

# Lutheran Synod Quarterly

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## Foreword

This issue of the *Quarterly* begins with a devotion by Professor John Moldstad, Jr. which was delivered to the annual vicar workshop at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary on May 11 of this year. Professor Moldstad is professor of New Testament and Dogmatics at Bethany Seminary.

The article on *Hymnody as Homiletics* was delivered by Professor Dennis Marzolf to the 1995 General Pastoral Conference of the ELS. It centers around the hymnody of Thomas Kingo, a Danish hymnwriter. The writer shows how Kingo's hymns preach powerful sermons and that "the whole counsel of God" is reflected in his hymns. Professor Marzolf is choir director and professor of music at Bethany Lutheran College.

Our readers will also appreciate the M.Div. thesis by Michael Langlais entitled *Jesus Christ and History: Refocusing the Doctrine of Church Fellowship in American Lutheran History 1820-1872*. Mr. Langlais is a transfer student from Luther Seminary (ELCA) and will graduate on Synod Sunday. He will be ordained and installed as pastor of River Heights Lutheran Church, East Grand Forks, Minnesota, on July 2 of this year. Emphasizing the importance of church fellowship, he reminds the reader that "forgetfulness is inevitably followed by unfaithfulness" and calls attention to one important lesson of history for judging the church fellowship question as it exists for the Lutheran church today. He states that "the need to be informed about the modern manifestations of unionism is pressing, especially in the light of the near critical-consensus upon the place of the confessional principle in Lutheran church history. The near collapse of orthodoxy has brought the church once again to the brink of crisis. The loss of *sola Scriptura* by the majority of American Lutheran theologians has led to confusion among Lutheran laity, and the deceptive promulgation of anthropocentric philosophies has taken the place of the clear confessional teaching of Biblical truth. The unity of faith and practice grounded in the apostolic norm of church fellowship, which is complete agreement in all the doctrines of sacred Scripture and the common participation in the Means of Grace, has been supplemented by gross forms of organic unionism." A timely topic indeed!

WWP

# Devotion for Vicar Workshop

May 11, 1995

by Prof. John A. Moldstad, Jr.

*Hymn: 411, vv. 1-4; closing v. 5*

*Text: John 15:1-11, "Remain in the Vine"*

Dear brothers in Christ,

For our brief meditation this morning we have chosen the words of the Gospel lesson assigned for C.F.W. Walther Sunday, for those who may have chosen to commemorate the death of Walther 108 years ago this past Sunday. We read from John's Gospel, chapter 15, verses 1-11:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup>By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. <sup>9</sup>As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. <sup>11</sup>These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." (NKJV)

The sainted Dr. Walther once began a powerful sermon on the doctrine of justification by saying, "If a person is to be blessed in the next world, then he must first become righteous before God in this world." The text that we have before us, using the familiar picture of the vine and the branches certainly lays out before us the way in which a person has righteousness before God in this present world. It can only be through the proper connection to Him alone who is the source of life (real life), the Author and Finisher of our faith, the

Lord Jesus Christ. And so this morning we meditate briefly on what it means to *remain in the vine*.

Apparently it was Maundy Thursday evening when Jesus spoke these words to His disciples. Some Bible commentators think it may have been while they were still in the upper room celebrating the holy Supper with the fruit of the vine that Jesus used this illustration of the vine. Others suppose this discourse took place as Jesus and His disciples were leaving the room and heading for the Garden of Gethsemane.

It's interesting to observe the frequency of the verb "remain" (μένω) in this text: the word occurs 10 times within these eleven verses. Jesus stresses with His disciples that they should *remain* in Him, firmly trusting Him as their Lord and Savior from sin, death and the devil. At the time Jesus spoke these words, the disciples would experience a separation from Jesus by the fact that He would die. Jesus had told them, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me" (John 16:19). Then, later Christ's ascension into heaven would visibly separate them as they would be sent out to do the work of spreading the Gospel. How easy it would be for them to drift away from Christ. Thus, our Lord comes with His beautiful "Remain in the Vine" discourse.

A separation of sorts is taking place here at our seminary. (There's no reference here to an impending walkout on the part of some of the faculty.) Today we are bidding God's blessing be upon those of you who will either be receiving your first calls into the full-time work of shepherding God's flock or embarking on your respective vicarages around our synod, or—as the case may be—simply leaving for the summer and returning for the fall. As this separation occurs, what better thought can we carry with us than that of our text, "Remain in the vine?"

Picture for a moment a vine—preferably a grape vine—filled with clusters of fruit. Jesus Himself is the vine stalk from which all of the branches—all of us—have to get our strength, our righteousness needed for eternity (as Walther said). The Heavenly Father, who is described here as the gardener, trims away the suckers and pinches off the buds that threaten to sap the branch's strength and prohibit production. The unending work is performed by the diligent and earnest work of the Holy Spirit. And as the Spirit works in the hearts of people, convincing them more and more of Christ's wonderful love and salvation, this is how the branches become more fruit-bearing. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Gal. 5:22, 23)

When we say to each of you today, *remain in the vine*, we take special care to see how our relationship to Christ is described. Jesus says of us, the branches, "You are already clean." How can He say this? Neither you nor I were originally part of the vine. We came into this world engrossed in sin, even though as tiny babies we were unaware of our spiritually severed condition. David's words apply to your and my conception and birth as well as his own: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). We were dead branches at one time, deserving to be thrown into the eternal fire.

But there is one of whom it *cannot* be said he was "shapen in iniquity" and conceived in sin: JESUS CHRIST, the Righteous One. He is the one who came forth at the fullness of time and was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus rescued us. He grafted us into His vine. He connected us to His gracious forgiveness of sins and won for the whole world, through the miraculous power of water and the Word. "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit..." (Titus 3:5). *This is why Jesus says that we are now clean*: "because of the word I have spoken to you."

But let us see that Jesus also here addresses the life of sanctification which naturally follows and flows from a heart that knows it has been justified by God's grace. "Remain in me," says Jesus, "and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me ... If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Yes, dear brothers in Christ, the more we realize that our whole existence on this earth, and that our eternal salvation, are completely tied up in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the more fruitful we will find ourselves becoming; the more we will be moved to carry out the Father's command to *love*.

Do you pray that you will faithfully carry out the work set before you? Our Lord reminds us here: The results, the fruits will be there; concern yourself with *remaining in the vine*. Diligently devote yourself to using the Means of Grace for your spiritual edification.

In Hampton Court near London, I understand there is a huge grapevine under glass; it's about 1,000 years old and has but one root which is at least two feet thick. Some of the branches are 200 feet long. But even those smaller branches at 200 feet from the stem bear much fruit. How can this be? They are joined to the vine and receive their strength and nourishment from it alone.

May God impress this important fact upon us as we go our separate ways following the vicar workshop: *Remain in the Vine!* This is our life and—as Jesus says—this is to the Father’s glory.

C.F.W. Walther, in that same sermon on justification by grace through faith in Christ, said in closing: “Blessed are those who cling to this doctrine. They have the right guidepost against all temptation, a sure comfort against all anguish of sin and physical and spiritual need, strength and power against all temptations, and a broad gate through death into eternal life” (found in The Word of His Grace, p. 7). Amen.

### *Prayer*

O Lord Jesus Christ, bless our workshop today, and as we go our separate ways involved in the work of Your kingdom, constantly have our hearts and souls rooted in You, the true Vine, our blessed redeemer. In Your name we pray. Amen.

# Hymnody as Homiletics

## The Hymnody of Thomas Kingo

by Prof. Dennis W. Marzolf

January, 1995

*“Jesus, crucified for me, is my life, my hope’s foundation, and my glory and salvation.”*

– Thomas Kingo, 1689

The song of the church is no idle moan. It is not an empty ritualistic act offered to the ears of a god who is deaf and impotent. The song of the church is the song of angels and priests. The song of the church is the word of God, full of might and comfort. It is the word of the prophets and evangelists, sung from evangelist to evangelist, from priest to priest.

St. Paul exhorts the Christian congregation and all its members and royal priests to engage in the work of liturgical song (Col. 3). For generation upon generation the faithful have had the word of God upon their lips and in their hearts as they participated in the work of liturgical song. The psalms of David led the way, and the hymns of the Christian church imitated and expanded the tradition of poetry and theology established by the psalter.

The song of the church is the word of God. God creates it and gives it to His creatures. The creatures return to God that which is from Him, of Him and through Him. Lutheran pulpit and pew preaching is the enactment of orthodoxy, from God, through His sacramental people, and back to God. It is conversation from God through his people. The liturgical song is the highest form of priestly homiletics.

Our liturgical song is *preparation* for the sacrament of pulpit, altar and font, but it is more. It is the act of homiletics, preaching, among the anointed priesthood. Our liturgical song must be the best of what we understand to be correct preaching. Our liturgical song, whether it is a congregational hymn, the order of our mass, the motet by the choir, the wedding solo, the children’s anthem, or even the instrumental music in the service, embraces all the elements of Law/Gospel proclamation that we are laboring to learn and understand.

St. Paul exhorts us, and he challenges us to use the divine gifts of poetry and melody in the high service of preaching. Our fallen nature uses the arts

and sciences of music, poetry and rhetoric as devices to manipulate the human spirit. We use them to sell. We use them for our own benefit. But that which seems best in our nature uses them to convict and convince. We use them to grant welcome release and expression to the human spirit and world of ideas. God creates them to be avenues by which His truth is proclaimed and His presence made known. Our regenerate nature offers poetry and melody to the glory of God.

The sound of speech and song achieve their noblest use when they are sanctified by God to bear His eternal truth. Poetic language is one of the sweetest ways in which God speaks to His people. It is little wonder that the greatest preachers of our Lutheran church have been poets and musicians, artists who led the community in the liturgical song commanded by God through the apostle Paul. We sing, pray and think the words of our psalms and hymns, and God uses that singing, praying and thinking to reveal His perfect nature to those who know all too well the sorrow of a fallen nature.

Liturgical singing is preaching. Hymnody is homiletics. It is powerful homiletics, for when the thought process is connected to rhyme, meter and melody that which is taught becomes infinitely more memorable.

Hymnody is poetry. It is unique poetry, in that it is used primarily in some form of corporate recitation. One of the happiest uses of hymnody is in private and personal liturgical reflection; in our day its major use occurs in the liturgical celebration of the people. Our use of hymnic poetry is counter-cultural and extraordinary. How often, in our society, do large groups of people engage in a unified proclamation of thought that embraces elements of the artistic rhetoric of poetry? Not often (pep rallies and political contests excluded).

This extraordinary, counter-cultural use of hymnody has always been the unusual practice of the church. The corporate recitation of poetry in the Divine Service by the congregation, choir and pastor is unique among our day to day experiences. As it is unique it is also powerful. The psalmist understood this, as did Paul and the fathers of the church. The hallmark of the Ambrosian tradition was that *rhyming* sermons were easy to remember and therefore powerful tools to ward off heresy and to teach orthodoxy. The tradition of congregational homiletics experienced a rebirth in the evangelical Lutheran community of the sixteenth century when the rhyming sermons of the chorale enshrined the Law and Gospel in the hearts of the hearers and singers.

Melody and vernacular poetry were exalted to a place of honor by the Lutheran reformers. The Torgau Articles of 1530 reveal the Lutheran attitude toward congregational liturgical song:

Some have adopted German singing, that by this practice men might learn something, as Paul also teaches, 1 Cor. 14, that in the Church nothing unintelligible should be spoken or sung.<sup>1</sup>

This sentiment reverberates through the Augsburg Confession, Art. 24:

All the usual ceremonies (of the mass) are also preserved, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns which have been added to teach the people.<sup>2</sup>

The Lutheran reformers were singing teachers. They wished to see a proper attitude of devotion among the people, but their paramount concern was pedagogical. How different was their attitude about hymnody from that which is expressed in the preface to a hymnal of recent publication:

The commission (followed the principle) that the hymns should be devotional rather than didactic or homiletical ... each hymn should be exalted in language, noble in thought and reverent in feeling.<sup>3</sup>

Hymnody was a part of the spiritual armor of reformation Christians. Battles may be a part of the Christian experience. Every Christian should expect to come face to face with the might of Satan, sin and the lonely hour of death. It is not enough that the Church sow the seed of the word. Christian souls need to be cultivated, nurtured, and trained. Christ's command and promise of Matthew 28 stand firm. The Lutheran liturgical tradition of hymnic preaching is exalted in language, noble in thought, reverent in feeling and emotional. It transcends romantic religiosity in that it is, and will remain, nutritious, difficult, challenging, and sacramental.

