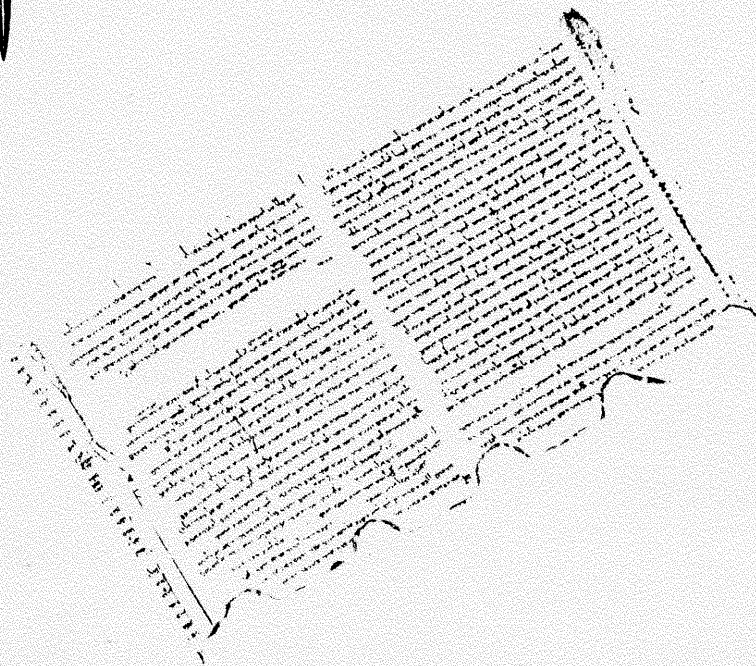
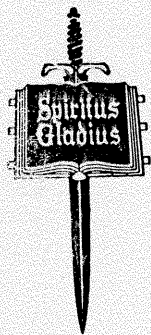


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## F O R E W O R D

This issue begins with a sermon by Professor J. B. Madson, which was delivered on Synod Sunday, June 20, 1984, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Sigurd Ylvisaker who served as president of Bethany Lutheran College from 1930-1950 and of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary from 1946-1950.

The timely essay on Prayer by Pastor Richard Newgard and the balanced approach to Apologetics by Pastor Steven Petersen were presented to the Pastoral Conference of Circuits 6 and 8, and we are pleased to present them in this issue.

The article by Dr. Koren, past president of the Norwegian Synod (now ELS), is well worth our study. He points out that doctrinal controversies, important as they are, carry with them the temptation to concentrate on them to the neglect of feeding God's people with His Law and Gospel. With true pastoral concern, Dr. Koren addresses the clergy of his day on what circumstances demand of them as faithful servants of the Lord. He describes the "Sardis Situation" that exists in many congregations and gives excellent counsel in dealing with the situation.

The paper on Abortion by Pastor Senkbeil contains some shocking information and suggests a pastoral approach to the problem.

We take this opportunity to wish our readers a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year in the Name of the Christ Child in whom alone we have lasting peace and joy.



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SERMON PREACHED AT THE ELS CONVENTION SERVICE  
COMMEMORATING THE 100th ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE BIRTH OF S. C. YLVISAKER

Held at Bethany Lutheran College  
Mankato, Minnesota  
Sunday, June 17, 1984

PRAYER: O blessed Triune God, in whose presence we gather for the 67th annual convention of our Evnagelical Lutheran Synod, let Thy Word and will so instruct and guide us that we take comfort and rejoice in our heavenly calling, and that we gladly serve Thee here upon earth. As we seek Thy will and direction for our work in Thy service, may we be heartened in our task by the memory of one of our esteemed spiritual fathers, the 100th anniversary of whose birth we commemorate these days. To that end renew in us the one thing needful. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Luke 10, 38-42

In Christ, fellow-redeemed festival worshipers, grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ!

The incident of our text is a familiar one to Christians. It should be especially familiar to Bethany alumni, for the three-paneled stained glass window off the nearby lobby of the administration building daily reminded them during their stay here of this little vignette in the early life and work of our Lord. That which transpired in the little village of Bethany on the slopes of the Mt. of Olives on this occasion is the basis for the name given to our small but beloved school - Bethany. And remembrance of the beginnings of our Bethany

is almost synonymous with the remembrance of Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker, through whose instrumentality the school was set on a course that would justify its name.

The Evangelist Luke here records that our Lord on one of His journeys had stopped at the home of some dear friends in this Bethany of Judea. Martha was the member of the family who welcomed Him, for she had likely made the invitation. At least she appears to have been in charge of the preparations for this welcome guest. But as it turned out, she was left alone with these preparations, a development that so upset her that she was unable to restrain her own expression of dissatisfaction -- not only because her sister Mary had left her with all the details of the occasion that were now making her so distraught, but also because the Lord himself was seemingly oblivious to this unequal state of affairs. And what she was led to say in the presence of both her sister Mary and the Lord Jesus was far from flattering to either one of them.

Her frustration, however - and her expression of it - became the backdrop for one of our Lord's most memorable utterances, that brief saying which was early adopted as the motto of our Bethany College and which is engraved on its seal in the original Greek of the Gospel of Luke: ἐνός ἐστὶν χρεῖα - "Of One Thing There is Need." This one thing is in distinct contrast to the many things that had so occupied Martha's attention that at the moment she had lost sight of what even she knew very well was to have higher priority.

Because of this incident Martha has been much maligned and Mary highly praised as a kind of super-saint. But Martha, too, remember, was a follower of the Lord, and the Apostle John in his account of the death of Lazarus reveals also Martha's



deep spirituality. On the occasion before us, however, she was deserving of the rebuke administered for it was she, at this moment, and not Mary, who had need for a reordering of priorities.

The Scripture's silence concerning any further response by Martha, as well as its record of her later joyful confession, lends itself to the understanding that Martha, too, profited from this occasion as much as did Mary, for she apparently gave heed to the corrective words spoken by Christ.

We are indeed left to wonder about what had been the specific topic of conversation between Mary and this special guest in their home, but on the basis of other recorded conversations of our Lord we can be quite confident that it was a rightful combination of Law and Gospel, so that Mary, too, would have no reason to leave this scene preening her spiritual feathers because of her own gode forhold - her good attitude or conduct - a Norwegian phrase that historically got in the way of a good confession.

What the Lord clarifies for Martha and for us all is that in our manifold efforts to serve the Lord one thing is never to be overlooked, and that is that we sit at His feet and hear His Word. That is a lesson which is not to escape us as individual Christians, as a congregation, as a Synod, as a Christian school. To listen to our Savior with believing hearts is the one thing needful.

Let us see that this is so because 1) Listening to our Savior is the highest form of worship of God, and because 2) It brings the highest form of blessing to man.

# I

Scripture shows clearly that from the early days in the Garden of Eden man's fall into sin was nothing else than his failure to listen to and give heed to the words of his Creator. From that time God has "at sundry times and in divers manners" spoken to men through His prophets, but men in their wilfulness have refused to hear what the Lord would say to them, choosing rather to serve Him in ways of their own devising.

Of the very first recorded sacrifices brought to the Lord, by Cain and Abel, it is said that Abel's act of worship pleased God because he heard and believed the Word of the Lord, whereas Cain's did not. As time went on, the pattern developed more clearly: there was always the remnant that listened to the Word of the Lord, and there was the vast number of those who failed to do so.

Even for God's people there was the constant temptation to grow deaf to the words of God -- to fail to give heed to them, yes, even to forget them. The Lord was not merely employing a rhetorical device when He prefaced many of His utterances through the Old Testament prophets with the injunction: "Now hear the Word of the Lord!" The fact is that by nature man is not willing to hear the Lord, and one therefore finds repeated words of lament such as those spoken through Jeremiah the prophet: "But you have not listened to me, declares the Lord." (25,7)

It wasn't exactly a matter of the people not being religious. Man is, in spite of protestations to the contrary, quite incurably religious, even in his unregenerate state; and because he readily listens to all sorts of other voices, he can come up with every imaginable idea of how he ought to worship God, or how he ought to be spared from worshipping Him.

The Israelites in the wilderness, with Moses away on Mt. Sanai receiving the written Law for his people, had little difficulty in tuning in to other voices and conjuring up their own private deity, which Aaron then fashioned for them in the likeness of a calf. There was surely need for a displeased Moses to stand in the gate of the camp then and cry out: "Who is on the Lord's side, let him come to me!" Exodus 32, 26.

When King Saul found it more convenient to disregard the express instruction of the Lord in his venture against the Amalekites, the Lord rebuked him through the prophet Samuel: "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the Word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king." I Samuel 15, 22. 23.

Again, through the prophet Isaiah God describes a wayward people thus: "I called but no one answered, I spoke, but they did not listen." But then, in stark contrast he has just said through the same prophet: "To this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my Word." Isaiah 66, 4 & 2.

Today is Trinity Sunday, when the church year reminds us especially of our God's attribute of trinity. The Holy Scriptures reveal the Triune God as a God who speaks, and who speaks in order to be heard. Blessed are they who hear Him, and cursed are they who do not. Through the long Old Testament period he spoke through His own chosen prophets and other representatives. When Christ had come and was transfigured in glory on the

mountain top, the Father declared from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" Matthew 17, 5. When the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews considers this development, he puts the Old Testament and the New Testament in perspective in his opening statement: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Hebrews 1, 1. For that reason the Son of God is called the Word. In His incarnation he is the ultimate expression of God's will and purpose for us. When He therefore speaks to us, as He does in His Word, we are to listen. To hear and receive this Son is the highest form of true worship of God.

## II

Hearing the words of our Savior God is the one thing needful also because it alone brings the highest form of blessing to man.

Now it must be understood that part of that Word merely sets the stage for the other. The Law is not the ultimate expression of God's will, but the Gospel is. Nevertheless, the Law, too, must be heard, not to establish men in their own righteousness, but to establish their desperate need for the righteousness of another. It is God Himself who speaks to us in His Law in such a way "that every mouth may be stopped and all the world become guilty before God." Romans 3, 19. This law preaching is necessary even after the individuals' conversation, for only the Law will keep the pesky old Adam within us at bay.

Great, however, as is the need of the Law of God for every one of us, there is one thing it cannot do. It cannot produce spiritual life nor can it sustain it. Paul writes very succinctly to the

Corinthians: "The letter kills." II Corinthians 3, 6. And "the letter" in this context is clearly the Law engraved in letters on tablets of stone.

But there is, thank God, a life-producing Word. It is the Gospel! It is denominated a mystery, because it is a truth unknown to man except God reveal it to him. It is called the means of grace, because by it is dispensed to us the gracious forgiveness of sins won for us by Christ. Luther points out an important distinction here when he says that while Christ won forgiveness for us on the cross, He does not dispense the forgiveness there; he dispenses it in the means of grace, the Word of His Gospel and the Sacraments, which are rightly called the visible Word.

While this word of the Gospel is termed the means of grace, it could as well be termed the means of life, for it is the only medium by which the Spirit creates and sustains the spiritual life of faith which lays hold of the saving promises of God. The Psalmist of old acknowledges this truth when he declares: "Thy word has quickened me," that is, given me life and sustained my life. (Psalm 119, 40) And Peter in New Testament times acknowledges the life-creating power of that Word when he declares that they who are God's people have been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, (namely) by the Word of God which lives and abides forever." I Peter 1, 23.

One of the most graphic descriptions of the life-giving power of the Word of the Lord is the prophet Ezekiel's account of his vision of the valley of dry bones. Having set Ezekiel down in the midst of this valley of dry bones, the Lord directs the prophet to speak God's word of life to these bones. Then he records: "So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them,

and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army." Ezekiel 27, 10.

The Apostle Paul likewise has made clear that we are God's children - that is, have received the full rights of the sons of God - by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3) and then again he declares that this "faith comes from the message heard" (Romans 10) the message that comes by the command of Christ.

There is no greater blessing than the privilege of being God's children and, with that endowment, being heirs of eternal life. When we understand that this blessing is bestowed upon us only by God's Word of Truth, the means of grace, how earnestly ought we not want to continue in the Word and pray with the hymn writer:

Speak, O Lord, Thy servant heareth;  
To Thy Word I now give heed.  
Life and Spirit Thy Word beareth,  
All Thy Word is Truth indeed.  
Death's dread power in me is rife;  
Jesus, may Thy Word of life  
Fill my soul with love's strong fervor  
That I cling to Thee forever.

