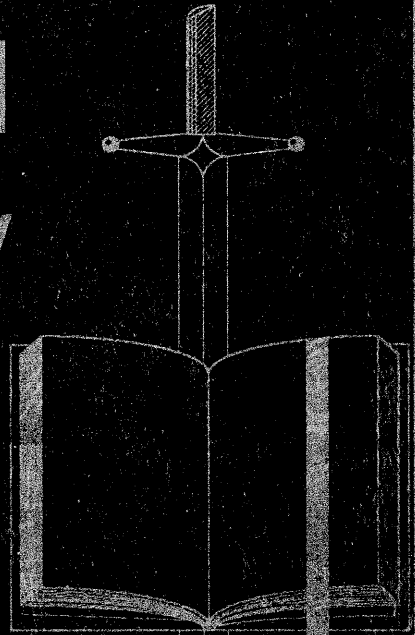


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Lutheran Synod Quarterly



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Foreword

By: Pres. Wilhelm Petersen

This issue begins with a sermon by the Reverend George Orvick, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, to the constituting convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) at Oberwesel, Germany, April 27-29, 1993. Thirteen church bodies, scattered throughout the world, were represented at this conference. This "new international conference" is built on the principles of the Evangelical Synodical Conference of North America which was in existence from 1872 until 1963. The sermon by President Orvick reflects the spirit that was so evident at this conference.

As many of our readers are aware, this year marks the 75th anniversary of the reorganization of the ELS. As we are reminded of our doctrinal heritage we would like to share with our readers a document written by Dr. U. V. Koren entitled "En Re-degjoerelse," which means "An Accounting." It was an accounting in theses and antithesis to the congregations of the Norwegian Synod explaining the issues in the Election-Conversion Controversy in the 1880's. This document reflects the clear understanding of the Scriptural doctrine of grace.

Also included in this issue is a paper by Pastor Gaylin Schmeling on The Theology of Church Fellowship, which was delivered to the fifth annual Free Conference at Plano, Texas, on February 2, 1991. Pastor Schmeling is chairman of the ELS Doctrine Committee. †

Sermon for the Closing Service
of the
Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference
Oberwesel, Germany
April 29, 1993

By: Rev. George Orvick, President ELS

Text: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24).

Fellow redeemed, brothers and sisters in Christ from many lands and nations, grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This has been a remarkable week! That thirteen different church bodies from all sides of the globe come together and form the new Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) is indeed something to behold. In this day and age when diversity in doctrine is so taken for granted, yea, even held up as praiseworthy by some, it is amazing that representatives from so many different churches could arrive here at Oberwesel, speak with one voice, express unity in all the doctrines of Scripture, and pledge their allegiance to God's holy and inspired Word. Yes, that is amazing. How could this be? How could this be brought about? It is only the Lord himself who could bring this about. Unity of faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. To him alone be praise and glory.

We therefore come together this evening in a spirit of great rejoicing! We are experiencing the truth of the Psalmist's words, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psa 133:1). And while our hearts are filled with jubilation, the unity which we enjoy is not based upon subjective feeling but rather upon our mutual adherence to the pure marks of the church, the word and sacraments.

There also exists a great need for such a conference. We are small church bodies and scattered far and wide. We therefore need to be united that we may strengthen one another and that we may bear witness to the world.

We have, as it were, launched a new ship to sail on the sea of this turbulent world. The name of the ship is "The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference." The rudder which determines the direction of the ship is the Word of God. The passengers are people from many lands and nations. And flying high atop the mast is a flag. And there is an inscription on the flag. It reads: "Justification by grace alone through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Since we began this historic conference with the formal principle of our faith, namely the Word alone, it is fitting that we should conclude with the material principle, that is, the blessed and comforting doctrine of that Word, "justification."

Why our new conference must ever proclaim the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the central doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, the chief article of God's Word.

The Holy Scriptures guide us as we journey through life. They clearly tell us what we are to believe and how we are to live. One of the doctrines of God's Word, for example, is that we are to believe and practice according to the teaching of church fellowship. This doctrine has played a major role in bringing us together here. In the history of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod the doctrines of conversion and election have of necessity received much attention. But there is one doctrine that stands out above all others. It is like the sun in comparison to the stars. It is the chief article of God's Word. Without it there can be no salvation, no forgiveness, no church. In fact, our Lutheran Confessions call it the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. The article upon which the church stands or falls. This is, of course, the blessed doctrine of justification. Of this article Luther said, "It is this article alone which begets, nourishes, sustains,

keeps and defends the church. And without it the church could not subsist for an hour.”

What makes this doctrine so important is the age-old question: “How can the sinner become righteous before God?” Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve there has lurked in the heart of man the mistaken belief that a person can justify himself, make himself right with God. Adam immediately employed this technique by shifting the blame for his transgression over to Eve. It was Eve who was to blame. And Eve followed suit by accusing the serpent.

At the time of our Lord the scribes and pharisees clearly sought to save themselves by their own good deeds. The church at the time of Luther had invented a whole system by which a man could try to satisfy the justice of God. Martin Luther himself struggled with this question, almost falling into despair. And there still exists in the heart of many a supposedly “good Lutheran” this age-old heresy — that we can become righteous before God by our own efforts.

As we gather here this evening in preparation for the Holy Supper of our Lord, we need to examine ourselves as St. Paul admonishes us, so that we can come acknowledging our own sin and guilt before God.

The fact that we as church bodies hold fast to the pure teaching of God’s word does not in itself justify us. The fact that we have severed our fellowship with erring church bodies does not justify us. The fact that we may have suffered on account of these actions, suffered the loss of friendships and relationships and perhaps the loss of income, likewise does not justify us before God. In fact there is the danger that the sin of pride could overtake us because we are not like other Lutherans.

We are made of the same clay as are all other people. We are victims of that hereditary sin from which no one has escaped. Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles, “This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it. It must be believed because of the revelation of the Scriptures.”

There is in the Holy Scriptures a prosecuting attorney pointing his finger at us. That prosecutor is the law. The Lutheran

Confessions teach that the law has an accusatory function. It accuses us before God and convicts us of sin. It is also called the thunderbolt of God by which he strikes down sinners.

What shall we do then? To whom shall we flee? There is a little hymn verse which reads like this:

To Jesus we for refuge flee, who from the curse has
set us free,

And humbly worship at his throne, saved by his
grace through faith alone.

Flee to Jesus! We have a dear and blessed Savior. God the Father "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," to be our Savior. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (Joh 3:17)." Patiently and lowly Jesus in his earthly life went about fulfilling the law for us. He showed humility where we show pride. He showed perfect love where we have felt anger and hatred. His love and concern for the salvation of souls makes up for our failures. And then in his great love he takes the punishment for our sins upon himself. In this past Lenten season we have seen him endure the lash of Pilate's soldiers, the pain of the crown of thorns, the humiliation of the mockery and jeering, the nails of the cross and finally a cruel and bitter death. He thus offers himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. The Bible says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb 9:22). John assures us that Christ is the Lamb of God which takes the sin of the world (Joh 1:29). And then on the third day he rose again from the dead. He broke the bonds of death, hell and the grave and came triumphantly back to life!

Now it is this blessed work, the incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, that is the foundation of this paramount doctrine, the doctrine of justification. For it was on account of the Savior's work that the justice of God was satisfied. Sin was paid for. Therefore our gracious heavenly Father declared the whole world to be justified, forgiven, pardoned from all their sins.

This, dear friends, is exactly what our text means when it says, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption

that is in Christ Jesus.” It was this grace alone that moved the Father to send his Son. It is due to the grace of God alone that the Father declared the whole world to be righteous on the basis of Christ’s redemptive work. This is justification by grace alone without any merit on our part.

And this marvelous gift of justification is ours by faith alone. Faith is the empty hand that reaches out to accept the gift. Faith is not a meritorious work that earns that salvation. It also is a gift of God and simply is the receiving organ by which we appropriate to ourselves this marvelous forgiveness which Christ has earned for us. The Bible clearly sets this forth when it says, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28).

And so this must ever be the proclamation of our CELC, because it is the central doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and the only way for poor, lost sinners to be saved.

Finally we must ever proclaim this doctrine, because it alone brings peace and comfort to sin-burdened souls.

Our ELS Explanation of the Catechism has this beautiful answer to the question: “How can God declare the sinner righteous?” “God can declare the sinner righteous because on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ; he has acquitted all men of the guilt and punishment of their sins, and has imputed to them the righteousness of Christ; he therefore regards them in Christ as though they had never sinned.”

Can you find better comfort than that? You have been acquitted. In spite of your guilt, You are declared free from the punishment which the law demands.

You received Christ’s righteousness. God has imputed that to you. Christ was perfectly holy and righteous. Now you are holy and righteous also because God gave this to you.

And how does God now look upon you? As though you have never sinned. Who, me? With all my evil thoughts words and deeds, how can God look at me as though I had never sinned? It is almost too good to be true. But it is true.

What then of all my failures and weaknesses? How can I ever be certain of salvation? Listen to the words of the *Formula*

of Concord: “We also believe, teach and confess that although the genuinely believing and truly regenerated persons retain much weakness and many shortcomings down to their graves, they still have no reason to doubt either the righteousness which is reckoned to them through faith or the salvation of their souls, but they must regard it as certain that for Christ’s sake, on the basis of the promises and the Word of the holy Gospel, they have a gracious God” (*FC Ep*, III, 6).

Did you hear that? Even though we retain these weaknesses we have no reason to doubt! We can be certain of our salvation because it is based upon the sure word and promise of God.

Oh, what comfort there is for each of us in this blessed doctrine of justification as we view the brevity of this life and our own departure. One hundred years ago last summer the first Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America was established. Now all of those participants are gone. In less than one-hundred years none of us who are gathered will still be living. But by faith in the blessed Savior we shall gather in heaven. “O happy day when we shall stand amidst the heavenly throng and sing with hosts from every land the new celestial song.

Come then, dear fellow believers, to the holy sacrament. Here the Savior gives you, along with the bread and wine, his holy body and blood which was given and shed for you upon the cross for all your sins. Here in the sacrament is forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation. Amen. †

“En Redegjoerelse”

An Accounting to the
Congregations of the
Norwegian Synod

By: Dr. U. V. Koren

It is well known to you that we now for several years have been attacked and accused of teaching false doctrines regarding election or the election of grace. Our teaching has been called Calvinistic. The teachings with which we have been charged are of two kinds: some, which we have never believed and never taught; these we have publicly repudiated, but we have continued to be accused of them anyway; others, which we actually have taught, because they are expressly taught in God's Word and confessed by the Lutheran Church in its public confessions. Therefore we cling to these in spite of all attacks. We do not accept as our own a single doctrine which is not clearly based on the Word of God and which cannot be shown to be in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.

We owe our congregations an accounting for what we teach and confess; and although we dare to believe that our hearers both know our testimony and will judge it by what they hear of us and not by what others say, we have still considered it our duty to present to you now this our common complete accounting, in which we hope no essential question that concerns the disputed doctrines has been unanswered.

We present this accounting to you, then, in the name of the Lord, for testing by the Word of God.

I

Concerning the Universal Grace of God, our Faith, Teaching, and Confession is as follows:

1. God will have all men to be saved. He is not willing that any sinner should perish and is not responsible for the damnation of any sinner (1Ti 2:4; 2Pe 3:9; Eze 33:11).

We reject the Calvinistic teaching that God does not will the salvation of all men.