The chorale, or Lutheran vernacular hymn of the 16th and 17th centuries, was one of the most powerful preaching tools of the reformation. An initial collection published in 1524 experienced widespread use. By the year 1528 the chorale was a mighty force in the work of reformation; in one instance the "spontaneous" singing of a chorale in a service inaugurated the work of ref-

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<sup>1</sup> Reu, J.M. The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources. Reprint, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Seminary Press #9770. p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> The Lutheran Hymnary. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1913 and 1935. p.xxviii.

<sup>3</sup> The Service Book and Hymnal. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1958. p. 286.

ormation for an entire geo-political region (The "Singers' Reformation" in Luebeck).<sup>4</sup>

The hymns were sung, memorized and taught so that the people would learn. This teaching consisted of objective doctrinal presentation and subjective confession. It was a balance that constantly challenged the people to rise above that which was simply convenient, obviously practical or immediately relevant.

The homiletician struggles to communicate a counter-cultural divine truth in a manner that is understandable. This is a challenge for those who ascend the pulpit, those who direct the choir, those who lead worship from the organ console, those who sing sermons to one another in the hymnody of the church, and those who select hymns for the congregational homily.

The Lutheran Church, in the first two centuries of its existence, did not shrink from using hymnody and liturgical poetry to teach with the same zeal and expertise of catechism and pulpit. The majority of the hymns produced in that time sing like "rhyming systematic theologies." They embrace a strong musical system to support this theology. David Chytraeus, the Rostock theologian, championed the sermonic worth of the chorale in 1573 when he wrote:

Our gracious, wise and merciful God has entrusted His beautiful art of music to us so that His word, that is to say the divine promises and warnings of our religion, may the more eagerly and joyfully be learned, to more easily be kept in the memory, and the more deeply received into Christian hearts, moving and exciting us all to fear, love, trust, and joy in God as well as to the heartfelt prayer and praise. For in these hymns the articles of our Christian faith and the important acts of God, especially the justification of the human race in Jesus Christ, are set distinctly and clearly to such pretty rhymes and such beautiful melodies that, when young people sing them with hearts full of serious piety, they will be brought in a pleasant and joyful way to the true knowledge of God and the practice of virtue.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas Kingo was a poet and pastor who loved the rhymes and melodies of orthodox Lutheran hymnody. He was a theologian who planted the flowers of subjective faith on the bedrock of the objective doctrine revealed in scripture.

Thomas Hansen Kingo was thoroughly acquainted with the chorale. The chorale tradition inaugurated by Luther's hymnody found a happy home in

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<sup>4</sup> Bergsma, Johannes. Die Reform der Messliturgie durch Johannes Bugenhagen. Hildesheim: Bernard Verlag, 1966. pp. 83-89.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss, G. Luther's House of Learning. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. p. 232.

the liturgical life of the churches in Denmark and Norway. The reformation in these regions was expressed in a liturgical order based on Luther's "German Mass" of 1526 as it was articulated by the Wittenberg ambassadors.<sup>6</sup> Hans Tausen brought the chorale tradition in 1529. In 1537 and 1539 the official Danish ordinance insured the use of vernacular hymnody in the Lutheran mass throughout the Danish realm. The chief architect of the Danish mass reform was undoubtedly Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther's pastor, confessor and friend.<sup>7</sup>

Bugenhagen's evangelistic missionary work resulted in the production of many liturgical orders for the regions bordering the reformation superhighway of the Baltic. In these orders the vernacular hymn plays a prominent role in the schools and the churches. The Lutheran orders elevated the chorale to a place of importance equal to the old Gregorian musical tradition. Bugenhagen and Luther embraced the choral music and the liturgical formulae of the Latin church. Their assumption that the entire congregation could function as a liturgical choir via the vernacular chorale was a result of evangelistic zeal, humanistic optimism and musical idealism. They were even more optimistic to attempt to pass on the doctrinal content of the chorales.

The chorale was a hallmark of the Lutheran liturgy. There was no teaching, preaching or worship without the congregational chorale. Where the Bugenhagen mass form was used the congregation was expected to function as a community of choral prophets and tuneful evangelists. The following outline of the Danish Lutheran Service according to the order of 1537 illustrates the prominent role of congregational song:

1. The pastor prays his Confiteor at the altar while
2. the people sing a vernacular hymn. On the great festivals the Latin Introit shall be sung by the choir *in addition to* the hymn.
3. Kyrie eleison is sung by the people.
4. The pastor intones the Gloria in excelsis, in Latin or Danish; the people shall sing the Gloria hymn, and on the festivals the Gloria/Laudamus shall be sung in Latin by the choir *in addition to* the hymn.
5. The Salutation and two Collects are sung; one for the Day and one for the King, to which the people shall sing their Amen.
6. The pastor reads the Epistle in Danish.
7. The choral scholars will sing the Alleluia and the Verse for the Day. The Gradual of two verses shall be sung, or a Danish hymn. In the festival

<sup>6</sup> Blume, F. Protestant Church Music. New York: W.W. Norton, 1974. pp. 611ff.

<sup>7</sup> Bergsma, pp. 115ff.

seasons a Latin sequence shall be sung in alternatim with the verses of the Danish hymn.

8. The pastor reads the Gospel in Danish.
9. He intones the Creed, in Latin and leads the people in singing the Danish form of the creed (Luther's setting in translation)
10. The Sermon
11. The Prayer of the Church; the Our Father; the Hymn for Peace (Grant Peace, We Pray)
12. The Preparation of the Bread and Wine; the communicants gather at the altar.
13. The Exhortation to the Communicants.
14. The Preface and the Sanctus, which may be sung by the choir in Latin on the festivals.
15. The pastor sings Our Father, in Danish. It may be sung in Latin on the festivals.
16. The pastor sings the Words of Institution, in Danish. After the Words of Institution the altar bells shall be rung to accompany the elevation of the sacrament.
17. The sacrament is distributed in both kinds, during which
18. Hymns are sung by the congregation. "Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior"; "O Christ, the Lamb of God," and others, as chosen by the cantor. The Latin Agnus Dei may be sung on festivals *in addition to* the hymns.
19. The Salutation and Collect of thanks are sung by the pastor to which the people sing their Amen.
20. The Salutation and Benediction are sung by the pastor.
21. A brief Danish hymn shall be sung, according to the selection of the cantor, during which the pastor prays his concluding prayer and removes the chasuble.<sup>8</sup>

The Danish church translated and adapted the hymns from the Wittenberg liturgical and academic tradition. Most of the great hymns of the Lutheran reformation were a cherished part of the Danish rite. In addition medieval hymnody unique to the northern tradition was successfully adapted for use in the liturgy of church, school and home.<sup>9</sup>

Den danske Psalmebog of 1569 was prepared by Hans Thomissøn, pastor of the Church of our Lady in Copenhagen. He had been a student in

<sup>8</sup> Bergsma, pp. 115ff.

<sup>9</sup> See especially Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary #290 "On Mary, Virgin Undeified."

Wittenberg from 1553-57, and he was acquainted with the Germanic chorale tradition. This volume contained 268 hymns set to 216 tunes.<sup>10</sup>

A Latin Gradual based on the Gregorian tradition was available from 1573 (Niels Jespersøn). This collection was used in the academic parishes where choirs from the Latin schools could sing the liturgy. Despite the availability of this collection the vernacular song of the Lutheran mass gained precedence and preeminence over the Gregorian music in the Danish rite, with the result that the chorale became the *chief* musical form in the service, even in the academic parishes. The Jespersøn Gradual and the Thomissøn Psalmebog defined the Danish-Norwegian liturgical tradition until the advent of the Kirke-Ritual of 1685.<sup>11</sup>

Kingo matured as a poet and a theologian in this chorale-informed environment. He would have held a copy of one of the Thomissøn editions as he participated in the liturgy in his school days in Slangerup and Hillerød. There, on the shores of Frederiksborg Lake, Kingo grew in his love for the hymnody of the Lutheran tradition. In the environs of Frederiksborg Castle the young Latin scholar grew to love the unique artistic traditions, language and politics of his native land. Kingo exhibited an ardent Danish nationalism that led him to study the folk tales and the poetic traditions of his mother tongue, an unlikely study in an age that emphasized the superiority of the Latin and German tongue in the schools. He lived at a time during which the artistic movement that we call "Baroque" was firmly established in the music, poetry, rhetoric, painting and architecture of northern Europe.

At the university of Copenhagen Kingo's love for the vernacular liturgical song was enriched by the tutelage of the Prof. Bartholin, an individual touched by the piety of Arndt, and through the dogmatic writings of Jesper Brochman, the Danish Lutheran systematician. Kingo, like Paul Gerhardt, knew the comfort of the orthodox faith. Kingo knew the sacramental grace of a loving God that floods the world in every moment through the gifts of scripture, baptism, absolution, preaching, and holy communion. Kingo was a pious dogmatician and an orthodox pietist. In this regard he was an outstanding representative of seventeenth century Lutheran Christianity. He graduated from the university in 1658.<sup>12</sup>

Kingo was ordained at the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen in 1661. He already had an established reputation as a stirring preacher and capable

<sup>10</sup> Blume, p. 614.

<sup>11</sup> Blume, p. 615.

<sup>12</sup> Aaberg, J.C. Hymns and Hymnwriters of Denmark. Des Moines, 1945. pp. 25-27.

poet. It seemed surprising that he should accept a call to be an assistant at a rural parish not far from Vedby. The young assistant pastor produced secular and sacred poetry that inspired the hearts of Danish folk. In 1666 Kingo applied for a position at his home congregation in Slangerup. This pastor was honored in his own hometown and he grew in esteem as a pastor and poet. Amid many personal sorrows he was known for his pulpit presence and his pastoral work among the people.

His poetry was a joy to many, not the least of whom was the Danish king. At royal appointment the forty-two year old pastor became the bishop of Fyn. Despite the demands of this position he still found time to write Danish poetry and Danish hymns in the Lutheran chorale tradition. In this time Kingo composed Aandelige Siunge-Koor I and II (1674 and 1681). These collections included 16 melodies in the Baroque manner that borrowed from the courtly style of Germany, France and England. Many aspects of the poetic style of Kingo, as well as other Lutheran poets of that time may be traced to the "radical" poetry of Martin Opitz (1597-1639).<sup>13</sup>

These popular collections supplemented Thomissøn as legitimate expressions of the faith. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century the old Ordinance, Hymnal and Gradual were in need of revision. It was clear that Kingo could take the mantle of Thomissøn in the production of a new resource of liturgical poetry that would become a genuinely Danish expression of the Lutheran way.

Hans Thomissøn's hymnal had become antiquated after serving the church for nearly one hundred and twenty-five years. It had served its purpose well. Its hymns had been sung by high and low until they had entered into the thoughts and conscience of all. A changing language and a fast developing literary taste long ago had shown their need for revision; but the people so far had opposed all attempts to change their beloved old songs. Their defects by now had become so conspicuous, however that even the more conservative admitted the desirability of at least a limited revision. And the only man for the undertaking of such a task was, of course, Kingo.

In March, 1683, King Christian V commissioned Kingo to prepare and publish a new church hymnal for the kingdom of Denmark and Norway. The carefully prepared instructions of his commission directed him to

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Opitz is regarded as a metrical revisionist in the world of German poetry. His hymns mark a transition from the older "Meistersinger" style to a more modern form of meter and regular rhyme. He is represented in our hymnody by the text "Arise, and Shine in Splendor."

eliminate undesirable hymns; to revise antiquated rhymes and expressions; to adopt at least two new hymns by himself or another for every gospel and epistle of the church year, but under no circumstances to make any changes to Luther's hymns that would alter their meaning.<sup>14</sup>

Kingo produced a new hymnal which promised enthusiastic reception and use. Over half of the hymns were from his own pen. For malignant reasons that seem to stem from courtly intrigue and churchly jealousy the king was convinced to withdraw his commission and give it to another. The second hymnal contained many fine translations and textual updates, but it did not include a single text by Kingo. Because of this "oversight" it, too, was rejected. Eventually a third hymnal was produced by a committee in consultation with Kingo. This hymnal of 297 hymns contained 85 Kingo texts. The Graduale of 1699 was designed to be a companion to the Altarbog of 1688 to assist in the practical execution of the orders proposed by the Kirke Ritual of 1685.