(M. B. Landstad, L. Hymnary, No. 260)

Surely it is the Lord alone to whom we are ultimately indebted for the grace and privilege of hearing and believing that Word. But at the same time, how grateful we ought also be to those through whose instrumentality God has ministered this grace to us. Especially are we indebted to those who have been strong and valiant leaders in God's economy of grace. Such a man was Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker!

When we stated at the beginning that S. C. Ylvisaker was almost synonymous with the early

years of our Bethany, we simply wanted to point up the significant role that he played in the founding of the school, first as chairman of the association that was responsible for the acquisition of the property, and then as president of the school for twenty years of its important formative stages. His influence extended far beyond the walls of Bethany, for his theological leadership within the Norwegian Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference is readily acknowledged. Likewise in the realm of education and scholarship he had gained the healthy respect of his peers.

He was endowed by his Creator with great natural talent, but what sets him apart in our remembrance is that he employed those talents in the service of Him who had called him to proclaim the saving Gospel. As a school administrator in a Christian college he was responsible for implementing many of the Martha-type projects which are very necessary to the operation of an educational institution, and we are deeply grateful for the success of his efforts also in these areas. Yet his greatest value to us and the church at large was that he with Mary of old had not forgotten to sit at the feet of His Savior, where he, too, had learned to despair in his sins but also to rejoice in their full forgiveness in the Christ of God. We honor him best when we cling with him to the One Thing Needful. With Mary of Bethany, Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker was not to have that good part taken from him. If we continue to learn that lesson of far-off Bethany, the blessing which accompanies it will be ours as well, for

This one precious treasure that all else exceeds  
Gives joy above measure and fills all my needs!

(J. H. Schröder, L. Hymnary, No. 227)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

-- The Reverend Juul Madson  
Professor of New Testament  
Bethany Lutheran  
Theological Seminary,  
Mankato, Minnesota

### COMMEMORATIVE PRAYER

Most merciful God, our Heavenly Father, we bless and thank Thee for having visited us in our lost estate and having established the ministry of reconciliation among us. In Christ Thy mercies have been new unto us every morning and Thy compassion has not failed. As we make ready for our annual convention, where we together consider both what Thou hast done for us and what Thou wouldst have us do for Thee, we acknowledge with grateful hearts that 100 years ago thou didst bring into this world Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker to be in later years a leader in Thy church here in this world.

We thank Thee for having blessed him with knowledge and understanding of Thy Word of Truth, and for having granted him the important gift of rightly dividing the Law and the Gospel. According to the promise of Thy Word Thou didst fill him with The Holy Spirit, steadfastly to confess Thee before men, and zealously to labor for the furtherance of Thy kingdom. We acknowledge especially the efforts in behalf of Christian education to which Thou didst impel him, and we gratefully remember his devoted dedication to the one thing needful.



As we seek to continue the work which he was instrumental in beginning among us, may our memory of him serve to encourage and strengthen us for the task. Graciously hear us, O God of Truth and Salvation, through Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we join to pray:

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN . . .

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

-----

So long as God has given us one and one only means of so educating men that they will love and do what is "true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of Good report" (Phil. 4, 8), namely the Gospel of Christ, we as Christians have one recourse, one privilege, one great cause in behalf of our youth, the establishing and maintaining of Christian schools that their hearts and minds, their character and whole life might grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, the fountain of every good, every strength, every hope.

-- Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker  
"A Plea for Understanding"  
BLC Bulletin, October 1940

## PRAYER, ITS PRIVILEGE, IMPORTANCE, AND EFFECT

Certainly much has been written on the subject of Prayer and we can add nothing really new. But we can learn to pray as the disciples prayed, "Lord, teach us to pray." Our prayers often become mechanical and heartless. Perhaps sometimes we may even be trying to coax prayer to grow from the soil of thinking that after all God is ruling my life the way He pleases and all things will work for my good anyway, so why bother to pray. It is said that Luther once illustrated the evil days on which prayer had fallen by citing the case of a certain cleric: "A certain priestling prayed the alphabet early in the day and said: 'Lord, out of the letters of this alphabet all words are composed; do Thou compose that prayer out of them which pleases Thee.'"

A nephew of mine in Saudi-Arabia told recently how he is witnessing first hand thousands of Muslims praying five times a day. Many carry a little "prayer rug" and on the hour they kneel down and pray toward Mecca. It doesn't matter where they are or what they're doing, whether in an office or out on the street, if it's time to pray they kneel down and pray five times a day.

It seems strange that those who believe in a false, non-existent diety would utter useless prayers more than believers who know the true Triune God and believe their prayers are heard and answered.

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Presented at Circuit Pastoral Conference  
May 21-22, 1984

As Christians we believe Prayer is an important privilege with blessed results.

### PRIVILEGE

While prayer is a duty of every Christian, it is indeed not a burdensome duty but a blessed privilege. It is one of the privileges we have as royal priests, that we can go, yea are invited and urged to go directly to God for Jesus' sake and plead our own cause and also the cause of others. God not only encourages us to pray on our own behalf but He also tells us that He is anxious to hear from us with regard to others. "I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men." I Timothy 2:1. We have "received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." With the hymnwriter we sing:

"What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear--  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!"

In a sermon for Rogate Sunday based on John 16:23-30, Martin Luther listed several points that surround the use of this privilege of prayer.

First of all he says the chief thing and foundation and power of all prayer is God's promise. "He promises that it shall be given us if we ask; and besides He swears: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in my name.' He promises that we might be sure of being heard in prayer; yea, He censures the disciples for the reason that they are lazy and have not therefore

been praying. As if He would say: God is ready to give more quickly, and to give more than you ask; yea, He offers His treasures if we only take them. It is truly a great shame and a severe chastisement for us Christians that God should still upbraid us for our slothfulness in prayer, and that we fail to let such a rich and excellent promise incite us to pray. We let this precious treasure lie there, and seek it not, nor exercise ourselves to receive the power in such a promise."

The second requisite of true prayer is faith --that we believe the promise is true, and do not doubt that God will give what He promises. "Faith is a firm, undoubting confidence in God's promise that it is true. He who doubts and yet prays, tempts God; for he doubts in respect to God's will and grace. Therefore, his prayer is nothing and he gropes after God like the blind for the wall. John also speaks of this assurance of faith in I John 5:14-15: 'And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth; and if we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him.' John describes with these words how a truly believing heart is disposed in prayer, namely, that it is concerned about nothing else than that its prayer be heard, knowing that it has even then obtained its petition. . . Try it now and pray. Then you will taste the sweetness of God's promise. What courage and consolation of heart it awakens to pray for all things! It matters not how great and high the petitions may be. Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves: yet when he prayed, it did not rain for three years and six months, and when he again prayed it rained. I Kings 17:1; 18:45. Notice, here you see a single man prays and by his prayer he is lord of the clouds, of heaven and earth. So God lets us see

what power and influence a true prayer has, namely, that nothing is impossible for it to do."

The third requisite according to Luther is that "one must name definitely something that he brings to God or for which he prays; as for strong faith, for love, for peace, and for the comfort of his neighbor. One must actually set forth the petitions, just as the Lord's Prayer presents seven petitions. This is what Christ means by the words: 'If ye shall ask anything in the Father.' 'Anything,' that is, whatever you are in need of. Besides, He Himself interprets this 'anything' and says: 'That your joy may be made full.' That is, pray for all things you need, until you have acquired even all and your joy is made full; and his prayer will first be fully answered on the day of judgment."

Luther stated something in this sermon which at first seems rather strange. He said: "Singing Psalms and saying the Lord's Prayer is not called praying. These are instituted for children and untutored people, as exercises, to make them athletes in the Scriptures." However, it is understandable in the context of praying for specific things, his third point. For he adds this thought: "Your prayer, however, no one but yourself sees and feels in your heart, and you will truly know it, when it hits the mark."

The fourth requisite is that we ask in the name of Christ. Luther states: "This is nothing more than that we come before God in the faith of Christ and comfort ourselves with the sure confidence that He is our Mediator, through whom all things are given to us, without whom we merit nothing but wrath and disgrace. As Paul says to the Romans: 'Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand: and we

rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' Romans 5:2. It is praying aright in Christ's name, when we thus trust in Him that we will be received and heard for His sake, and not for our own sake."

In this connection we would quote from another of Luther's sermons on prayer: "Our prayers must not be founded nor rest upon ourselves or our own merits. . . The very reason we do pray is because of our unworthiness; and just through the fact that we believe we are unworthy and confidently venture upon God's faithfulness to His Word do we become worthy to pray and to be heard. . . Therefore, be on your guard all through life that you may never think yourself worthy or fit to pray or to receive; unless it be that you discover yourself to be a freebold character risking all upon the faithful and sure promises of your gracious God, who thus wishes to reveal to you His mercy and goodness. Just as He, out of pure grace, as promised you, being so unworthy, an unmerited and unasked hearing, so will He also hear you, an unworthy beggar, out of pure grace, to the praise of His truth and promise. This He does in order that you may thank not your worthiness, but His truth, by which He fulfills His promise, and that you thank His mercy that gave the promise."

Thus prayer is in the name of Christ, not in our own name, and consequently enhances the privilege of prayer. I am not worthy to pray in my name, because of my reputation, but purely and simply because and for the sake of Christ my Savior. It is a privilege granted to unworthy sinners!

The fifth requisite of prayer is that it must be conditioned by the will of God. Luther, in the above quoted sermon, states: "One should so act in this confidence of prayer as not to limit God

and specify the day or place, nor designate the way or measure of the prayer's fulfillment; but leave all to His own will, wisdom and almighty power. Then confidently and cheerfully await the answer, not even wishing to know how and where, how soon, how long, and through whom. His divine wisdom will find far better ways and measures, time and place, than we can devise, even should we perform miracles. So, in the Old Testament, the children of Israel all trusted in God to deliver them while yet there was no possible way before their eyes, nor even in their thoughts; then the Red Sea parted and offered them a way through the waters, and suddenly drowned all their enemies. Exodus 14."

God surely hears and answers every true prayer, but within or according to His will. If it were not within His will then man would rule the world and the result would be chaos and disaster. Our heavenly Father has a plan of love and wisdom for us. This includes invaluable blessings: forgiveness of sin, membership in His family, partnership in the building of His kingdom of Grace, eternal life in heaven. Within this area, prayer is answered. St. John writes: "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." I John 5:14. Everything that is essential to this will, such as faith, forgiveness, strength, power and wisdom to serve Him, will be granted without reservation. Everything that is incidental to this plan, such as food, clothing, health, freedom from distressing circumstances, must be left to the discretion of God, praying "If it be Thy will."

The supreme example of such conditioned prayer is the Savior Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. Three times He pleaded: "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me." The answer to this

most fervent prayer was Calvary and all its bitterness, because it was essential to God's plan for man's salvation. But with that answer came an angel who strengthened Him and a calm strength which even the Cross could not break.

So we may pass through the very experiences which we hoped to ward off through prayer--sickness, bereavement, financial losses, trying personal and home situations. When this happens, we have God's assurance that the cup does not contain poison, but medicine wisely chosen by the Great Physician of souls for our eternal welfare. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28. A higher good, in harmony with God's plan, may result: a purer, stronger faith; a deeper love; a more consecrated service to God and man. And throughout the trial there is given to us, as to St. Paul, grace that is "sufficient."

Any enumeration of requisites or "rules" for prayer do not detract from the privilege or even ease of prayer. Prayer for the Christian should come easy and be easy. What's hard sometimes is that we forget to trust the promises of God. We carry our burdens instead of "casting" them on the Lord. Prayer is a privilege; we can speak to our God and He will hear. Prayer is not communication that is bound by red tape, sent in triplicate, but as the hymnwriter says it is "the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try... the burden of a sign, the falling of a tear, the upward glancing of the eye, when none but God is near." Hymnary 361:2-3.

