly defined orthodoxy" (*CW* 6, p. 12).

*Of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

- (3) They assert or imply that some of the traditional Scripture lessons are incongruous with the Gospel, are irrelevant to modern man, are no longer "exegetically defensible," or are socially hazardous (CW 6, pp. 16-17).
- (4) They do not distinguish properly between the apocrypha and the canonical books of the Old Testament (CW 6, p. 23).
- (5) They commemorate as saints, not only unitarians and enthusiasts, but even the Antichrist himself (CW 6, pp. 43, 46, 40).
- (6) They teach the brotherhood of all mankind without respect to state of grace (CW 1, hymn 4).
- (7) They misrepresent the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell as a mere descent to the dead (CW 5, p. 13, and *passim*).
- (8) They turn the Sacrament into a sacrifice by reintroducing the Eucharistic Prayer rejected by Luther (CW 2, pp. 15-17; *The Great Thanksgiving, passim*). And it is no use making a proper proclamation of the Words of Institution an alternate track to the Eucharistic Prayer, as the ILCW has now evidently decided to do (*Reporter*, July 5, 1976, p. 1). The Commission may thereby meet the needs of the pastor who wants a hymnal in which he could choose orthodoxy for ordinary Sundays and heterodoxy for special feast days. But we hope that few in Synod will settle for seeing pure doctrine and impure side by side in their hymnal.

In other matters, moreover, which of themselves are adiaphorous, undesirable tendencies

which have usually been indicative of doctrinal impurity abound in the products of the ILCW. Again, this case is clear from but a few instances:

- (1) They prefer agreement with Rome to "loyalty to our heritage" and "reverence for the Western lectionary tradition" (CW 6, p. 14). This preference is understandable in view of the presuppositions noted above.
- (2) They omit from the marriage service any suggestion of the obedience which the wife owes to the husband (CW 3). This omission is a pathetic capitulation to the demands of the women's liberation movement. The church of our day must counter those demands more vigorously than ever before by emphasizing the proper role of husband and wife according to Scripture.
- (3) They direct that the bread and wine for the Eucharist be brought to the altar with the offering, thereby emphasizing the change from Sacrament to sacrifice (CW 2, p. 31).
- (4) They have renamed the Sundays "after Trinity" Sundays "after Pentecost" (CW 6, p. 6). These actions are worrisome in view of the apparent erosion of the doctrine of the Trinity in American Lutheran circles. A recent issue of *The Lutheran*, the official organ of the Lutheran Church in America, advocated the ancient heresy of modal monarchianism (June 2, 1976, p.29).

The important point which we must all grasp is that the ILCW materials are not generally sound productions which must now be cleansed of some unfortunate faults in order to produce a new hymnal. Quite to the contrary, the endeavours of the ILCW were from the start founded upon woefully unsound presuppositions. Hence, any resemblance between

its products and authentic Lutheran theology is purely coincidental. If, then, the Synod is convinced that it needs a new hymnal, it will have to begin its preparation all over again. And the Synod will have to commit this task to orthodox Lutheran theologians with a deep appreciation for the tried and tested forms of worship, lessons, and hymns whereby we have joyfully offered up our praises to God in the manner of our fathers and of their fathers before them. But the bad ship ILCW we must abandon as quickly as possible. It is no use trying to plug the holes; the hull is built of cheese-cloth.

-- Judicius

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