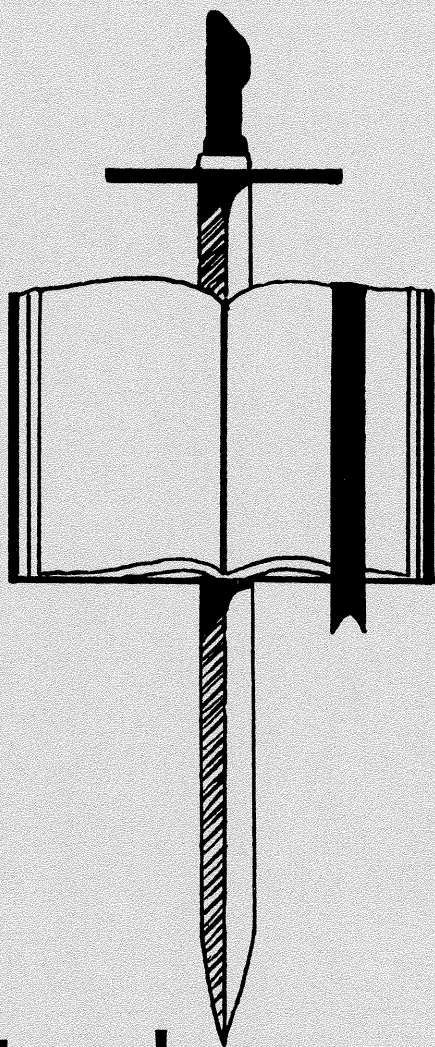


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FOREWORD

Our readers have expressed appreciation for sermons that have appeared in the Quarterly. This issue begins with another sermon, this one by Pastor Mark Bartels, associate pastor of King of Grace Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, Minnesota. This sermon was delivered to the Circuit No. 8 pastoral conference of the ELS which was held May 26-27 of this year.

Pastor Jay Webber shows from the Lutheran Confessions that the Lutheran Church is a liturgical church. It is so "because in Confessional Lutheran congregations the Word of God is regularly proclaimed and the Lord's Supper regularly celebrated within the context of a Biblically-based, historically-informed and dignified order of service."

Much has been said and written about the current Church Growth Movement. Dr. William Kessel, in three brief articles, expounds on the sociology of the church growth in America, the deficient theology of the movement, and exposes the controversial John Wimber and his power evangelism.

We continue with another chapter from ORTHODOX LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVES, a doctoral dissertation by Pastor Ernest Bartels. This chapter reviews confessional statements from the "Chicago Theses" of 1919 to "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" adopted at the 1973 New Orleans convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

The concluding article by Professor Juul Madson shows the place of repentance, or contrition, and its connection to faith. In its wider sense "faith is then the more important component alongside contrition whereas in the narrower sense, namely, as merely contrition, in its lowly yet God-ordained servant status it will prepare the way for the enthronement of faith."

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HEBREWS 9:24

"FOR CHRIST DID NOT ENTER A MAN-MADE SANCTUARY THAT WAS ONLY A COPY OF THE TRUE ONE; HE ENTERED HEAVEN ITSELF, NOW TO APPEAR FOR US IN GOD'S PRESENCE."

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

by

Pastor Mark Bartels

In the Old Testament there are some very troubling events connected with the ark of the covenant.

One of them is found in I Chronicles 13. The children of Israel were using some oxen to move the ark of the covenant. Two long poles were used to carry the ark so that no one would have to touch it. At one point the oxen stumbled, and a man by the name of Uzzah, apparently out of reverence for the ark, in concern that the ark would fall, put out his hand to steady the ark. God struck him dead on the spot. The Bible tells us, "The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God." Now why would God kill someone for an apparent act of reverence? It was certainly troubling and confusing to King David, and even aroused his anger.

Another account is found in I Samuel 6. The ark had just been returned to the children of Israel by their enemies. The enemies had captured it, but returned it because its presence was causing them great distress. When the ark was returned to the children of Israel, it wound up near the city of Beth Shemesh. There were a number of people, with apparently no malicious intent at all, who were curious about the contents of the ark;

the stone tablets, Aaron's rod, and the manna. They looked into the ark and all of them died. It was very troubling and confusing to the men of Beth Shemesh. Why would God put someone to death for a simple act of curiosity, when no malicious or evil intent was involved?

Do these accounts trouble you? They should, because ultimately they show us the depth to which our human nature has fallen. The ark of the covenant stood for nothing else than the very presence of the Almighty God in all his holiness and majesty. These accounts show what happens when sinful human beings come into contact with the presence of the holy God: there is a price for sinful human beings coming into contact with the presence of God, no matter what the intent of those humans might be. That price is life itself. God in his holiness and majesty cannot tolerate sin and imperfection in his presence. No wonder Adam and Eve hid from the presence of God when they fell. They understood there was something intolerable about their being in his presence. No wonder God remains the *Deus Absconditus*, the hidden God, for if he were to reveal himself to us in his glory and majesty we would not be able to bear his presence. Ezra explained it well when he said in Ezra 9:15, "O Lord, God of Israel, you are righteous!...here we are before you in our guilt, **THOUGH BECAUSE OF IT NO ONE CAN STAND IN YOUR PRESENCE.**" Guilt makes it impossible for us to survive in God's presence.

Does that trouble you? The men of Beth Shemesh expressed that troublesome thought so well when they said, "Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" Someday each one of us will have to stand in the very presence of the holy, majestic God, face to face. What about your pride,

your envy, your lust, your arrogance, your self-centeredness, your greed, your jealousy, your covetousness... will you be able to bear his presence? What about the depth of that sinful nature that you were born with and that boils deep inside as an enemy of God and of his holy will. All of those things are intolerable and unbearable in his presence. Will you be able to come into contact with him and live? If that troubles you, if it makes you tremble and quake, then I invite you to take comfort in the Ascension of our risen victorious Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's scripture reading about the ascended Lord is one of the most comforting passages in scripture to Christians who are troubled over the thought of coming into the presence of God. Hebrews 9:24 explains what the risen and ascended Jesus is doing this very moment in all of his glory and majesty before the throne of the Father in heaven. It says, "He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence." He is appearing FOR US right NOW in God's presence!

Right now this very moment, Christ is in heaven appearing in the very presence of God for you and for me on our behalf as our advocate. As he appears before the Father for us it's as if he says to the Father, look at me as if I were Mark Bartels (or whatever your name might be). He appears in God's presence in our place now and he will be doing it an hour from now and a year from now and as long as the world stands.

That is of great comfort and consolation for two reasons:

1. Remember that there is a price for me coming into contact with the presence of God. It's life. It's my soul being eternally cast

from the presence of God for all eternity in hell. As Christ stands right now before God on my behalf, as if he were me, it means that it is true that when Christ was nailed to the cross, my sins were nailed there with him as if they were his. It means that when Christ cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", as the Father cast his son from his presence to suffer the torments of hell, it were as if I had paid that price. Jesus Christ paid my price for coming into the very presence of God himself. The Bible says, "Christ died for all." And right now as he appears in heaven, he says to the Father, "Look at my death as if Mark Bartels had paid the price for a sinner coming into your presence." He credits that payment for a sinner coming into his presence to our account. He is our advocate. "He entered heaven now to appear for us in God's presence."

2. Remember how intolerable it is for the unholy to come into the presence of God. There is only one reason a person can appear in the presence of God and live. He must be blameless, faultless, holy, and innocent. Jesus, as the God-man lived that spotless, holy life, without sin, in our behalf. He has the right to stand in God's presence, not with fear and trembling, but with great joy. Right now the risen, ascended Jesus stands in God's presence on our behalf, as our advocate in heaven and says, "I give my perfect life to Mark Bartels...look at my life as if it were Mark's, so that he can appear in your presence and live." "He entered heaven now to appear for us in God's presence."

A time will come when we all must come into the presence of the Almighty God. Are you ready? When you come into his presence will you live?

There is only one way you can live in his presence: that is if you are pure and blameless. The only way you are pure and blameless is if you realize, I am a sinner, it was Jesus who was pure and blameless in my place, and who paid my price as a sinner to appear before God and live..

It all comes down to faith in that free gift. Concerning those who do not believe, II Thessalonians 1:8-9 says, "He will punish those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and SHUT OUT FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD and from the majesty of his power."

But to those who by the grace of God have been brought to faith by the Holy Spirit through word and sacrament the promise is that we will appear in the presence of God and live not because we deserve it but because Christ gives it to us as a free gift. We can shout with the voice of triumph along with Jude 24-25, "To him who is able to keep you from falling AND TO PRESENT YOU BEFORE HIS GLORIOUS PRESENCE WITHOUT FAULT AND WITH GREAT JOY, to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever more. AMEN"

As we close, this thought: in a few moments we will receive the Supper of our Lord. It is almost an overwhelming thought to know that the same risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ who this very instant appears in the presence of God the Father in heaven on our behalf will come to be present with us sinners. He will give us his real body and blood and the forgiveness he won for us. He will show us that there should be no doubt in our minds that everything he has is ours and he gives it to us freely. AMEN

WHY IS THE LUTHERAN CHURCH A LITURGICAL CHURCH?

by
David J. Webber

I. According to its official Confessions, the Lutheran Church is a liturgical church. This means that in Confessional Lutheran congregations the Word of God is regularly proclaimed and the Lord's Supper regularly celebrated within the framework of a Scripturally-based, historically-informed, and dignified order of worship.

But let us talk about the term "liturgy." It does not really mean a sacrifice but a public service. Thus it squares with our position that a minister who consecrates shows forth the body and blood of the Lord to the people, just as a minister who preaches shows forth the gospel to the people, as Paul says (I Cor. 4:1), "This is how one should regard us, as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the sacraments of God," that is, of the Word and sacraments; and II Cor. 5:20, "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Thus the term "liturgy" squares well with the ministry. (Apology XXIV:79-81)

We on our part also retain many ceremonies and traditions (such as the liturgy of the Mass and various canticles, festivals, and the like) which serve to preserve order in the church. (Augsburg Confessions XXIV:40 [German])

We are unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass. Without boasting, it is manifest that the Mass is observed among us with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents. (Augsburg Confession XXIV:9 [German])

We are perfectly willing for the Mass to be understood as a daily sacrifice, provided this means the whole Mass, the ceremony and also the proclamation of the Gospel, faith, prayer, and thanksgiving. Taken together, these are the daily sacrifice of the New Testament; the ceremony was instituted because of them and ought not be separated from them. Therefore Paul says (I Cor. 11: 26), "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death." (Apology XXIV:35)

From this description of the state of our churches it is evident that we diligently maintain church discipline, pious ceremonies, and the good customs of the church. (Apology XV:4)

II. The Lutheran Church is a liturgical church because it is a catholic church. The Lutheran Reformers of the sixteenth century were not sectarian innovators who sought to create a "new" church, but they acknowledged, and rejoiced in, their continuity with the church of the apostles and ancient Christian Fathers. They recognized that many of the centuries-old liturgical customs which they had inherited were both useful and beneficial, and they saw no reason to discard them. With humble gratitude Confessional Lutherans embrace the edifying liturgical usages of the pre-Reformation catholic church as important

components of their own heritage and identity. They do not believe that such historic Christian customs are unique to the Roman Catholic Church (or to any other individual church body or denomination). The Book of Acts (correctly translated) indicates that the corporate worship of the Christian church has always been "liturgical" in character. The Christians in Jerusalem "continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the communion of the breaking of the bread and in the prayers" (Acts 2:42, RCRV); on one occasion the Holy Spirit spoke to the Christians at Antioch "while they were engaged in the liturgy of the Lord" (Acts 13:2, NAB): and in regard to the Christians at Troas, St. Luke reports that "On the first day of the week when we gathered for the breaking of the bread, Paul preached to them" (Acts 20:7, NAB). The New Testament encourages all Christians to "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings" (Hebrews 13:7-9, NASB). In the forms of public worship which they employ, Lutherans do indeed "remember" and "imitate" those who have served the cause of Christ's unchanging Gospel throughout the church's history. The main elements of the historic Lutheran liturgy are not distinctively "Lutheran" and do not simply reflect the culture of sixteenth-century Germany and Scandinavia (or of twentieth-century America). They reflect instead the faith and devotion of God's people of all times and places.

....our churches dissent from the church catholic in no article of faith but only omit some few abuses which are new and have been adopted by the fault of the times

although contrary to the intent of the canons...
(Augsburg Confession, prologue to XXII, 1
[Latin])

...nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or to the church catholic. (Augsburg Confession, epilogue to XXVIII,5 [Latin])

...No novelty has been introduced which did not exist in church from ancient times...
(Augsburg Confession XXIV:40 [German])

We gladly keep the old traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquillity, and we interpret them in an evangelical way, excluding the opinion that they justify. Our enemies falsely accuse us of abolishing good ordinances and church discipline. We can truthfully claim that in our churches the public liturgy is more decent than in theirs, and if you look at it correctly we are more faithful to the canons than our opponents are. (Apology XV:38-39)

Since, therefore, the Mass among us is supported by the example of the church as seen from the Scriptures and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disapproved, especially since the customary public ceremonies are for the most part retained.
(Augsburg Confession XXIV:40 [Latin])

...we do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it. In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved. (Apology XXIV:1)

III. The Lutheran Church is a liturgical church because it is an orthodox church. Its historic worship forms are thoroughly Biblical and evangelical in content, and therefore serve as faithful guides in orthodox Christian worship. The chief articles of the faith (the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, sin and grace, etc.) are succinctly summarized in the unchanging parts of the service, and these basic Christian truths become deeply ingrained in the minds and hearts of Christian worshipers through the disciplined, weekly repetition of those texts (The chief parts of the "ordinary" of the Mass are the Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Nicene Creed, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei.). The annual cycle of festivals and seasons in the traditional church year reminds worshipers of the important events in salvation history. The weekly sequence of Scripture readings and other "propers" appointed for each Sunday of the year exposes worshipers to "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, NKJV). The historic liturgy provides a proper balance of continuity and variety in each Sunday's service. Through the words of the liturgy, worshipers are able to hear God's timeless message to his people, and to respond with prayers of thanksgiving, praise, and petition that have been molded and shaped by that message. The liturgy focuses the worshipers' attention on the objective, unchanging truths of Holy Scripture rather than on their own subjective and unreliable emotions, and thereby helps them to remain faithful to St. Paul's directive: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16, NIV).