#### IMPORTANCE

Why is prayer important? Because first of all God has commanded it. A few of the many Scriptures



that command us to pray are I Chronicles 16:11, "Seek the Lord and His strength, seek His face continually."

Matthew 7:7, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Luke 18:1, "And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Ephesians 6:18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

I Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."

James 5:13, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any among you merry? let him sing psalms."

These and many other passages induced Luther to write in the Large Catechism: "My prayer is as precious, holy, and pleasing to God as that of St. Paul or of the most holy saints. This is the reason: For I will gladly grant that he is holier in person, but not on account of the commandment; since God does not regard prayer on account of the person, but on account of His word and obedience thereto. For on the commandment on which all saints rest their prayer, I, too, rest mine." (Triglot, p. 701)

Prayer is important because, secondly, it is endowed with promises of a faithful God who "is

able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." The command to pray is found in a setting of promises that is truly amazing:

Psalm 91:15, "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him."

Isaiah 58:9, "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am."

Isaiah 65:24, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

Luke 11:9, "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

John 16:23, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you."

James 5:16, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

These promises are from Him of whom the Bible says, "He is faithful that promised." Hebrews 10:23. They are an integral part of a covenant, a contract, of which God Himself assures us, "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee." Isaiah 54:10.

From The Abiding Word we quote: "In the midst of these covenant-supported promises the inspired Apostle Paul places the Cross as the supreme guarantee when he writes (Romans 8:32): 'He that spared not his own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' What does this mean? Nothing less than this, that God in His infinite love has already presented the greatest gift in His possession, Him who was nearest and dearest to Him, His only-begotten Son. All that we have a right to expect on the basis of the promises made for this life and that which is to come is small in comparison with what we have already received.

"Can God do more to reassure us?

"But God is not only willing. He is 'able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think' (Ephesians 3:20). There are no limits to His power. No situation may arise that will defy His ability to help." (Abiding Word, Vol. I, p. 252)

Prayer is important, thirdly, because it is a vital part of Christian life. We sing: "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, The Christian's native air." 361:4. Luther said that "what the pulse is to the physical life, that prayer is to the spiritual life; to cease to pray means to cease being a Christian." C.F.W. Walther wrote: "To be a true Christian and to pray are so inseparably united that a person cannot think of one without the other. As crying is the first sign of life in a newly born child, so prayer is the first sign of life in a reborn Christian. As soon as Saul was converted, we read of him, 'Behold, he prayeth.'"

It is important to pray because we need to pray.

In his day, 550 years ago, Luther wrote: "Open your eyes and look into your life and the life of all Christians, particularly the spiritual estate, and you will find that faith, hope, love, obedience, chasteness, and all virtues are languishing; that all sorts of terrible vices are reigning; that good preachers and prelates are lacking.... Then you will see that there is need to pray throughout the world, every hour, without ceasing, with tears of blood, because of the terrible wrath of God over men. It certainly is true that the need for prayer has never been greater than it is at this time, and it will be still greater from now on till the end of the world."

In a sermon on Matthew 6:5-6 Luther wrote: "We live in flesh and blood that is crammed full of wickedness of every sort. In addition, the world is always with us and against us, bringing all our misery and sorrow and trouble upon us. Besides, there is the devil everywhere around us, stirring up innumerable sects, factions, and corruptions, and driving us into unbelief and despair. Thus there is never any end to this, and there is no rest for us. We are surrounded by the kind of enemies who will not stop until they have knocked us down, and as individual poor men we are much too weak to withstand so many enemies. For this reason God says in the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 12:10) that He will give to those who are His own 'the Spirit of grace and supplication' to preserve them while they are on the field of battle and to guard and protect them against that wicked and pernicious spirit. Therefore it is the particular work of Christians, who have the Spirit of God, not to be lax and lazy but incessant and constant in their praying, as Christ teaches elsewhere (Luke 18:1)."

Yes, prayer is important and vital in our

Christian lives. We give expression to our many needs and respond to God's mercies. Conscious of our unworthiness we confess our sins to our offended God and plead forgiveness. Facing life's tasks and experiences in a difficult and dangerous world we implore Him for help and sustaining strength. Noting the miracles of divine wonder and power in nature we praise Him. Seeing His mercies and guidance in our lives we give Him thanks, above all for the Gospel of forgiveness. In doing so we see His "mercies new every morning."

Though we ascribe importance to prayer, we do not regard it as a means of grace. Some regard it as a means through which a wrestling soul gains the exhilarating feeling that he is converted, or through which a groping soul receives a supernatural revelation independent of the Word of God and the Sacraments as the Reformed and Charismatics.

Scripture clearly points to the Word and the Sacraments as the means through which the Holy Ghost creates and sustains faith in man. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17. This revelation is adequate for all purposes of spiritual life. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." II Timothy 3:16-17.

Lutherans in distinguishing between the means of grace and prayer speak of the one as the hands of God extended to man, and the other as the hands of man extended to God. We do well to maintain this distinction.

#### EFFECT

How can we adequately measure the effect of

prayer? Some say there is no effect. The universe is under the control of fixed laws representing the highest wisdom of the Creator. It is therefore presumptuous for men, an insignificant speck in this vast world, to suppose that through prayer I can induce God at some point to interfere with this world in order to help me. But their objection would make God a prisoner of His own creation, reducing Him to a mechanic who can do no more than watch the world operate as a machine in accordance with its own inherent laws, deaf to the cries of man. This objection further invalidates and denies all that God promises regarding prayer, and the record of answered prayer in Scripture. There is no story more intriguing than the story of prayer. Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, Peter, John, Paul, and many other prayed. In answer the earth, the sea, the sky, the human body, the animal kingdom, yes, even death, suspended their laws. Add to this the answered prayers of Gideon, Hannah, Samuel, Solomon, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, Ezra, Zacharias, and the early Church and the record is even more astounding.

And then there is Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. Luther wrote of her: "She asked for nothing in her prayer for her son except that he might be liberated from the madness of the Manichaeans and be baptized. Meanwhile the solicitous mother was intent on finding a girl who would take him in marriage if it were possible to reclaim him in this way. But the more she prayed, the more stiff-necked and stubborn the son became, and her prayer seemed to her to have become a sin. But when the time for hearing her solicitous prayer had come (for God usually defers His help), Augustine is not only converted and baptized but devotes himself entirely to the study of theology and turns out to be such a teacher that he shines in the church to this day...Monica had never asked for this.

It would have been enough for her if her son had been freed from error and had turned Christian. But God wants to give us greater blessings than we can ask for, as long as we do not weaken in our prayer."

As for his own prayers, Luther stated: "As often as I have earnestly prayed, I have certainly been very freely heard and have received more than I had desired. To be sure, at times our Lord God has delayed a little while; yet He has heard. What is delayed is not denied."

Eddie Rickenbacker tells how he and his companions, adrift in the Pacific, prayed for rain. They saw a shower pass by a short distance away. As they kept praying, it turned against the wind and overtook them, providing the water they needed to preserve their lives.

In the June 1983 issue of the Lutheran Synod Quarterly, Dr. Ernest Bartels related an answer to his prayer when he was pastor of three rural churches in Wisconsin. There had been no rain for six weeks during the early summer prime growing season. Several parishioners requested that he pray for rain on the following Sunday. The Saturday evening forecast was "no rain in sight." He offered prayers for rain at the two churches but during the sermon at the third church it began to rain, very hard, and it rained for three days! The whole of Dr. Bartels dissertation in this and previous issues of the Quarterly dealt with A Lutheran Understanding of the Will and Providence of God. His discussion of the length of life being immutably fixed and yet shortened or lengthened fits well in the context of prayer.

Surely the list of Answered Prayers from the people of God would be endless, even according to

their standards of measurement. According to God's they would be even more endless because of seemingly unanswered prayer. There are many times when the experiences of life seem to contradict the promises of God. The distressed heart cries out time and again, but there is silence. It re-echoes the plea of the Messiah rejected by man and forsaken by God: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." Psalm 22:1-2.

So there are a vast number of prayers that seem to go unanswered. But this number is greatly diminished when the believer remembers that prayer is conditioned by the will of God and then submits to that will and prays "Thy will be done."

But there are also prayers that truly are not heard or answered because of wilful sin. Scripture speaks clearly on this matter:

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear." Isaiah 59:1-2.

"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law, even his prayers shall be an abomination." Proverbs 29:8.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Psalm 66:18.

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye



have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity ...Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer." Proverbs 1:24-26, 28.

"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." Proverbs 21:13.

"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." James 4:3.

These and other passages of Scripture, the unanswered prayers of obstinate Israel, of a stubborn Saul (I Samuel 28:6) warn us not only that prayer may not be heard, but that sin needs to be repented of before it finally separates the sinner from God forever. Our sin is at the root of all of our problems. Our sin must come to the surface. It must come to the surface in the presence of a forgiving God, who for Jesus' sake is able to say: "Come now and let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah 1:18. David said, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Psalm 32:5. The result was the peace of God which passes all understanding.

By prayer we are kept from temptation. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Matthew 26:41.

By prayer we are kept from worry. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Philippians 4:6.

By prayer we can experience joyful living. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." John 16:24.

The Christian who prays faces life's tasks and opportunities, its ordinary experiences and its crises calmly, free from the frictions and frustrations that can sap our souls. He draws from above a power that is adequate for every need. In response to specific prayers he time and again receives help that is denied the prayerless man.

Our Savior, who also was true man, burdened with a schedule that defied human strength, took time to retire into solitude for prayer. Luther said that at times he was so busy that he required three hours of prayer a day! Walther was a man of prayer. His calm strength and historic achievements in the kingdom of God were possible only to a man of prayer.

We need not belabor the fact that there are many blessed effects of prayer. What we might remember is that there are also many hindrances, not least of which is our own prideful nature and the attitude of many "What good does it do to pray?" But hindrance can also come from those who believe it does a lot of good to pray and it doesn't matter who the prayer is directed to or what the prayer says.

In the May 1984 issue of American Health, there is an article, "The Faith Factor," by a Dr. Herbert Benson, a cardiologist at Boston's Beth Israel Hospital. In this article Dr. Benson previews his latest book, Beyond the Relaxation Response, which explores the power of faith, meditation and prayer in healing. Research shows it can lower blood pressure and even decrease cholesterol. The process seems quite simple. Just pick

a word or phrase short enough to say silently as you exhale normally, six or seven words. This is like a "mantra." He suggests Catholics could take something from the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, or Prayer for the Pope. Protestants could pick a line from a Psalm, words of Jesus, etc. Jews, "Shalom." Muslims, "Allah." Hindus or Buddhists, something from the Hindu scriptures or Mahatma Ghandi. But then he also says, "If you don't affirm a traditional religious faith, the faith factor can still be a healing part of your life. Research has shown that any neutral sound or word can elicit the relaxation response. So even if you deny that religious or philosophical convictions are valid at all--you can get significant benefits from the faith factor. Simply pick a word like "one." Strongly affirming the power of the response itself may be sufficient to trigger the faith factor... There seems to be a similar potential for enhancing health, even though the content of the focus words or prayers is different."

Dr. Benson concludes his article by saying: "Frequently my patients say 'Thank you, doctor, for telling me to pray again. I wanted to but felt funny about it.'"

All of this seems to be saying that prayer has a psychological effect. It quiets the mind. It's a good relaxer, and if we can get the mind and spirit of man relaxed and stable there will be beneficial effects on the body. But, a mantra? Maybe a hot shower, a game of golf, or a good night's sleep would do just as much as exhaling repetitive sounds. We know that no "mantra" can or shall take the place of our almighty, gracious God who gladly hears and answers the prayers of His people.

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding

abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen." Ephesians 3:20.

-- The Reverend Richard Newgard  
Pastor of Mt. Olive Lutheran  
Church, Mankato, Minnesota.

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#### LUTHER ON PRAYER:

##### Why and How to Pray

But elsewhere I have often taken up and discussed the component parts and the characteristics which every real prayer has to possess; therefore I shall only summarize them briefly here. They are as follows: first, the urging of God's commandment, who has strictly required us to pray; second, His promise, in which He declares that He will hear us; third, an examination of our own need and misery, which burden lies so heavily on our shoulders that we have to carry it to God immediately and pour it out before Him, in accordance with His order and commandment; fourth, true faith, based on this Word and promise of God, praying with the certainty and confidence that He will hear and help us-- and all these things in the name of Christ, through whom our prayer is acceptable to the Father and for whose sake He gives us every grace and every good.