2. Christ has redeemed all men, and His redemption has the same content and purpose for all (1Ti 2:6; 2Co 5:15; 1Jo 2:2; Mat 18:11; Joh 1:29).
We reject the Calvinistic teaching, that Christ in reality has redeemed only the elect (2Pe 2:1).
3. In the Word, God calls all men to repentance, and it is "His will that in those whom He thus calls He will work through the Word they may be enlightened, converted, and saved" (*FC TD*, XI, 25). Accordingly this call of God is equally earnest and powerful over towards all (Act 17:30; Mar 16:15; Mat 23:37; Isa 65:2; Mat 22:1-14).
We reject the Calvinistic teaching that God's call is earnest and powerful only over towards the elect.
4. The means of grace always possess their innate power to work repentance, faith and perseverance (in the faith) and thus to save the man to whom they come. The means of grace do not have different powers over towards the different men (Joh 6:63; Rom 10:6-8, 17; 2Co 1:18-20).
We reject the Calvinistic teaching that the means of grace are powerful and efficacious only for the elect.
5. The power of the means of grace can be resisted and their saving effect can be prevented by every man and at every point (Mat 23:37; Luk 7:30; Act 13:46; Zec 7:11-12; Act 7:51; Heb 3:7-11).
We reject the teaching of the Calvinists that God's grace is irresistible and that the truly regenerated cannot fall away from the state of grace.

II

Concerning Conversion, our Faith, Teaching, and Confession in the disputed points is as follows:

1. The conversion (of the fallen) is "that a man who has fallen away from the grace of God and is dead in sin is again by the power of God raised up to a new spiritual life, reconciled with God by faith and thus entirely converted and changed" (Cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*, Q. 677;

Epitome.V.532; 2Ti 2:25, 26; Jer 3:1,6,7; Eph 2:4-6; Act 26:18).

2. When the Holy Scriptures call the natural man dead in sin, it designates thereby also a spiritual impotence and bondage such that the free use of the faculties of the soul in purely spiritual things is wholly and completely lost and gone; "the reason is darkened, the will is incapable of good and inclined to everything evil, and the peace of the conscience is disturbed." (Cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*, Q. 383 [Q. 382-386]; Epitome, Q. 270; Rev 3:1; 1Co 2:14; 1:21; Mat 13:11 ff.; 2Co 3:5; Rom 3:11,12; 6:20; Gen. 6:5; Joh 8:34; Eph 2:13; 4:17-18; Tit 3:3; 2Pe 2:19; Isa 49:9).
3. Being dead in sin, the natural man cannot himself change this condition of his heart nor cooperate, either little or much, in effecting this change; for "the man who is not regenerated resists God altogether and is wholly and entirely a slave of sin," and "he is and remains an enemy of God, until he by the power of the Holy Spirit is converted, made a believer, regenerated and renewed, through the Word that is preached and heard, out of pure grace, without any cooperation of his own" (*FC, TD, II, 44; II, 2; Joh 3:6; Rom 8:7-9; Eph 2:4-6; Phi 2:13; Jer 31:18; Hos 13:9; Mat 11:27; Deu 29:4; 1Co 12:3; Col 2:12, 13; Mat 7:17-18*).
4. The natural man has freedom and power outwardly to hear and consider the Word of God or not to do this, but man cannot cooperate at all in bringing about any inner change in his heart for good (*Col 2:13; Phi 2:13; Joh 15:5; Luk 11:23; 2Co 3:5; Jer 13:23; Rom 8:8*).
5. Not to want to hear the Word of God is an effective and deciding cause for a person's not being converted (*Rom 10:14,17*).
6. The fact that the unregenerate man outwardly hears and with his still darkened reason considers the Word of God is not a cooperating, much less deciding, cause for this that he is converted, although such hearing is necessary as a means which God uses for conversion (*Mat 13:14; Rom 8:7; 9:16; 10:17; 1Co 2:14; Mat 19:22; Act 28:26; 2Ti 3:1-7; Rom*

10:21; Heb 4:2; Act 16:14; 2Co 3:14-15). We reject the assertion that the natural, unregenerated man, because he can outwardly use the Word of God, can by this conduct of his cooperate in his conversion.

7. God's command — Repent ye, Awake, etc. — does not prove that it is possible for the unregenerated man by his own strength to obey, any more than the command; "Thou shalt love God above all things," shows that man is capable of doing this. Such and similar words are **means** which God uses, both to bring a man to recognize his own impotence and also by the power of the divine Word to produce the effect intended (Mat 7:18; Jer 31:18; 2Ti 2:25; 2Co 3:5; Eph 2:1; Joh 11:43; Mar 5:41-42).

We reject the Semi-pelagian, papistic misuse of the Scripture passages named, when by them men seek to prove that the unregenerated man is of himself capable of obeying; likewise that, if this were not the case, then these admonitions and commands would be meaningless.

8. There is no power left in the will of the unregenerated man, by which he can assist the work of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 8:7-8; Gen 6:5; Joh 15:5; 1Co 2:14; Joh 6:63; Eph 2:8-10). We reject the opposite Semi-pelagian and synergistic error.
9. The will of an unconverted man is not a cooperating instrument but is itself the object on which the Holy Ghost works in order to convert and change him. For, since the unregenerated man is dead in his sins, "no *modus agendi*, or no way whatever of working something good in spiritual things can be ascribed to man before his conversion" (*FC, TD, II, 31*). We reject the synergistic teaching that the unregenerated man, by the help of some divinely bestowed powers, can himself cooperate in his conversion. This would presuppose that the unregenerated man who is dead in sin already had a will, freed from the bondage of sin, to make use of such powers; but this is contrary to Scripture (Jer 31:18, 33; Act 15:9; 2Co 3:5-6; Phi 2:13; Eze 36, 26-27).
10. "This doctrine concerning the inability and wickedness of our natural free will and concerning our conversion and

regeneration, namely, that it is a work of God alone and not of our powers, is abused in an unchristian manner both by enthusiasts and by Epicureans" (*FC, TD, II, 21*); namely, so that they show contempt for the means of grace, are indifferent regarding their conversion, yes, even mock and blaspheme; but this does not give us the right to pass by, change or limit the express and oft-repeated teaching of the Word of God concerning it (1Co 4:12-15; Jer 6:10,19; Act 20:18, 21, 26-27; 1Ti 1:13; Rom 3:8).

11. The preparation of the heart of man for conversion by preparatory grace is a work of the Holy Ghost, like conversion itself, and is described in Holy Writ by many names, such as Calling, Awakening, Inviting, Drawing, Knocking, etc. (Mat 20:16; 2Ti 1:9; Eph 5:14; Luke 14:16; Joh 6:44; Jer 31:3; Joh 12:32; Rev 3:20).
12. There may be several steps and degrees in this preparation for conversion, through which men are led, sometimes in a shorter, sometimes in a longer, time; for God deals, in his wisdom and love, very differently with the different men (Isa 48:4; Act 24:25; 1Ti 1:13; Act 26:28-29; Heb 4:12; Luk 13:17; Mar 12:34; Luke 24:25; Act 16:14; 13:48; Mat 21:28-29; Luk 11:27-28).
13. Just as the unregenerated man is without ability to cooperate, but is passive, *i.e.* is acted upon, when the Spirit of God first begins to work on him by the Word, so he is also not active in producing the succeeding emotions or changes either, but is also then passive, *i.e.* is only acted upon, until conversion has taken place and the will thus has been set free and made capable of good (Cf. Pontoppidan, Sandk. til Gudfr., Q. 478, 485, 498, 586).

We reject the newer synergistic doctrine that every man to whom God's call comes receives before regeneration a liberated will by the operation of the Word, so that the as yet unregenerated man is assumed to be able to will the good or to determine that he will turn to God and thus decide his conversion and salvation himself; and that a man's conversion thus depends on his own choice. It is the teaching of

Scripture that the man who does **not** become converted, has himself to thank for it; but it does not teach that about those who are converted (Joh 3:6; Rom 8:7; Eph 2:4-5; 1Co 2:14; Phi 2:13; Gal 5:17; Rom 7:18, 22, 23; Jam 1:18; 1Pe 1:23; Joh 1:5; Rom 14:23; 9:16; Hos 13:9; Luk 11:23; Joh 1:12-13).

14. When we teach that a man during preparatory grace and in conversion itself remains passive, it is "not our meaning that in conversion no new emotion whatever is awakened in us by the Holy Ghost and no spiritual operation begun," (*FC, TD, II, 46*); for each of the preparatory operations of the Holy Ghost may produce even violent emotions and agitation in the as yet unregenerated man (e.g., terror, distress, and efforts to make oneself righteous according to the law). But since the unregenerated man does not as yet know God as his Savior and is at enmity with God in the depths of his heart, he cannot truly turn to God with his heart or contribute anything to the changing of his heart and thus cooperate in his conversion (Act 2:37; 2Co 4:6; Act 24:25; 16:27-30; Rom. 7:8-11; *cf.* the passages under Thesis 3).
15. God's work is not done on man by force, but by changing the will. Therefore, as certain as it is that God alone works conversion, so certain is it also that man repents and that the man who repents wants to repent. For the man who repents does not do it by compulsion, but willingly, although it is God alone who effects this that a man both wants to do this and does it. For it is not God, but man who repents of his sin; it is man who ceases his resistance; it is man who believes and makes good resolutions and thus decides for God, although all these things are the operations of grace, which God alone, without any cooperation of man, has produced in him by the power of the Word by which He in His grace bends and determines the will. (See Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 585, 586 [Q. 692, 487, 488]; Jer 24: 7; Joh 1:12; Jer 20:7; Eze 18:31-32; 36:26; Psa 51:14; Isa 55:6-7; Phi 2:13).

16. Since the unregenerated man is at enmity with God and resists God altogether, it belongs to the gracious work of the Holy Ghost to "remove the resistance of the will." This removal does not take place by compulsion, but by the drawing of God; for "the Lord God draws the man whom he wishes to convert, and draws him in such a way that his darkened understanding is turned into an enlightened one and his perverse will into an obedient one. And this is what the Scriptures call "creating a new heart" (Psa 51:12; *FC, TD*, II, 30; *cf.* Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 485; *Epitome*, Q. 369; Rom. 8:7; Act 7:51; Isa 63:17; 2Ti. 2:25; Act 9:1ff; Eze 36:26; Joh 6:44; Mat 11:27).
17. It is God's gracious will to remove all resistance in every man to whom His call in the Word comes. Where a man in spite of this persists in his resistance, this has its cause not in any lack or insufficiency in the operation of the Holy Ghost, but in man's own wickedness. But we do not have the right, according to Scripture, to deduce from this that those men whose resistance is removed have themselves cooperated in any way toward this result which must be ascribed to the grace of God alone.
- We reject the doctrine that the outward hearing of the Word of God by the unregenerated man constitutes a cessation of the rebellious opposition of the human heart and thus a change in his real conduct toward God. We likewise reject the doctrine that this inner, rebellious opposition, where it is removed, is removed not by God but by man himself, either by his own natural powers or by powers which the unregenerated man is supposed to have received from God (1Ti 2:4; Eze 11:19; Act 7:51; Jer 7:25-27; Luk 7:30; Mat 23:37; Hos 13:9; *cf.* Thesis 3).
18. When a man does not repent, he cannot rightly excuse himself with this that he was incapable of doing so. For it is God's gracious will to remove this hindrance, as well as everything which hinders a man's conversion. The cause is only this that the man himself would not (Mat 21:32; 22:4; Psa 95:8; Isa 55:6-7; Act 7:51; Isa 65:2).