The purpose of observing ceremonies is that men may learn the Scriptures and that those

who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so may also pray.
(Apology XXIV:3)

...the chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ. (Augsburg Confession XXIV:3 [German])

...ceremonies are needed especially in order that the unlearned may be taught. (Augsburg Confession XXIV:3 [Latin])

Places, times, persons, and the entire outward order of worship are therefore instituted and appointed in order that God's Word may exert its power publicly. (Large Catechism I:94)

To determine the apostles' wish and intention, therefore, we must consult their writings, not merely their example. They observed certain days, not because such observance was necessary for justification but to let the people know when to assemble. When they assembled, they also observed other rites and a sequence of lessons. Frequently the people continued to observe certain Old Testament customs, which the apostles adapted in modified form to the Gospel history, like the Passover and Pentecost, so that by these examples as well as by instruction they might transmit to posterity the memory of these great events. (Apology VII/VIII:40)

Although the holy Fathers themselves had rites and traditions, they did not regard them as useful or necessary for justification. They did not obscure the glory or work of Christ but taught that we are justified by faith for Christ's sake, not for the sake of these human

rites. They observed these human rites because they were profitable for good order, because they gave the people a set time to assemble, because they provided an example of how all things could be done decently and in order in the churches, and finally because they helped instruct the common folk. For different seasons and various rites serve as reminders for the common folk. For these reasons the Fathers kept ceremonies, and for the same reasons we also believe in keeping traditions. (Apology XV:20-21)

...we believe that the true unity of the church is not harmed by differences in rites instituted by men, although we like it when universal rites are observed for the sake of tranquillity. So in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's day, and the other more important feast days. With a very thankful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances, especially when they contain a discipline that serves to educate and instruct the people and the inexperienced. (Apology VII/VIII:33)

Every Lord's Day many in our circles use the Lord's Supper, but only after they have been instructed, examined, and absolved. The children chant the psalms in order to learn; the people sing, too, in order to learn or to worship. (Apology XV:40)

IV. The Lutheran Church is a liturgical church because it is an aesthetic church. The traditional symbols and ceremonies which often accompany the historic liturgy help to "harmonize" the outward appearance of the sanctuary and the outward actions of the congregation and pastor with

the words that are being spoken and sung. The evangelical ceremonies employed in the Lutheran Church serve to underscore, and draw attention to, various aspects of the evangelical message of the liturgy. The New Testament itself testifies to a wide variety of such ceremonial aids in Christian worship. Before St. Paul departed from the Ephesian elders, "he knelt down and prayed with them all" (Acts 20:36, NKJV). Christians are told that they "have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat" (Hebrews 13:10, NKJV). The worship of the courts of heaven, as described in the Revelation of St. John, is characterized by much symbolic imagery: "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes... Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne..." (Revelation 4:4,5, NKJV); "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand" (Revelation 8:3-4, NKJV). The liturgical ceremonies of the Lutheran Church, many of which have their origin in the apostolic church, are indeed useful for the maintenance of dignity in worship and for the cultivation of reverence and devotion among worshipers. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Hebrews 12:28-29, NIV).

The real adornment of the churches is godly, practical, and clear teaching, the godly use of the sacraments, ardent prayer, and the

like. Candles, golden vessels, and ornaments like that are fitting... (Apology XXIV:1)

...in the Sacrament of the Altar the body and blood of Christ are truly eaten and drunk in the bread and wine... (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:32) (emphasis added)

We keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of the lessons, prayers, vestments, etc. (Apology XXIV:1)

...Make the sign of the cross and say, "In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen." Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. (Small Catechism VII:1-2)

In the administration of Communion the words of Institution are to be spoken or sung distinctly and clearly before the congregation and are under no circumstances to be omitted. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:79) (emphasis added)

...it can readily be judged that nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches. (Augsburg Confession, prologue to XXII:6 [Latin])

...let all good men understand that we most zealously preserve the dignity of the Mass... (Apology XXIV:99)

V. The Lutheran Church is a liturgical church, but its various branches are not obligated to adhere

of the rubrics of any one particular rite. The sixteenth-century liturgical orders of the various branches of the Church generally did follow the basic outline of the western catholic Mass, but they often differed from each other in many details. The Lutheran Church acknowledges that God's Word has not bound Christian worshipers to any specific liturgy or ceremonies, and that all Christian churches therefore are, in principle, free to modify or change their liturgical practices. However, the Confessions of the Lutheran Church are also very clear in their teaching that such modifications or changes are to be made only when there are good reasons for them, and only in ways that are fully in keeping with the Church's Biblical standards of liturgical solemnity and doctrinal purity. Lutheran congregations are not required to be "high church" or "low church," but they are required to be churchly. The Confessions accordingly do not endorse the substitution of frivolous "evangelism" gimmicks for the public Divine Service, and they do not condone whimsical and arbitrary alterations of "the pattern of the sound words" of the established liturgy (2 Timothy 1:13, RSV). St. Paul reminds us that "God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (I Corinthians 14:33, NASB), and he tells us to "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40, NKJV). St. Paul's insights on the exercise of Christian freedom apply to the question of unnecessary deviations from the historic Lutheran (Christian) liturgy: "'Everything is permissible'--but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible'--but not everything is constructive" (I Corinthians 10:23-24, NIV). The basic liturgical policy of the Church of the Lutheran Reformation can aptly be summarized in the words of the well-known witticism: "If it's not broken, don't fix it."

With regard to church usages that have been established by men, it is taught among us that these usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church, among them being certain holy days, festivals, and the like. Yet we accompany these observances with instruction so that consciences may not be burdened by the notion that such things are necessary for salvation. (Augsburg Confession XV:1-2 [German])

Among us the ancient rites are for the most part diligently observed, for it is false and malicious to charge that all ceremonies and all old ordinances are abolished in our churches. But it has been a common complaint that certain abuses were connected with ordinary rites. Because these could not be approved with a good conscience, they have to some extent been corrected. (Augsburg Confession, epilogue to XXI:4,5 [Latin])

...the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, or reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration X:9) (emphasis added)

...neither are useless and foolish spectacles, which serve neither good order, Christian discipline, nor evangelical decorum in the church, true adiaphora or things indifferent. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration X:7)

...our opponents condemn us for teaching that human traditions do not merit the forgiveness of sins, and they require so-called "universal rites" as necessary for salvation. Here Paul is our constant champion; everywhere he insists that these observances neither justify nor are necessary over and above the righteousness of faith. Nevertheless, liberty in these matters should be used moderately, lest the weak be offended and become more hostile to the true teaching of the Gospel because of an abuse of liberty. Nothing should be changed in the accustomed rites without good reason, and to foster harmony those ancient customs should be kept which can be kept without sin or without great disadvantage. (Apology XV:50-51)

(Confessional quotations are from The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert [c 1959, Fortress Press]. "NAB" Scripture quotations are from The New American Bible [c 1970, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine]. "NASB" Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible [c 1971, the Lockman Foundation]. "NIV" Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version [c 1978, the International Bible Society]. "NKJV" Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New King James Version [c 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.]. "RCRV" Scripture quotation is from The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version [c 1952, the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.] .)

THE SOCIOLOGY OF CHURCH GROWTH IN AMERICA

by
William B. Kessel

More than a century and a half ago, Alexis de Tocqueville noted that "America is still the place where the Christian religion has kept the greatest real power over men's souls" (Tocqueville 1969: 295). Data extracted from recent surveys suggests that Tocqueville's words still ring true. About 95 percent of Americans reportedly believe in God, compared to 88 percent of Italians, 76 percent of Britons, and 65 percent of Scandinavians. The same surveys asked people if religion was "very important" in their lives. Fifty-six percent of Americans said "yes," compared to 36 percent of Italians and Canadians, 23 percent of Britons, and 17 percent of Scandinavians, West Germans, and Japanese (Benson:1981; Gallup 1984). Approximately 40 percent of American adults attend religious services every week, in contrast to fewer than 10 percent in Germany, France, and England (Caplow 1985). Even many Americans who do not claim a church affiliation still value religion. In a recent poll 30 percent of such individuals regarded religion as very important to them in their lives, and about three out of four claimed to pray occasionally (Naisbitt and Aburdene:1990).

Before Christians sit back and congratulate themselves, however, they had better take a closer look at the direction religion is really headed. Gilbert and Sullivan, in their opera "H. M. S. Pinafore," mused that "Things are seldom what they seem. Skim milk masquerades as cream." People may believe in "god" but which "god?" Islam is

experiencing world-wide growth, annually gaining thousands in America (See Appendix A). People may believe that religion is "very important" but for what reasons? While 91 percent of Americans claim to have religious preferences, only 58 percent believe in life after death and only 40 percent attend religious services regularly (Gallup 1984). A 1983 poll of Minnesota Christians showed that fewer than 10 percent cited worship as the primary reason they attended church (Bilheimer 1983).

For many years social scientists have studied trends in American religions. This paper is a compilation of their findings. As such it presents not only their data and summaries but suggests their explanations as well. The perspective of the authors cited is decidedly sociological and statistical and not theological. Nevertheless, their critical analysis should not summarily be disregarded by the theologian.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AMERICAN CHURCH MEMBERS

When viewed from a distance, America appears as a close-knit, cohesive society. Some 250 million citizens live within the geographical confines of 50 states. They share a common language, culture, and set of social customs. Below the surface, however, society is divided and subdivided. Individuals and entire groups compete with one another. The Republicans and Democrats vie for power; the environmentalists take on the industrialists; the frost belt and sun belt states compete for population; and the rich jockey for position with regard to the poor. Likewise, denominations enter the fray. If not actually struggling against one another, the various church bodies at least cater to certain segments of society and/or certain segments of society gravitate to certain church bodies.

Pollsters and sociologists are quick to point out the social characteristics of religious Americans. A sample of their findings will now be presented.

Residence. Catholics and Jews tend to be urban residents. Protestants tend to live in relatively smaller towns or in rural areas (Thio 1991:277).

Geographical Location. Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Jews are heavily represented in the Northeast. The Catholics also have a stronghold in the West and states bordering Mexico. Baptists and Methodists dominate Texas and the Southeast. Lutherans cluster in the Northeast and Midwest. Mormons occupy Utah and surrounding states (Caplow et al 1983:12-13; Robenstein 1992: 180).

Politics. Most religious groups favor the Democratic party over the Republican party. However, Protestants are not as overwhelmingly Democratic as are the Catholics and Jews. In fact, two Protestant groups, Episcopalians and Presbyterians, claim more Republicans than Democrats.

By and large, Protestants are more socially conservative and less supportive of civil liberty legislation than are Catholics and Jews. Within Protestantism, however, the Presbyterians and Episcopalians are most likely to be socially liberal and pro-civil liberties. Meanwhile, Baptists, who are overwhelmingly Democratic, are socially conservative and less supportive of civil liberties (Lipset and Raab 1978).

Caplow (1991:70) draws an interesting conclusion about Roman Catholics and social issues. He notes that between 1960 and 1975 the percentage of Catholics attending mass every week fell sharply, from approximately 75 percent to about 55 percent, where it is today. The common explanation for this

phenomenon is that people reacted negatively to the reforms of Vatican II which did away with the traditional Latin mass and weakened customary practices like fasting and confession. Caplow contends that this drop in church attendance was a result of Pope Paul VI's 1968 Humanae Vitae which attempted to prohibit the use of contraceptives, which by this time had become a heated social and political issue.

Class. America can be divided into five social classes based primarily on education, income, and occupation: Upper Class, Upper-Middle Class, Lower-Middle Class, Working Class, and Lower Class. Jews, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians tend to be at the top of the social hierarchy. Methodists, Catholics, and Lutherans are in the middle. Baptists draw members from the lower classes (Gallup 1984).

Age. Jews, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, and Northern Baptists have the oldest average age per member. Southern Baptists, Nazarenes, evangelicals and fundamentalists, and black Baptists are, on average, much younger (Caplow 1991:73).

Family. Black Protestants are most likely to be single or divorced. Southern Baptists, evangelicals and fundamentalists, and Nazarenes have the most children, while Jews, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians are the least fertile (Caplow 1991: 73).

Social Groups. Blacks, women, the elderly, and unmarried people are more likely to attend church than whites, men, young people, and those who are married (Knox 1990:328).

CHURCH GROWTH IN AMERICA

In America growth in church membership has not

kept pace with the general population change. Since the early 1970s the U. S. population has grown by 11.5 percent, but church membership has expanded by only 4.1 percent (see Appendix B). During this time some denominations have experienced rapid growth while other church bodies have witnessed a steady decline (Naisbitt and Aburdene 1990).

Generally, since the mid-sixties the main-line "liberal" denominations have lost members. Meanwhile, other more "conservative" groups and sects have experienced growth. This is evident from longitudinal studies of church membership changes (see Appendix C). Between 1965 and 1985 various denominations lost members. For example, the membership of the Presbyterian Church declined by 24 percent, the Episcopal Church (U.S.A.) by 20 percent, the United Methodist Church by 16 percent, and the Disciples of Christ by 42 percent. During the same time the membership of the Assemblies of God churches increased by 116 percent, the Church of God by 147 percent, the Church of the Nazarene by 50 percent, the Southern Baptist Convention by 34 percent, the Mormons by 116 percent, the Jehovah's Witnesses by 121 percent, and the Seventh-Day Adventists by 79 percent (Parrott and Perrin 1991:29).

If pollsters and sociologists have noted shifts in the religious preferences of Americans, they have also searched for explanations. Most often they analyze people's commitment to traditionally accepted values and norms. In recent decades American main-line churches have been attracted by the liberal positions on basic religious and social issues. Caplow (1991:71) lists six signs of the drift toward liberalism in the church.

