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# Lutheran Synod Quarterly

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ISBN 0360-9685

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# LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

Theological Journal of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Edited by the faculty of  
Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary  
6 Browns Court  
Mankato, MN 56001

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Layout . . . . . Rev. Paul Fries  
Printer . . . . . Ideal Printers Inc., St. Paul, Minnesota

Subscription Price: \$15.00 U.S. per year

*Send all subscriptions and other correspondence  
to the following address:*

BETHANY LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
ATTN: LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY  
6 BROWNS CT.  
MANKATO, MN 56001



## Foreword

In this Advent and Christmastide we behold the wonder of the incarnation. The nations were walking in darkness and the shadow of death. Gross darkness covered the earth. Yet in the fullness of time the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, was born at Bethlehem to bring life and light to our benighted race. His light brings joy and light to our lives. He is the Sun of Righteousness with healing on His wings. This is the point of the sermon on Isaiah 9:2 which has this theme: *The Light of Christmas*.

The theme of the 2003 ELS Synod Convention was *A Table in the Wilderness*. The sermon at the opening service of the convention was based on Psalm 23. In this sermon the speaker, Rev. Bradley Homan, reminds us that the Good Shepherd leads us from the wilderness to paradise. The Rev. Homan, who is pastor of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Madison, Wisconsin, served as the chaplain of the convention.

"There is nothing new under the sun. . . nothing new at all. Unionism and syncretism are poisonous potions that Satan has employed for ages in order to bring about a disintegration of the only blessed union there can be of sinners with the Savior, and then saints with other saints. But what is new is the rapid rate of public consumption of this noxious concoction." So writes Rev. David Russow who is co-pastor at King of Grace Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, Minnesota. In his paper *The Ecumenical Spirit and Revivalism in America* he points out the dangers of unscriptural unionism and syncretism which are so common today.

In *Church and State, Congregation and Synod: An Anthological Essay* the Rev. David Jay Webber considers church and state relationship and church polity with special reference to the church polity of the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He discusses the importance of Flacius and the Antwerp Confession for the free church concept and its influence on American Lutheranism. Rev. Webber is the Rector of St. Sophia Lutheran Seminary, Ternopil, Ukraine.

Included in this *Quarterly* is an exegetical note on Proverbs 8:35-36 by Professor Emeritus Rudolph Honsey of Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. There is also a report on the fiftieth anniversary of our sister seminary in Leipzig and a report from the ELS president.

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# Christmas Eve Sermon on Isaiah 9:2

by Gaylin R. Schmeling

**Prayer:** O Holy Child of Bethlehem, Light of the World, descend to us, we pray. Cast out the shades of darkness and bring to us the light of day. Through your means of grace fill our hearts with your light and love that we may show forth your light drawing all people to the light of life. Then we will be able to celebrate forever the joys of Christmas above. We ask this through Your Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection. Amen.

*Text: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)*

Around 150 AD there lived a Christian by the name of Justin who is known in church history as the martyr, for he gave up his life for the Savior. Before he was brought to faith he searched in vain for peace and truth in the philosophies of the day. All the while he felt like he was groping in a dense fog and darkness. He was walking in darkness and the shadow of death. Then a Christian acquaintance pointed him to the great Old Testament prophecies, like the birth of the Virgin's Son who was the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6-7) Through the Word, the Holy Spirit convinced him that these prophecies were all fulfilled in the Child born of Mary and he indeed saw the great light of Him who said, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) **We then behold the Light of Christmas.**

**I. For that Light Has Come.** Some 2000 years ago thick darkness covered the earth. There was Roman peace and Roman law and order, but all was not right with the world. There were gladiator contests in which men hacked one another to pieces before bloodthirsty crowds. Slaves and women were regarded as little better than animals. Yes, things were pretty bad that first Holy Night. Rome's heavy hand was everywhere in evidence; soldiers were arrogant and sometimes brutal; taxes were exorbitant and exacting. Bethlehem was packed with uncaring visitors.

None of them were there because they wanted to be, but because they were required to be there—to pay their taxes to support an oppressive state.

Gross darkness covered the earth not unlike today. We have the greatest standard of living that the human race has ever seen. There are more Christmas presents under our trees than will ever be used. Yet this seemingly wonderful lifestyle causes so much stress and tension that the only way many feel they can handle it is by using drugs and alcohol. Others are left so alone and forgotten that they are driven to the point of depression and despair. Did we come here this evening burdened down by financial worries, family problems, domestic dispute, sickness, and even the death of one most near and dear? Does all the holiday merriment and cheer just mock our sorry state? Do we feel like we are groping in the darkness looking for the light at the end of the tunnel? On each of us who by nature were walking in darkness the light has come.

It was Christmas Eve in a mid-western town. The winds of a snowstorm had been raging the entire day. Five-foot drifts were found on all the main highways. The power had been out since the night before but finally at sunset there was a calm in the storm. The power man knew that many of the homes in town were already bitterly cold and another night without light and heat would be unbearable. He reached the power station with his snowmobile and began to work. At the sacred midnight hour, time of the dear Savior's birth, light and warmth streamed in the town. The bells of the church rang and the light of every Christmas tree was seen throughout the city. But the power man never saw the light for he was found the next morning frozen in the place where he worked on the lights. He died to give them light.

In the same way the child born in Bethlehem died to give the light to us who are walking in darkness and the shadow of death. On that first Holy Night amid all the darkness a great light arose. The streets were dark and cold. The inn was dark—"no vacancy" it read. Only a stable was found. The smell was strong and there were flies. There in the darkness the Blessed Virgin lay down on hay and straw and from her womb burst forth the Great Light; the Light of the World; the true Light of Christmas.

This one is the Light for He was the Word who was with God and was God from all eternity and the Word who said in the beginning, "Let



there be light.” As He once had brought light out of darkness at the beginning, so on the Holy Night He brought light to a world lying in the darkness of sin. He won true light for all in the horrible depths of darkness on Calvary’s black cross when He rescued us from sin by His holy life, suffering, and death. There He died to give us the light. His death and resurrection bring light and life to our benighted race. He lights up our life. That magnificent light breaking forth from the Virgin was indeed the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, True God from Everlasting to Everlasting.

There is an old legend that at the birth of Christ everything stood still. The night birds flying in the air were motionless. The stable animals, the donkey and the oxen, were like statues. Everything had a sudden inclination to be still. Of course the legend is far from true. Almost no one paid any attention to the birth on that first Christmas. Yet in a deeper sense this fiction was fact. The old world in darkness was stopped still because the Sun of Righteousness had arisen with light and healing in His wings.

## **II. Yes, the Light has Come; Therefore Show Forth the Light.**

To all who have come here burdened down with cares and grief; to all who feel alone, depressed, and despairing; to all wandering aimlessly in sin asking how can this be Christmas when we feel like this; to us He says: “I died to give you light and life, and tonight again I say, ‘Let there be light to chase away all the darkness, fear, and despair in your heart.’” Regardless of our cross or burdens, He gives each of us in His life-giving Word and the Holy Sacraments the strength to face every problem and trouble and the power to overcome and obtain the victory. Light and hope for our lives stream from His crèche through His Word, Holy Baptism, and the Holy Supper of His body and blood.

Because His light has lit up our life, we will be lights in the world showing forth His light. Out of thanks for His death to rescue us from darkness, the light of His love will flow from us to all around us. That love that He first showed to us we will show to one another. A little girl who had never attended Sunday School or received any religious training in her home was sick in the hospital. On Christmas Eve the nativity story was read in the children’s ward. The little girl was enchanted. After the service she turned to her grim-looking nurse and said, “Have you ever

heard that story before?” “Oh, yes,” answered the nurse, “many times.” “Well,” said the little girl, “you certainly don’t look like it.” Because we have heard the story of Jesus and His love, His light will shine through us. People will see His love and light in our lives. We will be continually pointing those still walking in the darkness of sin and the shadow of death to the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. The Great Light has arisen!

Soon after the sermon this evening we will conduct the candle-lighting ceremony. The ceremony pictures for us that the Christ Child is indeed the Light of the World who lights up our life so that we can be lights in this dark world of sin. The main candle symbolizes Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, the source of all light. Our little candles symbolize each one of us. We get our light from Jesus who died to give us light. All that is good and noble, holy and inspiring, is from Him offered to us in His means of grace.

The candles are not lit that they may burn for themselves. They are lit to give light to others. We have not become Christians merely that our own soul may be saved. We have become Christians in order to enlighten the lives of others. The Lord wants us this Christmas to reach out with the light to touch those around us burdened, depressed, and despairing. Point them to the Christ Child, the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings. Finally on the Last Day the darkness will be shut up forever and ever in the bottomless pit, never to break forth again. Then there will be light eternal, for in the new heaven and new earth there will be no need for the sun or moon; the Lamb in our midst will be the Light. There all sorrows and tears will be wiped away, and Christmas Joy and Light will be forever.

This holiday season everyone is looking for a piece of Christmas. Some are trying an old-fashioned Christmas, some a family Christmas, and some a Christmas vacation. All these things are fine but our Christmas celebration will be flat and dull if the Light of Bethlehem is forgotten. He alone can make Christmas joyful. Are darkness and gloom shadowing all the expensive gifts and decorations in our house? Is our home as dreary as that stable the first Christmas before the pilgrims from Nazareth arrived? Is there no love in our home? It wasn’t meant to be this way. The Christ Child died to bring light to our town and to your house. Our Christmas can be as enchanted and wonderful as Mary’s was when the Light of the World burst forth. It is as easy as turning the light on in our home. May

we repent of all our sins and failures and trust in Him as the Savior, receiving Him through the Word and Sacrament. Then even though we were walking in darkness we will see the Great Light. The Light of Christmas has come! Show forth the Light! Amen.

# The Good Shepherd Leads from Wilderness to Paradise

## Sermon on Psalm 23

by Bradley J. Homan

*Text: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)*

A traveler stopped in to pick up a few odds and ends at a country store in the middle of nowhere. In a small yard on one side of the steps going up to the store sat a hound dog, howling. The customer went in and asked the storeowner, "Why is that hound dog howling like that?" The owner said, "He is sitting on a cocklebur." "A cocklebur? Why doesn't he get up and move?" the traveler asked. "He'd rather howl," said the proprietor.

For this year's convention the theme for the week is "**A Table in the Wilderness.**" Each day you will hear about the wilderness and how God has blessed us with His goodness and mercy. Without God's blessing, the wilderness would really be a place for us to howl.

When we think about wilderness we can go back to the children of Israel who were between Mount Hor and the Land of Edom. As they wandered, they chose to howl. They became impatient. They griped about the manna and the lack of water.

Is it possible that we are like the Israelites when we complain or when we howl? Have our conventions ever been like the Israelites, when we grumble or complain about how we did not get our own way, when things got a bit testy?

At such times we need to be reminded of **The Good Shepherd Who Leads Us From Wilderness to Paradise**. We need to take comfort in the Lord whose goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life.

Most of you have heard of Paul Newman. He is an actor, a director, and a race car driver. If you go into a grocery store you will find his face on bottles of salad dressing. This dressing is even available at McDonalds. Cartons of lemonade also have his picture on the outside. The proceeds of the food items are used to support a home for young people. At the dedication of a home, Paul Newman sat down by a boy and asked him, "Do you know who I am? The boy answered, "Nope." So Paul Newman pointed at a carton of lemonade on the table and said, "That is me." The boy looked at the carton and then at Paul Newman and back and forth again and said, "Wow, are you lost?"

When we think of our world, a place that can be described as a wilderness of sin, we can feel like we are lost. But when we feel lost, there is One who has come to find us and that is our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

The words of our text are familiar to us. They are from Psalm 23, which has brought comfort to so many people as they grieve the loss of their loved ones. But these words are appropriate not only when we grieve. They also are words which reveal God's care and protection from the beginning of our lives to the end, and even to our heavenly home.

**The Lord Promises that He is our Shepherd.** Because of this, we have everything we need. The recent double issue of the *Lutheran Sentinel* celebrates this anniversary time in our Synod. What impressed me were the revelations of some of the wilderness times for those early members of our Synod. Yet, those early members would speak of the great blessing from the Lord; they had everything they would need for this life.

Each of us will from time to time face difficulties. There are situations when we can hurt so much that it affects the very well-being of our soul. The Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who faced more difficult times than we can ever imagine, is the One who can restore us, when we are turned upside down in life.

**This Good Shepherd is the One Who Leads us in the Paths of Righteousness.** We Christians, who seek to be led in the paths of righteousness, know that there is much that especially causes the young to travel the paths of unrighteousness. In the secular world, this wilderness in which we live, there are so many influences which can lead our young in the wrong direction. We must thank God and then point our young to the One who leads in the paths of righteousness, and that is Jesus Christ, our Savior. Not only is this of great help to us, but also our Shepherd leads us through the valley of the shadow of death and he promises that the cup of blessing overflows in our lives. What a great Savior we have!

The story is told of Miss Murphy, who was a young parochial school teacher in the 1920s. She wanted to teach her class some Bible passages, and she began with Psalm 23. It did not take long before her class had put to memory the whole Psalm. But there was one in the class who did not have it quite right. When they came to the phrase, “goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives,” someone was saying it wrong. So Miss Murphy went around the room and had each one say it. Then she came to young Jack. When he came to the last part of the Psalm he said, **“Good Miss Murphy shall follow us all the days of our lives.”**

I know how glad we are that it is our Good Shepherd who follows us all the days of our life and not Miss Murphy. For God’s goodness and mercy are at the heart of our faith. God’s goodness brought the one Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, into this wilderness of sin. God’s mercy was so great that Jesus was lifted up on the cross to make payment for our sin. Now when we might think of wilderness, we are to really think of paradise. We are to know that our Lord Jesus Christ leads us to His heavenly home.

A pastor was visiting Israel to see some of the sacred places of the Holy Land. While on his visit he noticed a shepherd who was leading his sheep. And they were following him. A little later, in a nearby village, he saw another man who was trying to lead the sheep but they would not follow him. He had to force them to go where he wanted them to go. So the pastor asked the tour guide, “What is the difference between the two shepherds?” “Oh, the second man is the butcher.” We, who are pastors, have been reminded that we are to be shepherds of our flock. But we should never be like the butcher, forcing our flocks to go where God does

not want them to go. We do this when we preach the Law and place legalistic demands on our people. But we cannot preach only Gospel, for then our sheep will not have the need to follow. Only when they know that they have great need because of sin and learn from us the refreshing words of the Gospel, will they truly follow.

Then we can take comfort in knowing that we have gone from the wilderness to the place of paradise prepared by the Good Shepherd for us. So if we ever feel like howling, we can rather get up and follow Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

# The Ecumenical Spirit and Revivalism in America

*A Confutation of the Epidemic of Unbiblical  
Unionism Which Has Been Escalating in our  
Nation Since the Events of 9-11-01*

*by Pastor David P. Russow*

## *There is Nothing New Under the Sun*

September 11, 2001 changed everything and changed nothing. Ever since Satan spewed forth his syrupy lies:

- “Sin won’t hurt,” “...*You will not surely die...*” (Ge 3:4),
- “Sin is fun,” “...*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil...*” (Ge 3:6),
- “Throw out the Bible and decide for yourself,” (compare Ge 3:1a, “...*Did God really say...*” to Ge 3:6, “*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom she took some and ate it.*”), and,
- “Be my missionary!” “*She also gave some to her husband who was there with her, and he ate it,*” Ge 3:6b,

there was loss of the perfect image of God, shame, separation, blame-shifting, pain in childbirth and rearing, sweat in sowing and reaping, death and murderous men, like Cain, who make sure that the Abels do die, all the way up to a field near Shanksville, PA, the Pentagon building in Washington D.C. and the Trade Towers of New York, NY.

When the dust and ash of buildings and bodies blocked the sun and fell to the earth, something new for our time, but old in time, happened. The evil spirit of unionism, in post-Christian/post-modernistic fashion, was re-released from the abyss and found a new host in the body of post-911 resultant emotionalism and patriotic unity.



The clarion call was, “Unite! We are one!” In many a mind and heart the rivers of state and church, for the time and of necessity, were channeled into merger. In the church of America the tributaries of Christian denominations rushed in swift flow seeking each other on the same level. And to the horror of some – not enough – even the dam walls that held back the strange waters of pagan “persuasions” of non-Christian/non-Trinitarian/extra-biblical-other-sourced cults and sects broke and rushed together with the Christians into one big religious pool, creating a new spiritual cesspool.

Spiritual “cultures” have been amalgamated. To a society which, generally speaking, has been blinded by the god of this age, the polluted mixture which was churned together in the devil’s blender seems good and potable. Visualize taking, let’s say, a snake, a piglet, a rat, and a skunk, each symbolizing a non-Christian sect or cult, and place the same into a large and powerful blender. Add water, representing Christianity, even some labeled “pure water,” representing confessional/orthodox Christianity, and mix. The result: the purity of the water is lost within a brew of blood, hair, and stench which disgustingly oozes with viscera.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, the pristine Water of Life found in grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ Jesus alone, is labeled, “polluted,” spiritually totalitarian, judgmental, and unloving. In contrast, the vile mixture is labeled with a human version of Genesis 1:31, “Behold, it is very good.”

Nothing new at all. Unionism and syncretism are poisonous potions that Satan has employed for ages in order to bring about a disintegration of the only blessed union there can be of sinners with the Savior, and then saints with other saints. But what is new is the rapid rate of public consumption of this noxious concoction. What is new is who is distributing this soul-destructive cocktail. What is alarmingly new is why such are passing out this bottled yuck, “...for the Gospel’s sake...” What is more alarmingly new is how supporters and detractors have reacted and responded to this new/old phenomenon, to “unionism – that lethal leprosy of the Church...”<sup>2</sup>

### ***For Example:***

#### ***Islam***

What are some of those reactions that demonstrate a revival of unionism since 9-11? First, there is a new interest in Islam among Americans. Prof. John M. Brenner points out that:

People are visiting Islamic web sites and even buying copies of the Qur'an to see for themselves what Islam is all about. Some are finding Islam appealing. In a society dominated by moral and religious relativism, people are looking for spiritual anchors. The authoritative claims of Islam may strike a responsive cord in those who find nothing in the empty offerings of popular "feel-good" religion. The work righteousness of Islam appeals to the *opinio legis* in every human being and the optimistic view of human nature so common among Americans. Muslims have no concept of original sin. It is therefore easy for many Muslims to blame others for their problems rather than recognizing the evil that lies in their own heart. Our society also looks for causes of evil everywhere but in the human heart and often allows people to make excuses for their own sin and to blame others for problems of their own making. Confessional Lutherans must continue to proclaim God's law clearly to expose the evil that lies in our own hearts and in the heart of every human being. If we are not clear in our teaching of original sin and firm in our proclamation of God's law to hold the sinner accountable to him, we should not be surprised that people see no need for a Savior.<sup>3</sup>

To research for an understanding of Islam is amoral in and of itself, and actually can help us as we seek to witness the Word of Truth and the true Savior-God to the followers of Islam. But for many in America curiosity can lead to appeal. Curiosity and appeal can, at the worst, lead to acceptance of Islam as one's personal confession. But bad goes to worse when Christians are called to view Islam with tolerance as just another "viable" option to be chosen from the smorgasbord of diversified entrées of "god" and "spirituality." How easy in our nation, the melting pot of the world, to cook such a new stew of death, especially as it's simmered on the burner of postmodernism.

### *John Irwin*

Toleration leads to unionism. Since 9-11 the general public has heard sentiment after sentiment laced with the toxicity of unionism. Those sentiments don't necessarily have to come from the clergy. Take, for example, the comments of 84 year old John Irwin, a Navy Veteran, pictured sitting in his wheelchair which had just been wheeled out of the chapel at the Minneapolis Veterans' Home following a memorial service. It was the one year anniversary of 9-11 and this "good old boy" patriot, from "America's best generation" (as Tom Brokaw calls the generation of WW II, a

generation which stood for something, that experienced the attacks then and fought back valiantly). Irwin said what so many are thinking: "It's nice, now, to see the different religions come together."<sup>4</sup> - Surely, united we stand. But no one will stand, and God will not stand for it, if he stands there with a credo that confesses a multiple-choice-god as each knows him.

One of my seminary professors commented that what's in society will be in the church within seven years. The drowsy giant of unionism was jolted awake when the planes became missiles. People were re-awakened to a poignant sense of mortality and the need for rightness with God, so they flocked to the church (for a while). When even the "church" told them *any* church, or mosque, or temple, or stake house was okay, just get together with God, they did. When the flurry died down, many didn't flock anymore. But in the process it was the "church" that spurred on this new unionism. The dawn of the day of terror brought on revival of the terrorizing of churches and individual souls by means of heightened unionistic emphasis.

*Tommi Femrite, et. al.*

It should not surprise us that the "church," ever seeking to be relevant, became effusive with unionistic programs, gatherings, events, information and invitation. How many mailings have you received like that from Tommi Femrite of Gatekeepers International, in a bulk mailing dated May 2002, pleading for attendance at an "Intercessors Conference"? This citywide conference was held July 10-11, 2002 at North Heights Lutheran Church of Arden Hills, MN. As Ms. Femrite put it, "God continues to call his army to arise and unite in prayer...*across denominational lines*... Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, many have returned to 'normal'. In some ways we must. However, a national sense of uncertainty presses us to continue 'Preparing the Way' for Jesus in our area."

When an invitation from Mary M. Brown, "Evangelism Pastor" of Calvary Lutheran in Golden Valley, MN, came to our church asking us to join in a meeting of the local clergy with the Mayor, Mary closed with thanks for our, "...partnership in the Gospel..."<sup>5</sup> Because we pastors of King of Grace, Golden Valley, MN, didn't attend this joint meeting, our knuckles were wrapped with a phone call and, ever so politely, we were taken out back to the woodshed with the words, "...you were the only church in our community not represented..."

*Dr. David Benke*

We may not like, but we can expect, such unionistic comments from “John Q. Public,” or the unionistic invitations from the non-denominational Tommis and such unionistic expressions from the ELCA Marys. But then came the unionistic prayer from someone of a Lutheran synod so close to us, yet since 1955 and 1963, officially declared to be not so close. Yet, that is what happened.

Much has been written about Dr. Benke’s participation in *A Prayer for America*,<sup>6</sup> held on Sunday, September 23, 2001 at Yankee Stadium in New York City. He was the lone Lutheran who participated with all those political figures, celebrities, Jewish Rabbis, a Sikh, some Muslims, a Hindu, members of the Armenian Church, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, and Roman Catholic. The stated purposes of the unified gathering were noble: to generate and demonstrate unity in our nation and secure support for those who had been devastated by the loss of loved ones and to find comfort and solace in the face of such horror. But Satan masks evil with what seems good. The mask was religion.

This diversified band offered remarks, readings, prayers and reflections. Holy Scripture was read side by side with other religious sources. “The congregation” heard them all equally, was equally asked to pray with each cleric and to each cleric’s god, and was equally asked by each to reflect on each message given. The proper Names and reputation of the only God, the Triune God, and Christ Jesus, the one and only Savior of all, were vilified. Why? Because...their God was just one of many; and the true God is not! (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5,6,21; John 5:23; 2 John 9) Because...the Way to God was just one of many ways; and the ways to Him are not many! (John 14:6) Because...blessings from God for a dying people and a hurting nation were just some of many blessings from many gods invoked; and blessings are not from anyone but the Three in One! (Exodus 20:24; Numbers 6:24-26; Romans 10:13; 2 Corinthians 13:14) Side by side in union, not toe to toe in opposition!

Even if there was no intent to be involved in unionism, and even if it was to be an opportunity to “proclaim the Gospel” at a time of extreme and special circumstance, the God of that Gospel and the only Savior of mankind was not carefully defined. The “Our” of Benke’s prayer does not reflect that Christianity is inclusive of those given Spirit-worked faith in Jesus, yet has to be exclusive of those who in any way reject the Savior. Christianity can never be presented, in any way, by any impression, as just one of many options. Giving the impression that all “religious cultures” are

a wash means taking responsibility for that impression. Giving the perception that “cuius regio eius religio et suum quique” is valid in matters of relationship with God and each other also means assuming responsibility for that perception.

