

# LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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## Foreword

In this issue of the *Quarterly* we are pleased to share with our readers the 1996 annual Reformation Lectures, delivered on October 31 - November 1, 1996, in Mankato, Minnesota, and jointly sponsored by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the twenty-ninth annual Reformation lectures series, since they began in 1967.

The lectures centered around the theme: *LUTHER AND THE FANATICS—The Gospel Under Fire Then and Now*. The lecturer was the Reverend Harold Senkbeil, pastor of Elm Grove Evangelical Lutheran Church, Elm Grove, Wisconsin. Pastor Senkbeil has authored two books, *Sanctification: Christ in Action*, published in 1989 and *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*, published in 1994. He has also written numerous articles in various periodicals.

Pastor Senkbeil stated at the outset that his goal in these lectures was “to trace the threads of fanaticism from its origin at the time of the Reformation, through its resurgence in Pietism, to what I contend is re-blossoming in our day in American revivalistic evangelicalism.” In brief, then, he shows how the theology of the fanatics in Luther’s day is reflected in the theology of pietism and today’s so-called evangelicals.

The reactors to the lectures were Professor Lyle Lange who teaches Doctrine and Old Testament at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, and Professor John A. Moldstad who teaches New Testament and Systematics at Bethany Lutheran Seminary. Their reactions are also included in this issue and our readers will find them to be interesting and insightful.

These lectures led us to a deeper appreciation of our Lutheran heritage and “evangelicals” in our day. We trust that our readers will find these lectures, and the reactions to them, to be interesting, instructive, and edifying.

We also take this opportunity to wish our readers a happy, healthy, and faith-strengthening new year in the Name of the Christ Child whose birth we again celebrated.

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## The 29th Annual Reformation Lectures

**Bethany College and Seminary  
Mankato, Minnesota  
October 31-November 1, 1996**

*The Rev. Harold L. Senkbeil, STM  
Elm Grove Ev. Lutheran Church  
Elm Grove, Wisconsin*

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# **Luther and the Fanatics: The Gospel under Fire**

1. Allow me to begin by expressing my profound thanks for the invitation to present Bethany's annual Reformation Lectures this year. The list of presenters who have stood here at this podium before me is indeed impressive and-I must admit-somewhat daunting. Few parish pastors are extended this privilege. Therefore, however, in the same breath as I express my thanks for the honor, I must also begin by begging your indulgence. Many lay delegates to church conventions preface their remarks with "I'm only a laymen," and I'll begin these lectures with a similar disclaimer: as you listen in these days, please remember that I'm only a pastor. I've had to sandwich the preparation of these lectures in between my pastoral duties and I do not regularly benefit from the sharpening and honing of theological skills which takes place day in and day out in the classroom or regular interaction among colleagues in academia.

2. My perspective on our topic this year is distinctly that of the parish pastor. My regular duties are the same as those of many of you here: sermons, baptisms, catechesis, communions. Therefore I look at the issue of religious fanaticism from the viewpoint of the cure of souls. But what better viewpoint is there? Those who are charged with the pastoral care and oversight of a flock must constantly be on guard against both wolves and hirelings. That pastoral concern was what led me nearly ten years ago to careful analysis of the American Evangelical movement and its influence on Lutherans in America. My goal in these lectures will be to trace the threads of fanaticism from its origins at the time of the Reformation, through its resurgence in Pietism, to what I contend is its re-blossoming in our own day in American revivalistic evangelicalism.

3. Now like most pastors, I don't have the finesse of a theological professor. I haven't the patience of an exegete, nor the objectivity of an historian, nor the orderliness of a systematician. You will pardon me, therefore, if I launch my presentation with a statement

- that some will find compelling, while others may brand it inflammatory: I would be so bold as to suggest that confessional Lutheranism in America is looking death in the face.

4. At no time since Samuel Schmucker issued his *Definite Synodical Platform* in 1855 have Lutherans in America faced a greater threat to the heart of their faith and life. The argument then swirled around many of the same issues as today: liturgy, preaching, and the sacraments. We live among Christians of a revivalistic and puritanic spirit, was the argument. It simply won't do to hang onto outdated forms and rituals from the old country. In order to grow we're going to have to compete. We need "new measures": We need to downplay Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We need revivals. We need more subjective, emotional music. We need more teaching of rules and regulations for the sanctified life.

5. In the heat of that controversy over a century ago, Charles Philip Krauth, a colleague of Dr. Schmucker at the Gettysburg Seminary, rose to preach a sermon at the convention of the General Synod. His words were both courageous and incisive, and I believe they would serve us well today:

Too ignorant have we been of our own doctrines, and our own history, too little have we known of the fountain from which we sprang, and we have taken pride in times past in claiming a paternity in every reputable form of Christianity, and have denied our proper parentage, ...Shame that it has been so! ...Let us go back to our father's house...let us sit down at his table....They will better suit our appetite than the crumbs which we have gathered elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

6. Our father's house and our father's table is where we belong. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not pleading for the old head-in-the-sand, *wir bleiben beim alten*, don't-confuse-me-with-the-facts-my-mind-is-already-made-up approach to church life. Yes, of course this is a new day. Yes, of course, the church is in crisis. But it is a crisis of spirituality, not a crisis of technique or marketing. It's a question of spiritual nutrition. And the issue is whether we will sink our teeth into the rich nutrients of God's Word and Sacraments or be satisfied with today's spiritual junk food.

7. The real answer to the evangelical challenge lies not in becoming evangelicals ourselves, but in recovering a lost Lutheran heritage. A heritage which consists not in reciting coldly detached theological abstracts, but in actively confessing and living out the faith once delivered to the saints. This is not a matter, after all, of being faithful to our Lutheran forebears or paying allegiance to the “old country.” This is a matter of being faithful to our Lord and His Gospel. This is not simply a matter of joining with the confessors at Augsburg; this is a matter of the confession of the church catholic, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. I hope you will pardon that little outburst of pastoral zeal, but it will at least give you an idea of where I plan to take you tomorrow by way of application of our topic. But now, on with our journey. And for that, we need the perspective of history.

8. Many distinguished church historians have preceded me in these lectures, and this year’s topic is one which surely needs the guidance of an historian’s steady hand. I have sought the help of several. At the start I wish to acknowledge the counsel of Dr. Robert Kolb of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and give credit to the research of two other distinguished scholars of the Reformation: First Dr. Mark Edwards, formerly professor of church history at Harvard Divinity School and now president of St. Olaf College, whose book *Luther and the False Brethren* first appeared in 1975<sup>2</sup> and still ranks among the best historical studies of Luther and the fanatics. Secondly and most especially I want to acknowledge Dr. Carter Lindberg of Boston University, whose 1983 book *The Third Reformation?*<sup>3</sup> has been especially helpful to me in doing the spadework for these lectures.

9. The three focal points of these lectures I’ve already hinted at: the 16th Century radical wing of the Reformation, the Pietists of the 17th Century, and the influence of Evangelicalism on Lutherans in recent decades.

## **I. The Radical Protestant Threat to the Reformation**

10. It is hard for us to imagine the tumultuous foment of the Reformation era. As the Holy Roman Empire tottered on its way

- toward extinction, tremendous forces were unleashed in the social
- fabric of northern Europe, in the political arena, and most especially in the church. We are all familiar with the dramatic stand Luther took at Worms where at the Imperial Diet he publicly refused to recant his teachings. Before the assembled Princes, Dukes, and the young Hapsburg Emperor Charles V who called himself “a most catholic prince,” Luther spoke the words that appeared to seal his doom: I cannot and will not recant. As a result, he was branded not merely a heretic, but an outlaw of the Empire. Anyone who found him was free to kill him. Such is the stuff of which good movies are made. And over the years there have been many reenactments of the famous kidnapping which resulted in Luther’s exile in the Castle Wartburg, which stood high in the hills of Thuringia near Saxony’s western border. There it was thought Luther could wile away his time in comparative peace and safety till things quieted down.

11. Most Lutherans are quite familiar with the issues which separated Luther from the Pope, on the right of theological spectrum. The issues which separated him from other reformers on his left are another story. Yet I would suggest that the greatest threat to our confession in our own day is from this direction. Mark Edwards suggests that the Reformation can be viewed as a play in two acts: Act I was the time in which Luther had broken with the church of Rome, uncovered the “papal Antichrist,” rallied a sizable portion of the populace of Germany, and survived the confrontation at Worms. That’s Act I, the part of the Reformation we know the best. Act II is Luther’s challenge from the evangelical Protestant camp. And a formidable challenge it turned out to be; for it’s not over yet. The second act of the Reformation is still being played out on the stage of history-and each of us has a part to play. But I keep getting ahead of myself.

### **Andreas Karlstadt (c. 1480-1541)**

12. As it turned out, there wasn’t much peace and quiet to be had on the Wartburg. Luther’s stay there of about a year was only a brief respite between the first and second Acts of the Reformation. The disturbance, when it broke out, came not from Rome, but from

Wittenberg, of all places. In the fall of the year 1521 several of Luther's followers, including Melancthon, began radical revisions of the Mass. Those who regard the current debates over liturgy as unimportant might do well to think again, if history is to be our teacher. While Luther himself approved of many of the instituted revisions such as communion in both kinds, he was horrified to find that Andreas Bodenstein Karlstadt, who had been his doctor father at the University, was celebrating without vestments and had led the populace into acts of churchly vandalism, tearing down crucifixes and removing images from the sanctuaries of Wittenberg. He turned the gospel into law, arguing that since now the gospel had been restored, anyone who did not receive communion in both kinds was a sinner. All external ceremonies were to be abolished, since God is a Spirit and should be worshipped spiritually. "All visible and external acts of worship are useless," he insisted. "God esteems only the spirit."<sup>4</sup> Luther could no longer remain comfortably in exile while wolves ravaged the flock back in Wittenberg. He returned against the Elector's wishes in March of 1522 to preach a series of sermons on the proper course of the Reformation.

13. Distancing himself from those who sought to introduce radical reform on the basis of human ideas, Luther contrasted his own style with that of the rabble rousers of Wittenberg:

I did nothing; the Word did everything. Had I desired to foment trouble, I could have brought great bloodshed upon Germany; indeed, I could have started such a game that even the emperor would not have been safe. But what would it have been? Mere fool's play. I did nothing; I let the Word do its work.<sup>5</sup>

14. Here we see the great principle of Luther's Reformation. Genuine Christian theology is a theology of the Word of God. Anything undertaken apart from the Word of God, whether it originates in human reason or even claims support from direct revelation from God Himself, must be rejected as of the devil.

15. While Luther's sermons in the parish church of St. Mary settled the unrest in Wittenberg, it hardly silenced the opposition. Karlstadt's influence in Wittenberg was at an end, but his self-chosen mission



- had hardly begun. Like modern day gurus who offer “new paradigms for ministry” and style themselves harbingers of “the next church,” Karlstadt relinquished his position in academia and moved to Orlamünde, there to become pastor of the parish church as a sort of lay minister, taking up farming, dressing as a peasant, and calling himself “brother Andrew.” The effect in class-conscious Saxony was, of course, electric. But far more serious was what followed. Taking the reforms he had begun in Wittenberg the next step, Karlstadt not only removed images from the church in Orlamünde, but he also refused to baptize infants, and the Lord’s Supper was observed as a mere memorial of Christ’s death.

16. Though Luther retained personal affection for this man who had been his colleague and superior in Wittenberg—even sheltering him and his family in his own home during the Peasant upheaval—Karlstadt and Luther remained bitter theological opponents for the rest of their lives.

17. Legalism and spiritualism were the twin hallmarks of Karlstadt’s theology; theological aberrations which apparently go hand in hand, since they have reared their ugly head in nearly every generation since the Reformation. Justification was eclipsed by sanctification—again a familiar theme among evangelicals in our time.

### ***Thomas Müntzer (c. 1489-1525)***

18. If in Karlstadt we have a forerunner of modern evangelicalism, in Thomas Müntzer we have an early precursor of charismatic Pentecostalism. Thomas Müntzer was a parish priest who was an early disciple of Luther and in fact received Luther’s endorsement to serve as a kind of supply pastor in Zwickau in the year 1519. Zwickau was to become a hotbed of unbridled religious enthusiasm and the home of not a few religious crackpots, including the famous “Zwickau prophets” who showed up in Wittenberg during the Karlstadt fiasco claiming direct authority from the Holy Spirit. It seems that one of these self-styled prophets even had the audacity to show up on Luther’s doorstep to bring him a message from God which had come to him by means of a fiery cloud in a dream. The validity of that dream was proven, the prophet claimed, because it

ended when God emptied a mug of beer over his head. Dr. Edwards in reporting this incident informs us that “Luther was not impressed.”<sup>6</sup> I think we can understand why.

19. This is the circus-like theological atmosphere in which Müntzer lived and worked. Historians are of varying opinions as to whether the self-styled prophets of Zwickau were influenced by Müntzer or he by them. At any rate, by spring of 1521 he had created enough turmoil in the town that he was forced to flee Zwickau, settling first in Prague and then in the village Allstedt in Electoral Saxony, where over a year and half’s time he was preacher in the parish church of St. John. During this time he managed to practice what he had preached. He developed radical revisions of parish life around his theology-and one of the first and most dramatic revisions (let the reader understand) were his liturgical revisions. Gordon Rupp calls his liturgical work “strikingly modern,”-especially “his emphasis on worship as the common action of the whole People of God.”<sup>7</sup> Müntzer’s career as a reformer ended in disgrace. After summoning peasants to wage war against their rulers in what he considered would be the final battle which would bring in the Millennium, his troops were brutally slaughtered by the forces of Duke George at Frankenhausen. Müntzer himself fled the battlefield, but was hunted down like a dog and executed. Thus ended one of the sorriest chapters in the radical wing of the Reformation.

20. The influence of Müntzer’s teaching, however, lived after him. Lindberg is of the opinion that his legacy has risen again in our time in the charismatic movement. Essential to Müntzer’s theology is the separation of the Spirit of God from the Word of God. He was forever ridiculing Luther with such picturesque epithets as “the Spiritless Soft-Living Flesh at Wittenberg,” “Dr. Liar,” “Cousin Steplightly,” “Raven,” and “Rabid Fox.”<sup>8</sup> He saw Luther as leading people to false security in the external Word of God, when in reality what is needed is inner awakening. In fact, he went so far as to claim that all preaching of the Word of God is in vain if the heart of a person had not first been prepared by the Holy Spirit working apart from the Word: *the hearer must first have heard Christ preached in his heart through the Spirit of the Fear of the Lord, and then a true preacher can give him sufficient witness. But the Work of the*

- *Hands of God must have first shown him Reverence before God,*
- *otherwise all preaching and writing is vain.*<sup>9</sup> Here it must be noted that the phrases “Spirit of the Fear of the Lord” and “Work of the Hands of God” are technical phrases for Müntzer, and imply direct and immediate intervention on the part of God in the human heart apart from His instituted means.