## "THE ROLE OF APOLOGETICS IN LUTHERAN THEOLOGY"

This topic, "The Role of Apologetics in Lutheran Theology," is a very broad one, and one which may be approached through several avenues. I do not intend this paper to be a historical review of this particular discipline of theology, nor of the various apologies advanced in the past or in our own day. Furthermore, I do not intend to evaluate the validity or the usefulness of any apology, nor to debate whether or not there is a role for apologetics to play in Lutheran theology.

I am afraid my study of the role of apologetics in Lutheran theology has raised more questions for me than it has resolved. This paper will likely not be the final word on the topic, because it seems that the conclusion reached in it is a riddle. I had intended, at the outset of my study, to determine the exact nature of the relationship between human reason and Christian faith. Instead, I have uncovered what is for me a mystery. Briefly summarized, it is this: The sinner is saved through Christian faith. Christian faith rests on the Gospel promise, not on human reason. But, the events of the Gospel are all anchored in human experience. These three points will serve as the outline for this paper.

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## DEFINITIONS

The term "apologetics" derives from the Greek word *apologeomai*, meaning "to speak against," or more commonly, "to speak in defense," and *apologia*, meaning "a speech in defense, or a defense." (Liddell & Scott, GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON)

The term is variously used and defined. "Christian Apologetics has for its object the defense of Christianity. An apology is a particular defense of the Christian faith, especially with reference to a definite attack." (Lindberg, APOLOGETICS, 17) Apologetics is "that branch of theology concerned with the defense of the Christian truth..." (Montgomery, "Lutheranism and the Defense of the Christian Faith 2, 1970 Reformation Lectures, Bethany College) "Christian apologetics is concerned with a defense of the truthfulness of the Christian religion." (Pinnock, SET FORTH YOUR CASE, 3) The word, thus used, generally has a defensive connotation.

Some, however, seem to use the term with a more positive connotation. Apologetics is "the reasoned commendation of Christianity to persons interested, but not yet convinced." (Dodd, THE APOSTOLIC PREACHING AND ITS DEVELOPMENT, 4) "Christian apologetics is the scientific vindication of the truth and absoluteness of the Christian religion against unbelief." (LUTHERAN CYCLOPEDIA, 40) "The Christian apologist is in a position to show any rational man, particularly if he has a well-trained mind, that after all it would appear more reasonable to accept the claims of Christianity as true than to reject them as false. But, he must ever keep in mind that his real business is not to demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion to the unbeliever, but to uncover the insincerity of unbelief." (PIEPER, CHRISTIAN DOGMATICS, Volume 1, 110)

For my own purposes in this paper, I will refer to apologetics as the use of human reason (not excluding any of its aspects, such as the natural knowledge of God, logic, the philosophical arguments for God, etc.) and or human evidence (not excluding any of its aspects, such as archeological findings which demonstrate the veracity of the Scriptural record, extra-Scriptural literature which refers to or verifies Scriptural assertions, the evidence for the reliability of the Old and New Testament canon, etc.) in regard to the proclamation of the Gospel.

### THE GOSPEL PROMISE

In its most simple sense, the Gospel is the "good news about Jesus," (Acts 8:35) The *evangelion* which Philip shared with the eunuch was undoubtedly the message that Jesus of Nazareth was in fact the "sheep led to the slaughter" in the place of a worldful of sinners, Philip and the eunuch included. This is the Good News, the best news of all, that the life and death of One counts for others.

It is very important for us to recognize that the Gospel is a promise. It is a great and grave promise, a personal commitment to man on the part of the Only God, the Creator-Owner-Ruler of all things. The Gospel is the promise that on the basis of the life and death of Jesus the Christ, God, according to His grace, declares sinners innocent. Through faith in His declaration, all the benefits of innocence before God (the loving and blessed presence of God now, at death, eternally) accrue to the sinner.

"The Gospel is, strictly speaking, the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ." (APOLOGY, IV, 43)

Although there are many important aspects of the Gospel which might invite our attention, such as the active and passive obedience of Christ, the nature of the righteousness which God credits to the sinner, the power, gifts, and fruit which accompany the reception of God's declaration, and more, I wish to concentrate on the "promissory" aspect of the Gospel. We must concern ourselves with this point, because this paper will deal with the matter of faith, and "faith" is always related to "promise," not proof.

For example, the Gospel tells us that God loves the world. But to the eyes of man, the vision of God's love is often clouded by the smoke of war. For the person suffering the agony of a painful illness, where is the evidence that God loves the world? It is promised. The Gospel tells us that our sin is forgiven and forgotten by God. But to the eyes of man, the confidence that one is considered by God to be innocent and welcome in heaven is often obscured by one's own personal tendency to continue sinning. For the sinner crushed by failure, where is the evidence that he is sinless? It is promised. Most astonishing is God's assurance that we will one day rise from death. This is contrary to all the evidence man sees. It is promised.

The point is simple. God's Good News to man about grace, forgiveness and new life is a promise. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." (I Corinthians 2:9) The Gospel is too fantastic for man's feeble imagination. It is beyond man's ken. It is God's plan, His doing, and man's role in it is only as beneficiary. Earthly evidence, human experience, may seem to contradict the Gospel promise, and that is exactly why the Gospel is apprehended by faith.



Jesus calls us to "believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). Paul refers to the well-known patriarch, Abraham, as one counted righteous because he "believed God" (Romans 4:3). The writer to the Hebrews summarizes: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1)

The "promissory" nature of the Gospel divorces it to a great extent from the kind of examination by which purely human knowledge is tested. We speak rightly of the self-attestation of the Scriptures, and of the personal assurance we have of our own Christian faith, (II Corinthians 12:5, I John 3:14) but these are subjective, and of value only to the person experiencing them. In fact, they are personally valid only for the one who already believes their reality.

The Gospel promise is like all other promises in that it ceases to be a promise once it is proved. In this case, the promise will be proved on the last day.

But, the Gospel promise is unlike all other promises in that it does more than point to a reality which must be believed in order to be appreciated. The Gospel promise is actually capable of creating the very faith which is necessary to the apprehension of what is promised. In other words, the Gospel promise is both offerative (it offers sinners the benefits of Christ's life, death, and resurrection) and operative (it creates the faith through which the sinner personally receives those benefits). This point leads us into the next section.

#### THE GOSPEL PROMISE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

It may seem at first glance that we have delivered the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith which trusts its promise into the realm of the

imaginary. Indeed, some contend that faith is the belief in something that one knows is not true! Ambrose Bierce defined faith as "belief without evidence, in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel." (THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY)

These caricatures of Christian faith are unworthy. For although faith, by its very nature, is connected to the concept of promise, Christian faith is by no means senseless when we take the work of the Holy Spirit into consideration.

The Holy Spirit of God creates Christian faith.

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit....God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation.  
(LARGE CATECHISM, Second Part, 38)

Peter speaks to us, whose "faith and hope are in God," and says we "have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." He then explains that "this is the word that was preached (*evangelisthen*) to you." (I Peter 1:21, 23, 25) He connects the preaching of the Gospel promise with the creation of Christian faith, much as Paul does: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)

"To obtain this (justifying) faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as

through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel." (AUGSBURG CONFESSION, V, 1,2)

"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit," (II Corinthians 11:2) and for this reason it is necessary that the Spirit bring us to faith. Dead in sin, separate from God by nature, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (II Corinthians 2:14) Paul admits, for all of us, "not that we are competent of ourselves to judge anything we do, but our competence comes from God." (II Corinthians 3:5)

Attesting to natural man's inability to come to faith by his own power, the Formula contends:

The Holy Spirit is present with this Word (the Gospel) and opens hearts so that, like Lydia in Acts 16:14, they heed it and thus are converted solely through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, for man's conversion is the Spirit's work alone. Without his grace, our 'will and effort,' our planting, sowing, and watering are in vain unless 'he' gives the growth. Christ also states, 'Apart from me you can do nothing.' In these few words he denies all power to free will and ascribes everything to the grace of God, so that no one might boast in the presence of God (I Corinthians 9:16). (FORMULA OF CONCORD, Epitome II, 5,6) Man should hear this Word, though he cannot give it credence and accept it by his own powers but solely by the grace and operation of God the Holy Spirit. (FORMULA, Epitome II, 19) cf. AUGSBURG CONFESSION, XVIII, 2,3.

Faith is a gift God bestows on the sinner. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)

The preceding sections, although they do not break any new theological ground, are necessary to this paper. It is imperative for us to understand the unique nature of the Gospel: the promissory nature of God's announcement that for the sake of Jesus of Nazareth, the One who lived, taught, healed, died, rose from death, and ascended to His Father over 1900 years ago, the sin of the 20th Century sinner is forgiven.

That Gospel is apprehended, made our own personal reality, through faith. If we overestimate the value and benefits of apologetics, we may be in danger of compromising one of the three great "*solas*" of our theology, *sola fide*. We may mistakenly elevate human reason to a position denied it by the Scriptures.

Reason and faith belong to two entirely different spheres. Reason is therefore incompetent to assess or judge God's revelation, which can only be believed; and according to its own principles, reason must refrain from passing judgment in spiritual matters. Furthermore, the reason of the natural man is utterly corrupt. Corrupt reason regards the things of God as foolishness (I Cor. 2:14), and nothing of God's revelation would remain if reason were to have her way. (R. Preus, THEOLOGY OF POST-REFORMATION LUTHERANISM, VOL 1, 261)

Apologetics, dealing as it does with matters of human reason, must be conducted in light of the fact that "the faith that justifies, however, is

no mere historical knowledge, but the firm acceptance of God's offer promising forgiveness of sins and justification." (APOLOGY, IV, 48)

True, man does have free will and the ability to know and learn many things. But the axiom that this knowledge pertains to things below him, still holds.

To conclude the first two sections, we may say that the Gospel, God's promise to forgive sins for the sake of Jesus, is apprehended by faith, the creation of the Holy Spirit, through the Means of Grace.

#### THE GOSPEL PROMISE, CHRISTIAN FAITH, AND HUMAN REASON

Now we come to what may be considered to be the mystery of apologetics. The events of the Gospel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, are part of recorded human history, and are therefore open to reasoned investigation and verification. Speaking of the events of the Gospel, specifically the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul says to Festus, "I am convinced that none of this has escaped his (King Festus') notice, because it was not done in a corner." (Acts 26:26) As a matter of fact, the Gospel events are anchored in reality. They are presented in the Bible as such. Gospel writers refer to themselves as witnesses, eye-witnesses. (Acts 5:32, II Peter 1:16) They present their case in such a way as to challenge the investigation of their readers.

Yes, the announcement that sin is forgiven is a promise. It is made one's own through faith, despite what evidence to the contrary (humanly speaking) may exist. But the events upon which the promise is based, the living, dying, rising,

ascending of Jesus are not of a promissory nature, surely not to the writer or those of their day, and not to us as we read their accounts in the Bible.

Just as there is a danger in overestimating the value of apologetics (a danger which may result in giving up the *sola fide*) there is also a danger in underestimating the value of apologetics (a danger which may result in giving up the *sola scriptura* by rendering the accounts and records for which New Testament writers took their stands as somewhat of secondary value to the Christian).

This would not be right, for the Word through which the Holy Spirit works to create faith must be truthful and accurate.

The power of the Word, at least in part, stems from its truthfulness. God deals with men in a way that man, at least in part, can understand and can compare with his dealings with other men and things about him. God deals with man in His Word in a truthful and reliable way, even according to human standards.... Since among men an idea derives its power in part from its correspondence with the facts in the case, so in the Gospel of Christ its power is related to its truthfulness and factuality. To argue, as some do, that the Gospel would have fully as much power if Christ had not risen from the dead, or even if there had been no Christ at all, or that the Bible is so unreliable that we can really know nothing at all about Him, is to take a position that is contrary both to the way in which Scripture presents things, and to

the way in which the human mind works.  
(J. Preus, IT IS WRITTEN, 67-69)

The failure of modern theology is based in part upon its fear that the assumed "un-reality" of the Gospel events will be unmasked, shaking the foundation of faith. Therefore, modernism contends that the permanent validity of the Gospel cannot be related to the Gospel events, and argues that the Gospel cannot be identified with the acts and facts recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and Peter.