1. "Liturgical reform, aimed at modernizing and democratizing traditional forms of worship."
2. "The ordination of women in the Protestant denominations and the 'empowerment' movement of Catholic nuns."
3. "The abandonment of exclusionary practices that prohibited, for example, the re-marriage of divorced persons, the marriage of church members to the unchurched, the religious burial of suicides, and the acceptance of homosexuals as clergy."
4. "An extraordinary decline in long-standing hostilities between Christians and non-Christians, between Protestants and Catholics, and among Protestants of different convictions."
5. "A strong commitment to racial equality, the abolition of compulsory segregation in church organizations (although the voluntary segregation of blacks and hispanics in local congregations is accepted as innocuous) and preferential treatment of minority clergy."
6. "Increasing disregard of the doctrinal differences which nominally distinguish Catholics from Protestants and the main-line Protestant denominations from each other."

For the sociologist the implications of these data are obvious. Main-line denominations have drifted toward religious liberalism. Since the mid-sixties these same church bodies have experienced losses in membership. While this may be a coincidence it appears more likely that there is

a connection, if not a causal relationship, between liberalization and membership loss. This hypothesis can be tested by examining the obvious. Are conservative church bodies such as fundamentalists, evangelicals, charismatics and various sects gaining members? As has been seen, the answer is yes. Before discussing the growing church bodies, however, we must establish a basic vocabulary.

According to sociologists, the fundamentalist or evangelical revival is a response to liberalizing tendencies in American politics, society, and religion. Evangelicals figure largely in right-wing political groups "that are both antiliberal and antilibertarian" (Caplow 1991:70). They tend to favor the power of the state in enforcing sexual morality, family solidarity, and the Protestant work ethic. They tend to be pronuclear, anti-abortion, and in some cases, racially intolerant. Meanwhile, their theological message is well known. Fundamentalists emphasize a literal interpretation of everything found in the Bible. Evangelicals concentrate on a personal commitment to Jesus Christ which comes from being "born again." In crude terms, they are also characterized by a Spirit-induced emotional demonstration rather than quiet devotion at church services. Charismatics or Pentecostals emphasize speaking in tongues, uttering prophecies, and healing of the sick through prayer and the Holy Spirit (Thio 1991:278). Perhaps the political and theological message of the conservative denominations is most widely disseminated by the televangelists (Hadden and Shupe 1988).

If the fundamentalist and evangelical attract conservative audiences in America, they also appeal to the casualties of this fast-changing, high-tech age. These are the "people who are socially

isolated, mentally depressed, alienated, and dehumanized by modern society" (Thio 1991:279). In fundamentalist churches they become a part of a religious community as opposed to the religious audiences which characterize main-line churches. Likewise many individuals who find themselves on the peripheries of society follow the televangelists. In 1987 televangelists attracted huge numbers of followers.

<u>Televangelist</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Number of Followers</u>	<u>Annual Revenues</u>
Pat Robertson	Virginia Beach, VA	468,000	\$129 million
Jerry Falwell	Lynchburg, VA	4 million	\$73 million
Robert Schuller	Garden Grove, CA	1.7 million	unknown
Oral Roberts	Tulsa, OK	1.1 million	\$58 million

Studies reveal that relatively low-income, rural women over 50 years of age, who are somewhat alienated from the mainstream of American society, constitute the predominant audience for the televangelists (Martz et al. 1987).

Finally, sociologists have recognized the dramatic growth in certain individual congregations in America today. Much of this growth is found among minorities. A recent study reveals that 15 of the fastest-growing congregations in America are predominantly black (Sidney 1991). In addition, the lion's share of rapidly growing congregations are to be found in the sun-belt states. Certain rapidly growing congregations deserve specific mention.

Among black congregations, The Word of Faith Center in Detroit and Calvary Chapel of Albuquerque both reported gaining 1,500 people in average Sunday morning attendance between 1988 and 1989. West Angeles Church of God in Christ gained 1,200 worshippers in 1989. This congregation boasts an average Sunday attendance of 6,400. Other rapidly

growing black churches include Mount Ephraim Baptist Church, Atlanta; Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Baltimore; Ben Hill United Methodist Church, Atlanta; Concord Baptist Church, Dallas; Bountiful Blessings, Memphis; New Saint Paul Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, Detroit (Sidey 1991:45).

Various congregations in Florida have achieved significant numerical growth. The fastest-growing congregation in this state is Coral Baptist Church, Coral Springs. A St. Lucie County congregation, Calvary Assembly of God, is the third fastest growing. There the average Sunday attendance has risen from 800 in 1988 to 1,200 in 1989, to 1,500 in 1991 (Kaplan 1991).

Not to be outdone by Florida, another sun-belt state, Arizona, boasts of its own megachurches. "The Rev. Mr. Barnett," pastor of the Phoenix First Assembly, boasts that his average weekly attendance has risen from 200 in 1979 to 9,600 today (Johnson 1990). Nearby, The Community Church of Joy in Glendale, Arizona, has grown from fewer than 100 to more than 2,500 per Sunday during the past decade (Hiebuhr 1991).

Not surprisingly, California claims more than its share of rapidly growing congregations and may be germinating new denominations. Parrott and Perrin (1991) identify three "candidates for denominationhood" during the next century. They include Calvary Chapel of Santa Ana, the Vineyard of Anaheim also in California, and the Church on the Rock in Dallas. In 1965 "Pastor Chuck" (Chuck Smith), a Foursquare gospel pastor, seized the helm of a 25-member congregation. One year later it had 100 members, two years later it had 200. Today it has over 10,000 tithing families.

Today Calvary Chapel includes a 21-acre campus with a religious bookstore and a Christian school with 1,500 students. The congregation has spawned some 350 other Calvary Chapels. Not many miles from Santa Ana is John Wimber's Vineyard Christian Fellowship congregation. Wimber has led the church from a prayer group that met in a house to more than 5,000 members. The Vineyard now has over 300 congregations with more than 150 members each. Finally, in 1980 Larry Lea pastored 13 church members in a suburb of Dallas, Texas. A decade later the membership numbered 8,000. There are now 70 other affiliated churches across the United States under the umbrella of the Church on the Rock North America.

CONCLUSION

Religion is a powerful force in American society. According to sociologists it not only shapes society but is itself shaped by society. Only by viewing the American social system as a whole can one hope to gain an understanding of a phenomenon as complex as denominational growth or decline.

APPENDIX A

ESTIMATED RELIGIOUS POPULATION OF THE WORLD

Religion	1988	1989	1990
Christians	1,644,396,500 (32.9 %)	1,669,520,440 (32.9 %)	1,711,897,000 (32.9 %)
Muslims	860,388,000 (17.2 %)	880,555,210 (17.4 %)	924,611,000 (17.8 %)
Nonreligious	836,327,770 (16.7 %)	866,759,660 (17.1 %)	869,513,000 (16.7 %)
Hindus	655,695,200 (13.1 %)	663,495,450 (13.1 %)	689,205,000 (13.2 %)
Buddhist	309,626,100 (6.2 %)	311,836,170 (6.1 %)	311,438,000 (6.0 %)
Atheists	225,126,500 (4.5 %)	229,711,410 (4.5 %)	231,840,000 (4.5 %)
Chinese Folk Rel.	187,517,100 (3.7 %)	172,278,230 (3.4 %)	170,236,000 (3.3 %)
New Religionists	110,706,100 (2.2 %)	111,911,560 (2.2 %)	126,819,000 (2.4 %)
Tribal Religionists	94,758,750 (1.9 %)	92,040,570 (1.8 %)	90,810,000 (1.7 %)
Jews	18,075,400 (0.4 %)	18,169,340 (0.4 %)	17,357,000 (0.3 %)
Sikhs	16,604,150 (0.3 %)	17,187,390 (0.3 %)	17,735,000 (0.3 %)
Shamanists	12,762,200 (0.2 %)	12,381,640 (0.2 %)	10,702,000 (0.2 %)
Confucians	5,914,440 (0.2 %)	6,188,160 (0.1 %)	5,821,000 (0.1 %)
Baha'is	4,627,900 (0.1 %)	4,691,890 (0.1 %)	5,072,000 (0.1 %)
Jains	3,462,820 (0.1 %)	3,555,690 (0.1 %)	3,581,000 (0.1 %)
Shintoists	3,403,010 (0.1 %)	3,379,030 (0.1 %)	3,205,000 (0.1 %)
Other Religionsists	8,216,800 (0.1 %)	8,221,480 (0.2 %)	11,570,000 (0.2 %)
World Pop.	4,997,609,000 (100 %)	5,071,883,320 (100 %)	5,201,416,000 (100 %)

(From: 1988, 1989, 1990 Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year, Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.)

APPENDIX B

ESTIMATED CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN NORTH AMERICA

Denominations	1988	1989	1990
Roman Catholic	91,209,800	94,274,950	95,200,000
Protestant	94,965,500	93,637,200	94,600,000
Orthodox	5,910,000	5,871,470	5,900,000
Anglicans	7,511,000	7,262,000	7,200,000
Other Christian	32,452,100	31,511,460	31,700,000

(From: 1988, 1989, 1990 Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year, Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.)

APPENDIX C

WINNERS AND LOSERS AMONG U.S. DENOMINATIONS

<u>Denominations</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>Last Decade Change</u>
Roman Catholic Church	48,214,729	50,449,842	57,019,948	+ 13%
Southern Baptist Convention	11,628,032	13,600,126	14,907,826	+ 10%
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	2,073,146	2,811,000	4,175,400	+ 49%
Assemblies of God	625,027	1,064,490	2,137,890	+100%
Seventh-Day Adventists	420,419	571,141	701,781	+ 23%
Church of the Nazarene	383,284	484,267	561,253	+ 16%
Jehovah's Witnesses	388,920	565,309	825,570	+ 46%
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	381,321	407,043	419,312	+ 3%
Salvation Army	326,934	417,359	445,566	+ 7%
Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.)	272,278	435,012	582,203	+ 34%
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	152,670	190,087	190,183	+ 0%
Church of God (Anderson, Ind.)	150,198	176,429	199,786	+ 13%
Christian and Missionary Alliance	112,591	189,710	265,863	+ 40%
Baptist General Conference	103,955	133,385	133,742	+ 0%
Evangelical Covenant Church of America	67,441	77,737	89,014	+ 15%
Free Methodist Church of North America	64,901	68,477	75,869	+ 11%
Evangelical Lutheran Synod	15,663	19,885	21,544	+ 8%
United Methodist Church	10,509,198	9,519,407	8,979,139	- 6%
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	5,650,137	5,384,271	5,238,798	- 3%
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	4,045,408	3,362,086	2,886,482	- 16%
Reformed Church in America	367,606	345,532	330,650	- 5%
Episcopal Church	3,285,826	2,786,004	2,433,413	- 14%
Lutheran Church-- Missouri Synod	2,788,536	2,625,650	2,609,025	- 1%
United Church of Christ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	1,960,608	1,736,244	1,625,969	- 7%
Church of the Brethren	1,424,479	1,177,984	1,052,271	- 12%
Church of the Brethren	182,614	170,839	149,681	- 14%
Cumberland Presbyterian Church	92,095	96,553	90,906	- 6%
Mennonite Church	88,522	99,511	92,517	- 8%
North American Baptist Conference	55,080	43,041	42,629	- 1%

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THE THEOLOGY OF CHURCH GROWTH

by
William B. Kessel

The data are in. Analyses by sociologists and theologians alike produce the same results. While non-denominational churches like the Vineyard are experiencing impressive church growth, the mainline Christian denominations are decreasing in size (Jacquet and Jones 1991). If there is agreement about the direction in which religion in America is headed, there is no consensus as to why this phenomenon is taking place. Each analyst draws his or her own conclusions.

In this paper we will examine a variety of explanations which interpret the growth or decline of American churches. This will be followed by a brief evaluation of the Church Growth Movement, an outline of biblical church growth theology, and a practical guide designed to help pastors evaluate various evangelism programs.

VARIOUS EXPLANATIONS OF CHURCH GROWTH

The cover story of Newsweek magazine (December 17, 1990) provides an observation followed by a conclusion. The authors (Woodward et al 1990) note that at one time roughly two-thirds of the baby boomers dropped out of organized religion. Recently more than one-third of these dropouts have returned. The largest portion of the returnees (about 60 percent) are married with children. Married couples without children are least likely to return. Armed with these data and having paid visits to various growing churches, the Newsweek writers offer these

conclusions. Growing churches:

1. First and foremost focus on children. The baby boomers are looking for an environment in which their children can gain a knowledge of religion, learn solid values, and make friends with like-minded children.
2. Offer "ministries of compassion." These range from AIDS Service Centers, to homeless shelters, to GALS (a gay and lesbian fellowship).
3. Provide self-improvement opportunities, including adult education lectures and organized athletics.¹ "In many congregations, the path to God runs through the basement where the addicted gather for 12-step programs for recovering alcoholics, workaholics, chocoholics, the divorced, codependents and other victims of the fast-track 1990s" (Woodward et al 190:51). Singles look to the church as a place to meet and marry "kindred spirits."
4. Answer existential questions which help people make sense of their lives and answer their questions. For example: "I am successful in life, but what does that mean?"
5. Adopt church growth strategies. While this usually means utilizing polls, and adopting modern advertising and marketing procedures, it also implies the use, and often the abuse, of practical sense matters. As one Baptist preacher stated, "The No. 1 rule of church growth is that a church will never get bigger than its parking lot" (Woodward et al 1990: 52). Church growth strategies today include developing mega-churches which can supply a total spiritual recreational environment under

one "sacred canopy." They also emphasize meeting customer needs.²

The Newsweek article unwittingly summarizes its findings in the following sentence. "Unlike earlier religious revivals, the aim of this time (aside from born-again traditionalists of all faith) is support not salvation, help rather than holiness, a circle of spiritual equals rather than an authoritative church or guide" (Woodward et al 1990:56).

Perhaps there are as many explanations for church growth as there are local congregations or analysts. R. Gustav Niebuhr, staff reporter for the Wall Street Journal, recently discussed the pros and cons of adopting more modern music in the worship service (Niebuhr 1991a). He notes that many rapidly growing churches, including numerous Lutheran congregations, have exchanged the organ and traditional hymns for guitars and modern beats. As one eloquent pastor stated, younger people "don't dig Bach" (and we might add Beethoven and Buxtehude too). Advocates of sacred pop argue that they have historical precedent -- the revered hymns of today were pop hymns of yesterday. "Martin Luther borrowed music from a German love song for 'O, Sacred Head Now Wounded.'" Likewise, John and Charles Wesley launched the Methodist movement with hymns written to the melodies of English pub songs" (Niebuhr 1991a). Elsewhere Niebuhr (1991b) notes that some churches, like the 17,000 member Second Baptist Church in Houston, offer their clientele a variety of musical options. There are a variety of services which variously feature guitar sing-alongs, traditional hymns, and solid rock with Christian lyrics.

In 1990 the Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry interviewed George Gallup, Jr. about his views of religion in our society. Gallup remarked that

"There is no reason for the church not to grow" (1990:2). After all, he suggests, people are searching. Gallup offers three recommendations. Churches should:

1. Deepen prayer life. People need encouragement to pray and study their Bibles.
2. Teach people to share their faith. There is need for clear and compelling presentation of the Gospel.
3. Listen increasingly to the laity. Gallup's surveys suggest that the laity want a greater role in the church. They, laity for example, could "take over many of the Church's administrative functions to free the clergy for spiritual direction. What the laity really want from the clergy are spiritual leaders, not bureaucrats" (Gallup 1990:2).

In order to accomplish these goals, Gallup recommends the use of intensive small group Bible study. Here, in a non-threatening atmosphere, members study the Bible, pray, and find out what God has to say to them and how He can change their daily lives. Once they see the church as very important in their lives they will share it with others and the church will grow.³

One of the most rapidly growing denominations in America today is the Assemblies of God church. In 1980 the denomination had 9,773 churches with 1,064,490 members. In 1990 they had 11,300 congregations with excess of 3.5 million members. Robert Johnson, staff reporter for The Wall Street Journal, lists several reasons for their stellar rise in membership.

1. Faith healings and glossolalia appeal to a wide audience.

2. Many Assemblies churches provide superior entertainment. "Eluding the hellfire and smoke surrounding his pulpit, the Rev. Tommy Barnett waves goodbye. With a hearty 'Hallelujah,' he soars straight toward heaven and out of sight" (Johnson 1990:1).⁴
3. Some Assemblies churches utilize a variety of unconventional "tools" for ministry, including overhead TV screens, laser-light, fortune cookies with Scripture inside, miniature \$100 bills praising Jesus on the back, and T-shirts advertising "Kick Satan's Butt."

EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT

Many of the success factors outlined above are part-and-parcel of the Church Growth Movement introduced by McGavran nearly three decades ago. By now the movement has been around long enough to have attracted or repelled an enormous number of pastors and theologians throughout the United States. Furthermore, as the movement has evolved many people changed their minds about its doctrine and practice.

During the 1970s many pastors of mainline Christian denominations expressed misgivings about the McGavran theories. In recent years their opinions have changed however. Herb Miller, executive director of the National Evangelistic Association, has gathered data which suggest that 15 years ago five percent of mainline pastors supported the church growth movement, 20 percent were interested, and 75 percent were strongly opposed to the ideas. Today 25 percent of such pastors are positive about church growth, 50 percent are interested, and the

remaining quarter oppose the tenants of the movement (Sidey 1991:45).

What has brought about this shift in feelings regarding the Church Growth Movement? Some, like Craig Parro (1991), feel that it has produced positive theological results. According to him the movement:

1. Focuses on people. Many churches focus on doctrine at the cost of ignoring the hopes, fears, needs, and longings of people. Church growth does not separate Scripture and life's realities.
2. Focuses on stewardship. Church growth mobilizes people and resources to do church work.
3. Focuses on outreach. A church growth church is not content with the status quo. Programs target people and their current needs and are not continued for the sake of tradition.
4. Focuses on church-based ministry. Local congregations rather than para-church organizations accomplish church work.
5. Focuses on inclusiveness of faith. The movement breaks down the sacred-secular dichotomy and allows people to organize their whole lives around the Gospel.

Meanwhile, Sidey (1991:46-47) presents his explanation of why the Church Growth Movement has gained momentum in recent years. He notes that its theology has changed in two key areas which make it more palatable for many pastors.

1. Some years ago McGavran wrote, "People like to become Christians without crossing

significant linguistic, ethnic, or cultural barriers." Recently this homogeneous group theory has been modified.

2. Lyle Schaller has noted that "It used to be set in stone [by church growth leaders] that every church should be a growing church." Church growth leaders now concede that there are some churches which have a legitimate ministry and which do not grow. Peter Wagner, who helped McGavran shape the movement, now readily admits that in the past too much emphasis was given to numbers.

If the Church Growth Movement appeals to some, it is distasteful to others. Critiques of the Church Growth Movement have come fast and furious from the pens of various authors. Some analysts have attacked membership figures by showing that 80 percent of the new members in growing churches are transfers, not converts (Sidey 1991:47). Others zero in on the dangers inherent in adopting a marketing strategy for church growth. Parro (1991) delineates four areas where a marketing view of reality is inconsistent with the biblical view.

1. Marketing views the person as a "consumer," "respondent," "receptor," "prospect," or "target." Thus, individuals are identified according to felt needs. Jesus becomes a friend and companion. In fact, people are individuals with spiritual and transcendent needs. God is also the high and exalted One to be worshiped.
2. In marketing, the consumer defines the product. A market-driven church runs the risk of compromising its standards, of providing entertainment rather than change. Christianity

is supposed to change the person's world view not cater to it.

3. Marketing, by its very nature, takes a reductionist approach. Empirical data are distilled and form the basis for decisions. Life and faith often defy summation and stereotyping, however.
4. Church marketing can become a means of grace and replace the Holy Spirit. "If a church studies its market, devises intelligent plans, and implements those plans faithfully, it should see an increase in the number of visitors, new members, and people who accept Christ as their Savior" (Parro 1991).

Finally, conservative Lutheran theologians have recently spoken out against the Church Growth Movement. While the ELS has briefly expressed its righteous indignation against the movement (Rank 1991:111), authors in the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods have discussed the issues most clearly (Schneiderer 1985; Senkbeil 1989; Vallesky 1991). Anyone interested in reviewing pointed critiques of the Church Growth Movement is encouraged to study their works.

There is, however, one major issue associated with the Church Growth Movement which has received little attention. In order to avoid the theological pitfalls associated with the movement, some pastors have gone to the opposite extreme. They have, in fact, adopted a non-growth philosophy and have spurned practical issues and common-sense applications. The theological implications of such counter-growth thinking will now be discussed.

1. Overreaction #1 -- To Deny the Possibility of Significant Church Growth in the Present Era.

Even a casual reading of the Book of Acts reveals that the early church experienced rapid and genuine church growth.⁵ A sample of this growth is outlined in these simple words, "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:41). Here Peter proclaimed the Law and Gospel. The people were "cut to the heart" and asked Peter what they should do. Peter responded, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). The proclamation and application of the Gospel and Sacrament afforded the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work in their hearts. The church grew numerically as individuals were converted and grew in their faith.

Can such church growth take place today? The church grows (individuals are converted) by the Holy Spirit working through the Means of Grace. This is not the issue for conservative Lutherans. But can the Church grow numerically as it did in Apostolic days? This is the crux of the matter. Some pastors and theologians might argue that such growth today is unlikely because in the early days of Christianity there was a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This argument, however, is fraught with theological difficulties. While the Lord did bless the early Church with special, and perhaps time constrained, gifts--tongues and miracles--He ordained no other Means of Grace than the Gospel and Sacraments. Furthermore, when God gave Christians their marching orders in the words of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), He emphasized that disciplining comes about through Gospel

teaching and baptism, and that He would be with Christians in this endeavor throughout history. In other words, we have the same Means of Grace, the same Holy Spirit, the same presence of Jesus, and the same promise today as Christians had 2,000 years ago. Christians should not make *a priori* judgments which suggest that God is limited in His desire or ability to effect significant church growth in our day and age.

Elsewhere it might be argued that people are less receptive to the Gospel today than they were in the early Post-Pentecost era. After all, does not God Himself tell us that in the Last Days the world will be so evil that if it were possible even the elect would be lost (Matt. 24:22)? This argument, too, falls short. Certainly we are living in the Last Days, but so were the believers in the first century A.D. For them, as for us now, all signs of the last times had been fulfilled. But are not people more evil today than in yesteryear? The answer to this question involves the doctrine of salvation. God saves an individual not because of any good qualities inherent in that person, but simply because of His mercy and grace. Ephesians (2:1-9) describes a person as spiritually dead, then resurrected by God in Christ. To say that people are more evil today than centuries ago, and to suggest that this is the reason they are not converted, is to say that there is some speck of good in unregenerate man which makes him a candidate for conversion. Such a position is not biblical.

2. Overreaction #2--To Deny the Role of the Pastor and Congregation in Evangelism.

If the Holy Spirit works a miracle of conversion in the heart of the unbeliever through the Means of Grace then what is the pastor's role? The pastor

neither converts nor should take credit for converting the heathen. That is God's task and prerogative. Does this, then, mean that the pastor should become passive in evangelism? Here the answer is decidedly no. Luther has aptly noted that the Christian exists for the express purpose of sharing Christ with others, including unbelievers. The pastor who de-emphasizes evangelism in fact devalues the Great Commission (Matt. 28: 18-20), undermines the priesthood of believers (I Peter 2:9), and deflates the call into the public ministry (Rom. 10:17). Why, then, would a pastor de-emphasize evangelism? There are several possibilities: the pastor is content shepherding the existing flock and does not feel he has the time or ability to care for other sheep; other pastoral tasks such as theological study and correspondence are more comfortable for the pastor than evangelism; the pastor wants to let the Holy Spirit operate in the heart of the unbeliever without human interference. While all these explanations deserve rebuttal, the final one requires special emphasis. The pastor who feels that his calling is to preach the Gospel within the confines of the church edifice may secretly be harboring a synergistic view of conversion. His rationale might sound something like this. I am called to tend this flock, the names on the church membership list. If an unbeliever happens to be walking by a church on Sunday morning, and if the unbeliever happens to go inside the church during the service, and if he happens to hear the message of salvation, then he may be saved. But does not such a strategy implicitly suggest that the convert is partially responsible for his own salvation? According to this scenario he feels a need to find God. He takes the initiative to attend church. There is some spiritual spark within him which leads him to make a decision to invite Christ into his life. True

evangelism, reaching out to fallen humanity with the saving message of Jesus Christ, affords the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work in people's hearts and brings glory to God. A "here we are come and get it if you like" spirit invites pastoral and congregational lethargy and subtle theological synergism.

A BIBLICAL LUTHERAN THEOLOGY OF CHURCH GROWTH

Recently, David J. Valleskey, a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Seminary professor, undertook the ambitious task of evaluating the Church Growth Movement and expounding a correct theology of church growth. Since some ELS pastors may not have access to his published article, his 25 theses regarding church growth are here quoted at length (Valleskey 1991:117-119).

1. Without Christ mankind is totally lost, condemned and without hope (Ro 5:12; I Cor 15:22; Eph 2:12).
2. Mankind's greatest need is the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God (Ro 23; Eph 2:3b).
3. Through his perfect life and willing death, Christ has redeemed the world (Ro 5:5-8; 3:23-24; 5:18-19).
4. As a result of Christ's work of redemption God has declared the whole world to be not guilty (Ro 5:18-19; 2 Cor 5:19-21) (universal, objective justification).
5. Christ's universal atonement establishes the whole world as the church's field of witness. Hence, Christ has commissioned his church to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

6. The Church consists of all believers in Christ. All Christians, therefore, as priests of God, have a part in the mission of making disciples (1 Pe 2:9-12; 3:15-16; Mt 5:14-16).
7. A disciple is a believer in Jesus Christ (Mt 28:19; compare Mk 16:15) (universal, subjective justification).
8. The church is to make disciples by using the means of grace (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:47-48).
9. Through the law, God reveals to the world its sin and convicts it of its lostness (Ro 3:20; 7:7).
10. Through the gospel in Word and sacrament, God brings to the world the message of the finished work of Christ (2 Cor 5:18-19).
11. Only the gospel produces true growth of the church. The gospel in Word and sacrament is the living, powerful means of grace by which God saves lost and condemned people (Ro 1:16; He 4:12; 1 Pe 1:23; Tt 3:5; 1 Pe 3:21).
12. Conversion is a miracle of God, solely the work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel and not in any way a self-determined decision of an individual or group of individuals (2 Th 2:14; 1 Cor 12:3).
13. One who has been converted by the Holy Spirit through the gospel has been born again and has become a member of the Kingdom of God, that is, the Holy Christian Church (Jn 3:3,5).
14. While there may be converted people outside of visible gatherings of people around the

means of grace (normally, the local congregation), there are no converted people outside of the holy Christian church, the *Una Sancta* (Eph 4:4-6).

15. It is God-pleasing to appeal to a convert to join with others who have united in a fellowship around the means of grace, i.e., a local congregation (He 10:24-25; 2 Pe 3:18).
16. This appeal, however, is in the realm of sanctification rather than justification. Care must be taken to maintain the distinction that sanctification follows justification and that sanctification is seen as that which is necessary, but not that which is necessary for salvation (1 Jn 4:19; Ro 3:28; Jn 15:1-8).
17. The primary concern of Christians toward non-Christians must always be for their eternal salvation (Mt 16:26). Hence, the greatest need is to bring unbelievers to repentance and faith in Jesus through the gospel and thus into the holy Christian church. Making disciples is more important than making church members (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47; Jn 14:6).
18. As Christians use the means of grace to make disciples, they will remember the nature of the unbeliever, that he is spiritually blind, dead and an enemy of God (1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1; Ro 8:7). This has implications for witnessing:
 - We should not expect a proper spiritual interest, understanding or motivation on the part of the unregenerated.
 - We should not be discouraged if we meet with an initial negative response.