19. Since it is God's gracious purpose to remove every hindrance to conversion by the means of grace, and it still is possible for a man at every point to continue in his opposition to God, a man is never without responsibility over towards the grace of God, although he may mock and say that, since God is the one who does everything for our salvation, then a man has no responsibility himself, as we see in Romans 9:19. Cf. Theses 17 and 18.
20. There is only a difference in degree between those who by preparatory grace are awakened from their sleep in sin, are restless in conscience and therefore seek to escape God's wrath, and those with whom this is not the case, up to the time when faith enters in. Until this happens, a man is still carnal and an enemy of God; for there is no such thing as an intermediate state between converted and unconverted, regenerated and unregenerated, believing and unbelieving. (*cf.* Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 498 [Q. 484, 323, 327]; *Epitome*, Q. 217; Joh 3:6; Mat 6:24; Luk 11:23; Mat 7:13-14; Act 26:18; Heb 11:6; Eph 2:5; 5:8).
21. Where the first spark of the true faith is ignited in a man's heart, there the man is in truth converted (Mat 12:20; Mar 9:24; Luk 17:5; Heb 5:13; Isa 42:3; 35:3-4).
22. Although conversion in the strict sense, as a transition from death to life, must necessarily take place in an instant, it is still as a rule not possible in experience to tell when faith is created in the heart, and thus to notice the transition from the preparatory to the really converting operations of grace; "for the Holy Ghost does not work on the human will of man as by violent jerks, and one cannot put one's finger, as on a mathematical point, on the time when the liberated will begins to function" (Martin Chemnitz; Mat 6:24; Luk 11:23; Eph 5:14).

III

Conceiving Election — Introductory Remarks

1. The words: election of grace, election, predestination, foreordination to salvation, appointment to eternal life, are expressions which in Scripture and our confessional writings all

denote the same thing (Rom 11:5; 8:29-30, 33; Eph 1:4-5, 11; Mat 20:16; Act 13:48).

We reject the assertion that in some of the Scripture passages which treat of and explain election for us, the words "chosen" (elected) and "choose" (elect) have another meaning than that which our confessional writings have found in them, namely, election to eternal salvation, as our Savior Himself uses the word in Matthew 22:14; 24:22, 31; Mark 13:22, etc.

2. The doctrine of election is not a chief article in the teaching of God's Word; for a man can be a believing Christian and be saved, although he has not attained to a knowledge of this doctrine and appropriated it, but since Holy Writ treats of it, "We should not neglect or reject the doctrine of the divine Word on account of abuse or misunderstanding" (*FC, TD, XI, 1; 1Co 3:2; Heb 5:12-13; 2Ti 3:16-17; Act 20:27*).
3. A man comes to repentance and faith not by brooding over God's predestination, but by appropriating the Gospel of God's universal grace in Christ. No one who has not already become a true believer by the Gospel can appropriate the doctrine of election for his comfort (Luk 13:23-24; Rom 1:16-17; Mat 11:28).

We reject the Calvinistic error which makes the doctrine of election the starting point for the Christian faith.

4. The doctrine of election stands in close connection with the fundamental chief articles of the Christian faith, such as: That fallen man is completely corrupted and dead in sin; that God desires the salvation of all men; that salvation is by the grace of God alone; and that it therefore is gained through faith alone without the works of the law (Eph 1:3ff; Rom 8:29ff; Mat 22:1ff; 1Pe 1:1-2; 2Th 2:13).

Therefore the doctrine of election can be kept pure only then when these chief articles of faith are kept in their purity.

5. While that which is taught us in the Word of God concerning election is clear and definite, "God has still kept secret and concealed much concerning this mystery, and reserved it for His wisdom and knowledge alone, which we should not

investigate, nor should we indulge our thoughts in this matter, nor draw conclusions, nor inquire curiously, but should adhere to the revealed Word. This admonition is most urgently needed. For our curiosity has always much more pleasure in concerning itself with these matters than with what God has revealed to us concerning this in His Word, because we cannot harmonize it, which, moreover, we have not been commanded to do" (*FC, TD, XI, 41-42; Rom 11:33-36; Job 38:1ff; 40:2; 42:3; Isa 55:8-9*).

6. Where we in the Word of God meet with two clearly taught truths which we cannot reconcile with each other by our reason, there we shall let them stand side by side, "bring into captivity every thought," and believe both things. Just as we must do this in the doctrine of the Trinity, in the doctrine of Christ's person, of the sacrament and of conversion, so we must do it also in the doctrine of election. (Cf. Pontoppidan Sandh. til Gudfr., Q. 80 [Q. 15,16]; 1Co 13:9-12; 2Co 10:5; Heb 11:17-19; Joh 10,35; Ecc 8:17; Pro 3:5; 1Sa 1:23. We reject the opposite procedure as dangerous and presumptuous.
7. There is no real contradiction between the Scripture's doctrine of universal grace and that of election, although these doctrines cannot be harmonized by reason. He who seeks to harmonize them before the judgment of our reason will not succeed in doing so, except by limiting or changing one or the other of them, and must, on the one hand, depart from the Scripture doctrine concerning election, and, on the other hand, from the Scripture doctrine concerning the universality of God's grace (Calvinism) or from the Scripture doctrine concerning man's complete corruption (Synergism). Scripture gives us no other explanation than that in Hos 13:9: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help" (2Co 1:18-19; 1Co 2:12-13; 1Ti 2:4; Act 13:48; Mat 23:37; Rom 9:16).
8. Every article of faith must be sought in those Scripture passages in which the respective doctrine is specially and thoroughly treated by the holy writers. Other passages in which

the same doctrine is only incidentally mentioned must be explained in accordance with these passages (Rom 12:6; 1Pe 4:11).

It is therefore an improper way to treat Scripture when people in the doctrine of election partly set aside more or less those passages where this teaching is specially and thoroughly treated, partly want to explain these in accordance with such passages as either treat this doctrine only in passing or even do not treat it at all.

9. The passages in Scripture which specially and thoroughly treat of the doctrine of election are chiefly: Eph 1:3ff; Rom 8:29ff; Mat 22:1ff; 1Pe 1:1-2; 2Th 2:13.

On these passages, therefore, we base our faith and teaching concerning this matter, which is contained in the following theses:

The Doctrine of Election

10. "In this His counsel, purpose and ordination God has prepared salvation not only in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, also ordained that in the way just mentioned (by the means of grace and in the order of salvation) he will, by his grace, gifts, and efficacy, bring them thereto, aid, promote, strengthen and preserve them" (*FC, TD, XI, 19; Act 13:48; Rom 11:5; Joh 15:16; Mat 16:18; Joh 10:28; Isa 43:1; cf. Thesis 9*).
11. All those, and only those, who die in the faith in Christ are the elect (*FC, XI, 3; Pontoppidan, Sandh. til Gudfr., Q. 547, Epitome, Q. 426 and 454; Mat 24:24, 31*). We reject the Huberian error of an election of all men (*Mat 22:14*).
12. The fact that election does not apply to all men is not due to any unwillingness on the part of God to save all men. For God has not by any eternal decree either predestined any man to damnation or passed him by with His grace. That the many are not chosen has its ground alone in their resistance or in their renewed and continued fall from grace; "they have prepared themselves to be vessels of wrath" (*FC, TD XI, 52-53, Pontoppidan, Sandh. til Gudfr., Q. 545, 546; 1Ti*

2:4-6; Mat 25:41; 23:37; Isa 65:2; Jer 7:24; Mat 22:1-14; 2Pe 2:1ff; Luk 11:24-26; Isa 3:9; 5:1-6; Hos 13:9; Rom 9,22-23).

We reject the Calvinistic doctrine that God has predestined some men to damnation.

13. Election is not a mere foreordination to salvation or “a muster, thus: ‘This one shall be saved, that one shall be damned;’ — as though nothing more belonged to it and nothing more were to be considered in it” (*FC, TD XI, 7*). Rather it stands in the very closest connection with God’s universal will of grace, in that it includes the whole order of salvation, through which God in election has determined to lead the elect, and fain would lead all men, on to salvation (Eph 1:3ff; Rom 8:29ff; 1Pe 1:1-2; 2Th 2:13).

That presentation which limits election to the bare decree concerning salvation and which excludes from it God’s decree concerning the way and means of salvation, we do not acknowledge as the presentation of Scripture and the *Formula of Concord* (*FC, XI, 6 and 19*). However, so long as the doctrine of sin and of grace is kept pure, we do not regard anyone who has used, or uses, that incomplete concept of election as a false teacher. Therefore we acknowledge, not indeed as a complete definition of the concept of election, but still as a correct presentation of the last part of it, the answer given to Q. 548 of Pontoppidan’s *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*, which reads, “That God has appointed all those to eternal life whom he from eternity has seen would accept the grace proffered them, believe in Jesus and persevere in this faith unto the end (Rom 8:28-30)” (2Ti 1:13).

This is to be understood in the manner in which it is developed by Johan Gerhard in the following quotation:

“The merit of Christ is the cause of our election. But since the merit of Christ does not benefit anyone without faith, therefore we say that the regard to faith is a component part of the decree of election. We confess with loud voice that we teach that God has not found anything good in the man who was to be chosen to the life eternal; that he has not taken

into consideration either good works, or the use of the free will, or, what is more, not even faith itself in such a way that he was influenced by it, or that he has elected some on account of it; but we say that it is solely and alone the merit of Christ whose worthiness God has taken into consideration, and that he has resolved upon the decree of election out of pure grace. However, since the merit of Christ is found in a man only through faith, therefore we teach that election has taken place in view of Christ's merit which is to be appropriated by faith. We say, therefore, that all those, and only those, are by God in eternity elected unto salvation, of whom he has foreseen that they by the operation of the Holy Ghost through the ministry of the Gospel would come to a true faith in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and would persevere in the faith until the end" (Gerhard, *Loc. de electione*, par. 161).

Therefore, we declare also that we stand in fellowship of faith with those who like Pontoppidan and Johan Gerhard teach correctly regarding sin and grace and who, like them, reject the doctrine that God has been influenced in electing men by their conduct.

14. The election of grace or predestination is not an act of judgment, but alone an act of grace (Rom 11:5-6).
15. The cause of the election of grace is alone the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, and there is in us no cause for the sake of which God has elected us unto eternal life. (*FC, Ep*, XI, 20; Eph 1:4-5; Tit 3:4-7).

We reject the synergistic doctrine that God in electing a man has been "determined by" or has "taken into consideration" or has "been guided by" man's conduct. For a man's (good) conduct denotes something which man "does or omits doing," or a work of the law; and when one refers to election unto salvation and the attainment of salvation, we confess that "our best works are of no value whatever to that end" (Pontoppidan, *Sand. til Gudfr.*, Q. 325 [323, 327]; *Epitome*, Q. 215, 217). On the other hand, when one refers to

damnation, then we confess that a man's (evil) conduct is the cause of it (Eph 2:4-5, 8-9; Mat 22:5-8; 1Co 4:7; Joh 3:27; 1:17).

16. Although a man's good conduct (i.e., the works of the law) cannot contribute anything whatever to his salvation, it is still on the other hand certain that a man's evil conduct unfortunately can only too easily bring him to perdition. Furthermore, since the only way to salvation along which God leads the elect is via repentance, faith, and sanctification, and he accordingly who would be saved must be found on that way, it is blasphemous to say that, since our conduct does not help us to gain salvation, we can then conduct ourselves as we wish — which is the ancient offense of the Gospel (Hos 13:9; Joh 14:6; 2Th 2:13; Rom 3:8; 6:1-2; *cf.* Theses 12 and 13).
17. Since everything good in man is God's free and undeserved gift of grace, there is nothing in man which could induce God to elect him. Man's faith could not induce God to do this either, for faith is itself a free gift of grace from God, which He has not been induced to give to man by anything good in him, but alone by His mercy for Christ's sake; "because God in his counsel, before the time of the world, decided and ordained that he himself, by the power of his holy Ghost, would produce and work in us, through the Word, everything that pertains to our conversion" (*FC, TD XI, 36; Phl 1-29; Jam 1:17; 1Co 4:7; Eph 2:8-9*).
 Since we are saved by grace and therefore by faith alone without the works of the law, faith does not come into consideration here as a work of the law, i.e., as a piece of good "conduct" on our part. We therefore reject the synergistic doctrine which gives faith this significance (Rom 4:16).
18. Faith must not be excluded from the election of grace, for there is no election of grace except in Christ, and man is united with Christ only by faith. Therefore also faith is included in election as a part of the order which has been fixed in the decree of election itself (2Th 2:13; *cf.* Theses 9 and 13).