But the peculiar, astounding events of the life of Jesus are a constant referent in the New Testament presentation of the Gospel. Dodd, THE APOSTOLIC PREACHING AND ITS DEVELOPMENT, notes that in five of Peter's sermons on the Book of Acts (Acts 2:14-39; 3:13-26; 4:10-12; 5:30-32; 10:36-43), and in Paul's sermon there, as well as in several written presentations (Acts 13:17-41, Galatians, 1:3,4; Galatians 3:1; I Corinthians 15:1-7; Romans 8:34), among the various factors present in each is the death of Jesus, and a dominant feature in most is the resurrection.

What does this mean to us? That Paul and Peter apparently appealed to the historical facts (which in their day could be checked quite easily by their audiences) upon which the promissory nature of the Gospel is based. The most obvious case might be I Corinthians 15, where Paul refers the skeptic to the "more than five hundred of the brothers...most of whom are still living" who actually saw the resurrected Christ.

Does this mean that the confrontation with the historical facts about Christ is to be credited with the creation of Christian faith? No. Matthew says of the eleven disciples who saw Jesus

after His resurrection, that "some doubted." (Matthew 28:17) This fact is very important to understanding apologetics, conversion, and faith. Pieper speaks of *fides divina* and *fides humana*. (Pieper, CHRISTIAN DOGMATICS, Volume 1, 311) It is possible to recognize the historicity and reality of the acts and facts of the life of Jesus (*fides humana*), and remain unregenerate (without *fides divina*).

That notwithstanding, the fact remains that the story of Jesus is one which is based on real events, and that these events are often pointed to in the preaching of the Gospel. Beyond this, we can say that the reality of the Gospel events stands regardless of our faith or lack of faith in them. (Perhaps there is a similarity to the real presence in the Sacrament of the Altar, where even the unbeliever receives the body and blood of Christ.) Doubting or believing the reality of the events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection does not affect their reality. But only through faith does the promise which God attaches to the Gospel events have meaning for the individual.

Sinners are declared innocent on the basis of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. If the Holy Spirit did not present it in that way (if for example, He were to teach that God declares the sinner innocent simply because He is very, very nice, or that God forgives sin as a matter of course because he has some grandfatherly characteristics), then the acts and facts of Christ would have little bearing on our soul's salvation.

But the Bible teaches that God in His grace forgives me because Jesus has actually lived a perfect life (Romans 5:19; Galatians 4:4,5; Matthew 5:17), actually died in my place, suffering the



punishment I deserve (Isaiah 53: 4-7; Galatians 3:13; Romans 5: 6-8, and actually was raised from the dead for my justification (Romans 4:25).

Because these historical events, parts of a reasonable, experiential, evidential reality, have a bearing on the sinner's salvation, the riddle arises. Christian faith trusts God's promise. Promise implies a lack of human evidence, else it is no longer promise, but proof. But the promises of God are anchored in historical evidence: the life, death, resurrection, etc., of Christ. The Gospel promises are anchored in that kind of reality which is open to investigation, open for apology.

It is possible that trustworthy evidence entirely outside inspired Scripture could testify to the occurrence of the Gospel events. That evidence would be no less valid, no less true, than what Scripture teaches. If a statement is true, it is true whether found in the Bible or the archeology textbook. Of course we are speaking now of the certainty of Gospel events, not of the faith-producing power of the message which convinces that these events have profound meaning for the sinner. For information about Christ to have a faith-creating effect, it must contain the "for you," "for the forgiveness of your sin" sense.

Beyond this, several questions remain. Can we separate the Gospel promise from the events upon which it rests? Does one believe the Gospel promise because one knows the events are true? (An affirmative answer may lead to an unhealthy preoccupation with proofs, and place the *sola fide* in jeopardy.) Does one accept the record of the events as accurate because one believes the Gospel promise? (An affirmative answer may tend toward fideism, and place the *sola scriptura* in jeopardy.)

The point may be illustrated by the following two positions. First:

"It is desperately important not to put ourselves in such a position that the event-nature of the resurrection depends wholly upon 'the faith.' It's the other way around. The faith has its starting point in the event, the objective event, and only by the appropriation of this objective event do we discover the final validity of it. The appropriation is the subjective element, and this must not enter into the investigation of the event. If it does, the Christian faith is reduced to irrelevant circularity." (Montgomery, HISTORY AND CHRISTIANITY, 107)

Second: "If I feel a need to defend what I believe, then I don't really believe it yet."

The riddle remains. Christian faith is founded on God's Gospel promise to forgive sin for the sake of Jesus. This faith is created by the Holy Spirit, independent of proofs, evidence, and human reason. But the promise itself is intimately connected, inseparably tied, to events which are subject to proofs, evidence, and human reason.

Is it legitimate for us to use apologetics in regard to the Gospel? The appeal to proofs, evidence, and human reason is proper if the goal is to demonstrate the historicity of the events of the Gospel. It would be a hollow kind of Christian faith (if it is that at all) which would believe that sin is forgiven despite the so-called "inaccuracy" of the New Testament record of the Gospel events. It is inconsistent, at the very least, to believe the Gospel promise is valid, while holding that the event upon which that promise is based is fictional.

The apologist must have a clear understanding of the audience to which his efforts are directed, as well as a definite goal which his apology is to accomplish. If he intends to overwhelm an unbeliever with evidence, and thereby convert him, he has invested apologetics with something it has not. If, however, he intends to demonstrate that the historical events on which the Gospel promise rests are credible, then he is following a course which New Testament evangelists have charted.

-- The Reverend Steven Petersen  
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#### AN ILLUSTRATION:

A good, active barber must keep his thoughts, mind, and eyes closely on the razor and the hair and must not forget where he is with his stroke and shave. But if he wants to gossip freely at the same time or let his thoughts or eyes go elsewhere, he may well cut off a man's mouth and nose and his throat besides. Thus every matter, if it is to be done well, calls for the attention of the whole person, with all his senses and members, as they say: *Pluribus intentus, minor est ad singula sensus* (He who thinks about many things thinks of nothing and does nothing that is good). How much more does prayer, if it is to be a good prayer, require a heart that is undistracted, entirely and solely given to its devotion!

## THE REQUIREMENTS WHICH THE PRESENT CONDITION OF OUR CHURCH BODY DEMAND OF OUR CLERGY

Grace, mercy and peace in Christ Jesus, our Lord!

It is with a deep feeling of responsibility that I now proceed to fill the request made of me; namely, to suggest the main subject for our deliberation and also at the same time to introduce it. My proposal is that we seek to clarify for ourselves the requirements which the present condition of our church body demand of our clergy.

It is my humble prayer to God that through His Holy Spirit He will give the right insight into what is demanded and true earnestness in striving to fulfill it.

Why have we made the journey from our congregations and come together for a conference? We have done it in order to deliberate on how we can serve our congregations in the best manner. We must have this as a chief purpose in all our discussions--even when concerned only about outward arrangements and provisions. Otherwise we would have no right to be here. This must serve as a reminder and a warning in all matters which we discuss.

If we are to be able to serve our congregations, we must know them. We must see their condition, situation and circumstances in the light of God's Word. If we are to be able to do this we must in turn also know the signs of the times, the spiritual atmosphere in which our congregations and we ourselves live. Only then can we

rightly understand and pass judgment on the various phenomena which face us so that we see what these require on our part. This, however, we will not be able to do unless we have an eye open to God's dealing with us. Just as a child learns to see himself and his behavior in the right way only after the father or the mother have reminded and corrected him, so also it is with the children of God, Christ's disciples. Therefore, when God places His hand upon us in severe discipline--as He has in the last seven years--it is important for us not only to feel the discipline but also to learn to know and understand God's purpose so that we use it in a proper way.

By the prophet Jeremiah God complains: "In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction" (Jeremiah 2:30a). The prophet repeats the complaint (5:3): "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return." Isaiah complains in chapter 9, verses 13-16: "For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts. Therefore the Lord will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and honorable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed."

As we now look at conditions in our dear Norwegian Synod, we must surely be dismayed and appalled. All around us we see deluded leaders with large flocks following them, separating themselves from us, running here and there. What causes them to do this? What is it that motivates them? For

some it is undoubtedly a passion for honor, and the resultant envy which has been the hidden mainspring. However, I am of the opinion that with the greatest number of them it is ignorance together with partisanship which develops so easily during controversy. This partisanship is nourished by frivolous and untruthful accusations which are thoughtlessly believed by the people in many congregations. And yet--great as is this sin of partisanship and divisiveness and great as is the responsibility which many thoughtlessly have brought upon themselves--it is not this which must cause us the greater pain. The heaviest burden of all is this: it is God's superlative gift of grace to us, which is despised, attacked and scoffed at by the many who presently do not know what they are doing. After all this instruction, they do not see that which they ought to see: that they are attacking the basic truth of man's absolute inability to convert or save himself. They are attacking the truth of God's abounding grace and the confession which is based upon it; of God's mercy and the merit of Christ as the sole cause of our conversion and salvation; and of the fact that there is not cause in us according to which God should accommodate Himself. Hence, our salvation in truth depends on God alone.

And still, dear brethren, as certain as it is that blind guides have brought this misery upon so many in our dear congregations, just as certain it is that there is another One who holds them and us in His hand, He who rules in the midst of His enemies. He without whose will no misfortune comes upon a city is, therefore, the One to whom we must go when we want to know why He has permitted all this misery and affliction to come upon us.

It will not benefit us much just to mourn and

complain. Even less good will comes from heaping blame upon those whose sinful conduct rightfully deserves rebuke and correction. We must look deeper; we must use the light of God's Word if we are to find the true basis for discipline. My persuasion is that we must confess: "Lord, our God, on account of our sins You have permitted this to come upon us. We have deserved Your wrath inasmuch as we have not served You as we ought. We have not used Your grace aright and we have no excuse to offer."

Let us see to it carefully, my brethren, that we do not make such a confession with the mouth alone or because we know in general that all of us are sinners, wherefore such words are always justified. No, that kind of humility will not help us in this matter. We have before us a special rebuke and chastisement of God and so we need to confess the particular sins by which we and our Synod have deserved it and brought it upon ourselves.

We know that God has not forsaken us since He has preserved for us His Word pure and unadulterated. In spite of all the attacks made upon it, we have kept it until this time. This is not to be ascribed to our wisdom or faithfulness; but to God's long-suffering. How long will that last?

To the angel of the congregation in Ephesus the Spirit says: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst nor bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for thy name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted" (Revelation 2:2-3). Shouldn't we conclude that the congregation of which this could be said would be in so glorious a condition that there would be

occasion for rejoicing and thanksgiving rather than for sackcloth and ashes?

What is the sound of the rest of the Spirit's address to the congregation? It continues this way: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Revelation 2:5).

But though there be a great deal which would seem to give us the right in humility to apply to ourselves the first part of that which was addressed to the people in Ephesus, yet there is more reason to apply the rebuke and threat to ourselves, because they fit us. I have reminded you of this in order that we may not forget the abundant grace we still possess nor the great responsibility and danger which threaten us.

As I searched for a description which would picture the situation most commonly existing among us, it was with distress that I paused at the words of the Spirit to the angel of the congregation at Sardis: "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come on thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy" (Revelation 3:1-4).