- We need to be persistent and persuasive in our witness (Ac 9:22,28-29; 17:2-3; 18:4; 19:8).
19. As Christians use the means of grace to make disciples, they will also remember the nature of the means of grace. God's Word is clear, sufficient and efficacious. This likewise has implications for witnessing:
- We are not to manipulate people with psychology or emotion (2 Cor 4:2).
 - We are not to seek to argue people into rational submission (1 Cor 1:18-25).
 - We rather are to plant and water the seed of the Word, doing so as clearly, simply and often as possible, trusting God to make it grow and produce disciples.
 - This is "church growth" in the biblical sense (1 Cor 3:6-7).
20. As Christians use the means of grace to make disciples, they will remember that while they can do nothing to add to the power inherent in the gospel, they can unconsciously put barriers in the way of the gospel, making it more difficult to communicate it to unbelievers (2 Cor 6:3).
21. The social sciences, which make observations about people and societies in God's creation, may assist Christians in their work of making disciples, especially by apprising them of possible points of contact with the unchurched and by alerting them to possible external barriers which may keep people from being willing to listen to a Christian's testimony. Thus the social sciences can help the Christian in his quest to become all things to all

people so that by all possible means he might win some (1 Cor 9:22).

22. The social sciences can observe and measure only that which is visible, i.e., outward growth, not that which is invisible to all but God himself, i.e., faith and growth of the church (2 Tm 2:19).
23. The social sciences should not be used, therefore, for measuring the "success" of one's ministry. A successful ministry is measured by a faithful stewardship of "the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1-5).
24. Faithful stewardship means, first of all, remaining sound in doctrine. It also means making the best use of our time and gifts and resources, which may well include a judicious use of the findings of the social sciences--all to be used in the service of the gospel (Jr 23:28; Mt 24:14-30).
25. Since God causes his church to grow through the means of grace, use of the social sciences must always be subservient to the use of the means of grace (Ro 1:16).

Evangelism is not an option for the Lutheran pastor or congregation. It is a divine mandate and high privilege for the Christian. The conscientious pastor, therefore, will not shy away from evangelism programs in the local congregation. He will, however, use sanctified Christian judgment in selecting the programs, approaches, and methods to be used. In 1981 Samuel Nafzger, executive director of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, wrote an essay designed to assist pastors in evaluating evangelism programs. His thought-provoking remarks have been quoted elsewhere (Valleskey

1991:120-121) and will be repeated verbatim here (Nafzger 1981:48-49).

From a Lutheran perspective the key question is: "How does the author apply Law and Gospel?" More specifically, the following questions should be asked:

- a. Does the program or technique suggest approaching the unconverted first with the Gospel rather than seeking to discover whether the person has a knowledge of his or her sin and lost condition without Christ?
- b. Does the program or technique present the Gospel in a way that suggests that human beings have the ability within themselves to make a decision for Christ rather than that faith comes through the operation of the Holy Spirit?
- c. Does the program or technique, either directly or indirectly, focus attention on what is taking place within the individual rather than on what took place on the cross of Jesus Christ? Does it tend to regard the presence of certain extraordinary--or even ordinary--gifts of the Spirit as a basis for certainty of forgiveness and salvation? Does it foster the impression that faith is a good work that merits God's favor?
- d. Does this program or technique suggest that there are at least three categories of people--unrepentant sinners, believers or those who have accepted Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, and disciples or those who have accepted Christ as both Lord and Savior?

- e. Does the program or technique give the impression, either directly or indirectly, that spiritual growth is always visible to the human eye and can therefore be measured by statistics and plotted on charts and graphs?
- f. Does this program or technique create the illusion that the acceptance of the Gospel by sinners is attributable to the use of this program or technique?
- g. Does this program or technique lead to the conclusion that the lack of positive results, when this occurs, is attributable solely to the way in which it was implemented?

When questions such as these must be answered in the affirmative, there is confusion of sanctification with justification and a falling into work-righteousness.

But Lutherans must also guard against the opposite error, the separation of faith and good works which results in apathy, lethargy, and indifference. The following questions must also be asked:

- a. Is the lack of numerical growth in our congregation the result of a failure to prepare carefully and to execute a plan for reaching those people in our community who do not know Christ?
- b. Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to our failure to keep records and to make use of statistics and measuring devices to see weaknesses and discover trends?
- c. Have we made wise use of the resources and insights at our disposal--for example: the

social sciences, the arts, etc.--in proclaiming the Gospel and in furthering Christian nurture?

- d. Are we guilty of excusing our apathy and indifference for sharing the Gospel through a kind of "glorification of littleness"?
- e. Do we tend to attribute an absence of numerical growth to faithfulness rather than to laziness and inactivity?
- f. Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to a failure to communicate the Gospel clearly?

When these questions can be answered in the affirmative, then we have separated justification and sanctification and have fallen into the error of cheap grace or indulging sin.

NOTES

¹ The Second Baptist Church of Houston, Texas, claims 17,000 members. The church supports 64 softball teams, 48 basketball teams, 84 teams in volleyball, soccer, and flag football. They have golf tournaments. The activity hub contains a Family Life Center with six bowling lanes, two basketball courts, an indoor jogging track, racquetball courts, weight and aerobic rooms, and an arts and crafts center. It has a music wing for its orchestra and 500-member choir (Woodward et al 1990:53).

² The growing mega-churches often adopt a meta-church strategy which C. Peter Wagner calls the most

important development in the church-growth movement since the work of McGavran. The basic idea is summarized in the equation "Cells + Celebration." "Mega-church life revolves round two events: the meeting of small groups, or cells; and corporate worship, or celebration" (Sidey 1991:46). The idea that a pastor or pastoral staff can fully shepherd a very large flock is naive. They provide the celebration. Lay shepherding takes place in cells of about 10 members each. In such a church virtually all the ministry is decentralized and taken over by these smaller units.

³ In a very recent article in Christianity Today James F. Engel (1991:35-37) reports on a study of evangelism among the readers of that magazine. About half of those surveyed indicated that they believed that more emphasis should be given to evangelism in their churches. He also lists the obstacles to evangelism.

⁴ Barnett is the pastor of the fastest growing church in the nation. Set in the foothills of Phoenix on a 72 acre piece of prime real estate, the church boasts of an average weekly attendance of 9,600. In 1979 the average attendance was 200. Barnett, also known to have cut down a tree with a chain saw to make a point, had the biggest fourth of July fireworks display in Phoenix, and he rented an elephant, kangaroo and zebra for a Christmas service.

⁵ See Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:19-21, 24,26; 12:24; 13:43,48,49; 14:1,21,27; 15:3; 16:5; 17:4,34; 18:8; 19:18,20; 21:20; 26:18; 28:24.

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POWER EVANGELISM FROM THE VINEYARD

by
William B. Kessel

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid 1960s mainline Christian denominations have experienced membership declines. Meanwhile, various conservative church bodies and numerous religious movements have enjoyed numerical success. Southern California, in particular, has become a "laboratory for entrepreneurial church innovation" (Stafford 1986:17). Starting from Disneyland the church-goer within 15 minutes can drive to Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral Chapel, and John Wimber's Vineyard. These churches, along with the Dallas-based Church on the Rock North America, are among the fastest-growing non-denominational churches in the country (Parrott and Perrin 1991). In this paper we will concentrate on just one of these. The lessons learned from the Vineyard, however, may well extend beyond the confines of John Wimber's organization.

FROM ROCK AND ROLL TO THE VINEYARD

During the late 1950s and early 1960s one of rock and roll's more illustrious groups was "The Righteous Brothers." While their title might suggest a Christian connection with the Lord of Righteousness, the group was, in fact, secular. Likewise, John Wimber, a music arranger with the group, enjoyed an enormously successful career but without any avowed connection with Jesus Christ.

In 1962 Wimber's life changed direction. Both he and his wife were converted to Christianity. In his video cassette tape, "I'm a Fool for Christ Whose Fool are You?" Wimber (1987) reflects on how God "drew him from the ranks of pagan America into Christianity." Rather whimsically he muses about his first encounter with the Bible, "a book about Jewish people," and his perplexity in finding no ashtrays while attending church for the first time. Wimber's conversion to Christianity, however, apparently was sincere and his zeal to serve the Lord was pronounced. He reported, "For both of us the results of our conversions were the same: freedom from guilt and the fear of death, a purpose for living, and a renewed marriage. We also immediately plunged into personal evangelism" (Wimber 1986:xv). He thus began a theological odyssey which would span nearly two decades and ultimately come to rest in the Vineyard.

With new convert enthusiasm Wimber became a lay evangelist. Eventually he studied for the ministry and became a pastor of an evangelical Friends congregation in Yorba Linda, California. Within 13 years the congregation had grown to over 2,000, but Wimber had become disenchanted with this ministry. One day he realized that the institution and operation "had become more important than the Body of Christ" (Wimber 1987). He immediately quit the church and ministry and soon joined Peter Wagner as a church-growth consultant for the Fuller Evangelistic Association. For the next three years Wagner and Wimber flew from one end of America to the other consulting with hundreds of churches that wanted to grow. Significantly, none of them were Pentecostal or charismatic.

Meanwhile, Wimber's wife became a charismatic and started a prayer group which grew to 50 members.

In 1977 John felt directed by God to become a pastor to that group and resigned his consulting position.

Wimber's new church was neither instantly affluent nor free from trouble. The faithful met in a high school gymnasium. Pastor Wimber preached from the Gospel of Luke and was captivated by the many examples of healings and exorcisms. Wimber became preoccupied with healings. He offered repeated altar calls for healings, and the church prayed. For ten months these efforts realized no success. Many people were disillusioned or disgusted and as many as half the members left the church. Wimber continued. Eventually one young woman was reportedly healed in her home of a fever. Wimber was ecstatic. At the top of his lungs he yelled, "We got one!" From then on the growth of the congregation skyrocketed. The church now focused almost exclusively on healings and other charismatic gifts.

About this time Wimber approached Kenn Gullickson, the founder of the original Vineyard Christian Fellowship. Wimber hoped to have his flock join the Vineyard; but, in an unexpected turn of events, Gullickson soon turned over the entire Vineyard movement to him.

During the decade of the 1980s the growth of the Vineyard has been nothing short of sensational. By 1983 Wimber's congregation moved to its current Anaheim location where it has grown to over 5,000 members. While seven years ago there were seven Vineyard congregations with more than 150 members in each, today there are more than 300 such congregations (Fisk, personal communication). Approximately 500 men have been ordained, and Wimber's

vision calls for some 10,000 new Vineyards. Some experts (Parrott and Perrin 1991) believe that it will one day be a full-fledged denomination. Currently the Vineyard churches have no legal ties, although the name Vineyard has been trademarked.

THEOLOGY OF SIGNS AND WONDERS

John Wimber's theology may best be seen by examining the content of a course which he taught at Fuller Theological Seminary. From 1982 until 1986 the Pasadena, California, seminary offered a course entitled "Signs, Wonders and Church Growth" MC510. The course gained the reputation of being the most popular and controversial class on campus. It was originally developed by Fuller's School of World Missions as a response to "phenomenal growth in Third World churches, where missionaries frequently witness healings, speaking in tongues, baptisms in the Spirit, prophecies, visions and exorcisms from demon possession" (Chandler 1986: 48-49). The course had immediate appeal since 13 percent of Fuller's students come from developing countries and an estimated 30 percent are charismatic. Perhaps one of the most controversial portions of the course was the optional two-hour lab session in which students were given the opportunity to experience spiritual gifts such as prayers for healings. Several students claimed to have been miraculously healed, one of a degenerative eye disease.

Although Wimber emphasizes miraculous healings, the key word in his theological vocabulary is "power." Like the late Fuller professor, George Ladd, Wimber emphasizes that the kingdom of God is "an invasive force" not only proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom but "demonstrating its

superior power over Satan's kingdom through healings and exorcisms." (Stafford 1986:18). This can best be illustrated by an example from Wimber's 1986 book, Power Evangelism.

Wimber states that one day he was on a jumbo jet headed from Chicago to New York. He looked across the aisle and spied a rather average-looking, middle-aged man. But as Wimber looked at the man he saw something not visible to the other passengers. Across the man's face he saw written the word "adultery." Wimber claims that God also told him the name of the adulteress as well. A brief conversation ensued. The man hurriedly took Wimber to the upstairs cocktail lounge. There Wimber revealed the rest of the message from God--"unless you turn from this adulterous relationship, he [God] is going to take your life" (Wimber and Springer 1986:33). They started to pray. The man visibly and audibly confessed his sins and was converted. At Wimber's insistence the man returned to his seat and told his wife of the affair. She too was converted on the spot.

For Wimber this account illustrates "power evangelism." As he himself (Wimber and Springer 1986:35) explains:

By power evangelism I mean a presentation of the gospel that is rational but that also transcends the rational. The explanation of the gospel comes with a demonstration of God's power through signs and wonders. Power evangelism is evangelism that is preceded and undergirded by supernatural demonstrations of God's presence.

Wimber, like his mentor Peter Wagner, believes that there is a constant power and authority struggle going on between the followers of Jesus and Satan.

When primitive people from Third World countries see a demonstration of God's superior power they come to believe. The same effect is realized in our society. Healings and exorcisms are appropriate power responses which have an evangelism effect (Wimber and Springer 1986, 1987, 1991).

VINEYARD OR GRAPES OF WRATH

The ministry of John Wimber and the Vineyard can be analyzed on various levels and from a variety of perspectives. Everyone agrees that the Vineyard has been imminently successful in attracting members. The ranks of the Vineyard in 1986 numbered over 45,000. Here is where the agreement ends, however. Wimber's followers contend that he is genuine and that his church is of God. Meanwhile, his detractors label him a charlatan and argue that his religion is not Christian. The battle lines are drawn and easily recognizable.

Perhaps, however, some further insight may be gained by positing a sociological explanation for the Wimber phenomenon. Wimber's movement has been successful because he has been in the right place, at the right time, with the right audience. He has successfully targeted a particular segment of the population which was not being reached by conventional religion. In short, John Wimber has catered to people with similar life experiences.

Prior to his conversion John Wimber was economically successful. He was married and had children. Money and marriage, however, did not supply happiness. He fought with his wife, and they separated. He sought relief in alcohol and drugs but still was not content (Wimber 1987).

He was looking for something more, something which transcended the routine Southern California yuppie life-style.

This description of Wimber and his quest, is paralleled in his followers. Wimber appeals to a "casual, white, middle-class, youthful crowd" (Stafford 1986:17). They are attracted to entertainment and excitement. The worship service in the Anaheim Vineyard typically begins with 45 minutes of nonstop singing led by Wimber, a former jazz and rock-and-roll musician. The rather rotund Wimber dresses in the casual "Hawaiian-style" shirt. His message is presented in a humorous and extremely entertaining fashion. That he has personal charisma, no one would deny. The altar healings and exorcisms are filled with ethos, pathos, and pageantry. People used to dealing with other people on an impersonal level now hug, laugh, and cry together. They become a huge family with a bigger-than-life father. Church is more than an exercise; it is an encounter and an experience. It provides more than TV, movies, or radio. The moral precepts inculcated lead to a happier and more acceptable life out in the real world.

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CONFSSIONAL STATEMENTS
BY MODERN DAY ORTHODOX LUTHERANS

by
Rev. Ernest Bartels

Lutheran Churches in America have drawn up and adopted a number of confessional documents over the years. Most of these were prepared in the effort to unite the various Lutheran bodies. Some of these reflect varying shades of orthodoxy. Others do not.

Among such documents of the twentieth century are the "Chicago Theses" of 1919. These theses, based on a paper authored by Hans G. Stub, were intended to provide "orthodox" bases for National Lutheran Council churches to work together in home missions. These theses reflect the confessionalism of Midwest Lutherans. These later became part of the "Minneapolis Theses" of 1925.¹

In the same year the Chicago Theses were challenged by a writing entitled "The Essentials of the Catholic Spirit in the Church. Its authors were Frederick H. Knubel and Charles M. Jacobs of the United Lutheran Church in America. This document stressed the ecumenical nature of confessional Lutheranism. In the next year, 1920, the ULCA adopted an official position paper based on The Essentials of the Catholic Spirit in the Church. This was called "The Washington Declaration."²

An important unity document was the "Minneapolis Theses" of 1925. It was prepared by

Carl C. Hein, J. Michael Reu, Johan A. Aasgaard and Hans G. Stub, representing the Ohio, Iowa, Buffalo and Norwegian Synods. E. Clifford Nelson described it as a "Self-styled 'middle way' between ULCA and Missouri, but essentially orthodox and fundamentalist confessionalism"³ and "theology of Old Lutheranism."⁴

An intersynodical writing known as the "Chicago Theses" was prepared by representatives of the Ohio, Buffalo, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin Synods between the years of 1925 and 1928. This work was based on the efforts of Minnesota pastors of these synods who had produced the "St. Paul Theses" in 1916. It was an unsuccessful attempt to provide a fellowship basis among the conservative confessionalists in the German Lutheran bodies of the Midwest.⁵ These Chicago Theses of 1925-1928 are to be distinguished from the 1919 theses by the same name. Fred W. Meuser says that "Missouri's 1929 convention delivered the coup de grace" to this document.⁶ He states, "A preconvention report on the theses by faculty members of Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois, called the theses unclear, ambiguous, and inadequate."⁷ The men from Springfield who made the report were Theodore Engelder, Richard C. Neitzel, and Paul Schulz.⁸ The convention, in turn, rejected the theses as a basis for doctrinal unity.⁹

In 1932 the Missouri Synod in convention at Milwaukee adopted an orthodox document titled "A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod." This paper became the synod's authoritative statement for unity discussion.¹⁰

In this chapter special attention will be given to three confessional statements that are strongly

orthodox in character, including the Brief Statement. The other two documents which will be discussed were not written for unity negotiations between synods, but as synodical position papers. "This We Believe" was prepared by a Wisconsin Synod committee in keeping with a resolution adopted at the synod's 1955 convention in Saginaw, Michigan. "A statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" was prepared under the direction of Missouri Synod President J. A. O. Preus in the troubled days prior to that synod's 1973 New Orleans convention.

These three documents illustrate the orthodox Lutheran position in our day. All three have the characteristics of explicitness and exactness for which orthodox Lutherans are known. The approach in all three is that of thesis and antithesis--stating first the accepted position, and then the position or positions that are rejected. An analysis of these documents will show a continuity with the orthodox writings of previous days.

After the 1929 convention of the Missouri Synod had rejected the intersynodical Chicago Theses, the delegates at this convention in River Forest, Illinois, decided to have a doctrinal statement formulated which would present the doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod.¹¹ The intention was that this doctrinal statement should serve as the basis for agreement in future union efforts.¹² A committee was elected to draw up such a document.¹³ This committee was made up of the following individuals: Theodore Engelder, L. A. Heerboth, E. A. Mayer, Francis Pieper and Frederick S. Wenger.¹⁴ The primary author of the new confessional document was Pieper.¹⁵ In the 1932 Milwaukee convention of the synod, A Brief Statement was adopted "as a brief Scriptural statement of the

doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod."¹⁶ Nelson, writing of the period of the 30's to the 50's says, "As far as the Missouri Synod was concerned the Brief Statement became more and more the touchstone of orthodoxy and the symbol of authority."¹⁷ The synod reaffirmed the Brief Statement at its 1947 Chicago convention.¹⁸ In the 1959 convention held in San Francisco, the Brief Statement was virtually given confessional status. However, three years later the delegates at the 1962 convention in Cleveland recognized that it was unconstitutional to bind pastors or professors to anything but the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.¹⁹

The Brief Statement has articles on Holy Scripture, God, Creation, Man and Sin, Redemption, Faith in Christ, Conversion, Justification, Good Works, Means of Grace, Church, Public Ministry, Church and State, Election of Grace, Sunday, Millennium, Antichrist, Open Questions, and Symbols of the Church.²⁰

The orthodox nature of the Brief Statement is evident throughout the document. The contents of the statement were considered by the authors to be solidly based on the Holy Scriptures which "are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken."²¹

Everything in the Brief Statement is also held to be in agreement with the symbols of the Lutheran Church. The writers say, "We accept as our confessions all the symbols contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580. The symbols of the Lutheran Church are not a rule of faith beyond, and supplementary to, Scripture, but a confession of the doctrines of Scripture over against those who deny these doctrines."²² Also they hold,

"Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the symbols not 'in so far as,' but 'because,' the symbols agree with Scripture. He who is unable to accept as Scriptural the doctrine set forth in the Lutheran symbols and their rejecting of the corresponding errors must not be admitted into the ministry of the Lutheran Church."²³

Meuser of Trinity Lutheran Seminary of the Lutheran Church in America gave a very negative appraisal of the Brief Statement, speaking of "the matter of allegiance to repristination theology as epitomized in the so-called Brief Statement."²⁴ His evaluation, however, points up the orthodox nature of this confessional document. He made much of the fact that the main author of the statement was Francis Pieper. His comments relative to Pieper in connection with the Brief Statement are, in part, as follows: "The chief architect of Missouri's theological position was Franz Pieper, professor at Concordia Seminary and author of the synod's guide to dogmatic rectitude. Pieper viewed the Lutheran confessions through the eyes of the seventeenth-century dogmaticians who were 'repristinated' by an anti-Schleiermacherian group of German Lutherans about mid-nineteenth century. The advocates of 'repristination theology' felt that true Lutheranism could only be secured by asserting the inerrancy of a verbally inspired Bible and a dogmatic use of the confessions."²⁵ Meuser quotes a portion of Pieper's preface to his three volume work entitled, "Christian Dogmatics." There Pieper said of the theology of the Missouri Synod, which, incidentally, was also the orthodox theology which he and his co-authors wrote down in the Brief Statement, "Considerable space has been given to the charge . . . that the Missouri Synod

teaches a 'repristination theology' which must inevitably prove harmful to the Church. The claim is made that by identifying Scripture and the Word of God our theology will lead to an intellectualism ... I considered it necessary to refute the unwarranted charge and to remove any misgivings concerning the 'repristination theology'.²⁶ Pieper then says that other church bodies also adhere to this "repristination theology" and cites Hoenecke's "Ev.-Luth. Dogmatic" as proof that the doctrinal position of the Wisconsin Synod is exactly the same as that of the Missouri Synod.²⁷

Outside the Missouri Synod the Brief Statement was adopted by the American Lutheran Church in 1938. At that time the ALC was made up of the former Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods. Missouri and the ALC were negotiating toward union with one another.²⁸ The endorsement given by the American Lutheran Church was a qualified one. They had produced a "Declaration" of their own. They said at their Sandusky convention, "That we believe the Brief Statement viewed in the light of our Declaration is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses..."²⁹

The writer of this dissertation asked Edward C. Fredrich, professor of church history at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at Mequon, Wisconsin, if the other synods which were in the Synodical Conference at the time ever adopted the Brief Statement. These synods were Wisconsin, Norwegian (now Evangelical Lutheran Synod), Slovak (now part of Missouri) and National (now defunct). His reply was that they never took any official action regarding the statement, as such, but it was as "brothers between brothers" considered and referred to as a doctrinal correct document, especially during the period when doctrinal controversy arose between the

Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods on the one hand, and Missouri on the other.³⁰

Theodore A. Aaberg of the Norwegian Synod (ELS) wrote that "The 'Brief Statement' had the approval of the Synodical Conference."³¹ The ELS reprinted the Brief Statement in serial form in seven succeeding installments in their official organ, the "Lutheran Sentinel."³² When Missouri reaffirmed the Brief Statement in 1947 the Els said in an overture to the Synodical Conference, "the Brief Statement ... states the doctrines ... clearly, definitely, and correctly; ... includes the antithesis and with the same clearness, definiteness, and correctness."³³ Because there were matters in Missouri that troubled this Norwegian synod, they urged that union negotiations with synods outside the Synodical Conference be set aside for the time being, "in favor of discussions with our acknowledged brethren in the Synodical Conference, that all may be convinced of the deep meaning and implications of the Brief Statement, the sacred work of the Confessions which have been delivered to us, and the eternal truth of that inspired Word upon which the Synodical Conference has based its position since its inception."³⁴

Three orthodox Lutheran groups subscribe to the Brief Statement in the very same manner in which they make subscription to the Book of Concord. They are the Concordia Lutheran Conference, the Fellowship of Lutheran Congregations and the Lutheran Church of the Reformation.³⁵ Robert J. Lietz, president of the Fellowship of Lutheran Congregations says that this document is, "a confessional statement no Lutheran pastor should be relectant to subscribe to. If he is, he has exposed his confessional stance."³⁶

The second modern American confessional statement being considered in this chapter is "This We Believe" which was issued by the Wisconsin Synod. In the 1955 convention of the synod held at Saginaw, a conditional resolution was passed which ultimately, after a period of time, resulted in the termination of fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod.³⁷ A number of practices of the Missouri Synod disturbed the brethren in the Wisconsin Synod. These included the Missouri Synod's reaffirmation of a Common Confession with the American Lutheran Church "as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled," and alleged unionistic practices of joint prayer, scouting, chaplaincy, and communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council.³⁸ The writer asked Professor Fredrick about the origin of This We Believe. Professor Fredrick said that This We Believe came into being in much the same way as did the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod. He stated that during the discussion of the report of the Committee on Matters of Church Union at the above mentioned convention, a lay delegate rose to the floor and suggested that the Wisconsin Synod "not only say what it is against, but also what it is for."³⁹ Consequently a resolution was placed before the convention which said, in part, "Be it resolved, that we draw up for our mutual spiritual growth and understanding, and as a testimony before the world, a single, concise confession of our doctrine and practice in theses and antitheses pertinent to our present day controversies."⁴⁰ The convention voted to refer this matter to the General Synodical Committee for study and action.⁴¹

In March of 1967 the Commission on Doctrinal Matters of the synod announced the publication of "This We Believe." In an article in "the North-

western Lutheran" the commission said of This We Believe that it, "presents the publica doctrinae that is taught in the schools and from the pulpits of the synod."⁴² This was twelve years after the resolution to prepare such a document was adopted. The delay in publication was occasioned by the fact that the commission was struggling with the inter-synodical problems. In the midst of controversy nothing was done about the resolution. However, by 1965 the need for such a position paper was so evident that a committee was appointed to produce this confessional statement.⁴³ Since 1965 this statement of belief has gone through eight English printings and is also available in German, Spanish, Norwegian, and French translations.⁴⁹

This We Believe has articles on God and His Revelation, Creation, Man and Sin, Christ and Redemption, Justification of Faith, Good Works and Prayer, The Means of Grace, The Church and Its Ministry, The Church and the State, and Jesus' Return and Judgment.⁴⁵

Regarding Holy Scripture the authors of this document say, "We believe that God has given the Holy Scriptures to proclaim His grace in Christ to man...that God gave us the Scriptures through men whom we chose, using the language they knew and the style of writing they had...that in a miraculous way that goes beyond all human investigation God the Holy Spirit inspired these men to write His Word...that Scripture is a unified whole, true and without error."⁴⁶

Of the symbolical writings of the Lutheran Church the authors of This We Believe state, "We believe that the three ecumenical creeds...as well as the Lutheran Confessions as contained in

the Book of Concord of 1580 give expression to the true doctrine of Scripture. Since the doctrines they confess are drawn from Scripture alone, we feel ourselves bound to them in our faith and life... We reject every effort to reduce the confessions contained in the Book of Concord to historical documents that have only relative confessional significance for the church today. We likewise reject any claim that the church is bound only to those doctrines of Scripture that have found expression in these confessions."⁴⁷