We reject the Calvinistic teaching that God first has ordained some people to salvation by an absolute election and then thereafter has decided to send His Son and bestow faith as a means of salvation on those men who were in an absolute manner elected to salvation.

19. Since everything is eternally present for God, the faith of the elect is also foreseen, and the elect themselves are foreseen by God as believing, without its being the case, however, that this foreseen faith in any way dare be counted among the efficient causes of election. For “the eternal election of God not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto” (*FC, TD XI, 6; cf. Thesis 10*).
20. The faith of the elect is not produced by any other means than by the means of grace which are the same for all; nor by any special power which is supposedly added to them by election; for God wanted to lead all men exactly in the same way and by the same means through the ordinary order of salvation to eternal bliss (Isa 5:4; Rom 1:16; 2:11; Mat 22:1ff).

We reject the opposite, Calvinistic doctrine.

21. According to Scripture it belongs to the essence of grace to be free; for if grace is not free, i.e., undeserved by any kind of merit whatsoever in the one who is favored with it, then “grace is no more grace,” and a man cannot then trust in the grace of God alone (Rom 11:6; 3:23-24; 27-28; Eph 2:8-10). We reject the synergistic doctrine that the election in Christ has not taken place in accordance with a free purpose of grace by God, and that “salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone” (Eph 1:11).
22. On the other hand the election of grace is not absolute:
- Because it is conditioned by the merit of Christ, which is the foundation on which it is built (Eph 1:3ff).
 - Because it is determined by the order of salvation fixed by God, which points us to Christ. “In Him we are to seek

the eternal election of the Father, who has determined in His eternal, divine counsel that He would save no one except those who know His Son, Christ, and truly believe on Him” (*FC, Ep, XI, 12; 2Th 2:13*).

• Because there is no corresponding election of wrath, since no man is predestined by God unto perdition (*Mat 25:41ff; 7:22-23; Cf. Theses 9, 12, and 13*).

23. Every correct teaching and presentation of the eternal and saving election of God’s elect children must “give to God His own glory entirely and fully, that in Christ He saves us out of pure mercy, without any merits or good works of ours, according to the purpose of His will, as it is written at Ephesians 1:5: ‘Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved’” (*FC, TD XI, 68*).

Every doctrine according to which our election and our salvation in any part and in any manner are ascribed to any other source or origin than solely and alone and exclusively God Himself, robs God of His honor and depreciates the merit of our Savior.

Therefore, we reject every doctrine which either directly or indirectly mentions any work of any kind whatsoever in us men, along side of God’s mercy and Christ’s merit, as a cause or as a concurrent cause or as an explanatory cause of our election and salvation. For such a doctrine conflicts with the First Commandment, robs God of His honor and robs us of our hope (*Gal 2:21; 5:4; Rom 8:32; Isa 42:8; 48:11; Dan 9:7ff*).

IV

Concerning the Certainty, by Faith, of Preservation (in the Faith) and of Salvation, our Faith, Teaching, and Confession is as follows:

1. When a man has been converted to God, he has thereby received a new spiritual life with desire and power to do that

which is good (2Co 5:17; Rom 7:22; Eph 2:4-5; Phi 4:13; Mar 9:23).

2. The preservation of this new life is, like its creation, to be ascribed solely and alone to the power and grace of God (Phi 1:6; Heb 12:2; Phi 2:13; Heb 13:21).
3. Since faith is a new life, the believer is also willing to do, and be active in, the good by the powers given him by God, works out his own salvation with fear and trembling through daily renewal, and strives thus to keep the faith (Mat 3:8; Tit 2:14; 2Co 3:5; Phi 2:12; 1Co 10:12).
4. Where this exercise of the faith ceases, where the means of grace are neglected, where the mind becomes worldly and vain, and where a man becomes addicted to sins of security or malice, there faith is lost, and since man has the power to do this, he also has the power to hinder his preservation in the faith (1Ti 1:19; 2Ti 4:10; 2Co 13:5 ; Luk 8:7,14; 1Ti 6:10).
5. The cooperation of the regenerated man does not, however, have this importance for his preservation (in the faith), that it is a source and cause of it, nor does it merit it; for "the converted man does good to such an extent and so long as God by His Holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him, and as soon as God would withdraw His gracious hand from him, he could not for a moment persevere in obedience to God" (*FC, TD, II, 33; Phi 1:6; 2:13; Heb 13:21; Luk 22:32; 1Co 4:7; 1Pe 1:5; Joh 15:5; Psa 51:10*).
We reject the papistic doctrine "that our good works preserve salvation, or that the righteousness of faith which has been received, or even faith itself, is either entirely or in part kept and preserved by our works"; for from this would follow that the believer must depend at least in part on himself (*FC, TD, IV, 23; Jer 17:5; Pro 28:26*).
6. Since it is God's will to save by faith in Christ the one whom He calls, He has also promised the believer to keep him in all temptations by the true faith unto the end. (Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 509; *Epitome*, Q. 390; 1Co 1:8-9; Joh

10:27-28; 1Th 5:23-24; Isa 41:10-13; 1Co 10:13; Luk 12:32; Psa 55:23).

7. Since the good works which the believer must and will busy himself with cannot, whether wholly or in part, keep him in the faith, he must also with reference to his preservation (in the faith) trust in God alone (*cf.* Thesis 6).

We reject the error by which the believer is misled to trust more or less on the gift and work of God in him instead of on God Himself alone. (Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 56 and 98; Luk 18:11).

8. Since God has promised His children that He will keep them in the faith unto the end, the believer trusts in this promise of God, which is unbreakable and sufficient; therefore, he has the certainty by faith that he will be kept in the faith until the end, that God then "will grant him and all believers in Christ eternal life," and that he thus actually will attain and share the (life of) glory with God (*Small Catechism*, Art. III; Joh 14:1-3; Isa 41:10; 2Co 12:9; 2Co 1:19-20; 2Ti 4:7-8; Phi 1:6; 1Jo 3:2; 1Co 15:19,49; Rom 8:31-39; Col: 3:4).

We reject the papistic and synergistic doctrine of doubt that a believer neither can nor should have a certainty by faith regarding his preservation and his final salvation (1Jo 5:10; Heb 10:23; Jam 1:6-7; Mat 21:22).

9. This certainty by faith is not a more or less well-grounded assumption or a careless hope, but it is a faith, i.e., "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," a firm trust in the heart, because it is based on God's unbreakable promise. However it is often "hidden under weakness and temptation" (Pontoppidan, *Kort Begreb*, par. 35; Heb 11:1; Rom 8:38-39; 2Co 5:1-2; Phi 3:20-21; 1Th 5:24; 1Co 1:9; 2Th 3:3; 1Co 10:13; Mat 8:25-26; Mar 9:24).

The expression, "a conditioned certainty of salvation," is ambiguous. If thereby is meant that the certainty by faith of preservation and salvation is bound up with the order of salvation, so that only those who are in that order can have it, then the teaching is correct (Heb 3:6,14; Rom 11:22). But that expression is often used by those who teach the false

doctrine that a man's preservation and salvation has its cause more or less in his own works by which, accordingly, the certainty of salvation is conditioned. A "certainty" "conditioned" in this way becomes in reality an uncertainty or a groundless hope. For one can have no certainty by faith that a condition which *a man* must fulfill will really be fulfilled (Rom 9:16).

10. No man who will not trust in God alone for salvation, but who thinks that he must himself be able to contribute something to it, can have any certainty by faith that he will be saved (Rom 4:16; 9:16; Eph 2:8-9; 2Ch 13:18; Psa 84:13).
11. The certainty by faith that salvation will actually be attained is not an absolute certainty, as if it were impossible for a man to hinder it; for preservation does not take place by compulsion, and the possibility of apostasy is, therefore, not removed. Nor are the promises of God to the believer a prophecy that he will be saved (Rom 8:24-25; 1Co 9:27; Rev 2:10; Mar 4:17).
12. Recognition of the possibility of apostasy, and the earnestness which results from it in working out one's own salvation with fear and trembling (filial fear), does not take away the believer's certainty of salvation, nor does it limit it, but strengthens it; for that is one of the means whereby God preserves the believer. For it compels him continually to seek refuge in God's promise of help, which strengthens and preserves him in the firm faith and hope that the possibility of apostasy shall by the grace of God not become a reality. That recognition, therefore, will always accompany the true certainty by faith of salvation. Where it is forgotten and a man falls into sinful security, there the grace of God and faith are lost (Cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 86, 670, 514; Tit 2:11-13; Phi 2:12-13; Mar 13:33-37; 1Ti 1:19; 6:10; Psa 2:11; 1Pe 1:4, 8, 17).
13. A man cannot arrive at a certainty by faith concerning his salvation and election by brooding over election or by wanting to get that clear first, but alone by building on the universal grace and the call of God's love in Christ. But he who in

this way has become a believer will have, especially in temptation, this comfort in the teaching of God's Word concerning election, that God who in the Gospel has promised him salvation, has ("since through the weakness and wickedness of our flesh it could easily be lost from our hands") "wished to secure my salvation so well and certainly that He ordained it in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown, and placed it for preservation in the almighty hand of our Savior Jesus Christ, from which no one can pluck us" (Joh 10:28; *FC, TD, XI, 37*; Luk 16:29; Rom 11:34; Joh 1:12-13; 2Ti 1:9; 1Pe 2:6; Psa 9:11; Joh 3:16).[†]†

† Note: In the above quotations from the Formula of Concord, we have used the English version of the Concordia Triglotta, (St. Louis, 1917).

The Theology of Church Fellowship

By: Rev. Gaylin Schmeling

The doctrine of church fellowship is not a set of dry rules and regulations which hinders the work of the Holy Spirit and makes it almost impossible for Christians to proclaim the Gospel of salvation. The doctrine of church fellowship is rather a living truth from God's Word connected to the very heart of the Gospel, the central article of the faith, that a poor lost sinner is justified by grace for Christ's sake through faith.

The entire human race lost its blessed fellowship with God through the fall into sin (Gen 3:1-15; Rom 5:12). Yet God so loved the world that he gave his most prized possession, his only begotten Son, as the one atoning sacrifice for all sin. On the basis of Christ's holy life and innocent suffering and death, God has justified or declared righteous the whole world and is now reconciled to every sinner, as St. Paul testifies, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2Co 5:19). The bright and glorious Easter morning was the public declaration that the whole world was forgiven in Christ. The empty tomb proclaimed absolution for all humanity (objective justification).

This wonderful treasure of forgiveness flows to sinful man through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments and is received alone by faith (subjective justification). Even this faith or trust in Christ's redemption is not something that one does. Rather it is a mere hand created by the Gospel which receives Christ's forgiveness offered to him. This faith is indeed a gift of God as St. Paul indicates, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). Justification by faith alone then means that one is declared righteous alone on account of Christ's work of substitution. This treasure of forgiveness, life, and salvation is brought to one personally through the means of grace and is received through faith which is worked by

those very means of grace. Our salvation from beginning to end is the work of God.