In my opinion, there is in these words a description of the greater number of people in our congregations. Thanks be to God that I have certain hope that these words do not fit all our congregations in every respect. I know that there is a great difference both as to separate congregations as well as to the individual souls in them. For us, however, it is most important to strive for a true and clear impression of the condition which is most general, and therefore I paused with Sardis. There is small comfort in the thought that it is probably no better in other Norwegian Lutheran synods. Haven't we always rejoiced in having more advantage in respect to them? Purer Word? Greater gifts of grace? Should it not then be expected of us that we would be richer in fruits to the glory of God? Or are you of the opinion that the former description does not fit, that it is too gloomy? Isn't it still very common to take our Christianity as a matter of habit or custom? Or is it not a fact, which we certainly must admit, that things are in a bad way, yet we as pastors have the comfort that we are without blame? Can we say that we have done all we could do, that we have been as zealous for the salvation of souls and have been as fervent and constant in prayer to the Lord as we should have been? Can we say that we have been as filled with understanding of the importance of our calling and work as we should have been and so have spoken, preached and admonished as we ought to have done? Have we taken warning and strengthening as we ought to do from the thought of our Savior's return and of our appearance before Him? Can we really wash our hands as if we are without blame? No, dear brethren, we cannot justify ourselves, nor shall we seek to do so, for it will not serve any good purpose. This is not the way to obtain help from God toward a better state or situation. Nor shall we dispose of such serious

thoughts with the wretched comfort that we preachers, too, are all weak. Such actions will not help us when God calls us to judgment, and it will not help our congregations. Neither shall we let our heads hang in unbelief and flee from God. That is not the kind of instruction the Spirit gives to the angel of the congregation at Sardis. He says: "Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.... Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent." Just as the prophets under God's afflicting hand humbled themselves before Him, yet turned to Him in hope, so we also must act.

It is necessary, first of all, that we recognize our sins and confess them. I believe there is a Sardis situation in the majority of our congregations. The proper life is lacking. I believe this because I have evidence that there is a general neglect of the Word of God. There is little, if any, desire for its daily and faithful use, and for that reason a lack of real earnestness in the use of prayer. There is very little communion with the Savior; not much rejoicing in the Gospel, or love to the brethren; a lack of zeal in sanctification; very little fear of sinning; lack of mutual encouragement to do good; little fraternal reproof and admonition; little concern for the spiritual welfare of the children. Instead, we find more and more conformity to the world in all conduct. If all this is so, what part of the blame falls upon us who are the pastors? Have we failed to mention these and comparable things from the pulpit? Is it possible that we have failed to warn our people against current sins or to admonish them to use God's Word, to pray and do the other things we have mentioned? Indeed, there is no doubt that this has been the case. Far be it from me, however, to deny that there may be one or another, maybe many among us, who by the grace

of God have performed their work with great praise-worthy faithfulness and zeal. Nor am I so audacious as to take it upon myself to judge anyone among you as if you were a fallen servant, a belly-server, a hireling, an unbelieving person who has fallen from grace. Let us, however, earnestly examine ourselves and search our hearts and our objectives lest we who preach to others will ourselves be cast away.

But even if all of us by God's grace have been kept in a state of grace, does it follow from this that we necessarily are free from great and dangerous sins connected with our calling? Or would we have the right to draw the conclusion that we have no part in, or blame for the miserable condition in our congregations? Certainly not! Even if a person has not completely fallen from grace, he can be dull and sleepy and in need of shock and awakening. Idle hands and weak knees have not as yet become lifeless, but they need to be straightened and confirmed (Isaiah 35) if it is to be possible to "make straight paths for the feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way and not rather be healed" (Hebrews 12:13).

Well then, you will say, point out the sins connected with our work and calling. Show them to us so that we can see if your opinion is right, and in case it is, that we can correct our faults. It certainly wouldn't be so difficult for me to point out many things regarding myself inasmuch as I daily have the grief that I don't do anything right. But if I should attempt to give a description which would fit everyone, I would not be able to do it since I have neither the knowledge nor the insight keen enough to do it. However, I will point to those mistakes, which in my estimation are the most common and most generally neglected.

To begin with, I must say that I do not think there has been proper understanding in regard to the real needs in our congregations. At various times and occasions, long before the present strife began, I sought to lay this matter on my own heart and upon the hearts of my brethren. I direct you to the discussion at the Pastoral Conference in Decorah, January, 1878 (cf. Kirketidende for that year, page 166ff.), and to my messages to the Synod from 1879 and later. Note also the pertinent remarks in a lecture about Church parties (divisions). Now, after such stern rebuke, I feel it even more necessary to remind myself and you about these things.

A message which is not directed to the actual attitudes and conditions in the congregation to which it is addressed cannot expect blessed fruits. St. Paul does not write to the Corinthians in the same way as he writes to the congregation at Philippi; nor, to the Galatians as to the Thessalonians. The Spirit speaks quite differently to the congregation in Sardis than to the one in Smyrna and the one in Philadelphia (Revelation 2 and 3). I wonder if there has generally been among us an awareness of the soul-dangers prevalent in our congregation and therefore also an awareness of the need for conscientious shepherding? If it is so that Christianity is just a matter of habit and that there is spiritual indolence or maybe even spiritual death prevalent in our congregations, then God has set us to awaken them. I fear that in this matter there has been some very great drowsiness among us and also a lack of understanding and wisdom. If this is really true then we need not wonder at the fact that our sermons so often miss the mark. Even less ought we then complain over the fact that God afflicts and corrects us.

I believe it to be very common that a certain set of truths, especially such as involve matters of dispute, have made up the chief content of the confession of many, and they have not taken into account what the hearers need to hear. I have heard the complaint that from the pulpit nothing else is to be heard but the same thing over and over again Sunday after Sunday, causing only boredom and drowsiness in the listeners. When I asked what it was which was so constantly reiterated, the answer was: "We are all sinners and we are saved by faith in Christ." It is certainly true that we ought not take offense at being chided for constantly repeating the chief truths and for failing to bring in something new. Yet our hearers need to be impressed with the fact that, even though repeated constantly, the old truths become ever new to us; then it will not fail that many a one will hear them as if he were hearing them for the very first time. Above all will this be the case if the minister--with proper concern for the congregation's present conditions and needs--brings a sermon which is really the fruit of his meditation upon the particular truths which it is God's will that he proclaim.

If the above describes our congregations, then in his striving to proclaim the whole counsel of God the preacher will not be able to forget that he must put forth his best efforts to preach in such a way that it will lead to awakening and repentance. We dare not let those who are walking on the broad way continue to walk there in peace. If they are deaf, we need to speak all the louder. You will not misunderstand me as though I were thinking of outward screaming and shouting; nor yet, as though I meant the kind of repentance preaching which with a sighing and whining says "repent, repent," but perhaps brings forth a superficial emotion without true repentance.

What I really mean is this: I fear that all too often there is lacking not only the call to awakening -- which our congregations really need--but also the guidance which will show the unconverted how they can come to the Savior, that is, how "they shall conduct themselves"--the guidance which at the same time is the means by which God works the change, the attitude He wants to produce.

It is just in this area, that we who gladly bear the derisive name "Missourians," should show diligence in the practice of that which really is Missourian teaching. It is one thing to have the true doctrine regarding man's attitude and quite another matter to use and apply this doctrine correctly. We pray God to preserve us from the doctrine regarding man's attitude which has been unfolded and taught by our opponents, an attitude which has its origin in unconverted man's own choice and free self-determination, while at one and the same time it is also the determining factor in causing God to make His decision regarding the sinner's conversion and salvation. This attitude or conduct on the part of man is an attempt to explain that which our Lutheran Church in its Confessions states is unexplainable for us in this world. God be praised, we have not given up the teaching of God's Word regarding man's attitude and conduct. In our "Accounting" we have shown it to be perversion of the truth and blasphemy when they impute to us the ungodly conclusion that since our attitude (conduct) does not help us to be saved, we can then conduct ourselves as we please. We have confessed that the only way to salvation is the narrow way through repentance, faith, and sanctification. How could we expect God's blessing upon our world if we didn't preach and act in agreement with our confession?

Our dear departed teacher, Dr. Walther, was undoubtedly a good Missourian. In the abundantly rich instruction which he gives us in his Pastoral Theology regarding preaching (I am referring to the 11th chapter of his book and I take this opportunity to encourage my brethren to study it faithfully), he has some reminders which concern this very matter: "Another defect of preaching deserves to be mentioned in this connection: if a preacher diligently exhorts his hearers to believe, but fails to show how such faith may be obtained. In his Instruction for Visitors, 1528, Luther says: 'We notice in the teaching of some, especially this defect: they preach that we are saved only through faith, but they do not sufficiently show how such faith is obtained, and just about all omit a part of the Christian doctrine without which no one can understand what true faith is or means. Christ says, Luke 3:8; 24:47, that in His name we should preach repentance and remission of sins. But many nowadays speak only of remission of sins and say little or nothing of repentance. Yet without repentance there is no remission of sins, and remission of sins cannot be understood without repentance. And if remission of sins without repentance be preached, the people will believe that they have already received remission of sins and will become secure and without fear. This, however, is a more grievous error and a more grievous sin than all the false doctrines that have formerly been preached, and it is to be feared, as Christ says, Matthew 12:45; Luke 11:26, that 'the last state is worse than the first.' Therefore we have instructed and admonished the preachers that they are in duty bound to proclaim the entire Gospel and not one part without the other; for God says, Deuteronomy 4:2 'that we should not add to His Word nor diminish ought from it.' The contemporary ministers scold the Pope, saying that he has made

many additions to Scripture, which unfortunately is all too true. But these when they do not preach repentance are tearing a big section out of Scripture, and speak instead of eating of meat and other minor matters. We surely are not to remain silent about this, but at the right time, because of tyranny defend Christian liberty. Yet what is this than the very matter Christ speaks of in Matthew 23:24, 'to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel'? Then we have exhorted them that they diligently and often admonish the people to repent of sin and grieve over their sin and do not cease in this great and necessary matter of repentance. Both John and Christ chastise the Pharisees more severely for their holy hypocrisy than they do sinners in general. In the same manner the preachers must chastise gross sins of the common man, but where there is a false holiness, admonish them even more severely that they repent.' (St. Louis-Walch edition of Luther's Sammtliche Schriften, X, 19:12ff.).

"A third lack in this connection comes when a pastor insisently and continuously preaches about repentance and faith, but does not preach about the necessity of good works and sanctification, or does not give any thorough instruction about good works, Christian virtues, and sanctification. A thorough, graphic and quiet description of a truly Christian life and attitude will accomplish more than merely threatening and warning assertions of its necessity." Towards the close of his discussion Dr. Walther states: "There is one more thing in reference to preaching which should not escape our attention. There are many sermons of which it can be said that they do not contain any false doctrine nor that they failed to observe any of the aforementioned necessary requirements, and yet, in spite of it all, lack one of the chief characteristics of a good sermon: they fail to



grip the heart and conscience of the hearer. Such sermons are perhaps quite logically arranged, but their entire make-up is not in accordance with Biblico-psychological laws. Such sermons shoot their arrows over the heads of their hearers, so to speak, or if they grip the hearer, they do not hold him, but, like a broken net, let the fish that have been caught escape again; such sermons arouse the hearer in a way and bring forth a certain feeling of satisfaction and some pleasant sentiments; yes, they may even cause wholesome doubts to arise in the mind of a hearer and may fill him with admiration, but they do not persuade the hearer to form any definite resolution. That a sermon, insofar as it depends upon a sermon, has such result, needs heavenly wisdom. It cannot be learned from any course in homiletics, but must be learned as a result of one's own personal experience in Christianity and must be prayed for each time. Melanchthon therefore very humbly remarked: 'Preaching is not an art, otherwise I could also preach.' Any preacher who does not live in daily communion with his God, who has not himself experienced the trickiness and sinuosity and the utter corruption of the human heart as well as the way of the Spirit of God in his own soul, who does not pray when he begins the study of his text in order to prepare its contents to supply the needs of his hearers, who does not pray when he begins to memorize, and who does not pray when he ascends the pulpit; in short, a preacher who does not every time get his sermon by begging it from the Lord and does not preach as one who has been anointed with the Spirit of prayer: such a preacher cannot preach a sermon as it ought to be preached. After a well-prepared sermon that has been well preached, no one will perhaps exclaim, 'What a grand sermon this has been!' but those not yet hardened in their sins will quietly leave the house of God and, while they speak to no other

person about the sermon, will so much more feel compelled to speak about it to God. Let no one therefore imagine that such an effect has not been powerful; it is the very best effect that a sermon can produce. Great praise bestowed upon a preacher is often a suspicious sign, for too often it all amounts to--nothing." So far Dr. Walther.