Armin Schuetze wrote of This We Believe, "Its purpose is not to supplant or supplement the official Confessions of the Lutheran Church as found in the Book of Concord of 1580. No Synod convention has by resolution placed its official imprimatur upon This We Believe. Nevertheless... the doctrinal content, drawn from the Scripture, expresses what has been the public teaching within the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod all along. This we believe with our hearts; this we teach in our schools; this we confess with our lips."⁴⁸

At Missouri's 1973 New Orleans convention the synod adopted "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles." For a number of years it had been charged that false doctrine was being taught by some professors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Nelson wrote that a central issue was the continuing question of biblical authority in the "Old Lutheran terminology of verbal inspiration and inerrancy" on one hand, and on the other hand "the view that the Bible's authority rested on its character as the bearer of the primary witness to the gospel," and "the use of the historical-critical method of biblical study," and "gospel reductionism."⁴⁹ Harold Lindsell

briefly states, "Obviously what was at stake was the use of the historical-critical method at the St. Louis school,"⁵⁰ and "the use of the historical-critical method was the specific bone of contention."⁵¹ The chairman of the exegetical department of the seminary said that the members of his department operated, "on the assumption that the positions of Pieper and the Brief Statement have long ago been overcome."⁵²

Jacob A. O. Preus was elected president of the Missouri Synod in the summer of 1969. He is reported to have told the seminary president, John J. Tietjen, in November of 1969 that he believed his election was a mandate to clean up the theology in the synod. His starting place would be Concordia Seminary. In a December 1969 meeting of the board of control of the seminary, Preus mentioned that false doctrine was being taught at Concordia, and that he was considering an investigation. In December of 1970 a fact-finding committee began interviews with professors. Most of their work was completed by March of 1971. In the July 1971 convention of the synod, held in Milwaukee, Preus was commended for his investigation. However, Preus received virtually no cooperation from the seminary board, which had a one-vote moderate, or liberal, margin. In March of 1972 Preus publicly issued "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles." This document was reputedly not authored by Preus himself, but by Ralph Bohlmann, who was at that time a member of the seminary faculty. In the statement more than sixty false views were cited. Some of them touched directly on basic Christian doctrines. Later the Concordia professors denied that they held many of the views condemned in the Preus paper.⁵³ James E. Adams says, "Many Missouri moderates saw immediately that the new Preus

instrument might become a doctrinal standard spelling trouble for them."⁵⁴ Preus denied that this document represented any new doctrinal test.⁵⁵ Rather, he stated of the purpose of this writing that it, "is not to serve as a new standard of orthodoxy but rather to assist the board of control (of the St. Louis seminary) in identifying areas which need further attention in terms of the Synod's doctrinal position."⁵⁶

Synod president Preus and the synod's conservatives and seminary president Tietjen and the moderates were at an impasse as they went into the New Orleans convention in July of 1973. Lindsell says that, "At the center of the struggle was the theological orthodoxy of the denomination."⁵⁷ At the convention the delegates voted to reaffirm earlier synod decisions regarding the binding nature of synodically adopted documents. Then "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" was in the words of Nelson, "elevated to doctrinal status."⁵⁸ Lindsell writes that it was "adopted as an official doctrinal statement."⁵⁹ Later the delegates adopted resolutions condemning the theological positions of the majority of the seminary faculty,⁶⁰ saying that certain positions of the faculty majority were "in fact false doctrine running counter to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the synodical stance and for that reason 'cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended'."⁶¹ They referred charges against president Tietjen to the board of control.⁶²

The resolution adopting A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles partially reads, "Resolved, That The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod declares A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, in all its parts, to be Scriptural and

in accord with the Lutheran Confessions, and therefore a formulation which deserves its authority from the Word of God and which expresses the Synod's position on current doctrinal issues."⁶³

A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles has articles on the following subjects: Christ as Savior and Lord, Law and Gospel, Mission of the Church, Holy Scripture, Original Sin, and Confessional Subscription.⁶⁴

The statement adopted at New Orleans states the following regarding the inspiration of Scripture, "We believe, teach, and confess that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit and that God is therefore the true Author of every word of Scripture. We acknowledge that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired witness of Holy Scripture in all its parts and words and the witness of every other form of human expression, making the Bible a unique book."⁶⁵ The statement rejects the ideas that the Scriptures are only inspired in the way all Christians are "inspired" to confess Jesus Christ; that the Holy Spirit did not inspire the actual words of the Bible, but only provided the writers with special guidance, that only the Scripture portions which directly pertain to Jesus Christ and salvation were inspired by the Holy Spirit, that noncanonical Christian writings can be considered "inspired" in the same sense as the Bible, that portions of the New Testament consist of imaginative additions which originated in the early church.⁶⁶

In regard to confessional subscription the statement article begins by saying, "We reaffirm our acceptance of the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and our unconditional

subscription to 'all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God' (Constitution, Article II; cf. also Bylaw 4:21). We accept the Confessions because they are drawn from the Word of God and on that account regard their doctrinal content as a true and binding exposition of the Holy Scriptures and as authoritative for our work as ministers of Jesus Christ and servants of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod."⁶⁷ Then follow nine statements which further clarify the nature of the synod's confessional subscription.⁶⁸

A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles is used as a reference document by at least one group outside the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. As part of its doctrinal statement Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Tacoma, Washington, which is owned and operated by the World Confessional Lutheran Association, says, "We accept 'A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles' adopted by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, as a tool to identify theological and doctrinal issues which the Lutheran Church, we believe, needs to understand and believe."⁶⁴

ENDNOTES

¹E. Clifford Nelson, Lutheranism in North America 1914 - 1970 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972, 71; E. Clifford Nelson et al, The Lutherans in North America rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 409.

²Nelson, Lutheranism, 71. ³Ibid.

⁴Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 509.

⁵Nelson, Lutheranism, 71; Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 397.

⁶Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 447. ⁷Ibid.

⁸Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847 - 1947 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 319.

⁹Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 447.

¹⁰Nelson, Lutheranism, 71. ¹¹Baepler, 319.

¹²Tietjen, 125. ¹³Baepler, 319.

¹⁴Lueker, orig. ed., 140.

¹⁵Nelson, Lutheranism, 71. ¹⁶Tietjen, 116.

¹⁷Nelson, Lutheranism, 87.

¹⁸Lueker, orig. ed., 140.

¹⁹Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 528.

²⁰Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 3-22.

²¹Ibid., 3 ²²Ibid., 21. ²³Ibid., 21-22.

²⁴Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 461.

²⁵Ibid., 460-461. ²⁶Pieper, 1:ix.

²⁷Ibid., 1:ix-x. ²⁸Lueker, orig. ed., 140.

²⁹Theodore A. Aaberg, A City Set on a Hill: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Norwegian Synod) 1918-1969 (Mankato, MN: Board of Publication Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 142.

³⁰Edward C. Fredrich, interview by Ivan Ernest Bartels, 7 June 1989.

³¹Aaberg, 197. ³²Ibid. ³³Ibid., 167.

³⁴Ibid., 168-169.

³⁵Constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (n.p.:CLC Book House, 1985), 3: Constitution and Bylaws of the Fellowship of Lutheran Congregations (n.p., 1979), 2: The Lutheran Churches of the Reformation (A Synopsis) (Berwyn, IL: Lutheran Churches of the Reformation, n.d.), 1.

³⁶Robert J. Lietz, Letter to Ernest Bartels, 22 June 1989.

³⁷Reports and Memorials Thirty-Third Convention (Saginaw, MI: Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1955), 86-87.

- 38Ibid., 78.
- 39Edward C. Fredrich, interview by Ivan Ernest Bartels, 16 May 1989.
- 40Wisconsin Synod Reports 1955, 86.
- 41Ibid., 87.
- 42Armin Schuetze, "This We Believe," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly 64, no. 3 (July 1967): 214.
- 43Ibid., 214-215.
- 44This We Believe (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1967), 2.
- 45Ibid., 3-23 46Ibid., 4-5.
- 47Ibid., 5-6.
- 48Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 215.
- 49Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 531.
- 50Harold Lindsell, The Bible in the Balance (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 261.
- 51Ibid., 268. 52Marquart, 96.
- 53James E. Adams, Preus of Missouri: And the Great Lutheran Civil War (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 170-176.
- 54Ibid., 176.
- 55Ibid.

⁵⁶Report of the Synodical President to the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod: In Compliance with Resolution 2-28 of the 49th Regular Convention of the Synod held at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 9-16, 1971 (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1972), 152.

⁵⁷Lindsell, Bible in Balance, 268.

⁵⁸Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 533.

⁵⁹Lindsell, Bible in Balance, 264.

⁶⁰Lindsell, Bible in Balance, 264; Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 533.

⁶¹Convention Proceedings - New Orleans 1973 (St. Louis: Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1973), 139; Marquart, 96.

⁶²Nelson et al, The Lutherans, 533.

⁶³New Orleans Proceedings 1973, 128.

⁶⁴Report of Synodical President, 152-153.

⁶⁵Ibid., 153.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., 155.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary General Catalog 1983-1985 (Tacoma, WA: Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, n.d.), 44.

THE PLACE OF REPENTANCE AND ITS CONNECTION TO FAITH

by

Juul B. Madson

1. Repentance, whether the term is defined in its wider or narrower sense, is essential to the life of a Christian. The Augsburg Confession in Article XII defines repentance in the wider sense: "Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest." (Tappert, Book of Concord, 34, 3-6) Especially the Latin version of the AC goes on to contrast this understanding of repentance with the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance, which for them consists of contrition, confession, absolution and satisfaction.
2. I must confess that the title of this essay as assigned by the program committee of two years ago has been quite puzzling to the assignee, and it may well be that he has not solved the puzzle. For a time he thought that the phrase place of repentance was simply a reference to Hebrews 12, 17, where it is said of Esau that he found no "place of repentance" (topos metanoias). It was the additional phrase, "and its connection to faith," however, that seemed to rule out this understanding of the title. What we therefore have concluded concerning the intent of the assignment is indicated by the following expansion and

revision of the title: The place of repentance in the Christian's life and its relation to faith.

3. When Martin Luther of Reformation fame posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Schlosskirche at Wittenberg, he was obviously concerned about also the place of repentance in the Christian's life, for the first, and undoubtedly the best known, of those theses states: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." (LW 31, 25) As early as 1516 Luther in his sermons had been warning the people of the danger of being deceived by the traffic in indulgences which was infiltrating the nation, and at the same time he wanted them to know that true repentance was not a mechanical act, but a matter of the heart -- an inner attitude.

4. Luther's was certainly not the first call to true repentance. It was the message of our Lord and Savior himself while on his earthly mission, as it was the message of the prophets before Him, including the Forerunner, John the Baptist, and the apostles after Him. While the Old Testament prophets did not have, as it were, a special word to express alone the idea of repentance, the Hebrew word most often translated repent in English is the verb nacham in its niph'al and hithpa'el forms, (ca 38 times) with shub being a distant second (three times). The latter word is preponderantly translated turn again or turn.

5. In the New Testament the two Greek words translated repent in English are metamelomai (five times) and metanoeo (thirty-one times). While there is no noun found in the metamelomai

word group, the noun metanosi (repentance) occurs frequently as a representative of the metanoeo word group. The Septuagint translated the Hebrew nicham (niph'al) with both the Greek verbs above thus distinguishing between them as little as did classical Greek.

6. A more interesting, and possibly more helpful, comparison with the Septuagint is to note that the New Testament in translating the Hebrew verb shub employs metanoeo in place of epistrepho. This fact indicates "that the New Testament does not stress the concrete, physical concept implied in the Old Testament use of shub, but rather the thought, the will, the nous." (The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. I, p. 357) - Goetzmann)

7. If man is to turn, or return, to God, it must mean that he has wandered from his Lord and Maker, Yahweh. And the sin by which he wanders from God is not simply the sum total of all his individual faults and transgressions; he has a wrong attitude toward God, an attitude that accounts for his committing the innumerable individual and concrete offenses. The prophets compare it to the unfaithfulness of a wife to her husband (cf. Hosea 1-3), the rebellion of a son toward his father (cf. Is. 1,2) All such expressions "show that sin is simply turning away or apostasy from God. ...Thus sin is a corrupt attitude to Yahweh." (Kittel, Theol. Dict. of the N.T., Vol. IV, p. 985 - Würthwein)

8. As the prophets thus considered that Israel's basic sin was a turning away from the true God in attitude, involving heart, mind, and will, so a return to their God involved not merely some

outward observance of what God had commanded, but a change of heart, mind, and will -- a change of attitude ("Rend your heart and not your garments." Joel 23,2).

9. As Würthwein understands the prophets to express a strongly personal view of sin, so he finds them expressing a correspondingly strong personal view of repentance. He sees the prophet's concern as a "turning to Yahweh with all one's being," and the basic structure of that turning "is exemplified at the following points. a.) Obedience to Yahweh's will. ... b.) Trust in Yahweh. ... For the Worship of false gods is not just disobedience. It has its source in deficient trust in Yahweh. c.) Turning from Everything Ungodly. Conversion to Yahweh naturally carries with it a new attitude to everything else. This is displayed negatively in a turning away from all evil and ungodliness." (Ibid., pp. 985 ff.) But whereas earlier prophets quite rarely employ the Hebrew preposition min (from) with the verb shub, the prophet Ezekiel uses the verb almost exclusively in tandem with min.

10. In the Septuagint metanoeo and metanoia occur relatively infrequently. Metanoeo appears as a translation of nicham fourteen times, and metamelomai also appears as a translation of nicham. Epistrepho is the usual LXX word employed to translate shub. Because of the relationship of ideas between the Hebrew nicham and shub, metanoeo seemed to become a common equivalent of epistrephephomai, and therefore of the Hebrew shub, "to turn."

11. In the New Testament metanoeo and metanoia are found most commonly in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts (The words are absent from John's

writings except that the verb occurs twelve times in Revelation), with only a few occurrences in Paul's writings and a like number in the remaining N.T. literature.