Since the formal introduction of reformation thought, the Danish Lutheran liturgy had been rich in congregational hymnody. In the rites of 1685 congregational hymnody became the chief form of corporate liturgical expression. In the Ritual the Lutheran chorale form became *the* song of the church. No other Lutheran order gave such preeminence to the congregational chorale. In the course of the normal order of the chief service it was expected that the congregation would sing at least twelve hymns.<sup>15</sup>

In some circles the 1685 Ritual is seen as proof of a liturgical decline in the Danish churches. In one sense this is true; the Latin and choral portions of the services were limited, and the great "prose" texts of the Divine Service were lost their metrical paraphrases (Psalmody, Gloria Patri, Gloria in excelsis, Alleluia, Sanctus, Agnus Dei). In another sense this notion of liturgical decline is negated by the challenge of a regular liturgy that was rich in congregational participation. If we were to visit a congregation using the rite of 1685 we would see a service that could be called "high church" by the rank and file American protestant observer. The pastor was vested in the full historic vestments. The altar was vested, altar lights were lit, bells were rung, and the majority of the "altar service" was chanted. The historic pericopal system was observed; the epistle and gospel were sung, and the gospel lesson was always the text used for preaching at the chief service, and the full

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<sup>14</sup> Aaberg, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> See The Church Ritual, preliminary translation by Pr. M. DeGarmeaux. (attached to original presentation).

service of word and sacrament was still, in theory, the service for every Sunday and festival day.<sup>16</sup>

Congregational song was elevated to a position equal to choral liturgical song. It was an homiletic element in the service. It was an exercise in priestly preaching by which the men, women and children of the congregation could proclaim their faith to one another. It can be said that the hymnody of those congregations who used the 1685 Ritual was the chief tool for Christian evangelism, teaching, comfort and preaching.

Kingo understood this, and it was this understanding that paved the way for the production of some of the great treasures of our living Lutheran confession.

Kingo was a prolific hymnist. In this regard he stands alongside Watts, Charles Wesley and Paul Gerhardt. The amazing thing about all of these hymnists is that so many of their poetic presentations of the doctrine are not just good hymnody but *great* hymnody. Kingo is certainly one of the most ecumenical or "catholic" hymnists of the Lutheran tradition. This is not because he avoided discussion of the doctrine; Kingo is a celebrated treasure of the whole church because he preached the fine points of objective doctrine in a highly personal way. His brief hymn on Holy Baptism is a brilliantly simple commentary on the institution and blessing of this sacrament. It is interesting to note that this hymn has found its way into Roman Catholic and Anglican-Episcopal hymnody in recent years.<sup>17</sup>

There are many examples of Kingo's brilliance. This great gospel song is in the tradition of Luther's "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice."

Thy love, O gracious God and Lord, all other loves excelling,  
Attunes my heart to sweet accord, and passes power of telling;  
For when Thy wondrous love I see, my heart yields glad submission;  
I love Thee for Thy love to me in my poor, lost condition.

Yea, Thou hast loved our fallen race, and rather than condemn us,  
Cast out and banish from Thy face, Thine only Son didst send us;  
Who died upon the cross, that we should all be saved forever;  
Hence Jesus also died for me! My soul, forget it never!

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<sup>16</sup> Hunter, L.S., editor. Scandinavian Churches. London: Faber and Faber, 1965. pp. 85-103.

<sup>17</sup> See Worship III and The Hymnal 1982.

Thy love, O God, embraces all, and Jesus' merits cover  
 The guilt of all, both great and small, the world of sinners over.  
 Thy Spirit doth Thy light afford to all who will receive it,  
 And from Thy knowledge bars Thy Word no soul who would  
 believe it.

But what hath moved Thee, gracious Lord? Why is Thine heart still  
 yearning,  
 Since the great world rejects Thy Word, Thy love and mercy  
 spurning?  
 For men go on in sin each day in carnal-minded blindness,  
 And O, how few thy call obey, and heed Thy lovingkindness!

In us no beauty Thou couldst see, and no intrinsic merit;  
 We all were poor — but misery and sin we did inherit.  
 We wandered each a different path, and in our lost condition,  
 By nature children of His wrath, whom sin doomed to perdition.

Our virtues and our own good deeds with God cannot avail us;  
 With these the enemy misleads, such righteousness shall fail us;  
 Our will and strength and soul are dead in evil inclination;  
 Christ Jesus has the ransom paid, and gained for us salvation.

O gracious God, Thy loving heart was full of sweet compassion;  
 And felt our woe and desparate smart, and planned our restoration;  
 Thy grace and justice found a way to save us from death's horror;  
 And everlasting judgment stay, and give us joy tomorrow.

On Christ, the Rock, I'm anchored fast, by faith in Him remaining;  
 I'll weather every stormy blast my peace of soul retaining;  
 On Father, Son and Holy Ghost, my ever firm foundation,  
 Until the harbor bar is crossed, and I see God's salvation.

O Jesus, at my dying breath hold Thou my hand securely,  
 And may I in a living faith hold fast to Thee most surely;  
 That my last prayer to Thee may rise, my soul to Thee commending,  
 And I shall find in Paradise the joys of life unending.<sup>18</sup>

The hymn is a worthy part of the Lutheran chorale tradition. It is a rhyming systematic theology, dripping with the kind of doctrinal fine tuning that

<sup>18</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, #434.

our age relegates to a committee of experts or theological faculties in ivory towers. Yet it is burning with the fervent desire of the preacher who wants to take his hearers into the glorious majesty of the Good Friday victory. "Today *you* will be with me in paradise!" Kingo knows that every Christian heart *must* and can understand the doctrine. He places the counter-cultural teachings of Christianity in words that are challenging but intelligible. He knows the people in the pew. They may be poor and sinful, but they are not stupid! They may hate God, but they need to be instructed again and again how much God loves them. They need to understand and cherish the fine points of doctrine. They can't live without them.

In this sermon Kingo clearly understands what that great Lutheran "Preacher Teacher" will say almost two hundred years later. C.F.W. Walther admonished and encouraged pastors with these words in 1874:

When a preacher proclaims Christ Jesus, magnifies that Man and brings joy to the hearts of people by assuring them that they have so glorious a Savior, that is the right man, an ambassador of God. We preachers need to pretend that we ourselves were present with the Lord Jesus on Calvary, saw everything, and heard when Christ called out: "It is finished!" Then we must further imagine that the Savior called to us from the cross: "Go, tell the world what you have seen and heard." Viewing ourselves in that light, we shall serve entirely differently in the pulpit, preaching with a flaming tongue: "What a congregation of blessed people you are, you are saved!" ...It is not enough, however, that the preacher merely pay attention to this. He must above all experience in his own heart what a precious treasure the Gospel is... The preacher must be aware that he does not speak coldly and dryly of the marvelous work of divine salvation. He dare not be satisfied merely to present salvation in simple and dry words, without references to Scripture... [He must] muster all in order to convince his hearers of God's grand work of salvation. He seeks to draw his hearers away from the kingdom of the devil to the side of God.<sup>19</sup>

Thomas Kingo was such a preacher, and in his hymns he gives us a fine example of scriptural preaching. His hymns give us a clear example of the kind of art and rhetoric we must use throughout the Divine Service. Lutheran hymnody, Lutheran liturgy and Lutheran preaching have never been particularly "user friendly" in the modern sense. They are not and will not be "contemporary" in the overused cultivated sense. But they are "popular," for they

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<sup>19</sup> Walther, C.F.W. Convention Essays, trans. by A.R. Suelflow. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981. p. 89.

exist for the eternal good and blessing of all the people; they are "contemporary" as they bring all the anxieties and fears of every time and place to that crucial moment from which all time derives its meaning. We must use the whole counsel of God in our proclamation, whether that proclamation comes from the pulpit, the hymnal, the choir or the soloist. We may settle for less, and we may abandon the much maligned ethnic affections of our German and Scandinavian forebears in order to pretend to be "accessible" to the people in the pew and the people on the street. This is done at great peril to ourselves, to those to whom we minister, and to the generations of pastors and laity yet unborn.

Kingo used the whole counsel of God, even when that counsel challenged the singer. Hear what is certainly one of the finest sanctification sermons that we claim among our inheritance. Kingo realizes that our holiness flows from the absolute holiness of God. Our sanctification is a great gift of grace by which we proclaim in deed and word that we are citizens of the new Jerusalem.

How fair the Church of Christ shall stand, a beaconlight in all  
the land,

When love and faith all hearts inspire, and all unite in one desire  
To be a family and agree to live in peace and unity.

'Tis all in vain that you profess the doctrines of the Church, unless  
You live according to your creed, and show your faith by word  
and deed.

Observe the rule: To others do as you would have them do to you.

Resentment, hate and cruel jest, must not be harbored in the breast  
Where love and charity should dwell; Then think and speak of  
others well,

Refrain from all that causes strife and mars a truly Christian life.

So let your tongue, your heart and mind agree to banish every kind  
Of malice, falsehood and disguise, and here on earth a paradise  
Of peace and harmony maintain, where concord and goodwill  
shall reign.

For God observes our thoughts and deeds, the secrets of our heart  
He reads;

The wicked cannot be concealed, their evil ways shall be revealed,  
He every true believer knows, and love and grace on him bestows.

My soul, be therefore of good cheer, though sinners threaten, scoff  
and sneer,  
Serenly on your way proceed, nor worldly strife and clamor heed,  
For Jesus' sake the cross you bear, and soon with Him the crown  
shall wear.

O gracious God, wilt Thou my heart so fashion in each secret part,  
That Thou be sanctified in me, till Thee in heaven above I see,  
Where holy, holy, holy Lord, we sing to Thee with one accord.<sup>20</sup>

One must marvel that this text has been lost to English speaking Lutheranism!

Another lost text speaks of the might of sanctification that flows from the font. This great sacramental hymn was a favorite of H. N. Hauge, the radical Norwegian pietist.

The power of sin no longer within my heart shall reign;  
Faith must grow ever stronger and carnal lust be slain;  
For when I was baptized the bonds of sin were severed  
And I by grace delivered to live for Jesus Christ.

By faith I claim the merit of my baptismal grace,  
And with my heart and spirit my Savior's cross embrace.  
How great would be my blame should I abide in evil  
And not renounce the devil in Christ's Almighty name!

It would bestow no treasure on me that Christ arose,  
If I will not with pleasure the power of death oppose.  
Each day I will embrace the Savior, who his risen  
And has from error's prison redeemed me by His grace!

Lord Jesus, help me ever to drown my nature, so  
that it shall not deliver me to eternal woe.  
But that I daily die to sin and all offences,  
And, by the blood that cleanses attain my home on high.<sup>21</sup>

Kingo has been called the "Easter Singer" because of his hymns on the passion and resurrection of Christ. Happy the congregation that has been taught "On My Heart Imprint Thine Image" and "Over Kedron Jesus Treadeth." We search in vain for an Easter hymn that excels Kingo in his application of the benefits of Christ's resurrection to the sacraments and cal-

<sup>20</sup> ELH, #406.

<sup>21</sup> Aaberg, pp. 49-50.

endar of the Church. "Like the Golden Sun Ascending" must stand with "Jesus Christ is Risen Today, Alleluia," "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," "Awake My Heart with Gladness" and "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" as our chief Easter hymnody.

Thomas Kingo has given our church a great legacy of preaching. We do well to learn his hymns so that they can become a part of our confident liturgical proclamation. We must examine the hymnody that we use in our congregational worship, choral performance and educational programs in the light of the great legacy that is ours as Lutheran Christians. Each generation must be encouraged to produce its own Kingo, just as each generation must struggle to proclaim the truths of God in a world for which these truths seem to be anachronistic and unnecessary.

I pray Thee dear Lord Jesus, my heart to keep and train  
That I Thy holy temple from youth to age remain  
Turn Thou my thoughts forever from worldly wisdom's lore,  
If I but learn to love Thee I shall not want for more.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The Lutheran Hymnal, #655.

*Thomas Hansen Kingo (1634-1703)*

- 1634 ..... December 14 - Born in Slangerup, Denmark.  
*First performance of Oberammergau Passion Play.*  
*J. Nicollet lands on Green Bay and explores Wisconsin.*
- 1637 ..... *D. Buxtehude, Danish composer is born. (d. 1707)*  
*Johann Gerhard dies (b. 1582); The "arch-theologian of 17th century Lutheranism;" student of Johann Arndt (1551-1621).*
- 1639 ..... *Martin Opitz dies. (b. 1597)*  
 At six Kingo enters the Danish school.  
 At eight he enters the Latin School.  
 At fifteen he transfers to the school in Hillerød, where he resided with rector Albert Bartholin and his household.
- 1648 ..... *Peace of Westphalia; end of Thirty Years War.*
- 1654 ..... Graduation from Hillerød.  
*Coronation of Louis XIV at Rheims.*
- 1654 ..... May 6 - Enrolls in the University of Copenhagen.
- 1654-55. Winter - The University reconvenes after the plague. Kingo chooses Prof. Bartholin as his preceptor. Bartholin is his counselor and guide. Bartholin is a follower of the teachings of J. Arndt and the practice of "pia Desideria."
- 1658 ..... Kingo graduates with highest honors. He is employed as a tutor with the family of Jørgen Sørensen, the manager and overseer at Frederiksborg Castle. In time he becomes tutor at the Vadeby manor of Baroness Lena Rud.
- 1659 ..... The Battle of Copenhagen. Swedish forces attempt to overwhelm Denmark. Kingo takes a bullet through the mouth. It was an age of violence throughout the Danish countryside. The Baroness is depleted. Kingo takes an ecclesiastical position supervised by Jacobsen Worm at Kirkelhaven.
- 1661 ..... September - Kingo is ordained at the Church of our Lady in Copenhagen.  
*Coronation of Charles II, restoration of English Monarchy.*
- 1668 ..... Pastorate at Slangerup, his home congregation.
- c. 1670 .. Marries widow Worm; instant family Worm children as well as children from her previous marriage. She dies in 1671 leaving Kingo with a substantial family. Becomes rector of the small Latin school in Slangerup, probably for financial reasons.
- 1672 ..... Heinrich Schuetz dies. (b. 1585)

- 1673 ..... Aandelige Sjungekors I, dedicated to Christian V  
*Christopher Wren knighted.*
- 1674 ..... Marries widow Johanne Lund. She brings another stepchild to the family. Kingo is now stepfather to children from three different families.
- 1676 ..... *Paul Gerhardt dies. (b. 1607)*
- 1679 ..... Elevated to Danish nobility.
- 1682 ..... Doctor of Theology; Bishop of Fyn.  
*Versailles becomes royal residence.*
- 1683 ..... Royal Commission to prepare a new hymnal.
- 1684 ..... Spiritual Songs II, dedicated to Queen Charlotte Amalia.  
"Her majesty put to shame many who have eaten the king's bread for thirty years without learning to speak thirty words of Danish, because they hold it to be a homespun language, too coarse for their silky tongues."
- 1685 ..... Kirke Ritual  
*J. S. Bach and G. F. Händel born.*
- 1689 ..... Kingo hymnal rejected.
- 1693 ..... New official Danish hymnal rejected because Kingo was not represented.
- 1694 ..... 76 year old Johanne Lund Kingo dies. Kingo is 60 years old. In less than six months he marries Birgette Balslev, his junior by more than 30 years.
- 1699 ..... Graduale introduced, prepared by committee with Kingo consultation. Bishop Dr. Kingo continues his work, many perilous journeys to the islands of his bishopric, accompanied by his wife.
- 1700 ..... Zinzendorf born. (d. 1760)
- 1703 ..... October 14 - Kingo dies. Burial is in a small village church outside of Odense.  
*John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards born. Peter the Great lays the foundation of St. Petersburg.*

# Jesus Christ and History :

## Refocusing the Doctrine of Church Fellowship in American Lutheran Church History 1820-1872

by Michael J. Langlais

### *Holy Scripture and History*

In Holy Scripture, the record of salvation history is dated with human events (Is. 36:1; Hag. 1:1,15; Lk. 3:1). As Philip Schaff stated it, "History has two sides, a divine and a human" (Schaff, vol. 1, pg. 2). This conception of universal history is grounded in the "Christian presupposition of the unity of God, and the unity and common destiny of men" (ibid.), and avoids tendencies toward transcendence or immanence ending in deism or pantheism. The idea of the subsuming of world history in The Divine Will and purpose presents us with the revealed comprehensiveness of God's creative and redemptive will in Jesus Christ as the goal and purpose of human history (Col. 1:16-18; Jn. 1:1, 3; 17:5; 1Cor. 8:6; Rev. 1:5; 2Cor. 5:17; Acts 17:25-31). Nothing has, or will, take place outside the Father's purpose in Christ Jesus, "for in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8; Is. 41:4) of divine and human history, and in His work is the fulfillment and culmination of the promise and potentiality inherent in His creation (Gen. 1:2; Is. 40:2; 2Cor. 5:17). All that we can think or know, everything we can see or conceive, all of history past, present and future, is constituted by its inextricable connection to Jesus Christ, the Divine Logos of God. Nothing material or spiritual can take shape or meaning without the life given to it by the Father in the only-begotten Son of God. *Christ* is the center, and *Christ alone*. Thus, all of world history must be interpreted and understood from the foot of the cross, for it is *there*, through the suffering and folly of the cross of Christ that God's will and purpose for the world is revealed.

Jesus Christ, the Paschal Lamb (Ex. 12:5,11,14; Jn. 1:29; 1Cor. 5:7) was sent by the Father (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Gal. 4:4,5; Rom. 8:32), and in our place (1Pe. 3:18) died for our sins (1Pe. 2:24) as a sacrifice (Eph. 5:2), dying willingly (Jn. 10:18) to reconcile us to God (Rom. 5:10), bringing us to God (1Pe. 3:18) and restoring our fellowship with Him (1Thess. 5:10). Through the innocent (Mt. 27:4) and precious (1Pe. 1:19) blood of Christ we are rec-

onciled to God (2Cor. 5:9; Eph. 2:13-16), redeemed (Rom. 3:24,25), justified (Rom. 3:24-26, 5:9) and sanctified (Heb. 10:29), having communion with God (Eph. 2:18; Mt. 26:26-29), victory in Him (Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12:11) and eternal life (Jn. 6:53-56).

This Jesus Christ is the One Stephen proclaimed before the Council of the Synagogue (Acts 7:1-53). In Stephen's recounting of the prophetic history of Israel is revealed the fullness of God's promise to Abraham of a Savior made even more explicit in the giving of the law to Moses. The One of whom Moses spoke (v.37) was with the church in the wilderness and has authority above Moses. Jesus Christ is the Head and guide of a more excellent and glorious kingdom than that one in the wilderness, and God has appointed Him heir of all things, by whom He made the worlds, and who upholds all things by the Word of His power (Heb. 1:1-3). He is the same One by whom righteousness was imputed to Abraham (Rom. 4:22). This is the same One who went with our fathers under the cloud, passing through the sea, and being baptized unto Moses on their way up out of Egypt (1Cor. 10:1-11). He is that Rock struck by the rod of Moses, from which poured forth living water, and they all drank the same spiritual drink. These things, Paul says, are our examples, that sin may no longer control us, and that faith may flower (v.6). We shall not do as so many of them did, because of which they were destroyed (v.10). Their experiences in the wilderness happened as *historical examples* for us, and they were caused to be recorded by the Holy Spirit for our *instruction*, "upon whom the ends of the world are come" (v.11). Their history was written as a guide and tutor for the church, standing at the end of time and of all history. The coming of God in the flesh is the goal and end of all history, of all earlier revelations, and no other revelation follows upon it. In the Person of Jesus Christ is summed up all things spiritual and temporal. It is this same Jesus Christ who had freed us from the tutelage and curse of the law and made us the children of God by faith in Him (Gal. 3:25-26). Though we were dead in our trespasses and sins, God has made us alive in Christ by grace, raised us with Him, making us to sit with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:4-6). This same Jesus Christ is coming again quickly (Rev. 22:10,26; 22:14). It is our wisdom, and our duty to prayerfully watch in faithful expectation of His coming (Ps. 130:6; 1Cor. 16:13; Mt. 24:42; Mt. 26:41; Mk. 13:35; Acts 20:31; 1Th. 5:6; 1Pe. 4:7; Rev. 3:2; Rev. 22:12,20).

### *The Lutheran Symbols*

We unconditionally subscribe the Lutheran Symbolical Books because they are in full agreement with Holy Scripture and all points of doctrine just as they are recorded there in their fullness and truth. The Confessions provide an illuminating discussion of the meaning of history through their treatment of the true understanding of justifying faith. The Lutheran Symbols clearly point out to us that salvation is not the mere recounting of the events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, for this also the devil and the ungodly know (CA XX:44:23; AP IV:113:48; Jas. 2:19; Tit. 3:9), but insist that historical understanding must be from the standpoint of true faith. Such faith means "confidence in God, assurance that God is gracious to us, and not merely such a knowledge of historical events as the devil also possesses" (CA XX: 45:26). It is "firm acceptance" of God's promise in Christ Jesus (AP IV:114:50).

In the Apology, Melancthon delineates the scope of world history as the entire cosmic sweep of the battle between Good and evil, Truth and error, and the destruction of the powerful rule of the devil by the vicarious death of Jesus Christ (AP II:106:49). The *goal* of that history is found in the will of God to provide salvation for lost sinners through the propitiatory work of Christ Jesus, and it is this alone that constitutes the *purpose and goal* of world history: "*The forgiveness of sins.*" All of our historical understanding is to be integrated with this one article, "namely, that for Christ's sake and not because of our own merits the *forgiveness of sins* is bestowed upon us" (AP IV:114:51). As Holy Scripture so clearly teaches, the cross of Jesus Christ, His vicarious atoning death, is the central and defining moment of all history, taking up into itself all the meaning inherent in creation and the redemption of the world (1Cor. 1:18; Eph 2:13-22; Jn. 10:10,28; 1Cor. 2:7,8). The forgiveness of sins is the teleology of world history, and this is nothing else than the Divine Will and purpose acting in Christ Jesus in history. God's will eventuates in the objective justification of sinners and the reconciliation of the world through the vicarious death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:25; 2Cor. 5:21), and so His obedience and His righteousness "is reckoned to us as righteousness in the strict judgment of God" (SD V:562:22). The Lutheran Symbols faithfully convey the meaning of Holy Scripture as to the meaning of the cross of Christ for world history by clearly recapitulating and explaining Scripture's teaching regarding the goal and purpose of world history. That goal and purpose is visible to *true faith* which accepts God's promise of the forgiveness of sins. God has acted in history to effect His will and pur-

pose, that through Jesus Christ sinners should receive eternal life. The divine purpose to save sinners is the source of the Evangelical faith, and constitutes the very purpose of all world history, i. e., "the forgiveness of sins." Throughout the Lutheran Confessions the clear teaching of Holy Scripture concerning the nature of Christ's work as vicarious satisfaction for the forgiveness of sins is set forth. For example, passages explicating the meaning of Holy Scripture concerning the *satisfactio Christi vicaria* may be found in the Apology (esp. IV, XII, XXIV, XXVII, XXVIII), in the Large Catechism throughout, and in the Formula of Concord (SD II, III, V, VII, and XI). These passages and others are clear and unequivocal confessions of the central meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ for all history, sacred and profane.

### *Luther*

For Luther, Jesus Christ crucified is the central fact of all history and the chief moment whereby God's hidden revelation achieves redemptive significance for all of history. The cross of Christ displays the *essence* and the *content* of God's revelatory activity in history. He approaches us indirectly, and in a hidden manner through everything that is opposed to human sense and reason. Only through such hiddenness does God's activity in history produce faith. Faith is in things not seen, and so everything believed is hidden (Heb. 11:1-3). Matters of faith are hidden under things contrary to human experience, sense, and appearance. So when God makes *alive*, He does it by *killing*; when He *justifies*, He does it through *accusation*; when He *exalts* to Heaven, He does it by *laying low*. In all this we perceive that God's activity cannot be comprehended, and so room is made for the exercise of faith.

It is in His exposition of the *Magnificat* that we have, perhaps, Luther's clearest teachings about the nature of God's activity in history (LW 21:297f). For with the virgin Mary the Holy Spirit teaches that God is the Lord who raises up what is lowly and levels what is high, who breaks what is made and mends the broken. God is close to those who are humble and cast down, and far from those who are proud and elevated. In Mary's words Luther discovers the Holy Spirit dividing the world into two parts; wisdom, power, and wealth on one side, and mercy, judgment, and righteousness on the other. God is present in this latter side, just as He is absent in the former. In His dealings with each, God proceeds in a hidden manner, with the result that His activity is only discernible to faith. The central significance of *faith* and the manner in which God is far from the proud and near to the unwise, makes the *Magnificat* an important and clear statement of Luther's understanding of

history. He teaches a unity of all history which transcends human institutions and groups. With the categories of the two kingdoms in their radical opposition and struggle, Luther clearly accents the move through the worldly regiments to the spiritual redemptive nature of God's action in time, and emphasizes history as an exercise in faith. Wherever and whenever the work of Christ is effective through the instrument of the Word, there world history assumes the nature of salvation history. The Word which proclaims Christ and creates faith impels all of life beyond its natural and human boundaries - it is God's "attack" upon world history! This activity of God's Word working in and through world history, and in which God is recognized in faith, produces a salvation history that gives *meaning* and *unity* to the visible stream of world history. This is so even though the Word of God radically divides all of history (Heb. 4:12). It is operative in Law and Gospel through the two kingdoms making all of history *God's* work. Where the eyes of reason see only scenes without purpose or meaning, to the eyes of faith, the power and presence of God are evident.

### *Preface*

Like everything which sustains our life under God, that which we call "history" is at once profoundly mysterious, and yet open and obvious to observation. History is the bearer of both intensely personal and diffusely universal meanings. Jesus Christ reigns in the human heart as well as over the unending immensity of the cosmos. There is no recess or minute lacuna of the spiritual or material world that is not filled with His bright majesty and sovereign power. Our Lord is Lord of all history.

In a descending spiral, we will explore the significance of Jesus' Lordship for history, for the history of the Church, and for our own peculiar moment in the history of the church. The material focus will be an approximate fifty-year span of American Lutheran Church history (1820-1872) wherein we will take further focus upon the doctrinal issue of church fellowship among Lutherans comprising the three general bodies of that era. In our consideration of the implications of that very specific history, the discussion will again be broadened to the level of theology of history, in hope that the significance gained through the discussion might be useful to the confessing church. All this is attempted (and yet with a surety inadequately accomplished) out of love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and for His bride, the church. The course of observable history is but a mixed stream filtering down from the great torrent of the heavenly battle won by Christ over our great adversary and his hand-

maid, death. For although the victory is won, and assurance has been gained through the gift of faith, (the mark of which is the absolute certainty of the historical fact of the miraculous life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as revealed through the objective Word of God), yet the struggle between truth and error continues to *threaten* faith and the fellowship of true believers grounded in the unity and confession of the whole counsel of God in Christ Jesus. The Christian life is a life of trial, a life of great tribulation. It is a mixed life of tears and joy, of poignant blessedness and piercing contrition, of true holiness in the merits of Christ, and of blackest despair in our own unbelief, idolatries, ignorance, disregard and disobedience toward God.

Thus the importance of the pedagogic nature of history. It is a weapon whereby we may creditably contend for the faith. It is a light thrown upon the dark recesses of the human reason and imagination. It is, when properly grounded and informed by Holy Scripture, a true teacher of God's will and purpose in the creation and redemption of the whole world. The lessons of church history are of universal scope, are all-encompassing beyond human ability to know, and yet the lessons are pointed and instructive for the church and for individual believers. Let us now consider the historical lesson before us within the scope of the church and her fellowship.

### *Introduction*

In the realm of the Christian faith and life, history has repeatedly demonstrated that forgetfulness is inevitably followed by unfaithfulness. This is, perhaps, the clearest, the most promise-filled, and yet the most difficult, lesson history has to offer. This insight becomes all the more poignant when we recall that the Lord of the church calls us to be faithful and *watchful* stewards of the mysteries of God.

It is our aim in this paper to call attention to one important lesson of history for judging the church fellowship question as it exists for the Lutheran Church today, and especially for those segments of the church, which, remaining faithful to her Lord in Word and Sacrament, have become increasingly isolated by modern union movements. The need to be informed about the modern manifestations of unionism is pressing, especially in light of the near critical-consensus upon the place of the confessional principle in Lutheran church history. The near total collapse of orthodoxy has brought the church once again to the brink of crisis. The loss of *sola Scriptura* by the majority of American Lutheran theologians has led to confusion among Lutheran laity, and the deceptive promulgation of anthropocentric philosophies

has taken the place of the clear confessional teaching of Biblical Truth. The unity of faith and practice grounded in the apostolic norm of church fellowship, which is *complete agreement in all the doctrines of sacred Scripture and the common participation in the Means of Grace*, has been supplanted by gross forms of organic unionism.

Fellowship in much of modern Lutheranism has devolved into the simple exercise of interpersonal relations based upon a kind of extreme individualism bereft of historical and confessional consciousness. This loss of doctrinal sensibility has deflected much of American Lutheranism from participation in an understanding of the truly evangelical basis of Christian ministry and mission. In place of true evangelical concern for souls, made effective through unity in the life-giving Word of God, is found the self-concern of pietistic activism made effective through confused commitment to esoteric slogans such as “unity in diversity” and “confessional commitment and ecclesial diversity,” etc. The theological presupposition underlying the various forms of external union ever remains the surrender of the Scripture principle. This implicit, and yet real, apostasy from God’s Word is made explicit and effective through historical revisionism and neological pretense to the normative and orthodox in religious thinking. The lessons of the past have been studiously ignored, and the new wine of *kenodoxia* has burst the boundaries of redemptive history and has driven the New Lutherans into the poverty and captivity of subjectivism and rationalism, where they “are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” How have we arrived at such a lamentable state in the churches calling themselves “Lutheran?” Even the synod of Walther lies mortally wounded from attacks by malignant spirits of compromise and accommodation to the modern (post-modern?) *zeitgeist!* How can such things be? How are we to understand what we must, in the light of God’s Word, call full-blown apostasy in most of the modern Christian church? We have noted already that the root cause must be understood as the abandonment of *sola Scriptura as norma normans*. We must be quick to add that the loss of the confessional principle is the foundational fault, as we know that many heterodox church bodies appeal to the “Word” in their creeds. The confessional principle, derived from Scripture itself and forming the basis of a truly Biblical hermeneutic, is the *norma normata* to Holy Scripture, insuring faithful exegesis, teaching and preaching. Thus Scripture and the Lutheran Symbolical writings form the complex of interpretation and faithful response to the revealed will of God in Christ Jesus. It is this total doctrine of Christ as revealed in the *external* Word, that defines it as truly orthodox, truly catholic. As such

what is required of us is humble and simple obedience to God's objective and justifying Word. Man *in curvatus in se* must yield pride of place, must submit to, must obey the call of the external Word, offering his reason as minister to the mysteries of God. Faithfulness to Holy Scripture as expressed and applied confessionally, vigilance toward the truths so entrusted into our care, and all this undertaken out of love *for Christ*, who has taught us to be lovers of the souls of men (Jn. 21:15). This alone must be our motivation and the basis of Christian discipline, faith, and life. It is just *these things* that have been surrendered to the modern spirit of ecumenism and "scientific" theology. We wish to explore a local and circumscribed historical example of such surrender, and yet one that can be extraordinarily fruitful for the whole Christian church. It may not be exaggeration to suggest that historical theology must, in our time of uncertain *principle* and certain *error*, take a more central position within the program of systematic theology. Neither must we lose sight of the fact that the *history of theology* cannot be divorced from the *theology of history*. Theological reflection upon the nature and meaning of history is *a priori* the ground and essential framework for the historical recounting of theological viewpoints. These disciplines are naturally engaged in the dialogue constituting historical and theological reflection, and yet, it is the theology of history that must ground historical understanding. It is just here that we must not be afraid to point out that there is no presuppositionless philosophy or theology of history. Not even empirical science can truthfully make this claim, nor even, *pace* Husserl, may the phenomenological *epoche* provide such a "neutral" standpoint.

One must decide from which point to begin, must choose which tools he shall hold to begin building the edifice of historical and theological knowledge and understanding. No one begins with empty hands, no one beats nails with bare hands, but must take up the hammer. Secular philosophy takes up its man-made tools and so achieves the result it desires: the understanding of human consciousness at the center of history. We too, must take up our hammer, but the hammer we choose is the Hammer of God! This Hammer is "as a fire" and like a hammer "that breaketh the rock in pieces" (Jer. 23:29). That rock is human *diffidence* and *pride*, and the Hammer is God's Word, Sacred Scripture. It *tears down*, and yet only in this way can true knowledge be *built up*, only in this way can the broken and fallen structures of existence be redeemed and sanctified. It is the external and objective Word of God concerning Jesus Christ, the whole counsel of God in Christ, that can overcome the chaos and desolation of the human heart, that can enlighten the darkness in

the human mind. *This* is our "presupposition," and it is the only *true* one! We begin in faith in God's Holy Word, conforming our reason and our understanding to what God has spoken through the prophets and apostles, to what He has revealed in the words and deeds of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. *Sola Scriptura* is our beginning and our ending, and all is done in *faith alone*, by *grace alone* through *Christ alone*. *Fides quaerens intellectam*: faith seeking understanding is our *method*, and faith discovers its absolute ground and meaning in God's Holy Word.

It is the presupposition of the efficacy and sufficiency of the objective Word of God that undergirds the conception of human history as *heilsgeschichte* (salvation history). In the historical Person of Jesus Christ, the only Begotten of the Father as revealed in Holy Scripture, is the unity of history achieved. He is the beginning and the mid-point and the end of history simultaneously. The *beginning* in that only in Him does history take-on permanence and spiritual significance. Human history achieves eternal significance in the Incarnation, a meaning for which all creation groaned and suffered in hope of the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ. He is the *mid-point* of history in that all temporal events point forward to His advent, and all subsequent events point backward to that same moment in time. History before the Incarnation was prophetic, *anticipatory*, and achieved implicit meaning in its central identification with the cross of Christ. History after the Incarnation is expository and *retrospective*, and becomes explicitly meaningful through the same cross of Christ proclaimed as the consummation of God's will and purpose for the world. So too we understand the Cross of Jesus Christ as the *end* of all history, for at the Cross "the fullness of the time" was fully manifested in the vicarious death of the Son of God for the sins of the whole world. All of human history, and even post-resurrection history in its simple chronological sense, is subsumed in the central moment of the Cross. The Cross of Christ is, therefore, the *end*, the absolute *telos* of time and history and invests time and history with power and eternal significance. The disconnectedness of events embedded in the *chronos* inhere and become invested with meaningful relation in the Cross of Christ, "for in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

The Scriptural, confessional understanding of history forms the necessary foundation to any understanding of specific historical events. History is the manifest unfolding of the will and purpose of God the Father in Christ Jesus effected through God the Holy Ghost. All of history is in relation to the central event of this Divine Purpose which is the Cross of Christ. The Father has

“appointed the days” in which he has freely chosen to act toward His creation in mercy and reconciliation, freely justifying us through the vicarious atonement of His only begotten Son (Acts 17:31). So too must historical interpretation and understanding be grounded in God’s will and purpose to reconcile the world to Himself in Jesus Christ; and this interpretation of history must be mediated and accomplished through the only means by which God has chosen to reveal His will: through the objective Word of Holy Scripture and in the application of this His Word in the Sacraments.

It is here then that we clearly see the genesis of the confessional principle of church fellowship in the inherent relationship between the pure doctrine of Holy Scripture and its gracious out-working in the Means of Grace. The proper distinction between the Word of God proclaimed, and the Word of God applied, is first discerned here in incipient form, and although these aspects of the Word of God are aspects of the One, unitary Word of God receiving life and power in the Person of the Divine *Logos*, this formal distinction will become the basis of a proper understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship in its historical manifestations in the period under discussion. It is the co-ordination and identity of assent to pure doctrine and practical application of doctrine that will form the basis of our understanding of “orthodoxy” and “confessional.” Our historical interpretation will be consistently reviewed in the light of the unity of God’s Holy Word which is nothing less than the total doctrine of Christ. It is the formal principle of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura*, which undergirds our historical investigation. It is this Biblical view of the church and her history which constitutes the Confessional understanding of history as the conditioned bearer of God’s will and purpose in Christ Jesus. Here we must mention that this approach to American Lutheran Church history is *the one* studiously avoided by most historians of the period.

Even among nominally “conservative” or “confessional” Lutheran historians, sociological theories grounded in secular philosophies of history form the primary presuppositions in evaluating church history. The work of one such historian has been reviewed by the present author elsewhere (cf. “Book Review: Gustafson, David S. *Lutherans In Crisis: The Question of Identity In the American Republic*, Michael J. Langlais, LSQ, Sept. 1994, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 53-59). Another approach that rejects *sola Scriptura* and employs purely secular philosophical and sociological categories in analyzing the historical period under study is the one represented by Paul P. Kuenning’s *The Rise and Fall of American Lutheran Pietism: The Rejection of an Activist*

*Heritage.* In this book, the author rejects an historical and theological analysis of American Lutheran church history, and especially its early roots in Halle pietism, as manifesting tendencies opposed to historic Lutheranism. For this historian, the rejection of pietism among early confessional American Lutheran groups was not the result of doctrinal aberrations among the pietists, but was the result of Pietism's inherent social and political activism, especially its stand on the issue of Abolition. This kind of theological and historical revisionism should not surprise us as the roots of its methodology may be traced to purely secular sources in the philosophy of history and in the sociology of religion. This approach may be best represented by such authors as H. Richard Niebuhr whose classic on the origin of denominationalism in American religion, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929) forms the basis for much subsequent work in American Church history, and is, in turn, founded upon the work of liberal sociologists of religion such as Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, and liberal historians such as Adolf von Harnack (Niebuhr, pp. vii, 17).

In all three of these works, and with each taken as representative of degrees of capitulation to social science in their approach to American Lutheran Church history, there is yet one unifying characteristic: the rejection of the reformation Scripture principle, *sola Scriptura*, and the adoption, with varying degrees of commitment, of social, economic, political, and psychological theories of history. The clear teachings of Holy Scripture, understood as God's inerrant and authoritative Revelation to man revealing His will and purpose effected in world and church history, and the clear confessional voice of the Lutheran Symbolical Writings, "the unanimous consensus and exposition of our Christian faith" (EP:465:4), are replaced by the "assured results" of modern scientific method. The primary thesis of this paper is, that in full agreement with the teachings of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Symbolical writings, and in concert with the opinions of the fathers of the church universal, it is to be concluded that the history of the church is the history of its doctrinal conflicts and of its doctrinal triumphs. It is precisely this summary formulation of the meaning of history and of *church* history that is denied by the majority of historians, even *church* historians. Representative of these is Sydney E. Ahlstrom who says in his *A Religious History of the American People*: "first, religious history as a field of study must be placed not only spatially but theoretically within the larger frame of world history. It enjoys no rights of sanctuary, no immunity from the demands for evidence and plausibility that are made on historians generally. The historian cannot claim divinely inspired

sources of insight nor can he place one body of Holy Scripture above another. 'Orthodoxy' and 'heresy' may not be used as dogmatic judgements, but only as historically conditioned designations. This prescription, it may be added, even disqualifies the kind of *theologia gloria* that has informed many supposedly secular accounts of the Redeemer Nation." (p.xiv) For Professor Ahlstrom, and for these three authors, and the vast majority of other modern church historians, the progress of church history is marked, not by doctrinal controversy and resolution, but by the interaction of social, economic, political, and psychological forces which determine the course of subsequent events. The story of the earthly *ecclesia* is not the struggle of truth and error, light and darkness, orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Such absolutes do not exist for those whose reference point is mercurial human consciousness, and whose tools of knowledge are fashioned from vagarious human reason. It is precisely this viewpoint on church history that it is our desire to engage and discredit, with the end in sight that the true foundations of all history may be discovered in the divine will and purpose of God in Christ Jesus, that "true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (Jn. 1:9).

### *The Fifty Years (1820-1872)*

In this section we will consider in summary form some key documents concerning church fellowship from the histories of the three major Lutheran general bodies: The General Synod (1820), The General Council (1867), and The Synodical Conference (1872). An examination of these documents in light of the Biblical, confessional understanding of fellowship principles will instruct us, not only in the extreme importance of a proper doctrine of church fellowship, but will afford us the opportunity to employ the basic principles of a Biblical-confessional idea of history in a test case bearing deep significance and weighty implications for the confessing church. We must first establish from Holy Scripture the church fellowship principles that will guide the discussion.

Initially we must say that church fellowship is grounded upon our fellowship with God, that is, that communion, fellowship, and intimacy re-established by Him by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, our Mediator and our Sin-bearer. Fellowship with God is made possible by the cleansing power of the blood of God's own Son (1Pe. 3:18; 2:24; Rom. 5:10; 1Thes. 5:10), who, by His vicarious and atoning work upon the Cross restored that intimate fellowship with the Father destroyed through the first disobedience of man (Gen. 3:23,24; Is. 59:2). Now, we enter into fellowship with God by faith in Christ

Jesus (1Cor. 1:9; Eph. 2:18; Jn. 14:6; Heb. 11:6; Jn. 6:56; Heb. 12:22,23; 10:19-22; Rom. 5:1,2; 8:15). We may say, *objectively*, fellowship with God is made possible through the blood of Christ; *subjectively*, by our Spirit-wrought faith in that blood. In Jesus Christ, our Lord, and in Him alone (1Tim. 2:5) "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him" (Eph. 3:12). Furthermore, we must say that this fellowship with God in Christ can only be effected by the means established by God Himself in His Word and Sacraments (Rom. 10:17; 2 Pe. 1:4; Rom. 1:16; 1Pe. 3:21; 1 Cor. 10:16). It is in these divinely ordained means alone that we receive and share in Christ's benefits and enjoy fellowship with God and with one another. From this rich fount and source of all blessing flows the fellowship of the church.

So we must say that the true Scriptural-confessional concept of fellowship which derives from the *satisfactio Christi vicaria*, is always *church* fellowship. It is the unity of believers in Christ within the one Church created by the life-giving Word. This comprehensive unity exists because there is one Lord (Jn. 10:16; Eph. 4:4-6), and the unity of faith and practice attained in church fellowship has its divine source in the very Godhead (Jn. 17:11, 21-26). This invisible unity in Christ through faith is *visible* according to the *apostolic norm* of church fellowship, which is nothing less than complete agreement in all the doctrines of Holy Scripture and the common participation in the Means of Grace (1Pe. 3:21; 1 Cor. 10:16; Acts 2:42; 1Pe. 3:8; 1Sam. 20:42). These very Means of Grace *create* the church, bringing into being true church fellowship, and are the *marks* of the true church (*notae purae ecclesiae*). They spring from the faith-creating, life-creating Word of God, and their true ground and source is the love of God the Father for us in Jesus Christ. From the preceding we must conclude that *church* is *confession*, and the *Lutheran* confession is the only true one, and so the question of fellowship has only one truthful answer: *there can be no fellowship between truth and error*. To share pulpits and altars with those of other church organizations is to endorse (however subtly or innocently) the faulty confession of that other denomination. The true and pertinent question is not one of courtesy or the recognition of the Christianity of others. The question of fellowship is the question of clarity and fidelity of confession, not of who will be saved. Either the church is understood as a voluntaristic *association* of believers, or it is understood as *confession*. We must be willing to quiet outraged human reason, and admit simply that these views are mutually exclusive.

Let us now see how the doctrinal confession and practice of the three large groups of American Lutherans we are considering comported with the Biblical-confessional understanding of fellowship.

### *The General Synod (1820)*

As early as 1811 the leaders of the North Carolina Synod (1803), Gottlieb Schober and C. A. G. Storch, advanced proposals for closer union with the Pennsylvania Ministerium, "these brethren of our common faith" (Wolf, 53:21). The impetus toward external union continued until in 1818 the Ministerium resolved "...that the synod thinks it were desirable if the various Evangelical Lutheran Synods in the United States were to stand in some way or another in closer connection with each other..." (Wolf, 53:22). Schober's presence at the convention of the Ministerium in 1819 with a pre-prepared plan for a central organization for the Lutheran Synods in America led to committee action in drafting a plan for union based upon his proposals. The result of this committee's work, the so-called *Plan Entwurf* (Proposed Plan) was approved for adoption by the Ministerium by a vote of 42 to 8, and 600 copies of the Plan were made. The general body proposed by the Plan would be a central federative body exercising co-ordinating control over nearly all liturgical, catechetical, and doctrinal matters among the synods, and would have the power to fix grades in the ministry and to arbitrate conflicts. Though there was considerable opposition to the Proposed Plan, chiefly from the Tennessee Synod on doctrinal grounds, the requirement for a three-fourths majority vote by the synods for ratification was met by votes from the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the North Carolina Synod and the Ohio Synod. The synods ratified the plan and resolved to draft a constitution for the new General Synod at an organizational meeting scheduled for October 1820 in Hagerstown, Maryland. Though the Ohio Synod bowed out of active participation in the Plan for union, and active opposition within the Ministerium of Pennsylvania resulted in S. S. Schmucker's organizing the West Pennsylvania Synod for union, the newly formed Maryland-Virginia Synod stepped forward to endorse the Plan. The constitution that was finally drafted attempted to remedy much of the negative criticism that had been leveled against the strongly centralized body outlined by the *Plan Entwurf*, and substituted an organization that was more advisory and coordinating. Yet in regard to the question of fellowship the General Synod Constitution called for "unity of sentiment among Christians in general, of whatever kind or denomination in order that the blessed opportunities to heal the wounds and schisms already existing in the Church

of Christ and to promote general concord and unity, may not pass by neglected and unavailing" (Wolf, 70:27). While the new General Synod had been largely decentralized, it would still be utilized as a "common agent in cooperative and interdenominational activities" (ibid). In 1859 the Melancthon Synod, led by the rationalist Benjamin Kurtz, was admitted into membership, bringing with it a storm of protest over its complete and enthusiastic support of the *Definite Synodical Platform* of 1855. In 1864 the General Synod admitted the Franckean Synod which had been formed in 1837 in burned-over western New York under the direct influence of Charles G. Finney's preaching. This last event created a break between the Synod and more conservative elements of the general body, leading to the formation of the General Council in 1867. Though the Synod would move in a more generally confessional direction from this point, it would never formulate a clearly Biblical concept of church fellowship, and would still remain concerned with a variety of unionistic activities. This concern for external union, especially with the Reformed churches, would be consistently carried out by elements within the General Synod over the next century.

It is possible to discover the roots of desire for organic union in the *genesis* of the General Synod. The Moravian, Schober, of North Carolina and the rationalist, F. H. Quitman, of the Ministerium of New York were primary influences in the push for the development and adoption of a plan for external union. Their desire for union included Reformed churches as well, and the final form of the General Synod Constitution reflected this desire, through sympathetic co-workers on the organizing committee of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania such as George Lochmann and Daniel Kurtz. The end result of their work was a constitution for a general Lutheran body that nowhere mentions, even implicitly, the Lutheran Symbolical Books, not even the Augsburg Confession which was at least of *some* concern in certain quarters of American Lutheranism. This non-confessional stance of the first Lutheran general body was effectively *ahistorical*, although some, notably S. S. Schmucker, engaged in some historical reconstruction and revisionism (Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church*, pp.11-119). The public confession of the General Synod was neither grounded in the formal principle of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura*, nor was it in any sense of the term, *confessional*. As a result the historical sense of the Synod was severely circumscribed and local, and it was susceptible to contemporary and prevailing cultural influences desiring external union in spite of the clear witness of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Symbols. This influence reached proximately to

the Prussian Union of 1817 under King Friedrich Wilhelm III and distantly to the end of its own long nose buried so deeply in the affairs of the American religious scene.

### *The General Council (1867)*

Our treatment of the General Council will narrow the focus of our inquiry to the specific question of church fellowship. Whereas the General Synod was unable to formulate a proper and coherent doctrine to guide its lusts for union, the theologians of the General Council were in possession of the Scriptural and confessional basis for a proper doctrine of church fellowship. They came into possession of this material during the long process of confessional and conservative reaction stemming from the confessional awakening in Germany which largely followed the state-sanctioned Prussian Union. The great influx of confessional Lutheranism accompanying the German and Scandinavian immigrants of the American Midwest greatly aided and enhanced this process, giving it new life and a deeper historical sense and direction. We cannot trace this process here, but we merely note its primary importance in producing a genuine Lutheran theology on American soil. It was this spirit of true Christianity as expressed in the historic Lutheran faith that extricated itself from the cold clutches of loveless union in the General Synod and established itself upon a proper confessional basis. The church is greatly in the debt of Council men such as Charles Porterfield Krauth and Theodore Schmauk. Krauth's *The Conservative Reformation*, and Schmauk's *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions*, are models of Lutheran doctrinal orthodoxy, and were, and still are, powerful propaedeutic tools for the confessing church. We would be hard-pressed to find more clear, doctrinally sound, useful theological works. These publications, along with the public doctrinal statements of the General Council, constituted a clear and true Lutheran voice in the wilderness of American Lutheranism. These voices still ring true today. It is precisely here, however that we must focus our historical inquiry, for it is here that the confessional principle itself was tragically misunderstood and misapplied by this august and stalwart Lutheran body. This episode in American Lutheran Church history perhaps represents one of the great tragedies of Christian Church history, and is for this reason particularly poignant and immensely instructive for the modern church. It has been truly said that we rest upon the shoulders of giants, and our survey of the vast scope of salvation history is the gracious resultant. Yet do we not also find instruction and clear admonition in the midget foolishness of our spiritual

forebears? After all, these giants of Lutheran orthodoxy were men of flesh and obdurate bone, and like us and all of human flesh, depend moment by moment upon the Lord of history for each and every semblance of truth inhering in these dark bodies of error and death. We fail because we are *fallen*, and it is only by grace alone that the rich and precious treasures entrusted to such unworthy stewards are preserved. We thank our precious Lord for providing such a sure way through such men as these. Yet we must soberly assess what they have done and go on. So it is that our praise for these useful servants to the church is moderated, muted praise.

In the midst of theological agitation and debate over questions of membership in the new General Council, the Synods of Ohio (1818), Iowa (1854), Wisconsin (1849), Minnesota (1860), and Illinois (1846) were concerned primarily about clarification on the Council's stand on the "Four Points:" chiasm, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, and secret societies. During general discussion of fellowship issues at the 1870 convention of the Council, held at Lancaster, Ohio, then president of the General Council, Charles Por. Krauth made some informal remarks to the effect that Lutheran altars were for Lutheran communicants only, and Lutheran pulpits were for Lutheran pastors. Delegates of the Iowa Synod, disturbed over the way in which the Council had replied to an inquiry of the Minnesota Synod concerning the Four Points (Wolf, 167:75; 168:76), noted great value in Krauth's general statement, and requested that he expand and formalize this statement to be presented at the Akron Convention of 1872 and be made the official position of the Council on the church fellowship question. It was adopted by the convention (Wolf, 169:77) and became the basic form of what later became the "Galesburg Rule" (1875; Wolf, 171:79). As a result of dissention over the content of the Galesburg Rule, Krauth drew up a set of 104 Theses (1877; Wolf, 172:80) justifying the Rule, and which were presented to the meetings in 1877, 1879, and 1881. In 1889, the Council presented its final statement endorsing and clarifying the Galesburg Rule (Wolf, 177:81).

We cannot carefully analyze the genetic history of the Galesburg Rule, nor consider in great detail its content and the attendant theological debates that arose for and against it. But we may gather some extremely important implications for the contemporary situation from its general history. To begin with, let us note the important response of the Iowa Synod in 1872 to the declared position of the General Council on fellowship in the Four Points when they said, "...the thing desired is not the mere pastoral advice how to act in certain difficult cases, but the establishment of the confessional principle"

(Wolf, 170:77). This indeed was the true issue, the true *doctrinal* issue, and it is the true question for us as well. What does it mean to be *confessional*, to uphold the confessional principle of historic Lutheranism inherited from the fathers of the church, and even as our heritage from the Lord of the Church Himself? Holy Scripture clearly teaches that confessing is confessing *Christ*, and that this is the result of God's grace and power alone (Mt. 16:17; Mk. 9:23f; Gal. 4:6; Jn. 15:26f). Confessing the faith is possible only by the work of the Holy Spirit in us through God's Word. Confession is the Spirit-wrought response to the revelation of the Father in Jesus Christ, His only Son. This is the Source and power of confession, and its content is Christ alone, His Person, and His atoning and reconciling work upon the Cross. Furthermore, confession of the one true faith is never confined to the isolated, individual believer, standing alone, but finds its true ground in the Spirit-wrought response of a fellowship, of a faith-consensus. Confessing the faith is the work of the Holy Ghost in the church and her fellowship, created through the life-giving Word of God, created through the Means of Grace, and *expressly confessing Christ* and His doctrines revealed to men in Sacred Scripture. Thus, to be confessional is to confess Christ in *every aspect* of the Christian life, in *word* and *deed*. It is to *live* upon the basis of justification by grace through faith in every area of our lives, in thought, word, and in every act which flows from the life-creating fount of God's Holy Word.

In light of this understanding of the confessional principle, what can we say about the specific matter under consideration? The Akron/Galesburg Rule, which was to be the definitive doctrinal confession of the General Council on the fellowship question expresses "the earnest hope that our practice may be conformed to our united and deliberate testimony on this subject" (Wolf, 171:79). That is, there was awareness on the part of the framers of the Rule that practice and public confession must be consonant, but as we see from the subsequent stubborn tendencies toward unionism residual to the fellowship question in the Council and given explicit life in the merger of 1918, this awareness was not foundational and persistent. Here is the basis text of the Akron/Galesburg Rule: (the Galesburg Rule of 1875 (Wolf, 171:79) we must clearly note, was a supplementary statement to the Akron Rule of 1872)

- I. *The Rule is:* Lutheran pulpits are for Lutheran ministers only. Lutheran altars are for Lutheran communicants only.
- II. *The Exceptions* to the rule belong to the sphere of *privilege*, not of *right*.
- III. *The Determination* of the *exceptions* is to be made in consonance with

these principles, by the conscientious judgment of pastors as the cases arise. (Wolf, 170:77)

It should be further noted that the Council made subsequent statements to supplement the Akron/Galesburg Rule. By 1889 the Council had determined a policy of *close* communion and non-interchange of pulpits, but allowed individual synods and congregations considerable leeway in their interpretation of the policy.

What were the chief circumstances that led up to this situation of loose practice that was grounded in a seemingly sound doctrinal statement? Initially, we must note that, throughout a careful review of documents pertaining to the debate within the Council on the fellowship issue, it is noted that there was very little Biblical or historical analysis undertaken. A theological impasse was reached as the result of uncritical repetition of presuppositions on both sides. This lack of "archeological" understanding of theological assumptions led to a hardening of positions and simple disregard of opposing viewpoints. The remedy for this kind of theological head-butting would have been serious Scriptural-confessional and historical work on the specific doctrine under review, the doctrine of church fellowship. This would have avoided the impasse which then became an overwhelming *political* problem for Krauth: how not to further disrupt the Council, which had suffered the exodus of several old Lutheran synods in its early years. The problem of fellowship had not been dealt with and resolved upon the proper Biblical-confessional basis, and so it became a matter of *expediency* and *politics* which centered in the attempt to cut losses. Krauth, even though moving from a voluntaristic to a historic Lutheran understanding of ecclesiology in the period of the 1860's and 70's, was yet, as the result of the theological impasse, especially concerned to allow enough leeway in practice so that confessionalists like J. Seiss and G. Krotel could remain in the Council, in spite of their refusal to adopt a truly confessional stance on the fellowship issue. Krauth sustained much criticism for this apparent inconsistent and vacillating approach, but he was more concerned about retaining men like Seiss and Krotel for the Council than in satisfying his critics. At the same time, Krauth undertook to *educate* those who had not yet arrived at the old Lutheran position, and we have his fine doctrinal work yet before us as a witness to his orthodoxy. Yet he was *accommodating in practice*, and this constituted a real set-back in the progress of confessional Lutheranism in America. In fact, we have not recovered from it, and neo-Lutheranism has by now totally co-opted the conservative English

Lutheranism of Krauth and Schmauk, and has paved it into the imposing bulwark of heterodoxy hedging-in the Lutheran church in America.

Krauth incorporated disparate elements in an attempt to satisfy and retain opposing sides in the debate over church fellowship. This attempt was feasible only on the basis of the organic union achieved at Reading in 1866, the true nature of which was so studiously avoided in Krauth's *Fundamental Principles of Faith and Church Polity* (Wolf, 143:63) and in the Constitution of the General Council itself (1867; Wolf, 148:64). As a result this wedding of confessional and non-confessional elements was doomed from the start. The prevalent attitude leading up to the formation of the General Council was simply this: Let us form a *union*, and then we will be able to work our differences and achieve true *unity*. The record of the proceedings of the first convention (Reading, PA., Dec. 12, 13, and 14, 1866) which was initiated by a *call for a convention* dated August 10, 1866, is clear on this matter. Union was called for in spite of known differences among prospective member synods. The preceding lack of Biblical-confessional and historical understanding in the debates leading up to the union, was productive of a kind of theological naiveté masked by nominally conservative Lutheran sentiment and sensibility. This is an extraordinarily dangerous combination, and the explosive results, though delayed until the turn of the century, are still reverberating in American Lutheranism. The failure of spiritual discernment and doctrinal fidelity set the stage for the possibility of illicit union, and the real tragedy is that Krauth, and Theodore Schmauk after him, failed to perceive the underlying un-Scriptural and non-confessional basis of the Council, and continued to seek ways through compromise and accommodation to sustain the life of the illicit marriage of synods they had presided over. The Council was so preserved for over fifty years, but this period was marked by the progress of error in regard to church fellowship until finally the Council was delivered up to the spirits of crass unionism that issued in the U.L.C.A. in 1918.

### *The Synodical Conference*

It was this subtle but powerful spirit of compromise that was clearly repudiated by those confessional Lutherans who would later constitute the Synodical Conference (1872). We cannot examine this question in detail here, but only demonstrate in summary fashion, and by way of contrast, what the position of the Missouri Synod, and particularly, that of C. F. W. Walther was, concerning the church fellowship question, for it was Dr. Walther (and Dr. Sihler) who, above all others, very early on clearly and forcefully presented

the true Biblical-confessional position over against that of the large eastern Lutheran general bodies. Missouri noted consistently her preference for free conferences in response to the unionistic overtures of the General Council (Wolf, 154:65; 158:68), and had been engaging in such theological conferences over the period from 1856-1859. Walther clearly understood the Scriptural and confessional principles underlying the doctrine of church fellowship and the proper means for achieving true unity among brethren, and he proceeded upon a steady course without deviation or compromise.

The Norwegian Synod was at every point in full agreement with Missouri and was very capably represented at the first and fourth free conferences by U. V. Koren and J. A. Ottesen (Pr. Ottesen served as the vice-chairman of the fourth conference held at Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1859, where important Scriptural and confessional principles concerning the office of the ministry were outlined).

The Ohio Synod was not represented in the General Council after the first convention as a result of the inadequate reply of the Council to Ohio's inquiry regarding the Four Points (Wolf, 155:66; 157:67). Ohio had been engaged in fruitful discussions with Missouri that eventuated in doctrinal agreement between the two synods in 1868 (Wolf, 183:84). Ohio later took strong initiative in the planning and formation of the Synodical Conference (1871-72).

The Iowa Synod took an equivocating position on the Four Points (especially in regard to chiliasm), and on the fellowship question proved to have an inadequate understanding and practice by adopting the right of *debate privilege* in the Council which compromised its confessional integrity.

The Wisconsin Synod joined the General Council upon false union principles at Reading, PA in 1866 by adopting the proffered theses on Faith and Polity drafted by C. P. Krauth. Wisconsin then withdrew in 1869 over the inadequate position of the Council on the Four Points.

Both the Minnesota and Illinois Synods likewise withdrew from the General Council in 1870 over the same issue of church fellowship as reflected in the Council's position of the Four Points.

We conclude from this sketch of the doctrinal positions of the synods forming the Synodical Conference that regarding their earlier relations with the General Council, it was the Missouri and Norwegian Synods that held the clearly confessional position. It was through them, and more particularly through the influence of Walther, that the first impetus toward the calling and implementation of the free conferences occurred. These stalwart adherents of historic Lutheranism were fully informed about the doctrinal issues and

were acutely aware that the focus of the doctrinal debate concerned the doctrine of church fellowship. They clearly showed, through their public confessional statements, and especially in their *actions*, that they were in possession of the true Biblical and confessional teaching on this most vital issue. The Free Conference was to provide the proper confessional motive and basis leading to true Christian unity. These four conferences, taking place each year from 1856-1859, served as a forum for clarifying doctrinal, liturgical, and practical questions upon which participating synods were in essential agreement. Although these conferences did not produce the hoped-for unity, they did produce the proper basis and means for achieving true Christian unity on Scriptural and confessional grounds. The general attitude behind the Free Conferences, unlike that of the General Council, was simply this: let us achieve *clarity* and *full-agreement* in the total doctrine of Christ *first*, and then we may join in God-pleasing *unity* on the basis of this pre-existing and complete agreement and confession. It was upon this sure Scriptural foundation that the Synodical Conference was formed, and it was, just as its name indicates, a *conference*. It possessed only the power of giving advice and counsel to its member synods, and as such, was the agency for the public confession of the doctrinal agreement upon which it was founded. Thus, it was quite different in purpose and structure from the General bodies which preceded it. The difference was the result of the absolute contrast between a Biblical-confessional unity issuing in a *conference* of free synods for the purpose of the public confession and expression of the *pre-existing* unity, and a non-confessional *organization* of synods drawn together on the basis of external union for the purpose of achieving unity as the resultant of the pre-existing organic union. The Synodical conference was formed on the basis of the clear teaching of *God's Word*; the eastern general bodies were formed on the basis of *voluntarism*. This is fellowship as a self-willed banding together of like-minded individuals and issues in an organization based upon the will and words of man. Without complete pre-existing agreement in the total doctrine of Christ as revealed in Holy Scripture and as given confessional expression in a "summary formula and pattern" (SD, Rule and Norm, Tapp. 503:1) as *the unanimous consensus and exposition of our Christian faith* (Ep., Rule and Norm, Tapp. 465:4), the kind of external union underlying the large general bodies retained and incubated all sorts of doctrinal error that was allowed to grow unchecked through indifference and unconcern for the confessional principle underlying the true Biblical doctrine of church fellowship.

The Synodical Conference will forever remain the paradigm for Lutheran bodies desiring unity and fellowship on a proper Scriptural and confessional foundation. The method of achieving this true unity of the faith, the Free Conference, was a practical and powerful tool in the hands of historic Lutheranism on American soil, and instructive for the confessing church of today which finds itself awash in a sea of fevered ecumenism. The fathers of American Lutheran orthodoxy proved themselves to be thoroughly conversant with Holy Scripture and with the Lutheran Symbolical Books in their quest to unite the Lutheran Church in America. There was never a hint of the sectarian spirit about them, and yet they were steadfast and unmoveable in their doctrinal fidelity. It is one of the penetrating ironies, and a tragedy of astonishing proportions, that it would be a perversion of fidelity to the truth concerning fellowship principles that would usher in the agonizing and protracted demise of the Synodical Conference between the years 1938-1955. It is our prayer that the newly formed confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, formally constituted on the same confessional basis as the Synodical Conference (Oberwesel, Germany, April 1993), will prove to be as much a blessing to the Christian church as was that older body.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

In the historical example before us from the period 1820-1872 in American Lutheran church history, and in our reconsideration of the doctrinal question concerning church fellowship in that period, we have attempted to set the stage for confessional historiography. The necessary prolegomena to the writing of history, whether of history sacred or profane, is a careful consideration of the inspired and infallible inscripturated Word of God. This authoritative and normative revelation of the meaning of history is then given confessional form through that "summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God" (SD, Rule and Norm, 503:1), and which is none other than "the unanimous consensus and exposition of our Christian faith" (Epitome, Rule and Norm, 465:4). A consideration of the opinions of the foremost of the evangelical church fathers, Martin Luther, agrees with the teachings of Holy Scripture, and with the whole church of Christ, and offers further light upon the proper interpretation of history (AP IV, 166:389; SA II:II:295:15).

With this as our basis and firm foundation of understanding, we are able to interpret the historical relationships among the American Lutheran general

bodies upon their proper *doctrinal* foundation. It is the material principle of Holy Scripture, with its active principle of faith as gift, which directs us to Jesus Christ and His Cross as the meaning-center and organizing life-principle of all history.

From a Biblical and confessional exposition of directly relevant texts we have interpreted fellowship to be *church* fellowship. This is to say that fellowship possesses its center of gravity in Christ, and this is to say in His *doctrine*, for it is the objective Word of God which reveals Him (Heb. 1:1-2; Mt. 16:17; Rom. 10:17; 16:26; Jn. 20:31). Church fellowship is unity of confession in the total doctrine of Christ, and a common sharing of the Means of Grace, which is to say, unity in the *Gospel* in its proper Biblical-confessional sense (SD V 558:2ff). It is God's Word alone that establishes articles of faith (SA II:II:295:15), that is the norm and rule of all doctrine (SD, Rule and Norm, 505:9), and that is the living and life-creating power that creates and sustains the church through preaching and the administration of the Sacraments according to the institution of Christ (AC VII). The Son of God, sent by the Father and appointed by Him the heir of all things, has spoken to us, and His *words* are *spirit* and they are *life* (Heb. 1:2; Jn. 5:24; 6:63). For He has *given us the words* that the *Father* gave him, and we have *received* them and *know* in truth that Jesus Christ has come from the Father, and that the Father has sent Him (Jn. 17:8; 14:24). Unity is unity of faith in the Word of God brought in the Person of the Son and made of effect in us by the Holy Ghost (Jn. 14:24-28). Without this unity of faith worked by the Holy Ghost there can be no true basis for fellowship. In the historical examples before us, this is certainly the case. From the gross abandonment of the *regula fidei* by the General Synod, to the subtle unionism of the Galesburg Rule of Krauth and the General Council, sound Bible exegesis, and adherence to the confessional principle were abandoned by degrees, with the resultant loss of a Christ-centered doctrine of church fellowship. Though the historical forms differed, the end result achieved was uniform, and the spiritual heirs of eastern Lutheranism are reaping the bitter fruits of a new Lutheranism which has lost all historical direction. In the subtle unionism of the General Council the door was opened to error, and as error replicates (Gal. 5:9) it spawns false teachers and shepherds who enter the sheep-fold surreptitiously (Jn. 10:1-18). They speak the same words given to the Son by the Father in strange voices (Jn. 10:3-5) and in so doing create divisions and offenses among believers contrary to the pure doctrine taught by Christ (Rom. 16:17-18). We *mark* them,

and *avoid* them, out of love for Christ who brings us the words of life (Jn. 14:23-24).

The practical outcome of our study of history, and of the particular historical question before us begins to loom before us with powerful implications for the confessing church. The meaning of this history carries with it a pressing sense of urgency for pastors and teachers, and is to be appropriated most fully and effectively by pastoral theology. How is this so? We simply respond: we cannot over-estimate the importance of the doctrine of church fellowship, for it is not a *prescriptive* set of *rules*, but it is Spirit-wrought *unity* in Christ, who is the Gate into the sheepfold (Jn. 10:1). This history teaches us that error does not enter upon the scene in fully-developed, recognizable heterodox forms, but that error seeks a proper *humus*, a nutritive seed-bed in the convolutions of human consciousness where it can become insinuated and begin to grow in darkness and secrecy. So does error deflect attention and doctrinal scrutiny, suffering little risk of detection and extirpation. This history admonishes us: *Brothers in Christ!* We must watch and pray at the places where error breaches the walls, and look with understanding in such a way to recognize error in the manner in which it appears. This we can do by the grace of God alone who makes us able through His Sacred Word to never grow tired and discouraged, but to be ever vigilant, through love for the Lord Jesus Christ, ever vigilant and valiant for His Truth.

In an age when the impetus toward organic unionism has reached epic proportions, when the tragi-comic compulsion to erase every vestige of doctrinal understanding and fidelity has become truly pathological, and paroxysmal signs of the death of the giant new Lutheran enterprise are clinically evident, in such troubling and confusing times it is essential for us to be clear in our thinking and courageous in our confession. The confessing church is assailed on many fronts, and attrition has caused her to seek comfort and safety in quarters themselves compromised. We need not be attracted by those things in themselves that offer a sense of belonging and that hold out promises of growth, of affirmation and security in exchange for the *old ways* that may seem somehow a bit quaint and useless in the glorious light and heady rush of modernism.

We began this paper with a discussion of the meaning of history in the light of Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Symbols, and in the thought of the foremost of the church fathers, Martin Luther. It was necessary to lay this methodological foundation before proceeding to concrete historical analysis so that the proper significances are achieved as we move from the only "presup-

position" capable of subsuming all of history in a coherent meaning-complex to its specific outworkings in time. As has hopefully been made clear, this presupposition is *sola Scriptura*, the objective Word of God, wherein is revealed, by grace alone, through faith alone, the *sola Christus* who is the meaning-center of world history, as well as the Alpha and Omega which draws all things in heaven and earth into the redemptive sphere of the crucified and risen Son of God. This is no idealistic philosophy, no abstract concept requiring only external assent to logical propositions; but it is the very Source of life itself, set before us in time, and in our hearts *very near*, so that we become partakers in the true life and blessings which the gracious Lord of Life freely gives (Deut. 30:11-20). This is not something beyond our reach, but is *very near*, in our mouths and hearts, so that we may obey it (Deut. 30:11-14; Rom. 10:8). In history, and by the Word of God, we hear His voice, and we cling to Him, for the Lord is our *life* and His promises are sure (Deut. 30:20).

All of history is unified in the cross of Jesus Christ and gains significance only in this manner. All of history is focused at the foot of the cross, for it is only the crucified Christ who can bear the burgeoning significances of world history, and who redeems the fallen structures of existence and the shattered souls of men. Here we must leave behind the vapid speculations of human reason, for it contains the seeds of death and error, and falls far short of its own enthusiastic ambition to unify its imaginary worlds. All of history and the nearly infinite complexity of actual events flowing from it, has its Source in the One who "laid the earth's foundation and marked off its dimensions, who stretched a measuring line across it while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" (Job 38:1-7). All of these upsurges of concrete reality in time have fixed limits, and that limit is the mystery of the Incarnation, God deep in the flesh! "This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt" (Job 38:1). Surely we speak of things we do not understand, things too wonderful for us to know! (Job 42:3).

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## Book Review:

### What Does This Mean? by James W. Voelz

by Prof. John. A. Moldstad, Jr.

- Voelz, James W. What Does This Mean? St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995.
- Price: \$18.99
- 368 Pages, Hardcover
- Order through BLC Bookstore: 1-800-944-1722

A subtitle of this recent volume on hermeneutics is "Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World." As he indicated in his preface, the author intends this work for a Lutheran audience, since a "neutral reading" of the Scriptural text is nonexistent. With no insinuation that Lutherans have the edge on interpretation, Prof. Voelz properly insists, "Only believers can truly interpret the sacred books of God."

Five traditional Christian assumptions established at the outset make the reader aware of the commendable conservative bent to the approach by Voelz: 1. God has acted in human history, and that in a revelatory and saving way; 2. The sacred Scriptures are a record of God's activity; 3. These Scriptures are also God-breathed Word of God in human words, both human and divine in their qualities; 4. The sacred Scriptures, as record and Word of God, have a unity in theme, in content, and in purpose; 5. The center of the Scriptures is the person and work of the God-man, Jesus Christ (p. 20).

Since new textbooks on hermeneutics from the confessional Lutheran perspective are rare, this book by Voelz automatically will appeal to pastors and seminary students in our circles. For a number of years in our own seminary we have used Berkhof's Principles of Biblical Interpretation, together with Bohlmann's Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions to offset any of the Reformed influence found in Berkhof. Clearly the time is ripe for the serious consideration of a volume such as this.

A unique feature of What Does This Mean? is that the resources are listed up front at the beginning of each chapter. One may wonder why the author chose to include the works of several renowned liberal scholars while omitting reference to theologians one might "expect" to see in a Missouri Synod publication of this nature (possibly Fuerbringer, Surburg, etc.) Ironically, the

highly acclaimed Bohlmann text did not find its way even into Voelz's final chapter (14) dealing with the role of the Lutheran Confessions in the interpretation of Holy Writ.

One is impressed with the substantial section included on textual criticism (pp. 21-82). The author contends that "it is not possible to establish the best text of the NT on the basis of **external evidence**, i.e., on the basis of a manuscript's age, provenance, pedigree, material of composition... The text must be established on the basis of **internal evidence**, viz., the actual readings themselves, including the readings of all the various variants" (p. 46.)

A major thrust of the book, which shows the author's innovative style while carrying the conservative torch, is his adoption of the modern linguistic approach of Saussure. This involves a comprehensive approach to the study of language and does not limit the scope of the student to a heavy emphasis on etymology. Voelz remarks, "[K]nowing etymology and etymological relationships may help one to remember the meanings of a word, *but* it is highly doubtful that it is a key to understanding the characteristics or components of meaning conveyed by that word in various contexts and at various times in the history of its usage" (p. 111). Context is promoted as the determinant for the meaning of a given word: the "[w]holistic" view; the context will be "as large as necessary for the thought" (p. 113). He warns against what James Barr has called "illegitimate totality transfer," where several meanings are truly conveyed by the same word and not part of one "giant super-meaning" (p. 124). In the opinion of the reviewer, the author may be a little too quick to discard etymological import for Biblical exegesis. If it is used selectively and appropriately in conjunction with contextual analysis, a word's etymology may well provide the interpreter with an illustrative description that can easily enhance the understanding of an author's intended meaning of a specific text.

Voelz has many addenda scattered throughout the volume. In Addendum 7-A on the issue of "God Talk" he addresses the hot topic of masculine language used of God in light of feminists' concerns and also "culturally conditioned" metaphors. The author rightly maintains that the Scriptural male metaphors used of God are definitive and must be upheld. However, his overarching reason for doing so is that "it is congruent with our own reality, congruent with the need of our created and fallen nature." One wishes the author would have drawn attention to the obvious: God alone has the right to inform us in his own decisive word pictures precisely how he wants his created beings to perceive his Eternal Being!

A few other concerns can be listed:

- In a discussion of I Tim. 2:15 (p. 185), no mention is made of a possible Messianic understanding: “But she will be saved through childbearing/ the birth of a/the Child.”
- Voelz speaks of “two foci” prophecies (pp. 270-274) and includes Isaiah 7:14 and Psalm 2:8 in this category. But this contradicts one of our basic hermeneutical principles: there is one Spirit-intended meaning of a particular passage. Prof. R. Honsey in his essay on Psalm 2 asks the pertinent question of those who do not take verse 8 as a rectilinear Messianic prophecy: “If our psalm speaks at one time of David and Jesus, who is really meant?”
- In the treatment of I Cor. 11:5ff., a section frequently referred to by the author, may answer to the dilemma he poses (why there is a difference between a dogmatic application of women’s hairstyle/head covering in I Cor. 11 and the prohibition of women exercising authority in the public worship life of the church in I Tim. 2) lie in the verse he fails to mention I Cor. 11:16? “But if anyone seems to be contentious (φιλονεικος), we for our part have no such custom (συνθηθειαν), neither do the churches of God.”

In spite of the fact that this reviewer has chosen to draw attention to certain perceived shortcomings of this CPH publication, there is much to recommend, not least of which is the final chapter on the confessions. Two citations especially are noteworthy: “The Confessions do not exhaust every exegetical or doctrinal detail in Scripture that may be brought to bear upon a given topic that is discussed in the Confessions” (p. 359); “When interpreters who subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions address matters not discussed in them, they will do so in a way that does not override the basic doctrinal framework of the Confessions but, instead, fits what they have found within the larger whole. In other words, theological reflection will take place within this framework” (p. 360).

Pastors and students of theology, this book will provide some valuable insights for provocative discussion with your peers in the wide realm of Biblical hermeneutics. The book is worthy of its price tag!