Babel was revisited. The flames of the Pentecost, in this peculiar way, were a bit doused.

Christians and confessional Lutherans observed. To say nothing is to say something. To do nothing is to do something, (Ez 33).

Others observed. Some observed and were made more comfortable in their unbelief, believing in “god” but not God. Some, in all this, observed and were made to imagine what their hearts want to believe: that the souls of everyone lost in the strikes of terror ascended – almost by right because they died tragically – to “heaven” with the wafting smoke. Some observed and were comforted by the display of unity alone. Some observed, took note and took offense. Others, sadly, observed as “weak Christians” and could have been made weaker. Some observed and protested. All in all, the incident did not go unnoted.

Even the Washington Post took note:

You would think that the more militant forms of Islam would be enough to worry about these days, for those inclined to anguish over religious extremisms. But no.

Apparently the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod deserves our special concern. In late June, the church suspended the Rev. David Benke, the president of its Atlantic District and the pastor of a Brooklyn church, for praying with clerics who don't share the Christian faith.

Naturally, the suspension caused all hell to break loose. From the New York Times editors to Fox News' Bill O'Reilly, pundits and commentators chided the Lutherans for their intolerance. Mr. O'Reilly, not otherwise known for theological expertise, even accused the church of not following Jesus.” A column in Newsday said Mr. Benke's accusers were “advocating religious isolationism.”

But what exactly had the church done wrong? What if it had a point?

When it was announced, soon after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, that Oprah Winfrey would lead a “Prayer for America” ceremony at Yankee Stadium, Mr. Benke, by his own admission, lobbied

the event's sponsors for an invitation. When unsuccessful, he sneaked onto the field by joining Cardinal Edward Egan.

Once there, he became part of a clerical assembly that included Muslims, Jews, Sikhs and Hindus – along with Baptists, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Politicians and celebrities were on hand, too, for hymn-singing, expressions of mourning and, yes, prayers.

To participate in an interfaith service is, as the synod announced upon suspending Mr. Benke, “a serious offense” strictly forbidden by tradition and church law. But the source of the prohibition is Christ’s own words. “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6)

Mr. Benke has stated in his defense that the gathering was a “civic event,” not a religious one. But Rudolph Giuliani, who was present, insisted on calling it a “prayer service.” There were invocations, a blowing of the shofar, prayers by Jewish, Catholic, Sikh and Muslim clergymen. Scripture readings and two benedictions. All the trappings of worship – even Bette Midler singing “Wind Beneath My Wings.”

Mr. Benke argued as well that the ‘Prayer for America’ was a response to an extreme situation. “Not to make the primary human connections at a time of civic, national and global tragedy,” he wrote in his defense, “would be a great pastoral error.” But only a few years before, in non-extraordinary circumstances, he had taken part in a service with clerics from other faiths — and been reprimanded by the church for it. After apologizing, he declared: “I assure the Synod that I will not repeat this error in the future...” Amazingly, three months after the Yankee Stadium event, with charges against him pending, he joined in yet another interfaith service.

Such renegade behavior runs against the grain of the Missouri Synod, whose system of Belief is firmly grounded in Scripture and an intellectually rigorous theology. Preserving its Doctrine is a key aspect of the faith. The synod was founded, as it happens, by German Immigrants fighting ecumenicalism. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm III, ordered Lutherans to pray and worship with Calvinists, as one. It was a popular Edict among his subjects, swept up in patriotic feeling after the allied victory at Waterloo. But the church of

Luther was unwilling to compromise its beliefs, even if those who resisted the edict faced persecution, including imprisonment. Lutherans emigrated to Australia, New York and Missouri.

The synod resisted compromise then, and resists it now, even as the surrounding Culture exerts its own edictless pressure. During the 1960's and 1970's, when trendy church leaders gutted the core beliefs of most mainline Protestant denominations, the Missouri Synod stood fast. The suspension of Mr. Benke – now being “reviewed” by the church in response to his appeal – is another example of the church's insistence on doctrinal rigor.

And it is right to insist. Critics should think twice before elevating their love of patriotic ecumenism above the distinct beliefs that, even today, separate one faith from another.<sup>7</sup>

Many have followed the whole drama story by story, with heightened interest and bated breath, to find out whether and how the reactors would respond. Others have observed with saddened hearts (because of what once was, because of past aid and guidance lent, because of a cherished relationship now broken), but thinking, “I guess I'm not surprised. With levels of fellowship, with selective fellowship, with prayer considered to be outside of the realm of fellowship, the next domino was bound to tip and tumble.”

Such thoughts would just be script of mind unless they are based on black on white statements. In “Unity, Union, and Unionism,” the litmus is given:

Through their official organs and the published reports of conventions and other meetings, through addresses made by representative members on important occasions, through their constitutions and by-laws, and through the discipline practice, on their congregational and synodical level, a fairly accurate judgment can be formed.”<sup>8</sup>

In “The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship,” written by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, as commissioned by the 1998 convention, a definition of fellowship, which excludes prayer as an expression of full fellowship, begins to take shape with the opening statement, “Though the word ‘fellowship’ describes a wide range of activities among Christians, this study concentrates on altar

and pulpit fellowship.” While the document does call for complete unity in altar and pulpit fellowship it limits fellowship to just that:

For some time after Christ’s resurrection Christians continued to pray with the Jews in their synagogues and the temple (Acts 2:46, 3:1, 21:26ff.) even though their leaders did not believe that Jesus was the Christ and had been raised from the dead (Matthew 28:11-15, Acts 4:1ff.). However, Holy Communion was not celebrated in the temple but only in the homes of Christians that served as their churches (Acts 4:25). Unbelieving Jews were excluded from the Sacrament...Agreement in the apostles’ doctrine was necessary for the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). *Church fellowship is altar and pulpit fellowship in the New Testament.* [Italics are in the original]

In brief address to such an explanation, first it should be noted that descriptive passages seem to be used in prescriptive application. Secondly, application of Acts 2:42 seems to be limited to Holy Communion whereas the passage makes a complete litany of applications. Thirdly, the reference (Acts 3:1) to praying with unbelieving Jews is misleading. The Scriptures never say that they joined them in prayer. In fact, the opposite would be true. The time the Disciples and believers spent in the temple was spent in witnessing the truth and in so doing refuting the opposite, Acts 4:23-31. Also, according to Acts 5:42, they gathered at the temple during the hours of Jewish prayer not to pray, but to be able to preach Christ to the people gathering at those times. There was pulpit, unshared with the unbelieving pulpits, not prayer with those who didn’t believe.<sup>9</sup>

It is argued that fellowship is based on Word and Sacrament, and prayer is neither. But, while prayer is not *beneficium* (God to us) but rather *sacrificium* (we to God), does not true prayer – sacrificium - flow from beneficium, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments (Augsburg VII)? Absolutely. Does it not follow that only Christians can pray and can essentially only pray with other Christians, whose prayers alone are heard? Absolutely, again. Hence, prayer has to be an expression of fellowship. Both, prayer and fellowship expressions (*sacrificium*) flow from the same headwaters, the results of the actions and power of the Holy Spirit as He applies the Gospel in Word and Sacraments (*beneficium*). Therefore, “prayer” outside of Christianity cannot be validated in any way, (He 11:6; 2 Co 6:14). And, therefore, prayer within Christianity, while recognized as valid in all of Christianity, should never validate false teaching, denying, in any way, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments (*beneficium*).<sup>10</sup>



Ironically, Benke's participation was justified on the basis that it was an opportunity to give Christian witness. Christian witness would be sacrifice, yes, a result of beneficium. But is not Christian witness, the dissemination of the Gospel, beneficium? How could prayer be beneficium if it is addressed to God? Indirect witness? I suppose. But is that really what prayer is?

How different from the above definition of Church Fellowship is one from a previous LCMS definition from "Theology of Fellowship":

Thus the exercise of fellowship consists in an activity dominated by the Word, an activity involving the total personality. For example, the men of the first church act with and for one another in worship (Acts 2:42); in prayer and intercession (Acts 4:24-31; 12:5; 1:12 to 14); in... (p. 8)

No doubt Dr. Benke, more than likely, did feel that he was in line with present confession and practice. Perhaps that is why the LCMS President responded as he did:

President Benke contacted me twice about the event prior to his participation. I did and do support the pastoral decision he made to participate. His action in doing so is clearly in line with a document entitled "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: A Report on Synodical Discussions." This document was prepared by past Synodical president Dr. Alvin Barry and our church body's Commission on theology and Church Relations and unanimously adopted by that commission. It was also, in Resolution 3-07A, commended by our Synod gathered in Convention this past summer. This document reads, in part:

Not every occasion where worship takes place is necessarily a manifestation of church fellowship. There are situations where discretion is appropriate... Pastors, teachers, and other officially recognized church workers are often asked to participate in activities outside of their own and other LCMS congregations. Some of these are civic events. Offering prayers, speaking and reading Scripture at events sponsored by governments, schools, and volunteer organizations would be a problem if the organization in charge restricted a Christian witness. For instance, if an invitation requires a pastor to pray to God without mentioning Jesus, he cannot in good conscience accept. Without such a

restriction, a Lutheran pastor may for valid and good reason participate in civic affairs such as an inauguration, a graduation, or a right-to-life activity. These occasions may provide opportunity to witness to the Gospel. Pastors may have honest differences of opinion about whether or to what extent it is appropriate or helpful to participate in these or similar civic events. In these cases charity must prevail. There are also “once in a lifetime” situations. It is virtually impossible to anticipate all such situations or to establish every type of situation pastors and congregations face. These situations can be evaluated only on a case-by-case basis and may evoke different responses from different pastors who may be equally committed to LCMS fellowship principles. The LCMS has always recognized this.

Situations such as those that have confronted us in recent days often call for difficult decisions. While not everyone would make the same decisions, I encourage you, as the above statement indicates, “to let charity prevail.”<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Benke concluded his prayer: “Those of us who bear the name of Christ understand that your towering love found its ultimate strength when you stooped to send your Son to die and live again in order to bring the world back together.” Gospel was there in speaking of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but it was cushioned with the qualifier, “...those of us...” for pluralistic ears. And God’s greater plan through His one Mediator was not necessarily, “to bring the world back together,” but to bring the world back to Him. “O Tower of Strength...” could have easily been said in a Masonic hall as it could have by those who shared that podium at Yankee Stadium.

Pluralism is unionism’s cousin. A generic god is unionism’s god. To this matter let the encouragement be heard:

The Christian is to be a witness for Christ at all times by word and deed. It is, however, a distortion of both the concept and duty of witnessing to insist that witnessing requires one to attend and speak and otherwise participate in whatever assembly or group he has the chance to do so, even if it puts one in a compromising position or gives offense so far as the doctrine of church fellowship is concerned. One can and does also witness, and sometimes powerfully, by one’s formal confession of faith

through church membership, and also by one's silence and one's absence from other assemblies...crass unionism...cannot be defended or excused on the basis of one's duty to witness. We are not to take what God has not given. The disregard of the pure marks of the church by such a joint service and the offense it causes to others, especially the weak and the "little ones" of all ages, children and young people in particular, is staggering to the heart and mind.<sup>12</sup>

And to this matter let it be said that, "Perhaps this is not a very good case to evaluate the LCMS's practice of fellowship since 'hard cases' make bad law. This was a very trying situation, but it was also a very extreme case of ecumenical prayer at its worst. It gave a very confusing testimony to the American people who are already confused enough on this issue. If the LCMS's policy does not forbid participation in such a service as this, it is hard to imagine any prayer service that it could not apply to."<sup>13</sup>

### *Madeleine L'Engle*

David's sins and cover-up not only dishonored the LORD and made Him and His distinct Word and people a laughing stock, it confirmed unbelievers more firmly in their unbelief. Unionism does the same.

Last summer, as part of an assignment for a pastoral theology course, "Grief Counseling With a Cross-Cultural Emphasis," (led by Prof. John Schuetze at our sister seminary, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary), C. S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed* was assigned for reading. In the foreword to the edition that I read, Madeleine L'Engle deals with death – from her perspective outside of the church – in a way that many inside the church, because of unionism, would accept and appreciate. She wrote:

"We don't have pat answers. The church is still pre-Copernican in its attitude towards death. The medieval picture of heaven and hell hasn't been replaced with anything more realistic, or more loving. Perhaps for those who are convinced that only Christians of their own way of thinking are saved and will go to heaven, the old ideas are still adequate. But for most of us, who see a God of a much wider and greater love than that of the tribal God who only cares for his own little group, more is needed. And that more is a leap of faith, an assurance that that which has been created with love is not going to be abandoned. Love does not create and then annihilate. But where Joy Davidman is

now, or where my husband is, no priest, no minister, no theologian can put into the limited terms of provable fact."<sup>14</sup>

Unionism's child is universalism.

### *Lloyd Ogilvie*

Gracious God, all that we have and are  
is a result of Your amazing generosity.  
Since September 11, in the battle against terrorism,  
we have discovered again that  
You truly are our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.

We rededicate ourselves to be one nation under You.  
In You we trust. We reaffirm our accountability to You,  
to the absolutes of Your commandments,  
and to justice in our society.

Bless our President, Congress, and all our leaders  
with supernatural power.  
We commit ourselves to be faithful to You  
as Sovereign of our land and as our personal  
Lord and Savior. Amen.<sup>15</sup>

If universalism is unionism's child, then generic language is the child's blanket.

Brothers, how important it is for us, especially since 9-11, to blow the clear trump of confession and a call to arms. With the sword of the Spirit in hand, that child and her mother – enemies of the Truth and of precious souls – must be slain. "*For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth,*" 2 Co 13:8, for precious souls.<sup>16</sup>

### *Church Fellowship, a Doctrine of Love*

Oh, how that sounds pugilistic and unloving! But isn't the formula for concord, for true unity, based on confession, not on compromise? God help us, yes! The confession that unites is confession of the Word of Truth. The opposite is unionism. Unionism must be refuted and confuted.

George O. Lillegard proposed this definition of unionism: "Unionism is joint worship or joint church work with those who do not confess the true faith in all aspects (Ro 16:17; Mt 7:15; 2 Jn 10, 11; Tit 3:10)."<sup>17</sup>

A church body that loves the Lord, who first loved us, that loves His Word, that loves its members who are already gathered, and that loves all those for whom Jesus had a gut-wrenching love (Mt 9:36), who are harassed and helpless, who are like sheep without a shepherd, will also love the doctrine of church fellowship and its application made in an evangelical way. In fact, it is necessary:

In order for a church body to remain confessional, and thus preserve its doctrinal heritage, it is important that it have a firm position on church fellowship. A strong position on Scripture and church fellowship go hand in hand; they are interlocking. Conversely, a firm position on Scripture without a firm position on church fellowship will eventually lead to a demise of the Scripture principle. We need to clearly distinguish between true and false doctrine and maintain doctrinal discipline when necessary. As we confess the truth we must also expose error. No church can remain confessional if it does not make this distinction and admonish errorists and remove them if they persist in their error. God means what he says in passages such as Romans 16:17, Titus 3:10, and Matthew 7:15...

The Rev. Henry Ingebritson, one-time president of the reorganized Synod, in his message...1939 emphasized the important of preserving the truth by quoting from Dr. Pieper's treatise on Unionism which says, "If we grant error a place alongside of truth, we thereby take back our confession of truth because the truth has this characteristic: it claims exclusive right and huts every error out. The truth is always exclusive over against error. We deceive ourselves when we imagine that we embrace the truth, if at the same time we grant error a place alongside of the truth."

Ingebritson then refers to "the last sad chapter of the old Synod...the spirit of unionism and indifferentism began to silence the confessionalism which had prevailed in the Synod. The flood gates of unionism and indifferentism were wide open."<sup>18</sup>

So, unity is to be with those who do confess the true faith in all aspects. And so, again, it has to follow, that, "Confessing the faith opposes

whatever subverts the faith.”<sup>19</sup> The *positiva* first, the *negativa* second. Thus we agree that:

### Thesis III

Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained in the past. (Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran reformation, and the Synodical Conference)

“When the word of God is taught in its truth and purity,” a God-pleasing method for attaining unity has been instituted. Compromise with error, hedging on disputed points, cowardly failure to teach *all* things whatsoever the Savior has commanded, is not, and cannot be, the basis for the establishing of a true union, nor of true unity. Union without unity, without unanimity in doctrine and practice, is unscriptural and therefore impossible to us. Loyalty to the truth of God’s Holy Word, orthodoxy in doctrine and practice, opposition to all error and heresy, fidelity to the symbols of Christendom and to the confessions of our Lutheran Church will promote true unity.<sup>20</sup>

Feel free to lift the following Biblical presentation and share...

### ***Our Close Fellowship in Christ and in the Church: A Positive Truth, Both in Doctrine and Practice***<sup>21</sup>

*God brings us into fellowship with Himself in two ways: 1) He credits us with Christ’s righteousness; 2) He removes our sin.*

- God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God, 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, purifies us from all sin, 1 John 1:7.
- To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness, Romans 4:5.
- I consider (all things) rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the

law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith, Philippians 3:8,9.

- Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers, Hebrews 2:11.
- I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me. I have given them the glory that You gave me, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me, John 17:20-22.
- Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, 1 John 1:3.

**Comments:**

“Death was there waiting for us when we were born. Obviously it did not get us then, but it will, even if it has to wait a hundred years. In sharing our humanity, the Son of God made Himself subject to the same mortality. He did it willingly, for a special and glorious purpose: to destroy the devil and ‘free those who all their lives long were held by their fear of death’ ... in Christ that cringing, hiding, guilt is done away with. Death still exists and it is still real, but those who have fellowship with Christ are freed from its real dread...the law of God killed (Jesus) in my place and now it cannot kill me. God punished Him in my stead and now He will not punish me. The devil did his worst to Him and now he has no claim on me. Death could not hold Him and it will not hold me.”<sup>22</sup>

*God brings us into our invisible fellowship with all believers in two ways: 1) He gathers us into the Holy Christian Church (Invisible) and 2) He separates us from the world.*

- Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, Ephesians 2:19.
- We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us, 1 John 1:3.

- But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light, 1 Peter 2:9.
- I have given them Your Word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world, John 17:14.

**Comments:**

“I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God which is the beginning of entering it.”<sup>23</sup>

Christians are: “... The holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.”<sup>24</sup>

“Because faith in Christ is invisible, we cannot practice the spiritual fellowship we have within the *Una Sancta*. We do not know what the personal relationship is that people have to Jesus Christ. The attitude of people hidden in their hearts does not enable us to recognize them as fellow members of the Body of Christ. We can judge them only on the basis of the outward evidence of what they say and do. Paul writes to the Roman Christians, ‘It is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved,’ (Ro 10:10). We can recognize those who are one with us only on the basis of their confession. While it is true that we may be deceived when their confession and conduct are hypocritical, the Lord does not expect us to recognize sham Christians. ‘He who searches our hearts,’ (Ro 8:27) will himself judge them and deal with them in His own time and in his own way, as He did when he exposed Ananias and Sapphira in the apostolic church.”<sup>25</sup>

*In all of Christian life, we positively express our invisible fellowship with God in two visible ways: 1) We live as God’s righteous children, and, 2) we avoid the world.*

- If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light,



as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, 1 John 1:6, 7.

- Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live among them, and will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord," 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18.
- Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul, 1 Peter 2:11.
- They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth, John 17:17.
- You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? James 4:4.

***Comments:***

"Back to Ephesians 2:10 and the works of those who are in Christ. Paul speaks of a new creative act. Where there was nothing God called forth something. As in the beginning He did it by His Word of power, so now He does it by His Word of grace. He has created us in Christ Jesus so that all our thoughts and words and deeds should be good by His standard and according to His judgment. God sees his workmanship, as He did in the beginning, and judges it to be 'very good.' For this very purpose and with this very result He has created us in Christ... God prepared these good works in advance for us to do. Good works are God's work. He has designed them for us and designed us for them. The sun shines; that is its function. Birds fly; that's just what they do. Those who are created in Christ Jesus do good works. The Gospel does not say, 'You must do good works.' It creates people who simply do them... My sin crushed the life out of Him but on the third day He rose again. He broke the power of sin by His perfect life, by his sacrificial death, by His resurrection. Crucified with

Christ, the sinful 'I' no longer lives. 'But Christ lives in me.' I am not free to sin but free to serve. My life is at the beck and call of Him who lives in me. In one sense I am not free to do as I please. In another sense I do as I please, for the Christ in me is pleased to love God and my neighbor, to serve God in my neighbor."<sup>26</sup>

*In the visible church we positively express our invisible fellowship with all believers in two ways: 1) we join with those who confess and practice the whole truth of the Gospel, and, 2) we avoid those who do not.*

- They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, Acts 2:42.
- Because there is one loaf, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf, 1 Corinthians 10:1.
- Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching, Hebrews 10:24, 25.
- James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me, Galatians 2:9.
- They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers, Acts 1:14.

**Comments:**

“When He established peace and fellowship between God and man He also established peace and fellowship between man and man. He took two kinds of people and created a third kind, neither Jew nor Gentile but Christian.”<sup>27</sup>

“1. *We do acknowledge and value the invisible church.* Belief in the reality and blessedness of the invisible church is at the heart of our focus on external evidences of it. An emphasis on the pure Gospel and adequate confessions does not lead us away from the invisible church, but allows us to discern its presence with as much certainty as we can gain here on

earth. It is not a matter of swapping fellowship with members of the invisible church with a lesser fellowship with visible church members, but seeking to preserve and express fellowship with the invisible church as made recognizable to us in visible ways (use of pure Gospel and adequate confessions). Since God's word calls us to value the invisible church and to practice responsible church fellowship with visible churches, we do both.

2. *We do not hinder Christian fellowship in the invisible church.* We are fully aware that the fellowship enjoyed by all members of the invisible church goes far beyond that enjoyed and visibly expressed in visible churches. We also affirm that practicing church fellowship in ways limited by God's Word in no way hinders or restricts the ongoing Christian fellowship maintained by the Holy Spirit. We grieve over our inability to recognize and express in visible ways the fellowship we possess with many believers, yet we are comforted with the assurance that we are sharing expressions of faith with them outside the context of church fellowship."<sup>28</sup>

"It is the duty of the church militant to strive for complete agreement in all matters of faith and doctrine; yet a higher level than fundamental agreement will never be attained."<sup>29</sup>

"Membership in a church body is an act of confession. Through his membership a person confesses himself to the teachings of that church. In joint expressions of faith that are public, such as, for example, public worship, prayer together in public, and going to the Lord's Supper together, you would have to judge the other person on the basis of this confession of church membership, which is a public confession. To disregard this public confession would only create offense and confusion. Whoever is a member of a persistently erring church body needs to be avoided in all joint public expressions of faith."<sup>30</sup>

"We call all such organizations of Christians "visible church" because we can identify the members of such groups by their public acceptance of the confession of that church and by their participation in the activities of that church...The false teaching which is tolerated in heterodox churches is always dangerous to people's faith. Christians have a duty to separate themselves from such error to protect themselves from it and to warn others against it."<sup>31</sup>

“Because obedience to Scripture is a self-evident mark and fruit of faith in Scripture, our Synod has found it necessary to separate from erroristic churches, however near the members may be by blood or may seem to be by outward confession, so that it may be known to all that our love of God and His Word goes before any loud-voiced ‘love of the brethren.’ In the sight of God there is no true love of the brethren which does not spring from love of God and obedience to His Word; from which it also follows that this loving obedience to God and His Word will direct a Christian and a Christian church to that true love of the brethren which God truly blesses. Separation from an erroristic church is thus an earnest warning to those who are members there and would claim fellowship in faith with us, that their error is a serious thing which we dare not share with them. Faced with the clear demand of God, we “cannot do otherwise” than make such separation a necessary part of our public confession, both for our own sake that we may keep the full measure of “grace and truth” which are in Christ, and for the sake of those from whom we have separated that they may be warned to turn away in time from an evil course which, as leaven, will inevitably, though secretly, leaven the whole lump.”<sup>32</sup>

“The Word of God throughout emphasizes doctrinal unity. The history of the early Christian church clearly shows what emphasis was placed upon doctrinal unity. The God-appointed leaders in the Apostolic church issued earnest warnings against false doctrines. Read the Ecumenical Creeds, especially the Athanasian Creed, and note the precise and exact language used. There can be no doubt that the early Church sought to safeguard soundness in doctrine. Or think of the Lutheran Confessions. Much time and effort were spent to express things so definitely and precisely that there should be no misunderstanding. Think especially of the Formula of Concord...Even so today the paramount need is that Lutherans whole heartedly and consecratedly unite on the basis of sound, Biblical doctrine. Such agreement and unity must be reached, not only between official committees, but also out in the field between pastors and between members of our congregations... Today efforts are being put forth toward fellowship via cooperation. Cooperative efforts have been proclaimed and heralded as harbingers of Lutheran fellowship and Lutheran union. Let me speak very frankly, If such cooperation involves joint work in mission, in Christian education, in student welfare work, in joint services celebrating great events, then cooperation is just another name for pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship. Without doctrinal agreement, this spells compromise. It means yielding in doctrinal positions. Such fellowship will not stand in the light of Scripture.

Furthermore, doctrine definitely must be followed by practice. Indescribable harm has been done the cause of Lutheran fellowship when men become guilty of unionistic services, whereby they create impressions that after all, there is no difference or that the differences are of little moment...<sup>33</sup>

*Even avoiding errorists is a positive, loving expression of our fellowship with God and the church.*

*a. Avoiding errorists positively expresses our trust that God never commands anything that is unloving or harmful to His church.*

- Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves, Matthew 7:15.
- I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them, Romans 16:17.
- Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him, Titus 3:10.
- Rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth, Titus 1:13, 14.
- If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work, 2 John 10, 11.
- He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it, Titus 1:9.

*b. Separation from errorists positively expresses our love for God by upholding the truth of His Word.*

- Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all

things grow up into Him who is the head, that is, Christ, Ephesians 4:13-15.

- God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth, 1 John 1:5, 6.
  - We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth, 2 Corinthians 13:8
  - ... Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, Matthew 28:20.
  - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work, 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.
- c. *Separation from errorists positively expresses love for our own souls by recognizing the danger even a little error poses.*
- A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough, Galatians 5:9.
  - Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true, Acts 17:11.
  - Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, 2 Corinthians 7:1.
  - Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world, 1 John 4:1.
  - Their teaching will spread like gangrene, 2 Timothy 2:17.
  - I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the

plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in the book, Revelation 22:18,19.

d. *Separation from errorists positively expresses our love for souls of others and our mission zeal for a going church.*

- If any of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner away from his error will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins, James 5:19,20.
- My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, John 17:20.
- We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us, 1 John 1:3.
- They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach, Titus 1:11.
- [False teachers] will secretly introduce destructive heresies, 2 Peter 2:1.

**Comments:**

“The objection is raised: ‘You yourselves admit that also in heterodox bodies there are still dear children of God, and yet by separating from these churches, you separate yourselves from these children of God; yes, you condemn them by avoiding these heterodox churches. In that case, isn’t it better to practice fellowship with the heterodox?’ First of all, we answer: No! It cannot be better, because God expressly forbids us to do this. Moreover, we do not even separate ourselves *from the children of God* among the sects, but *from the sects as such*. Rather, the sects separate these dear children of God from us. They hold those who belong to us – for children of God are determined to accept the whole Word of God – captive among us...It is also for the benefit of the children of God among the heterodox that we refuse church fellowship to these churches...According

to God's Word, Christians do not belong in the company of those who openly contradict some doctrines of Christ."<sup>34</sup>

"It is not orthodoxy that dulls love but a lack of love that makes orthodoxy dead."<sup>35</sup>

"Dr. Herman Sasse has reminded us that in the same prayer in which our Lord prayed, 'That they all may be one,' He first prayed, 'Sanctify them through Thy truth,' Thus, 'the quest for truth and the quest for unity are one.'"<sup>36</sup>

"The church needs to keep truth and love in balance just as much as an airplane needs two wings to fly. If either wing is lost, the plane will crash. If either truth or love is lost, the church cannot carry out its mission. Truth and love are not opposites. They are not rivals. They are partners that dare not be separated."<sup>37</sup>

"Thus the churches will not condemn one another because of dissimilarity of ceremonies when, in Christian liberty, one has less or more of them, provided they are otherwise agreed with one another in the doctrine and all its articles, also in the right use of the holy Sacraments..."<sup>38</sup>

"Let us also state our awareness of how quickly and how subtly a "party spirit" can grow up among us. An emphasis on correct teaching for the sake of faith and souls can easily become an emphasis on orthodoxy because we are orthodox. The temptation to exalt our external fellowship over against another is constant. It is also easy to tell others, 'This is simply the way we do things and where we draw the line in this matter,' rather than explaining the biblical basis and loving rationale behind it. Whether motivated by laziness or insecurity, this behavior is mechanical if not legalistic, misses the real point, and will inevitably be understood as loveless."<sup>39</sup>

"The doctrine belongs to God, not to us; and we are called only as its ministers. Therefore we cannot give up or change even one dot of it."<sup>40</sup>

"We are telling that individual or group that we will not share the responsibility for their error because:

1. we would be sinning against God by failing to show our love for His pure Word and failing to separate ourselves from anything false (1 Jn 1:5,6; Ps 119:103-205; Ro 16:17);



2. we would be sinning against our fellow Christians and our own souls by failing to separate completely from error, thus implying that one doctrine is as good as another and exposing them and ourselves to the spiritually destructive nature of error which never is static but always spreads like gangrene and yeast (2 Jn 11; 2 Co 7:1; Gal 5:9; Ro 16:17,18);
3. we would be sinning against the errorists, confirming them in their error by continued fellowship with them instead of separating from them when they begin to cause divisions in the church and lead others astray (Tit 1:13f; Jas 5:19f; Rev 22:18f; Ro 16:17,18).

But – let it be said again because it is so important to remember – in each of these cases whether it is on the basis of Matthew 18:17 or Romans 16:17 or both, each must be preceded by earnest and repeated admonition. Only in this way will we be scriptural and evangelical in our practice because

- only in this way will we avoid taking a legalistic “easy way out”;
- only in this way will we avoid giving a person the lasting impression that we are glad to get rid of him;
- only in this way will we be showing the full measure of love God wants us to show in trying to lead a manifestly impenitent sinner or a persistent errorist to repentance;
- only in this way will the final admonition to the manifestly impenitent sinner or the persistent errorist truly alert faithful Christians to the danger of the spiritual leaven at work in their midst;
- only in this way will the final action of excommunication or termination of fellowship be a continuing testimony to the person of his lost or straying spiritual condition.<sup>41</sup>

The following is a chart that may be helpful in comparing certain Scriptures which deal with our noting and responding to those who fall into error and persistently or unrepentantly continue in error:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>"Marking":</b> <i>Admonition Which Establishes Impenitence</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>"Avoiding":</b> <i>Separation from the Impenitent Brother</i></p>
1 Thess 4,5 - we told you... warn	- keep away from
2 Thess 3 - take special note	- do not associate
Matthew 18 - show him his fault -take one or two others -tell it to the church	- have nothing to do with
Titus 3:10 - warn... warn	- have nothing to do with
Ro 16:17 - watch out for	-keep away from
1 Cor 5 - I have passed judgment	-put out of your fellowship -hand over to Satan -not to associate with -not even eat with

### *Our Blessed Fellowship*

Because we are for Christ we have to be against some doctrines and their proponents. But that isn't our all. Only a caricature of us would depict that. But because we are for Christ we are also for and with those with whom we share a common confession and mission. We have a blessed fellowship with those in the CELC and the WELS.

From an ELS perspective:

The Wisconsin Synod proved to be a true brother during those trying years, fighting shoulder to shoulder with us over the same issues. And since the break-up of the Synodical Conference the two synods have been drawn closer together and have given expression to their

fellowship in various ways, the latest being the formation of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in Oberwesel, Germany, April 27-29, 1993. This Conference, international in scope, consists of lonely confessional Lutherans scattered throughout the world. A true unity of spirit was certainly evident at this constituting convention and it was only right and proper to give expression to this unity. As the reorganized Synod was the spiritual heir of the old Norwegian Synod, so the CELC is a true successor to the Synodical Conference, because it is built on the same scriptural principles.

The ELS has been in fellowship with the WELS since 1872. We have passed many synodical resolutions over the years expressing gratitude for this fellowship and imploring the Holy Spirit to strengthen the bonds of this fellowship. On our anniversary year we thank God again for the blessing of this fellowship over the years and pray that the Lord will continue to pour out his blessing on this fellowship.<sup>43</sup>

From a WELS practical perspective:

... We say that our Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod is in fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). This means that we recognize one another as brothers in the faith. We recognize that we are in confessional agreement, and we are ready to give expression to this unity of faith by worshipping together and working together in the kingdom of God...

We may invite pastors of the ELS to preach in our pulpits. Then we are practicing pulpit fellowship. We may invite members of the ELS to commune at our altars. Then we are engaging in altar fellowship. We may hold joint Reformation services together with them, invite congregations of the ELS to join our area Lutheran high school associations, ask them to cooperate with us in training our pastors in the Bethany program, and jointly carry on work in missions or charity.

If one were to ask: How do we know that the ELS is one with us in faith? – the answer is obviously: On the basis of their confession. We cannot look into their hearts, and they cannot look into ours. We can judge one another only by what we say and do... We are to judge them by their confession.<sup>44</sup>

## *When Love isn't Love and Fellowship isn't Fellowship*

Much is made of Church Fellowship being a doctrine of the Gospel and not of the Law. To be sure, in the Apology, Articles VII and VIII Melancthon rightly uses the term *evangelii doctrinam*, while Justus Jonas, in the German translation, uses the broader term *Gottes Wort*.

The fact, of course, is that all doctrine, although it is not Gospel in the narrow sense, does serve the proclamation of it. Law is not the good message of the Gospel, but the Gospel cannot be taught without also teaching the law. And so it is with all Scripture teaching. All that God reveals and teaches in Holy Scripture is ultimately in the interest of proclaiming His saving grace in Christ. Thus, the broad concept of "Gospel" as comprising all that Christ taught, not merely mathematically adds together parts or doctrines, but it recognizes that all doctrine of Scripture inherently belongs together, and failure in any part threatens the Gospel in the proper narrow sense.<sup>45</sup>

Augsburg VII states:

Also they teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc., Eph. 4:5,6<sup>46</sup>

*Satis Est* has two directions. "On the one hand it says, 'It is enough. If more is required by way of agreement that is beyond what is necessary.' (Limiting Role) "On the other hand it says, 'If you have this much agreement, it is enough. Anything less will not be enough.'"<sup>47</sup>

Aaberg draws a loving conclusion when he writes:

Let us be frank to admit that we ourselves are not always as clear and sharp as we should be in distinguishing and repudiating subjective faith as the basis for the acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship. We all need the admonition contained in

Thesis 11 of the Overseas Brethren Theses on Church Fellowship:

The marks of the church are all decisive. Everything must be referred to them. This duty is hindered by presumptuous judgments or statements concerning the faith or lack of it in individuals. It is Enthusiasm to build on subjective faith (*fides qua*) and love, for faith is hidden and love is variable. Both are in man. The Means of Grace are objective, solid, apprehensible. Since these are God's own means, we must attend entirely upon them and draw from them the distinction between the orthodox and heterodox churches (1961 ELS Report, p. 41)

It is *fides quae*. That which is believed, that is, the doctrine, the objective truth of God's Word that is the basis for the Christian's acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship with other Christians here on earth.<sup>48</sup>

In no uncertain terms Aaberg marks and warns against those who abuse the "love" angle for the sake of fellowship:

Liberal Lutherans, trying to keep one foot in their Lutheran tradition while planting the other foot in the modern ecumenical movement, have sought to keep from being split apart at the seams through the ever-widening gap by trying to tone down the bases for church fellowship on the basis set forth in Art. VII of the Augsburg Confession.

"The Gospel," which must be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it, mentioned in Article VII, does not mean all of Scripture, every doctrine of Scripture, they say, but rather some of the teachings of Scripture, its central teachings, in particular that which is necessary for salvation. This contention is made again and again, for example, in the essays presented by men from the National Lutheran Council in the NLC – LCMS exploratory meetings of the early 1960's. Speaking for the NLC, Prof. Conrad Bergendoff said:

"The *doctrina evangelii*, thus, is what the New Testament proclaims as its fundamental truth and this

is the Gospel which is to be preached in the church of Christ...

What has been said hitherto clearly points to a Gospel or message proclaimed what God has done for man in Christ Jesus and what God still does in human hearts by the ministry of the Word...it is the message of Christ dying for our sins and rising to reign in the hearts of his people eternally...

The force of the *satis est* is as much as to declare that not more than the Gospel could be demanded for true unity as to declare that nothing less was required. This throws the weight of the matter on what is the Gospel, and we have seen that its sum and substance is the forgiveness of sins secured by the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Wherever this Gospel is proclaimed and believed there is unity, and such unity should be witnessed to the world...

There is warrant neither in Scripture nor the Confessions for a demand that a whole theological system be held in common before a unity can be established between groups of Christians...

The proposition of complete unity or none at all cannot be defended on scriptural grounds, nor is it the description of the relations between Christians in church history.

(Conrad Bergendoff, "A Lutheran Study of Church Unity," Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran cooperation, published jointly by the LCMS, St. Louis, MO, and the National Lutheran council, New York, NY, 1961, pp. 7,9,10,14)

### *The Unit Concept: This is Love*

Walther's Thesis XXI in *The Evangelical Lutheran Church* concludes, "The Ev. Lutheran Church rejects all fraternal and churchly fellowship with those who reject its confessions in whole or in part." Fellowship comes with the Book, the whole Book. With the Book comes Jesus. As Jesus comes with the Book, the Book comes with Jesus. Without Jesus there is no true love. With Jesus there is true love.

### *The Principles of fellowship: The Unit Concept*

According to Scripture church fellowship must be dealt with as an undivided whole in two different respects.

First, when doctrines of Scripture are being discussed to determine if groups or individuals may practice fellowship together, all doctrine must be dealt with as a unit. Since all the teachings of Scripture have the same divine authority, we have no right to add anything to them nor to subtract anything from them. The practice of church fellowship, therefore, must be based on agreement in *all* of the doctrines of Scripture.

Second, the various activities which express church fellowship must be dealt with as a unit. Since various ways of expressing church fellowship (such as joint mission work, celebration of the Lord's Supper, exchange of pulpits, transfers of membership, and joint prayer) are merely different ways of expressing the same fellowship of faith, *all* expressions of church fellowship require the same degree of doctrinal agreement, namely, agreement in *all* of the doctrines of Scripture.

In short, the basic principles are that we work together for the truth, but that we avoid all fellowship with those who persist in error.

#### Some Guidelines for Applying the Principles of Fellowship

1. Before we consider exceptional cases, we should be sure that all parties involved understand and agree with the scriptural principles summarized above. We cannot make sound applications without a clear understanding of the principles.
2. We must be careful that we do not allow difficult cases to establish or modify the principles. We may not let feelings, emotions, or human reason pressure us into a particular application and then reshape our principles to condone our action.
3. We must guard against allowing specific applications or historical precedents to become rigid rules which govern similar cases. We must evaluate each case in the light of the scriptural principles.

4. We must remember that there are hard cases\* in which it is difficult to determine which scriptural principle applies. In such cases like-minded Christians may not reach the same conclusion at the same time. We should be careful not to pass hasty judgment on decisions which fellow Christians have made in such difficult cases. We may not know all the circumstances that led them to their decision. We should patiently listen to their explanations.

5. When we are faced with such a hard case, we should seek the advice of fellow Christians and explain the reasons for our actions to those who are concerned about them.

6. We should recognize that exceptional cases may lead us to depart from our normal practice, but we should be on guard that exceptions are not used to undermine principles. Such exceptions are exceptions to our regular practices, not to the scriptural principles.

7. We must constantly balance two responsibilities: to deal with the weak patiently and to deny fellowship to those who cling to error.

8. We must be careful that our patience in dealing with the weak does not become a source of offense and confusion to other Christians who may get the impression that we are condoning the error. We can guard against this by regularly reporting the status of our dealings with the errorist to our brothers and sisters in the faith.

9. We must pray for courage and decisiveness in dealing with adherents of error. We ask God to take away any timidity or desire for the approval of men, which may make us hesitant to testify clearly against error or that may make us willing to yield to false teachers and their followers (Ezekiel 2:3-7, 3:3-8).

10. We must not regard our responsibility to practice the principles of church fellowship as a burden or a handicap, but as a privilege and an opportunity. Here is an opportunity to show love for God and for our neighbor. Here is an



opportunity to suffer for the truth if it is God's will that we do so (1 Peter 4:12-16).

11. Above all, remember that these are not our principles of church fellowship; they are God's principles revealed in the Holy Scripture. Human judgment cannot determine the principles. They are established by God's Word. But human judgment must evaluate each situation to see what principles apply at this moment. As with any application of law and gospel, the proper application of the principles of church fellowship requires life-long study and practice. We pray that God gives us the willingness and the wisdom to apply these principles faithfully.\*\*

[\*A "hard case" is not a case which is hard on us, that is, a case which may arouse hostility against us or which may conflict with our emotions and desires. A "hard case" is a situation which is covered by two or more principles of God's Word which cannot be applied simultaneously, and we are struggling to determine which should be applied at this moment. \*\*These guidelines are adapted from Brug, *Church Fellowship*, p. 107-109]<sup>49</sup>

### *Fellowship Another Way*

**Pluralism**, the thought that every religious platform is valid and holds with it the idea that, in fact, we're stronger for it if we have diversity. Solomon wasn't referring to pluralism when he wrote, "*As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another,*" Proverbs 27:17. Pluralism, rather, cuts and kills true faith and confession. We are not better for it. Pluralism necessarily puts us side by side with those outside of Christianity entirely. Pluralism is based on compromise and is to be rejected.

**Ecumenism**, a form of unionism, has as its credo, "Let's agree to disagree," and has as its goal: "...the merging of all churches into one united but very differentiated church..."<sup>50</sup>

It's a fellowship based on compromise and is to be rejected.

**Minimalism** is one way toward ecumenical unionism. "If we are to accept the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds [as ecumenical confessions], it can only

be the faith expressed in these Creeds, not the particular formulation of this faith in thought forms which are in large measure meaningless for us today,"<sup>51</sup> Unity based on finding the least common denominator, albeit those denominators may be understood and interpreted and presented differently, is fellowship based on compromise. It, too, is to be rejected.

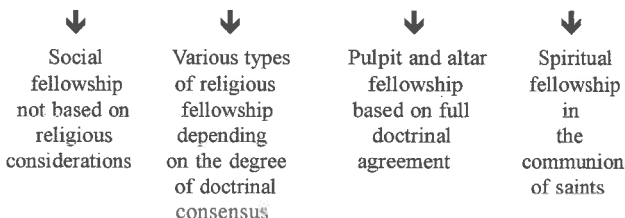
**Triangular fellowship** happens when one church body joins in fellowship with another church body, but that church body is participating in a fellowship with a body with which the first church body refuses to fellowship. The LCMS got itself into such a sticky situation in their last convention when it declared fellowship with the ELCL, the Lutheran Church of Latvia. The ELCL is participating in fellowship with the LWF, the Lutheran World Federation, with which the LCMS does not participate. Archbishop Vanags of the ELCL is quoted as saying, "There is tension between the LCMS and the LWF, but we should not play games according to their rules. We establish our own rules and develop friendly relations with all churches," (*Baltic times, July 5-11*)<sup>52</sup> Besides this triangular relationship, the ELCL has ordained women pastors/priests ordained during the communist regime. While Bishop Vanags is not ordaining any more women as pastors, he is not removing the ones who are serving. The LCMS refuses to recognize these women pastors or use them on Call lists interchangeably. With a "sufficient agreement" platform for fellowship strange bedfellows happen.

Triangular fellowship is inconsistent with a clear confession. It is a compromise and is to be rejected after the weak brothers are identified as persistent errorists.

**Levels of fellowship** is another approach to fellowship. It is based on a "continuum...ranging all the way from a relatively minimal agreement in this faith [in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior], all the way over to the other end of the continuum, where we have full agreement in the whole doctrine of the Gospel as taught in Scripture."<sup>53</sup>

Here is a graph that maps out how these levels would play out:

*Levels of Fellowship or Levels of Inter-Christian Relations*



The levels of fellowship concept is subject to human judgment, not Scripture. Since Scripture does not have full sway, levels of fellowship, too, is a compromise and is really an attempt to protract the Invisible Church into a visible one. Falsehood which is allowed to stand on any level is still emblematic of heterodoxy and is to be rejected.

**Selective fellowship** is a means to gain commonality with those of “like minds” who hold membership outside of one’s fellowship. What matters according to selective fellowship, and thus constitutes a platform for fellowship, is one’s private confession of faith not public confession of faith. Church membership, as aforesaid, is one’s confession of faith. If one’s church no longer confesses what the Bible states, in all aspects as well as one’s personal confession based on the Bible, that person is enjoined to mark and avoid.

But sometimes, if not most times, those who hold membership in a church body which is not within our confessional fellowship indicate that they are still holding membership because they are fighting to bring their church body back to confessionalism. That is a good reason and can be God-pleasing. Perhaps, such persons ought to formally declare that they are *in statu confessionis*, in protest of and seeking biblical resolve concerning false teachings and practices within the body within which they hold membership. That would blow a clear trump. That would publicly announce what one privately already embraces.

Yet, such a declaration doesn’t seem to be the practice. Instead, labels are attached, “conservative,” “moderate,” “liberal” and a party spirit forms within such groupings or unions. Often times those parties look for parties of the same bent within their “fellowship” and also with others outside their unions, selectively.

What’s done in the closet should also be able to be done in the market place in an open confession of faith. What’s done with one should be able to be done with the whole. What’s done with the one or the whole should also be able to be done with reciprocity. What’s done with one aspect of expression of fellowship should be able to be done with every expression of fellowship.

Theodore A. Aaberg gives the following encouragement, in the case of those who should attend in fellowship at the Lord’s Table:

The doctrine of church fellowship comes into consideration here, for there is a horizontal as well as vertical aspect of participation

in the Lord's Supper. That is, partaking of the Lord's Supper involves the communicant not only in a relationship with God, but also with the others communing. By participation in the Lord's Supper one is confessing a common faith with the others communing at the same altar.

Honesty requires that there actually be such a common confession of faith. When this fact is brought out, some visitors may not want to commune at our altars for the obvious reason they do not want to be along in a joint confession of what we stand for. Perhaps most vexing, in this connection, is the case of a conservative Lutheran, who still holds membership in his old church which has become increasingly liberal. Privately and informally he may stand with us confessionally, but one has to consider his formal church membership too, and the danger of giving offense to others by his participation at the Lord's Table with us."<sup>55</sup>

Love enjoins us to judge confessions, not hearts, and to listen to public confessions of faith, not just private. We seek to establish publicly what we can share privately first before we express fellowship, not necessarily in hopes of a permanent public confession which may be forthcoming. Public confession, in some way, should normally precede public expression of fellowship.

### *Elijah and Elisha*

Sometimes we feel alone in this confessional fellowship thing. 1 Kings 19 followed 1 Kings 18, confessional stance followed by upset, followed by the, "Woe are we...they've stoned the prophets before us and we're the only ones left." Sometimes we do feel like the plucked chicken. The accusations of "totalitarian," "sectarian," "separatist," "judgmental," "you think you're the only ones getting to heaven," are hard to hear.

They'll laugh at us and berate us. Look at what they're saying about those who avoid false unionism (written in regard to the 165<sup>th</sup> anniversary – 1991 – of the Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary, from the Fall, 1991 issue of *The Lutheran Theological Bulletin*):

The theme of the anniversary issue of the *Seminary Bulletin* is "Openness to the World." We read that "Gettysburg from its start cultivated an open fellowship with other Protestant denominations. It saw the future of Lutheranism in a gradual

withdrawal from its Germanic past and in association with the main stream of a religious people trying to discover an indigenous American character and destiny” (p. 5). **The seminary’s distinctive posture is described as having “preserved in the Church an effective counter-irritant against repristination theology and modified what might have become a headlong drift to the right in the direction of an even more reactionary theology as exemplified by the Missouri Lutherans.”** It is said to have “released creativity. Its temperament permitted internal experimentation, relatively uninhibited theological reflection, and openness to non-Lutheran and secular thought. It had no image of Lutheran orthodoxy to safeguard” (*ibid*).

S.S. Schmucker’s successor, J.A. Brown, in his inaugural address in 1864, **castigated those “who are more Lutheran than Luther himself, ...building the tombs and garnishing the sepulchers of the fathers”** (p. 20). In the “Gettysburg saga” the “openness” of later leaders is characterized as being “more favorable, responsive and accepting of evolution, biblical criticism, and the social gospel” than their counterparts in General Council Lutheranism.

John A. Singmaster, from 1900 to 1926 professor and then president of Gettysburg, asserted: “We have no sympathy with that illiberal, exclusive spirit manifested in some quarters. **We look with no favor upon proscriptive intolerance, whether found in those who represent what is called Old Lutheran Systems, or those who question the orthodoxy of all who do not chime in with their doctrinal views or subscribe to their theological basis”** (p. 6f). Opposing “too rigid and wooden confessionalism,” Raymond T. Stamm, professor at the seminary from 1926 to 1962, asked, **“How can we avoid treating...our Confessions as a kind of Lutheran Talmud?”** (p. 7).<sup>56</sup>  
{emphasis mine}

We’re not called to be popular, but faithful. We needn’t call she-bears forth to consume the children of unionism, God will not be mocked on His own. We’ll still continue to pray that God will let His Name be hallowed and His Kingdom come and in so doing hinder, thwart, smash and control every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, sinful flesh and the demon of unionism. We will love as we are loved, but we will also hate what God hates, Psalm 5:5. We will pray the imprecatory Psalms, as well as the Lehr und Dank Psalms: “Stop them, Lord; Teach us, Lord; Thank you, Lord.” And we will...

*Examine Yourself to See if You are in the Faith,  
Test Yourself (2 Corinthians 13:5)*

At a Lutheran Free Conference, held July 29-31, 1969 at the Hotel Blackhawk, Davenport, IA, Bjarne W. Teigen, made this observation:

At a Lutheran Free Conference such as this it would be unthinkable not to attempt to make an evaluation of the present status of the Biblical doctrine of Baptism in the church. From a rather cursory look one cannot say that a rosy picture emerges. Orthodox confessional Lutheranism, under the impact of the ecumenical movement, is fast waning, with little or no significant evidence that it might begin to wax in the near future.<sup>57</sup>

We desire to be a part of the waxing, not the waning, of orthodox confessional Lutheranism. The physician needs to get up on the exam table, too, for self examination and to allow brother physicians the opportunity, professionally and lovingly, to render careful diagnosis – to see if he’s a healthy contributor to such good waxing.

At an earlier Lutheran Free Conference, held July 9-12, 1968, in Minneapolis, MN, President George M. Orvick shared a wonderful quote:

It is better for the true congregation of Christ to be a small, unpretentious, and despised flock in the eyes of the neo-orthodox corrupters of Christianity, and to be true to the incarnate and inspired Word of God, than to win honor and thanks by extending the hand of fellowship to theologians and churchmen who betray and ravage the life-giving truth concerning the historical incarnation of God’s Son and the revelation of God’s nature on our earth. (Olav Valen-Sendstad, from *The Word can Never Die*, Concordia Publishing House, 1949, p. 18)<sup>58</sup>

Whenever we extend the hand of fellowship it must be to uphold the life-giving truth, not to betray or ravage it with false impressions of public acts of fellowship which may cloud our confession or cause offense. It’s always easy to spot the wolf of ecumenism and unionism and to hold him at bay as we bar the door to him. But ecumenism and unionism isn’t always so egregious and bold. Sometimes they can enter the house like mice in the smallest of cracks, often undetected. We’ve identified and defended against the wolf. Self-examination is a needed mouser for us and among us.

*For example...A Wedding*

Would you have been comfortable with this occurring at a wedding? The labyrinth was cut in the grass. Some preacher, I believe some Lutheran one at that, stood in the center while bride and groom did their labyrinth walk as a harmonic convergence.<sup>59</sup>

*For example again...Free Conferences*

Another area we might examine would be our involvement in Lutheran Free Conferences. The Lutheran Free Conferences of 1856-1859 and of 1964-1970 seem to be a little different from what is now considered a Lutheran Free Conference.

When C. F. W. Walther promoted the Free Conferences in His day he did so extending invitations only to those who had "a whole hearted acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg confession," over against those who followed the mutilations offered by the Definite Platform. His invitation was not extended to church bodies, but was a general call for individuals who wanted to be confessional Lutherans. "Therefore, since the Free Conferences consisted of men who confessed unreserved acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, there was present a fundamental unit. Whatever errors one or the other may have held, was a matter of weakness and not of persistence. To refuse joint prayer under such circumstances would have been a violation of brotherhood."<sup>60</sup>

Pastor Norman Berg moderator for the 1963-1970 Free conferences described a different setting:

Gathered as laymen and pastors dedicated to the service of the Savior, we seek a unity worked solely by the Holy Spirit. His guiding dare not be ignored. His guidance, however, is not to be found in mere human desire for unity. It is to be found only in His Means of Grace through which he works. The Spirit inspired teachings of Scripture alone can be the judge as to whether unity exists and therefore should be recognized...As individuals committed publicly to confessional groupings which disagree in doctrine we will not by joint opening worship devotions proclaim a confessional fellowship which does not exist publicly. We therefore now as before each session offer time and opportunity during a time of silence for our personal petitions for an added measure of the Holy Spirit's gifts.<sup>61</sup>

After the 1964 Free Conference held in Waterloo, IA, Armin Schuetze reported:

There was no attempt to disregard the fact that even though there was agreement on the doctrine of the Scripture, differences in doctrine might well be present among the participants. That is to be expected among a group coming from the many synods represented among the participants, synods for the most part not in fellowship with one another. What the differences are will have to become apparent through further discussions, since it cannot be assumed that each participant in every case holds to the doctrinal position of the body of which he is a member. In many instances it was dissatisfaction with the present position of their synods that brought the men to the conference. Yet, whatever differences are present need to be reckoned with and, if possible, overcome through the power of God's Word. The very fact that no devotions were conducted was evidence of the fact that these differences are not to be forgotten or disregarded in favor of premature expressions of fellowship.<sup>62</sup>

I have attended Lutheran Free Conferences which bore out the format and the spirit expressed and practiced towards the end of the last century.<sup>64</sup> And I have attended, as an observer, so-called Free Conference presentations where this was not so clear, nor practiced. Clear trumps need to be sounded today concerning Lutheran Free Conferences. Lutheran Free Conferences ought to represent what their nomenclature claims. They ought to be truly *FREE*...

- *Of a specific synodical identity or exclusive synodical host*
- *Of worship and prayer fellowship*
- *Of meeting stated purposes that would be directed to help the cause/mission of a specific synodical identity*
- *To allow for meeting a continuing need for conservative Lutherans of all synods to study and discuss issues on a Biblical basis outside of the parameters of fellowship*
- *To allow the presenters and participants to assemble, offer, and react as individuals who meet as free agents, not in official representation of their church bodies as such.*

### *In conclusion...*

On the base of a statue of Martin Luther located at the Seminary from which I graduated are quotes from the reformer. My favorite quote



says, "I have taught, preached and written God's Word; otherwise I have done nothing. The Word did everything." Perhaps you will be as satisfied as I if our work for the Lord is able to bear such a humble, yet honored ascription. I will be satisfied if this work does the same.

So we go into the world pocked by craters of terror, scarred by hatred and death, broken, hurting, crying, sighing and dying. We go back to our dear saints gathered at home, and to the highways and byways there to reach those wandering like sheep without a shepherd. We go to offer the best: the True, Holy, Loving, Triune Savior God, the honest, clean, and pure Gospel in Word and Sacraments (the only real ties that bind), and not the quick fix of unionism's hollow and crumbling comfort and answers to sin and death in the world. All because we've got the best to offer, Jesus, who said, "*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full,*" John 10:10.

## Appendix A

763.545.5659  
763.545.6953 fax  
www.calvaty.org  
7520 Golden Valley Road  
Minneapolis, MN 55427

# Calvary

August 6, 2002

Pastor David Russow  
King of Grace Lutheran Church  
6000 Duluth Street  
Golden Valley, MN 55422

Dear Pastor Russow,

On behalf of Golden Valley Mayor Linda Loomis, I invite you to a luncheon for clergy and church leaders on Tuesday, August 27, at 12 noon. This lunch with the mayor will be held in the Fireside Lounge of Calvary Lutheran Church. We look forward to a get acquainted session and time of discussion on how our congregations and the city work together.

You are welcome to invite members of your staff and congregation to join us. Simply RSVP with the names of those attending to my secretary, Ms. Kathi Miller, at 763/545-5659, ext. 107, or [knlller@calvary.org](mailto:knlller@calvary.org). We would appreciate hearing from you by Friday, August 23.

We thank you for your partnership in the Gospel and look forward to seeing you on the 27th.

Fondly,

Pastor Mary M. Brown  
Evangelism Pastor  
Calvary Lutheran Church

## Appendix B

### *Labyrinths – Tools for Transformation*

The labyrinth can be described as a powerful spiritual tool whose path leads one to one's own center. It is a sacred design, a divine imprint or archetype, birthed almost 4,000 years ago. Labyrinths are found in several traditions across the world. This spiritual tool is now coming back to use as people all over the world seek new (ancient?) ways to experience and understand their life journeys.

Labyrinths are a form of maze. Unlike mazes, however, labyrinths offer one path which always leads to the center. There are no false turns or dead ends. By following one path to the center, the seeker can use the labyrinth to quiet the mind and find peace and illumination at the center of his or her being. This is a tool for meditation that serves as a metaphor for one's spiritual journey. The labyrinth reflects back to the seeker whatever he or she needs to discover.

#### *A Three-Fold Mystical Tradition*

Three stages, known as the Three-Fold Mystical Path, comprise the labyrinth experience. The first part of this path, until you reach the center of the labyrinth, is shedding or Purgation. This comes from the root word "to purge" meaning to release, to cleanse, to let go. It is a letting go of the details of your life. It quiets the mind.

The second stage of the Three-Fold Path, Illumination, is found in the center of the labyrinth. Usually it is a surprise to reach the center because the long winding path seems "illogical" and cannot be figured out by the linear mind. After quieting the mind and opening your heart in the first part of the walk, the center presents a new experience: a place of meditation and prayer; a place to receive what is there for you. Often people at this stage in the path find insight into their life situation or clarity about a certain problem.

The third stage, Union, begins when you leave the center of the labyrinth and continues as you retrace the path that brought you in. In this stage, the meditation takes on a grounded, energized feeling. Union is the joining with Divine, your Higher Power, to bring your new insights and discoveries of your individual gifts out into the world. This part of your journey empowers, invites, even pushes you to be more authentic and confident in sharing your gifts with the world.

The **Three-Fold Path** is based on a universal understanding of meditation: to release and quiet; to open and receive; to take what was gained back out into the world. Each time you walk the labyrinth you become more empowered to find and do the work for which your soul is reaching.

## Appendix C-1

# ROCKY MOUNTAIN FREE CONFERENCE

*"THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF THE HOLY  
MINISTRY"*

*MAY 14-15, 1993*

"Lutheran Free Conference" is an informal gathering of Lutheran pastors and laypersons for the purpose of discussing doctrines which divide Lutherans. (In such a gathering Church Fellowship is neither expressed, practiced nor implied.)

### SPEAKERS:

Rev. Wayne Mueller (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod:  
Administrator of Parish Services, WELS,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

Dr. Norman Nagel (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod:  
Graduate Professor of Systematic  
theology, Concordia Seminary, St.  
Louis)

LOCATION: TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH (LCMS)  
4225 West Yale Avenue  
DENVER, COLORADO

REGISTRATION FEE:      \$20.00 per person, postmarked by  
May 1st  
                                     \$25.00 after May 1st  
                                     \$10.00 per spouse

Please make checks payable to "Rocky Mountain Free Conference" and send to:

Rocky Mountain Free Conference  
1405 W. Tamarack Road  
Salt Lake City, UT 84123

(Transportation and accommodation arrangements are left up to the individual participants. Please see separate sheet for agenda, and registration form)

Conference Sponsors:

Dennis Brech, pastor LCMS    -David Russow, pastor WELS  
Greg Sahlstrom, pastor LCMS    -Paul Wendland, pastor WELS

## Appendix C-2

### SATURDAY MAY 15:

**Session 2:** "Historical Articulations of the Doctrine" – Roman Catholic vs. Lutheran, Grabau vs. Walther, Missouri vs. Wisconsin(Thiensville Theses) Meaning of Terms: Pfarramt and Predigtamt. Is the Public Ministry the Pastoral Ministry?

8:30 AM Coffee

9:00 AM Prof. Nagel

9:50 AM Break

10:00 AM Prof. Mueller

10:50 AM Break

11:00 AM response by Prof. Nagel

11:15 AM response by Prof. Mueller

11:30 AM Questions and Answers

12:00 PM Lunch

**Session 3:** "The Current Scene" -Current articulations/applications of each church body on their teaching on Ministry, meaning of ordination vs. installation, ordination of teachers, calls for Sunday school teachers, elders/deacons, janitors? Church Growth terminology: "ministries" vs. "the ministry." Office of the Public Ministry vs. Priesthood of all Believers. Pastor as "overseer," "shepherd," or "coach."

1:00 PM Prof. Mueller

1:50 PM Break

2:00 PM Prof. Nagel

2:50 PM Break

3:00 PM response by Prof. Mueller.

3:15 PM response by Prof. Nagel.

3:30 PM Questions and Answers

4:00 PM Break

### **Session 4:** "Summations and Final Questions"

4:15 PM Question Forum

5:00 PM Summations, Prof. Nagel

5:15 PM Summations, Prof. Mueller

5:30 PM Close

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Note: If such a description seems repulsively boorish, consider how epugnant to our Holy God and His clear will in the First and Second Commandments. The sin is only as great as the One who is offended by it.

<sup>2</sup>Dr.Theo. Graebner, *The Lutheran Witness*, 1919, p. 180ff.; quoted in Essays on Church Fellowship, Curtis A. Jahn, editor, Milwaukee: NPH; p. 210.

<sup>3</sup>Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 99, Number 2, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup>Minneapolis Star Tribune, September 11, 2002, Section A, p. 17

<sup>5</sup>See Appendix A

<sup>6</sup>“So take the hand of one next to you now and join me in prayer on this ‘field of dreams’ turned into God’s house of prayer... O Lord our God we are leaning on you today... Those of us who bear the name of Christ understand that your towering love found its ultimate strength when you stooped to send your Son to die and live again in order to bring the world back together... O Tower of Strength, unite us now across all boundaries in acts of grace and truth in this great city...”

<sup>7</sup>Mollie Ziegler, *Interfaith Is No Faith*, Washington Post, July 19, 2002. Ms. Ziegler, a layperson in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, reports on the music industry from Washington.

<sup>8</sup>“Unity, Union, and Unionism,” Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, Bethany College, Dec., 1938; p. 19

<sup>9</sup>For a succinct review of this matter see WLQ, Vol. 97, #4; pp. 302-305.

<sup>10</sup>For example concerning prayer itself: the reformed consider prayer as a beneficium; the Roman Catholics pray to saints and Mary; then there are those who deny Scriptures by adding to or subtracting from (Re 22:18-19) the Scriptures, including the teachings concerning prayer, et. al.

<sup>11</sup>For a succinct discussion of this see WLQ, Vol. 99, #1; pp. 68-71

<sup>12</sup>T. A. Aaberg, “The Doctrine of Church Fellowship,” ELS General Pastoral Conference, Minneapolis, MN, January 4-7, 1977, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup>John F. Brug, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 99, #1, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup>C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers; 1989; p. 9.

<sup>15</sup>Lloyd Ogilvie is the Chaplain of the United States Senate. This prayer was offered at the one year anniversary of 9-11.

<sup>16</sup>NOTE: “For precious souls”! Consider: “Religious comfort has value only if it is based on something real. Only the comfort that is based on Jesus’ death and resurrection is real. Now when so many people are torn by this terrible tragedy we should be directing them to real comfort, not joining in comfort which is shallow and false. We should be saddened by this disaster. It is heart-breaking to think of so many young lives ended, of spouses and young children left alone. But in these sad days have we felt even greater sorrow that so many victims of the attacks were not spiritually prepared to meet the only God? For the terrorists too we should feel a measure of sorrow, that for them the flames did not end in that fiery crash but only began, that they have lost forever the happiness a loving



Father had prepared also for them. In such hours of horror we can't join in dispensing useless pain kill that makes people feel better for awhile but does nothing to heal the disease. If you have the medicine that heals forever, how can you fail to warn against useless placebos?" John F. Brug, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 99, #1, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> George O. Lillegard, "Modern Ecumenism and Cooperation in Externals," 1959, Zahn, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm Walther Petersen, "Our Great Heritage," delivered at 76<sup>th</sup> Annual Synod Convention Commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ELS; pp. 22-23.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1991; p. 137.

<sup>20</sup> "Unity, Union, and Unionism," op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Presented in service to the Savior by Wayne Mueller, Spring Valley, WI, 9-25-94.

<sup>22</sup> Richard D. Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and practice: Five Studies in the Teaching and example of Jesus and the Apostles, April 25-26, 1984; pp. 2, 6.

<sup>23</sup> LC, The Creed, Art. III:61,52, Triglot, p. 691; Tappert, p. 417

<sup>24</sup> SA, III, XII:2 Triglot, p. 499; Tappert, p. 315

<sup>25</sup> Wilbert R. Gawrisch, "Levels of Fellowship" – Scriptural Principles or Rules of Men?, Jahn, op.cit., p. 287.

<sup>26</sup> Balge, op.cit., pp. 4, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Forrest L. Bivens, "Current issues Concerning Church Fellowship," October 29, 1995, p. 6

<sup>29</sup> C.F.W. Walther, "Theses Concerning the Modern Theory of Open Questions," 1868, Thesis 5.

<sup>30</sup> Armin W. Schuetze, "Timely Topics", 1961, Jahn, op.cit., p. 337

<sup>31</sup> John F. Brug, *Working Together for the Truth: The Biblical Doctrine of Church Fellowship*, NPH: Milwaukee, 1996; p. 1,7.

<sup>32</sup> S. C. Ylvisaker, *Grace for Grace*, Lutheran Synod Book Company, Mankato, MN. 1943; p. 209.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. John W. Behnken, *Lutheran Witness*, 1946.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. F. Pieper, *The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*, 1889; p. 28

<sup>35</sup> Balge, op.cit., p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 51 (a quote from *This Is My Body*, Minneapolis, 1959, p. 334).

<sup>37</sup> Brug, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> FC, "Of Church Rites", Triglot, p. 1063;

<sup>39</sup> Bivens, op. cit., p. 6

<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther, *Galatians Commentary*, LW 27:37

<sup>41</sup> David P. Kuske, "Excommunication or Termination of Fellowship?" Jahn, op. cit.; pp. 304, 307

<sup>42</sup> John F. Brug, "Exegetical Brief: 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15 – Admonish Him as a Brother", *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 96, #3, p. 216,

<sup>43</sup> Petersen, op. cit., p.p. 21-22.

<sup>44</sup> Wilbert R. Gawrisch, "Romans 16:17,18 and its Application to Individual Fellowship," Jahn, op. cit., pp. 242, 243

<sup>45</sup> Armin W. Schuetze, "The *Satis Est* in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, Jahn, op. cit., p. 277

<sup>46</sup> AC, Of the Church, Art. VII, Triglott, p. 47; Tappert, p. 32

<sup>47</sup> Schuetze, "The *Satis Est*...." op. cit., p. 276

<sup>48</sup> Aaberg, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> John Brug, "Are There Ever Any Exceptions To Our Regular Fellowship Practices Which Do Not Violate Fellowship Principles?" pp. 1,2

<sup>50</sup> David Hedegaard, *Ecumenism and the Bible*, Evangelispress, Orebro, Sweden, 1954, p. 215.

<sup>51</sup> J. M. Shaw, Lausanne Conference Report, p. 348, quoted in, Hedegard, *ibid.*, pp. 218-219

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in WLQ, Vol. 99, #1, p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> Ralph A. Boholman, "Conversations," cited by Gawrisch, "Levels of Fellowship..." op. cit., p. 287.

<sup>54</sup> Gawrisch, *Ibid.*, p. 288

<sup>55</sup> Theodore A. Aaberg, "A Young Pastor's Concern Over Close Communion," *The Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. XXII, No. 3, September 1982, p. 74.

<sup>56</sup> Wilbert R. Gawrisch, News and Notes, vol. 89, # 3, pp. 224-225

<sup>57</sup> Bjarne W. Teigen, "God the Holy Spirit Acts Through Baptism," from *God the Holy Spirit Acts*, Milwaukee:Northwestern Publishing House, Eugene P. Kauffeld, Editor; 1972; p. 105

<sup>58</sup> George M. Orvick, "Jesus Christ, The Humble Servant – Fact Not Fiction," from *Jesus Christ – Fact or Fiction*," Milwaukee:Northwestern Publishing House, Vernon H. Harley, editor; 1969; p.54

<sup>59</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>60</sup> *Fellowship Then and Now*, pp. 8, 9

<sup>61</sup> Journal for the 6<sup>th</sup> Lutheran Free Conference written by Melvin Smith, quoted in "The 1856-1859 and the 1964-1970 Free Conference, Similarities and Differences," by John Strackbein, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library files.

<sup>62</sup> Armin Schuetze, "News and Comments," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 61, #3; p. 209

<sup>63</sup> See APPENDIX C1 and C2 . You might notice that two of the men who co-sponsored the Free Conference then are on the clergy roster of the ELS now (Greg Sahlstrom and the essayist). A third is now a Professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (Paul Wendland). Note the explanation of a Lutheran Free Conference as given, noting well the parenthetical statement.

# Church and State, Congregation and Synod: An Anthological Essay

*With Special Reference to the Church Polity of the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*

*by David Jay Webber*

## *Basic Principles*

The authority of civil government has its origin in God and in God's will for the temporal welfare of the human race. Therefore we

should honor the State as an institution of God for the regulation of the outward affairs of men, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives here upon earth. God has given us this institution "for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well" [1 Peter 2:14]. And for the execution of this purpose God has bestowed upon it the sword. The State has authority from God to employ force where this is necessary for the accomplishment of its ends.<sup>1</sup>

The authority of spiritual government has its origin in God and in God's will for the eternal welfare of the human race. This means that

The Church also is a divine institution, but its realm is quite different from that of the State. It is limited to spiritual affairs. It touches matters which the State cannot reach – religion, conscience, the thoughts and intents of the heart. God has entrusted it with the means of grace and has laid upon it the obligation to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. The Church's work is in a word evangelization. The Church has no sword but the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. She employs no force, but uses only the persuasive power of the Word. Church and State observing their appropriate spheres should dwell together in harmony.<sup>2</sup>

But the coexistence of Church and State in this world has often not been as harmonious as the divine originator of each would have wanted. At various times in history one or both of them have failed to heed the guidance that the Lord himself has given. As followers of Christ, however, we believe that

The relation of Church and State is to be determined on the basis of Christ's command to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's (Matt. 22:21). The sphere of the Church and that of the State are different. Neither must interfere with the affairs of the other. Since the Church possesses an external organization, it is in temporal matters subject to the laws of the State; but in spiritual matters, in those which concern the sphere of the Church as such, the State has nothing to say. On the other hand the Church has no right to interfere in the affairs of the State. She has no right as an organization to take any part in politics. In all her activities she must aim at spiritual results and use spiritual means. Her one fundamental duty is that of administering the Means of Grace. She has no call officially as a Church, therefore, to enter into any purely humanitarian enterprises, to organize plans for social uplift, to take sides in industrial disputes, to line up with a particular political party, or to push political measures of any kind through legislatures or congress. Her members as individual Christian citizens may and often should do many of these things. They have political rights and duties which they are to assert and fulfill in a Christian and conscientious manner. But the Church as a Church should confine herself to that work which belongs to her; namely, the work of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of enunciating the principles of love and righteousness which should guide men in their social and political relations.<sup>3</sup>

Basically, "The State is concerned with the temporal welfare of men and the maintenance of outward law and order; while the Church is concerned with the spiritual welfare of men and the maintenance of genuine religion and morality in the heart."<sup>4</sup>

These principles are stated clearly in the Augsburg Confession, the fundamental confession of the sixteenth-century Lutheran Reformation. There had been a lot of confusion on these points, and on the proper roles of those who held ecclesiastical and political offices. In addressing these problems, Philip Melancthon writes that Lutheran teachers

have been compelled, for the sake of instructing consciences, to show the difference between the power of the church and the power of the sword. They have taught that because of the command of God both are to be devoutly respected and honored as the highest blessings of God on earth. However, they believe that, according to the gospel, the power of the keys or the power of the bishops is the power of God's mandate to preach the

gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. For Christ sent out the apostles with this command [John 20:21-23]: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” And Mark 16[15]: “Go...and proclaim the good news to the whole creation....” This power is exercised only by teaching or preaching the gospel and by administering the sacraments either to many or to individuals, depending on one’s calling. For not bodily things but eternal things, eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, eternal life, are being given. These things cannot come about except through the ministry of Word and sacraments, as Paul says [Rom. 1:16]: “The gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.” And Psalm 119[50]: “Your promise gives me life.” Therefore, since this power of the church bestows eternal things and is exercised only through the ministry of the Word, it interferes with civil government as little as the art of singing interferes with it. For civil government is concerned with things other than the gospel. For the magistrate protects not minds but bodies and goods from manifest harm and constrains people with the sword and physical penalties. The gospel protects minds from ungodly ideas, the devil, and eternal death. Consequently, the powers of church and civil government must not be mixed.<sup>5</sup>

Martin Luther also accentuates these principles very strongly. According to their spiritual office, the church’s pastors and preachers do not have authority in matters that are strictly economic or political. Instead, according to Luther,

Here you have the spiritual rule (*Regiment*), which one should be sure to separate as far from temporal rule as heaven and earth are apart. Now the men who have charge of this spiritual rule are real kings, real princes, real masters; and it is their duty to govern. Note here, however, and learn how this rule is limited and how far it extends. It extends (as the words clearly say) over the entire world; and yet it is to deal only with sins. Neither with money nor goods, neither with the means of subsistence nor with anything pertaining to them, is it to concern itself. With these, emperors and kings, princes and lords, are to deal; they are to arrange and to do everything in a manner most serviceable to the general interest and peace. But this spiritual rule is directed only at sins. Where sin begins, this rule is to begin too, and not elsewhere. One should be careful not to mix and mingle these two jurisdictions...<sup>6</sup>

## *Involvement of the Princes*

It might therefore be surprising for us to hear Melanchthon, in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, say something like this to the Emperor:

You have the responsibility above all to God: to preserve sound doctrine, to propagate it for posterity, and to defend those who teach rightly. For God demands this when he honors kings with his own name and calls them gods [Ps. 82:6], “I say, ‘You are gods,’” so that they may take care in preserving and propagating on earth “divine matters,” that is, Christ’s gospel, and as vicars of God that they may defend the life and welfare of the innocent.<sup>7</sup>

In the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Melanchthon expands this obligation to other kings and princes:

It is especially necessary for the most eminent members of the church, the kings and princes, to attend to the church and take care that errors are removed and consciences restored to health, just as God expressly exhorts them: “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth” [Ps. 2:10]. The first concern of kings should be to promote the glory of God. It would, therefore, be most shameful for them to use their authority and power to encourage idolatry and countless other disgraceful acts and to slaughter the saints.<sup>8</sup>

Especially in regard to the synods and councils of the church, the civil authorities are told that they should see to it that everything is done in an orderly way and according to God’s Word. Melanchthon writes that since “judgments of the councils are judgments of the church, not of the pontiffs, it is wholly appropriate that rulers restrain the wantonness of the pontiffs and ensure that the power to examine and to make judgments according to the Word of God is not snatched away from the church. And as other Christians are obliged to censure the rest of the pope’s errors, so must they rebuke him when he avoids and obstructs the church’s inquiry and true judgment.”<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand these statements, and to harmonize them with what had been said in the Augsburg Confession, it is necessary to pay strict attention to the fact that these rulers are being called upon to involve themselves in the affairs of the church because they are professing Christians. Just as clergymen who hold an ecclesiastical office do not thereby cease to be citizens of their country, so likewise Christians who hold political

office do not thereby cease to be members of the church. They are, in fact, at least by some standards, “the most eminent members of the church.” The advice that the Confessions give to the Emperor, the kings, and the princes is advice that would not be given to non-Christian rulers. These men are being asked to play a role in ecclesiastical affairs because they are baptized members of the church who should be concerned about its problems, and because by divine providence and the circumstances of history they have the “clout” that is needed to reform the church and to suppress the tyranny of the pope and his bishops. Essentially they are being called upon to do what any Christians should do, that is, condemn error and rebuke those who misuse their authority. But for obvious reasons there is an expectation that the political rulers will be more likely to succeed in such efforts, and to achieve practical results.

In fact, “The early Lutherans led by Luther and his co-laborers put the government of the young evangelical church into the hands of the princes. It was intended to be temporary,” and “Luther looked forward to a time when this government could be put into the right hands (‘in die rechten Haende’).”<sup>10</sup> But, for the time being at least, such an arrangement was seen as the best that was available. Over time the papacy had insulated itself from the possibility of being reformed from within the church, by separating itself from all ordinary lines of accountability to the church at large. Luther therefore called upon the princes to take extraordinary action.

Certainly this was not an ideal situation. Luther was also realistic about the need to monitor them in this work, and to admonish them if they neglected their duty. Before long he became painfully aware of the fact that “among the nobility there are also some louts and skinflints who declare that they can do without pastors and preachers now because we now have everything in books and can learn it all by ourselves. So they blithely let parishes fall into decay and brazenly allow both pastors and preachers to suffer distress and hunger.”<sup>11</sup> But given a choice between ecclesiastical government by the pope’s canonical bishops, who opposed the preaching of the pure Gospel, and ecclesiastical government by pious laymen functioning as “emergency bishops,” who supported the preaching of the pure Gospel, Luther’s preference was unambiguous. He writes: “Now our temporal rulers must be emergency bishops, must protect and help us pastors and preachers – since the pope and his horde will not, but are opposed to it – so that we can preach, serve churches and schools.”<sup>12</sup>

Specifically in response to the pope's claims to the contrary, Melancthon says in the Treatise that "it must be acknowledged" that the keys of the kingdom of heaven

do not belong to one particular person but to the church, as many clear and irrefutable arguments show. For having spoken of the keys in Matthew 18[:18], Christ goes on to say: "Wherever two or three agree on earth..." [Matt. 18:19-20]. Thus he grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the church...<sup>13</sup>

Since the princes were members of the church, and since they therefore shared in the power of the keys (together with all other Christians), the Reformers believed that it was permissible for them, in an emergency situation such as existed in the sixteenth century, to assume certain supervisory duties that otherwise would be carried out by regularly-called bishops. Luther had written in his 1520 address *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* that "those who exercise secular authority have been baptized with the same Baptism, and have the same faith and the same Gospel as the rest of us." For this reason "we must regard their office as one which has a proper and useful place in the Christian community."<sup>14</sup>

### *The State-Church System*

Their "proper and useful" role in the reform of the church was eventually facilitated by political developments within the Holy Roman Empire:

In 1526, the Diet of Speyer decreed that each territorial ruler could decide whether to implement the Reformation in his territory until such time as an ecumenical council could settle the religious differences. This provided an opportunity for evangelical princes to reorganize church life in their territories according to evangelical principles, and required, in turn, visitation of parishes to evaluate the conditions of church life and determine what practical reforms were needed. Parochial visitation was a duty of the bishop, but in Electoral Saxony it was undertaken under the authority of the Elector. Luther and Melancthon prepared Visitation Articles for the visitors. But the visitors went out as electoral officials...<sup>15</sup>



This provisional method of governing the affairs of the church was put in place “at a time when the princes were generally men of sincere interest in the Church and at a time when they were the best fitted persons for the task. Nevertheless it laid the foundation for a continuing injury to Lutheranism,” from which the Lutheran state churches in Germany and Scandinavia have suffered greatly. What was supposed to be temporary became permanent, and as a result the Lutheranism of the state churches became permanently disfigured. “The time came when the Church had to bear the yoke of the State for definite service. Some of the worst cases may be seen in the forced introduction of the Church Union in Prussia and other parts of Germany.” In general, through the state-church system, “the Church was degraded into a mere factor of civilization, in line with the education through school, theater and press.”<sup>16</sup>

And the state churches of Europe continue to suffer as a result of this system. In Germany, for example, the “visitation” committees that the secular governments organized at the time of the Reformation, to investigate and supervise the life and work of the congregations,

soon became permanent bureaucracies. Even today, their members represent both the church and the secular government – a reminder of the twofold basis on which they were originally organized. All this has left the Protestant churches in Germany with a still-unresolved problem. In fact, these governmental bureaucracies still make decisions about the life of the church. In so doing, they assume rights and responsibilities that really belong to the congregations. That is true at least of all those tasks that the prince assumed as “chief member” of the church: the selection and the installation of pastors and church officials, the adoption of liturgies for the use in worship, and church discipline – the last is, admittedly, not very energetically administered. Obviously we cannot begin to guess how the situation would have developed if the congregations at the time of the Reformation had retained these responsibilities. The example of all those Protestant congregations who have had to organize themselves under governments who have opposed their very existence demonstrate that the result would not necessarily have been chaos. The fact is, however, that the German Protestant churches have been under the control of the secular government and that, as a result, even today the congregations have hardly any rights and responsibilities. We deceive ourselves if we expect mature congregations to develop under that condition.<sup>17</sup>

Again, the Reformers had emphasized the point that the governing authorities should assume such duties as “the most eminent members of the church,” and not as “kings and princes.” Nevertheless, “it is very easy to see that this nice distinction might be forgotten and the kings and princes themselves as well as others might come to think that their secular dignity in itself conferred upon them the authority of governing the Church also.”<sup>18</sup> By the second half of the seventeenth century there were theologians who were willing to defend and justify this usurpation. John William Baier wrote in 1685 that the duties belonging to the civil magistracy included

The appointing of suitable ministers of the Church; the erection and preservation of schools and houses of worship, as well as the providing for the honorable support of ministers; the appointing of visitations and councils; the framing and maintenance of the laws of the Church, the controlling of the revenues of the Church, and the preservation of Church discipline; the trial of heretical ministers, as also of those of bad character, and all other similar persons belonging to the churches and schools, and the compelling them to appear before a court; providing for the punishment of those convicted of heresies or crimes; and the abrogation of heresies that are manifest and have been condemned by the Church, and of idolatrous forms of worship, so that the Church be cleansed from them.<sup>19</sup>

“It needs no proof that this is doing what the Augsburg Confession warns against, confounding the civil and the ecclesiastical powers.”<sup>20</sup>

### *The Role of Civil Government*

Civil rulers, as civil rulers, are to be concerned with matters of external order and discipline in society, and if need be they may use coercive force in preserving such order and discipline. But according to Luther, rulers as rulers are not to be concerned with matters of faith and conscience. “For faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced. Indeed, it is a work of God in the spirit, not something which outward authority should compel or create.”<sup>21</sup> There should, therefore, be no laws directed against the holding of heretical opinions. “No ruler ought to prevent anyone from teaching or believing what he pleases, whether it is the gospel or lies. It is enough if he prevents the teaching of sedition and rebellion.”<sup>22</sup>

However, Luther thought that the proper jurisdiction of the State, with its interest in the preservation of outward societal order, also extended over areas that we would probably not recognize as being within the competency of civil government. He held that those who publicly “teach doctrines contradicting an article of faith clearly grounded in Scripture and believed throughout the world by all Christendom” are “not mere heretics but open blasphemers.”<sup>23</sup> And blasphemy, because of the public disruption that it causes, should be censured by the civil authorities. Luther would want to reassure everyone that

By this procedure no one is compelled to believe, for he can still believe what he will; but he is forbidden to teach and to blaspheme. For by so doing he would take from God and the Christians their doctrine and word, and he would do them this injury under their own protection and by means of the things all have in common. Let him go someplace where there are no Christians.<sup>24</sup>

In summary, we can say that in Luther’s view, the State, in matters of faith, must not permit any compulsion or maintain a reign of terror. Luther thus asserts the right of freedom of faith and of conscience. – not only for Christians who have the true faith but also for heretics. True faith and heresy are both matters of the conscience and of the spirit, and the government may not deal with them by using force. God himself works faith in the heart, and we neither can nor may try to compel someone else to believe. This is also why we cannot overcome and eliminate heresy by force. For it too is a spiritual matter. Against heresy, only the word of God is powerful. Using force only increases the inner strength of the persecuted faith or the heresy – and betrays the inner weakness of one’s own position. Using force implies that one is not able to deal with opponents on the basis of God’s word but only by violence. All this, however, clearly presupposes that the other faith or the heresy does not openly oppose the common Christian teaching. When either of these occurs, the state’s toleration has reached its limit and the authorities must intervene. Luther cites Romans 13 as evidence that the government should intervene against public propaganda for anarchism and communism. He also thinks the government should intervene against a public attack on the scriptural and common Christian articles of faith because such a public attack is blasphemy, and the government ought to punish blasphemy. However, Luther still preserves freedom of faith and of conscience. Only public teaching against the Christian faith is

forbidden and threatened with punishment. Luther's position is also influenced by the consideration that it is not good to have contradictory doctrines proclaimed simultaneously. When that is done, division and tensions are created even in secular life. There is, of course, a great difference between Luther's ideas and our understanding of our situation in a pluralistic society.<sup>25</sup>

It was not easy for the Reformers of the sixteenth century to conceive of the possibility of a religiously diverse yet harmonious society, in which the civil government would remain neutral in strictly religious questions. From our perspective almost 500 years later, we are able to see that the Reformers' Biblically-based principles regarding the distinction between spiritual and temporal authority would naturally lead in this direction. At the time, however, they were not able to rise above the limitations of the medieval world view that they had inherited, and to apply these visionary principles in such a visionary way. Such an experiment would have to wait until the founding of the Rhode Island colony in colonial America in 1636.

### *Martin Luther's Two Opinions*

From within the limitations of his sixteenth-century perspective, Luther offered this opinion in 1530:

If it happens that in a parish, a city, or a principality, the papists and the Lutherans (as they are called) are crying out against one another because of certain matters of belief, and preaching against one another, and both parties claim that the Scriptures are on their side, I would not willingly tolerate such a division. My Lutherans ought to be willing to abdicate and be silent if they observed that they were not gladly heard, as Christ teaches (Matt. 10:14). They ought to have themselves compelled to preach, as I am. For I leave off readily if people do not want to hear me, and all my preaching and writing has been done under force and compulsion. But if neither party is willing to yield or be silent, or if neither can do so because of official position, then let the rulers take a hand. Let them hear the case and command that party to keep silence which does not agree with the Scriptures. This the great emperor Constantine did when he caused Athanasius and Arius to be heard and their case judged by his procurator, Probus. It is not a good thing that contradictory preaching should go out among the people of the same parish.

For from this arise divisions, disorders, hatreds, and envyings which extend to temporal affairs also.<sup>26</sup>

Certainly Lutherans should wish to live at peace with their neighbors, and should not instigate public conflicts with them – religious or otherwise. But Luther’s advice had deeper implications than this. In the volatile setting of sixteenth-century Europe, such advice would have the effect of discouraging the organization of Lutheran congregations in areas where the government and/or the majority of the population remained committed to another confession. In this instance Luther’s concern for the preservation of social order seems to have overridden his concern for the faith of those who had embraced the teachings of the Lutheran Reformation, and who wanted to cling to the pure marks of the church and worship God according to the dictates of their conscience.

At an earlier time, before his idealism had been shattered by the advent of Anabaptist sectarianism and the upheavals of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1525, Luther had not expressed himself so cautiously. In 1523 he had penned a treatise *On the Ministry* (*De instituendis ministris Ecclesiae*) to the Bohemian Utraquists – heirs of the fifteenth-century reformatory efforts of Jan Hus – on the subject of the proper ordering of the Public Ministry of the Gospel among themselves. In this treatise, which emphasized the right of a congregation to elect its own pastor,

Luther dealt positively with the difference between the priesthood of all believers on the basis of baptism and the office of the ministry to which one was called. The tasks of the priest, i.e., of anyone who was baptized, were teaching and preaching, baptizing, consecrating (performing the Eucharist), binding and loosing, praying for others, sacrificing, and judging doctrine and spirits. Luther gave thorough proof of his surprising statement that this was potentially the task of all who were baptized. So remembering Christ in the Eucharist was everyone’s task. By sacrifice, he understood the self-sacrifice of Christians. Judging doctrine was likewise the task of all. However, the public exercise of office was not to be usurped on one’s own authority, but it had rather to be bestowed by all and, if necessary, also revoked. If the papal bishops refused, the church could by itself appoint bishops and ministers (*Kirchendiener*). In view of the specific circumstances in Bohemia, Luther advocated not only that the congregation choose pastors and preachers, but that it appoint bishops to supervise the church. Wherever this took place with prayer, it was not an innovation contrary to the New

Testament. ... The Bohemians did not need to doubt that they were the church of God, for wherever the Word of God was, there was the church.<sup>27</sup>

In one of the key statements of this treatise, Luther explains that

It is of the common rights of Christians that we have been speaking. For since we have proved all of these things to be the common property of all Christians, no one individual can arise by his own authority and arrogate to himself alone what belongs to all. Lay hold then of this right and exercise it, where there is no one else who has the same rights. But the community rights demand that one, or as many as the community chooses, shall be chosen or approved who, in the name of all with these rights, shall perform these functions publicly. Otherwise, there might be shameful confusion among the people of God and a kind of Babylon in the church, in which everything should be done in order, as the Apostle teaches [I Cor. 14:40]. For it is one thing to exercise a right publicly; another to use it in time of emergency. Publicly one may not exercise a right without consent of the whole body or of the church.<sup>28</sup>

And Luther explicitly states that a Bohemian congregation that wants to take charge of its local affairs in such a manner need not wait for the approval of others. He writes:

It is not necessary, I think, to put this form of election immediately into practice in the Diet of Bohemia as a whole. But if individual cities adopt it for themselves the example of one will soon be followed by another. The Diet might well consider whether this form should be adopted by all of Bohemia, or if one part might accept, and another part postpone decision or even reject it altogether. For none should be forced to believe. We must give freedom and honor to the Holy Spirit that he may move wherever he will. We cannot hope that these things will be acceptable to all, especially right away. The fact that not all agree should not affect you – rather you ought to be moved to the venture when many do not agree with you. It is enough if at first a few set the example. After the use has been established and in the course of time the whole people will be challenged to follow their example. As the venture succeeds, with the help of the Lord, and many cities adopt this method of electing their bishops, then these bishops may wish to come together and elect one or more from their number to be their superiors, who would serve them and hold visitations among them, as Peter visited the churches, according to the account in the Book of Acts [Acts 8:14ff.; 9:32ff.].

Then Bohemia would return again to its rightful and evangelical archbishopric, which would be rich, not in large income and much authority, but in many ministers and visitations of the churches.<sup>29</sup>

It might be helpful to add here that Luther does not think that the Public Ministry of the Gospel “in the name of all with these rights” is merely a pragmatic humanly-devised arrangement. In his treatise on *The Misuse of the Mass*, Luther observes that in Titus 1:5-7

Paul says to his disciple Titus: “This is why I left you in Candia, that you might complete what I left unfinished, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you, men who are blameless, the husband of one wife, whose children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate. For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless,” etc. Whoever believes that here in Paul the Spirit of Christ is speaking and commanding will be sure to recognize this as a divine institution and ordinance, that in each city there should be several bishops, or at least one. It is also evident that Paul considers elders and bishops to be one and the same thing, for he says: Elders are to be appointed and installed in all cities, and that a bishop shall be blameless.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, in his *Sermon on Keeping Children in School* Luther states that “the spiritual estate has been established and instituted by God, not with gold or silver but with the precious blood and bitter death of his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ [I Pet. 1:18-19].” He explains what he means by “the spiritual estate” when he then says that Christ

paid dearly that men might everywhere have this office of preaching, baptizing, loosing, binding, giving the Sacrament, comforting, warning, and exhorting with God’s Word, and whatever else belongs to the pastoral office [*Amt der Seelsorger*]. For this office not only helps to further and sustain this temporal life and all the worldly estates, but it also gives eternal life and delivers from sin and death, which is its proper and chief work. Indeed, it is only because of the spiritual estate that the world stands and abides at all; if it were not for this estate, the world would long since have gone down to destruction. I am not thinking, however, of the spiritual estate as we know it today in the monastic houses and the foundations... They give no heed to God’s Word and the office of preaching – and where the Word is not in use the clergy must be bad. The estate I am thinking of is rather one which has the office of preaching

[*Predigtamt*] and the service of the Word and sacraments and which imparts the Spirit and salvation, blessings that cannot be attained by any amount of pomp and pageantry. It includes the work of pastors [*Pfarramt*], teachers, preachers, lectors, priests (whom men call chaplains), sacristans, schoolmasters, and whatever other work belongs to these offices and persons. This estate the Scriptures highly exalt and praise. St. Paul calls them God's stewards and servants [I Cor. 4:1]; bishops [Acts 20:28]; doctors, prophets [I Cor. 12:28]; also God's ambassadors to reconcile the world to God, II Corinthians 5[:20].<sup>31</sup>

In this respect Luther would want everyone to remember this important vocational distinction:

It is true that all Christians are priests (*sacerdos*), but not all are pastors. To be a pastor one must be not only a Christian and a priest but must have an office and a field of work committed to him. This call and command make pastors and preachers.<sup>32</sup>

It is also important to emphasize that the congregational calling process that Luther recommends does not mean that the voting members of a congregation are the "owners" of the Public Ministry, or that they are permitted to exercise arbitrary control over the pastors whom they have called. Jesus Christ is and remains the sole Lord of his Church, and "The offices of the ministry and sacraments are not our property but belong to Christ. For he provided for these and left them with his church so that they might be used and administered till the end of the world."<sup>33</sup> When a congregation of believers issues a call to an ecclesiastical office, they are acting in the stead of Jesus Christ, who is actually issuing this call through them. They are not functioning as a collection of opinionated individuals with the right to impose their human expectations on the pastor. Rather, in calling ministers they are functioning as the body of Christ, under his divine authority. If a Christian congregation would forget this, and would try to silence a faithful pastor or "manage" his ministry in their own sinful interests, Luther would remind them of the facts:

I certainly hope you will have enough Christian understanding to know that the ministry of the Gospel is neither our property nor the property of any human being, not even of an angel. It belongs to God, our Lord, who has purchased it with His blood, has given and instituted it for our salvation. Therefore He severely condemns those who despise it. He says: "He that despiseth you despiseth Me" (Luke 10:16). ... You are not lords



over preachers and the ministry; you have not established the office. God's Son alone has done so. Nor have you contributed anything to it. You have far less right to it than the devil to the kingdom of heaven. You should not lord it over the ministry or give it directions. Nor should you keep it from rebuking. For its rebuke is not of men but of God, who does not want the rebuke hindered. He has commanded it. Tend to your own business, and leave God's governing unmolested lest He teach you to do so.<sup>34</sup>

In a similar vein, Luther would admonish his fellow preachers to be conscientious in their calling and attentive to the spiritual needs of their flock, and he would warn them against the temptation to abuse their office in the interest of a love of power or greed for money. He reflects on these dangers in a sermon to his own congregation:

My office, and that of every preacher and minister, does not consist in any sort of lordship but in serving all of you, so that you learn to know God, become baptized, have the true Word of God, and finally are saved. Never do I claim worldly power; princes and lords, mayors and judges, are to establish and provide for that. My office is merely a service which I am to give to everyone freely and gratuitously, nor should I seek from it either money or goods, either honor or anything else. For if I were to preach in order to receive a big salary, to be made a king or an emperor, you could not get me into the pulpit with ten horses. I would not take a thousand florins for every sermon, for I would know that I would go to the devil with them if I sought no more in the ministry than how to become rich. For as soon as I preached for the sake of money, I would preach what the people like to hear in order thereby to get the money. Therefore I am preaching freely, for nothing, and this I must do; nor should I seek either honor or good from it. ... But I have been bidden to serve you and whomever I can with teaching, instructing, comforting, and exhorting with the Word of God, that you may be saved, that I do not lord it over you but bring you together with myself under one Lord, who is called Christ. Beyond this service I seek nothing. But, to be sure, if I do you this service, it, in turn, is your duty to support me. For since I am to serve you by my preaching ministry, I cannot at the same time attend to earning my support. Therefore you are obliged to support me, too, entirely for nothing; for he who serves at the altar, says St. Paul, should live from the altar.<sup>35</sup>

## *Where the Church Can Be Found*

The practical advice that Luther had given to the Bohemians in 1523 was based squarely on one of the chief theological insights of the Reformation, namely that the church of Jesus Christ, with all of its God-given authority and prerogatives, is discernibly present wherever God's people are gathered around God's Word. And so, according to Luther, "wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, 'a Christian holy people' must be there, even though their number is very small."<sup>36</sup> In contrast to the physical temple of God in Jerusalem during Old Testament times, Luther affirms that

The temple is now as wide as the world. For the Word is preached and the sacraments administered everywhere; and wherever these are properly observed, whether it be in a ship on the sea, or in a house on land, there is God's house, or the Church, and there God should be sought and found.<sup>37</sup>

In his address *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, Luther had explained that the pastor of a congregation of confessing Christians does not acquire his legitimacy through subjection to an episcopal hierarchy. Rather,

when a bishop consecrates it is nothing else than that in the place and stead of the whole community, all of whom have like power, he takes a person and charges him to exercise this power on behalf of the others. It is like ten brothers, all king's sons and equal heirs, choosing one of themselves to rule the inheritance in the interests of all. In one sense they are all kings and of equal power, and yet one of them is charged with the responsibility of ruling. To put it still more clearly: suppose a group of earnest Christian laymen were taken prisoner and set down in a desert without an episcopally ordained priest among them. And suppose they were to come to a common mind there and then in the desert and elect one of their number, whether he were married or not, and charge him to baptize, say mass, pronounce absolution, and preach the Gospel. Such a man would be as truly a priest as though he had been ordained by all the bishops and popes in the world. That is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution. ... In times gone by Christians used to choose their bishops and priests in this way from among their

own number, and they were confirmed in their office by the other bishops without all the fuss that goes on nowadays. St. Augustine, Ambrose, and Cyprian each became [a bishop in this way]. ... Because we are all priests of equal standing, no one must push himself forward and take it upon himself, without our consent and election, to do that for which we all have equal authority. For no one dare take upon himself what is common to all without the authority and consent of the community.<sup>38</sup>

Luther also responds to some of the objections that had been raised against his theology in another treatise from the year 1523, with the self-explanatory title: *That A Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture*. He writes:

But if you say, “Did not St. Paul command Timothy and Titus to institute priests [I Tim. 4:13; Titus 1:5], and do we not read, Acts 14[:23], that Paul and Barnabas instituted priests among the congregations? (Therefore, the congregation cannot call anyone, nor can anyone draw attention to himself and preach among Christians; rather, one must have permission and authorization from bishops, abbots, or other prelates who represent the apostles)” I answer that if our bishops, abbots, etc., did represent the apostles, as they boast, our opinion would certainly be to let them do what Titus, Timothy, Paul, and Barnabas did when they instituted priests, etc. But since they represent the devil and are wolves who neither want to teach the Gospel nor suffer it to be taught, they are as little concerned with instituting the office of preaching or pastoral care among Christians as the Turks or the Jews are. They should drive asses and lead dogs. Moreover, if they were really decent bishops who wanted to have the Gospel and wanted to institute decent preachers, they still could not and should not do so without the will, the election, and the call of the congregation – except in those cases where need made it necessary so that souls would not perish for lack of the divine Word. For in such a need, as you have heard, not only may anyone procure a preacher, be it through pleas or the power of worldly authority, but he should also hurry to the scene himself and make an appearance and teach if he can – for need is need and has no limits – just as everyone should hurry to the scene of a fire in town and not wait until asked to come. Otherwise, if there is no such need and if there are those who have the right, power, and grace to teach, no bishop should institute anyone without the election, will, and call of the congregation. Rather, he should confirm the one whom the congregation chose and

called; if he does not do it, he [the elected man] is confirmed anyway by virtue of the congregation's call. Neither Titus nor Timothy nor Paul ever instituted a priest without the congregation's election and call. This is clearly proven by the sayings in Titus 1[:7] and I Timothy 3[:10], "A bishop or priest should be blameless," and, "Let the deacon be tested first." Now Titus could not have known which ones were blameless; such a report must come from the congregation, which must name the man. Again, we even read in Acts 6[:1-6] regarding an even lesser office, that the apostles were not permitted to institute persons as deacons without the knowledge and consent of the congregation. Rather, the congregation elected and called the seven deacons, and the apostles confirmed them. If, then, the apostles were not permitted to institute, on their own authority, an office having to do only with the distribution of temporal food, how could they have dared to impose the highest office of preaching on anyone by their own power without the knowledge, will, and call of the congregation?<sup>39</sup>

And finally, among the official Confessions of the church, the Treatise declares that

when the regular bishops become enemies of the Gospel or are unwilling to ordain, the churches retain their right to do so. For wherever the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the church to retain the right to call, choose, and ordain ministers. This right is a gift bestowed exclusively on the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church, as Paul testifies to the Ephesians [4:8,11,12] when he says: "When he ascended on high...he gave gifts to his people." Among those gifts belonging to the church he lists pastors and teachers and adds that such are given for serving and building up the body of Christ. Therefore, where the true church is, there must also be the right of choosing and ordaining ministers, just as in an emergency even a layperson grants absolution and becomes the minister or pastor of another. So Augustine tells the story of two Christians in a boat, one of whom baptized the other (a catechumen) and then the latter, having been baptized, absolved the former. Pertinent here are the words of Christ that assert that the keys were given to the church, not just to particular persons: "For where two or three are gathered in my name..." [Matt. 18:20]. Finally this is also confirmed by Peter's declaration [1 Peter 2:9]: "You are a...royal priesthood." These words apply to the true church, which, since it alone possesses the priesthood, certainly

has the right of choosing and ordaining ministers. The most common practice of the church also testifies to this, for in times past the people chose pastors and bishops. Then the bishop of either that church or a neighboring one came and confirmed the candidate by the laying on of hands. Ordination was nothing other than such confirmation.<sup>40</sup>

### *Reforming and Governing the Church*

These basic principles had been articulated by Luther and the other Reformers on many occasions. It therefore does not surprise us that the earliest comprehensive attempt at reorganizing the church in a distinctly Lutheran way was characterized by a desire to implement them:

The first true Reformation church order was prepared for the principality of Hesse in 1526, by the former Franciscan Francis Lambert on the request of Landgrave Philip. The landgrave had already undertaken actions, such as the suppression of cloisters, as his way of fulfilling the edicts of the Diet of Speyer authorizing rulers to settle religious differences in their realms in a way pleasing both to God and to the emperor. This ordinance was adopted by a synod of clergy and laity at Homberg. It provided for a democratic organization in which congregations elected their own pastors, elders, and deacons and sent their pastors and elected representatives to an annual synod or assembly. This synod was charged with overseeing the care of the whole territorial church and providing a superintendent (the Latin term for bishop) for each district. The landgrave was permitted only to take part in deliberations and to vote. When Landgrave Philip showed this church order to Luther, the reformer advised that it was not suited to the needs of Hesse, that some interim step was needed before Hesse could move to a representative or synodical form of church life, and induced the Hessians to adopt the model of the Saxon Visitation instead. The Elector of Saxony had taken up Luther's request that a visitation of parishes and church institutions be carried out and appointed a number of Visitors.

When he requested his own prince to do this, Luther had clearly explained that

the assistance of the Elector was viewed as a service of love and not as a rightful function of government. The Elector, however, had issued his own "Instructions" as a prince and granted the Visitors "power and authority" from himself. Thus, the Saxon

Visitation marked the beginning of the state control of the Lutheran churches in Germany. The model that emerged from Electoral Saxony had the prince as *summus episcopus*, appointing visitation committees to examine and evaluate church life, consistories to judge doctrine and practices, and superintendents to oversee pastoral care of the parishes. The organization of the Reformation in the cities was often patterned after the organization in Wittenberg. The city council usually designated one of the city pastors to serve as superintendent or senior of the ministerium and made him responsible for the religious life of the entire city.<sup>41</sup>

Should Luther have had enough foresight to anticipate the way in which this paternalistic arrangement would be misused by a later generation of princes, who ended up not being much more accountable to the church at large than the pope had been? Was he, in fact, betraying the principles of an evangelical church polity that he had so clearly enunciated in the past, when he now advocated the top-down approach of Electoral Saxony, rather than the bottom-up approach that Philip of Hesse had wanted? In fairness we should not accuse Luther of something that serious (although we might see some evidence here of an overreaction to the threat of the Anabaptists and unruly peasants). Just as he had wanted the direct involvement of the princes in church affairs to be a temporary arrangement, so also he did not reject Landgrave Philip's proposal as inherently mistaken or permanently unworkable. But he did believe that the German people, at that stage in their history, were not ready for something like this.

In principle Luther always believed that the members and pastors of local parishes should govern their own local affairs on the basis of God's Word. But, he also believed that they should be *able* to do this before they are asked to do this. In the 1520s Luther had good reason to believe that they were not even close to having this ability. He was aware of the serious problems that existed in many of the parishes of Germany, at first from the reports of others, and later from his own experience as an official visitor in Electoral Saxony and Meissen (in 1528 and 1529). In the Preface to the Small Catechism he describes the "deplorable, wretched deprivation" that he encountered during these visitations:

Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers. Yet supposedly they all bear the name

Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, even though they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments! As a result they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and, despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have mastered the fine art of misusing all their freedom.<sup>42</sup>

We can easily sympathize with Luther's conclusion that it would not be pleasing to God or beneficial to the church for the weighty responsibilities of ecclesiastical government to be entrusted to such people. But in another time and place, where the clergy would be well-educated in theology and ecclesiology, where the laity would be well-catechized in Christian doctrine, and where both would have reached the necessary level of wisdom, maturity, and sophistication, we would expect Luther to think differently.

And now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we would also have to agree that

The ideal of a strictly Christian state, altogether based on the fundamental truths of the Christian religion, without any compulsion and tyranny in religious matters, can be realized only where all the subjects of the State are professing Christians, and is at present realized nowhere. Under the present circumstances, which will hardly ever change for the better, the total separation of Church and State...is the only arrangement that is just and fair to all citizens. ... Luther entirely agreed with this principle of total separation between Church and State, but held that circumstances at his time were such that out of love to the Church the civil government had to take hold of the government of the Church also, and hoped the time would come when the correct principle could be carried out fully. This time never came. The princes assumed as right what was given them at first by necessity, and later Lutheran theologians justified this as normal.<sup>43</sup>

### *The Local Congregation*

The Lutheran state-church system was at its height in the second half of the seventeenth century. But even at that time there were still some people who were able to recognize what the natural contours of Lutheranism would be if its external institutional life could be shaped according to the impulses of its internal theological life, and not according to the constrictions of an authoritarian hierarchy or government-sponsored bureaucracy. Veit

Ludwig von Seckendorf, a high-ranking Saxon attorney, was one such person. He did encourage those parishes that were already a part of an established church to conform to its administrative procedures, and to submit to its consistorial oversight. But in his understanding of the deeper ecclesiological issues he demonstrated a sharper acuity than some of the professional theologians in his day. According to Seckendorf, if we want to know, ultimately, where the spiritual authority of Christ's church can be found, it is

safest to adhere to the principle that Christ Himself has given when He said: "Where two or three (not to speak of a larger congregation) are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). From this it follows that such an assembly or congregation in itself has the power to do and execute all things that are demanded for the exercise of divine worship and for which Christ has promised His gracious presence. Such an assembly, though it has an inward communion with other Christians and the same confession or religion, nevertheless is not of necessity or by obligation directed to anyone else, but it has Christ in its midst by His Word and sacraments, just as have the others. Hence, it must also have the proper and certain right to call persons for worship and ministry; for this belongs to the church or congregation, which has the authority to elect one or several competent persons to serve as presbyters or elders and leaders in doctrine. Now if the congregation already has pastors, they above all, together with the rest, belong to those who are to call and appoint pastors along with the magistrates, and no [e]state should be excluded. Now if today a congregation of converted Christians would be organized, let us say, in India or on an unknown island by a Christian landing there, it follows from what has been said – and the theologians may expatiate on this matter – that such a congregation, according to God's Word, can establish the ministry and ministerium by its own power; and though thereby it essentially would become a member of the universal church, being united in doctrine, it would not be absolutely bound to send its ministers for ordination or consecration to a bishop or a consistory or ministerium, especially if that would be difficult on account of great distance or peril; nor would it have to be governed in outward church matters by foreign authorities. Yet it would maintain communion with all other Christians by its same doctrine and faith without depending on any church government. However, it would be neither a sin nor a heresy if it



would adhere to a certain church and its government, as some separatists in England think who greatly exaggerate the idea of liberty. We have examples of coreligionists [fellow Lutherans] living in distant lands, such as in Moscow, where for hundreds of miles there are no churches of our confession, who maintain congregations and public worship. Similarly, there are many congregations in Hungary under Turkish rule who have pastors and *exercitia religionis* (exercises of religion). These cannot be asked to become members of the external church in other countries and subject themselves to certain superintendents or consistories, but such congregations have the full right to appoint their own ministerium and ministers. The pastor whom they call does everything in such congregations that is the duty of a bishop or superintendent of a large diocese; for it is not the size or number in itself that determines the increase or decrease of the office. ... When we consider that the first church meetings were held, as time and place permitted, in humble private homes, perhaps also in the fields and woods or in caves and caverns, as well as that neither archbishops nor bishops administered the office of a minister or pastor in the way and with such authority as in later times, but very poor and simple persons who during the week, especially in poor congregations, had to support themselves by working on the farms, we can understand much better that the kind of church government that developed in the course of time and still prevails today is not a matter that stems immediately from any divine command or right, or that on this depends the truth of the doctrine or the very essence of the church.<sup>44</sup>

For Confessional Lutherans it is axiomatic that

matters of church government belong to the adiaphora, to the “rites and ceremonies, instituted by men” (Augsburg Confession VII), concerning which there may and must be freedom in the church. Christ is not the legislator of a human religious fellowship, and the Gospel has in it no law which prescribes the only right way of organization and polity for the church. One must be clear as to what this means. Other churches have “an order by which the Lord wills the church to be governed,” as Calvin put it. This is true of all Catholic churches, both of the East and of the West, and of all Reformed churches. Their differences have to do only with what that order must be – the universal monarchy of the pope, the episcopal-synodical government of the church as in the Eastern churches and Anglicanism, a ruling senate of presbyters among whom there must be no differences of rank, or

the autonomy of the individual congregation as in Congregationalism and among the Baptists. These are just a few notable options, all of which claim to represent what the New Testament requires for the polity of the church. Luther's entire greatness and the boldness of his basic theological principle of the strict separation of Law and Gospel become evident when one sees how[,] beyond all these possibilities[,] he goes his lonesome way: Christ gave his church no such law prescribing one right organization, government, and polity (*de constituenda ecclesia*). Any way of organizing things may do, so long as the means of grace are going on and are not frustrated.<sup>45</sup>

This does not mean, however, that Lutherans are not able to recognize the fundamental importance of the local congregation, since

God does indeed command Christians to assemble. This is inherent in the command to teach and preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. The early Christians recognized this (Acts 2:42). When some withdrew from their assemblies, they were admonished: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (Hebrews 10:25). Christians need the encouragement they can give one another. They need to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (v. 24). This requires first of all some kind of local gatherings. Christians must gather at some particular place where they will regularly hear God's Word and receive the sacraments; where they are encouraged, admonished, and edified; where church discipline can be carried out according to Matthew 18. We call these primary gatherings local congregations.<sup>46</sup>

Following through on these thoughts, we observe furthermore that

In Matt. 18:18-20, the Power of the Keys is said to exist wherever "two or three are gathered together in my name." Wherever, then, there is a Christian congregation, there is authority to communicate to penitent and believing individuals the Gospel promise of the gratuitous forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake. ... The authority delegated by Christ rests ultimately in any congregation of two or three believers. Such assembly, as the Spirit of Christ influences it, will act with reference to the interests of the entire Church, and according to a fixed order. But it is never to be forgotten, that all the power of the Church exists in its smallest congregation, and is not derived by the local assemblies, through larger Particular Churches, and by Particular

Churches from the Church Universal, and by the Church Universal from Christ. The New Testament conception of Christ, dwelling in the heart of the believer, and making him a king and priest unto God, does not provide for a long and complicated series of agencies whereby we may reach Christ and Christ may reach us.<sup>47</sup>

This is in complete accord with the Apology of the Augsburg Confession when it states that

the church is not only an association of external ties and rites like other civic organizations, but it is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons. It nevertheless has its external marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ. Moreover, this church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews, sanctifies, and governs by his Spirit...<sup>48</sup>

The history of Lutheranism in America provides us with a good example of an ecclesiastical polity that acknowledges the centrality and importance of local congregations, where the divinely-instituted marks of the church are most vividly and fully evident. The Lutheran Church in the United States,

unhampered by any union with the state, was able to apply without hindrance the principles of Church government which she believed to be most evangelical and best adapted to the circumstances in which she found herself. At the basis of her organization lies the local congregation, consisting of pastor and laity, which potentially possesses all the rights and duties committed to and enjoined upon the Church. The pastor, chosen by the congregation, is the person charged both with the official administration of the Means of Grace and with the spiritual leadership in the congregation. All the local affairs of the congregation are administered under his leadership. A Church Council...is elected to assist the pastor in the direction of the affairs of the congregation. ... For the doing of the work of the Church which lies beyond the local sphere, the congregations are united in synods. The work of education, missions, mercy and other general activities of the Church cannot [ordinarily] be performed by individual congregations acting separately, but is performed by the congregations acting together in a synodical organization.<sup>49</sup>

As we have already observed, the Lutheran Church in sixteenth-century Europe was, as a rule, organized in a significantly different way. But there is one example – a vitally important example – of an exception to this rule.

### *Lutheranism in the Netherlands*

Lutheranism entered the Netherlands as early as 1518.<sup>50</sup> An early center of Lutheran activity was the city of Antwerp in the Southern Netherlands (now Belgium), where the Lutherans came to be called “Martinists.” The monks of the Augustinian monastery there “had been profoundly influenced by their German brother-member Martin Luther.”<sup>51</sup> This monastery “furnished able preachers” for the Lutheran cause,<sup>52</sup> and also produced its first two martyrs: Hendrik Vos (Voes) and Johann Esch (van Essen). They were executed in Brussels on July 1, 1523, and died bravely. “These first martyrs of Lutheranism, when fastened to the stake, repeated the Apostles’ Creed, and then, until suffocated by the flames, chanted responsively the *Te Deum laudamus*.”<sup>53</sup>

“While separate Lutheran congregations began to be formed, according to V. E. Löscher, as early as 1528 at Utrecht, nevertheless for a long time Lutheranism was the name of a powerful tendency, before it began to organize congregations.”<sup>54</sup> This delay in the formal organization of Lutheranism in the Netherlands was due to none other than Luther himself. In the 1540s the “Martinists” in Antwerp had asked him for his advice as to whether or not they should organize congregations, which could meet in homes.<sup>55</sup> In keeping with the previously-mentioned opinion that he had expressed in 1530, he answered them in the negative. Luther was concerned about “distinguishing his followers from the Anabaptists,”<sup>56</sup> who were very active in the Netherlands, and therefore he was opposed “to any form of secret house church, which competed with the public church.” Lutherans “should either be satisfied with private devotions at home, or be prepared to leave the country” and resettle in an area where the Lutheran Church was permitted by the government. But “such advice took no account of the circumstances in which Dutch dissidents found themselves. Despite Luther clandestine gatherings took place spontaneously because evangelicals who wanted to study the Scripture and the fashionable new theologies were denied an opportunity to do so within the Catholic

Church.”<sup>57</sup> Out of respect for the Reformer, however, these informal gatherings – at least the distinctly Lutheran ones – were not allowed to develop into anything more permanent or structured. “For twenty years the Martinists waited, unorganized, served occasionally by army chaplains.” By comparison, the growing number of Calvinists in Antwerp had no such scruples. During this same time period, while Roman Catholicism was still the only legally-permitted confession in the Netherlands, “the Calvinists prospered, organized around a semi-secret and vigorous consistory.”<sup>58</sup>

The situation in Antwerp changed in 1566. In September of that year Prince William of Orange persuaded Archduchess Margaret, who governed the Netherlands as the regent for King Philip II of Spain, “to grant the Protestants religious freedom to worship within the Antwerp city walls.” Roman Catholicism continued to be the established religion of the city, but the so-called “‘September Accords’ made Protestantism legal in the Netherlands for the first time.” According to the provisions of these Accords “Calvinists and Lutherans were allowed each three churches inside the city walls,” and the Calvinist and Lutheran communities would each be governed by a group of six deputies, “responsible to the city council.”<sup>59</sup> “Each such group was a kind of state within a state.”<sup>60</sup>

The religious toleration that was hereby granted was tenuous at best, but when the Accords were issued the Lutherans “decided that the time had come which Luther had told them to wait for.”<sup>61</sup> They called pastors<sup>62</sup> and started to hold public worship services:

When the Martinists began public worship, their Calvinist neighbors could look in, and they did not like what they saw. They were offended, for one thing, that there were services on Saints’ days. ... Although the Calvinists had not yet got around to serving Holy Communion, they were displeased that the Martinists scheduled it every Sunday. They did not like it that the “vleescheters” (flesh-eaters) and “bloetdrinkers” (blood-drinkers), as they called the Lutherans, knelt to receive it. The latter, for their part, hurled back their own epithets, calling the Calvinists *swermers* (enthusiasts, ravers) and *bilderstormers* (iconoclasts).<sup>63</sup>

The Antwerp Martinists also invited six Lutheran theologians to come from Germany to help them in the formal organization of their church.<sup>64</sup> Foremost among these was the Croatian-Italian scholar Matthias Flacius Illyricus (Matija Vla i Ilirik), who had become famous through

his vocal opposition to the “Leipzig Interim” of 1548.<sup>65</sup> He arrived in Antwerp on October 5. Another well-known Lutheran who spent some time in Antwerp during this period (although he was not one of the six officially-appointed organizers) was Joachim Westphal of Hamburg.

### *Matthias Flacius Illyricus and the Antwerp Confession*

Soon after his arrival Flacius began to work on a church order for the Lutherans, the “Antwerp Confession,” which was published around December 1. It was a pivotal document in the history of the Lutheran Church:

In the discussion leading to the Confession, Joachim Westphal, who visited Antwerp that Fall, advised that they continue following Luther’s advice against a “house church.” If Luther’s own advice had been taken there would have been no organization at all. But, on what is probably the threshold from folk-church to denomination in the midst of pluralism, Flacius quoted Luther’s letter to the Bohemians against Luther’s letter to Antwerp, and made it the basis for a new church order. It was he, “especially, who against Westphal, appealing to the young Luther, held fast to the thought that a congregation has the power to establish its own organization, to elect its own teachers and to call its own preachers.”<sup>66</sup>

“Here for the first time in history a Lutheran ‘free’ church was founded: it was independent of the government of the country and had its own ecclesiastical administration.”<sup>67</sup> The Antwerp Confession was doctrinally conservative, “in the tradition of the Smalcaldic Articles,”<sup>68</sup> but in its establishment of a congregational-synodical church polity it was breaking new ground. Today we may take this kind of polity for granted, but in the mid-sixteenth century it was still an untested theory, which Luther had been afraid to implement during his own lifetime.

According to the Antwerp Confession, the “deputies” appointed by the congregation “were to protect the material interest of the congregation” and “to call and supervise ministers. The position of these deputies was more or less derived from the administrative competence that in German Lutheranism was assigned to the sovereign as *praecipuum membrum ecclesiae* (chief member of the church).”<sup>69</sup>

The sad story of the capitulation of Antwerp to a Spanish army under the command of the Duke of Alva in 1567, and the consequent dispersing of the Lutheran congregations and the proscription of any non-Catholic religious practice, need not be recounted here. Nevertheless, the influence of the Antwerp Confession outlived the congregations for which it was originally prepared. There were other places in Europe with Lutherans in similar circumstances, and before long the Antwerp model of Lutheran church organization “spread to German congregations in Cologne and Aachen, as well as to Dutch congregations such as Woerden and Amsterdam, in which the Antwerp Lutherans took refuge after the collapse of their city in 1567.”<sup>70</sup>

### *The Amsterdam Congregation*

Amsterdam now began to play an especially prominent role in the preservation and extension of “free-church” Lutheranism in Europe and beyond. “Amsterdam, as a commercial center, was in constant intercourse with other parts of Europe, especially northern Germany and England, and could not remain isolated from the religious movements that were agitating the countries closely connected with its mercantile enterprises. In 1531 there were both Lutherans and Reformed among its citizens.”<sup>71</sup> The Lutherans in Amsterdam had attempted to organize themselves more formally in 1566, following the example of their coreligionists in Antwerp in that same year, but they were hindered in this effort by the Calvinists of the city, who “became alarmed over the prospect of a divided Protestantism at a time when Catholicism was still dominant in the land.”<sup>72</sup>

Calvinist opposition to an organized Lutheran Church in the Netherlands did not abate, and reached the level of outright persecution after the political independence of the Netherlands from Spain. In 1572 Calvinism was officially adopted by Holland and Zeeland. These provinces, “after introducing the Reformed faith as the national religion, declared that the followers of the Augsburg Confession did not need their own church, because the Reformed faith was not at variance with this confession.” In response, “the Amsterdam Lutherans informed the government that the Reformed doctrines were at variance with the Augsburg Confession.”<sup>73</sup> By 1583 Calvinism had prevailed in all the United Provinces,<sup>74</sup> and its adherents sought every opportunity to suppress the Lutherans:

The persecution reached its climax in 1600, when the South and North Holland Synods appealed to the magistrates of the towns to prohibit Lutheran public worship, which caused considerable agitation for several years. For a brief period the church in Amsterdam was actually closed. The persecution in the city continued until 1604, when the civil authorities insisted upon internal harmony in order to take full advantage of the prosperity arising from the increasing overseas trade. Toleration elsewhere, however, was only partial, for the States General permitted services to be held only in the towns but forbade them in all but two villages. Full toleration came only at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>75</sup>

And so, "The Lutherans owed it only to the liberal conduct of the Dutch government," and not to the goodwill of the leaders of the Reformed Church, "that they were able, especially after 1604, to enjoy reasonable freedom, taking into account the intolerant atmosphere that ruled the rest of Europe. With only a few exceptions the government turned a blind eye to their religious practice."<sup>76</sup> The Reformed Church continued to have an antagonistic attitude toward the Lutherans, but

This antagonism proved more annoying than formidable. The 'states of Holland' were on the side of tolerance. The rise of Arminianism, just as the seventeenth century was entered, gave Calvinism in Holland an opponent, which, for the time being, was deemed more formidable.<sup>77</sup>

The form of church government employed by the Dutch Lutherans was determined in part by the requirements of Dutch civil law,

which provided that the congregations of all faiths be governed by a consistory [consistorium], or church council, embracing the pastors and elders. A lower rank of officers, the deacons, were occasionally permitted, in the smaller churches, to become members of the consistory. In the Calvinist congregations the elders were appointed by the magistrates; in the Lutheran congregations they were elected by the church members because there were no Lutheran magistrates.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, the Lutherans regulated themselves according to constitutions that were adopted by each congregation. "In 1597 the congregation in Amsterdam, which was by far the largest Lutheran church in the Netherlands, prepared a church order, or constitution, to govern itself. With subsequent revisions this was adopted by other congregations



in the Netherlands during the early decades of the seventeenth century.”<sup>79</sup> This constitution, which bears the title *Christliche Ordonnantie*, “stands directly in the Antwerp tradition.”<sup>80</sup> As revised in 1614, 1644, and 1681, it

binds all preachers to teach according to the rule of the divine Word, as declared in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, and forbids them to depart from either the doctrine or the modes of expression “of our symbolical books, viz., the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, together with the two catechisms of Luther.” All sermons are to be directed to the edification of the congregation, by teaching God’s Word purely, distinguishing between true and false doctrine, and, with all plainness and directness, reproving sin.<sup>81</sup>

The 1644 version of the constitution demonstrates that the Dutch Lutherans still felt the need to explain and defend their congregational form of church government, and they seem, in fact, to be somewhat apologetic about it:

Although we know and confess that the two regiments, spiritual and secular, must be distinguished, and neither one of them [is] permitted to interfere in the office of the other, still – because in the Churches of the Augsburg Confession the Christian magistrate[,] as member of the church and her nourisher[,] out of Christian love[,] participates in the government; for Paul, too, says that the Almighty God has set helpers and rulers into his congregation. I Cor. XII. This Christian congregation, because of the lack of such a magistrate, elects four men from the whole congregation each year, which here are called “deputies,” so they are helpers and that everything take place in an orderly fashion for the edification of the congregation of God.<sup>82</sup>

The local congregation was central in the Dutch Lutheran system, but each congregation also had, and cultivated, a fraternal interest in the welfare of the other congregations. Accordingly, in 1605 (the year after the overt Calvinist persecution was brought to an end), a “fraternity” was formed by six congregations and seven pastors, headed by the church in Amsterdam.<sup>83</sup>

In general, things were set up among the Lutherans in the Netherlands in the following manner:

Every congregation was governed by a “consistorium,” composed of the pastors and lay elders, or such other persons as were elected by the congregation. The final decision in all doctrinal questions belonged to the pastors. All discussions of the consistorium were secret. Ordinations occurred either in the congregation of which the candidate had been elected pastor, or in the congregation at Amsterdam. The [pastoral] representatives of the three nearest congregations and a representative of the congregation at Amsterdam officiated at such ordinations. Controversies between pastors were not brought before the congregation, but were settled in the consistorium. The congregation was held responsible for the support of the widows and orphans of its pastor.

In regard to the above-mentioned “lay elders,”

The time of their election was fixed as the first Sunday in May, at the time and place of the afternoon service. Ten names were nominated yearly for elders, and twelve for deacons, double the number to be elected. The term of service was two years. No one elected was excused, unless for most clear and weighty reasons. To avoid all offense, a father and son, or two brothers, or two brothers-in-law could not serve in these offices at the same time. They were installed with the laying on of hands, and, at the expiration of their term, they were dismissed from office, according to a very full order, in which they receive the thanks of the congregation for their services, and the benediction of the pastor. They were responsible for the pure preaching of God’s Word, the right administration of the sacraments, the godly life, and the observance of the church regulations by the pastor; and, for this purpose, the presence of at least some of the elders at every public service was deemed necessary. On the dismissal of the congregation, they stood by the door with the receptacles for the collections in their hands, in order to receive the contributions of the people for the support of the church and for the poor. In this they were aided by the deacons. They saw to the support of the pastor, and cooperated with him in removing all causes of offense among the members, in reproving sin wherever it occurred, in bringing the erring to repentance, or, where this could not be effected, in the exercise of discipline. The deacons were purely collectors and distributors of alms. In their house-to-house visitations they were charged with the duty of bringing to the church service those who had been negligent in this particular. There was also a special office devoted to the care of the sick [*Zieken-trooster*, “comforter of the sick”]. This included

frequent visitations by one competent to console the sick with God's Word, who reported to the pastor as his spiritual, or to the deacons as their pecuniary, aid was needed. As parish clerk, the same officer was charged with the duty of putting the hymns on the hymn-board, keeping the register of baptisms and marriages, collecting the requests for the special prayers of the congregation, and reporting all irregularities of those receiving alms to the deacons or consistorium.<sup>84</sup>

The Lutheran congregation in Amsterdam continued to grow numerically – and in importance – so that by 1698

there were for the one congregation two church buildings, with six ministers, one of whom preached in German, and thirty thousand souls. For many generations it had the distinction of being the largest Lutheran congregation in the world. This large and wealthy congregation had to bear the chief burden of the support of the Lutheran church throughout the entire country; and with this responsibility it gained corresponding influence. ... Every five years a synod of all the Lutheran congregations was held at Amsterdam. It was the gradual development of the union, made in 1605, between seven of the Lutheran pastors, whose parishes had previously been isolated and independent, which was followed by the "Fraternity" of 1614. Important matters occurring between the meetings were settled, if possible, by an appeal to the three nearest congregations.<sup>85</sup>

### *Amsterdam's International Influence*

The importance and influence of Amsterdam was also felt beyond the Netherlands:

In the first half of the 17th century the Netherlands founded a colony in North America. But the Dutch themselves were not particularly eager to emigrate and recruited foreigners to populate this outpost, among them many Lutherans. In 1649 these Lutherans asked the Amsterdam consistory to send them a pastor. It took eight years before their wish was granted; as formerly in the homeland, so now the opposition of the Reformed colonists was persistent and severe.<sup>86</sup>

It was so severe, in fact, that the colonial authorities prevented the pastor who had been sent in 1657 (Johannes Ernestus Gutwasser) from exercising his office among the Lutherans in New Netherland. Spurred on by the Reformed clergy, they compelled him to return to Holland instead.<sup>87</sup>

But the tide turned in 1664, when “The English conquered New Amsterdam, renamed it New York, and granted freedom of religion.”<sup>88</sup> The devout Lutherans in New York were delighted by these events. The two congregations that existed at the time – in New York City (New Amsterdam) and Albany (Beverwyck) – had been struggling to survive for almost twenty years. In a more formal way they now

started organizing themselves by appointing elders and governors. In 1669 the minister Jacobus Fabritius, sent by Amsterdam, arrived. He continued the congregational organization by applying the Amsterdam Church Order.<sup>89</sup>

In New York City, for example, as reported by the new pastor, “twelve men from the congregation, who were found suitable thereto, were, with the general approval and after previous special announcement and the delivery of an election sermon, publicly ordained and elected to the offices of elders, deacons and overseers” [*Ouderlingen, diaconen ende voorstanders*].<sup>90</sup> Also, before long

the office of lay reader [*Voorleser*] was used, and by the close of the seventeenth century also that of church master [*Kerkmeester*]. All the officers, together with the Pastor, were members of the Church Council [*Kerkeraad*]. ... All the offices were copied from the Amsterdam Lutheran Church, excepting that of the lay reader. ... In the Amsterdam Church there were “school-masters” [*School-meesters*], whose duties in the absence of the pastor were similar to those of the lay reader...<sup>91</sup>

The constitution that was adopted by the New York City congregation

provided for a solid core of lay leadership, including elected elders and deacons, and a lay reader and a bell-ringer. The elected officials served on the church council and had responsibility for church funds. In matters of “doctrine, faith, and morals” the elders and the pastor were to decide together. Collection and distribution of alms for the poor were the deacons’ distinctive charge. The lay reader led singing and read from prepared materials when the pastor was absent, likely serving in another congregation. The bell-ringers’ tasks included the obvious one, as well as having water ready for baptisms, sweeping the church, digging graves, and responsibility for the church-key.

This constitution, inspired by the precedent of Amsterdam, successfully “addressed the local situation of a free church with voluntary

membership and no church taxes for financial support.”<sup>92</sup> “Since Lutheranism in New York had its beginnings in an environment similar to that in The Netherlands, the organization of the Church developed naturally on a congregational basis, in which each congregation was an entity in itself.”<sup>93</sup> For this reason the Amsterdam order “was in keeping with the way the Dutch Lutherans in America organized themselves: it was, after all, based on the principle of self-government.”<sup>94</sup>

An interesting and perhaps inspiring element of this history is that the beginning of the Lutheran Church in New York was wholly a laymen’s movement. No Lutheran missionary came to the colony to organize a congregation. The precarious tolerance granted the Lutheran Church in Holland made it impossible for that body even to think of sending a missionary to the colony. The Lutheran Church in the colony, therefore, was organized by laymen, the first services were conducted by laymen, and when the first pastor arrived, he came by virtue of a call extended by the congregation organized by these laymen.<sup>95</sup>

The Lutheran congregation in Amsterdam also had a significant impact on the Lutherans in London, England, and more precisely on St. Mary’s Lutheran Church in the Savoy, organized in 1694. Like the Lutherans in Holland, the Lutherans in England were a small minority of the population, functioning as a “free church” outside the Anglican religious establishment. They accordingly had a lot in common with their Dutch coreligionists. It does not surprise us, therefore, that the Savoy Church “was closely associated with the Amsterdam congregation, and adopted the church constitution of the latter, ‘in order that our unity might the more clearly appear.’” In the Savoy Church, however, “One important change was made in its government, in the provision for but one order of lay officers, namely, the Overseers [*Vorsteher*], in place of the elders and deacons as at Amsterdam.”<sup>96</sup>

But this trajectory of influence does not stop in London. In another sad story that need not be repeated here, the prince-archbishop of Salzburg, Austria, expelled all of his Lutheran subjects in 1731. Some of these refugees passed through London on their way to resettlement in the British colony of Georgia, and as they did they picked up a copy of the constitution of the Savoy Church and brought it with them for use in America.<sup>97</sup>

Through the converging and expanding influences of the Dutch Lutherans in New York and the Lutheran Salzburgers in Georgia, the

Lutherans of Amsterdam – and behind them the “Martinists” of Antwerp – ended up leaving a very significant mark on American Lutheranism. “In this way the substance of the Amsterdam church order spread until its main features were commonly used throughout America.”<sup>98</sup> And of course, those Lutheran churches in the world that have come into existence through the work of American Lutheran missionaries, as well as those Lutheran free churches in Europe that have modeled their church government after the example of their New-World sister-churches, also bear the imprint of the Lutheran experiment in the Netherlands in very noticeable ways. Such churches “are governed by a Congregational-Synodical church order, which builds on the ancient tradition according to which congregations could elect their own pastors, the theme of the early Luther’s *Letter to the Bohemians*.”<sup>99</sup> And, on the basis of this kind of order, such churches are governed internally, by their own elected representatives at both the congregational and synodical levels, without the involvement of officials of the civil government.

### *Conclusion*

We can be thankful for Martin Luther, who in the days of his youthful idealism enunciated the evangelical principles that stand behind this way of doing things. But we must also be thankful for Matthias Flacius Illyricus, and for the early Lutherans in the Netherlands, who courageously put these principles into practice, for their own benefit, and ultimately for ours.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> C. H. Little, *Disputed Doctrines* (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1933), p. 88.
- <sup>2</sup> Little, pp. 88-89.
- <sup>3</sup> Joseph Stump, *The Christian Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), pp. 245-46.
- <sup>4</sup> Stump, *The Christian Life*, pp. 265-66.
- <sup>5</sup> Augsburg Confession XXVIII:4-12 (Latin), *The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 91,93.
- <sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, Sermon on John 20:19-31 (WA 52, 268); quoted in *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 950.
- <sup>7</sup> Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXII:44, Kolb/Wengert pp. 244-45.
- <sup>8</sup> Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 54, Kolb/Wengert p. 339.
- <sup>9</sup> Treatise 56, Kolb/Wengert p. 339.
- <sup>10</sup> J. L. Neve, *Churches and Sects of Christendom* (Blair, Nebraska: Lutheran Publishing House, revised edition 1944), p. 159.
- <sup>11</sup> Large Catechism, Longer Preface: 6, Kolb/Wengert p. 380.
- <sup>12</sup> Luther, WA 53, 255; quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 296.
- <sup>13</sup> Treatise 24, Kolb/Wengert p. 334.
- <sup>14</sup> Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 129.
- <sup>15</sup> Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 318-19.
- <sup>16</sup> Neve, p. 159.
- <sup>17</sup> Friedrich Mildenerger, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 121.
- <sup>18</sup> Henry Eyster Jacobs, "Church Polity," *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 108.
- <sup>19</sup> John William Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae* (1685); quoted in *Doctrinal Theology of the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, third edition, revised, 1961), p. 809.
- <sup>20</sup> Jacobs, p. 108.
- <sup>21</sup> Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), p. 108.
- <sup>22</sup> Luther, "Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 22.
- <sup>23</sup> Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 82," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 13 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 61.
- <sup>24</sup> Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 82," p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 125-26.

<sup>26</sup> Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 82," pp. 62-63.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Luther, "On the Ministry," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Luther, "On the Ministry," pp. 40-41.

<sup>30</sup> Luther, "The Misuse of the Mass," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959], p. 155. In his treatise *On the Councils and the Church*, Luther also writes that "There must be bishops, pastors, or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer, and use" the Word of God, Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, and the power of the keys "in behalf of and in the name of the church, or rather by reason of their institution by Christ, as St. Paul states in Ephesians 4[:8], 'He received gifts among men...' – his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some teachers and governors, etc. The people as a whole cannot do these things, but must entrust or have them entrusted to one person. Otherwise, what would happen if everyone wanted to speak or administer, and no one wanted to give way to the other? It must be entrusted to one person, and he alone should be allowed to preach, to baptize, to absolve, and to administer the sacraments. The others should be content with this arrangement and agree to it. Wherever you see this done, be assured that God's people, the holy Christian people, are present. It is, however, true that the Holy Spirit has excepted women, children, and incompetent people from this function, but chooses (except in emergencies) only competent males to fill this office, as one reads here and there in the epistles of St. Paul [I Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:6] that a bishop must be pious, able to teach, and the husband of one wife – and in I Corinthians 14[:34] he says, 'The women should keep silence in the churches.' In summary, it must be a competent and chosen man. Children, women, and other persons are not qualified for this office, even though they are able to hear God's Word, to receive Baptism, the Sacrament, absolution, and are also true, holy Christians, as St. Peter says [I Pet. 3:7]. Even nature and God's creation makes this distinction, implying that women (much less children or fools) cannot and shall not occupy positions of sovereignty, as experience also suggests and as Moses says in Genesis 3[:16], 'You shall be subject to man.' The Gospel, however, does not abrogate this natural law, but confirms it as the ordinance and creation of God." (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 41 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966], pp. 154-55.)

<sup>31</sup> Luther, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 219-21. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession says explicitly that "the church has the mandate to appoint ministers, which ought to please us greatly because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it." (Apology XIII:12, Kolb/Wengert p. 220.)

<sup>32</sup> Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 82," p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Luther, WA 38, 240; quoted in Althaus, p. 324.



- <sup>34</sup> Luther, Letter to the Congregation and Town Council of Creutzburg (WA-Br 10, 255, 257); quoted in *What Luther Says*, p. 926.
- <sup>35</sup> Luther, Sermon on Matt. 20:24-28 (WA 47, 368); quoted in *What Luther Says*, pp. 923-24.
- <sup>36</sup> Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," p. 150.
- <sup>37</sup> Luther, On Matt. xxi., 12 sq. (Erlangen 44, 253); quoted in Jacobs, *Martin Luther: The Hero of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1898), p. 379.
- <sup>38</sup> Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," pp. 128-29.
- <sup>39</sup> Luther, "That A Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 39 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 311-12. Not everyone would necessarily agree with Luther's characterization of the seven deacons in Acts 6. Johann Gerhard, for example, "believed that the Seven were 'not simply excluded' from the work of teaching, but were 'principally put in charge of tables.' Such deacons, 'conjoined with presbyters, preached the Word together with them, administered the sacraments, visited the sick, etc.,' and so 'were made teachers of a lower order in the church ... Phil. 1:1 ... I Tim. 3:8.'" (Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* [Fort Wayne, Indiana: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, corrected edition 1995], pp. 140-41. The quotations are from J. Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, XII.XXIV.29.)
- <sup>40</sup> Treatise 66-70, Kolb/Wengert pp. 340-41.
- <sup>41</sup> Senn, p. 329. Senn's text mistakenly says that the Hessian synod was held in "Hamburg," rather than in Homberg, which is where it actually occurred. This is corrected in the quotation that appears in this paper.
- <sup>42</sup> Small Catechism, Preface: 1-3, Kolb/Wengert pp. 347-48.
- <sup>43</sup> Jacobs, "Church Polity," pp. 108-09.
- <sup>44</sup> Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf, *Christenstaat* 3, 11, par. 3,5,6; quoted in C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), pp. 239-41.
- <sup>45</sup> Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), pp. 70-71.
- <sup>46</sup> Armin W. Schuetze, *Church-Mission-Ministry: The Family of God* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), p. 27.
- <sup>47</sup> Jacobs, *A Summary of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1905), pp. 403-04.
- <sup>48</sup> Apology VII/VIII:5, Kolb/Wengert p. 174.
- <sup>49</sup> Stump, *The Christian Faith* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 370.
- <sup>50</sup> Harry J. Kreider, *Lutheranism in Colonial New York* (New York: 1942), p. 3.
- <sup>51</sup> J. L. Klaufus and Willem J. Kooiman, "Netherlands, Lutheranism in the," *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), Vol. III, p. 1721.

<sup>52</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, fifth edition 1907), p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, p. 24.

<sup>54</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, p. 25.

<sup>55</sup> Klaas Zwanepol, "Lutheran-Reformed Unity in the Netherlands," *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 4 (Winter 1995), p. 427.

<sup>56</sup> Oliver K. Olson, "The Rise and Fall of the Antwerp Martinists," *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. I (new series), No. 1 (Spring 1987), p. 100.

<sup>57</sup> Alastair Duke, "The Netherlands," *The Early Reformation in Europe* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 162.

<sup>58</sup> Olson, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> Olson, pp. 101-02.

<sup>60</sup> Olson, p. 108.

<sup>61</sup> Olson, p. 105.

<sup>62</sup> The Lutheran pastors in Antwerp in 1566 were Franz Alard, Johann Ligarius, Johan Saliger ("admired for his beautiful voice"), and Balthazar Houwaert. (Olson, p. 102.)

<sup>63</sup> Olson, p. 103.

<sup>64</sup> These theologians were Matthias Flacius Illyricus, Johannes Vorstius, Cyriacus Spangenberg, Martin Wolf, Joachim Hartmann, and Hermann Hammelmann. (Olson, p. 105.)

<sup>65</sup> Flacius's stand in the so-called "Adiaphoristic Controversy" is vindicated in Article X of the Formula of Concord. Unfortunately, Flacius had also become a controversial figure within Lutheranism because of his use of misleading terminology regarding the doctrine of Original Sin. That matter is addressed in Article I of the Formula.

<sup>66</sup> Olson, pp. 107-08. The quotation is from Kooiman, "Die Amsterdamer Kirchen Ordnung in ihrer Auswirkung auf die Lutherischen Kirchen-Ordnung in den Vereinigten Staaten Amerikas," *Evangelische Theologie* 16 (1956), p. 226.

<sup>67</sup> Klaufus and Kooiman, "Netherlands, Lutheranism in the," p. 1721.

<sup>68</sup> Olson, p. 107.

<sup>69</sup> Zwanepol, p. 428. Zwanepol's imprecise English has been corrected in the quotation that appears in this paper. His "administrational competence" has been rendered as "administrative competence," and his "prominent member of the church," as a translation of *praecipuum membrum ecclesiae*, has been rendered as "chief member of the church."