12. Except for Luke 17,2 f. and II Cor. 7,9 f., where the context indicates the use of metanoein in the popular Greek sense of regret or have remorse, the only possible meanings seem to be "to change one's mind," etc., and "to convert," etc. When Kittel's Theol. Dict. of the New Testament concludes that the N.T. terms metanoeo and metanoia express the theological terminology of the O.T. shub and t'shubah, it adds:

This is no idle philological finding. For as the call metanoείτε which Jesus issued in the steps of the Baptist is construed as an emotional appeal: "Feel sorry," or as a stirring of the whole consciousness: "Change your mind," or as a demand for acts of expiation for wrongs committed: "Do penance," or as a summons to a radical change in the relation of God to man and man to God: "Convert," "be converted," so according to these various interpretations there will be radically different understandings of the message of Jesus. (IV, 999 f.)

13. That there have been such various different understandings of the message of Jesus is borne out by church history, notably the Roman Catholic position which necessitated the Reformers' lengthy exposition on penitence, or repentance, in Article XII of the Apology of the AC, and the position of the majority in the 1918 Lutheran merger which wanted to make room for natural man's feelings of responsibility over toward the acceptance or rejection of grace.

14. In the Middle Ages it was said that penance (or repentance, consists of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. But the evangelical concept of repentance espoused by the Lutheran Reformers asserts that its elements are contrition and faith. Luther himself opposed the Roman Catholic definition. In the Fifth Article of his Defense and Explanation of all the Articles in 1512 he states: "There is no basis in Scripture or in the holy teachers of ancient times for the doctrine that penance has three parts: contrition, confession, and satisfaction." (LW 32,32) It was this contention of the Reformers that raised the hackles of the papal opponents. The Roman Confutation of the Augsburg Confession expresses the discord very clearly:

In the twelfth article [the Lutheran princes'] Confession...that the church should give absolution to such as return to penitence is commended... But the second part of this article is utterly rejected. [emphasis added] For when they ascribe only two parts to penitence, they come into conflict with the whole church, which from the time of the apostles has held and believed that there are three parts in penitence: contrition, confession, and satisfaction... This part of the article, therefore, can in no way be admitted, nor can that which asserts that faith is the second part of penitence, for it is known to all that faith precedes penitence inasmuch as nobody repents unless he believes..." Pt. I, Art. XII - quoted in Tappert, Book of Concord, p. 192)

15. It is noteworthy that Melanchthon in his further reply to the opponents, after again

stating that the Reformers divide penitence into two parts, namely, contrition and faith, nevertheless adds that his party does not object to classifying fruits worthy of repentance (Mt. 3,8 karpon axion tes metanoias) as a third part of repentance.

16. At the same time that we acknowledge also this statement as a part of a norma normata, we distinguish sharply between repentance and its fruits, even as Mt. 3,8 leads us to understand. Dr. Theo. Engelder, in response to the statement of the Apology referred to above, has written:

We would not stand for it that a Papist adds this third meaning [i.e., that fruits worthy of repentance are a part of repentance], for he would mean the wrong thing thereby. But if one does it who knows the true essence of repentance to be contrition and faith alone, then we know what he has in mind: he wants to emphasize as strongly as possible the inseparable connection between good works and conversion.

17. Then he adds that the Holy Scripture itself at times does this, as in Ezekiel 18,21, both of those who live in carnal security (that they have not really repented) and for the sake of the "truly penitent, whose careless, lazy flesh has to be spurred on to righteousness." (Theo. Engelder, "Repentance," Central Illinois Proceedings, 1925, p. 25.)

18. Consideration of the place of repentance also raises the question of whether such preaching is to be addressed only to unbelievers or also to believers. While it is true that the

exhortation to repent in some passages may seem to be directed especially to those who may never have acknowledged Christ, the children of God themselves need this exhortation because of the old Adam which daily plagues them. The letter of the Lord to the Church at Ephesus, penned by St. John, makes clear that repentance is also for those who are already God's people: "Kineso ten lychnian sou ... ean me metanoeses." Rev. 2,5. (I will remove your lampstand. ...if you do not repent.) This church at Ephesus was certainly a Christian congregation which had conducted itself very commendably in certain respects (vv. 2 & 3), yet there is need that even such people repent. The use of the second person singular in both pronoun and verb form in the passage above is accounted for by the fact that in each of these letters it is the messenger (aggelos) of the church that is addressed. The Apology acknowledges in simple words that repentance is to be preached also to Christians: "These two parts [of repentance, viz., contrition and faith] also appear in the lives of the saints." (XII, par. 55)

19. In this long Article XII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Melancthon takes on the papal opponents on several fronts. In fact, in par. 17-27 he lists twelve teachings of the scholastics and canonists that are incompatible with the teachings of Holy Scriptures and the Church Fathers. Nevertheless, his chief points of discussion have to do with establishing the necessary components of repentance and clarifying the role of necessity of faith in this sequence.

20. The Apology, in order to cut through much of the confusion that has surrounded the

poenitentia, states: "We have given penitence two parts, namely, contrition and faith." (XII 28V) This contrition it defines as "the genuine terror of a conscience that feels God's wrath against sin and is sorry that it has sinned." (par. 29) "This contrition takes place when the Word of God denounces sin." (Ibid.) [When the article at this point states that it is one of the functions of the proclamation of the Gospel to denounce sin, it very obviously employs this term in the wider sense of including also the proclamation of the Law of God, for later it makes clear that it is the Law, not the Gospel, that denounces sin.]

21. It has been the position of the Lutheran Church that the term repentance may be used in a wider or narrower sense. In the narrower sense it means only as much as contrition. In the wider sense it means both contrition and faith. The first is effected by the law, the second by the Gospel. This proper distinction is at the heart of the Scriptural divine message. As Bengt Hagglund points out in his History of Theology, the evangelical concept of repentance has a direct connection with the doctrine of Law and Gospel. He then expatiates on this theme:

Repentance was placed side by side with conversion, the experience whereby faith is ignited and man passes over from wrath to grace. Since it was believed that this could be done only through the Word, it was only logical to define repentance as the effect of the Law and Gospel on man. Instead of saying that penance consists of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. ... it was said that the decisive experience in repentance consists

of contrition and faith. ... By providing men with an insight into sin and into the wrath of God, the Law drives him to repentance [sic!]. The Gospel, on the other hand, brings the assurance of the forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake, which comforts the contrite conscience. The fruits of this faith are good works and the amendment of life. In the interest of clarity, the belief that good works plays a role in repentance was rejected. In the strict sense, repentance consists only of contrition and faith. (pp. 318-19)

22. When Haaglund says in the middle of the quotation that the Law drives men to repentance, it is obvious that he uses the term here in the narrow sense, that of contrition only. Also the Formula of Concord recognizes that the word repentance "is not used in a single sense in Holy Scripture," i.e., only in a wide or in a narrow way. Citing passages such as Luke 13,5 ("Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish") and Luke 15,7 ("Even so, there will be joy in heaven over the sinner who repents"), it understands the term to refer to "the entire conversion of man." Again, citing Mark 1,15 ("Repent, and believe in the Gospel") and Acts 20,21 ("Testifying ... repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"), where repentance and faith are distinguished; and Luke 24,47 ("Repentance and remission of sins should be preached"), where repentance and forgiveness are distinguished, it understands the term in the narrow sense of sorrow over sin. (Art. VI, par. 7-8)

23. One point on which the papists and the Lutherans agreed, at least nominally, is that contrition is one of the elements of

repentance. Where they disagreed here was on the nature of this contrition and on the role it played in repentance. The Romanists (e.g., Gabriel Biel in his Commentary on the Sentences --see footnote 2, p. 193 of Tappert, The Book of Concord) contended: "Because a person who has attrition and contrition elicits an act of love of God, he merits the attainment of the forgiveness of sins by this act." The Lutheran Reformers totally rejected this assertion and rather attributed to faith the forgiveness of sins that becomes ours in repentance. To attribute forgiveness to contrition would make it a doctrine of the law (Apology, XII, 78), and the law only kills. (II Cor. 3,6: to gar gramma apoktennei.)

24. Dr. Theo. Engelder, in the article on repentance cited above, speaks to the roles of both contrition and faith in the doctrine of repentance. We quote at length:

Contrition is a part of repentance. This, however, does not mean that he who has come to the knowledge of sin is then half converted. So long as he does not believe in Jesus Christ he is neither half nor in one thousandth part converted. Contrition on the part of Judas did not bring him closer to God. In the terrors of conscience he and Peter and David hated God.

In what sense, then, is contrition a necessary part of repentance? Why are both contrition and faith inseparably connected in God's call to repentance as, for instance, in Joel 2, 12-13: "Turn ye even to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto

the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and repenteth Him of the evil?" Why does God require first the preaching of contrition and then the forgiveness of sins? Answer: Because the knowledge of sin is prerequisite to faith. And why can only he come to true faith who has true contrition? Not because contrition makes the heart morally better and in this sense more receptive, but only in this respect, that it makes the heart aware of its need, because they that think themselves whole want no physician. The Pharisee in the temple despised the Gospel because he did not feel guilty and deserving of damnation. Only when a man has despaired of being able to save himself does he reach out for the saving hand of his Redeemer.

This also makes clear that nothing depends on the degree of contrition, the depth of sorrow. Man has true contrition when he realizes that he is lost. To what has been said about the contrition of Judas this should be added: The reason why in his case conversion did not result is not to be sought in the assumption that his contrition was not of the right kind and did not come from the same source as that of Peter. There was no essential difference between their contrition. As our Apology declares, the difference in their repentance was that Peter came to faith. His contrition led to salvation because he accepted the Gospel. In both men God had created contrition because he wanted to bring both to true faith. (pp. 16 & 17)

25. While contrition and faith are inseparably connected in repentance, they are not of equal rank. In his Catechism Konrad Dieterich asks the question: "How many parts belong to repentance?" And the answer is: "Two: contrition and faith." (Q. 136) That he, however, despite the use of a coordinate conjunction, considers contrition subordinate to faith is evident from his answer to the preceding question, in which repentance is thus defined: "Repentance is the conversion to God, by faith in Christ Jesus, of a poor sinner, who has a knowledge of his sins by the Law and experiences sorrow for them." (Q. 135) The subordination, both grammatically and logically, of contrition to faith is more readily discernible in the German original: "Die Busse ist eines armen Sünders, der seine Sünden aus dem gottlichen Gesetz erkannt hat und darüber Leid tragt, Bekehrung zu Gott durch den Glauben an Christum."

26. Of only faith can it be said that it saves us, for this is Scriptures' own claim. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith (allein durch den Glauben - Luther) without the deeds of the law." (Romans 3,28) Yet that law is extremely useful, for contrition (acknowledgment of one's sorrow over sin) is wrought alone by that law. In his memorable commentary on Galatians (3,19) Luther speaks of the necessity of the law of God to crush man's "presumption of righteousness," which he terms "a horrible monster." Contrition, which results alone from the proclamation of this law, is a necessary preparation for the proclamation of the Gospel and the entrance of faith. "It follows, therefore, that the Law with its function does contribute to justification -- not because it justifies, but because it impels one to the

promise of grace and makes it sweet and desirable. Therefore we do not abolish the Law; but we show its true function and use, namely, that it is a most useful servant impelling us to Christ." (Luther, LW, 26, 315)

27. Even as the law is then a servant, so is one of its effects, contrition. A Pastor J. A. Rimbach, writing in the October, 1904 issue of the Theological Quarterly, in contending for the subordination of contrition to faith in the matter of repentance, says: "Faith is the domina (mistress), contrition the ancilla (maid. ... If a man could have faith without contrition, he could be saved without contrition. Contrition is not necessary in itself, but as a prerequisite of faith. (emphasis added) ...Before a person can believe in the Savior, he must see and feel his need of Him. That is the purpose of contrition, to show the sinner his sin and his lost condition, in order to awaken in him a desire for help and salvation, that he may go to the Savior and believe." (Theological Quarterly, "What Relation Does Contrition Bear to Repentance?" Vol. VIII, pp. 215 ff.)

28. Both contrition and faith are the work of God, as the Apology says:

"I Sam. 2:6, 'The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up!' In each of these sentences the first part means contrition, the second faith. Isaiah 28:21, 'The Lord will be wroth, to do his deed--strange is his deed! and to work his work -- alien is his work!' He calls it God's alien work to terrify because God's

own proper work is to quicken and console. But he terrifies, he says, to make room for consolation and quickening because hearts that do not feel God's wrath in their smugness spurn consolation. In this way Scripture makes a practice of joining these two, terror and consolation, to teach that these are the chief parts of penitence, contrition and the faith that consoles and justifies. ... One or the other of these works is spoken of throughout Scripture. One part is the law. ... the other part is ... the promise of grace granted in Christ ... All the saints were justified by faith in this promise, not by their own attrition or contrition. ... The doctrine of penitence and the doctrine of justification are very closely related." (Apology, XII, 50-54, 59)

29. When we consider repentance in the wider sense, faith is then the more important component alongside contrition (or repentance in the narrower sense). When we consider repentance in the narrower sense, namely, as merely contrition, in its lowly yet God-ordained servant status it will prepare the way for the enthronement of faith.

30. What is even more important than discussing the fine distinctions of the doctrine of repentance is being daily engaged in its practice and thus from a believing and joyful heart being able to join the Psalmist in saying: "I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity I have not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." Psalm 32, 5.

My sins, O Lord, against me rise,
I mourn them with contrition;
Grant, through Thy death and sacrifice,
To me a full remission.
Lord, show before the Father's throne
That Thou didst for my sins atone;
So shall I from my load be freed.
Thy Word I plead;
Keep me, O lord, each hour of need.

O Lord, in mercy stay my heart
On faith's most sure foundation
And to my inmost soul impart
Thy perfect consolation.
Fill all my life with love to Thee,
Toward all men grant me charity;
And at the last, when comes my end,
Thy succor send.
From Satan's wiles my soul defend.

(Johann Schneesing)

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

ERRATA

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Page 6 end of line 9
 "Law of" should be "Law to"

Page 11 second line of quoted paragraph
 "godliness" should be "godlessness"