21. By the time that Müntzer met his ignominious end in the Peasant’s war, Luther’s struggle against Karlstadt had reached dramatic proportions. Taking up Luther’s challenge, Karlstadt had written a series of diatribes against the Wittenberg theology. The chief of his attacks were leveled against Luther’s teaching on the Sacrament of the Altar. In his famous tract *Against the Heavenly Prophets* Dr. Luther took deadly aim not only against Karlstadt, but also Müntzer, the Zwickau prophets, and all others who dared to separate the Spirit from the Word of God. Although much of the tract was leveled at Karlstadt, it was Karlstadt’s *spirit* which drew Luther’s venom. This is the spirit which from the beginning of the world seeks to drive a wedge between God and His Word, between Spirit and flesh, between heaven and earth-and thus between the sinner and the means of grace. Dr. Luther, as we know, retained to his dying day an enormous reverence for the sacred mystery of the presence of the Savior’s body and blood in the Holy Supper. Nothing to him was more despicable than to call into question the Lord’s sure Word attached to this Testament. When Karlstadt dismissed the words of consecration as mere “whispering and breathing over the bread,” Luther denounced him publicly as an unbeliever:

Tell me, if someone certainly knows that it is a Word of God and yet dares consciously to noise abroad with disdain and ridicule that it is a human whispering and breathing, thus perverting the poor mob by such lies and poison, and does this without any fear or trembling and shows no contrition for it, but rather feels joy and glee in such wickedness, as if God would give him a crown for such blasphemy and perversion of souls and dub him a knight of grace, how can such a one believe or think that there be any God?<sup>10</sup>

22. Both Müntzer and Karlstadt consistently separated the Spirit from the Word of God. Already in 1522 Karlstadt proudly claimed in a letter to Müntzer “I lecture more about visions and dreams than

any of the other professors.”<sup>11</sup> It was this division between Word and Spirit which led them inevitably to reject the power and validity of the sacraments.

23. If the Word has no power to deliver the presence and power of the Holy Spirit together with all the gifts earned by Jesus Christ, then of course the door is open to all kinds of charismatic aberrations which in fact manifested themselves during the tumultuous years of the radical Reformation. Furthermore, the gospel itself recedes further and further into the background, and Jesus becomes a model and law-giver rather than a redeemer.

24. Müntzer, for example, repeatedly attacked Luther as a preacher of a so-called “sweet Christ” and a denier of the divine Law.<sup>12</sup> He spoke of a Justification *sola lege* (by the Law alone). This, of course, was the theological foundation for the program of civil reform which led Müntzer into leadership in the peasant rebellion which-he believed-would bring in a theocratic world rulership as the first stage of the Parousia.<sup>13</sup>

25. Recent years have seen increased interest in the study of the radical wing of the Reformation. The importance of this theological movement can hardly be underestimated, particularly since its echoes reverberate in America today. Perhaps the best way I could sum up the influence of the radical Reformation on theological thought today is to use Carter Lindberg’s succinct analysis of Karlstadt and his impact on succeeding generations:

The fundamental concern of Pietism and the charismatic renewal is not the unconditional forgiveness of sins but a quest for the power to fulfill the will of God. Karlstadt continued to work on this issue through the last decade of his life, the Swiss period of 1530-1541. The true sense of the law is first understood by the spiritually re-born man whose freed spirit now understands the spirit of the law. The gospel is understood in the sense of a new law (*Nova Lex*), a law of the spirit and life (*lex spiritus et vitae*) mediated by Christ. The Christian is thus given the power to do good works. These are the presuppositions for a second justification, a justification by the law which is an advancing sanctification through fulfillment of the law. Whereas for Luther, justification meant freedom from the law, for Karlstadt it meant freedom for the law.<sup>14</sup>

26. The similarities with contemporary evangelicalism are remarkable. So it is, in fact, whenever truth is set aside for error. The problem is as new as this morning's broadcast on Christian radio, but it is as old as the false teachings rejected in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. Whenever the presence of God in the means of grace is denied, whenever the power of the gospel for the forgiveness of sins is rejected, all that is left is human obedience to the law.

27. This is the fundamental error of the fanatics of Luther's day, an error which-as we shall see in the next lecture-spilled over into the era of Pietism and beyond. It is an error which persists into our own time and which dare not be ignored by pastors who intend to remain faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> quoted in Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, (New York: The Century Co., 1927), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Luther and the False Brethren*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (1975), 242 pp.

<sup>3</sup> *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press (1983), 345 pp.

<sup>4</sup> Lindberg, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> AE 51:77-78.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, p. 25

<sup>7</sup> Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation*, (Fortress Press, 1969), p. 305, cited in Lindberg, p. 78.

<sup>8</sup> Lindberg, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> quoted in Lindberg, p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> quoted in Edwards, p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> Franz, Günther, ed., *Thomas Münzter. Schriften und Briefe. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1968), 387, 15f. quoted in Lindberg, p. 88)

<sup>12</sup> Lindberg, p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Gritsch, "Luther und die Schwärmer: Verworfenene Anfechtung?" *Luther* 47 (1976): 105-21, 118, quoted in Lindberg, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup> Lindberg, p. 74.

# Luther and the Fanatics: The Gospel under Fire

## II: The Pietistic Threat to the Reformation

1. The subtheme of our lectures, “the Gospel under Fire,” provides the common thread between the three distinct eras upon which we focus our attention. We have seen, in the case of Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer, how the radical reformation led a frontal assault on the gospel during the Reformation era itself. We turn now to the next major challenge to Lutheran theology and practice which appeared on the historical horizon: Pietism.

2. It would be fair to say that Lutherans in our own day have had a kind of love/hate relationship with Pietism—a relationship, I might add, that carries over into a kind of ambiguous flirtation with modern evangelicalism as well. On the one hand there is a desire among Lutherans to be faithful to our doctrinal tradition, but at the same time a strange fascination with those movements which claim to provide a needed supplement to our tradition. Pietism and its theological children, revivalism and evangelicalism, wish to pay homage to Luther and the Lutheran Reformation, but consciously claim to supply us with a corrective balance to our theology which is in their mind is too heavily weighted on justification to the detriment of sanctification, sacraments to the detriment of commitment, and the gospel to the detriment of the law.

3. An investigation of the influence of Pietism among Lutherans in America is outside the parameter of this paper. C.F.W. Walther’s commitment to what was later scornfully branded “Repristination Theology” can scarcely be understood apart from his experience with pietistic groups and teachers during his student days. He relates, for instance, his new-found joy in a student conventicle being ruined by a Pietistic pastoral candidate who said to these zealous young men:

“You imagine you are converted Christians, don’t you? But you are not. You have not yet passed through any real

penitential agony." I fought this view day and night (Walther records), thinking at first that he meant to take us from under the sway of the Gospel and put us back under the Law. But he kept repeating his assertion until I finally began to ask myself whether I was really a Christian.<sup>1</sup>

4. Suffice it to say the clarity and conviction with which Walther held and taught the Lutheran Confessions was sharpened by personal observation of the negative impact of Pietism's subjective legacy for his own personal faith and in the spiritual lives of his peers. This also explains the conviction and energy he brought to the missionary enterprise of the church on these shores as German Lutheran immigrants fell prey to pietistic and revivalistic preachers. This present audience is, I'm sure, more knowledgeable than I of the influence of Scandinavian pietism among Norwegian Lutheran immigrants.

5. Like its modern-day successor, evangelicalism, pietism has almost as many definitions as it does students. However, in order to establish a bench mark, perhaps a good place to begin would be with the definition offered by one of Pietism's best known students, Martin Schmidt, in the monumental *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*:

Pietism is the term for the far-reaching movement of the late 17th and early 18th centuries which set for itself the goal of a new Reformation because the first Reformation had become stuck in Old Protestant Orthodoxy, in the institutional and dogmatic. Pietism's watchwords therefore became "life" vs. "doctrine," "Spirit" vs. "Office," "power" vs. "appearance" (2 Timothy 3:5). The Reformation's central concept of faith received the characteristic addition, "living faith," the liveliness being sought in the ethical "fruits of faith," above all love; thereby affecting the social characteristic of Pietism. Christian perfection became the main theme. Therefore it is natural to view the essence of Pietism in its piety....In the place of justification with its correlation of Word of God (as promise)—faith and law—gospel appeared *rebirth*.<sup>2</sup>

6. Carter Lindberg identifies three features which characterize Pietism in its classic form: First, Pietism was marked by a decided emphasis on the small group as the central environment for religious

edification. These conventicles were regarded as more important for Christian faith than the formal services of the church. "Above the doctrine and worship of the church," Dr. Lindberg writes, "Pietism valued the community of conscious, rigorous Christians."<sup>3</sup> Participants in the pietistic conventicles classified themselves as the "reborn in the Lord," and looked down on those who merely participated in the regular life of the church. Thus the church was effectively divided into two camps by the conventicle movement.

7. Secondly, despite the individualism and anti-clericalism rampant in Pietism, pietists in general have a tendency to look to Spener and his legitimate successors as the authoritative source of Biblical interpretation and questions of faith. The Bible tends to be read from the perspective of the "patriarchs" and "fathers" of Pietism.

8. Thirdly, Pietism is characterized by a strong strain of individualism, tempered only by its emphasis on conventicles. Those whose religious experiences qualified them as awakened and reborn derived their identity from their membership in the conventicles of the "brothers," as they were identified by others who shared in their experience. Pietism's emphasis on the *collegia pietatis* can hardly be over-emphasized. Hartmut Lehmann comments:

Although individual pietists sometimes doubt their rebirth supported by the brothers, they relied unflinchingly upon divine grace and thereby strove to overcome sin by repentance and penance and by a deeply felt conversion and over various stages of personal 'sanctification' to acquire eternal salvation.<sup>4</sup>

9. Recent decades have seen lively scholarly interest in Pietism, and not without reason. It is fair to say that Pietism lives on in new incarnations within the church growth movement and its emphasis on small groups, within meta-church thinking with its spotlight on individual leadership by laity over the ministry of the means of grace by the clergy. Pietism's seemingly self-contradictory themes of individualism coupled with dependence on group affirmation are still the twin themes close to the heart of modern Evangelicalism.

10. Like Evangelicalism, classic Pietism resists a comprehensive or inclusive definition. A wide variety of theological teachings were



- encompassed by pietists. Common to them all, however, is a decided
- emphasis on the inner spiritual life at the expense of the outer Word of God. Faith was defined in a highly experiential way, and the language of justification was set aside in favor of the language of rebirth.

11. To be sure, there is a distinct link between Pietism and the Lutheran Reformation. I would argue, however, that Pietism, just as its predecessor Enthusiasm, was linked with Lutheran theology in discontinuity rather than continuity. All of the early leaders of the movement paid homage to Luther and the Reformation, but in so doing they lamented that the 16th Century had only begun what turned out to be an abortive attempt to reform the church. Pietists saw themselves as bridging the gap between faith and life and thus completing the work Luther had not been able to finish during his lifetime. For example, the great Lutheran Pietist, Philipp Jakob Spener wrote that the Reformation “has not come as far as it should” and that he intended to complete the edifice for which Luther unfortunately had only completed the foundation.<sup>5</sup>

12. As “exhibit A” of their link with Luther, pietists pointed to his famous *Preface to Romans* where the reformer allegedly equated faith with rebirth:

Faith...is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly.<sup>6</sup>

13. Dr. Lindberg points out that, while both Luther and Pietism understood the centrality of faith in the Christian life, they differed in their understanding of the relationship of faith to its fruits. For Pietism, the validity of faith lay in its ethical achievement.<sup>7</sup> “Rebirth” means assuming a new, higher nature which becomes visible in the renewed life of the believer. The Pietists believed that the goal of the gospel was good works. Luther, on the other hand (with St. Paul) understood the gospel to be the power of God for salvation. In other words, the gospel has no goal beyond the forgiveness of sins. With

the forgiveness of sins comes the death of the old Adam and newness of life which bears fruit in daily vocation. Such fruit, however, remain clouded and hidden under the cross in this world. The ethical dimension of Christian living is marked by struggle between the old Adam and the new man; for as long as he is in this world, every Christian is *simul iustus et peccator*. Ultimate victory will not be openly revealed until the final judgment of God. The *simul* of that phrase remained the sticking point for pietism as it does for modern day evangelicals. When faith is identified with rebirth rather than with Christ, Christ recedes into the background and the believer and his experience of renewal seizes the spotlight. Thus the Christian is seen as only *iustus*; his identity as *peccator* is relegated to his life before conversion.

14. Lindberg reminds us that, despite Pietism's claims to the contrary, the movement had much more in common with medieval mysticism and religious enthusiasm than it did with Luther. Luther saw Christianity as a series of dialectics: law and gospel, sin and grace, damnation and faith. Pietism, on the other hand, saw not dialectics or paradoxes in the Christian faith, but only the continuity of faith as experienced in the new life. Lindberg writes: "From a structural point of view, Thomas Muntzer appears as a connecting bridge from mysticism over Luther to Pietism. For both Muntzer and Pietism there is a distinct interest in the visible working of the Word which is not present in Luther."<sup>8</sup> The debt of Pietism to the radical reformation is well documented. Many of the tracts of Karlstadt and other enthusiasts were reprinted by Pietist teachers.

15. The relationship between Pietism and the Reformation must be labeled at best tenuous. Pietists saw the Reformation as proceeding no further than reforming institutions. What remained to be done was the reform of individuals and a recovery of primitive Christianity. This remaining task was the self-appointed mission of Pietism.