<sup>70</sup> Zwanepol, p. 4228.

<sup>71</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, p. 26.

<sup>72</sup> Kreider, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Zwanepol, p. 424.

<sup>74</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, p. 27.

<sup>75</sup> Kreider, p. 3-4.

<sup>76</sup> Zwanepol, pp. 426-27.

<sup>77</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>78</sup> Kreider, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, "The Church's Infancy," *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, revised edition 1980), p. 53.

<sup>80</sup> Olson, p. 108.

<sup>81</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, p. 41.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in F. J. Domela Nieuwenhuis, *Geschiede der Amst. Luth. Gemeente* (Amsterdam: 1856); quoted in turn in Olson, p. 108.

<sup>83</sup> Klaufus and Kooiman, "Netherlands, Lutheranism in the," p. 1722.

<sup>84</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>85</sup> Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, pp. 39-40. The present-day Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands is the institutional heir of the "Fraternity," but it is not a Confessional Lutheran body. Together with two Reformed churches it is a part of the "Uniting Protestant Churches in the Netherlands."

<sup>86</sup> Klaufus and Kooiman, "Netherlands, Lutheranism in the," p. 1724.

<sup>87</sup> Kreider, *The Beginnings of Lutheranism in New York* (New York: 1949), pp. 38 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Klaufus and Kooiman, "Netherlands, Lutheranism in the," p. 1724.

<sup>89</sup> Zwanepol, p. 436. Zwanepol's text states that Fabritius arrived in New York in 1668. He actually arrived on February 19, 1669. (Kreider, *The Beginnings of Lutheranism in New York*, p. 50.) According to the "old" Julian calendar, in use at the time in England and its colonies, this would still have been in the year 1668. But to avoid confusion, Zwanepol's text is altered in the quotation that appears in this paper to read "1669," in conformity to the reckoning of the "new" Gregorian calendar.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Kreider, *Lutheranism in Colonial New York*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>91</sup> Kreider, *Lutheranism in Colonial New York*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>92</sup> L. DeAne Lagerquist, *The Lutherans* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999), pp. 25-26.

<sup>93</sup> Kreider, *Lutheranism in Colonial New York*, p. 81.

<sup>94</sup> Zwanepol, p. 436.

<sup>95</sup> Kreider, *The Beginnings of Lutheranism in New York*, p. 8. The present writer is not ashamed to be a direct descendant of several of these committed Lutheran laymen. His ancestors include Tjerck Claessen De Witt, the lay leader who conducted the first known Lutheran worship service in Beverwyck, New Netherland (Albany, New York), in 1656.

<sup>96</sup> Kreider, *Lutheranism in Colonial New York*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>97</sup> Tappert, p. 54.

<sup>98</sup> Tappert, p. 54.

<sup>99</sup> Olson, p. 98.

## Proverbs 8:35-36 Revisited

by *Rudolph E. Honsey*

The two verses under consideration are the closing verses of the great wisdom chapter, Proverbs 8, in which wisdom is personified and specifically ascribed to the pre-incarnate Son of God in verses 22-31. That is the interpretation of the writer of this article. In the closing verses of this chapter wisdom (חִכְמָה) urges the reader to accept the invitation and not reject it.

This study hinges on the meaning of one word in the closing verse, the first word in the Hebrew text: וַחֲטֵאֵי. Lexicons and commentaries agree that the etymological meaning of the word is “miss the mark,” “fail.” The picture is that of an archer shooting an arrow at a target and missing it. The Greek word ἀμαρτάνω suggests the same picture, and invariably is used as translation of חטא in the Septuagint.

However, in its many occurrences in the Old Testament, the verb חטא is rarely used in its etymological sense. Whereas the root חטא occurs almost 600 times, it is used in its original sense only about one percent of the time. In most instances it has the derived meaning of “sin.”

There are, however, a few passages in which the context requires the etymological meaning of the verb חטא: “miss” or “fail.” Such is the case in the passage before us and in a few others. All of the lexicons and most of the commentaries we consulted support that interpretation. The lexicons give that meaning for the root חטא in Judges 20:16, Job 5:24, Proverbs 19:2 and Proverbs 20:2 in addition to Proverbs 8:36. We shall turn our attention to those four passages and briefly comment on them before we consider Proverbs 8:36.

### Judges 20:16

מְכַלֵּי הָעָם הָזֶה שִׁבְעַת מֵאוֹת אִישׁ בְּחֹרֵר אִשָּׁר יִדְרִימִינוּ כְּלִיזָה קִלְעַ בְּאַבָּן  
אֶל־הַשְּׁעָרָה וְלֹא יַחֲטֵא

*Of all these people were 700 choice men, left-handed. Each could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.*

In its context the first of those four passages, Judges 20:16, describes a battle between certain tribes of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. A literal translation reads: “Of all this people 700 chosen men, restricted as to the right hand (that is: left-handed), each slinging a stone at a hair and did not let it miss.” The last word is יִחַטֵּא, the same word that is usually translated “sin.” It is in the hiphil, the causative pattern, “cause (the stone) to miss.” The imperfect tense suggests repeated action in the past. (It seems strange that those descendants of Benjamin, “son of the right hand,” were left-handed.) The Septuagint surprisingly translates אָטַר יִדְיָמִינוּ with the word ἀμφοτεροδέξιοι, (“ambidextrous”). Obviously the verb יִחַטֵּא in this passage has the etymological meaning of “miss.”

### Job 5:24

וַיֵּדַעַתְּ כִּי־שְׁלוֹם אֶהְיֶה וּפְקֻדָתְךָ נֹדֶד וְלֹא תִחַטֵּא

*You will know that your tent is secure; you will inspect your property and you will miss nothing.*

Such is the case also in Job 5:24. In this passage Eliphaz, the first of Job’s three “friends” and probably the oldest, is speaking. After implying that Job’s suffering is a consequence of special sins, Eliphaz paints a picture of prosperity and happiness for one who repents and turns to God. A literal translation of the verse reads: “And you will know that (there is) peace (to) your tent; and you will inspect your habitation, and you will not miss (anything).” The last word is תִּחַטֵּא, in the imperfect qal, the basic pattern of the verb. Again, the usual translation, “sin,” is out of the question. There is a close connection both structurally and in the meaning between the two clauses of this sentence. The etymological significance of שְׁלוֹם is that of “wholeness,” “wellness.” שְׁלוֹם is a common greeting still used today. Likewise, the verb חָטַא with the emphatic negative לֹא is appropriate in this verse to express the completeness of the property of the righteous man whom Eliphaz describes. Nothing will be missing.

### Proverbs 19:2

גַּם בְּלֹא־דַעַת נִפְשׁ לֹא־טוֹב וְאֵין בְּרַגְלָיִם חֹטֵא

*Also it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, and one who hastens with his feet misses (the way).*

The two remaining passages that clearly use the verb חטא in its etymological sense are from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 19:2 can be literally translated: “Also a person (נפש) without knowledge is not good, and (one who) hastens with his feet misses (the way).” The fourth word in the Hebrew text (נפש) is very challenging. It has a wide range of meanings. Etymologically it suggests “breathing.” The most common translation is “soul.” In some instances it is best translated “life,” as is also the case with the Greek word ψυχή. When it speaks of an individual it is best translated “person.” This writer prefers that translation in this verse. The last word in the Hebrew text is חוטא, an active participle in the qal pattern. Since the context rules out the most common meaning “sin,” it must have the etymological meaning “miss” in this passage.

#### Proverbs 20:2

נַהֵם כְּכַפִּיר אֵימַת מְלֹךְ מִתְעַבְרוּ חוֹטֵא נַפְשׁוֹ

*The wrath of a king is like the roar of a lion; whoever makes him angry forfeits his life.*

The fourth and last of these passages is Proverbs 20:2. This verse can be translated literally: “A roar like (that of) a lion (is) the wrath of a king; whoever makes him angry forfeits (חוטא) his life (נפש).” In this passage the word נפש is best translated “life,” although some translations, including the KJV, use the word “soul.” Similarly, the comprehensive meaning of the Greek word ψυχή is illustrated in Matthew 16:25,26. Most English versions translate the word “life” in verse 25 and “soul” in verse 26. In the verse before us (Proverbs 20:2) the verb חטא in its participle form must have its original meaning. Most versions, with the exception of the KJV and the NKJV, (and a few others), translate it “forfeit” or “lose,” literally “miss.”

We shall now turn our attention to the passage under consideration, Proverbs 8:35-36. The text in the original Hebrew is as follows:

כִּי מִצְאֵי מְצָאֵי חַיִּים וַיִּפֶּק רְצוֹן מִיָּתוֹה  
וְחָטְאֵי חַמְס נִפְשׁוּ כָּל־מְשֻׁנְאֵי אֲהָבוּ מוֹת

*For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from Yahweh. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all (those) who hate me love death.*

A literal translation would be: *For one finding me (whoever finds me) finds life, and obtains favor from Yahweh. But one missing me (whoever fails to find me) harms his soul (himself); all those hating me love death.*

The second and third words in verse 35 are from the same verb root, מִצָּא, “find.” That word is important for understanding how to translate the first word in verse 36, its antonym. The form מִצָּאֵי is the active participle qal with the 1 singular objective suffix. The form מְצָאֵי with an additional final ם, is the 3 masculine singular perfect qal. וַיִּפֶּק is the 3 masculine singular imperfect hiphil of פִּיק, which in that pattern means “obtain” or “receive.”

In verse 36 the first word is in the same form as its antonym, the second word in verse 35. Here וְחָטְאֵי means “misses me,” “fails to find me.” דָּמָס is the masculine singular participle of a word that means “harm,” “endanger.” נִפְשׁוּ is a form of the word נִפְשׁ, previously referred to in Proverbs 19:2. Among its many possible meanings are “soul,” “life” or “one’s self,” as it is rendered in the NIV, God’s Word (a revision of Beck’s translation), the Jewish TANAKH, and several others. If one contrasts it with the final word in verse 36, מוֹת (death), one could translate it “life.” Regardless, the meaning is clear. In the last half of the verse the participle is in the piel pattern, with the 1 singular objective suffix: “hating me.” The last two words, “loves death,” stand in sharp contrast to the closing words of the previous verse, 35.

The Hebrew language, like a number of other ancient Semitic languages, notably Akkadian and Ugaritic, uses parallelism very effectively. Not only does it lend poetic beauty to a passage, but also it is very helpful in understanding the message of the verse.

In Proverbs 8:35, 36 we can find synonymous parallelism within each verse, with the second half expressing essentially the same thought as the first half. We can also see antithetic parallelism between the two verses, which stand in sharp contrast. Antithetic parallelism is the most common form of parallelism in the book of Proverbs.

For this study many Bible versions, lexicons and commentaries were consulted. The lexicons consistently list Proverbs 8:35, 36 and the four passages we previously treated under the etymological meaning, “miss,” “fail to find.” Most of the commentaries also give that meaning. An exception is The Anchor Bible, which renders it “offends against me.” More than half of the English versions translate מָטָה “miss” or “fail to find.” Both the 1891 and the 1965 translations of the Norwegian Bible also render the word in its etymological sense.

However, some English versions, including the KJV, NKJV, and the Douay-Confraternity Bible, translate it “sinneth” (or sins) against me. This is also the case with Luther’s German Bible and the Vulgate. The Septuagint renders it with a form of the verb ἀμαρτάνω. That is understandable, since ἀμαρτάνω is a very close synonym of מָטָה, with the etymological meaning of “missing the mark,” as in archery. Both words are also in most cases translated “sin.” Since they appear to be such close synonyms, it is not strange that in the Septuagint ἀμαρτάνω is invariably used to translate מָטָה. It is also possible that in the five passages in this study the Greek word ἀμαρτάνω might be understood in its original sense “miss,” “fail to find,” in the Septuagint.

As we read and ponder the message in this great wisdom chapter, Proverbs 8, may we heed the call of our Lord and Savior, the true Wisdom from on high, as He invites us to receive Him with hearts of faith. To ignore or reject His call is an act of sinning against Him. May God keep us from rejecting His invitation.



## A Partial List of Books Consulted

### Hebrew-English Lexicons and Commentaries

Gesenius, William. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated by Edward Robinson, pp. 306-310.

Koehler, Ludwig and Walter Baumgartner. *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, pp. 288-290.

Harris, R. Laird; Gleason L. Archer, Jr.; and Bruce K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, p. 277.

Van Gemeren, Willem A., editor. *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, pp. 87-88.

Jenni, Ernst and Claus Westermann. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Vol. I. Translated by Mark E. Biddle, Vol. I, pp. 407-408.

Keil, C.F. and Franz Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament* Vol. VI by Delitzsch, Translated by James Martin, Vol. VI, p. 195.

### Bible Versions (*English unless specified*)

**Versions which translate חטא "sin against" or similarly. These are a sampling:**

The Greek Septuagint

The Latin Vulgate

Luther's German Bible

The Geneva Bible

Douay-Confraternity Bible

King James (Authorized) Version

New King James Version

English Revised Version

New American Standard Version

Beck's An American Translation (1976 and 2000)

God's Word (1995 revision of Beck)

The Anchor Bible (a commentary)

**Versions which translate אָמַן "miss," "fail to find," or similarly.**

**These are also a sampling:**

Keil-Delitzsch Commentary

English Standard Version

New American Bible (Catholic)

New Jerusalem Bible (Catholic)

Knox's Translation (Catholic)

Modern Language Bible (New Berkeley Version)

Robert Young (also author of the concordance)

Contemporary English Version

Lamsa's Translation of the Syriac Peshitta

TANAKH (Jewish)

New International Version

Revised Standard Version

Norwegian Bible (1891)

Norwegian Bible (1965)

All of the lexicons listed under I of this section.

## Fifty Years of Theological Training in Leipzig

by Gaylin R. Schmeling

When the city of Leipzig is mentioned, probably the first thing that comes to mind is the Leipzig Debate that occurred between Luther and Johann Eck in 1519. Musicians may think of the *Thomaskirche*, where Johann Sebastian Bach spent many fruitful years. The church historian may recall that Nikolaus Selnecker, one of the authors of the *Formula of Concord*, was superintendent of Leipzig and is buried in the *Thomaskirche*. Yet for confessional Lutherans there is another important location in Leipzig, the seminary of our sister church body in Germany known as the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (*Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche* [ELFK]). The name of the seminary is *Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar Leipzig*.

On September 27, 2003, the *Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar* celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The anniversary was a very festive and joyous occasion. At the festive worship service Rev. Martin Hoffmann, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Leipzig and professor at the seminary, served as liturgist. Rev. Fritz Horbank of Chemnitz, a former rector of the seminary, preached on Hebrews 13:7-9, with the theme "Remember Your Teachers." He reminded the assembly of the important professors and teachers with which the seminary had been blessed throughout its history. In the afternoon Rev. Gaylin Schmeling, the president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, presented an essay entitled, "Baptism the Fountain of Life." Following the afternoon coffee Dr. Gottfried Herrmann gave an essay on "50 Years of Biblically and Confessionally Faithful Training of Pastors."

President Rolf Borszik of the ELFK brought greetings and encouragement to the seminary on behalf of the synod. Rev. Egil Edvardsen, president of the LBK, brought greetings from our sister church in Scandinavia. Rev. Gaylin Schmeling brought greetings on behalf of President John Moldstad and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The seminaries of our sister churches in Russia and Ukraine, and the seminary of the WELS sent written greetings. Written greetings were also received

from Rev. Armin Panning, the president of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), and from Rev. Juhani Viitala from our sister church in Finland. There were around 130 people in attendance, which more than filled the seminary to capacity.

During the week of September 29 – October 3 Rev. Gaylin Schmeling lectured on “Johann Gerhard – Theologian and Pastor” at the Leipzig seminary. It is said that Gerhard was third (Luther, Chemnitz, and Gerhard) in the series of Lutheran theologians, and after him there was no fourth. Also he should not be confused with the important Lutheran hymn writer Paul Gerhardt. For the anniversary and this special presentation the students of our sister seminary in Ljungby, Sweden, were present together with Rev. John Vogt, the WELS Friendly Counselor in Scandinavia. Before the anniversary Rev. Schmeling was invited to the General Pastoral Conference of the ELFK in Dresden.

The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church was organized in 1876 as a bastion of confessional Lutheranism in Germany. The church body was centered in Saxony but it also included other states in Germany. The pastors of the ELFK were trained in the seminaries of the LCMS for many years. But that changed after World War I. The church decided to found its own theological seminary. In 1921 a seminary was established in Leipzig but it was soon moved to Kleinmachnow near Berlin. After 1948 its pastors were trained at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Oberursel near Frankfurt am Main.

Because of the separation between East and West Germany it was difficult for students in East Germany to travel to Oberursel in the West. In 1953 the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church established its own theological seminary in Leipzig. The seminary officially opened on October 21, 1953, with Rev. Walter Rüger as the rector of the seminary. Because of poor health he had to resign, and in 1958 Dr. Ernst Lerle was called to serve as rector. Dr. Lerle, who was a prolific writer and a well-known theologian, was the rector of the seminary until 1978. He was succeeded by Dr. Gottfried Wachler, who had served as a professor at the seminary since 1960 and as rector until 1989. Rev. Fritz Horbank was rector from 1989 to 1992.

Since 1992 the rector of the seminary has been Dr. Gottfried Herrmann. Dr. Herrmann has written a definitive history of the ELFK entitled *Lutherische Freikirche in Sachsen*. It gives invaluable information

concerning the Lutheran free church movement in Germany. The other professors at the seminary are: Rev. Martin Hoffmann, Rev. Günter Meinhold, and Rev. Hans-Wolf Baumann. With the exception of Dr. Herrmann, all these pastors serve congregations in addition to their work at the seminary.

Today the seminary has a beautiful building on Sommerfelder Strasse 63 in Leipzig which also serves as the home of the Trinity congregation. The building provides adequate room for classrooms, the library, and student housing. This fine building was obtained in 1993.

This year there are nine students in the seminary, including several international students. Two students from the *Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar* have studied at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. Andreas Drechsler was in Mankato for the 1999-2000 school year. He is a vicar at Trinity Lutheran Church in Leipzig and is teaching the Hebrew introductory course for the seminary students. Andreas Heyn attended classes during the 2001-2002 school year. He is preparing for his first examination and will vicar this spring.

The seminary has produced an anniversary festschrift *Auf dein Wort* (At Your Word) which contains essays on exegetical, systematic, and historical theology. The title of the festschrift is based on the words of Peter in Luke 5. Here the holy Evangelist records the calling of the disciples by Christ. The Lord sent Peter, the experienced fisherman, and his friends out on the Lake of Gennesaret in broad daylight contrary to everything they knew and understood about fishing. Still Peter confidently replied, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless **at Your word** I will let down the net." Thereupon they received a great catch of fish. The founding of the *Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar* appears just as wondrous. The members of the ELFK did not begin this seminary on their own initiative; rather, it was at the direction of the Lord. The border problems in the early 1950s forced them to establish a seminary in the East. They did not see how establishing and maintaining a seminary under communism would be possible. Yet they confidently replied to the Lord, "At Your Word," and the Lord gave them success. At the Lord's Word the *Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar* and the ELFK have remained steadfast in the faith making a firm confession on the basis of the inerrant Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

## A Report from the ELS President

*by John A. Moldstad, Jr.*

On August 18<sup>th</sup> of this year, Rev. G. Kieschnick of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod issued invitations to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod to hold formal doctrinal discussions between the three church bodies. The purpose of the invitation, according to the Missouri Synod president, was to discuss possible ways for the church bodies to address areas of disagreement currently hindering fellowship between the churches, and also to explore ways to support and assist one another in facing contemporary attacks on the Gospel. Both the ELS and the WELS wrote letters declining the invitation.

In my letter dated September 25, 2003, I replied to President Kieschnick: “In our estimation, the doctrinal differences that originally separated our two synods still remain... If it were the case that recent decisions and actions in the LCMS would appear, from our perspective, to indicate a sincere attempt to return to the scriptural position on the doctrine of church fellowship, we would be interested in holding inter-synodical discussions. However, this is not the case.”

In 1955 the ELS suspended relations with the Missouri Synod, and the Wisconsin Synod did so in 1961. The Synodical Conference, the group that originated in 1872 and served as a bulwark for preserving purity of doctrine through the mergers characteristic of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fell apart in 1963. Why did this happen? In a nutshell, the Missouri Synod, which had long been the leader in confessional Lutheranism, began to contend for a position on fellowship that was out of harmony with the historic stand of both the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference. More than this, it was evident that no disciplinary action was being taken against those within its synod who spoke and acted contrary to the principles espoused by Missouri in its earlier days.

Have things changed for the better in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod? Has the LCMS leadership shown there is a genuine interest in returning to the scriptural fellowship practices of the old Synodical Conference days? Has Missouri demonstrated a return—or at least a sincere

*desire* to return—to the orthodox position on church fellowship held by Walther and Pieper? Some might argue in the affirmative. They note how LCMS dealt with the Seminex issue in 1974, where historical criticism became widespread in its St. Louis seminary. They might also positively point to the short-lived fellowship of Missouri with the ALC (a predecessor of today's ELCA). In 1969 fellowship had been declared, but in 1983 that bond was severed.

Yet, Missouri appears to be a divided camp. While many pastors in the LCMS desire to uphold the confessional Lutheran practice of worshiping *only* with those fully agreed in doctrine, other pastors in the LCMS have a much more open practice. In fact, a 1998 LCMS statement on church fellowship limits the areas where full doctrinal agreement is necessary to *altar* and *pulpit* fellowship. Conspicuously absent is the subject of *prayer* fellowship, i.e., holding prayers with church leaders and church bodies not in full doctrinal agreement. In point of fact, the LCMS maintains that its pastors may conduct prayers with church leaders and church bodies with which the synod is not in full doctrinal agreement.

A well-publicized example of how this official LCMS position allows for a liberal and loose fellowship practice is the 2001 Yankee Stadium prayer service that followed the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Rev. David Benke, an LCMS District President, joined in conducting prayer in a worship service featuring not only a wide range of Christian denominations but also Muslim and Jewish religious leaders. President Kieschnick of the LCMS defended the action by Pastor Benke, appealing to a 2002 synod resolution that reads in part: “Not every occasion where worship takes place is necessarily a manifestation of church fellowship. . . Pastors, teachers, and other officially recognized church workers are often asked to participate in activities outside of their own and other LCMS congregations.” First Vice President Daniel Preus expressed his opinion that the Benke case was a flagrant violation of the scriptural church fellowship principles. When he recused himself from adjudicating the case, the duty fell to the second vice president, Pastor Wallace Schulz. Pastor Schulz ruled that Rev. Benke was in violation of the scriptural church fellowship principles and therefore suspended him from the LCMS clergy roster. A synodical appeals panel, however, sided with President Kieschnick and lifted the suspension of Rev. Benke. Since the LCMS

previously had gone on record saying that joint prayer is *not* church fellowship, how could anyone be surprised at the final outcome?

Sincerely demonstrated efforts to adhere to clear teachings of Scripture are necessary for church bodies currently not in fellowship with each other to begin holding official doctrinal discussions with a view toward unity. Our Evangelical Lutheran Synod takes seriously the Lord's injunction to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). But equally serious to our synod is the Lord's warning to "watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the doctrine you have learned" (Romans 16:17). Our *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* in its June/September 2003 issue contains the reprint of a doctrinal work by our ELS forefathers in the year of 1938. The document is entitled, "Unity, Union and Unionism." An important thesis in this document is as follows:

We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact; or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know "the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26).  
(p. 213)

We pray for those in the LCMS who are striving to advance the cause of confessional Lutheranism. We ask that God would move the hearts of the leaders to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord by disciplining pastors and teachers who need rebuke and by promoting the truth as it is set forth in Scripture and expounded in our Lutheran Confessions. We also pray that God would protect our own synod from any sins of arrogance or self-righteousness as we humbly seek to know the truth of his Word and boldly profess it before others.



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