No matter how varied the individual situation may have been in all these matters, I am persuaded that in our calling and work we must acknowledge that we stand guilty before God. There has been a great lack of proper analysis and wisdom as well as lack of true earnestness and zealously in our witness.

But, you will say, when we under the chastening hand of God acknowledge our own sins and the sins of our congregations, what shall we do? How shall we bring about a better condition among us?

I believe that the first thing which is required of us is that we truly confess our sins to the Lord our God. We must not let the matter rest by simply joining the prophet and complaining: "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble!" (Jeremiah 14:19). Let it also be in uprightness and with shame and sorrow that we make the following words our very own and say: "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee" (Jeremiah 14:20). Where there is acknowledgement and confession of sin, there will be a proper resolution and striving for improvement. He who knows himself and also knows the grace of God will certainly join in the prophet's

words and pray: "Do not abhor us for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us" (Jeremiah 14:21).

If we really come before God in such humility, sorrow and prayer, it is God's will that we shall take to heart the blessed comfort found in these words: "In my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee" (Isaiah 60:10). Let us exhort one another further with the words of the prophet Hosea: "Come and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us, he hath smitten, and he will bind us up" (6:1). This is the will of God. He has not forsaken us nor removed His hand of blessing from us. We have the very strongest proof of this in the unspeakable grace and mercy He has bestowed upon us by preserving His Word pure and unadulterated among us. He has helped us under all persecution, derision, lies, and cunning to hold fast to His Word and to the old Lutheran faith, "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). That is the faith that Christ alone is our Savior; that those who receive Him become children of God. This receiving of faith is God's work and gift which never altogether, nor in half, nor even in the smallest part is brought about by our own work.

If we who are ministers really are to improve ourselves, we must begin by rubbing the sleep out of our eyes. Then we need to look more carefully upon our congregations and pass judgment upon them. This judgment must not be based upon habit, custom, and what is commonly considered to be right, nor upon what we may find here and there, but the judgment must be based upon the New Testament. If we should find that there is more or less of a Sardis-situation, which the Spirit

describes with these words: "I know thy works, that thou has a name, that thou livest, and art dead," we will surely take to heart the admonition of the Spirit to "be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die."

We will clarify for ourselves the dangers which threaten our congregations. There are many ways in which Christians can depart from their Savior. To begin with, we have the dangers which the spirit of the times brings forth, which none of us can escape. Our congregations are not situated now as they were in the earlier days of our Synod. The influence which is brought to bear upon them by newspapers and writings of all kinds, as well as the example of many among them who now set the pattern and have become spokesmen for our countrymen and women, present to our clergy requirements quite different and more difficult now than those of twenty to thirty years ago. We older pastors must not forget that the doctrines and elementary principles, which in times past were impressed upon our congregations, are of benefit only to the older members of our congregations, while thousands who have grown up in later years are for the most part very little grounded in those basic principles.

Neither dare we overlook the temptations and dangers which follow in the wake of the doctrinal strife which we have been compelled to carry on. Many weak souls, who otherwise have very little desire for the Word of God, are tempted to use this strife as an excuse to neglect more and more the use of God's Word. Others who take an active and earnest part in the doctrinal questions under contention are tempted to confuse their zeal and interest in the questions with a zeal and interest in the Gospel, which is a mark of God's children since it invites and draws the troubled sinner to

the Savior. Still others demonstrate the power that error has upon hearts in that they so readily are filled with doubt and even fall completely from the truth. In addition to all this, there are dangers and temptations of many kinds also for those of us who hold fast to confessional truth. There is the temptation to give in a little here and there and to accept ambiguous words as full truth in order to gain peace. Again, there is the temptation to remain silent when we ought to speak, and to twist and adjust ourselves in accordance with that which carnal reason might deem to be advantageous. Then there is the temptation to confuse what might be classified as carnal earnestness in the strife with the humble zeal for the truth, which is one of the fruits of the Spirit in the true disciples of the Lord, and on the basis of such confession excuse and cover up sins which such carnal zeal brings forth. Or there is danger that we become so filled with zealous thoughts for the truths which are attacked that we finally think of little else and our sermons and discussions become more and more one-sided and senseless; for example, if we should find that our congregations are made up chiefly of people who in sinful security belittle all righteousness and are quite satisfied with living a sinful, worldly life, and we should then unrelentingly and constantly thunder away against self-made repentance and self-righteousness. Finally, because of non-appreciation and opposition, in despair over the church's distress, we may be tempted to give up hope and cease working.

To what shall we turn in such distress? Shall we sign for peace first and foremost? Shall we say ourselves: "As long as this strife with its misery and wretchedness continues, there will be no advance in that which is good. Peace we must have at any price"? Shall we allow ourselves to

overcome by all this misery and distress we see in our church so that we finally silence our testimony regarding the controverted doctrine and give up, if not completely, yet at least insofar that we go along with resolutions of peace and compromise? No, dear brethren, that would be unfaithfulness. Here it is required to "hold fast that which we have." God has not sent us His chastisement that we should despise His gift. Neither does the Spirit speak that way to the congregations. To these in Sardis He says: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."

We must not let go of our heritage of the Word. It is my prayer to God that He will fill us with a holy hatred of this miserable doctrine, which is condemned both in Scripture and in the orthodox church; a doctrine which mixes a person's own works and cooperation into God's work and in this way robs God of His glory and trembling sinners of true comfort. Let us be most careful to have our eyes open to this lie, even though it comes with "good intentions," yes, even if it comes with the very best of "intention" and under the mask of piety with ambiguous expressions and a fine manner of speech saying: "All is grace, only by grace without merit." This shall not deceive us when in the next sentence is smuggled in the thought that we decide our conversion and salvation, so that salvation rests in our own hands. Our Lutheran forefathers testified that "pious souls and tried Christians" would not for a thousand worlds have their salvation dependent upon themselves. May we be exceedingly careful lest we be led astray into a false faith.

If we are to be able to preserve this truth which God has committed to our care, let us never forget the great responsibility which rests upon us.

The preservation of it is not our work but God's work, and God will not preserve it among us if we do not make better use of it than we have hitherto.

Throughout the world many objections are raised against the old-time Christianity and against true Lutheranism. What might be the most common objection brought out by those who will claim to be Christians? It is this that it is so unfruitful in life. We know that this accusation is radically wrong and rests upon ignorance regarding true Lutheranism. We know that there is no child-like, quiet, blessed Christian other than just this Lutheranism--that is, the old Christian truth.

But can we call them blessed who are satisfied with the mere outward confession of the pure teaching? Will not those who sit back and are satisfied therewith be disgraced in due time by thousands of other Christians who had lesser gifts? Will such Christians who have the name of being orthodox, but are not believers, in the long run keep the pure teaching? Never! Just as little will they be permitted to keep it as the unfaithful servant who did not make use of the talent entrusted to him was permitted to keep the talent.

For what purpose do we possess the truth? It is entrusted to us in order that we shall use it to bring our hearers to Christ. If we have good reason to fear that this purpose has not been attained by the majority, and in addition must strive against the dangers of mob-Christianity and habit-Christianity, then the admonition to us is all the stronger not to have part in careless smugness nor content ourselves with the thought that everything is progressing as

usual. We expect that the strife which has been brought so thoughtlessly into our midst has been a powerful means of awakening for many of us. This is all the more necessary since it is very apparent that the strife has served to lead many astray. Many have been strengthened in their natural offense toward the ancient Gospel, while others have taken offense against all Christianity; still others have been tempted to take the truth in vain and carelessly comfort themselves with their very incompetence.

We must constantly expect a repetition of these phenomena as we recognize them from the days of the apostles. And Luther often spoke of it too, showing on the one hand that there has always been a taking of offense at the free, undeserved Gospel of grace--the very thing we now see in many of our opponents--and on the other hand that the Gospel has commonly been misused, a thing which is being repeated by many of those who still confess it outwardly.

Under the chastening hand of God, we acknowledge both our own sins and those of our congregations, and recognize the dangers to which we are exposed. How shall we conduct ourselves in order to bring forth a better condition? Dare we leisurely say to ourselves: "Well, there isn't anything we can do! Our assignment is to plant and water. God must give the growth." With that we feel at ease and settle down to the common routine and let it go at that.

No! Let us weigh the matter carefully to see whether the planting and watering have, perhaps, been done in such a way that we have no right to expect increase from God or blessing from Him upon our work. Isn't it possible that in many places the preaching of the Word in the congregations



has been unwise and not fitted to the needs of the people? If, in fact, the circle of ideas narrowed down by the present strife has dominated the preacher's thinking and been made the central teaching of his sermons, then this is certainly not the way it should be. Our congregations, without a doubt, have in their membership a large number of secure and sleeping Christians, people who are Christians by habit. How will it benefit them to be most strongly warned against synergism? People who in false security live in unrighteousness need entirely different sections of God's Word than do those who must be admonished because of self-righteousness and false trust in their own attitude. Let the others speak of their good attitude by which they think God will be forced to decide to save them. We have admonished them with all zeal and patience and can only pray that God will enlighten them. Let us see to it that we have our eyes open to the situation which threatens to bring so many of our hearers into eternal damnation. Only when we are able to bring them to see their attitude or conduct in the light of God's Word, can we hope that they will heed the Gospel with earnest eagerness, for the Gospel is preached to the poor in spirit. All those sleeping souls must be made to see their sinfulness; they must learn to know that they are living in great danger to their souls, a danger from which their nominal Christianity cannot save them. If this happy situation is accomplished in them, they will approach the Gospel quite differently than they do now and will finally see what a precious treasure we have been contending for all this time. It is a well-known fact that it is the most earnest and well-informed Christians among our hearers who have most steadfastly supported us in the battle for God's Word because they have fully seen what they are in themselves and therefore also what the grace of God really means.

As for our opponents, it is our duty to pray to God to give us the mind and disposition by which, if possible, we may bring them to see the right way. It is true that the majority apparently have resolved the issue by the position they have taken for themselves, and in opposition to the Synod have blindly permitted some of their leading men to do just as they please. The majority of those who are opposed to us are, without a doubt, deceived by the accusations constantly being circulated and so untiringly and unceasingly being repeated. Their leaders, in addition to other means of stirring up the people, have sought to add the idea that they are being made martyrs. We have not humored them in this. We have bided our time and waited and hoped. This, too, has been made to appear as shrewdness and cunning. But it is not only in doctrine that they have forsaken us. Principles, which in earlier years were considered self-evident among us, have in more recent years been cast aside. On the basis of these principles, the Synod has drawn up methods of procedure to be followed in various matters. The procedures drawn up by the Synod for dealing with arbitrary, tyrannical ministers who have set themselves in opposition to all synodical order are classified by them as synodical domination and used as a means to stir up the masses. Yet in spite of all this, we must not give up the hope of being of service to those who have left us, by bringing them to see the great unfairness and blameworthiness with which they have carried on the battle against the truths we have championed.

If by the grace of God such a happy outcome should result, that we ourselves are awakened to make the right use of God's discipline and correction, and by the Word of God bring our congregations to do the same, then the joint work of our

Synod's outward business will not be left undone. If the right spirit is living within us, the load is not heavier than we can easily bear if only we have good will and unity.

After this introduction, I take the opportunity of making the motion that we divide the question which I have given as the theme for my remarks in such a way that we discuss the requirements which the present condition in our church body demands of the ministers 1) over against our Lord and God, 2) over against the congregations, 3) over against our opponents, and 4) with regard to our Synod's outward affairs.

The Lord help us by His Spirit to find the right way and bless our deliberations to that end for Jesus' sake. Amen.

-- Dr. U. V. Koren  
President of the  
Norwegian Synod  
from 1894-1910.

## LUTHERANS - FOR LIFE

### I. THE CURRENT ABORTION SCENE

A striking commentary on the abortion issue and the church comes in the form of a short bit of creative writing from the pen of Chris Humphrey, titled "A Parable for Protestants."<sup>1</sup>

Unborn child was well on his way to birth, when suddenly he was set upon by doctors, who removed him from his mother's womb, cut the cord and placed him in a basin near the hospital window. As it was summer, the window was open, and his cries could be heard faintly on the street a short distance below.