God the Holy Ghost creates, strengthens, and preserves faith and new life in the Christian through the life-giving Word and the blessed Sacraments. Since it is through these means that God brings man his grace and makes him partake in that divine grace by faith, the Word and the Sacraments are called the means of grace. The spirit has chosen to use vehicles to convey to us the treasures of salvation. The Scripture declares that faith comes from hearing the Word, that Baptism saves us, that whenever you forgive sins they are forgiven and whenever you do not forgive sins, they are not forgiven, and that the Lord's Supper gives the forgiveness of sins (Rom 10:17; 1Pe 3:21; Joh 20:23; Mat 26:28). The Scripture clearly states that God works through means, as Luther taught,

... for he wants to give no one the Spirit or faith outside of the outward Word and sign instituted by him, as he says in Luke 16:29, "Let them hear Moses and the prophets." Accordingly Paul can call baptism a "washing of regeneration" wherein God "richly pours out the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5). And the oral Gospel "is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom 1:16; *LW* 40:146).

Through the continual offering and giving of remission of sins, life, and salvation in the Word, Holy Absolution, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, the Christian is strengthened, nourished, and comforted throughout this present vale of tears until he reaches the promised heavenly Canaan above. This faith-life relationship with the Lord is the "vertical" aspect of church fellowship. Without his working through the means of grace the Christian is lost.

When an individual becomes a believer and child of God by faith created through the means of grace, he also becomes a member of the Holy Christian Church which is made up of all believers in Christ and **only** believers. The believer becomes part

of the household of God according to St. Paul, "Now, therefore, you are not strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19). Since this is the case, the Christian never stands alone. Far too many think only of their personal relationship with Christ and fail to recognize that the Bible usually does not consider the Christian individually but rather as a part of the church. 1 Corinthians 12 describes believers as members of the body of which Christ is the head. The individual parts or members relate to the head through the body, the church.

The Christians do not establish this unity in the church. It is a creation of God. In Baptism through faith the Spirit unites one with Christ and incorporates him into the body of Christ, the Church (1Co 12:13). In the Holy Supper Christians become his one body, the church, by receiving his body in the Sacrament (1Co 10:17). By creating faith in the heart, through Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit draws the individual into the communion or fellowship of saints. The word "fellowship" as it is used in the New Testament (κοινωνία; German *Gemeinschaft*) is not something that the individual does, like joining a volunteer organization. Rather, it is a participation or sharing in common things (LW 37:356). Church fellowship or confessional fellowship is a participation in sacred things (*communio in sacris*), that is, the means of grace. This fellowship is created by those very means of grace and includes every joint expression and manifestation of a common faith. The Lord unites Christians into this fellowship through faith so that they together share in the blessings of salvation. This relationship with others sharing in the treasure of redemption is the "horizontal" aspect of church fellowship (W. Elert, 4).

Because God has established the church, the unity of the church as the church itself can never be destroyed (Mat 16:18). The church may appear outwardly to be rent asunder, but the Lord always preserves its true unity. What comfort there is in Luther's beautiful statement concerning the church in the *Large Catechism*:

I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism (*LC*, II, 51, 417).

The church's welfare and eternal destiny does not depend on man or on his efforts, but it rests alone in the hands of God. He will never allow his own to be plucked from his hand (*Joh* 10:27-28).

The church of God is invisible because it is made up of all those and only those who trust in Christ's redemptive work. This trust or faith cannot be seen for no one can look into another's heart. Since this is the case, the Christian in this life can never know precisely who is a Christian and who is not. This is the reason Christians confess in the Apostle's Creed, "I believe ... the holy Christian Church." While the church is invisible, it is nonetheless real. That means that it really exists. The Confessions state, "We are not dreaming about some platonic republic, as has been slanderously alleged, but we teach that this church actually exists, made up of true believers and righteous men scattered throughout the world" (*Ap* VII 20, 171).

The Christian will desire to gather with fellow believers to acknowledge and exercise on earth the church fellowship which he has with other believers (*Heb* 10:25). He desires to unite with others in worshipping the Savior and growing in the life-giving Word (*Col* 3:16). He desires to gather as Christ's one body to receive his true body and blood in the Supper (*Act* 2:42). How then is the Christian to find fellow believers if the church is invisible? The Christian will have no great difficulty finding groups or assemblies where he knows Christians are present, even if he cannot identify the Christians individually. Since he was brought to faith through the means of grace, and since God has promised that his word will not return void, he knows that where the Word and Sacraments are used there the church is and there Christians are to be found (*Isa* 55:11). Thus the means of grace are the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*) which show where the church exists (*Ap* VII 5, 169).

These visible assemblies gathered around the means of grace are not to be equated with the Holy Christian Church (*Ap VII* 12-13, 170). The Holy Christian Church is found within the visible group; it is hidden in the visible assembly which may be made up of both believers and hypocrites. Visible assemblies like congregations and synods may be called "church" only because of the believers in their midst. They are church in the improper sense of the term. In its proper sense "church" refers only to the Holy Christian Church. Therefore church fellowship is not a fellowship of this or that congregation or this or that synod. Rather it is the fellowship of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.. There is only one fellowship of the church. It is not that the fellowship we have with all believers in the Holy Christian Church is any different from the church fellowship we have as a congregation or synod. It is the same fellowship. The only difference is that in the former case the fellowship cannot be exercised on earth (Eph 4:4-6).

The Scripture exhorts Christians to manifest the unity and fellowship already given them by virtue of their incorporation into the body of Christ. St. Paul writes, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with on another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3). This church fellowship, which is also referred to as "confessional fellowship," includes every joint expression of a common faith. This fellowship created by the means of grace will manifest itself in various activities connected with the means of grace. Christians will gather to worship and praise the Lord for all his blessing and especially for his greatest blessing, salvation full and free (Heb 10:23-25). They will unite in prayer asking his continual blessing (Act 2:42). As they come together, they will desire to grow in the life-giving Word; St. Paul urges the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16). Christians will desire to gather as Christ's body, the

church, to receive his body and blood in the Supper for the strengthening and nourishment of their faith-life and in this way they are drawn into his one body, the church (Luk 22:19, Act 2:42, 1Co 10:17). Christians then will seek out other believers in Jesus Christ in order to build them up and to be built up by them through the means of grace (Rom 1:11-12).

Believers exercising their fellowship with God and with one another will labor to extend the fellowship through the means of grace. They will follow Christ's great commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mat 28:19). Christians will not want to preserve the treasure of salvation only for themselves and their children. They will want others to hear the message of Christ crucified. Having received Christ's redemption, Christians cannot but share the blessing of Christian fellowship with the world, that world for which Christ shed his blood (Act 4:20; 1Jo 1:1-2:2).

Christians are to acknowledge and exercise the church fellowship which they have with one another by giving special help to one another. The Scriptures say, "Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10). Remember that a special offering was taken in Asia Minor and Greece for the needy of the congregation in Jerusalem (1Co 16:1-4). Christians will always be concerned about the needy in their midst and all those in poverty throughout the world.

Christians will practice the wonderful fellowship which is theirs in Christ by striving to maintain that fellowship. They will do their utmost to live peacefully with one another, letting nothing disrupt the unity. St. Paul writes, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same things, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1Co 1:10). The followers of Christ will strive "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3).

Christians will find fellow believers where the Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments, the marks of the church, are in use. Concerning these marks of the church Jesus says, "If you remain in My word, you are really my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (Joh 8:31-32 [NET]). Here Jesus emphasizes that the marks of the church are to be pure. Christians are to gather with those who confess the pure marks of the church, where the word is taught in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are rightly administered. Jesus does not say to gather all those who confess that I am Lord, but rather gather with them "who remain in my word." In the great commission he tells us to teach not merely part of his proclamation but all the things he has command us (Mat 28:20). St. Paul warns against those who do not teach the full truth of Christ, "But shun profane and vain babbling, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some" (2Ti 2:16-18; Rev 22:18-19).

It is sometimes implied that Christians living in our real world with different opinions and viewpoints cannot know the full truth of Christ in every detail. Those with such ideas have succumbed to the relativism of our modern era. The Scripture declares itself to be infallible and errorless in every detail (2Ti 3:16; 2Pe 3:15-17; Joh 10:35; Joh 17:17). The Scripture declares itself to be clear and simple so that even a child can understand it (Psa 119:105; 2Ti 3:15). Luther says, "There is on earth no clearer book than Holy Scripture. Among other books, it is like the sun among all lights" (St. L. V., 334). One may not find the answer to every question that comes to mind, but all that is needed for salvation is clearly revealed. Therefore the Christian can know the truth of Jesus Christ. The marks of the church are limited to the pure Word and Sacrament. The Scripture never attributes any saving power to error or false doctrine. Error or false doctrine is always detrimental to saving faith.

When discussing the basis for the acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship, two Latin phrases may be helpful.

There are *fides qua*, that is, the faith by which one believes, personal, subjective faith, the faith of the heart; and *fides quae*, that is, that faith which is believed, the doctrine taught in God's Word. *Fides quae* is and always remains the basis of church fellowship. This is not meant to slight the *fides qua*. It is by such faith that one is justified, made a member of Christ's church, and brought into the fellowship of all believers. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that such personal, subjective faith, though known to God, is hidden to man and therefore cannot be the basis for the acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship between Christians here on earth. Those who try to make *fides qua* serve this purpose, lose the objective basis for church fellowship and are led into a subjective, pietistic viewpoint. The means of grace are objective, solid, and apprehensible. Through these, God's own means, the distinction is drawn between orthodox and heterodox churches. It is *fides quae*, that which is believed, the objective truth of God's inerrant Word, which is the basis for acknowledging and exercising church fellowship (*FC, Ep, I, 4-5, 465*).

If the marks of the church are pure, differences in church organization and church government will not affect church fellowship. Likewise different church rites, liturgies, and hymnbooks will not hinder the fellowship. These things are in the realm of Christian liberty and adiaphora. In these areas Christians will bear with one another in love.

This is indeed the doctrine of our Lutheran Confessions: For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Ephesians 4:4-5, "there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (*AC, VII, 32*).

Lutherans of a liberal stripe have tried to interpret the word "Gospel" in this quotation from the Augsburg confession not as meaning all of Scripture and every doctrine of Scripture, but rather only as Scripture's central teachings which are necessary for salvation. However, the *Formula of Concord* shows that the Gospel means all the doctrines of Scripture.

We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because it has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God, as long as there is mutual agreement in doctrine in all its articles as well as in the right use of the holy sacraments, "Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith" (*FC, Ep, X, 5, 493-4*; see also *FC, SD, X, 31, 616*; *FC, Ep, V, 5-6, 478*).

When the Augsburg Confession says, "For it is sufficient, etc." (*satis est*) it is not making a contrast between the doctrines of Scripture and other doctrines of Scripture, but between the doctrine of the Gospel and church ceremonies. There must be agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture in order to have church fellowship, but there does not need to be agreement in church ceremonies.

In emphasizing the scriptural requirement of doctrinal agreement for church fellowship, one must realize that among Christians, especially in congregations and church bodies, there will seldom be more than "a fundamental unity" in doctrine and practice. This means that misunderstandings due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of Scripture may arise among those who are in church fellowship. It does not, however, mean an outright denial of any doctrine of Scripture can exist. The church will bear with weak brothers in all patience and love.

Christians will guard and defend the precious fellowship that they have with one another by remaining steadfast in the use of the Word and Sacraments (Act 2:42; Rom 6:3-5; Gal 3:25-28; 1Co 10:16-17; 1Co 11:26). Dissension and division arise when Christ's disciples do not carefully listen to His voice as He speaks to them in the Holy Scripture, God's inspired and inerrant Word. Jesus assures them that they will really be His

disciples who possess the liberating truth if they continue to make careful use of His life-giving Word and Sacraments (Joh 8:31-32). Therefore the Scripture urges Christians to watch their life and doctrine closely and continue in them so as to save themselves and their hearers (1Ti 4:16; 2Ti 1:13; Joh 5:39).

Satan is continually roaming the earth seeking whom he may devour (1Pe 5:8). Through false doctrine and unscriptural teaching he is striving to separate the believer from the Good Shepherd and drag him to the pit of destruction. All false doctrine has its origin in Satan, the father of lies (Joh 8:44). Because of this, Christians will always be on their guard against error and falsehood. In his protective care Jesus urges, "Beware of false prophets" (Mat 7:15). St. Paul writes, "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Rom 16:17 [NIV]). The present active infinitive *σκοπεῖν* in this passage means "to keep on watching out for." It refers to Christians' ongoing activity of being on guard against those who cause divisions and offenses by teaching contrary to God's Word. Those who teach false doctrine are to be avoided. Christians will not assist or encourage those who do not continue in Christ's teaching (2Jo 10-11; 2Ti 2:16-18).

Christians motivated by love and concern will exercise and defend their fellowship by admonishing one another whenever they have strayed into error (Eze 33:1-9; Gal 6:1-5; 2Ti 4:2). The purpose of this admonition is to show the erring that they have deviated from the clear truth of Scripture and to draw them back to the inerrant Word. Failure to admonish is contrary to the loving Savior's expressed desire and is evidence of a loveless spirit. Some consider it unloving to point out a brother's error. Yet the very opposite is true. Love for Christ constrains Christians to lead those who are erring to the light of God's Word. Christians will lovingly and humbly admonish those who have fallen into error as the Good Shepherd who came to seek and save the lost and to give his life as the ransom for all.

The response to such fraternal admonition given to those who have fallen into error will determine whether their error is a

matter of weakness or whether they are persisting in error, that is, one who is causing divisions and offenses contrary to God's Word (Rom 14:1; Rom 16:17). If those erring are willing to be instructed from God's Word, the error is a matter of weakness. Christians will rejoice and thank God when those who have erred accept admonition and correction from the Word.

The Scripture enjoins us to test the spirits to see whether they are of God (1Jo 4:1). This testing involves making a judgment based on the principles of Scripture. Those who are willing to accept instruction from the Scripture are weak brothers. However, those who reject admonition from Scripture and who continue to hold to error, are those who are causing divisions and offenses. Their persistence in error is evidenced by the fact that they openly hold to false doctrine, demand public recognition for it, or even make propaganda for it and thus lead others astray. Concerning these the Scripture commands that we are to avoid them, that is, we will not practice church fellowship with them because there no longer is a scriptural basis for such fellowship (Rom 16:17; 2Jo 9-11; 2Ti 2:16-19; Gal 1:8-9; Mat 7:15-19). The termination of fellowship with persistent errorists protects Christians from the spiritual poison of false doctrine and it is a continual witness to false prophets that they are teaching contrary to the life-giving Word.

When the Scripture urges us to avoid persistent errorists, it makes no distinction in the errorists. All persistent errorists are to be avoided. It is not that error can be tolerated in regard to some doctrines, but in regard to the more essential doctrines of the faith no deviation can be accepted. No, there must be agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture. Scripture knows of no non-fundamental doctrine, doctrine concerning which it is not necessary to agree for the acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship. Any limitation on the extent of the application of the scriptural injunction to separate from persistent errorists must be rejected. All who deviate are to be avoided.

Every expression and manifestation of unity in belief is included in the "avoid" directive of Romans 16:17. The command of the passage is all-inclusive. There are no degrees of avoiding

just as there are no degrees in keeping the unity of faith in Ephesians 4:3. This directive makes no distinction between the various expressions of fellowship as though an errorist must be avoided at the communion rail but can be accepted as a brother in joint prayer. There are various ways in which our fellowship manifests itself. (Altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, prayer fellowship, fellowship in church work, in music, in Christian education, in Christian charity; see also paragraphs 12-15) In these, Christians bear witness to each other and to all people that they are brothers and sisters in Christ. All these expressions of a common faith must cease with those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the teachings of Scripture. When Christians participate in such things with persistent errorists, they are in effect being untruthful. They are saying there is unity of faith when there is no unity.

The termination of fellowship is a judgment on the doctrine of those who continue in error. It is not a judgment on their personal faith. The termination of fellowship is not to be equated with excommunication. It does not close the gates of heaven. The termination of fellowship witnesses to the fact that the poison of false doctrine is being tolerated within the church body, which is indeed dangerous to the salvation of souls. Yet by the grace of God many believers are being preserved in erring church bodies.

There are not many different kinds of fellowship — each one being quite different from another. Rather all manifestations of a common faith are one. All the doctrines of Scripture are a unit. One cannot distinguish between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines in regard to their necessity for church fellowship. The doctrines of the Bible stand as one. In a similar way, all expressions of church fellowship are a unity. Christians cannot practice fellowship in some areas of church life, but not in others. Church fellowship is a unit both in respect to the doctrine of Scripture, that is, there must be consensus in all the doctrines of the Word for fellowship and in respect to the various expressions of a shared faith that they all be considered a unit or

an indivisible whole. There is either complete fellowship or none at all.

In the New Testament all expressions of fellowship are treated as a unit. They are all ways of expressing a common faith worked by the Spirit through the means of grace. Christians exercise fellowship when they gather together to worship and be strengthened through the life-giving Word (Heb 10:24-25; Col 3:16). Sharing in the Holy Sacrament of Christ's body and blood is an expression of fellowship and unity between the participants (1Co 10:17). Joint prayer indicates a oneness in Christ just as it is expressed by adhering to the Word and by participating in the Holy Supper (Act 4:42). The one who provides support for a teacher of the church or a missionary is expressing fellowship with him. The Philippians were partners in Paul's work through the financial support which they sent him (Phi 1:5; Phi 4:14-15). On the other hand, those who support or encourage false teachers are partners in their evil deeds (2Jo 11).

According to the Scripture, church fellowship or confessional fellowship is a participation in the holy things (*communio in sacris*), the means of grace. This fellowship is created by those very means of grace and includes every joint expression and manifestation of the common faith. This fellowship created by Word and Sacrament shows itself in altar and pulpit fellowship and in every expression of a shared faith, like prayer, which is a result of a response to the means of grace. There are various ways in which the fellowship is manifested: altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, prayer fellowship, fellowship in church work, in music, in Christian education, in Christian charity. All these things have this in common, that they manifest a common faith worked by the Spirit through the means of grace. In this respect they are a unit and should be regarded as a unit. There are not many different kinds of fellowships, some being more an expression of the common faith and others less. It is not that pulpit fellowship involves something different from altar fellowship, and these again something quite different from prayer fellowship. It is not that the practice of altar and pulpit fellowship requires complete agreement in doctrine while prayer fellowship and joint

church work require less agreement. Rather, insofar as they are joint expressions of faith, they are the same and should be regarded as a unit.

Certain things, like the celebration of the Holy Supper, the proclamation of the Word, and prayer, are by their very nature expressions of faith. When these are done jointly, they are always expressions of faith. Other things, like extending hospitality or giving physical help to others, are not in themselves expressions of faith. They only become expressions of faith when those involved intend them to be expressions of faith. This is seen in 2 John 9-11 where assisting or encouraging a false teacher is considered to be an expression of fellowship.

The unit concept of fellowship does not in any way disparage or belittle the means of grace. The objection has been raised that the unit concept places the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, which are acts of God in which He comes to us, on the same level as prayer, which is man's response to God. This — it is implied — confuses God's divine actions and human responses. This argument confuses the issues and leads to unclarity. To be certain the Word and the Sacraments are God's powerful, faith-creating, and therefore church-creating instruments of salvation (*media salutis*) imparting forgiveness, life, and salvation. They are the power sources of the Christian faith-life. As means of grace, they should never be equated with human action. What God does for His children is always more vital than what the Christian does in response to God's grace. However, joint proclamation of the Word and joint celebration of the Sacraments, which are God's life-giving means of grace, are at the same time expressions of fellowship, because when Christians proclaim the Word and celebrate the Supper, they are expressing their faith, and when they do these things with others, they are expressing their faith jointly with them. In the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Supper, the most important fact is that Christians are nourished and strengthened through these means of grace, but also through them Christians are jointly expressing their faith. The preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments as the

means of grace should never be put on the level of any human action. Here God comes to man. But they are also joint expressions of faith and as such are the same as joint prayer and joint church work. This is what is meant when it is said that all expressions of fellowship are to be treated as a unit.

In connection with this objection to the unit concept of fellowship, it has been advocated that because the church is created alone by the Word and Sacraments, church fellowship is limited only to the use of the means of grace, that is, altar and pulpit fellowship. It is true that joint prayer, joint church work, etc., are not part of the marks of the church, the means of grace. But as a response to the means of grace they are an expression and fruit of faith which must be in harmony with and under the control of the marks of the church. To limit church fellowship to altar and pulpit fellowship cannot be supported by Scripture. St. Paul in Galatians speaks of offering the right hand of fellowship, showing church fellowship includes all manifestations and demonstrations of a common faith. Likewise the New Testament directives to terminate fellowship are all-inclusive (Rom 16:17; 2Co 6:14, 17; 2Jo 10-11). The termination of fellowship is not limited to only certain expressions of fellowship.

Church fellowship was regarded as an indivisible whole throughout the Ancient Church. This is seen in Werner Elert's exhaustive study, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship*. Indicating that the Ancient Church viewed church fellowship as embracing all expressions of a common faith including prayer, Elert writes, "Epiphanius saw the schism between Bishop Meletius of Lycapolis and Peter of Alexandria completed in the way that they prayed separately from one another, and so also each performed the other holy services by himself" (Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship*, 167). "Whoever prays together with a man outside the communion of the church even at home, is himself to be excluded" (Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship*, 94). The Ancient Church did not make any distinction between the various expressions of fellowship, some which needed only partial agreement in doctrine and others which needed complete agreement in doctrine.

Such gradations and distinctions in church fellowship have absolutely no connection with the regulations of the early church ... Either there was or there was not fellowship between two churches or two bishops, which practically amounted to the same thing ... Never did the relations between two churches and their bishops provide for permitting the laity to receive the Sacrament while denying the clergy the privilege of officiating in it because church fellowship was somehow incomplete or because the congregations or their bishops were of different confessions or only in partial confessional agreement. There was either complete fellowship or none at all (Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship*, 164).

The scriptural doctrine that church fellowship is an indivisible whole, that there is complete fellowship or none at all was also confessed in the Lutheran Reformation. Luther writes, "Whoever really regards his doctrine, faith, and confession as true, right, and certain cannot remain in the same stall with such as teach or adhere to false doctrine" (St. L. XVII, 1346). Luther put this statement into practice at the Marburg Colloquy of 1529. As the Colloquy began, all participants considered themselves "Catholic" Christians who wanted the Catholic Church reformed, even if they differed on the manner of the reformation. They viewed themselves as brothers who were coming together to discuss disagreements that had arisen between them. As a result of the Colloquy, Zwingli and the Swiss showed themselves not to be weak brothers but those who were persisting in false teaching in regard to the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. The *Formula of Concord* quotes Luther's verdict in regard to the Reformed and fellowship with them:

I reckon them all as belonging together (that is, as Sacramentarians and enthusiasts), for that is what they are who will not believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is his true, natural body, which the godless or Judas receive orally as well as St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever, I say, will not believe this, will please let me alone and

expect no fellowship from me. This is final (*FC, SD, VII 33, 575*).[†]

These scriptural principles of church fellowship were upheld by the Lutherans in Poland under the leadership of the seventeenth century dogmaticians Calov and Huelsemann at the Colloquy of Thorn in 1645. The King of Poland convened this Colloquy hoping to resolve the disagreements between the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and the Reformed in his domain. The Roman Catholics and the Reformed favored opening the meeting with prayer. Although they found no fault with the content of the prayer suggested, the Lutherans declined to practice prayer fellowship with the Roman Catholics and the Reformed. It appears that there could be no joint prayer for these Lutheran fathers without complete agreement in doctrine. It might be added that *Der Lutheraner* of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) commented favorably upon this action of the Lutherans in Poland: "From this we can see (1) that we are following that same practice as the faithful Lutherans of Poland in the year 1645; (2) that this demand for public prayer with errorists and heretics is a characteristic of the Reformed, but is foreign to the true Lutheran Church" (*Der Lutheraner*, 1908, 111 qtd. in *Fellowship Then and Now*, 29-30).

The Synodical Conference, likewise, held that church fellowship embraces every expression of a common faith including prayer. In an essay on unionism, Dr. Francis Pieper, one of the leading theologians of the LCMS, writes concerning 2 John 10-11, "God here forbids Unionism, church fellowship with such as are known as false teachers. With such we are not to fellowship in prayer or in holy Communion etc., for in so doing we would, as the Apostle says, be partaking of their evil deeds" (Pieper, 5)^{††} Dr. Adolf Hoenecke of the Wisconsin Evangelical

† For a complete study of the Marburg Colloquy, see H. Sasse, *This is My Body*, pp. 151-238).

†† See *Fellowship Then and Now* for examples of the same doctrine of fellowship expressed by Dr. G. F. Bente, Dr. Carl Manthey-Zorn, Dr. Theodore Graebner, Dr. Theodor Engelder, Dr. William Arndt, Dr. Ludwig Fuerbringer, and Dr. John Behnken.

Lutheran Synod (WELS) writes in his *Dogmatik* regarding church fellowship:

In conflict with the biblical teaching concerning prayer are all those who practice prayer fellowship with errorists. To refrain from all prayer fellowship and fellowship in worship with those of another faith, only this is in agreement with God's Word. For we should, on the one hand, according to Matthew 10:32, 33, confess Christ, and this confession includes everything the Scriptures teach concerning him, his person, his office, his work. On the other hand, according to Luke 9:26 and Mark 8:38, we should not be ashamed of him and his words. Practicing prayer fellowship and fellowship in worship with errorists sets this duty aside. Moreover, according to 1 Thessalonians 5:22 we are to "abstain from every form of evil," thus also from this evil that we, contrary to 2 Corinthians 6:14, approve of fellowship between light and darkness, between truth and error ... Unionism (false fellowship) opens the doors wide to indifference in doctrine. And how could it be otherwise. All unionism is based on the assumption that the truth of Scripture should not be insisted on so strongly, that we should not in every case condemn all error, even the least, and warn against it as poison to the soul. For as soon as that happens in a false fellowship, such a fellowship can no longer continue (Hoenecke, III, 441f).

At the Theologians' Conference at Mankato, Minnesota, in August 1963, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) participants expressed the historic ELS understanding of church fellowship:

In practice, church fellowship with others is manifested primarily in a fellowship in the pulpit, at the altar or in prayer. Whatever form it takes, the confession of all concerned must be in harmony with what the marks of the church demand, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments. If a minimum agreement is required for one form and more complete

agreement for other forms, the result will be a fragmentation of the whole concept of what constitutes church fellowship. Werner Elert is credited with the following statement concerning the early church. "There is either complete fellowship, or none at all." ... The matter of prayer fellowship amongst the early Christians is very intimately joined to fellowship in doctrine, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Act 2:42). Even the Lord's Prayer cannot be prayed with one who clings to a different doctrinal platform, because the very first petition commits those praying together to pure teaching as well as holy living (Church Fellowship, paragraphs 18-19).

The principles of church fellowship set forth in the Scriptures do not change. God's Word always remains the same; however, the manner in which these principles are applied may vary as different circumstances arise. The principles of church fellowship are not legalistic rules but loving directives of the Lord for the good of his church. They must be applied in the spirit of the gracious Savior who loved us so much that he gave his life for us. There will be times when prayer together with other Lutheran Christians or even with Christians of other denominations may be proper, such as when it is apparent that their membership in the false church body is the result of a weak faith which does not fully understand the error of the church body, or it is clear that they actually do not share in the error at all. In such situations one must consider more than the confession of their church membership. There will be times when it will be necessary to attend the worship services of an erring church, such as at the wedding or funeral of a loved one. Here care must be taken so that such attendance is not understood as agreement with the doctrine of the erring church.

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

do not necessarily hold to the teaching of the church body to which they belong. They may indeed be open to instruction from the Word and may be seeking direction. When such individuals come to us, we cannot always deal with them solely on the basis of their formal confession of faith which they make by their formal church membership. One has to also consider their informal confession of faith. However, this informal confession too must be considered on the basis of the true marks of the church.

The scriptural principles of church fellowship remain changeless, but the applications of the principles may vary as different situations arise. A statement adopted by the CICR of the WELS and the Doctrine Committee of the ELS may shed light on this point:

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

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

In the past few years new terminology has been heard in the discussion of church fellowship. These terms are levels of relationships between Christians, levels of unity, and levels of

fellowship. Each of these terms refers to the concept that relationships between Christians may be viewed as a continuum or spectrum ranging from relatively limited agreement in Christian doctrine all the way to the other end of the spectrum where there is full agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture. The type of relationship or fellowship permitted will depend on the level of doctrinal unity. It is argued that different levels of cooperation and fellowship can be practiced in proportion to the degree of consensus that exist.

The levels of fellowship approach is being proposed as a way to give Christians guidance and direction in their relationship with those Christians with whom they are not in full doctrinal agreement. For example, what kind of relationship can Confessional Lutherans have with those who believe they are saved alone by faith in Christ as the Savior, but who deny the comforting scriptural teaching concerning the Sacraments? What kind of a relationship can Confessional Lutherans have with those who may confess the heart of the Gospel but who deny the inerrancy of the Holy Scripture? A leading member of the LCMS puts the question this way: "How can we relate to those whom we recognize on the basis of their confession, like Billy Graham for example, as a brother in Christ, but with whom we disagree in the confession of our faith in Jesus Christ?"

When the question was raised in the video, *Conversations: Inter-Christian Relationships*, as to what type of relationships Confessional Lutherans can have with those who are not fully agreed with them in doctrine, it was stated that such relationships were limited only to the cooperation in externals (*cooperatio in externis*). Levels of fellowship are to have nothing to do with church fellowship proper (*communio in sacris*). If this is the case, why is the term "levels of fellowship" used since fellowship in the sense of church fellowship refers to every expression and manifestation of a common faith? The terminology is confusing. If levels of fellowship really refer only to cooperation in externals, why should Christians speak of levels at all? In externals there is no level of agreement required for cooperation.

Here we can cooperate with Calvinists, Papists, Muslims, and atheists.

Cooperation in externals is cooperation in such matters as do not involve joint expressions of a common faith. Christians of every denomination and even non-Christians can work together in helping disaster victims, in providing for the poor and the homeless, and in opposing legislature which legalizes abortion and euthanasia.[†] Cooperation in externals does not involve joint expressions of a shared faith in contradistinction to church fellowship, which is a participation in sacred things, the means of grace, and includes every expression of a common faith. Again it must be asked, "If levels of fellowship refer merely to cooperation in externals, why discuss levels at all?" In this realm no unity of faith is required to cooperate.

It would seem that the levels of fellowship approach is intended to have a wider application than the narrow limits of true cooperation in externals. It seems that cooperation in externals is being so defined as to include certain fellowship actions. Thus the distinction between cooperation in externals and church fellowship is blurred. Here is the real danger of the levels of fellowship approach. When cooperation in externals includes fellowship activities and church fellowship is defined as something other than every expression of a shared faith, then fellowship relations are viewed as a continuum. Then there are degrees of fellowship based on the amount of doctrinal agreement, which is the basic concept behind levels of fellowship. This viewpoint is to be found in the document, *The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship*.

Through the use of the word "fellowship" almost exclusively to refer to a formal altar and pulpit fellowship relationship established between two church bodies on the basis of agreement in the confession of the faith, some have been given the impression that no fellowship relationship other than the spiritual unity in the body of Christ can or should exist among members of Christian churches not in altar and pulpit fellowship. The fact that

† See paragraph 33 above.

the LCMS is closer doctrinally to a church body which at least formally accepts the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions than to those denominations which do not is often obscured by the "all or nothing" approach that frequently accompanies ecclesiastical declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship (LCMS-CTCR, *The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship*, 43).

This document leaves room for the understanding that complete doctrinal agreement is needed for altar and pulpit fellowship, but is not necessary for other expressions of fellowship such as joint prayer. This is confirmed by earlier statements of the LCMS like this one from the *Four Statements on Fellowship*, "Therefore the matter of joint prayer between Christians not in the same confessional-organizational fellowship cannot be determined by a flat universal rule. It would be a dangerous oversimplification to say that any one of the manifestations of fellowship, such as joint prayer, always necessarily presupposes and involves every other manifestation, such as pulpit and altar fellowship" (*Four Statements on Fellowship*, 45). This statement contends that there are differences between the various expressions of fellowship.

This concept which advocates different degrees or levels in the expression of fellowship has been taken a step further. There seems to be a differentiating between "worship services" which require full fellowship and those which do not. In 1983 the Council of Presidents of the LCMS approved a set of guidelines on joint worship. This document requires that joint worship be practiced only with those with whom the LCMS has declared pulpit and altar fellowship. However, members of the LCMS may conduct, cosponsor, or participate jointly with other Christians in celebrations, gatherings, concerts, and rallies provided that the clergy are not vested and there is no sermon or Sacrament. The purpose of these events as found in the guidelines shows that these events are not in the realm of pure cooperation in externals. Valid reasons for such joint celebrations and gatherings include thanksgiving for the doctrinal heritage of Lutherans and prayer for greater doctrinal unity on the basis of God's

Word. Such thanksgiving and prayer are certainly expressions of fellowship. It seems that only a minimal doctrinal level of agreement is required for a Christian gathering which includes prayer, Bible reading, and sacred music, while a greater level of agreement is required at such gatherings which include sermon, Sacrament and vestments. The levels view of fellowship leads to a total fragmentation of church fellowship.

The dangerous unscriptural results of the levels concept of fellowship are even more clearly indicated in this fellowship survey of the Atlantic District of the LCMS:

Eight themes which are supported by accompanying data emerged from the survey:

1. 71% of the congregations responding have intentional policies regarding admission to the Sacrament of the Altar.

2. The most important prerequisite for fellowship at the altar identified by the congregations surveyed is belief in the Real Presence rather than agreement in doctrine and all its articles.

3. The CTCR Document *The Nature and Implication of the Concept of Fellowship* does not reflect the fellowship practice of congregations responding to the survey. These fellowship practices include: communion, joint fellowship, participation in baptisms, weddings, etc., joint mission work, joint school endeavors, and receiving and transferring members.

4. Strong distinction is made between fellowship with other Lutherans and fellowship with non-Lutherans.

5. Narrower fellowship practices at the altar are observed than for pulpit fellowship. There is more reluctance to share the Sacramental meal than to share the Word, especially with non-Lutheran Christians.

6. Participation in such services as baptisms, weddings, funerals, installations, and ordinations is not taken to imply altar and pulpit fellowship.

7. Occasional services such as Thanksgiving, Lent, etc., are viewed as regular opportunities for participation with

other Lutheran and non-Lutheran Christians.

8. Congregations do not view Synod as the one who decides the policy of local congregations. When the Synod attempts to impose a narrower understanding of fellowship than its member congregations accept, it loses its credibility and ability to influence. The congregations then have no alternative but to practice fellowship on their own as they find a common faith in the Gospel and Sacraments under the Lord's guidance.

From this report it is quite evident that the levels of fellowship approach is being applied to church fellowship proper and not merely to cooperation in externals. The fifth point reads, "Narrower fellowship practices at the altar are observed than for pulpit fellowship," implying that altar fellowship demands a greater level of agreement than pulpit fellowship. According to the sixth and seventh points there are different kinds of worship services, some which require altar and pulpit fellowship and others which do not. This would seem to be the logical result of a concept of fellowship which does not regard every expression of the fellowship as a unit.

The fragmentation of church fellowship as a result of the levels of fellowship approach is evident in still another area as is indicated in the report of the Atlantic District of the LCMS.

Any question of fellowship must also recognize the different levels of fellowship that exist between congregations and Synod. As our survey points out, two distinct types of fellowship stand side by side. ... One is the local pulpit and altar fellowship of a particular congregation. ... The other side of fellowship is that which is formulated through a common agreement of congregations. The Synod is one example of the kind of fellowship that unites congregations far from one another's communicants. ... Problems result when documents fail to distinguish between these types of fellowship and therefore fail to respect the differences.

Here the position is defended that a congregation has fellowship on two levels. One level is synodical fellowship and the

other fellowship is on the local level with neighboring congregations. These are to “stand side-by-side.” On a synodical level fellowship may be practiced in one way but on the local level it may be practiced in quite another way. This practice will lead to a lack of discipline within the organization and to religious pluralism. Such a concept of fellowship is certainly contrary to the *Brief Statement* which states concerning church fellowship, “We repudiate **unionism**, that is, church fellowship with adherents to false doctrine” (*Brief Statement*, 28). This bi-level explanation of fellowship also reveals a strange concept of the church, for there is but one church and one church fellowship.

Christians, on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, must reject the view that there can be degrees of fellowship based on the level of doctrinal agreement. There are not many different kinds of fellowship. For example, a congregation cannot say, “We will have joint prayer and joint fellowship in church work with another congregation, but we won’t have pulpit and altar fellowship because full consensus has not been reached between us.” Such a view fragments the concept of church fellowship. Rather church fellowship is an indivisible whole, which is the historic teaching of the Lutheran Church and LCMS.[†] There is only one fellowship — that of the Holy Christian Church, and that fellowship is expressed in its totality or not at all.^{††} The “avoid” directive of Romans 16:17 gives no degrees of avoiding. All persistent errorists, whether their error is great or small, are to be avoided in every activity that expresses a common faith.^{†††} Likewise there is no degree in keeping the unity of the faith in Ephesians 4:3.

The question was asked on the video, *Conversations: Inter-Christian Relationships*: “How can we relate to those whom we recognize on the basis of their confession, like Billy Graham for example, as a brother in Christ, but with whom we disagree in the confession of our faith in Jesus Christ?” In reply it must be said that Graham confesses the central article of the faith,

† See paragraphs 36-40 above.

†† See paragraphs 11 and 30-33 above.

††† See paragraph 28 above.

justification by faith alone, but he also teaches many doctrines which are spiritual poison and can so easily erode the central article. We are filled with thanksgiving that God the Spirit has preserved many believers in erring churches. In heaven we will be able to celebrate for all eternity with them in the feast of the Lamb. However, on this side of heaven we can exercise church fellowship only on the basis of one's confession (*fides quae*). Those who accept Jesus' Word in all its truth and purity are His disciples (Joh 8:31-32; Mat 28:20). Those who mix God's truth with error are to be avoided (Rom 16:17-18; 2Jo 9-11; 2Ti 2:16-19; Gal 1:8-9; Mat 7:15-19).

Church fellowship or confessional fellowship is a participation in sacred things (*communio in sacris*), the means of grace. This fellowship is created by those very means of grace and is evidenced in every expression and manifestation of a common faith. Christians practice church fellowship on the basis of the pure marks of the church. The marks of the church are to be pure, that is, there must be complete agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture in order to exercise fellowship. There are no degrees or levels in the practice of church fellowship and there are no expressions of a shared faith which are excluded from church fellowship. Church fellowship is a unit both in respect to the doctrine of Scripture, that is, there must be consensus in all the doctrines of the Word for fellowship and in respect to the various expressions of a shared faith that they all be considered a unit or an indivisible whole. There is either complete fellowship or none at all. †

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Book Review:
Dictionary of Christianity in America
By: Prof. Glenn Reichwald

This is a worthwhile reference book to be placed on your library shelf next to such specifically Lutheran reference works as the *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. Compared with many other religious publishers, InterVarsity Press is fairly conservative in its publication and is also intellectually respectable. This volume is also fairly complete. The slip jacket states that the book contains 2,400 informational articles and 1,500 biographical articles. Since the book is not written from a specifically Lutheran perspective, much information is included which is not to be found in specifically Lutheran works.

While it is impossible to evaluate all of the information in this book, several things can be pointed out. Articles of varying length are offered on various personalities, theologians, and philosophical movements with the Christian church. These articles also have brief bibliographies, which permit and encourage the readers to look further.

When criticism is called for, the book is blunt and to the point. When Mormonism is discussed, it is treated under the name and not under its official name. Judgment is passed upon Mormonism. The article states: "The *Book of Mormon* is fundamentally an early American romance and its theology appears to be essentially Christian" (776). But then it is quick to add that the revelations of Joseph Smith and later prophets really explain Mormon theology. Joseph Smith, for example, taught polygamy as an essential part of his theology. The theology of Mormonism has also changed. While Joseph Smith would not permit African Americans to be members of the Mormon priesthood, one of his successors, Spencer Kimball, received a revelation in 1978 to African Americans. The article points out that Mormonism is not a Christian religion, but a new religion. After examining the theology of Mormonism, a judgment is passed: "... Mormon theology (is) an extreme form of Pelagianism" (776). Additional

judgments are also passed. Similar judgments are passed on the New Age Movement, the Jehovah's Witnesses and others.

When considering articles on conservative theologians, they seem to receive fair treatment. J. Gresham Machen, the very competent Presbyterian New Testament scholar whose works still have value today, receives sympathetic treatment. This is not always done in many circles today. Machen, who had used his knowledge and talents to oppose liberalism in his church body, was read out of his church because he supported an independent mission group which was conservative rather than the official missions which had liberals.

When looking at articles of specific Lutheran interest, one may not always agree with conclusions offered. When F. K. Wentz states in his article on George Sverdrup that he was a "seminal thinker," no member of the ELS would agree with that (1151). One would rather say that he did not appreciate orthodox Lutheran theology because of his very pietistic leanings. Sverdrup rejected the strong doctrinal approach of the old Norwegian Synod as "thesis theology" because of its emphasis on proper, complete biblical theology. One must also wonder why names such as U. V. Koren and H. A. Preus were omitted; Sverdrup, after all, was in constant reaction to them. Robert Kolb's articles on Francis Pieper and C. F. W. Walther are much better in their approach to theological reality.

At times the predilections of the writers seem to editorialize on an article indirectly. For example, the article on "Charles Porterfield Krauth" makes no mention of his role in starting the general Council. It also makes no mention of his opposition to S. S. Schmucker and his *Definite Synodical Platform*, which, simply stated, denied the Lutheran Doctrine of the Means of Grace.

These few negative comments should not discourage anyone from

Dictionary of Christianity in America

Coordinating Editor: Daniel G. Reid

Cost: \$44.99

Size: 1305 pages

Date: 1990

Publisher: InterVarsity Press

buying this book. The cost is reasonable for a book of this size and for the information it contains. In this present theological world where one cannot tell the players without a program, this book will be of considerable help. †

Book Reviews:
The Youth Builder
Junior High Ministry
All Grown and No Place to Go
 By: Prof. Glenn Reichwald

Pastors looking for help in working with the youth and younger members of their congregations will find these books helpful for their work. Readers will notice that these books have been in print for some time. They were recently called to the attention of this writer. Readers will also notice that they do not bear the imprint of the usual Lutheran publishers (*i.e.* Northwestern, Concordia, or Fortress).

Junior High Ministry

Author: Wayne Rice
 Cost: \$12.99
 Date: 1987
 Publisher: Zondervan

fresh and stimulating. The books may thus help pastors who are struggling to maintain and expand their youth programs. The books will make readers think.

The Youth Builder

Author: Jim Burns
 Cost: \$17.00
 Date: 1988
 Publisher: Harvest House Publications

While these books thus come from non-Lutheran sources, they do have a number of insights which may prove helpful to readers. One certainly does not have to accept everything they say, but some of the insights they offer may be

All Grown Up and No Place to Go

Author: David Elkind
 Cost: \$9.95
 Date: 1984
 Publisher: Addison-Wesley

David Elkind is a Professor of Child Study at Tufts University. He discusses the psychological, physical, and other pressures youth are under. These pressures are considerable; it will thus take more than a sermon to straighten out the problems and give direction. Wayne Rice has worked with a number of youth agencies and offers some insights and suggestions of the junior high level — the age of confirmation. These young people, who are moving toward adulthood and have tremendous energy and idealism, need to become involved. This means they need to be “aimed” rather than blocked. Jim Burns, in his book, discusses working with older youth. His approach is to work with youth by becoming close to them, getting involved with them, and working to meet their particular needs.

Books are expensive, but if one finds one good idea in them, they more than pay for themselves. And these books have more than just a few good ideas in them. They are available in the Bethany College Bookstore. †

Errata

The cover of the March edition of LSQ was mistakenly labeled "Volume XXXIII Number 2;" Please replace "Number 2" with "Number 1."

Page 10 — part of the first paragraph on page 10 was mistakenly duplicated next to the text box. Please omit.

Page 16 — line 6 of the quotation should read, "Norwegian-American Lutheran Church people. Fi—"

Page 55 — the title should be Exegesis of Joel 2:28-32. In the Hebrew Old Testament the verses are numbered 3:1-5.

Page 55 — the line under *BHS*, should read, "Joel 2:28-32 (3:1-5 in the Hebrew) זואל"

Page 65 — line 3 "Sending" should not be capitalized

Page 74 — the last full line of the first paragraph should read, "Apostles, for Jesus says, 'He who hears you hears me' (Luke"

Page 81 — the Hebrew text is out of order. It should read,

ונחתי מופתים בשמים ובארץ הם ואש ותימרות עשן:
השמש יהפך לחושך והירח לדם

Page 84 — again the Hebrew text is out of order. It should read,

והיה כל אשר יקרא בשם יהוה ימלט כי בהר ציון ובירושלם
תהיה פליטה כאשר אמר יהוה ובשרידימי אשר יקרא:

Page 86 — the first line of the last paragraph should read, "The concept of 'escape' is continued in the word: בשרידימי "

Page 89 — the parenthetical in the last line of the page should read, “(cf. ‘flesh’ [בשר] in 3:11)”

Page 94 — the text box is missing the last word, “earth”

Page 101 — the seventh line from the bottom should read, “key to understanding the abounding love of God for you”

Page 105 — this book review is by Prof. Glenn Reichwald

Page 105 — line 5 of paragraph 2 should read, “us a thorough and clear exposition of the book and applies its”

Page 108 — this book review is by Prof. Glenn Reichwald

Page 109 — line 5 should read, “have strengthened the faith of those Old Testament saints in”