16. The story of Pietism begins with Johann Arndt (1555-1621) who, though he lived during the rise of Lutheran orthodoxy, was heavily impacted by the themes of German mysticism. His *True Christianity* remains a classic work in Christian spirituality and wielded great influence in the homes of German and Scandinavian

- Lutherans who migrated to these shores. Arndt's emphasis was on the interior spiritual life; perhaps most revealing is his addition of "love" to the marks of the church. He wrote:

Word and sacrament are rightly held as marks of the church; however many false Christians clothe themselves with these, they have frequently used Word and sacrament but have not become a hair better. Therefore it is necessary to add also the third mark, namely, love, which is nothing other than the noble life of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

### **Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705)**

17. However important the work of Johann Arndt in the development of Pietism, the movement was not to reach its full flower until the era of Spener and his famous disciple Francke. Philipp Jakob Spener is generally regarded as the father of Pietism. His earliest spiritual formation was influenced heavily by Johann Arndt's theology and Puritanism as well as an association with peers who cultivated a piety based on medieval mysticism. It was not until his university years that he was introduced to Luther's writings. His situation, one could observe, parallels that of many Lutherans today who come to Lutheran doctrine after being raised on a heterodox piety. Studying in Basel and Geneva, he was heavily influenced by the Reformed tradition of Bucer and Calvin. By the time he received his doctorate in 1663 at Strasbourg his Lutheranism was heavily colored not only with Arndtian piety but also Reformed doctrine.

18. Upon assuming a pastorate at Frankfurt am Main his first emphasis was upon catechesis as an aid to spiritual life and edification. This effort was soon supplanted by the famous *collegia pietatis*. Beginning in 1670 these discussion groups gathered in Spener's home twice a week. The goal of these small groups, Spener wrote, was:

to establish among Christian individuals a holy and close friendship, that each one learns to recognize the Christianity of the others whereby the fire of love is more and more inflamed among us, from which so much passionate desire arises that everyone may be edified at every opportunity and

by their example may excite others next to them to heartfelt earnestness.<sup>10</sup>

19. Later Spener himself was forced to abandon the conventicle movement because of the divisions arising from it. Nevertheless these *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, or “little churches within the church” continued to have a heavy impact on the spread of Pietism.

20. No movement can succeed without a program. The success of Pietism as a movement was greatly aided when in 1675 Spener published his *Pia Desideria*, widely regarded as the central programmatic writing of German Pietism. In this definitive work, Spener put forward six concrete proposals for the reform of the church:

1. Expanded reading of the whole Bible, which included the abandonment of the pericopal system by the pastors and also Bible reading in households and private meetings.
2. Renewed emphasis on the responsibilities of the universal priesthood of believers. All are called not only to study the Bible and lead a holy life, but also to teach, remove the erring, and console the afflicted.
3. Exhortation of both clergy and laity to move from mere head knowledge of doctrine to the practice of piety.
4. Reduction of confessional polemic and theological controversy and the establishment of true doctrine by repentance and a holy life.
5. Adjusting theological studies by the introduction of *collegia pietatis* at academic centers and the study of German mysticism, Thomas a Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* and Arndt’s *True Christianity*.
6. A reform in preaching which would involve a shift from proclamation toward application.<sup>11</sup>

21. As an outline for parish program, Spener’s *Pia Desideria* was influential enough. But as a theological treatise it has had its greatest impact, shifting the Reformation’s emphasis on the external Word of God to the inner spiritual life. Spener wrote: “Our entire Christianity exists in the inner or new man whose soul is faith and

- its effects are the fruits of life.”<sup>12</sup> The only way to escape the ravages
- of the world is by rebirth. Faith by itself is not sufficient to carry the totality of the Christian experience. Faith by itself does not save; it requires completion through works. Therefore Spener appended the adjective “living” to faith. By such “living faith” Spener intended to include both faith and its fruits. This “living faith” is never born only of the Scriptures but through the Spirit.

22. There is in Spener’s *Pia Desideria* a clear implication that the reality of the primitive church’s experience is accessible in every age. This, together with his emphasis on the inner man at the expense of the outer Word, paved the way for the perfectionist movements to follow and finally its culmination in the Charismatic movements of our own day.

23. Two parallel implications follow from Spener’s definitive work. First, when the spotlight is put on the new man at the expense of the external Word, this leads to a devaluation of public doctrine in the church and exaltation of the individual at the expense of the church. Second, it leads to an ecumenical movement based not upon doctrinal agreement but agreement in Christian lifestyle. It hardly needs to be mentioned that these two trends have yet to reach their zenith within western Christendom and therefore Pietism has not yet reached its high water mark.

24. While one valid interpretation of Pietism sees it as an effective counter-balance to the excesses of Rationalism, it must be said that Rationalism and Pietism share a fundamental error: both are anthropocentric rather than theocentric. In the case of rationalism, human reason takes the center position while in Pietism human experience occupies the center. The “Christ for us” is replaced by the “Christ in us.” In both Pietism and Rationalism God takes second position to man. Thus we have the beginning of the modern era in theology.

25. As the founder and leader of the pietistic movement, Spener found himself increasingly the center of controversy. Such controversy led him away from his pulpit in Frankfurt to become the chief court chaplain to the Saxon Elector in Dresden. There, however, he encountered great opposition from the theology faculty of Leipzig. In 1691 he accepted the call to St. Nicholas in Berlin

where, after gathering a number of influential Pietists around him, he was able to introduce the reforms he advocated while also forming the new University at Halle into a Pietist center under the leadership of his protégé, August Hermann Francke.

26. While in fairness it must be said that Spener never deliberately turned his back on Lutheran orthodoxy, still the end result of the theology he advocated was a separation of the Spirit from the Word, of faith from life, and therefore a separation of the life of the inner man from the means of grace. Listen, for example, to this excerpt from his *Pia Desideria*:

One should therefore emphasize that the divine means of Word and sacrament are concerned with the inner man. Hence it is not enough that we hear the Word with our outward ear, but we must let it penetrate to our heart, so that we may hear the Holy Spirit speak there, that is, with vibrant emotion and comfort feel the sealing of the Spirit and the power of the Word. Nor is it enough to be baptized, but the inner man, where we have put on Christ in Baptism, must also keep Christ on and bear witness to him in our outward life. Nor is it enough to have received the Lord's supper externally, but the inner man must truly be fed with that blessed food. Nor is it enough to pray outwardly with our mouth, but true prayer, and the best prayer, occurs in the inner man, and it either breaks forth in words or remains in the soul, yet God will find and hit upon it. Nor, again, is it enough to worship God in an external temple, but the inner man worships God best in his own temple, whether or not he is in an external temple at the time. So one could go on.<sup>13</sup>

27. Luther could, of course, use much of this same terminology. He would speak of the voice of the Holy Spirit and the inner man as well. But he was adamant that the Holy Spirit works on the inner man through outer means; that inner faith comes from hearing the external Word of God. That very Word both kills and makes alive. Such faith is by definition a living faith, since it originates in the living and life-giving Word of the Gospel, which flows from the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. This is the faith which justifies the sinner before God, brings the new birth in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This faith-as Luther so eloquently put it in

- the Preface to the Epistle to the Romans-this *justifying faith* is a living, busy, active, mighty thing. Not because of where it resides in the inmost heart of the believer, but because of where it clings: to Christ and His sure Word of absolution.

28. Pietists and their latter-day heirs have tended to denigrate the centrality of justification, treating it simply as one stage in salvation to which sanctification must be added in order for it to be valid. In practice, for both Pietism and Evangelicalism, sanctification (defined as a human activity) is the focus of faith rather than justification. Christian Hoburg, one of Spener's contemporaries and colleagues in the pietistic movement, had the courage to resign his Lutheran pulpit and become a Mennonite preacher. His motto articulated the unspoken central tenet of Pietism: "Justification is fiction; rebirth is fact."<sup>14</sup>

### **August Hermann Francke (1663-1727)**

29. Our discussion of Pietism would be incomplete without mentioning the contribution of Spener's most prominent disciple, August Hermann Francke. Though Spener came first chronologically, Francke surpasses him in terms of influence on the movement.

30. Early in his career while teaching at Leipzig he came under the sway of a pietistic group formed by some young theologians, the *collegium philobiblicum*. Shortly thereafter he experienced a spiritual awakening while wrestling with a deep inner crisis of soul. He, like so many who went before and came after him, described this experience in the language of Luther's Preface to Romans. At last, he claimed, he for the first time began to be "a real, convinced, resolute, selfless and clear-sighted Christian."<sup>15</sup> This experience marked the beginning of a deep personal and spiritual relationship with Spener, who soon found Francke a position at the University of Halle. The world-famous "Halle Institutions" were started by Francke during his tenure there and put Halle on the map as a center for educational and charitable concerns. Under his leadership, the Halle Institutions launched first a school for the poor, then a common school, an orphanage, a teacher training school and high school.

Thus the central Pietistic goal of changing the world through changing persons was addressed.

31. Francke's theological convictions and administrative genius came together in a comprehensive plan to bring about a world ruled by the will of God. His program involved six points:

1. A plan is necessary. Francke anticipated the organizational and sociological emphasis of the church growth movement in this regard. A model is necessary in order to establish the necessary institutions with which the world might be changed. One must be free, however, to adapt the model to fit the circumstances.
2. Teamwork is required. The Christian worker must be united and coordinated with others. In anticipation of the role of the central administrator about whom we hear so much from modern church consultants, Francke stressed that this team must be led by a strong leader who will both define tasks and encourage independent, responsible service on the part of all.
3. The school is the model of life just as the child is the model of the adult. Knowledge and action are linked in education just as faith and love are linked in Christianity. Action is the verification of knowledge as love is the verification of faith.
4. Time management was a high priority. Consciousness of each passing moment and its employment for God must be impressed upon both teachers and students.
5. Attention must be given to details. Francke had regulations for the structure of the days in his school, the instruction, the clothes, the food. Above all, Christian principles must be applied concretely, not merely in the abstract.
6. The over-all goal of Christian work must be kept in mind. The church must be understood as a "seminarium"—a hotbed where seeds are nourished into saplings and saplings are raised to be transplanted into the world to raise up for God a new, obedient humanity in every aspect of life.<sup>16</sup>

32. For all his many admirable accomplishments, it must be said that Francke's greatest accomplishment of all was not so admirable: he replaced Christian doctrine with Christian living. While his was



- a biblical theology, the Bible for Francke was not the revelation of
- the gospel, but of the law. The Bible ultimately in Pietism after Francke was understood as ethical imperative.

33. The second major accomplishment of Francke was at least as deplorable as the first: he introduced the modern category of experience as the criterion for authority. Ultimately the truth of the gospel rests not on the authority of God's revelation in Christ but rather on personal testimony. Here is the theological underpinning for that classic hymn of American Protestantism: "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart."

34. Francke accomplished what Spener before him had only begun: he shifted the focus of the Reformation away from the Word of God and toward the believing heart. Faith for Luther finds its validity and power in that upon which it rests: namely, Christ Himself and His atoning work. In Luther's mind, faith subjectively considered was always in flux, continually ebbing and flowing, sometimes weak and sometimes strong. Such talk is foreign language for Francke and the later Pietists. For them, faith is either "true" or "living" faith, or it is no faith at all. Faith is treated not in terms of its object, but in terms of its subject. Not the one in whom faith rests, but the one who has faith, is the focal point. Faith is understood in terms of its quality and accomplishment.

35. It is apparent from this brief excursus into the thought of the chief architects of Pietism that during this era the central motifs of the Lutheran Reformation were under attack. Though Pietism presented itself as a friend of the Reformation intended to bring an uncompleted work to completion, in reality Pietism effectively dismantled the foundations of the Reformation. (It would perhaps be safe to say, at least theologically speaking, that one must always beware of Germans bearing gifts, at least when they propose to improve on the Reformation).

36. The central motif for the Reformation is Justification; for Pietism it is rebirth. While Lutheran orthodoxy treats rebirth as one element within the overall plan of salvation, Pietism understands rebirth as encompassing the entire process of salvation. Scholars are of different opinions in articulating the teaching of various Pietistic theologians on rebirth. Some are of the opinion that pietism

emphasizes rebirth as a momentous event which encompasses not only justification, but total sanctification defined in terms of ethical renovation. Others interpret Spener and Pietism as focusing not so much on the event of rebirth but on the process of renewal, which happens also to be a favorite category among modern charismatics. 37. Perhaps the latter position is closer to the truth. It would seem that Spener and his followers understood rebirth to be a forensic act of God, the Pietistic equivalent to justification. Renewal, on the other hand, they understood to be a process in which the reborn cooperate with God in spiritual and ethical healing. The programs advocated by Spener in his *Pia Desideria* and brought to spectacular fruition in the institutions launched by Francke lend credence to the interpretation that continuous renewal, rather than rebirth defined as a crisis event, is the central concern of Pietism.

38. Having said this, one understands why sanctification takes over the spotlight from justification within Pietism and its subsequent movements. For renewal becomes the sum total of the Christian life. Dr. Lindberg sums up pietistic teaching on sanctification as follows:

Renewal is the creation of the new person both ethically and ontologically. It is the perfection of the divine image received in rebirth that includes growth in ethical virtue and union with God. The concern of classical Pietism for ethical verification of faith and therefore a growing sanctification is related to the concern for certainty of salvation. The teleological orientation toward the "new man" leads fundamentally toward perfectionism.<sup>17</sup>

39. Two observations can be made about Pietism's teaching on sanctification which fits as well for modern evangelicalism: First, sanctification is defined anthropocentrically chiefly as a matter of individual human morality. Luther's *Small Catechism*, on the other hand, defines sanctification theocentrically as chiefly a matter of the forgiveness of sins in the Holy Christian Church. Second, Pietism understands sanctification synergistically, while Lutheran orthodoxy understands sanctification monergistically.<sup>18</sup>

40. In evaluating the effect of Pietism, Dr. Lindberg correctly observes that its strength was its weakness. That is, in its focus on

- the individual Christian and personal spiritual growth through
- participation in the conventicles, Pietism effectively “posed the possibility of creating two classes of Christians: the normal ‘church-goers’ and the ‘better’ Christians of the ‘ecclesiola in ecclesia.’”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Pietism certainly reminded the church of the vitality of faith and of its nature as a community bound together by faith and fellowship.

41. Lindberg finds four points of agreement between Francke and Luther<sup>20</sup> which, in the interest of fairness, I list here:

1. An emphasis on the Bible as the Word of God which communicates the Holy Spirit who works faith in the heart, both kindled and strengthened by the Word.
2. Francke, together with Luther, rejects an “opus operatum” view of the Word. There is an emphasis both in Pietism and in the Reformation upon personal faith and the right hearing and use of the Word and sacraments.
3. Francke, despite his optimism regarding the fallen nature, did understand the severity of sin and evil. The model of salvation is not sickness and healing but rather death and rebirth. The cross and mortification mark the life of every child of God.
4. Francke continued to hold, despite his emphasis on works, that salvation is effected by God’s grace alone; that our works have no bearing upon our justification. Faith and love must be distinguished even though they are inseparable.

42. We have already noted the distinct discontinuities between the Reformation and Pietism. Several points must be reaffirmed:

1. For Luther, faith always came by hearing the Word. In Pietism, there is a tenuous relationship between the Word and Spirit. Pietism has a distinct tendency to downplay external hearing in favor of the direct influence of the Spirit upon the inner man.
2. Thus within Pietism doubt is to be overcome not by hearing the Word of God as His address of promise, but by inner faith verified experientially. For Luther faith was always faith which laid hold of God’s sure promise in Christ; its subjective qualities were of little concern to him. On the other hand, Pietism intro-

duced the use of adjectives in connection with faith—a practice which continues down to our own time—words such as weak faith, dead faith, living faith, powerful faith, victorious faith, etc.

3. There is a distinct shift in Pietism away from Luther's *Christus pro nobis* to the *Christus in nobis*. Because of its emphasis on rebirth and renewal, Pietism turned away from Luther's dialectic of Law and gospel, sinner and saint and spoke instead of experientially verified stages of salvation and the power of faith for renewal and good works.
  4. Most radically of all, Pietism posited in place of Luther's theocentric orientation an anthropocentric orientation. For Luther, God always descends to the sinner. For Pietism, the sinner ascends to God.
  5. Thus there is a distinct synergistic tone to Pietism which is noticeably lacking in Luther. Salvation is viewed as man's obedience to the will of God rather than Christ's obedience by which sinners are declared righteous. Thus the Christian is effectively directed by Pietism to rely upon himself and his own experience of faith for certainty of salvation. This involves not a mere modification of Reformation theology, but a total reversal of it.
  6. Contrary to Luther's continued insistence that our standing in justification cannot be determined by our sanctification, Pietism continues to insist that works are "indications of a person's degree of growth in faith and the quality of his existence in grace."<sup>21</sup>
  7. In the end, Pietism effectively reduced all theology to a form of Christian ethics. To the Word and Sacraments, Pietism added love as a mark of the church. Thus the church itself is redefined. For Luther, the church as she really is remains hidden from the eyes of men. Because of the addition of love to the marks of the church, Pietism identified those Christians who exhibit "genuine Christianity," as they called the religion practiced within the conventicles, as the true church.
43. Thus we close our consideration of the second great assault on the Reformation. I hope that you can see the challenges presented by Pietism bear striking resemblance to the challenge of Fanaticism.

- 44. More pointedly, these challenges and which persist to our own time. Dr. David Luecke, in a recent article entitled “The Emerging Lutheran Awakening Movement,” calls forthrightly for a new blossoming of Pietism in contemporary Lutheranism:

Many recognize an *emerging Lutheran Awakening movement* (italics his) that consists of renewed church leadership focus on experiential ministries that more directly develop the context for the Holy Spirit to bring people to initial faith in Christ and to awaken deeper, more heartfelt and informed response among those hearing the call of Christ to follow him into all the dimension (sic) of their life.<sup>22</sup>

45. If we would close our eyes, we can hear the voice of August Hermann Francke all over again. Dr. Luecke, who previously gave us *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*<sup>23</sup> and *The Other Story of Lutherans at Worship*<sup>24</sup> argues that Pietism is a legitimate expression of the Lutheran Confessions and an important strand in our tradition and history which deserves not mere recognition, but emulation.

In this century (he writes) it became academically fashionable to sweepingly malign the pietists in Lutheran history. Yet the equivalent Pietist expression in the English heritage of Protestantism is thriving and earning new respect. They are known today as American Evangelicals.<sup>25</sup>

46. Here is an honest program for action. While one may admire Dr. Luecke’s honesty, historically, Biblically, and theologically we must reject his program. For no matter how eloquently Pietism pleads for an inch on the church’s landscape, it ends up seizing a mile. While Dr. Luecke laudably calls for Lutheran parameters to his awakening movement, he ends up capitulating in the end:

Any movement calling itself Lutheran must remain accountable to the Lutheran Confessions and the parameters they set for application of Word and sacraments. Any church movement seeking awakenings must focus on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, working through Word and sacraments, *and needs to remain open to new forms of ministry* (italics mine) through which the Holy Spirit is being effective at touching and changing lives.<sup>26</sup>

47. We've heard this all before. We heard it in the case of the fanatics, and we heard it in the case of the Pietists. Now we hear it again in the circles of Evangelicalism. The assault on the Gospel is fundamentally the same. Whenever the presence of God in the means of grace is denied, whenever the power of the gospel for the forgiveness of sins is rejected, all that is left is human obedience to the law.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Fifteenth Evening Lecture, St. Louis: CPH, 1928, p. 142.
- <sup>2</sup> Martin Schmidt, "Pietismus," *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 5:370. Quoted in Lindberg, p. 133.
- <sup>3</sup> Lindberg, p. 134.
- <sup>4</sup> Hartmut Lehmann, *Pietismus und Weltliche Ordnung in Württemberg von 17. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969, p. 17.
- <sup>5</sup> Spener, *Theologische Bedenken* 4 Bde. (Halle, 1701), quoted in Lindberg, p. 139.
- <sup>6</sup> Luther, *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, 1546. AE 35, 365ff., quoted in Lindberg, p. 140
- <sup>7</sup> Lindberg, p. 140.
- <sup>8</sup> Lindberg, p. 141.
- <sup>9</sup> Arndt, quoted in Lindberg, p. 144.
- <sup>10</sup> Spener, quoted in Lindberg, p. 145.
- <sup>11</sup> Lindberg, pp. 145-146.
- <sup>12</sup> quoted in Lindberg, p. 146.
- <sup>13</sup> Spener, trans. Theo. Tappert, *Pia Desideria*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press (1964), p. 117.
- <sup>14</sup> Lindberg, p. 149.
- <sup>15</sup> Lindberg, p. 151.
- <sup>16</sup> Lindberg, p. 152.
- <sup>17</sup> Lindberg, p. 165.
- <sup>18</sup> To be sure, the Formula of Concord distinguishes between the work of the Holy Spirit prior to conversion, in which "God changes stubborn and unwilling people into willing people" (FC, Epitome, III, 17, Tappert, p. 472) and after conversion, when "in the daily exercise of repentance, the reborn will of man is not idle but cooperates in all the works which the

Holy Spirit performs through us.” (Ibid.) Here there are two points to keep in mind when the Formula goes on to speak of human cooperation with the Holy Spirit in the works that follow conversion (FC, Epitome, III, 18, loc. cit.) First, good works must always be viewed in the context of “the daily exercise of repentance,” not a continual march toward perfection. Second, the works in which we cooperate with the Holy Spirit are themselves performed by the Holy Spirit through us. Thus we have in the Formula a perfect reflection of Holy Scripture: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12) And the Formula also perfectly reflects the teaching of the Small Catechism which defines Sanctification by the Holy Spirit christologically for the forgiveness of sins through the means of grace within the context of the *sanctam ecclesiam catholicam, sanctorum communionem (the holy Christian church, the communion of saints)*. “In which Christian church He [the Holy Spirit] daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He [the Holy Spirit] will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true. These are the true holy things for the holy people in Christ.”

<sup>19</sup> Lindberg, p. 171.

<sup>20</sup> Lindberg, pp. 172 f.

<sup>21</sup> Lindberg, p. 177.

<sup>22</sup> David Luecke, “The Emerging Lutheran Awakening Movement,” *Worship Innovations*, (Vol. 1, no. 2) Fall, 1996, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> David Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*, CPH (1988).

<sup>24</sup> David Luecke, *The Other Story of Lutherans at Worship*, Fellowship Ministries, Tempe, Arizona, (1995).

<sup>25</sup> Luecke, “Awakening...,” p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Luecke, p. 6.

# Luther and the Fanatics: The Gospel under Fire

## III: The Evangelical Threat to the Reformation

1. It would seem at first hearing that there must be some mistake in the title to this third lecture. If “evangelical” means gospel-centered, how can Evangelicalism be a threat to the gospel? Yet I would argue that that is precisely the case. This is why I began these lectures by ringing the alarm about the threat to the heart of the Lutheran confession in our day.

### *The Mission and the Ministry*

2. There’s an unfortunate tendency in Lutheranism today to split the church’s work into two distinct compartments: mission (outreach) and ministry (inreach). As far as I can see, the idea seems to be if you’re going to be concerned about theology, then by all means you ought to confine your concerns to ministry within the church. But when it comes to mission to those outside the church, then anything that works is fine.

3. Increasingly we pastors in the church are being asked to make choices. You can either be a theologian—one of those ivory tower boys who goes into great throes of ecstasy over the nuances of a Greek verb but doesn’t know the first thing about ministering to Grandma Schmidt in the nursing home—or you can be a pastor, who holds his people in his heart. You can either be theological or you can be real; you can either be liturgical or down to earth, but you certainly can’t be both. And today we are also told you can either be an evangelistic pastor—a mover and a shaker in a vibrant, alive and growing church; or you can be an ordinary pastor, that is, maintenance man in a dying church. But I contend that’s all nonsense, and before I make my plea for a Lutheran evangel I would like to make my plea for a Lutheran ministry. For if we take the Scriptures half as seriously as we say we do, we can see that the **evangelistic mission of the church** goes on in the context of **the pastoral ministry of the church**.



- 4. The only reason you and I are here this morning, for example, is
- because of the few words spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ just prior to His ascension to the Father's right hand and recorded by Matthew in a prominent position at the end of his gospel: "Go therefore and make disciples of every nation, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." The mission which Jesus instituted leads not down the sawdust trail but to the baptismal font. The **mission of the church**, in other words, *flows from* and *returns to* the **ministry of the church**. It is that mission of Christ's church which first brought every one of us to the baptismal font—where we first met Jesus—and it is within the fellowship of His church that Jesus continues to teach everything He laid down for us in His holy gospel. We can't afford to go on dividing the mission of the church from the ministry of the church without paying a price. For what we lose, I am afraid, will be nothing less than faithfulness to our Lord and His gospel. And we can't afford to go on dividing the evangelists of the church from the pastors of the church. If pastors are going to wear all the hats offered them by the hawkers of American church life today, they're going to run out of closet space; and they're going to run out of energy as well trying to be everybody's latest model of the successful pastor.
- 5. For the truth is, we have no evangelistic mission apart from our evangelical ministry. The Lutheran church is an evangelical church...that is, it centers in the gospel. It puts first things first. And the first thing is the proclamation of the glorious good news that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not counting their trespasses against them. That's the first thing, and that's the last thing as well. We are absolutely stuck in that rut. For Lutherans, it is impossible to speak about anything anywhere in Scripture without speaking about the cross. Our theology is a theology of the cross. With St. Paul, we have a one-track mind: "I was determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." This is the heart of the faith which is believed, taught, and confessed in our midst. And this cross-shaped gospel is the very power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...therefore the cross is at one and the same time the *content of the faith which is believed*, and it is

also the *power which calls forth the faith by which we believe.*

6. And that's where you and I come in. For *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. But how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?* One of Satan's favorite tactics is to divide and conquer. He's forever trying to divide the evangelistic mission of the church from its evangelical ministry—to make the whole thing over into a sales campaign. To make the pastor over into a used car salesman or an appliance store hawker. But the mission cannot be separated from the ministry of Word and Sacrament. We have no mission apart from this ministry. Nor is there any ministry apart from the mission of the One who said His disciples: *As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.* And for what purpose did he send them? Not to be traveling salesmen, but to be His *ministers*, that is, those through whom He would continue to pronounce His Word of Absolution to hearts locked in the bondage of sin: *If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven.*

7. The church has no mission apart from its ministry, for both flow from one and the same gospel. We have no tools to use other than the ones the Lord of the church has given us. These are the lowly tools of the gospel: the oral and visible Word of the gospel proclaimed and the sacraments administered. These tools have gone out of fashion, thanks to the vigorous propaganda campaign of the evangelicals. But these tools were handcrafted by our Lord himself. And they are the only tools we have. The church of the Augsburg Confession knows of no other way of doing evangelism. We have no mission apart from our ministry. Our church bluntly confesses: *To obtain such [saving] faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means he gives the Holy spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases in those who hear the Gospel.*

8. Therefore to be a pastor in a confessional Lutheran church—by definition—means to be in mission. And the mission is always one mission: to stand in the place of Jesus Christ, to proclaim His Gospel, to baptize into His death and Resurrection, to announce His Word of absolution, to distribute His body and blood given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. Our evangelistic and evangelical ministry

- rests not on gimmicks or techniques borrowed from psychology,
- sociology, from advertising or the entertainment industry, but squarely on the *evangel*, the external word of the gospel, which alone is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes.

9. This connection between the *mission* of the church and the *ministry* of the means of Grace is what shapes both Lutheran style and Lutheran substance.

### **The Evangelical Challenge**

10. This was not always my personal conviction. Any of you who have read the introduction to my book, *Sanctification: The Evangelical Challenge*, know that my instinct initially told me the opposite. I was convinced, in fact, that our Lutheran church was too hung up on its sacramental heritage to be of any practical use in leading people today to a vibrant faith in Jesus. I was tired of apologizing to my evangelical friends about the spiritual deadness of our church and I was looking for an answer. Like many other Lutheran pastors, I began experimenting with some of the styles of worship and methods of ministry popular among more rapidly growing churches. In fact, I set out researching the whole topic for my STM thesis. I wanted to discover what it was about today's so-called evangelical gospel that made it more attractive than the traditional Lutheran gospel...I anticipated that much of our theological heritage was ballast that needed to be tossed to save a sinking ship.

### **The Great Shift**

11. I now see that heritage not as ballast, but as treasure. But I'm getting ahead of myself. First I need to outline for you what I discovered as I took a serious look at the message of today's evangelical teachers. Now first off we must recognize that the word "evangelical" has gone through a dramatic transformation. Historically the word was used in Reformation times by those who were opposed to reform. They thought the reformers were too "evangelical"—that is, too much interested in the gospel, or evangel. Like the American revolutionists who proudly wore the derogatory name given them by the enemy, "Yankee Doodle," the reformers

seized the name “evangelical” and made it their own. Ever since, the words evangelical and Lutheran went hand in hand. To this day there is usually an “ev.” somewhere in the official name of most our congregations, because we are people of the gospel.

12. But something new has happened to that good old fashioned word in the middle of twentieth century America. The word “evangelical” as it is used in the public media has now come to refer exclusively to those Christians who are descendants of protestant fundamentalism.

13. I have explored the history of American evangelicalism elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Briefly speaking, it is fair to say that today’s evangelicalism is shot through and through with Arminianism—which spotlights the human will in conversion—and colored heavily by pietism and revivalism—both of which see little need for the Means of Grace. That much we understand. That goes with the territory. But there has been a radical shift within the framework of evangelicalism itself. Wells and Woodbridge in a book which has come to rank among the classics investigating the modern evangelical movement [titled *The Evangelicals—What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They are Changing*<sup>2</sup>] sum it up this way:

In the reformers’ formulation and well into the nineteenth century, evangelicalism was God’s way of salvation, not only in the offering of it to men but in the applying of it to their hearts as well. Last century, however, the evangel began to be seen more as the divine offer of grace and not so much the divine application of grace.<sup>3</sup>

### Cardinal Teachings of American Evangelicalism

14. Once you have made the gospel simply offer and not application as well, everything in theology has to shift. And sure enough, that is what I discovered as I looked into what today’s evangelical teachers are preaching. I found it in the writings of Chuck Swindoll, but you can hear it on any of the highly popular programs on so-called Christian radio and television. There are four tendencies in contemporary evangelical thinking, all of which are diametrically opposed to not only our Lutheran confessions, but also the teaching of the church catholic.

1. **The evangelical gospel is essentially mere historical information.** It is information about Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross, and it's absolutely true, and it's crucial information. But that's all it is. It's information. From there on, it's up to you. You must act on that information by an act of the will and accept it for it to be of any benefit to you.
2. Generally speaking, **evangelicals seem to view sin as a moral blight**, a glitch in the human character that can be overcome by making the right choices. Armed with the forgiveness of sins, we are now freed to make those right choices and improve our lot.
3. **Salvation** then becomes a **repair job rather than a rescue story**. And this repair job is a do-it-yourself job. Remember, it's up to *you* to make the right choices, we are told. Jesus died for you, and you can be forgiven *if* you make the right choice; if you reach out to him in faith under your own will. But that's only half the story; you complete your own repair job by making correct moral choices based on God's Law.
4. Hence the **Law becomes a friend to the Christian**. The Law prescribes the correct structure to life, and therefore leads the Christian onward to overcome sin and its effects. Sitting here in the isolated safety of a Lutheran conference we can see the blatant confusion of law and gospel that is going on, but the tragedy is that the American public today buys it.
15. The fact is, you see, our culture has sunk so low that the Law does seem like a friend. Our society has become so chaotic that structure and order seem like good news. Ten principles of Christian fatherhood come as a relief to the man who is sensing his family disintegrating in front of his very eyes. The five steps to victorious living seem like good news to a person who is locked in the bondage of addiction. The law provides a framework for the sanctified life, you see, and in the sanctified life people are looking for contact with the reality of God.

## The Central Issue: Contact With God

16. This is the issue uppermost in the mind of Americans in the last decade of the 20th Century. Pagan and Christian alike, we're all looking for some contact with God in a world that seems to have gone crazy. Everybody seems to be asking the same question: *Where in the world is God?* Having lost confidence in physical reality, our world is desperately longing for access to spiritual reality.

17. And here the evangelical gospel has found a hungry and a ready market. "God is to be found inside of you" is the general idea. Forget the historic concepts of the church and of the means of grace. You will know the reality of God's power once you reach out and accept Jesus—and then, when your life begins to change, you will know for sure God is real. You will remember that this was also a prime theme within Pietism: that subjective experiences connected with rebirth and renewal are the proof for the reality of God and demonstrable evidence of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

18. Now Americans are a pragmatic people. The first question most people ask is not "Is it true?" but "will it work?" And this helps us to understand why the evangelical gospel is such a hot item today. The whole thrust of evangelical thought is in the direction of sanctification. And it is a theology of sanctification that appears to work. It is one which produces results. And people want results.

### **A Lutheran Sellout?**

19. So desperately do people want results that many Lutherans are willing to put our confessional birthright up for sale in order to get the attractive evangelical pottage.

20. During the Missouri Synod's controversy in the 60's and 70's over the doctrine of Holy Scripture arguments raged hot and heavy in what was termed the "Battle for the Bible." The late Dr. Martin Scharlemann, a prominent figure in that battle, wrote the following shortly before his death:

Our Lutheran heritage is threatened not only from the left, by historical critics and their followers, but also from the right, by Fundamentalism [Evangelicalism]. In fact, at the moment, the latter is, by all odds, the more menacing be-

- cause so much of it sounds very biblical, and also because so many of our fellow conservative Lutherans hear fundamental preachers and read “Evangelical” literature with Lutheran eyes and ears, so to speak, and thus feel at home in the material.<sup>5</sup>

21. Dr. Scharlemann’s words have turned out to be tragically prophetic. Having survived an attack from the left, our church now is undergoing an attack from the right which threatens our very lifeblood. But the battle rages far beyond our own Synod. These issues transcend Synodical and even confessional boundaries, as I shall later show.

### Toward a Lutheran Ethos

22. What we need in the face of the present crisis, I contend, is not simply doctrinal purity, but a genuine effort at developing a Lutheran *ethos*, or form of piety. It is no secret that Lutherans get a bit skittish when you bring up piety and sanctification. But the price we pay is that our people, for that matter many of our pastors, view the faith as essentially abstract information. We have left the field of sanctification wide open, and consequently evangelicals seem to have the only game going in sanctification.

23. It’s time for a response to this challenge. For we have a treasure to offer those searching for a meaningful life of sanctification...a Christian life defined, shaped, and empowered not by the human will and outward regulations, but by the living Christ Himself in His Word and Sacrament. A Lutheran view of the sanctified life has three components:

- its foundation is incarnational
- its focus is sacramental
- its shape is liturgical.

All three components cannot be understood apart from a fundamental grasp of the New Testament gospel, which deliberately and intentionally presents itself as the very “Mystery of God.”

## Mystery

24. As Dr. Krauth challenged his fellow Lutherans over a hundred years ago to uncover their own heritage, we need to rediscover what it means to be Lutheran, which, if we really believe what we say we do, is just another way of rediscovering what it means to be Christian.

25. And there's only one place to begin recovering what it means to be Christian, and that's with the gospel itself. And square one of coming to grips with the gospel means coming to grips with one New Testament word: *mysterion*, mystery.

26. Now that sounds mystical. No, it's not, if by "mystical" you mean the magical or the psychic. Yes, it is mystical if you mean metaphysical. For the gospel we preach is by apostolic designation called the *mystery of God*, and whether we like it or not, ministers of the gospel are to be regarded as *stewards of the mysteries of God*.<sup>6</sup> And whatever else this may mean, at bare minimum that means that the word and sacraments which we administer are genuine links with God and the new life that is be found in Him. They are, as one of my computer-oriented members called them "tangible interfaces with eternity."

27. And people today are looking for an interface with the spiritual. How else do you explain the new age movement or the tremendous interest in the occult apart from a desperate searching for a reality beyond what can be seen, touched, and heard with the senses?

28. In the face of this spiritist climate we live in it's high time this apostolic designation ("stewards of the mysteries of God") become something more than just a phrase from the Bible; that we devise a pastoral style and practice genuinely centered around the mysteries of God. It's time we start to act a bit mystical; to behave in the chancel as though we were a celebrant at the heavenly feast instead of the master of ceremonies at a civic club luncheon. It's time to preach as though we were heralds of the King rather than guests on a talk show. It's time we teach like those explaining spiritual truths to spiritual people instead of someone expounding on ancient history. Our sermons had better be something far more than entertainment or modern pop psychology. The Real Presence is not just a doctrine, you see. It is a *reality*. Jesus actually meant that He intends to be



- present in His church where His Word is proclaimed and His
- Sacrament administered. These are the mysteries of God. And anyone called to the pastoral office is privileged to be stewards of those mysteries!

### Reality

29. This is a prime difference between us and the evangelicals. We do not merely teach principles, but we proclaim a reality; the reality of Christ who lives out His life in His people through His Word and Sacrament. The real presence is not just a doctrine, it is a reality...and a reality not confined to the Holy Supper, I might add. We do not merely teach *about Christ*; we *teach Christ*. And this has dramatic implications for the Christian life. For example, in warning the Ephesians against sexual immorality, the apostle did not talk about rules for Christian conduct. He did not list six principles for Christian sexuality He simply said: "You did not so learn Christ." The Christian pastor does not teach *about* Christ or His will for people as though He were Confucius or Buddha-that is, some departed hero who was a great moralist. The pastor does not teach *about Christ*; he *teaches Christ*. This is not merely semantics. This has to do with our fundamental view of the gospel and the means of grace. God actually comes to us in the oral and the visible word of His Gospel; that is, through preaching, absolution, and the sacraments.

### ***The Incarnational Foundation of the Christian Life***

30. We need, I contend, to recover what it means to live a sacramental Christian life. And a Lutheran understanding of the Christian life is sacramental because above all else we are incarnational. You can't begin to talk about the reality in, with, and under the sacraments apart from the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God in real human flesh.

### The Reformed Bias: Non Capax

31. This is why sacramental language is foreign language to American Protestant Christendom at the end of the twentieth Century. For the new evangelicalism cannot break free of its reformed bias.

The reformed mind, you will remember, has been pretty good at talking about the cross, but it has always balked at the full implications of the Incarnation of the Son of God in human flesh. The finite is not capable of taking on the infinite, they insist. The end result of this thinking, of course, is that the cross is robbed of its power. Lutherans, on the other hand, have preferred to bend the knee at this mystery: namely that in Christ all the fullness of the godhead was pleased to dwell bodily. It is this personal union of the divine and human natures within Jesus Christ that helps us to grasp how God still operates with His spiritual power in this physical world of ours in real, although hidden, ways. The real presence of the incarnate Lord within His church is fundamental at the center of our Lutheran confession of the gospel. This incarnational foundation is, in turn, fundamental to understanding our sacramental theology and piety.

### The Baptismal Realities

32. The connection goes something like this: Jesus brought us spiritual life by the death and resurrection of His physical body. The water of our baptism plunges us into that death and resurrection of His; and the bread and wine of the Holy Supper bring us His incarnate body and blood, and with them all the benefits that they have secured for us.

33. We believe, with St. Paul, that the key to living the Christian life hinges around our Baptism. *Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*, he writes.<sup>7</sup> There our sinful nature was put to death with Jesus. And there in Baptism we were raised together with Him in newness of life.

34. This is the doctrine of Baptism we all have paid lip service to over the years. But we haven't helped our people see this reality. No wonder, then, that Lutherans are leaving their churches in droves to join churches that seem to be more alive and vibrant!

### Baptism and Christian Renewal

35. Lutherans, after all, have a Christian renewal to teach too. But it is a renewal more radical and far-reaching than your typical born again or charismatic experience. After all, you can't get more radical

- than the cross and death. And the renewal we teach is nothing less
- than that, a daily search and destroy mission, as the old adam in us is rooted out and killed by contrition and repentance.

36. We believe in conversion experiences, too. But Lutheran conversion is more radical, for it goes on daily. And it is more painful. For it involves the deliberate execution of our sinful nature, which always complains that it's too young to die! But the life that emerges from the death of sin is always the life of the new man, Jesus Christ, who lavishly bestows His own risen life in exchange for the living death that is at the heart of every sinner.

### Confession and Absolution

37. Confession, you see, is not merely a preparation for communion. Essentially, it is baptismal renewal. And it is a key component in the life of sanctification. The Augsburg Confession and its Apology make it clear that private confession and absolution were a part of everyday church life. Pietism and revivalism have almost killed the practice in our midst. The price we pay are the wounded consciences of the faithful, the seared consciences of the erring, and a general apathy that has descended over Lutheran church life like a funeral pall. It is not for nothing that our confessions identify Holy Absolution as the third sacrament—for it is the bridge between our daily life under the cross and the renewal we have been given in our Baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. That is why Luther could make this rather bold assertion in his Large Catechism: *When I urge you to go to confession I am simply urging you to be a Christian.*<sup>8</sup> In the more familiar words of the Small Catechism he shows the intimate link between Baptism and Confession in daily Christian life: “Baptism indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

38. This is what catechesis is all about; helping people to see who they are as baptized children of God and how their lives are shaped by Jesus Christ Himself in the drowning of the Old Adam and the resurrection of the new man. This is genuine Christian formation. This the only legitimate shape for the Christian life.

39. Evangelicals have been very good at prescribing a shape to the Christian life, too. They have fostered what someone has called “a catechesis of lifestyle.” The evangelical attraction is its ready-made, off the shelf, ready-to-wear brand of Christian living. They have prescriptions for everything, ranging from the kind of music you listen to to the way you pray. It’s all laid out for you. But it is a do it yourself Christianity. It is a renewal imposed by one’s own will, and it is from the outside in. It is shaped not by the gospel, but by the law. It is motivated not from the Word and sacraments, but from the heart of the believer, which is a rather anemic motivating power.

#### External Power, Internal Renewal

40. Genuine Christian renewal is a renewal from the inside out. It stems from God Himself, who works in us constantly so that we might unceasingly be at work for Him. Our daily renewal is shaped by the dramatic renewal God worked in us at our Baptism. And our baptismal renewal continues day in and day out. God is at work in us, rooting out sin and dealing it to death, bestowing His New life in us—which is the Life of Jesus Christ. This Living Lord Himself, we confess with St. Paul, is not simply our justification, but also our sanctification as well as our redemption. [1 Corinthians 1:30]

#### The Shape of the Christian Life and the Means of Grace

41. And so there is a certain shape to the Christian life. An *ethos*, a piety defined by the Gospel itself. There is a regular cycle to the Christian life, a kind of ebb and flow centering around the baptismal font and the altar, which is at the heart of gospel proclamation and the Christian life. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession makes the following observation about life in the churches of the Reformation: *...it is certain that most people in our churches use the sacraments, **absolution and the Lord’s Supper**, many times in a year. Our clergy instruct the people about the worth and fruits of the sacraments in such a way as to invite them to use the sacraments often.* [Apol. XI (3)] I’m not sure that could be said any longer. To call ourselves “Lutheran” would appear to be deceptive advertising—at least when you look around you at the sacramental piety of actual parish life.

• 42. And we've paid a heavy price for this neglect. Our people—and for that matter many of our pastors as well—have begun to long for greener pastures. We have abandoned our treasured theology of the cross and sought out the attractive theologies of glory on the religious market today. We have turned our back on the hidden realities of God's means of grace and begun to seek out a visible route to God—in today's experiential do-it-yourself Christianity of the evangelical world.

43. We have a great treasure in our sacramental heritage that needs to be unearthed and put to work in the whole gamut of the Christian life: from evangelism through Christian formation. This is not a matter of parochial jealousy; this is a matter of faithfulness to the gospel itself. As sad as it is to say it, we must say it: today's evangelical church lost its heart. It has wandered away from the heart of the evangel...which is the reality of the presence of the living Christ in His church through Word and Sacrament. The Jerry Fallwells and the Chuck Swindolls of this world indeed have a form of godliness, but they deny the power of it; the power for the Christian life in their teaching boils down to the best efforts of the human will, not the reality of the presence of Christ in His Word and Sacrament. This is a message woefully lacking in the Christian arena today.

44. Therefore we have something to offer not only our own people, but the whole evangelical church as well. Simply put, it is this: the Christian life is a sacramental life, pure and simple. The Christian life flows out of the realities God Himself accomplishes in us in washing, word, and meal—the presence of the living Christ in His objective Gospel through the oral Word and the visible Word. This is where God is to be found, and this is where He comes to feed and empower us.

45. And if the Christian life is first of all incarnational and therefore secondly sacramental, then we must also be bold enough to go the third step and say that the Christian life is also a liturgical life.

### The Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life

46. I contend that one of the reasons we are regarded as “also rans” in the contemporary church scene is not because we are burdened

with an outdated, culturally foreign liturgy, but because we haven't allowed the liturgy to speak to our situation. Our problem is not that we have used the liturgy too much, but that we haven't used the liturgy enough. I believe that a recovery of what it means to be Lutheran will also involve a revitalization of the liturgy—and in three distinct, but overlapping areas of the Christian life: in **public worship**, in **private devotion**, and in **daily vocation**.

Recovering the Public liturgy:

The Presence of Christ among His People

47. The revitalization of our worship life hinges around an appreciation of the sacramental realities. And this, quite frankly, we simply don't have in most of our churches. It's not surprising that vast numbers of our Lutheran Christians find liturgical worship boring. Boredom, after all, is the experience of constantly being forced to pay attention to insignificant things. And by our manner and our example, we have for generations told our people that liturgical worship is insignificant. If our people have every reason to believe that liturgy is only an outdated relic from the past, then it's no wonder they find it boring!

48. But with proper catechesis, liturgical worship is everything but boring. There was nothing boring, for example, about Jesus inviting himself to dine with Zacchaeus. The presence of Jesus at table in the house of Zacchaeus transformed his life.

49. So too, the presence of Jesus in His word and supper still has life-transforming power. What is happening in public worship is no different than what happened at the house of Zacchaeus: Jesus Christ teaches and sits at table with His people. The more clearly we can help our people see this hidden reality, the more dramatic will be their appreciation for our way of liturgical worship.

50. The Christian life is by definition a sacramental life. And that means that the Christian life is also a liturgical life. The Divine Service is a two-way street. Christ is present with His church in the liturgy with His Word and Sacrament, and they respond to Him in the liturgy with their prayer and praise. Public worship is a vital component in catechesis, for it is in the Divine Service that Christian formation continues throughout all of life. There God goes to work

- on us. There Christ is present in His Word and Sacrament. And
- where Christ is present, things happen. That means that one of the prime ingredients in catechesis of young people is to prepare them for effective life-long devotion to the church's liturgy. In the liturgy Christian formation continues all throughout the Christian's adult life. It is the most effective and efficient way of doing pastoral care, for it is the most effective and efficient way of reaching the majority of our people consistently week after week with the life-changing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

51. The *koinonia* of early Christians, we read in the book of Acts, was no spontaneous thing, but developed from *devotion* not only to the apostles' doctrine, but also to the Eucharist ("the breaking of bread") and to historic worship forms ("the *prayers*," as Luke refers to them in the plural). One of the most important things we can do for the life-long spiritual health of the Christian is to help him or her appreciate the public liturgy of the church.

52. Now when you mention liturgy today, you are immediately embroiled in controversy. It is a controversy all the more frustrating because it is so hard to nail down. In the "good old days" a generation ago theological controversies were simpler and more straight forward. Then you could line up on one side or another behind the champions of your cause and everybody knew where you stood. Biblical innerrancy was fairly easy to comprehend once it got down to brass tax: were Adam and Eve historical people or not?

53. Some would suggest that our theological confusion today is a non-issue today; that everything boils down to a simple matter of style and taste and that we are all agreed on the substance of the gospel we believe, teach, and confess. I am not that optimistic, and I hope you're beginning to understand why I would say that.

54. At any rate, while there may be as many opinions on what's bugging the church today as there are participants here, there is one thing I'm pretty sure we'd all agree on: The liturgy seems to be the place where the battle is being joined. Many people are pointing their finger at the liturgy as the source of lethargy in our spirituality and impotence in our mission. If we could just get rid of our outdated traditional way of worship we could really be going and growing, is the contention. As recent surveys indicate, there is a great deal of

confusion among Lutherans as to what in the world is supposed to happen in our churches on Sunday morning. A radical departure from the historic liturgy appears to be waiting in the wings; in some places in the church its already center stage! And so no matter what your opinion is on church growth or synodical politics, I'm sure you would agree with me that the what, the why, and the how of Sunday morning worship is up for grabs these days.

55. That is why in this last section of my presentation I would like to direct my efforts at toward recovering a Lutheran liturgical theology.

### **1. THE LITURGY IS SOURCE OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST.**

56. The Liturgy is the source of the church's life because it is the setting in which the church is created and nourished by the life-giving power of the Triune God.

57. *By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth, the Psalmist writes. [Psalm 33:6] And The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. [Genesis 2:7]* All of life rests upon the generating power of the Word of God and His Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life.

58. As it was in the beginning, so it is now. As the Word of God was the source and the power of life in the first creation, so the Word of God is the source and power of life in the new creation by water and the Spirit. The eternal Word from the Father, through whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made that has been made, this very same Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, the only Son from the Father.

59. And that means we cannot discuss the liturgy apart from the incarnation of the Son of God in human flesh. The incarnation is the sobering reminder that all talk about "invitational, entertaining, uplifting worship" must begin somewhere else. All discussion of marketing the church to the peculiar tastes of American baby boomers at the end of the twentieth century must begin with this solemn first century assumption: *You were dead in your trespasses and sins [Ephesians 2:1]. But the people walking in darkness have*



- *seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death*
- *a light has dawned.* [Isaiah 9:2]

60. And so all liturgy begins at the beginning, with the astounding great good news that God has breathed His Life into this world of death in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who is our life. He is the source and origin of all life. Not only in the creation of the cosmos, but also in the new creation of His holy bride, the church. As Eve was built from the very flesh of Adam, so the Church originates in the incarnate flesh of the Son of God. *In him was life, and that life was the light of men.* [John 1:4] From the side of the second life-giving Adam poured forth blood and water in his death on the cross. But that very death is the source of life for the church in every age. *For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ...And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* [1 John 5:7-8, 11]

61. The Incarnate Word of God is thus the focus of all worship and liturgy. He Himself is our life, and in the liturgy the Lord of Life comes to our dying world to dispense His life hidden under the channels of washing, proclamation, and meal. That He should condescend to use such lowly channels is as amazing to us as to those who first came with hurried steps to gaze upon God lying in the hay. Yet each Lord's day this same God born in Bethlehem, crucified, risen, and ascended to the Father's right hand lies hidden in the oral and tangible Word of His Gospel as surely as He once lay in lowly infant disguise in the manger. And in the swaddling clothes of His Word and Sacrament our risen and ascended Lord continues to breathe life to all His people in every age.

62. No, the Liturgy is not a means of Grace. But the Liturgy is the framework in which the church serves as stewardess of the means of Grace, serving up heaping portions of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation earned by her glorious Lord. "She is His new creation by water and the Word." The church has no life apart from that Word. And the church has no life to impart to this dying world apart from that life-giving Word of God.

63. God has so arranged it in His church that the Word of His Gospel comes in both oral and visible forms. And when we begin to speak

of forms, we are immediately speaking of liturgy. The church cannot baptize, preach, or eat the Lord's Supper without liturgy. The question is not whether there will be a liturgical life in the church; the question is what kind of liturgical life will it be?

64. I have a radical proposal. I would suggest that we begin defining the "how" of liturgy by the "what" of the Gospel. The liturgy is the church's life first of all because Christ is the *source* of the Church's life. In the liturgy the Lord of Life comes in the means of His grace to breathe life to His church. And the church's life *is* Jesus Christ!

## **2. THE LITURGY IS THE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST.**

65. The church has no life apart from Jesus Christ, who comes to impart His life to us in the means of Grace. The liturgy is the church's breath. In so far as the liturgy is the setting in which the precious gemstones of Word and Sacrament are mounted, the liturgy breathes the life of the gospel into the body of the church. In the liturgy the church breathes deeply of the life-giving breath of the Spirit. But in the liturgy the church also exhales; that is, she offers up to God her prayers.

66. Prayer is to faith as breath is to lungs. There can be no breath without lungs. But there can be lungs without breath-and they are dead lungs. True prayer cannot exist without faith, but faith that does not pray is dying. In other words, when the Giver of all life opens our mouth to receive the good gifts of His Holy Word, out of that same mouth flow petitions and praises. Thus the psalmist can write: *O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.* It is this inhale/exhale posture of the church in her worship that lies behind the genitive in the German word *Gottesdienst*; that is, the liturgy is God's service to the church in His Word and Sacrament and the service given to God by the church in her worship as well. In the liturgy the church both stands in the presence of God to receive His good gifts and she also responds to him in prayer and praise.

67. The church has no life apart from Christ. Her motto is the same as Paul's: *For me to live is Christ.* The liturgy is the church's life first of all because it is in the liturgy that the living Lord comes to

- meet His holy Bride. The liturgy is the church's life also because in
- the liturgy the Bride gives herself to her heavenly husband. The liturgy has no life of itself, but only because it is filled with the life of Jesus Christ in His Word and Sacrament. The liturgy is both the *source* and shape of the church's life. It is the place where she draws her breath and where she gives it back again. It is where she inhales the life-giving power of the Spirit and where she exhales in the power of the Spirit. It is where she receives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in the means of Grace and where she offers her sacrifice of worship *to* the Father *through* the Son *in* the Spirit.

Style and Substance: Real Presence and Sunday Morning

68. The Lord of the church has given us the gospel and sacraments; He has not given us one prescribed liturgy. Before He ascended on high He laid down the pattern that is to be in place until the end of time. It is by baptizing and teaching that disciples are made; it is by preaching and eating that they are fed and nourished and it is in that Holy Supper that they proclaim His death until He comes.

69. Therefore all talk of liturgy apart from the Word of God and the sacraments is just talk. All discussion of liturgical form, historic vestments, liturgical gesture, and aesthetically pleasing music is idolatry apart from Him who is our life. This kind of liturgical idolatry is roundly condemned by our Lutheran fathers:

Scripture calls traditions "doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1) when someone teaches that religious rites are helpful in gaining grace and the forgiveness of sins. This obscures the Gospel, the blessing of Christ, and righteousness of faith.<sup>9</sup>

70. Yet in the very same article our fathers were bold to say that the liturgy was held in higher esteem among them than in the church of Rome:

We can truthfully claim that in our churches the public liturgy is more decent than in theirs, and if you look at it correctly we are more faithful to the canons than our opponents are. ....Every Lord's Day many in our circles use the Lord's Supper, but only after they have been instructed, examined, and absolved. The children chant the Psalms in

order to learn; the people sing, too, in order to learn or to worship.<sup>10</sup>

71. The Lutheran church in other words, was genuinely evangelical in its gospel—and at the same time more catholic in its liturgy than the Roman church. Now we must ask what was it that constituted evangelical catholicism—why were certain liturgical practices acceptable and others not? What made the difference in the reformers' minds between the proper use of the historic liturgy and its abuse in the Roman rite of the day—a liturgy which Luther scornfully called “the pope’s bag of magic tricks?”<sup>11</sup> The answer lies in the Word of God incarnate, who is the proper focus of all worship and discussion of the divine liturgy. *The chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel*, we read in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession.<sup>12</sup> The Gospel and the Sacraments give shape to the liturgy which is the shape of the Church’s life in Christ.

72. Our Lutheran Confessions insist that the only way to build the church is by the hand-crafted tools entrusted to the church through her evangelical ministry:

To obtain such (saving) faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.<sup>13</sup>

73. It is the evangelical ministry of the church that provides for her catholicity: having the ministry of the gospel and sacraments, *satis est*—that’s enough.

it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.<sup>14</sup>

74. The argument today is that since liturgy is *adiaphora*, we are free to use any form of worship that will work. But what works these days—I would argue—is not the gospel and the sacraments. What works in America today is what has always worked in

- America—a heavy dose of sentimentality laced with subjectivism
- packaged in a do it yourself framework. This is the evangelical style which, it is claimed, can suit Lutheran substance just as well as its own.

### Evangelical Self-critique

75. But here some of our evangelical neighbors are doing us a favor. Men such as Robert Patterson, former Associate Director of the National Association of Evangelicals, and Michael Horton, who edited *The Agony of Deceit*, an expose of American Televangelism are publicly calling the movement to account. Michael Horton has publicly charged his fellow evangelicals with capitulating to the spirit of the age and compromising the gospel in the name of effective evangelism. Evangelical churches, he argues, have fallen prey to the American heresy of individualism, pragmatism, consumerism, the pursuit of pleasure, the subjectivity of emotion, relativism, and alienation. “We are not selling a product to a consumer,” he reminds us, “but proclaiming a Savior to a sinner.”

Commercial evangelism may bring attention to us, but the evangelical revival we have been hearing about is just another movement. Wait until the bright lights burn out and the superchurches are turned into warehouses as the next generation grows more cynical than it would otherwise have been. What happens when the churches can no longer keep up with the technological sophistication of the entertainment industry? In short, what happens when the loaves and fishes run out?<sup>15</sup>

76. Even more graphically Horton accuses his fellow evangelicals of emasculating the gospel in an attempt to “sell” it to the American public:

Our emotional, sentimental religion has knocked the objective, rational foundation from under American Christianity, thereby undermining ultimate meaning for civilization. We have neutered God!<sup>16</sup>

77. Os Guinness, in his provocative critique of the mega-church movement entitled *Dining with the Devil*, observes that the good

news of Jesus Christ has become only a means to an end in today's evangelical circles, not the end in itself. He criticizes what he calls the "malling of religion"—the creation of "grand cathedrals of consumption one-stop church complexes premised on controlled environments with multiple-option boutiques catering to diverse needs."<sup>17</sup> "Nothing more poignant could be said of this generation," he writes, "than that our church planting was illustrious but we lost our first love."<sup>18</sup> Recently Professor Guinness joined Dr. Horton and a large group of evangelical theologians in what has become known as "The Cambridge Declaration" of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Their goal is to call the contemporary American church to repentance for its compromise of the Gospel and capitulation to consumerism and post-modernism. The emergence of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals is one of the brightest spots on what is otherwise a rather depressing landscape in the church in America.

### The Gospel under Fire

78. In conclusion, I am suggesting a response to American evangelicalism that gets beyond polemics or even apologetics to genuine confession. We must have the courage in our own era to stand with Luther at Worms and say "Here I stand"—or to stand with the Princes and estates of the realm at Augsburg and say "This we believe, teach, and confess."

79. For what passes for Gospel in America in our day is subjective, sentimental, individualistic,—and we might add decidedly anti-incarnational and anti-sacramental message is what passes for Gospel in America today. This is the substance of evangelicalism. At best, I would suggest, it is a parody of the gospel. At worst, it is *another gospel*—it is not the faith once delivered to the saints.

80. Now there will be some who will say all of this is an illustration of the kind of ivory tower theology I criticized when I began. ...that we don't have time for such fine theological distinctions today, while our culture is under siege and the fabric of our society is crumbling before our very eyes.

- 81. And it's true; Christians do live under siege in America today.
- At first, it seems like the matters I have been talking about are trivial in comparison....that the sacraments and liturgy are trappings we can do without since we live on a battleground. It's tempting to lay aside these distinctly Lutheran ideas and concentrate instead on patching people's lives together.

82. Lots of band-aids are needed these days, it is true. Counseling and how-to seminars have their place in the ministry. But these are, after all, only band-aids. In the long haul pastors are going to run out of band-aids long before the Body of Christ runs out of wounds. The Body finds its only genuine healing and its only real nourishment in the historic means of pastoral care: in preaching, absolution, and in the sacraments.

83. It shouldn't surprise us that people aren't asking for these things today. They are, after all, forgotten realities for most of our people. But these are God's tools for His church, and they are the only lasting cure for people who live in the moral pollution and social decay of our age. A general under fire doesn't survey his army for the weapons they would like, but he gives them the weapons he knows they will need for the battle.

84. And so we have come full circle. From 16th Century Fanatics through 17th Century Pietists to 20th Century Evangelicals, we see that the gospel has come under fire in every era from those who seek to divide the internal spiritual life from the external Word of the Gospel. This does not surprise us. For so it was in the church's infancy, so it is now, and so it shall ever be until our Lord comes again in glory.

85. This is a call to watchfulness and faithfulness for the saints and especially for their shepherds. Yet we do not lose heart nor do we despair. Luther reminds us whose we are and whom we serve:

It is not we who are able to maintain the church, nor could those before us, nor will those who come after us be able to do so. It is only He who says, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." It has always been He, is He now, and will always be He.<sup>19</sup>

86. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is our Life, and in Him we live both now and eternally. Our consolation in this present distress and our sure confidence for an uncertain future remains this: that we, too, are among those for whom Jesus Christ prayed: "Holy Father, keep those whom you have given me in your name. Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth." Thus He prayed, and so we pray:

*Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy. Amen.*

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Senkbeil, Harold, *Sanctification: Christ in Action, evangelical challenge and lutheran response*, Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House (1989), pp. 19-52.

<sup>2</sup> Wells, Wm., and Woodbridge, John, eds., *The Evangelicals—What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They are Changing*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon, (1975).

<sup>3</sup> loc. cit., p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> See my discussion of August Hermann Francke, Lecture II in this series, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Scharlemann, *Affirm*, 9:5, Feb./March 1982, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> I Corinthians 4:1.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 6:3.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, Large Catechism: Confession (30), Tappert, p. 460.

<sup>9</sup> Apology to the Augsburg Confession, XIV(5), Tappert, p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> loc. cit., [XIV(39-40)] p. 220.

<sup>11</sup> Smalcald Articles XV (4), Tappert, p. 316.

<sup>12</sup> Apology to the Augsburg Confession, XV(42), Tappert, p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> Augsburg Confession V(1-3), Tappert, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> loc. cit., VII(2), p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Horton, *Made in America*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991, p. 71

<sup>16</sup> Horton, p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993, p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Guinness, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> quoted in Hermann Sasse, Norman Nagel, ed., *We Confess the Church*, Vol. 3, St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1986, p. 15.



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Mark U. Edwards, Jr., "After the Revolution" *Christian History*, Issue 39 (XII:3), pp. 8-13.

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David Luecke, "The Emerging Lutheran Awakening Movement," *Worship Innovations*, (1:2) Fall, 1996, pp. 4-6.

# ***Review of*** **Luther and the Fanatics: The Gospel Under Fire**

**By Rev. Harold Senkbeil**

*Presented by Lyle Lange at the Bethany Reformation Lectures*

I wish to thank Rev. Senkbeil for the essays which he delivered to us at these Reformation Lectures. He need not apologize for being “only a pastor.” Through these essays he demonstrated a thorough grasp of the material and the ability to give us a connected view of fanaticism as it developed from the Reformation era to the present time. Though he may not have led us to agonize over the nuance of a Greek verb form, nor transported us to the “realms of ecstasy” by revealing some tidbit of historical information that no one else had as yet uncovered, he served us well by the material he presented. His material was clear, concise, and free of confusing scholarly jargon. The essays served to edify the scholar at the same time they explained in a clear way to Grandma Schmidt the essence of fanaticism. His presentation is a reminder to us all that scholarship is a tool to be used in the service of the gospel and the care of souls. For your shepherd’s heart and your scholarship in the interest of the care of souls, I commend you.

I also appreciated the tone of the essays. The essayist gave evidence of a great deal of “enthusiasm” and conviction in dealing with his topic. This is appropriate. The Reformation is not Hamlet pondering, “To be, or not to be: that is the question” (Act III, Scene 1). It is Luther at Worms, stating with conviction and the quiet confidence of faith, “*Hier steh’ ich. [Ich kann nicht anders.] Gott helfe mir! Amen* (Here I stand. [I can not do otherwise.] God help me! Amen.) (Schaff, Vol. 7, 305). The Reformation is about the gospel. It is about people who devoted their lives to the service of Christ and who gave up their lives for his sake. We will not be unmoved by

God's acts in history through which he restored, to us, that most precious treasure, the gospel.

I also appreciated the relevance of the essays. Pastor Senkbeil did not discuss academic abstractions which have no relevance for our daily lives. His call to arms reminds us of Jude's encouragement "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). We dare not be lulled into a state of complacency. The fight for the faith lies before us. Evangelicalism, today, poses a critical threat to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The question is, do we recognize this threat? Not too long ago, I was discussing Promise Keepers with someone who remarked, "They may not have fellowship straight, but at least they preach the law and the gospel." The question is, "Do they?" A careful study of their theology leads one to the conviction that it is by a "happy inconsistency" that the gospel may be found in their theological system. The essence of evangelicalism is legalism, and we do well to heed Rev. Senkbeil's admonition to be aware of its threat to the gospel.

With regard to the content of the essays, Rev. Senkbeil clearly demonstrated the connection between Karlstadt, Muentzer, Pietism, and Evangelicalism. It may also be demonstrated that the roots of Evangelicalism reach back not only to Orlamuende and Zwickau, but also to Zurich and Geneva. Concerning Zwingli, F. E. Mayer wrote, "In his opposition to the superstitious view that God deals with men through relics, he (Zwingli) went to the other extreme, for it was here (during his ministry at Maria-Einsiedeln, a popular shrine of relic worship) that he first conceived his "enthusiastic" principle expressed in his theological axiom, 'The Holy Spirit requires no vehicle'" (Mayer, 202). "According to Zwingli, the separation between the Creator and the creature is such that God does not employ means of grace. Nor are means necessary, for the believer receives all spiritual blessings immediately through divinely wrought faith. The Christian's assurance does not rest on creaturely means, such as Word and sacraments, but solely on faith itself, which is implanted directly by the Holy Spirit" (Mayer, p. 204). Zwingli's view that the Holy Spirit worked directly also led him to entertain the hope that heathen such as Socrates, Plato, Cato, Scipio, and Seneca would be in heaven.

- Concerning Calvin's view of the Word, Mayer observed, "Calvin not only distinguishes between the Word and the Spirit, but separates the two. True, Calvin never went as far as Zwingli...He definitely maintained that ordinarily the Spirit employs the Word in the calling of the elect and that the Spirit is present conjointly with the proclamation of the Word. He made a careful distinction between the outward Gospel, which can be resisted, and the Spirit which comes immediately and irresistibly to the elect" (Mayer, 217).

Rev. Senkbeil pointed out that for the fanatics, the primary emphasis was on the Christian life rather than on Christ's life, death, and resurrection for us. He quoted Lindberg as follows, "The fundamental question for Karlstadt was not 'How do I find a gracious God?' but rather 'How can man fulfill the law of God?'" (I,8). Calvin's concern was not that much different. Mayer observes, "The central and controlling thought of Calvinism is...What must I do for the greater glory of God...Lutheran theology asks, What has God done for my salvation? and finds the answer in the Scriptural revelation of God's grace. Calvin asks: What must I do to the greater glory of God? and sees in the Bible the Sovereign's will for man's conduct and belief...Thus the Bible is made the code for right belief" (Mayer, 206-208).

The essayist noted the claim of Muentzer and Karlstadt that God directly and immediately intervened in the human heart apart from his instituted means, a theme repeated in Pietism and Evangelicalism of today. As heirs of the Reformation, we do well to remember Luther's reply in his treatise *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments*. He wrote, "Now when God sends forth his holy gospel he deals with us in a twofold manner, first outwardly, then inwardly. Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through material signs, that is, baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly he deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts. But whatever their measure or order the outward factors should and must precede. The inward experience follows and is effected by the outward. God has determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward. For he wants to give no one the Spirit or faith outside of the outward Word and sign instituted by him...Observe carefully, my brother,

this order, for everything depends on it. However cleverly this factious spirit makes believe that he regards highly the Word and Spirit of God and declaims passionately about love and zeal for the truth and righteousness of God, he nevertheless has as his purpose to reverse this order. His insolence leads him to set up a contrary order and, as we have said, seeks to subordinate God's outward order to an inner spiritual one" (AE 40, 146-147).

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther wrote, "We must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts—that is, from the spiritualists who boast they possess the Spirit without and before the Word and who therefore judge, interpret and twist the Scriptures or spoken Word according to their pleasure...Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil" (SA, III, VIII, 3, 10, Tappert).

In his third essay on Evangelicalism, the essayist noted the historical setting which encourages people to accept Evangelicalism's law-driven theology. He wrote, "Our society has become so chaotic that structure and order seem like good news" (III, 7). We do live in a chaotic society. We are reaping what we have sown. Dr. Spock's methods of child-rearing didn't produce the results that had been anticipated. Into the breach, steps Dr. Dobson with his *Dare To Discipline*. Whether he uses law and gospel properly, many church people do not care. All they care about is that someone gives them hope to bring order to their families.

For years, people were told that fathers are not important to families. Now, with the home disintegrating, with men propagating children and walking away from their responsibilities in droves, people realize that fathers have a job to do. Into the breach steps Promise Keepers. Through seven promises, a man is to be remade into a responsible husband, father, and leader in his church and community. Husbands are packed off on busses to a revival at a football stadium. Many appear to come back transformed. The harried wife

- doesn't care how her husband got that way. All she cares is that now
- he pays some attention to her and the children.

Rev. Senkbeil clearly laid out for us the essence of Evangelicals' theology. It is the law. The gospel is conspicuously thin or absent. As one reads through their works, he is reminded of the burger commercial popular some years ago. The elderly lady sourly looks at the minuscule hamburger on the bun and remarks, "Where's the beef?" Evangelical's material will lead one who is evangelical to ask, "Where is the meat of the gospel and the sacraments?" It is noticeably absent. It is absent in the area of our salvation. It is absent in the area of our sanctification.

Rev. Senkbeil observed, "The Jerry Fallwells and the Chuck Swindolls of this world indeed have a form of godliness, but they deny the power of it; the power for the Christian life in their teaching boils down to the best efforts of the human will, not the reality of the presence of Christ in His Word and Sacrament....The Christian life is a sacramental life, pure and simple. The Christian life flows out of the realities God Himself accomplishes in us in washing, word, and meal—the presence of the living Christ in His objective Gospel through the oral Word and the visible Word. This is where God is to be found, and this is where He comes to feed and empower us" (III, 15). Not only is the Lutheran teaching on justification different than the Reformed, so is the teaching on sanctification. Reformed theology separates the gospel and sacraments from sanctification; Lutheran theology teaches that sanctification flows from the gospel and the sacraments.

One should also comment on the practical result of this law-dominated theology. It leads either to Phariseeism or despair. "Are you sure you're a Christian" is a question in bold type and box in *Seven Promises Of A Promise Keeper*. "You need to do five things to become a part of God's family," the article intones. But, what if I haven't done them all just right? What if I haven't done enough? Years ago when I served as a parish pastor, I visited a man in the hospital who was facing the prospect he could die. He wasn't a member of my congregation but had attended our services a few times. I arrived at his bed shortly after he had been visited by some of his Reformed friends. He was in a state of terror. These people

had asked him what religious experiences he had in his life. When he told them he didn't know of any, they told him he could not be sure of his salvation. What a difference it made in his life when he was pointed to Christ as the assurance of his salvation.

The other extreme is Phariseeism, perfectionism. Promise Keepers follows the "small-group" method of Pietism in its efforts to keep a person focused on spiritual growth. In dividing up the groups for mentoring, you are told to classify yourself as to your level of spiritual growth. One of the categories is the Joseph group, described as follows, "An overall look at your life story reflects a consistency of spiritual growth, and most of the trials you've faced have come from living in a fallen world instead of from falling yourself" (*Go The Distance*, 51). What a difference that is from Paul's description of the Christian life in Romans 7, where he describes the conflict between the old and new man.

With regard to numbering absolution among the sacraments, it should be noted that when Melancthon lists absolution as a sacrament in Apology XIII, he defines sacraments as "rites which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added" (Apology XIII, 3). In the Large Catechism Luther speaks of two sacraments (LC, Fourth Part, Baptism, 1).

In conclusion, there are many aspects of Rev. Senkbeil's essays that I especially appreciated: the concise summaries of the aberrations of enthusiasm; the strong emphasis on the gospel and the sacraments as the means of grace; the focus on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as the basis for the Christian faith, not on the Christian's own life; the emphasis on the right preaching of the law and the gospel; the importance of baptism and the Lord's Supper for the sanctified life; the stress on the importance of a Christocentric liturgy and the value for our Christian faith and life; the emphasis on the theology of the cross in contrast to the evangelical's theology of glory; the relation between the mission and the ministry of the church. So many important issues were raised in these essays that one could write an essay on each of the points by themselves. For guiding us to see once again the precious heritage which is ours from the Lutheran Reformation, I thank you.



- These essays have again reminded us of how blessed we are to have the Lutheran heritage of the gospel and the sacraments. God through Word and sacrament will enable us to resist the siren call of today's evangelicalism. The spiritual course evangelicalism charts is tempting, especially when the theology of glory is offered instead of the theology of the cross. Let us remember what is happening, however. It is Satan, the father of lies, offering us again what he offered to Jesus: the easy way to glory as opposed to the way of the cross. Yet, why would we ever want to trade our birthright as heirs of our Father's kingdom, given us in baptism, for the mess of legalistic pottage cooked up by enthusiasts? Far better that we share with them the precious heritage which we have. If husbands are looking for strength or guidance, they will do far better to sit in our Bible classes or attend the Lord's Supper than they will to attend a law-driven, candle-lighting, high-fiveing, male-bonding session in a football stadium. We have the means of grace through which God gives us his salvation and empowers us to live sanctified lives. May we ever continue to treasure and proclaim the heritage which comes to us from the Lutheran Reformation.

“In trembling hands”—the treasure won  
 We only hold through Scripture, Lord.  
 Then keep us all, till life is done,  
 As people trembling at your Word. CW 199:5.

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# ***Review of* Luther and the Fanatics: The Gospel Under Fire**

**The Rev. Harold Senkbeil, STM**

*John A. Moldstad, Jr., Reactor*

Dare I use the loaded term? I have been greatly “enthused” by Pastor Senkbeil’s presentation— enthused in so far as he has so ably and eloquently reminded us of our Lutheran heritage and its focus on the Means of Grace. As he implies, this is the only appropriate kind of enthusiasm over against the fanaticism that places “emphasis on the inner man at the expense of the outer Word.” The Word alone is the way that our gracious Heavenly Father has chosen to deal with us poor sinners. The merits of Christ’s life and death, as publicly verified by his resurrection, are distributed to souls (souls not just damaged but deadened by nature) through Word and Sacrament.

Permit me also to express gratitude to our essayist for the production of his *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (NPH, 1991). As soon as I read it, I was determined to have it serve as one of the texts in our seminary classroom, using it in conjunction with Dr. Franz Pieper’s treatment of sanctification in his third volume of *Christian Dogmatics*. A great strength of our essayist’s book, as well as the lectures before us, is that he not only attacks present day aberrations resulting from an improper distinction between Law and Gospel but that he offers the appropriate antidote. In the hope of whetting the appetite of those who are yet pondering the purchase of *Sanctification: Christ in Action*, I draw attention to one of the gems put forth by the hand of Pastor Senkbeil: “While other forms of piety attempt to climb to heaven by achieving a certain state of spirituality, Lutheran piety centers around the reality of Christ present with his church in his Word and sacrament” (p. 165).

Tracing the roots of today's Evangelicals and their correlate Church Growth advocates back to Carlstad, Thomas Muentzer, and those of a century later, Pastor Senkbeil has shown in these lectures the common denominator among all who fall under the umbrella of Luther's label "Schwermerei." The bottom line for all of them is that, while claiming to champion "grace alone" and the "uninhibited working of the Spirit," they in reality detest the very channel that God has carved out and filled with the Living Water that wells up to eternal life (John 4:13).

A vital question must be addressed: What plan has *God* put into effect for the building of his Church? Any spiritual life attributed to other kinds of tools turns the attention from justification by grace through faith (the *Hauptartikel* of Lutheranism) to what our essayist calls "band-aid" solutions which treat the building of the church more like a "repair job rather than a rescue story." The doctrine of hell is real. It can only be overcome by the blood of the Holy One. This blood was shed to atone for all. Thus the dispensing method for this spiritual medication cannot be tampered with at any cost. Since the Means of Grace are the *only* way instituted in Scripture for a sinner to come to faith in Jesus and to remain in that faith, they are the essential tools for the building of God's house. As much as a carpenter depends on his hammer and nails and his saw and boards in order to begin and complete his work of building an earthly dwelling, so much—and far more—does our God depend on his instituted Means to erect his spiritual building. No wonder we treasure the heritage bequeathed by Luther to the confessional descendants that bear his name!

For any who may think that our distinguished essayist has hit the modern Evangelicals a little too hard, or who may feel that his emphasis on liturgical worship is simply reflecting a personal whim, don't forget Luther's stark admonition to which Pastor Senkbeil alluded: "We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil." SA, III, Art. VIII, 10 (Tappert, p. 313) Luther was convinced that it is the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16), that faith comes from hear-

- ing the message (Rom. 10:17), that Baptism is a washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5), and that the Lord's Supper truly conveys the Real Presence and the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28). Yes, Luther—as we say—was convinced of this, and so should we be!

In the first lecture, fittingly delivered on the precise day we Lutherans commemorate the inception of the Reformation, our thoughts were directed to the agony of Dr. Luther in having to rebuke a man for whom he had personal affection as his “colleague and superior in Wittenberg.” Due to the radical reforms of Carlstadt, as typified by his smashing religious statues, and due to the “legalism” and “spiritualism” that dominated “brother Andrew’s” theology, Luther was compelled to deal with the issue head on. The precious Gospel, for which he had valiantly fought and for which he had laid his life on the line at Worms was threatened with obliteration.

Did Luther ever *regret* the way in which he thundered against Carlstadt and the fanatics? Not at all. Look carefully at what Luther said in his Galatians commentary. In our Galatians course in the seminary this fall we are using as our chief commentary that of Luther, which comprises volumes 26 and 27 of the American Edition. Luther’s commentary on Galatians is known for his excellent remarks on the importance of properly dividing Law and Gospel. In the 1535 edition Luther writes: “I urge you, who are to be teachers of others, to learn this doctrine of the true and proper use of the Law carefully; for after our time it will be obscured again and will be completely wiped out. Today, while we are still alive and are insistently urging this doctrine, there are nevertheless very few, even among those who want to seem ‘evangelical’ and who acknowledge the Gospel with us, who correctly understand the use of the Law. What do you think will happen when we have been taken away? Right now I am not even speaking about the Anabaptists, the Neo-Arians, and the spirits who blaspheme the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ; they are all as ignorant of this proper use and function of the Law as the papists are. They have long since defected from the pure doctrine of the Gospel to laws. Therefore they do not teach Christ. They boast and swear that they are intent on nothing except the glory of God and the salvation of the brethren,

and that they teach the Word of God purely; but in fact they distort the Word of God and twist it into an alien meaning, so that it is forced to tell them what they themselves imagine. Under the name of Christ, therefore, they teach their own dreams..." (LW 26, p. 312).

Our essayist suggested (following Lindberg's contention) that Muentzer is the precursor of the dream-led "Charismatics" of our day. Undoubtedly this is true. Although the headlines on the religious scene are not captivated as much in 1996 by the Charismatics as—let's say—in the 1970's, they are still an imposing force to be reckoned with. The difference is that the more palatable name "Evangelical" has been adopted by many who share the Charismatics' chief tenet, that of a direct-working Spirit exhibited, for example, in tongue-speaking and in visions providing extra-biblical revelation. There are still a number in Lutheranism who identify with their cause. This was brought home to me in a personal way. In my pastoral experience in Arizona I was confronted one day by a man—a Lutheran of a different brand—who regularly visited our congregation but did not commune. He told me he had received a dream in which the chancel area of our church was depicted, and off to the side appeared the face of Christ weeping. He said he felt compelled to tell me his dream, since he took this as an indication the Lord was not pleased with our "close Communion" practice. After sharing with him the words from Jeremiah, "I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' (23:25), I asked him, "G\_\_, do you know for *sure* whether the *reason* Jesus is seen as crying in your dream is because of his dislike for our Communion practice? Might it be because he is sad that you yourself do not believe what Scripture clearly teaches on the doctrine of church fellowship?" He smiled nervously and then after a pause said, "Oh, Pastor, *I* know why he's crying. *I* can feel it!" ... Didn't our Lord also say, "For what has straw to do with grain?" (23:28).

Three points from the second portion of the essay are worthy of special note.

- 1) In critically evaluating Spener's *Pia Desideria*, Pastor Senkbeil appropriately summarized Spener's theology: "Faith by itself

- does not save; it requires completion through works. Therefore
  - Spener added the adjective ‘living’ to faith.” Doesn’t this recall Luther’s continual refrain that “Papist and Schwarmerei are alike”? To this very day, the Roman Catholic Church in spite of cosmetic changes persists in anathematizing Luther’s (no—*Scripture*’s!) “justification by faith.” In its recent editions of the Catholic Encyclopedia, the Roman Church continues to enjoin “faith *and* good works” as necessary for eternal salvation. Regardless of vehement denials to the contrary, all pietists in the vein of Spener find themselves in the same camp with Rome through their elevation of sanctification over justification.
- 2) A key observation by Pastor Senkbeil is found in his quotation of Dr. Lindberg: “The concern of classical Pietism for ethical verification of faith and therefore a growing sanctification is related to the concern for certainty of salvation.” Since two great mentors of past and present “enthusiasts,” Calvin and Arminius, disavowed *gratia universalis* and *sola gratia* (respectively), how can we expect their spiritual descendants to find an absolute certainty of salvation apart from some inward reflection on self? Take away these two great doctrinal pillars among the Reformation *solas*, and one destroys the basis for divine certainty of eternal life. Far different is the attitude of a Johann Gerhard, for example, who exclaimed: “What if the heavens and the earth accuse me, and mine iniquities declare my guilt; yet it is enough for me that the Creator of the heavens and of the earth and He who is righteousness itself pleads my cause for me. It suffices for me to acknowledge His merit, because mine will not suffice...” (*Meditationes Sacrae*, ch. VIII).
  - 3) Our essayist’s lengthy excursus (footnote 18) on the issue of cooperation in the area of sanctification was very edifying. One could mention an illustration put forth by the writers of the Formula of Concord as a help in discussing the *kind* of cooperation here involved: This kind of cooperating is *not* depicted as two horses drawing a wagon, for the working of God and the working of man are not here coordinate. God Himself is the one who does the working of good works in and through us.

The final portion of the essay was the most challenging and provocative. While warning against “liturgy for the sake of liturgy” (a penchant of liberal Lutherans), Pastor Senkbeil boldly castigates popular Church Growthy entertainment-oriented worship and pleads for the return to the conventional sacramental and yet sacrificial liturgies handed down in the Lutheran Church from of old. In particular, he ought to be commended for focusing on the *incarnation* of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our essayist highlighted this fact: “The Incarnate Word of God is thus the focus of all worship and liturgy.”

If one realizes the departure of the Reformed in the area of Christology (something currently on the mind of this reviewer as he leads students through Pieper, vol. II), then one will not be surprised at the way in which the Reformed (and thus the Evangelicals of today) deal with the Sacraments. The rationalistic axiom, “The finite is incapable of the infinite,” which the Reformed use to tear apart the union of the two natures in the Person of Christ is the same one employed by them to strip Absolution, Baptism and the Holy Supper of true life-giving power. Yet we Lutherans have always held that Word and Sacrament are not only God’s *invitation* and *transportation*, but an actual *impartation* (of the forgiveness of sins) and *vivification*.

Much appreciated was our essayist’s stress on the proper kind of liturgy without prescribing a codification of a particular liturgical format. C. P. Krauth once said that the Lutheran Church possesses “liturgical life without liturgical bondage” (*The Conservative Reformation*, p. 159). What *must* receive top billing, however, is that the entire lens of any liturgy pinpoint the focus on Word and Sacrament, for—as Pastor Senkbeil fluently states—“in the swaddling clothes of His Word and Sacrament our risen and ascended Lord continues to breathe life to all His people in every age.”

If there is any slight criticism of the lectures, it would be this: While the term “liturgy” rightly includes heavy emphasis particularly on the Sacrament of the Altar, this is not done at the expense of good Law/Gospel preaching from the pulpit. Our essayist appropriately quoted the Apology of the Augsburg confession in its contention that “The chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel.” *Both* the administration of the Sacraments **and** the pulpit ex-



- position and impartation of God's Gospel fall under that sentence
- scrawled by the pen of Melancthon. Possibly more attention in the third part of the essay could have focused on the importance of good Lutheran sermoning. I will be presumptive in saying that Pastor Senkbeil hardly would disagree. It is understandable that the Sacraments received his major focus, since this is where the cutting edge of past and present fanaticism has wielded its biggest slice on the Lutheran front. Yet the proper division of Law and Gospel in sermons and the conscientious labor of applying in a pertinent way these two great truths to the lives of ordinary hearers is an ongoing challenge for every confessional pastor. Luther knew this well, for he observed: "The distinction between the Law and the Gospel is necessary to the highest degree, for it contains a summary of all Christian doctrine... So far as the words are concerned, the distinction is easy. But when it comes to experience, you will find the Gospel a rare guest but the Law a constant guest in your conscience..." (*LW* 26, p. 117). We refer also to a quotation on preaching from the Apology: "Practical and clear sermons hold an audience... The real adornment of the churches is godly, practical and clear teaching, the use of the sacraments, ardent prayer, and the like...." (*Ap* XXIV, 50-51; Tappert, p. 259).

Thank you again, Pastor Senkbeil, for your informative and meaty essay!