Now by chance a conservative Protestant minister was walking down the street. He was on the way to an evangelistic meeting, and hoped that God would use him to save many souls. When he heard the cries of the child, and recollected that this infamous hospital aborted more children than it delivered, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise a liberal Protestant minister, as he was on the way to a conference on social activism, heard the cries of the child and passed by on the other side.

But a middle-aged Catholic mother, as she walked along the street behind them and saw them cross over, stopped to hear the infant crying. Moved with pity, she called out--  
'What are you doing with that child?'

A nurse, who was neither Catholic nor Protestant nor Jew but whose conscience was uneasy, heard the women's question and ran to the window. She paused an instant, grabbed the basin, and ran with the child to the post-natal intensive care unit where the child's life was saved. The conservative minister turned back to remind her that abortion is not as important as salvation and that no one can expect non-Christians to be good. The liberal minister continued down the street, to think about social justice in South Africa.

And the nurse lost her job.

Whatever else you may see in this parable, it is clear that the author intended for churchmen of all theological stripes to recognize that protecting the unborn is a basic human value and that it may well be an agnostic who takes appropriate action while we are busy riding our own favorite theological hobby-horse. That bothers me, and I hope it bothers you. That should trouble everyone in the church.

The best statistics available indicate that since the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, over one million babies have lost their lives each year by "termination of pregnancy," as the procedure is euphemistically described by its practitioners.

One innocent life deliberately taken the Bible calls murder, but the specter of ten million lives sacrificed to the gods of convenience and materialism I believe deserves the name Holocaust; a holocaust made even more reprehensible because it is widely accepted and acknowledged in our society as perfectly normal. Anyone using the term "holocaust" to describe abortion practice in America

is immediately branded a radical and accused of sensationalism. Yet I use the term with the deliberate intention that it ring echoes in the minds of people who cannot forget Aushwitz, Dachau, and Buchenwald, but do not give a second thought to the tiny mutilated, mangled body parts that are hauled out with the rubbish in many of our American cities. In our society, as in Hitler's Germany, medical science has been enlisted to contribute to the systematic elimination of those who have not reached a sufficient stage of development to rate the designation "human." In our society, infanticide has become accepted--witness the infamous case of Baby Doe in Indianapolis and other similar situations around the nation, where withholding needed surgery or even basic nourishment has become an accepted form of medical treatment for babies born with mental retardation. On the other end of the life spectrum, senior citizens are reminded that they have a "duty to die." One Florida physician, also a member of the state legislature, has proposed legislation which he says may someday lead to the death of 90 percent of the state's "mental defectives." This is where the abortion mentality is taking us. We have sown the wind and reaped the whirlwind. What better designation is there for this horror than the term "holocaust?"

These matters are not the rantings of a few radicals on the fringe of society. They are being discussed matter-of-factly in the most respected and reputable of our institutions. Peter Singer, internationally known bioethicist, has written forthrightly in the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics:

We can no longer base our ethics on the idea that human beings are a special form of creation, made in the image of God, singled out

from all other animals, and alone possessing an immortal soul.

...If we compare a severely defective human infant with a nonhuman animal, a dog or a pig, for example, we will often find the nonhuman to have superior capacities, both actual and potential, for rationality, self-consciousness, communication, and anything else that can plausibly be considered morally significant. Only that fact that the defective infant is a member of the species Homo sapiens leads it to be treated differently from the dog or pig. Species membership alone, however, is not morally relevant. Humans who bestow superior value on the lives of all human beings, solely because they are members of our own species, are judging along lines strikingly similar to those used by white racists who bestow superior value on the lives of other whites, merely because they are members of their own race.

Leaving no doubt as to the direction his line of thought is leading, Prof. Singer draws this final conclusion for the benefit of countless baby doctors all over our nation:

"If we can put aside the obsolete and erroneous notion of the sanctity of all human life, we may start to look at human life as it really is: at the quality of life that each human being has or can achieve."

For Mr. Singer, even the question of viability used as the plumbline in the 1973 decision of the Supreme Court is passé. Now the real heart of the matter is exposed: The core issue in deciding questions of life and death is the "quality of life."

The shift is dramatic and it is complete. Only an inebriated mole would claim that legalized abortion has not affected the ethical standards of our country. Just over 200 years ago one of the founders of this nation, himself not a Christian, penned words that have inspired generations of Americans:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." (emphasis mine)

Now a recognized authority on ethics writing in a respectable journal of American medicine has set us straight: No human being has an unalienable right to life; it must be earned by his "quality of life."

## II. A SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON UNBORN LIFE

The Word of God is clear in its indication that human life is not a matter of a sliding scale of quality developing during the period of gestation.

In Psalm 139 (verses 13-16) we read:

For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth.

The Word of the Lord to Jeremiah is recorded in the



first chapter of his prophecy: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." (Jeremiah 1:5)

St. Luke the Evangelist records that the holy angel informed the father of John the Baptist that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet unborn. (Luke 1:15)

The great Messianic Psalm of hope in the midst of despair quoted by our Lord from the cross, Psalm 22, contains this confession: (verses 9, 10)

"But thou art he that took me out of the womb. Thou didst make me hope upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb. Thou are my God from my mother's body."

As confessional Lutherans, we understand that this latter quotation points the way to more overriding evidence. According to some exegetes, it is very likely that Jesus may have quoted all of Psalm 22 from the cross. If not, our Lord almost certainly intended that those who stood by the cross that day tie this Psalm, with all of its clear Messianic prophecy, to His suffering there. It becomes His personal confession of faith in the Father as well as His clear self-identification as the Messiah of Israel. Listen to those words again: "I was cast upon thee from the womb. Thou art my God from my mother's body."

As Lutherans we have a unique appreciation for the mystery of the Word made flesh. Alone among Protestants, we confess the unity of the two natures of Christ in one Person. Quoting Luther, our Confessions state:

"...from the moment that the deity and the humanity were united in one person

this man, Mary's son, is and is called  
the almighty and everlasting God."<sup>2</sup>

I would submit that our Lutheran Christology gives us no choice in the question of when human life begins. We need not get involved in the debate among Fundamentalists as to how many Scripture passages can be marshalled to support the pro-life cause. For us, the issue becomes plain when we consider the unity of the Person of Christ. He is at one and the same time God and man from His conception. "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary," is the verbal confession of this mystery by the Nicean fathers. We have no concept of the divine Son of God wandering about somewhere as a theological abstraction, but rather He is localized and physicalized (if one can use such a word) in the human nature since the time of the incarnation. Calvinists may ask how the finite may possibly be capable of the infinite, but Lutherans have never had that problem. We simply bow the knee at the profound mystery of Jesus, true God and true man, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily--since the moment of His conception. Elizabeth did not shrink from calling an embryo "Lord" when visited by her pregnant cousin, Mary, and neither do we. (Luke 1:43)

The implications are obvious. We who confess Jesus as God and man since His conception have no possibility of talking about an unborn child, even in its very first stages of development, as a "glob of tissue" or a "product of conception." One shudders to contemplate the implications of the advice most modern problem pregnancy counselors would have given to the virgin Mary, a young girl just past puberty with no husband and no economic future.

If God was willing to become a fetus, then the least we can do as Lutheran pastors is not to hedge on the life issue. Yes, we say, a fetus is human. Not only is the genetic and biological evidence clear, but the theological evidence is overwhelming.

### III. TOWARD A LUTHERAN APPROACH TO THE LIFE ISSUE

Allow me to propose several theses on action appropriate to us as Lutheran pastors.

1. In our preaching and teaching we must clearly teach that unborn life is indeed human life.
2. We have a duty to our parishioners to bring the whole counsel of God to bear on this vital social issue.
3. We fail in our pastoral responsibilities when we shrink from preaching on this issue for the sake of those in our parishes who may have had abortions or encouraged them. We make no such distinctions in dealing with any other sin. We preach law and gospel; we direct the secure sinner to the unequivocal condemnation of the law of God and we direct the penitent sinner to the entire forgiveness of all his sin in the accomplished sacrifice of Christ on the cross. If we only preached law in connection with sins of which our parishioners were not guilty, we would have very short sermons!
4. We fail in our pastoral responsibilities when our preaching on the life issue is of such a legalistic nature that it drives

sinner to despair or makes our members self-righteous. Those who have participated in abortions need to hear of the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses them, too, of sin. Those who have consistently opposed abortion, on the other hand, should be led to see that their opposition is not the key to heaven, indeed their own sins disqualify them from salvation were it not for the Grace of God in Christ.

5. We fail in our pastoral responsibilities when in our preaching on the life issue we neglect to point out that a Christian response goes beyond saying "no" to abortion.

We who know the love of our Lord Jesus Christ that extends to the very least of His brothers and sisters in this world can do no less than to do all in our power to aid the woman facing a problem pregnancy. Following His Word through the prophet Micah, it is our intention for the sake of Jesus to "do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with (our) God." (Micah 6:8) As Christian taxpayers, we are willing to support children whose parents abandon them. We are not only opposed to abortion; for the sake of Christ, we are Lutherans for life.

6. We fail in our pastoral responsibilities when in our preaching and teaching on the life issue we attempt to dictate our parishioners' political activity.

We have no direct line to God to determine which candidate or which constitutional amendment will best serve to advance the pro-life cause in our country. Our tools

are Word and Sacrament, not political pressure nor the ballot box. There is a direct link between private morality and public policy. Public policy on the life issue will be changed as the individuals in our congregations become active in the public arena. Our primary responsibility as parish pastors is to inform those individuals of the Scriptural principles involved.

7. We fail in our pastor responsibilities when in our preaching and teaching on the life issue we give our parishioners the impression that private conviction is sufficient.

"Personally, I'm opposed to abortion, but I wouldn't dream of forcing my faith on anyone else." We have all heard that line of argument. There is no room for that approach to the abortion issue. Here is a clear case of right and wrong, on which the state needs the witness of the church, both corporately and individually.

We believe in the separation of church and state. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms was well established before the United States of America was even a dream. That does not mean, however, that we have nothing to say on this social issue.

Dr. Ralph Bohlmann, President of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, has warned against an isolationist stance in church/state relations:

The two kingdoms must be carefully distinguished from each other, to be

sure. Their means (Gospel and Law) as well as their ends (eternal salvation and worldly peace) are quite different. Authorities in one kingdom have no power in the other. But God rules in both kingdoms, and Christians serve Him in both.<sup>3</sup>

In the Christian church, then, it is our proper work to proclaim and teach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But it is also our "foreign" work to proclaim the Law. It serves as the mirror by which we recognize our sin, and as the guide for Christian good works. But we also proclaim the Law as a curb against the evil of this world and to assist the state in its proper functioning.

How tragic that the extreme secularism of our day is occurring at a time when the most critical issues facing society -- peace, justice, and life itself -- have a profoundly moral dimension. To separate God and His Moral Law from the state's consideration of such issues serves neither church nor state.<sup>3</sup>

THESES ON A LUTHERAN APPROACH  
TO THE LIFE ISSUE

Thesis I In our preaching and teaching we must clearly teach that unborn life is indeed human life.

Thesis II We have a duty to our parishioners to bring the whole counsel of God to bear on this vital social issue.

Thesis III We fail in our pastoral responsibilities when we shrink from preaching on this issue for the sake of those in our parishes who may have had abortions or encouraged them.

Thesis IV We fail in our pastoral responsibilities when our preaching on the life issue is of such a legalistic nature that it drives sinners to despair or makes our members self-righteous.

Thesis V We fail in our pastoral responsibilities when in our preaching on the life issue we neglect to point out that a Christian response goes beyond saying "no" to abortion.

Thesis VI We fail in our pastoral responsibilities when in our preaching and teaching on the life issue we attempt to dictate our parishioners' political activity.

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FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Uncertified Human, May 1980.

<sup>2</sup>Formula of Concord, SD VIII, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>The Lutheran Witness, July 1984, p. 34.

-- The Reverend Harold Senkbeil  
Pastor of Lutheran Church  
of the Living Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin